

ADRIAN ROGERS

# LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



A C T S

These transcripts are taken straight from live audio recordings of Adrian Rogers during his tenure as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As such some of the transcripts may contain stutters, stammers, transcription errors, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.

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# Making Jesus Known

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 7, 2001

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 1:1–3

*“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus,  
of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”*

ACTS 1:1

## Outline

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## Introduction

Of course, a message of that song is this: that any God who can raise the dead can solve your problem. You don't have any problem that He cannot solve today, if you will turn it over to Him, no matter what it is. If you have a broken heart, give Him all the pieces; He'll put it back together.

Find the Book of Acts chapter 1—the Book of Acts chapter 1—right past the gospels. We're talking today about living supernaturally. And all this year at Bellevue the emphasis is going to be on evangelism for the entire year. Three hundred and sixty five days we're going to be on this theme: “Making Jesus Known.”

Now, what is the purpose of our church? Do you know our mission statement? First of all, it is magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word. That's what we're doing right now: magnifying Jesus. Can you say that? Magnifying—don't say it out loud—but magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word. That's the first segment of it. The second segment is moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry. That is, to help you to grow up, stop being a spiritual baby, to find your ministry, and to get at it. Moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry. Now, once we magnify Jesus, and move believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry, the third purpose of Bellevue Baptist Church is making Jesus known—listen—to our neighbors and the nations.

Making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. Magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word; moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry; and then, making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. Now, that third segment is what we're going to be talking about all this year: "Making Jesus Known." It's going to be the theme of our mission conference. It's going to be the theme of this series of messages from the Book of Acts: "Making Jesus Known." And let me tell you something: this world needs to know Jesus. Your neighbor needs to know Jesus. Friend, that's what the song is about this morning. It's what the sermon is about this morning. It is what the Holy Spirit is saying today. We need to make Jesus known. Friends all around me are trying to find what the heart yearns for, by sin undermined; I have the secret, I know where 'tis found: only true pleasures in Jesus abound. Jesus is all this world needs today. Blindly they strive, for sin darkens their way; oh, to pull back the grim curtains of night; one look at Jesus and all will be light.

Acts chapter 1, the first eight verses: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. And when they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Now, notice what He has given them. It's almost like a mission impossible. Here they are. Look at them—a little group, ragtag apostles, some of them fishermen. They're unlettered, most of them, don't have any education. They don't have any college behind them. They have no seminaries. They have no finances. They have no prestige. They have no political pull. And they're commanded to go into all of the world and tell the message of a Galilean peasant who died on a cross, crucified by the Roman government. It's a mission impossible. Think of what they had, and then think of what they were up against. There was the imperial might of the iron legions of Rome. There was the intellectual sophistry of the Greeks. There was the religious bigotry of the Jewish religion. And here they are. And Jesus said, "You will receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem,

Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.” And it reads like a magnificent novel, but it is absolutely true. It is the story of the church triumphant.

Now, my heart bleeds for our city, and for our nation, and for our world. And I see what God has brought here together called Bellevue Baptist Church; folks, God has given us a lot. God has been so good to us. But with all of His giving, God requires of us that we do what He wants us to do. And what that early church did so long ago, we need to repeat in this day and in this age. And, if we want something new, we’re going to have to find something old. We’ve got to go back to the basics. A church is not some sort of a glorified country club with stained-glass windows and a steeple on top. We have been given a commission. We have been given a responsibility. And I want us in this Book of Acts to think together about living supernaturally, not superficially, and we’re going to go back to the basics.

There’s a story—I don’t know whether it’s true or not, but it’s often told; it probably is true—about the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi. And it is said that one day his team had played miserably, and he brought them all in to what we used to call, when I played football, skull practice. That is, not on the field, but thinking, practicing, getting your head right, getting, between your ears, things arranged. And the legendary coach wanted to get the boys back to the fundamentals, back to the basics of the game. And he reached in a bag and pulled out a football, and said, “Gentlemen, this is a football.” Now, these are professional football players, but he’s saying, I’m going to go back to the rudiments, back to the basics, “Gentlemen, this is a football,” and to go from there. I think that’s what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs to do today, is to go back to the very basic, fundamental, rudimentary elements of our faith. So I want to tell you, “Ladies and gentlemen, this is a Bible.” This is a Bible. It is the Word of God. We need to go back and find out what God wants us to do. They criticized Billy Graham one time. They said of Billy Graham, “Why, he’s not up to date with his evangelism, and his methods, and he’s behind. He’s decades behind.” He said, “Oh.” He said, “No, I’m not. I don’t want to set the church back a decade or two decades. I want to set it back two thousand years. I want to get back to the very essence, the very fundamentals, of the faith. So let’s look right here in these first eight verses of the Book of Acts.

And I’ll tell you, this is a wonderful success story. There are three things. If we would make Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations, there are three things we are going to find in these eight verses.

## **I. We Need to Recognize His Presence in Us**

And the very first is this: that we need to recognize His presence in us. Now, most of us don’t do that. Now, listen. Those words can go past you so quick—pfffft—you didn’t even hear them. It made no impact. But this is the most phenomenal thought. I’ve been

thinking about this all week. I've been thinking about this morning. It is a phenomenal thought, if you get it in your heart and in your mind, that Jesus Christ is in us. Look again at the first three verses: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach—underscore began both to do and teach—until the day in which he was taken up, after that he, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Now this was written by a man named Luke. Luke was a physician. He was a doctor. We have a number of wonderful doctors in our church today, and they believe the Bible is the Word of God. And that proves to me that you don't have to check your brains at the door to believe the Bible, amen? I thank God for MDs who are not ashamed of the Lord Jesus.

Every good book has a hero, and the hero of this book is Jesus. Look in verse 1: "...of all that Jesus began both to do and teach." But in the Bible that I have up here, at the heading it says the Acts of the Apostles, but down here in verse 1, it says, "all that Jesus began to do and teach." Friend, I want you to get the point. Don't miss it. The title, "The Acts of the Apostles" was put on by the Bible publisher. That's not in the text at all. That's not a part of the inspired thing at all. And here they missed it. The Book of Acts is not the story of the acts of the apostles; it is the story of the acts of Jesus Christ. Now, don't miss that: "...of all that Jesus began to do and teach." Now, see, he said, "The former treatise have I written unto thee." Well, what was the former treatise that he'd written? Luke wrote what? The Gospel of Luke. He said, "Now, I've written the Gospel of Luke. This is what Jesus began to do. Now, I'm going to write the Book of Acts. This is what Jesus continues to do," because he's not saying, "I wrote what Jesus did; it's finished." No. "The former treatise have I written unto you, the Gospel of Luke, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach. Now, I'm going to write something else. I'm going to show you what Jesus Christ is continuing to do."

Now, in the Gospels, you find out what Jesus did in His human body, the body of His flesh. In the Book of Acts, you find out what Jesus is doing in His mystical body, the church. You see, Jesus is still active and alive on Planet Earth today, and He still has a body. In the Gospels, it was His material, physical body. In the Book of Acts, it is His new body, which is the church, and Jesus is alive and well today in His mystical body. This is what the Bible calls, in Colossians chapter one, verse twenty-seven, "Christ in you." You see, we're not here just imitating the Lord Jesus. I love the idea, "What would Jesus do?" That implies what would He do if He were here. Friend, He is here. He is here. And it's not what would He do; we just need to let Him do what He will do. This church, and any New Testament church, is the body of Jesus in this city. We are Him. He is us. Jesus Christ is the visible part, or we are the visible part of the invisible Jesus,

and He is the invisible part of the visible church. If we ever let that thought get into us that Christ is in us, that He began in the Gospels, but He continues today, the church of Jesus Christ is the body of Christ on this earth.

Now, we need to stop doing things for Jesus. We need to start letting Him do something through us. You see, there's only one person who has ever lived the Christian life. What's His name? Jesus. No one else has ever lived the Christian life, only Jesus. And if the Christian life is lived where you hang your hat, where you go to work, where you go to school, it will not be you living it; it will be Jesus living it in you. Oh, you say, "Adrian, you're just playing with words." No, I'm not. The apostle Paul said, in Galatians chapter two, verse twenty, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ that lives in me; and the life I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Now, if you do it, if you're doing things for Jesus, that's superficial. If Jesus is doing something through you, it is supernatural.

Did you know the only thing I have about my life that I have any right to ask you to believe and emulate is that which you cannot explain? If you can explain Adrian Rogers apart from the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ inside of me, then it's superficial. But my life is to be supernatural; I mean, absolutely supernatural. Jesus Christ is to be living in me, and the life I live, I'm to be living by the faith of the Son of God. Not faith in the Son of God; the faith of the Son of God. The faith that He has given to me is the faith that I am to be exercising. You see, folks—listen to me—the Christian life is not difficult; it is impossible. The Christian life is impossible. Well, you say, "If it's impossible, then forget it." Now, wait a minute. It is impossible, but God does the impossible, and He'll do it in you and through you.

Stuart Briscoe, a great preacher, said, "When I first got saved, gave my heart to Jesus, I went out to live for Him." He said, "This is wonderful." But then, he said, "After I stumbled and fell several times, boy, this is difficult." He said, "I rededicated my life and started again," but then, he said, "I stumbled and fell again. And I stopped saying this is wonderful, or this is difficult. I began to say this is impossible." Then he said, "I discovered that it was Jesus Christ in me who was going to do it through me." And then, he said, "This is wonderful—this is wonderful." We need to stop trying, and start trusting, and let Jesus Christ live His life in us.

Now, you might think I'm just talking about so much hocus pocus, but, friend, I'm talking to you about fundamental religious truth, spiritual truth. The Book of Acts is what Jesus is continuing to do. God wants to write a twenty-ninth chapter of the Book of Acts, and He wants to write it through Bellevue Church, or what Jesus is going to do in this city. Stop asking ourselves, "What would Jesus do, if He were here." He is here! Let Him be God in you. Now, other than that, all you'll be is a little, cheap, tin imitation of Jesus.

My friend, Bob Sorrell, is sitting out here. Bob's a great golfer. I never played golf with Bob, because I don't like to be humiliated, and I'm too rotten proud to play a game with him. But suppose one day I said, "Well, I'm going to go out here and I'm going to beat Bob playing golf, so I'm going to play like Tiger Woods. Bob will play like Bob, and he's good, but I'll play like Tiger Woods, and I'll beat him." Well, you laugh, of course. I can't just say I'm going to play like Tiger Woods, and play like Tiger Woods. I can't just say, "I'm going to be like him." And you can't just say, "I'm going to be like Jesus." But suppose I could take Tiger Woods and put him in a pill and swallow him down. He fills me. Bob doesn't know I've had that pill yet. All right now, we go out there and we tee off. Pooph! There it goes right down the straightaway, and he says, "Good night, Rogers, where'd you learn how to play golf like that?" If I'm honest, I'd say, "Hey, it's not Adrian; it's Tiger in me."

Friend, listen. It's not you; it's Jesus in you. And we need to stop strutting around like we're somebody wonderful. If—friend, listen—if we're doing anything good, it is Christ in us. "The life I live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And the Book of Acts is what Jesus continues to do. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Jesus were let loose in Memphis, Tennessee, through His body, the church? See, we are the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Living the Christian life is a miracle. There are three miracles in the Christian life. There's the first miracle, which is the new birth. That's a wonderful miracle. There's the concluding miracle, the last miracle, which is our translation, when we are made to be like the Lord Jesus. But in between that first miracle and that last miracle there's a middle miracle, and that is the life that we live. Our life is to be a supernatural life. Now, I want you to remember this: that the Christian life is not your responsibility. It is your response to His ability. Major Ian Thomas said about this, "I can't—He never said I could; He can—He always said He would." And so, that's the first thing we need to do. We need to recognize His presence in us.

Now, with that, the Bible says—look if you will in this passage of Scripture, look in verse three: "To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking to them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Back up to verse two. He gave commandments unto the apostles.

Now, why did He give them this mission impossible? Well, He gave them this mission impossible because He knew that in Him they could do it. But He also knew, without Him they could not do it. What were the commandments that He gave? We don't have to guess; we know. Do you know what Jesus' marching orders are for Bellevue, and, since you're a member, for you? All right, put in your margin Matthew 28:19 and 20—you know it: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe

all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Now, this is not a request; this is a command. Jesus is King. If you are not a part of obeying this command—listen to me; I want to say it as sweetly as I can—you’re not right with God, and, furthermore, you’re guilty of high treason against your king. Jesus said, “I have commanded you to go and make disciples.” We are to be making Jesus known.

Now, what does He say to do in Matthew 28:19 and 20? Three things.

#### **A. We Are to Make Disciples**

Number one: We are to make them—“Go ye, therefore, and make disciples.” Now, He didn’t say, make decisions. People talk about great evangelistic crusades, and they say, “We had a thousand decisions.” He didn’t say, make decisions; He said, make disciples. Make them.

#### **B. We Are to Mark Disciples**

Not only are we to make them; we’re to mark them. He said, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Don’t you minimize baptism. Jesus commanded that we be baptized. Jesus commenced His public ministry by baptism. Jesus concluded His public ministry commanding baptism. Once a person is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, that person is to be baptized by immersion, marking himself out, saying, “I belong to Jesus Christ. I’m not ashamed of Jesus Christ.” Some of you haven’t been baptized because you say, “I’d mess up a \$40 hairdo.” I’m serious. You say, “Well, that’s incidental.” It’s not incidental. Jesus has commanded it—“...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

You know why I wear that ring? That’s the only piece of jewelry I have, unless you call that watch jewelry. You know why I wear that? That ring shows that I belong to Joyce. I’m a one-woman man. I belong to that girl, and I love her, and I’m not ashamed of her. When I go out of town, I don’t take the ring off. I belong to a lady.

Do you know what baptism means? Friend, it means that you belong to Jesus Christ. You’re not ashamed of Jesus Christ. I want everybody to know. See me up here, buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection. If you haven’t been baptized, you ought to be the first one down this aisle this morning, and say, “I want to make an appointment for my baptism,” that is, if you’re truly saved.

#### **C. We Are to Mature Disciples**

First, you make them; then, you mark them; and then, you mature them. “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” That’s the marching orders of Bellevue Baptist Church: to make them, mark them, mature them—moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry. That’s what we are all about. And to do it we need to recognize His presence in us. He hasn’t just given us a mission impossible, and backed off, sitting

up there in heaven peering down to see what we're going to do. Jesus lives in His church: Christ in you, the hope of glory. The gospel is what He began to do. The Book of Acts is what He continues to do. In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church, and in this 21<sup>st</sup>-century church, that's what it is all about.

## **II. We Need to Rely on His Promise to Us**

Now, secondly, not only should we recognize His presence in us, but number two, we should rely on His promise to us. Look, if you will, in verses four through eight: “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” They wanted to talk about prophecy. “And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me...”—they wanted to talk about prophecy; He wanted to talk about proclamation—“...ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Now, here Jesus is talking about a promise He had made. When He was walking with them, and talking with them, He gave them a promise. Put in your margin Luke 24, verse 49, and here's what Jesus said to them. He said, “Behold, I send the promise of the Father unto you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power on high.” Jesus said, “Don't go out now and start any kind of a ministry until, first of all, you receive this promise. I am going to send the promise of the Father.” What is the promise of the Father? It is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And, really, this is almost a repeat of the first thing. You see, we need to recognize His presence in us, and then we need to rely on His promise to us. He has not given us a job that we're not able to do. Again, these were unlettered, uncouth people. They had no finances. They had no colleges. They had no seminaries. They had no buildings like this. And He said, “Go to all the world,” but He did not leave them helpless.

I heard of some cows who were grazing in a field, and a milk truck went past, and it said, “Thus-and-such a dairy. Our milk is Grade A, sanitized, vitamin-enriched, homogenized, pasteurized milk from contented cows.” One cow said to the other one, “It makes you feel inadequate, doesn't it?” I mean, we don't have what it takes. But Jesus said, “Don't go out.” Just don't go out knocking things over and calling it working for Jesus. “Tarry in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” That was until the Day of Pentecost comes. Now, we're not told to tarry any more, because the Day of

Pentecost has come. We don't need to keep asking Jesus to send the Holy Spirit. He has sent the Holy Spirit, and He has said in verse eight, however, "you will receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me." Now, learn this secret. You don't have to be an intellectual top water in order to be used of God. As a matter of fact, I've been a pastor long enough to know that some of our brightest minds are our worst witnesses. There's nothing wrong with having intellect, but Jesus did not call you to be a lawyer; He called you to be a witness. A lawyer argues a case; a witness tells what he's seen and heard. Come up close—I want to tell you something. You know why some of our people don't witness? Folks, they haven't seen or heard anything. But a Christian—a Christian—who's had an experience with Jesus Christ is automatically a witness. He can't help but witness. You don't have to know all the answers. When you share Jesus Christ, you say, "But if I go out and start witnessing, somebody is going to ask me a question about the Bible that I don't know the answer to." Don't worry about it. Let me tell you, you can answer any question—any question anybody asks you, any question. Let me tell you how to answer it. Say, "I don't know." Isn't that a good answer? Listen. When you stop pretending you know things that you don't know, people will start believing you when you tell them what you do know. That's what a witness does. Just the facts, ma'am. What have you seen? What have you heard? That man, Jesus opened his eyes. He was blind, and they, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they began to question him, and belittle him, and say, "Who healed you? What were His credentials? Ta-da-da-da-da." He said, "I don't know. I don't know. But one thing I know. Once I was blind, and now I see." Now, friend, that is a witness. Not a lawyer. You don't have to know everything. You, if you are saved, you know enough to be a witness of Jesus Christ. Say, amen. Now, if you're not saved, you haven't seen anything; you haven't heard anything. A man went in to a department store one time, a preacher. He went back to the back of the department store, one of these big stores like K-Mart, or something like that. He went back there to where they were selling fishing tackle. And he walked up there, and he just asked this question: "What is a good bass lure?" The man over here shopping turned to him, and said, "Hey, let me tell you about a good bass lure," and he began to talk to this man, and he began to tell him everything about bass lures, the best places to fish, and so forth. The man said, "Well, thank you very much." And he bought one of the lures, and started to walk out; this man just followed him all the way out to the car. All the way out of the parking lot, this man was still talking about bass, and bass lures, and how to catch bass. Now, I'll tell you one thing about that man: the little doubt is that he was a bass fisherman, little doubt but that he knew something about what he was talking about, and he was very interested in it. Now, I don't know whether he knew Jesus or not, but probably, if that man were a member of a local church, and you told him to testify, he'd say, "Well, I can't

do that.” You know why? He was not interested in the subject, not filled with the subject. Friend, when Jesus Christ is real to you, witnessing will be just as natural as talking about bass lures was to that bass fisherman. You see, what’s down in the well comes up in the bucket, doesn’t it?

The reason? Jesus said, “You’ll be witnesses unto me,” and He’s not left us to do it by Himself. I’ve said it many times from this pulpit, before I preach, I get on my knees and preach, because anything I can talk you into, somebody can talk you out of. But when the Holy Spirit of God takes the man of God and His words, and brings them home to your heart, then it’s not Adrian; it is the Holy Spirit of God speaking to you.

God wants to use you with your neighbors, and God wants to use you with the nations. Our job is making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. We’re to begin in Jerusalem. That’s our community. And then, Judea. That would be tantamount to our state. And then, Samaria. That would be tantamount to the Mid-South, and then, the whole world. And that’s what we exist for, folks. This is the year of evangelism. God has so blessed our church, and God has given us so much, but we’re not going to sit on our hands, sit, and soak, and say, “What good boys and girls we are.” We’re going to take this community for Jesus Christ. I mean that. I mean that. We’re going to take Jesus Christ to Shelby County. Say amen. We’re going to do it. And I don’t say it arrogantly. God has given us that assignment. Give God a hand. We’re going to do it. And I don’t mean just to help Bellevue keep growing. We find churches that are not growing—we’re going to help them grow. We’ll send some of you members to join those churches, teach Bible there, help them to grow. If these pastors can’t get it started, we’ll say, “Come on and have a joint staff meeting with our church.” If we find an area where there’s not a church, we’ll plant a church. If we find an area where there’s a church doing a good job, we’ll help that church. And we’re going to try to reach all people, the whites, and blacks, and Chinese, and Latinos. And we’re going to try to reach the down-and-out and the up-and-out, and we’re going to share Jesus Christ, because Jesus wants us to do it. This is our Jerusalem, and we can’t play leapfrog. We can’t jump over our Jerusalem and go across the nation, go across the world. We start here with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the purpose of this church is making Jesus known to our neighbors and to the nations.

And so, how are we going to do it? We’re going to recognize His presence in us. We’re going to rely upon His promise to us. “You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” Now, we’re not to witness about Bellevue Baptist Church. We’re not to witness about the Baptist denomination. People need Jesus. They need Jesus—“witnesses unto me.”

One man was trying to make a Baptist out of a Methodist, and the Methodist didn’t want to be made a Baptist. And so the Baptist got in an argumentative mode, and said,

“Well, how come you’re a Methodist?” He said, “Well, my daddy was a Methodist, and my granddaddy was a Methodist, and that makes me a Methodist.” The Baptist said, “Well, wait a minute. If your daddy was a fool, and your granddaddy was a fool, what would that make you?” He said, “Well, I guess I’d be a Baptist.”

We’re not witnessing to some denomination. People need Jesus. “You shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” Now, this is the divine strategy, and listen to me carefully. God can use you. Say amen. God can use you with what you have. God can use you where you are. And God will supply your every need. If this church ever really gets serious about sharing Jesus Christ, what an impact we will make in this particular city. God has made a promise to us, a solemn promise, that we will receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon us.

### **III. We Need to Respond to His Program Through Us**

Now, here’s the third and final thing I want you to see this morning, as we think about what God wants us to do. We need to respond to His program through us. What is His program through us? Look again in verse eight: “But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem”—in Shelby County. How about your neighbors? Do your neighbors know Jesus? Do they know you’re saved? Do they know that you have anything more just sort of a cultural Christianity? You know, really, they don’t care how much you know about Bible prophecy. The apostles said, “Lord, are you going to at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said, “That’s not your concern. That’s not for you to know. Your business is to be a witness.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers who ever lived, said, “I had rather lead one soul to Jesus than to unpack all the mysteries in the divine Word”—to lead one soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I’m concerned about the world. As a matter of fact, I met two of our precious young people today at the New Members’ Breakfast, the Discovery Class. They said to me, “Pastor, we have just been accepted by the Foreign Mission Board to go to Kosovo. We’re going to Kosovo to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.” My heart burned with joy to think that two young people out of our church have now been approved to go to missionary training service. They’re going to Kosovo. But I’ll tell you why they’re going to Kosovo is because they’ve been witnessing for Jesus right here. One man applied for missionary service, and the man who was reviewing his application said, “Well, what are you doing in your neighborhood where you are right now?” He said, “Well, not much.” He said, “Well, please don’t go across the ocean and do it.” You see, if you’re not doing it here, you’re not a candidate for missionary service anywhere. We need to recognize and fulfill His program in us

right now.

## Conclusion

Now, folks, I hope you're going to be with me. As we study this Book of Acts together, we're going to find out how the early church did it, and we are going to get with it.

I'll tell you a story. Preachers have told it for a long time, but it's a good one. A man was known as a great fisherman. And he would come back with a ton of fish, a boatload of fish. One day, a stranger said, "Would you take me fishing with you?" The man said, "Sure, come on." So he got out in the middle of the lake, and this man who was known to be such a great fisherman reached under his seat and got a stick of dynamite, and he lit the fuse, and threw it overboard. It sank to the bottom with a tremendous explosion, and hundreds of dead fish just floated to the surface. This man started picking them up. This other man reached in his pocket, pulled out his billfold with a badge, and said, "Sir, I'm the game warden. What you are doing is illegal. You are in serious trouble." The fisherman didn't say a word. He just reached under his seat, and got another stick of dynamite, and lit it, and handed it to that man. He said, "Are you just going to sit there and talk, or are you going to fish?"

I want to ask you a question. How about you? Now, listen. Are you going to come to Bellevue Baptist Church, listen to a sermon, make some notes, but would you say, "Dear God, make me a soul winner; make me a witness."? Again, a witness is somebody who just tells what he's seen and heard. Friend, there's no greater joy than to lead a soul to Jesus Christ. Recognize His presence in us. Rely upon His power to us. And remember His program for us. We are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. And, this year, we're going to be living supernaturally, because we're going to learn the secret in the Book of Acts. And God's people said, Amen.

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed.

# Making Jesus Known

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 7, 2001

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 1:1–3

*“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus,  
of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”*

ACTS 1:1

## Outline

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## Introduction

Well, our Lord, who looked into the mouth of an open grave and said, “Lazarus, come forth,” is the God who is bigger than any problem you may have. Thank God for the testimony of Lazarus, and thank God for the testimony of every twice-born child of God in this building today.

Take God’s Word, find the Book of Acts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and then Acts in the New Testament. Today, we’re going to be talking about Making Jesus Known. As a matter of fact, that’s the theme for this entire year. The year at Bellevue Baptist Church, this year, is the year of evangelism, and with all of our heart and soul, we’re going to be emphasizing making Jesus known.

Now, you know at Bellevue Baptist Church, we have a Mission Statement. You should know it by heart, but it is in three parts. The first part of the Mission Statement is that Bellevue Baptist Church exists for the purpose of Magnifying Jesus through Worship and the Word. That’s what we’re doing this morning: Magnifying Jesus through Worship and the Word.

The second part of Bellevue’s Mission Statement is this: Moving Believers in Jesus Toward Maturity and Ministry. That is, helping you to grow up, not to be a spiritual baby, and then to find a ministry, because God has a ministry for every man and woman in

this building today, if you will grow up and ask God to put you to use.

Now, so, Magnifying Jesus through Worship and the Word; Moving Believers in Jesus toward Maturity and Ministry; and then, last of all, Making Jesus Known to our Neighbors and the Nations—Making Jesus Known. Friend, this world needs to know Jesus. Now, that's not just rhetoric—that is absolute truth. There is no answer to the problems of this world, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. I sincerely believe that with all of my heart, and I hope that you do. Making Jesus Known not only to our neighbors, but to the nations, and not only to the nations, but to our neighbors. Friends all around me are trying to find what the heart yearns for, by sin undermined. I have the secret, I know where 'tis found. Only true pleasures in Jesus abound. Jesus is all this world needs today. Blindly men strive, for sin darkens their way. Oh, to pull back the grim curtains of night. One look at Jesus, and all will be light.

Now, we're going to look in the Book of Acts and find out how they did it in the Book of Acts. If we want to do something new, we need to study something old. We need to go back to the very fundamentals, back to the basics.

I don't know whether it's true or not, but there's a legendary story about the great coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi. And it is said that, one day, when the team had played so miserably, he decided he would bring them all the way back to the very rudiments, back to the absolute fundamentals, back to the basics. So he got the team together, ready to talk to them. He reached in the bag, and pulled out an object, held it up, and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football." Now, these are professional football players. "Gentlemen, this is a football." Bring them back to the absolute fundamentals. I want to do that with you this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a Bible—this is a Bible. We're going to go back and find out what the Word of God has to say about reaching our generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Somebody criticized Billy Graham, and said, "He's going to set evangelism back fifty years." He said, "Well, I didn't mean to do that. I wanted to set it back two thousand years." And that's what we need to do, is to go back, so we can start there and go forward.

Now, I want to lay three things on your heart, because this speaks to you. Would you say this—not out loud, but say it to yourself: "The preacher is preaching to me this morning." Just say that to yourself now: "The preacher is preaching to me this morning. God has something for me this morning. God wants me to be a part of Making Jesus Known to my Neighbors and the Nations." And three things I would lay on your heart if you, if that would be true.

## I. We Need to Recognize His Presence in Us

Number one: you need to recognize His presence in you. We need to recognize His presence in us. Look here, verses 1 through 3: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus...—somebody said, “that’s the awfulest name I ever heard”—The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

Now, go back to verse 1. Look at it: “...of all that Jesus began to do and teach.” Notice it is an unfinished story. “...of all that Jesus began to do...” That is, Jesus had not finished. Now, when the Book of Acts was written, Jesus had already ascended to heaven. He’d already gone back to the glory. And Luke had written about that. He called that, “The former treatise have I written unto thee, O Theophilus.” What was the former treatise that Luke had written? It was the Gospel of Luke. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke, and it told about all that Jesus did and taught. But Luke said, this is what He began to do. Now, the emphasis is that the Book of Acts is what Jesus is continuing to do. In the Gospel, Jesus began; in Acts, Jesus continues. In the Gospel, He did that through His literal body. In the Book of Acts, He does that through His mystical body. Now, learn this: that the church of Jesus Christ is the body of Jesus on this earth. Now, listen. Don’t let that go over your head. That is not incidental. That is so fundamental that Jesus Christ inhabits His church. He is alive and well. We are His body. We are His spiritual body. People talk about what would Jesus do if He were here? Friend, He is here. He lives in us, and we need to understand that, because if we don’t, we will be superficial and not supernatural. God wants us to be supernatural. Anything about you or me, so far as my Christian life is concerned, that can be explained, is superficial. Anything that you can explain apart from Jesus is superficial. I am called upon, and you are called upon, to be supernatural. Our life, our Christian life, is supernatural from beginning to end. It starts with the supernatural. The new birth is supernatural. We’re not just nice people; we’re new creatures. When we get finished, when God’s finished with us, and we die, or the rapture comes, we’re going to be made like Him, swept up to glory, given a glorified body. That’s supernatural. So the beginning miracle is supernatural. The ending miracle is supernatural. I want to tell you something: the middle miracle is supernatural. That is, Christ in you. It’ll be a great day when we learn that Jesus doesn’t want us to do anything for Him. He wants to do something through us. You say, “You’re playing with words.” No, I’m not. I am not. Listen. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God...” Not faith in the Son of God—“...the faith

of the Son of God.” He puts His faith in me. Faith is not something I conjure up. “The faith of the Son of God”: that is the life that we are now to live. And, folks, I’m telling you, the only thing that I have any right to anybody to ask to believe about my spiritual life has to be Christ in me, or else it is superficial.

Now, many of us start out in the Christian life, and we think it’s very easy to live. Stuart Briscoe, a great preacher, said, “When I got saved, it was so wonderful. The burden of sin was gone. Boy, I started out, I was going to live for God, and be so happy. It’s wonderful. Here I am saved. Hallelujah, Jesus. I’ll never make another mistake, now I’ve been saved. My sins are forgiven. I have the Holy Spirit in me.” And he said, “I was saying, this is just wonderful, and then,” he said, “I stumbled and fell. I realized I wasn’t perfect, and I got discouraged a little bit, and I said, well, this isn’t as easy as I thought. This is difficult.” And he began to strive, and to try to be a better Christian. And he still failed miserably. And he stopped saying, “This is easy,” and he stopped saying, “This is difficult.” He hung his head in despair, and said, “This is impossible. Nobody can live the way I’m supposed to. I just can’t do it.” And you know, he was right. It is impossible. But then, he discovered that God is the God of the impossible, and that Jesus Christ was in him—that Jesus Christ was in him—and when he stopped trying, and started trusting, and let the Lord Jesus Christ live His life through him, he stopped saying “This is easy,” or “this is difficult,” or “this is impossible,” and he started saying, “This is wonderful.” And it is wonderful, when we understand that Christ is in us.

Major Ian Thomas said, “We can’t. He never said we could. He can. He always said He would.” We need to let Him. And we need to let the Lord Jesus Christ live His life in us. What Jesus began to do in the Gospels, Jesus wants to continue to do, and He wants to do that in Memphis, Tennessee, and He wants to do that through Bellevue Baptist Church. And you are a member of the church. You are part of the body. And Jesus Christ wants to live His life through you. I’ve said it before: there’s only one person who has ever lived the Christian life. It’s not you, and it’s not Adrian. It’s Jesus. And, if in your home or my home, or your job or my job, or your school or my school, if it is lived, it will be Jesus Christ living the life in us. And, therefore, it will not be a superficial life. It will be a supernatural life.

Now, it is Christ in us. It’s Christ in us. Our former Associate Pastor, Bob Sorrell, is a good golfer. As a matter of fact, I understand he’s an excellent golfer. I’ve never seen him play golf. He’s tried to tantalize me to come out on the golf course and play with him, but I won’t do it because I’m too rotten proud. I don’t want to get beat by Bob Sorrell like that. If I thought I could beat him, I’d play in a skinny minute, but I know I can’t. And, as a matter of fact, I’ve only tried to play golf several times. It looked like I was trying to kill snakes. And so, I just don’t know how to play that game, and don’t play that game. But now, suppose that one day I went out, and I said, “Well, you know, I

really believe I'm going to put Bob in his place, so I'm going to go out and play like Tiger Woods." I just decide that Tiger Woods is my model for golf, and he's a great golfer, so I am going to play like Tiger Woods. Well, what good is that going to if I say I'm going to play like Tiger Woods? I can't play like Tiger Woods. So what good is it to say, "Well, I'm going to be like Tiger Woods?" But suppose I could take Tiger Woods and put him in a pill and swallow him down. He fills me. And now, I'm walking around in Adrian's skin, but it's Tiger on the inside. I say, "Bob, let's play golf. I go out there and I tee off. There it goes straight down the fairway. Bob's jaw falls on his chest, and he says, "Man, I can't explain that." Oh, no, he wouldn't be able to explain it, because it would be someone in me doing it. Friend, that's what it is. It is Jesus in you that is living the Christian life. I'm not just playing with words. Folks, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory"—Colossians 1 and verse 27.

In Acts chapter 5, verse 12, the Bible says, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders done"—"by the hands." Actually, the Greek language is, through the hands of the apostles, signs and wonders were done. One pastor used to keep a tattered, old glove on his desk, and he'd pick it up and say, "Lord, You fill me like my hand fills this glove. And, Lord God, You use me." Now, would you say that today? Would you recognize His presence in you, because He wants to do something through you? Look in verse 2: "Until the day he was taken up, after that he, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles..." Now, for forty days, Jesus had been walking, talking, teaching the apostles after His resurrection. Then He was taken up. And He gave commandments. Well, you say, "I'd like to know what those commandments were, and are." Good, I'm glad you asked.

Put in your margin Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20. We don't have to guess about it. Here's what Jesus said during this time from His resurrection, before His ascension. Here's what Jesus said to the church, which is His body. "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." "I'm not going back to heaven, peering down through the clouds, and telling you to do this. I am with you always to the end of the age." And what did He command us to do? What has He commanded Mark and Adrian and Jim to do? What has He commanded you to do?

#### **A. We Are to Make Disciples**

All right, first of all, we're to make disciples. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples..." Now, He didn't say, make decisions; He said, make disciples. People talk about great revival crusades, and they say, "We have a thousand decisions." I want to know, how many disciples did you get? Make disciples. A disciple is a learner, a follower, somebody who has a new master. We are to make disciples.

## **B. We Are to Mark Disciples**

First of all, we're to make them, and then we're to mark them. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"—did you know that baptism is a part of the Great Commission to the church? We have a lot of evangelism programs today that don't emphasize baptism. That is wrong. It's almost heresy. Jesus said we're to "baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Have you been baptized? If you're a believer and you've not been baptized, you're living in sheer disobedience to our Lord. Don't think it's incidental. Some people don't want to get baptized, because they're afraid it'll mess up a \$50 hairdo. I'm telling you, folks, this is not incidental. Jesus began His public ministry by being baptized Himself, to identify Himself with us, and He concluded His public ministry by commanding baptism. We identify ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know what happens when you go up there in that baptistry and get baptized? You're saying to everybody, "Look. Here I am. I am identifying myself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I'm not ashamed of Jesus. I want everybody to know that I am baptized as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ."

You see that ring. That's the only jewelry I have, that I know of. I might have a few trinkets somewhere I don't wear. That's the only piece of jewelry I have—right there. You know why I wear that? That shows that I belong to a lady. She's up there in the choir this morning. She's my beloved. I'm not ashamed of her. I'm not ashamed for people to know I'm married. I want people to know I'm a one-woman man. I don't take it off when I go out of town. I belong to a lady, a special lady. Her name is Joyce.

When you get baptized, you're saying, "Look. I'm not ashamed. I belong to Jesus Christ. I've died with Him; I've risen with Him; I've ascended with Him. I belong to Jesus Christ."

## **C. We Are to Mature Disciples**

We are to make disciples. We are to mark disciples. And then, we are to mature disciples. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." We're to take people, once we bring them to Jesus, once we baptize them, then we're to move believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, therefore, the Book of Acts that we're going to study ends in chapter 28, but the rest of us are going to be writing chapter 29 with our lives, and, as Jesus Christ is alive and well, living in this city, living not only in our church corporately, but living in you individually, because the corporate body is made up of individual members.

So, what's the first thing that we need to understand? We need to recognize His presence in us. This is all that Jesus began to do and to teach, but He is continuing—He is continuing to do it.

## II. We Need to Rely on His Promise to Us

Now, here's number two. Not only do we need to recognize His presence in us, but, friend, we need to rely upon His promise to us. Look now in verse 4: "And being assembled together with them—that is, Jesus is with them after His resurrection—He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." This is the promise that He made. Luke 24, verse 49, says, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued—or clothed—with power from on high." That is, He said to the disciples, "Don't you start out to do a thing until the promise of the Father comes."

Now, the promise of the Father is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God was poured out upon the church on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were tarrying. They were waiting. And then, on that special day, the Holy Spirit, as we're going to see in the next chapter, was poured out upon the infant church. And Jesus said, "You wait there in Jerusalem. You tarry in Jerusalem until you are endued with power. Don't just go out and try to do something until you have the energy of the Holy Spirit, the power, the dynamite of the Holy Spirit in you, to do this."

Now, what has He told them? Well, He told them that they were to be witnesses. He told them that they were to share Himself. Well now, you think about it. To whom is He speaking? Folks, this is a motley crowd. They are tax collectors, and fishermen, and just ordinary people. They're unlettered. They have no finances. They have no colleges and seminaries. They have no political clout, and yet He tells this little group, this little motley group, this small group, "You're to be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the world"—mission impossible. But He said, "Don't you go out and do it until you be endued with power from on high."

They went out against the imperial iron strength of Rome. They went out against the sophisticated intellectualism of the groups. They went out against the stiff-necked bigotry of the Jews. They turned that world upside down. How did they do it? They had power from on high. It is so important that we understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we don't have to tarry until we're filled with the Spirit. No, because Pentecost has come. We don't need to say, "God, pour out Your Spirit." He has poured His Spirit now. What we need to do is to surrender, and say, "Lord, I know that You have sent Your power. I know that You have sent Your Spirit. I surrender myself to You. I am ready, willing, and able, Lord, through Your Holy Spirit, to do what You want me to do." You see, apart from the anointing of the Holy Spirit, apart from relying upon His promise to us, it is a mission impossible.

I heard about some cows who were out grazing. A milk truck passed with some advertising on the side, and it gave the name of the dairy, and then said, “Our milk is grade A, pasteurized, fortified, vitamin enriched, sanitized. It comes from contented cows.” One cow looked at the other, and said, “It kind of makes you feel inadequate, doesn’t it?”

When we look at what our Lord has commanded us to do, I mean, we are totally inadequate. But with the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit—look again in verse 8: “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me...” You are to be consciously filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

I was reading where a scientist said there’s enough power in a cube of sugar—he’s talking about atomic power now—enough power in a cube of sugar to decimate the entire city of London—one little cube of sugar. Now, that sugar does not generate that power. All it would do would be to release it. You might see an atomic power station. You say, “Well, that generates power.” Well, in the truest sense, if you go back to the rudiments, it is releasing the power. You see, the power in this church is there. There’s enough power in this auditorium this morning to turn Shelby County inside out, upside down, for Jesus Christ, but it’s got to be released. We have been endued with power from on high.

So how can we do this? Well, first of all, we need to recognize His presence in us. Jesus lives in us. Number two: we need to rely upon His promise to us. He has promised the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. We don’t have to ask for guidance to energize us, to encourage us. The Holy Spirit is alive and well in us, and we don’t have to be waiting on God anymore. He has sent the Holy Spirit. We need to surrender.

### **III. We Need to Respond to His Program Through Us**

Now, here’s the third and final thing. Look. Recognize His presence in us. Jesus is continuing to work and to teach. Number two: rely upon His promise to us—“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” And, number three: we need to respond to His program through us. Now, look again at what He says in verse 8: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.” That’s His program for us. We don’t have to wonder what He wants us to do. We’re to be witnesses. Now, say to yourself, “If I’m saved, I’m a witness.” You are a witness. You say, “Well, wait a minute, Pastor. I don’t know how to be a witness.” Well, I hope you train yourself to be a better witness, but, friend, if you’re saved, you are a witness. You’re a witness. You don’t have to have a training course to be a witness. Now, I want you to take one, if you can. But, you see, He didn’t say, “You shall be my lawyer.” What’s the difference between a witness and a lawyer? A lawyer

argues a case; a witness tells what he has seen and heard.

Now, do you know the reason that some people are not witnesses? They haven't seen or heard anything. I mean, spiritually, they don't know anything. If you have seen and heard, if you know Jesus, you can't help but be a witness. You say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, if I try to witness to somebody, they would ask me some questions about something I can't answer." Of course they could. People ask me questions that I can't answer. You don't have to know to answer to everything. A witness doesn't have to know the answer to everything. All they want to know in a courtroom is what have you seen, and what have you heard. That's all. "Just the facts, ma'am," as Jack Webb used to say. If you remember that program—just the facts, ma'am. That's all they want to know.

You see, there was a man born blind. Jesus opened his eyes. And so, the enemies of Christ began to castigate and excoriate and interrogate this man, and they said, "Who was it that healed you? What were His credentials? By what authority did He heal you? Well, this man, he'd never even known of Jesus before, until Jesus came and opened his eyes. And they said, "Tell us, is He a sinner?" This man said, "Look," he said, "whether He's a sinner or not, I don't know, " but he said, "one thing I know. Once I was blind, and now I see." Dr. Vance Havner said, "A Christian with a glowing testimony is worth a library full of arguments." Once I was blind, and now I see. You don't have to know the answer to every question.

Let me give you a good answer you can always use. Are you ready for it? Boy, this will take a lot of pressure off you. Somebody asks you a question you don't understand, you can't answer—here's the answer: just say, I don't know. Isn't that a great answer? You know, when you tell people you don't know what you don't know, they'll begin to believe you when you do tell them what you do know. I think it was Josh Billings who said, "A man doesn't show his ignorance by not knowing so much as he does by knowing so much that ain't so." Just say, "Hey, I don't know. Now, let me tell you what I do know." A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and what he has heard. You don't have to know everything to witness. Friend, if you've met Jesus, if Jesus has changed your life, you're going to want to share the Lord Jesus.

A preacher went into a big department store, like a K-Mart, back to the back. He went back there to buy some fishing tackle. And he was standing there at the counter, and he just happened to say this: "What's a good lure for bass?" When he said that, the man standing next to him, his head snapped around. He said, "Man, let me tell you," and he began to talk to him about fishing lures. And, from that time on, he just kept talking about good places to catch bass, how to use this lure, and talked about this and that, and he kept talking. The preacher bought one of the lures, and started out through the department store. That man followed him all the way through the department store,

just talking to him about bass fishing, good places to catch bass, etc. The preacher left, went outside to go to his car; the man followed him outside. He's getting in his car—he's still talking to him about catching bass. Well, you'd just have to say that was a man who loved fishing, right? And that was a man who knew something about it, and it was very easy for him to do that. Now, if you took that same man and put him in a church, and said, "Sir, go out and share Jesus Christ," he'd say, "Oh, I can't talk. I don't know how to do that; I don't know how." No. You know what his problem is? Jesus Christ is not as real to him as the bass. That's it. Jesus Christ is not as real to him as a bass. Friend, when you meet the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ has changed your life. You'll be a witness unto Him. A witness is somebody who tells what he's seen and heard.

May I ask you this question this morning: Do you have a testimony? Have you seen anything? Have you heard anything? How are we going to share Jesus Christ? How are we going to make Jesus Christ known to this world? Number one: we need to recognize His presence in us. Number two: we need to rely upon His promise to us. Number three: we need to respond to His program through us. His program through us is, we are to be witnesses, both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

Now, let me tell you, this year is the year of evangelism at Bellevue. You know what our challenge is now as a church? We're going to start in our Jerusalem. We're not going to play leapfrog. We're not going to say, "Well, we're going to go all over the world, but we're going to miss Shelby County." Our assignment from God is to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to every soul in Shelby County, every one of them. It doesn't mean that they're all supposed to come to Bellevue. They would not, and they should not. If we find a church that's plateaued, we, as a church, are going to come alongside that church and help that church to grow. If they don't have any workers, we'll ask some of you to go as associate members, and just get in there and help them to teach and to share Jesus Christ. If their staff needs help, we'll say, "Come over here and sit in one of our staff meetings, and see if we can share what the Lord Jesus has taught us." And we're going to look at our city geographically. We're going to look at the north and the south, the east and the west, and we're going to see that every home is saturated with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we cannot reach an area, we'll help those who can reach that area to reach that area. And we're going to reach the white, and we're going to reach the black, and we're going to reach the Asians, and we're going to reach the Latinos with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're going to reach the up and out, we're going to reach the down and out, we're going to reach the out and out, with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're going to start in our Jerusalem and we're going to make Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. And not only that, but we will do whatever it takes to reach this community with Jesus Christ. That's what we're going to do.

Our responsibility is to make Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. We

begin at Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. And that's not to take away the importance of the uttermost part of the earth. I met two of our wonderful young people this morning who said, "Pastor,"—a young married couple—"we're going to Kosovo with the gospel of Christ. The International Mission Board has accepted us. We're going to Kosovo." And my heart just burned with joy to think that kids who grew up here at Bellevue Baptist Church are now going to Kosovo to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. But you know why they're going to Kosovo? Because they're already witnessing here. If you're not a witness here, 2,000 miles of ocean is not going to make you a witness. If you're not doing anything here, please don't export it. What I'm saying is this: this is the Lord's call to us. Now, listen to me, friend. God can use you. Don't cop out. Age is no barrier. Education is no barrier. Social status is no barrier. God can use you. God can use you now. God can use you with what you have. And God will supply all that you need to be a witness.

General Patton, a great general in World War II, he had on his tanks, 3 A's in a row—A-A-A—and then there would be a zero with a line, a bar across it. A-A-A-0, with a bar across it. Somebody asked the great general, "What does that mean?" He said, "The first A is anywhere; the second A is any time; the third A is any way." "Well, what is the 0 with the bar across it?" "Bar nothing." Anywhere, any time, any way, bar nothing, we are at war. And so are we as a church, and we need to understand that God has a plan for us. This is God's call to Bellevue Baptist Church. This is the year of evangelism. We're going to be making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations, and you're to be a part of it. God is calling you. And, friend, this is not something that's just nice. This is a necessity. And, if you call yourself a Christian, and Jesus Christ says, "You are to do whatever I've commanded you," if you fail, you're not just merely failing; you're guilty of high treason against Heaven's King.

## Conclusion

There's an old story that preachers tell. I love it. A man was a fisherman. He would always come in with a boatload full of fish. Other people might come in with dry runs. He always came in with a boatload of fish. One day, a man came to him, and said, "Stranger, would you take me fishing with you?" He said, "Yes, come on. Get in." They got out in the middle of the lake, and this man, who was this great fisherman, reached under his seat, got a stick of dynamite, lit it, and threw it overboard. It sank to the bottom. Boom, a big explosion. All these dead fish floated to the top. The man just gathered them up, hundreds of them. The stranger, who was fishing with the fisherman, reached in his billfold, pulled it out, and showed him the badge, and said, "Sir, I am the game warden. What you're doing is illegal. You're in serious trouble." With that, the man, who was the fisherman, reached under the seat, took another stick of dynamite, lit

it, and handed it to this man. He said, “Are you going to fish, or just sit there and talk?”

What about you? Are you going to take this gospel dynamite and do nothing with it? “You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” That word power is the word we get our word dynamite from. The gospel has not failed; it’s just not yet been tried. I’m telling you, folks, if the army that’s in this building this morning, and was in the earlier service, if we ever really catch fire for the Lord Jesus Christ, and recognize His presence in us, remember His promise to us, and rely upon His program for us to make disciples, we’re going to see Jesus do something wonderful in this area. And I want you to be with me. And God’s people said—Amen.

Now, bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. And I want to lead you in a prayer. If you’re not saved, I want to lead you in a prayer, so you can receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Now, listen to me. No one move. Don’t gather your Bibles. If you’re already saved, you begin to pray for those who are not saved. You can be saved today. I mean, today, this morning, you can step from death to life, from condemnation to salvation. You can be saved today and kept for all eternity. It’s not a fairytale. The gospel of Jesus Christ is absolute power today. If you will receive Christ, He will forgive every sin. He will come into your life to empower you for the purpose to which He has called you. He’ll begin to make you what He wants you to be. And, when you die, or when He comes again, He’ll take you to heaven. Would you like to be saved, I mean, truly be saved? Not just be a church member, but truly saved. Not just a nice person, but truly saved to know Jesus. All right, I want you to pray a prayer like this, if you can, silently, but fervently: Dear God. I am a sinner, and I’m lost. I deserve judgment, and I’m headed to hell. Was that hard for you to say? Friend, if you’re not saved, it’s all true about you. I’m headed to hell, but I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me, if I would trust You. I do. I believe You’re the Son of God. I believe You paid for my sin with Your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised You from the dead, and I receive You now into my heart and my life, as my Lord and Savior. Take control of my life now. Begin to make me the person You want me to be. Save me, Jesus. Ask Him. Save me, Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then, by an act of faith, pray this way: Lord Jesus, I receive it, and that settles it. You’re now my Lord and my Savior and my God and my Friend. It is a gift, the gift of Your grace, and I receive it by faith. Now, Lord, I’m weak, but You’re strong, so begin to work in me. Give me the courage to make it public. Help me not to be ashamed of You. And begin now to make me the person You want me to be. You’ll have to teach me how to walk and talk and work, because I don’t know how. But, Lord, I turn my life over to You. Begin now in me to make me the person You want me to be, and I will follow You the rest of my life, not in order to be saved, because that’s a gift, but, because I’m saved, I will live for you, Lord Jesus. In Your name I pray. Amen.

# The Pathway to Power

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: January 4, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 1:1–9**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Recognize the Presence of Jesus in Your Life
- II. Receive Jesus' Promise to You
  - A. I Need His Power to Enlighten Me
  - B. I Need His Power to Enable Me
  - C. I Need His Power to Encourage Me
- III. Respond to Jesus' Program Through You

Conclusion

## Introduction

The book of Acts is a wonderful, wonderful book, and we're going to be looking at the book of Acts for quite a bit of time in the future. As a matter of fact, we're beginning in this New Year a brand new series, and the title of the series is "That Old-Time Religion." Now the reason that I want to call it "That Old-Time Religion" is that we need to take a look back, that we might really face the future. And it's very important that we do this today, because it is the Old-Time Religion that needs to be the New-Time Religion.

I heard that Billy Graham had come to a particular city some time ago—he was supposed to come for a revival crusade, and there was a preacher who didn't want him to come. The preacher was kind of liberal, and he said, "We don't want that man here in our city. Why, he will set evangelism back fifty years." When Billy Graham heard that, he said, "Well, I didn't want to set evangelism back fifty years; I wanted to set it back two thousand years." Amen? That's what we need to do—get back to the basics.

I am told that Vince Lombardi (the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers) didn't like to lose a football game. And on a particular occasion, they had lost a game, and it was a game that he didn't want to lose, didn't think they should have lost, and lost because of some foolish mistakes. He said very little on the bus headed away from the stadium, and very little on the airplane coming back. But the next day at practice, when they assembled on the field, he reached into a canvas bag, held up a football and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football," and he started with the basics. And that's what I want us to do this coming year: I want us just to get back to the basics.

I'm impressed as I read the book of Acts. The book of Acts is the story of success. It is the story of a church triumphant. Really, it is the story of a small group of unlettered, uncultured people with meager resources, very little money, no prestige, no colleges, no seminaries, no radio or television, no printing presses, and no magnificent buildings—a small little group of people who went out to tell the story of a publicly executed Jew. They went out against great obstacles—the imperial might of Rome, the intellectual sophistication of Greece, the religious bigotry of that day—and they turned that world inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ. They did so much with so little. We do so little with so much. Now I believe we need to go back and see what they did and how they did it. And for that reason, we're going to be studying the Book of Acts, which is the story of a church on fire with evangelism and growth, and I believe it can become our pattern for today. And I want God to burn the message into your heart.

Now today, for this particular message, I'm going to be speaking to you, as I've already told the television and radio audiences, about "The Pathway to Power." And we're going to be looking at Acts chapter 1, the first nine verses. Are you ready? *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen; to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard from me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight"* (Acts 1:1-9).

Now look again in verse 1: *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach"* (Acts 1:1). Now what was the former treatise? It was the Gospel of Luke, because, you see, the author of the book of Acts is the author of the Gospel of Luke. Doctor Luke, who was a medical doctor, wrote the Gospel of Luke, and then he wrote the book of Acts. And you know, that's a blessing to me—to see a medical doctor who was not ashamed of Jesus. We have a great host of medical doctors in our church who are not ashamed of Jesus, who believe the Word of God. That tells me that you don't have to check your brains at the door when you give your

heart to Jesus Christ. I thank God for Doctor Luke, who was a great physician.

And also he was a noted historian, and he had written the former treatise, which was the Gospel of Luke; and now, he has written this wonderful book of Acts to tell us what happened there in those primitive years of the Church, and also, what ought to be the pattern for us who live here in this day and in this age. And I pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help me to indelibly impress upon your hearts and minds three vital truths, which come out of the verses that I've read to you today—three things that I want to impregnate your conscience with; three things that I want to cause to reverberate through your soul and to be etched upon your very being, that you will never get them out of your heart and life all the year long; three things that will help you to live victoriously, and to have power with God and power with men—three wonderful, wonderful truths.

## **I. Recognize the Presence of Jesus in Your Life**

Truth number one: I want you—now, I'm talking to Christians—I want you to recognize the presence of Jesus in your life. “Well,” you say, “that's so simple. What's so earth-shaking about that?” Oh friend, listen. Pay attention. That is more than just a phrase—that is one of the most vital, dynamic, electrifying, earth-shaking thoughts that I can ever give to you. Now notice how this starts. *“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1).

Now notice: The idea is not that Jesus is finished. He is still doing, and He is still teaching. “Well,” you say, “but the Bible says that He was taken up into Heaven.” That's right, but He's still acting, He is still working, and He is still teaching. You see, in the gospels, He was here in His physical body. In the book of Acts, He is here in His mystical Body. Now in the Bible that I have, it says across the top: “The Acts of the Apostles.” Well, that was put in there by the publisher—that's not a part of the inspired text. This is not really the acts of the apostles. It's not really even specifically the acts of the Holy Spirit. What you have, in the book of Acts, are the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in the Gospel of Luke I showed you all that Jesus started to do. In the book of Acts, I'm showing you all that Jesus continues to do. Now folks Jesus is still alive and active. He just has a different body. You say, “Where is the body of Jesus?” Sitting in this auditorium. “Where is the presence of Jesus?” In us. You see, He doesn't want us to do anything for Him today. When will we ever learn this—that He wants to do something through us? The Bible says, *“Christ in you [is] the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27). Jesus Christ is alive, and He lives in us.

Now you know, when I was a young Christian, I started out to do something for the Lord, and it was a great day in my life when I discovered that God didn't want me to do

anything for Him. As a matter of fact, I couldn't do anything for Him. Well, you say, "That's confusing. I thought you were supposed to serve the Lord?" Well, I'm using technical language, but pay attention: *The Christian life is not difficult—the Christian life is totally impossible.* Impossible. There's not anybody here who can live the Christian life: nobody on this platform, nobody in this choir, nobody in this orchestra, and nobody in our television audience—not one can live the Christian life. *There's only one person who ever lived the Christian life—His name is Jesus. And there's only one person who can live the Christian life, and His name is Jesus. And if the Christian life is lived where you live, it will be Jesus, in you, living that Christian life.*

Do you understand what I'm talking about? It is Christ in you—the hope of glory. He's the only one who can live the Christian life. Somehow, we get the idea that we can live it. Now we all know that we're not saved by our own works. We all know that salvation is a miracle—that new birth is a miracle. We know that our Christian life commences with a miracle, and we know that it's going to conclude with a miracle—our translation when we're caught up to meet our Lord in the air, at least our earthly Christian life. But I want to tell you, dear friend, not only does it commence with a miracle, and not only does it conclude with a miracle, but it is to continue with a miracle.

You see, there are to be three miracles. The very life that I live is to be a miracle life. It is to be Christ in me. The Apostle Paul said, in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20: *"I am crucified with Christ..."* Well, what can a dead man do? Nothing. *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). Christ in us.

There was a preacher in Kentucky who used to keep on his desk an old tattered leather glove; and each Sunday, before he'd go out to preach, he took that old glove off of the desk, and he would slip his hand into the glove and flex it several times. Then he would take the glove off, put it on his desk, and go back out and preach. Someone said, "Why do you do that?" He said, "To remind myself of this vital lesson that that glove is absolutely impotent and powerless until my hand is slipped into it, and then I say, 'O God, as my hand has activated this glove, I want you, Lord Jesus, to activate my life, and I want you, Lord, to enter into me and inhabit my humanity and live Your life through me.'" And by the way, that's not a bad illustration, because in the Old Testament—in the Book of Judges—the Bible says that the Spirit of the Lord wore Gideon like a suit of clothes. The Bible says the Lord clothed himself with Gideon.

How would you like for God to wear you like a suit of clothes, and just as you carry around your suit of clothes, for the Lord just to carry your humanity, and for Him to just inhabit your humanity? You see, the reason that this early church did what they did with such power, is that it really wasn't them doing it. It was Jesus doing it. You say, "Well,

I'm not adequate." Well, I'm glad that you've learned it. But He is adequate. Somebody has coined these words: "Lord, I can't. You never said that I could, but You can, and You always said that You would." *You see, the great ability that you need is availability. Bringing the world to Christ is not your responsibility—it is your response to His ability.* You see, we have a *mission impossible*. How are we going to fulfill that mission?

I heard of some cows that were out grazing, and a milk truck went past, and they looked up. And there was advertisement on the side of that big milk tanker. It gave the name of the dairy, and then it said, "Our milk is Grade 'A': sanitized, pasteurized, homogenized, vitamin-enriched from contented cows." One cow said to the other one, "It makes you feel inadequate, doesn't it?" Well friend, when I look at the Great Commission—what our Lord has told us to do—how inadequate do I feel? But listen. Jesus said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus didn't say that we would build His Church. He said that *He* would build His Church.

Now notice what Doctor Luke is saying. He said, "I wrote the Gospel of Luke—that's what Jesus began to do. I'm writing the book of Acts—that's what Jesus is going to continue to do." The first time He did it in His physical body; and now He's going to do it in His mystical Body. Oh friend, if you could just understand that Christ is in you and that He wants to do this in you—what a difference it's going to make!

Turn, if you will, to Acts chapter 5 for a moment, and begin in about verse 12, and let me show you something here. "*And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest dared no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them.)*" Now watch in verse 14: "*And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)*" (Acts 5:12–14)—a landslide of souls being saved.

Go back to verse 12: "*And by the hands of the apostles...*" Look at that little word *by*. It may be accurately translated "through the hands of the apostles." In other words, it is not what the *apostles* were doing—it is what the *Lord* was doing *through* their hands. How would you like for Jesus to work through your hands, to speak through your lips, to think through your mind, and to love with your heart? Jesus Christ now has your body as His body, and He lives in you. Oh, if we could only understand this. You see, when we try to live the Christian life without Christ in us living that Christian life, no wonder we fail. How many Baptists are failing—and Methodists and Presbyterians, for that matter—because they are trying? God doesn't want you to try. It's time, this new year, that you stop trying and start trusting. Say: "Lord, I can't so I'll quit trying. But now, Lord, You can, and I'm going to let you."

Now I'm not a golfer. Brother Bob thinks that he's a golfer, but I'm not a golfer. I don't golf. But suppose now I decided that I'm going to be a golfer—that I've been converted

to golf and am now going to be a golfer. And since I've been converted to golf, I've got to get a model. So I say, "Well, let's see. Who will I pick? Jack Nicklaus? All right. He's about my age, I guess. I'll take Jack Nicklaus. I'll let him be my model. Oh, I'm going to read books about Jack Nicklaus, and I'm going to see how he plays. So I'm just going to go out there and play like Jack Nicklaus." Do you think I could? Of course not! I would be ludicrous to think as much. I tried to play the game one time. It looked like I was killing snakes. Now listen. If there's some way, Brother Jeff, that I could get Jack Nicklaus into me—some Jack Nicklaus pill that I could swallow and his life would be reproduced in me, and then I'd get out there and tee up, and that thing would take off for hundreds of yards, straight down the fairway—that wouldn't be me. That would be Jack in me doing that, you see. Now friend, if you do anything that is spiritual, lasting, and worthwhile, then it's not you. It's Jesus in you, and Jesus needs to get the praise and the glory.

*"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach"* (Acts 1:1). But the idea is that He has not quit doing it now. Then, He was in the gospels, in His physical body; and now, He has a mystical Body. Won't it be wonderful to see what Jesus does in our church this year as we begin to let Him work—and, more specifically, what Jesus does in your life? All right. Number one: If you want to be radically, dramatically transformed, then recognize, recognize, recognize His presence in you.

## **II. Receive Jesus' Promise to You**

Number two: Receive His promise to you. Now He's made a promise. Begin now, in verse 4, and look at it. *"And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power..."*—now, remember the keynote of our message today is how to have power: "The Pathway to Power"—*"But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:4–8).

Now Jesus had made a promise. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 24, verse 49, He said, *"And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49). Now Jesus said, "Don't go out and try to do anything until you're endued with power." Now friend not only

is it foolish, but it is wicked—it is wicked to try to do God’s work without God’s power. Now you can receive the promise of the Father, and the promise of the Father is spiritual power through the Holy Spirit to get that work done.

Now we don’t have to tarry any more because the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an accomplished fact. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that a Christian today is commanded to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, but we’re all commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And Ephesians 5, verse 18, says, “...*Be filled with the Spirit*” (Ephesians 5:18). And when we’re filled with the Spirit of God, we’re filled with the Spirit of power. And the Holy Spirit of God is Christ in the Christian.

You say, “Well, Brother Rogers, you said that Christ is in me, and now you say that I need the Holy Spirit. Do I need Jesus or the Holy Spirit?” The answer is yes. You need Christ the Holy Spirit. *Let me give you a good definition of the Holy Spirit: “Christ in the Christian.”* Jesus said, “*I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you*” (John 14:18), when He was talking about the Holy Spirit.

You see, we don’t worship three gods—we worship one God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit in my heart, and in my bosom, is Jesus in me—that’s the promise of the Father. “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you...*” (Acts 1:8).

#### **A. I Need His Power to Enlighten Me**

And why do I need that power? I need that power in this coming year to enlighten me. I don’t know where to go. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to say, but He does. Jesus said that He’ll guide you.

#### **B. I Need His Power to Enable Me**

But not only do I need Him to enlighten me, dear friend, I need Him to enable me, because, as I’ve said before, I can’t. He never said I could. But not only will He enlighten me. It’s not enough to know the will of God. Do you think that, if you knew the will of God, then your problems would be over? You’ve got to do it. Well, how are you going to do it? Well, it’s going to be Him doing it in you. You can’t do it. He has to enlighten you, and then He has to enable you.

#### **C. I Need His Power to Encourage Me**

And then dear friend, He has to encourage you. You see, as a matter of fact, the word *Comforter*—the name for the Holy Spirit—also means *encourager*: one who is called alongside of me—a *paraclete*, which means somebody who just gives us strength and encouragement in order to get the job done.

These Christians were going to face persecution—that’s not an easy road. There

were going to be heartaches and tears. Some of them were going to be physically threatened, and some of them were going to be killed; but they had the power to live for Christ and to die for Christ, because the Holy Spirit of God had come upon them.

Now we're going to be talking more and more, in these studies, about who the Holy Spirit of God is and how the Holy Spirit of God empowered the apostles. The Bible says, *"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all"* (Acts 4:33).

Now one great preacher, Dr. A. C. Dixon, said, "When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely upon education, we get what education can do. When we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely upon the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do."

### **III. Respond to Jesus' Program Through You**

Now there's a third thing you need to do. Listen. Do you want to be victorious this year? You want power? Recognize His presence in you. Receive His promise of power to you. And then—and here's the bottom line—respond to His program through you. Respond to His program through you.

Now look again at Acts chapter 1, verse 8: *"But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me"* (Acts 1:8). What is His program through you? To witness—to share the love of Jesus. You say, "Well, I thought He was going to do it." Yes, He's going to do it, but He's going to do it through you; and if you don't allow Him to do it, then it will not be done. We are to be witnesses.

Now Jesus didn't call us to be lawyers. A lot of you say, "Well, you know, I just can't witness." Of course you can. Suppose you saw an accident, and they brought you into the courtroom, and they said, "Tell us what you saw." You say, "Well, you know, I just can't do that. I'm not a lawyer. I'm not trained. I've never been in a courtroom before." "Look: just the facts, ma'am—just tell us what you saw and what you heard." A witness is not a lawyer. A lawyer argues a case; a witness tells what he has seen and heard.

Now if Jesus Christ has done anything for you, then you're to witness to it. You're to tell about it. You are to share the love of Jesus. Anybody who is saved can witness. Don't tell me that you can't witness. If you can't witness, then I doubt that you've been saved. Can't you tell how you got saved? Can't you tell what happened to you? Perhaps you haven't seen anything. Perhaps you haven't heard anything, and that's the reason why you can't be a witness. But listen. When you make yourself available to His program through you—and remember again, I want to tell you that the greatest ability is availability, just simply saying, "Lord Jesus, You inhabit my humanity; Lord Jesus, in the Holy Spirit of God, You have given me power"—then you can be a witness for Him and share the saving love of Jesus.

Did you know that the word *witness* and the word *martyr* are the same word in the Greek language? Did you know that? Same word. And what is a martyr? A martyr is somebody who has been killed for the name of Christ—because of Christ. “Well,” you say, “we don’t have any more martyrs today, do we, preacher? That was all back in Bible times?” Stephen Olford has said that more people have died for the cause of Christ in the last 30 years than from Pentecost up until the last 30 years. More people have died for Jesus Christ in the last 30 years, than in all the history of the Christian Church prior to that time. I don’t know whether you’ll be so honored or not, but I know this friend, that the word *martyr* and the word *witness* are linked together, and you don’t have to die physically in order to die to your pride. You don’t have to die physically to die to your ambition. You don’t have to die physically to die to your ego, and to say, “Lord Jesus, I want to be obedient to You. I want to be a witness. And I want to start in my Jerusalem.” It doesn’t end in Jerusalem, but it starts in Jerusalem—no leapfrog here.

A man came to a foreign mission board and said, “I want to be a missionary.” They interviewed him. They said, “What are you doing for Jesus here?” He said, “Not much of anything.” They said, “Well, please, for God’s sake, don’t go overseas and do it.” Amen. Don’t export it.

No, we begin in Jerusalem, and go to Judaea, and then, we go to the uttermost parts—the outer regions—for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But dear friend, listen. When I am available to His program in me—and that is sharing Jesus Christ—I tell somebody about Jesus. Oh, there’s somebody. There’s somebody that you can bring to Jesus Christ.

Now the disciples wanted to talk about Bible prophecy. They said, “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” Jesus said, “*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me*” (Acts 1:6–8). They wanted to talk about prophecy—He wanted to talk about proclamation. *It’s time that some of us got our heads out of the clouds of prophecy and got our feet on the sidewalks of soul winning*—amen—and began telling others. Now listen, friend. You don’t know—you do not know, you cannot dream—what potentiality there may be in your witness.

## Conclusion

I shared some time ago one of the most amazing stories, which I want to share again with you. There was a man named Mr. Kimball who went to a shoe clerk in order to witness to that shoe clerk. The shoe clerk was back there in the boxes—in the stacks. This man, Mr. Kimball, was a Sunday School teacher. This nineteen-year old boy was in

his class. Mr. Kimball laid a trembling hand on the shoulder of that shoe clerk and told him about Jesus. The shoe clerk received Christ into his heart. He was saved. Do you know that shoe clerk's name? Dwight L. Moody.

Now the young people may not know about Dwight L. Moody, and some of you older people may not, but he was one of the greatest evangelists that God ever, ever put on this green earth. He started out in Chicago just teaching boys and girls in Sunday School. And winning a lot of them to Christ, he became a speaker. He was a layman, really, never ordained, but he was so powerful when he preached the gospel that he was invited over to England to preach. And there in England he preached in the church of F. B. Meyer, a very erudite and cultured Englishman. Moody murdered the King's English, and F. B. Meyer was ashamed that he had invited this uncouth, uncultured American. But yet the fire of God fell on that service. And F. B. Meyer said later—he was having tea with one of the ladies in the church—“Ah, and how is it with you today, madam?” She said, “Wonderful, Dr. Meyer.” She said, “Since Moody has been here, I've won every girl in my class to Jesus Christ.” Meyer said, “I learned something that day about the language of the human soul. It transformed my life.” Dwight L. Moody touched his life.

F. B. Meyer came to the United States, and he was preaching in a college. The students were out there, and F. B. Meyer was talking about surrender, and this is what he said: He said to those students, “If you're not willing to give everything to Jesus Christ, then will you at least tell Him that you're willing to be made willing?” And a student out there was named Wilbur Chapman. Wilbur Chapman said, “O God, that's me. I haven't been willing.” Chapman was ready to quit. He was about to get out of school. But he said, “God, I'm willing to be made willing.” And God took him at that starting place, made him willing, and Wilbur Chapman became a great evangelist. But wait a minute. Wilbur Chapman, in his later years of evangelism, needed a helper, so he found a young YMCA clerk—an ex-professional baseball player, whose name was Billy Sunday. And Chapman said to Billy Sunday, “Would you come help me do the counseling, set up the tent, and do these other things?” Billy Sunday said, “I will.” And many of you have heard of Billy Sunday—world-famous like Dwight L. Moody—Billy Sunday began to help Wilbur Chapman. When Chapman finally retired from evangelism, or was too feeble to carry on, Billy Sunday took over and had a worldwide ministry; and millions of people were impacted by Billy Sunday.

Billy Sunday went to Charlotte, North Carolina in 1924 and held a revival crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina. And there was such a mighty moving of God's power in Charlotte, North Carolina, that a prayer meeting got started and continued right on through when the Depression came. And those men were praying and said, “Oh, God, send another revival to Charlotte that will shake Charlotte and shake the world.” As a

result, Mordecai Ham came to Charlotte, North Carolina for another crusade. And in that crusade, when Mordecai Ham was preaching, a young, tall, lanky, sixteen-year old farm lad came forward and gave his heart to Jesus Christ. His name was Billy Graham, who has preached to kings and princes around the world, has been on national television by satellite, and so forth. The impact! But how did all of that start? Trace it on back to a Sunday School teacher who got serious about soul winning and told a shoe clerk about Jesus.

You don't know. You don't know what you may do when you bring a soul to Jesus Christ. Do you want this year to be a great year? Recognize His presence in you, receive His promise to you, and respond to His program through you.

Let's pray. Father, I pray, in the name of Jesus, that You would make me a greater soul winner this year. And Lord, help me to recognize that, in the truest sense, You are the one who draws those people to Yourself as You inhabit my humanity and display Your deity. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# Missions

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** February 23, 1997

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 1:8

*“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

ACTS 1:8

## Outline

Introduction

- I. A World of Darkness
- II. A World of Desire
- III. A World of Difference

Conclusion

## Introduction

Turn if you will, please, to Acts chapter 1, and here is a great missionary text. In Acts 1:8, the Lord Jesus said to all of us, and to each of us, *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8)

Now our world is rapidly growing. One thousand, two thousand, three thousand: that's three seconds—another child was just born. One thousand, two thousand, three thousand—another child was born. One thousand, two thousand, three thousand—another child was born. Did you know that over ten thousand are born into this world every hour? Two hundred and forty thousand people are born every day. Ninety million are born every year.

If you were to go back from the time of creation to 1850, there were one billion people on this planet. From 1850 to 1930, there were two billion. From 1930 to 1960, there were three billion. From 1960 to 1975, there were four billion. From 1975 to 1980, five billion. And now we're rapidly approaching six billion people on Planet Earth. Did you know that more than fifty percent of all of the people who have ever lived since creation are alive today? Now, you think about that. Over fifty percent of all of the people who have ever lived from creation are alive today. And what an incredible opportunity we have to tell them about the Lord Jesus Christ!

I think of Love Worth Finding. I think of our message going up and coming down from a satellite. Most of us, many of us, can remember when there were no satellites. And then, after we heard about it, we had to learn how to spell it, and we still didn't understand what all was happening. And now the kind of a message that I'm speaking to you right now can go out, up to the air, up into space, and come back down in strange-sounding places to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. And think about the ability that we have on the Internet and other things like that to get out the gospel of Jesus Christ. That technology is not there to sell smut and to spread lies, but to tell the message of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen? And our mandate is to take the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to the very end of the world. I appreciate what Dr. Jimmy Draper said today: "You must not ask what place missions will have in your life; that is the wrong question. The question is, what place will your life have in world missions?"

Now the book of Acts is a missionary book. And God has put a trinity of chapters together in the book of Acts that we're going to look at very briefly today, Acts chapter 8, 9, and 10; so, turn to those chapters there, because in Acts chapter 8, 9, and 10 we have the conversion of three notable people.

For example, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 8 and verse 27. And the Bible says there, "*Behold, a man of Ethiopia.*" (Acts 8:27) And we're going to find out how a man from Ethiopia got saved. And then, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 9 and verse 1, and we read there, "*And Saul...*" (Acts 9:1) We'll just stop right there, because we're going to see how a man named Saul got saved. And then turn over, if you will, to Acts chapter 10, verse 1: "*There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius.*" (Acts 10:1)

Now God has put missions in a microcosm in these three chapters as you see these three individuals who have been saved. Now one of them was a son of Ham—that was the man from Ethiopia. The other of them was a son of Shem—that was the man from the Middle East whose name was Saul, who later became Paul. And one was a son of Japheth—and that was the man, the centurion, the man who was from Italy. You see, there were three who came out of the ark, three sons of Noah—Ham, Shem, and Japheth—and in these three chapters you have their descendants. And what they do, they represent all of the world.

Now, three basic, simple things we're going to see. And I know that time is very short tonight, but I want you to see a world of darkness. I want you to see a world of desire. And I want you to see a world of difference.

## **I. A World of Darkness**

A world of darkness. Here are these three: one a son of Ham from Ethiopia; one a son of Shem from the Middle East—he was a Shemite or Semite; and one a son of Japheth from Europe. That represents all of the great racial strands of all of the earth. But while

one was a son of Ham, one was a son of Shem, and one was a son of Japheth, they were all sons of Adam, right? And what does the Bible say? Romans chapter 5, verse 12: *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Romans 5:12) These three came from Africa, from Asia, and from Europe, and yet they were all sinners. So the first thing we need to understand is that this world lies in darkness. All of the people, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of their geographical origin, regardless of their language, regardless of their culture, they are lost without the Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. A World of Desire

Now, here’s the second thing, and I’m moving on very quickly tonight. Not only do you see a world of darkness, but you see in these three chapters a world of desire. These three men came from vastly different backgrounds. For example, the man from Ethiopia was in the world of government and the world of finance. Look in chapter 8 and verse 27, if you will, for just a moment: *“And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship.”* (Acts 8:27) Here was the secretary of the treasury from a notable country. Here was a man who had great authority. He was a man with power, prestige, intelligence, and wealth. He was a man that knew about finance.

And then, what about the other man? Well, Saul you’re going to read about in the next chapter, in chapter 9. Saul was from the realm of religion, education, and philosophy. Saul was a scholar. He was an educator. He was a teacher. He was a rabbi. He was a religionist. And he was full of religious zeal. Look in chapter 9, verses 1 and 2: *“And Saul, yet, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way...”*—that’s what they called the Christians “people of the way”—*“if they found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”* (Acts 9:1–2) What he did was to go out and arrest, incarcerate, and bring to Jerusalem Christians, so-called enemies of Judaism, and bring them there to be put in jail or to be killed.

All right, so here’s a man, the first man, he’s in the realm of government and finance. Here’s another man. He’s in the realm of philosophy and religion. Now, here’s the third man I want you to see that gets saved here, and that’s a man named Cornelius. Look again in chapter 10, verse 1: *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band.”* (Acts 10:1) Now this man was in the world of the military. His world was not in esoteric things like philosophy and religion, like Saul; nor was his world in the military and the governmental affairs, like the Ethiopian.

This man was a military man. He was a macho man. He was a man's man. He was a leader of men. He was a fighting man.

Now you could hardly get three people from more varied backgrounds; but, dear friend, if you look very carefully, all three of these men—the man in the world of government and finance, the man in the world of philosophy and religion, and the man in the realm of militarism and warfare—all three of these had a hidden hunger. All three of them were on a quest. And as you look at this chapter, you can find out that they were all on a quest.

For example, the Ethiopian, this Ethiopian, this man who was the treasurer, the Bible has said he had been to Jerusalem in order to worship. He had made a journey all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. And why? He was hoping to find some answer to the puzzling questions of life. He went seeking God. When he went there and he bought a copy of the Scriptures. He is coming back in his chariot. He is reading the prophet Isaiah. He is trying to find the answer, the longing of his heart. Look, if you will, in chapter 8 and verse 27. The Bible says that, *“And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all of her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.”* (Acts 8:27–28) Here is a man with all of his authority and all of his inside activity with the government, next to the queen; here is a man who has all of this at this fingertips; and yet he has a God-shaped vacuum in his heart.

Now, the next man, Saul—if you had seen Saul as he was on the road to Damascus, as he was out there persecuting Christians—he has letters in his hand from the high priest; he has everything he needs—and had you seen him, you would have said, “There he is—educated; there he is—with authority; there he is—a man of means, a man of background, a man of letters.” You wouldn't want to get in an argument with him. You would not ever want to match wits with this man. He had the equivalency of a triple Ph.D. He was one of the most brilliant and most arrogant men who ever lived. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, the highest of the high. He was a high muckety-muck in the world of religion. And had you seen him, he would have reminded you perhaps of your pagan professor that you had in college who seemed so smug and so sure and so smart and so arrogant that you dared not open your mouth in class—if you had a professor like that. I had one or two like that. But listen. If you could peel him back like an onion and look down deep enough on the inside, there was a churning turmoil and a hunger.

As a matter of fact, this Saul was on the road to Damascus, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light, and the Lord Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, it's hard for you to kick against the pricks, isn't it?” (Acts 9:5) What was the prick? It was the

goad that an ox would be goaded with. And sometimes the old ox would kick back, because the driver of the oxcart would be goading that ox. And that's what the Lord Jesus had been doing to Saul. Saul was there when Stephen was stoned. Saul saw Stephen with a face shining like an angel, who said, "Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge." He saw Stephen, God's wonderful deacon martyr, die for his faith, and Saul could never forget it. (Acts 7:58–60)

Now what I'm trying to say is this: You might not have seen it, but that man from Ethiopia had a hidden hunger. You may not have seen it, but Saul had a hidden hunger. He was in turmoil. And what about Cornelius, the military man, the strong man, the square jaw, the broad shoulders, the Marlboro man—Cornelius, this guy? You would have said, "Well, there is a man who's not afraid of anything, and there is a man who doesn't have a tender bone in his body." But if you would read—look, if you will, in chapter 10 about this man Cornelius: "*There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*" (Acts 10:1–2) He was very religious, but he was lost. He didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. It will be a great day in America when people turn from religion to Jesus Christ, will it not?

Here was a man who had a desire to know God. I don't know where it came from. Maybe when he was a young soldier out on a lonely sentry duty, he looked up into the starry heavens, as I did last night when I saw those beautiful stars, and just stood there in awe for a while and thought, "Oh, that didn't just happen. How, where, who, what? O God, whoever you are, whatever you are, I want to know you!" And he prayed, and he gave, but he wasn't saved.

Now, what am I saying? There is a world of darkness, and there is a world of desire. Now, listen to me, precious, sweet friend. Whether it is in Memphis, or whether it is in Romania, or whether it is in South Africa, or whether it is in former Soviet Russia, wherever it is—in Red China—every man, every woman, every boy, every girl that you meet is lost in a world of darkness and has in his heart a deep, deep desire to know God. He may not know that it is God that he's searching for, but there is a vacuum, a God-shaped vacuum, in every man's heart, and he can never be satisfied until he has that vacuum filled with the only thing that can fill it—and that is the Lord Jesus.

### **III. A World of Difference**

Now, here's the third and final thing I want you to see—and I'm moving along very quickly. There is a world of darkness. Friend, there is a world of desire. And there is a world of difference that only Jesus can make. Notice, if you will now, in chapter 8 and verse 35, what happened to this man from Ethiopia. Look, if you will, in verse 35. And

the Bible says, *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him”*—say that next word—*“Jesus”*—*“preached unto him Jesus.”* (Acts 8:35) Now, look, if you will, in chapter 9 and verse 5. You remember Saul had this vision, and Saul asked the Lord, *“Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am”*—say the next word—*“Jesus...”*—*“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”* (Acts 9:5) All right now, turn to chapter 10 and look, if you will, please, in verses 38 and 39 with me for just a moment how Simon Peter went to this soldier, and here’s what he told this soldier, Cornelius: *“How God anointed”*—say the word—*“Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem,”* and so forth. (Acts 10:38–39) Who is it that he preached? Who is it that he presented this man? His name was Jesus—Jesus!

Now, who makes a world of difference? Not the missionary, not even the message, but the Master. These people who are in darkness, these people who have a desire, the only way that that desire can be fulfilled is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that may seem like simplistic to you; but, folks, our world is quickly moving away from that.

Did you know that you and I are going to be thought of as narrow-minded bigots if we say that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven? Paul Negrut, who has spoken from this pulpit, told me, “Brother Rogers, when the Communists took over in Romania, they did not try to exterminate religion.” He said, “It was all right to be religious, but they said you may not, you must not, you will not say that Jesus is the only Savior and He has absolute authority. Why? Because Ceausescu said, ‘I have the absolute authority.’ It was all right to say we worship Jesus as long as we said that Ceausescu has the ultimate authority.” But, friend, Jesus is the only answer to this world. I don’t know whether you believe that or not, but my whole life is built upon that—that Jesus is the only answer.

Now one man from Africa, one man from Asia, one man from Europe; but I want to see the need of Africa, the need of Asia, the need of Europe is not better education, not better finance, not more food, not better roads: it is Jesus! He is what this world needs today.

Now I want you to notice what God is saying to you in these three chapters. Turn to chapter 8 and look, if you will, in verse 29—chapter 8 and verse 29: *“Then the Spirit said unto Philip,”*—everybody say the next word—*“Go.”* (Acts 8:29) All right now, look, if you will, in chapter 9, verse 11: *“And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go.”* (Acts 9:11) Hey, you’re getting it real good. Turn to chapter 10 and look with me in verse 20: *“Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go.”* (Acts 10:20) Are you learning something?

What is the message? All right now, if there is a world of darkness, and there is a world of desire, and Jesus can make a world of difference, what is God saying to

Adrian? What is God saying to Bob? What is God saying to you? What is God saying to each? What is God saying to all? It's a two-letter word: "Go!"

Spell *God* for me. First letter: *G*. Second letter: *o*. Let's just stop there. All right now, spell *gospel* for me. First letter: *g*. Second letter: *o*. Got it? Now what I'm trying to say is this, folks: Jesus said we are to go into all of the world. Now we all may not go literally, physically, but we go with our prayers. We go with the Word of God. We go with our children. We go with our money. We go with our influence. We are to be missionary in person, missionary in purpose, missionary in purse, missionary in parentage, and missionary in praying. We are to go into all the world and take the gospel of Jesus Christ. And if you are not interested in that, God has sent me here to tell you that you need to re-examine and see if you have ever been saved. I'm telling you, folks, *a Christian who is not interested in world evangelism, whether it be across the street or around the world, is guilty of high treason against heaven's King*. He is the One who said, "Go into all the world and make disciples." (Matthew 28:19)

I read some time ago about a wealthy couple who were traveling across the desert. They were out sightseeing. And as they were out there in the desert, their automobile broke down, and they stayed out there in the desert around Nevada hoping to get the automobile fixed. They were driven by a chauffeur. Finally, when help came, they found that the elderly couple were dead but the chauffeur was still alive. And what they found out was this: the chauffeur had spent a great deal of time underneath the automobile under the pretext of trying to fix the engine, but what he was doing was drinking the radiator water out of that old radiator that had no antifreeze in it. And a little bit at a time, he had kept himself alive while those others perished.

I wonder if you and I are not sometimes just a little bit like that chauffeur. We're so blessed. We spend our time saying, "Pastor Rogers, feed me. Oh, I hope you'll say something interesting today, some little tidbit that I haven't yet understood, some little new nuance in the Word of God." I'm telling you, there are people in the world today who have never even once heard the name Jesus. We're so blessed here at Bellevue Baptist Church. And sometimes we have to even ask our people, "Won't you please come back on Sunday night? Won't you please come to prayer meeting? Won't you please just give a dime out of your pocket to World Missions? Oh, friend, it's time we got serious about this command—and that is to go into all of the world.

I'm finished—but I want to tell you three character qualities that it will take if you go, and I want the Holy Spirit of God to burn these into your heart. The first characteristic it will take is availability. Do you know who it was that told that Ethiopian about Jesus? It was a man named Philip. Who was Philip? He was a deacon. And what was he doing? He had been down in Samaria and he was holding a revival meeting. And the Holy Spirit of God said to Philip, "Arise, and go to a place in Gaza, in the desert," and he got

up and went. God spoke to him, and he obeyed. (Acts 8:26–27) And I'm glad he did, because that Ethiopian got saved, and he opened up all North Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now I'm not saying that God is calling you to be a foreign missionary, but I am asking, are you available? Now, answer that down in the deepest part of your heart. You say, "Well, not me. I'm already seventy-five." That won't get it done. God might want you to be a seventy-five-year-old missionary somewhere somehow. It doesn't make any difference. You say, "I'm only thirteen." It doesn't make any difference. Our boy David, who is a missionary in Spain, came to us as a mere child and said, "God is calling me to be a missionary." He's now in Spain. The only thing I'm asking tonight is, are you available?

Now, the second characteristic that it will take is not only availability, but expendability. Do you know who it was that really wrapped up the thing with Saul? The Lord Jesus appeared to Saul and said, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*" And he said, "*What wilt thou have me to do?*" He said, "You go a certain place, and it will be told you what to do." And then the Lord found a layman named Ananias, and said, "Ananias, I want you to go speak to this man about Christ." Now, you think about it. What had Saul been doing? He had been arresting Christians, right? What were they doing with the Christians? They were stoning them. Do you remember how Stephen got stoned? God says to Ananias, "Ananias, go down there and speak to him." "Who is going with me?" "Nobody! Go down there and speak to him." "What do you want me to speak to him about?" "Speak to him, this proud, arrogant Pharisee. Tell him about Jesus." Every word that Ananias spoke was from his heart, because his heart was in his throat. He went down there and spoke to Saul and witnessed to Saul. Do you know what that is? That's expendability.

I think of Darla Richardson in Albania. I think of the Yorks' children. Where are they? In the turmoil of South Africa. I think of Betty's son. Where is he? In Yemen. These are not places you go to have a picnic. It costs to serve Jesus. It costs every day. It costs every step of the way. Are you afraid that if God called you, you might have to give up your position as a lawyer, as a doctor, as an entrepreneur; that you might have to leave your fine house? Well, you might. It may cost your life.

Availability. Expendability. There's one last thing—and that's adaptability. Do you know who went and witnessed to Cornelius? It was a man named Peter. And do you know what Peter's problem was? He was a Jew, and Cornelius was a Gentile, and the Jews didn't have any dealing with Gentiles, especially in religious things. And God had to speak to Peter and get Peter to go down there and witness to Cornelius. Remember that vision when He let down that sheet out of heaven with all those unclean animals and said, "Peter, rise, slay, and eat." He said, "Not me! I don't touch unclean things." And the Lord here is not teaching you that you ought to eat unclean things. What the

Lord is teaching you in this passage of Scripture is that you don't call any human being an unclean thing, regardless of the color of their skin, regardless of their culture. And He said, "What I call clean, Peter, don't you call unclean." (Acts 10)

## Conclusion

Now here it is, and I'm finished. But, folks, there's a world of darkness. There is a world of desire. And Jesus will make a world of difference. And He wants to do it through Adrian and through you. And He says you are to have availability, expendability, and adaptability. Now, don't ask if I have it. Ask if you have it. Don't ask if I'm willing. Ask if you're willing. Ask what the world's greatest missionary who got saved in that ninth chapter said to the Lord: "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" Not, "Lord, what will others have me to do?" and not, "Lord, what will you have others to do?" "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

Would you bow your heads in prayer, and I want you to think for just a moment about that. I want you to think about that availability, about that expendability, and about that adaptability. Just pray, "Lord, what do you want to do with my life?" Think about your world mission offering. Think about your children. Are you willing and even wanting for them to go? Think about your own life. Think about your next-door neighbor. For Jesus said, "*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) Father, speak to our hearts, I pray, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

# Pentecostal Fire

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: December 3, 1989**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:1–3**

**Sponsored by: Sponsor**

*“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues  
like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”*

ACTS 2:3

## Outline

Introduction

I. Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit

II. Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit

III. Don't Quench the Holy Spirit

Conclusion

## Introduction

Turn with me, please, tonight to Acts chapter 2. The second chapter of the book of Acts. And may I say that a church aflame with Pentecostal fire is a mighty weapon of a holy God. And I want you to see what the Bible has to say about a church aflame. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.” I want to pause right now and not read the rest of this story, but stop right there and tell you, dear friend, that Bellevue Baptist Church has been given an opportunity like few churches that I've ever heard of. But all of that opportunity will be as nothing unless we have in our church Pentecostal fire, Pentecostal fire.

Now we're not trying to repeat Pentecost. We can't repeat Pentecost. We can't repeat Pentecost anymore than we could repeat Bethlehem. This is the season of the year when we're thinking about Bethlehem. And Bethlehem is God with us. Emmanuel means “God with us.” God came from heaven to earth. And Bethlehem is God with us. We can't repeat that, but we sure do enjoy that. Calvary. We will never repeat Calvary. He died once and for all. That is an event never to be repeated. But, thank God, it is an event always to be enjoyed. If Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary was God for us. Christ died for our sins. Thank God for it.

Now what about Pentecost? Pentecost is God in us. We never repeat Pentecost

anymore than we would repeat Bethlehem or would we would repeat Calvary. But just as we enjoy Bethlehem, and just as we appropriate Calvary, bless God, we need to enjoy, appropriate, and continue what happened at Pentecost, with is God in us. That was a marvelous thing. What happened there that day in Jerusalem that I just read to you from, about, in the second chapter of the book of Acts is this. There was a great, great festival that took place. That festival was called The Feast of Pentecost. Now scholars tell us that perhaps there were a million Jews present, an incredible number. And yet out of that one million Jews who were present, there were 120 of them that became the focal point of all of it. For fifteen hundred times this Feast of Pentecost had been, ah, practiced yearly as the Jews would come to Jerusalem to take part of this feast. And, by the way, I'm so grateful that this feast that typifies what we enjoy was a feast. It wasn't a funeral.

Now what they would do, among other things, they would take some grains of corn and they would grind up these grains of corn very fine until they became fine flour. And then they would mix it with oil and leaven. And then they would bake two loaves of bread. Now the oil represented the Holy Spirit of God. And the two loaves of bread represented the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He has taken both Jew (one loaf) and Gentile (another loaf) and the two become one in the Lord Jesus Christ who has broken down that middle wall of partition. And, of course, two is the number of witness. And the church is to be a witness to the world after that the Holy Ghost has come upon it.

Now, dear friend, those individual grains, when they were baked together, became one loaf. A hundred and twenty disciples went into that upper room on the Day of Pentecost as one hundred and twenty individuals, but they came out of that room as one body. No longer individuals but one body. The birthday of the church was at Pentecost. And so, it was a wonderful experience. God sent the Holy Spirit out of heaven, and heaven's throne gift is the Holy Spirit of God. And He came upon that infant church. Now when He came, He came with wind and fire. Wind is an emblem of the Holy Spirit and fire is an emblem of the Holy Spirit.

Now why is wind an emblem of the Holy Spirit? Well, the wind comes from the heavens and so does the Holy Spirit. The wind moves at its own will. Nobody commands the wind except God. And so it is with the Holy Spirit. The wind is mysterious. Jesus told Nicodemus about how mysterious the wind is. It just simply blows. Jesus said, "You don't know it's coming from and you don't know where it's going." So is the Holy Spirit. He is, indeed, mysterious. And yet, He operates according to fixed laws just like the wind does.

A preacher was going to preach on that text of Scripture where Jesus said, "The wind blows where it will. You can't hear the sound thereof, or you, yeah, you don't know

where it comes from or where it goes. You can hear the sound thereof, but that's all you know." And the preacher who was going to preach on it thought he would go a sea captain about the wind. And he asked the sea captain, he said, "Sea captain, you've been sailing the seas for many years. Tell me what you know about the wind?" And the old captain thought for a while, and he said, "You know, to tell you the truth," he said, "I know very little about the wind, but," he said, "I do know how to set my sails."

And, friend, that's a great lesson for us. We don't have to understand all about the Holy Spirit of God. Who can comprehend God? But, oh, dear friend, let's learn to set our sails. Let's learn to let the Spirit of God move us and impel us and drive us. And so, the wind, the wind, invisible but powerful, is an illustration of the Holy Spirit. But not only is the wind an illustration of the Holy Spirit. Fire is an illustration of the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit, one of the emblems of the Holy Spirit is a gentle dove. And that's why we have the dove up there.

Another emblem of the Holy Spirit, as I've already said, is oil and anointing oil. But fire is one of the most powerful emblems of the Holy Spirit of God. Let me tell you why fire is such an emblem of the Holy Spirit of God and why you need not only the wind of the Spirit but the fire of the Spirit, because it is the wind that causes the flame to spread. Wind and fire – what a mighty demonstration God gave these disciples on that Day of Pentecost. It sounded like a cyclone was in the building. And on every man's head there was a flickering flame. A hundred and twenty human candles there with the flame just flickering over their head. And God used that as an emblem and a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God. Let me tell you several things that fire does. Fire illuminates. Fire reveals. You see, God gave us the Holy Spirit to illuminate and to give us light. Whether it be the fire of the sun or the fire of a candle, it is a fire that gives light. And Jesus said, "When the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost comes, He'll teach you all things."

Thank God for the illuminating fire of the Holy Spirit. And when you read this book, dear friend, you'd better let the Holy Spirit hold a candle to it. You'd better let the Holy Spirit shine His light upon the pages of this book. Fire illumines. Fire enlightens. But not only does fire illuminate; fire consumes, and so does the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 12:29 says, "For our God is a consuming fire..." And how important that is in my heart and in my life, that the fire of God's Holy Spirit burn in me to purge out the dross. When I was a younger preacher, I used to think, *Oh, how I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If I could only be pure enough, if I could only be clean enough, if I could only be strong enough, if I could only be wise enough, if I could only be yielded enough, then perhaps God would fill me.* Do you know I had it all backwards? My dear friend, you don't get your life all cleaned up and then get filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit of God that cleans up your life. You know, a banker...the old saying goes, "If you can just prove you don't any money, maybe he'll loan you some." Well, dear friend, God is not that

way. If you can just prove to God that you don't need the Holy Spirit, then maybe He'll send Him. No! You say, "Lord, I am in desperate need and I need to be purged." And it is the fire of God's Spirit, when we yield, who burns away the dross.

Isaiah had that experience. In Isaiah 6:5 and 7, 5 through 7, Isaiah finally had a conception of himself. He, he really realized what a needy person he was. And listen to what he said. Isaiah 6:5: "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Dear friend, any man who struts has never seen the King. But when a man sees the King, he says, "Woe is me." Then notice what else Isaiah said. He said, "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

You see, the fire consumes the sins. Fire from the altar, anointed by the Spirit. But not only is, does fire illumine, and not only does fire consume, but fire transforms. You see, fire has the ability to change whatever it's burning into its own likeness. That's one of the qualities of fire, that when a fire burns something up, it just turns whatever it burns up into the fire itself. You see, when you put a poker in the fireplace and leave it in the fireplace, not only does the poker goes into the fire, but the fire goes into the poker. There's just something about fire that it just transforms.

And as I spoke about that this morning in 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Bible says, "We all with an open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Spirit of the Lord transforms us. It changes us just like a fire changes whatever it consumes. But I'll tell you what else fire does.

Not only does fire do these other things, dear friend; fire warms. Thank God for the warmth of Holy Spirit fire. Do you know what our churches need today more than anything else? It's just some Pentecostal warmth. Do you know what's going to cause people to come to Bellevue Church? Oh, they'll come to look at the buildings once or twice. They'll come to hear me some, perhaps. They'll come to hear the music and the singing tree. But do you know, dear friend, what more than anything else is going to keep people coming back? It's going to be the warmth of the Holy Spirit of God. I mean that with all of my heart. And, you know, if that Pentecostal fire is in me and that Pentecostal fire is in you, people are going to come and they're going to say, "You know, that's a big church, but oh, what a warm church it is." Fire warms. Fire warms.

God, forgive us where so many churches are like the church of the holy refrigerator where Jack Frost is the pastor. You can ice skate down the aisles. Listen. I, I want our church never to get crusty, never to get cold, never to lose that warmth. It is fire that

warms. You can tell, you can tell when the Holy Spirit's present. You can tell, dear friend, when He's absent. I've been in some churches I'd just as soon spend the night in a mausoleum. Cold and clammy because the Holy Spirit is not honored. He's not present.

I'll tell you what else fire does. Dear friend, not only does fire warm, but fire gives power. You remember the Lord Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Now let's just imagine there's a man. He has a great factory. It's a marvelous factory. And that factory, let's say, is to factories what this building is to church buildings. And yet, the man says, "None of my machinery works." So he calls in a, an expert, and he says, "Would you help me to get my factory going?" And the expert says, "Well, let's oil the machinery." And he oils the machinery and nothing seems to be happening. Then the expert says, "Well, let's train the workers." So he trains the workers, and nothing seems to be happening. "Well," he says, "then let's decorate your factory." So they put out some poinsettias, and nothing seems to be happening. Then he says, "Well, let's put stained glass in your factory." And so he puts stained glass in the factory, and nothing seems to be happening. And then he says, "Well, let's make the seats a little more comfortable in your factory." So he makes the seats a little more comfortable, and nothing seems to be happening. So they get rid of that expert and they get another expert. And he says, "You know what's missing in this factory? There's no fire in the boiler." And they put a fire in the boiler and a head of steam comes, and those great wheels begin to turn and churn, and the entire factory begins to move.

You see, there's power in fire. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." I'll tell you something else about fire. You know, fire just attracts people. Have you ever thought about the attracting power of a fire? When I was a kid, I had an irresistible urge every time I saw a fire engine to get on my bike and peddle as hard as I could just to follow it. Did you ever do that when you were a kid? Some of you men do it now. You just want to see. When there is a fire, there's just something a fire.

I was preaching one night...I think I told you on another occasion...I was preaching in the First Baptist Church of Brooksville, Florida when I was a college student in a youth revival meeting. And I'm telling you folks, it was one of those rainy nights that youth revival preachers don't like to see. And, you know, as, as a young preacher, you're already unsure of yourself. I mean, a lot of times you preach and you don't want to see anybody at the door because you think you've, you've failed, and you probably did. But, you know, if they said, "That was a good sermon," you want to hit them in the mouth. And you just, you know, kind of just want to turn and run and go out the back door. You're so insecure. And, and it was raining. There were just a handful of people there that night. And I felt so intimidated. I felt like, *Oh, if I, if they just had a better*

*preacher, there would be more people here. God, I must not be right with you. There must be something terribly wrong with me. Why did You put me in the ministry, anyway. And then I said, "Well, well, I ought not to feel too bad. After all, it's, it's raining."*

And just when the services let out, I heard one fire engine go past. And then another fire engine. And then the fire chief in his car with the thing going. And I looked off on the horizon and I saw that pink glow. Then I saw the cars start to go past. And I got in my car and I went down there. And there was a house. It's one of those kind of fires where they didn't get to it in time. And I mean, the entire house burned to the ground while people just standing around watching that house burn. I was standing out there, and there were hundreds of people standing out there in the rain watching that house burn. And I said, "No, I can't use the rain for an excuse either." Friend, they stood in the rain to watch a house burn down. Friend, I believe if we'll set ourselves on fire, people will come see us burn.

I really believe that. I mean, we'll stop making excuses about the weather and the ice and the snow and the rain and all of the rest of it. It is no excuse. There is the attracting power of, of a fire. And the Bible says that the people were gathered together there on the Day of Pentecost. So many of them came that three thousand souls were saved on one day. Now, question: How are we going to keep Bellevue burning with Pentecostal fire? I want to give you three warnings that I'm going to take into my own heart today and I want you to take into your heart. I want to name three things that will quench the fire, that will bank the burning, that will cool down this church or your life, and I want you to listen to them.

## **I. Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit**

The very first is what I call lying to the Holy Ghost, lying to the Holy Ghost. Turn with me to Acts 5: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it; and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not thine, in, in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but a, unto God." Now what happened here was this: There was a man named Ananias, excuse me. There was a man named Barnabas who made a great gift to the church. And Barnabas was such a good and a godly man. He gave that gift to the Lord. He could have sung that song, "*Naught that I have I call my own; I hold for the giver. My life, my soul, my will, my all are His and His forever.*" And everybody said, "Wasn't that wonderful what old Barnabas did?"

Ananias and Sapphira heard about it, and they said, "Well, let's us make a gift. We'll

get in on the love offering. We'll make a gift. Let's tell everybody that we sold all our property and gave it." Now they didn't have to sell all their property. They didn't have to give it. God never forces anybody to give anything. God didn't force you to give in the love offering. He wouldn't have forced you. Dear friend, what you don't want to give, God neither wants nor needs. Put it down. What you don't desire to give, God neither wants nor needs. You just miss the blessing. God is not poor. God doesn't have to have what you need or what you have. But, but they said, "Well, let's us, let's just tell everybody we gave it all."

Now what was their sin? Their sin was the sin of pride. And, and what was the fruit of pride is pretense. Every hypocrite is really proud. He's trying to pretend something about himself that he doesn't have. But who plants the seed that causes the root that finally causes the fruit? Well, it is the devil himself. Notice, ah, what, ah, Peter said. He said, "Satan has filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost." The, the devil uses pride. Pride is the dirty soil in which Satan plants his seed, and hypocrisy and pretense is the fruit of that seed. Now when you lie to the Holy Spirit of God, what you do is you just simply kill Pentecostal fire.

Now are there anybody, is there anybody here tonight who's lying to the Holy Ghost? I think there are a lot here tonight who lie to the Holy Ghost. Do you know what it is? Deacon, you want me to tell you what it is? Staff member, do you want me to tell you what it is? Pastor, here's what it is. It is simply this: pretending a devotion to Jesus Christ that you don't have. That's all it is - pretending a devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ that you don't have. Do you do that? Have you ever sung this song: "*All to Jesus I surrender; I surrender all?*" Have you ever sung that? How many of you have sung it, let me see your hands. Take them down. Have you surrendered everything to Jesus Christ? Don't lift your hand this time. But if not, you sang a lie. You did exactly what Ananias and Sapphira did. You lie to the Holy Ghost. And when you did, you put out the fire.

Have you ever sung this: "*Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I without.*" You ever sung that? Then you hold it with all your might. Have you ever sung, "*Faith of our Fathers, holy faith; I will be true to Thee to death.*" And then you don't even love Him enough to tithe a dime out of a dollar. "Oh Lord, I'd die for You." You wouldn't die for Him; you don't even live for Him.

You see, what is wrong in our churches today is that we talk much, but we lie to the Holy Ghost. Now, friend, it's bad to lie, but, you know, sometimes it's more dangerous to lie to some people than it is to somebody else. For example, if you lie to me, that's one thing. If you lie to a judge under oath, that's something else, right? I mean, it's more dangerous. See, that's perjury if you lie to a judge. But have you ever thought about lying to God? How dangerous that is to lie to God. Peter said, "You've not lied unto men, you've lied unto God." Have you ever thought about how dangerous that is? I

mean, and not only dangerous, but foolish, because God was there, the Holy Spirit was there when the idea was discussed. He was there when the deal was made. You can't get away with lying to God.

Now let me tell you something, friend. Sin among God's saints is more serious than sin among the lost. And a sin against the Holy Ghost is the most dangerous sin that a child can commit. Don't pretend a devotion that you don't have. I mean, if you don't have it, don't stand up and say you do. If you're not right with God, don't say that you are. Don't play the hypocrite, because after a while you'll get to believing your own lies. But you won't fool God. And the fire will go out.

## **II. Don't Grieve the Holy Spirit**

Now I want you to turn to Ephesians 4. I'll tell you something else that will kill that Pentecostal flame, and that's not only lying to the Holy Ghost, but it is grieving the Holy Ghost. Look, if you will, please in Ephesians 4:30. And the Bible says, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God..." You say, "Pastor, why do you say sometimes Holy Ghost and sometimes Holy Spirit?" Because the words are used interchangeably. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed until the day of redemption." Not only may you lie to Him, but, dear friend, you may grieve Him. Now lying is pretending a devotion you don't have. Grieving Him is not having the devotion you ought to have. Grieving the Holy Spirit of God is allowing some sin to come into your heart and into your life.

Now what kind of sin grieves the Holy Spirit of God? Well, just back up, if you will please, to verse 25 and you're going to find out there that, ah, that, ah, dishonesty grieves the Holy Spirit of God. He says, "...putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor..." And so, if you're a liar, you grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Verse 26. Anger grieves the Holy Spirit of God. "Be ye angry and sin not..." Anger is so destructive. Notice in, in verse 28 that stealing grieves the Holy Spirit. "Let him that stole steal no more..." And notice again, if you will, in verse 29 that filthy speech grieves the Holy Spirit. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good..." Notice in verses 30 and, ah, through 32 that bitterness grieves the Holy Spirit. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; And be ye kind one to another..."

You know, the devil is a bitter person. Did you know that the devil is still pursuing his old enemies? The tragedy today in the church of the Lord God is bitter brothers, sour saints, caustic Christians. It grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Slander grieves the Holy Spirit of God. Verse 31. He calls it evil speaking. When we were kids, we used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Really, probably it's just the opposite. Words hurt the most. Proverbs 25:18: "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is as a maul (that means a heavy hammer),

and sword and a sharp arrow.” Malice grieves the Holy Spirit. Look in verse 31. He speaks of, of malice, the last part of verse 31. That spirit that delights in someone else’s misfortune.

Are these kind of things in your life? You wonder why you can’t understand the Bible. You wonder why you don’t have any joy. You wonder why there’s no power in your witness. I’ll tell you why, dear friend. You have grieved the Holy Spirit. You see that emblem up there? The Holy Spirit is a dove, so gentle. Fire has power. That’s one part of His nature. But, oh, the other part is a gentle, gentle dove, so easily frightened off, so easily wounded. You see, grieve is a love word. You can only grieve someone who loves you. The Holy Spirit of God loves you and, therefore, He is grieved by this sin in your life.

### **III. Don’t Quench the Holy Spirit**

Now I want to mention a third sin against the Holy Ghost and we’ll be finished. Turn with me this time to 1 Thessalonians 5:19. First Thessalonians 5:19. The Bible says don’t lie to the Holy Ghost. The Bible says don’t grieve the Holy Ghost. And now the Bible says do not quench the Spirit. “Quench not the Spirit...” Do you know what the word quench means? It just means to put out the fire. Now how do you lie to the Holy Spirit? By pretending a devotion that you don’t have. How do you grieve the Holy Spirit? By not having the devotion that you ought to have. How do you quench the Holy Spirit? By not obeying Him when He tells you what to do.

Now the Holy Spirit of God is sent there to lead you and to guide you. He never shouts and He never shoves. If you find a hand between your shoulder blades shoving you this way, it’s not the Holy Spirit. He guides. He does not shove. He speaks, but He does not shout. He is called in the Bible “a still, small voice.” And, by the way, that’s one of the reasons you need a quiet time, because if you don’t get quiet, you’re not going to hear a quiet voice.

That’s one of the reasons you need to fast, because from time to time our flesh takes over and our ears get dull of hearing that gentle voice. And the Holy Spirit of God will speak to you. You say, “God never speaks to me.” Well, if God doesn’t speak to you, it may be, dear friend, that God is speaking, but you’re not just listening. Or it may be that you’re in such a condition that God cannot even speak to you because He knows it will do no good. But what is it to quench the Holy Spirit? It is to have an impression from God that you ought to do this or this or this and fail to do it.

A man wrote me a letter this past week. He said, “Pastor, you asked me a question. You asked me what books I had been reading lately.” And he said, “I told you the names of two books that I’d been reading.” And he said, “When I got back, I thought about it. I had not been reading those two books.” He said, “I just couldn’t think of

anything to say right then.” He said, “I gave the names of two people, two authors that I knew of, that sometimes away back yonder I had read a little bit of.” But he said, “I was just flustered, and that came to my mind and it sounded good, and I told you, pastor, that’s what I’d been reading.” But he said, “I have written to ask you to forgive me for saying something that wasn’t true.”

Now, friend, I would never have known till I got to heaven that that person had deceived me. It was no big deal with me, anyway. I mean, about what books he was reading. It was only conversation. But do you see the tenderness of that man’s heart? I saw something very beautiful on that piece of paper. And I wrote him back a letter, and I said, “Sir, I want to thank you for what you wrote me. And, certainly, I forgive you. But more than that, I have worshipped today, and your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit has rebuked my own heart and caused me to wonder, *Oh, Adrian, do you sometimes carelessly quench the Spirit of God?* I imagine that that man argued in his mind a hundred times, *I don’t need to write him. Why make a fool of myself. Why do that?* But the Holy Spirit just said, “Do it. Do it. Do it.” And I can’t tell you what a blessing it was to my heart when I read the letter of a man who said, “I had rather make a fool of myself than to quench the Spirit of God.

## Conclusion

Now, friend, what we’re going to have to do in our hearts and in our lives is keep that Pentecostal fire burning. And how is it? Don’t lie to the Holy Ghost. Don’t pretend a devotion you don’t have. Don’t grieve the Holy Ghost. Don’t allow sin to be in your heart and in your life. And don’t quench or smother the Holy Ghost. When He speaks, obey. And the way to do all of that is to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Just yield all that you are to all that He is and let Him fill you. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Would you right now say, “O God, O God, I want that fire, that Pentecostal fire, to keep burning in my heart and in my life. O Lord, for those times that I’ve lied to You, forgive me. O my God, for those times that I have grieved You, forgive me. Lord, when I quench Your gentle Spirit, forgive me, Lord. O Lord, like a fire, illumine me. Like a fire, consume the dross out of my life. Like a fire, transform me, O God. Like a fire, warm my heart, O God. Like a fire, dear God, empower me. Like a fire, dear Lord, make me an attraction for the Lord Jesus Christ. Pentecostal fire, burn in me. Father God, bless, we pray, this message to our hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.

# How to Keep Your Spiritual Fire Burning

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 21, 1999**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:1–4**

*“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”*

ACTS 2:3

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## Introduction

Take your Bibles, God's Holy Word, and turn to the second chapter of the book of Acts. Now as you're turning to the second chapter of the book of Acts, may I tell you that a New Testament, Spirit-filled church is a mighty weapon in the hands of a holy God, and the pattern for that church is found in the book of Acts, and I want to read several verses in Acts chapter 2: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all*

*with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1–4)*

We’re going to be thinking tonight on this subject: “How to Keep Your Spiritual Fire Burning.” And this is so important in this day and in this age. Never in my ministry have I had people giving more attention to spiritual things than this time in which we’re living. It seems to me as if the world knows it doesn’t have the answer, and one more time the world is looking to the church, and they’re wondering, do we really have the answer. And, friends, we do. We are more than a religious, snooty country club with a steeple hiding behind stained glass windows; we are the church of the living God.

## **A. What Happened on the Day of Pentecost**

### **1. The Power of the Holy Spirit Was Symbolized**

Now the passage that I just read to you took place on a Jewish feast day called Pentecost. For fifteen hundred years, the Jews had kept this feast of Pentecost, but there was never another just like this. It took place fifty days after Passover and what they would do is this. They would take wonderful grain, and they would crush it, and make flour out of it, and then they would take that flour and mix it with oil, and the priests would bake that flour mixed with oil into two loaves of bread.

Now, you know, that oil represents the Holy Spirit, and the wheat represents the church of the living God. There were two loaves there on the day of Pentecost because now all of those individual grains were becoming one loaf, but there was both Jew and Gentile becoming one new body. A hundred and twenty disciples on the day of Pentecost went up into an upper room as individual grains of wheat, but they came together at Pentecost, and we have the birthday of the church, and it was a wonderful illustration that now something new, something supernatural, was happening. The Holy Spirit was coming in great power to abide in the church.

On that day also they sacrificed on the day of Pentecost and the old Jewish feast day seven lambs and two rams and one young bull were all sacrificed that day. That is, there were ten animals that were sacrificed. Ten is the complete number. And I believe that pictures the complete, perfect blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now God is teaching a lesson here, and it’s full of symbolism, and so this mighty power that came on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the infant church, it is symbolized several ways. First of all, it was symbolized by sound. Look, if you will, here again in verse 2: “*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.*” There have been two tornadoes in my life, and I can attest

to what everyone says: it does sound like a freight train. The sound of a rushing mighty wind.

One time in Florida Joyce and I were asleep in the middle of the night. And I'm a sound sleeper when I put my head upon the pillow. It's a light sound, but I woke up and looked in the backyard. And I've never seen anything like that. The grass was lying down flat, and there was that sound, that roar, and we ran to get the children away from the windows; but by that time the sound had passed on by. We looked out in the backyard and two mighty oak trees were lying down flat; but not a shingle was lifted on our house, thank the Lord. And that tornado passed by. And I've often thought of the sound of a mighty rushing wind.

And wind is an emblem of the Holy Spirit of God. As a matter of fact, Jesus taught us that, you remember, in John chapter 3 and verse 8. He says the wind blows where it will. You can't tell from where it comes or whither it's going, but you can hear the sound thereof. (John 3:8) And wind, therefore, is an emblem of the Holy Spirit of God, because it comes from heaven; it moves at its own will. It is commanded by nobody except God Himself. It is mysterious. We don't know from whence it comes, or where it goes, and it is invisible, but very powerful. What a wonderful emblem of the Holy Spirit of God!

There was the symbolism of the sound, and then the symbolism of the fire. Look again, if you will, in verse 3: *"And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."* They looked like human candles. Can you imagine 120 people with a flame just flickering over their heads just like that, that, that—fire upon each head.

And the fire also is an emblem of the Holy Spirit. Just like wind, it has its special significance. Fire spreads, fire consumes, fire warms, fire purges, fire illuminates, and fire energizes. And so you have wind and fire. There is fire, and wind to spread it, and it sat upon each of them. It sat upon the apostles, and it sat upon the lowliest believers, because there were no super saints. This was to be a universal thing—the wind and the fire.

## **2. The Power of the Holy Spirit Was Vocalized**

And so, first of all, this power was symbolized. But then this power was vocalized. Look, if you will now, in verse 4: *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."* They are speaking now with strange languages, languages that they have never learned. Well, I think it's important that we just continue to read this: "They spake with other tongues,"—and the word *tongues* means "languages"; it's a Greek word, *glossa*, and so speaking in tongues is called *glossolalia*—"as the spirit gave them utterance." Now this was not something they had learned; it was something that the Holy Spirit of God did. *"And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews,"*—now, underscore this, because tongues are

primarily assigned to Jews—“*devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and they were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*” (Acts 2:4–6)

By the way, this was a known language, not an unknown language; they all heard them speak in their own language. When you go to the book of 1 Corinthians, and it speaks of an unknown tongue, read it carefully, because the word *unknown* is italicized, and it means that is not in the original. The translators put it in there to try to make it read more clearly, but there they obfuscated the meaning.

They heard them speak, everybody was hearing them speak, in their own language. “*And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak not Galilaeans?*” By the way, the Galileans were the hillbillies of that day; they basically were thought of as backward and unlearned. “*And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues*”—that is, “in our languages”—“*the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*” (Acts 2:7–13) That is, they were drunk. So the power that was symbolized by fire and by wind is now also vocalized, and they are beginning to speak in languages they have never learned.

Now again I want to remind you this was primarily a sign to the Jews. Put in your margin 1 Corinthians 14, verses 21 and 22. Paul was explaining to the Corinthian church about tongues, and he says, “*In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people;*”—he’s talking now about Israel—“*and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.*” (1 Corinthians 14:21–22) So tongues are a sign to unbelievers. Sometimes people think that speaking in tongues is a sign that you’re filled with the Holy Spirit. No. Speaking in tongues is not a sign to God’s people about anything. Speaking in tongues is a sign to unbelievers, primarily this people; that is, the Jews. Tongues are mentioned three times in the book of Acts, and every time they’re mentioned, Jews are present, and unbelieving Jews are in the background.

Now the true mark of spirituality is not that you speak in a foreign language or speak in an unknown tongue. The true mark of spirituality is that you control the one tongue that you have. That’s serious. I mean I’m deadly serious about that. I’m not trying to be funny. If you are filled with the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is love. The Corinthian church was carnal and divided and childish and immature, and they were making merchandise

of what they thought was the gift of tongues; but it was not of God. Now there is a biblical gift. The biblical gift of tongues is a language known by others but unknown by the speaker. It is a miracle gift primarily to convince unbelieving Jews.

### **3. The Power of the Holy Spirit Was Actualized**

This power was symbolized by wind and fire. This power was vocalized as they were speaking in strange languages that they'd never learned. And then this power was actualized. Go back again, if you will, to chapter 2, and look in verse 4. And here is the key: *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."* This is the abiding miracle of Pentecost.

Sometimes people say we need another Pentecost. Well, be careful. You think we need another Pentecost? We couldn't have another Pentecost without an indoor cyclone and tongues of fire sitting on everybody's head. It's not another Pentecost that we need. We don't need another Pentecost any more than we need another Bethlehem or another Calvary. Bethlehem is God with us. Calvary is God for us. Pentecost is God in us. We need to enjoy Bethlehem, enjoy Calvary, enjoy Pentecost; but Pentecost was a special day. It was the birthday of the church. And the miracles that were given—the mighty rushing wind and the flames of fire—these things were illustrative of the mighty power, the filling of the Spirit of God.

### **B. Four Words Dealing with the Holy Spirit**

There are four distinct words that have to do with the Holy Spirit, and I want you to pay attention to what they are.

#### **1. The Baptism of the Spirit**

First of all, there is the baptism of the Spirit. Jesus said, *"Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* (Acts 1:5) That is before He ascended to heaven. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what we're talking about.

When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and these individual grains now have become one loaf, they are baked together by love, they have become one, just as those of us in this congregation are not many, and they are one. Paul tells us about that. This is the baptism of the Spirit. Put down in your margin 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13: *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..."*—that's the baptism of the Holy Spirit, when many become one—*"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Now every so often, somebody will ask you, "Have you received the baptism of the Holy Ghost?" And they might mean by that, "Have you had some esoteric experience?" If you are saved, you have received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. When you become a child of God, you are placed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ—and that is the

baptism of the Spirit. It doesn't happen to some and not to others, for this verse of Scripture says, *"For by one Spirit are we all"*—the Greek language literally says, "for by one Spirit have we all been": every one of us—*"baptized into one body."*

Every child of God has the baptism of the Holy Ghost. There is not one scripture that ever commands a New Testament Christian to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Not one! If I'm wrong, stand up and prove it. Not one! No! We were commanded to be filled with the Spirit. We are already baptized with the Spirit the minute we receive Christ. *"For by one Spirit have we all been baptized into one body."* That is the work of the Holy Spirit of God that takes many of us and makes us one when we get saved and are placed into the mystical body of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

## **2. The Indwelling of the Spirit**

Then there is the indwelling of the Spirit. He also says we've been made to drink into one Spirit. He now comes into us. He lives in us and dwells in us. Jesus said in John 14, *"When the comforter is come, He will abide with you forever."* (John 14:16) He dwells in me. He lives in me. He is the abiding possession of every child of God. Some people have the erroneous idea that you get saved, and after you get saved, later on, subsequently, you may receive the Holy Spirit. Put it down big; put it down plain; put it down straight: If the Holy Spirit is not in you, you are not even saved. There is no such thing as getting saved and later receiving the Holy Spirit. Romans chapter 8 and verse 9: *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you."* And then Paul says, *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* (Romans 8:9) You don't belong to Him. If you don't have the Holy Spirit of God, how do you call yourself a Christian? Because Christ is not in you. How is Christ to come into you except by the Holy Spirit? Do you think Jesus in His body is literally going to come into you? I mean, His physical body is in you? No! The only way that Jesus can be in you is through the Holy Spirit. *"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."* If Jesus is not in you, you are not saved. The only way that Jesus can be in you is by the Holy Spirit. Do you understand that?

## **3. The Sealing of the Spirit**

So by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body. That's the baptism of the Spirit: when we are placed by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. But then, thank God, the Holy Spirit is into us: *"we...have been all made to drink into one Spirit."* So there's the baptism of the Spirit; there is the indwelling of the Spirit; and then, thank God, there is the sealing of the Spirit.

Now what happens there is this. Once you are put into the Body of Christ, you are sealed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit of God. Put down Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 13. Paul speaks of Jesus, and he says, *"In whom ye also trusted, after that*

*ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” (Ephesians 1:13)*

Over in the book of Esther, we read that the king’s seal no man can break. (Esther 8:8) The king has put a seal upon you, and that seal is not to be broken. You were signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit of God. It means a finished transaction. In biblical days, when there was a deal done, there would be a stamp called the seal, of melted wax; it was affixed to a document, and it meant “It is done; it is finished; it is paid in full.” And we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of God.”

#### **4. The Filling of the Spirit**

There is the baptism of the Spirit. There is the indwelling of the Spirit. There is the sealing of the Spirit. And there is, fourthly, the filling of the Spirit. Now we are going to dwell more about the filling of the Spirit. Acts chapter 2 and verse 4 says they were all filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Now, move aside the symbolism; move aside the emblems; move those aside, and understand what the abiding miracle is. It is in verse 4: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:4)*

Now I’ve told you there is no command in the Bible for you to be baptized in the Spirit. But there is a definite command for you to be filled with the Spirit. And that is in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 18. The Bible says, *“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)*

I don’t want to be too technical, but I want to tell you that it is in the imperative mood. And if I were to tell you, “Get up out of here, and leave this place right now; it’s imperative that you do it; do it!” that’s not a suggestion; that’s imperative. And the Bible says, *“Be filled with the Spirit.”* It’s imperative. That means this is not just something nice; this is something necessary. This is not just simply a blessing to enjoy; it is a command to obey. And it is passive in voice. It doesn’t say, “Get filled.” It says, *“Be filled.”* That is, it’s something that God does. It is supernatural. *“Be filled with the Spirit”*: it is plural in number. It literally says, “Be ye being filled, all of you.” The apostle says, “The promise is to you and your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:39) Everybody is to be filled with the Spirit. Not just the pastor, not just the evangelist, not just the choir leader; we’re all to be filled with the Spirit, young and old. When we are saved, He comes into us as resident; but when we’re filled, He becomes president. He comes not only to abide, but to preside in us. And so we are to be filled with the Spirit.

Now the filling of the Spirit is conditional: the filling of the Spirit comes when we meet God’s conditions. And the filling of the Spirit comes to turn weaklings into witnesses. And Jesus said in Acts chapter 1, verse 8, *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” (Acts 1:8)* Now among the illustrations of what the Holy Spirit does, He is like wind, and He is like fire. There is

a fire, and there is wind to spread it.

### **C. What the Fire of the Holy Spirit Does**

Now I told you tonight that I want to talk to you about how to keep your spiritual fire burning. And I want to remind you of what fire does, because the Holy Spirit of God is to your life what fire is. And fire illuminates. I want you to write these things down now.

#### **1. The Holy Spirit Is the Illuminating Fire of God**

The Holy Spirit is the illuminating fire of God. Fire gives light. The light that's shining down on us is coming tonight from fire, whether it's the light of the sun, the light of a candle, or the incandescent light. Whatever it is, fire is light. And the Holy Spirit of God is there to illumine you. It was the Holy Spirit of God that gave the Scriptures. And as a matter of fact, you can read in Acts chapter 1 verse 16; you're right there in the neighborhood—just look at verse 16 and you'll see: *“Men and brethren, the scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake.”* (Acts 1:16) Who was speaking when David wrote the Psalms? The Holy Ghost. This is illuminating fire. And not only did the Holy Spirit give the Scriptures; the Holy Spirit helps you to understand the Scriptures. When I prepare a sermon, I soak it in prayer. I pray and say, “God, give me understanding.” But Jesus said in John 14, verse 26, *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things,”*—the Holy Spirit is the teacher; He teaches us—*“and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”* (John 14:26) And so the Holy Spirit is the illuminating fire of God.

#### **2. The Holy Spirit Is the Consuming Fire of God**

And the Holy Spirit is the consuming fire of God. Not only does fire illumine, but fire consumes. Put this scripture down—Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 29: *“For our God is a consuming fire.”* (Hebrews 12:29) And it is the Holy Spirit of God that burns away the dross of sin.

This week when I was studying, I came across an interesting passage. It's in Isaiah chapter 4 and verse 4—don't turn to it, but listen to it. He is talking about the time when God is going to come in mighty power on the nation Israel, but here's what it says: *“When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.”* (Isaiah 4:4) God is going to purge away sin from Israel with the spirit of burning. That is the Holy Spirit of God.

Now when I was a younger preacher, I so desired to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and I had an erroneous idea. I thought if I could be pure enough; if I could be holy enough; if I could be clean enough, then God the Holy Spirit would fill me. If I could only live victoriously, then I might be filled with the Holy Spirit. I had it 180 degrees

backward. I could never be clean and be pure until I was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. You know, sometimes we have the idea that being filled with the Holy Spirit is an attainment. It is not. It is receiving a gift from God: very much just like you were saved. You know how the bankers are: if you can go to the banker and prove that you don't need any money, he just may loan you some. Sometimes I had the idea, "Dear God, if I can just prove to you that I am supernatural enough, pure enough, holy enough, good enough, then maybe you'll fill me with the Holy Spirit." No, dear friend, I need to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God because I don't have what it takes. Now that doesn't mean that I can cling to my sin and expect God to fill me; but it does mean that the only way that I will ever be victorious over sin is to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

### **3. The Holy Spirit Is the Transforming Fire of God**

The Holy Spirit of God is the illuminating fire of God. The Holy Spirit of God is the consuming fire of God. The Holy Spirit of God is the transforming fire of God. Another propensity here of fire is that fire transforms; and what fire does, it transforms whatever it is burning into its own likeness. It turns whatever it is burning into the fire itself, and the fire just transforms. You put a poker even in the fire, and let it stay in the fire, and if the poker stays long enough in the fire, you look at it, and the fire will be in the poker. When you are with the Lord Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, you are being transformed from glory into glory. (2 Corinthians 3:18) And because the Holy Spirit of God is the transforming power of God, fire not only consumes; it transforms.

### **4. The Holy Spirit Is the Empowering Fire of God**

And then, the Holy Spirit is the empowering fire of God. Fire gives power. Remember Acts chapter 1, verse 8: "*Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you*"? Don't you want power in your life? Do you know what's wrong with so many churches? No fire. And because there is no fire, there is no power. Can you imagine a factory where everything in this factory is perfect? I mean, all of the machinery is in place, there are mighty wheels and great pistons and conveyor belts and chains and hoists, and everything is there in the factory, but the factory is cold and dead, and nothing is happening. Somebody says, "Well, maybe we need to put some stained glass windows in the factory. Maybe we need to put a steeple on top of the factory. Maybe we need to put a big sign out in front of the factory. Maybe we need some robed choirs in the factory." Then somebody says, "Wait a minute. There's no fire in the boiler. That's what we need, is a fire in the boiler. There's where the power comes." And so many churches today, they have everything except fire. Fire is power. "*Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*" Rationalism and ritualism and traditionalism and formalism will not do it. It's not form. It's not facts. It's not fashion. It's fire. The Holy Spirit is the empowering fire of God.

## 5. The Holy Spirit Is the Attracting Fire of God

And then, folks, the Holy Spirit of God is the attracting fire of God. The Bible says here in the second chapter of the book of Acts, when these things began to happen, it was “*noised abroad.*” (Acts 2:6) Something was so supernatural that people came and they wanted to see what was happening. One thing about a fire is you don’t have to advertise it. A fire, it advertises itself.

I was preaching in the First Baptist Church of Brooksville, Florida, many years ago. I was a college student, and it was a rainy night, and we were supposed to be having a revival meeting. But there were just a handful of people there, because it was raining. And I wept and preached and poured my heart out, but not very much happened. Somebody kind of put their arm around my shoulder and said, “Well, Adrian, don’t worry. It’s a rainy night, and you can’t expect folks to come on a rainy night.” As I was walking outside that church, I heard a clanging and a siren, and a fire truck went by, and another fire truck went by, and then the fire chief with his sirens screaming went by. And I looked down about a half a mile from the church and I saw a red glow on the horizon. I got in my car and I went down there myself, and a number of other foolish people were standing out in the rain watching a house burn. And I thought to myself, “There’s a much bigger crowd here standing in the rain watching this house burn than there was inside this church where I was preaching.” And I’ve never forgotten it. You don’t have to advertise a fire.

Folks, if Bellevue ever really gets on fire from God, really on fire with the Holy Spirit of God, we’re going to see people come here in ways that propaganda, personality, and advertisement cannot. We won’t need that. We’re just going to have the supernatural fire of God. People are going to come. Do you know that John Wesley used to say this: “If I would just set myself on fire, people would come to watch me burn”? And fire has power.

Too many of us are reading the Bible like it’s a math book rather than a love story. By the way, if dead wood starts fires, I know a lot of churches that are ready to burn. These early Christians, they had a fire that water couldn’t drown and swords couldn’t kill and jails could not hold. All of this is the fire of God. And that’s the reason on the day of Pentecost God gave these great emblems of wind and of fire. Now I’m not talking about wildfire, and I’m not talking about painted fire; I’m talking about real fire. Sometimes when you talk about getting on fire, people are afraid we’re going to become fanatics. In an average church, there’s not much danger of that. It would be like putting a culvert and a policeman around a graveyard to keep a wild demonstration from breaking out from those who sleep there. And I also believe this. I believe the reason that the cults are getting many of the members of Bible-believing churches is because there is an empty place in people’s heart. They want something that is real. They want a passion.

They want a fire.

Now I've just mentioned all of the things that fire does. And you need to keep the fire burning in your heart, because this church is not going to stay on fire until the members—pastor and people and staff and deacons—until we ourselves are on fire. So I want to give you four things. By the way, that's all introduction. That's all just introduction—seriously. I'm not going to keep you that long, but all that's just introduction. Now we're getting to the sermon. All right now, here's the sermon. I want to give you four things—three of them negative, and one of them positive—if you would keep the fire burning. And they all deal with the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of fire and the Spirit of burning.

## I. Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit

Number one, principle number one: Don't lie to the Holy Spirit. If you lie to the Holy Spirit, you're playing with fire, and you're going to get burned. In Acts chapter 5, let me give you an example of somebody who lied to the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 5, I read this: *"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it,"*—that is, she was in on the deal—*"and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet."* They were having a Love Offering, see, and so she brought it, and laid it at the apostle's feet. *"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost,"*—just underscore that: *"to lie to the Holy Ghost"*—*"and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?"*—that is, "You didn't have to give it; nobody twisted your arm"—*"why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost:"*—that means he died. The ghost was the spirit that was in him—*"and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him."* (Acts 5:1–6) They carried this man out of the church service.

Now what had happened was this. There was a great wave of revival that was sweeping the early church, and the number of disciples was being multiplied. First, there was addition. And then, there was multiplication. And the devil wanted to cause division and subtraction; the devil wanted to get into the arithmetic, also. And so what he did, he began to work through the people in the church, particularly Ananias and Sapphira. He had already tried to stop the church by persecution, and he found out that only made it to grow; so Satan said, "If I can't stop them, I'll join them; and I'll work from the inside." And so he got into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, as we're going to see.

Now, what caused Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the Holy Ghost? The root of their

sin was pride. Now, listen to me. It's pride that causes you to lie to the Holy Ghost. The root of their sin was pride. There was a man named Barnabas, who gave an exceptional Love Offering gift, and people were grateful for it. But Barnabas didn't do it to show off, but Barnabas was not ashamed to let it be known what he had done. The Bible says we are to let our lights so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16) And what Barnabas did was a spontaneous show of love. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to get in and bask in the glow of that, so they sold a piece of real estate and told everybody they were going to give everything they received to the Lord. Now they didn't have to do it. Peter said, "It was in your power. You didn't have to give anything. You could have given part. But don't lie and say that you have done something that you have not done."

The reason that they did this simply was pride. They wanted to be praised; they wanted to be petted. And nothing puts a man more in jeopardy in spiritual things than pride. There's nothing that will put out your spiritual fire quicker than pride, because the Bible says that God resists the proud and He gives grace to the humble. (James 4:8; 1 Peter 5:5) The Holy Spirit of God has poured out the Spirit of grace upon people who are humble.

Now the root of their sin was pride, and the fruit of their sin was pretense. They pretended more than they had. They wanted credit. Again, I wanted to say that it's not that they refused to give. That was in their power, Peter said. But they were acting as hypocrites. Read the Bible, and you're going to find out that Jesus Christ reserved His sternest words for hypocrites. Frankly, I had to search my heart before I could preach this message. I mean, on my knees, I had to ask myself, "Adrian, do you pretend to be more holy than you are? Are you telling people things that you don't believe, or even worse, things that you do believe and don't practice?" You see, that will put out the fire.

There is pride that leads to pretense. And I believe that many of our churches are filled with that. I've seen congregations stand and sing, "I surrender all, all to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give," and frankly, that's a lie. They have not surrendered all; they have not given all freely to the Lord Jesus Christ. We sing, "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold." Well, how many congregations do you believe really mean that? "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold"—they withhold it with all their might. I've seen congregations sing on Sunday mornings, "Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death," and then they don't even come back on Sunday night. I mean, they'll stay home to watch the Sunday night movies, but they will sing on Sunday morning, "Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we will be true to thee till death." That's hypocrisy. It is lying to the Holy Spirit.

Now, who caused that? Well, Peter said to Ananias and Sapphira, "Why has Satan put in your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" It's a strategy of Satan to sabotage the spirit

of revival. Again I say, he tried intimidation and persecution. That didn't work. The cause of Christ has been hurt far more by hypocrites within the church than by enemies outside the church.

Now, listen to me. I'm talking about how to keep your spiritual fire burning. If you lie to the Holy Ghost, you're playing with fire. It is serious to tell a lie to anybody; more serious to tell a lie to a judge; thrice serious, and much more than that, to lie to the Holy Spirit of God—to lie to God. It's not only serious; but, folks, it's foolish. Let me tell you why it's foolish. Because the Holy Spirit was there when the deal was made. The Holy Spirit was on the inside. The Holy Spirit knew everything. You can't fool God. Abraham Lincoln said, "You can fool some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." You can't fool God any of the time. I mean, why do you try to lie to God? It's serious. It's foolish.

"Well," you say, "was God capricious when God struck Ananias dead and later Sapphira dead?" No, God had warned them. As a matter of fact, he said, "*Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?*" That means that the Holy Spirit of God had been speaking to them, because He is the illuminating fire of God. Their error was an intentional error. It was willful, and it was inexcusable, and God made them an example to the coming generations. Have you ever wondered why God doesn't strike hypocrites dead today in the churches? Why did He strike Ananias and Sapphira dead? Why doesn't He strike the hypocrites dead in our churches today? Because God took certain individuals and He made them an example.

Let me give you some examples of examples. Jude verse 7: "*Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*" (Jude 1:7) How does God feel about sodomy? How does God feel about sexual perversion? Go see Sodom and Gomorrah. He left Sodom with its smoking ruins as an example.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 10, verses 10 and 11, how does God feel about murmuring? "*Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" (1 Corinthians 10:10–11) When God killed those people in the wilderness with poisonous serpents, why doesn't He kill people who murmur today with poisonous serpents? God has given an example. Why did God strike Ananias and Sapphira dead? Why doesn't He strike every hypocrite dead? God has given the example. We need to learn. We need to be on guard against hypocrisy.

Ask yourself this question: "Is there any hypocrisy in me? Am I pretending a devotion to Jesus Christ that I don't really have?" Are you going in and out among your brethren,

serving as a deacon, serving on the staff, singing in the choir? I mean, think about what Debbie sang tonight: “Oh, the glory of your presence.” Would she not have been filled with folly and foolishness if she were not enraptured with the glory of His presence? I mean, you think about it. Would I stand and sing a song, “Oh, the glory of your presence,” and sing that to entertain, or to have somebody say, “What a beautiful voice”? I don’t believe this about this young lady. I believe she meant every word that she sang. But would it not be foolish to do that? Choirs are so foolish. Folks, listen in the choir; listen to your pastor. You are not there to lead the church *in* worship. You are there to lead the church *by* worship. When you worship in front of us, then we worship, because you are worshipping and setting the example in worship. Don’t sing what you don’t mean. That is hypocrisy. That is lying to the Holy Ghost. And you’re playing with fire.

## II. Don’t Grieve the Holy Spirit

Number one: Don’t lie to the Holy Ghost. Number two: Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit. Now if you grieve the Holy Spirit, you’re going to dampen the fire. Well, what grieves the Holy Spirit? Unconfessed, un-repent-ed-of sin in your life. Turn this time to Ephesians chapter 4 and look, if you will, in verse 25: *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil.”* That is, don’t give a beachhead or campground to the devil. *“Let not him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”* Now, watch verse 30: *“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* (Ephesians 4:25–32) He says here, “Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit,” and then he prefaces that and follows that with a litany of sins—sins of the flesh, sins of the spirit, everything from malice to an unforgiving spirit—and he says this grieves the Holy Spirit of God.

Now when you grieve the Holy Spirit of God, you dampen the fire of God. You see, the Spirit of God is burning love. He is passionate love. The word *grieve* is a love word. Did you know that you can only grieve somebody who loves you? You can only be grieved by somebody that you love. You think about it and see if what I’m saying is not true. When the neighbor’s kids do wrong, that vexes you. When your kids do wrong, that grieves you. There is a difference. You see, a person is only grieved if they love the person who’s doing wrong.

I have been grieved by people when they do wrong—so grieved. Somebody told me a while back about a preacher who had fallen into immorality. I'm not ashamed to tell you, when I heard it, I fell to my knees and I wept like a baby. I could not stop crying. When I heard about what this man had done, because I loved him, I admired him—and I am grieved. Now the Holy Spirit of God loves us so much that when we have filthy sin in our hearts and in our lives—unconfessed, unrepented-of sin—that grieves the Spirit of God, and it dampens the fire.

Look up here, and I'm going to tell you something. As I stand before you tonight, I don't have any unconfessed, unrepented-of sin in my life that I know of. I would be a fool to try to live the Christian life while harboring sin in my heart and in my life. You say, "Well, who do you think you are: some super saint?" No! That's normal Christianity. That's not abnormal. Don't get the idea that we're all supposed to have our pet little sins. Yes, we fail. Yes, we stumble. That's the reason he says, "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let the sun go down upon your wrath.*" (Ephesians 4:26) Get it right! Don't harbor that sin! Don't go back to bed with that sin! Don't wake up with it!

I am so grateful that I can wake up in the morning and not carry the baggage of yesterday's sin into this new day. How wonderful to start a day clean and pure and to lift your hands and to praise the Lord and not grieve the precious, blessed Holy Spirit of God who loves us so much that His heart is broken with unconfessed sin in our lives!

### **III. Don't Quench the Spirit**

Now if you want to keep the fire burning, don't lie to the Holy Ghost. Don't pretend something that you're not. If you want to keep the fire burning, don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God; don't lie to the Holy Spirit. Number three: Don't quench the Spirit. First Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 19 says, "*Quench not the Spirit.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:19) Now if you quench the Spirit, you'll just put the fire out. We need that fire, that illuminating fire, that energizing fire. We need that purging, cleansing fire. The Holy Spirit is sent by God the Father to guide us, to lead us. He gives us fire to light our path, and we need to be very sensitive to the Spirit of God, because He is so easily quenched.

There have been times in my life I'm afraid that I have quenched the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God has spoken to me, and I have not obeyed the Spirit of God. I can remember a time with deep remorse the first little church I ever pastored. I had told the Lord, "I will talk to every person in this town that I can about you; I will go to at least every house." And I had worked and worked and worked and worked, and there was one house kind of down the road a long distance, and the Holy Spirit seemed to be moving my heart, saying, "Go to that house." And I said, "Well, I've done enough, and I won't go." I was driving later down the street. I saw a woman coming, driving in her

automobile, both hands in the air. Her hands were not even on the steering wheel. She was screaming at the top of her voice. I pulled over and asked her what was wrong. She pointed to the orange grove there in front of that very house and said, “He’s dead! He’s dead!” I went into that orange grove and there I saw that man with a high-powered rifle that he had put up to his head and reached up and pulled the trigger. And there he was: his body was already blue, and he was there; rigor mortis had come. He had gone out in that field and shot himself. I can see that scene in my mind right now. And I wondered, “Did I quench the Spirit? That was the one house I did not go to.” And that has stayed with me all of these days.

Don’t lie to the Holy Ghost. Don’t quench the Holy Ghost. Don’t grieve the Holy Ghost. When God’s Spirit speaks to you, “Be quick, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet.” Is God speaking to you about something: somebody you need to get right with, some money you need to give, some restoration you need to make, some witness that you need to bear? Then, do it—because you can put out that flame; you can quench the Spirit.

#### **IV. Be Filled With the Spirit**

Now, listen. Don’t lie to the Holy Spirit. Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit. Don’t quench the Spirit. But let’s come right back to our verse again in Acts chapter 2, verse 4: “They were all filled with the Spirit.” Now, remember again Ephesians 5, verse 18: “*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*” (Ephesians 5:18) Now, don’t get the idea that you are a vessel, and the Holy Spirit is some sort of liquid power that He pours into you like you would fill a jug. No, no, no, no! You are a temple, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit means that He has the key to every room. First Corinthians 6:19: “*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which ye have of God?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19) Have you given Him the key to every room, to every closet?

How are you filled with the Spirit of God? Just be completely committed. Where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty. (2 Corinthians 3:17) Just simply say, “Here I am, Lord. Take my life, every ounce, every inch, every nerve, every fiber, every possession: it is yours. I give you the key to every room, every closet, complete commitment, and continual control.”

This verse of Scripture, the one thing I left out when I told you that it was in the imperative mode, and passive voice, and plural in number, is that it is in the present tense. It means it is continual action; it actually means “be being filled.” Why does he say, “Don’t be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit”? Why didn’t he say, “Don’t steal, but be filled with the Spirit”? Why didn’t he say, “Don’t commit adultery, but be filled with the Spirit”? How does a person get drunk with wine? He’s speaking here not

only in contrast, but in comparison. How does a person get drunk with wine? He drinks. How does he stay drunk? He has to keep drinking. “Be being filled.” He’s talking here in comparison. Just constantly be being filled with the Holy Spirit of God. It is the present tense, continual action, as we are letting God’s Holy Spirit fill us.

So, how are you filled with the Spirit? Well, there is complete commitment. There is continual control, as we are drinking and letting Him have His life in us. And then there is constant claiming. You’re saying, “Lord, I claim your power right now.”

That’s what I did on my knees before I came out here to preach this message. I know the message has been longer tonight than normal, but listen to me. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples went out. On the day of Pentecost, the lost came in. And God was glorified by that New Testament church.

## Conclusion

Now, folks, we’ve been out here ten years, and God has blessed us. I want the fire to burn brighter and greater than it has ever burned. Are you with me? That’s going to start in you. Teens up here in the choir, high schoolers, it’s going to start in you. I want you when you go to school tomorrow to let the fire burn. Choir, I meant what I said. You don’t lead the church *in* worship; you lead the church *by* worship as you worship God. I want all of our deacons to understand that the requirement for being a deacon is, first of all, to be Spirit-filled. I want every staff member not to lie to the Holy Ghost. I want every staff member not to grieve the Holy Ghost; I want every staff member not to quench the Holy Ghost, but to be filled with the Spirit. “And the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:39)

Folks, let’s keep the fire burning. Thank God there’s the fire, and there’s the wind to spread it. My heart almost jumps out of my chest when I stand here on a Sunday morning and see this building filled twice, and I think, “My God, what would happen if everybody who comes on Sunday morning were a Spirit-filled believer, and would let Holy Ghost fire burn in them?” Would you say, by God’s grace, “I will be at least one; I will, by the grace of God”?

# The Principles of Power

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: January 14, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:1–4**

*“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,  
and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”*

ACTS 2:2

## Outline

### Introduction

- A. Leading up to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Promised
  - B. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Symbolized
  - C. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Vocalized
  - D. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Actualized
- I. The Holy Spirit Is a Promise to Be Received
  - II. The Holy Spirit Is a Power to Be Released
  - III. The Holy Spirit Is a Person to Be Recognized

### Conclusion

## Introduction

Be finding the book of Acts, and that’s right after the Gospels, and we’re in Acts chapter 2. We’re talking about living supernaturally. If you didn’t bring a Bible, most likely there’ll be one there in the pew rack before you. A woman had taken a course in First Aid. She was so thrilled that she had taken this First Aid course, because, when she went back to her study group, they were having testimonials. She said, Let me tell you what happened to me. Out in front of my very own home, there was a horrible automobile accident. An elderly man driving an automobile lost control, went over the curbing, hit head-on an oak tree. He was thrown out of the automobile onto the ground; his head was crushed like an eggshell. His eyes were rolling around in pools of blood. He was pumping out his life’s blood on the asphalt there. It was terrible, horrible. But she said, I was the first one on the scene. I remembered my First Aid. I remembered if I would put my head between my knees, I would not faint.

That’s the way the church is today—in a world of sorrow and pain and anguish and trouble, going around with its head between its knees, saying, I’m so glad I’m a Christian. It makes me feel so good, so wonderful in this day and in this age. Friend, listen. God has anointed us, and God has empowered us, to rescue the perishing, and

to care for the dying, to lift up the fallen one, the weak or the erring one, to tell them of Jesus, who is mighty to save. We don't need to be going around moaning and groaning and talking about living in the last days, as if God were dead.

Now, let me tell you, as I told you last week, God has a purpose and a power for His church in these days, and God says, the Lord Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." There has never been a greater day, a greater age to preach the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ than in this day and this age. Let me tell you why.

First of all, our mandate has not changed. The Lord Jesus has never withdrawn the Great Commission. It is just as powerful, just as real, today as it ever has been.

Not only has our mandate not changed, our Master has not changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and friend, He is not getting old, and He's not sick; He has as much power in the twenty-first century as He had in the first century. Do you agree with that?

Now, listen. The mandate has not changed; the Master has not changed; the message has not changed. We don't need a new and a modern gospel for a new and modern age. Friend, if it's new, it's not true. The Bible says we are to "earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints." And I want to say again that our methods have not changed. Now, the means have changed. The apostle Paul didn't have a microphone, he didn't have electric lights, he didn't have automobiles—those are the means. But the methods have not changed—prayer, truth, Holy Spirit anointing, sharing, witnessing, soul-winning, giving, loving, sharing—those are Bible methods; they're just as fresh today as they were 2,000 years ago.

You say, Yes, Pastor, surely, yes, the mandate hasn't changed, and the Master hasn't changed, no, no, no, no, that's true. Our methods haven't changed, our message hasn't changed, but pastor, let me tell you what has changed: mankind has changed. Men are so hard today, men are so wicked today, people are so sinful today. Folks, I want to tell you something: Adam was totally depraved, and you can't get worse than that. God has never had anything but sinners to work with, understand that? It is an insult to God—an insult to God—to say we cannot have revival. That was a good place for an Amen; I waited and nobody said a word. Hello! It is an insult to God to say we cannot have revival.

All right, now, listen—listen. The Bible says, "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." The Bible says, concerning all of the wickedness that's on the outside, "Greater is he that is in you"—that is the Holy Spirit—"than he that is in the world"—that's the devil.

Now, what I want to talk to you about is The Principles of Power. We're in Acts chapter 2, and I want you to begin reading with me verse 1: "And when the day of

Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

#### **A. Leading up to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Promised**

Now, remember last week we talked about the fact that Jesus had promised, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” They were to tarry in Jerusalem; they were to wait for the promise of the power—the fulfillment of the promise, the coming of the power.

And this is when it happened. This is the day of Pentecost. It was a special feast day in the life of Israel. They had been keeping this feast for fifteen hundred years, but this one was special. No other Pentecost like this Pentecost. It was a feast. You know, the Bible’s full of feasts, and they all typify the Lord Jesus, and when I invite you to Jesus, I’m not inviting you to a funeral; I’m inviting you to a feast. I hope you understand that.

This was a feast day, and there were many things that happened that day, but one thing that they would do would be to take some grain, crush it, grind it, sift it, purify it, and then they’d bake two loaves of bread, and they’d pour into this bread oil, and they’d bake these loaves, and now these individual grains are no longer individual grains, they have been blended, baked together. Then, they took seven animals, seven perfect lambs, and they offered a blood sacrifice with those. And then, one bull and two young calves, ten altogether, speaking of the perfection of the precious shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the total completeness of Calvary. Those individual grains represent the church, no longer individual members. Now, they are blended, baked, melded, molded together. The oil in that bread represents the Holy Spirit of God. This was the birthday of the church. The Holy Spirit had come, and God had promised power.

#### **B. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s Power Was Symbolized**

Now, He’s going to demonstrate that power. Now, He’s going to symbolize it. He wants us to understand what it’s all about, and so you’re going to see this power symbolized. It was symbolized by two things: by fire and by wind. There was a sound, and there was a sight. Look at it again, if you will, in the second chapter of Acts, verse 2: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.” Have you ever heard a tornado, a cyclone? How many of you have ever heard one? All right. Everybody says it sounds like what? A freight train. That’s true—that’s true. I heard one, one time—well, twice, I have been in enough proximity to a tornado to hear the noise, and it is an awesome sound. Now, if you think a tornado sounds awesome outside, what would you think about an indoor one? This one was inside the house where they were sitting, and

there was the symbolism of the sound.

Now, we said that oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit that was upon that bread, but wind is also an emblem of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches this. You see, as the wind comes from heaven, the Holy Spirit comes from heaven. As the wind moves at will, commanded by nobody, so the Holy Spirit of God is sovereign, and moves at will. As the wind is mysterious—we can't tell where it comes from or where it's going—so is the Holy Spirit. And yet, as the wind operates according to fixed laws, so does the blessed precious Holy Spirit of God. And the wind is invisible but powerful, and there's an invisible powerful force in this building this morning, and that is the Holy Spirit of God.

So, it was symbolized, first of all, by wind, but then again by fire. Look, if you will again, in verse 3: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." They looked like human candles, 120 candles, with flame flickering over their heads. And what about fire? We know what wind does—what about fire? Fire spreads. Fire consumes. Fire warms. Fire purges. Fire illumines. Fire energizes. Fire purifies. Now, wind and fire—what a combination, what an illustration, what a symbolism of the Holy Spirit of God—wind and fire.

### **C. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's Power Was Vocalized**

This power was symbolized, and then this power was vocalized. Go on and look, if you will, in verse 4: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Here are 120 people now beginning to speak in foreign languages, known languages. The people who were there said, How is this—how can we understand this? They're speaking every man in his own language wherein he was born. They're hearing these Galileans who didn't have a Ph.D., they were not, bilingual, trilingual, multi-lingual. Here they are, praising God with languages they've never heard. This power symbolized; this power now is vocalized.

Now, what was this? This was a sign to unbelieving Jews. As a matter of fact, you can go over to 1 Corinthians 14, verses 21 and verse 22, and it says this: "In the law it is written with men of other tongues"—that is, other languages—"and other lips will I speak unto this people. Yet for all that they will not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe." Listen. Come up close—let me tell you something. Tongues are not a sign to God's people about anything. Tongues are a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not. Tongues were a sign to the Jews. Three times in the book of Acts you'll find the believers there speaking in tongues. Every time, there were Jews who were doing this, and Jews were present, and unbelieving Jews are in the background. Now, it is true that Gentiles did this, but it is a sign to the Jews. Now, listen. By the way, the mark that you're filled with the Holy Spirit is that you control the one tongue you do have.

#### **D. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's Power Was Actualized**

This power was symbolized, this power was vocalized, but now here's the key: this power was actualized. The Bible says—look—they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. That's the abiding principle, is the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the abiding miracle of Pentecost is that men, women, boys and girls were filled with the Holy Ghost. We're not trying to repeat Pentecost. Every now and then, somebody says we need another Pentecost. Well, if you have another Pentecost, you have to have more fire and another cyclone. You see, all of this was to symbolize, to teach us, something. Now, this is the day of Pentecost, and the promise of the Father came with this wonderful power—power that was symbolized, power that was vocalized, power that was actualized—as actual human beings now become inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God, as He comes into them.

Having said all of that, I want to give you three principles of power, okay? Three principles of power, and I pray God that He'll write these upon your heart. We're talking now about the dear precious Holy Spirit of God.

#### **I. The Holy Spirit Is a Promise to Be Received**

Number one: the Holy Spirit is a promise to be received. Have you got that? He is a promise to be received. Now, in this same chapter, let's go over to about verse 38. Peter preached a sermon, a wonderful, anointed, Christ-filled sermon, and there was conviction there. Let's begin in verse 37: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts." Now, that's Holy Spirit conviction that does that. "And said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what must we do?" Now, they're unsaved. "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" I hope you'll be asking that question, if you've not been saved: What should I do?

Here's what God says to you, the same thing that Peter said to those people so long ago: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Now, he didn't say, you will receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost; he's not here talking about tongues, or miracles, or signs, or visions, helps, government. No, you will receive the Holy Ghost himself. He is the gift. You will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now, notice verse 39: "For the promise is unto you and to your children, to all that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Holy Spirit is a promise to be received. The promise is for you, for your children, to those that are far off, and as many as the Lord our God shall call. Friend, God has made a promise to you, God has promised. Are you listening? God has promised to you the Holy Spirit. You were not left off, left out. The promise is unto you, and to your children, to those who are far off, and as many as the Lord our God shall call.

While we're in the neighborhood right now, we have something I need to give attention to, because there are some who'll tell you that you have to be baptized in order to be saved, so I'm going to make a little detour here for just a moment when we're on verse 38: "Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for"—f-o-r—"the remission of sins." Now, somebody may ask you, Were you baptized for the remission of sins? And you would say, No, I came to Jesus for the remission of my sins. Baptism didn't remit my sins. They say, Well then, why don't you believe the Bible? The Bible says you're to be baptized for the remission of sins.

Well the problem is understanding this little preposition f-o-r, three letters in the English language, three letters in the Greek language, epsilon, iota, sigma, *eis*—you pronounce it like ice cube. And this preposition, repent and be baptized *eis* the remission of sins, for the remission of sins. Now, the preposition for in our English language has a number of meanings even in English. We could say he wept for joy. Why did he weep? Because he was joyful. He went to the store bread and milk. Now, he went to the store in order to get bread and milk. Two different sentences—the preposition is used two different ways. One means because of; the other means in order to. So, how are you going to tell which it means? Just in its simple usage. See how it's used, and you know how it's used. Now, it's the same way in the Greek preposition. This Greek preposition for may mean in order to, or it may mean because of. Now, are you baptized in order to have your sins remitted? No, you're baptized because of the remission of sins.

Let me give you another verse. Put this in your margin—Luke 11, verse 32: "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonas." That's the same Greek preposition, now it's translated at: they repented at the preaching of Jonas. It's the same word that's found in Acts 2:38. Now, think with me a moment. They repented at the preaching of Jonah—the preaching of Jonah. Did they repent in order that Jonah could preach? No, they repented why? Because Jonah preached. It's the exact same word. Now, you say, Well, Pastor, you've spent too much time on this. I agree, I want to move on.

All I want to say is this: that there is a promise that, if you will repent of your sins, receive the Lord Jesus Christ, obey Him, you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a promise to be received. Now, Jesus told the disciples to tarry until they were imbued with power from on high. We don't need to tarry. The Holy Spirit is already come. He has come. We don't need to say, O God, send your Spirit. He's sent His Spirit. That would be like praying, O God, send Jesus to die on the cross. No, He has died on the cross. Calvary's an accomplished fact. Pentecost is an accomplished fact. What we need to do now is to receive the promise.

Now, let me tell you something. If you are a Christian, if you are truly saved, you've already received that promise. You say, Well, I don't feel it. I want to tell you something. You can be a Baptist and be lost. You can attend these worship services and be lost. But you cannot be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit in you. That's what makes you a Christian. When Peter said, "Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," he didn't say, you might. He said, you shall. And the very word shall here is a very positive word. It literally means, once and for all. If you repented of your sins, you did receive the Holy Spirit of God. Now, are you listening to me? If you repented of your sins, you did receive the Holy Spirit of God. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, in Romans chapter 8 and verse 9—listen to this—Jesus gave the Holy Spirit, and the Bible says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Are you listening? If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you don't belong to Jesus. That's what the Word of God says. Romans 8, verse 9: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Now, God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we're children of God. What is this witness? How do I know that I have the Holy Spirit of God? Well, I don't know that I have the Holy Spirit of God because of some emotional feeling. Emotions come and go. I've told you many times, your emotions are the shallowest part of your nature. Salvation is the deepest work of God. God doesn't do the deepest work in the shallowest part. The Holy Spirit is the one who communicates the things of God. Your human spirit is the instrument of spiritual knowledge, and the Holy Spirit of God speaks to your human spirit that you belong to God. It is not an emotional feeling; it is an awareness. You say, Pastor, I'm not sure of the difference. If you have it, you know the difference. If you have it, you know the difference. If you don't have it, I don't know that I could explain it to you. But, when you get saved, the Holy Spirit of God comes into you. I mean, how else could Jesus come into you? Could He, in His physical body, come into you? How else could Jesus come into you, apart from the Holy Spirit? You see, Christ is in you. How is Christ in you? Through the Holy Spirit.

Now, we're talking about three principles of power. Number one is, the Holy Spirit is a promise to be received. The promise is unto you, to your children, to those that are far off, and as many as the Lord our God shall call. Got it? Okay now, listen.

## **II. The Holy Spirit Is a Power to Be Released**

Here's the second principle. Not only is the Holy Spirit a promise to be received, but the Holy Spirit is a power to be released—a power to be released. Remember Acts chapter 1, verse 8: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Now, what kind of power is this? Is this physical power? No. Economic power? No. Political power? No. It is spiritual power. Now, actually it's the word we get our word dynamite

from. You shall receive *dunamis*, a dynamic power will be in you. I would be a fool, an absolute sheer fool, to attempt to preach without the anointing, the power, of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God is power.

As you open your Bible, you see the Spirit of God moving in power. When there was a chaos, back in Genesis chapter 1, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep, and that chaos became a cosmos. There was a little virgin girl whose name was Mary. The Spirit of God moved upon Mary, and Mary becomes with child, the Christ child, because of the power of the Spirit of God. You read in the Bible about a grave where a man named Jesus is lying, and the Spirit of God moves into that grave, and Jesus is raised from the dead by the Spirit of God.

And now you see Simon Peter—I want you to look, if you will, in verse 14; we’re in chapter 2—look in verse 14: “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said unto them, Ye men of Judea and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken unto my words.” Wait a minute, just a minute. Is this the Peter who cowered in front of a little girl? Is this the same man? Notice the transformation. He’s not denying Jesus now; he’s not swearing, and saying, I never knew the man. But to the contrary, he stands up and he says, Listen to me, hearken unto me. Look in verse 22: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him.” There is a power that has moved upon this man.

Now, God wants you to live with power. God doesn’t want you just simply to have the Holy Spirit in you as some residing person. He wants that power to be released in your heart and in your life. That brings up an interesting question. For a long time in my early ministry, I was endeavoring to make myself somehow worthy to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I had the idea that, if I could be good enough, if I could pray long enough, if I could make myself worthy enough, then perhaps God would fill me. Do you know I had it backwards, completely totally backwards? You know, sometimes, if you go to the bank, and you need a loan, the banker will start talking to you, make you fill out all these forms. And, if you can prove that you don’t need any money, then he’ll loan you some— isn’t that right? Then, he’ll loan you some. I mean, I used to think, God, if I can just prove to you I don’t need this power, maybe you’ll give it to me. If I could live holy, if I could be pure, if I could have, if, if, if, if I could win enough souls, then maybe you’d give it to me. I wouldn’t need it then.

One of the greatest things I have ever learned in my life is this: that holiness is not the way to Christ; Christ is the way to holiness. Oh, if you could only understand this. That doesn’t mean that that you can come, wanting to be filled with the Holy Spirit, with your hands full of sin. No! Peter said, repent. But don’t think that you can earn anything from God. This is a gift like your salvation—do you understand that? Quit trying to make

yourself worthy. You're not worthy; you're not worthy of salvation; you're not worthy of anything. What do you have that you've not received? That's what the apostle Paul says.

The Holy Spirit of God is a promise to be received; then, He is a power to be released. Why are we so pathetic? Why are there so many in this building and we're doing so little? I'll tell you why. You've not allowed the Holy Spirit of God to do what He wants to do in our hearts and in our lives. Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me. On the day of Pentecost, five thousand people got saved. A hundred and twenty witnesses—five thousand saved in one day. Today, in modern church, five thousand people can't win a hundred and twenty in a year. What's the difference? Well, the difference is we're trying to do it in our own strength rather than depending upon the Holy Spirit of God.

All right, the Holy Spirit of God is a power to be released—got it?

### **III. The Holy Spirit Is a Person to Be Recognized**

Okay now, here's the third thing: the Holy Spirit, a promise to be received, a power to be released; now, the Holy Spirit is a person to be recognized—a person to be recognized. On the day of Pentecost, they saw all of this, and they said, What does all of this mean? Well, look, if you will now, in verse 12: "They were all amazed and were in doubt saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine, but Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said unto them, Ye men of Judea and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken to my words, for these are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing but it is but the third hour of the day..."—it's only nine in the morning. Of course, he'd never been to America—"these are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day, but this is that which is spoken of the prophet Joel: and it shall come to pass in the last days of God that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and on my handmaidens will I pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."

Now, Peter, what is all of this? How did all this happen? Well, I'm going to tell you how it happened. We all went to seminary. We were in seminary for three-and-a-half years with the best teacher; and, besides that, we are all holy men; and, besides that, we've been praying for ten days in a prayer meeting. That's why it's all happening. No, Peter refused to take credit for what was happening. There was a person that was recognized there, and that was the Holy Spirit of God. What does this mean? Peter said, I'll tell you what it means: it means the Holy Spirit is working.

Do you know one of the things that kills some churches? When God starts working, people start taking credit for it. They start taking credit for it. We have a pastor here

today in this congregation who's here to study Bellevue Baptist Church. Why is God blessing Bellevue? Well, because the way brother Mark administrates, the way brother Jim waves his hands, and the way this man keeps the grounds clean—that's why. Or, because our congregation is so intelligent, or because we dress so well, or because we have our building. No, no, no, no, no. It's because of Him. We start taking credit for what God does, friend, it stops. What is there about this church, or any church, that you cannot explain apart from the Holy Spirit of God?

Same thing in witnessing. I hear people say something—kind of silly to me—they say, Well, I know that I don't share Jesus, but I just want people to see my life. I just hope by my life they'll want to be saved. Come up close, and I'll tell you something: they're not saved by your life; they're saved by His death, and if you live the life without giving Him the glory, you are taking praise under false pretenses. You ought to say the way that this can be explained is that there is a person—His name is Jesus—who has changed my life, and the way that you can explain any church that is being moved and working is, this is that which is spoken of by the prophet Joel. It shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.

The Holy Spirit of God is a person to be recognized. And God says, I'll not share my glory with another. We need to be constantly, constantly recognizing, giving God the praise and the glory for what He is doing. People ask me, What about Bellevue? How do you explain Bellevue? I say, it's like an airplane with a tailwind—with a tailwind. God is doing something. You know, the only thing that we have any right to ask anybody to believe is that which cannot be explained apart from Him.

Now, when you have this kind of a service, there are three things that will happen. They will happen today in this service. Want me to tell you what these three things are? And we're coming into the end. Look in verse 12. There are some who will be amazed; there will be amazement. You know, I want this church to be an amazement to people. I want my life to be an amazement to people. There will be amazement. Perhaps I'll call this sermon I'm going to preach tonight The Amazing First-Century Church. God doesn't call us to be amusing, but amazing. There will be amazement.

But there will be also amusement. Look in verse 13: "Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine." When was the last time anybody accused you of being drunk because of your faith? New wine—when was the last time that you were so different somebody said, Well, there's something possessing that person. You know, a person filled with wine—his walk is changed, his talk is changed, his very demeanor is changed. But they mocked them; they laughed at them. When we begin to amaze some, we're going to amuse others. They're going to look at us, they're going to call us all kinds of names: fools, freaks, fanatics, nuts. We may be nuts, but we're fastened to a good bolt.

There will be amazement. There will be amusement. But I'll tell you a third thing

there will be: there will be acknowledgement. Look, if you will, in verse 41 of this same chapter: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” There are going to be those who acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior.

## Conclusion

Let me ask the church here a question as we come to the conclusion. Church members, I’m going to start with you; I’m going to start with all the choir, the orchestra, start with you two guys over there, ask myself this question: are you filled with the Holy Spirit? I’m not talking to your neighbor now. I can walk right down here, and put my hand on you, and say, Are you filled with the Holy Spirit of God? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit of God? Are you filled with the Holy Spirit of God? I mean, it’s to you, and to you. Hey, quit wondering, Are they hearing the message? I’m asking you: are you consciously, conspicuously filled with the Spirit of God? If not, you’re not just missing a blessing; you’re guilty of rebellion and sin. We’ll talk more about how to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. I’m not talking about wildfire; I’m talking about spiritual reality, without which we will not reach this world. Aren’t you tired of playing church? How could so many people be in one city and not make more difference than we’re making?

Second question I want to ask: To those of you who are not certain of your salvation, are you certain you’re not saved? Have you repented? Have you put your sins on Jesus, or are you still carrying them? Men and brethren, what must we do? Repent. When you repent, you turn from sin to Jesus. I’m not asking you, Are you a church member, a Baptist? Is Christ real to you? If you died right now, would you go to heaven? Are you certain of it?

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed; no one stirring, no one moving. If you are already saved, begin to pray for those round about you who may not be saved, and if you want to be saved, I’m going to lead you in a prayer, and in this prayer you can ask Jesus Christ to save you. Now, it’s the prayer I’m leading, but it won’t do any good if it’s my prayer—it has to be your prayer. Would you pray like this?

Dear God...—that’s right, just speak to Him out of your heart. Dear God, I am a sinner, and I’m lost, and I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you this moment—now, right now, I receive you into my heart, as my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Lord Jesus. Pray it in faith. Did you ask Him? Then pray this way: Thank you for doing it, Jesus. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You are now my Lord, my Savior, my God, and my friend. Now, Lord Jesus, I will not be ashamed of you. I will make it public, if you will just give me the strength, and I’ll do it today. In your name I pray. Amen.

# How to Have a Church Aflame

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 4, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 2:1–5

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”*

ACTS 2:4

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sign of Speaking
- II. The Sign of Standing
- III. The Sign of Sharing
- IV. The Sign of Serving
- V. The Sign of Suffering
- VI. The Sign of Submitting
- VII. The Sign of Soul Winning
- VIII. The Sign of Singing

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you turn to the second chapter of the book of Acts. Now in my Bible, the heading says “The Acts of the Apostles,” but that is not a correct heading. I want you to understand that the chapter titles are not a part of the inspired text. And this is really not the acts of the apostles; it is the acts of the Holy Spirit, and what the Holy Spirit did in the life of the apostles. And we’re going to be talking tonight about the Holy Spirit of God and “How to Have a Church Aflame,” a church on fire.

I know that God has blessed Bellevue Baptist Church and blessed us incredibly, marvelously, wonderfully, inexplicably. For that, I give God all of the glory, all of the praise, all of the majesty. But, friend, we have not begun to begin to see what God can do if this church really catches fire for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 2, verse 1: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”* Now Pentecost was a Jewish feast day. It came fifty days after Passover. *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem*

*Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:1–5)*

And I want to stop the reading right there. But I want you to imagine the scene now. The Lord Jesus has come out of the grave. He has gone out to Mount Olivet. He has given the Great Commission. He has ascended the high hills of glory. But He has commanded the apostles to wait until they be endued with power from on high. It's the day of Pentecost. And suddenly something happens. When they're gathered together, there comes a roaring, swirling cacophony like a cyclone.

Have you ever heard one? I heard one, one time—a tornado. Joyce and I were asleep in the night, and I heard this incredible roar. And they say it's like a freight train—and in many ways it is. And I jumped out of bed. I'm a sound sleeper, but it woke me. And I looked outside. Brother Jim, it was in Merritt Island. And I looked out in the backyard, and I saw the strangest sight. The grass was lying down flat. And I thought, you know, like the grass is normally up like this, but the grass was like somebody had taken a big comb and just combed it smoothly. And here was this roaring sound, and I knew immediately it was a tornado. And it left as quickly as it came. It never lifted a shingle on our house, but I looked out in the backyard and our two gigantic oaks were lying there on the side. It just went through our backyard without touching our house. What an incredible sound that was!

But there is on the day of Pentecost this roaring sound like a rushing mighty wind; not just a breeze, but a rushing mighty wind. The idea here is of a cyclone, a tornado. And then, sitting upon every man's head is a cloven tongue of fire, flickering this way and that way—120 candles. They looked like human candles. Here was this fire, and here was this flame. And then the Bible says, “And they began to speak with other languages.” They began to speak in tongues—*glossa*. And it was an incredible experience.

Now, what is the significance of that experience? Well, it's very clear what the significance of that experience is if you will look in verse 4: “*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.*” That's the significance of all of this. This was a great demonstration of what happens when the Holy Spirit of God comes upon a church: wind and fire and witness.

Friend, I hear people say sometimes, “We need another Pentecost.” No, we don't. We don't need another Pentecost. We don't need another Pentecost any more than we need another Bethlehem. We don't need another Pentecost any more than we need another Calvary. Bethlehem was God with us. Calvary was God for us. Pentecost is God in us. I want to enjoy Bethlehem and Calvary and Pentecost. I want to appropriate all three. We're not trying to repeat Pentecost. Every now and then, somebody says, “Well, we had a Pentecostal service.” Well, did you have a cyclone? Were there flames of fire sitting upon everyone's head? You say, “Well, we all spoke with tongues.” Well,

that's not the sign of Pentecost, without the wind and the fire. This was not something that is meant to be replicated down through the ages. The important thing, the key thing, the significant thing, is this: they were filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Well, when you get saved, the Spirit of God comes into you. When you are filled, the Spirit of God takes control of you. It's one thing to contain the Spirit; it's another thing to be controlled by the Spirit. It's one thing to have the Holy Spirit in you as resident; it's another thing to have the Holy Spirit in you as president. To be filled means to be completely, totally, controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Now, what are the marks? I want us to take the book of Acts and I want us to go through the book of Acts tonight. And we're just going to go right on through the book of Acts and we're going to find instances where the Bible says the apostles, the disciples, or the church, were filled with the Spirit. And then we're going to see what it means, indeed, to be filled with the Spirit. Then we're going to ask ourselves individually, are we as individuals filled with the Spirit? Then we're going to ask ourselves this question: Is our church a Spirit-filled church? Is our church a church aflame? Because when God put fire and wind together, He meant there is something there that is an incredible dynamic, something that cannot be controlled. It cannot be contained, very much like the fires that burned in the western part of the United States not so very long ago.

So, let's look, if we will, here, and let me give you these things, and let's let them begin with an alliterative form, with the letter s, so they'll be easier for you to take notes, and easier for me to remember.

## **I. The Sign of Speaking**

The very first sign that a person is filled with the Holy Spirit that I find here is the sign of speaking. Look, if you will, in chapter 2 and verse 4: *"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak."* They began to speak with other tongues in this instance. But go on, if you will, to chapter 4, and look, if you will now, in verse 29. They are praying and saying, *"Now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."* (Acts 4:29–31)

Now the significant thing here is not the glossolalia, or the speaking in tongues. The significant thing is the speaking at all. Now there is a gift of tongues. What is the gift of tongues? The gift of tongues is the ability to speak in a language that you have never learned—a true language. You would speak that language supernaturally. The gift of

tongues is not some language that is unknown. The word *unknown* is only supplied by the translators. It is not found in the original language. The word *tongues* is a translation of the Greek word *glossa*, which means languages. And it, tongues, are known languages, supernaturally given.

Tongues are—were—for praise and worship. On the day of Pentecost these people spoke with languages they had never learned before. They were praising, worshipping, and glorifying God. And it was a public exercise. Not something for the prayer closet, but a public exercise.

It was a gift of the Spirit. First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7, says, “*The manifestation of the Spirit is to given to every man to profit withal*” (1 Corinthians 12:7)—that is, to profit the body, not to profit the individual. Gifts are tools, not toys. They are given for the edification of the body, not for personal edification.

And then, finally, I want to say that the gift of tongues is not a sign to a believer that he’s spiritual. The gift of tongues is a sign to unbelievers that they might believe the gospel. But the significant thing is today not that we’re able to speak in a foreign language. If God wants to give that gift, He may. But the true sign that you’re filled with the Spirit is that you control the one tongue you have—I’m serious about that—and that you use that tongue to speak the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On the day of Pentecost, there were three thousand professions of faith on that one day. But don’t forget that same day there were 120 witnesses who were sharing the faith. I love Psalm 68 and verse 11. It says this: “*The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.*” (Psalm 68:11)

Do you know what is wrong with our church? Many of us are not sharing Jesus Christ. Frankly, plainly, that is a crime against Almighty God. Stephen Olford said, “The average Christian is like an arctic river: frozen at the mouth.” Now, let me tell you, folks, God has called you to speak. God has called you to share Jesus Christ. And if you’re filled with the Holy Spirit, you’ll do it. I’m telling you, if you’re not sharing Jesus Christ, it is proof positive for me that you’re not filled with the Holy Spirit of God. They were filled with the Spirit, and they spake the Word of God with boldness.

Now, just consider Bellevue Baptist Church. On a Sunday morning we will have approximately ten thousand people here on Sunday morning, not counting the children in the nursery and so forth. I’m talking about in the worship center. I’m talking about adults. Sometimes more, sometimes less; but let’s take that as a round figure. Let’s take that figure, ten thousand, and just cut it in half. Let’s take what would be in, say, one of the morning services—say, the 9:30 service—and just say we had five thousand Christians, and these are all the Christians in the whole wide world—just the five thousand people that were here this morning at Bellevue Baptist Church—no other Christians in the whole wide world. Now, let’s suppose that each of those five thousand

in one year would win three souls to Jesus Christ.

Now I want to ask you a question. Is there any Spirit-filled Christian who is praying, earnestly trying, lovingly sharing Jesus Christ who could not lead three people in 365 days to Jesus Christ? Now, think about it. I didn't say lead three hundred; I said lead three people to Jesus Christ. Well, if the five thousand people here this morning were each of them this coming year to lead three people to Jesus Christ, next year there would be twenty thousand. Is my arithmetic correct? Sure. It would be twenty thousand. Now if each of those who have been won to Christ were taught to do the same thing—that is, to carry on this pattern—because, what is the Great Commission? The Great Commission is, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19–20) What did He command them to do? To go and make disciples. So your soul winning is not complete until your convert becomes a converter. Your soul winning is not complete until the one that you have brought to Jesus Christ becomes a soul winner himself. Then the cycle is complete.

Now, let's say that we complete that cycle; that everybody in the building this morning in the coming year wins three people to Jesus Christ. In one year, we'd have twenty thousand believers. In ten years, every soul on Planet Earth would know Jesus Christ. In ten years, three a year, and teaching the disciples, the converts, to do the same thing.

Now, folks, we're playing at the game. And we can boast about our Love Offerings, and we can boast about our architecture, and we can boast about our music; but, folks, we need to get busy sharing Jesus Christ with this community. I'm telling you it needs to be done. And I'm not speaking to everybody. Look up here. I'm speaking to you. Not to anybody else. And when you go home, look in the mirror and say, “He was talking to me tonight. My pastor was speaking to me tonight.” And by the way, I'm speaking to me also. Every time that finger points out, there are three pointing at me right there. And I have no right to tell you and ask you to do anything that I would not do.

## **II. The Sign of Standing**

So, what is the first mark of a church on fire? Speaking. Number two: Standing. Look, if you will, in chapter 4 now and verse 8 of this same chapter: *“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost...”*—there's our phrase. We're going to find this phrase all the way through: *“filled with the Holy Ghost”*— *“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye*

*crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.” (Acts 4:8–10)*

Now, what is he doing? He is clearly and plainly standing up for the Lord Jesus Christ. What a boldness! Here’s Peter. He’s being approached by the high muckety-mucks, the high intellectual top waters of that day, those people in the Sanhedrin, those people in the counsel, those people who had the power there to perhaps lock Peter up in prison. And they just had a man that had been healed and they said, “Who gave you the authority to do this? What does all this mean?” He said, “I’ll tell you what it means. We healed this man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, and God has raised Him from the dead.”

Look in verse 12, if you will—he gets even bolder: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* Now, notice verse 13: *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:12–13)*

Do you know the mark of a Spirit-filled man? He’s bold. He knows how to take a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s hard to build a dam when you’re floating down the river. We need some people today in this congregation—some businessmen, some women, some teens, some retirees—who will say, “Jesus Christ is Lord. He is risen from the dead. There is no other way to be saved apart from the Lord Jesus. And do what you will—put me in jail, if you will; kill me, if you will—but I am going to stand for Jesus.” Would you ask God to make you bold? What we need today is some good, old-fashioned holy boldness. I’m talking about in the school. I’m talking about on the job. I’m talking about on the ball field. You say, “Well now, wait a minute. I can’t do that on the job. I might lose my job. A man’s got to live.” No, he’s got to die, and he’s got to face the Lord. Obviously, you don’t want to be obnoxious on the job. Obviously, you don’t want to be unethical in your witness. But there are times, there are ways, there are places, if you will pray, that you can be bold for the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **III. The Sign of Sharing**

The mark of a Spirit-filled man, number one, is speaking. Number two: it is standing. Number three: It is sharing. Chapter 4 now and verse 31, and look, if you will, at this wonderful passage; read right on through verse 32: *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”* We’ve referred to that. *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” (Acts 4:31–32)* Sharing: that’s a mark of a Spirit-filled person. A person

who is fleshly will grasp; a person who is Spirit-filled will give. This is the answer to New Testament stewardship. As a matter of fact, many people cannot understand the stewardship of Bellevue Baptist Church. They want to know, “Do we have a financial campaign every year?” And I say, “No.” “Do you preach regularly on giving?” I say, “No.” “Do you ask people to sign pledge cards?” “No.” “Well, what is the result? Why does Bellevue Baptist Church do what it does as wonderfully as it does?” And I thank God for what we do. I’m not satisfied. I’m not talking about how much money we raise. I’m not satisfied with our spirit in giving. But I thank God for what we are doing, and I bless God for that. And the secret to that, friend, is a Spirit-filled church. When you are Spirit-filled, you want to give. The tightwad needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There are people that, it just kills them to give. They drop their dollar in the plate and sing with might and main: “When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain.” A Spirit-filled person wants to give. He’s not afraid to give. Number one: He’s giving to Jesus. Number two: He knows he cannot out-give Jesus.

Now when the Bible says, “They had all things common,” this is not communism. Let me tell you difference between this and communism. This is rooted in faith. Communism is atheistic. Number two: This was controlled and administrated by the church. Communism is administrated by the state. Number three: This was voluntary. Communism, when they take over, enforces it. Number four: This was temporary, for the emergency of that particular time. Nobody has ever asked us to take all of our funds and put them in a common fund. But you miss the point if you don’t understand that they were saying, “Lord, whatever is necessary, I just offer it up to you.”

Joyce and I years ago gave to the Lord everything that we had at that time and everything we ever hoped to get. Now He lets us hold temporary possession to it, and I’m grateful for that; but it belongs to Jesus. We are not our own. We cannot say anything that we have is our own. The Apostle Paul said, “What do you have that you have not received?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

#### **IV. The Sign of Serving**

Sharing is a mark of a Spirit-filled person. Do you find it hard to give, hard to share? You need to be filled with the Spirit. I’m going to tell you another mark of a Spirit-filled person. Turn to chapter 6; begin in verse 1: “*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration*”—that is, in the passing out of benevolent goods. “*Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*” Now it wasn’t that the apostles were too good to do it. They just said, “It doesn’t make sense. We’re not using our gifts and abilities and calling as we ought. So it’s not

reasonable. It doesn't make sense that we do this." *"Wherefore, brethren,"*—verse 3—*"look ye out among you seven men of honest report,"*—now, notice this phrase; here's our phrase again—*"full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."* (Acts 6:1–4) This is the choosing of the first deacons. They were not chosen to free the pastor from work, but to free the pastor to work, so that the pastor could give himself to the ministry of the Word of God and to prayer. And I've often told you, the best thing that I do for you is when I'm apart from you, getting ready to talk to you, and talking to God about you, as much as talking to you about God. And every minister needs that time to do that. And so the Bible says, "Get some men of honest report, but be certain that they are filled with the Holy Spirit."

Now, what were they filled with the Holy Spirit to do? To run the church? To wait on tables. Now today when you think of a person who perhaps has a menial task, you might say a waitress, a waiter. These men, filled with the Holy Spirit, were there to do the most mundane task. And, friend, when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are going to do the same thing.

You may say, "Well, you know, there are certain things that are not important enough for me to do, because I am so important." Go on down to verse 8 and look: *"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."* (Acts 6:8) Stephen was a man so anointed, so gifted, that he had the power to do miracles. And do you know what else he was doing? Waiting on tables. Serving tables. Friend, I have seen people too big for God to use, but I've never seen a man too small for God to use. And the great men and women in this church will do the most menial of tasks.

As soon as I finish this message, as soon as we have the benediction, a veritable army of men will move in here and start rearranging this platform. They will go to work to build the set for the Singing Tree. There are people who do things; those people who stand at the door and greet you, these dear ushers; those people over there who are taking care of our babies over there, and they're crying. Every church ought to have a *bawl room*. Let them go over there and bawl. Those people who are over there who are doing that thing—there are so many jobs, menial tasks, concomitant with serving tables, that it takes a Spirit-filled person to do them. Bellevue Baptist Church could not exist without the servants in our church.

Now, are you one of these who think that you ought to be served? Are you one of these who come and complain because the building is too hot or too cold? Are you one of these who come and complain because the music is too loud or too soft? Are you one of these who come and complain because it starts late or went too long? Are you one of these who think that we're here to pamper you and make everything just right so

you will be comfortable? Bless your poor, pitiful, little old heart! Friend, we are here to serve and to give and to wait on other people, and to do those menial tasks that God wants us to do. Serving is one of the marks. The danger is between the things that some of us think are too big for us to attend, and there are other things that we think are too small for us to bother with, we just don't do anything. As I said to the congregation at eleven o'clock, we think we've done God a wild favor when we come, sit, and listen to a sermon.

Serving—do you have a place of service in this church? The Bible says, “God hath set every member in the body as it hath pleased him.” (1 Corinthians 12:18) There is no part of my body that is not important. My fingernails are important. Have you ever tried to pick a straight pin up off the dresser? Without any fingernails, you have to brush it off. Your eyebrows are important. Why? You get out there and work, and you begin to perspire—it will run down and around your face; it won't come in your eye. Some women, they take and pluck all theirs off, and then they paint them back on. That doesn't make sense. And then put a bunch of other stuff there. They look like a jack-o'-lantern with the light blown out. Why did God give you those eyebrows? They're important. Every part of your body is important. You may be a fingernail. You may be an eyebrow.

But I'm telling you, God put you in this church to serve Him. And if you get filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and let your gift begin to exercise, you're going to find a place of service. But you don't have to be on a committee to serve. You don't have to teach a class to serve, or be in the choir to serve, though many of you ought to be in the choir. Say *amen*. You ought to be in the choir. I'm serious. You have voices. You have the ability. You need to make that commitment. We're not looking for people who just want to saunter up there and sing every so often. These people pay a price. And I want to tell you, I love you and I respect you for what you do. Give them a hand, this choir. God bless you. Amen. You can serve God in this church.

If you're walking across this campus and there's some paper on the ground, reach down and pick it up, and put it in the trashcan. You would do that at home, wouldn't you? This is your church home. Last one out of the building, turn out the lights. You're walking down the hall, and you see somebody: greet them. Say, “Hi! How are you? God bless you. Good to see you. Have a great day.” That's a part of serving Jesus. Don't think that is somebody else's job to do that. Ask yourself this question: “If every member of this church were just like me, what kind of a church would this church be?” If every person sings like you sing, what would the song service be like? If every person gave the same amount, the same proportion of his salary, what would the offering be like? If every person helped to carry the load like you carry the load, what would get done around here? What do you do other than come to Bellevue and sit and listen? You're to

have a ministry. If you're filled with the Holy Spirit of God, you're going to find your ministry.

And, by the way, I see a man sitting right over there in the corner. Stand up, Phil. Yeah. That's you, son. Stand up. If you don't know what to do, go see Phil Weatherwax. He'll put you to work. I'll guarantee you. Isn't that right, Phil? We need a bunch of people to give out these shoeboxes this Christmas. There is so much that can be done. You get filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and you're going to start serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

## V. The Sign of Suffering

Now, turn to chapter 7, and look, if you will, in verse 54. I'll tell you another mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and you won't like this one—but it is suffering. Now here is that man that I was talking about a little while back, that man who was so gifted who would wait on tables, the gifted man named Stephen. He preaches a great sermon. And the Bible says, *“When they heard these things,”*—that is, those who were listening—*“they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”* It doesn't sound to me like he's been to a seminar on user-friendly evangelism. *“But he,”*—watch it, here's our phrase again—*“being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. And they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him:”*—now, watch this—*“and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.”* (Acts 7:54–58)

God put a barb in Saul's soul that day. Saul was this young, popular, intellectual Pharisee who had been praised and petted, who was persecuting the church. There is Stephen, whose face shines like an angel, who preaches one of the most magnificent sermons that has ever been preached. They were cut to the heart, because the Word of God is like a sharp two-edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12) And they were cut to the heart, and they turned on Stephen and stoned him. You say, “That was tragic.” Well, I don't know whether it was tragic or not. Well, I know it wasn't tragic, really, in the truest sense of the word, because God could have overruled, but God allowed it. Jesus is normally talked of as sitting at the right hand of the Father, but Stephen looked up and said, “I see heaven opened, and there is Jesus standing on the right hand.” (Acts 7:56) Do you know why He was standing? He stood up to welcome old Stephen home. He said, “Come on home, son.” He saw Jesus there. What a blessing that must have been! What a glorious entrance, even as I preached this morning about those who receive a better resurrection.

But what about old Saul on the road to Damascus? Jesus appears to him, a light brighter than the noonday sun, and Jesus speaks to him. And he says, “Who are you, Lord?” He said, “I’m Jesus, the one you are persecuting. It’s hard for you, isn’t it, to kick against the prick?” (Acts 9:3–5) What does He mean there? There was an ox goad. A man with an oxcart would have a sharp stick. It was called the goad, the prick. And if the old ox was not pulling him hard enough, he would take it and jab him with it. The old ox would kick back like that. He said, “Saul, that’s what you’re doing: you’re just kicking because something is goading you.” Do you know what it was that was goading Saul, who later became Paul? He could never forget the face of Stephen who bowed his head and prayed, “Lord, don’t lay this sin to their charge. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” (Acts 7:60)

We may be called on to suffer for Jesus Christ. And when we are, it’s going to separate the men from the boys, and the girls from the women of faith. Would you suffer for Jesus? Now, don’t answer that lightly, because when I ask myself that question, I have to stop and say, “Do I mean it?” Because we say many things that are glib. But would you suffer for Jesus—I mean, really suffer? I’m not just talking about being called a bad name. I’m used to that. But would you suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ? You know, when we do, we prove the old proverb that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. When people try to stamp out this flame, all they do is just scatter the fire. And we need to learn how to suffer as saints for the Lord Jesus Christ. Suffering is one of the marks of being filled with the Spirit.

## **VI. The Sign of Submitting**

Let me mention another one. Turn to chapter 9 this time, and look, if you will, in verse 17. The Apostle Paul is still in our focus right now. Saul has been blinded. God speaks to a man named Ananias. He says, “Ananias, go tell Saul my plan for him.” Now, beginning in verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul,”*—boy, I love that: *“Brother Saul.”* Saul now has just been saved, and here’s old Ananias calling him brother—*“the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight,”*—now, watch this—*“and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”* There’s our word again: *“and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”* *“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat,”*—or “food”—*“he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.”* (Acts 9:17–20)

Now this is mighty Saul. And a man, just an unknown, non-descript layman named Ananias, who is commissioned to go speak to this Saul, lays his hand on him and says,

“Saul, Jesus has sent me to you. You need to get believer’s baptism.” And here is mighty Saul submitting to Ananias. The word I’m going to give you is the word *submit*. When a man is filled with the Holy Spirit, he has a submissive spirit. He is now a man under orders. And Ananias is now telling Saul God’s plan for him. And he is communicating to Saul the will of the Lord.

Now you’re going to find this out about Spirit-filled people: they submit one to another. Submission is not merely for women. It is for Christians. “*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*” (Ephesians 5:21) Bill Gothard has rightly said, “You tell a man his rights, you’ll have a revolution; show him his responsibilities, you’ll have a revival.”

Do you have a submissive spirit, or do you think nobody can tell you what to do? You’re the cock of the walk. You talk around. You know, “Nobody’s going to tell me to do this or do that. I’m going to do it my way. I don’t like this. I don’t like that.” No. That’s not the Spirit. That’s not the Holy Spirit. I’ve told you this before. If my ministry makes difficulty for you, or your ministry makes difficulty for me, or her ministry makes difficulty for him, there’s something wrong with what one of you is doing, or what both of you are doing. We are in a body. And the members of this body are to cooperate. They are to be coordinated. That’s the way the body works. And there’s to be a spirit of sweet submissiveness.

Now God wants you to have spiritual authority, but you will never have authority over those things that God has put under you until you learn to get under those things that God has put over you. And if you do not have a submissive spirit, I can tell you beyond the shadow of any doubt, you’re not a Spirit-filled person. I don’t have to guess about it. You are not a Spirit-filled person. A Spirit-filled person is not a doormat. He is not a milquetoast. He doesn’t just simply fail to say what he thinks he ought to say, if he says it kindly and in love. But he will be submissive to those things that God has put over him, wherever that may be.

## **VII. The Sign of Soul Winning**

I must move from that point, because I’ve got two more, very quickly. The next one—look, if you will, now in chapter 11. Just keep on going right on through the book, and look, if you will, in verse 22. Now, remember all of these scriptures that I’m giving to you have the phrase “filled with the Spirit.” Chapter 11 now, and look, if you will, in verse 22 of this wonderful book: “*Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God,*”—and by the way, how do you see the grace of God? What color is it? How big is it? What he saw was the working of God in that church, and when he had seen the grace of God—“*was glad, and*

*exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost...*—there's our word again—*"full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."* (Acts 11:22–24)

Soul winning is a mark that you're filled with the Holy Spirit. *"He was a good man, and full of Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."* I've already referred to this when I talked about speaking, but I want to say again that you are to be a soul winner. A Christian who is not a soul winner is not missing a blessing; he is guilty of high treason against heaven's King. The worst thing about not winning a soul to Christ may not be that you don't succeed: it is that you don't try. There is somebody you can bring to Jesus Christ. If you can't bring an old person to Jesus Christ, bring a young person to Jesus Christ. If you can't bring a rich person to Jesus Christ, bring a poor person to Jesus Christ. If you can't win your own children to Jesus Christ, win somebody else's children to Jesus Christ.

Dwight L. Moody was an evangelist of yesteryear. There was a man in his meeting who was testifying about his mountaintop experience, going on and on about how glorious was his mountaintop experience. Moody asked him, "How many souls have you won, brother?" The man got quiet. He said, "We don't need any more of those mountaintop experiences. Next. Let somebody else share." Friend, the nearest and the dearest thing to the heart of God is souls getting saved.

Now I'm grateful that this past year we baptized approximately a thousand souls. That's more than we've ever done in the history of our church—as far as I know, more than any Southern Baptist church has done. No, let's wait a minute, just a moment, because I'm ashamed. Thank you, Jamie, but I'm ashamed. It should have been five thousand, ten thousand. Thank God for what happened. You know, you're always on the razor's edge, failing to be grateful for blessings on the one hand, or being satisfied on the other, is that not true? Friend, I'm telling you, we are not bringing people to Jesus Christ as we ought. Our staff is not doing it. Our deacons are not doing it. Our Sunday School teachers are not doing it. We need to get more serious about bringing people to Jesus Christ.

We're beginning a new program that will run parallel to Evangelism Explosion. It's called FAITH. And in your Sunday School class I don't want you to react against it. I want you to say, "Show us how we can take our Sunday School class and make it a beacon, a lighthouse, to reach out in our community." We have tried to teach you the lighthouse ministry, where your home can be a lighthouse, where you can share Jesus Christ in your neighborhood. But soul winning is one of the marks.

## **VIII. The Sign of Singing**

Now, here's the last one, and I'm finished. And look, if you will now, in chapter 13 and

verse 52: *“And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 13:52) I just, in order to keep the alliteration going, wrote down “singing.” It doesn’t say anything about singing there. It just says something about joy. Brother Jim, you can’t be filled with joy and keep it silent, so I just put “singing.” And that just signifies that there is going to be an overflowing heart. If you are filled with the Holy Ghost, you are going to be filled with joy. If you are filled with joy, you are filled with the Holy Ghost of God. You need the joy of the Lord. And only the Holy Spirit of God can put that joy in your heart. And by the way, I want to say this. One of the best forms of evangelism that we have in this church is joy. Did you know that? Most of the people who come to Bellevue Baptist Church are not all that interested in going to heaven or hell—I’m talking about the new visitor; they are looking for meaning in life. They want to know how to hack it on Monday.

Some woman will beg her husband, “I want you to go down to Bellevue. I want you to come to my church. Come, Sweetheart. They’ll love you down there. You’ll love the services. You’ll love the music. I want you to hear my pastor. I want you...” “Oh,” he says, “some other time.” She says, “Please, Darling; please just come one time. I won’t ask you to go again, if you just come one time.” He says, “Well, all right.” So he comes. I’ve seen them sit back there in the back and look at me from underneath their eyebrows and get the program out there. They’re checking things off; you know, “Get it done.” Well, you let a man like that get in a service, and get in one of these cold, dead, spiritless services that sometimes people get into; and the choir comes out there and sings something in Latin; the preacher gets up there and gives some book review, some soliloquy, talks about current events, or maybe he gives them a lesson in Greek grammar. Somebody said, “When our choirs sing in Latin, and our preachers preach in Greek, it’s no wonder our people want to speak in tongues.” They’re looking for life. And the congregation, the song leader, has no enthusiasm, and the congregation doesn’t sing, about a third of them singing; it sounds like a couple of calves dying in a hailstorm. And the people are not interested. There’s no open Bible. That man will endure that service, and that’s the last time you’ll see him there.

Bobby Burns, the Scottish poet, went into a church one time. He was tired and dejected. He sat down. It was a service like that. They didn’t know who he was, but he opened the hymnal and wrote in the back of it, “As cold a wind as ever blew, as cold a church, and in it but few, as cold a minister who ever spack, you’ll all be hot e’er I come back,” and closed the hymnal and left.

But you let a man come to a service where the choir comes out with the light of the noonday sun on their face, and they sing, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart”; let the congregation stand up and sing, “What a mighty God we serve”; let the man of God open the book of God, anointed with the

Spirit of God, preach the Christ of God to the people of God, and the people of God say *amen*, and that man is going to look around. He's going to say, "Hey, these folks believe that stuff." Do you know what? Before long, he'll be believing it, also. True evangelism is caught as much as it is taught. I'm telling you, the very way that you sit in the service, the very countenance of your face, the way you greet the visitors, the way you sing, the way you hold your Bible, the way you nod your head, the way you say *amen*—all of it is a part of bringing souls to Jesus Christ. It shows that the church is aflame with the Spirit of God. There was joy in the church.

I had a man visit our church down at Merritt Island years ago. I've never forgotten it. He said, "I don't understand this." He said, "These people, when I came up here, I saw them walking across the street." He said, "Everywhere they were going, they were just so happy. They were all smiling." He said, "I don't understand it. Look at them." He said, "I believe they've been chewing lotus leaves." Whatever that means, I'm not going to chew one. But he said, "They look like they've been chewing lotus leaves." He just saw the joy of the Lord. It's one of the marks that you are filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

## **Conclusion**

Now, folks, I want to take these qualities and I want them to permeate Bellevue Baptist Church. Now this is not what God is saying to all of us; this is what God is saying to each of us. Will you take the message tonight and just personalize it? Take those things in your quiet time, and go over them, and say, "Lord, I want to be a Spirit-filled person. I want there to be in my life a flame, a fire, and a wind to spread it."

# The Person of Pentecost

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: July 11, 1982**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:1–5, 12–19, 38**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. He Is a Possession to Be Received
- II. He Is a Power to Be Released
- III. He Is a Presence That Will Be Revealed
- IV. He Is a Person to Be Recognized

Conclusion

- A. Amazement
- B. Amusement
- C. Acknowledgement

## Introduction

“**T**he Person of Pentecost.” Now, I want you to take your Bibles, please, and turn to that Pentecostal chapter, the second chapter of the Book of Acts. Sometimes, in some Bibles, the Book of Acts is delineated with this title: “The Acts of the Apostles.” The one that I have in my hand says up here in big bold letters, “The Acts of the Apostles.” But really, it is “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” Remember that the title of these books printed on here by the printer—the publisher—of the Bible is not a part of the inspired text. But, I believe if I had to give the Book of Acts a chapter title, it would not be “The Acts of the Apostles,” but really “The Acts of the Holy Spirit of God.”

Now, in Acts chapter 2, we begin reading in verse 1: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:1–4).

Now, the song that the choir sang a few moments ago, “Pentecostal Fire is Falling,” had a line in it: “Pentecost can be repeated” (author unknown). And, if they mean by that that we can enjoy today and appropriate today the riches and the power of Pentecost, I agree with that completely. But, if they mean by that song—and I know they did not mean, should not mean, (at least, in this church, we did not mean that if they meant by that)—and if the writer of that song meant that we have to have another day like Pentecost, I would disagree with that. We do not need another Pentecostal day like

this day that I've just described to you. I do not believe that the Bible intends for us to have such a day.

You see, dear friend, there are certain days that God gives in history that are inaugural days, that are specimen days, that are days that are set aside, set apart, not to be repeated as such. For example, thank God for that day in Bethlehem when Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. That was a marvelous day, a wonderful day, a necessary day, a miracle day. But, we're not trying to repeat Bethlehem. Thank God for that day "when [Jesus] Christ"—God—"the mighty Maker died, / For man the creature's sin" (Isaac Watts). And, when Jesus Christ poured out His rich, red, ruby blood upon Calvary, thank God for that day. It was necessary, marvelous, wonderful, and all of the things that we could say about it. But, we're not trying to repeat Calvary; we're not saying now we need another Calvary. Nor do we need another Pentecost, in that sense. Bethlehem was God with us. Calvary was God for us. Pentecost is God in us. And, I want to enjoy Bethlehem—and I do. And, I want to enjoy Calvary—and I do. And, I want to enjoy Pentecost—and I do. But, I'm not trying to repeat Bethlehem, not trying to repeat Calvary, not trying to repeat Pentecost, as such.

Now, what a day Pentecost was! What a marvelous day that was! Just imagine you're there. There are 120 disciples. They, in obedience to the Lord Jesus, are "*[tarrying at] Jerusalem, until [they] be endued with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). And suddenly, the very room where they are is filled with a mighty cyclone. A tornado-like wind just blows through the building. I hear people say, "Well, we had a Pentecostal service." Did you have a cyclone? Was there a mighty rushing wind in the building? Well, there was this mighty rushing wind. Then, on top of that, there sat upon each man a cloven tongue of fire just flickering above his head—a flame just flickering (Acts 2:3). Like human candles, they were burning. And then, they started to speak, and people who were unlearned—uneducated people who had not been off to college to study foreign languages—stood up and began to praise the Lord Jesus Christ in languages—known languages—that they had never learned. They were speaking fluently in foreign languages never having learned them. Miraculously, supernaturally, they were praising God. And then, Peter stood up and preached Jesus—preached Christ crucified, buried, risen, ascended, and coming. And, when the invitation was given, 3,000 souls were saved.

Now, what is the significance of Pentecost? I want to say that the significance of Pentecost is not the mighty rushing wind. The significance of Pentecost is not that tongues of fire sat upon men's heads—not that men were able on that day to speak in languages they had never learned, not even that 3,000 souls were saved that day. The significance of Pentecost is found in verse 4—and here it is: "*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:4). That is the significance of Pentecost, and if you miss

that, you miss the whole meaning of the day. *“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:4). That literally means that God Himself came and indwelt these people—that God filled human beings with the Holy Spirit. And, when He filled these human beings with the Holy Spirit, they did not go around trying again to repeat that particular day, which was the birthday of the Holy Spirit as He came into this world and into this age to fill men in that unique and spectacular way. They were not trying to repeat that day, but they went out. And, the Bible tells us that in 24 months they had evangelized all of Asia Minor. In 24 short months, they had done that, according to Acts chapter 19 and verse 10 (Acts 19:10). And, someone put it so beautifully this way: that “just before that experience, Jesus had ascended to heaven, the Mount of Olives. So, Jesus went up; the Holy Spirit came down. The disciples went out, and the lost came in.” And, dear friend, that is the significance of Pentecost. And oh, how I pray that we can understand it anew and afresh tonight!

I have entitled our sermon tonight “The Person of Pentecost,” and the person of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person. Now, never speak of the Holy Spirit as a thing, as an influence—a mere influence—an “it.” Some people speak of the Holy Spirit with the impersonal pronoun. Well, I hope you wouldn’t say concerning me, “It wore a dark pinstriped suit today.” I hope you would at least give me enough deference to use a personal pronoun when you refer to me, because I’m not merely a thing, an influence; I am a person. And, God the Holy Spirit is a person; therefore, we have entitled the message tonight “The Person of Pentecost.” And, having said that, I want you to notice with me four things about the person of Pentecost, and I pray God that He will use Himself, the Holy Spirit, to etch and to burn this message into your heart and help you to live in that Pentecostal power that God wants us all to have.

## **I. He Is a Possession to Be Received**

Now, the very first thing I want you to learn about the person of Pentecost is that He is a possession to be received—He is a possession to be received. Look, if you will please, in Acts chapter 2 and verse 38. People were perplexed on that day. They asked Simon Peter what they ought to do, and these unsaved people heard Simon Peter say clearly and without stammer or stutter—in verse 38: *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). Now, notice what he says: *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive”*—not *may* receive, not *might* receive, but you *will*, you *shall*, emphatically receive—*“the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). The Greek word there has the idea of receiving once and for all the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Now, the Bible says here, and I want to make up... Just while we’re in the

neighborhood, I just want to clear up another point: this verse is not teaching that we are baptized in order to have our sins remitted, as some people teach. And, that's not really what the message is all about, but while we're in the neighborhood, I want to pay my respects to that. "[And] Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). That word for... The preposition—the Greek preposition—*eis* does not mean "in order to" have your sins remitted, but "because of" the remission of sins. It means, with reference to the remission of sins, "because your sin had been remitted, you should be baptized." We're not baptized in order to get our sins remitted; we're baptized because our sins are remitted. And, we use even our English *for* to mean "because of": a man stole *for* hunger; he wept *for* joy. It means "because of" in that sense, and that is the sense that is used here. We are baptized because of the remission of sin, but that's not really the major point. He says that "[we] shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38)—not *might*, but *shall*.

Now, notice he doesn't say we will receive the *gifts* (plural) of the Holy Ghost. That's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about the gifts of the Spirit. He's not talking about, for example, the gifts of tongues, or the gifts of healing, or the gifts of faith, or the gifts of helps, or the gifts of government, or wisdom, or knowledge, or the discerning of spirits. He doesn't say, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the *gifts* of the Holy Ghost." He says, "*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:38). That is, God is going to give you the Holy Ghost—God is going to give you the Holy Spirit. The gift is the Spirit Himself. That is, when you repent, when you receive Christ Jesus as your personal Savior, when you are saved, when you are born again, you receive God's gift, which is the Spirit Himself. And, that happens every time a man is saved. When a man is saved, when a man repents of his sins, when a man receives Jesus Christ, he receives God's Holy Spirit.

Now, there's a lot of confusion about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are some people today seeking... They say, "Well, I'm saved. Now I want to be baptized with the Holy Ghost." Friend, let me tell you something: if you're saved, you were baptized with the Holy Ghost. And, you'll not find one shred of scripture in the Bible that ever tells a Christian to seek to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. If I'm wrong, you just meet me up here after the service, and I'll apologize to you; and you can point it out and so forth. I'm not wrong; you won't find any scripture that tells you as a Christian to seek to be baptized with the Holy Ghost—not as a Christian. Why? Not in this age, not in this dispensation. Why? Because, friend, you have already been baptized with the Holy Spirit if you're saved.

Now, just keep you hand there in Acts chapter 2—your bookmark—and turn to 1

Corinthians chapter 12, and let's look in verse 13. I want to make that very clear and very plain before we go on. For the Bible says if you repent of your sins, you're going to receive—no *ifs*, *ands*, and *buts* about it—*“[you] shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38)—not the *gifts*, the *gift*. You're going to receive Him. For, you see, the Bible says here in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13: *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). Now, look at this: *“For by one Spirit are we all...”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). It literally means “have we all been”; it's already taken place—not some of us, but all of us (talking to Christians, those who are saved). *“For by one Spirit are we all”*—or, “have we all been”—*“baptized into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). Every Christian has the baptism of the Spirit; every Christian has received God's Holy Spirit. And, it happens when you are saved.

Now, there's no Christian, therefore, who's not received this baptism. For it says, *“For”*—again—*“For by one Spirit are we”*—what?—*“all”*—*“all”* (1 Corinthians 12:13). So, if we're all baptized with the Holy Spirit, that means, dear friend, that it is universal and it must be instantaneous. The minute a person becomes a Christian he is a part of that “all.” You cannot be saved without the Holy Spirit. It is blasphemous to talk about getting saved one time and then receiving the Holy Spirit at another time—it's blasphemous. The Bible says in Romans 8, verse 9: *“if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”* (Romans 8:9). If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you don't belong to Jesus Christ. *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive”*—not *might* receive; *ye shall* receive—*“the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38), which is the Holy Ghost Himself—not a gift *from* the Holy Ghost, but the gift *of* the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit Himself will come into you. God's gift to you is the Holy Spirit. He is a presence, dear friend, to be received—a possession, rather, to be received. We must receive Him. And, when we trust in Christ, the Bible says, *“For by one Spirit [have ye] all [been] baptized into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13).

You see, the way that I know that I'm saved is that the Holy Spirit lives in me. You see, that's the proof of my salvation. The Bible says in Romans chapter 8, verses 15 and 16 that *“the Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Romans 8:16). God's Spirit bears witness. Let's just look. You're in Acts. Just turn right to Romans for a moment, and look, if you will please, in Romans chapter 8 and verse 15: *“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but...have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness”*—and incidentally, this translation, “the Spirit itself,” may be translated, and should be translated, and is in many translations, “the Spirit Himself”—*“beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Romans 8:15). Now, how do I know I'm saved? I cannot know that I'm saved apart from the Word of God, but I cannot know that

I'm saved apart from the Spirit of God.

Now, when the Spirit of God bears witness, what does He do? Does He just give me a funny feeling? Is there a little voice in there saying, "Adrian, you're saved. You're saved. You're saved"? Oh, no. How does the Spirit bear witness? The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and brings it to my heart to tell me that I'm a child of God. This is the instrument of the Spirit's witness. The Spirit and the Word bear witness together, and the Spirit of God takes the Word of God, and speaks to my heart, and tells me that I'm a child of God. And, that is the witness that I have—the truth of this Word borne into my heart by the Holy Spirit. And, I cannot tell you, dear friend, and explain it to you where it satisfies you, but I know that I know that I know that I'm saved. And, the way I know it is because God's Holy Spirit in my heart tells me I belong to Jesus. I am sometimes ashamed of the way that I live. I'm sometimes embarrassed by the things that I do, but I thank God that by God's Holy Spirit, whom I have received, I'm sealed until the day of redemption.

And so, the very first thing I want you to learn about the person of Pentecost—I want you to learn this: He is a possession to be received—a possession to be received. *"Repent, [every one of you,] and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). Does God's Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you're a child of God? Have you received Him? Does the person of Pentecost live in your heart? I hope so. If not, you ought to give your heart to Jesus tonight.

## **II. He Is a Power to Be Released**

Now, the second thing I want us to learn from this second chapter of Acts—not only is the Holy Spirit a possession to be received, but He is also a power to be released. We talked this morning about power and strength. Jesus said, *"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you"* (Acts 1:8).

Look, if you will, here in Acts chapter 2, beginning in verse 14: *"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken [unto] my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day"—that is, it's just nine o'clock in the morning (too early for them to be drunk). Of course, he'd never been to America)—"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens [will] I...pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and*

*vapour of smoke*” (Acts 2:14–19).

Now, here these verses speak of the power that’s going to rest upon those who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. I want you to see the boldness of Peter. You remember last Wednesday night we spoke of Peter, who cursed and swore and denied Christ, and Peter, who failed so ignominiously. But, this is the same Peter, and he’s here on the Day of Pentecost. He couldn’t even stand before a little maiden, and now he’s standing before a multitude. Look at it in verse 14: *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell [in] Jerusalem...hearken [unto me]”* (Acts 2:14). What transformed Peter? What gave him this dynamic power? What changed him? Well, it’s the Holy Spirit. You see, the Holy Spirit is in the transforming business.

Way back here in the Book of Genesis, in Genesis chapter 1, you see the Spirit of God brooding upon the face of the deep. The Bible says that *“darkness was upon the face of the deep”* (Genesis 1:2). And, the Spirit of God brooded over that darkness, and He brooded over that chaos and turned it to a cosmos. You see the Holy Spirit of God brooding over the womb of Mary, and from the womb of Mary comes the Messiah. You see the Holy Spirit of God brooding over the grave of Joseph, and out of the grave of Joseph comes the glorified Jesus. And, you see the Lord, the Holy Spirit, brooding over and filling a weak, vacillating, stammering Simon Peter, and he becomes the marvelous preacher of Pentecost. This is the purpose of the Holy Spirit: to give power to people who do not have power.

Now, I want to confess to you, friends, that for a long time I didn’t have this right. As a matter of fact, I had it just backward. As a young preacher, I wanted more than anything else to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Hours I spent alone seeking God, crying out to God, begging God, pleading with God, arguing with God, studying the Scripture, and saying, “O God, O God, O God, O God, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And, I had the idea if I could just somehow live right, if I could live good enough... Perhaps I had a sin here. If I just stopped that thing... Perhaps I wasn’t praying long enough. Perhaps I wasn’t studying enough. Perhaps I wasn’t pleading enough. And so, I tried harder, and harder, and harder, and harder because I wanted that Pentecostal power. And then, I had a revelation that changed my heart, and it changed my life. And, I pray God He’ll help me to share it with you. Friend, you do not have to get victory in order to be filled; you’ve got to be filled in order to have victory.

You see, it’s not “if you could live good enough, then God might perhaps fill you.” Oh, my dear friend, let me tell you something: holiness is not the way to God; God is the way to holiness. And, you know, sometimes we struggle, and we strive, and we say, “You know, if somehow I can just meet the conditions.” Friend, if we’ll just come to Him, and say, “O God, I can’t meet the conditions. And Lord, if You don’t do it, it won’t be

done. And Lord, I just cast myself upon You. And, by faith—by faith—Lord, I receive that Pentecostal power.” And then, dear friend, the witnessing begins as it ought. And then, the prayer life begins as it ought. And then, that purity comes, because... Oh, I’m not saying that you can hold onto your sin with one hand and say, “Now, Holy Spirit, fill me” with the other. Oh, no, I don’t mean that. You know I don’t mean that. But, what I am saying is this, dear friend: that you will never live victoriously until that victor, the Holy Spirit Himself, is releasing His power within you.

And oh, what a difference—what a difference—it made to Simon Peter, and what a difference it made to all of those apostles, because not only is the Holy Spirit a possession to be received; He is a power to be released. And, these early disciples turned that world upside down. And, on the Day of Pentecost, 120 of them saw 3,000 converted. Now, we’ve just turned it around today. It takes 3,000 a year to see 120 converted. On that day, 120 saw 3,000 converted in one day. B. H. Carroll said this early church had a membership of over 50,000 in six months. Why? Because that Pentecostal power was there. He is a possession to be received. *“Repent, and be baptized...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). And then, *“ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”* (Acts 1:8).

### **III. He Is a Presence That Will Be Revealed**

Now, the third thing I want us to learn about the person of Pentecost—not only is He a person—a possession, rather—to be received, and not only is He a power to be released, but He is a presence that will be revealed—He is a presence that will be revealed. Now, look here in chapter 2, and let’s begin reading in verse 5: *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. [And] now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language”* (Acts 2:5–6). Now, notice that phrase—*“the multitude came together”* (Acts 2:6).

Now, why did they come together? Well, I want to tell you that Pentecost was one of the greatest days in the Jewish year. It was a feast day, a great festival. And, historians tell us that there were perhaps a million people present on this day in Jerusalem. And, of course, Jerusalem was not nearly that large a city. People had come from all over Judea. They had come from all parts of the world. They had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost. A great multitude was there. It was perhaps the greatest event of the year—more important to them perhaps than the World’s Fair is to us, or the inauguration of the President. I mean, this was Pentecost. People had come from all over. And, I tell you, they came for one purpose—and about a million people there.

And yet, do you know what became the center of attention at Pentecost? A hundred

and twenty motley Christians just stole the show. You talk about stolen thunder! All of the emphasis is turned from everything else. And, the Bible says, “[And] when this was noised abroad”—that is, it went through them like lightning—“*the multitude came together, and were confounded*” (Acts 2:6). I mean, all of the attention was focused upon 120 common people. Now, they did not have any television to advertise by. They did not have any newspapers. They had not yet cranked up their printing presses. They had not organized a door-to-door visitation. But, I want you to know that the presence of God’s Holy Spirit was revealed that day. There was something happening that was so supernatural that it confounded those people.

Now, I want to ask you a question: How are we going to reach the multitudes today? Are we going to do it primarily by advertising? Are we going to do it primarily by techniques? Do you know how to reach the multitudes? I’ll tell you how: you just let the members of this church get supernaturally filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and things will happen around here. There will be so inexplicable...that His presence will be revealed in such a way that people are going to come.

You see, look, you don’t have to advertise a fire, do you? I was down in Florida one time, preaching in a revival meeting in Brooksville, Florida—the First Baptist Church of Brooksville, Florida. I was a young preacher. And, it was on a weekday night, and it was raining. You know, we hate to see rain come, especially when you’re a preacher. We have that song “I Believe (for Every Drop of Rain that Falls),” you know. If I had written that, I’d write it, “I believe for every drop of rain that falls a Baptist stalls.” And, it was raining. And, we had a little old crowd there, and I said to people, “Well, after all, it’s raining, you know.” And, I tried to explain it away, but right at the close of that service I heard a commotion. And, a fire truck went by, and another fire truck went by, and another fire truck went by. And then, I got all excited, and I went myself and stood with a bunch of other ignoramuses out in the rain—about three or four times as many as we had at church—to watch a house burn down. Now friend, listen: people come to see a fire. Did you know that? You let a church get on fire; you let us get right with God, and I’ll tell you that the Holy Spirit of God is going to attract the people.

I want to say again that 120 common people became the focal point that day. It was not their planning, not their promotion, not their advertisement, but... And oh, you say, “Well, no, it must have been...it must have been then the foreign languages.” Oh, no. That was incidental, too. Friend, what they were doing was this: they were glorifying Jesus Christ, and that’s what they were doing even when they were speaking with tongues. You see, Jesus draws people like a magnet. The Bible says (Jesus speaking), “*And I, if I be lifted up...will draw all men unto me*” (John 12:32).

#### IV. He Is a Person to Be Recognized

Now, the next thing I want you to learn about the Holy Spirit—not only is He a possession to be received, not only is He a power to be released, not only is He a presence that will be revealed, but I want you to notice that He is a person to be recognized—a person to be recognized. I suppose the most overlooked person in most of our churches is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes He is so overlooked that one preacher said, “If the Holy Spirit were to suddenly die, some churches would meet next Sunday and never know the difference.” And, you say, “Oh, no. They’d have to know.” Well, why did... Why then did Paul have to remind the Corinthians, “*What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which...[you] have of God, and [you’re] not your own?...therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit*” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). You see, we must acknowledge the person of the Holy Spirit. He is a person to be recognized.

Now, let me show you something here in Acts chapter 2 and verse 12: “*[Now] they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and [saith] unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken [unto] my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy*” (Acts 2:12–18).

Now, what happened was this: they came to Peter, and they said, “Peter, what does all of this mean? What means this?” (Acts 2:12). Now, if Peter had been like the average person that I know, he would not have given the Holy Spirit the recognition that the Holy Spirit deserves. He’d say, “Well, it’s very obvious what has happened. I mean, after all, we’ve been to seminary three years with Jesus, and, I mean, we’re pretty well trained, you know. We’ve got our degrees. And, not only that, but I want to remind you, folks—do you really want to know why God’s blessing my preaching today?—I was there at the transfiguration. Man, I saw Jesus. I was an eyewitness of the transfiguration. And furthermore, I want you to know that one of the reasons God is blessing my poor, humble ministry is that I was there when Jesus commissioned the disciples. I mean, I was in the upper room. Friend, He came into that upper room; He sent us out. I am one of those. And furthermore, why, it’s no wonder—I’ve been praying for ten days. Man, we’ve been on our face. We’ve been tarrying before the Lord. We’ve been praying, and God has answered our prayer. And furthermore, I mean, listen, we’re

living pretty good. We're a holy people. No wonder God is blessing us. I mean, after all, if you've been to seminary for three years, and if you've been praying like we've been praying, if you've been living clean like we've been living clean, if you had a commission from Jesus, well, after all, I suppose He'd bless you like He's blessing us." I'm glad he didn't say that; I'm glad that Simon Peter recognized where the power was. And, he says, "*This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel... [I'm going to] pour...of my Spirit upon all flesh*" (Acts 2:16–17). I'm glad that he recognized the work of the Holy Spirit.

You know, dear friend, I want to confess something to you: I'm so far over my head pastoring this church it's unbelievable. I sat down there—sat there in that seat tonight, and I looked out at this throng of people. And, I thought to myself, "My Lord, what am I doing here? What right do I have to stand and preach?" And yet, I have every right because God has called me, and God has ordained me, and God has anointed me. And, I would be a fool if I ever got to thinking what is happening in this church is due to me, or you, or us, or we, or they, or any body else. Oh friend, He will continue to bless to the degree that we continue to say, "This is that which [is] spoken by the prophet" (Acts 2:16)—that God—God—is doing it. You see, when we start to take the credit for it, when we fail to recognize His presence and His person, then He is grieved, and He withdraws Himself. Oh friend, how important it is that we recognize the dear Holy Spirit!

You see, we'd better not take praise under false pretenses. I hear people say, "Well, you know, I'll admit I'm not the kind of a witness that I ought to be. I'll tell you what I do: I just go to work, and I want them to see my life. And, when they see my life, then perhaps they'll want to be saved." Well, friend, listen: I believe God has changed my life, but if I let you just see my life, and I don't tell you what has changed my life, then I'm taking credit under false pretenses. See, I don't have any right to do that. If I don't... You see, if I just live it without speaking it... If I don't say, "Listen, yes, I'll tell you why: because there lives in me God's Holy Spirit"...

And, He is a recognized person. Peter recognized the person of Pentecost. "This is the Holy Spirit," he said. "It's not us. It's the Holy Spirit. You want to know what this means? It's the Holy Spirit of God." Friend, listen, *they're not saved by your life; they're saved by His death*. And, if you just say, "Well, I just want to so live that they'll see my life," well, if that's all you do—is just so live that they see your life—and you don't tell them and let them know what makes your life the life that it is, what right do you have for that credit? What right do you have for that praise? Thank God, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter didn't start spouting off about his degrees, and his commission, and his prayer life, and all of the rest of it. Thank God that he gave to the dear Holy Spirit of God the praise, the honor, the worship, the adoration, the adulation that was due to His name. And, God help us to do that—God help us to do that.

Friend, who is the person of Pentecost? He is a possession to be received. He is a power to be released. He is a presence to be recognized, and He is...or a presence to be revealed. And, He is a person to be recognized.

## Conclusion

Let me just close this little message tonight by telling you that there were three reactions to Pentecost that day, and those three reactions you'll see any time the gospel is preached in power. And, I want you to see what they are.

### A. Amazement

Look in verse 12. The first reaction—amazement: *“And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?”* (Acts 2:12). And oh, dear friend, when the Pentecostal power is present, there will always be something that cannot be explained by personality, propaganda, and promotion. Amazement.

### B. Amusement

But, let me tell you the second reaction: amusement. Look, if you will, in verse 13: *“[And] others [mocked]”* (Acts 2:13). Some were amazed, and some were amused. Others just laughed, and they mocked. And, they said, “Look at these fools, and look at these fanatics.” I want to tell you something else, friend: when you get filled with the Holy Spirit, some people look at you like you are a nut. And, I am, but *I'm fastened to a good bolt. His name is Jesus*. But, there will be those who will mock, and there will be those who will ridicule. And, there will be those who will put you down and look at you as a fanatic. There are those who will be amazed. Amazement is one reaction. Amusement is another reaction.

### C. Acknowledgement

But, acknowledgement is yet another reaction. Look in verses 16 and 17: *“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, [that] I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh”* (Acts 2:16–17). Oh, others will acknowledge Him, receive Him, and be saved. Now, Peter said in Acts 2:38: *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* Have you repented? Have you trusted Him to save you?

I want every head bowed, every eye closed. Ask yourself this question: Have I received the gift of the Holy Ghost? Have I, by the Holy Spirit, been baptized into the Body of Christ? If not, you can tonight. You see, to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost is just another way of receiving Jesus, for the Holy Spirit is Christ in the Christian. Have you received Him? Why don't you pray right now, tonight, a prayer like this: “O God”—

just pray it right now—“O God, I am a sinner, and I’m lost; and I need to be saved. I repent of my sin. I open my heart. I receive Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. Holy Spirit, come into me. Abide in me. Fill me. Use me.”

Father, I just pray that many tonight will be praying that way and that they will receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. For we pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

# The Principles of Pentecost

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 10, 1981**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:1–6, 12–18, 38**

*“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come,  
they were all with one accord in one place.”*

ACTS 2:1

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Holy Spirit Is the Abiding Possession of the Church
- II. The Holy Spirit Is the Activating Principle of the Church
- III. The Holy Spirit Is the Attracting Power of the Church
- IV. The Holy Spirit Must Be the Acknowledged Person in the Church

Conclusion

## Introduction

Turn to Acts the second chapter, please, and I want us to look in Acts chapter 2 and verse 38: *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 2:38) Now that’s what I want us to think about tonight: the gift of the Holy Ghost. And, really, I’m going to entitle the message tonight “The Principles of Pentecost.”

On the Day of Pentecost, some amazing things happened. Let’s just go also and look in chapter 2, verse 1: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* (Acts 2:1–4) And the significant verse here is that *“they were...filled with the Holy Ghost.”* And then in 2:38 Peter says, “And if you’ll repent and be baptized, you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Now what happened on Pentecost was phenomenal. It was just amazing. This is fifty days after the resurrection of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And the disciples are there; they have been waiting; they have been praying, 120 of them. And suddenly there’s the sound of a cyclone that fills the building. Suddenly, an amazing thing

happens on these 120. There is a flickering flame, or what appears to be a flame, dancing upon every head. They looked like human candles. It was a tongue of fire. And then they opened their mouths and began to speak in foreign languages—languages that they had never learned. The city was crowded, because the feast of Pentecost was a notable feast, and there were Jews there from all over the world. Jews are present, and just a great, great crowd of people. The city was gorged with people. And then the disciples testified of the Lord Jesus. Peter stood up and preached a magnificent sermon. He gave an invitation, and three thousand souls were saved.

Now, what does all of that mean? Well again, the key verse is verse 4: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”* And because they were filled with the Holy Ghost, they had tremendous power. They went out not only to reach three thousand that particular day, but ultimately to evangelize all of Asia Minor. Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 19 and verse 10, and you’ll get something of the spirit of revival that they had: *“And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”* (Acts 19:10) Twenty-four months, and all Asia Minor was filled with the Word of God. Someone put it this way: “When the Savior went up, the Spirit came down, the disciples went out, and the lost came in.” This was Pentecostal power.

Now, what is the significance of being filled with the Holy Ghost? What is the significance of the gift of the Holy Ghost mentioned in Acts 2:38? Well, I want to mention four things tonight about God’s dear Holy Spirit.

## **I. The Holy Spirit Is the Abiding Possession of the Church**

The first thing I want to remind us all is that the Holy Spirit is the abiding possession of the church. He is called the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, look again in Acts 2:38; just let’s look at it carefully: *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38)—not *“might receive”*; *“shall receive.”* And the Greek people tell me that this word *receive* means that you are going to receive once and for all.

Now I know that we have some people today who use this verse to teach that you have to be baptized in order to be saved. I don’t believe it teaches that at all. Sometimes they will come to us and say, “I want to ask you a question: Have you been baptized for the remission of your sins? And if you haven’t been baptized for the remission of your sins, then your baptism is not valid and your sins have not been remitted.” I tell them, “No, I wasn’t baptized for the remission of my sins. I was baptized because of the remission of my sins. I was baptized because my sins were remitted. I was baptized because my sins had been forgiven.” But they remind me that this verse says, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the*

*remission of sins.*” But then I remind them that that word *for* can be used in several senses, and even our English word *for*, and even more so the Greek preposition *eis*, can be used in several senses. For example: “A man stole *for* hunger.” Did he steal in order to be hungry? No, he stole because he was hungry. “A man wept *for* joy.” Did he weep in order to be joyful? No, he wept because he was joyful. “I am baptized *for* the remission of sins.” Am I baptized in order that my sins be remitted? No, I am baptized because of, or on the basis of, the remission of my sins. And even our English word can mean that. It is even clearer, I believe, in the original language. And so I am not baptized in order to be saved. The Bible makes it very clear and very plain that salvation is by grace through faith, and not of any works at all. (Ephesians 2:8–9) Baptism, whether a spoonful or a tankful, cannot take away your sins.

Any time, dear friend, that you say, “Baptism is necessary to salvation,” you spoil the gospel, because you take the *whosoever* out of it. Here is a man dying in the middle of the desert. Well, if that man is dying in the middle of the desert tonight, and he remembers the sermons he heard as a little boy, and he’s out there a hundred miles from nowhere, and no one can get to him, and he’s dehydrated, and he’s perishing for lack of water—let’s suppose that man out there in the middle of the desert begins to pray a prayer like this: “O God, I have been a fool. Perhaps, Lord, you have allowed me to come to this extremity to see my need of you; but, God, I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins. I believe in salvation by grace through faith. You said, Lord, that ‘*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*’ (Romans 10:13) And, Lord, whether I ever get out of this desert or not—and it doesn’t look like I’m going to—I want you to know, dear God, with my whole heart I call upon you. Lord Jesus, forgive my sins, come into my heart, and save me. I receive you now by faith. Thank you for saving me, Jesus. I receive it according to the promise of your Word, and that settles it. Praise your dear, sweet, holy name.” I want to ask you a question: If that man prayed that prayer and meant it, would he be saved? Of course he would! For the Bible says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”

Now if baptism is necessary to salvation, though, he’s in a pickle, isn’t he? Sure is. First place, there’s no water there. If there was, he would drink it—and he still wouldn’t get baptized. All right, he would probably drink it all. There’s no water there. And secondly, there’s no one to baptize him. And so we just have to change that verse in Romans 10 that says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*”; we just have to change it to say, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord and is fortunate enough to be near water and is fortunate enough to have a preacher of my denomination shall be saved.*” Well, that’s kind of ridiculous, because it takes the *whosoever* out.

No, dear friend, when you get a verse of Scripture like Acts 2:38 that is of doubtful

interpretation, that looks like you might be baptized because of the remission of your sins, or you might be baptized in order to have your sins remitted, and it could conceivably be interpreted both ways, which way are you going to interpret it? I'll tell you how to interpret it: always interpret it so it will agree with the rest of the Bible, amen? I mean, if you pick up a piece of glass off the ground, you don't hold it up and look through it and say, "The world is green." You put the glass in the palm of your hand and hold it in the sunlight and say, "The glass is green." You just take a verse that is hard to interpret and look at it in the light of the rest of God's Word, you see, and you just see what the rest of God's Word says.

Now I'm just simply saying that if there is a choice of interpretation, we always take the one that agrees with the rest of the Bible, since by interpreting that way we do no violence to this text nor to the rest of the Bible. And so Peter said, "*Repent, and be baptized...for the remission of sins*"—because, or with reference to, the remission of your sin—"*and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"

Now, notice he doesn't say, "the *gifts* of the Holy Ghost." Let's be careful here. He says, "the gift." He's not talking about the gifts of the Holy Ghost. He's not talking about healing, and tongues, and faith, and helps, and governments, and prophecy. He's not talking about spiritual gifts; he is talking about the gift of the Holy Ghost. That is, he is talking about the Holy Ghost Himself, or the Holy Spirit Himself, which is God's gift. Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, "If you will repent, you will receive what we have received, and that is the gift of the Holy Ghost. You will receive the Holy Ghost." And every Christian since Pentecost, when he believes on Jesus, receives the gift of the Holy Ghost—every Christian! He is the abiding possession of the church.

Now some Christians today have gotten all confused about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Because of the modern-day charismatic movement, some people have equated the baptism of the Holy Ghost with speaking with tongues. And so they'll come up to some Baptist or some Methodist or something like that and say, "Hey, have you got the baptism of the Holy Ghost?" Well, if they ask me that, I say, "Yes." And then, they light up because they think I speak in tongues, and I do not. And then I have to explain to them that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is when the Holy Spirit of God placed me into the Body of Christ and I was made to drink into Him.

Look, if you will please, in 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13: "*For by one Spirit are we all...*"—now, look at that little word *all*—"*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*" (1 Corinthians 12:13) That is, we have drunk of Him, and He has come into us, and then He has baptized us into the Body of Christ. The baptism of the Holy Ghost takes place when you receive Christ as your personal Savior. Otherwise, Paul could not say "all." He'd have to say "some." If there are some

Christians who have the baptism and some who don't, he would have to say, "For by one Spirit have some been baptized." But he doesn't say that. Look at what he says here. He says, "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized.*" Since he says "all," it is universal.

And since it is universal, it has to be instantaneous. If it were not instantaneous, there would be some Christians that have it and some Christians that didn't. You see, you are instantaneously baptized with the Holy Spirit when you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. When you repent, you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Now some people erroneously teach—and it's worse than an error; it's heresy—that you can be saved at one time and receive the Holy Spirit later. Paul says in Romans chapter 8 and verse 9, "*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*" (Romans 8:9) That is, if the Holy Spirit of God does not live in you and dwell in you—if you have not received the gift of the Holy Ghost—then, dear friend, you are not saved.

You can be a Baptist and not have the gift of the Holy Ghost. You can come every Sunday to this building and worship and not have the gift of the Holy Ghost. But you can't be saved and not have the gift of the Holy Ghost. You can't be a Christian without having the Holy Ghost. I hate to tell you, but you can be a Baptist without being saved. Did you know that? And sometimes when people move their church letter from one church to another, it's like moving a corpse from one mausoleum to another. I mean, they have never ever been saved; they are just religious but lost. You can be a Baptist without having received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, but you cannot be saved without having the baptism of the Holy Ghost. "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.*" "*Repent, and be baptized...for the remission of sins, and ye shall*"—not "might"; "you absolutely shall"—"*receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"

Now that's the way you know you're saved—is that you have received the Holy Ghost. You have the outward objective witness of the Word and the inward subjective witness of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says in Romans 8, verses 15 and 16, that "*the Spirit [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*" (Romans 8:16) The way I know that I am saved is the Word of God tells me and the Spirit of God tells me. Now you say, "Well now, how does that work? What is it? Do you have sort of a liver shiver? Do you get goose bumps? What is it? Is it a tingle? Is it an electric shock? Or do you get wet around the lashes? Do you feel light? Is it warm liquid love inside?" None of those things. You see, the Holy Spirit is not primarily the source of our emotions. The Holy Spirit is the organ of knowledge, not emotion. The Bible speaks over and over again about knowing things by the Spirit. It is through the Spirit that we know. It is by the Spirit that we understand.

Now I know I'm saved not because of an emotional feeling. The witness of the Spirit is not an emotional feeling. I want to ask you a question: How does God know something: because He has emotions about it? Or does God know something because

He learned it or because somebody told Him? How does God know? How does God know something? You say, “Well, He’s God: He just knows.” That’s right, He knows because He knows. And when you get saved, and that same Spirit of God comes to live in you, you know because you know. And somebody doesn’t have to tell you, and you don’t have to have an emotional, subjective feeling about it; you just simply know because you know. And I can’t explain it to you; I cannot pass it on to you; but I want to tell you, you’re looking at someone who knows he’s saved, because God’s Spirit bears witness with my spirit. It is not a tingle. It is not an emotion. It is Him telling me, “You belong to me.” You belong to Jesus. You belong to the Father. *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”* (1 John 5:10) God’s *“Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”* (Romans 8:16)

And the Holy Spirit is the abiding possession of the church. Every Christian, the moment he is saved, receives God’s Holy Spirit. Now he can get so carnal that he’s not aware of God’s Spirit in his heart. And sometimes a man will doubt God’s Spirit because he does not feel the witness of the Spirit. It does not mean that the Spirit is not witnessing; it means that he has become so carnal that he is not listening to what the Spirit says. And he needs to be reminded, as Paul had to remind the carnal Corinthians, *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) You need to be reminded of it. But, my dear friend, when you are obeying Him and yielding to Him, He will sweetly testify to you that you belong to Him and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

All right now, He is the continuing possession. The Bible says in the book of Ephesians chapter 4, verse 30, that we *“are sealed unto the day of redemption”* (Ephesians 4:30) by the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t come and then go. He moves in and settles down to live forever.

## **II. The Holy Spirit Is the Activating Principle of the Church**

Now, the second thing I want you to see as we consider the principles of Pentecost: Not only is He the abiding possession of the church, but He is the activating principle of the church. Look, if you will now, in chapter 2, and let’s begin reading in verse 14. The Bible says, *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”* That is, it’s only nine o’clock in the morning. They’re not drunk. You see, back then they didn’t have the strong wines and the strong liquors that we have today. They had a certain form of wine that wasn’t intoxicating at all, and even the intoxicating wine

took you quite a while to get drunk. The Bible talked of those who tarry all day long at the wine. You know, if they wanted to be on a high at night, they would start early in the morning. So Peter said, “Well, these are not drunks, seeing it is but the third hour of the day”—“it is just nine in the morning. Of course, he had never been to America. And he said, *“These are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”* (Acts 2:14–18) The Holy Spirit is not only the abiding possession of the church, but He is the activating principle of the church.

Now this is the same Peter in chapter 2, verse 14, that is lifting up his voice and saying, *“Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you.”* This is the same Simon Peter that just a few hours before was cowering, sniveling in front of a little maiden, cursing and swearing and denying the Lord Jesus—and now he has become the flaming apostle of Pentecost. Why? Because now he has been activated by a new principle. See the mighty boldness of Peter.

You see, every time you see the Holy Spirit, you’ll find Him energizing; you find Him bringing activity. For example, we are first introduced to the Holy Spirit in Genesis the first chapter, and we see Him brooding upon the face of the darkness, (Genesis 1:2) and we find Him bringing a cosmos out of a chaos. And then we go on down through the Bible and we see the Holy Spirit activating the womb of a virgin called Mary and we see Him producing the Messiah. We see that Holy Spirit of God activating the borrowed grave of Joseph of Arimathea, and out of that grave comes the glorified body of the Lord Jesus. And we see that Holy Spirit moving on these weaklings here, these fishermen, and they become flashing, mighty witnesses and apostles.

Now, friend, do you want power in your life? Then you’re going to have to understand that God has given you the Holy Spirit that you might receive that power. Jesus promised it in Acts 1:8: *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”* (Acts 1:8) I had rather die, I honestly believe, than try to preach the gospel without power, without that anointing, without that awareness that I’m not up here by myself, that I can stand up here and say, *“We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”* (Acts 5:32) I thank God that there are two in the pulpit tonight: Adrian and the Holy Spirit.

Now, does this mean therefore that in order for me to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I have to get victory over all of my sins before I can be filled with the Holy Spirit? I used to believe that. Do you know what I used to believe? I wanted so to be filled with the Holy

Spirit. I thought, “Dear God, if I could just get my life clean enough, then maybe you would fill me.” And so I kept searching my heart and confessing my sins. Then I thought, “Well, maybe I’m just not praying enough. Maybe I’m just not praying long enough.” And I thought, “Well, maybe if I could get up earlier and pray longer.” And I can remember as a young preacher getting in my study and getting on my face and just crying out to God, and weeping and begging and pleading with God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. Then I thought, “Well, maybe it’s because I’m not studying the Bible enough.” And I would get into the Bible and pore over the pages of the Bible and say, “Lord, speak to me. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Then I would get to thinking, “Well, maybe I’m not witnessing enough.” And I would go out and spend so much time witnessing that I would get to feeling I hadn’t spent enough time praying, and spent enough time praying to think, “Well, I hadn’t spent enough time in Bible study,” and spent enough time in Bible study to think I hadn’t spent enough time in witnessing, and then the whole time just feeling like, “If I could just make myself worthy, maybe God would fill me.” And then I learned a blessed and a sweet secret—and, oh, I want you to learn it too tonight, my dear people: I did not need to give up my sins in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now before you say, “Blasphemy,” hear me. I did not need to be a prayer warrior in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I did not need to be a Bible scholar in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit to give up my sins. I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit to pray. I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit to study the Bible. Oh, listen. *Holiness is not the way to Christ; Christ is the way to holiness.* It’s not that somehow we can work our way to Him. It is not that somehow if we can get good enough; if we can just do certain things; if we can only give up certain things... The very power I needed, I lacked. I thought perhaps if I could be good enough, then God would fill me. And one day I learned it was not my job to persuade God to fill me with His Holy Spirit, but just to permit Him to do so just by repentance. That’s all I had to do.

Now repentance is not giving up your sins; repentance is willingness to give up your sins. Repentance is an attitude. Repentance is a change of mind. Repentance is saying, “God, I’m sick and tired of it. I turn from it. Now, Lord, I need you.” And, oh, dear friend, when you come to that place, then Jesus moves into you through His blessed Holy Spirit and He becomes not only that abiding possession; He becomes that activating principle. And He does in you and through you and with you and for you what you could never do for yourself. And what a difference it makes! I read here where 120 witnessed and three thousand were saved in a day. It takes the average church of three thousand members a year to get 120 saved—if they get that many saved. We’ve just gotten things all out of focus, because we’ve not understood that the Holy Spirit is the activating principle of the church.

### III. The Holy Spirit Is the Attracting Power of the Church

But I want to say something else about the Holy Spirit: He is also the attracting power of the church. Read here in chapter 2, verses 5 and 6: *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad...”*—what? that they had been filled with the Holy Ghost; that there was a sound like a cyclone, tongues of fire, and foreign languages—*“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.”* (Acts 2:5–6) Now, look here in verse 6: *“When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together.”*

Now, remember, this was on the feast day. It was a great, great festival. It was a time not only of worship, but a time of joy and a time of fellowship. And there were perhaps in Jerusalem on that day a million Jews, and people had come from far and near—Jews from all over the world. It was the greatest event of the year. Now, you just think of this huge crowd in Jerusalem! And yet 120 people had become the focal point of everything. A hundred and twenty people now take over the whole affair. You just get thinking now. Here’s a group of people—about as many people as are in the greater Memphis area. And yet the word gets out that something is happening, and the word spreads like wildfire. And they come together because of 120 people. The Holy Spirit is the attracting power of the church. They were drawn by what the Holy Spirit of God was doing.

How are we going to reach the multitudes? I believe in advertising, because common sense tells me we ought to advertise. I believe in building buildings. I believe in word of mouth. But I want to tell you, we’re never going to reach the multitudes until it gets noised abroad that something is happening here that cannot be explained by personality, propaganda, or promotion, amen? There was something they could not explain on that Day of Pentecost, and it was noised abroad. And these 120 persons became the center of the whole thing. I believe that’s one of the reasons that the Holy Spirit was symbolized as a flame of fire—because fire spreads, and there was wind to spread it. And that is God’s way of telling us symbolically.

I don’t believe that we are trying to repeat Pentecost. Now, you know, there are some people who get the idea, “Well, you know, if we could just speak in tongues, then we could get a crowd.” That’s not necessarily so. Most of what is called “tongue-speaking” today is not tongue-speaking at all. At best, it’s a psychological phenomenon. At worst, it’s satanic. There is a legitimate, biblical gift of tongues. It will always fit the biblical pattern. The great majority of what goes under the guise of tongue-speaking is not tongue-speaking today. I’m not saying those people are not saved or they are not sincere. I believe our Presbyterian and Methodist friends, when they trust Jesus, are saved; but I believe they are wrong when it comes to baptism. It doesn’t mean they are

not saved. That's not it. And I'm not saying that our Pentecostal friends are not saved. But I'm not trying to repeat Pentecost. We don't need to repeat Pentecost. We don't need to repeat Pentecost any more than we need to repeat Bethlehem or Calvary. Bethlehem was God with us. Calvary was God for us. Pentecost is God in us. I'm not trying to repeat those things. I want to enjoy those things. God here just simply inaugurated something; but when He inaugurated something, He gave us a great principle, and a principle that we need to understand—and that is that the Holy Spirit of God doing in His people that which is supernatural and is to be the attracting power of a church. *“When this was noised abroad, the multitude came together.”* You don't have to advertise a fire. Did you know that?

I was preaching in the First Baptist Church of Brooksville, Florida, when I was a college student, in what we called a “youth revival.” And we had a rainy night. And there weren't many people there on a Sunday night, and I tried to justify the small crowd. And I said, “Well, after all, it's raining. That's why they didn't come.” But right when I dismissed that service, I heard a fire truck go past, and then another fire truck, and then another fire truck. And a house about three or four blocks from the church had caught fire, and the flames were leaping out the window. And I looked out there and saw a crowd twice as big as we had at church standing in the rain watching that house burn. The rain didn't have anything to do with it. We just had no fire down at the church. Listen. Somebody said, “If we set ourselves on fire, people would come out and watch us burn.” They will.

You see, there sat upon them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it was noised abroad. I believe that Bellevue Church will make an impression upon Memphis, Tennessee, when it is noised abroad that God the Holy Spirit is doing the inexplicable here, don't you? You see, He is the abiding promise of the Father. He is the activating principle. He is the attracting power. And why is He the attracting power? Now some of you theologians are saying, “No, the Holy Spirit is not the attracting power. Jesus is the attracting power.” Well, that is why the Holy Spirit is the attracting power: because the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus. And Jesus is that marvelous magnet who said, *“And I, if I be lifted up...will draw all men unto me.”* (John 12:32)

#### **IV. The Holy Spirit Must Be the Acknowledged Person in the Church**

Now, the last thing I want to say about the dear Holy Spirit of God: He, therefore, because He is these other things, must be the acknowledged person in the church. Now, look, if you will, here in chapter 2 and verse 12: *“And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known*

*unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose...*—he didn't say they were not drunk; he just said they're not drunk like you suppose. They were drunk on new wine—*“these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”* (Acts 2:12–17)

When they asked Simon Peter what this was all about, he acknowledged the Holy Spirit. That's the point I'm trying to make. There were three reactions to what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The first reaction was amazement. Notice in verse 12: *“They were all amazed.”* The second reaction was amusement: *“Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.”* But the third reaction was acknowledgement: *“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”* And whenever the Holy Spirit is working, there is always going to be those three reactions. There's going to be amazement, amusement—some are going to laugh at it, try to laugh it away—but the Christian is going to do acknowledgement. He's going to say, “This is the work of God.”

Now Peter did not try to take credit for it all. Suppose when Peter stood up and preached, and three thousand people got saved; or suppose when the Holy Spirit had come upon them and done these miracles, someone had come to Simon Peter and said, “Peter, what does all this mean?” “Well,” he says, “I'll tell you what it means. You know, we've been going to seminary here for three years now, and we've been studying the Greek, and the Hebrew, and church history. And I guess this is just the result of our scholarship. We've been three years in seminary under the Son of God.” He could have done that. Or he might have said, “Well, I'll tell you why this is happening, fellows. I was there at the Transfiguration. I saw it with my own eyes. And I just suppose that God has decided that since I've seen the Transfiguration, I could be used.” Or maybe he could say, “Well, I'll tell you guys what is happening. I received a special commission from Jesus. Jesus told me to feed His lambs, and I just want you to know I'm so glad that He chose me. And that's the reason all of this is happening.” Or he might have said, “Well, if you really want to know what it's all about, we've been praying for ten days. A hundred and twenty of us for ten days have been on our face before God. And now, look at the answer to our prayers.” Or he might have said, “Well, I'll just tell you why all of this is happening. We are pretty holy. We are a holy people.” Aren't you glad he didn't say any of those things? Aren't you glad he didn't give the credit to the scholarship? And aren't you glad he didn't give the credit to his commission, or even to his praying? But he acknowledged the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

And how we need to acknowledge His presence! He is the acknowledged person of the church. God help us to acknowledge Him. You see, if we don't acknowledge Him; if

God is doing something here great and marvelous at Bellevue Church and we don't acknowledge Him, then do you know what we'll be doing? We'll be taking praise under false pretenses. We'll be acting like we are the ones who are responsible.

One of the things that kind of aggravates me a little bit is when you talk to a person and ask him to be a soul winner, and he says, "Well, I'll admit that I don't outwardly witness. But I just want people to see my life. And when they see my life, then I hope by seeing my life they will want to be Christians." That sounds so pious it stinks. If they see your life and you don't tell them why you're living that life and how you're living that life, do you know what you're doing? You're taking praise under false pretenses. Friend, why can you live the life, if you are living the life? How can I live the life I live, if I am living the life? Only by the dear Holy Spirit of God. And if you praise me for the life that I live, and the constancy of my life, and the joy of my life, and the power of my life, and I take that praise, then I have robbed heaven of heaven's glory.

Peter refused to take the praise. They said, "What does this mean?" And Peter said, *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."* And as long as we keep giving Him the praise, He will keep letting it happen. But when we start taking the praise, it's going to stop happening. People say, "Well, I just want people to see my life." Friend, *they are not saved by your life; they are saved by His death*, in the first place. And you're going to have to tell them about His death, and you're going to have to tell them the reason you live the life that you live is because of His death and because of the gift of the Holy Spirit of God.

## Conclusion

Well, that concludes our study tonight. I just want to ask you a question. Have you repented? Have you? Peter said, *"Repent...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."* (Acts 2:38) Does God's Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Is He that abiding person in you? Is He that activating principle in you? Is He that attractive power in you? Is He the acknowledged person in your life? Are you giving the dear Spirit of God the praise that you ought to give Him?

# The Ingredients of a Church Aflame

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 4, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:**

*“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

ACTS 2:3–4

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you turn, please, to the book of Acts chapter 2. We're in a brand new series entitled "That Old-Time Religion." And we told you this morning that if you want something new, then try something old, because we need to go all the way back in order to find the pattern for a New Testament church. And we can find it in the book of Acts. We told you that these people so long ago did so much with so little, and we do so

little with so much. And this is going to be the year of a great breakthrough for us. I thank God for His revival blessings on this church. This church is a significant church and a God-blessed church; but, ladies and gentlemen, we have not yet begun to even see what God can do and what God will do through us and with us when we're committed totally to Him. A holy church, a New Testament church, a church aflame, is a mighty instrument in the hand of a holy God.

Now I'm speaking to you tonight on this subject: "A Church Aflame." A church aflame—that's what we need to be. We don't want to come across to this community as a religious country club, or plastic hypocrites, playing water boy to a game of life. We want to demonstrate to this community and to our world the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts chapter 2 and verse 1: "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*" (Acts 2:1) Now the day of Pentecost was a great festival. Perhaps a million Jews were in Jerusalem on this day of Pentecost, and there were feasts, fellowships, meetings, reunions, and worship. But on this day there were 120 people who were the center of attention. These were our Lord's disciples that day, and they had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

We're going to talk about that in a moment, but let me just tell you about this feast of Pentecost and what it was. The Jews had been holding this feast for some 1,500 years—and, by the way, it is a picture and a prophecy of what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when I invite you to Jesus tonight, I'm not inviting you to a funeral; I'm inviting you to a feast to come to know the Lord Jesus. Now in this feast, one of the things that they would do is to take some beautiful grain, wheat; these individual grains would be ground up and made into flour, that flour would be mixed with oil and leaven, then it would be baked, and two loaves of bread would be baked. And then there were some sacrifices that were made. Seven lambs without spot or blemish would be sacrificed. One young bullock would be sacrificed. Two rams would be sacrificed as a burnt offering. There were ten of these all together sacrificed.

Now, what does this picture? What did it all mean when they would take all of these ingredients and celebrate this feast, this feast of Passover? Well, those ten animals that were sacrificed and that blood sacrifice speak of the completeness of Calvary. Ten in the Bible is the number of completeness. And that speaks of our peace offering that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ. The oil that was mixed into that bread represents the Holy Spirit, because oil in the Bible has been an emblem of the Holy Spirit. And those two loaves picture the Body of Christ, the church. Why two loaves? Because the church is made up now of Jew and Gentile. Two also is the number of witness, and it is the church's job, duty, and privilege to witness the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now what happened is this: Before the Day of Pentecost, they were like individual grains of wheat. But after Pentecost, they had become one body. A hundred and twenty

disciples went up into an upper room like individual grains of wheat, but no longer are they 120; now they are God's loaf, baked together. What is the significance of the leaven? Well, leaven, in the Bible, is an emblem of sin. And God is reminding us that though we have become one, and though we have been infused with the Holy Spirit, we have not yet been completely purged of sin, and will not be until the Rapture, when Jesus comes again.

And so they were keeping this feast of Passover—verse 1. But now, notice in verses 2 through 13: *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these who speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners of Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.”* (Acts 2:2–13)

I want to mention tonight four or five things that are the ingredients of a church aflame, a church that will make an impact on this community or any community.

## **I. Supernatural Power**

And the very first thing is what I'm going to call supernatural power. What happened there on the day of Pentecost? God gave a demonstration of the power that He had promised in Acts chapter 1, verse 8: *“But ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you.”* (Acts 1:8)

Now I want to say that this power was visualized, this power was vocalized, and this power was vitalized.

### **A. Visualized Power**

Now, first of all, it was visualized. There sat upon every man's head a flame of fire. They looked like 120 human candles with a flame just flickering above every man's head. And there was in that building the sound of a cyclone, like a tornado, on the inside—wind and fire. Now this was a visualization of this power. The sound of the wind was a symbol of the Spirit, because Jesus equated the Holy Spirit with the wind. In John

chapter 3 and verse 8 Jesus said, *“The wind bloweth where it willeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell from where it cometh, and where it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”* (John 3:8) This wind was an emblem, a symbol, of God’s Holy Spirit. Thank God for the wind. That wind comes from the heavens. That wind moves at its own will; it is commanded by nobody. It is mysterious. And yet it operates according to fixed laws. And wind is the symbol of the Holy Spirit of God.

A preacher was going to preach on the wind being an emblem of the Spirit of God and he said, *“Who really would know the most about the wind?”* And he said, *“I know whom I’ll talk to. There’s an old sea captain down here, and he sails by the winds one of those old schooners.”* And he went down and he talked to him. He said, *“Captain, tell me everything you know about the wind.”* He thought he was going to get a long speech, but the captain said, *“To tell you the truth, I know very little about the wind. It’s so mysterious.”* But he did say, *“I’ll tell you what I do know: I know how to set my sails.”*

And I thought, when I heard that, *“Oh, God, that’s what I want. I don’t want to be able to understand the Holy Spirit—who can? But I want to know how to set my sails when the wind of God’s Spirit blows.”* Thank God for that wind.

There was the sound in verse 2, but then also there was the sight in verse 3: *“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire.”* (Acts 2:3) Fire also is an emblem of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because fire spreads and fire consumes. It was said of John the Baptist that he was a burning and shining light. There can be no shining unless there’s burning. And our Lord wants to consume our lives for His glory. Fire warms. God forgive our cold services, if we have them.

Robert Burns, the Scottish poet, went into a church and sat down. Nobody greeted him. The song service was absolutely as dead as a wedge; it sounded like a couple of calves dying in a hailstorm. Everything was cold. The minister was cold. Nobody knew who Robert Burns was. But Robert Burns picked up a hymnal—somebody found it later—and he wrote in the back of that hymnal, *“As cold a wind as ever blew, a cold church, and in it but few, as cold a minister as ever spoke—you shall all be hot before I come back!”* He put that in the hymnal and left it.

Oh, dear friend, fire warms. I believe in a warm service. I’ll tell you something else that fire does: Fire purges. It cleanses. It purifies. Something else that fire does: Fire illumines. It gives us light. Another thing that fire does: Fire energizes. And our great engines are run by fire. Now all of this is telling us that the Holy Spirit is symbolized by wind and by fire.

## **B. Vocalized Power**

And so, first of all, we see this power visualized; or if you’d rather, we see this power symbolized. But then not only was it visualized; it was also vocalized. Notice, if you will now, beginning with verse 4: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to*

*“speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* (Acts 2:4) Now this was miraculous and inexplicable. Those 120 disciples began to speak in foreign languages. Now, remember there were people there from all over the known world. There were people who did not have common languages. It was a *polyglot*. And yet there, 120 disciples began to speak in languages that they were not familiar with. This was not nonsensical gibberish. This was not nonsensical sound. They were known languages. Notice in verse 5: *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because every man heard them speak in his own language.”* (Acts 2:5)

Now, what was this? This power was vocalized as a sign gift to the Jews. Now I want you to understand that tongues are given for a specific purpose: as a sign to the Jewish nation. Now if you don't mind writing in the margin of your Bible, just write there 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verses 21 and 22. The Apostle Paul explains this when he says, *“In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me,”*—“this people” means the Jews—*“saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe...”*—tongues are not signs to God's people about anything. Sometimes people say, “Oh, if you speak in tongues, then that's a sign that you're spiritual.” No, tongues are not signs to God's people about anything—*“Wherefore, tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not; but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them who believe.”* (1 Corinthians 14:21–22)

Now, what does that verse tell us? That God gave on the day of Pentecost a sign that would confirm the gospel to the Jews. Now speaking in tongues is mentioned three times in the book of Acts, and we'll see it as we go through the book of Acts. Each time when the act of speaking in tongues is mentioned, Jews are present and unbelieving Jews are in the background. As we study this gift, we see that it was a temporary gift. The Apostle Paul said, *“Whether there be tongues, they shall cease.”* (1 Corinthians 13:8) Now you can argue when they will cease, or when they have ceased, or you can say that God still does that. But I'm telling you that the Bible says that tongues will cease of themselves. That was a transitional thing and a temporary thing.

Sometimes people have the idea that today if you are spiritual, then you will speak in tongues. Well, let me say that if you do speak in tongues, and it is biblical tongues, then it will be a foreign language that you have never learned and somebody that knows that language will be able to understand it. But let me say this, dear friend—and I don't want to be misunderstood, because I believe many wonderful, wonderful people believe contrary to what I believe about this, and I love them; they are my brothers and sisters in Christ—but the real mark of spirituality is not speaking in tongues. The most carnal

church Paul had majored in that gift. The real mark of spirituality is controlling the one tongue that you do have; really, that the law of kindness and love is in your mouth, and that that tongue is used to glorify Jesus, to praise Jesus, and to preach the gospel of Christ. But now God is doing something here, because He is inaugurating a new age.

And so this power was visualized. And then this power was vocalized. But those were incidental things. God is only inaugurating things again. But there are even people who today say, “Oh, we need to repeat Pentecost.” No, we don’t. And no one ever has. If you repeated Pentecost, then not only would you have the tongues, but you would also have the flames of fire. Not only would you have the flame of fire, but you would also have the cyclone. Do you understand what I’m talking about? We’re not repeating Pentecost. *We don’t need to repeat Pentecost any more than we need to repeat Bethlehem or Calvary. Bethlehem was God with us. Calvary was God for us. Pentecost is God in us.* Thank God for all of those things. We’re not trying to repeat them, but to thank God for them, because we’re going to enjoy them. And I’m going to receive the truth of Bethlehem, Calvary, and Pentecost and live by it.

### C. Vitalized Power

So that brings me to the next thing: Not only was this power visualized, and vocalized, but it was also vitalized. If you will, look now at the real miracle in verse 4: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:4) Now, ladies and gentlemen, that is what men, women, boys, and girls need today: to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. And I hope and I pray that you are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Now as I told you this morning, the baptism was once for all. That is an accomplished work for every child of God. You cannot be a child of God without having the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For the Apostle Paul says, *“For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body.”* (1 Corinthians 12:13) And if you are saved, then you have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. You are not told to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit; you are told to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18: *“And be not drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 5:18)

Actually, there are a number of works of the Holy Spirit. For example, there is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? The baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act of God in which He places you into the Body of Christ—when you are baptized into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit; when you get saved. If you are saved, then that has happened to you—1 Corinthians 12:13, all right? And then there is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Not only does He place you into the Body of Christ, but He also comes into you to live in you. *“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”* (Romans 8:9) Now some people will tell you, “Well, you can get saved, and then later on you receive the Holy Spirit.” Oh, no. It is impossible to be saved

without receiving the Holy Spirit. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” By the baptism of the Spirit, you are placed into the Body of Christ. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is when Christ comes into you. And then there is the sealing of the Holy Spirit, in which you are sealed into Christ: “After ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.” (Ephesians 1:13)

I wish that I had time to talk about all of those things, but let me tell you that those things, dear friends, just tell us that once we are children of God, we are children of God forever, because these are acts of the Holy Spirit of God never to be withdrawn. The baptism, the indwelling, and the sealing of the Spirit of God tell us that we are a part of the body once and for all. Now those things are done and accomplished in the heart and life of a Christian. But the filling of the Spirit is not. The filling of the Spirit is conditional. And it depends upon you—your receptivity, your surrender, and your faith.

And you are filled with the Spirit to make weaklings into witnesses. On the day of Pentecost, 120 disciples led three thousand to Christ. Today, three thousand can't even lead 120 to Christ. And the reason is that we've not understood the fullness of the Spirit.

There is one other act of the Spirit. There is the baptism of the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, the sealing of the Spirit, the filling with the Spirit, and then there's the anointing of the Spirit. What is the anointing? Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, as the Bible says. (Acts 10:38) At His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, that was not when He was filled with the Spirit. Jesus was already filled with the Spirit. (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) Do you think that Jesus lived thirty years without being filled with the Spirit? Of course not! Why, if John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, would his Lord be less? (Luke 1:15) No. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit from His childhood, but He was anointed with the Spirit when His ministry began. What is the anointing? The anointing is a special touch for a specific task. And if you have a specific task to do—to preach, to sing, to witness—then pray, “O God, I know, Lord, that you dwell in me. Now, Lord, fill me. Take every part. And, O God, anoint me. Anoint me, O God. Let that unction, that power, be on me.”

In a country church a preacher asked a deacon to dismiss everyone in prayer. The deacon prayed, and in the midst of that prayer he said, “Lord, *unctionize* our pastor! *Uctionize* our pastor!” And the pastor didn't exactly like that prayer. He met the old deacon at the church door and he said, “Deacon, that was a good prayer that you prayed, but you asked God to *unctionize* me.” Then he said, “What does that word *unctionize* mean?” The deacon said, “Reverend, I ain't sure what it does mean; but whatever it means, you ain't got it.” Friend, whatever it means, I want it. I want that anointing in my heart and in my life.

## II. Scriptural Preaching

Now, this first ingredient is a supernatural power—you can't have a church aflame without it. Now, the second thing we need, besides supernatural power, is scriptural preaching. Begin now in verse 14: *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.”* (Acts 2:14) And then Peter preached a Christ-centered message. In verses 22 through 26, he spoke of the manner of Jesus' life, the meaning of Jesus' death, the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, and the magnificence of Jesus' reign. He preached and he exalted the Lord Jesus. Its climax begins in verse 23: *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it.”* (Acts 2:23–24)

I cannot believe that this is the same Peter that cursed, swore, and trembled before a little maiden and denied the Lord Jesus. The difference is that now Peter is filled with the Holy Ghost. Now Peter speaks the Word of God with boldness. I'll tell you that there's another difference, too: Peter has now had an encounter with the resurrected Christ—one of the great proofs we have of the Resurrection.

Remember we were speaking in our previous message about Acts 1, verse 3, when Jesus showed Himself alive with many infallible proofs. You see, Peter knew that Christ was alive. Do you know how Peter died? Good tradition tells us that he was crucified upside down. He said, “I am not even worthy to be crucified right side up like my Lord. If I am crucified, I want done to me what you will; you can kill my body, but that's all you can kill.” Now, folks, listen. Almost every one of these apostles died by martyrdom. Are you going to tell me that they believed that Jesus Christ was still in that grave? No. Do you know why they were no longer afraid of death? Because of the Resurrection.

Now, listen. One of the great proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the martyrdom of the early believers, the eyewitnesses. Now a man may live for a lie, but no man will willingly die for a lie. They knew He was alive. One of the great proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that these men were willing to seal with their blood their faith.

Now I wish I had time to talk about the preaching of Peter on this day, but if I were to get on any of these points—His wonderful life, His death, His resurrection, and His reign—I never would get to the completion of this particular message. But let me tell you that in order to have a church aflame, you must have spiritual power. You must have scriptural preaching. Peter said, *“But this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel.”* (Acts 2:16) He took a text and he preached the Word of God. This church will die on the vine if this pulpit ever ceases to preach the Word of God—scriptural preaching.

### III. A Saved People

Now, there's a third thing that will make a church aflame: spiritual power, scriptural preaching, and a saved people. Now, notice what happened as a result of this. The third thing is a saved people. Notice in verses 37 through 41: *"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."* (Acts 2:37–41)

Now a New Testament church should have a born-again membership. Many churches do not put an emphasis on this. As a matter of fact, some people de-emphasize it. I saw an ad in the paper not long ago; it said, "You're welcome at our church no matter the number of times that you've been born." Well, unsaved people are welcome here, of course; but they are not welcome to be a part of the membership without a new birth. So many of our churches are more like clubs, and they are filled with people who have never been born again.

#### A. They Were Convicted by the Lord

Now in order to have a church aflame, there has to be a saved people. And I want you to see how these people were saved. Number one—look in verse 37—they were convicted by the Lord. *"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart."* (Acts 2:37) And this, oh, my dear friend, I pray for over and over again: "Dear God, let the Holy Spirit of God convict people." I can't just browbeat anybody into being a Christian. I can't do a sales job on people. I want us to have such spiritual power in our hearts and in our lives that when the Word of God goes forth, it cuts the hearts of people. They were convicted by the Lord.

#### B. They Were Converted to the Lord

Secondly, they were converted to the Lord. *"Peter said unto them, Repent."* (Acts 2:38) Now that word *repent* means "a change of mind, a turning around." There must be a change of mind about sin. There must be a change of mind about self. There must be a change of mind about God. Now, let me say that when Peter said, "Repent," he might as well have said, "Believe." Or if a person says, "Believe," then he may as well have said, "Repent," because *repentance and faith are heads and tails of the same coin.*

But the point is this: When I turn from sin, I turn to Jesus. When I turn to Jesus in faith, I turn from sin. But nobody has ever been saved unless he has been converted.

And nobody has been converted unless he first repented. And Jesus said, *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”* (Luke 13:3)

### **C. There Was a Confession of the Lord**

They were convicted by the Lord. They were converted to the Lord. And then there was a confession of the Lord. Notice in verse 38 Peter said, *“Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* (Acts 2:38) That is a confession of the Lord. Baptism is an outward expression of that inward reality.

Now, look very carefully at that phrase *“for the remission of sins.”* Does that mean that we are baptized in order to have our sins remitted? No. It means we are baptized because our sins are remitted. The Greek preposition *eis* may be translated as “for,” or it may be translated as “because of.” In this instance, it would be better translated as “because of.” “Be baptized because of the remission of sin.” Let me show you how that same preposition is used in another place. In Luke chapter 11, verse 32, the Bible says, *“They repented at the preaching of Jonah.”* (Luke 11:32) The little word *at* is the same little preposition here translated “for.” Now they repented *because of* the preaching of Jonah. We are baptized because of the remission of sin.

Baptism is like wearing a wedding ring. It is a symbol that you’ve been saved, just like a wedding ring is an emblem that you’ve been married. Wearing this ring doesn’t make me married; it shows that I’m married. I could be married and not wear it. Or you could wear a ring and not be married. But, dear friend, in our society the wedding ring says, “Look, I belong to Joyce. I’m not ashamed of it.” I don’t take it off when I go out of town. I wear it. And baptism says, “Look, I belong to Jesus. I’m not ashamed of Him.” And baptism is a public demonstration of our faith in Christ.

And a New Testament church is a people—number one, verse 37—who have been convicted by the Lord. Verse 38: There is a conversion to the Lord. And then there is a confession of the Lord as people are baptized. And if you have not been baptized by immersion, openly and publicly, then you need to do so. Many of you perhaps ought to come tonight and present yourself for baptism.

### **D. There Was a Control by the Lord**

And then there’s a control by the Lord. Notice again in verse 38 after you are baptized because of the remission of sins, *“ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 2:38) Now, what is the gift of the Holy Spirit? The gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit. That is God’s gift to you. When you are born again, your birthday gift is the Holy Spirit. You receive the Holy Spirit when you repent, when you believe the gospel, and when the Holy Spirit comes into you.

Now, what does He come in to do? He comes in to control your life. Now, listen, folks. *Salvation is not just believing some thing, or achieving something; it is receiving*

*Someone.* Let me tell you what salvation is: *Salvation is not getting man out of earth into heaven. That's just the bi-product of salvation. Salvation is getting God out of heaven into man.* Repent, believe the gospel, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

#### **E. There Was a Continuing with the Lord**

But there is not only a control by the Lord; there is also a continuing with the Lord. Notice again in verses 41 and 42: *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly...”* (Acts 2:41–42) Now *Jesus did not call us to make decisions; He called us to make disciples.* And a person may have gone through all of these other things, but if he doesn't continue, then he's not saved. It's not that he loses his salvation, but that he never had it.

Real salvation is not merely a crisis act that you look back to; it is a present experience. And if you want to know whether or not you're saved tonight, don't tell me about being down there at Mt. Pisgah Church as a little guy at twelve years old when you gave your heart to Jesus. That's not the question tonight. The question tonight is: Is the person sitting in your seat right now trusting Christ as his personal Savior? The Bible never tells us to look back. *The Bible never tells us to look back at some past experience. The Bible tells us to look to a present reality. The way I can know that I'm saved is that I believe now in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.*

#### **IV. A Spiritual Program**

I wish that I had more time to deal with this, but let me say the next ingredient here, and this will be the last thing that I'm going to speak about. I have talked, dear friend, about a supernatural power. I have talked about scriptural preaching. I have talked about a saved people. Now, here's the last ingredient in the kind of a church that I want to be a part of and the kind of a church that I want to pastor. There is, dear friend, a spiritual program in that church.

And what is the program of the church? The spiritual program of a church is found right here in verse 42, but begins in verse 41: *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued”—here's the program—“steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with*

*gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:41–47)*

Now, what was the program of that church?

### **A. Indoctrination**

It was, first of all, Bible study. Notice in verse 42: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.”* Now that means that there was a program of indoctrination. They had a way to teach the Bible. That’s why we have our Sunday School ministry here. Now if you are not in Sunday School, then get in Sunday School. And if you don’t have a regular time of Bible study, then get one, or you will be a spiritual weakling. Bible study, or a program of indoctrination—verse 42.

### **B. Edification**

And then, there was fellowship. Notice in verse 42: *“...and fellowship.”* You need me. I need you. We need one another. That’s why we meet here on Sunday nights. I drive down here to church. So many churches are closed on Sunday nights, and you just drive right past them, all locked up. No, we need the Sunday night service. We need the morning service. We need the Wednesday night service. We need one another to build one another up. The Bible says that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some churches is. (Hebrews 10:25) Even the great Apostle Paul needed other Christians. He was a prisoner, and he was coming to Rome, and certain Christians came out from Rome to meet him; and the Bible says in Acts 28, verse 15, *“When Paul saw [them], he thanked God, and took courage.”* (Acts 28:15) You don’t know how much courage that you give me when you put your arm around my shoulder and say, “Pastor, I love you, and I’m praying for you.” And I hope that I can be that kind of encouragement to you.

### **C. Adoration**

You see, indoctrination is one part of our program. Edification—or fellowship—is another part of our program. Adoration is another part of our program. Look, if you will: *“...and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* This speaks of the worship service. Thank you, Jim, for leading us tonight in our adoration. Worship must always be a part of our program.

### **D. Participation**

And then, notice in verses 43 and 44: *“And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common.”* (Acts 2:43–44) I’m going to call that service giving. Let me just sum it up by using the word *participation*. The folks didn’t just sit out there and say, “Well, let Dr. Rogers do it. Let Jim Whitmire do it.” No, they had all things common.

They took their resources and they pooled them. They took their talents, they took everything that they had, and they said, “Together—together we’re going to do it.”

Now this wasn’t communism. Some people say, “This is the root of communism.” Oh, no, no, no, it wasn’t communism. Number one: It was based on a belief in God. Number two: It wasn’t state-controlled; it was church-controlled. Number three: Dear friend, it wasn’t forced; it was voluntary. It didn’t come about by revolution; it came about by people being born and saved. And also this thing of having all things in common was only temporary—because of the emergency situation that they were in. But it shows me this: Everything they owned was at God’s disposal whenever it was needed. Is everything that you own at His disposal?

### **E. Propagation**

All right now, look. I know it’s getting long, and I’m coming into the landing strip right now. Look. Here’s the program: indoctrination, edification, adoration, participation; and here’s the last one: propagation. Notice, if you will, verses 46 and 47: *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (Acts 2:46–47)

This church was a growing church. Now, you know, there are some people that say, “Well, I don’t want to be a member of a big church.” Well, then you wouldn’t want to be a member of this church. Let me tell you how this church grew. Just lick your fingers and go back to Acts chapter 1 and verse 15. Look at it. *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said,”*—and parenthetically—*“(the number of names together was about an hundred and twenty).”* (Acts 1:15) All right, you have been a member of a church with 120 people: do you say, “Well, we like it that way.” Well, turn to Acts chapter 2 now and look in verse 41, if you will. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”* (Acts 2:41) Pretty good jump in membership, huh?

We don’t have it the way that we used to have it. We have our sweet little church. Now they had 3,120 people. “Well,” you say, “did it stop there?” Well, look, if you will, in verse 47 of this same chapter. They were *“praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (Acts 2:47) They had a big gathering of three thousand, and then every day people were coming in—more each day.

Then, turn, if you will, to Acts chapter 4 and look in verse 4: *“But many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”* (Acts 4:4) See, now they’ve got five thousand men who believe. And most likely, their families

came too. Let's say that there were twenty thousand, if you have four people in a family. All right, we add that twenty thousand to these that we already have. We've got maybe twenty-five thousand members. It's just a few days that have passed.

Look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 5, verse 28, and see what happened: *"Saying, Did not we strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine."* (Acts 5:28) Praise God! I mean, now the entire city is filled with it. And now notice, if you will, in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7: *"And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly."* (Acts 6:7) They have stopped talking about being added and now they are being multiplied. Do you know what happens when you start multiplying? Listen, folks. It's amazing what happened. B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, "This early church had in excess of sixty-five thousand members in six months." G. Campbell Morgan said, "No, it was more like 250,000 souls."

## **Conclusion**

Now, folks, listen. When you get supernatural power, scriptural preaching, saved people, and a spiritual program, look out! Listen. It's right here. Let's let God live in us. And let's realize that Jesus Christ is alive and well and He is living in us. And He doesn't want us to do anything for Him; He wants to do something through us. And this year is the year of revival.

# Finding God's Vision for Our Lives

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 6, 1994**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:17**

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”*

ACTS 2:17

## Outline

### Introduction

- I. Six Ways to Evaluate Whether Your Objectives Are Worthy
  - A. Is My Vision Based on Timeless, Proven Biblical Truth and Principles?
  - B. Do I Feel That My Vision Represents the Very Best That Is Within Me?
  - C. In My Best Moments, Do I Feel God About What This Vision Represents?
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  - E. Am I Aware of the Strategies and Skills and Discipline That Will Help Me to Accomplish What I Have Written?
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### Conclusion

## Introduction

Finding God's plan and God's vision for our lives. In Acts chapter 2 and verse 17, here's what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost as he quoted the prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh;

and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” So whether you’re young or old tonight, the message is for you. Sometimes we think that young people are too young and old people are too old, and somehow there must be some quintessential, special age where people can understand what, the pastor is talking about when he talks about catching a vision. Really, you’re never too young for a vision.

Do you know I made the three biggest decisions of my life, I was in the process of making them, when I was a teenager; the three big ones. I tell our young people they all start with M: Life’s Master, Life’s Mission, and Life’s Mate. I met the girl that I’m now married to when I was in grammar school. She’s the only girl I’ve ever dated, the girl I’m married to. So watch whom your kids are running around with. And, I just grew progressively in love with Joyce, and I love her more today than I ever have. And I met the Lord Jesus as a teenager, a young teenager, and He saved me and He’s kept me saved. God called me to preach when I was a teenager, and He shaped my life. I began to pastor a church when I was a 19-year old boy. That’s all I know how to do is preach. And don’t say, “You don’t know how to do that yet.” But I am, I’m learning, and you’re a good audience to practice on. But those are decisions that I made as a youngster. And God put a vision in my heart about certain things. And the vision, the goal, the call, whatever you want to call it, shaped and molded my life and it’s still doing it.

But, you know, I talked about Moses this morning. Moses was an old man. He was 80 years of age when, he led the people out of Egypt. He wasn’t a youngster; he was 80. Some of you older folks might get the idea that God is finished with you, and I’m going to talk to the young people, but he says here that “...your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” I don’t care how old you are. You ought to have a dream.

Caleb was 85 years of age when he said, “I want that mountain.” You say, “Well, those were Bible people.” Well, Colonel Sanders was 70 years of age when he started that Kentucky Fried, finger-licking good chicken. I mean, he started a... Ray Kroc began to sell Big Macs, McDonalds, when he was 70 years of age. When we were in Moscow, Brother Bob, we went into McDonalds and got a Big Mac or something over there. Casey Stengel was a manger of the Yankees, became manger of the Yankees baseball team when he was 75. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, was riding on horseback and preaching regularly, strenuously, when he was 88 years of age. And that’s back when people did not have the medicine, the doctors, and things that we have. So, you’ve just got to have a vision. You know what happens to a lot of folks? They start out. They have a vision, but then they fail to dream dreams.

Alexander the Great had a vision. He conquered the known world. Then he lost his vision, and he was conquered by a liquor bottle. King David had a vision. He became a

mighty king. He lost his vision, and was defeated by one woman in immorality, went down into shame and degradation as he failed to have a vision to keep on doing what he ought to do. Samson had a vision. He was a judge of Israel, and he won mighty battles. And then he lost his vision, and was defeated by Delilah. King Saul had a vision. King Saul won battles for God, and then King Saul lost the vision, and he couldn't conquer his own jealousy over little David. Noah had a vision, built an ark, and then he lost the vision, and got drunk, and disgraced God. Elijah had a vision, and he stood up against 450 prophets of Baal. Then he lost the vision, and ran before one woman. I just want to encourage you to keep the vision.

Now, you're going to have to be asking yourself, what is it that I want to be? What kind of character traits do I want in my life? And then, you're going to have to ask yourself, what is it I want to do? What is it that I wish to achieve? And then, you will ask yourself, what is it that I want to have? Now, if you're not careful, your last list will be the longest, but, really, the first two are far more important. What is it that I want to be? What is it that I want to achieve? And also, what is it that I want to have?

And so, here's a worksheet that says, "My Objectives." And there's one—a Spiritual Growth Objective. Another—a Physical Health Objective. Another—Professional Objective. Now, whether you're a surgeon or a clerk, that's your profession. It makes no difference. And then there's a Financial Objective, a Family Life Objective, a Ministry Objective, and then, in case we left anything out, Other Objectives.

Now, what I want you to do this week is to spend some time, using this sheet, to record your personal objectives, as God reveals them to you. Now they're the result of vision, and they're very broad. So, in your quiet time all this week, I want you to be filling this in. We're not going to fill it in tonight. But get the worksheet that says, "My Objectives," and just pray over it, and say, "Lord, what do You want me to be spiritually? What do I want to be spiritually? What is the goal, the aim, the vision that I have? What can I conceive of myself being as a Christian? And write it down. And go on through these with each of these objectives.

## **I. Six Ways to Evaluate Whether Your Objectives Are Worthy**

Now, I hope tonight that you'll take some notes. And, as you take some notes tonight, let me give you ways to evaluate whether or not your objectives, your vision, your dream is worthy—six things. And then, we're going to talk more specific about the dream.

### **A. Is My Vision Based on Timeless, Proven Biblical Truth and Principles?**

Number one: Is my vision based on timeless, proven, biblical truth and principles? Joyce tells me, "Every time you give a list, you give it too fast." And I'm in the middle of the first sentence before you start the next one. So I'm going to go a little slow. I hope

it'll not be tedious. But, is my vision based on timeless, biblical, proven principles? That's so important, because if it's not, God can't be in it. Got it?

**B. Do I Feel That My Vision Represents the Very Best That Is Within Me?**

Number two: Do I feel that my vision represents the very best that is within me? Does it challenge you? Give of your best to the Master; give of the strength of your youth; give of your wisdom; give of your physical, emotional, mental, financial strength. Do I feel this vision represents the best that is within me?

**C. In My Best Moments, Do I Feel Good About What This Vision Represents?**

Number three: In my best moments, do I feel good about what this vision represents? Does God's Spirit bear witness with my spirit that this is God's plan, this is God's vision for me? Got it?

**D. Do I Feel Direction, Purpose, Challenge, and Motivation When I Look at This Vision Statement?**

Number four: Do I feel direction, purpose, challenge, and motivation, when I look at this vision statement? It ought to excite you. It ought to impel you. Do I feel direction, purpose, challenge, and motivation by this vision statement when I review it?

**E. Am I Aware of the Strategies and Skills and Discipline That Will Help Me to Accomplish What I Have Written?**

Number five: Am I aware of the strategies and the skills and the discipline that will help me to accomplish what I have written? If you do not have strategies and skills and disciplines, you won't accomplish it. And if you know what they are, then how can you know whether you have them? You're just writing a wish list, if, along with those things, you do not have strategies and skills and disciplines to go with them, because they will not happen, ipso facto, of themselves.

**F. What Do I Need to Start Doing Now to Be Where I Want to Be Tomorrow?**

Number six: What do I need to start doing now to be where I want to be tomorrow? I think that's the hardest thing of all is just to say, what's the first step? That might seem like the simplest thing, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. So, you need to ask yourself, what do I need to start doing now to be where I want to be tomorrow? Well, think about those things.

## **II. Vision Statements**

Now, I'm going to tell you what happened to me some time ago. This is the very sheet of paper that it's written on. I'm not going to let you look at it, but this is my own sheet of paper. This is what I wrote down for myself. I went to my prayer journal and pulled this out this afternoon to bring it down here. These are statements written a long time ago about me, written in my quiet time. Now, I'm not going to give you specifics, but I'm

going to tell you some things that are here. Here are some vision statements.

I had a vision statement about my personal life, some things that are written down here. I had some physical goals, what I wanted to weigh. I felt I was getting a little thin and needed to beef up a little bit. There's a goal there. I wrote down about what kind of physical shape I wanted to be in, not only in weight, but in tone. I wrote down some other things that I felt that I needed to do physically to keep myself to be what God would want me to be in temple maintenance. It would be very personal if I were to read some of those things, so I'm not going to read them. But I wrote down also some financial goals, what financial attainments, and what kind of stewardship, what kind of giving I wanted to do. I wrote down some professional goals: what kind of a pastor I wanted to be, a plan for this church that I felt was God's plan through me for this church and dealing with leadership. I wrote down a plan for the radio and television ministry. I wrote down a plan for my preaching ministry, and for my writing ministry—some goals. These are all goals, things that I wanted to attain. I wrote down some goals for my children, and I listed my children one at a time. My firstborn son, Steve, and I talked to God about a purpose for his life, talked to God about his goals, what I wanted and desired for him, although I could not choose for him what I desired for him. And even such things as to his family and his physical wellbeing, his health; and for Gayle, and for David, and for Janice, and their spouses, and their children so that I could pray over them. I wrote down some things for my parents, what I desired for my parents. I wrote down some things that I desire for my brothers and my sisters, and some in my family that I don't think know the Lord, and I'm talking, now, about nieces and nephews, and others, about their salvation, and relationships with them. These are all under the heading of Family. I wrote down some goals for our house, our home where we live. I want it to be beautiful, functional, and to have order. And, I talked about and wrote down some things I desired that would help me in my study, and some other things there in the house. I wrote down some things about Joyce, things that I desired for her, among other things. And these are very personal things. And I'm not trying to give you the details, but by Joyce's name I have, "Fulfilled, received, serene, healthy, have fun." I want her to have fun. I wrote those things down, that I would commit myself to helping my wife to be fulfilled, to be received, to be serene, to have health, to have fun. Now I never intended to share any of these things with anybody else, never thought I would, but these are personal things. This is folded in a prayer journal that I can pull out and review and look at and begin to pray over and help to shape and to mold my life. Now, basically, those are the same things that are on this sheet—"Objectives" for you to do. And you need to just get a quiet time, and sit down, and just spiritually dream, and say, what do I desire for these things? What do I desire in all of these areas of my life?

I'm going to share a little bit about what I wrote in personal goals for our family. I

wrote this, again, not planning to share it. This is personal. But here I wrote, and I want you to listen to this. Here are the overarching objectives, vision, for the Rogers' Family, and I wrote this: A family should live together to provide the following benefits, and I mentioned five of them. You might want to take these down. One is mutual love and fellowship. Two: mutual help in providing the physical needs of life. Three: spiritual training. Four: educational opportunities of all kinds. Five: spiritual service and witness as a family group. When I sat down and I thought, now, what do I want our family to do? What do I want us to be? I'm going to read those again. Mutual love and fellowship. Two: mutual help in providing the physical needs of life. Three: spiritual training. Four: educational opportunities of all kinds. Five: spiritual service and witness as a family group. Now, those are the broadest, overarching objectives, extremely broad, but you must have an overarching objective that's as broad as it can be. That's the vision.

Now, the vision is made up of goals, which are the component parts—overarching objectives. And underneath the goals are strategies to enable you to meet the goals, to reach the objective. Overarching objectives, goals, strategies.

#### **A. Overarching Objectives**

So I wrote for my family five overarching objectives. I give them again. Mutual love and fellowship; mutual help in providing the physical needs of life; spiritual training; educational opportunities of all kinds; and spiritual service and witness as a family group. That is, not merely me witnessing, or Joyce witnessing, or the children witnessing, but letting our family be a witness: the family witness together. All right.

#### **B. Goals for Each Objective**

Now, once I got those objectives, then I wrote down some goals—goals for each of these five overarching objectives. After I got the objectives, I took one objective, mutual love and fellowship, and I listed five goals. A. Here's a goal in my family: To have members of the family express love and devotion to one another without self-consciousness. Do you know what I want in our family? I want us to be free to look one another in the face and say, "I love you."

You know, I was raised in a home. My mom and dad are wonderful people, but it was extremely hard for my mom and dad to say to me, "I love you," or to say to one another, "I love you," or for our children to say to each other, "I love you." We all knew that we loved one another. We all felt like you're not supposed to say that. That's too personal; it's too intimate; it's too something. But my goal is to have the members of our family to be able to say it without it sounding corny—"I love you"—and express love. When I'd call my mom and dad on the phone, Joyce and I began to do this years and years ago, I'd say, "I love you, daddy; love you, mama." They'd kind of say, "Thank you." It was just hard for them. The people in that day and age, they just didn't, they

wouldn't do that. But now, when I talk to my folks on the phone—I talked to my dad yesterday; he said, "I love you, Adrian." It meant so much to me. I knew he loved me the whole time. My daddy would die for me. But I wanted our family to be a family where we could express love, and so we set out. I put that down as a goal. Now, that was the positive goal. The negative goal, number B, was to eliminate harsh words, arguments, and vindictiveness. Now, your family wouldn't need that, but ours did. I'm talking, particularly now, about the children. Number three: to learn to discuss disagreements fairly and constructively, to have family councils. Four: to teach courtesy and good manners to all members of the family. Do you know where we ought to practice the most courtesy is at home? That's generally where we practice the least, isn't it? I mean, to have courtesy: to come to the table, to sit up straight, to use manners, to be an honor, preferring one another, to say "thank you" and "no, thank you." And last of all, to have some place where grievances can be aired and reasonable judgments made. All of that is under one heading, Mutual Love and Fellowship. Those were five goals under that one heading. Now, remember, I had five headings, and under one heading I had five goals. The goals come under the overarching objective.

All right now, the first overarching objective was Mutual Love and Fellowship, and those were five things I wanted us to do. And then, I wrote down, secondly, mutual help in providing the physical needs of life. And I said, "All right. That's just big. How am I going to qualify and quantify that? Where am I going to get some goals?" And so, here's what I wrote down: Have every member of the family accept his or her fair share of the workload at home. Boy, that's a big goal, too. I mean, especially when your boys' bedroom wins the City Dump Look-alike Contest. Number B: Establish a sound policy of family financial management. We call that around here financial freedom. If we're going to meet the physical needs of our home, then there has to be sound family financial management. Number C: Provide a reasonably clean and attractive home for comfort and the entertainment of guests, and every member of the family should have a part in seeing that this is done. It's not just Joyce's responsibility. And D: Teach various members of the family frugality and responsibility in the handling of personal and family income and the maintenance of family possessions. Now, again, I'm telling you I did not write this to share from the pulpit. These are my notes, these are my personal notes I wrote in a quiet time without outside books or ideas, but as I just simply sat down, and said, what do I want our home to be? And so, that was the second of these overarching objectives.

Now here was a third one. Remember the third one, Spiritual Training and Fellowship. And so I wrote down five goals for our family in spiritual training. Number one: My desire, my goal, is for all members of the family to have a workable knowledge of God's Word. I want my children to know the Bible. A workable knowledge of God's

Word. B: For all the members to have a meaningful prayer life, personal, and with other members of the family. I want my children to be able to pray together. I want to be able to pray with my children. I want Joyce and myself to pray together, and we do pray together regularly. C: For all members to understand the Spirit-filled life. Don't get the idea that it's only grown people who ought to be filled with the Spirit. Children who are little baby Christians, as soon as they're saved and born again, ought to be taught the Spirit-filled life. You teach children how to live and walk in the Spirit, your discipline problems are going to change radically. How many of us think about teaching a child to be filled with the Spirit? My desire is that my children be filled with the Spirit. D: One of my goals was for all of the members of my family to be active soul winners. When one of my children tells me they led somebody to Christ, my heart explodes with joy to know that my children are winning souls to Christ. It's a goal, a desire of my heart. And E: For all the members of my family to seek, to know, and to do the will of God for their lives. Those are goals.

Now, number four: I wrote down, a goal was for them to have educational opportunities of all kinds. That's the overarching objective. And I wrote four goals. A: Provide opportunities for continuing education, commensurate with their personal goals and activities. I don't want to superimpose my desire for their education, but I want to provide opportunities that are commensurate, for their continuing education never stops, commensurate with personal goals and activities. B: To create an atmosphere of inquiry and learning in family relationships. Home ought to be a seminary, a college, a high school, a grammar school, and a nursery school. Home schooling is an idea taught in the Bible. And you're to teach in the home. Create an atmosphere of inquiry and learning in family relationships. I'm not saying that you're unbiblical if you send your children to public schools. I'm saying you're unbiblical if you don't educate them at home, regardless of where else you may send them. And then C: Provide specific opportunities for broadening learning experiences, such as travel. I have taken money that some people would say should have been saved or invested somewhere else, and I've spent it on my children to take them with me to places I thought they ought to go, places like the Holy Land and other places. This is under the educational opportunities. I have sent my children to special Bible schools at financial expense. We've had special guests in our home. And, when we have guests in our home, we don't say to the children, "Now, you all be quiet and be still while our guests are here. Get out of the room, or go play, or go off on a date." We're saying, "We're having guests. We want you here." We try to have them seated at the table. And, if we have somebody in our home that we think is somebody special—and I don't mean a big shot; I just mean somebody who knows God—we want our children in there listening and sharing. Let me just read the entire sentence: Providing specific opportunities for broadening learning experience,

such as travel, special guests, library, tapes, and music.

Now you get the idea. I'm going to stop here because this is being drawn out. But you get the idea of having the overarching objectives. And then, under the overarching objectives, having goals. Do you get that? Nod your head. Make me feel good. Just nod your head. Hello! Okay? I told you I was just going to talk to you. I'm trying to reach out to you and communicate now and get you to begin to dream some dreams and think about your own family and your own life.

### **C. Strategies to Reach Those Goals**

Now once you have the objective, and then you get the goals under the objectives, then you've got to have the strategies to reach those goals. Making lists will not do any good unless you get some strategies to reach those goals. And so, you have here for Family Life, for example, you have one, "A Goals and Strategies Worksheet." So, once you have gotten your objectives on the major worksheet for the family, then you begin to work on this. It's in the materials that we gave you. And, you see, as this family, and this family, and this family, and this family begin to do this, think what that's going to do in the life of our church, as you begin to work, for example, on the financial part. And, you say, "Well, as a family, we're going to get out of bondage. We're going to get financially free. And one of the things that we're going to do to get financially free is to begin to be honest with God in the matter of stewardship." And many people are going to begin to tithe. Then, what a blessing that will be to the church. But, what a blessing it will be to the family. And, see, there's no way that you can be all that you can be without helping other people to be all that they can be.

## **III. Five Things to Do as You Work on Your Family Goals**

Well, let me just suggest here several things and then we're going to have prayer, and I know that time has gone. But I want to suggest that, as you begin to work on your personal goals, you do that by yourself. But when you work on your family goals, I've got a lot of lists tonight, but let me give you five things to do working on your family goals, okay?

### **A. Do It Together**

Number one: Do it together. Call a family meeting. Now, I must confess, I didn't do mine with the family. As a matter of fact, none of my family is here tonight. Joyce is in Dallas tonight. And I did not work this out with Joyce or anybody else, just in my study alone with God. But it would have been better had we as a family come together, and Big Daddy hadn't just done it all by himself. But, if you call a family council, there can be family ownership.

## **B. Begin to Ask Key Questions**

Number two: You, as the head of your family, whether you're a single parent, or whether it's husband and wife, begin to ask key questions. Why were we given to each other? Why did God put together this particular mix of personalities and temperaments? What special gifts and talents does each member of the family have? How can we put it all together to maximize our effectiveness as a family team?

## **C. Begin to Create a Family Statement**

Begin to create a family statement. Let everybody participate. Work it out, very much like a constitutional convention. Have somebody be the secretary. Bring it back to the family for revision and editing.

## **D. Write It Down**

Then, write it down, and post it in a conspicuous place where every member of the family can see it over and over again.

## **E. Bring It Up Constantly at Family Gatherings**

And then, bring it up constantly at family gatherings, dinnertime, or whatever it is, and you'll find that this will begin to mold and meld your family. The Rogers Family is far from perfect, but I bless God that all of our children know Jesus, and I bless God that, if you'd ask any of them, they'd all tell you that Mom and Dad are not perfect, but they'd all tell you that Mom and Dad love Jesus and they're not phonies. They'd tell you that. They're not phonies. They love God. And so, what I want for you is what I want for myself. The greatest, highest joy is a family that's one in the bond of love.

Now, maybe you're a single person, but you set those personal goals. And then, the other goals are ambitions that you will have when you get married, desires that you will have. Maybe you're a widower, but don't stop dreaming. And, if your family is what it could be and should be, begin to help other families. I've met so many folks, even today, who have told me—I think I've met at least five people today who have told me, "I've recently been divorced." There's an epidemic of divorce. And I'm so glad that we have a church where people can come for help and love and healing. And when they're going through a tragedy like this, we're not here to put blame; we're here to give love and support and help. But we also want to help homes to stay together, and we want to help young people who are not yet married to learn how to be one when they do get married in the bond of love.

## **Conclusion**

Trying to catch a vision: a personal vision and a family vision, and to buy into the church's vision. Vision is foresight with insight based on hindsight. Vision is a star to steer by. "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Don't lose the dream! When you do, you'll lose the essence of life.

Father, seal the message to our hearts tonight. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Now, look up here. Well, let me say this before I give the invitation. Some of you are going to say to me, "Pastor Rogers, can I have your list?" No! That's all personal. There's a lot of personal stuff in there I didn't share, and I'm not going to let you see what my goal for my weight is. You can't see that, and other things. That's just personal. And I'm not saying that yours has to match mine. This came out of my heart as I sat down and prayed and thought. And, if you just simply write down what I wrote down, it won't be yours. So write down for you the vision, the goals, and the strategies that God will give you. And, if you have a family, how wonderful if you can have a family council and do it together.

Now, folks, Bellevue Baptist Church is a wonderful church. There's nothing like it in the whole wide world. I really believe that. Don't you believe that? Nothing like Bellevue in the whole wide world. And, what is unique about Bellevue Baptist Church is, as one of our new members told me in the New Members' Fellowship tonight, "We came to Bellevue because Bellevue stands for something. Bellevue has some standards. And, we came because we wanted that for our children. Bellevue is a Bible-based church, but we're not angry about it. We believe the Bible, but we try not to be pestiferous and negative. We try to be positive, and loving, and we're a family church. We are a family of friends, and a friend to the family. And if you're a single person, that does not mean that you're not welcome. It means you're all the more welcome, because, if you don't have a family unit to live with, it's all the more necessary that you be a part of a big family like this one, your church family. We are your family! We're a family of friends, and a friend to the family.

# The Amazing First-Century Church

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: January 14, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:22–26**

*“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”*

ACTS 2:22

## Outline

Introduction

- I. We Are to Exalt the Savior
  - A. Peter Preached About the Manner of Jesus' Life
  - B. Peter Preached About the Meaning of Jesus' Death
  - C. Peter Preached About the Miracle of Jesus' Resurrection
  - D. Peter Preached About the Magnificence of Jesus' Reign
- II. We Are to Evangelize the Sinner
  - A. They Must Be Convicted by the Lord
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  - C. They Must Confess the Lord
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  - E. They Must Have a Continuance with the Lord
- III. We Are to Enlist the Saints
  - A. We Enlist Them in Bible Study
  - B. We Enlist Them in Fellowship
  - C. We Enlist Them in Worship
  - D. We Enlist Them in Stewardship
  - E. We Enlist Them in Evangelism

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you find Acts chapter 2, where we left off this morning, and we're talking tonight about The Amazing First-Century Church. And we are thinking about what kind of a church God wants Bellevue Baptist Church to be: a New Testament church. A Spirit-filled, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring church is a mighty weapon in the hands of a holy God. Again, I want to say, God's pattern is found right here in the book of Acts.

Do you have the feeling that God is giving the church one last mighty urge for the revival of all revivals before the night of all nights comes? I have that feeling. I also have a feeling that the world is looking at us one more time. They have tried everything—every form of government, every kind of leader, every excess of pleasure, everything that money can buy, that hearts desire, that minds can conceive—and they’ve found nothing satisfies. And they’re wondering one more time, do we have the answer? And the answer is, Yes! But, when they look at us, I wonder what they’re going to see.

Nietzsche—actually, Hitler was a disciple of Nietzsche—Nietzsche was a cynic, an atheist, an ungodly, lascivious man. He looked at the church; he considered Christianity. Do you know what he said? He said, If you want me to believe in your redeemer, you’re going to have to look a little more redeemed. Now, you think about it. This world gets their idea of Jesus Christ, not from us, not from the Word of God, because they don’t read it; they get that from us.

Now, I’m going to give you, now, a description of a church triumphant, and I’m going to ask God to make our church that kind of a church. I want to mention the three major purposes of Bellevue Baptist Church. Now, we know we have our mission statement: Bellevue Baptist Church exists for the purpose of magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word, and moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry, and making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. And, this theme, living supernaturally, the overarching theme is, making Jesus known. But I want us to kind of put away our mission statement, and look at a different mission statement, in a sense, or just from a different perspective, found right here in the second chapter of the book of Acts. Now, if you were here this morning, you know we talked about the principles of power, and the Holy Spirit of God. But now, once we have that anointing, that power, what do we do? What is our purpose?

## **I. We Are to Exalt the Savior**

Well, number one: we are to exalt the Savior. Now, begin now in verse 22 of this chapter. The day of Pentecost is come, all of these signs and wonders have been done, the Holy Spirit has come and baptized that motley crew into the body of Christ, and Peter stands up to preach the gospel, and here’s what he says, in verses 22 through 26: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that he should behold him of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand that I should not be moved.

Therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad. Moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope.”

Now, Peter preached a message, and it was simple to see that it was a plain, Christ-centered gospel message. The church grew because they lifted up Jesus. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” No church, in my estimation, is going to be a growing vibrant church that does not exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. We at Bellevue Baptist Church have learned to make much of Jesus. I hope we will always do that. I tell our choirs and I tell our ministers of music, Don’t sing any songs that a Unitarian could enjoy. Glorify the Lord Jesus; magnify the Lord Jesus.

Some churches reserve Sunday morning for God the Father, Sunday night for God the Son, and Wednesday night for God the Spirit. Now, not really, but you know, there’s sort of an emphasis like that on Sunday morning—they just want to speak of God, and there’s nothing wrong with that. Of course, we should magnify God the Father, but every service—every service—must exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? I do, because He is the attracting power of the church. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.”

Now, notice the message that Peter preached concerning Jesus.

#### **A. Peter Preached About the Manner of Jesus’ Life**

First of all, he preached about the manner of His life. Look in verse 22. He says there that, “he was a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him.” Somebody wrote this about the manner of Jesus’ life, and I love it. Said, I’m far within a mark when I say that all of the armies that ever marched, and all of the navies that ever were built, and all of the parliaments that ever have sat, and all of the kings that ever have reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as the one solitary life Jesus of Nazareth. Think about that. Here was a man born two thousand years ago, and tonight this building is filled with people who say, I love Him with all of my heart, including the man who is preaching. Jesus Christ is real to me.

#### **B. Peter Preached About the Meaning of Jesus’ Death**

And so, first of all, Peter preached about the manner of His life. And then, he preached about the meaning of His death. Look in verse 23: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, have ye taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Now, what’s he saying here? He’s saying that Jesus Christ’s death was not an accident, it was not an incident; it was planned before the foundation of the earth. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Nothing went wrong. God was not up there in heaven wringing His hands and saying, Oh, how terrible that this has come to pass. And the purpose of the cross, as we learn from this message, is

substitution—the just for the unjust, Christ died for us; He took our place.

And we must not only speak of His sinless, spotless life, but His vicarious death, that He died upon that cross to pay the sin debt. Take that message out, and forget the rest. And yet, there are many who want to take the message of the cross of Jesus Christ out. That's like taking water out of a well, blue out of the sky, notes out of music, and numbers out of mathematics. You don't have anything left, if you take the death of Jesus Christ for our sins out.

### **C. Peter Preached About the Miracle of Jesus' Resurrection**

But not only as the exalted Savior did he speak of the manner of His life, and the meaning of His death, but he also spoke of the miracle of His resurrection. Continue, verse 24: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." Death cannot keep his prey. There's no way possible that death could keep Jesus in the grave.

I read years ago about a spider who saw a great massive lion with a great mane go into a cave to sleep. And the spider thought, I will imprison that lion in that cave. And so, he said, I will spin a web to keep the lion in the cave, and so he crisscrossed the mouth of that cave with his web, and he spun and he spun and he spun and he spun, almost spun himself away, and there was the spider's web. Then came the time when the old lion awoke from his nap and he gave a ROARRR that caused the mountains to tremble, shook the dust off his old mane, walked out of that cave, never knew the web was there. Friend, I thought of the resurrection of our Savior. And old death says, I'll keep Him in, we'll put Him there, and He will not rise; but up from the grave He rose, the mighty triumph o'er His foes.

### **D. Peter Preached About the Magnificence of Jesus' Reign**

And what Peter preached on this day of Pentecost, anointed with the Holy Spirit, was Jesus, the manner of His life—signs, wonders, miracles; the meaning of His death—by the predetermine counsel of God; the miracle of His resurrection. And then, the magnificence of His reign. Look, if you will, in verse 33 now: "Therefore, being on the right hand of God, exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, which he hath shed forth: this, which ye do now see and hear. For David has not ascended into the heavens, but he says himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." Not if, when; or maybe, but until. Thank God for the until.

Where is Jesus right now? He has ascended the high hills of glory. Where is He? He is seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, and He is waiting till that time when God gives the signal, and He will step from His throne back down to this earth to rule and reign. But Peter preached on that day that Jesus is exalted, that He is Lord of lords

and King of kings. And I'm going to tell you something: you may not be a believer. Maybe you're listening through the radio tonight. You may not be a believer, but I can tell you with all of the authority of the Word of God, and unction and function and emotion of my soul: one day you will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. I don't care who you are? Saddam Hussein, if you get hold of this tape, you're going to confess it. I don't care who you are, where you are: "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" to the glory of God the Father.

## **II. We Are to Evangelize the Sinner**

And so, what do we do as a church? What is our duty? What is our privilege? What is our joy? What is our mandate? It is, first of all, to exalt the Savior. Now, until we do that, we have not done anything. But, secondly, not only must we exalt the Savior; secondly, we must evangelize the sinner. Now, continue to read now, and look, if you will, in verses 37 through 41 in this passage of Scripture: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?" Let me tell you what true evangelism is. Let me tell you what true salvation is. Let me give you the marks of it. They're right here.

What are the steps in a true conversion?

### **A. They Must Be Convicted by the Lord**

First of all, people must be convicted by the Spirit. Verse 37, do you hear this—do you see it? "When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts." I've preached enough to know that there are services where there is no conviction. My heart grieves, and I wonder, Lord, is it me? Am I the one that has failed to pray and seek your face? Is there coldness? Have you been in a service when you just couldn't explain it, the people began to weep or tremble, and there's the moving of the Spirit of God? I think we sang tonight, All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Don't just saunter in here and sit down, and chatter a little bit, without praying and saying, O God, send your convicting power.

### **B. They Must Be Converted to the Lord**

See, first of all, they must be convicted by the Lord, and then they're converted to the Lord. Look now in verse 38: "They said, What shall we do?" They said that because they were pricked in the heart. Now, verse 38: "Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." To repent means to change your mind. I've told you that this morning. It's a Greek word *metanoia*, which means a change of mind. To change your mind about what? Change your mind about sin. In my estimation, you've never been saved, if you've never changed your mind about sin. Jesus said, in Luke

13:3, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

But not only does it change your mind about sin; it’s a change of mind about self. You say, I can’t; I don’t have what it takes to overcome this sin, and you have completely no more confidence in the flesh. And not only is it a change of mind about sin, and a change of mind about self, but it’s a change of mind about Jesus Christ, about God himself. You’re saying, He is my only hope; I put my faith where God has put my sins, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is a conversion. You say, Pastor Rogers, this verse doesn’t say anything about faith. No it doesn’t, but faith is there. Repentance and faith are the heads and tails of the same coin. Or you cannot turn to God without turning from sin. You cannot turn from sin truly without turning to God.

One time, I was preaching in the old building, and one of these Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary students came up to me—he hadn’t been a student very long, but he wanted to rebuke me a little bit. And he said, Now, you were telling people how to be saved, but he said, you never mentioned repentance. I said, Oh, that’s interesting. I said, Do you know what book in the Bible—the whole book—tells us how to be saved? What book is that? “These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and believing you might have life through his name.” He wasn’t quite sure, so I told him. It’s the Gospel of John. I said, Now, son, go home and read the Gospel of John all the way through, and see if you can find the word repent one time. It’s not there, but how to be saved is there.

### **C. They Must Confess the Lord**

Now, you cannot turn to God in faith without repenting. You cannot repent without turning to God in faith. But it is a conversion; it is a turning, coming to God. You must be convicted by the Lord; you must be converted to the Lord; and, thirdly, you must make a confession of the Lord. Look, if you will, in verse 38—he says, “Repent and be baptized,”—not some of you—“every one of you.”

Now, does baptism save you? No, but if you repent, and you’re truly saved, you ought to be baptized. Baptism is the outer expression of what takes place in your heart. I am not convinced that anybody is truly saved who says, I know I ought to be baptized, but I’m not going to. Jesus asked a good question. He said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the thing that I say? How can you say that Christ is your Lord when He has commanded baptism, and you’re nonchalant or oblivious to it? His Great Commission says, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever things I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

Do you know what New Testament confession of Jesus Christ was? Not coming down the carpeted aisle and shaking hands with a preacher—nothing wrong with that;

I'm going to ask you to do that tonight—but that is the precursor to the real confession of Christ, which is baptism. That is the confession of Christ. That—open, public baptism—is the way that you acknowledge and you confess the Lord Jesus Christ. You identify with Christ in the water of believer's baptism. By what right do you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ if you've not had believer's baptism? I didn't say sprinkling; I said baptism. Sprinkling is not baptism. And I said, believer's baptism—that happens after you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. If you were baptized before you're saved, that's like having your funeral before you die. You've gotten it backward. The Bible never says, be baptized and believe; it's always believe and be baptized. There is a confession of the Lord. It says, I belong to Him.

I read somewhere years ago about a little boy who got saved in the children's church—not the big worship service, but in the children's church service. The pastor of the children's church service said to the little fellow, Now, you need to go over and tell them over at big church that you've been saved, and you need to get baptized. Well, he didn't quite understand what we understand, so he went and told the pastor, I've been saved, and I need to get advertised. That's very true. Once you get saved, you get advertised. You're saying, Here, I belong to Jesus Christ. I want everybody who sees me to know that I have been buried with Him by baptism into death, and raised to walk in newness of life. I am identifying myself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

#### **D. They Must Yield to Control by the Lord**

What is the evangelization of the sinner? Number one: it is the conviction by the Lord; it is conversion to the Lord; it is a confession of the Lord; and, it is control by the Lord. Look again in verse 38, if you will here: "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." That is, he comes into you to control you. The Holy Spirit takes possession now of the person who has been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Real salvation is not just to believe something, or to achieve something, but to receive someone. The Holy Spirit of God comes into you. Real salvation is not just going to heaven when you die—that's a byproduct. Salvation is not getting man out of earth into heaven; it is getting God out of heaven into man.

#### **E. They Must Have a Continuance with the Lord**

First of all, there's conviction, then there's conversion, then there's confession, and then there is control, and, finally, there is continuance. Look, if you will, in verses 41 and 42 of this same chapter: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly." As I told you the Sunday before last, Jesus did not call us to make decisions; he called us to make disciples. "They continued steadfastly"—a continuance

with the Lord.

Now, that's what we're about in evangelizing. That's why we preach, that's why we teach, that's why we have Faith, that's why we have E. E.: that people might be convicted, that they might be converted, that they might make a confession of Jesus, that they might be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that they might go on and on with God in continuance, and continue steadfastly.

### **III. We Are to Enlist the Saints**

Now, here's the third thing that we want to do: not only exalt the Savior, not only evangelize the sinner, but we want to enlist the saints. Once we get them saved, what do we do? Well, begin now in verse 42 again, and look: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." A little boy again didn't understand what the word doctrine meant. Somebody asked him, What is doctrine? He said, That's what folks need when they're sick. I said, Amen, we need a lot of it. Great churches are Bible-centered. They continued in the apostles' doctrine. That's just another way of saying they continued in the Word of God, because the Word of God came through these apostles.

#### **A. We Enlist Them in Bible Study**

And so, how do we enlist people here at Bellevue Baptist Church? Well, first of all, we get them in Bible study. Now, we do that here, what we call Bible Fellowship classes. How many of you are in a Bible fellowship class? Let me see your hands. All right, the rest of you, in about one or two nights, two in the morning, we're going to drive past your house real slow, and we're going to throw a brick through your living room window. And on that brick is going to be tied a dead duck and a note, and the note's going to say, This dead duck is you, if you don't get in a Bible Fellowship class. Folks, listen to me.

You are missing a major part of Bellevue, if you're not in a Bible Fellowship class. Believe me. You say, Well, Pastor Rogers, I just don't need it. Yes, you do. That's the little country church. That's how they know you by name. That's how they miss you when you're sick. That's how they pray for you when you're sick, and if you go to the hospital, come over and cut your grass, and minister you. That's where you have fellowship; that's for prayer, care, share—there in that class. And so, we're going to enlist people in Bible study.

#### **B. We Enlist Them in Fellowship**

But also, we're going to enlist them in fellowship. Notice, if you will, in verse 42 again: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine"—watch this—"and fellowship"—fellowship. We just dedicated a fellowship building. Now, there are some people that think that fellowship is incidental. No! Fellowship is absolutely fundamental. The Bible

does not teach a lone ranger Christianity. I need you. You need me.

I was reading this afternoon an interesting passage of Scripture concerning the apostle Paul. Do you think the mighty apostle Paul had such a walk with Jesus? Did he need fellowship? Listen to this verse. It's Acts 28 verse 15. Paul has been through a shipwreck. He's been trying to get to Rome. Finally, he lands on the shores of Italy, and this is what it says: "And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii forum and the three taverns, whom, when Paul saw"—now, when he saw these brethren—"whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage." I love that. Here's the mighty apostle Paul, these brothers go out and meet him now. He's tired, worn, bedraggled, and when he saw them, he said, Oh, thank God! And he took courage.

Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25, says, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more." We need fellowship. Why do we build a fellowship building? For this purpose: for fellowship. Now, that's not the only way to have fellowship, but I'm grateful for the building.

Do you know what our challenge here is at Bellevue Baptist Church because we're a large church? Our challenge is two-fold. Number one, to grow; and number two, to stay small. How many of you ever heard anybody say, I just determined I wasn't going to go to Bellevue because it's too big. How many have ever heard anybody say that? It's universal. I'm not going to Bellevue because it's too big, and then they say, But, I came. That was my first mistake. I came, and I got hooked.

Now, people say that big churches are cold. Well, be reasonable. If big churches are cold, how do they get to be big churches? No. Big churches don't have to be cold; big churches can be full of big love. But there's a danger with a big church. The danger is that we can have wonderful programs, and we can become program-centered rather than relationship-centered. Now, friendliness is a sine qua non, a prime requisite for any growing church, and I can't do that by myself. I can say with a full heart, You're so welcome here; but people—listen to me—it is up to you. If you're not friendly, this will not be a friendly church, and we have to grow in fellowship.

I was reading some statistics about what causes people to come to churches. What do you think causes people to come to churches? Well, here's what the statistics say. Nearly 50% of people who filled out these surveys said they went to this or that church, number one, because of friendliness. Number one, nearly 50%. Fifteen percent said they came because of programs. Twelve percent said location—12%. Well, let me ask you a question: Your friends that you choose—do you put a point on a map and then just kind of draw a circle around it, and then say, Well, I won't have any friends except in this circle? No. Not with the day of automobiles. People drive across town to

restaurants; they go to ballgames; they go here, there. People do not come to churches anymore because it happens to be in the neighborhood. A few may, but they do not come primarily because of location. Only 12% said location, and 12% said belief.

Now, you would think it would be different. You know, sometimes I'm amazed at people who move away from Bellevue Baptist Church, and they said, Pastor, we joined thus and such a church over in thus and such a town, and I said, Oh, good night, how could they do that? Don't they know what that church believes? Don't they know what those people practice? But, evidently, the nincompoops are oblivious. Doctrine doesn't seem to make them much difference. I'm not saying that it's not important; it's very important. I'm just saying, how do people's minds work, when they're looking for a church? Only 12% said belief, and 12% said location. Seven percent said denomination. Again, almost 50% said friendliness. That's just another way of saying fellowship. And let me tell you, folks, we need to work at this. When people come in here, they need a look, they need a nod, they need a word, they need a touch. They need this hands-on ministry. Those of you who are Bible Fellowship leaders and teachers—how many of you are Bible Fellowship teachers? Let me see your hands. All right, how many of you have another job in your Bible Fellowship—maybe you're a greeter, a leader, something?

All right now, listen. When those people come into that fellowship, and especially if they're here for the first time, they are very apprehensive. And especially if they are not Baptists, don't know anything about Baptists—you'd be surprised what people think about Baptists; really, you may not be surprised what some of them think about it. They think weird things. I've talked to a lady who believed that you had to take off all your clothes to get baptized. She believed it! It's amazing what people think.

Now, listen. Suppose you were invited, you had neighbors, and they invited you to a Buddhist temple; they're Buddhist, and they kept after you and after you, and after a while, you said, Well, honey, we've just got to go. So, we go. They say, Well, we'll pick you up. You said, Well, I'll tell you what: we'll just take our car. When you say that, why? Because you want to be able to leave when you want to leave, and so forth. And when you go there, you'll be wondering, Am I going to do something wrong? All these people looking at me—I wonder what they're thinking about me, what are they going to do next? Friend, fear is a terrible thing, and what we need to do is to reduce the fear element.

And every Bible Fellowship class needs to have some greeters. Now, a greeter doesn't wear a badge that says greeter, friendly person. No! Practice greeting people. Practice smiling. You know you have to practice smiling. Sometimes, when I have a guest preacher, I'll sit over there like Brother Mark, and afterward, people come up to me and say, Pastor, you don't feel good today, do you? What's the matter, Pastor—you

sick? Not sick, I just sit there. I'm not preaching, not animated, and I'm not aware that my countenance has fallen. I feel perfectly happy, joyful and everything else; I just don't want to sit up there with a gooney grin. Folks, the most attractive part of you is your smile. A smile is a passport to almost anywhere.

Get some greeters, informal, no badges, and then get some hosts and hostesses who wear a badge so they, if they want to go and ask a question, they can go. And I want to say a word of thanks to the ushers of Bellevue Baptist Church who do such a wonderful job every Sunday making people feel welcome. Now, we are to exalt the Savior; we are to evangelize the sinner; we are to enlist the saints.

### **C. We Enlist Them in Worship**

We enlist them in Bible Study, we enlist them in fellowship, and we enlist them in worship. Look in verse 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in breaking of bread and prayers." Now, most exegetes believe breaking of bread here refers to the Lord's Supper, and prayer obviously is worship, as they're praying together. We need to always maintain the worship service. That's the first point in our mission statement: magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word. I could say more there, but I'm going to move on.

### **D. We Enlist Them in Stewardship**

We must enlist them also in stewardship. Look, if you will here, in verses 43 through 45: "And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles, and all that believed were together,"—now, watch this—"and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need." Talk about Bible stewardship—there it is, folks. None of them said, What I have is mine. Lord, if you want it, you can have it. There was an emergency; there was persecution there.

Some people think this is talking about communism. It was not communism for a number of reasons. Number one: it was temporary. Number two: it was based on belief in God. Number three: it was church-controlled. And, number four: it was voluntary.

But the point is this: that everything that they owned was at the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is everything you own at the disposal of Jesus? I mean, honestly, if He asked for your last penny, would you give it to Him? I'm not saying He will, but if He did, you should. It all belongs to Him. That's the last thing that we want to release: our finances, our material possessions. It all belongs to God. Don't get the idea that one-tenth belongs to God and the rest is yours, for your pleasure, for your squandering. It all belongs to God. One-tenth is only a sign that it all belongs to God. Don't get the idea that one day belongs to God, and six are for you. Every day belongs to God, and He is to be the Lord over it all. And we're to teach this kind of stewardship.

So many of us are afraid that we're going to over-give. You can't out-give God. You shovel out, He shovels in; He's got a bigger shovel. Two men were talking. One said, Do you tithe before or after taxes? The other man said, I tithe before taxes. He said, Why is that? He says, God gets more that way. And I'll tell you something: I believe that man gets more also, because God loves the man who can trust Him with his finances.

Now, I'm not trying to tell you to give things God doesn't tell you to give—that's presumptuous. I'm just simply saying, Hey, you tell the Lord, Lord, whatever you want me to do. You know how we built the fellowship building? Let me tell you something, folks—and I give God the glory for this: that building is paid for. That building has been paid for by three ways. Number one: our people have over-given the budget. Number two: our staff has under-spent the budget. Number three: we take an annual Love Offering and put those things together. That has enabled us to do that. Isn't that wonderful?

And you know what I tell folks when we take the Love Offering? Pastors say, How do you raise this money? I say, I tell our people that what you do not willingly and joyfully give, God neither needs nor wants. We don't go around wringing people's arms and trying to make them give. Listen. You can't fall in love with Jesus and not want to give. I mean, you cannot love the Lord and not want to give. You cannot have the Christ that Peter was preaching about, when he said, exalt the Savior; you can't have that without wanting to give—to give. And so, we have to enlist people in stewardship. And we have to keep giving and keep giving. You say, Well, when we get our buildings built, then we can stop. No, that's when we'll really start, because now we're going to be reaching out and out and out and out, sharing Jesus Christ with this community, and sharing Jesus Christ with this state, and sharing Jesus Christ with this world, and we're going to be pouring more and more money into reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### **E. We Enlist Them in Evangelism**

So, that brings me to the next some. Not only do we enlist them in stewardship, but we enlist them in evangelism. Notice here again in verse 46, now: "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people,"—now, watch this—"and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This church was a growing church. There's nothing wrong with a small church, nothing wrong with a big church. There's something wrong with any church that's in an area where there are a lot of lost people, and the church is not growing. The church is to grow.

This early church was perhaps in size the greatest church in church history. Are you ready to do a little arithmetic? Let me show you something. You just get your Bibles now, lick your fingers—look in Acts chapter 1 and verse 15: "And in those days Peter

stood up in the midst of the disciples and said,”—now here’s a parenthesis in the Word of God—“the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty.” All right, so we start with 120. The 12 had become 120. Now, look in Acts 2, verse 41: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Pretty good church growth. Now, they’re 3,120.

But now go to Acts 2, verse 47. It speaks of them praising God, and having favor with all the people. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Now, we don’t even know how many this was, but every day—every day—souls are getting saved. More every day, not just on Sunday. Now, go to Acts chapter 4, and look, if you will, in verse 4. And they had another service, and the Bible says here, “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of men was about five thousand.” Now, it doesn’t say five thousand were saved; it says the number of men that were saved were five thousand. So let’s just give each man a wife and two children. That’s 20,000 right there, if the rest of the family came to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, now the church that’s been growing every day takes this 3,120, plus those which came in every day, which probably now they have 20,000; we add another 20,000—that’s 45,000 members in just a few days.

And then, look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 5, and look, if you will now, in verse 28. They are rebuking the disciples for the preaching, and here’s what they said to them: “Did we not straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” By the way, that’s what I’m calling the church to do, is to fill this city with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our Jerusalem. They said, You have filled this city. They literally saturated this city with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, look in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7: “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” Remember what I said there in Acts 2: “the Lord added to them daily such as should be saved.” No more addition now; now, it’s multiplication. The church is growing exponentially. B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said that this church had a membership in excess of 65,000 members in the first six months—65,000 in the first six months. G. Campbell Morgan said, No, it was more like 250,000 in the first six months. Talk about big churches. Listen. Do you think God wants everybody to go to hell? Do you think God just doesn’t want people reached for Christ? We’re not going to get 250,000 in this building, but we can build some other buildings somewhere. We can help some other churches to grow. We can send some workers to other churches, if they’re not growing. And we can find places to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, if we will enlist the saints.

## Conclusion

Now, here's what we exist to do: to exalt the Savior, evangelize the sinner, and enlist the saints. Not complicated, is it? Not complicated at all. Question: Does this excite you? Would you like to be a part of that? Or, do you just want to draw your breath, draw your salary, drag into heaven with a wasted life? All right, give God a hand, if you want to do what you ought to do.

And these days we're going to be talking about making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations, and we're going to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bellevue's not going to stop growing, and we're not going to do it all at one time, and we're not going to do it haphazardly. And don't get antsy, and say, Well, I don't see a whole lot happening. You know what we do around here? We lay a lot of groundwork, we make plans, we try to do it as strategically, but by God's grace, and by God's glory, we will do it. And we're going to be in the business of making Jesus known by living supernaturally. We cannot do it naturally, but friend, there's enough power in heaven, if we'll wait for the anointing, if we will learn the Word of God, if we will be obedient, we can see our city impacted for Jesus Christ.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you say, Lord, make me a part of that vision; Lord, I don't want to be just a drone; I don't want to be just a Sunday night bench warmer; I want to be a part of that vision; show me, Lord, what part I'm to have? And then, would you pray for the pastor? Would you say, God bless Pastor; give him wisdom; give him strength as he leads? Would you pray for the staff—God give them an anointing; give them strength; give them unity? Would you pray for our dear deacons—God keep them pure; help them to be men of God; help them to have truly a servant spirit? Would you pray for the leaders of our Bible Fellowship classes—O God, may they take their assignments seriously; may they care for those in their class? Pray for them. Father God, let your hand be upon this dear church, and Lord, give us a ministry that reaches out across denominational and racial barriers, against socioeconomic barriers, that reaches out over prejudice, and pride, and selfishness, to share Jesus. In His dear name we pray. Amen.

# The Church Triumphant

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: May 20, 1990**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:22–26, 36–42, 46–47**

## Outline

Introduction

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- II. A Converted Membership
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- III. A Constant Ministry
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- IV. Continual Multiplication

Conclusion

## Introduction

**T**ake your Bibles, tonight, and turn to the second chapter of the Book of Acts. I want to bring for just a few moments tonight a message—a biblical message—and the title of the message is “The Church Triumphant.” I want our church to be a triumphant church. The pattern for a triumphant church is found in the Book of Acts. I believe that today, one more time, God is giving us a chance. The world is looking on. This city is looking at Bellevue Baptist Church. They’re wondering, do we, indeed, know something? Do we, indeed, have the answer? They want to know. The world has tried everything, and nothing is working. And, nothing will work, dear friend, because you can’t make a good omelet out of bad eggs no matter how you try. I mean, we can mix it this way, mix it that way, but the only answer—and I mean it with all of my heart—is found right here in this book.

Now, I want you to see what a New Testament church is to be. Now, I’m going to fast-forward in Acts, the second chapter, until I get to verse 22, and there you have the

message that Simon Peter preached on the day of Pentecost.

## **I. A Christ-Centered Message**

And, may I tell you without the shadow of any doubt or equivocation, one of the elements in a church triumphant is a Christ-centered message? I want you to see the message that Simon Peter preached on that day of Pentecost, at the birthday of the Church. Listen to it—here’s the way he begins: *“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth”*—that’s the way he began—*“hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”*—now, my dear friend, I want you to see, as Peter goes on to preach about Jesus, he says—*“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope”* (Acts 2:22–26).

Now, I’m telling you, folks, that when Peter got up to preach on the day of Pentecost, he did not preach philosophy; he did not preach world events, as such, unless they related to the Lord Jesus Christ. But Peter, on the day of Pentecost, set the standard for us all, and he preached a Christ-centered message.

### **A. The Manner of Jesus’ Life**

For example, he spoke of the manner of Jesus’s life. Look in verse 22: the Bible says, *“A man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you”* (Acts 2:22). That is, Jesus Christ lived among men. And, when He had finished living here on this earth, He could look every man in the eye and say, *“Who can accuse Me of any sin?”* (John 8:46) Friend, I wouldn’t ask my friends that, much less my enemies, but the Lord Jesus did.

Someone wrote these words: *“Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He (Jesus) is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader in the column of progress.”* And then, this person eloquently said, *“I am far within the mark when I say that of all of the armies that ever marched, and all of the navies that were ever built, and all of the parliaments that ever have sat, and all of the kings that have ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that one solitary life: Jesus of Nazareth.”*

### **B. The Meaning of Jesus’ Death**

So, Peter preached on the manner of His life—verse 22 (Acts 2:22). And then, in verse

23, he preached on the meaning of His death: *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”* (Acts 2:23). Now, notice what Peter said: Peter said, “It was God’s plan, but men did it (the Crucifixion).” May I tell you that Jesus Christ did not die as an incident or an accident? Jesus died by divine plan. The Bible makes it plain here that Jesus was not a martyr. The Bible says that He died by the *“foreknowledge of God”* (Acts 2:23). The death of Jesus Christ on the cross for my sins and your sins was planned from eternity.

And, what is the meaning of His death? It is substitution. Now, we talk... All these folks talk about Jesus Christ being “the way-shower.” Jesus Christ is not the way-shower, friend; He is the way—He is the way. He died for us, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Sin had to be paid for; and, therefore, God, from eternity, planned that there would be a substitute.

And, may I say to every man, woman, boy and girl in this building tonight that *your sin will be pardoned in Christ, or it will be punished in Hell, but it will never be overlooked?* Some people say, “Well, God is too good to punish sin.” You’ve got it backward. He’s too good not to punish sin. God is a righteous and a Holy God. He’s the judge of the universe. *They say, in a court of law, when a guilty man is acquitted, the judge is condemned. If a judge knowingly, willingly, deliberately, lets a criminal go free, he becomes a criminal. If God were to let sin go unpunished, God would topple from His throne of holiness.* But, God knew that sin must be punished, but He loved the sinner. And so, God let His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, die a substitutionary death on the cross.

### **C. The Miracle of Jesus’ Resurrection**

Notice what Peter preached. Peter preached the manner of His life—verse 22 (Acts 2:22). Then, he preached the meaning of His death in verse 23 (Acts 2:23). And then, he preached the miracle of His resurrection in verse 24: *“Whom God hath raised up, being loosed of the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”* (Acts 2:24). Boy, I love that. You know, there were those who said, “We’re going to kill Him. We’re gonna put Him in the grave, and we’re gonna be rid of Him.” But friend, the corpse has outlived the pallbearers. Amen? It’s not possible that death could hold the Lord of life.

*Years ago, I read a fable—just a fable, but a beautiful story—of a lion, the monarch of the jungle, who was sleepy, and he saw a cave. And so, he said, “I’ll go into that cave, and I’ll take a long summer’s nap.” And, the old lion with his massive mane went into the cave, gave a yawn, and lay down. There was a spider who saw him, and the spider says, “This is my chance. I will imprison that lion in here.” And so, the spider, at the mouth of the cave, began to spin a web. Up and down, back and across, and*

around, and around, and around, and around, the spider spun 'till he almost spun himself away. And finally, there was the spider's web. And, he said, "Now, I have the lion as my prisoner. No longer will he stalk his prey in the jungle. No longer will he strut through the mighty forest. He is my prisoner!" But, the old lion arose from his nap and stretched himself, shook himself, and the dust went off his mane. He stretched one more time and let out a roar that echoed through the valley. And then, he walked out of the cave and never even knew that the spider's web was there. Death said, "I have Jesus. I've got Him! I've got Him in my hold now!" My friend, I want to tell you the Lion of the tribe of Judah is alive and well tonight. Death could not hold his prey—Jesus, my Savior.

#### **D. The Majesty of Jesus' Reign**

What is the ingredient of a New Testament church? It is Christ-centered preaching: the magnificence of His life, my dear friend; the meaning of His death; the miracle of His resurrection; and the majesty of His reign, for Peter's not finished yet. Look, if you will, in verse 36 of this same chapter: he says, "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36). Who is the head of Bellevue Baptist Church? Well, it's not the pastor, and it's not the deacons. It's Jesus Christ; He is the sovereign Lord of this church.

We talk about "making Jesus Lord"—you're too late! He already is. Now, you can get in on it if you want to, but you're not gonna make Him Lord. Friend, He is Lord and Christ! He's risen from the dead. He has ascended. And, one day, He's coming back again. And, any church that calls itself a church that is not presenting this kind of Jesus is not worth the real estate that it occupies. It's a bogus church. Every church is to be a Christ-centered church that is preaching a sinless Savior, who died a substitutionary death; who came up out of that grave, literally, bodily, actually; who's gone into the heavens; who is Lord; and who is coming again. His name is Jesus. And, my dear friend, I want to tell you that a New Testament church has a Christ-centered message.

## **II. A Converted Membership**

Second thing it has: It has a converted membership—it has a converted membership. Continue to read now in verse 37: "*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify*

and exhort, saying, *Save yourselves from this untoward generation*”—that is, “Get off this merry-go-round, not going anywhere; this untoward generation, not going toward anything except judgment”—“*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized*”—now, watch it—“*the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*” (Acts 2:37–41). Three thousand people were saved in one day—converted.

A New Testament church should have a converted membership. So many churches today are like glorified country clubs with a steeple on top. But, my dear friend, the purpose of the church is to get men, women, boys, and girls saved. And, let me show you how it happens.

### **A. They Were Convicted by the Lord**

First of all, they were convicted by the Lord. Look in verse 37: “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart*” (Acts 2:37). Who did that? The Holy Spirit of God. I’ve told our people many times that *any thing I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of*. I can preach truth, but only the Holy Spirit can impart truth. And, when Peter was up there preaching about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God just stabbed them right in their heart. They were convicted by the Lord. There’ll be some of you in this service tonight convicted by the Lord. And, you know what the Bible says? The Bible says, “Don’t quench the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Don’t pour cold water on that convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Don’t do it. I beg you, don’t do it.

I read, one time, where Napoleon, that archangel of war, had a battle that was going on somewhere. And oh, the battle would rage this way, and then that way, and then this way, and then that way, and this way, and that way. And, there were heavy losses on either side. And finally, one day, a runner came and said to Napoleon, “Sire! We’ve won! We’ve won the victory!” Napoleon hung his head. He didn’t smile. He didn’t jubilate. He said, “Sire, we have won! The battle is ours!” Napoleon, knowing the heavy losses that he had taken, said this: “Another such victory would cost me my kingdom.” Sometimes, you sit in a service like this, and the Holy Spirit says, “Come to Jesus.” Human pride says, “I’ll not come.” The Holy Spirit says, “Come to Jesus!” Excuses say, “I’ll not come.” The Holy Spirit says, “Come to Jesus!” Convenience says, “Don’t come.” And finally, you win, and the Holy Spirit loses. Another such victory may cost you your soul. It’s a battle you can’t afford to win. Every time you say, “No” to Jesus Christ, your heart gets a little harder, and it gets harder for you to say, “Yes” the next time. Don’t ever get in a battle with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you, when you’re so pricked in your heart, say, “Yes” to Him.

### **B. They Were Converted to the Lord**

They were convicted by the Lord, and they were converted to the Lord. Look in verse 38: “*Then Peter said unto them, Repent*” (Acts 2:38). And, they said, “What must we

do?” And, Peter said, “Repent.” The word *repent*—*metanoia*—is a Greek word that means, literally, “to change your mind; a change of mind.” Now, so many times when we say, “Repent,” we think of repentance from sin. Now, that’s included, but it means “to change your mind about sin, about self, and about God.” Don’t see God as the enemy; see God as the friend. Don’t see yourself as sufficient; see yourself as insufficient. See sin for what it is, and change your mind about sin. Why didn’t Peter say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?” Why did he say, “*Repent*” (Acts 2:38)? Because repentance and faith are heads and tails of the same coin. You can’t turn from sin without turning to Christ; you can’t turn to Christ without turning from sin.

### C. They Made a Confession of the Lord

Convicted by the Lord, converted to the Lord, a confession of the Lord—verse 38: “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38). You’re convicted; you’re converted, and you confess Christ. Walking down an aisle is not truly the confession of Jesus Christ. The real confession of Jesus Christ takes place right up there in the baptistry. That is the New Testament, authentic confession of faith in Christ.

Some of you say you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and you’re not ashamed of the Lord Jesus. Well, Jesus said, “*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). I can prove without any shadow of a doubt, equivocation, stutter, or stammer that the Bible teaches baptism by immersion of believers only. That’s why we have this church. It’s a *Baptist* church. It’d be cheaper to build a church without a baptistry in it, I can tell you that much. And, some of you ladies with a 24-dollar hairdo had rather not have that thing up there. You say, “It cost me 20...” What does it cost now? How much? Joyce, don’t tell me; I don’t want to know. But anyway, listen, my dear friend, why that trouble? Because it’s a glorious privilege; because when people are put in that water, that’s a liquid tomb. And, when they go under the water, that pictures the burial of Jesus. And, when they come up out of the water, that pictures the resurrection of Jesus. And, we are baptized in the likeness of His death, knowing also that we’re in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5). Dear friend, the Bible teaches baptism by immersion. That is the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, somebody says, “The Bible says we’re to be baptized for the remission of sin. Does that mean that the baptism remits our sin?” No. The Greek word translated as for is *eis*, and it means, in this instance, “because of” the remission of sin. In Luke chapter 11, verse 32, the same preposition is used when it says, “*They repented at the preaching of Jonah*” (Luke 11:32). The preposition *eis* is translated there, “*at the preaching of Jonah*” (Luke 11:32). They repented *because of* the preaching of Jonah. We’re baptized *because of* the remission of sin.

#### D. They Had a Containment with the Lord

Now, watch it. Here's a converted membership. Here's what makes a New Testament church: first of all, convicted by the Lord; then, converted to the Lord; then, a confession of the Lord—now, watch—and a containment with the Lord. That is, the Lord comes inside of us. Look in verse 38: and he says here, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:38). You contain the Lord. The gift of the Holy Ghost is not something the Holy Ghost gives you; it is the Holy Ghost that God gives to you. When you get saved, you don't just believe some thing; you receive Someone. *Salvation is not getting men out of Earth to Heaven; it is getting God out of Heaven back into men.* You receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want to ask you tonight—not, are you a member of Bellevue Baptist Church? I want to ask you this question: Does God live in you? If not, you're not saved—you're not saved. The Bible says, *“if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”* (Romans 8:9).

#### E. They were Continuing for the Lord

You see, listen, what is a New Testament church? There is a Christ-centered message and a converted membership. There's a containment with the Lord; and then, there's a continuing for the Lord. Look, if you will, in verses 41 and 42: and the Bible says, *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly”* (Acts 2:41–42). *“They continued”* (Acts 2:42)—their continuance. You walk down the aisle, and join some church, and say, “Now, that's done; that's over with.” You don't live for God. You don't love God. You don't serve God. Dear friend, you've never been saved.

Let me tell you something: there are so many people who are counting on their church membership to get them to Heaven. They come to their funeral and say, “Well, he was a member of this church. He was a member of that church.” So what? So what? Are you continuing with the Lord? You're not saved because you continue; you continue because you are saved, my dear friend. So, salvation that keeps you. *A lot of these people—they remind me of an Alka-Seltzer. You baptize 'em; you put 'em in water. They fizzle a little while and then disappear. The faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first, mister—never saved.*

Now, what I'm trying to tell you is this—listen, listen—what is a New Testament church? Convicted by the Lord—they were pricked in their hearts. Converted to the Lord—they repented. Confession of the Lord—they were baptized. Containment with the Lord—they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. A continuance for the Lord—they continued! Give us people like that, and we will make an impact on this city and on the

world for Christ.

### III. A Constant Ministry

All right, one last thing, my dear friend: not only was there this converted membership, but there was a constant ministry. What was the ministry of this church?

#### A. Indoctrination

Well, begin now in verse 42—look at it: *“And they continued stedfastly”*—number one—*“in the apostles’ doctrine”* (Acts 2:42). Do you see that? Do you know what that is? That’s indoctrination; that is Bible teaching. All great churches are Bible-centered. Why do we spend millions of dollars to build educational wings? Not to stand around and drink coffee in, but to teach the Word of God. *“They continued...in the apostles’ doctrine”* (Acts 2:42). Do you know what the apostles’ doctrine is? The New Testament. They continued in that indoctrination. That was part of their ministry.

#### B. Edification

Secondly, edification. Look in verse 42 of this same chapter: the Bible says, *“They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship”* (Acts 2:42). Fellowship! Now, that’s edifying one another. It’s the word I preached about this morning: *koinonia*—“to edify one another.” Friend, these days are so rotten and so vile you can’t even watch television, you can’t pick up a newspaper, you can’t walk down the street without having your spiritual sensibilities wounded. The name of Jesus Christ is mixed in the muck, and filth, and slime of the sewer. I mean, on every side! It’s in the air like a fungus. We’re living in the last days. And, you need a church where you can come, and fellowship, and grow together. The Bible says we are not to forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:25).

#### C. Adoration

So, what is the ministry? First of all, indoctrination; secondly, edification; thirdly, adoration—that is, praising the Lord God. Look, if you will, in verse 42: *“they continued...in...fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42). The breaking of bread, I believe, refers to the Lord’s Supper. The prayers belong to the worship part of the church. As we worship the Lord, we adore the Lord Jesus Christ. What a blessing, tonight, to hear this choir sing “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”! What a joy to hold hands and sing, “There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place”! Adoration—that’s a part.

### IV. Continual Multiplication

Now, let me come quickly to the final thing. I said a Christ-centered message, a

converted membership, a constant ministry. One last thing makes a New Testament church, and it is continual multiplication—continual multiplication. Now, look in verses 46 and 47: *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people”*—now, watch this—*“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:46–47). There’s nothing wrong with a church that’s not a big church. But, my dear friend, there’s something wrong with a church that’s not a growing church, if it’s surrounded by lost people.

Now, you listen to me: the Church is to multiply. How big was this first church? All right, now lick your fingers. Let me show you something. Turn to Acts 1, verse 15—look at it: *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)”* (Acts 1:15). All right, do you see that? They started out with 12, and the 12 got to be 120. Now, look in Acts chapter 2, verse 41, where we just were: *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41). Now, you’ve got 3,000 plus 120—that’s 3,120. And, the thing hadn’t been going but a day. And then, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 2, verse 47: *“[And they were] Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:47). How many was that? We don’t know, but more were added every day.

Then, look in Acts chapter 4 and verse 4: *“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand”* (Acts 4:4). Now, you’ve got 5,000 men plus their families, ’cause it just counts the men there—that’s 20,000. Plus the 3,120 we had—that’s 23,120. Plus those who were added daily—we don’t know how many that is. Then, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 5 and verse 28. And, the Bible says that—in Acts chapter 5 and verse 28—that they had *“filled Jerusalem with [their] doctrine”* (Acts 5:28). I mean, the entire city, now, is saturated with their doctrine. And then, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7. And, there it says, *“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly”* (Acts 6:7). Now, I mean, they’ve already got 25,000. And then, they filled the city. And then, the Bible says it multiplies (Acts 6:7).

D.H. Carroll, who was the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said that this church had a membership of 65,000 in less than six months. J. Campbell Morgan said, “No, it was more like 250,000 members that were added in six months.” You say, “Pastor, how big is big enough?” Well, I’ll tell you how big Bellevue will be when it’s big enough: when every one of the five billion people on the face of this earth know Jesus Christ, then we’ll stop growing. You say, “You think you can do it by yourself?” Nope, I hope some others will help us. But, if they don’t, God has given us a

challenge to preach the gospel to every creature. Tell them about Jesus! Bring them to Christ!

## **Conclusion**

Now, what are we gonna dedicate these buildings to? Why have we met? Why have we built these things? A Christ-centered message, a converted membership, a constant ministry, and a continual multiplication. And, to that reason, to that purpose, for God's glory and by His grace, we dedicate this place. And, God's people say, "Amen."

All right, let's bow in prayer. Father God, I pray in Jesus's name that You will make us like that first church in Jerusalem. Teach us, O God; help us. In Jesus's holy name, amen.

# In the Name of Jesus, Rise and Walk

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: February 4, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 3:1–6**

*“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”*

ACTS 3:6

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Jesus Is the Risen Lord
- II. Jesus Is the Residing Lord
- III. Jesus Is the Redeeming Lord
- IV. Jesus Is the Returning Lord

Conclusion

## Introduction

Find Acts chapter 3. We were in Acts chapter 4 this morning, so we're going to back up just a little bit. I've already told you the name of our study is, In the Name of Jesus, Rise and Walk. There was an advertisement that was on the radio and television several years back where a person had fallen and could not reach the phone, and, finally, could reach the phone, and say, Help, I have fallen, and can't get up. Perhaps you felt that way emotionally, spiritually, economically, domestically, physically. You've said, I'm down, and I can't get up. Well, the message to you tonight is, In the name of Jesus, rise and walk. Listen to God's Word.

Acts chapter 3, verse 1: “Now, Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms”—that is, he was begging—“of them that entered into the temple. And seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms and Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise and walk.” Now, if you're down, I want to tell you tonight, there's a miracle waiting for you, and in the name of Jesus, I

want you to rise and walk.

Let me give you the setting. Here was a man who was lame from his birth. When he came into this world from his mother's womb, his parents looked at his little legs, twisted and deformed. They knew that he would never be able to run, they knew that he would never be able to work, they knew that he could not play with the other children, they knew that he would be a cripple all of his life, because he was born lame. And so, every day they would take him now as a grown man, and bring him to the Beautiful Gate.

If you've been to Israel, and you know that you can go up on the Mount of Olives, look down upon the Kidron Valley, and then there's a rise that comes up, and there at the temple mount, where today the Mosque of Omar is, there on the temple mount is a gate, the Eastern Gate, the Beautiful Gate. Josephus, who was a Jewish historian, wrote about that gate, and he said it was made of Corinthian brass, but it was overlaid with panels of silver and gold, and, as the sun would come up over the Mount of Olives and shine down on that temple mount, it would strike that gate. It would be absolutely dazzling, so they called it the Gate Beautiful. And here was this man lying at the gate, a beggar, and, by Levitical law, in his condition, he could not go in, wanting to go in, but there was a gate between him and, as it were, the worship of Almighty God. He's a beggar; he's lying there. Peter and John come, and a notable miracle is done, and he rises up to walk.

Now, the Bible says, in Acts chapter 4, the next chapter, verse 22, "And the man was about forty years old on whom the miracle of healing was shown." Now, that's a very interesting verse, the miracle of healing, because the word there in Acts chapter 4 and verse 22 for miracle is the word that means a sign miracle—not a mere miracle, but a sign miracle—a special miracle, a miracle that has symbolism; miracle with a message.

Now, the passage of Scripture that we have before us is not to teach, therefore, that we today that we have the power to go about and say to people who are in hospitals, In the name of Jesus rise and walk. God has not given us that ability; God has not given us that power. It's not to say God cannot do it, but it is absolutely not normative. This was a special miracle; it was a sign miracle meant to teach a deeper lesson. The apostles had power to do things that you and I don't have power to do.

Now, I want to give you some scriptures. Just put them down. Acts chapter 5, verse 12—and the Bible says here, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." By the hands of the apostles, and the apostle Paul had those who did not believe in his authenticity as an apostle. They said, You're not a true apostle, and Paul had to vindicate his apostolic authority, and this is what he said in 2 Corinthians 12, verses 11 and 12: "I've become a fool in glorying. Ye have compelled me, for I ought to have been commended of you, for in nothing am I behind

the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” Paul, can you prove that you’re an apostle? Yes, by the signs of the apostles; the miracles that have been wrought by my hands authenticate my apostolic authority. What I’m trying to say is this: this is not the rank and file of people going around, saying, In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk.

Now, why these miracles in the early days? There were miracles of introduction; there were miracles of authentication, collaboration and substantiation. Now, we live in a different age. We have not miracles of glory, but miracles of grace. Jesus said, “Greater works than these that I do shall ye do.” What’s He talking about? He’s talking about the ministry of evangelism. All of these are signs to teach a greater lesson.

For example, when Jesus opened blinded eyes, was that what He came to do? No! He didn’t open all the blind eyes, but when He did open blind eyes, it was a sign that He was able to open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind. When Jesus unstopped deaf ears, did He do that for all? No! It was a sign, a miracle, to show that He was able to help those who are deaf and cannot hear from God. When Jesus cleansed the lepers, that was a sign to teach that He could cleanse us from the vileness and the filth of sin. When Jesus raised the dead, He didn’t raise all the dead, but it was a sign to show that He is the resurrection and the life, and He can raise those who are dead in trespasses and sin.

So here was this man—he was a highly symbolic man. The word for miracle is a word that means a sign. Here was a man who could not walk, he could not work, he could not worship, and Jesus, through the apostles, heals this man. Now, there are a lot of people who want to put an emphasis upon healing and not salvation—physical miracles which are only temporary. Peter and John said, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto you.” What we have is greater than the ability to heal the sick.

Now, this man was healed, however, and it was a miracle that could not be denied. Notice in verse 11—chapter 3, verse 11: “And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John,”—he wouldn’t let them go; he was just clinging around their knees—“all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.” Now, no reasonable person—no reasonable person—could deny this miracle that was done, and, today, in the spiritual sense—catch the parallel now—there ought to be miracles in my life, in your life, in this congregation, that no reasonable person can deny. It was a miracle that could not be reasonably denied—verse 11.

It was a miracle that could not be humanly explained, in verse 12: “And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our power or holiness we made this man to

walk?” What he was saying is there is no power inherent in me; don’t look at me, I did not do this. It was a miracle could not be denied, reasonably denied. It was a miracle that could not be humanly explained.

You could not explain the miracle by Peter or John. He said, Hey! Don’t look at me as though I have done this. That’s one of the reasons I don’t believe in praying to saints. There are some people that have the idea that saints have some inherent value in themselves, that saints have some super ability, so, if we can’t go to God himself, maybe we can go to a saint and get halfway there, and pray to a saint, because he has some built-up validity, or some built-up virtue of himself. I see people going around with a little saint on the dashboard. Have you ever seen that—a little saint on the dashboard of the car? Friend, it would be better to take that saint off the dashboard and put him behind the steering wheel; why don’t you drive like one, then?

All right now, it was a miracle that could not be reasonably denied. It was a miracle that could not be humanly explained. But it was a miracle that could not be lightly dismissed. Look in verse 13. Here Peter says, “The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified his son Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied him in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go.” What he is saying is this: that this miracle was done in the name of Jesus. Jesus here, His name stands for His person. Actually, what Peter was saying is, Jesus is still in business, and now, Peter turns the attention from this lame man, he turns the attention to and away from the lame man, and away from the apostles, and he turns the lesson to Jesus, and Jesus is the hero of this story.

And then, Peter, now, becomes a prosecuting attorney. Go over to chapter 4, and see what Peter said to these people. Now, here’s a miracle. They are face to face with a miracle, a miracle that could not be humanly, explained, miracles that could not be reasonably denied, and it is a miracle that cannot be lightly dismissed; it’s there, and they’re face to face with it.

Now, look in chapter 4, and look at verse 8: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, You rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day, being examined of the good deed being done to the impotent man by what means he’s made whole, be it made known unto you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.”

As a result of that, a great number of people came to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us in Acts 4:4 the number of men was about five thousand. By the way, you want to get a lot of people saved, don’t try to reach a lot of people; start reaching individuals. When you get a man who is supernaturally transformed, it will touch the multitude.

Now, Peter just wades into them here. Look what he says to them in verse 14 of this same chapter. He says, “You denied the Holy One, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” What he’s talking about there is Pilate presented to them Barabbas, and he said, when the Jews were trying to get Pilate to adjudicate Jesus worthy of death, Pilate, the Roman governor, the procurator, did not want to do that, so he said, Look, I’ve got a man over here who is a notable criminal—his name is Barabbas, he is a murderer, he’s a rebel, he’s an insurrectionist—and I have Jesus. I’m going to release one of them. Which one do you want me to release? Thinking they would say, Well, release Jesus, and crucify Barabbas. But the people there, they denied Jesus, and they chose Barabbas. And that’s what he’s talking about here in verse 14. Look at it: “Ye denied the holy one and the just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” And so, they made a choice, and Peter is saying, Now, you made a terrible, awful choice.

I’ve often told you, friend, that you always, when it comes to a choice, you’re not free—you’re free to choose, you’re not free not to choose, and you’re not free to choose the consequences of your choice. Once you make a choice, then your choice chooses for you.

Now, this is the Lord Jesus Christ that they were dealing with, and as we come to the Lord’s table, I want you to learn three things about Jesus who caused this man to rise and walk, because I want you to rise up over the circumstances of your life and walk. There are three things I want to lay on your heart about Jesus tonight.

## **I. Jesus Is the Risen Lord**

Number one, He is the risen Lord. Say, risen. He is the risen Lord. Look in verse 15: “And you killed the prince of life whom God hath raised from the dead, where we’re witnesses.” What caused Peter, who cringed and denied Jesus in front of a little girl, now to stand and look in the very face of the high muckety mucks of that day, the highest court of the Jewish land, the Sanhedrin, and the chief priests who had also civil authority, and put his finger in their face, and say, You crucified Him, but God hath raised Him from the dead? Why this boldness?

As I preached last Sunday on holy boldness, once they had seen Jesus Christ come out of that tomb, once they knew that He was alive, there was no way that you could daunt them, no way you could intimidate them, because they were absolutely certain that He was the prince of life, that He had been raised from the dead. And, if we have a living Savior, then what have we to fear?

Now, folks, listen. These apostles were not preaching facts about a dead Christ. That’s the only way you can explain the boldness of these people. How do you explain the early church? How do you explain the fact that this Peter, this man who is now

talking, they finally took him—and if tradition is correct, and we have reason to believe that it is—they crucified Peter? When they were getting ready to crucify Peter, Peter said, Look, don't crucify me right side up; crucify me upside down. I'm not worthy to even be crucified as my Lord was crucified. Where did he get that boldness? Friend, he had no fear of death. Of course he didn't want to be crucified, but he had no fear of death, because he knew that his Savior was alive.

Listen. You cannot explain away the resurrection of Jesus. History tells us that these early apostles paid for their faith with their lives. Now, men may live for a lie, but few men will willingly die for a lie, if they know it is a lie. Hypocrites and martyrs are not made of the same stuff.

This is the risen Christ. He is the risen Lord, and I want to say to you tonight, if the devil has you down, in the name of the risen Savior, rise and walk.

## **II. Jesus Is the Residing Lord**

Second thing I want to say. Not only is He the risen Lord, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the residing Lord. Say, residing. Look in verse 16 now: “And through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know. Yea, faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

Now, remember when we began this message on the book of Acts, we told you that the book of Luke is all that Jesus began to do and to teach; in the book of Acts, we see all that Jesus continued to do and teach. What Peter's saying, though: we said in the name of Jesus rise up and walk—we didn't do it; it is Jesus Christ in us. When it says, it's done by His name, name means nature. It was done by the holy nature of Jesus Christ in these men. Our Christ is the contemporary Christ.

Now, go back to chapter 4, and look, if you will, in verse 10. I love this beautiful story here. Now, here's Peter; he's not the defendant now, he's the prosecuting attorney. Here's what he says in verse 10: “Be it known unto you in all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught with you builders which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby ye must be saved.” Now, that's very interesting. Look in verse 11: “This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders which is become the head of the corner.”

There's a story that is told; it's come down to us through history that, when Solomon's temple was being built they wanted the temple built without the ring of hammers and the sound of chisels, so the stones were designed, and the specifications were sent to the quarry. The stones were cut out in the quarry and brought to the work

yard to be assembled together by the workers, and they were building this magnificent temple. There was one stone that was in the middle. It was a strange-looking stone; nobody seemed to know what it was for, how it would fit, and they kept stumbling over it. It was a stumbling stone; it was in the way. And, finally, the project manager said, Men, move that stone out of the way. They took that stone over to the edge of the temple mount, took their pry bars, and rolled it over, and it went down, down, down, down, into the valley, the Kidron valley.

Now, they set a stone at naught. Now, they come; it's time for the cornerstone. "Bring the cornerstone! Send word to the quarry: we're ready for the cornerstone." "We've already sent the cornerstone." "No, you haven't. We don't have it." "We tell you, our records say we sent the cornerstone." Where do you think it was? Down in the valley. That's what this verse is talking about. That stone which is set at naught of you builders is become the head of the corner.

Peter's saying, Listen, you want me to tell you how this is done? That stone that you rejected, Jesus Christ the living stone, the cornerstone, He is the one who has made this man whole. He is the risen Lord, He is the residing Lord, and I want you to know that Jesus who is alive lives in you. Oh, if we could only get that in our hearts. We're not just talking about somebody; friend, He is alive and well in you. Do you understand that?

### **III. Jesus Is the Redeeming Lord**

He is the risen Lord, He is the residing Lord, and, friend, He is the redeeming Lord. Look, if you will, in verse 17 now; we're back in chapter 3, just continue to read right on down. Now, look at it: "And now, brethren, I want that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers." That's the reason Jesus could pray, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." But now, notice in verse 18: "But those things which God before hath showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled, repent ye therefore and be converted, let your sins be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." That's the reason I'm saying that this miracle was only a platform to preach salvation—to preach, being converted.

It is an amazing thing. Here where man did wickedness and wrongness, and when man ruled in wickedness, God overruled in righteousness, and he said, you did it, but those things which God before hath showed by the mouth of his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. It is an amazing thing. He's saying, Here is the wickedness of man and the righteousness of God coming together in the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says now, you need to be converted; you need to be changed; you need to

be saved. And what did he tell them to do? He told them to repent and be converted. Look in verse 19: “Repent ye therefore and be converted.” Question: Have you repented? Answer: No. Statement: You’re lost.

Jesus said in Luke 13:3, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” No one has ever been saved who has not repented. Through repentance and faith—they’re heads and tails of the same coin. And friend, if there’s no repentance, there can be no refreshing. What is repentance? Repentance is not overcoming sin; you can’t do that until you have Jesus in your heart and in your life.

God doesn’t say, Clean up your life, and I’ll save you. That’d be salvation by works. But what is repentance? The word *metanoia* means a change of mind, and, friend, it is a change of heart, a change of mind, that leads to a change of life. Have you repented? The Bible says, in the name of Jesus repent, believe. In the name of the risen Lord, in the name of the residing Lord, in the name of the redeeming Lord, rise and walk. Say, redeeming.

#### **IV. Jesus Is the Returning Lord**

He’s the risen Lord. He’s the residing Lord. He’s the redeeming Lord. One more thing, and we’re going to have the Lord’s Supper. He is the returning Lord. Look now in verse 20: “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.” Send Jesus Christ? Why, I thought Jesus had already come. Yes, but He’s coming again. “And he shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” What’s the world coming to? It’s coming to Jesus, because Jesus is coming to the world. Heaven has received Him until the time of restitution. He is coming to restore all things.

I was talking to Joyce about this morning, when we were getting dressed in the bathroom. And I said to Joyce, I said, You know, Joyce, Satan is a pervert. Satan has no raw materials. God made everything—God made everything—and everything that God made is good. And, if you know anything that’s bad, it’s a perversion of something that was once good—no matter what it is. Anything bad is a perversion of something that was once good. Now, what is wrong with the world today is the master pervert has done his work. But Jesus is coming, and He’s going to restore things, and put them as they’re supposed to be.

I love this verse—look at it again, verse 20: “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since the world began.” He calls it, in verse 19, the time of refreshing. Jesus is coming again. First time, He came as a lamb. He’s coming again as the lion of the tribe of Judah. He came the

first time to redeem; He's coming again to reign. He came the first time to die; He's coming again to raise the dead. When He came the first time, they asked, Where is He that is born king of the Jews? Next time, He's coming as King of kings and Lord of lords. The first time, to a crown of thorns; next time, to a crown of glory. First time, in poverty; the next time, in power. The first time, He had an escort of angels; the next time, He's coming with ten thousands of His saints. The first time, He came in meekness; He's coming again in majesty.

## **Conclusion**

Don't ever lose sight of the fact that Jesus is alive and well. He is the risen Lord. He is the residing Lord. He is the redeeming Lord. He is the returning Lord. We're going to take the Lord's Supper tonight, and we're going to say, Till He come. And, even so, come Lord Jesus.

# The Key to a Beautiful Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 11, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 3:1–20

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”*

ACTS 3:19

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Today, I want to begin talking to you about “The Key to a Beautiful Life”—Acts chapter 3. And if you would like the secret to a beautiful life, then pay attention. We read together now the first ten verses: *“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man, lame from his birth, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but, such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up. and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he,*

*leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they knew that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.” (Acts 3:1–10)*

Now, what was the result of all of this? The result was that perhaps twenty thousand people came to Christ. Look, if you will, in chapter 4 and verse 4: *“But many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”* (Acts 4:4) How many women were there? Well, if you know anything about worship, you know that generally there are more women than men. Women have a softer heart. Men are hardheaded and hard-hearted. So I would imagine that there were more women there. And he doesn’t mention anything about the children. If we just simply say five thousand men, five thousand women, and ten thousand children—two children for every man and woman—that’s twenty thousand. Just the men were five thousand that were converted in this one service. We talk about Pentecost, where there were three thousand saved on the day of Pentecost. Folks, it is beginning to build, and now in a single service twenty thousand come to our Lord and Savior.

Now what was the background? Something happened—three basic ingredients—and I want you to see them.

## **I. The Miracle That Confronted Them**

Number one: These people who were saved were confronted with a miracle, and there was the miracle that confronted them: it was the healing of a man that had been lame or crippled from his birth. When he was born, and his father and mother took him and examined him, as all mothers do to little babies, they noticed that something was not quite right with the little baby’s feet: his anklebones had not developed, nor his little feet. Somehow they were not made whole, like feet should normally be for a little baby. And this little boy never learned to walk. When other boys would go out to skip, run, and play, he couldn’t. Later on, when other men went to work, there was no work that he could do. All that they could do was to take this man—and loving friends would take him every day—and put him down there at the gate to the temple, the gate that was called Beautiful. He had his little tin cup there, and as people would come and go to worship, he would cry out, *“Baksheesh! Baksheesh! Alms! Help the poor! Help the poor!”* And people would drop their pennies and their coins into his tin cup. Day after day, that is the way he lived. People would come and go, and he was right there at the gate of the temple.

That gate of the temple was called Beautiful. It was gorgeous. It was really the Corinthian gate made of Corinthian brass, overlaid with silver and gold panels. And

when the sun would come up over the Mount of Olives and burst upon that gate that looks toward the east, it would just dazzle and almost blind you in its beauty. It was unspeakably beautiful, and it came to be known as the Beautiful Gate—the gate called Beautiful. And here is this man just outside that Beautiful Gate, because he cannot enter through it, because Levitical law said that a deformed man could not enter past that gate. He is on the wrong side of a beautiful life. He is just outside the gate, and he's crippled.

Now Peter and John come and they see him, and he says, "Alms." And Peter and John didn't have any money. *They were like that preacher when he went to cash his check, and the banker said, "I hate to give you these old dirty bills." And the preacher said, "That's all right: no germs could live on my salary." That's the way that they were.* They didn't have any money, for they said, "*Silver and gold have I none;*"—oh, but they had something better than silver and gold; they said—"*but, such as I have, give I thee:*"—and, friend, that something that we all ought to have is Jesus; and then they said—"*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" (Acts 3:6) And they take him by the right hand and lift him, and immediately his ankles and his feet receive strength, and he realizes that he's been healed.

Now, the next chapter tells us that he had been this way for forty years—a forty-year-old man who had never walked; not one step had he taken. And now he's leaping, dancing, and praising God. And now he enters into the gate Beautiful, into the temple of God, in with the people of God, loving God, serving God, and praising God with the people of God. It was a miracle.

"Well," you say, "Pastor, do you have the power to perform a miracle like that?" Nope, I don't, and I'm not expected to have it. Acts chapter 5 and verse 12 tells us that these were the works, the miracles, of an apostle. "*And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.*" (Acts 5:12)

Now God gave the apostles special power. You can read in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12 where the Apostle Paul there is arguing his apostolic authority, and he says, "*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*" (2 Corinthians 12:12) God gave the apostles certain power to authenticate the message of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And these were special miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles to give authenticity to the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now in Acts chapter 4 this miracle is called a sign. Now, why is it called a sign? It was more than a miracle; it was a miracle with a message. That is, there was a sermon in this miracle. It is meant to illustrate an even greater truth. And it would be a shame if you would only see the physical miracle. We don't deny the physical miracle, but there's a greater miracle and a greater truth that lay behind this sign. You see, it is all of us.

This man was born crippled, and he represents all of those of us who are spiritually and morally crippled by birth. The Bible says, *“In sin did my mother conceive me.”* (Psalm 51:5) Here is a man who cannot walk, and here is a man who cannot work, and here is a man who could not worship. And what he needed was a touch from Almighty God, more than merely in the physical realm, but in the spiritual realm.

You see, these miracles that Jesus did, John the Apostle calls them also signs, as in when Jesus opened blinded eyes. The greater truth is that men are spiritually blind; and except for a man who is born again, they cannot see the kingdom of heaven. And when Jesus unstopped deaf ears, the greater miracle is that men need their spiritual ears unstopped, because, as Jesus said, *“Having ears, hear ye not?”* (Mark 8:18) And when Jesus raised the dead, He was giving the greater lesson that men are dead in trespasses and in sin. And Christ said, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”*; talking to people whose hearts were already beating, but saying, *“I am come that they might have life.”* (John 10:10) And when Jesus, through the apostles, healed this man, then what He was saying is this: All of us need a touch from God to live a beautiful life, to walk the walk of God, to do the works of God, to worship God, and to go through that gate of God into the house of God with the people of God to have a beautiful life. He wants to make something beautiful of your life today. So these men were confronted with a miracle—the miracle that confronted them.

#### **A. A Miracle That Could Not Be Reasonably Denied**

Now I want you to notice several things about this miracle. The very first thing that I want you to notice is that it was a miracle that could not be reasonably denied. Look in verse 11: *“And as the lame man who was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering.”* (Acts 3:11) I mean, it was there, folks. The only way that you could deny this miracle would have been to close your eyes. They knew him. For forty years, this man had been begging. They knew him. It could not be reasonably denied.

#### **B. A Miracle That Could Not Be Humanly Explained**

Secondly, it was a miracle that could not be humanly explained. Look in verse 12: *“And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man walk?”* (Acts 3:12) “Don’t give us the credit for it; we don’t take the credit for this.” There is no human explanation for what has happened.

#### **C. A Miracle That Could Not Be Lightly Dismissed**

It could not be reasonably denied—verse 11. It could not be humanly explained—verse 12. And therefore it could not be lightly dismissed—verse 13. Here’s what Peter says: *“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified*

*his Son, Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he”—that is, Pilate—“was determined to let him go.” (Acts 3:13)*

Now, what is Peter saying? Peter is saying, “Do you want to know who did this? Jesus. You’ve still got Jesus on your hands. I mean, this Jesus that you denied, this Jesus that you delivered up, this Jesus that you thought you crucified, this Jesus that you thought that you’ve been finished with—He is the One who healed him.” They couldn’t get rid of Jesus. *They are like the man who bought a new boomerang and killed himself trying to throw the old one away. Jesus just keeps coming back.* And now he’s saying, “What are you going to do about it? I mean, you cannot lightly dismiss that a miracle has been done.”

Now, folks, let me tell you something. If you don’t believe in Jesus Christ, then let me tell you: you have still got Christ on your hands, and He is still performing miracles. I mean, listen. You are going to have to be confronted with a miracle. His life was a miracle. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension are miracles. Then there are physical miracles, such as the healing of this man; and the spiritual miracles, such as my own life. You say, “Oh, you’re bragging.” Oh no, friend. I’m testifying. My life is a miracle—a miracle! You can’t explain what has happened to Adrian Rogers. You will never explain what has happened to me these blessed years since I’ve known Jesus, except that God worked a miracle in my heart and in my life. I know it is so. I know day by day that the life I live is a miracle life, that God is alive, and that He is doing something in me. And every Christian who has been changed by the power of God and all of those of us who will open our eyes and look around will have to testify, unless we have bigotry and prejudice, that God is a God of miracle. He is still changing lives today.

*I heard of a little girl who was standing on the edge of a crowd while her daddy was giving a testimony. It was a street meeting—an old-fashioned Salvation Army street meeting. This man was standing up, testifying how Jesus Christ had saved him and delivered him from his alcoholism, his craving of drink, and the old life that he had, and he was giving Jesus the glory. And there was a cynic on the edge of that crowd who said, “Oh, why don’t you just shut up and sit down? You’re just dreaming!” That cynic felt that little girl pull at the tug of his coat. And that little girl was a beautiful little girl, quite mature for her age; she and said, “Sir, that’s my daddy that you’re talking about. You say my daddy is dreaming. Let me tell you about my daddy. My daddy used to be a drunkard. He used to come home drunk. He used to hit my mother, and she would cry most of the day.” And she said, “We didn’t have good clothes to wear, because my daddy spent all of his money on whiskey.” She said, “Sometimes I didn’t even have shoes to wear to school.” “Look,” she said, “Look at those shoes. Look at this dress. My daddy has a good job. Over there is my mother. She is happy now. She doesn’t cry around the house now; she sings around the house, even when she’s ironing. My*

mother is happy now. And Jesus changed my daddy, and Jesus has changed our home. And if my daddy is dreaming, then please don't wake him up." Amen?

Oh, listen. Let me tell you something friend. He is a God of might, a God of miracle—and there are miracles that cannot be denied. And the first step is this: They were confronted with the miracle.

## II. The Murder That Condemned Them

But notice not only the miracle that confronted them; notice, secondly, the murder that condemned them. Now Peter goes on. Now that he has their attention, he begins to say in verse 14, *"But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."* (Acts 3:14) And now Peter points his finger in their face and he accuses them of murdering the Prince of life. And the way he did it is this: He said, "Do you remember what you did? You were in that crowd when Pilate said, 'Which of these two men shall I release unto you: Barabbas or Jesus?'" Now, remember Pilate said, "I'm going to release a man to you today. Which of the two?" Peter said, *"Ye denied [the Lord] and desired a murderer to be granted unto you."*

I want to tell you something, ladies and gentlemen: God arranged it so that Barabbas was a portrait and a picture of every unsaved man, woman, boy, and girl in this world. Think about it.

### A. Barabbas Was a Thief

In the first place, the Bible tells us that Barabbas—that man that was released that day, that man they chose that day—was a thief. And every man without Christ is a thief. "Oh," you say, "don't call me a thief, Pastor." Well, I just called you one—a thief. You say, "Why am I a thief? I don't steal." Listen. If you haven't given God the glory, and if you have not submitted your life to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then you have robbed Him of that glory that is due to His holy name, and you live here on this earth and you walk God's green earth breathing God's pure air, receiving God's sunshine and God's rain, and eating God's food. God is your landlord, and you do not serve Him: you have stolen from God. The Bible says, *"Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."* (Malachi 3:9) *"The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof."* (Psalm 24:1) And you owe to Him, dear friend, that allegiance, that alliance, and that service that is His. You fail to give it, and thus you steal.

### B. Barabbas Was a Rebel

Well, not only was Barabbas a thief; Barabbas was also a rebel. The Bible says that he was arrested for insurrection. And every man, woman, boy, or girl without the Lord Jesus Christ is a rebel against God. When you refuse God, when you refuse Christ, it is

not just merely that you miss a blessing. Unbelief is a clenched fist in the face of God. Unbelief says, “God—if there be a God—you are not big enough to make me serve you. I am my own god. I am going to live my own life.” And there is rebellion against Almighty God—and the crime of the man without Christ—are you listening?—is the crime of high treason against heaven’s King.

### C. **Barabbas Was a Murderer**

But not only was Barabbas a thief; and not only was he a rebel; he was also a murderer. That’s what Peter tells us right here: *“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.”* “You chose a murderer, and you denied the Prince of light.” You say, “Well, Pastor, you can’t charge me with murder.” I just did. You’re a murderer. You say, “I never killed anyone.” You killed the Son of God. You killed the Son of God! You see, when you choose Barabbas, you deny Jesus. You say, “Well, I want Barabbas, but I don’t want to deny Jesus.” Listen, friend. It’s never Christ and Barabbas; it’s always Christ or Barabbas. Jesus said in Matthew 12, verse 30, *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”* (Matthew 12:30)

Our sins nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. Our hard hearts drove those nails. And maybe those people there that day—those twenty thousand—they didn’t literally nail Jesus to the cross. But I want to say that Peter said, “You murdered Him. You murdered Him! If you’re not with Him, then you’re against Him. If you don’t crown Him, then you crucify Him.” And in God’s court, in heaven’s court, our sins crucified Him, and we are implicated in His murder.

Dr. Robert G. Lee, former pastor of this church, one time was witnessing to a man. And the man was getting under conviction of sin and he said, “Well, Preacher, I guess that I’ve done just about everything—except kill a man.” Dr. Lee said, “You did that, too.”

Now, listen. What he does is this: to bring them under conviction. O God, Holy Spirit, help the people who sit in church this morning, so dressed, so nice, so cultured, who come and go, to understand that in the sight of God they are guilty for the decision of the murder of God. The same kind of crowd that was there in the temple area that day is the crowd that listens to me today. People who were religious and little dreamed the crime that condemned them.

## III. **The Message That Converted Them**

Now, notice, first of all, there was a miracle that confronted them. Secondly, there was a murder that condemned them. Now, thirdly, after this platform is laid, there was a message that converted them. Once they had seen these things—on the one hand, they had seen the mighty miracleA working power of God; and, secondly, they had seen

their part, their complicity, in the very death of the Son of God—now the stage is set for one of the greatest evangelistic messages ever preached. And I want you to see the message that converted them.

### A. He Is a Risen Lord

The Apostle Peter begins to preach, and point number one in his message is: A Risen Lord. Look in verse 15: *“And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”* (Acts 3:15)

Now, listen, folks. The death of Jesus Christ is a clearly authenticated fact. In Acts chapter 1, verse 3, the Bible says, *“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs.”* (Acts 1:3) There is more evidence that Jesus Christ came out of that grave than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived. *“By many infallible proofs.”* No one who will look at the facts can deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that when Jesus Christ was put in that grave, the religious leaders warned the Roman leaders, “He has said that He’s going to be raised from the dead. Now it may be that His disciples will come in here and try to steal the body, so we want you to seal that tomb and make it as sure as you can.” And so they put a great stone in front of the tomb. It would have taken a forklift to move that stone in front of the tomb. And then they put a seal upon that tomb. And then they took Roman soldiers there to guard that tomb. If you know anything about Roman law, then you know that a Roman soldier, derelict in his duties, suffered the penalty of death.

Now, do you remember what happened that Easter morning? When Jesus Christ came, the stone was rolled away. Now actually the stone was blown away. It was not rolled up the track, but in a place separate, all the way over. Human beings could never have lifted and moved the stone that far. Well, the Sanhedrin got all antsy, and the Bible tells us—the Sanhedrin being the Jewish high court—that they paid those Roman guards and told those Roman guards, “Listen. Say that the disciples came and stole the body.” You can read about that in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 12.

Now, let’s suppose that they had a court case there that day to prove what happened to the body of Jesus. Let’s examine this. They didn’t have a court trial—and I’ll tell you why: they didn’t want one. They didn’t want to hear the evidence. Suppose they had had a court trial. Can you imagine how ridiculous it would have been? The judge is there, and first of all he summons—a subpoena goes out—and those guards come, and the judge says, “Are you the guards that were given the job of guarding the tomb?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “Is it your testimony that the disciples stole the body of Jesus?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “Were you guarding the tomb?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “Well, when did they steal the body of Jesus?” “While we were asleep.” “You were asleep? Do you know that to sleep on guard duty is a crime worthy of death?” “Well, yes, Your Honor.” “Well, have you been arrested?” “Well, no.” “Well, why haven’t you been

arrested?” “Well, we don’t know, Your Honor.” “Well, you say that the disciples stole the body while you were asleep, is that right?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “Well, if you were asleep, then how do you know what happened?” “We don’t know, Your Honor.” “Throw these bums out of court.” Can you imagine the ridiculousness of a trial like that? “Now, bring the disciples in. Do you know where the body is?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “Have you seen it?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “All of you?” “Yes, Your Honor.” “All of you were alone?” “Oh, no, Your Honor. He was seen by five hundred people at one time. Call them in, if you wish, Your Honor.”

Listen, friend. Let me tell you something. They didn’t want to put those people on trial that day. He was shown alive by many infallible proofs. As I told you before, many of these disciples paid for their testimony with their very lives. Now a man may sometimes live for a lie. No man knowingly dies for a lie. But they sealed their testimony with their blood. And so, the first point in this sermon is that He is a risen Lord, and we are witnesses.

### **B. He Is a Residing Lord**

But not only is He a risen Lord; He is a residing Lord. Not only is He alive; He is present. Look in verse 16 of this same chapter of Acts: “*And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong...*”—now the word *name* stands for “character, nature”; just change it—“*And his [nature] through faith in his [nature] hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*” (Acts 3:16) What is he saying? That Jesus did it. It is done in His name, in His nature, and in His power. He is not an absentee Lord; He is a residing Lord. He is here. He is present.

### **C. He Is a Redeeming Lord**

Not only is He a risen Lord, and therefore a residing Lord, but thank God that now He sets the stage for the message and He is a redeeming Lord. Look in verses 17 and 18: “*And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shown by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*” (Acts 3:17–18) Now, friend, listen. This thing was not done in a corner, and it was done exactly as God had said; through the centuries it would be done to the fulfillment of Holy Scripture. And fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest proofs of the character, the deity, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. And now He tells them in verse 19 that because of this they can be saved: “*Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*” (Acts 3:19) Hallelujah!

Now, listen. Do you want to be saved? Repent. Do you want a beautiful life? Do you want to be spiritually healed? Then, repent. What does *repentance* mean? The Greek work for “repentance” literally means “a change of mind”; *metanoia*: “a change of mind.”

Well, what does that mean? Well, you change your way of thinking. Before you're saved, you say, "I am boss, and I have no room for Jesus." But now you say, "He is Lord." Before you're saved, you say, "Sin is best." Now you say, "Sin is wrong, and righteousness is best." Before you're saved, you say, "I think I can make it by myself." And now you say, "I can't do it by myself: I need the Lord." Before you're saved, you sometimes fall after self, sin, and Satan. But what is repentance? Repentance is a change of mind about self, about sin, about the Savior, and about Satan. It is a change of mind. It is an about-face. And Jesus said in Luke chapter 13 and verse 3, "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3) You don't have any hope of heaven unless you repent. And if you have joined a church and you have never repented, then I would hate to be in your shoes at the Judgment. Repent, and be converted.

Have you repented? Have you? Has there been a radical, dramatic change in your life, where you say, "I'm sick and tired of the old way. I'm going the new way. I want Christ"? Repent. Now that doesn't mean that if you can clean up your life, then God will save you. You can't clean up your life without Him. But, dear friend, you have to be willing for Him to clean it up. There has to be a heart attitude. *Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life.*

When you repent, Christ comes in and He gives you the power to live the life that you could not live. I'm not telling you that if you can be good enough, then Jesus will save you. None of us can be good enough. But there still must be that time in our hearts and in our lives when we say, "I'm tired of the old way. I want God to work a miracle in me—a greater miracle than the healing of that lame man so long ago." "*Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" (Acts 3:19) That speaks of something beautiful that He's going to make out of your life. "*Times of refreshing*"—I looked this up in several translations of the Scripture yesterday. One of them says "seasons of refreshing." I love that. Another says "better and brighter days from the Lord." But, friend, no repenting, no refreshing. Have you received the Lord? Look. Listen. He is a risen Lord. He is a residing Lord. He is alive and present. He is a redeeming Lord. Repent, and be converted.

#### **D. He Is a Returning Lord**

And then, the last thing in this great gospel sermon that Peter says is that He is a returning Lord. Notice verses 20 and 21: "*And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the age began.*" (Acts 3:20–21) Do you know what the Bible has been saying since the creation of the world? That Jesus is going to come and redeem us, He's going to go back to

heaven, and then He's coming back again to restore everything. I mean, He is going to make it all right, folks.

*What is this world coming to? It's coming to Jesus.* And if the outlook looks glum, then I want to tell you that the *up-look* is very bright. Jesus is coming, and heaven has received Him until the time of restitution. I don't want you to be in hell when all that is going on. I don't want you to be on the wrong side of the gate; I want you to be inside the gate called Beautiful. And I want you to be like this man—leaping, dancing, and praising God—when Jesus comes again.

Listen. What a day it's going to be when our Lord comes again. The first time, He came as a Lamb. When He comes again, He is coming as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The first time He came, He came to redeem. But when He comes again, He is coming to reign. When He came the first time, they asked, "*Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*" (Matthew 2:2) When He comes again, He is coming as King of kings and Lord of lords. When He came the first time, they gave Him a crown of thorns. When He comes again, in the restitution, He will wear a diadem of glory. He came the first time in poverty. But, friend, He's coming again in power. When He came the first time, He had an escort of angels. When He comes again, He will come with tens of thousands of His saints. He came the first time in meekness. He's coming again in majesty.

## Conclusion

Now, put it all together folks, if you want a beautiful life. Picture yourself on the wrong side of the gate. Picture yourself, spiritually, as a cripple—unable to walk the walk of God, unable to work the work of God, unable to enter into the worship of God—on the wrong side of the gate. Picture a new life. Picture a gate gloriously beautiful. You are right on the wrong side of that gate, and you can't enter in without a miracle. I want you to picture the Lord Jesus Christ who was in Simon Peter that day. I want you to picture Him coming by you today and looking down at you, and I want you to picture today Jesus reaching down to you with a nail-pierced hand, taking you by your right hand, raising you up, spiritually giving you a lift that will last, and giving to you, my dear friend, the power to enter in through the gate to the ports of God.

That's what this miracle is all about. God wants to give you today a new life. He wants to make something beautiful of your life. The miracle that confronted them, the murder that condemned them, the message that converted them—a risen, a residing Lord; a redeeming, a returning Lord.

If you will just say, "Lord, just come and save me; Jesus, save me," then He will; for the Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" (Acts 16:31) I want every head bowed and every eye closed—no one stirring. Are you saved? I didn't say, "Are you a member of the church?" I'm not asking if you're a Baptist, a Methodist,

or a Presbyterian. Are you saved? Does God's Holy Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? If not—if you don't know that if you died right now you'd go to heaven, then I want you to pray a prayer like this: "Dear Lord..."—just speak to Him out of your heart—"Dear Lord, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. And, Lord, spiritually, I'm crippled, and I'm on the wrong side of the gate. But, Lord, I reach up now with the hand of faith. Save me, Jesus. Come into my heart. Save me, and make something beautiful of my life. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Holy Boldness

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 28, 2001

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 4

*“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.”*

ACTS 4:29

## Outline

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- I. Keep Company with God the Son
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## Introduction

Would you find the book of Acts, turn to chapter 4, and as you’re finding it, may I ask you a question: Are you a bold Christian? Or, perhaps, are you a cowardly Christian? May I put it this way: If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Do your neighbors know that you are a Christian?

A little boy had a mongrel dog, and a man asked him, “Son, what kind of dog is that?” “Oh,” he said, “he is a police dog.” The man said, “Well, he doesn’t look like a police dog.” The little boy said, “Well, he’s in the secret service.” I think we have a lot of Christians today who are cowardly Christians. They are saved, but somehow they are in the secret service.

There is the curse of cowardly Christians. They don’t want to be seen in the office with a Bible on their desk. They don’t want to be seen in the cafeteria bowing their head and thanking God for their food. They don’t want to witness the saving love of Jesus Christ when there’s an opportunity, afraid that someone may dislike them, or criticize them, or whatever. Now they’re saved, but they are cowardly Christians.

Well, we’re going to look at some verses today—chapter 4, verse 13—and I want

you to notice the word *boldness* that is used in all three of these verses that I'm going to read: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13) Now, go to verse 29: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." (Acts 4:29) That's the second use of the word *boldness* in this chapter. Now, go down to verse 31: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31) Three times in this chapter he uses the word *boldness*. One time, it's associated with God the Son; the other time, with God the Father; the third time with God the Holy Spirit: *boldness, boldness, boldness*.

Are you a bold believer, or are you a cowardly Christian? Do you want to be a bold believer? What is boldness in the first place? Well, some people think that they are bold, and they're just arrogant. They have bad manners, and sometimes bad breath to go with it. That's not boldness. Those people turn more people off than bring people to the Lord Jesus. We're to be gentle, apt to teach, and in nothing give offense. Don't think that if you go around getting in people's face that you are necessarily bold. Boldness is not arrogance; and boldness is not presumption, where you just do things to show how much courage that you have.

For example, there are people who in some churches, in certain areas of the United States, that handle snakes—big, long, juicy rattlesnakes; pick them up and handle them to show how bold they are. That is not boldness, friend; that is stupidity. Now they are sincere. You have to be sincere to pick up a venomous rattlesnake.

One time I heard of a gospel quartet that went into one of these churches—you've probably heard the story—and they did not realize it was a snake-handling church out in the backwoods. When they brought the rattlesnakes out, this one man in the quartet said to the preacher, who was sitting next to him, "Does this church building have a back door?" He said, "No, it doesn't." He said, "Where would you like one?"

Arrogance. Presumption. This is not boldness. What is boldness? Boldness is having the courage to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ in the face of opposition.

Now as we look here at this particular passage, what has happened is this. There has been a man that was healed. He was lame from his birth, and the apostles healed him right there at the beautiful gate. We read about that in chapter 3. It's the gate leading into the eastern side of the temple. It was made of Corinthian brass. It was incredibly glorious and beautiful. This poor beggar was on the wrong side of the gate, and he was asking alms. And Peter and John said, "*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise and walk.*" (Acts 3:6) And a miracle was done.

And those Pharisees and Sadducees, and others who hated the Lord Jesus Christ, whose hearts were filled with venom, could not deny the miracle, but they thought, “Perhaps we can contain it if we tell the apostles not to preach any more in the name of Jesus.” Well, of course, they were not able to stop them and keep them from preaching. They brought them before the apostles. Look in verse 9. They asked him, “How are you doing this?” And they said, *“If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified...”*—now this is Simon Peter talking. He’s not cowardly anymore. He’s not denying Jesus Christ anymore. They put him on trial, but he is not the defendant; he becomes the prosecuting attorney—*“whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.”* That is, “We didn’t raise this man from the dead. Jesus Christ raised him from the dead.” *“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.”* And now I want you to notice how bold he is: *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:9–12)

And let me just pull over and park here for just a moment. Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved. Now if you say that today, the world is going to come down on you like a hammer. They’re going to call you arrogant. They’re going to call you bigoted. They’re going to call you narrow. Whatever else they may call you, they also ought to call you a Bible-believing Christian. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* Now that was a bold statement. I mean, it is bold to turn to those who crucified the Lord Jesus and say, “You crucified Him. God has made Him the head of the corner. There is no salvation in any other.” *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”* (Acts 4:13)

What is the basis of our boldness? It’s linked to the Holy Trinity. And we’re going to see that right now. And I want to tell you how to be a bold Christian, and I want to give a testimony. What I am saying today is not something that I have learned out of a book; it is something that I have found from the book, the Word of God, and something that I have experienced in my life, and continue to experience, as I preach and witness and testify. Here is the basis of my boldness. This can be the basis of your boldness. These three things can keep you from being a cowardly Christian and being intimidated by Satan. The Bible says we are in nothing to be terrified by our adversary. (Philippians 1:28) And if there were ever a need for a bold Christian, this is the time; this is the day; this is the hour.

## I. Keep Company with God the Son

Number one: Keep company with God the Son. Now we're going to talk to you in a moment about God the Father and God the Spirit. But, first of all, keep company with God the Son. Now, look in verse 13: *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and took knowledge of them,"*—what?—*"that they had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4:13) They were keeping company with the Son of God. You cannot walk in His presence and be a coward; you just can't do it. Now Jesus is alive and well on Planet Earth. They said, "How did this man get healed?" They said, "Don't blame it on us. Blame it on Jesus. Give Him the glory. By Him, by His name, by His presence, this man was healed."

Now, walk with Jesus. Make certain that Jesus is real to you. I want to say to you—and I say this from my heart in all sincerity: Jesus Christ is real to the man named Adrian Rogers. He is real to me. He is just as real as that man that I sat next to—and more real to me. I have talked with Him. I have fellowshiped with Him. I love Him. He is real to me. He is not somebody that I read about in a book.

I love the song, Brother Jim—sometimes the people want to take it out of the hymnal because they think it's ephemeral and syrupy—it's one of the greatest songs in hymnody: "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear falling on my ear the Son of God discloses. And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own." And the voice I hear is the voice of Jesus. No one else knows what we know as believers. Jesus Christ is not in heaven peering through the clouds. Jesus said, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20) Jesus Christ is here. That's the reason you ought to sing. That's the reason you ought to worship. That's the reason you ought to rejoice. He has not left us alone. He is here with us always.

One of the first times I was ever called on to witness, I was just a kid; I had not been saved very long. My dear sweet mother, who is in heaven right now, was a young lady in the church, and they gave my mother an assignment taking a survey. That is one thing my mother did not want to do, go from door to door taking a survey, a Christian survey. And, bless her heart, she unloaded that on me. She said, "Adrian, will you take this survey for me?" And I said, "Yes, Mama, I will." And there in West Palm Beach, Florida, I went to my first door and I said, "Oh, I don't want to do this. I don't want to knock on that door. I'm afraid. I don't know what's behind that door. I don't know what anybody is going to say." And at that moment the Scripture came to me. Jesus said, "You go and make disciples; and, lo, I am with you." (Matthew 28:19–20) *"Lo, I am with you."* I cannot tell you the change that made in my heart just as a boy, a new Christian. I said, "Well, listen, Jesus: we're going together to this door," and I went down that street with Jesus. You see, that's where the boldness comes from: knowing that the Lord

Jesus Christ is with you.

They're telling us we can't take Jesus into the public schools. Oh, we can. Let me tell you how we can take Him into the public schools. I was coming back to this country. And, you know, when you come back to this country, if you've been overseas, you have to go through security. And there are several things they won't let you bring when you go through security. You can't bring in, you know, fruits and vegetables, and animal life, and certain products, food products. And there was a man in front of me. He had some gourmet cheese. And the inspector there said, "I'm sorry, sir, you cannot bring this cheese into this country." But he said, "I paid a lot of money." "No, you can't bring it in." He said, "I will bring it in." He said, "You will not bring it in." He said, "I will, too, bring it in." He walked back there and ate it, and then walked right on through. He said, "I'm going to rewrap it." Pretty smart.

Listen. They may say that we can't take Jesus in the public schools; but, friend, He's in us. He is in us. There is no way that they can keep Jesus out. As long as Christ is in us, then boys and girls can go to school with Jesus, and we just permeate every school in Memphis with Jesus Christ, because He is with us—actually, literally, within us.

They marveled and took knowledge of them. They said, "They're unlearned. They're ignorant. They haven't been to seminary. They haven't been to college." "Yes, but they have been with Jesus." That's the basis of boldness: you keep company with God the Son. You see, Jesus didn't come to get you out of trouble, mister; He came to get into trouble with you. And He will be with you.

## **II. Have Confidence in God the Father**

Now, here's the second basis of boldness: Not only, keep company with God the Son; but, number two, have confidence in God the Father. Now they told them not to preach anymore; but now, notice in verse 24: "*And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God*"—he's talking now about God the Father—"with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which has made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants,"—here it is again—"that with all boldness they may speak thy word." (Acts 4:24–29) They said, "Don't speak anymore." And they said, "O God, just give us more power to do exactly what they told us that we could not do."

Now they not only were keeping company with God the Son; they were having confidence in God the Father. You know, you have to get things in perspective. If you don't get things in perspective, you're going to get spooked. The devil is going to have you on the run. But when you have things in perspective, when you see God, who He is really is, the man who can kneel before God can stand before anyone else. One fear—a holy fear of God—removes all other fears. You see, they saw God.

#### A. Confidence in God as the Creator of All Things

Look at this now. Here is the confidence they had. They had confidence in God as the creator of all things. Look in verse 24: *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.”* This is God who scooped out the oceans, who heaped up the mountains, who dotted the universe with stars, billions and billions and billions of stars, out over the velvety blackness of space; and they were saying, “God, you made it all. Why should we tremble when you are our Father? Why should we be intimidated when a God who can do such things is on our side?”

A college student asked his pastor, “Pastor, do you believe there’s life on other planets, other places out in space?” The pastor said, “No, son, I really don’t believe there is.” He said, “Now, Pastor, think about it. There are billions and billions and billions and billions and billions of stars, and you don’t believe there’s life out there anywhere?” He said, “I can’t prove there’s not, but I just don’t believe there is.” And then the college student said, “Well, Pastor, why did God go to all that trouble to make all that stuff?” The pastor said, “What trouble?” There it is. Only God could do that. He spoke, and universes drip from His fingers. What a mighty God we serve!

#### B. Confidence in God as the Controller of All Things

You see, they had confidence in God as the creator of all things. And so it follows, as night follows day, they saw God as the controller of all things. Now, listen. You’ve got to get your perspective right. Look, beginning in verse 25. They speak of God the Father, *“who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord...”*—boy, can you see that as they stand on their two big feet, stick out their big chest, and shake their puny fist in the face of Almighty God? They stand up—*“together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,”*—now, watch this—*“for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”* I love it. God is the creator of all things, and He is the controller of all things.

Do you think dark Gethsemane and bloody Calvary were a mistake? Do you think

things got out of hand? Do you think God is walking up and down in heaven saying, “Oh, no; oh, no, what am I going to do now? What am I going to do now?” Do you think the Holy Spirit ever meets in emergency session to say, “Oh my! Look now what has happened! Look! They’ve crucified the Son of God”? Oh, no. Not a blade of grass moves without His permission. *“To do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”*

### C. Confidence in God as the Conqueror of All Things

Look up here and let me tell you something, friend. God has never lost control, and God never says, “Oops.” God is in control. Now that ought to give you courage. And know that He is the creator of all things. He is the controller of all things. And therefore He is the conqueror of all things. Peter here is quoting Psalm 2, and he says, “The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and His Christ, His anointed.” But Psalm 2 goes on to say, *“Yet have I set my king upon the holy hill of Zion.”* (Psalm 2:6)

I want to give you good news: We win! Jesus Christ is going to be enthroned in Jerusalem. Sin can’t win. Faith can’t fail. Things are not right in this world right now, because, as I’ve told you before, things are out of place. The church is the bride, and the bride belongs with the groom—and we will be at the Rapture. Jesus is the King, and the King belongs on the throne: He will be when He comes again. Satan is the criminal, and he belongs in the dungeon—and he will be when Jesus comes again. *“Yet have I set my king upon the holy hill of Zion.”* You know, sometimes you look at the ebb and flow of things, and you get the idea, “Well, everything has gone wrong. Maybe God has failed. Maybe the Bible is not true.” No! No! Sin cannot win. Faith cannot fail.

I was raised in Florida on the east coast. I love the ocean. I love to watch the ocean. I love what a poet wrote when she said:

*On the far reef the breakers recoil in shattered foam,  
While still the sea behind them urges its forces home.  
Its song of triumph surges o’er all the thunderous din:  
The wave may break in failure, But, the tide is sure to win!  
Oh! Mighty sea, thy message in clanging spray is cast.  
Within God’s plan of progress it matters not at last  
How wide the shores of evil, How strong the reefs of sin.  
The wave may be defeated, But, the tide is sure to win!*

PRISCILLA LEONARD

Now, don’t you get your eye on some little old wave. I’m telling you, God’s tide is moving, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ. (Revelation 11:15)

Now, what is your problem? Think about it today. Have you got it in your mind? Now,

double it. Make it twice as bad. Now, double what you've doubled. And now I want to ask you a question. Is that big to God? Of course not!

What is the basis of boldness? You must keep company with God the Son. You must have confidence in God the Father. When these people were terrified, they took their eyes off of man and put their eyes on God. The Bible says, *"The fear of man bringeth a snare."* (Proverbs 29:25) Take your eyes off of your problems. Focus your eyes upon Almighty God who is the creator of all things, who is the controller of all things, who is the conqueror of all things. That is the basis of your boldness.

### **III. Receive Courage from God the Spirit**

Now, here's the third thing if you would be bold today. Number one: Keep company with God the Son. Number two: Have confidence in God the Father. He is over all. He cannot fail. He must prevail. Have faith in God. Number three: Receive courage from God the Spirit. Now, begin reading again in verse 29 where we left off: *"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."* (Acts 4:29–31)

The first time, we mentioned God the Son. The second time, we mentioned God the Father. Now we're mentioning God the Spirit. And boldness is in the triune God. When we keep company with God the Son, when we have confidence in God the Father, then we receive courage from God the Spirit. God the Holy Spirit will give us the courage that we need to live for Him.

Now, notice what the apostle said: "Lord, look at their threatenings." Look, if you will, in verse 29: *"Behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word."* The word *servant* here is the Greek word that means "bondslave." Are you a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ? I try to make it a habit every day to lift my hands in surrender to the Lord, to say to the Lord, "I am your servant." Not really just simply a servant; this word means a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Boldness is not for rebels. You will never have boldness—true boldness—until you can say, "Now, Lord, grant your bondservant—your slave—boldness." Now when you do that, the Holy Spirit of God will give you courage. You know, if there is any unconfessed sin in your life, any unsundered area, you're not going to have boldness. The Bible says, *"The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."* (Proverbs 28:1) The wicked flee when no man pursues. He's always wondering, you know, do they know this? Have they heard that? Will I be discovered

here? Whatever. Oh, but when you can wake up and say, “There’s nothing between my soul and the Savior. Lord, I am your servant. I am your slave. Jesus is with me. God the Father is above me. Holy Spirit of God, you’re within me. Grant boldness to declare your Word.”

Now, what did they want courage for? All right, receive courage from God the Spirit.

#### **A. Courage to Express God’s Word**

They wanted courage to express God’s Word. Look again in verse 29: “...*with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” I think the curse of the twenty-first century is cowardly Christians who are not expressing the Word of God. These apostles did not ask for safety. They asked for courage. They asked for the ability to do more what got them in trouble in the first place.

By the way, I want not only courage for the man and woman in the pew. Do you know what I’m praying for, and what Joyce and I prayed for this morning? Courage for pastors. We need more pastors with courage. Now I don’t hold myself up as the paragon of excellence in that area, but *I’m truly convinced there’s not a whole lot wrong in America that could not be radically, dramatically, and swiftly put back in place if all across America we had a generation of preachers who would open the Word of God, filled with the Spirit of God, and preach the Christ of God, without fear of intimidation, or worrying about being politically correct.* Preach the Word of God.

#### **B. Courage to Extend God’s Hand**

They wanted courage to express God’s Word. They wanted courage to extend God’s hand. Look in verse 30: “Lord, give us courage, *‘by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy hold child Jesus.’* O God, let your miracle-working power flow through our hand.” Well, you say, “I thought Jesus did it.” Yes, He does. Look in chapter 5, verse 12: “*By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.*” (Acts 5:12) And the word *by* actually means “through.” Jesus Christ is doing it through us. Anything that you’re doing that can be explained apart from Jesus is not worth anything.

#### **C. Courage to Exalt God’s Son**

Now, what did they want? They wanted courage to express God’s Word. They wanted courage to extend God’s hand. They wanted courage to exalt God’s Son. Look again in verse 30: “*By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*” The *name* means the authority of Jesus.

Did you know that people don’t want you to mention the name of Jesus anymore? I just read an article the other day where Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard law professor, I believe, took great exception when Franklin Graham prayed the inaugural prayer in the name of Jesus. You know, the name of Jesus today is the name people don’t like. You

can pray; just don't pray in the name of Jesus. Just don't lift up the name of Jesus.

Friend, I want to tell you something. If there was ever a generation that needs boldness about Jesus, it is this generation. And don't you let them dumb you down about praying in the name of Jesus. You know, I go to a public occasion somewhere and they call on me to pray—well, friend, if they don't want me to pray in the name of Jesus, then they ought not to ask me, because that's the way I pray.

It would be a form of religious persecution and bigotry to tell me I ought not to pray the way I pray. I don't expect a Jew to pray in the name of Jesus. I wouldn't have respect for a Jew who prayed in the name of Jesus if he didn't believe in Jesus. I'd have more respect for him if he prayed the way he normally prayed. I would have no respect for a Muslim who prayed any differently in public than he prays in private. I want him to pray the way he prays. I want a Jew to pray the way he prays. I want a Christian to pray the way he prays.

And all they do, they prate about pluralism. They don't mean pluralism. What they mean is syncretism. Just dumb it all down so it means nothing to everybody, and then we'll let you mumble a little mumbo-jumbo. No. Don't be ashamed of Jesus. Don't be afraid to lift up the name of Jesus. Holy Spirit of God, give us courage to express your Word, to extend your hand, to exalt your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now not everybody will believe in Jesus. And I would not force Jesus on anyone. But I don't want anyone telling me I cannot express the Lord Jesus and I cannot exalt the Lord Jesus.

Now, what happened? When these people were filled with boldness, go down to verse 31: *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”* Now, look in verse 33: *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”* (Acts 4:33) And there were multitudes who were swept into the kingdom of heaven.

## **Conclusion**

Now as I bring this message to a close, let me tell you something. I'm calling upon Bellevue Church to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in Shelby County and any surrounding county that is in that general circumference. Now we won't do it in a year, but this is the Year of Evangelism, and the challenge to Bellevue today is to make Jesus known to our neighbors. And we don't want to be here in this county without making certain that everyone understands who Jesus Christ is and how to get to heaven. They will not all believe, but we're going to share the Lord Jesus Christ with them.

You say, “Adrian, the day of evangelism is passed.” You are wrong. You say,

“People are not interested in Jesus.” You’re wrong again. Surveys have been taken, and today research shows us that there is today, in the hour and the day in which we live, a harvest of souls greater than any that the apostles witnessed here in the book of Acts. There are massive victories being won in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is growing three times faster than the world’s population.

Every day almost 200,000 profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is the fastest growing faith in the world with a 6.9 percent growth rate compared to 2.7 percent Muslim, 2.2 percent Hindu, and 1.7 percent Buddhist. Listen to that again. Our faith is the fastest growing in the world. Listen. More than seventy percent of the progress of world evangelization, from the time of Christ until today, has occurred since 1900—more than seventy percent. Now seventy percent of that progress has happened since World War II. And seventy percent of that progress has happened in the last sixteen months.

Souls are coming to Jesus Christ every day by hundreds of thousands, and they will come to Jesus in our world today if we will stop being cowardly Christians, if we’ll stop being in the secret service. You may be a little afraid. You may feel a little intimidated. But remember, I’m not talking about arrogance. I’m not talking about brashness. I’m talking about courage to express God’s Word, to extend God’s hand, to exalt God’s Son.

# The Secret of Holy Boldness

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date:** January 11, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 4:1–4, 13

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Expecting the Persecution
- II. Expressing the Persuasion
- III. Experiencing the Presence
- IV. Exalting the Person

Conclusion

## Introduction

**W**e need an epidemic of holy boldness. The Bible says here in Acts 4, verse 13, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Now if you’re one of those who wish that you had more courage to testify and witness for Jesus, then I want you to pay attention. I am convinced that many of us want to share our faith, and want to tell others about our Savior, but we’ve been intimidated and we are cowardly Christians.

When I was a little boy, there used to be a program on the radio called *The Low Pressure Salesman*. And he had to go out and make sales, but he was intimidated by people. And he would knock on the door, and then say, “Nobody home I hope... I hope... I hope.” Do you remember that program? That’ll date you if you remember that: *The Low Pressure Salesman*. And I believe that there are a lot of people like that—when they go out to testify for Jesus, their loyalty makes them go, on the one hand; but their fear makes them slow, on the other hand; and they just are not the vibrant testimony for Jesus that they ought to be.

Well, what made Peter and John so bold? Well, I want us to go back and get the setting here, if we can, and I begin reading now in chapter 4, verses 1 through 4: “*And as they spoke unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody unto the next day*”—now, that means they were in jail—“*for it was now eventide. But many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand*” (Acts 4:1–4).

## I. Expecting the Persecution

Point number one: If you are going to be a bold witness for Jesus Christ, then you can expect persecution. You can expect it. They were persecuted, and so will you be if you get bold for Jesus Christ. The servant is not greater than his master. Now it's very obvious to see why they were persecuted. The persecution was really not against them; it was against Jesus. Now remember that we've told you that the book of Acts is not what the apostles were doing; the book of Acts is what Jesus Christ was doing in the apostles.

Now I told you this morning about a man—a lame man—at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and how this man was miraculously, supernaturally, instantaneously, dramatically, and radically healed and changed. Now people wanted to know how it was done. Go back to chapter 3, and verse 12: *“And when Peter saw it, he answered the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we made this man walk?”* (Acts 3:12). Peter's saying, “Hey, don't give us credit for this.” And then look, if you will, in chapter 4 and verse 10. Here's what Peter says, again, *“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified”—now watch—“whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you well”* (Acts 4:10). It was Jesus Christ who had healed this man.

Now the Sadducees did not believe in the Resurrection, and their petty doctrine had been touched. And rather than examine their doctrine, they opposed the truth. And there were the chief priests—they were the ones who held sway in the temple. And now people were leaving them and going after the Nazarene—after the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they persecuted Peter and John, they weren't really persecuting Peter and John; they were persecuting Jesus. And I want you to understand this, dear friend, that if you are in Christ and Christ is in you—if the resurrected Christ dwells in you—the same world that hated Jesus will hate you, and the devil will aim all of the artillery of Hell at you. And it's just evidence that you love the Lord Jesus, and you can expect persecution. In this world, we are going to be persecuted, and Jesus said we're to rejoice and to be exceedingly glad.

I remember that we're going to study later on, in the ninth chapter of Acts, where Jesus comes to Saul on the Road to Damascus, and Jesus says to Saul, *“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”* (Acts 9:4). Now remember this is after Jesus had been crucified. He appears to Saul and says, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” You can't persecute a dead man—only a living man. Now the point is this: that is, *if you know the Lord Jesus, and you stand for the Lord Jesus, then you're going to find yourself going against the tide, and you're going to find yourself persecuted. You stand near the general—you're going to expect the hottest artillery.*

## II. Expressing the Persuasion

Now the second thing: not only the persecution that you can expect, but I want you to notice something else, the persuasion that you can express. Look now in verses 4 through 12: *“But many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made well; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you well. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:4–12).

Now think of it. Think of it. They are persecuted, yes, but they are powerful. The Church persecuted is always the Church powerful. Now they come to these people; they put them in jail; they intimidate them; they speak against them; but also, I want you to notice in verse 4, that 5,000 men are saved in one service, and we estimated this morning that, along with the women and children, there could have been as many as 20,000 people saved in that one service.

Now what convicted and convinced all of those people? Do you think that Peter just preached a good sermon and that’s what did it? No. No one can preach that way. There’s no one that has that power of persuasion. What convinced the people? I’ll tell you what convinced the people: not facts about a dead Christ, but an encounter with a living Christ. They met Jesus again. They had seen Jesus. Arguments did not convince them. I’ve learned something a long time ago—that I’ll never argue a man into the Kingdom of Heaven. And by the way, when you go out to witness, if it turns into an argument—stop! *No one is ever argued into Heaven. We can be witnesses, but we’re not called to be lawyers. Oh, we can defend the faith, and we can give a rationale, but when it becomes an argument, then just stop, because if you lose the argument, then you’ll win the point; if you win the argument, you lose the person.* Nobody is ever argued in the Kingdom of Heaven. These people were not argued into the Kingdom of Heaven. It wasn’t an argument. They had met Jesus in the person of the apostles. They had seen Jesus. They’d seen Him work.

After the resurrection of Jesus, Thomas was a doubter, and the other disciples—the

other ten—tried to convince Thomas that Jesus Christ was alive. They had seen Him. But after having seen Jesus, they could not convince Thomas that Jesus was alive. But when Thomas saw Jesus, he didn't need an argument. He had had an encounter with Jesus Himself, and he fell at His feet and said of Jesus, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28). Now if ten of Thomas' friends could not convince Thomas that Jesus was alive, then I'll never convince you that Jesus is alive by an argument. But when the Holy Spirit of God filled these apostles, and so Jesus Christ was alive and living in them, then they were not just simply arguing that a dead Christ existed sometime ago, or even that a living Christ had risen from the dead—they were demonstrating, with Christ in their hearts, that He was alive. I would pray that, when I would stand up here and preach, you'd not say, "Well, there's Adrian up there preaching," and that's the only thing you'd say; but I would pray that you would say, "Jesus is in that man, and Christ is in this service," and that you would have an encounter with the living Christ. Oh, there's power when Christ, in us, convinces the people. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: I can preach truth, but only He can impart truth.

I love verse 11, where Peter ends this passage by saying, *"This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner"* (Acts 4:11). Now remember: all of the high muckety-mucks were out there. I mean, all of the religious and governmental top waters were there, and now Peter—this is the same Peter that had been such a coward, who was petrified, who trembled in front of a little teenage girl, who cursed, swore, and denied Christ—is surrounded by all of them. And rather than being intimidated, he becomes the prosecuting attorney. *It reminds me of that sergeant who said, "Men, we're surrounded by the enemy. Don't let a' one of them escape."* He becomes the prosecuting attorney, and he says, *"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."*

*There's an ancient Jewish tradition that says that when Solomon's Temple was built—you will remember that this is not tradition, but actual history—that all of the stones were cut out of the quarry, so that when the temple was constructed there would not be the sound of a hammer on the temple site. All of the stones were precut to be assembled there on the temple site, and they were hauled there, to the temple site, and they were put in the construction yard, and they were stacked and numbered by the architect, so that they could send for each particular stone. Now there was one stone sitting right out in the middle of the construction yard—quite an unusual and quite a large stone—and it was sitting there, and nobody seemed to know what it was for. And the workmen had to keep walking around it, and some of them would stumble over it, and it was just in the way of the construction. And so finally somebody said, "That stone is a worthless stone and a useless stone. Get rid of it." And so they took their crowbars, and they began to tumble that stone and to roll it off of the temple mount, and it rolled*

down into the Kidron Valley, there to the East of the temple mount, and it just rolled down into that valley. And then the weeds and the bushes grew up over it, and it had just plain disappeared. Then, finally, when they came to put the cornerstone in—the stone that would unite the whole building, hold it together, and give it strength and beauty—they sent to the quarry and said, “We’re reading for the cornerstone. Send the cornerstone.” They said, “We’ve already sent the cornerstone.” In response, they said, “No, you haven’t sent the cornerstone. We have done an inventory. We don’t have the cornerstone. Send us the cornerstone.” They sent back and said, “We’ve already sent the cornerstone. You’d better check again.” And then of course, you know what they discovered: that the stone that they had rejected—the stone that they had rolled off down the mountainside—they had to go get and retrieve, because that stone that the builders rejected had become the head of the corner.

Now it is that illustration, I believe, that Peter is using to tell them, “Listen. Jesus is the chief cornerstone, and you have rejected Jesus, but He is the head of the corner, and neither is there salvation in any other.” Ladies and gentlemen, if there’s one message that the Church needs to preach today, it is that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Now if that’s bigoted—if that’s narrow-minded—then I can’t help it. Dear friend, *if I cannot preach that Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven, then I’m not going to preach at all, because if Jesus Christ is not the only way to Heaven, then Jesus Christ is none of the ways to Heaven.* If Jesus Christ is not the only way to Heaven, then the Apostle Peter is a liar. If Jesus Christ is not the only way to Heaven, then Jesus Christ Himself is a fake, a fraud, and an imposter, for He said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). Peter said, “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there’s none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Now watch. Watch. Because Christ is alive, there will be persecution. But secondly, because Christ is alive, there will be persuasion. I don’t have to depend upon my powers of persuasion.

Every now and then somebody says to me, “Hey, you’d make a good salesman.” They’re talking to me: “You’d make a good salesman.” And evidently they think that being a preacher is being a salesman. *I would not want to cross the street to make a Baptist out of you by my persuasion, or to try to talk you into confessing Christ by my persuasion. Anything I can talk you into, somebody else can talk you out of,* but thank God that Jesus Christ is alive. He’s the only who builds the Church, and what we need to do is to recognize the power of the living Christ. And there may be persecution because He still lives, and He, in us, is going to be persecuted, but there’s going to be persuasion, and there’s going to be power.

### III. Experiencing the Presence

And then thirdly: I want you to notice not only the persecution we may expect and the persuasion that we may express, but I want you to notice the presence that we shall experience. Look with me now in verses 13 and 14 of this same chapter. *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”—*that is, Christ is their contemporary—*“And beholding the man who was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it”* (Acts 4:13–14).

These men were bold. Why were they bold? Well, I mean, they were bold because they had been with Jesus. They had seen Christ alive, resurrected, and now Christ lives in them. And all of the forces of Hell could not intimidate them. They could not shut them up, and they could not hold them back. The apostles refused to let up, shut up, or back up, because they were filled with the Spirit of God and the presence of Jesus. I want to say again—listen to me—one of the curses of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity is the cowardliness and the silence of good people.

Look in this auditorium. What would happen if this many people, filled with holy boldness were turned loose on this city tomorrow? It is the strategy of the devil to keep good people silent in an evil time. In my humble, but I think accurate, opinion the curse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, again, the silent majority—those who never speak up. We need a contagious epidemic of holy boldness. What is this boldness—when they saw the boldness of Peter and John—what is this boldness that they had? What was it that set those people on their ears so long ago and made them marvel?

Let me tell you what holy boldness is not: Holy boldness is not human courage. Now there are some people who have an extraordinary amount of courage. That’s not holy boldness. It may be self-confidence. Maybe they took a Dale Carnegie course, or it just may be that they don’t know enough to be afraid. That’s not what I’m talking about. If you say, “Pastor, I’m just not wired that way. I’ve always been afraid,” then I want to remind you that so was Simon Peter—so much so that he trembled in front of a little girl before he had this boldness. Holy boldness is not human courage—not innate courage. I want to say that holy boldness is not arrogance. I see some people today, who, what they call boldness, I call brash. They say, “Well, I just speak my mind. I’m bold for Jesus.” I just think that they are arrogant people, and they’re going around telling people off. They call it witnessing, and they witness in such a way in airports, bus stops, and so forth, so as to embarrass people. Jesus never did that. Jesus was winsome. He was bold, but He wasn’t arrogant. He wasn’t brassy. He wasn’t going around buttonholing people and calling it boldness.

What is boldness? It’s not human courage. It’s not arrogance. It’s not presumption. I see some people who call themselves bold, and in order to show how much faith they

have, they handle rattlesnakes. Friend, that's not boldness to me. It may be bold for a little while, but you won't be old long. I have to admire these people, because obviously, there's some fear. That's not boldness. That's presumption. That's tempting God. The Bible says, *"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"* (Matthew 4:7).

Boldness is saying, "Lord Jesus, If You are for me, then who can be against me? Lord Jesus, if You want to use me, then use me Lord. And I trust You to take care of me. And Lord, if You choose—if You choose to let me be put in jail—then I'll rejoice that I'm counted worthy to suffer shame for Your name. If you choose, Lord Jesus, that I suffer bodily harm, then Lord, nothing will come to me that will not come through You first. And Lord, You are my Commander-in-Chief, and Lord, I submit myself to you, and I will speak at Your command." *"When they saw the boldness of Peter and John...they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus"* (Acts 4:13).

#### **IV. Exalting the Person**

Now the last thing that I want you to notice in this passage, beginning in verse 15, is the person that we must exalt. Notice, beginning in verse 15: *"But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all those who dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:15–20).

Now listen, ladies and gentlemen. *You cannot be convinced that Jesus Christ came out of that grave, and that He's the only hope of a sin-cursed world, and be silent.* You cannot! *You might as well tell the sun to cease to shine than tell a Christian, who has had an encounter with the living Christ and has that Christ alive in him, to shut up and be still.* living Christ All Hell could not stop these men from speaking. They said, *"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*

Remember that Jesus said, *"Ye shall be witnesses unto me"* (Acts 1:8). What is a witness? A witness is someone who tells what he's seen and heard. And the reason that some people do not witness is that they've not seen or heard anything. What was evangelism in the New Testament? Evangelism, in the New Testament, was not an eight-day meeting where they brought in an outside speaker. Evangelism was not some sort of a religious show. It was the daily business of these early Christians. They were all at it, and they were always at it. And I want to challenge you, my dear friend,

tomorrow to say, “Lord Jesus, You are alive and well, and You live in me. If I suffer persecution, it’ll only be a sign that You’re in me. I’ll not be ashamed of You, Lord Jesus, no matter what happens. Lord Jesus, I’m not going to try to persuade anybody. I’m going to let You, in me, persuade them. And Lord Jesus, I’m going to keep such company with You that I’ll not be intimidated by any person. And Lord Jesus, I’ll not let them shut my mouth. I will not keep silent. I will not! Dear Lord Jesus, speak Thou through me.”

These early Christians were remarkable. I tell you, dear friend, as I told you in the introductory message, that they had no radio; they had no television; they had no newspapers; they had no buses; they had no literature; they had no church buildings; and yet, they turned that world inside out and upside down for the Lord Jesus Christ. New Testament Christianity cannot be explained; it cannot be rationally denied; and it cannot be intimidated. We cannot but speak those things, which we’ve seen and heard.

## Conclusion

Do you know the Lord Jesus? I mean, do you know Him—really know Him? Sometimes people come down here, and they think that we’re giving them a bunch of rules and telling them what to do and how to live, and they say, “Well, I just can’t live that way.” Friend, I’m not here to lay a lot of rules on you—not at all. I just want to introduce you to somebody who’s alive—His name is Jesus—and to tell you to let Him live in you. Mark Twain said, “Don’t tell me what to do.” He said, “I already know what to do.” He said, “I’m not living up to half of what I already know. It’s not what to do that I need—it’s how to do it, how to do it.” It’s the desire to do it and the power to do it. You see, dear friend, Jesus is the one who not only shows you what to do, but He makes you want to do it, and He gives you the power to do it. Have you ever really bowed before Him—ever really just made Him Lord?

Years ago, I read a story that has stayed in my heart and in my mind. It was about a young man who was having difficulty living the Christian life. And he somehow just did not seem to be able to make that full commitment. He went to his pastor, a man named Dr. Evans, and he said to Dr. Evans, “Dr. Evans, I’m just having difficulty living the Christian life. I don’t know why, but it just seems like I’ve never really ever committed myself to Him, or I just don’t seem to have that power in my life.” Dr. Evans said, “Son, there’s a painting of Jesus that I’d like for you to see. Would you go see it?” The young man said, “Well, yes, sir. I will.” He said, “It’s in thus and such a building,” and told of the building where this magnificent painting was. He said, “You go and tell the caretaker there that I sent you and that I want you to see the painting.” The young man said, “All right. I’ll go.”

And he went to this particular building. The caretaker came out, and he said, “Son,

you've come to see the painting, haven't you?" He said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, come in, and I'll show you the painting of Christ." The young man walked into the building, and there, on a huge wall, was a painting of Christ. And Christ is on the cross, and He's crucified. He's dying in agony and in blood. Right away, when the young man saw the painting, he was repelled by it—almost repulsed by it—because it looked like the artist was not a good artist. The painting, somehow, seemed to be top-heavy. It seemed to be leaning out. It seemed to be out of proportion—almost grotesque. The caretaker said, "Son, get closer." So the young man came closer. And then the caretaker said, "Son, get a little lower." And so he got a little lower. The caretaker said, "Would you get closer?" And he got closer. Then the caretaker said, "Now son, get lower." Now he said, "Get closer. Now get lower. Now get closer." And the young man kept getting closer and closer to the picture 'til finally he found himself on his knees, right at the foot of the cross. And when he looked up, it was in perfect proportion, and that was the only position from which it made sense—right on his knees, at the foot of the cross. From that perspective, it had been painted.

I want to tell you, friend, it may be that that's exactly where our Lord wants to bring you, tonight—on your knees, right at the absolute foot of the cross, where you bow your head, and you say this and mean it: "Jesus is Lord!"

Let's bow together in prayer. Lord Jesus. I pray that, in my own life, You'll give me a holy boldness, Lord, so that I'll not be arrogant, not strut and swagger, and not be brassy and argumentative. And Lord You've said that the righteous ones are as bold as a lion. Help us, Lord, to be bold for You. And Lord if we have difficulty, then help us just to come and kneel at the foot of the cross, and say, "Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You. Lord Jesus, inhabit my humanity. Take control of my life, Lord Jesus." Take control of our lives in this service tonight. And I pray that those who don't know Jesus might come to know Him tonight. In His wonderful name, I pray. Amen.

# The Conquest

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: April 3, 1994**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:1–20**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. His Persecution Continues
- II. His Preaching Convinces
- III. His Power Confronts
- IV. His Presence Compels
- V. His People Confess

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word and be finding Acts chapter four—The Conquest—Acts chapter four. When you've found it, look up here. A teacher gave this assignment to her students. They were to write an essay on the greatest living man. One student wrote an essay on Jesus Christ and the teacher said, this is a wonderful essay but you misunderstood. I said, the greatest living man. And, that student rightly answered that teacher. He is alive. He is alive. Others die and they stay dead. Jesus died and He rose again.

I was reading about Harry Houdini. Harry Houdini was an escape artist. Actually, he died in 1936, on November the 29th, but I have read about him. This man was a genius. He could get out of anything. They said that he had the flexibility of an eel. He had the eyes of a cat. They tried all kinds of ways to keep Harry Houdini locked up. Sometimes they would put him in a coffin and bury the coffin. He would get out. Sometimes they would rivet him in boilers. He would escape. Sometimes they would sew him up in canvas bags and throw him in the river. He would come out. They would seal him in metal milk cans and weld the top, and yet, somehow, he would escape. One time they put him in a federal prison in Washington. Maximum security. He was in there less than half an hour and he walked out and in the meanwhile he had moved most of the prisoners from one cell to another. An incredible individual—his biographer said, he could escape from anything except your memory. And yet, there came a day when Harry Houdini died and, friend, he did not escape. No trickery there. No skill there. No flexibility there. Harry Houdini died, but friend, I want to tell you, there was another who died, His name was Jesus and he made the great escape. Jesus came out of that grave and He arose.

Now, I want us to think about some things that are true because He arose—five resurrection facts that you’re going to find here in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts. Look, if you will now, beginning in verse one—Acts chapter four, verse one: and as they spake unto the people and the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. What is the first fact—because He lives?

## **I. His Persecution Continues**

The first fact is this: that His persecution continues—His persecution continues. Did you know that because Jesus Christ is alive, He is still being persecuted? Now, here we are in Acts chapter four, and these people are grieved that Jesus is being preached, that He is alive from the dead. You’re going to find out that it was the apostles who were persecuted but in the truest sense, it was the Lord Jesus who was being persecuted. Now, the reasons the apostles were being persecuted is that they had done a miracle. But look very carefully, look in chapter three and verse twelve. Peter refuses to take credit for the miracle. And, when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Why look ye so earnestly at this? Or, why look ye so earnestly on us? As though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk. And, then look, if you will, in chapter four and verse ten: be it known unto you all and to all the people of Israel by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.

Do you get it? A miracle had been done. The high muckety-mucks didn’t like it. The people were beginning to follow the Lord Jesus. They thought they had been done with Jesus, but now here is a man who is healed. Peter said, hey, we didn’t do it; Jesus did it—Jesus did it. And, when they were persecuting these apostles, who were they persecuting? Jesus—because the apostles were just the hands and the feet of the Lord Jesus. He has a new body now. His new body is called the church. But He’s still alive.

Do you remember when the apostle Paul was on the road to Damascus and Jesus appeared to him? He said, who art thou, Lord? And, He said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. Now, he might have said, well, whoever you are, I’m not persecuting you; I’m just persecuting these apostles; I’m just persecuting these Christians. But the point is so clear you can’t miss it. When you persecute the church, you’re persecuting Jesus. Jesus is not dead. He is alive. You can’t persecute a dead man. And, because He lives, His persecution continues. Now, that’s an interesting thing. Why did they persecute Jesus? Why did they persecute these apostles? Why will they persecute you? Why don’t they like us? Why doesn’t the world love the Lord Jesus? You would think the world would be glad to hear a message like that one wouldn’t you? You would think that

people would love the Lord Jesus but they don't. Why? Why? Why? Why?

Let me tell you something. The world loves the baby Jesus. Nobody has any difficulty with the baby Jesus. They don't persecute Jesus because He was born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem. They don't persecute Him because of His teachings. They don't persecute Jesus because He healed the sick and fed the multitudes. As a matter of fact, the world likes that message. That's a good message to the world. Christmas time, the merchants who don't even believe in Jesus, they love to put the Christmas carols in their store so they can sale more merchandise. They don't mind that. What Jesus is it that the world doesn't like? It's the Jesus that came to destroy the works of the devil. That's the Jesus they persecute—the Jesus who is against rape and murder and greed and pride and abortion and sodomy and racial hatred and all of these things. That's the Jesus the world cannot stand. It is the Jesus who said, I am the way, the truth and the life, and no man come unto the Father but by me.

Put it down big, plain and straight: when you stand for this Jesus, as these apostles did here in the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, this world is going to come down on you like a hammer, and all of the artillery of hell is going to be aimed at you just like it was aimed at the Lord Jesus Christ. And, if you're not getting any persecution, don't boast about it, for the Bible says, and all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Don't get the idea that the world has gotten more churchy, if there's no persecution. It's only because the church has gotten more worldly.

## **II. His Preaching Convinces**

When we began to let the living Christ alive and live in us, you're going to find out number one, the first fact of these resurrection facts is this, His persecution continues. But I want you to see something else. His preaching convinces. Look if you will in verse four. How be it many of them which heard the word believe and the number of men was about five thousand? One of these days, I'd like to preach when five thousand men get saved. Now, what was it? How did these men, fishermen, unlettered, uneducated, How was it that they were able to stand up and preach and five thousand come to Christ? I'll tell you why, because He lives and they were not dependent upon their power of oratory or their power of logic, their winsomeness to bring these people to Christ. There was a living Christ inside of them. I've told you before and I'll tell you again, anything I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of. We are not preaching today, facts about a dead Christ of history. We present a living Christ to you. I am not dependent upon talking you into believing in Jesus Christ. If eleven of Thomas' friends could not convince Thomas of the resurrection, if eleven apostles who had seen them with their own eyes could not convince Thomas, I'll not be able to convince you. Do you know what convinced Thomas? He has an encounter with the living Lord. And, when he had

an encounter with the living Christ, he was convinced.

Do you know what you need today? An encounter with Jesus Christ—not with the church, not with Adrian, not with choirs; you need to meet the living Christ. These people were brought into contact by the Holy Spirit with the living Christ, and they were totally, absolutely convinced. You see, other leaders, they come and they go. They die. I visited Lenin’s tomb on an Easter. I was in Moscow, the orthodox Easter. I said to my wife, we will not be in Moscow, without visiting Lenin’s tomb. Now, the reason that I wanted to visit Lenin’s tomb was I wanted to gloat a little on that Easter morning. I wanted to go there and look at his dead carcass.

Now, in Lenin’s tomb, Lenin is there in a crystal sarcophagus—a crystal case. He’s there. He is beautifully embalmed. There is his waxen face. His beard is trimmed just so. There’s a soldier here, a soldier there, and a soldier here, and a soldier there. And, they’re guarding Linen. And, on that tomb, these words are written—I want you to listen to it: He was the greatest leader of all peoples, of all countries, of all times. He was the lord of the new humanity. He was the savior of the world. And, there lies that dead rascal. He was the savior of the world. Do you notice it’s all past tense? He was. He was. He was. Jesus said, I am He that liveth and am alive forevermore.

Friend, I want to tell you, that makes a difference. My little ole’ wife who is a rule keeper, I mean she is one of the greatest rule keepers in the world, and in that tomb, you’re not supposed to whistle, talk, laugh, not even put your hands in your pocket, you’re not supposed to say anything; but when Joyce walked past each of those guards, she just leaned in and whispered, Christos Voscras. That means, Christ is risen—Christ is risen, Christ is risen, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. You see, it is the living Christ. It is an encounter with the living Christ that convinces people. And, that’s the reason why I don’t have to depend upon my ability to cause you to believe. My ability, my job, my joy, my responsibility is just to bring you to encounter with Jesus Christ. When you meet the Lord Jesus Christ, when you meet Christ, you see, because He lived, His persecution continues. Because He lives, His preaching convinces. There is a difference, because we are preaching a living Christ.

### **III. His Power Confronts**

Here’s a third thing I want you to see. Not only does His persecution continue. Not only does His preaching convince. But His power confronts. Begin now in verse five: “And, it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the High Priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst”—that is, the apostles—“...in the midst, they asked, By what power, and by what name, have you done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost,

said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, and by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.” His power—His power—confronts. They had a man who had been healed. There was the power of the living Christ and they were confronted with it. Now, they thought they were done with Him. They put Him in that grave. They set a seal upon it. They said, He is finished. But He wasn’t finished. It was finished—the plan of salvation. They said, if you’re the Son of God, come down from the cross. That was the wrong question. They should have gone to the tomb and said, if you’re the Son of God, come out. He’s shown to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. And now, He’s still alive and He’s on the loose. They thought, “we’ve finished with Him.” Peter said, you crucified Him, but it’s the same one that you crucified who’s just healed this man and now they are confronted with the power of the living Christ. And so are you in the world today. Skeptic, I want to tell you there are things happening in this world today that are being done by the hand of Jesus and you can’t deny it. I dare you to look at the evidence. I dare you to look at the evidence as to what the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is doing today. You think you’re rid of Him. Peter used a wonderful illustration they all knew. He talked about the cornerstone. Look if you will in verse 11: “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.” Up there on Mount Moriah where the cross was and where the temple was built—the cross on one side of Mount Moriah, the temple built right on the top of Mount Moriah—there today is the Dome of the Rock, but Solomon built his temple there. And Solomon, when he wanted the temple built, said that the temple was to be built without the noise of a chisel. So they brought the stones, cut the stones for the Temple out of a great rock quarry underneath the temple mount. If you ever go to Jerusalem, you can go into that quarry. I’ve been into it. I think, Bob, you and I went into it one time. You can go way back under the city of Jerusalem. And there you can see where they have chiseled out these massive stones for the temple. Now, they cut them exactly to shape; beautiful specifications were written. And so, those stones were brought up to the Temple mount to build Solomon’s temple. And Jewish tradition says that there was one stone, a very special stone, that was crated, and sent up to the temple mount, and it was there in the work yard, and the workmen had to keep working around it. Sometimes they would stumble over it. I suppose, maybe, bruise their shins upon it. And, finally, they didn’t know what it was. It got moved over to the side, and finally just fell over into the brook, in the valley of Kidron there. And the bushes grew up around it. When time came for the cornerstone for the Temple, they said to the

people in the quarry, send up the cornerstone. They said, what do you mean, send the cornerstone? We sent that a long time ago. They said, no, we don't have the cornerstone. Said, well, you better check again. We know that we sent it. You know where it was, don't you? The stone that the builders rejected, the same became the head of the corner. They had to go down into the bushes, down in the valley, and bring up that stone, and set it there in its place. What was Peter doing on that day after the resurrection? He's saying this—listen, folks: you thought you were done with Him. You thought that you had finished with Him. You thought you'd rolled Him off the temple mount and down into the valley. You thought He was in the bushes. You thought He was in the tomb. But He is the one who is the head of the corner. I want to say today, He lives. And because He lives, His persecution continues; His preaching convinces, friend; and His power confronts. He is a living Christ, and He is still doing miracles. Look, if you will, in verse 12—I love this. After he says he's become the head of the corner, he says in verse 12: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." That's one of the great, great verses in all of the Bible. Jesus is not a good way to heaven. Jesus is not the best way to heaven. Jesus is the only way to heaven. That's what it says right here. If you don't like that, just go argue with the Lord here, and say, Lord, you made a mistake in your Bible. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Not the name of Buddha, not the name Confucius, not the name of Allah—the name of Jesus. Not the name of Abraham, not the name of Moses, not the name of any of the great saints—there's one name—wonderful name—and I love that name. His power confronts us today.

#### **IV. His Presence Compels**

Now, here's the fourth of these resurrection facts I want you to notice. Not only does His persecution continue, not only does His preaching convince, not only does His power confront—all of these things because He lives; but His presence compels—His presence compels. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "And when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." They'd been in His presence. Now who is it? Peter and John. Well, Peter wasn't known for boldness a little while back. He had cringed before a little maid. Had said he never even knew the Lord Jesus; cursed, swore, denied the Lord Jesus. But now he had seen the risen Lord, and he was compelled. You could not shut him up. You see, when you're in the presence of Jesus Christ, something happens to you. When you're in the presence of the risen Lord, just as you put an iron in the fire and leave it in the fire, before long,

that piece of iron gets red hot. And not only is the iron in the fire, but the fire is in the iron. And you spend time with the Lord Jesus, and you're going to be as bold as these people are, and His presence will compel you. "Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John ..." What was it that set them on their ear? What was it that caused them to marvel? It was the boldness of these men for the Lord Jesus Christ. You know what we need in our church today? We need an epidemic of holy boldness. Do you know how we're going to get it? Spend time in the presence of Jesus. When they saw that these were ignorant and unlearned men, they absolutely marveled, and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And the thing that caused them to marvel was their boldness—the boldness of these men.

Now, what is boldness? What is holy boldness? Well, it's not arrogance. A lot of people think they're bold; they're just arrogant. Holy boldness is humble boldness. These men were not arrogant, but they were bold. It's not self-confidence. You can have self-confidence, and that will turn people off. We don't need self-confidence. That's not boldness. Not human courage, not presumption. Over here in the hills of East Tennessee, some people, in order to show how bold they are, pick up rattlesnakes, and handle rattlesnakes, and kiss rattlesnakes, and caress rattlesnakes. You can call that boldness, if you want to; I call it tempting the Lord. I read one time about a man who was in one of these services, Brother Steve Green. He was part of a quartet. Said he'd gotten into one of these country churches, didn't know what they were going to do, but they began to handle snakes. He asked his friend, he said, is there a back door in this church? He said, no, there isn't. He said, well, where would you like one to be? What some people call boldness is not boldness. What is holy boldness? What is holy boldness? Friend, it's knowing that Jesus is alive. I mean listen—listen—if you are truly, truly convinced that Jesus Christ walked out of that grave, could you ever be intimidated? Think about it. Think about it. When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they marveled. They took knowledge of them. They're ignorant and unlearned men, but they said, hey, they have been with Jesus. They have been with Jesus. We need an epidemic, I say, of holy boldness—not to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, these men, if you think about it, they were facing the equivalency of the Supreme Court. They were a couple of country bumpkins. They were from Galilee. They were from the hill country. They were fishermen. They should have been standing there just kind of shuffling they're feet, with their heads down, just kind of afraid. But there they are, I mean in front of the highest rulers of the land. Think of the place where they were, there in the magnificent temple. They are absolutely, absolutely uninhibited, with a face like the noonday sun. They take a stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. They would not shut up, let up, back up. They are preaching Jesus. I want some of that boldness in my own life. You need it. I tell you the way that you get it is to spend some time with the

living Lord Jesus Christ. Friend, His presence—His presence—compels us. We cannot be ashamed. We cannot back off.

## **V. His People Confess**

Now here's the fifth of these resurrection facts I want you to notice this morning, right out of this chapter. What happens when we know that He is alive? Well, His persecution continues. His preaching convinces. His power confronts. His presence compels. And here's the last: His people confess—His people confess. Look, if you will now, in verse 14—look at it: “And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they”—that is, the religious leaders—“conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not so speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.” But now watch this, “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Now verse 20—here's the key: “ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Friend, they said, you can't preach a risen Lord. We don't want you to tell this message. We don't want this message out. Why didn't they want this message out? Because of the power of that message. I'm told that one demon said to another demon, if those liberal theologians ever really let Jesus out of this grave, hell help us, all heaven will break loose. That's true. Say, they knew that all heaven was about to break loose. They said, you can't preach this message any more. You might as well have told the sun not to shine as to tell these men that they could not preach a risen Christ. Why? Because they'd seen Him. They had seen Him. You could not shut them up. Because He lives, His people confess. Anybody who has known that Christ is alive cannot keep quiet. Some of you are not witnessing. Some of you are not witnessing at all. Do you want me to tell you why you're not witnessing? It's right here in verse 20. Look at it. They said, “For we cannot speak, we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Do you know what a witness is? A witness tells what he's seen and heard. Do you know why some of you don't witness? You haven't seen or heard anything. That's it. You haven't seen or heard anything. A person who has seen and heard that Jesus Christ is alive cannot be made to shut up. His people confess. If you're not sharing Jesus Christ, if you're not telling people about Jesus Christ, very frankly, I don't think you understand that He's alive. I don't think you've seen anything. I don't think you've heard anything. Look, if you will, in chapter 5 and verse 42. Here's the way the early church worked—look at it in verse 42: “And

daily...and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” They’ve been told, you can’t do it. They said, we’re going to do it. They said, we forbid you. They said, we’re still going to do it. Evangelism in the New Testament was not an eight-day meeting where they brought in some revivalist or some evangelist. I’m not opposed to that. But, in the New Testament, these Christians were all at it, and they were always at it. You know why? They’d seen Him. They knew He was alive. You could not shut them up. His people confessed—His people confessed. Think about what that early church did. They had no printing presses. They had no buses. They had no radio, no television, no loudspeaker system. They had no church building. And yet, they turned that early world upside down and inside out for Jesus Christ. They did so much with so little. We do so little with so much. He is alive. His people confess it. Would you like to confess it? He is risen... He is risen indeed. He is risen... He is risen indeed. He is risen... He is risen indeed. Oh, let’s get that in our hearts. Let’s get that in our mind. He is alive, and because He’s alive, His persecution will continue. People will still persecute Him. And the way they’re going to persecute Him is by persecuting you. Wear that persecution like a badge of honor—like a badge of honor. Because He’s alive—He’s alive. His preaching convinces. Don’t feel like when you teach or preach or witness that it’s up to you. All you do is not bring them into an encounter with the living Christ. It is Jesus that convinces. His power confronts. His power is real in the world today. Jesus Christ is still alive and well, and the Christ that walked the shores of Galilee is alive through His new body, the church, today. And, His power confronts. His presence compels. Stay in the presence of Jesus. Like you put iron in the fire, and the fire gets in the iron, and there will be a holy boldness about you. You’ll not be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, His people confess. They’ll say, we cannot but speak, tell, and preach the things that we’ve seen and heard.

## **Conclusion**

Let me tell you what New Testament Christianity is, friend: It is supernatural. It cannot be explained, and it cannot be denied. It will not be intimidated, and it must not be ignored. Christ lives. Christ lives. Now here’s the big question. Are you ready for the big one? The real big one? Christ lives—do you? Do you? You say, well, Pastor, yes, sure, I’m alive. I’m hearing you. I’m listening to you. No, no, no, no. I didn’t say, do you exist? I said, Do you live? Jesus said to people whose hearts were already pumping, I’ve come that you might have life and have it abundantly. How do you get this life? Well, the risen Lord imparts it when you trust Him. Remember that verse that I quoted a while back, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Would you bow your heads in prayer?

Every head bowed and every eye closed. No one stirring; no one looking around. If you already know the Lord Jesus, would you begin to pray for those who might not know Him? And, today, if you've not yet made the wonderful discovery of Christ in your heart, let me lead you in a prayer right now where you can invite Christ into your heart. And I want to promise you on the authority of the Word of God that where you are right now, Jesus, the living Christ who is here today, will come into your heart, forgive you, cleanse you, and save you, if you will invite Him in. Pray a prayer like this: Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you. Tell Him that. I do trust you. I believe that you're the Son of God. I believe that God raised you from the dead. I confess you as Lord. I trust you as Savior. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus. Save me today. I don't want to die and go to hell. I don't want to live without you. I'm sick of the old way. I need you, my God. Save me, Lord Jesus. Pray it from your heart. Save me, Lord Jesus. Ask Him. Save me, Lord Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then thank Him. Pray this way. Thank you for saving me, Lord Jesus. I don't deserve it, but I receive it by faith, like a child. You're now my Lord, my Savior, my God, and my friend. Lord Jesus, because you died for me, help me to live for you and not to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Why We Witness

*By Adrian Rogers*

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**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:1–20**

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*“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”*

ACTS 4:20

## Outline

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## Introduction

Turn to the fourth chapter of the book of Acts, sometimes called the Acts of the Apostles. But not the Acts of the Apostles, and not the Acts of the Holy Spirit, although it is true that the Holy Spirit is doing the action in the book of Acts. But, literally, this book is the Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ in His continuing life through His new body, the church, here on earth. We're going to point that out in a moment. And I want to read the first twenty verses of Acts 4. And the title of the message tonight is, "Why We Witness."

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is

the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Now the key verse is verse 20, at least for me tonight. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Do you know what a witness is? A witness is someone who tells what he’s seen or heard, isn’t that right? Now I’m trying to get you to witness. And I want to tell you that one of the major reasons that some people don’t witness is they haven’t seen anything or heard anything. We’re trying to get them to share something they don’t know anything about.

Now if you have seen something, and if you have heard something, and if what you have seen and what you have heard is this, that Jesus Christ is alive, in my estimation, I don’t see how anybody could keep quiet about that kin

d of news. You see, this chapter starts out dealing with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let’s go back and look at it again. Now what it was was the disciples knew beyond the shadow any doubt of peradventure that Jesus Christ had come out of that grave alive. Look in verses 1-2: “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” These disciples were totally, completely convinced that Christ was alive. They had seen Him. They’d talked with Him. They had heard Him and seen Him, and they could not keep quiet about it. You might as well tell the sun to stop shining as to try to tell these disciples to shut up about the Lord Jesus Christ. *Christ is alive! He’s not behind us on a cross. He is before us on a throne. And He is within us in our heart.*

Now I said that the book of Acts is primarily the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me show you what I’m talking about. Just put a bookmark there in, like I’m doing, in Acts 4 and then just go back to Acts 1 for a moment and see how the book of Acts begins. Acts

1:1: “The former treatise have I made un, made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.” And, incidentally, Jesus did not practice what He preached; He preached what He practiced. “...of what Jesus began to do and to teach.” In other words, Jesus did it and then He taught it.

Now notice the writer is the Doctor Luke. And Doctor Luke is writing to a person named Theophilus. And someone said that’s “the awfulest” name I’ve ever heard. But that was the man’s name, Theophilus. And Luke is saying now, “I’ve already written one book. The former treatise I wrote to you.” And that was what we call today the gospel of Luke. And that was what Jesus began to do and to teach. And now Luke is writing another book of what Jesus continues to do and to teach.

The book of Acts is what Jesus Christ is doing in His new body, the church. The church is the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the invisible part of the visible Christian, and the Christian is the visible part of the invisible Christ. Jesus Christ is alive and well and living in Memphis through me, through you, through this church, which is His body. And Christ is alive. And the whole fourth chapter of the book of Acts deals with Jesus, who is our contemporary Christ. Not the Christ of history and not the Christ of prophecy, but the Christ of today, the Christ who is alive, the Christ who is living, acting, working in Memphis, Tennessee. Now, because He is alive, because He is alive, we must be His witnesses. I want to mention some things that are true just because Jesus Christ lives.

## **I. Because Christ Is Alive, His Persecution Continues**

First of all, because Christ is not dead, because Christ is alive, His persecution continues to this day. Jesus Christ is still being persecuted. Now don’t get the idea that only Christians are being persecuted. Christ Himself is being persecuted. There arose a persecution against these early disciples. And the reason that they were persecuted was this: That they had healed a man at the temple gate and God had done a notable miracle. Jesus Christ literally had healed him. And because the man had been healed, a crowd came and, and the apostles took that as an opportunity to witness and do some soul winning. And the high muckety-mucks of Israel saw that they were losing the followship of the people, and they tried to stultify that witness. They tried to shut up that witness, and they couldn’t do it. They commanded them not to speak. But Peter said, “Hey man, you’re going to have to make a decision whether the people ought to obey God or men. But as far as we’re concerned, we can’t help. We can’t help it. You, we cannot help but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” And as a result of this, these Christians were being persecuted.

But I want you to notice that Peter refuses to take credit for the miracle. Now a miracle had been done. Everybody knew that a miracle had been done. But Peter didn’t stick out his chest and say, “Look what we did.” He gave the credit where the credit was

due. Go back, if you will, to chapter 3:12. Now notice as Peter explains what happened. “And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” He said, “Don’t, don’t be gazing at us that way; I mean, like we had done something, like we have some power that is inherently ours. Why are you looking at us this way? We are not the one who did this. It’s Jesus Christ who healed this man.”

Look, if you will, here in chapter 4:10. You get the same idea. Notice Peter is giving credit where credit is due. “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified—now watch it—whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.” Who healed the man? Who raised him up? Peter and John? No! Jesus Christ. And they want to make it clear and they want to make it plain that it is not Peter and John therefore that you’re persecuting. It is Jesus Christ that you’re persecuting, because Jesus is the one who has done this miracle.

Do you remember when Saul was on the road to Damascus to persecute the Christians there? That Jesus appeared to Saul; that is, the Christ who’s alive, and He said to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecuteth thou Me?”

That’s very interesting for two things. Number one: When you persecute a Christian, you persecute Jesus. When you persecute the church, you persecute Jesus. You cannot separate a man from his body, and the church is the body of Christ. And, therefore, correspondingly, when you neglect the church, you neglect Jesus. When you love the church, you love Jesus. Saul was going to persecute the church, and Jesus said, “Why persecuteth thou Me?”

But something else I want you to see is you can’t persecute a dead man. You see, because Jesus is alive today, the same world that persecuted Jesus Christ so long ago still persecutes the Lord Jesus Christ. Now are you being persecuted today? If Christ is alive in you, you will be persecuted. Now let me say that again. If Jesus Christ is alive and living in you, you will be persecuted.

Now if you’re not persecuted, let me give you the reason why. Let’s just turn to chapter 5 here of these materials and look in verses 31 and following. Simon Peter preaches Christ, and he says, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (now watch in verse 32). And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and they took counsel to slay them.”

Now do you see how clear that is? Listen, friend, when Jesus Christ is alive in you, when Jesus Christ is living in you, and when you won’t shut up about it, when you are a

witness of Jesus Christ, and when the living Christ is witnessing through you, “We are witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost, which is Christ in the Christian, so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.” The same world that hated Jesus so long ago will still hate Jesus today. Now you say, “Oh, I don’t think so. I don’t think so. The world has gotten more Christian today.” No, the Christian has gotten more worldly today. That’s all. Listen. When we begin to behave like those early disciples, the same world that crucified Jesus, the same world that persecuted Jesus, will persecute us today.

Some years ago somebody asked this question. It’s a good question. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Hm. Thank God for these Christians who had the evidence of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in them.

Now I’m telling you, you listen to me. If Jesus Christ is alive and living in you, you can expect bombardment from the artillery of hell. If you are standing with your Lord, “the reproaches of them that reproach thee fell on me,” is what the psalmist said.

You remember when they tried to assassinate President Reagan? There were several people who got shot along with the President. You know why? Because they were with the President. They were the President’s men. And bullets that were meant for the President also found their way into the body of those people there that day. And I’m telling you, dear friend, when you are one with your Lord, when your Commander-in-Chief is, indeed, by your side and you are by His side, the reproaches of those that reproach Christ are going to fall on you. The servant is not better than his lord.

So the first thing I want to tell you tonight, because Jesus Christ is alive today, His persecution is going to continue. Jesus is still being persecuted in Memphis, Tennessee.

## **II. Because Christ Is Alive, His Preaching Is Convincing**

Now there’s another side to that, though. Not only is His persecution continuing, but because He’s alive, His preaching is convincing. Look, if you will, in verse 4. Now we’re in chapter 4:4. Of course, we’re getting scattered all over the place, but that’s our home base. Go back and look. The Bible says that, “They laid hands on them and put them in the hold until the next day, for it was now eventide. That is, they put them in prison. “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”

Now what did they believe? Did they just simply believe a set of propositions? I mean, was it just mere propositional truth? Was it a, was it facts about Jesus that they believed? No. They believed more than facts about the Lord Jesus, though they did believe some facts about the Lord Jesus. What they did was, they believed on Christ.

They met Christ. They had an encounter with Christ.

Now as you go out to be a witness, arguments are not going to convince people. I've said it hundreds of times, anything that I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of. You can never argue a person into being a Christian. We are called not to be lawyers; we're called to be witnesses. A lawyer is someone who argues a case. A witness is somebody who tells what he has seen and heard. Now these people were witnessing. Peter said, "It's by the name of Jesus that this man stands here whole. Don't look at us. Christ did it." And they could not deny that Christ had done it.

Now let me tell you something. Thomas was a doubter. He was a good man, obviously, but he was a doubter. And the other disciples knew that Jesus Christ was alive because they were there after the resurrection. Thomas was absent. Later on, they went to Thomas and they said, "Thomas, Jesus is alive. Thomas, Jesus has been raised from the dead." Thomas didn't believe them. Not till eight days later, when Thomas went and Thomas met Jesus Christ for himself, and Thomas had an encounter with the risen Christ, not until then did Thomas fall down and say, "My Lord and my God."

I want you to listen. If eleven of Thomas' friends could not convince him that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead, I won't be able to convince you. But if you meet Christ, as Thomas met Christ, Jesus will convince you that He's alive. And so what I'm trying to say is this: That soul winning is not just you doing a sales job on somebody. It's not just you coming with a list of facts about Jesus.

Oh, I'm not saying that you must not present the facts. You must present the facts. But there is a divine dimension where the Jesus in me meets you through His Spirit. That's what Peter meant when he said, "We are witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost, so is also the Holy Ghost..." Do you have that also witness? I mean, is a living Christ in you?

Friend, do you know the way I want to live? I want to live as to where you can't explain Adrian Rogers apart from Jesus Christ. I don't want somebody to say, "Well, that guy is a good talker. He's smarter. He's cleverer. He's this or that." I want them to say, "God's in that man. God's in that man. There's something about his life I can't explain." There's a divine dimension. We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost. Friend, I want to tell you, if Jesus Christ is alive, He will continue to be persecuted. But if Jesus Christ is alive, He will continue to be persuasive. His persecution is continual, but His preaching is convincing because we are not just talking about facts; we're introducing people to a person.

Do you know what soul winning is? It's just introducing somebody to your good friend named Jesus. That's what it is. I mean, not trying to get them to subscribe to the Baptist code or creed or church or cause, but to say, "I want you to know my friend,

Jesus. He's alive in me, and I want to introduce Him to you."

### **III. Because Christ Is Alive, His People Are Going to Be Courageous**

Now I want to say a third thing, friend. Because Jesus Christ is alive, His people are going to be courageous. Now I want to, to look at this extended passage here in the fourth chapter. The Bible says in verse 5, "And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem." Now, friend, ah, these were the high muckety-mucks. I'm talking about the, the, the topwaters right here. I mean, this, you can't get any bigger shots than these. "And when they had set them in the midst ..." mean, they had a kangaroo court.

Can you imagine being a fisherman surrounded by people like that? I mean, it'd be like having the President, the Secretary of State, the Vice President, the head of the Pentagon, and everybody else got you in the middle, and they're sitting around looking at you. "And they set them in the midst, and they asked, By what power, or by what name have you done this?" That was a wrong question to ask. "Then Peter (here it is again), filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel."

I want you to see, friend, for just one split second did those people get to be the prosecuting attorney. And then Peter becomes the prosecuting attorney and there in the prisoner's dock. He just turns the thing on them. And he says, "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified..." Can you imagine him saying that? Can you imagine saying, "whom you crucified?" Can you see him as he fixes those fisherman's steely eyes upon them and he points that finger right in their face. "...whom ye crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by him that this man stand here before you whole." You see, there's not a scintilla of a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ is alive. And he goes on to say, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And, friend, I want to tell you, *Jesus Christ is not a good way to heaven; He's the only way.* That's what Peter says here.

Now notice verse 13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men..." Now you have to understand who was, who had them in a circle. I mean, you have to understand, friend, these were not college graduates. These are fishermen. Can you imagine someone talking like that to the rulers, the elders, the big shots, the intelligentsia, the learned men. "...They

marveled and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” I mean, these were people who were walking in the company of the risen Christ.

Now what I’m trying to say, dear friend, is this: That when a man is convinced that Jesus Christ is alive, you can’t intimidate him, you can’t intimidate him. I mean, when, God’s people are courageous. All of the forces of hell could not stop them nor intimidate them. They refused to let up, back up, or shut up till they were taken up. Now I believe that one of the curses of the twentieth century is silent Christians, cowardly Christians. We talk about the Moral Majority. Friend, there’s a silent majority, those of us who do not speak, never name the name of Christ. It is the strategy of the devil to keep good people silent in evil times.

Now our church needs a contagious epidemic of holy boldness. And where does that boldness come from? Look in verse 13: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” The boldness of Peter and John set those people on their ear. I tell you, people are going to marvel at us when we have the boldness of these First Century Christians.

Now I want to say something parenthetically here about boldness, because so many times people don’t know the difference between boldness and arrogance, or something like that. Holy boldness is not arrogance. Peter and John were not arrogant. They were humble. They were submissive. And yet they were bold as a lion.

Now if you’re an arrogant person, you’re going to turn people away from the Lord Jesus. The Bible says, “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach.” You must have a gentle spirit. And being bold does not mean that you’re just loudmouth and brassy and going around knocking things over calling it witnessing. Nor is boldness human courage. It is not self confidence. Maybe you took a Dale Carnegie course, and that’s fine, but that’s not what we’re talking about here. You might have to take another course, How to Win Back the Friends You’ve Influenced. But that’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re not talking about self confidence. We’re not talking about that.

Nor are we talking about being presumptuous. Holy boldness is not just rushing in where angels fear to tread. It’s not handling snakes. It’s not just plunging headlong without using wisdom. But O God, give us that spiritual, reckless abandon where we’re not intimidated by man nor beast nor devil. “If God be for us, who can be against us.”

And, friend, I want to confess to you, I’m not as bold as I ought to be in the Lord. I’m convicted of it. And I want you to pray for me, that God will make me a bolder witness for the Lord Jesus. I find, many times, that fear shuts my mouth and sometimes I’m too concerned about what people think of me. But, you see, I need to dwell some more and some think some more about the fact that Jesus Christ is alive in me. And if He’s alive

in me, friend, could anybody intimidate me if the Son of God, who conquered the grave, is in me?

I mean, when they looked at Peter and John, they said, “How are you going to figure these guys out?” They marveled and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. Now if He’s alive, His persecution is going to continue. If He’s alive, His preaching is going to convince. If He is alive, His people are going to be courageous, because they know, they know that He’s come out of the grave.

#### **IV. Because Christ Is Alive, His Proclamation Is Commanded**

I want to say another thing. Listen, friend. If He’s alive, if He’s conquered the grave, and He has, then His proclamation is commanded.

Let’s begin reading in verse 15 of this fourth chapter and look at it here. “But when they commanded them to go aside, but when they had commanded them to go aside—that is, when the, the council commanded the Christians to go aside—out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all, ah, them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them (now watch it in verse 18), and commanded them not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. But we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” All hell could not stop them. You see, His proclamation is commanded. Jesus, the risen Lord, had appeared to them and He breathed on them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” And then He commissioned them to be His witnesses.

Now I want to ask you a question. You’re reasonable people. If you had been Peter, James, and John, and had met the living, risen Christ who had walked out of that grave, do you think you could ever be quiet about it? Do you? It would be impossible, wouldn’t it? You know, somebody said this; I think it’s tremendous. “If Jesus Christ is still in that grave, nothing really matters. If He came out of that grave, nothing but that really matters.” That’s something to think about, isn’t it? I mean, had you met the living Christ; I mean, had you seen Him.

Well, friend, I’ve met Him. How can I be quiet about it? You see, as I said before, you might as well tell the sun to stop shining as to tell these men not to witness.

Now the reason that you couldn’t shut them up is in verse 20: “We cannot but help speak the things which we’ve seen and heard.” I am convinced that the reason that most people don’t witness is they’re not saved. They’re not saved. They haven’t seen anything and they haven’t heard anything. Can you tell me that you really believe that

Jesus Christ is alive and you're quiet about it?

Well, let me ask you this question: If you knew the cure to cancer, would you tell it? Well, friend, saving a soul from hell is, is so much more important than curing a body from cancer, isn't it? I mean, would you, would you keep silent? If you knew the answer to war, would you tell it? I mean, how to have peace? Of course you would. But, oh, how much more important to have peace with God.

And so what I'm trying to say is this, dear friend, that we must witness, we must witness. Now look in Acts 5:42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Now we're going to start a new program of witnessing here at Bellevue Baptist Church. I'm going to teaching on Sunday nights, God willing, every Sunday night in September. And then the last Tuesday in September in special assigned area through special assigned groups and in Sunday school, through Sunday school classes, we're going to have a brand new epidemic of contagious witnessing in Memphis, Tennessee telling about Jesus Christ.

But, also I'm going to be teaching on these Sunday nights at, at 5:15 right here in this auditorium so that those who will not be going out from these specific groups, but those who simply go to school or go to work or go to play or go to visit, wherever they go, they will be able to do what these Christians did. Now notice what it says. "And daily—that is, every day—in the temple, and from house to house, they ceased not to preach and to teach Jesus Christ."

Now, friends, they were all at it, and they were always at it. Evangelism to these early Christians was not an eight-day meeting where an evangelist came in. I mean, the entire church was caught up in this, and they did not quit.

Do you know what they said about Charles Haddon Spurgeon's church in London? Do you know what they called it? A soul trap! That's what I want them to call Bellevue, don't you? I mean, they come in and we get them for Jesus. I mean, I just, I just want it to be that way. And I want not only for, for our public meeting to be that way, but I want your lives to be that way as you go out.

Now I'm confident of this, precious friend, that not all Christians can witness the same way. A precious member of our church asked me, "Pastor, do you mean that I am to go out door to door. I just can't do that." I said, "Friend, if that's not your gift, I don't expect you to do that. But I expect you to witness in your way with the opportunities that God gives you, with the gifts that God gives you where you are." But God's going to open a door for all of us to witness in our way, in our way to someone, dear friend. Oh, I love this verse, Psalm 68:11. Listen to it. "The Lord gave the word: and great was the company of them that published it."

## Conclusion

Now look around you tonight. You see these almost three thousand people here in this building tonight? Can you imagine what would happen if all of us, just us, became soul winners? “The Lord gave the word, and great was the company of them that published it.” “And daily in the temple, and from house to house, they ceased not to preach and to teach Jesus Christ.” It was said of those early Christians, they turned that world upside down, and they did it without television, without radio, without newspapers, without buses, without literature, and without church buildings. They did so much with so little, and we do so little with so much. But I’ll tell you, friend, perhaps they’d seen some things and heard some things that some of us have not seen and heard and need to see and need to hear. Remember, a witness is someone who tells what he’s seen and what he’s heard. Have you seen anything? Heard anything?

Let’s bow in prayer. Lord Jesus, I pray, first of all, for my own heart as the pastor and leader of this people, that You will give to me, Lord, a soul winner’s heart. I want to be like my Lord, dear Lord, who will do and teach. And, Lord, that I’ll not say, “Do as I say and not do as I do,” or, Lord, that I’ll not even practice what I preach, but I’ll preach what I practice. Lord, I pray for our staff, the members of our staff, Lord, that You’ll make them greater soul winners. I pray, Lord, for our deacons, God, that You’ll give these godly deacons a deeper, sweeter burden for lost souls. Lord, I pray for our Sunday school teachers. Oh God, anoint them to be soul winners, have a burden for the unsaved in their class, and to be enlisting more and save people in their class. Father, I pray for the committee members. I pray, Lord, for our choir. I pray, Lord, for the rank and file of our membership. Lord, that You’d help us get pure and clean and filled with the Holy Spirit and obedient about this matter of witnessing. And, Lord, I pray that You will, ah, stir us again tonight to understand that Jesus Christ is alive. And because He’s alive, we cannot but keep the things that we’ve seen and heard. For we pray in His wonderful name, amen.

Now we’re going to conclude the service tonight with a gospel invitation. What I mean by that is this: We’re going to give you in this auditorium a chance, an opportunity, tonight to receive Christ as your personal Savior. And, ah, it’ll be our joy to take an open Bible tonight and show you exactly from this Bible how to be saved and have prayer with you, a prayer of confession, a prayer of commitment, and a prayer of thanksgiving, that you are trusting Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. So what we’re going to do in a moment is rise and sing. Brother Jim and the choir are going to lead out as we sing. And the counselors of our church, dear men of God, the ministers, are going to stand at the head of each of these four aisles. And I’m going to ask you tonight if you are willing to trust Christ as your Lord and your Savior. You believe that He is alive. You believe that God raised Him from the dead. And you’re not just coming to accept some

propositional facts, but you're coming to meet a living Lord and receive Him into your heart and into your life. I'm going to ask you to come. Up in the balcony, you come. Down here on the ground floor, you come. Make your way to the aisle and right down here to the front. And take one of these counselors by the hand and tell that counselor, "I want to trust Christ," or, "I want to be a Christian," or, "I want to give my heart to Christ." Put it in your own words. He'll know why you're coming. And, oh, do it tonight. Tomorrow may be too late. We're praying for you tonight. You can know the joy of knowing Jesus tonight. You can go home and put your head on your pillow tonight and close your eyes and go to sleep and say, "If I died tonight, I'd eat breakfast with Jesus in the morning." How wonderful to know that. So when we rise and sing, you come to giving your heart, okay.

Now others of you who are saved but you have not been baptized since you've been saved, the Bible teaches baptism, real baptism follows real salvation, real conversion. If you were baptized before you were saved, it would be like having your funeral before you die. You've got it all backwards. Or if you've not been baptized at all and you're saved, in either case, you ought to come tonight and tell the counselor, "I know I'm saved. I know I'm a child of God. That's settled. Because of that I want believer's baptism and membership in this church." Maybe you're a member even of this church and need to come for believer's baptism. Come.

Then there may be some who'd like to transfer their membership to Bellevue Baptist Church from a sister church somewhere. If you know Christ, love Him, and will so live as to bring Him glory through your membership here, lovingly we invite you to come. Again, we're not asking you merely to join for the sake of being a member. If you don't mean business with Christ, you don't intend to be a growing, vibrant, witnessing Christian, don't join. I'm not saying that you have to be perfect. I'm not saying that you may not be weak. But I'm saying that when you come, you're saying, "I want to grow in Jesus, weak as I am, failing as I am, yet I mean business. I don't want to play at this matter of being a Christian." Would you do it? Come and link your heart and life with ours and help us to make an impact on this city and on our nation, yes, please God, on the world for Jesus Christ. Will you do it?

Now just pray, folks, because there's dear, precious souls here who may die and go to hell, some of them if they don't get saved tonight. That may be true. I've preached on many a sermon where it's the last sermon a person ever heard before sudden death. Death comes in such strange ways. I read in the paper this last week where a man drinking a beer swallowed a bee—it's no joke—got in the beer. Did you read that? Stung him in the throat. And before the doctor could administer to him, his throat swelled up so that he suffocated. It's a strange way to die. Now I tell you, here's a man sitting down there having no idea whatever that in a few moments he would be in

eternity. You know, the Bible says, “What is our life, but a vapor that appeareth a little, but for a little while and then vanishes away. Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” I wouldn’t go twenty-four hours without Jesus Christ for one million dollars. God in heaven knows I mean it. Not for one million dollars. I might die in that twenty-four hours. And besides that, I wouldn’t deny Jesus for a billion dollars for twenty-four hours. I wouldn’t do it. Why would you go day after day without knowing Him when you can be saved tonight? God loves you.

# How to Put Power in Your Prayer

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 18, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 4:23–33

*“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”*

ACTS 4:31

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## Introduction

Would you take God’s Word, please, this morning and turn to Acts chapter 4. As you’ve already heard, we’re speaking today on “How to Put Power in Your Prayer.” Now I am totally convinced that the need of the hour is power in prayer; not merely to pray, but to pray with power—to pray so as to get your prayers answered. I begin reading in Acts chapter 4 and verse 23. Let me give you the background for this passage of Scripture. The disciples had done a notable miracle, and the religious rulers of that day could not deny the miracle, but they tried to keep the disciples from preaching or teaching anymore, and so they forbade them to preach the gospel. Now as a result of that, we begin reading in verse 23: *“And being let go, they”—*that is, the disciples—*“went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they had heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said,*

*Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:23–33)*

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I want you to know that it was trouble that brought the church to prayer. The gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was being opposed. Christians were being threatened. And this was the catalyst for this great prayer meeting. Christians, someone has said, are like tea: their real strength comes out when they're in hot water. Now that's true. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ today ought to be praying.

I look around and I see militant, marching humanism. I see false cults that are spreading like wildfire. I see the communist menace circling the globe and surrounding America. I look inside of this beloved nation of ours and I see moral corruption in the movies. I see the slaughter of the unborn innocent babies. I see a drug epidemic, alcoholism, and sexual perversion. I see a people that do not know God; millions—God help us, billions—who have never even heard the name of Jesus. And I am convinced that only prayer can hold back the floodtide of sin and judgment, and only powerful prayer can send revival.

Now it is not just any prayer that we need, but it is prayer with power. It is not the rhetoric of our prayer—how eloquent our prayers are; it is not the music of our prayer—how beautiful our prayers are; it is not the logic of our prayer—how argumentative our prayers are; it is not the method of our prayer—how methodical our prayers are; but it is the power of our prayer that counts. I read in verse 31 that when these disciples had prayed, the place was shaken. That is, there was power there—such power that it literally shook the place. God said amen with an earthquake.

Now I want us to look at this passage of Scripture and see what the principles are

now of powerful prayer—how to put power in your prayers.

## I. The Confidence of Mighty Prayer

Number one: I want you to see what I have called the confidence of mighty prayer. Look in verse 24: *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.”* (Acts 4:24)

### A. They Saw God as Creator of All Things

This was a prayer that saw God as the creator of all things: “God, you are a sovereign God. You are Almighty God. Now this Jewish high court has told us not to preach. They have told us not to teach. But, Lord, you are the Creator. Lord, they are the created. And, Lord, we don’t have to be intimidated by them, because all of the forces of nature are at your fingertips.” Now, friend, it’s necessary that when we’re opposed, and when trouble comes, we go back and get things into perspective, look beyond the visible to the invisible, and look beyond the creature to the Creator, to bring it one more time into focus so that we can pray with confidence.

### B. They Saw God as the Controller of All Things

Now they saw God, in verse 24, as the creator of all things; and so it follows, as night follows day, that they saw God as the controller of all things. Begin in verse 25. They speak of this God, *“who by the mouth of thy servant David, hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,”*—now, watch this and underscore it—*“for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”* (Acts 4:25–28)

Now these disciples were facing a difficult situation. But then they looked back to the darkest day that they had ever known, when all of their hopes, aspirations, and dreams were nailed to a hellish Roman cross; when the Son of God was ganged up on by the high court, by Herod, by Pontius Pilate, and when all of these people nailed the Son of God to the cross. But they said this: “Nothing has gotten out of control.” They quoted from Psalm 2 and they understood that David had said seven hundred years before Jesus Christ was born in Psalm 2 that this was exactly, precisely, what was going to happen. And again I want you to notice in verse 28: *“For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before”*—that is, before it ever happened—*“to be done.”*

Now what God showed these people was not only that God was the creator of all things, but also that God was the controller of all things; that nothing had gotten out of

the control of Almighty God, that God foresaw it all, and that God knew exactly, precisely, what was going to happen. You see, we get all bent out of shape. We think, “Well, maybe the devil somehow has taken over, and maybe somehow things are not going to turn out as the Bible says they are going to turn out.” But, dear friend, nothing—nothing—has happened that God has not already foreseen and that God does not control. You need to learn this: God is still in control.

A while back I had the privilege of having lunch with Corrie ten Boom, that woman who had suffered in Hitler’s concentration camp and was such a shining testimony for Christ. Many of you saw the film of her life called *The Hiding Place*. And I thought, “Well, this is a rare opportunity for me. I’ll not speak so much. I’ll just listen a lot and learn what I can learn.” I learned a lot that day—but Corrie ten Boom said one thing that I wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible. She said this—and I don’t know whether she had ever said it before or since; but I heard it, and it was like a barb in my soul: “There is no panic in heaven, only plans.” And I thought, “Isn’t that wonderful?” The Holy Trinity never meets in an emergency session. Amen? Praise God!

Listen. This is what God had foreordained. This is what God planned. God knew it was all going to take place.

### C. They Saw God as the Conqueror of All Things

Now, notice the confidence of this prayer: “Lord, you are the creator of all things. Lord, you are the controller of all things.” And then it follows, as night follows day, that if He is the creator, then He must be the controller; and if He is the controller, then He is the conqueror of all things—because if you read Psalm 2, Psalm 2 tells about how the kings would crucify the Lord Jesus Christ, and then in Psalm 2 it says, “*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*” (Psalm 2:6) It speaks of how the Lord Jesus Christ is going to rule, how He is going to conquer, and how He must prevail. It tells us, ladies and gentlemen, that God is on the throne, that sin cannot win, that faith cannot fail, and that our God is the conquering God.

I read about a little boy who was up late one night reading a murder mystery. He was reading a book—he was in the middle of this thing—and there was a villain, a dastardly villain, in this story. He was plotting to do all kinds of mayhem and dastardly things to the heroine in this book. And he was feeling sorry for the heroine and almost afraid of the villain himself. He got so concerned about the thing that he couldn’t wait, so he decided that he would read the last chapter before he finished the book. So he went over and read the last chapter, and in the last chapter he read how the villain got it in the neck, how he was repulsed, turned back, and ignominiously defeated, and how the heroine was delivered. Then he went back and began to read the book again with a smile on his face. And every time the villain would plot to do some dirty dastardly thing,

the little fellow would say, “If you knew what I know, then you wouldn’t be so proud and cocky right now.” You see, he had read the last chapter.

Well, friend, I want to tell you that God’s children have read the last chapter. We know how it’s going to end. We know how it’s going to end, and therefore we can pray with a confidence that God is the controller of all things, because God is the conqueror of all things and the creator of all things. Thank God for that. And when you pray, dear friend, you need to get your prayer in perspective. So many of us are whining and groveling when we ought to be praising God and thanking God for the victory, and praying with the mighty confidence that these disciples prayed with so long ago.

## II. The Commitment of Mighty Prayer

The second thing that I want you to notice is not only the confidence of mighty prayer, but I want you to notice the commitment of mighty prayer. Look, if you will, in verse 29: “*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” (Acts 4:29) Underscore, please, the word *servants*. That speaks of the commitment of mighty prayer. That word is a translation of a Greek word that literally means “bondslaves.” “Lord, grant to your slaves—your bondslaves—that they might speak your word with boldness.”

Now, ladies and gentlemen, the reason that many of our prayers are not answered is that we have not made that commitment to the Lord.

Every now and then I’ll come behind a car, and it will have a bumper sticker on it that says, “God is my co-pilot.” No, He’s not. Some businessman says, “Well, I’m going to open a business, and I want God as my partner.” He doesn’t want to be your partner; friend, He is your Lord. He is not your partner. He is not your co-pilot. You are His slave, and He is your sovereign Lord.

Many times we want to use God. God is not going to be used. Do you want God to answer your prayers? Then submit yourself to Him totally as Lord. I mean, why should God increase your strength to give you more power to serve the devil? Why should God answer your prayer, unless you are committed to Him totally?

### A. The Commitment to Express God’s Word

Here were people who were committed to Him. Answered prayer is not for rebels. It is not for rebels. What did they want God to do? Now, look. First of all, they wanted God to give them power to express God’s Word. Look in verse 29. As servants they deserved three things. Number one: to express God’s Word. “*And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” Is that the desire of your heart: to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, to obey the Great Commission? Grant, Lord, “*that with all boldness they may speak thy word*”—that

they may express God's Word.

Now I remind you—are you listening?—it was the expression of God's Word and it was the preaching of God's Word that got them into trouble to begin with. They didn't say, "Lord, move us to more favorable circumstances." They didn't say, "Lord, keep us safe." Do you know what they prayed? They prayed, "Lord, give us more of what got us into trouble in the first place." Now, you think about that: "Lord, we're in trouble for preaching your Word. Now, God, give us boldness to preach it some more." Amen? "We want to express your Word." Ladies and gentlemen, *Jesus Christ did not come to get you out of trouble; He came to get into trouble with you.* And that is exciting. These disciples, if you read the book of Acts, they just stayed in trouble. They said, "Lord, give us boldness."

### **B. The Commitment to Extend God's Hand**

Now this is the commitment of prayer with power: to express God's Word. But not only did they want to express God's Word, but I want you to look at it here: They wanted, ladies and gentlemen, to extend God's hand. Notice in verse 30: "*By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child, Jesus.*" (Acts 4:30) "Now, Lord, we want you to stretch forth your hand." Well, how was Jesus going to stretch forth His hand? After all, Jesus had gone to heaven. How was He going to stretch forth His hand? Their hands were to become His hands. What they were saying is, "Lord, take our hands and do through our hands what you would do if you were here in the flesh."

Let me show you how that prayer was answered. Turn to chapter 5 and look in verse 12: "*And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.*" (Acts 5:12) They said, "Lord, stretch forth your hand," and then the Bible says, by the hands of the apostles were these things done. Do you understand that we are now the Body of Christ and that He wants to inhabit our humanity and display His deity through our humanity? Are you available to Him? Are you saying, "Lord, these hands are your hands; and, Lord, if you want to stretch forth your hands, then all you have to do is to say the word, and my hands will be stretched forth"? Are you committed to Him like that? That is the commitment of mighty prayer—prayer that wants to express His Word, prayer that wants to extend His hand.

I read some time ago about a cathedral in Europe that was bombed in World War II. Some of the Americans were there and they wanted to rebuild the cathedral, and so they did. And in that cathedral was a magnificent statue of Christ with his arms outstretched, and underneath it the scripture, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28) The statue had been broken to pieces. They searched through the rubble. They found all of the parts of that statue of

Christ and they assembled them back together. But when they came to the hands, they could not find the hands. The hands had been destroyed, and they couldn't find them. They didn't know what to do, until somebody had an idea, and he wrote beneath that statue with those arms without hands stretched out, "He has no hands but our hands." That is so true.

### C. The Commitment to Exalt God's Son

"Lord, we are your bondslaves." "Lord, we are here to express your Word." "Lord, we are here to extend your hands." "And, Lord, we are here to exalt your Son." Notice the third thing—verse 30: *"By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."* (Acts 4:30) Not in our name, but in the name of Jesus. And I've told you that the name stands for character and person. That is, when it is done, it will be obvious that Jesus Christ is doing it, and Jesus Christ will get the glory, and Jesus Christ will get the praise. Jesus said that we are to pray in His name. (John 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:23–24, 26) That is what they're talking about. Praying in the name of Jesus is not just something at the end of your prayer, tacking on a little phrase, "In Jesus' name, amen." It means, "Jesus, with your authority, and in your power, and for your glory, Lord, do this. We want you, Lord Jesus, to be exalted."

So many of our prayers are so selfish. We are not concerned with the glory of Jesus. The Apostle James says, *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* (James 4:3) *God is not some glorified bellhop running up and down the corridors of heaven to find things to bring them to you in order to satisfy your whims and your wants. God is not a sanctified Santa Claus. God is not a grocery clerk that runs around when you come with a shopping list.*

Many of us need to understand what prayer is. Prayer is a means of bringing the power of heaven into our lives; and when we are interested in expressing God's Word, when we're interested in extending God's hand, and when we're interested in exalting God's Son and glorifying the Lord Jesus, then maybe we'll see our prayers answered. There is no *maybe* to it.

I was reading recently about a lady down in Miami. They had a hurricane down in Miami. This woman was an agnostic, or an atheist, or whatever she was, and she wrote this to the *Miami Herald*, the newspaper down there. She said, "I've never believed in God, and I've never believed in prayer. I thought it was all superstition. But the storm was coming, and I thought that maybe I would give it a try to see if it really works. So I asked God to protect my house from the storm—and nothing happened; my house got damaged. So, what do you say about that? And all these people say that they believe in God and believe in prayer." She wrote a letter like this to the editor. I thought that the

editor's answer was pretty good. He wrote back and he said, "Madam, I don't know much about prayer either, but it must be that God was busy taking care of his regular customers." Amen?

Now there are so many of us who think that we can just kind of run up to God with a little shopping list. Are you committed to Him? Friend, there is the confidence of powerful prayer, of mighty prayer. That confidence sees God as creator, God as controller, and God as conqueror. And then along with that confidence, not only is there the sovereignty of God, but there is the servanthood of man, where we say, "Lord, now, grant to your bondslaves that we may exalt Jesus, that we may extend the hand of God, that we may express the Word of God."

### III. The Consequences of Mighty Prayer

Now comes the third thing I want you to notice. I've talked to you first of all about the confidence of this prayer. Then I've talked to you about the commitment of mighty prayer. Thirdly, I want you to think of the consequences of mighty prayer. I want you to see what happens. Begin in verse 31: *"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."* (Acts 4:31–33)

Now, what were the consequences of this prayer?

#### A. The Spirit Is Received

Number one: The Spirit is received. Look, if you will, in verse 31: *"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."* Now they had already been filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, but now they are filled with the Holy Spirit again. And that teaches us a lesson: that we cannot operate on yesterday's experience. There must be a fresh filling of God's Holy Spirit. And there must be this time when day after day in powerful prayer we are filled with the Spirit.

But there is another lesson that I have learned: that I cannot divorce the fullness of the Spirit from the witness of the servant. Now, look at it: *"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."* Why is God going to fill you with the Holy Spirit? Not to make you feel good, and not to soothe you, but to empower you. Acts 1, verse 8: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me."* (Acts 1:8)

Now, listen. You say, "O Spirit of God, fill me. I want to be a great Bible student."

The Spirit of God says, “I’m not interested.” “Spirit of God, fill me. I want to live victoriously over sin.” The Spirit of God says, “I’m still not interested.” “Spirit of God, fill me. I want to have peace in my heart.” He says, “I’m not interested.” “Spirit of God, I want to express God’s Word. I want to extend God’s hands. I want to exalt God’s Son.” The Spirit says, “Is that what you want? That’s what I want also. We’ll get together on that.”

Friend, I’ll tell you, the Holy Spirit of God will fill you when you’re committed to be a witness to Jesus Christ. Are you committed that way? Listen. They were committed as servants. And the Bible says that when they prayed, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And I’ll tell you something else: They knew when they were filled with the Holy Spirit so much that they knew the time and the place when it happened. Think about that. Are you consciously filled with God’s Spirit? You could say, “Yes, that was the time when God’s Spirit came upon me in power.”

### **B. Unity Is Achieved**

Now, look. What are the consequences? Number one: The Spirit is received. Number two: Unity is achieved. Notice, if you will, here in verse 32: *“And the multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”* (Acts 4:32) They were fused together. They became one. *Prayer, more than anything else, unites the church. We are not to be wired together by organization. We are not to be frozen together by formalism. We are not to be rusted together by tradition. But we are to be fused and melted together by prayer.* When the church prays, that Spirit is received, and that unity is achieved.

I hear people talk about what fellowship is—and sometimes they say that it is “two fellows in the same ship.” No, no, that’s not what the Bible word *fellowship* means. That’s all external. You and I can be on the same boat and be enemies. But the Bible says, dear friend, that they were *“of one heart and of one soul.”* The Jesus that is in me is the Jesus that is in you, and there is that unifying power. And the Bible says, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psalm 133:1) The Bible says, *“These...things doth the LORD hate”—including “he that soweth discord among brethren.”* (Proverbs 6:16–19) *The devil had rather start a church fuss than sell a barrel of whiskey any day.*

And how is that unity achieved? Through prayer—as we pray and seek the face of God. And, by the way, if you have ever had a prayer partner, or been in a prayer group, then you will know that those people that you’ve prayed with have become friends for life. There is a unity that is achieved in prayer that can be achieved in no other way. And so, dear friend, if we want our church to stay unified and be greatly unified, then indeed

we must practice this kind of prayer. I want to call upon your deacon group to pray more. I want to call upon our choirs to pray more. I want to call upon our orchestra to pray more. I want to call upon our staff to pray more. I want to call upon our Sunday School classes to pray more. I want to call upon our divisional directors to get together in this kind of unified prayer where we pray together.

### **C. The Gospel Is Believed**

Now, the third thing that happened—watch it: When the Spirit is received, when unity is achieved, then the gospel is believed. Notice what the Bible says in verse 33: *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”* (Acts 4:33)

As a matter of fact, there are three great things that ring through the book of Acts. Two of them are here, and one is in Acts chapter 5: great power, great grace, and great fear. That’s what we need in our churches today. And, dear friend, it just follows that when God’s Holy Spirit comes in, we are fused together by the Holy Spirit of God, and there is a unity and a power that causes the gospel to be believed when we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our first duty is not to preach the gospel, but to be ready and worthy to preach it through prayer—real prayer.

### **Conclusion**

You say, “What does this have to do with my life, Pastor?” I’ll tell you what it has to do with your life. The time will come—if it has not already come—when for God to answer your prayer will mean more to you than anything else on this earth. I’ll tell you what else it means to you. Many of you have loved ones who are going to die and go to hell if you don’t learn how to pray and witness. I’ll tell you what else it means: It means that your life, your home, your family, this church, this community, America, and our world, will never see the power of God as they ought until God’s people learn how to pray—how to put power in your prayer. The need of the hour is prayer with power.

# Earthshaking Prayer

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: April 30, 1989**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:31**

*“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”*

ACTS 4:31

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn please to the book of Acts. Some Bibles call the book of Acts the Acts of the Apostles. I want you to understand that description is not in the original text. It's just what the Bible printer put up there to describe what he wanted to call the book of Acts. And, he calls it the Acts of the Apostles. It's not really the Acts of the Apostles. It's the Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, as you're going to see, as He continued to live and work through the apostles. Turn to Acts chapter 4 and I want you to look at one verse and then we're going to back up and read some verses that come before that one verse after a moment.

But, first of all, that one verse. Acts chapter 4 verse 31 says, *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness”* (Acts 4:31).

Some years ago—probably more than a decade or so—we were in a prayer meeting here. We were having a prayer meeting and we had a visiting choir. And, in the middle of that choir's singing this place began to move and quiver. At first, I thought it was just me. I thought maybe something was happening to my seat. I was sitting right over there about where Otis Lott is. And, I thought, well, maybe my chair is giving way beneath me. Then I heard a rumble and I looked up at the chandelier—that used to be up there, which is now stored, which will in a few months be hung in the foyer of our new building—and it was swaying. And, I said, “I've never seen it on this wise before.” And, it dawned on me that we were having an earth tremor. How many of you were here that night? All right.

Now, what I did was to stand up and move over to that doorway. Now, the deacons have accused me of deserting the ship. But, my mama didn't raise a fool. And, well, I know you want to debate that, but anyway I just figured that I better lead the flock. What I really wanted to do—in all seriousness—was to go get my back against the wall and survey the situation, because very frankly, I had never been in the house of God before when it began to shake.

Now, I have been in many prayer meetings where people have prayed, “Lord, shake this place.” But, he never did. We weren't praying for Him to shake that place that night, but we had a concert that almost brought the house down. And, I thought to myself, that little tremor brought more excitement into this church than I've seen in a long time. Now, it wasn't necessarily spiritual excitement, just excitement. And, very frankly, some of us had a quickened heartbeat if you were here that night. No serious damage was done. But, it was a nice little tremor .

I want to talk to you tonight about earth shaking prayer. Notice again here in Acts chapter 4 and verse 31: *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And they spake The Word of God with boldness”* (Acts 4:31). Now, let me tell you what had happened is this. The apostles, the disciples, and the earliest followers of the Lord Jesus had been preaching Christ. And, not only were they preaching Christ, but God was confirming their preaching with signs and miracles. And, a lame man had been healed and the religious leaders—the Sanhedrin—didn't like it all because the crowds were beginning to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and they were beginning to follow the apostles. And, they wanted the Sanhedrin to shut up that preaching—to stop them from preaching—but they couldn't do it because the popular mood was with the disciples at that time. And, the people were glorifying God. They didn't know what to do. So they brought them together and they commanded that they not preach any more. If you will look about in verse 16, they asked themselves: *“Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in*

*Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name”—that is, we'll threaten them and tell them never again to preach the Gospel in the name of Jesus—*“And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:16–18).

Now, I want you to remember this was a powerful group. This was the group that engineered the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts chapter 4 verse 19 says: *“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19–20). That is, you might as well tell the sun to stop shining as to tell us to shut up. Because we have seen Him, we have heard Him, He is risen from the dead. And *“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.”* (Acts 4:21–23).

Now, this is the setting for a prayer meeting. This is the setting for an earthshaking prayer meeting. Now, I want you to see three things. We are going to look at three things that were elements of earth shaking prayer. Prayer that was so powerful that it literally caused the building to vibrate where they were praying.

## **I. The Perspective of Earthshaking Prayer**

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the perspective of earth shaking prayer. I want you to see the perspective that these people prayed from. It's very important that you pray from a proper perspective. Now, I want you to notice the prayer. I want you to see the perspective Now, notice in verse 24: *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is”* (Acts 4:24).

Now, here was their perspective.

### **A. They Saw God as Creator**

First of all, they saw God as creator. Have you got that? This was the perspective they had. They saw God as creator. Now, if you have any difficulty with miracles, friend, if you can get just past Genesis 1:1 you won't have any more trouble. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). Just get past that and the rest of the Bible is duck soup. You don't have any difficulty believing the miracles in the Bible. What they did was they had to put this in proper perspective. Now, they had to say this

Sanhedrin, this council that has forbidden us has power but God you're the creator and you have almighty power. We have at our beckon call the God who holds the forces of nature in the palm of his hand. Lord, these people who have threatened us they are creatures. But, God, you are the creator. And, what they did was they looked beyond the visible to the invisible. I don't know how big your God is. But, you'll never pray an earth shaking prayer unless you pray it to a God who is a big God.

### **B. They Saw God as Controller**

Now, look. What was their perspective? They said, "God, why should we worry? You made it all." Now watch. That's part of the perspective. They saw God as creator. But, also they saw God as controller. He didn't just wind it up and throw it out and let it spin. Oh no. Continue to read now in verse 25. You made everything and then you said something: *"Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever"—watch it now—"thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done"* (Acts 4:25–28).

Now, when they prayed, they began to pray Scripture. And, what they're quoting is Psalm 2. What they're quoting here in Acts chapter 4 verses 24 through 28 is just a quotation from Psalm 2. And, they're saying, "Lord, all of this is exactly what you said would happen in the prophecy." In Psalm 2, you would say that the people would rage and the kings and the rulers would rise up against your Lord and his Christ. But, they said, "Lord, it was exactly what you said would happen." They did whatever your counsel determined before to be done in verse 28. Lord, not only are you the creator, but Lord, you're the controller.

You see, what they did is this, before they prayed this prayer they looked back to the darkest day of their lives and they remembered the day when all of their hopes were nailed to that cross and they thought all was lost and all was gone. And, then they saw Jesus Christ come out of that grave. They knew that He ascended into Heaven. They knew that everything was on course and it was exactly, precisely what God planned—that Jesus Christ was slain before the foundation of the world and that nothing, nothing was out of control.

Now, friend, when you begin to pray that way, you're praying from a proper perspective. They saw God as the creator and then they saw God as the controller. Notice again verse 28. He says it so plainly: *"For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done"* (Acts 4:28). God knows what's going to happen.

As I've told you before the Holy Trinity never meets in emergency session.

### C. **They Saw God as Conqueror**

Let me tell you another perspective that they prayed out of. Not only did they see God as creator and not only did they see God as controller, but, my dear friend, they saw God as conqueror of all things. Now, notice in Psalm 2 that they quote from. Psalm 2 is a Psalm that tells of the Lord Jesus Christ who is going to rule and to reign from Zion. And, they knew that the God who had fulfilled the first part of that Psalm was going to fulfill the last part of that Psalm too. They knew that the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Next time you have a problem, friend, listen, you glance at your problem and you gaze on your God who is A—creator, B—controller, C—conqueror. Fix your mind on God. You pray earthshaking prayer when you see that kind of a God.

## II. **The Purpose of Earthshaking Prayer**

Now, the second thing I want you to see. Not only the perspective of earth shaking prayer, but I want you to see the purpose of this prayer. Now, if you pray with a wrong purpose, you also are not going to pray a powerful prayer. But, notice the purpose of this prayer. I read verses 29 and 30. Now, here's their prayer. Now listen to it: *“And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus”* (Acts 4:29–30). A threefold purpose. They said, “Look, Lord, we're servants. Here we are.” You see their threatenings. Here we are Lord. Just servants reporting for duty. And, here are three things they prayed in this prayer.

### A. **To Express God's Word**

Number one, they desired to express God's Word. Look in verse 29: *“...that with all boldness they may speak thy word...”* (Acts 4:29). Lord, here are thy servants. Grant, Lord, that we'll be bold enough to speak. Question. What got them into trouble in the first place? Speaking The Word of God. Another question. What are they praying for? Are they praying for a better position? Are they praying that God would give them ease of comfort? No. They just prayed for boldness. They just pray for courage. They say, “Lord, we got in trouble speaking for your name.”

Now, Lord, just give us courage to do it some more. All right, what they prayed for, here's earth shaking prayer, they prayed, “God, give us courage to express Your Word. We want to express Your Word.” Look around you tonight. There are almost three thousand people in this building. What would happen if you folks went out tomorrow with boldness, even if it meant you got into trouble with boldness to share the Lord Jesus

Christ. Now, that's the first element.

### **B. To Extend God's Hand**

Now, listen. I'm talking about the purpose. The first purpose was to express God's Word. That's what they prayed for. But, not only to express God's Word, but also to extend God's hand. Look in verse 30: *"...that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus"* (Acts 4:29–30). What they were saying is, "Lord, let your miracle-working power just flow through us. Lord, let our hand be your hand. Lord, not only do we want our mouths to be your mouth. But, Lord, we want our hands to be your hand." Now, Jesus is in Heaven. But they're saying, "Lord, stretch forth your hand." What hand did he have? Their hand. Because now the Lord Jesus Christ has gone to Heaven, but He still has a body on earth. And, that body is His church. Do you know what Bellevue Baptist Church ought to be doing? Nothing more, nothing less than Jesus Christ would be doing if he were here in the flesh. Do you believe, Adrian, that we ought to be doing miracles? Yes. I believe if Jesus were here, He'd be doing miracles.

Now, I do believe that miracles of grace are greater than miracles of glory. And, I believe that the physical, literal miracles that he did may still be reproduced. But, Jesus said, "Greater works than these that I do shall ye do that believe on me." Greater than these physical miracles and more abundant are going to be the miracles of grace and glory. But, what I'm telling you, dear friend, there's only one person who's ever lived the Christian life and His name is Jesus. And, if it is lived today, it'll be Jesus Christ in us living it. And, He wants to stretch forth His hand.

Back over in Europe in World War II a cathedral was bombed, a beautiful cathedral. They went to put the cathedral back together and some of our servicemen were overseas and they were helping to put that cathedral that had been bombed back together. In that cathedral there was a statue of the Lord Jesus Christ with his arms outstretched. They found the fragments of that statue that had crumbled and they put it all back together, but they couldn't find the hands. They searched all over for the hands but they couldn't find them. And, a soldier wrote these words and put them at the pedestal of that statue of Jesus. "He has no hands but our hands."

Now, here was their prayer. Listen to it. It wasn't a prayer for ease. It wasn't a prayer for comfort. It wasn't a prayer for wealth. It wasn't a prayer even for healing. Here was the prayer. Listen to the prayer. "Lord, we want to express Your Word. Lord, we want to extend your hand."

### **C. To Exalt God's Son**

A third thing they said: "Lord, we want to exalt your Son. Look if you will in verse 30 again: *"By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done*

*by the name of thy holy child Jesus*” (Acts 4:30). The name of Jesus. It was a prayer in the name of Jesus. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? Does it mean that we go to God with a little shopping list, and then say, “In the name of Jesus.” I’ve done that so many times. I’m ashamed of it. Thinking that somehow by superimposing His name on the end of our prayer, that’s a little religious foo foo dust that makes the prayer acceptable. It is not. Do you know what it means to pray in the name of Jesus? It means to pray with his authority for his glory. In His name, for His glory. That’s what they were praying for. The kind of a prayer that shakes the house is a prayer that says, “Lord, I want to express Your Word. Lord, I want to extend your hand. Lord, I want to exalt Your Son.” That’s the kind of a prayer that God was pleased to answer that day. We don’t pray those kind of prayers. We’re praying, “Lord, help me in this little problem. Lord, I stubbed my toe. Lord, this thing or that thing. Lord, give me a job.” Those things are all well and good. But, those are not the kind of prayers that shake the house. Those are not the kind of prayers that cause God to move in mighty revival power. You know, we’re asking God to do things for us. And, we’re not really having God’s glory in our heart and in our mind. I want you to examine the prayers you pray all next week and see how many times you pray, “Lord, give me boldness to express your Word. Give me courage to extend your hand and O God, give me a motivation to exalt your Son.”

Now, all right, I’ve talked to you about the perspective. They saw God as creator, controller, and conqueror. And, out of that perspective they prayed with a purpose, a purpose that God’s Word would be expressed, a purpose that God’s hand would be extended, and a purpose that God’s Son would be exalted.

### **III. The Power of Earthshaking Prayer**

Now, I want you to see a third thing and I’ll be finished. I want you to see the power of that kind of a prayer. I’ve talked to you about the perspective of it. I have talked to you about the purpose of it. Now, I want you to see the power of it. Three things happened when they prayed that kind of a prayer.

#### **A. The Spirit Is Received**

In verse 31, the Spirit is received. Notice. *“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...”* (Acts 4:31). All right? The Spirit is received.

Now, notice they had already prayed, “Lord, we want to express Your Word. Lord, we want to extend your hand. Lord, we want to exalt Your Son.” Now, can you understand why they were filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? So many of us want to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can have ease, ecstasy, and luxury—or whatever it is. God’s not interested. My friend, when you get your life narrowed down, when you get your focus narrowed down to where you want to

express God's Word, when you get where you want to extend God's hand, and when you get to where you want to exalt God's Son, I'll promise you on the authority of The Word of God the Holy Spirit will fill you. That's right. The reason we're not filled is because so many times we're looking for some little hocus pocus good feeling type of thing that makes us feel good. You get serious about serving the Lord God and the Holy Spirit finds a person who wants what the Spirit wants and they get together.

### **B. Unity Is Achieved**

I want to tell you something. These same disciples had already been filled at Pentecost. But, the church can't operate on past experience the world. We'd make an impact on this city. We're just playing at it, folks. We're just playing at it. I'm telling you, the Spirit was received and unity was achieved. One of the greatest marks that we belong to Jesus Christ is our unity. And, I'll tell you before and I'll tell you again the devil had rather start a church fuss than open a porno palace or sell a barrel of whiskey any day. If you think we're going to be unified around our denomination, around our program, around our building, or around our pastor, you're wrong. Our unity has got to be in Jesus. And, that comes through prayer.

We tried to be wired together through organization or rusted together through tradition or frozen together by formalism. Dear friend, we need to be melted together by the Holy Spirit of God. When they prayed, there was a unity.

### **C. The Gospel Is Believed**

Listen. The Spirit was received. Unity was achieved. And, you know what happens when that happens? Watch it. It's so beautiful. The Spirit's received, unity achieved, and the Gospel is believed. It just follows as night follows day.

Now, look if you will in verse 33: *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all”* (Acts 4:33). You see, the Gospel was believed. When we start living this way people are going to believe what we preach. With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. No foe could daunt them. No fear could haunt them. They became witnesses. Let me say something else right now. Witnesses are not made by programs. Love worth sharing cannot make you a witness. It cannot make you a witness. Learning the four spiritual laws cannot make you a witness. Only the Spirit of God can make you a witness. Those things can teach you how to witness, but they don't know the difference. Don't tell me what has happened to you. I want to know right now are you being filled with the Spirit. You pray this kind of a prayer and you will be. I'll tell you something else about it. You say, “I don't know whether I'm filled with the Spirit or not.” They knew whether they were filled. I mean, it was so obvious that they were filled they could record it. They could write it down. They could say this is the date, the time, and

the place where we were filled with the Holy Spirit. Man, the filling of the Holy Spirit is a real legitimate experience. I'm not talking about speaking in tongues. There's no evidence here at this instance that they did. But, there was evidence. A Christian ought to be continuously and consciously Spirit-filled so much that it could be recorded, filled with the Spirit.

Now watch. Here is the first power. The Spirit is received. Secondly, unity is achieved. Look if you will in verse 32: *“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”* (Acts 4:32). Oh, my soul. What would happen if we began to pray that kind of a prayer, boys and girls? I mean, when we pray in such a way that God's Holy Spirit fills everybody and everybody is of one heart and one soul. Can you imagine the power of unity in a church like Bellevue Church if we were all of one heart and one soul and not anybody said anything I have belongs to me? If God wants it, He can have it.

Oh, you say, “Brother Rogers, you've gone too far now.” Yeah, that's right. We don't want to be like this. We say we want a twentieth, we want a first New Testament church. And, say, “God, if you want it, you can have it. It's not mine. It's yours.” We'd pay for those buildings, wouldn't we? We'd send missionaries around the world. We'd make an impact on this city. We're just playing at it, folks. We're just playing at it. I'm telling you, the Spirit was received and unity was achieved.

One of the greatest marks that we belong to Jesus Christ is our unity. And, I'll tell you before and I'll tell you again the devil had rather start a church fuss than open a porno palace or sell a barrel of whiskey any day. You think we're going to be unified around our denomination or unified around our program or unified around our building or unified around our pastor, you're wrong. Our unity has got to be in Jesus. And, that comes through prayer.

We tried to be wired together through organization or rusted together through tradition or frozen together by formalism. Dear friend, we need to be melted together by the Holy Spirit of God. When they prayed, there was a unity. Listen. The Spirit was received. Unity was achieved. And, you know what happens when that happens? Watch it. It's so beautiful. The Spirit's received, unity achieved, and the Gospel is believed. It just follows as night follows day.

Now, look if you will in verse 33: *“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all”* (Acts 4:33). You see, the Gospel was believed. When we start living this way people are going to believe what we preach. With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. No foe could daunt them. No fear could haunt them. They became witnesses.

## **Conclusion**

Let's pray. Father God, I just pray Lord that in my own heart and life You will speak. Lord, that you will stretch forth your hand as my hand is stretched forth. O, dear God that in my life and in flesh the Holy Child Jesus will be exalted. And, what I pray for myself I pray for these and we pray for one another. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

# Earthshaking Prayer

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 13, 1992**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:31**

**Sponsored by: Sponsor**

*“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”*

ACTS 4:31

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Perspective of Earthshaking Prayer
  - A. They Saw God as the Creator of All Things
  - B. They Saw God as the Controller of All Things
  - C. They Saw God as the Conqueror of All Things
- II. The Purpose of Earthshaking Prayer
  - A. To Express God’s Word
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Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 4 with me tonight? I want to speak to you on powerful prayer. Really, we might call it “Earthshaking Prayer.”

Look, if you will, please in Acts chapter 4 and look in verse 31: “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken.” Do you see it? Do you see it? “When they had prayed, the place was shaken.”

One of our members went off on a trip somewhere and saw an historical marker and stopped to read it. And this is what it says: They copied it down and handed it to me. “Historical marker – Pine Log Methodist Church – Pine Log Community. On this site August 31, 1886, Reverend J. M. Sullivan prayed this prayer: “Lord, if it takes it to move the hearts of these people, shake the grounds on which this old building stands.” Let me read that again. “Lord, if it takes it to move the hearts of these people, shake the

grounds on which this old building stands.” And, then, the historical marker went on to say, “Before the conclusion of Reverend Sullivan’s prayer, the grounds were violently shaken by a sudden earthquake.” And, then, underneath that is a verse of Scripture: James 5, verse 16: “The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Amen. That’s, that’s an interesting thing, isn’t it, that enough to make an historical marker? Here’s a man who prayed what so many of us have prayed: “Lord, shake this place.” And He did. Be careful what you pray.

Now, this church, this early church had been going through persecution. For example, if you’ll back up and see what, ah, predicated this prayer, look in verse 23, for example. “And being let go, they went to their own company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, ‘Lord, Thou art God, which made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is.’”

Now what happened is this: That these people were being persecuted. Ah, they were being told not to preach, not to teach, not to witness, not to stand up for the Lord Jesus Christ. And that persecution was what caused them to pray.

I was talking to our staff today, some of them, about a book that I read many years ago. If you pick it up and read it, I think it’s out of print, but if you can find it, it is by L. E. Maxwell. The title of the book, “Crowded to Christ.” L. E. Maxwell, “Crowded to Christ.” And what Dr. Maxwell so eloquently said is this: That most of us need trouble to bring us to prayer. Most of us need to be crowded to Christ.

It was trouble that brought these people to this place of prayer. And, perhaps, the worst thing that could happen to most of us is that we live a soft life. These disciples were being persecuted, and they were being prosecuted, and they were being told, under the penalty of law, not to preach and not to teach and not to witness. But they prayed and the place was shaken. So many of our prayers are more like a lullaby than an earthquake. But here was a prayer that literally, physically shook the place.

But why did God send an earthquake to rattle the windows? Why did God cause the foundations to quiver? It was just heaven saying, “Amen.” Just heaven saying, “Amen.” He doesn’t always do that. But in the book of Acts, He was just giving them some signs to say, “I approve.” And He was giving them a demonstration of His power. But in all of this we’re going to learn a secret about prayer, earthshaking prayer, powerful prayer. And I want you to study their prayer with me, and I want you to see three basic things.

## **I. The Perspective of Earthshaking Prayer**

And, first of all, I want you to see the perspective from which they prayed, the perspective. All prayer has to have the right perspective. Now look at their perspective. Ah, look in verse 24: “And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice with one

accord and said, ‘Lord (now mark this), Lord, Thou art God, which made the heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is.’”

Now what did they do? They got their focus away from the problem and they got their focus immediately on God. Theirs was the prayer that saw God, first of all, as the Creator of all things. Do you have it? As the Creator of all things. God, You made it all. I mean, everything is here. Every molecule, every planet, every sun blazing in the eternal sky – all of it. Every grain of sand, all of it. Lord God, it came from Your hand. You are the Creator. It came from the tips of Your fingers. You are Almighty God!

Now what they were doing is just backing off and saying, “Is this really a big problem when we consider how big our great God is who holds the very forces of nature in His hand?” What these Christians did, and what I need to do in my prayers, is look past the visible to the invisible, and look past the temporal to the eternal, and look past all of these things that look so big to the things that are really big.

Now, if you have a problem right now, I want you to get your mind on your problem. Bring it into focus. Do you have your problem in mind? Okay. Now I want you to double it in size. Now I want to ask you to hold it up to God and tell me if it’s a big problem when you look at God. Compare it to God.

You see, what we have to do is to look at our problems with a proper perspective.

#### **A. They Saw God as the Creator of All Things**

They saw God, number one, as the Creator of all things. And because He was the Creator of all things (now watch), they also saw Him as the Controller of all things. Look in verse 25 through 28: “Who (this God who made everything), who by the mouth of Thy servant David has said, ‘Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things...?’” You know what He’s doing right now? He’s quoting, ah, David in Psalm 2. This is a quotation from Psalm 2. “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD, and against His Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel (watch it) determined beforehand to be done.”

God, You’re the Creator of all things, and God, You’re the Controller of all things. Everything that happened to Jesus Christ at Calvary, the way that Herod turned on Him, the way that Pontius Pilate turned on Him, the way the people turned on Him, the way they mercilessly beat Him, the way they nailed Him up on that hellish machine called a cross, it was all predetermined by Almighty God. God had recorded part of it in Psalm 2 and the rest of it in the rest of the Bible. And they’re saying, “Listen. Nothing is out of control.”

## B. They Saw God as the Controller of All Things

We need to get a proper perspective when we pray and see that it is God who is the Creator of all things, and it is God who is the Controller of all things. And as I've told you before, ha, bless God, the holy Trinity never meets in emergency session. I mean, we, we say, we go around wringing our hands and saying, "What's going to happen? What's this world coming to?" Well, I don't really know, but I'm going to tell you that God knows and not for one skinny minute has He lost control. Everything He said that your hand, that your mind predetermined to do. Look in verse 28: "They did, ah, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined beforehand to be done." God has not lost control.

## C. They Saw God as the Conqueror of All Things

Now, not only did they see God as the Creator of all things, ha, and not only did they see God as, as the Controller of all things. Therefore, it follows, ipso facto, that God is the Conqueror of all things. If He's the Creator, and if He's the Controller, He is the Conqueror. And so, look at the next verse and see what it says there in verse 28: "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Now, ah, God is in control. And you don't have to worry about that. I don't know what the world is coming to, per se, but I tell you one thing. I do know that I know, and this gives me great comfort in these days in which we're living. Want me to tell you what I know that I know? The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

Now, when you pray, when you pray, you need to back away from the problem for a while and, and, and as the poet said, ha, "Lean thine arms upon the windowsill of heaven and gaze into the face of thy God and put the vision fresh in thy heart. Then turn to meet the day." Look into the face of God. Glance at your problems. Gaze at your God. A proper perspective. Earthshaking prayer. There is the perspective of prayer.

## II. The Purpose of Earthshaking Prayer

And, then, also we see not only the perspective of this prayer, but we see the purpose of earthshaking prayer. Look at it. I see a three-fold purpose here. Ah, look in verse 29. Here's what their prayer was: "And now, Lord, ha, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." Now the key word right there is *servant*. "...grant to thy servants..." And the word *servant* here is a word that means "bond slave." We're Your slaves, Lord. Friend, prayer is not some way that you get your will done in heaven; prayer is where God's will is done on earth. And we present ourselves as servants of God. Answered prayer is not for rebels; answered prayer is for slaves. When you make yourself a bond servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, when you say, "Lord, I see You as sovereign. You created all things. You control all

things. You conquer all things. That's the way I see You. And now, Lord, here's how I see me: a servant standing before You, God. Grant unto thy servants."

And they asked His servants that they might do three things.

#### **A. To Express God's Word**

First of all, that they might express God's word. Look in verse 29: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." That's a very interesting thing, because it was speaking the Word of God that got them into trouble. They're not saying, "Lord, we're in trouble. Help us out. Lord, see to it that we don't go to jail. Lord, make these people like us." That's not their prayer at all. They're just saying, "God, give us courage to keep on doing what we did that got us in trouble in the first place, ha, to, to preach Your Word." They weren't asking for a favorable position. Again, I remind you that Jesus didn't come to get us out of trouble; He came to get into trouble with us. And so what they're saying is, "Lord, they've said we can't preach anymore. They've said we can't teach anymore. But we're Your servants, and You have commanded us to share Your Word. And so, Lord, our prayer is, as servants, that You would grant us boldness, number one, to express Your Word."

May I tell you very frankly, that I believe the problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century doesn't revolve around the demise of the Moral Majority, but the great problem is the silent majority.

I, I pray to God this anti-nudity ordinance will stand. But if it does, I can tell you that one of the reasons it has and will and does is because some people spoke up, some people spoke up. They said, "Enough is enough."

God, give us boldness! Now I'm not talking about arrogance, but boldness. "Lord, to speak, even if everybody doesn't us. We're not here to be popular."

#### **B. To Extend God's Hand**

Here, my friend, is the, is the purpose. Number one: To express God's Word. Not our opinion; God's Word. Look at it. Look at their prayer. It's, it's very clear. "And now, Lord (verse 29), behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness we may speak thy word." But not only to express God's Word, but to extend God's hand. Look in verse 30. "...we may speak thy word by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

Now what they were saying is, "Lord, not only do we want to be Your mouth; we want to be Your hands. Lord, we want to speak Your Word and, Lord, we want to extend Your hand. We express Your Word. We extend Your hand. You see, friend, you and I are the body of Christ.

I read somewhere a long time ago about some soldiers, after World War 2, had

come upon an old cathedral, and the cathedral had been bombed by the Nazis. And there was a statue in the cathedral that had, statute of Christ, beautiful statue, and it was fragmented. And these soldiers thought that they would put the statue back together. And so they began to collect the pieces and cement this beautiful statute back together. And they found all the pieces except the hands. And there was this statute of Christ standing there with His arms outstretched and no hands. And someone said, ha, "It's a pity we can't find the hands." And someone said, "Oh, I know what to do," and wrote on that statue this placard: "He has no hands, but our hands. He has no..." And that's so true. That is so true. You see, He says to Jesus, "Jesus, stretch forth Your hand." Well now, wait a minute. Jesus is up there in the glory in a resurrected body. How is He going to stretch forth His hand? Well, just fast forward, if you will, onto, ah, chapter 5 and look in verse 12 and see the answer to this prayer: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people..." They said, "Lord, stretch for Your hand." He says, "All right, I will," and by the hands of the apostles were many things done. You see, when we're praying, ah, our words are His words and our hands are His hands.

### C. To Exalt God's Son

Now here's the third thing that we do when we pray powerful prayer: Not only do we pray, "God, as servants, help us to express Your Word." Not only do we pray, "Lord, help us to extend Your hand." But we pray, and here's the bottom line, "Lord, help us to exalt Your Son."

Look, if you will, in verse 30: "By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." And I remind you that the name, the word *name* means "authority." In the authority of Jesus!

Now, friend, do you want to be a mighty person in prayer? Why don't you tighten the focus, and you say, "The great burning ambition of my life is not to be wealthy, or not even to be healthy, or not even to be happy, but, God, You're sovereign. I'm a servant. The great desire of my heart is to express Your Word, extend Your hand, and exalt Your Son."

We wonder why prayers are not answered, and we're so selfish in our prayers. James says, "You ask and receive not, that you might consume it upon your lusts." God's not some sort of a glorified bellhop there to, to come and run and answer your beck and call. He's not some dotting grandfather or some mystical Santa Claus.

No wonder this place was shaken when these apostles prayed this prayer. We need to examine the motive of our prayers. We ask for whims, fancies, never with any real desire to express God's Word, extend God's hand, and exalt God's Son.

### **III. The Power of Earthshaking Prayer**

All right. Now look. We have talked a little bit about the perspective of this prayer, and we've talked about the purpose of this prayer. Now I want you to see one last thing, and that's the power of this prayer. You're going to understand why God ratified this prayer and why God said amen and why God shook the place and gave such a physical demonstration of power, because this was a powerful prayer. Three things happened:

#### **A. The Spirit Is Received**

Number one: The Spirit is received. Look, if you will, in verse 31: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

If you're going to speak the Word of God with boldness, you need power to do it, don't you? You see, it's not just you see the right purpose of prayer. You've got to have the power to fulfill the purpose.

They said, "God, give us power to speak." God says, "All right, I'll fill you with the Holy Ghost." When you pray this way, the Spirit is received. A lot of people want to be filled with the Spirit, but they don't want to be witnesses. And may I tell you, dear friend, that that's not possible. "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

Why is our prayer not answered? Selfish. Why are we not filled with the Spirit? Unyielded. When the Holy Spirit finds a person who wants what the Spirit wants, then the Holy Spirit and that person get together.

Now the Bible says they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They'd already been filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. But now it says they're filled again. Point: You cannot operate on yesterday's experience. They're filled, these disciples who had been filled. Literally, the Bible says in Ephesians, "Be ye being filled. Be ye being filled."

#### **B. Unity Is Achieved**

All right. So what happened? What is the power of this prayer? Well, first of all, the Spirit is received. Secondly, unity is achieved. Look in verse 32: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul..."

What brings unity? Prayer. On the Day of Pentecost, it did. Any congregation that is a praying congregation is a unified congregation. Not wired together by organization. Not rusted together by tradition. Not frozen together by formalism. But melted together by prayer. When the Spirit is received, unity is achieved.

We talk about fellowship, and, and you ask some people what fellowship is, and they will glibly give you a little, ah, cliché, and they'll say, "Fellowship is two fellows in one ship." That's not fellowship. Fellowship is two people sharing the life of Jesus together. When the Holy Spirit that's in me is in you, and you, then that's the spirit of unity. See,

they were filled with the Spirit. And when they were filled with the Spirit, then they were of one accord. It's very clear. Look in verse 32: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own..." Well, you can tell me that was a revival, wasn't it? "...but they had all things common." This was not Communism. I could digress there, but I'm not going to. The point is, unity is achieved.

### **C. The Gospel Is Believed**

Now let me tell you the third thing that happens. This is the power: The gospel is believed. The Spirit is received, unity achieved, the gospel believed.

Look in verse 33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all."

And if you continue to read, you're going to find out, because of this great power, this witness, this grace, the church literally exploded with growth. It just follows as night follows day. They said, "God, You are the Creator of all things. You're the Controller of all things. You're the Conqueror of all things. You're sovereign. We're servants. So, therefore, Lord, we want to express Your Word, we want to extend Your hand, we want to exalt Your Son. Grant it, God." And God says, "I surely will. I'll give you the Holy Spirit. I'll make you one. And I will open your mouth and give you power to witness like you've never known before." And God said, "Just to show you I mean business," the whole place began to shake.

## **Conclusion**

I'd kind of like to have been there when this old Methodist preacher prayed. "Lord, if it takes it to move the hearts of these people, shake the ground on which this old building stands."

But whether He shakes us physically or spiritually, we need to get out of our lethargy. The salvation of your loved ones may depend on whether or not you learn how to pray. Your life of service is going to be measured by the way you pray. What happens in your home, in this church, and in America is going to be measured by the way I pray and the way you pray.

Would you bow with me. Lord, You know what my prayer was before I preached this message. My prayer was, Lord, that You would forgive me for the weakness, the failure, the positivity of my own prayer life. And I do pray, and I believe in prayer, and don't want these people to think that I don't, but, God, You know and I know that I need to learn so much more about prayer. And, Lord, I believe what I'm trying to confess to You, that most of us are trying to say the same thing right now. We do pray. But, O God, our prayers are so weak in comparison to that apostolic church. Lord, I thank You for Paul Williams and the Prayer Ministry, and I pray, God, as pastor and people, You will teach

us to pray. And, Lord, I want us to pray for one another, and these people to pray for me, as I pray for them, and as we pray one for the other. Help me, dear Lord, and help us to be a people of prayer. In Jesus' name, amen.

# What Is a Great Church?

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 27, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:33**

*“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”*

ACTS 4:33

## Outline

Introduction

I. Great Power

II. Great Grace

III. Great Fear

IV. Great Persecution

V. Great Joy

VI. Great Numbers Saved

Conclusion

## Introduction

Find the book of Acts chapter 4. In a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 33. What kind of a church should Bellevue Baptist Church be? Well, folks, I would like it to take its pattern from the church found in the book of Acts, which, in my estimation, was a great church. Now, often we throw the word great around, and use it freely, and perhaps too loosely. So not everything that we call great is great, in the sight of God. By the way, how would you measure a great church? You say it's a great church because of the number of members, the size of the budget, the architecture, or the organization, eloquence in the pulpit, elegance in the pew? What makes a great church? Not necessarily any of those things. I want us to find how God uses the word great in the book of Acts when he describes the church, and I've found five places there where he does this, and we're going to look at those, and use these as the hallmark of a great church, because I truly want Bellevue Baptist Church to be a great church.

## I. Great Power

First of all, a great church has great power—a great church has great power. Look, if you will, please, in verse 33: “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Now, I'm going to stop right there and say that a great

church does not operate on human ingenuity, wit, wisdom. A great church operates on supernatural power. There ought to be something about Bellevue Baptist Church that is supernatural, if Bellevue Baptist Church is to be a great church. You know, it's possible to have a great organization, it is possible to have great mechanics, it's possible to have great planning, it is possible to have great talent, and still not be a great church, if the power of the Holy Spirit is not there. And that's one of the dangers of a church like Bellevue Baptist Church that has the ability to do things and to do them right. Sometimes—sometimes—we may depend on those things. God forbid that we ever shall, amen?

One man wrote another man about his church. He said, in response to a question, How's your church doing? He wrote back, and said, Pray for us. He said, The furnace is out, but the blower is still going. I don't want that to happen to our church. I don't want us to just simply go on with form and no force.

Now, what had happened here when the Bible says, "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," is this: 120 disciples were praying. They were waiting before God, tarrying in Jerusalem, as God had told them to do, and suddenly the Holy Spirit of God came in great power. The room was filled with the sound of a cyclone. Cloven tongues of fire set upon every man's head. They looked like human candles. They began to speak and to praise God in foreign languages that they had never learned, and it was a demonstration of mighty power. Now, we're not trying to repeat Pentecost.

People say, Well, we need another Pentecost. I've often told you we don't need another Pentecost any more than we need another Bethlehem or another Calvary. Bethlehem was God with us; Calvary was God for us; Pentecost is God in us. We're not trying to repeat those things; we're trying to appropriate and enjoy those things.

But a very interesting thing happened on the day of Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came in such power—inexplicable power, undeniable power—those who were standing around were amazed. In Acts chapter 2, verse 12, the Bible says, "And they said one to another, What meaneth this?" What does this mean? We don't understand it. We cannot explain it. We cannot deny it. What does this mean? And then, a little later on, in Acts chapter 2, verse 37, they were so under conviction that they said to Peter and the apostles, "Men and brethren, what must we do?" Now, notice the order of the questions. First, they said, what does this mean? and then, secondly, what must we do?

You know the problem with the modern church today is we've reversed the order. We're trying to get them to ask what must they do before they ask what does this mean. You see, we have no right to ask them to believe anything until they've seen something they cannot explain. What is there about Bellevue Baptist Church that cannot be explained apart from organization? What is there about our church that cannot be

explained apart from talent? What is there about our church that cannot be explained apart from willpower? That's the only thing we have any right to ask anybody to believe, see? First of all, they have to ask, What does this mean? And, when they say, what does this mean? we can't explain it, then, once they've been amazed, they'll be asking, What must I do? I would like for unsaved people to walk into this building, and see something, feel something, sense something that they cannot go away and explain, wouldn't you? I mean, I would like for there to be great power in this church, and I'm not talking about intellectual power; I'm not talking about persuasive power. I'm talking about the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God.

On that day, on the day of Pentecost, a 120 people led 3,000 souls to Christ. Today, it takes 3,000 to lead 120 to Christ. They did it in one day; we can't do it in a year. We are to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the power is the power of the Holy Ghost. Acts 1:8 says, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me." Jesus Christ is on trial today like never before. You're to be a witness, and you're to be a witness filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Are you filled with the Spirit of God? You may be wondering, Is my pastor Spirit-filled? I trust I am. But I'm going to turn that back on you, and ask this question: are you Spirit-filled? I didn't ask, do you believe in the Holy Spirit? I'm not asking, are you spirited? I'm asking, does the power of the anointing of the Holy Ghost rest on your life? Does it? Does it? Does it? If not, you're living in disobedience to God. Listen to me. The Bible says, in Ephesians 5 and verse 8, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Are you ready for a little lesson in grammar? That is in the imperative mode. Be filled with the Spirit. You know what we mean when we say it's in the imperative mode? Suppose I were to tell you to do something, and you were to dally around—now wait a minute, do this. It is imperative that you do this. That means, it's not a suggestion, it's not a request; it is a command. God has commanded you to be filled with the Spirit. If you're not filled with the Spirit, friend, you're living in disobedience—you're living in disobedience.

Now, not only is it in the imperative mode; it is in the present tense. He didn't say, Get filled with the Spirit. He said, Be filled with the Spirit. I'm not asking you, were you filled with the Spirit? I'm asking you, are you filled with the Spirit? I'm asking, is the person now, tonight, sitting in that seat, right now, filled with the Spirit of God? If not, you're living in disobedience. It is present tense—present tense.

And next is passive voice. What does that mean? It's not something you attain. It's not something that you do. It's something that God does in you, and through you, and for you, and with you. God moves on you, as God will move upon anybody. It is passive in voice. As you allow God to do in you, and through you, and for you, and with you,

what you cannot do for yourself.

And next, it is plural in number—it is plural in number. What does that mean? He’s speaking to all of us. He’s speaking to Adrian. He’s speaking to Joe. He’s speaking to Ken. He’s speaking to Jim. He’s speaking to the choir. He’s speaking to the deacons. He’s speaking to the children. He’s speaking to the adults. And Peter said, on the day of Pentecost, The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call. Our church will be a great church to the degree that the members of this church allow themselves to be filled with the Spirit of God. I’m not talking about speaking in strange languages. I’m not talking about acting spastically, or going around with some fanaticism. I’m just saying that there ought to be something about our lives that is inexplicable, that God the Holy Spirit moves in us, and when we witness, the Spirit of God witnesses also.

Folks, when this church really gets filled with the Spirit of God, when the members of our church get filled with the Spirit of God, we’ll turn this city inside out and upside down for Jesus Christ, and touch the world—and touch the world. A great church—a great church—has great power: “and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” You say, Well, I hope our pastor can do it. No, ladies and gentlemen, we must do it together—men, women, boys and girls. And so, we are to have the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **II. Great Grace**

Now, here is the second mark of a great church. Just stay in the same verse, Acts chapter 4 and verse 33: “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,”—now, here’s the next sign—“and great grace was upon them all.” Great power, great grace. Now, what is grace? Let me give you a definition of grace. We sometimes say, God’s riches at Christ’s expense. That’s a little acrostic. Let me give you a more theological definition, if I can. Grace is the desire and the power to do the will of God. Grace is the desire and the power to do the will of God. You would not even want to do the will of God, had not the grace of God moved in your heart. But, even if you desired to do the will of God, you could not do the will of God apart from the power of God in your heart and in your life. So God gives grace, which is desire and the power to do the will of God.

I’ll give you another definition of grace. It is the loving Spirit of Jesus Christ—the loving Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is saving grace, living grace, dying grace, praying grace, testifying grace, loving grace, giving grace. You know one of the things I hear about our church that I’m so grateful for? People say, You know, this is a loving church. They say, I’m surprised. I came to Bellevue Baptist Church, and I thought, because it’s big, it’d be cold. Brother Wayne, you were saying this to me just the other day. Wayne Allen, one of

our new members here—and we’re so glad to have him, going to preach for us one of these Sunday nights—he said, I’m amazed at the love in this church. Where’s that love come from? That’s grace in action. That is God’s love. Now, that needs to be flowing through us all of the time. I want the unsaved, when they come in here, to sense the grace of God. I want the saved to come in here, to sense the grace of God. I want the hurting who come here to feel the grace of God. I want the needy who come here to feel the loving grace of God.

Years ago, I read about a soldier who was in the barracks; he was an inductee. It was below freezing, there was no heat in the barracks. The sergeant came through. That boy was a big old boy about six feet four, was on a small army cot, and the boy’s big feet were sticking out from the covers, and the boy was just trembling. And the sergeant said, Boy, you’d better pull those feet in under those covers. He said, No sir, he said, If I brought those cold things in here with me, I would freeze to death. Oh, would that all of our members were warm. Would that all of our members had the love of the Lord Jesus. You know, sometimes I wonder about who a person will sit by when they first come to Bellevue Baptist Church. You know, I can think of some people, I say, O God, I hope they don’t sit by that person. I mean, you know, they look like they’ve been weaned on a dill pickle. They’re the kind of person who deprives you of privacy without providing you with company. Man, we are to love people.

Do you know what has happened in Bellevue Baptist Church sometimes? Ought to make angels weep. Members will come and say, Pardon me, that’s my seat—would you move? Say that to a guest. Good night, I can’t believe that. You ought to go stand in the corner. Friend, we’re here to fall all over ourselves to make people welcome, show the love, the grace of Jesus Christ. One little boy walked across town past this church, and this church, and this church, and this church, to go to that church. And they said, Why do you pass all those churches to go to that church? He said, Because they love a fellow over there. I want our church to be known for its love; not for its pettiness, not for its divisions, but for love, and that love is the grace of God in action. It is both the desire and the ability to do the will of God.

### **III. Great Fear**

What is a great church? Great power. What is a great church? Great grace. Tell you another mark of a great church. Just turn the page now to chapter 5, and look in verse 5. The other mark is great fear. “And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost, and great fear—great fear—came on all them that heard these things.” In Acts chapter 5 and verse 11: “And great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things.” Acts chapter 5, verse 13: “And of the rest dares no man joined himself to them, but the people magnified them.” Now, I preached on this text

about three or four Sundays ago— it's the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who pretended a devotion to God that they did not have. They were big pretenders. God struck them dead, and, as a result of God striking them dead, great fear came on the church.

Now, God was setting a pattern. God does not always strike people dead who are pretenders and hypocrites. If He did, we'd have far more funerals in this church than we have today. I'm very serious about that. God does things for examples. For example, God doesn't destroy every perverted city, but He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, the Bible says, and left them for an example to those that after should live ungodly. God doesn't destroy all the murmurers, but He destroyed the murmurers coming out of Egypt. The Bible says, these things happened to them for examples to us. God did something to Ananias and Sapphira as an example to the rest of us, and it struck fear in the life of the church.

Now, folks, I think that one of the things that's missing in many churches today is the fear of God. In my estimation, you cannot have a great church unless there's the fear of God there. Now, we're not talking about cringing dread; we're talking about the utmost reverence for Almighty God. The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding." "The fear of the Lord is clean, enlightening the eyes." God's secret is with them that fear Him. Do you want to be an intimate of God? Then learn to respect and fear God.

This early church was such a respected church that people did not waltz down the aisle to join it casually. As a matter of fact, chapter 5, verses 13 and 14: "And of the rest darest no man joined themselves to them, but the people magnified them, and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and of women." It's a very interesting thing. It's almost contradictory. It says people were afraid to join the church, and multitudes were added to it. Did you know a church that has great fear, great respect, great reverence, will have a repelling and an attracting force at the same time? Now, there's a movement in churches today called the church growth movement, and people are trying to attract the unsaved, and they call that user-friendly, or seeker-sensitive, and all that, and, rightly understood, I appreciate that—we certainly ought to be friendly to people. I've already spoken about that. We certainly ought to have the air conditioning right, if we can. We certainly ought to have the sound balanced as much as possible. You'd be surprised how hardly a space time goes by that somebody will tell me it's either too loud or too soft, or this or that—you know, too hot or too cold; hey, fleas come with the dogs, that's just all part of it. Folks, I mean, everybody's not going to be satisfied about those things, but we ought to, as much as is possible, try to accommodate ourselves to people, but not in any way to trim the message, not in any way try to outworldly the world, and trying to win favor, trying to be attractive. Friend, we

may have lost our main attraction. Our main attraction is the Lord Jesus Christ, and I think the world sometimes looks at churches today, well, almost disgustingly, because we have failed to be respected.

Now, I know everybody in this city is not going to love Bellevue Baptist Church, but I certainly want them to respect our church. I want them to say, these people believe something; they stand for something. There will be a fear, a reverence, a refusal to trim the message, the compromise with sin. I'm not nearly as afraid of what people think about us as I am about what sin may do to us. I want us to be a holy church, with great fear, a reverence for a holy God. All right?

#### **IV. Great Persecution**

Here's the fourth mark of a great church, and you're going to find it in chapter 8—just keep on going through, look in chapter 8 and verse 1—and it's great persecution: a great church will know great persecution. Look, if you will, in chapter 8 and verse 1: "And Saul was consenting unto his death,"—talking here about the death of Stephen—"and at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem."

Great churches are going to be persecuted. Now, if you go along to get along, rub shoulders with this world, never preach against sin, you're not going to get much persecution. Don't be amazed if everybody doesn't love a New Testament church. A true New Testament church is going to have as much opposition as ever. These early Christians were not out to enjoy the world; they were out to change it. They had a faith that jails couldn't look up, that swords couldn't kill, that water couldn't drown, that death would not destroy. They had a head-on collision with the powers that be. They were not in the middle of the road. Now, we don't have to be afraid of persecution. Now, we don't go out and bait it, we don't have a martyr complex, but look, we don't have to get along with everybody.

Some years ago, I had a preacher friend, an old man, very wise man, he was telling me about a church who was looking for a pastor, and they came to him to see if he could suggest somebody. He said, Yes, I know somebody I could suggest to you. He said, he is a great theologian, absolutely brilliant, has the equivalency of three Ph.D.'s, fluent in many languages. Well, they were very interested. He's a world traveler, is a great missionary, great evangelist, a great church builder. They were even more interested. He has great numbers of people saved, and sees great numbers baptized. They were even more interested. But they said, he's getting quite old. Oh, they said, Oh. And said, he's not in good health. They said, Oh. And he's been thrown in jail a number of times. They said, Oh! And he's caused riots some places where he's gone. They said, Oh! And, sometimes, he has been known to be so dogmatic that people

have risen up against him. They said, Well, we certainly don't want him for a pastor. He said, Well, you couldn't get him anyway; he's already in heaven. His name is the apostle Paul. You see, we don't have to win a popularity contest to be right with God, do we? No.

## **V. Great Joy**

A great church has great power. A great church has great grace. A great church has great fear, great reverence. A great church may know great persecution. Now, we don't want to bait it; we want to get along with people as much as is possible, but don't be surprised if not everybody loves us. I'll tell you the next mark of a great church. A great church has great joy.

Look in chapter 8 now, beginning in verse 6: "And the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, for unclean spirits crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed of them, and many taken with palsies and they that were lame were healed and there was great joy in that city." Well, of course there's great joy when you're seeing the sick healed. There's great joy when you're seeing demons cast out. There's great joy when you're seeing souls come to Christ, and I think that one of the great attracting powers of any church is the joy of that church, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Now, that means that everything doesn't have to be somber. Can you imagine what happened in those days when they saw the lame healed, they saw demons cast out? Would be very much like in our Passion Play. I always enjoy the Passion Play when that scene comes and Jesus does the miracles; don't you enjoy that? I enjoy watching those people in jubilation seeing Jesus do something supernatural. Great joy.

I was preaching here a while back, and I saw a big old boy, looked like he was about six foot three, and he came out down there, and came over here, and began to talk with one of the ministers. I saw a deacon come and begin to walk out this way, and I saw a little lady—she may be here tonight—I saw her jump up, say, Jesus! Glory to God! Thank you, Jesus! And she began to dance and weep, to shout, and came here, and just kind of danced around behind him all the way. It was her son. She'd been praying for him to come to Jesus. And oh, I saw that little woman, Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Lord! All the way out there, following that big old boy for giving his heart to Jesus. We need to see more of that, folks. That's the joy of the Lord. That's not cheerleader enthusiasm. That's something that happens when God moves in and the devil moves out. Supernatural power. Oh, we need that.

I'm in favor of laughter. I'm in favor of happiness. I'm in favor of the ice cream supper we're going to have tonight. You know, every time that people want us to come in and be so quiet, and everybody says, Well, I like reverence: there's no contradiction

between reverence and laughter. There's no contradiction between reverence and joy. As a matter of fact, when I walk in here, come out here before the service starts, now, there's a time to get quiet, but I hear you folks out there, kind of like sparrows in a tree, just all chattering—chchchchc. You think that's bad? No, that's good! We're brothers; we're sisters; we're meeting one another. We are filled with the joy of the Lord and happiness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tell you one of the worst things can ever happen in a church: you watch, if you go to church, when the final Amen is said and everybody just walks out and disappears, there's something bad wrong in that church. People who have the joy of the Lord, they want to stick around, they want to fellowship, they want to laugh, they want to hug; a great church has great joy.

## **VI. Great Numbers Saved**

Now, here's the last thing I want to say about the great church. A great church sees great numbers saved. Turn to Acts chapter 11, and look at verse 21: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." A great number believed. People say, Well, I'm not interested in numbers. Well, God is interested in numbers, because he wrote right down here, a great number believed: that's divine inspiration. God is interested in numbers. And, by the way, you're interested in numbers, too. I can prove it. I got a deal for you. You come up here after the service, and I'll give you some one-dollar bills for some of your ten-dollar bills, okay? No, you won't do that, will you? No, you're interested in numbers, because we know that numbers count for something. Now, we're not just counting numbers; we want to make numbers count. But a church that is no longer seeking the lost, the church itself is lost. What did Jesus say in Matthew chapter 4 and verse 19? He said, "Follow me, and I'll make you to become fishers of men." If we're not fishing, we're not following. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that out. Follow me; I will make you to become fishers of men.

Do you know what I did this past Thursday? I went fishing. I'm going to brag a little bit. We caught 63-something fish. I caught my share of them, had a great time. I'm not going to tell you where the fishing hole is; had some guys take me fishing, had a big time. Spent some time out there in that boat with these guys, haven't been fishing like that since Hector was a pup, and enjoyed it so much. But I got to thinking about that. When you catch fish, you know what you're doing? You take fish from a beautiful life unto death, but when you catch men, you take them from death into a beautiful life. Oh, how wonderful to be a fisher of men, to see souls come to the Lord Jesus Christ! "Follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men."

People all around us, they need the Lord. The other day, I went to a board meeting

in Colorado Springs—Focus on the Family. A young man came and picked me up. His name was Jeff. Before we got to the headquarters, he bowed and prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into his heart. I was in my study the other day, a man came to do some work on the house. I was up there preparing a sermon. He walked in, I introduced myself to him; his name is Jim. I said, Tell me about you, Jim. He said, Well, there's nothing to tell. I said, Tell me about your father. He said, My dad's a preacher. I said, Is he? Yes. He turned around and walked back out. I said, O God, give me a chance to speak to that boy. He came back in. I said, Jim, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever come to the place in your life where if you died you know you'd go to heaven? He said, No sir, I can't say that. I said, Jim, would you like to know? He said, Yes sir, I sure would. Just gave his heart to Christ right there. I mean, look, folks: people all around us are ready to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And, if you say that they're not, let me tell you something: it's because you're not out there asking the questions; you're not out there trying to bring souls to Jesus Christ.

A great church is going to see great numbers saved, and, by the way, I thank God that we'll baptize somewhere around 1,000 people this year, but listen to me, precious friend: that is a drop in the bucket. That means it takes about 27 of our members a year to bring one soul to Jesus Christ and get him in the baptistry. That's a shame—that's a shame. Say Amen. Say, Oh, God. Say to yourself, You know, I ought to bring a soul to Jesus this summer. I ought to go out there and win somebody. Listen. If you can't win a man, win a woman. If you can't win an adult, win a child. If you can't win one of your own children, win somebody else's children. If you can't win somebody of your race, win somebody of another race. If you can't win them and get them in Bellevue, win them and get them in somebody else's church. But bring souls to Jesus Christ. A great church is going to see great numbers saved. And I hope that God will give you a burden for lost souls.

## **Conclusion**

Now, these are five marks of a great church. There are others, but these are five places where, in the book of Acts, God uses the word great. In conclusion, let me tell you what my desire for Bellevue Baptist Church is—and, by the way, this is kind of my instructions for you for this summer, because I don't want the mice to play while the cat's away. What desires do I have? What is my vision for Bellevue Baptist Church? Somebody asked Helen Keller, who was born blind, What could be worse than being born blind? And she said, To have sight and to have no vision—to have no vision. Here's what I want—and I'm going to list these things very quickly.

Number one: I want a congregation committed, devoted, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Say amen. A congregation committed and devoted to the Lordship of Jesus

Christ.

Number two: I want this church to have a godly, Spirit-filled pastor. By God's grace, I will be that man.

Number three: I want our congregation to be growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ. The great sign of whether or not we're being successful is not how many numbers we have, but we're to present every man mature in Christ. The mark of my ministry is, are you becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ?

Next, I want our church to learn more and more how to worship God—I mean, to truly worship the Lord. We exist for the glory of God.

Next, I want this congregation to be a group of people who are discovering, developing, and putting to use their spiritual gifts. You are a gifted child. God did not put you in this church just to warm a pew, or to fill up a seat, or even to help in the song service. You can do all of those things, but God has given you a gift, and there's something in this church that you could do and should do, and I want our church to discover, develop, and put to use your spiritual gift.

Next, I want our church to be a church that cares for the needy, for the hurting, for the forgotten, for the lost, for the down-and-out, the last, and the least. I want us to be a church with compassion, a heart of compassion, a heart like the heart of Jesus, who went about doing good. I told you this morning that our main commission is to win souls, but we are to show compassion in the name of Jesus.

Next, I want us to be a congregation that disciples and disciplines its members.

Next, I want us to be a congregation that strengthens the family. All of the artillery of hell is aimed against the family today.

Next, I want us to be a congregation with a passion for souls and a nationwide and worldwide missionary outreach.

Last of all, I want us to be a congregation that will strengthen other congregations. I hope that we can, as a congregation, find other congregations in our city and around the world that are struggling, and give them whatever help they need to be the kind of a church they ought to be.

Do those things vibrate in your heart? I hope they do. And, if they do, I really believe we can be a great church.

Let's bow our heads together in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Now, your body is no greater than the sum total of its members, and this body is no greater than the sum total of its members, and so, to some degree, either you're a part of the strength or a part of the weakness of the church. Would you, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, ask yourself this question? If every member of this church were just like me—now the word me means, don't ask if every member were just like the pastor; you ask it for yourself. If every member of this church were just like me, what

kind of a church would our church be? If every member gave the same percentage of his or her salary, if every member invited people like you do, if every member sings like you sing, or with the same enthusiasm, if every member prayed like you pray, if every member welcomes guests like you welcome guests, if every member attends like you attend, what kind of a church would this church be? Would you say, Lord Jesus, make our church a great church and begin with me? Would you pray that prayer—Lord, make our church a great church, and begin with me? Father, if these things that the pastor says his desires are for the church are of you, Father, let them come to pass. Father, protect our church, and keep it from harm, and may Bellevue be a shining light in this city—would you pray that?

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, how many in the building tonight can say, Pastor Rogers, I've given my heart to Jesus Christ; I'm saved, I know that I'm saved; I know if I died tonight I'd go straight to heaven; God's Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I'm a child of God? If you could give me that testimony, would you lift your hand and hold it up? Thank you—and I think that's most of us; it is most of us. But not everyone could lift his or her hand. Thank you for being honest, if you don't have that assurance. But the wonderful thing is that tonight you can leave this building a child of God. You can be saved tonight. And I promise you on the authority of the Word of God that Jesus Christ will save you tonight as He saved me when I was a teenage boy. He will keep you in the future as He's kept me now for more than a half a century, and He will satisfy you, and meet the deepest hunger of your heart, as He is constantly meeting mine, if you will trust Him.

Now, you can trust Him by an act of faith. You can pray, and say, Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me. I can't save myself but you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you, right now. I yield my heart, my life, to you. I take myself off the throne; I enthrone you in my life, Lord Jesus. I receive you as my Lord and Master tonight. Would you pray that? Just pray, Lord Jesus, come into my life, forgive my sin, cleanse me, save me; begin now to make me the person you want me to be. Pray it and mean it.

Did you ask Him? Then pray this: Thank you for doing it, Jesus. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I stand on your Word. And then, tell Him this—now, listen very carefully—tell Him this: Jesus, in the invitation tonight, I will go forward. I will go forward. I will not deny you. I will not be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Church Member of My Dreams

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 10, 1988**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:34–37; 11:20–26; 15:37–40**

*“For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”*

ACTS 11:24

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Find Those Who Are in Need, and Enrich Them
- II. Find Those Who Are Excluded, and Include Them
- III. Find Those Who Are Misunderstood, and Affirm Them
- IV. Find Those Who Are Undiscovered, and Develop Them
- V. Find Those Who Have Failed, and Restore Them

Conclusion

## Introduction

Be finding Acts chapter 4, and when you’ve found it, look up here. Now we have all kinds of church members, but I want to talk to you about the church member of my dreams, the kind of church member that I would like for us to have a great many of—and it’s a man whose name was Joseph. Most of you do not know him by that name, but you know him by his nickname. His nickname was Barnabas. And if he were alive today, and a member of Bellevue, we would call him, probably, Barney.

Americans love nicknames. I heard of a man who was called Tex, and somebody asked him, “What part of Texas are you from, Tex?” He said, “I ain’t from Texas.” He said, “Why do they call you Tex?” He said, “Well, I’m really from Louisiana. But I didn’t want to be called Louise.”

We all love nicknames. Some nicknames we have in fun, and some nicknames we have in affection. This man’s nickname was a nickname given to him by affection. He was called Barnabas. And Barnabas really means “encourager.” It literally means “son of consolation.”

Begin reading here with me, if you will, in Acts 4, verse 34. It speaks of the early church, and they were persecuted and in poverty. I’m going to break in, in verse 34: *“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of*

*lands and houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made to every man according as he had need. And Joses,"—that's our man; we would Anglicize that today and say Joseph—"who by the apostles was surnamed"—that is, "nicknamed"—"Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,)"—that literally means "a man of encouragement"—"a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." (Acts 4:34–37)*

Now here was a man that we see was so much of an encourager that they called him "encourager." When they said, "Barnabas," they were really saying, "son of consolation." They were really saying, "encourager." Now I don't want to get too technical, but this word *consolation* is the same word that is translated for the Holy Spirit—*paraclete, parakletos*, which means "somebody who is called alongside of you to help you, to encourage you, and to strengthen you." So here was a man that had a ministry very much like the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who encourages me and encourages you day by day as we yield to Him. Wouldn't you like for your life and ministry to be very much like to somebody else as the Holy Spirit is to each of us?

Now I say that the church member of my dreams is a church member who knows how to encourage other people, because there are so many discouraged people in the world today. And the sad thing about it is that many of us, rather than being encouragers, are ourselves discouragers, and make it worse. I know some people who are like a drink of water to a drowning man. They are people who discourage rather than encourage. And many of them are parents. These are wonderful young people behind us. And I'm going to tell you one thing that they all need, and they need a good dose of it, and they need it every day—and that is encouragement.

Bill Glass played football for Baylor University, and was a great pro—and I saw him play in the Sugar Bowl—and then later on became an evangelist, and is an evangelist today, and he speaks a lot in prisons, and this hunk of a man gets a lot of respect when he preaches to those prisoners. But Bill Glass was speaking to a thousand prisoners, and he asked them this question. He said, "How many of you were told by your parents that you would never ever amount to anything?" Almost every one of those thousand prisoners lifted their hand. Almost every one of them had been told by their parents, "You will never amount to anything." And they lived up to it.

I'm telling you, young people need today encouragement. They don't need discouragement. They don't need criticism. They need to be lifted up. A major cause of failure is people who are discouraged. A major cause of victory is people who are encouraged and just refuse to quit.

While we're on the subject of football, in the Football Hall of Fame is a helmet that was worn by Bobby Lane, the great quarterback. And on that football helmet it says,

“Bobby Lane never lost a game; he just ran out of time.”

There was a man who just did not know what it was to quit. We all need encouragement.

And let me give you a verse of Scripture here—1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14: “*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded...*” (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Now when the Bible says “*feebleminded,*” he’s not talking here about the insane. He’s not talking about the retarded. He’s not talking about the senile. When the Bible says, “*Comfort the feebleminded,*” the word literally means “the small-souled,” and it refers to people who are discouraged. Comfort people who are discouraged. There are so many of them around. You meet them every day.

I know about human nature. I’m speaking to some of you tonight who are very low. You are very discouraged: discouraged about your work, discouraged about your health, discouraged about your parents, your children, about your marriage relationship—discouraged about something—and you need encouragement. And the Bible says that God is the God of all consolation. That means all encouragement. That means that God has cornered the market in encouragement. He is the God of all consolation. And if we get any, we’ll get it from Him, and pass it on to somebody else. And we are to comfort the feebleminded, those who are discouraged.

And the devil is the chief agent of discouragement. There’s an old story about the devil auctioning off some of his tools. And lust was a tool, and pride was a tool, and revenge was a tool. And he was auctioning off all of these things—dishonesty—and people were buying his tools. There was one tool, however, that had a very high price. And it was well worn. And somebody said, “What is that tool?” He said, “Well, it is discouragement.” He said, “Well, why is it so worn? And why is it so valuable to you?” He said, “Well, I use that perhaps more than any other tool. I use that tool to pry open a man’s heart. And when I’ve pried open his heart with discouragement, I can get inside and do all kinds of damage.” Discouragement.

There are so many people who are discouraged. Do you ever read “Peanuts” in the comic strips?” Lucy and Charlie Brown were talking. And Lucy, you know, she’s the little philosopher. And Lucy was saying, “Charlie Brown, life is like an ocean voyage, like a cruise ship.” And she said, “Some people put their deck chair facing forward so they can see where they’re going. And other people put their deck chair facing backward so they can see where they’ve been. And some people arrange the deck chair sideways so they can see where they are. What about you, Charlie Brown?” Charlie Brown said, “I can never get mine unfolded.” Maybe you’re that way. Maybe you just say, “I just can’t make things work out.”

Well now, what I want you to do tonight is, I want you to get a piece of paper somewhere, and I’m going to ask you to think about five names that will come to you in

the midst of this message; five people that you may want to encourage. And I'm going to ask you to write down five names. Five may not come to you. Maybe just one will come to you. But if you'll think, I believe that God will give you the names of five people. It may be a grandchild. It may be your husband. It may be your wife. It may be your parents. It may be your neighbor. It may be somebody that you go to school with, somebody that's on the team with you, somebody in the choir with you. But I hope that by the time I'm finished tonight, you will have five names, and you will say, "I will encourage these five names in these five areas," because what we're going to do tonight is, we're going to take this man Barnabas, who was a wonderful man, and we're going to use him for an illustration, because I'm going to show you five ways that Barnabas encouraged people, and five ways in which people need to be encouraged. And I hope perhaps you'll find five people in one of these categories, one person for each of these categories, and you'll begin to pray and say, "Lord, make me a Barnabas. Make me the church member of the pastor's dream."

## **I. Find Those Who Are in Need, and Enrich Them**

All right, number one: I want you to find those who are in need, and enrich them. Find somebody who has a need, and see how you can go and meet that need. Find somebody in need, and enrich him. Now God will give you the name of somebody who has a need; and before the sermon is over, maybe you'll write that need down. Now in the scripture that I just read to you from Acts chapter 4, there was a great need in Jerusalem. And what happened is this: people were running out of food. They were running out of clothing. They didn't have a place to stay. And so everybody that had houses and lands sold it and brought it to the church, just gave it to the church, and laid it at the apostles' feet. It was an emergency. This was not communism, because it was temporary. It was not communism, because communism is built on atheism. This was church-centered, and it was led of the Spirit, and it was to meet an emergency.

If, God forbid, this city got under atomic attack, or somebody came in, and all we Christians had to huddle together, I would hope that you would not hoard what you have, but you would share what you have with the brothers and sisters in Christ. These people were in dire need, and so people were bringing their goods to the church and giving it to the church, and distribution was being made. And the Bible says, Barnabas, he had land, and he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. So you find Barnabas lifting a load. You find Barnabas finding a need and meeting that need.

You see, Barnabas understood the principle of stewardship. Do you know what stewardship is? Stewardship is that part of life, that area of life, where men make money and God makes men. You see, a steward realizes that what he has he really doesn't

own, that it belongs to God. And a steward is somebody who begins to share what God has put in his hands. You see, real riches multiply when they are spread around.

Some years ago here in Memphis, Tennessee, we had the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast. And there was a businessman who came, and some of you will remember the name when I mention. His name was Stanley Tam. And I went to the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast and enjoyed hearing this man, a very successful businessman, speak, but he said something that was so important to me I took out a note card and wrote it down. It is still in my heart and in my mind today. Here is what Stanley Tam said: "It is what you sow that multiplies, not what you keep in the barn."

Now you can keep it in the barn and it will gain interest. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about it multiplying. I'm talking about it being used to bless the hearts and lives of other people. God did not give you those resources to hoard them to yourself, but to make you a blessing.

Now, let me give you a couple of more scriptures. Galatians chapter 6, verse 2: "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" (Galatians 6:2) "Well," you say, "Pastor, if I had a big piece of property, and I had a lot of money like Barnabas, I'd sell it, and I'd find a need, and I would meet it." Friend, you've got more to give than property. Maybe you don't have property. You can give love. You can give health. You can give time. You can give wisdom. You can give friendship. Find somebody that has a need, and enrich that person.

Now, did God give a name? Are you thinking right now of somebody who has a need, and you're saying, "By God's grace, I'll be a Barnabas to that person"?

## **II. Find Those Who Are Excluded, and Include Them**

All right now, here's the second thing I want you to do: Not only find somebody in need, and enrich that person; find somebody who is excluded, and include that person. Now, go to Acts chapter 9 with me for just a moment. And here again we're going to see an episode in the life of this man Barnabas. You know, Saul had been converted. And he had been a persecutor of the church. Later on, he became Paul. But he was Saul, and he was persecuting the church. In Acts chapter 9, verse 22, after he is saved, the Bible says, "*But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving this is very Christ.*" That is, proving that Jesus was the true Messiah. "*And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.*" They said, "We're going to lurk here at the gates. The man has got to go out of the city. When he comes out of the city, we're going to pounce him and slay him." "*Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem,*"—that is, now he's from Damascus going to Jerusalem, the

holy city—*“he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him...”*—now you can understand why they were afraid of him: “Is this a trick? Is he just trying to fool us to get on the inside to find out who the true believers are?” They were afraid of him. They were very much like people were treating Charles Colson, the Watergate hatchet man. After Charles Colson, this man who had been so vicious and so conniving gave his heart to Jesus Christ, many Christians were afraid of Charles Colson. They said, “Is this for real? Has this man truly been converted?” They were afraid of Saul. And verse 26—*“they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him,”*—there’s our word again: old “encourager,” good old Barnabas took him—*“and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”* (Acts 9:22–27)

Now Paul needed a friend. Paul was an outsider. He was excluded. And the church at Jerusalem was just giving him the cold shoulder. They didn’t trust him. They didn’t know about him. And he was sitting over there isolated and excluded. And Barnabas had enough of the love of Jesus in him, he had enough spiritual acumen, that he went, put his arms around Saul, brought him in there, and said to the other apostles, “Now, listen, fellows. Let me tell you something about this man Saul. He is truly saved. I can tell you, he met Jesus on the Damascus road. I heard him in Damascus preach and teach about Jesus Christ being the Messiah. You don’t have to be afraid of him. He’s a dear brother in Jesus. Peter, make him feel welcome.” And I can see the big fisherman as he puts his arms around old Paul and says, “Welcome, brother; welcome.” And here he is. He is included. He is a part of the family of God.

Did you know that there are people sitting in this very auditorium tonight who feel excluded? Did you know that? They look around and they see all these little happy groups, little people laughing and joking, and so forth. They don’t have friends. They need somebody. And, kids, let me say something to the choir. Sometimes high school kids are terrible about failing to include somebody who is new. And if you’ll just think, there will be somebody who has transferred from another school, or somebody who perhaps is not as handsome or witty or charming, or somebody who perhaps is a little underprivileged. Sometimes they come to church, and we just go right past them. We don’t include them. We don’t love them. So many of our Sunday School classes think they are having wonderful fellowship. What they are is sacred societies for snubbing sinners and saints alike. They just have their own little clique, their own little fellowship. They don’t mean to do it.

But do you know what an encourager will do? An encourager at a party will be looking around. He will see that person backed over against the wall. Nobody else pays attention to them, but a Barnabas will go over there and begin to talk with him, make

friends with him, and say, “Let’s get some punch. Come over here: there’s somebody I want you to meet. Sorrell, I want you to meet my friend here. This is John. John has just moved to our city. This is Bob Sorrell. He’s one of my friends, *ta-da-da-da*.” And we begin to make friends. Because I have become an encourager, I have found people who are excluded, and I begin to include them, and introduce them to other people.

Folks, have you got somebody on your list right now? Are you thinking about somebody who has been on the outside, and somebody who needs to be included, somebody who needs to be loved? You know, Paul, who was included by Barnabas, later wrote these words in Romans 15. And we’ll get to them when we preach through Romans; but in Romans 15, verses 5 through 7, he says, “*Now the God of patience and consolation...*”—do you know what the word *consolation* means? “Encouragement.” Now, listen to this—“*Now the God of patience and [encouragement] grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*” (Romans 15:5–7)

Now even if you don’t have the money that Barnabas had, I will guarantee you that God will use you, my precious, sweet friend, to find somebody, somebody who needs a friend, somebody who needs to be brought into your group, and include them. On ABC, John Stossel had an interesting program, and he was talking about how little babies, babies not yet a year old, needed psychotherapy, because these babies had been raised in families where, for whatever reason, the baby had not been loved. And the baby was suffering psychological problems because of a lack of eye contact, a lack of verbal communication, a lack of touching, a lack of hugging, a lack of soothing and caressing; little babies who perhaps physically were strong, but emotionally were already becoming warped and wounded. And this program said something like this. They said, “It is impossible to spoil a baby the first year of its life.” You cannot love a child too much the first year of its life. That baby needs to be hugged, held, kissed, corrected, and caressed. And those people who have had that kind of love the first year of life, according to this program, had the healthiest self-image, and were less divisive and volatile when they grew up.

Now if that is true about physical babies, I’m going to tell you that it is definitely true about spiritual babies. Spiritual babies need to be loved. And these people who come down the aisle of this church this morning giving their hearts to Jesus Christ, that’s where our Sunday School classes come into play. That’s where you come into play. If they’re in your group, you see them. God brings them to you. It’s up to you to take these newborn babes and to give them that encouragement that they need.

Now old Saul, he was a professor; he was a teacher; he was a religious leader; he was a philosopher—but he needed love. And I tell you, everybody needs love. Do you

have somebody's name that God wants you to encourage, somebody that you're going to reach out now and include? I hope you will.

### **III. Find Those Who Are Misunderstood, and Affirm Them**

Now, here's the third thing I want you to do: Not only do I want you to find a need, and meet it; and not only do I want you to find somebody excluded, and include them; but, number three, find someone who is misunderstood, and affirm him. Now, go to Acts chapter 11, if you will, and in Acts chapter 11 let's begin in verse 20: *"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."* This is a revival now that's breaking out in Antioch, according to verses 20 and 21. *"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas..."*—here he is again—*"they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God,"*—and by the way, that must have been some kind of grace that you can see; he had seen the grace the God—*"was glad, and exhorted them all,"*—that is, "encouraged" them—*"that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he"*—Barnabas—*"was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul."* (Acts 11:20–25)

Now, let me just pause right there. What had happened is this: a revival had broken out in Antioch, and this was a far-flung place from Jerusalem, up in Syria. And word had come to the apostles that they were worshipping the Lord Jesus up there, and the church leaders at Jerusalem said, "Well, how do we know that is not some kind of a cult? How do we know that they are true Christians? How do we know that they have the right doctrine, the right kind of leadership? We had better check this thing out." And so they said, "Who would be the best man? Who could we send? I know who to send. Get Barney." "Barney, we've got a job for you, guy. Barney, would you go up to Antioch and check those people out up there and see what's going on out there, because, very frankly, we're very concerned." And so Barnabas goes up there. Barnabas sees the grace of God. He sees the hand of God. And he encourages these people and exhorts these people who were misunderstood and doubted. And the revival continues. And the Bible says a great number of people came to the Lord.

Oh, I love people who encourage people when other people might have questions about them. I think of some people in this congregation who have encouraged me. I'm just so grateful for it. These very buildings that we're in tonight, they come, I think, as a result of the encouragement of some people. Brother Bob, some years ago, the early 1980s, you and I and a couple of other laymen, Al Childress and Billy Mills, went to

Florida. We went to Florida to look at some church buildings, because we were planning to build downtown. And we were trying to build a building down there that would seat at least six thousand people; not as big as this building, but we felt we needed one that would seat at least six thousand people. Now we had about twenty-four acres of property downtown. We needed more property. We were trying to buy more property; but we had a lot of difficulty trying to buy more property down there, and the prices were escalating, and it was very difficult. But we went down there to look at some church buildings. And the First Baptist Church of Orlando was being built, and we went to look at that. And then there was another big Assembly of God church being built in Lakeland called The Carpenter's Home Church. And we went to look at that. And that night after we looked at those churches, I had a sleepless night, because, very frankly, it was dawning on me that we were trying to do the wrong thing to build downtown. It seemed like every place we turned, we hit a closed door. And we had prayed, and we had sought the Lord, and we had gotten planning and all kinds of things, people to help us, but we just seemed to be hitting a brick wall, as it were, every place that we turned. And I tossed and turned all night. And it seemed as God the Holy Spirit was speaking to me and saying, "Adrian, you're trying to do the wrong thing."

Well, folks, you have to understand that Bellevue Baptist Church had been there on that corner since 1903, and we had just built some fine buildings there. And God was blessing there. And we had been talking about what we were going to do there. And for me to talk about moving that ministry, for us to move that ministry from there to here, I had just about as soon volunteer to be a Russian astronaut. But it was in my heart and in my mind. And so the next day at the airport I said to those men, "Gentlemen, please don't think I'm crazy, but I want to ask you to do something. I want you to take all of the investment, all of the history, everything that we've done here downtown, put it in brackets, and just for a moment put it out of your mind. I know all kinds of arguments, but put that out of your mind. I want to ask you a question. What would happen if we moved out to the northeast quadrant of our city out on Interstate 40 and bought some acreage and moved everything?"

Now, folks, I want to tell you something. I learned two things about an idea. Number one: An idea is a very fragile thing. Number two: An idea is a very powerful thing. Both at the same time, very fragile and very powerful. I believe if those men had said, "Pastor, that is absurd; that is crazy; it is ridiculous," do you know what I think I would have said? "I believe you're right"—because it wasn't a conviction with me at that time; it was an idea. It became a conviction as we investigated and as we prayed. It was only a little idea, a little baby idea, and it could have been so easily strangled at birth. But I want to tell you what happened. Al Childress looked me in the face. I love Al Childress. He's such a great, dear man. He looked me in the face. He said, "Pastor, are you

serious about it?" I said, "Al, I'm serious that I want us to pray about it." He said, "All right." Billy Mills said to me—Billy Mills is in heaven; he is Morris Mills' brother. He's in heaven now; one of the most godly laymen, a quiet man, but a dear man of God—Billy Mills said to me, "I'll tell you one thing, Pastor: It would be easier to raise the money for it if we did it." I cannot tell you what that word of encouragement meant to me. Bob, you were there. We were sitting right there. And we got to thinking about it. And it was so absurd, but yet we couldn't get it out of our heart and out of our minds. And that idea grew and grew and was confirmed by you loving people. And you were so encouraging as we did this—because, yes, there were honest questions, but I thank God for the Barnabases who were with me that day, and the Barnabases who gathered with them, and the Barnabas who said, not that "it can't be done," but, "By God's grace, it can be done, and it will be done." And it has been done. Praise God!

It is so easy to be negative; it's so easy to say that something cannot be done, and so easy to strangle good ideas when they are of God and to put them down at their birth. So I just want to encourage you to encourage other people.

And, by the way, when I'm talking about people who have encouraged us to come out here, there's another person I want to mention. I don't know whether she's here tonight or not, the lady I dearly love. Her name is Emily Wilson. Emily Wilson is beautiful within and without. Emily, a long time member of Bellevue Baptist Church, one of our most respected—I won't call her a senior saint; I'll call her a seasoned saint. When we were wondering what our older people would think about this move—you know, sometimes older people just don't like change. You know that, don't you?—we wondered what they would think about it. I remember her standing up there in our first Love Offering to talk about this thing, and she said, "People ask me, 'Emily, are you in favor of this?'" She said, "You had better believe I'm in favor of it." Boy, I just thought, "Atta way, Em!" Amen? People who don't say it can't be done.

Friend, you can find fault with anything. But this church has by and large been the kind of a church that believes that it can be done, and by God's grace it ought to be done, and should be done, and then will be done. And so I'm just so grateful for people like Barnabas who find somebody who is perhaps misunderstood or could be misunderstood or in danger of being misunderstood, and encourages them. Can you think of somebody now who wants to attempt something, somebody who feels that they have something in their heart, and they need to be encouraged? Friend, we all need encouragement. I tell you, I needed encouragement.

The age of these kids right back here in the choir, don't you think they don't need encouragement? They're high-schoolers. When I was in high school, the dean of men called me into his office. Now, friend, when you get called into the office by the dean of men, you wonder what for. And he called me into his office. And I was president of the

senior class. I was captain of the football team. But I wasn't a scholar. He called me into his office. He said, "Adrian, I want to ask you a question." I said, "Yes sir, Mr. Price." He said, "Adrian, what do you intend to do with your life?" "Well," I said, "Mr. Price, God has called me to preach the gospel. I'm going to be a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Do you know what he said to me? He said, "Son, I've been looking at your grades," and he said, "I've looked at your IQ test," and he said, "The two don't match at all." And he said, "Son, you are capable of doing much better work than you're doing. You can do it. And I want you to do it." I tell you that moved my heart like few things ever moved my heart. I was just a teenager, just the age of these boys and girls up here.

You don't know what a word spoken can mean. Find some teenager. Find somebody who wants to start a new business. Find somebody who wants to do something good or great or fine, somebody maybe that's on the edge a little bit. Now I'm not talking about leading them off into something wild. But you be to them what Bill Mills was to me, and Al Childress, and Emily Wilson, and these others. Be an encourager. There are people today who need encouragement. The people down in Antioch, Syria, needed encouragement, and old Barnabas went there. And he saw the grace of God and he said, "That's wonderful what God is doing here." Thank God for those kinds of people.

#### **IV. Find Those Who Are Undiscovered, and Develop Them**

Now, here's the fourth person I want you to find: Find those who are undiscovered, and develop them. Go look in Acts chapter 11 now and verse 25. After he had been up there to Antioch and he saw all the good things going on, notice what happened: "*Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.*"—now, remember, he had already met Saul; he had already introduced Saul around the church at Jerusalem; but now he goes to Tarsus to seek Saul—"and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year that they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." (Acts 11:25–26)

They are making history right now. You see, what happened is this: Barnabas, when he saw this revival, he saw the grace of God; he saw the hand of God; he realized that he had been deputized and sent by the church at Jerusalem there to encourage those people. Barnabas had enough sense to know that he needed help. He knew what his limitations were. He knew that he did not have what it took, but he remembered a man named Saul who now became Paul. He had heard him preach. He knew his intellect. He knew his passion. He knew his insights. He knew his background. He knew that this man was an undeveloped treasure. And he said, "I know just the man to help us here in

Antioch in this revival.” He goes down to Tarsus. He says to Saul, “Saul, listen. I need you, buddy. Come on over here. I’ll tell you, we’ve got a great opportunity over here in Antioch—and you’re just the man. We want you to preach. We want you to teach. We want you to lead. We want you to help.” And this is where Saul got his start.

Now Barnabas did not need then to be the leader. What he did was to find somebody and encourage somebody and make a leader out of somebody else. He wasn’t interested in starting a little cult of Barney boys. He was content to encourage somebody else. Somebody says, “It takes more grace than I can tell, to play second fiddle, and play it well.” Barnabas was content to take the lesser place and let the new Christian lead. Do you know what an encourager is? An encourager finds somebody who has talent, somebody who has giftedness, somebody who is undiscovered, unknown, and helps develop that person for the cause of Jesus Christ. Find somebody who is undiscovered, and develop them.

Can you think of somebody who has a lot of talent, a lot of giftedness, but nobody knows who they are? Do you know who has one of the greatest gifts of doing this of anybody in our church? Jim Whitmire. Jim Whitmire is uncanny, that guy sitting right over there. He can find people and develop them. I don’t know where he finds them. I don’t know how he gets them. I look at the Passion Play; I look at Celebrate America; I look at the Singing Christmas Tree; I look at the things that are done, and I say, “Where does he find those people?” Have you ever wondered that? From where do those people come? And how does he know what they can do? And how do they learn to do all of that? I have seen little Jim Whitmires who have gone out all over the Southern Baptist Convention, ministers of music whose lives are part of this man who takes talent and develops people and helps them to use that talent for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This church is filled with talent, it’s filled with people, but many of them are not using their talent. There are some Sauls sitting out there who need some Barnabases to put them to work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now it may be somebody on your list tonight. Maybe you’re saying, “Yeah, I know somebody; I know somebody in this church.” It may be a businessman; it may be a woman; it may be a singer; it may be a musician; it may be some kind of a leader, and that person is not being maximized. And, friend, we have all kinds of needs. Would you ask God to make you a Barnabas for a person like that and encourage that kind of a person? Find those who are undiscovered, and develop them.

Let me tell you about some people who need to be encouraged. Let me tell you about a man that I read about. This man had been told by his teachers when he was in high school that he would never be successful in anything academic, because he wasn’t smart enough. They told him that the only thing he could do would be to get a job doing manual labor. And so from the ages of sixteen to thirty-two, he tried thirty-seven

different jobs, and he drifted from one job to another. He wasn't successful in any of them. And then at the age of thirty-two, after he had tried thirty-seven different jobs, somebody said, "I think we ought to give that man an IQ test. Everybody says that he's not intelligent." They gave him an IQ test. Do you know what his IQ was? 161. Now today he is a well-known scientist. He's working with lasers and other modern scientific things. He became the president of the Mensa Society, if you know what the Mensa Society is. You have to have an IQ of 145 even to be a part of the Mensa Society. These are intellectual top waters. He became the president. Now at the age of thirty-two, they thought of him as a dunce; and at the age of thirty-three, they saw he was a brilliant scientist. What the difference was, was this: somebody—I don't know who—but somebody saw in this man something that nobody else could see, and said, "Let's develop him." And somebody encouraged him.

I'm so glad that Barnabas encouraged Saul from a human viewpoint. I know God the Holy Spirit could have overruled, but from a human viewpoint over half the New Testament was written because Barnabas encouraged Saul. He became Paul. He's the one who wrote thirteen New Testament books. And we're going to see in a moment that Barnabas encouraged another man named Mark. Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. So, find somebody who is undeveloped, somebody who has giftedness. Be a Barnabas. Be to them what Barnabas was to Paul.

## **V. Find Those Who Have Failed, and Restore Them**

Now, here's the fifth name I want you to write down. How many of you have at least one name of your list? Let me see your hand—at least one name? Okay, you're doing good. All right now, here's the last thing. Find somebody who has failed, and restore them.

Now, look in Acts chapter 15 and we're going to see what Barnabas did again. In Acts chapter 15 Paul and Barnabas had taken a missionary trip and on that missionary trip they had taken along with them the nephew of Barnabas, whose name was Mark, John Mark. And when the going got tough, the tough didn't get going. The tough—the weak—went home. That was John Mark. John Mark turned tail and ran. He went home to hold his mama's hand. And Paul didn't like that at all. And so now they were getting ready for the second missionary journey. And I begin reading here in Acts chapter 15, verse 37: *"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work."* That is, Paul said, "No, we're not going to take him. Do you remember how he cut and ran in Pamphylia? And I don't think we ought to take him." And now here are two brothers, and there is an argument. Verse 39: *"And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas,*

*and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.” (Acts 15:37–40)*

Now Paul and Barnabas have a *thee–thee*, and the subject is Mark. And Paul said, “I’m not going to take him. I don’t want him. He’s a quitter. He’s a failure. I am not going on a missionary trip with him.” Barnabas said, “Paul, give him another chance. Failure is not final.” Paul said, “No, I’m not going to take him.” “Come on, Paul.” “I am not going to take him.” “Well, Paul, you ought to take him.” “I’m not going to take him.” “All right then, I’ll take him. You find somebody else.” Paul says, “I will. Silas, how about it? You come with me, buddy.” Barnabas says, “Come on, John. We’re going to go on a missionary journey.” Barnabas was the man who took up for the failure. Barnabas was the man who found a failure, and he was ready to restore him.

Well, did he restore him? Later on, old Paul is in prison, and he’s down in this dark, dangerous prison. And Paul needs somebody to help him, and he says in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 11, *“Only Luke is with me.”* And then he says, *“Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he”—Mark—“is profitable to me for the ministry.”* (2 Timothy 4:11) Paul had a change of heart, because Barnabas knew that down in Mark’s heart, though Mark had failed, he was still profitable. He could make something out of him. He knew that failure was not final.

Can you think of somebody who has failed; somebody who has failed morally; somebody who has failed perhaps in a marriage; somebody who has failed perhaps in business; somebody who has failed in ministry? What do you do? Do you fulfill the cliché that says the church is the only army that shoots its wounded? Or do you obey the Word of God in Galatians chapter 6, verse 1: *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* (Galatians 6:1) We have a number of people in our church who have failed. They don’t need your criticism; they need your love. You need to be a Barnabas to somebody.

Are you thinking of that failure? Is there somebody that you know? I wonder if some of you have five names on your list. I wonder if God has made a Barnabas out of you to some John Mark, somebody who has failed, somebody who dropped out, somebody who washed out, but you say, “I’m not going to let him go. I’m going to encourage him. He needs encouragement. My name is Barnabas. I am a son of consolation. I am a paraclete. I am like the Holy Spirit. I am not going to forsake him. I’m going to stay with him. I’m going to stay with her. I’m going to encourage that person.”

## **Conclusion**

I want to tell you one more story, and I’ll be finished. This is a true story about somebody that most of you know or have heard about. He was a failure. Let me tell you

about him. His father died when he was five. He himself dropped out of school when he was fifteen. By the age of seventeen, he had already lost four jobs. He married at the early age of eighteen. And by nineteen he was a father. When he was twenty, his wife left him and took their daughter with her. And from the ages of eighteen to twenty-two, he worked as a railroad conductor, but he failed as a railroad conductor. He joined the army, and he washed out in the army. He farmed some land. He couldn't succeed at that. He applied for law school. He was rejected. He became an insurance salesman, and he failed again. The man couldn't do anything. He did know a little bit about cooking, so he got a job in a restaurant as a dishwasher and a cook in a small caf. He begged his wife to return, but she wouldn't. He grieved for his baby daughter, but he couldn't see her. He planned to get his daughter back, so he went to where his wife had the daughter and he hid in the bushes and watched his little daughter at play. He planned to do the same thing the next day, and kidnap his little daughter, take his little daughter. He hid in the bushes the next day, and his daughter didn't come out to play. He couldn't even kidnap his own little daughter. He just seemed like he was destined to fail.

Eventually, this man convinced his wife to come back and stay with him. She did come back. The two of them worked in the caf together cooking and as a dishwasher. And he just eked out a living. When he turned sixty-five, he retired. He went to the post office and he got his first social security check. Somehow getting that social security check was the final blow to this man's life. Now it's not that those who get social security don't deserve it, and shouldn't have it; but to this man, he said, "That is the ultimate failure. Now I'm going to have to depend upon the government to take care of me the rest of my life. I have been a failure for sixty-five years. I'm going to end it all. I'm going to take my own life." He went out in the backyard and he set down under a tree and got out a pad and a pencil, and he began to write his last will and testament.

But sitting under that tree, he began to think about what perhaps he ought to be, what he could be, what he should be. There was one thing that people had encouraged him about. They had encouraged him as a cook. They said, "You are a wonderful cook." And he got to thinking about that, and he wrote out a plan for his life. He got up. He went to the bank and he borrowed from the bank. At the age of sixty-five, he had to borrow eighty-seven dollars against his next social security check. The bank loaned him eighty-seven dollars. And he went and bought some chicken and began to fry that chicken with his special recipe, and then go from door to door in Corbin, Kentucky, selling that chicken.

That sixty-five-year-old chicken salesman was Colonel Sanders, who founded the Kentucky Fried Chicken empire. After sixty-five! I mean, as a failure, with less than a hundred dollars! When he was eighty-eight years of age, he was world famous—at

eighty-eight! He was speaking with some students, and somebody said, “Colonel Sanders, how much money do you have?” He said, “I really don’t know; but if I want it, I can buy it.”

Here was a man. He needed encouragement. And somebody said, “You fry chicken real good.” Friend, do you know why Barnabas was the great man that he was? The Bible says, “And he was a good man, full of faith, and the Holy Ghost was upon him.” (Acts 11:24) He was a good man, because he was full of faith. And he was full of faith, because the Holy Ghost was upon him. You can be a Barnabas. You need to be a Barnabas. Don’t be a negative person. I mean, if people were to give you a nickname, would it be “paraclete”? Would it be “son of consolation”? Would it be “encourager”? Let’s just make up our mind that we’re going to find those five people, if God will just help us, and be a Barnabas to them.

# The Gift of Encouragement

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: June 9, 1991**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:34–37**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Give Encouragement, Not Discouragement
- II. Five Lessons of Encouragement from Barnabas
  - A. Seek to Enrich and Encourage the Needy
  - B. Seek to Encourage the Lonely
  - C. Seek to Encourage the Misunderstood
  - D. Seek to Encourage and Develop Undiscovered People
  - E. Seek to Encourage and Restore Failing People

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word, open it, if you will, please, to the Book of Acts chapter 4; and, in a moment, we're going to study about a man named Barnabas. And his name is very important. You know, names are important.

I heard about a man whose nickname was Tex; everybody called him Tex. And finally one time, somebody asked him: "Hey, Tex, what part of Texas are you from?" He said, "I ain't from Texas." He said, "I'm from Louisiana." Said, "Well, why do they call you Tex?" He said, "I don't want to be called Louise." I can understand that.

The name of the man that we're going to study today is a nickname, and it was Barney—actually, Barnabas. And his name is very, very important. I began reading here, in Acts chapter 4, and verse 34: "*Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses,*"—now that's his real name: Joses. I guess today we'd call him Joe—"who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas..." (Acts 4:34–36). Now *surnamed* just means, that's what they called him. That's his nickname: Barnabas. I suppose if he were an American, we'd call him Barney. Surname: Barney—"(*which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,*)..."—well, *consolation* is a word that we don't use very much today; but, let me tell you what it literally means: it means, "encouragement." He was "the son of encouragement"—"a Levite and of the country of Cyprus,"—who, that is, Barney—"having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36–37).

I want to talk to you today about encouragement—a man that had a gift, and it was the gift of encouragement. He just had a way—this greathearted soul, this wonderful man. He had a way of encouraging people everywhere that he went. And I so want to be like Barnabas. I wish I had a church full of people like Barnabas.

You know, there are some people who are encouragers, and there are some people who are discouragers. You ever meet a discourager? They're like a drink of water to a drowning man. They can brighten up a room by leaving. A lot of people like that. I mean they just discourage you in everything that you do, and they themselves are the people who somehow leave you drained and depressed.

## I. Give Encouragement, Not Discouragement

Somebody has well said that discouragement is a dark room where the negatives of fear and failure are developed.

Bill Glass is a Southern Baptist evangelist. Bill Glass one time was speaking in a prison to 1,000 prisoners, and he asked them this question: he said, "How many of you were told by your parents that one day you would end up in prison?" Almost every one of them lifted his hand. Every one of those prisoners, almost to the man, had parents who said, "One of these days, you're going to end up in prison." Some encouragement that was. It was self-fulfilling prophecy.

Now the Bible tells us of God Himself, in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and verse 3, that He is the God of all consolation (2 Corinthians 1:3). That is, God is the God of all encouragement. God has cornered the market on encouragement. All encouragement comes from God—real encouragement. Therefore, all discouragement comes from the devil. *You're never more like God when you're encouraging people. Never more like the devil when you are discouraging people.* God is the God of all consolation, the God of all comfort. You see, dear friend, discouragement is such a terrible thing, because it is the tool that the devil uses to open the door to all other kinds of problems that come into your life. When a man believes that he can do something—I'm not just talking about positive thinking—but when a man has the gift of encouragement, he's such a wonderful person to be around. And he encourages others.

Now we all get discouraged. You ever get discouraged? I do. You say, "Pastor, you don't show it." Well, I think sometimes I may show it. I get discouraged sometimes. We all get discouraged. There's no one who doesn't get discouraged. We can put on a right face sometimes and plow right ahead, but we get discouraged. You know somebody in your family perhaps today who's discouraged. Maybe you have a neighbor who's discouraged; a father, mother, brother, sister, child, who's discouraged. Now the Bible tells us, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, and verse 14: "*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded*" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Now you

say, “Oh, that means those who are retarded.” Oh, no. It doesn’t speak of those who are retarded or those who are senile. The word *feeble-minded* here literally means “the discouraged, the faint-hearted.” What it literally means is a person who is *small-souled*; a person who is discouraged. We all know those kinds of people. I mean, I want you today not to take notes on my sermon, but I want you to write down the names of five people God will bring to your mind as I preach—just write down five names; and, if you’re embarrassed for your neighbor to see you jotting these names down, just put them in your mind by some sort of a memory device. I want you to think of five people—five people that I want you to encourage today—and you’ll know them. They’re all around us.

I read *Peanuts* every now and then. Do you read *Peanuts*? Yeah, go ahead and nod your head. You know, Lucy and Charlie Brown were talking, and Lucy’s the philosopher. She said, you know, “Life is really like a cruise. And,” she said, “some people on the deck of the cruise ship, they put their chair facing forward so they can see where they’re going. Other people,” she said, “they put their chair looking backward so they can see where they’ve been. And,” she said, “others put their chair facing so they can see where they are right.” Charlie Brown said, “I can’t even get my deck chair unfolded.” There are a lot of people like that. They are having a hard time in life, and they need a Barnabas. They need somebody who will encourage them.

## **II. Five Lessons of Encouragement from Barnabas**

I want to show you five instances in the life of Barnabas where he definitely encouraged, and I want you take those five instances, and I want you, by each one of those instances, to put in the margin of your Bible somebody that you need to encourage. First of all, if you would be an encourager, and have the gift of encouragement as Barnabas did, I want you to find a needy person and enrich him—a needy person and enrich him. That’s what Barnabas did in the scripture that we just read.

### **A. Seek to Enrich and Encourage the Needy**

There was a time of great persecution. These early Christians had their goods confiscated. Many of them were hiding in secret places—in caves—and they were afraid of the authorities, and many of them were being put to death and their goods had been taken away. And Barnabas was a wealthy man. He was a landowner, but he took that land, and he sold it, and he brought the money, and he laid it at the apostles’ feet. And he said, “Listen. Take this and help somebody who needs to be helped.” He saw some people with a heavy load. He said, “I’ll just move in to bear their burden.”

Now there’s somebody that you know who’s really struggling right now financially,

and you have some money that you could give to them. I want you to do it. You say, “But Pastor, if I give them what I have, I may not have enough, when I need it for myself.” Friend, I want to remind you that it’s not what you keep in the barn that multiplies; it’s what you sow that multiplies. And God says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38). Someone has well said that stewardship is that area of life where men make money and God makes men. Barnabas had it. But he realized that God had not given it to him just for his own personal aggrandizement, but God had given it to him to encourage others with. And he took the resources that God had given him and used them to bless those who had need—those who were hurting.

Now you say, “But that may be costly. The time may come when I need it.” There’s a Mr. Jarman, a fine Christian businessman and one of the finest Christian businessmen that I think America’s ever know. Mr. Jarman, when he was making a lot of money, was giving a lot of money. I mean, multiplied thousands and thousands and thousands he was giving. And then one day, he himself had financial reversal, and he himself saw his wealth shrink to very small dimensions till it was virtually gone. One day somebody said to him, “Mr. Jarman, do you ever think about all that money that you gave away?” He said, “I certainly do. That’s the only thing I have left.” Don’t you love that? “That’s the only thing I have left.”

My friend, when you die, all that you hold in your cold, dead hands is what you’ve given away. Barnabas was a man who found a need. He found a need with people, and he moved in to help; and by doing that, he encouraged. You say, “Well, Pastor, I won’t write a name down here, because I don’t have anything to give.” Now wait a minute. You can give more than money. Perhaps you can give love. Perhaps you can give help. Perhaps you can go over and help your next-door neighbor to do her laundry. You can give time. Perhaps you can help that boy who’s having such a difficult time with mathematics; maybe you can become his tutor. Maybe his dad and his mom don’t know how; maybe they didn’t have the education background that you do. Maybe you could do that. Maybe you could give wisdom. Maybe you are a retired executive, and you live next door to a little married couple. They don’t even know how to set up a budget. You could go over there, and set up some ledgers for them, and show them how to balance a bankbook. There’s so much that you have to give. And it may not mean all that much for you to give it; but I guarantee you it’ll mean a lot to somebody who needs it. Be an encourager. Here was a man who loved to encourage people so much, that they called him *Barney*, which means “encourager; son of consolation”.

## **B. Seek to Encourage the Lonely**

Number two—have you gotten a name for the first one yet? If you haven’t, think. Just find, dear friend, a needy person and enrich him. God will give you a name. Secondly,

find a lonely person and include him. Let's go on and look, if you will, in Acts chapter 9, and let me show you this man Barnabas the next time we find him here. Now I begin in Acts chapter 9, and verse 23. This is an episode in the life of the Apostle Paul, who at this time has just been saved, and nobody really trusts him very much—because he was a persecutor of the Church—when it came to Christians; and then, he got saved. And he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was a ruler, a leader, among the Jews; and now, when he professed Christianity, they didn't trust him either. He'd been persecuting the Christians.

The Christians didn't trust him. Now he got saved, and his former crowd didn't trust him. And so look, if you will, in verse 23: *"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:"*—who? Paul. He's known as Saul at this time—*"but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him"* (Acts 9:23–24). They said, "Sooner or later, he's going to come out this gate, and we're going to pounce on him." *"Then the disciples took him"*—that is, Saul, who later would become Paul—*"by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket"* (Acts 9:25).

Can you imagine how humiliating this is? I mean, here's this man, this learned man, this triple PhD—he's huddled up in a basket. They're lowering him over the wall in a basket. They're letting him down. They let him down by the wall in a basket. *"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him,"*—Isn't that something? See how he's caught in the middle here?—*"and, believed not he was a disciple"* (Acts 9:26).

He's just like Charles Colson, when Charles Colson got saved—the Watergate hatchet man. Said, "Don't tell me that guy's saved. We don't trust him. We know who he was." And they believed not that he was a disciple. They didn't believe that he was saved. Now look at verse 27. I love verse 27: *"But Barnabas"*—oh, thank God for that!—*"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus"* (Acts 9:27). Barnabas moved in to this lonely man, and just reached out those big arms, and took Saul in.

I'm telling you, if you will think, God will give you the name of some lonely person who desperately needs your love, who desperately needs for you to include him. May I say this—In a church like ours, that is a growing church, many times, it is the new convert—that's what Saul was—a new convert. He lost all of his former friends. And you know, these people, when they get saved, and they come over here, and they give their heart to Jesus Christ, that old crowd, many times, will drop them just like that. They need a friend. Somebody has well said—I think one of the best definitions of a friend that I've ever heard is: "A friend is somebody who comes in when everyone else has gone out."

You know, a lot of times we have a church like this one—and I love this church, I think it's a wonderful church. But we talk about our fellowship, how sweet our fellowship is, how much we love one another; but, you know, if you're not careful, your Sunday School class can become a *Sacred Society for Snubbing Sinners*. That's what it can become. I mean, here's somebody over there, just comes in, wants to be a part of this, and they look around, and they say, "Well, this thing's bigger than the Pentagon." And "How do I fit in?" They want the God that you have. They want the love that you have. Nobody knows them, believes in them. God give us a church full of Barnabases, who reach out to these people and say, "Come on, we're going out for pie and coffee after church tonight." Or, "Some of us sit down here at this corner. Meet you there. We're having a potluck over at our house at such and such a time. Come and be a part."

One psychiatrist said that 70% of today's population suffers from chronic loneliness. The Apostle Paul never forgot what Barnabas did for him. He wrote this, in Romans chapter 15, verses 5 through 7: "*Now the God of patience and consolation*"—that's our word; listen to it—"...*the God of [comfort] grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus*" (Romans 15:5). He says, "God is a God of comfort, and you be that way to one another." And then, he says in verse 7, "*Wherefore receive ye one another*" (Romans 15:7). Paul knew what it was to be received, because he had known what it was to be rejected.

A while back on the television program ABC's 20/20, they had an interesting thing. They had a reporter, John Stossel, reporting as to what psychiatrists are doing now with little babies—giving babies psychotherapy in the first year of life. Now why would a baby in the very first year of life need psychotherapy? These are little babies who, for whatever reason, had been denied by mama and by daddy what every little baby needs—and, that is to be snuggled, to be caressed, to be kissed, to be stroked, to have eye-to-eye contact. For whatever reason, these little babies had not had that. And they could tell that the little minds of these children already were getting a mindset that would be deleterious and hurtful to these children. And already, they needed psychotherapy—and I want you to listen to it. And I believe it is absolutely true. It is virtually impossible to spoil a child in his first year of life. You cannot love him too much. You cannot hug him too much. You cannot kiss him and caress him too much. It is virtually impossible to spoil a child in his first year of life.

And when I heard that, I thought how true that is also of a newborn child of God. Somebody who's just been saved—they don't need to be shut out. They need love. They need encouragement. They need contact with other believers in Christ in the family of God. Well, have you got a name? Good.

### C. Seek to Encourage the Misunderstood

Let's go on now to a third name I want you to write down. Not only do I want you to find somebody who has a person with a need, and move in to meet it. And not only do I want you to find a lonely person, and move out to include him. But I want you to find a misunderstood person, and affirm him. Look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 11, would you please. Acts chapter 11. Now the gospel is spreading, and revival fire is breaking out everywhere. And a revival breaks out in Antioch. Look in verse 20: *"And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus."* Oh, and look in verse 21: *"And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."* Oh, that's what I want, O God: Your hand, and a great number of people saved! *"Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem:"*—and now, watch—*"and they sent forth"*—who? You named him—*"Barnabas,"*—great soul! They sent ole' Barney, encourager—*"that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all,"*—that means, he encouraged them all; he cheered them all up—*"that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he,"*—Barnabas—*"was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord"* (Acts 11:20–24).

Now here is a man who found some people who perhaps were misunderstood, and affirmed them. You see, a revival had broken out in Antioch, but the center of Christianity at this time was Jerusalem, and that's where the apostles were. And this revival—they were wondering, "Is this really true fire or wildfire? I mean, is there apostolic authorization for what is happening over there in Antioch? I mean, how do we know that these people are real Christians? How do we know they're real believers? We don't want to deny the work of the Holy Ghost. We don't want to attribute to Satan the work of the Holy Ghost. But we don't want to attribute to the Holy Ghost the work of Satan, either. I mean, how do we know? Who's going to find out what's going on?" "Hey Barney, I want you to hide up over there at Antioch, and you find out what's going on, and you come back and tell us. We're not quite certain that everything is right over there. We just don't know."

So Barnabas goes up to investigate, and when he's up there, he just says, "Guys, this is great! Thank God for you! The hand of God is upon you." He affirmed them. I'm telling you, folks. There are a lot of people who're starting out for God, who need your affirmation. There are a lot of people who are misunderstood, who need your affirmation. There are a lot of people who are not trusted, who need you to encourage them, like Barney encouraged these kinds of people.

Now Barnabas could have gone up there and been a wet blanket, and said, "Now

look, you're not doing it just exactly the way we think you ought to do it;" or, "It can't be done;" or, "Don't do it this way." He could have been a wet blanket. You know, in every church, you have wet blankets—people, who, when they see anything happening, they want to pour cold water on it. They don't want anything to happen that they can't control, or they don't understand—and, any kind of growth threatens them.

Some pastors one time were talking about committees, and one pastor said to another pastor, "Do you have any committees in your church?" He said, "Oh yes." He said, "I've got committees. You have any standing committees?" He said, "Sure," said, "I've got standing committees." He said, "I've got sitting committees." He said, "I've got some lying down." And he said, "Oh, what kind of committees you have here?" "Oh," he said, "I've got all kinds." He said, "I've even got a bucket brigade committee." He said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, anytime anybody wants to do anything great and good and holy—anytime anybody has any big plans, the bucket brigade committee comes and pours cold water on it." Every church has it. And sometimes, these churches are pastored by leaders who are that way. They're just *small-souled*.

Somebody said in churches you have three kinds of leaders: you have risk-takers, caretakers, and undertakers. Now Barney was a risk-taker. I mean, when you read this, man, if he saw it, if it looked like it was gonna be good, if it looked like it was going to be for God, boy, he got up there. He said, "Hey, the grace of God is on these people," and he affirmed them, and he blessed them. I love people like that. We have some of them here in our church. We sit in this beautiful place today, but, folks, we weren't in it a couple of years ago. I remember when we brought the plan to the church. Dear precious Emily Wilson—she may be here in this service or in the next service, I haven't seen her yet—she's one of our leaders of the vintage Bellevue, been around Bellevue for a long time. And she stood up and she said, "Some of you wonder what I think of this plan. Am I for it?" She said, "You better believe I am." Boy, when she said that, I said, "Hot dog." I like that. I like that. You better believe I'm for it.

When I talk to Bill Mills—Billy Mills now is in Heaven—he was one of the leaders, when we first even conceived to this little idea. I was down in Orlando, Florida, and before I said anything to anybody on earth, Billy Mills and another man were sitting there, and I said to them, "What do you think about this idea?" Billy Mills said, "Sounds great! Sounds great!" I like that. He could have said, "I don't think it can be done." He could have said, "Oh, not in a thousand years." But he had the spirit of Barnabas. I like Barnabas. I like people who don't think of why it can't be done, but why it can be done, people who will encourage other people—not members of the Cold Water Committee.

Do you know somebody right now who's about to start on something, who needs your encouragement? I mean, do you know somebody now who has an embryo idea? Maybe they're starting a new Sunday School class, maybe they're trying to write a book,

maybe they're trying to get started in a business, maybe they're trying to have a baby, maybe they want an adoption—Why don't you affirm them? Why don't you just come alongside of them, put your arm around them, and say, "Hey, I just believe in you. More than that, I believe in the grace of God that I see in you, and through you."

#### **D. Seek to Encourage and Develop Undiscovered People**

Have you got a name? Good. Let's go on to the next one and tell you something else that Barnabas did. Look, if you will, in chapter 11 now, beginning in verse 25. And let me read verses 25 and 26, and tell you what they mean to me: *"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* (Acts 11:25–26).

Now here's what happens. Barnabas goes down there, and he says, "Hey, this is of God. God is in this." He gets so excited. He says, "Now we've got a lot of new wine here, but we need to get a wineskin to put it in. We need somebody who can teach these people—we need somebody who can develop them and to help them to grow. I know the guy. It's that guy Saul. He's the guy. I just believe the hand of God is on that man. I believe God has called him into the ministry. I believe that God will use him to help these people at Antioch. I'm going to go get Saul."

"Saul, buddy, listen. I've been to Antioch. You won't believe what's happening in Antioch. Now Saul, I know you, Saul. You've been steeped in all that religion, but you know the Old Testament inside and out. And now you've seen Jesus Christ face-to-face, and I've seen the power of God on your life. And Saul, God has his hand on you, and God wants to use you. Now Saul, you come down here. I want to get you in this church over here, Saul. I want you to help these brothers at Antioch. I want you to come and share. I know you're green. I know that you're not developed. But I believe, friend, that you've got it in a warehouse, and we're going to put it in a showcase. Now you get down here and go to work."

Now what do I want you to do? Here's the fourth thing. I want you to find a potential and undeveloped person, and disciple him. I want you to find an undiscovered person, and develop him. Now Barnabas didn't just stay there and say, "Well, I'm going to lead this whole thing myself." I mean, God was not interested in starting a cult called *Barney's Boys*. He knew that the job was behind him, and so, he found a young man named Saul, with gifts and abilities—the same Saul that had fled from the wrath of his enemy—and he saw that he had hidden talent and buried abilities, and he began to work and to develop this young man named Saul. Now he didn't put himself first. Did you know that we have in this church sitting out here a lot of Sauls. Somebody needs to

find them. Somebody needs to develop them. Many of them are overlooked, and they're not in service in this church, and, very frankly, they ought to be.

I read an incredible story about a young 16-year-old boy. This boy was told by his teachers over and over again that he did not have the mental ability to stay in school—that he would never be successful at all because he wasn't smart enough. And his teachers told him that the only thing he would ever do would be manual labor. So between the ages of 16 and 32, this boy, whose teacher said—and had been telling him over and over again—that he was a dullard, he held 67 jobs. He just couldn't hold a job. And at 32 years of age, this boy, that all of his teachers said was so dumb, somebody looked at him, and said, "You know, there's something different about that boy. Let's give him an IQ test." And they gave this boy an IQ test—are you ready for this? He had an IQ of 161. He was incredibly brilliant. They sent him back to school. Today, he's a well-known scientist working with lasers. For two years, he was the president of *Mensa*, which is an organization of high muckety-mucks. You have to have an IQ of 145 to even get in. He was the president of the thing for two years, and they told him he was so dumb he couldn't make it through school. Now at 32, he was an idiot; at 33, he's a genius. Just undiscovered talent. Somebody encouraged him. That person sitting next to you may be the best Bible teacher this church will ever know, but they need somebody to help them to discover it.

I think of the people who encouraged me, Bob. I never had the idea that I could speak. And I don't think that I'm the world's best, by any stretch of the imagination, but I remember the first time I was called on to lead in prayer in a Sunday School class I was so embarrassed—I said, "I can't do that." And then, it embarrassed the teacher for doing that. I never in a thousand years, Jim, ever dreamed I would be able to stand and proclaim the gospel of Christ, but I can think of those men in my church who put their arms around me—a little old teenage boy—and encouraged me. People need to be encouraged. You find somebody who needs to be developed and develop that person.

Now Barnabas, so far as I know, never wrote a book in the Bible. As a matter of fact, I know he didn't—but half of the New Testament as we know it was written by Paul, that Barnabas encouraged, and, as we're going to see, the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, whom Barnabas encouraged. Maybe you'll never be a great leader, but you can be a great encourager. I would to God that you would, and that you would take great pleasure in seeing those that you've encouraged go on for the Lord.

#### **E. Seek to Encourage and Restore Failing People**

Now last of all, I want you to find a failing person and restore him. Look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 15. You're going to find out why they called Barney, *Barney*. Look at it—Acts chapter 15, verse 36: "*And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us*

*go again and visit our brethren in every city...*” (Acts 15:36). Now by this time, Paul has become the leader, and Barnabas is following Paul. Paul is second fiddle. It takes more grace than I can tell to play second fiddle well. But Barney knew how to do it. And so Paul now says to Barnabas, *“Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark”*—John Mark. *“But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus”* (Acts 15:36–39).

Now just underscore that. So Barnabas took Mark. You would know it. I mean, that’s just the heart of this guy. Now what is happening is this: Paul says, “Barney, let’s double back on our tracks. Let’s just go back and see how the brothers and sisters are doing in the churches.” And Barney says, “Hey Paul, that’s a good idea, pal—let’s go. I’ll go get John Mark, and we’ll go.” Paul said, “Who’d you say?” “John Mark.” He said, “No, Barney—you remember? John Mark is a quitter. John Mark went home to hold his mama’s hand. John Mark got cold feet. John Mark is not the kind of man we want. I’m not going on any missionary journey with a quitter, a slacker, a failure like John Mark.” But Barney says, “Paul, sure he failed one time, but he’s not without redemption. I mean, my goodness, who doesn’t fail? He needs somebody to help him.” Paul says, “Well, listen. This is serious business. This is not a nursery school. There’s going to be danger. There’s going to be difficulty. There’s going to be hardship. I don’t want some quitter along.” “Well now, Paul, John Mark has some good stuff in him.” “Look, Barney, we’re not going to take John Mark. We’re not going to take him. We are not going to take him.” “Well, I’ll take him.” “Then you take him.”

Barney found this failure, this quitter, put his arm around him, and said, “Come on Mark, we’re going to go work for Jesus.” Do you see why Barnabas was such a great man? Do you see why Barnabas was such a great man? Now who was right—Paul or Barnabas? Well, I think Paul was logically right, but ole’ Barney had something in his heart that just made him the right kind of a man, and Mark learned from Barnabas that failure is not final.

And I don’t know all that Barnabas did for John Mark, but let me just give you a couple of verses that’ll bless you. I mean bless you good. Second Timothy 4, verse 11. Paul is in prison. He says, *“Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry”* (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul said, “I need Mark.” That’s right, the same one you wouldn’t have anything to do with. Oh, and later on, the great Apostle Paul wrote a lesson I think he’d learned from Barnabas, in Galatians chapter 6, and verse 1: *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are*

*spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness*” (Galatians 6:1). Do you know somebody who used to be a member of this church who doesn’t come any more? You know somebody who’s quit—somebody who’s a failure? You know somebody who’s washed out in business, perhaps ruined his marriage? Somebody who is a disgrace? Somebody who just feels like there’s no hope for me? *“Ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness”* (Galatians 6:1). Be a Barnabas to that person.

## **Conclusion**

I must quit, but I want you to look in Acts chapter 11, and verse 24. Let me tell you why Barnabas was such a great man. Here’s a character sketch of him. Now look at it—Acts 11, verse 24: *“For he was a good man,”*—do you know why he was a good man? “Oh,” you say, “just his genes and chromosomes.” Oh, no, you missed it—*“...he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost...”* (Acts 11:24). It was God in Him. Because, you see, God has cornered the market on consolation. He’s the God of all consolation. Why was he a good man? Because he was full of the Holy Ghost. “Well,” you say, “why was he full of the Holy Ghost?” We’ll continue to read, *“...he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith”* (Acts 11:24). He was a good man, because he was full of the Holy Ghost; and he was full of the Holy Ghost, because he was a man of faith. Isn’t that wonderful? And friend, that’s something that any of us can do today. Trust God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and give us the gift of encouragement. And there are five people who are waiting on you. You got the names? I hope you do.

# Five Ways You Can Encourage Others

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** February 4, 2001

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 4:36–37

*“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”*

ACTS 4:36–37

## Outline

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- I. I Will Encourage Others by Practicing Stewardship
- II. I Will Encourage Others by Extending Friendship
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Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles, find the Book of Acts, right after the Gospels, and turn to the fourth chapter, where we were last week. And we're going to read just two verses to get us started. In a moment, we're going to read verses 36 and 37. If I could just model and mold a church member, I mean, the church member of my dreams, what would he be like? Well, he would be like the man that we're going to read about today, a man named Barnabas.

Now, Barnabas was not his real name. His name was Joses, but he had a nickname. Do you have a nickname? Nicknames have a way of sticking. This man's nickname was Barnabas. If he lived today, doubtless, we wouldn't call him Barnabas; we'd call him Barney. And, actually, the name Barnabas means encouragement.

Here was a man who had a gift, and his gift was the gift of encouragement. He was an encourager. The Bible calls him here, “the son of consolation.” Look at it—verse 36: “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas...”—when it says “by the apostles he was surnamed Barnabas,” that means that's the name that his parents did not give him. But the apostles looked at him and said, “Look. Look how he encourages

other people. We're going to give him the nickname Barnabas"—"...which is by interpretation, the son of consolation." Now, the word consolation is a word we don't use very much today, but it actually means encouragement. So here's Barney, who is the son of encouragement. He was a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus. "Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Now, the word encouragement or consolation is the Greek word *parakletos*, or the word for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. He is called the Paraclete—the Greek word *parakletos*. It's the same word. And so, here's a man who is doing for other people what the Holy Spirit does for the child of God, who comes inside us, alongside us, to encourage us, to give us comfort, to give us hope, to give us health, to get us on our way. And I've come to live long enough to see that there is not a mother's child in this world that does not need encouragement. Say amen. You know that is true.

I love to be encouraged. I need encouragement. I'm so grateful for people who encourage me. And I'll tell you, I don't like to be around discouraging people. Now, sometimes we have to. It comes with the territory. The fleas come with the dog. But I don't like to be around discouraging people. I mean, they're just discouragers. Now, here was a man—thank God—who could lift your spirits.

Do you know why discouragement is so bad? Discouragement opens the door for all other kinds of sins and failures. Somebody said, "Discouragement is a dark room where the negatives of failure are developed." Did you know the Bible calls God the God of all encouragement? Let me give you a verse before we get into our text—2 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort." Now, it's the same word. It's the same word that is used here for consolation. And the word comfort, the word consolation, actually means encouragement. God is the God of all encouragement. That means that God has cornered the market on encouragement. He's the God of all of it.

Now, if God is the God of all encouragement, the devil is the sinister minister of discouragement. Discouragement comes from the devil. Let me tell you, discouragement is a major cause of failure.

Bill Glass, who was a pro football player—I watched him when he played for Baylor University—Bill Glass, a mighty man of God, has a prison ministry. Bill Glass was preaching to one thousand inmates, and he said, "I want to ask you a question. How many of you—those of you who are here in prison—how many of you had a father who told you 'one of these days, you're going to end up in prison'?" Almost every one of them lifted his hand. Think of that. "One of these days, you are going to end up in prison." And that's exactly what they did. Discouragement is such a cause of failure.

I love people who believe it can be done. I want to be surrounded by people who

believe it can be done.

In the Football Hall of Fame, there's a man, Bobby Lane. Some of you are too old to remember Bobby Lane. But there's his helmet up there. And underneath the picture is said, "Bobby Lane never lost a football game; just ran out of time." I like that. I believe that we need to encourage one another.

There's a scripture—1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 14: "Now, we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." Now, I want to take a phrase out of that: "comfort the feebleminded." When you think of a person who is feebleminded, what do you think of? Someone who is senile? You think of somebody who is mentally handicapped? That's not what the word here means. The word here feebleminded actually means someone with a small soul, somebody who is small-souled. It means somebody who is discouraged. And what he is saying here is, "encourage the discouraged." That is a command from Almighty God. And there are so many people who need to be encouraged, some in your own family.

You ever read Peanuts in the comic strip? Lucy is talking to Charlie Brown. She said, "Charlie Brown, people put their deck chairs on the cruise ship in different ways. Some people put their deck chairs so they can see where they're going, and so they face this way. Other people put their deck chairs so they can see where they have been, and they face it this way. Some people put their deck chairs this way, so they can see where they are. How do you do it, Charlie Brown?" He said, "I can't get mine unfolded." There are a lot of Charlie Browns in this world, and they need to be encouraged.

I want to give you today five ways that you can be an encourager, and, if you will take these five ways, and do these five things, you will be, precious friend, the church member of my dreams—five ways that you can be a Barnabas; five ways that you can encourage people in your family, in your neighborhood, in your school, on your team, and in this particular church, and wherever you go. And we're going to find those five things, they're things that Barnabas did. I'm going to take, from the Book of Acts, five places where Barnabas encouraged other people. And Barnabas can be your patron saint today. Now, I don't believe in patron saints, in the classic sense, but you understand what I'm talking about. He can be your guide, your model, your encourager, to encourage others. All right, are you ready for these five things? And I want you to put them in the first person.

## **I. I Will Encourage Others by Practicing Stewardship**

So, here's point number one. Here's what I want you to say to yourself, and I want you to write it down, if you take notes. I will encourage others by practicing stewardship—I

will encourage others by practicing stewardship. Now, I've already read verses 36 and 37, but let's read it again: "And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation—that is, of encouragement—a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Now, here was a man who had much to give. There was persecution in Jerusalem, and there was poverty in Jerusalem, and there was a need. Barnabas, who was an encourager, saw a need, and he moved in to meet that need. Now, Barnabas knew there was a difference, and I want you to listen to this carefully: there's a difference between ownership and stewardship. Now, many of us just major on ownership, but what we're really doing is just managing the affairs of God. We don't really own anything.

And, by the way, talking about that, I'm going out of town tomorrow. I need some money. I forgot to get any money. I really need \$100. "Wally, have you got \$100? Do you? Give it to me, would you, son? You just carry around \$100 like that?" "All the time." "Thanks." "You're welcome." Boy, it's good to have church members like that. Now, let's see, where was I?

Barnabas saw a need, and he moved into to meet it. I know I'm not going to get anything else done till I explain that. Do you know why Wally gave me that \$100? It's mine. I gave it to him before the service. I said, "Wally, when I ask for it, give it back." He was just giving back to me that which is already mine, isn't that right? I gave it to him. I had every right to ask it for it back, right?

What do you have that God has not already first given you? Doesn't He have any right to ask for it, if He placed it in your hands? What do we have that we've not received? Here was a man—here was a man—to whom God had given much, and he saw a need, and he moved in.

Now, I went to the men's prayer breakfast here in Memphis some years ago, and there was a man, a businessman, a godly businessman, named Stanley Tam, and he said many wonderful things. But he said one thing that I whipped out my pen and I wrote it down in a hurry lest I forget it. I want to put it in your mind right now what Stanley Tam put in my mind. He said this—and listen to it: "It is what you sow that multiplies, not what you keep in the barn." It is what you sow that multiplies, not what you keep in the barn.

Now, if Barnabas had kept this money, we would not be talking about him on this particular part right now. Well, you say, "Pastor Rogers, I am not rich. I have nothing to sell, and, therefore, this doesn't apply to me." Oh yes, it does apply to you. There's more than money to give. You can give you. You can give help. You can give time. You can give wisdom.

I was reading over here in Acts chapter 3, verse 6. We read about some other apostles. They're not rich like Barnabas was. Read there in Acts chapter 3, verse 6. There was a man lying at the gate who needed help. What did Peter and John say to him? "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I unto thee." God's not going to ask you to give what you don't have. Are you willing to give what you do have—love, time, help, prayer, ministry? You see, an encourager is a person who understands that he or she is a steward of that which God has placed in their hands, whatever it may be.

We have a ministry here at Bellevue Baptist Church called Car Care. We have a group of men who are mechanics who set up shop, and the widows in our church, who don't know much about getting their automobiles assessed, the oil changed, and all these things, can bring their automobiles there, and these men get their hands greasy, stick their heads beneath those hoods of those automobiles in the name of Jesus to minister to those widows. "Such as I have give I unto thee."

There are so many people in our world today that need to be encouraged. And so, the Bible says, in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 2: "Bear one another's burdens." Friend, just say, "I will be an encourager by practicing stewardship. Whatever I have, when I see a need, I'm going to move in to meet that need." And you will encourage somebody. I know there's a neighbor next to you that needs some help. I know there's a person in your school that needs some help. I know there's a friend that needs some help. Why don't you, in the name of Jesus, move alongside that person, and say, "Such as I have give I unto thee." If you do, you'd be acting like Barnabas.

## **II. I Will Encourage Others by Extending Friendship**

Now, here's the second principle. I want you to write this down. I will encourage others not only by practicing stewardship, but I will encourage others by extending friendship.

Now, you're in the Book of Acts. Fast-forward to chapter 9—chapter 9—and look, if you will, in verse 23. This is talking about Saul. Let's go back to 22: "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." You understand that Saul had been an enemy of the church, and now he is a friend. He's been saved, and he's preaching Jesus. "And after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their lying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him." They said, "As soon as he comes out, we're going to kill him." "Then the disciples took him by night,—that is, Saul—and let him down by the wall in a basket."

Now, this had been the mighty Pharisee, this man with so much zeal to destroy the church of Christ, and here's a man with so much authority. Now, I see him humbling himself, sitting in a basket, preferably being let down over a wall at nighttime. "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they

were all afraid of him...” Underscore that.

Why shouldn't they be afraid of him? He'd been having them killed, thrown into prison, and everything else. And now he's between these people who want to kill him, on the one hand, and his own brothers and sisters in Christ who are now afraid of him. And the Bible says, “and they were all afraid of him, and believed not he was a disciple.”

But now look in verse 27: “But Barnabas...—underscore that—But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” Thank God for Barnabas.

Now, what was Barnabas doing now? Barnabas is extending friendship. He is encouraging Paul by extending love and friendship. Paul needed somebody to love him. Here he is. He's lost all of his old friends, and his new friends are suspicious of him, so he's in between.

Chuck Colson of Watergate fame, called the Hatchet Man, gave his heart to Christ, and nobody would trust him. They said, “Well, it's just a political ploy. It's imagination. It's foxhole religion.” There he was, his former president now in disgrace, his boss. But there were some friends that put their arms around Chuck Colson early, and I was one of them, met him early, and encouraged him in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I thank God that I had enough gumption and had the ability and the opportunity to do that.

Here is Barnabas who finds a new believer and makes a friend out of him. Somebody said, “A friend, a true friend, is somebody who comes in when everybody else goes out.”

You know what is wrong with many churches, including Bellevue Baptist Church? We don't learn how to befriend a new believer. We think we're having fellowship, but many of our churches are sacred societies for snubbing sinners. We need to practice friendship, and we need to take these new believers and encourage them.

Barnabas said, “Look, you don't have to be afraid of Saul. He's been saved. Welcome him now.” And I can see old Simon Peter reaching out and giving to Paul a big old bear hug, saying, “Welcome brother.” Friend, that's what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs today. We need some Barnabases.

Did you know that psychologists tell us that 70% of today's population—70%—suffers from chronic loneliness? That didn't sink in, did it? Seventy percent, seven out of every ten people that you see, according to some statistics, are suffering from loneliness, chronic loneliness. That's the reason we call Bellevue Baptist Church a family of friends.

You know what Paul wrote later on? Now, remember, Paul—Paul—was included by a man named Barnabas. Now, here's what he wrote. Put down Romans chapter 15, verses 5 through 7: “Now, the God of patience and consolation...—that's

encouragement; now, listen to it—Now, the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Paul knew what it was to be received. He knew what it was to be encouraged.

So you have more than money to give. You can give friendship. Why don't you ask God—why don't you ask God, “God, give me a new member in Bellevue Baptist Church that I might encourage a newborn Christian”? Newborn babies need love.

John Stossel, of ABC fame—you watch him on television—did a documentary on ABC's 20/20, and he talked about how psychologists are giving psychotherapy to newborn babies, or to babies that are not yet a year old. And he said that—and some of these babies are older than a year old, but they're being given psychotherapy. And these babies, who are hurt or harmed emotionally, are babies who have never, for whatever reason, received eye contact; they've not been touched, they've not been hugged, they've not been kissed, they've not been held close. And these babies were developing, at a very early age, psychological problems. And they had statistical proof to show that those babies that don't receive this love in the very first year of life grow up to be cold and indifferent, and some of them, brutal. And so, they're actually giving psychotherapy to little babies.

Now, here's the kicker in the whole thing. That program said this: that it is virtually impossible to spoil a baby the first year of his or her life. You can't give one too much love. Now, you can spoil kids, but it is virtually impossible to spoil a baby the first year of its life. All of the love, all of the attention, all of the hugging, all of the kissing, all of the coddling you want to do, just do it. And I want to say, correspondingly: it is virtually impossible to spoil a newborn Christian. Love him. They need to be loved. They need to be included. May God give us a church full of Barnabases.

I was over there at our New Members Class this morning. We call it the Discovery Class. And I said, “You know, sometimes people say big churches are not friendly.” Do you ever hear that? Lift your hand. Did you ever hear that? Sure. That's ridiculous. How did they get to be big churches—by being unfriendly? It's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. Big churches have a lot of love, and a lot of love to give, and you need to be a part of it. That's what makes this church the church that it is. We are a family of friends.

### **III. I Will Encourage Others by Building Partnerships**

You want to be a Barnabas? Friend, then you practice stewardship, and it goes beyond money. You want to be a Barnabas? Then you practice friendship. Here's a third thing. You want to be a Barnabas? Here's the third thing I want you to say about yourself. I will

encourage others by building partnerships—by building partnerships. We're talking about stewardship, friendship, now partnership. Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 11—Acts chapter 11—and let's look, beginning in verse 20, and reading about four verses here now. What has happened in the early church is a revival has broken out in Antioch, and God is just doing incredible things in Antioch. Now, watch verse 20: "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus." And, by the way, they made fun of George Bush because he spoke of those people who were Greeks as Grecians. They need to make fun of the King James Bible, too. Did you know that? Oh, you're probably not even aware of what I'm talking about. Forget it. All right. "And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord. Then tidings of those things came unto the ears of the church which was at Jerusalem—now, watch it—and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, who, when he came, had seen the grace of God, and was glad, and exhorted them all, that they with purpose of heart, that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and faith: and much people was added, unto the Lord."

Well, what has happened is this: now, revival had broken out at Antioch. The headquarters of the Christian church at that particular time was in Jerusalem. And the Word of God was going out from Jerusalem, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. And, so they found out, "Who are these people there in Antioch? What do they believe? Are they right? Are they orthodox? Is this a cult? Is this a breakaway movement? We need to send somebody down there to investigate to see if they are really of us. Who should we send?" Who do you think they chose? They chose Barney. They said, "Barney, go down there and check that bunch out, will you?" And old Barnabas goes down there, and he says he saw the grace of God.

Have you ever thought about that? How do you see the grace of God? What color is it? What size is it? How much does it weigh? Friend, I'll tell you, when you get in a service where God is present, you'll see the grace of God. I don't know how to measure it, but I'll tell you it is there. You can tell when God is on a congregation.

He walked in there and said, "Good night. God is all over this place." He saw the grace of God. And he went back, and he reported, and said, "These are brothers and sisters, and we need to get with them." He was not a divider. He was not a wall builder. He was a bridge builder. It's easy to build walls and bridges, by the way. But here was a man who got people together. He encouraged others by building partnerships. People have been a little suspicious of those others.

I'm so grateful for people who encourage us, and who get people together rather than dividing people. Somebody asked me the other day, they said, "What is one of the

major epics in your life, as you look back on your life?” I said, “Asking the church to move from the old location to the new location.” Friend, I’m telling you, when we decided to do that, if you...

How many of you have come to Bellevue after we’ve moved? Let me see your hands. Take them down. How many of you were here before we moved? Let me see your hands. Friends, there are more people who’ve come after we moved than were here before we moved, according to this very accurate survey I’ve just done. You don’t understand what a monumental thing that was. And I’ve often told people, “An idea is one of the most fragile things in this world, and at the same time, one of the most powerful things.”

We were trying to build downtown. We could not buy the property. We could not get the space. There were all kinds of monumental problems, but we did not want to put a lid on the growth and stop the growing of this church. We said, “O God, what shall we do? Where shall we go? What are we going to do?” And we were still moving heaven and earth to build downtown.

I was in Orlando with two other men of my church—of this church, of your church—and one of them is now in heaven. His name is Billy Mills—a dear man of God, Morris Mills’ brother. We were in the airport, and with the former Associate Pastor Bob Sorrell, and Billy Mills was there, and Al Childress. We’d been down there to look at some churches that were building worship centers. That night I spent a sleepless night, and I’m a sound sleeper. Joyce can tell you, when my head hits the pillow, it’s lights out. But I just wrestled with God all night. I’ve often said I had a rock for a pillow. And God seemed to be saying to me, “You need to go out and buy some acreage and move everything.”

Now, folks, that may sound just, oh yeah, sure, that’s what we should have done. I want to tell you, it sounded about four thirds insanity. I said four thirds. I hope you get that, after a while. To do it. But there was a little idea in my heart, and in my mind. I met those guys in the airport, the Orlando Airport, and I said, “Gentlemen, I want to ask you a question,” the next morning before we flew back, “what would happen—just put in parentheses and brackets everything we have and own right now; just put it out of your mind, just put that out of your mind so you can think freely; everything downtown, everything we’ve planned to do, all the money we spent planning and all of that, just put that out of your mind—what would happen if we moved out in the northeast part of our county on Interstate 40 and just bought some raw acreage, and moved?”

Now, folks, it was not a conviction to me at that moment; it was only an idea. It became a conviction as we thought about it, and prayed about it, and wrestled with it. But it was an idea that was so fragile. And, if those men that I respected so much said, “Preacher, that’s crazy,” I would have probably said, “You’re right. Forget it.” I never will

forget. Al Childress said, “Are you serious?” I said, “I’m serious that I want us to think about.” Billy Mills said, “I’ll tell you one thing, Pastor, it would be easier to raise the money for it.” He didn’t discourage it. Brother Bob, you were there.

We all sat on the airplane. We almost got like school kids giggling, just thinking about it. I’m so grateful that they didn’t step on that idea, because it became a conviction. And then, I’m as certain as I stand here that it was God’s plan and God’s will, and God has blessed it and multiplied it in such an incredible way.

Did you know there are people who can be so negative they can’t believe anything big? They can’t understand a vision, something from God, or even give God a chance to give a vision.

No, here was a man named Barnabas, and others like an Al Childress, and a Billy Mills, and so many of the men in our church. Folks, I want to tell you something. One of the great things of Bellevue Baptist Church—and I’m not taking anything away from our ladies; I thank God for them—but God has given us some laymen who are towering giants for God. They love God; they love this church; they love the pastor; they love one another. And I just thank God for the wealth in this church of Barnabases. We’ve got a bunch of them, and I’m so grateful. You see, a Barnabas encourages others by building partnerships.

There are three kinds of people in the world: there are those who are risk takers, there are those who are caretakers, and there are those who are undertakers. I’m so grateful for people who encourage.

One pastor was talking to another pastor, and he said, “How many committees do you have in your church?” He said, “Oh, we’ve got a committee for this, a committee for this, a committee...” He said, “Do you have a cold water committee?” He said, “What’s a cold water committee?” He said, “Well, the cold water committee, that’s when anybody has a good idea, they come and pour cold water on it.” The guy said, “Yes,” he said, “I’ve got one of those in my church. As a matter of fact, I can tell you who the chairman is.” Thank God for Barnabases who don’t go to see what’s wrong, and why it can’t be done.

#### **IV. I Will Encourage Others by Developing Leadership**

Now, here’s a fourth way. You want to be a Barnabas? All right, here’s the fourth way. I will encourage others by developing leadership—by developing leadership. Now, go—you’re still in Acts chapter 11—and look, if you will, in verse 25: “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

Now, Barnabas is in the middle of this again. Now, he goes to look for Saul again. Why did he do this? Well, Barnabas, when he came down there, he said, “Look at all of this. Look what God is doing. They’ve got all this; they’ve got all this wine. They need some wineskins. They need somebody with an organizational mind. They need somebody with spiritual insight. They need somebody who is a leader. Who can lead all of this? I know who it is. I know. It’s that same man Saul. He’s the man. We’ve got to get him down here to Antioch. Saul can lead this bunch.” And so he says, “Saul, get over here. I need you, son. There’s a job to be done.” And Barnabas did not have to get to do it. Barnabas was not a leader; he was an encourager. And he didn’t try to build a bunch of folks called Barney’s Boys. He had enough sense to know that he needed somebody else. And he saw this man with hidden talents. He saw this man with varied abilities. He knew that Saul had spiritual gifts that needed to be developed, discovered, and developed, and put to work. And so, he sent for this man and developed a leader.

You know, Paul never forgot that. Do you know what he wrote in Romans 12, verse 10? “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” Barnabas was content to let Saul take the leadership. Now, he had been deputized. He had been sent down there, but he says, “No, not me. I’m not the one. Saul is the one.” And Barnabas stood on the sidelines, as he helped find a leader, a godly leader. It takes more grace than I can tell to play second fiddle, and play it well, but that’s what this man did. He’s not trying to build it around himself. He is developing leadership.

Now, we’re talking about reaching Shelby County with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We’re talking about going beyond Shelby County to all the world. And, friend, we need to raise up some leaders, and they’re all over, but we need to discover leadership, and teach people to lead; find leaders, single them out, develop them and equip them, and send them out. Not everybody is a leader. Barnabas wasn’t a leader; he was an encourager.

We have a ministry in our church. That’s helping people to discover their spiritual gift and to move into places of either service or leadership, or both. Some people have the gift of developing leaders. This young man sitting right here—he looks young anyway; he’s getting to be an old coot, but this guy, this guy right here, has a gift, an incredible gift. He is a Barnabas A plus, when it comes to discovering leadership and putting people to work. That’s the way so much gets done in these pageants. He has a way of finding people, and seeking out people with hidden talents and abilities, and saying, “I know somebody who can do that,” and that’s the way so much of this gets done here in this particular church. There are all kinds of people with varied abilities, and we need some Barnabases who help ferret these people out.

Did you know that Barnabas never wrote a book in the Bible, but there were two

people that he encouraged who wrote books in the Bible. For example, the apostle Paul wrote 13 of the New Testament books. And we're going to learn later on that Barnabas encouraged a man named Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark. Pretty good—pretty good. From a human viewpoint—from a human viewpoint—we may never have had the 13 books that Paul wrote, or the Gospel of Mark. Now, I know God could overrule and get some other Barnabas. Just understand what I'm saying. I'm saying that Barnabas was the man that God used to develop leadership. Do you see why I say that we need some Barnabases in our church?

## **V. I Will Encourage Others by Rebuilding Relationships**

All right now, here's the fifth thing—here's the fifth thing you will do. I will encourage others by re-building relationships. Now, go to Acts chapter 15. We're going to find Barnabas again. We're going to find him still encouraging people. Acts 15, verse 36: "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of God, to see how they do—that is, we're just going to go back and retrace our steps, our missionary journey—and, Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark—or, as we call him today, John Mark—but Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them, from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was sharp between them..."—can you imagine Barnabas and Paul now having a contention? They did, and it was a sharp one—"...and they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus: and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God."

What's the background? Well, there was a young man whose name was Mark—John Mark—and he went with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Mark, somewhere along that journey, got homesick, or afraid, or something, and he wanted to go home and hold Mama's hand, and he said, "I don't want to be here anymore. Count me out." And, at Pamphylia, he said, "Goodbye, guys. I am going home." Boy, it got all over Paul. Paul thought, that quitter, that slacker, that shirker, that Mama's boy, whatever he is. All right. So Paul and Barnabas just went on. Later on, they wanted to go back and retrace their steps. Barney says, "Okay, I'll get Mark." Paul says, "Don't get him." "No, he's all..." "No, hey, he quit. He dropped out. You can't count on him. I don't want Mark." Barnabas says, "Now, look, Paul." He said, "Don't you now look me." "Listen," Paul said, "I am not going to take him." Barney says, "Okay, okay, I'll take him. You go that way; I'll go this way." Sometimes those things happen, don't they? Well, here's old Barnabas' heart. He knows this boy has failed, but he also knew that failure is not final, and so he wants to mend a broken relationship. And he takes old John Mark, and he continues to nurture John Mark. Later on, Paul is in a filthy, Roman prison. Time

has passed. Put in your margin 2 Timothy 4, verse 11. Here's what Paul writes. "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." "Hey, bring old Mark. I need him." How about that? How about that? This is the guy that Paul wouldn't have anything to do with. He said, "Bring him. He is profitable to me for the ministry." How did that happen? Because there was a man named Barnabas, who refused to let go of a good man named Mark just because he failed. There are many in this church who have failed, and they need you to restore that relationship.

I have told you, one day when I was a kid, I shimmied up a coconut tree down in Florida to get a coconut. I mean, a big tree, almost as tall as this ceiling. Had my arm around a palm frond, just a kid trying to unhook a coconut. The palm frond came loose, the coconut came loose, and I came loose. Shooooo—down to the ground. I fell on the grass, but this left arm fell on the sidewalk and splintered my elbow, the bone actually going out of the skin. It was awful. I'm lying there on the ground, writhing. My brother was there. You know what my brother did? He ran all over town, saying, "Hey, hey, hey, Adrian fell; Adrian fell, ha, ha, ha, ha." He didn't do that. I'll tell you what else he didn't do. He didn't stand there and say, "Adrian, you're the stupidest thing I've ever seen. Couldn't you see the palm leaf was yellow? Why do you climb up the tree like that? Why don't you wait until the coconuts fall? No, he didn't give me a lecture. I'll tell you what else he didn't do, and I'm so glad he didn't take out a gun and shoot me. "Pooooom—he's got a broken arm. He's no good anymore." No, my brother came alongside of me, and gave me some tender, loving help. Thank God, I've got that arm again to use.

Friend, there are people who fall, and they don't need us going around, saying, "Did you hear about so-and-so." They don't need us going around reporting. They don't need lectures. They don't need... Somebody said the church is the only army in the world that shoots its wounded. No, we need some Barnabases. And the Bible says, in Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1, "ye which are spiritual, restore such a man in the spirit of meekness...if any be overtaken with a fault." And the word restore, actually, in the Greek, is the word for setting a bone—tender, loving care.

## Conclusion

Now, let me tell you something. Bellevue Baptist Church, and your church, wherever you are, you need some Barnabases. Now, don't you be looking around, friend, saying, "I wonder if some of these people will be Barnabases." I ask you to write the notes, and put it in the first person. I will encourage others by practicing stewardship. I will encourage others by building friendships. I will. I will. I will. And, by the grace of God, and for the glory of God, will you say, "God, make me a Barnabas—will you?" Now, you may be something else. You may also be a Paul. You may be a John Mark, but be,

among all things, be a Barnabas.

Bow your heads in prayer.

How did Barnabas get to be Barnabas to begin with? How was he such a good man to begin with? Well, the Bible says very clearly and very plainly that Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith. He was a good man. Why was he a good man? He was a good man because he was full of the Holy Ghost. Why was he full of the Holy Ghost? Because he was a man full of faith. And that's what we're talking about right now.

Would you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Would you trust Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? "Pastor Rogers, would Jesus save me today?" Yes, He will, if you'll trust Him. If you'll pray a prayer like this, if you're not saved, if you're not heaven-bound, if you're hell-bound, and you need to be saved. And you are hell-bound, if you're not saved, no matter how good you are. Would you pray, Dear God, I am a sinner. I'm lost. I need to be saved. Jesus, You died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust You. Lord Jesus, I turn from my sin to You. I trust You today as my Lord and Savior. I give You my life. I receive You as my Lord. Save me, Lord Jesus.

# The Church Member of My Dreams

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: April 26, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 4:36–37**

*“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”*

ACTS 4:36–37

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## Introduction

Would you take God's Word this morning, please, and turn to the book of Acts chapter 4. We're preaching in the book of Acts under the general heading "That Old Time Religion." Because we told you that the old time religion sets the pattern for the new time religion, which is the all time religion and ought to be the every time religion. And, we're thinking today under the general heading of that old time religion, under the specific heading we're thinking, "The Church Member of My Dreams."

Now, what would a pastor's dream church member be like? I mean, the kind of a church member who would be the church member of my fondest dreams, what would he be like? Well, I'm going to show you in just a moment what he would be like. And, if you'll take God's Word and open here to Acts chapter 4, I want us to begin reading in verse 36: *“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet”* (Acts 4:36–37).

Now, the church member of my dreams would be the apostle Paul. Oh, I'd love to have Paul, I suppose, in the congregation, but I'd personally hate to have a

congregation full of Pauls. You talk about being intimidated when you preach. It's bad enough with these Mid-America seminary professors over here when I preach. But, I just don't believe I'd enjoy preaching to a congregation of Pauls. And, I sure wouldn't want a congregation of Simon Peters. Can you imagine what that guy would be like in a business meeting? I mean, I love Peter. I'm glad God made Peter. I believe God made one because we needed him, but only one because he's the only one we could stand. Thank God for Simon Peter. He's a great guy, but I just don't believe I'd like a church full of Simon Peters.

I believe that if I could have the church member of my dreams it would be this man, Joseph, or Joses, that I just read to you about. Only, that's not what they called him, they called him Barnabas. That is, that is the name he was given—what today we would call his nickname—was Barnabas. And, the word *Barnabas* was interpreted “son of consolation.” “Well,” you say, “What's so great about that?” Well, the word *consolation* is the word *paracletos*. It's the same word that the Holy Spirit is called by, “the comforter.” Well, what does that mean? It literally means *encouragement*. Encouragement. Now, we're getting to the bottom line.

What was so great about Barney? They nicknamed him encourager. They said, “You are Barnabas, you are the encourager. You are the son of consolation. You're the guy that encourages us every time we're around you.” Now, I don't really believe they even called him Barnabas. If I know this guy like I think I know him, they called him Barney. Old Barney, the guy every body loved. He was a great encourager. You see folks, if there's anything that people need today it's encouragement, because there's so many folks who are discouraged. So many people are so low they could sit on the curb and dangle their feet. They are discouraged, and they need to be encouraged. Did you know that in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 3 that God is called “*the God of all comfort?*” (2 Corinthians 1:3). And, literally it's this same word, the God of all consolation, the God of all encouragement. Friend, if you are discouraged God didn't do it, the devil did it. The devil wants to get you discouraged, because folks, if he's got you discouraged he has you set for failure. Discouragement is the dark room where the negatives of failure are developed.

Now, if you are discouraged the devil is on your trail. If you are encouraged you can do almost anything. In the football hall of fame there's a helmet hung up there. It belonged to Bobby Lane and underneath that helmet it says this, “Bobby Lane never lost a football game, time just ran out.” I like that. Here's a man who just believed that it could be done, and he was a man that kept the fires of encouragement in his heart, and therefore he was able to encourage other team members. Thank God for people who have the gift of encouragement, who know how to encourage people. The Bible tells us, in the book of Paul, Paul told the Thessalonians, “...*comfort the feebleminded...*” (1

Thessalonians 5:14). Now, when he said feeble-minded there he didn't literally mean those who are weak-minded, I mean not senile people, not retarded people. The word *feeble-minded* there means "the small souls." Those people who are discouraged. He is saying encourage the discouraged. If there is anything that we really need in this day and time it is those who know how to encourage other people. And, that's the gift that Barnabas had. Barnabas had the gift of encouragement. He was a great encourager, and therefore I want you to see five characteristics in his life. We're just going to do a little character study on Barnabas today, and I want you to see five characteristics in his life that I pray God he'll put into my life and into your life.

## I. An Encourager Is a Load Lifter

Number one, an encourager is a load lifter. Look, if you will now again, in this passage of Scripture, beginning in verse 36. Acts 4, verse 36: "*And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet*" (Acts 4:36–37). Now, what had happened is this, there was a great distress in the land of Jerusalem at that time. You see, revival had broken out and many people wanted to know what was happening, and they just poured into the city of Jerusalem. Many of them became Christians, and they decided to stay and to learn more and more about their faith. They had no home to sleep in. There were no hotels. They were not a wealthy people, many of them just common ordinary people. And, besides that, this early persecution arose immediately. And, so many of these people had no place to go, nothing to eat. It was just turmoil. And, there was a great need for financial resources and immediate needs.

Now, Barnabas had some property. He said, "I know what I can do. I've got a piece of land. It's a valuable piece of land. I can sell it easily." And, he sold the land and he just gave it to the apostles, and he said, "Here, this ought to help." Now, what he did was this, he saw a need and he moved in to meet that need. He saw a load and he decided to lift it. You see, the Apostle Paul later wrote, "*Bear ye one another's burdens...*" (Galatians 6:2). That's what an encourager is. He just lifts burdens from people. You say, "Well, I don't have any property to sell." Well, you don't have to have property to lift a load. Maybe you have love that you can give. Maybe you have wisdom that you can give. Maybe you have advice that you can give. Maybe you have time that you can give. Maybe there's a mother next door that's got a sick child. Maybe there's somebody that you know that has an elderly parent whose mind is leaving. Maybe you have somebody that you know whose child has leukemia, and who needs somebody to baby-sit a little bit. Maybe there's somebody that you know who has just lost their job and needs somebody loan them a car, or something like that. You see, we all have

something to give. If we'll just think about it, there's somebody that we can say, "Look, have you got a need? I believe I can help you." Wouldn't it be wonderful just to be in a church full of people who want to lift somebody else's load, and bear somebody else's burden? That's what this man Barnabas did. He just had land, and he sold it.

By the way, listen, Barnabas knew the difference between ownership and stewardship. A lot of us think we own what we own. We don't own it, we're only stewards. And, it needs to be available to the Lord, if the Lord wants to use it. You say, "Well, Barnabas lost what he had." No, he didn't. As a matter of fact he still has it, because the only thing we carry to Heaven is what we've given away. Barnabas still has it. You see, look folks. True wealth, when it's divided, multiplies. True wealth.

I went to the mayor's prayer breakfast this past week. And, there was a man there, a multimillionaire, who has a tremendous business. He said, when he was just a kid, he decided he was going to make God his partner. And, he entered into a solemn contract with God that 51% of everything he earned would go to the Lord. God would be the senior partner earning 51%. This man has so been blessed, but he said something that stayed in my mind. He said, "So many times we tell people, if you'll tithe, if you'll tithe you'll be able to do more with the nine tenths after you tithe, and God will bless the 90%." But, he said, "If you really think about it, it's not really the 90% that God blesses, it's the 10% that God blesses that you gave." You see, it's not the seed that's kept in the barn that increases—it's the seed that is invested that increases. It's that which you give away. It's that which you invest. It's that which you sow. It's that which you plant that multiplies and comes back again, and again and again. And, the way to get is to give. And, here was a man who didn't give to get. He gave, however, to lift a load He was an encourager. I thank God for the Barnabas' in this world today who are load lifters.

## II. An Encourager Is a Friend Finder

Let me tell you another sign of a Barnabas, a son of consolation. Not only is he a load lifted, but friend, he is a friend finder. Would you turn to Acts chapter 9, and look with me please in Acts chapter 9 for a moment. The episode that I'm going to read to you now is right after the conversion of Saul, when he became Paul. Now, Saul you know, was persecuting the Church. Jesus appeared to him, he became converted, and now I begin reading in Acts 9, verse 23: "*And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him*" (Acts 9:23). To kill whom? To kill Paul. Why did they want to kill Paul? Well, they felt that Paul was a traitor, a turncoat. Paul had been persecuting the Church and now he lined up with the Church. And, so they think of him as a turncoat, and they are going to kill him. But, verse 24 says: "*But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket*" (Acts 9:24–25). Can you see this

once proud Pharisee, hovered in a wicker basket, going down over the wall of Damascus, trying to escape the city for his life? Now notice verse 26: *“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple”* (Acts 9:26). Now, here he is. His former friends want to kill him. Now, he needs to go and be with the Christians in Jerusalem, and they are afraid of him. He’s in no man’s land. They are suspicious of him. They don’t think he’s really been saved. They feel about him like some folks thought about Charles Colson, the Watergate hatchet man. “Well,” they said, “that guy couldn’t be saved. We don’t really think he’s saved.” And, so he’s kind of a man without a country.

But, now notice verse 27: *“But Barnabas took him,”*—just underscore that—*“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus”* (Acts 9:27). Now, what did Barnabas do? Barnabas was a friend finder. Here was a man who needed a friend. Barnabas went out and found him, and became a friend to a very lonely new disciple. Now, folks I want to tell you there are a lot of new Christians who need somebody to find them, and to be a friend to them. There are a lot of people who need an encourager. Do you know what the new Christian needs? Oh folks, if anybody needs encouragement it is a brand new Christian. And, so many times they feel like it’s so hard to break into our churches, and especially if they come from a different background, a different culture, a different socio-economic status. They feel like, “Oh, I’d love to be a part of that group. I’d love to go to that party. I’d love to be in that class. I’d love to stand around and just laugh and tell stories and jokes like these guys do. How could I get in?” O God, give us some Barnabas’ who will reach out, and find these people, and bring them in, and be as it were a “people pollinator.” That’s what an encourager is. He’s a friend finder.

I heard about a man who went into a bookstore, and he saw a book entitled *How to Hug*, so he bought it. He thought he would learn how. But, what it was an encyclopedia starting with how, and it went all the way to hug. Now, we need some books that teach us really just how to hug. Can’t you see the big fisherman just putting a bear hug on old Saul, and just loving him and saying, “Come on brother, you’re one of us. We’ll love you. God bless you.”

John Stossel, on ABC’s “20/20” did a program, and in that program he talked about little babies who need psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Little babies. Little babies, not yet one year of age, whose psyches have been warped. And, these children who were psychologically harmed were children who lived in homes where there was no eye contact, no laughter, no cuddling, no touching, no caressing, no stroking, the things that little babies need. And, these little babies, deprived of that, had maladjustments as little

babies. And, then this is what this program went on to say, and this is the line that struck me. They said, “It is impossible to spoil a baby the first year of life.” I mean you just keep on giving that love. You can’t give too much. Just keep on giving that love. It’s just impossible to spoil a baby the first year of life. They need that love. And those babies who received that love, that eye contact, that care, that caressing, the first year of life, grew up to be so well adjusted. They had love to give, and demanded less than other babies who didn’t receive it. Friend, I want to tell you not only is that true in the physical world, that is true in the spiritual world. The most important year is that first year, when a person comes to know Christ. When he’s a babe in Christ. And, a church like this needs to be filled with Barnabas’, people who will find a friend, and embrace that friend and bring him in to the fellowship.

### **III. An Encourager Is Also a Bridge Builder**

Barnabas was called an encourager. He was lost, and he was found. He as a friend finder. And I want to tell you another reason that Barnabas was an encourager. Dear friend, he was an encourager because he was a bridge builder. Would you look here in Acts chapter 11 and verse 20? Acts chapter 11 and verse 20, well let’s begin in verse 19: *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord”* (Acts 11:19–24).

Now, what had happened is this. A revival meeting broke out in Antioch. The gospel fires are beginning to burn. The Christians have been persecuted. Many of them left Jerusalem, some of them to Antioch. They began to tell the story of the resurrected Lord. People believed, and a revival fire got started and there was an upheaval. That city was turned upside down and inside out for the Lord Jesus. Now, word of that revival went back to Jerusalem, to the headquarters where the apostles were. And, they said, “Look, a lot of folks, a lot of Greeks are getting saved over there in Antioch.” “Well,” they said, “we wonder, is that true fire or wildfire? Is that of God?” I mean, you see it had no apostolic guidance. It had not apostolic credence to it. They had not approved it. They had not initiated it. They had not watched over it. They said, “We wonder. Is that real

Christianity? Is God really blessing there? Should we approve it? We better send somebody to investigate.” And, who do you think they sent? You guessed it. They sent Barnabas. Now, Barny goes up there and Barny, the Bible says was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. And, he saw there the grace of God. He saw God moving in such a way he said, “My goodness this has the unmistakable stamp of the authenticity of God upon it.” And, what it said in the Bible, it said he just exhorted them. “Boy,” he said, “you’ve got it. Praise God. Hold on to Jesus. This is wonderful.” And, old Barny is just going around slapping backs, hugging, saying hallelujah, praise the Lord, this is of God, this is of God. And, the Bible says he just exhorted to go on with the Lord.

Now, here’s the important thing I want you to see about Barny. He’s a bridge builder. Over here in Jerusalem is what we’re going to call traditional Christianity. Even though it’s young, it’s old enough now to have tradition to it. I mean the apostles are here, and they know exactly what God is doing. I mean these are the Jews. Over here in Antioch here’s something that is just spreading. These folks back in Jerusalem didn’t start it, they didn’t control it, and it’s among the Greeks, and it has a little different form, but it’s the same thing. Now, here’s Barnabas. Barnabas comes from that group, but he knows this group. And, what he becomes is a bridge builder. He’s a fellow who sees what God is doing here, and he knows what God has done there. He knows the old and he sees the new. He believes in the tradition, but he believes in the frontier. And, he just sort of is used of God to mold it all together. He’s a bridge builder. And, oh folks, let me tell you. We need that kind of a person in our church.

Do you know what’s wrong with so many people today? They look at something new and they say, “We’ve never done it that way before.” We’ve never done it that way before. There are three kinds of church leadership. There are risk takers, caretakers and undertakers. Now, there are a lot of people who don’t want to be a risk taker. I mean they like it all just like it is, and they don’t want anything new. They don’t want anything to disturb them. “Come well or come woe, our status is quo.” They just like it just like it is. They are back in Jerusalem. But, old Barney, Barney has a vision. Barney says, “Hey, God wants to do something wonderful. And, God is doing something wonderful.” Thank God for the encouragement that he gave them, and also gave the folks back in Jerusalem.

You know, when we got ready to move our property here, or to move out East before we bought the land we now call Canaan. We just prayed, and we soaked that in prayer. We really thought it was of God, and it had in my mind the unmistakable stamp of God upon it. We had a church business meeting here to tell you folks about it. And, the building was so full of people here, they let down the back walls there, and the people stood out into the foyer. They were standing around the doorways, standing around the walls, you couldn’t get anybody else in with a shoehorn. And, it was just that crowded.

And, people were wondering, “Is this really a bold breakthrough? Is that God’s plan for us? This new departure, does God want us to do that?” And, in those days a lady in our church stood up here, her name was Emily Wilson. She is one of Bellevue’s finest. She’d been a member of Bellevue since Hector was a pup. I mean way back there you know. She’d seen the buildings built, and she’d been with us when her husband—he was the former chairman of the deacons here. He is now in Heaven, Brother Roy. She stood up there and she said, “I want to speak for some of the older folks.” You know older folks don’t like change very much. She said, “I want to speak for some of the older folks.” And, she told of the memories, and the blessings, and the things that God had done for her in her life here at Bellevue church. And, how every one of these walls and halls are almost sacred to her. Then, she talked about what she’d seen, and felt, and prayed in her heart and in her mind and she said, “My friends at Bellevue, I want to tell you that what our pastor tells us this has the stamp of God upon it. People asked me, ‘Are you going to participate?’” And, this is what she said, she said, “You better believe I am.” I said thank God for that. Oh, I just felt the courage come up in my heart. I said, “Oh, thank God for that.” If that lady just knew just how much that one statement, “You better believe I am,” did for my own heart. That’s an encourager. That’s a person who’s a bridge builder, who can take the past and link it to the future. Who can take the old and link it to the new. Who can take the traditional and tie it to the frontier and say, “We can do it.” Not think of reasons it can’t be done, but reasons it can be done. That’s the kind of a guy, an encourager that old Barney was. You have to love him.

Two pastor’s were talking, they said, “Do you have any committees in your church?” He said, “I’ve got a lot of committees.” “Do you have any standing committees?” He said, “Sure,” He said, “We’ve got standing committees, sitting committees and committees lying down.” He said, “We even have a bucket committee.” He said, “What’s the bucket committee?” He said, “Well whenever we think of anything good, and great, and grand and glorious there’s a self-appointed bucket committee. They come and pour cold water on everything. They just simply say it can’t be done.”

O God, deliver us from the bucket brigade. God give us some Barneys, some people who say, “Yes, God’s in it and it can be done, and it will be done.” What is a Barnabas? I’ll tell you what a Barnabas is dear friend, a Barnabas is a guy who is a load lifter. When he finds a need, he moves in to lift that load. A Barnabas is a friend finder. He goes out and he finds the lonely, and those that nobody else seems to pay any attention to. And, he puts his arm around that person, and brings him over and says, “Come on, we want you to be a part of the group.” A Barnabas is a bridge builder, and when there’s a bridge that needs to be built over troubled waters he says, “I’ll build that bridge, and I want to bring people together for the cause of Christ.”

#### **IV. An Encourager Is a Disciple Developer**

I'll tell you what else a Barnabas is, I'll tell you what else an encourager is, my dear friend, he is a disciple developer. Notice now in Acts chapter 11 and verse 25, the Bible says, *"Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch"* (Acts 11:25–26).

Now, here's what Barny does. He looks around and he says, "My goodness, look what is happening here. These folks need to be taught. They need somebody to develop them. I mean we've got to get some wine skins to put this new wine in. I know just the fellow, it's that guy Saul." Now, remember he doesn't see with the eyes we see, it's not the Apostle Paul that he sees, it's just that new convert that he sees right now. That's all he sees. He says, "I wonder where that fellow is. Boy, he'd make a dandy teacher. Boy he's got the gift, he's got the ability. With his background, I know what he could do. I wonder where he is." "Oh some folks say he's down in Tarsus." "Well you stay right here, I'm going down to Tarsus. Have you seen Saul? Have you seen Saul? Oh there he is. Hey Saul. Hey buddy, come over here. Saul man let me tell what has happened. Man, revival has broken out in Antioch. I mean there are folks there hungry. Thousands of them are getting saved. Saul, they need a teacher, and buddy you're the guy who can do it. I've already seen you. Listen, God has given you an uncanny insight into the Word of God. You have the ability. Hey Saul, come on buddy, I want you to go on back there, and I want you to teach those folks. You can do it." Saul goes back, he becomes such a proficient teacher of the Word that people are first called Christians at Antioch because he so infuses them for Christ. Now, what this man did was he finds disciples, and finds hidden talent and buried gifts, and he develops them and brings them out.

Now, you see in every church there are people like that. There are people who need to be found, they need to be discovered, they need to be encouraged, they need to be developed. They have gifts and they have abilities. But, it takes a Barnabas to find those people. Now, Barnabas, he just plays second fiddle. You don't hear much about Barnabas. Some of you have never heard about him until I began to preach about him today. Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament. And, later on I'm going to show you another man that Barnabas influenced, who wrote 1 book in the gospel of Mark. More than half of the books in the New Testament are there through the influence of this man named Barnabas. Isn't that wonderful? Now, he was just kind of playing second fiddle, but yet he's a man who knows how to encourage people. He's a man who can find talent. I thank God for those who encouraged me.

Listen, I've had people encourage me. When I was first a young man, I would not

consider myself a preacher. I remember when somebody called on me to lead in prayer in public and I just said, “I’m sorry I can’t do it.” I was embarrassed and they were embarrassed. But, I thank God for people who put their arms around my shoulders and said, “You can.” And, they encouraged me.

I was reading about a 16 year old boy who dropped out of school at 16. Do you know why he dropped out? His teacher said he was mentally deficient. He couldn’t learn any more. He had learned all he could learn. They said, “Son, the best thing you could do is to just get out of school and get some kind of a job, manual labor.” And, this boy got manual labor, got a job, and from the age of 16 to 32 he had had 67 jobs. He couldn’t do anything; 67 times he had failed. They said, “He’s just too dull, he can’t, he can’t learn.” And, then somebody looked at him and somebody said, “You know that boy has talent. That boy has latent ability. I believe we ought to give him an IQ test.” They gave him an IQ test. Do you know what his IQ was? 161. He was a genius. They said, “Son you’re brilliant.” He began to study. At 32, at 33, he’s a genius. Do you know what he’s doing now? He’s a scientist working in laser technology at a respected position and a high salary, because somebody looked at a person who had a buried talent and had enough gumption to say, “There’s something in that boy, let’s get it out of him.”

I wonder, in the spiritual realm, if there might not be some people like that. I wonder if there are not some people who could sing, some people who could preach, some people who could teach, some people who could do all kinds of things—and an encourager is not necessarily the fellow who does it himself.

But, God give us some Barnabas’, some people who say, “There’s a fellow named Saul down there, I believe Saul could do it. Saul come here son, here’s a job that you can do. I see it in you and you can do it.” He stood by his side to encourage him. No wonder they called this man Barnabas. No wonder they called him encourager. Because, dear friend, he was a load lifter, he was a friend finder, he was a bridge builder, he was a disciple developer.

## **V. An Encourager Is a Failure Fixer**

But, I’ll tell you one other thing about him that I really like, this is the last thing I want to mention, he was a failure fixer. He was a failure fixer. I want you to see something here with me for a moment. Look in Acts chapter 15, and I begin reading now in verse 36. Acts 15, and verse 36: *“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the LORD, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took*

*Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God” (Acts 15:36–40).*

Now, here’s what happened. Paul and Barnabas have linked now to become missionaries. And, on the first missionary journey that they are going on, Barney says, “You know, I have a nephew whose name is Mark.” And Mark was, John Mark was Barnabas’ nephew. He said, “I have a nephew who would like to go, he’s interested in missions.” Paul said, “Fine, bring him along.” Well, when things got started Mark quit, I mean he just dropped out. I don’t know why he dropped out. Maybe it was too hard on him. Maybe he was afraid. Maybe he was home sick. Maybe he was spiritually discouraged. Maybe he was backslidden. I don’t know. But, I’ll tell you this much, what happened is this, that John Mark went home to momma.

Now, they are going on a second journey, and Paul says, “Come on Barney, let’s go check on the churches.” Barney says, “Fine, I’ll get Mark.” Paul says, “No you won’t.” “Oh yeah, Mark needs...” “No, you’re not getting Mark.” “Listen, Mark...” “No, we’re not taking Mark, Mark’s a quitter. I’m not going to be encumbered with Mark. Mark’s a quitter. You can’t depend on Mark. You can’t count on Mark. We’re not taking Mark.” “Paul, I believe we ought to take him.” “We’re not taking Mark.” “Well, all right. But, I tell you what Paul, there’s some good in that boy.” “He’s a failure, he’s a quitter.” “Yeah, but there’s some good in him.” “I don’t care, we’re not taking him.”

And, they agreed to disagree. The Bible says the contention was sharp. Do you know what happened? Barnabas said, “All right, I’ll take Mark and you take somebody else.” And, so Paul and Silas went their way. Barnabas and Mark went their way. I mean these were brothers. They just agreed to disagree. I mean, they really felt strongly about it. Good men who differ. But, now Barnabas takes this failure, this boy, this coward—or whatever he was—this backslider and he reaches down and lifts him up and puts his arm around him and says, “Come on John Mark, you’ve got good stuff in you son. You can do it.” I want to tell you that was the same John Mark who later wrote the gospel according to Mark. Thank God for that. He was the same man you read there in 2 Timothy chapter 4, and verse 11, when the Apostle Paul was in a dirty, dark, damp Roman prison he said, “Only Luke is with me. Go get Mark and bring him. He is profitable to me in the ministry. I need him” (2 Timothy 4:11). Isn’t that wonderful? The one man in all the world Paul wanted when he was in prison, he said, “Bring Mark. Bring Mark.” Aren’t you glad, aren’t you glad there was somebody who found failure and fixed it and salvaged it?

## **Conclusion**

There’s a boy whose daddy died when he was five years old. This boy dropped out of school when he was 16. He had already lost two jobs by the time he was 17. By the

time he was 18 he got married. By the time he was 19 he had a little baby. By the time he was 20 he and his wife were separated. From that time on he tried to make a living. He tried to be a railroad conductor. He failed. He got in the army and he washed out of the army. He applied to law school. He couldn't make it. He tried farming. He couldn't grow a thing in the world. He tried to be an insurance salesman. He couldn't be an insurance salesman. He tried even to kidnap his little baby, and get his little baby in his own arms. He couldn't even do that. Finally, he got a job as a dishwasher and a cook. He couldn't do anything else. He finally talked his wife into coming back to him. And, together in a little cafe they cooked and washed dishes. When this man got to be 65 years of age he retired, and he got his first social security check for \$105.00. On the day that check came, he looked at that check and it so discouraged him he said, "Now I've been a failure all of my life, a dishwasher, I can't do anything. I can't make anything work. And, now the government is going to have to take care of me." And, he decided he would commit suicide at the age of 65. He went out in the backyard of his house and sat under a shade tree and began to write out his will. And, then he got to thinking, "Why should I be such a failure? Is there anything I can do? Isn't there anything I know how to do?" He said, "One thing I can do better than most folks, I can cook." And, an idea came to him. He went down to the local bank and borrowed 87 dollars against his next social security check. And, he went down to the supermarket and bought some chicken and some boxes. And, he began to fry that chicken the way only he could fry it, and he went from door to door in Harlan, Kentucky, and in Corbin, Kentucky, selling that chicken. You've already guessed. Colonel Harland Sanders, Kentucky Fried Chicken king. At 65, a failure, ready to commit suicide. Couldn't do anything, immediately successful, known the world over. After he was 65. He was speaking one time and a boy asked him, said, "Mister Sanders, how much money do you have?" He said, "Son, I don't know. But," he said, "if I want it I can have it. If I want it I can afford it. Anything I want I have."

Now, I'm not interested in selling fried chicken today, don't misunderstand me, but what I'm trying to tell you is this—listen to me—that man wasn't a failure when he decided he wasn't. Have you decided that you're a failure? What you probably need is some Barnabas to tell you you're not. To put his arm around you. Thank God for a Barnabas, who found a John Mark and a man that even Paul wouldn't have anything to do with and said, "Come on son, we love you. We're going to give you another chance."

# Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** October 7, 1990

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 5

*“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”*

ACTS 5:3

## Outline

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- III. The Source of Their Sin Was Satan
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## Introduction

Open your Bibles to Acts chapter 5. The title of our message, *Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit*. Don't lie to the Holy Spirit. The title of the message this morning was *Don't Mistreat Your Best Friend*. And, I told you that your best friend is the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is Jesus in you. And, He is the one who makes manifest the life of the Lord Jesus in your mortal flesh. What a wonderful, wonderful friend is the Holy Spirit.

Now, in the passage of Scripture that I'm going to read to you, we find a phrase in here about lying to the Holy Ghost. May I tell you, dear friend, that all lies are serious? Now, sometimes we tell little lies, you know we exaggerate a little bit and we think that's not quite so serious.

I heard of one preacher who said to one preacher, as they were talking about their Sunday school statistics. This one preacher said, “Now, if I lie about my attendance, and you know that I am lying about my attendance, and I know that you know, isn't that

like telling the truth?”

Sometimes we justify our dishonesty. Sometimes we lie about things that we think are frivolous. Most folks will lie a few pounds about their weight, isn't that true? They say that the seven ages of a woman are baby, child, junior miss, young woman, young woman, young woman, and young woman. Now, some lies we think are whimsical and maybe even humorous. But, a lie is a very serious thing.

When I told you this morning that Jesus is known as the truth. Satan, the Bible says in John chapter 8 verse 44: *“he is a liar, and the father of it”* (John 8:44). When you tell the truth, therefore, you give God an opportunity to work. When you tell a lie, you tell a lie because Satan has already been working.

Now, let's see this passage of Scripture that has caused us to entitle the message tonight, *Don't Lie to the Holy Spirit*. *“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”*—And, by the way, that's a wonderful proof text that the Holy Spirit is God—*“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.”*—And, by the way if you think we have long church services, this is three hours and it's still going on—*“And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)* (Acts 5:1–5).

Now, may I tell you that the early church, when this passage was written, was in the white heat of revival? God was saving multitudes. Miracles and wonders and signs were being done in this church. And, the devil, if you were to read the first four chapters of the book of Acts, had done all he could do to stop this mighty move of God. He had come

against these disciples with great persecution. But, he was not able to stop them with persecution, as a matter of fact, the more they were persecuted, and the more they went to Jesus. The more they went to Jesus, the more Jesus came to them, and the more Jesus came to them the more power they had.

That intimidation had done nothing but drive the church to her knees. And persecution can never stop the church of the Lord Jesus. There are not enough devils and demons in Hell or out of Hell to stop any church by persecution. Remember that. Persecution cannot stop the work of God.

And so, Satan changes his strategy, now he begins to work not from without, but he decides that he will work from within. And if he cannot conquer the church, he will corrupt the church. So he finds two likely candidates that he will use as his fifth columnist, a man names Ananias and his wife Sapphira. And they try to damage the church of the Lord Jesus and stop the revival. And may I tell you, dear friend, that after having been in the pastorate for many years, I've come to believe with all of my heart that the cause of Jesus Christ is hurt far more by hypocrisy, than she's ever been hurt by persecution. Isn't that true?

Now, we talk today and we moan a lot about the persecution that we're getting as Christians. We ought to get persecution. I mean it may be just a sign that we are standing for something and doing something. But, dear God, deliver us from hypocrisy within the church.

Now, here's what happened. There was a man named Barnabas who had some property and he sold it and he brought it and gave it to the church. Now, Ananias and Sapphira heard about that and Barnabas was a good man and Barnabas got praise for what he had done. And they thought they would emulate what Barnabas had done and perhaps they could get some praise. But the problem is they did not have the motivation and the purity that Barnabas had.

There are three things I want you to notice tonight in this message as I try to lay on your heart a plea from my heart to your heart and a warning to my own heart. As we look at this sin, lying to the Holy Spirit, I want you to notice. And, by the way, it was a sin of hypocrisy, that's what it was. It was a sin of pretending that they had a devotion to Jesus that they did not have.

## **I. The Root of Their Sin Was Pride**

I want you to notice that the root of their sin was pride. Now, put it down, we're talking about the deception that expressed this hypocrisy and the root of that sin was pride. Now, look at the gift that Barnabas had made for example in Acts chapter 4 and verse 36: "*And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,)*"—That means the son of encouragement—"a

*Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:36–37).*

Now, Barnabas, who was a good man, knew there was persecution, knew there was a need for a love offering, so he had a piece of property, he sold the property. He brought the money to Peter and the other apostles. He said take this and use it for the cause of Christ. What good man was Barnabas as he gave? Now, he didn't make a gift to be seen of men, but he did not hide his light under a bushel either. He was not ashamed that he gave. I love that spirit. I love the spirit of those who give not to be seen of men but also of those who are not ashamed of what they do for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, so Barnabas's gift was just a spontaneous act of love, it was motivated by the Holy Spirit, and he brought it. And, it did a wonderful, wonderful service for the Lord Jesus. I think Barnabas could have said it to minute "Naught that I have I call my own, I hold it for the giver, my life, my soul, my will, my all are His and His forever." And, I hope that you've said that. I hope that you've said to the Lord, "Lord, nothing that I have is mine." I've said that to the Lord before. And, I've found myself sometimes taking it back from the Lord. And, I have to examine my heart each time I say that, "Lord do I mean it? I don't want to be like Ananias and Sapphira, Lord do I mean it, when I say that I have given to you everything?"

Well Barnabas was a good man, and he gave this gift and Ananias and Sapphira wanted to bask in the glow of that gift. And, so they decided that they would do something similar. But, the root of their sin, my dear friend, and the root of all hypocrisy is pride. It is pride. And, pride made them a sitting duck for the devil. Just keep your bookmark there if you will in Acts chapter 5 and turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 5. I want to show you something, and it's been a great warning to my heart tonight. 1 Peter chapter 5 back over near the end of the New Testament. In 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5 here's what God says. *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder."* And, by the way, anybody who submits to anybody else does so through true humility if it is genuine submission. *"Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble"* (1 Peter 5:5). Do you see that? Now, skip on down to verse 8. *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..."* (1 Peter 5:8).

Verse 5 says to be clothed with humility. Verse 8 warns us about our adversary the devil. I've seen many young preachers fall and in almost every case, the problem, when it is properly analyzed, is pride. It is pride. How does the devil get a young preacher or an older preacher for that matter? Or, a businessman for that matter? Or, a teenager for that matter? It is through pride. What caused Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the Holy

Spirit? The root of their sin was pride. They wanted to be praised like Barnabas was. They wanted the affirmation of that congregation. I want you to listen to what someone has well said. “Nothing puts a man out of the devil’s reach than genuine humility.” Did that sink in? Nothing puts a person more out of the devil’s reach than genuine humility. Be clothed with humility. Why? Because your adversary the devil goeth about. It was pride that made the devil, the devil to begin with. The Bible says that a young preacher should *“Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil”* (1 Timothy 3:6).

## **II. The Fruit of Their Sin Was Pretense**

Now, the root of their sin was pride, the fruit of their sin was hypocrisy. The root was pride, and the fruit was pretense. Look if you will in verse 3. Peter said unto Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

Now, what was their sin? I mean what is lying to the Holy Ghost? Well, they had sold a piece of property, they pretended that they brought all of the money and gave it to the church. Now, they didn’t have to give the money to the church, they didn’t need to do that. They didn’t have to sell that piece of property, there’s no commandment in the Bible, nor was there any compulsion from anybody in the church telling them that they had to do that, it was their right to keep the property if they wanted to. Notice verses 3 and 4. Peter said, “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And, after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” Now, you see, the root of this sin was pride, but the fruit of their sin was pretense. The problem was not that they only gave part. The problem was that they only gave part and declared that they had given all. It was their right to keep back some if they wanted to keep it back, but they pretended that they had given everything to God. We sold it, and this is all we got. And, when they said that they lied.

Now, my friend, listen to me, they wanted credit for something they had not done. It’s just as simple as that. The root of their sin was pride, the fruit of their sin was pretense. Pretending devotion, they did not have. Oh how I had to check my heart, as I prepared this sermon, and prayed over it, and did just a few moments ago before I preached it. And, I had to say to myself, “Adrian, do you pretend a devotion when you preach that you don’t have? Do you preach things that you don’t experience? Do you say things that you don’t believe? Do you declare commitments that you’ve not made?” And, very frankly, the very question struck fear into my heart. To say, “Adrian are you honest? Is there any pretense in your life?” And, I think we all need to ask that question. The question is not how much we give of our money or of our time or our devotion or

anything else, that's not the question. The question is how much do we say that we give in comparison to what we give?

Oh, how God detests the sin of hypocrisy, the sin of pretense, the sin of saying we are one thing, but really being another. If you will read the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find out that Jesus reserved his sternest words for hypocrites. There was one thing that Jesus Christ detested, and it was hypocrisy. And, oh how I pray God in my own life, that I will not be a hypocrite. That I will be transparent, that I will be pure and will be true. I wonder how many hypocrites that we have in our churches. I mean, many of them that are looked upon as some of the best members. We stand and we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender." Have you done that? Or, do you just sing it? I surrender all, and we don't. We sing that song, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite will I withhold." Have you ever sung that? I mean, have you ever meant it? Somebody said, "Take my silver and my gold not a mite would I withhold, and we hold it with all our might." We're not ready to give up anything for the Lord Jesus.

Now, that doesn't mean that if you say, "Lord take my silver and my gold not a mite will I withhold does it mean that he will take it." He knows that you have to live. He knows that you need groceries. He knows that you need recreation. He knows what needs you have. But, dear friend, you have to come to God this way. This way. What you do not willingly give, God neither needs nor wants. Understand that. We're not here to put any pressure on you, to twist your arm, or to say you must give that. But, on the other hand, you make certain that what you give, you give from a pure heart. And, don't you dare to pretend a devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ that you do not have.

### **III. The Source of Their Sin Was Satan**

The root of their sin was pride. Wanting others to brag on them, and therefore they opened themselves up to the devil. And, the fruit of their sin is pretense. Any time you see a hypocrite, you can be certain he is a man who is reeking with pride and ripe for the Satan to work within him.

#### **A. The Deception of Their Sin**

Now, the very first thing that I want you to see is what I am going to call, the deception. The second thing, the detection.

#### **B. The Detection of Their Sin**

Now, you see, God detected that sin, and the Holy Spirit just flashed the whole thing before Peter. Look in verse 3. Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart?" Now, the root of their sin was pride but the source of their sin was Satan. You see, Satan found fertile soil when he found pride. And, so here's a man with a heart full of pride, and Satan says, "Oh boy, I can work with that heart." And, so Satan filled

Ananias' heart, Sapphira's heart. It was Satan in the heart. Satan whispered to Ananias when he saw that pride, "Tell them that you're giving everything, they'll never know the difference." John 8 verse 44 says that Satan is a liar and a murder. My dear friend, when you lie, when you're a pretender, when you have pretense, you're acting like the devil himself.

How important it is that we pray for daily deliverance from the one who would fill our heart? And, how important is it that we keep our heart with all diligence? Oh keep your heart. Keep your heart. If you don't keep your heart, Satan will fill your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost. And, so the Holy Spirit revealed the source of the sin, it was Satan.

And, the Holy Spirit revealed the seriousness of the sin. What is the seriousness of the sin? Look if you will in verses 3 and 4. He says that Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, in verse 3 and then the last part of verse 4, you've not lied unto men, you have lied unto God.

Now, let's go back to what we said as we introduced this message. It's a serious thing to tell a lie. But, my friend, it's more serious to tell a lie to a judge. When you get in the courtroom you better tell the truth or you'll purge yourself. But, it is serious beyond words to lie to God, to lie to God. And, not only is it serious, it's foolish. I mean, you can fool a judge sometimes.

I heard about a man who was in a courtroom for stealing a watch. They tried to prove he stole it, but they couldn't prove it, and so finally the judge said, "Well you are acquitted." He was an ignorant man and didn't have an education. He said, "Well, does that mean I have to give the watch back?" Now, you can fool an earthly judge, but friend it is serious and foolish to try to lie to God because you see, the Holy Spirit was there when the deal was made.

The Holy Spirit was there when Ananias and Sapphira had this conversation. He knew all about it. It was the Holy Spirit that revealed the matter to Peter, who had the gift of knowledge. The Holy Spirit had warned them. As you read this whole passage you can tell that they had not sinned ignorantly. They had not sinned carelessly. They sinned against light. It was not an intentional error, it was a conspiracy, it was willful, and it was inexcusable.

Therefore, it was a direct challenge to the Holy Ghost. Look, if you will, in verse 9. Peter said unto her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" Now, it's very obvious therefore, that the Spirit of God had been working with Ananias and Sapphira. I mean they brazenly said, "We're going to do this, we are going to test God." They may not have said it overtly, but in their heart they knew what they were doing. Friend, it was a direct challenge to the Holy Spirit and I would not advise that for anyone.

### C. The Destruction of Their Sin

Now, I want you to think, not only of the deception of their sin and the detection of their sin. But, I want you to notice the destruction that this sin brought. I want you to see how this sin brought devastation into the life of Ananias and Sapphira.

Notice in verse 5. And, Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost. That's just a euphemistic way of saying he died. And, great fear came on all them that heard these things. And, then the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. It's a very interesting thing. It's a very severe judgment. Ananias and Sapphira both died. The passage goes on to say the same thing happened to Sapphira. It's almost been a little humorous to me as I read this. It almost seems like it was a part of the service. I mean, Peter says, "you've not lied to men, you've lied to God." Just like that they fall down dead.

And then the Bible says that the young men come in wrapped them up, carried them out and buried them. It makes you wonder if they didn't have a committee in the church called the blanket committee. They just come in here, you know, and wrap them up and carry them out. I guess that's why they we have graveyards near the church, in those early churches. I mean, they just died if you lied to God.

That bringing up a very interesting question, do you think Ananias and Sapphira were saved? I do. The reason I think Ananias and Sapphira were saved is the way that God dealt with them. You see, the Bible teaches that God does not judge this way with the unsaved. As a matter of fact, Romans chapter 2 verse 5 tells that the unsaved get their judgment later on "*...after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...*" (Romans 2:5). The ungodly, the unsaved, put their judgment in the bank against that day. But, God deals with His saints, God deals with His servants immediately.

I have reminded you that there are three kinds of judgment that we face.

#### 1. Judgment as a Sinner

We face our judgment as a sinner at Calvary, we're judged as sinners at Calvary. You see, when Jesus Christ died for me I died with Him and Jesus took my judgment, I settled my case therefore out of court by receiving Christ as my personal Savior. And, the Bible says in Romans chapter 8 verse 1: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...*" (Romans 8:1). That judgment for me, judgment as a sinner, has already passed and I praise God, because my sins were judged at Calvary.

#### 2. Judgment as a Servant

But, not only am I judged as a sinner, I'm also judged as a servant. Now when is my judgment as a servant going to take place? At the judgment seat of Christ. After I die,

I'm going to be caught up along with all believers to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And, the Bible says, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10). And, so one of these days, I'm going to face my Lord as a servant, or as a steward, and this won't be a judgment to determine whether I go to Heaven or Hell, that's already determined by my judgment as a sinner, when I received Christ. But, my judgment as a servant is a judgment of reward. Not everybody will have the same reward in Heaven. Jesus said, *"...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."* (Matthew 6:20). That makes no sense whatever unless some have more treasure than others. So we're going to be judged as servants.

### **3. Judgment as Sons**

But, then there's a third judgment that you have and that's what Ananias and Sapphira got. We're judged as sinners at Calvary, we're judged as servants at the judgment seat of Christ, but my friends, we are judged as sons right here in this life.

#### **a. A Severe Judgment**

Now look with me please, turn to Hebrews chapter 12 for a moment and you'll see what I'm talking about. Hebrews chapter 12. And, in the book of Hebrews chapter 12 the Lord talks about our judgment as sons, and when He says, "son" He's speaking in the generic sense because He includes there those who are both men and women. Hebrews 12 verse 5: *"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Hebrews 12:5–6).

Now, "to chastise" is a very severe word and "to scourge" is a very strong word, it speaks of a severe lashing. And, then verse 7, *"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers..."*—That is all sons are partakers—*"...then are ye bastards, and not sons"* (Hebrews 12:7–8). What God is saying is that "If you live in sin and you're My child I will chastise you, I will scourge you."

Now He says, "If I don't chastise you and I don't scourge you, it doesn't mean that you've gotten away with your sin. It just simply means that you're not My son. I never sired you, I never Fathered you spiritually you illegitimate, you have never been born into My family." And, He says very clearly and very plainly, "If you were Mine I would have chastised you." That's the reason that I believe that Ananias and Sapphira were truly saved. Well you say, "Would God kill them?" I believe He would. I believe He did.

Turn to 1 Corinthians here with me for just a moment and look if you will in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. It's a very amazing passage of Scripture. I'm going to begin

reading in verse 29. He says here in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 29. Well let's begin first in 28. He's talking about the Lord's Supper. *"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."* When we come to the Lord's table be very certain that you examine yourself before you take the Lord's Supper because *"...he that eateth and drinketh unworthily..."*—That is in a manner without a cleansed heart—*"eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"* (1 Corinthians 11:28–29).

Now, the word "damnation" here means "judgment," it does not refer to someone being consigned to Hell, but the word in the general sense means he is eating judgment. That is when you take that element, that unleavened bread into your hand and ingest it, you've just ingested judgment. When you take that ruby red fruit of the vine and drink it, you just drank liquid judgment. That's what he is saying here. He says that when you do this you are taking judgment into yourself, into your heart. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment, damnation to himself. Why? Because he's not discerned the Lord's body. He has not understood that these elements stand for the broken body and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus. In a cavalier way, in a light way, he has just taken holy things and made a mockery of holy things. That's what Ananias and Sapphira were doing, they had sinned against God in the heat of a revival.

And, then he goes on to say in verse 30. *"For this cause..."*—because some have eaten judgment, because some have dropped down judgment—*"For this cause many are weak..."* Now, that could mean spiritually weak, physically weak, emotionally weak, mentally weak, or financially weak, many are weak in their lives. They wonder, "Why don't I have any Christian strength." Because you've been eating and drinking judgment. *"...and sickly among you..."* Not all sickness is a direct result of personal sin. But, I am telling you, my dear friend, it would amaze us and surprise us if we knew how much of our physical and emotional illness are the direct result of travesty with holy things.

And, then look at the next part of that verse, *"...many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"* (1 Corinthians 11:30). Now, the Bible never uses the word "sleep" to refer to the death of the unsaved, but just to the death of the saved. Many of these early church members were prematurely dead, like Ananias and Sapphira, because they made travesty of holy things, and God judged them.

It is entirely possible that many of those who die early, die early because of their sin against God. Turn with me now over near the end of the New Testament to 1 John chapter 5 and look with me in verse 16: *"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it."* (1 John 5:16).

I dare say that no one could have prayed for Ananias and Sapphira and saved their lives in this early church meeting. They had so sinned against light and love they had so made a travesty of something holy that God's judgment came upon them.

"Adrian, have you ever seen this in your pastorate?" Yes, I believe I have. I believe that I have seen on several occasions people that I know or believe sinned against the Holy Spirit who were saved. They challenged the Holy Spirit, they knew what they were doing was wrong. They were hypocrites and pretenders and yet they were saved and I believe that God killed them and took them out. Now, if I'm wrong I'll find out when I get to Heaven, but it is the conviction of my heart that God did that and I will delineate some of those stories tonight. But, some of them have been the most frightening things that I have seen in my ministry. This judgment was a severe judgment.

Now, you say, "Pastor, do you believe that God would do something like that in our services today?" Yes I do. Yes I do. You say, "Why don't we see more of this today?" I'll tell you why we don't see more of it. Because the level of our fellowship commonly is so low, there's no fear of God. And, the Holy Spirit of God is not working in revival fire like He did so long ago. And, I believe if we were to have the kind of a white-hot revival that they had so long ago, we would see more of the severe judgment of God upon great pretenders. But, I have seen in my ministry where people have challenged the work of God, many of them great pretenders, lying to the Holy Spirit, and their judgment was a severe judgment.

### **b. A Saving Judgment**

But, not only this judgment a severe judgment, may I say secondly it was a saving judgment. Don't get the idea that God is just reacting. God knew what He did and why He did it and He did it in love. Now, what kind of a judgment was this and why did God so judge Ananias and Sapphira? I think first of all, to save Ananias and Sapphira from deeper sin. I believe He loved them and He saw this hypocrisy in their heart and He took them home early.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 5 for a moment. And, look with me in verse 5, there was a man who was living in open flagrant sin in the church at Corinth and Paul gave admonition and instruction to that early church to do this "*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Corinthians 5:5). Now, could it be that God delivered Ananias and Sapphira to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that their spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus? Could it be that God in mercy let them go home early, that they would not heap sin upon sin?

But, I'll tell you what else He wanted to do. Not only did He want to save Ananias and Sapphira from further sin, He wanted to save that early church from further pollution. Go back, if you will, to Acts chapter 5 and look in verse 11. The Bible says in

verse 11, “*And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things*” (Acts 5:11). When God brings this kind of judgment, it brings fear upon other people.

These people were a pure people and they were a praying people. And, because of this, God moved in this swift and strong judgment. I’ll tell you a third reason that He did it. I believe not only to save Ananias and Sapphira from further sin and to save the early church from pollution, but it was to save the lost from Hell. As a result of God’s judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira, the Bible says, “*And believers...*”—verse 14—“*...were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women...*” (Acts 5:14). And, so we see the terrible, horrible sin of pretending a devotion to Jesus that we do not have.

## Conclusion

I’m finished with the message, but let me make four observations, and four pleas with you tonight. Number one, may I tell you, if you’re a child of God that sin among the saints it is more serious than sin among the lost? And, sin when God is working in revival power, is the most dangerous of all sin. May I tell you number two? That sin against the Holy Spirit is extremely, extremely, extremely serious. Do not tempt the Holy Spirit of God. Do not be a pretender. Number three, may I urge you, may I plead with you to do what God has lead me to do and is leading me to do? And, that is to be on guard against hypocrisy in your own life. It’s far better not to be what you ought to be than to pretend that you are what you’re not.

Do not pretend. As a matter of fact, if you’re having problems, perhaps if you would share the fact that you’re having problems. Perhaps, if Ananias and Sapphira had come and said, look, Simon Peter I’ve got a problem. I’m jealous. I’m jealous of Barnabas. He’s getting all this praise. Simon Peter would have said, “Ananias, I can understand that, I had some problems myself and still do. Let’s pray about it brother Ananias.” Don’t pretend that you’re something that you’re not. We preachers are often tempted to do that, to exaggerate, or to pretend devotion because we think that we’re setting the example. In my estimation, I want my pastor just to be honest and to tell it like it is in his heart. And, I want my people to be honest. And, I believe when there’s a spirit of honesty even though there’s a spirit of failure, God can work. I beg you. Don’t pretend a devotion to Jesus Christ that you don’t have. Don’t settle down on a lower plain, but don’t pretend. Don’t lie to the Holy Ghost. And, last of all, don’t let some hypocrite keep you from getting the best out of life. Ananias and Sapphira come all along life and all along the trail. I’ve seen many of them in my ministry but they cannot hold back the power of God in revival if we keep our eyes on Jesus.

Let’s bow in prayer. Father God, I pray tonight as I have brought this message, you

dear Lord would help me that I might be judgment day honest with you, as best I know my heart. And, not to pretend, dear Lord, a devotion that I do not have to you. But, oh dear Lord, help me not to be satisfied with a lack of devotion, but to be a growing Christian. And, Lord I pray tonight for those in this congregation who are not saved, that even tonight they might come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior in His wonderful name we pray, Amen.

# Living Supernaturally or Superficially

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: March 11, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:1–11**

*But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”*

ACTS 5:3–4

## Outline

Introduction

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Find the book of Acts, and turn, if you will, to chapter 5. When you've found it, look up here, and let me tell you there are two great forces that are working against your life and the life of this church—they are orchestrated by Satan himself. One is persecution. The other is hypocrisy. And these forces are working against every church. The early church faced both of these, and we will face both of these.

Now, the devil, with the early church, at first, had tried intimidation. And that did not work. He tried to persecute the early church, and all that did was to drive these Christian to their knees. And so, he came back again, and he said, "Well, if I cannot attack from

the outside, I will attack from the inside.” If intimidation and persecution doesn’t work, then I’ll get inside, and I will attack the church with hypocrisy and superficiality.

And I want to say that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the early church, and this church, has been hurt far more by hypocrisy, lukewarmness, and superficiality than by persecution. Do you believe that? I believe that with all of my heart.

Did you know that the Lord had rather have you out and out against Him than lukewarm, pretending to be for Him? Jesus said, “I would that you were hot or cold; so then, because you are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, I will spew thee out of My mouth.” Now, I don’t want to upset your equilibrium this morning, but that literally means you make me sick at my stomach—enough to vomit. Because you are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, I will spew you out of My mouth. The Lord would rather have you out and out against Him than to have you pretending to be for Him, and yet truly, really, denying Him.

I read just a few weeks ago in our local newspaper an article that broke my heart. Here’s what it said. It’s an article about a church, and it says—the title of the story: “Church Sensitive to Gays Ends Scout Sponsorship.” And then it told a tragic story about a ceremony in this church, and it was called a separation ceremony. It’s a church in Denver. And this church in Denver was separating itself from Boy Scout troop 89. Here was a prayer that they prayed. This was in our local newspaper: “O Lord, we come together in memory and appreciation of the good times afforded by troop 89 in days gone by. But diversity is to be celebrated.”

Then, the 125 members replied in unison—quote: “With utmost humility, we stand in opposition to the Boy Scouts of America’s discriminatory policy against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.” In twenty minutes, it was over: Troop 89 was no longer sponsored by the 75-year-old congregation. The reason for this is that the U. S. Supreme Court affirmed the rights of Boy Scouts to bar homosexuals from leadership. Now, that is sad.

But here is the saddest part—listen to this: “On Sunday, second graders were invited to gather at the front of the church, where they heard a children’s sermon about love and where each was presented with Bibles accompanied by a gentle cautionary note.” Now, listen to what they told these second grader: “You don’t have to agree with everything in it. It’s got some great stories.”

Now, they are giving the second graders Bibles. But now, kids, you don’t have to agree with everything in it. It’s got some great stories. Does that not make you sad? That makes me sad—so sad.

Today, I want to lift up a red flag of warning against superficial religion. I believe that Satan is in the corner smiling, when people put doubts in the minds of little children concerning the Word of God. Read the book of Genesis. When Satan first crawled his

slimy, corroding path onto the pages of history, he put a question mark after the Word of God, and said, “Yea, hath God said?”—hath God said? You don’t really just have to take His word for it.

Now, friend, anybody—whether he’s a pastor, or professor; whether he is a political leader—anybody who puts a question mark after the Word of God is doing the work of Satan. I thank God for Bible-believing churches. But, if you’re a member of a church that doubts the Word of God, you need to saturate that church with your absence. You say, “Well, grandma is buried in the back yard.” Well, she’d get up and leave too, if she could. I guarantee you!

The book of Acts is the story of the early church. And the early church believed in the Word of God. Now, in our message this morning, I want to give you two things to beware of, and two things to be sure of, okay?

## **I. Beware of the Pretended Devotion of Superficial Religion**

Number one: beware of the pretended devotion of superficial religion. Now, let’s begin to read: “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she straight then fell she down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as hear these things.”

Now, beware of pretended devotion. Let me give you the background for this passage of Scripture. There was a man named Barnabas. I talked about Barnabas here about a month or two ago. Old Barney did good. Barney had made a gift to the church. He was a very generous man, a great-hearted soul. The word “Barnabas” means encourager. And he was also wealthy. He had some property, and he sold it because there was persecution. There was a great financial need to the church. Well, you can

read about it in Acts chapter 4. Look, if you will, in verse 36 and 37: “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Barnabas had a piece of property. He sold it. He took all the money. He said, “Here you are, Peter, James, John—take this money. Do with it as you will. There it is. Use it.” Magnanimous. He wasn’t doing it to show off. It was a gift motivated by love. Now, he was letting his light shine, however, before men. And men saw his good works, and they glorified God in heaven.

Now, Ananias and Sapphira were there. They saw what Barnabas had done. They saw how the people glorified God. They saw how the people talked about Barney, and what a great guy he was. They said, “You know, we’d like to bask in some of that sunlight. Sapphira, we have a piece of property. Why don’t we sell this piece of property, and we’ll take the money and bring it to the church. Well, do you think we ought to give all of it? Well, they don’t know how much we sold it for. We can tell them that’s all we got for the property, and we can keep part of it. But we’ll get credit for giving everything. Nobody knows how much we sold it for. So, we’ll just say, Hey, Pete, here’s the money we got from the property. It’s all there. We’re giving everything to the Lord.”

Well it was a lie. It was a lie. It was a pretended devotion. It was a devotion they did not have. Now, what made them do that? What is behind all superficial and hypocritical religion? P-r-i-d-e—pride, pride. They wanted to be praised. They wanted to be petted. They wanted to be adulated. They wanted to be looked up to, and it was pride that did this.

Now, the Bible says, “Why hast Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” Satan’s chief tool is pride. Now, listen to me very careful. Pride is such a dangerous thing. The root of their sin was pride. The fruit of their sin was hypocrisy. Now, I want to give you two scriptures. Put these in your margin. The last time I preached on this passage of Scripture I gave you these. I hope you remember them. First Peter chapter five, verse 5. Peter says, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” What is grace? Grace is the desire and the ability to do the will of God. That’s what grace is: both the desire and the ability to do the will of God.

Now, when a man is filled with pride, do you know what happens to him? He does not receive the grace of God, because God gives grace to the humble. Now, when a man is full of pride, grace is withdrawn, and God sets up a barricade against that man. God resists the proud. Now, that’s bad enough. But now, go down to verse 8—1 Peter 5, verse 8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, goeth about

seeking whom he may devour.” Can you imagine an individual like this? Devoid of the grace of God, God resisting him, Satan circling to devour him. That’s what pride does. Nothing puts a person more out of the reach of Satan than genuine humility.

But what happened to Ananias and Sapphira? How could Satan fill their hearts to lie to the Holy Ghost? Pride. The root of their sin was pride. The fruit of their sin was hypocrisy. They wanted credit for giving all. They pretended a devotion they did not have.

Now, listen to me carefully. Their sin was not that they failed to give everything. They didn’t have to give everything. There was no command that they should give everything. Peter makes that very clear. Look, if you will, in verse 4 of this chapter. Watch it. Peter said, “While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power?” You could do with it what you wanted. You didn’t have to give it all. What was their problem? Not that they failed to give it all. Their problem was they pretended a devotion they did not have.

Question: are you sitting in this church this morning pretending a devotion to Jesus Christ that you do not have? God did not command that they give it all. I tell our people when we have our annual Love Offering: What you do not freely give, God neither needs nor wants. Say amen. What you do not freely give, God neither needs nor wants. You’re not helping God out. God owns the world. God is not going to extort anything from you. Peter said, Look. It was in your hands. You could give it, or you could withhold it. Now, it was their right to keep back some, if they wanted to. But they played the hypocrite. Jesus’ sternest words were given to the hypocrites.

Now, I wonder about us in this congregation this morning. And I’ve asked myself this question sincerely, as I prepared this message, “Adrian, do you pretend a devotion to Jesus Christ that you do not have?” I have settled that in my own heart. We sing, brother Jim, “All to Jesus I surrender; all to Him I freely give.” You sing that—is it true? Or have you sung, “Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold”? And we hold it with all our might.

That’s the Ananias and Sapphira sin. Have you sung, “Faith of our fathers, holy faith; we will be true to Thee till death”? And then we deny the Lord Jesus Christ by our actions, our lives. Not even faithful to the house of God when it’s worship time. We’ll be true to Thee till death. I believe there are a lot of modern day Ananiases and Sapphiras in our congregation, amen? Perhaps, Oh me.

## **II. Beware of the Premeditated Deception of Superficial Religion**

Second point. Now, look. Beware of the pretended devotion of superficial religions. Number two, beware of the premeditated deception of superficial religion. Now, the key word is “premeditated.”

Now, all of us sometimes have said things that we ought not to have said. All of us sometimes have spoken of devotion that we do not have. All of us sometimes have told an untruth. Later on, we have to confess it. We didn't think about it. Somebody called in the middle of the night, or maybe early in the morning about 5:30, and they say, "Did I wake you up?" Oh, oh, no, no, no. Liar. But, I mean, you weren't thinking about it. And you just said, "No, no, no, you didn't." That's not a premeditated lie. I'm not saying there's anything good about that. But I want you to notice what we're talking about here. We're talking about premeditated deception. Look in verse 4: "But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

Now, he had lied to the Holy Ghost. Now, this was not a casual lie. Satan put the lie in their heart, but they made room for the lie. Satan said, "Hey Ananias, Sapphira, tell them you gave everything." Satan put that in their heart. Did you know every lie originates with Satan? Every lie originates with Satan. You ever tell a lie? It's Satanic. Put this verse down—John chapter 8 and verse 44. Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, who had superficial religion, said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." He is the spawner of all lies. He, Satan, is a liar, and he's the father of it.

Whenever you tell a lie—listen to me. Teenagers, listen to me. Businessman, listen to me. Whenever you tell a lie, you're acting like the devil. Proof—John 8:44: "He is a liar, and he is the father of it."

Now, what the Holy Spirit is doing now is revealing the seriousness of this premeditated deception. Verse 3: "Peter said, why has Satan put it in your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Look up here, and let me tell you something. It is serious to tell a lie. It is more serious to tell a lie to a judge. It is most serious to lie to God. Now, if you're going to tell a lie, don't lie to God.

You see, not only is it serious when you lie to Holy Ghost, but it's foolish. You see, the Holy Spirit was there when the plot was hatched. The Holy Spirit was there when the land was sold. The Holy Spirit was there when the money was counted. The Holy Spirit was there when the gift was made. He saw it all, and now they are lying to the Holy Ghost.

Not only did the Holy Ghost see it, but friend, it was a conspiracy. It was premeditated. Later on, Peter asked Sapphira, "Did you agree to this?" She said, "Yes." What this was—listen: it was a direct challenge to God, a direct challenge to the Holy

Ghost. That's the reason that Peter said, "You've not lied to men, but unto God." I would not advise you to try this.

I told our Forerunners, the seniors in our church, at a lovely banquet we had a little while ago, about something I recently read about a woman out in San Diego. She was sitting out in front of the supermarket, the windows in her car rolled up, a very hot day, the engine off. She's sitting there with her car doors locked, her hands behind her head like this, sitting there, her eyes closed. Somebody looked at her, and thought, well, perhaps she is meditating, relaxing, but she's sitting there for an inordinately long time. They thought, maybe she's in trouble.

Somebody pecked on the window, and said, "Madam, do you need any help?" She nodded her head. Said, "Are you in trouble?" She nodded her head. They said, "Would you unlock the doors?" She said, "No." No, shook her head this way. "Do you want us to break in?" She nodded her head. They got an ax, broke the window, and said, "What's wrong?" She said, "I have been shot." I'm holding my hands behind my head to keep my brains in." They investigated. She had bought a can of Pillsbury biscuits. Put them in the back of the car and the heat caused them to explode. It sounded like a gun shot. A wad of biscuit dough had hit her in the back of the head. She has her hands around a biscuit, holding her brains in. Listen. If you think you can lie to God and get away it, you've got biscuits for brains. I'm going to tell you something.

Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? You can't lie to Him. Premeditated deception. I wouldn't advise you to try that. Pretended devotion. Premeditated deception. Here's **the third thing**. Two things to beware of. **Here are two things to be sure of.**

### **III. Be Sure of the Penetrating Detection of Superficial Religion**

Be sure of the penetrating detection of superficial religion. God the Holy Spirit told Peter that Ananias and Sapphira were lying. Now, Peter was different than we are. Peter was an apostle, and God spoke to Peter, and Peter declared the Word of God. And the Word of God was in the mouths of these apostles. You know, the Bible says, in Hebrews 4:12, "the Word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword...dividing asunder of soul and spirit, penetrating—penetrating—to the thoughts and intents of the heart." Oh, there is the penetrating power of the Word of God.

Now, I wonder this morning, if my heart were on display, if you could see—I'm talking about my spiritual heart up there on that big screen; you say, "There's the Pastor's heart; there it is; there is every secret in his heart; there are the things that nobody else knows about," but they're right up there—would I want my heart on that screen for you to see? Would you want your heart up there for everybody to see? No secrets. Now, the Bible teaches, one of these days, that's going to happen. The Bible

says, One of these days, our hearts are going to be put on display. There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. Things that are spoken in secret will be shouted from the housetop. And one of these days, those things are going to be made known. Now, listen. Peter, with penetrating insight, saw that sin. It's only a matter of time—listen—it is only a matter of time until hypocritical and half-hearted religion, and pretended devotion, will be made manifest. Paul said, when our Lord comes, He's going to make known the hidden counsels of men's hearts. Perhaps there are things in your heart you don't even know are there.

Joyce and I went to Moscow, Russia. I was on a preaching mission, preached on Easter in Red Square shortly after Communism imploded and the iron curtain came down. Things were strange in Moscow in those days. We went to Moscow, and I preached on a stage in Red Square, preached on nationwide television across the nation. I thought, well, I need to bring a souvenir home from Moscow.

I saw a little boy on the street who had a piece of cardboard, and on this cardboard he had pinned some war medals. I saw one. It was made of silver or pewter. Inside it had a ruby red stone. I couldn't read the Russian on it, but I thought, "I'd like to have that." I said, "Son, would you sell me that?" He said, "Yes." I gave him a few dollars for it. I took it, and said, "You know that's really a very interesting souvenir, a Russian war medal," put it in my suitcase. Joyce and I are going through customs, and the man says, "Do you have any of this, and this, and this...?" "No, no, no." "Do you have any of this?" "No, no, no, no." "Fine." He said, "Mister, would you open your suitcase?" "Sure."

That man with guided hand reached right down in the suitcase where that medal was, and plucked it out. He said, "What is this?" I said, "Well, I forgot about it. It's a medal. It's something I bought on the street." He said to me, "Why are you trying to take our history out of the country?" Just a souvenir. He said, "Stand here." Two other men come in uniforms. They hold up that medal. They have a conference. They lay it down. Some more come. They hold it up.

He said, "You come with me." Say what? "Yes." "Can she come?" "No. You come." I said, "Joyce, I'll be back—I hope." I walk over there. There's an office. There's a guard who said, "You stand by her." Inside that office was a woman. I mean a big old gal. And she has that medal on the desk, and she's writing and writing and writing and writing and writing, like that. And then, she takes a big old stamp and stamps it, brings out this thing written in Russian, and says, "Sign it." I said, "I'm not going to sign that. I can't even read it." She said, "sign it." I said, "Nyet! I'm not going to sign it." Stand off.

I thought, you know, here goes the Cold War starting all over again. I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what was happening. I saw a soldier. I said, "Do you speak English?" He said, "A little." I said, "Can you tell me what all this is about." He read it, and he laughed. I didn't think it was funny. He said, "That is a receipt they are asking

you to sign. They are saying that you cannot take this medal out of the country. But they admit that it is yours. They are going to hold it for you, and any time you want it, you can come get it within three months. But you cannot take it out of the country.” I said, “Man, I’ll sign it. That’s worth whatever I paid for the medal just to have the experience. I haven’t seen it since then.

Point to that whole story. Friend, I had forgotten I had even put that in the suitcase. One of these days, God’s x-ray vision is going to look into your heart and my heart, and there are things, perhaps, that we don’t even know that are there, but I’m telling you there is a penetrating insight that God has. Are you willing—are you willing—to ask God the Holy Spirit to put the searchlight into your heart right now, and just like that x-ray scanner that man had, to look into your heart? “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and see if there be some wicked way in me.”

Do you know what I do not want in my heart and in my life? I don’t want hypocrisy. I do not want to preach something I do not practice. I don’t want to say something I don’t believe. And, constantly, I’m saying, “O God, I want to be real. I want to be true. I want to be pure,” and, therefore, I put myself at God’s x-ray in the mornings. Do you do that? “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and see if there be some wicked way in me.” There is, dear friend, the penetrating detection. If not now, later on.

#### **IV. Be Sure of the Purifying Discipline of Superficial Religion**

Now, here is the fourth and final thing I want you to be sure of—two things to beware of, two things to be sure of: you can be sure of the purifying discipline of superficial religion. What happened? They told a lie. They told a premeditated lie. It was detected. And notice what happened, beginning in verse 5: “And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost,”—that means he died—“and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.” Three hours later. Don’t you ever complain about a long church service, okay? She’s just getting there, and the service has been going for three hours. “Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?”

You see, this was a conspiracy. This is not an off-handed thing. “To tempt”: that means to test the Spirit of God. It was a challenge to God. “You agreed”—you conspired—“to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. And she fell down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the

church, and as many as heard these things.”

I want to say two things about this discipline, this judgment.

### **A. It Was a Severe Judgment**

Number one: it was a severe judgment. They both died. It's almost humorous. It's almost like they had in the church, you know, various kinds of committees, and they have a blanket committee to bury the dead. They said, “Well, Ananias died. Wrap him up, carry him out, bury him. Hey, committee, we have another one. Get this one. Wrap her up, carry her out.” Talk about grandma being buried in the backyard, no wonder they had the cemetery so close to those churches in those days. They died. It was very severe.

Now, question: Were Ananias and Sapphira saved? I believe they were. Will God judge His own children? Certainly—certainly. I believe I'll meet Ananias and Sapphira in heaven. I told you before, there are three kinds of judgment. There is our judgment as a sinner. There is our judgment as a servant. And there is our judgment as a son.

#### **1. Our Judgment as a Sinner**

Judgment as a sinner takes place at Calvary. When Jesus Christ died, He took the judgment for our sins. That is the judicial judgment, and we'll never face that again. Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation—no judgment—to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Thank God we have settled out of court. Amen? Amen.

#### **2. Our Judgment as a Servant**

But there's also our judgment as a servant. That's the judgment seat of Christ, where we're going to receive the rewards for the things that we've done. And He's going to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” if you've been a good and faithful servant. That's our judgment as servant. Now, that takes place at the judgment seat of Christ, after the rapture.

#### **3. Our Judgment as a Son**

But there's a third judgment, and that's our judgment as sons, and that takes place day by day. Do you think that, if you get saved, you can sin and get away with it? No. If you get saved, that means, if you sin, you won't get away with it. An unsaved sinner, God does not deal with him in this life like He does one of His own children. The Bible says, “whom the Lord loves he chastens.” God loved Ananias and Sapphira. Put down Hebrews chapter 12, verses 5 to 7. And the writer of Hebrews says—whom, incidentally, I believe was Paul—“have ye forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son,”—now, listen; this is sons—“despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening,

God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" You said, "But they died." Yes. This judgment is a severe judgment, especially when you challenge God. When it is premeditated, when it is a conspiracy, when it is a confrontation between that which Satan has put in your heart and that which the Holy Spirit of God has warned you against.

Paul warned the church at Corinth about the way they were taking the Lord's Supper—1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 29 and 30: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself"—the word "damnation" means judgment—"not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and some sleep." Some have died like Ananias and Sapphira in the Corinthian church because of the judgment of God upon them. They were children of God, and they died prematurely.

Again, the Bible says, in 1 John chapter 5, verse 16, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." What is a sin not unto death? It is not premeditated. It is not tempting God. It is not challenging God. And then, he goes on to say, "There is a sin unto death. I do not say you should pray for it." There comes a time when you as a child of God can so challenge God that you sign your own death warrant. It does not mean that you're not going to heaven. It means you're going to heaven sooner than you should.

Now, it was a severe judgment. I believe I've seen this in my years in the ministry. I have seen—I believe I have seen—people who have challenged God, living hypocritical, superficially, yet with a name in the Lamb's book of life, who check out and go to heaven too soon, like Ananias and Sapphira did. Which, incidentally, like Moses did. When Moses died, his eye was not dim nor his strength abated. Moses died prematurely, because he challenged God.

## **B. It Was a Saving Judgment**

Now, listen. Not only was it a severe judgment, but it was a saving judgment. You say, "God is cruel. God is vindictive." No, God is loving, and God is kind.

### **1. It Was to Save Ananias and Sapphira from Further Sin**

Number one: it was to save Ananias and Sapphira from further sin. God did this, I believe, in mercy. There was a man in the church at Corinth who was living in open sin, a brother—1 Corinthians 5:5. This man was living in sexual immorality. He had been warned. He would not repent. Paul said, "Deliver such a one..."—this is 1 Corinthians 5:5—"Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." You see, God is far more interested in your spirit than He is your body. "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ."

## **2. It Was to Save the Early Church from Pollution**

Now, could it be that God, in mercy, brought Ananias and Sapphira home to keep them from further sin? Now, not only was it saving to Ananias and Sapphira; it was to save the early church from pollution. God doesn't want hypocrites in the church, so God took them out, because there was such a holiness there, such a fire, such a revival, God would not let them spoil it. And the Bible says, in this same chapter, in verse 11, "and great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things." Therefore, this was a blessing to the church.

## **3. It Was to Save Lost People from Hell**

Number three: it was a blessing because it saved lost people from hell. The worst thing could happen to a church would be for the church to be so filled with hypocrites and superficiality that unsaved people can see no difference. It's good when God brings judgment like this upon a church. The Bible says, in Acts chapter five, verse 14, "And believers were more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." The home-going of Ananias and Sapphira brought fear to the church, and it brought salvation to many people. And where Satan ruled, God overruled.

## **4. It Was to Save a Succeeding Generations from Hypocrisy**

And I'll tell you another reason God may have done it: to save succeeding generation from hypocrisy. Now, there's a big question right here. If God took Ananias and Sapphira to heaven early, why doesn't God do that today? I mean, why doesn't God go through the congregation, and say, "You're one of them—you're outta here; you're one—you're outta here; you're one—you're outta here"? One preacher said, "If God were to kill all the people who did that, where would I be?" They all laughed. He said, "I'd be preaching to an empty house." Why doesn't God do that today? You're going to find there's a principle in the Bible: God will do certain things as an example in the physical world about how He feels in the spiritual world. For example, Sodom and Gomorrha—God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha with fire and brimstone. Well, why doesn't God destroy cities today that are given over to sodomy with fire and brimstone? Answer—Jude 1, verse 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example—for an example—suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." When God eradicated Sodom and Gomorrha with fire and brimstone, and left their smoky ruins, God said, that is an example. That's an example. You want to know how I feel about it, there's an example.

Let me give you a principle again. In the wilderness, when the children of Israel were coming out of Egypt and going to Canaan, they lived in sin, they fell into idolatry, and God destroyed many of them. Now, listen. First Corinthians 10, verses 10 and 11:

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now, all these things happened unto them for ensample: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” God does certain things as examples. God says, “Look. You want to know how I feel about sodomy? There’s an example. You want to know how I feel about murmuring? There’s an example.” God says, “You want to know how I feel about hypocrisy and superficiality in the church? There is an example.” God does these things sometimes as examples. Can we learn today?

## Conclusion

I’m finished with the message. I want to give you five thoughts very quickly, just click them off.

Number one: Sin among the saints is more serious than sin among the lost.

Number two: Sin against the Holy Spirit is very serious. All sin is serious, but sin against the Holy Ghost is very serious.

Number three: Be on guard against hypocrisy in your life. Ask God to search you. Make certain that your heart is clean and pure. And, above all, do not pretend a devotion greater than you have.

Number four: Don’t let some hypocrite keep you away from Jesus Christ. There have always been hypocrites. There always will be hypocrites. One of the twelve apostles was not even saved at all. Don’t you let some hypocrite keep you from hell. I don’t want to be a member of the church; they’re so full of hypocrites. It would be better to be in a church with a few of them than be in hell with all of them forever. Don’t let some hypocrite keep you from Jesus.

And, last of all, a church that is filled with the Holy Ghost, a church that has the Word of God, a church that will live pure and clean and righteous and holy, cannot, will not, be stopped by superficiality and hypocrisy on the part of some. You want to know how strong a church is—you see what it takes to stop it. All hell could not stop this church, and it continued to grow.

Now, what is the lesson? The lesson is this: love Jesus with all of your heart. If you’re weak, say, “Lord, help me.” If you can’t give all to the Lord Jesus Christ, and haven’t given all to the Lord Jesus, say, “Lord, I want to; help me.” While it is in your power, it’s your own. Just don’t pretend a devotion that you do not have. Say, “Lord, here is where I am. Here is where I want to be. Help me to grow.” And God will start with you where you are. And God will bring you to where you need to be. Just don’t stonewall God. Don’t be a big pretender. Don’t be superficial. Don’t be hypocritical. Be real, and God will love you. God will help you. God will strengthen you. God will guard you. God will guide you, and He’ll take you where you are, and make you what you

ought to be. He's still working on me. He's still working on me.

I was thinking about that, if you could see my heart up there on that big screen. I'm kind of glad you can't. I tell you one thing, and I can say this sincerely—and I know God is listening: I'm real—I'm real. I know I'm not all I ought to be, but I'm real. You say, "you're boasting." No, I'm not. I'd be a fool to stand up here and not be real. Be real. Let God start with you where you are. And God will bring you. Just don't stonewall God. Don't lie to the Holy Ghost. Don't be superficial and hypocritical. Amen?

Father God, seal the message to our hearts. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Now, the message, the episode concerning Ananias and Sapphira, do you know what it did? It caused unsaved people to get saved, and I believe it will do the same today. If you are here today without the Lord Jesus Christ, and you want Christ, don't let some hypocrite keep you from Jesus. I promise you, on the authority of the Word of God, God will save you, and He'll keep you saved, if you trust Him.

The Bible says, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved. If you'll pray a prayer like this from your heart: O God, I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I can't save myself. I need to be saved. I want to be saved. O Jesus, come into my heart. Forgive my sins. Save me, Lord Jesus. He will. I promise He will. He'll forgive every sin. He'll put His Spirit in your heart and begin to make you the person He wants you to be. And when you die, He'll take you home to heaven. I'm going to ask you to do that today. I'm going to ask you to trust Jesus, and I'm going to ask you to make it public by coming forward.

Walking an aisle doesn't save you. Shaking a minister's hand doesn't save you. It's Jesus that saves. Walking the aisle is your way of saying, I'm not ashamed of Jesus. Jesus said, If you're ashamed of Me and My Word before this sinful and adulterous generation, I'll be ashamed of you when I come in the glory of the Father with the holy angels. But Jesus said, if you'll confess me before men, I'll confess you before My Father.

So, all the way across the front here, all the way, there will be a minister waiting to receive you. Up there in the balcony, under that banner that says "Redeemer," there's one waiting to receive those of you in the balcony on that side. And over here under that banner that says "Messiah," there's someone waiting to receive you. And we're going to stand. We're going to sing, "Lord, I believe. Lord, I receive. Lord, I confess You now." And just step out and come. "Pastor, what would I say when I go down there?" Just say to the minister something like this: I'm trusting Jesus. It feels good in your heart when you say it. We'll rejoice with you, take a Bible, give you some more Scripture to stand on, seal it in prayer. It'll take just a few moments. You can settle it for all eternity today. Others of you today, you need a church home. And every Christian ought to be a member of a local New Testament church, if at all possible—if not Bellevue, one somewhere that preaches the Bible, and loves Jesus. I invite you to come this morning,

if you're already saved, and say, "I want to place my membership here." If you've not had believers baptism as we understand it, we'd want the privilege and the joy of baptizing you as a believer in Jesus Christ. It may be that you just have a prayer burden today, and you say, I need somebody to pray with me. You just come, and somebody will be glad to pray for you today, if you have a special burden. Let's stand together. You step out and come.

# The Danger of Spiritual Pretense

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: August 8, 1999**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:1–11**

*“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”*

ACTS 5:3–4

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Deception That Expressed Their Hypocrisy
- II. The Detection That Exposed Their Hypocrisy
- III. The Destruction That Expelled Their Hypocrisy
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  - C. Our Judgment as Sons in This Life
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Conclusion

- A. Sin Among the Saints Is More Serious Than Sin Among the Lost
- B. Sin Against the Holy Spirit Is Especially Dangerous
- C. Always Be on Guard Against Hypocrisy in Your Own Life
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## Introduction

Take God's Word and turn to Acts chapter 5. I want to talk to you a little bit about pretense, spiritual pretense—pretending to be what we really are not. The title of the message is The Danger of Spiritual Pretense. Chapter 5, verse 1: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whilst it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost and great fear came on all them which heard

these things. And the young men arose, bound him up, and carried him out and buried him. And was about the space of three hours after that his wife, not knowing what was done, came in."

You think you have long church services? All right, she comes in three hours later, and the service is still going on. "And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much, and she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the spirit of the Lord?" That literally means to test the Spirit of the Lord. "Behold, the feet of them which buried thy husband are at the door and shall carry thee out. And she fell, and fell she down straightway at his feet and yielded up the ghost and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things."

Now, what had happened was this. There was a man named Barnabas who made a great gift to the church, and he didn't do it to show off, but he did it because God had touched his heart. Ananias and Sapphira saw how praise was given to them and the adulation that came to them because of what they did, and Ananias and Sapphira thought, Well, we'll do something of the same—we have a piece of property. They sold their property, thinking that nobody knew how much they got for it, and brought the money to the church, and pretended that they were giving every cent that they received for that property to the treasurer of the church. And of course they were pretending. They had not given it all; they had kept back part of it secretly, and, so what they did was to live a life of pretense, and they were lying to the Holy Spirit.

Now, people do lie, and people lie about all manner of things. Sometimes we think our lies are trivial—people lie about their weight; people lie about their age. They say the seven ages of a woman are baby, child, junior miss, young woman, young woman, young woman, and young woman. But this lie was a very treacherous lie. No lie is a good lie, but this lie that was told was a satanic strategy. It was to sabotage the spirit of revival that was in that early church.

The devil had tried intimidation. Intimidation only drove the church to her knees and caused them to have greater power. And so now, the devil decides, Well, if I cannot bombard from the outside, I will infiltrate, and I will work from the inside, and if I cannot conquer the church, I will corrupt the church, and thereby I will conquer the church. Now, I want to say at the outset of this message that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has always been hurt far more by hypocrisy than by persecution. Persecution only causes the church to grow. Hypocrisy causes the church to disintegrate. And so, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of the sin of pretense.

Now, as we prepare to give our hearts to the Lord at the Lord's Supper, so often at the Lord's Supper we will sing or say or think something like this: All to thee I surrender,

all to thee I freely give. Now, those words are easily uttered, but I wonder if we may not be very much like Ananias and Sapphira, with a spiritual pretense, pretending a devotion that we do not have. There are three things we will think about tonight, very quickly, somewhat swiftly, as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper, and prepare to give, I trust, all to Jesus.

## **I. The Deception That Expressed Their Hypocrisy**

Number one, I want you to notice the deception—the deception—that expressed their hypocrisy. Now, you find that in verses 1 through 4, and I've already read the scripture, but what had happened is this, that the root of their sin was pride. Barnabas had made a gift. He didn't do it to be seen of men, but on the other hand, he did not try to hide his light under a bushel, and there was toward Barnabas, who was a great man, there was toward Barnabas a great show of love in the church, as he gave this gift motivated by the Holy Spirit.

I think that Barnabas could've said in these words, Naught that I have I call my own; I hold it for the giver. My life, my soul, my will, my all are His and His forever. Now, I want to say that; I want to say that and mean that; but, very frankly, as I looked at this scripture tonight, I was challenged by it. Very frankly, I had to get on my knees tonight and to confess the sin of spiritual pretense. Saying things sometime that are easily uttered, but wondering in my heart, do I really mean these things?

You see, what happened is this. We're talking now about the root of their sin, which was pride. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to bask in the glow that had come around Barnabas, and pride made them a sitting duck for the devil, and pride will do the same thing to you or to me. Peter said in his epistle, 1 Peter 5, verse 5, and evidently he had seen this because Peter was involved in this story, Peter wrote, and he said—listen: "Be ye clothed with humility, all of you," and then he said in a few verses later, 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 8, the reason that you need to be clothed with humility is that your adversary, the devil, "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." The devil is after you.

And a wise man said many, many years ago, Nothing will put you further out of the devil's reach than genuine humility—genuine humility. But when you become proud, you are ripe for Satan's attack. So, the root of their sin was pride. The fruit of their sin was pretense. Pretense always follows pride. We're pretending to be what we really are not. They wanted credit for giving all, and they pretended the full devotion that they did not have.

Now, I want to make something very clear. Their sin was not refusing to give. They gave. Nor was their sin refusing to give all of it. God had not commanded nor demanded that they give all of it. Their sin was the sin of pretense, saying that they had given all,

when they had given all. That's where the sin was. It's very clear.

Look in verse 4. Peter said, "While it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" That is, Ananias and Sapphira, you could've done what you wished. You are not under condemnation for not giving every penny of it; you are under condemnation for pretending a devotion that you do not have. Actually, what it was was just pretense; it was pretending a devotion they did not have.

Now, if you study Jesus and the ministry of Jesus, Jesus' sternest words, most stinging rebukes, were not for harlots, drunkards, or for even thieves. His most stinging rebukes were always for hypocrites, for those who pretended a devotion that they did not have.

Well, you say, Pastor, I'm glad he said that to all those old hypocrites. You know, I've often thought that Baptist churches are full of hypocrites, some of them standing behind the pulpit like I am. We sing songs. For example, All to Jesus I surrender; all to Him I freely give. Have you done that? I said, have you done that? You know, there are times when I can feel my heart getting a little cold; maybe I'm getting away from the Lord. Just very slowly, imperceptibly—you wouldn't know it, Joyce wouldn't know it, but I know it. I have to get alone by myself, get in my study of somewhere, and just have a session with God.

And I have to ask myself this question: Adrian, have you really surrendered everything to Jesus? I mean, have you really done it? Not just said it, but do you release your position as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church? Do you give your wife, your children, your bank account, what you've set aside for retirement, your physical health, your reputation, your friends, your lifeblood? Adrian, have you really done that?

And, folks, I'll tell you, if you get down and do some heart searching, you'll find that that's easier said than done. And then the thought gets to me, well, I'd be a sheer fool not to trust Jesus with everything—a sheer fool. He loves me enough to die for me, but I have to have that breakthrough. And I can tell when I've reached that breakthrough. I can't explain it to you, but there's a verse of Scripture that says, "When your eye is single, your body is full of light." Now, I don't know what that means to you, but there comes a time when it's just clear and your body is full of light.

And I think we need to ask ourselves this question: have we kept back part and said we've given all? I sometimes laugh when Baptist congregations will stand and sing, Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. They hold it with all their might. Churches in building programs say, O God, send us some money to build this building. Friend, they've got it on their fingers, they've got it in their pockets, they have it in their savings accounts, saying, Dear God, give us the money. He's already given it to us. He said, I gave it to you—now return it back to me. But we sing, Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. I wonder, do we really mean that?

Sunday morning we sing, Faith of our fathers, holy faith, we would be true to Thee till death. You ever heard a congregation sing that? Half of them don't even come back Sunday night. True to thee till death. No, we sing things that we don't mean; we pretend many times a devotion that we do not have. That's what Ananias and Sapphira did. Now, I'm not saying that they sinned because they didn't give every penny that they got for the property. That was not the point. They were pretending. The root of their sin was pride, and the fruit of their sin was pretense.

## **II. The Detection That Exposed Their Hypocrisy**

Now, here's the second thing. Not only the deception that expressed this hypocrisy, but I want you to notice the detection that exposed this hypocrisy. God pulled the cover off.

Now, there was the Holy Spirit that revealed the source of this sin. Look, if you will, in verse 3, "But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost and to keep back part of the price of the land?" What was the source of this sin? It was Satan. Satan is the father of lies and the author of pride. It was Satan who put it into their heart. It was the devil who whispered, Tell them you're giving it all. Tell them you're giving everything.

Jesus said, in John chapter 8 and verse 44, that Satan is a liar, and he is the father of liars, and when you tell a lie—big lie, little lie, white lie, black lie, Technicolor, living color, makes no difference—when you tell a lie, you, my friend, are acting like the devil. Or, if I tell a lie, I'm acting like the devil. That's the reason Satan wants to fill our hearts: to make pretenders out of us, hypocrites—that's what the Bible calls them, hypocrites; they're play actors, pretending a devotion that they do not have.

Now, Peter says to Ananias, Why has Satan filled thine heart? That's the reason I have to keep my heart with all diligence, for out of it—out of my heart—are the issues of life. Now, the Spirit revealed the source of the sin, which was Satan, and the Spirit revealed the seriousness of the sin. Notice again in verse 3: "Why has Satan filled thy heart?" Now, here's the seriousness of the sin: "to lie to the Holy Ghost."

Now, friend, think about that—that's devastating, to lie to the Holy Ghost. It's bad to tell a lie to one another; it's more dangerous to tell a lie to a judge; but, friend, it is incredibly haughty, dangerous, fearful, serious beyond words, to lie to the Holy Spirit. Not only is it serious; it is foolish, because you can't pull it off. The Holy Spirit is everywhere; he knows everything. You can't get away with it.

The Holy Spirit was there when Ananias and Sapphira cooked up the deal, when the bargain was struck for the land, and the Holy Spirit flashed the whole picture before Simon Peter's eyes. And Peter, at this point, had the spiritual gift of knowledge. He knew exactly what had happened. He was not there when it happened, but the Holy Spirit of God, that they had lied against, told the truth to Peter, and Peter told them.

Now, the point of the whole matter is when Peter said, Why has Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? the point of the whole matter is that the Holy Spirit of God was dealing with Ananias and Sapphira. He had warned them, they'd sinned against light. Verses 3 and 4 make it clear that this was not an unintentional error; it was a conspiracy, it was willful, inexcusable, and dangerous. It was a direct challenge to the Holy Spirit, and friend, I would not advise you to try it. Do not lie to the Holy Spirit of God.

### **III. The Destruction That Expelled Their Hypocrisy**

And so, here's the third and final thing. I want you to notice the destruction—the destruction—that expelled this hypocrisy. God got this hypocrisy out of the church. Look, if you will, in verse 5: "And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost, and great fear came on all them that heard these things." Ananias was stricken dead. It was a severe judgment. He falls down, and the Bible says that the young men came in, and bound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

I know it's not a funny part of the Scripture, but it's always been a little funny to me. I mean, it's like a regular part of the service—they got the blanket committee, and they come, bind him up, carry him out, and they go on with the service. I mean, it's like, hey, don't do that here. Maybe that's why they have cemeteries next door to churches.

I mean, here's this guy. He tells a lie—bang, he's down. They come in, bind him up, carry him out, and they go right on with the service. It was a severe judgment. Well that, and later on, the same thing happened to Sapphira. She came in about three hours later. You know, I wonder why? I wonder if it was to make a grand entrance, so everybody could see her as she came forward. I wonder—I don't know why—but she was caught in the duplicity and the complicity of what happened. And the same thing happened to Sapphira.

That brings up a big question. Were Ananias and Sapphira Christians? I think they were. One of the reasons I think they were is because of this judgment. You see, God does not judge the unsaved this way; they get their judgment at the Great White Throne—but God does deal sometimes very seriously with His own children.

There are three kinds of judgment on sin.

#### **A. Our Judgment as Sinners at the Cross**

There's the judgment that we receive as a sinner that comes at the cross. Jesus took our judgment for us as sinners—that's the cross.

#### **B. Our Judgment as Servants at the Judgment Seat of Christ**

Then there's a second judgment that we're going to get, and that is a judgment as servants; that's at the judgment seat of Christ. And we're going to receive a reward for

the things that we've done, or suffer loss for the way that we've failed. We're not saved by works, but we will be judged by works.

### **C. Our Judgment as Sons in This Life**

So we're judged as sinners at the cross, we're judged as servants at the Great White Throne, but we're also judged as sons and daughters in this life. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 5 through 7, says that whom the Father loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He may receive—whom He may receive. And I believe that this was the Father's judgment, the scourging upon Ananias and Sapphira.

#### **1. A Severe Judgment**

They were children of God, but they had committed the sin of pretense, and there was a very severe judgment.

But, you say, Pastor, can it be that severe? Yes. As a matter of fact, if you'll read in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, about verses 29, 30, and 31, Paul was warning the church in Corinth about taking the Lord's Supper in an irreverent way. Actually, they had turned it into a gluttonous feast and a drunken orgy. You couldn't believe that these people would do this, but they had been raw pagans not much earlier, and Paul rebukes them.

And then, Paul says, I think in verse 30, "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and some sleep." And when it says sleep, he didn't mean, Now, I lay me down to sleep. That is the Christian terminology for the dead who die in the Lord; the Bible calls them asleep. Paul said, Some of you are weak, some of you are sick, and some of you are dead, because of your sin. Did you know that God's judgment can be so severe that God will call you home early? He will.

Or you read 1 Corinthians 5, verse 5, talking about a man who was in the church, and the context makes it clear that he was a brother, but he was committing a sin of sexual immorality, and Paul said, "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Whom the Lord loves, He chastens. I believe the Lord loved Ananias and Sapphira, and I believe that Ananias and Sapphira, like many in this building, loved the Lord, but what they did, they committed the sin of pretending a devotion for Jesus that they really did not have, and God brought a very severe judgment.

I believe I have seen it happen—I believe. You know, 1 John 5, verse 16, says, "There is a sin unto death." There is a sin unto death. I believe I've seen it happen. I've told you illustrations of church members that I believe I've seen directly challenge the Holy Spirit. Not just challenge the pastor, but directly challenge the Holy Spirit to such a degree that I've warned them. You are living dangerously. And to attest to it, I've taken other members of the church, and told them what has happened to document it.

I think of one man in another church that so directly challenged the Holy Spirit. He

was a good man. I led him to Christ. I baptized him, a faithful friend. But he directly challenged the Holy Spirit. I said, Jack, I'm afraid for you. I said, Jack, you are living dangerously. He said, "Well, maybe I am, but this is what I'm going to do." I felt a chill go over me. I went and told Jesse. I said, "Jesse, I want to tell you, Jack is in grave danger." A few days, they called me, they said, "Pastor, did you hear about Jack?" I said, "No." They said, "He fell dead." Fell dead. I was not at all surprised, because he directly challenged the Holy Spirit of God.

You see, this was not just a casual sin; it wasn't a kind of sin that sometimes we do, perhaps, saying, "All to Jesus I surrender; all to Him I freely give." And perhaps we're not thinking, but these people had looked into the face of the Holy Spirit. They had conspired to do wrong. They had lied to the Holy Ghost. And this judgment was a severe judgment.

## **2. A Saving Judgment**

But I want to say something else. God was not cruel. This judgment was a saving judgment. Did you know God sometimes does that with a believer to save the believer from further sin? When God sees a believer living so much in sin, God may take that believer's life to keep him from going into further sin, I believe. That's 1 Corinthians 5:5: "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

It's like a little boy goes to a birthday party, and maybe he's five or six years old, and sticking his fingers in the cake, and pulling a girl's hair, and running around, acting like a little tyrant—his mother warns him. He doesn't straighten up—his mother warns him again. Finally, she says, Johnny, you're not going to embarrass me this way. And she just takes him home—the party's over. I believe that happens sometimes to a child of God. God says, Come on home. You're not going to disgrace me here. The party is over. "Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

I believe God may have done this to save them from further sin. He certainly did it to save the early church from pollution. God wants His church pure. Look in verse 11 of this same chapter. The Bible says, "And great fear came upon all the church." I would imagine so. If somebody in this service were to directly challenge the Holy Spirit, and they fell down dead, and then their wife comes in, and they fall down dead, I think the rest of us would be on praying ground, wouldn't we? We would. You see, the temperature can get so high it'll kill the germs, and so here the Lord is doing this to save Ananias and Sapphira, perhaps, from further sin, to save the early church from pollution, and to save the lost from hell. Notice in verse 14—the Bible says, as a result of this, "And believers were the more added to the church, multitudes both of men and women." When sin is severely judged like this, it doesn't mean that the church goes

backward; it means that the church goes forward. A church that is a pure church is a church where souls are going to be saved.

And then, I believe God did this for Adrian, and for those people here on the platform with me, and for the choir, and for the congregation in front of me, and for those who are listening to me tonight by television. You see, God does not kill every person who challenges the Holy Spirit. God does not do that. God does miracles, and God brings cataclysmic judgments as examples.

If you have your Bible, for example, turn to Jude verse 7—it's the last book before Revelation—and you will find out what God did to Sodom and Gomorra. What a lesson for America! "Even as Sodom and Gomorra..."—this is Jude verse 7—"Even as Sodom and Gomorra and the cities about them in like manner giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Now, God doesn't destroy every city that gives itself over to sodomy. God doesn't destroy the cities, the centers of sodomy, like San Francisco, and other places have become. No, but they have Sodom and Gomorra. God left Sodom with its smoking ruins as an example to those that after should live ungodly.

Or take your Bibles, and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 with me for just a moment—and it's worth turning to it, so go ahead and turn to it. Sometimes I pick these scriptures out ahead of time for you, but let's let our fingers do the walking through the sacred pages. All right, look, if you will, in verse 10. Paul says to the people at Corinth, "Neither murmur ye as some of them murmured..."—that is, the Jews in the wilderness centuries before—"Neither murmur ye as some of them murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer."

Now, watch this in verse 11: "Now, all these things happened unto them for examples, and they're written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." Now, the Jews out in the wilderness murmured, and God sent fiery snakes among them. Well, God doesn't send fiery snakes today when we have murmurers in our churches, but I'll tell you what He does do. He gave us His Word; He said, There's an example. To those of us who are living in the last days, there is an example. God doesn't kill every great pretender in a Baptist church, but He gave Ananias and Sapphira as an example. If you want to know how God feels about it, just read that story.

One preacher stood up and preached, and he said, You know, if God killed every liar, where would I be? They all laughed. He said, I'd be preaching to an empty church.

No, God doesn't do that today—God doesn't do that today. But see, here is the principle of example. God left Sodom and Gomorra as an example. God sent the fiery serpents as an example. God gave Ananias and Sapphira as an example to see and let

us know how He feels about pretending a devotion to Jesus Christ that we do not have. Now, indeed we ought to give all, everything. As I said this morning, it's not one seventh of our time and one tenth of our money; it all belongs to God. He lets us hold it. We're stewards of it; we ought to be good stewards.

## **Conclusion**

Four quick concluding remarks and we'll have the Lord's Supper; four things I want to lay on your heart.

### **A. Sin Among the Saints Is More Serious Than Sin Among the Lost**

Number one: Sin among the saints is more serious than sin among the unsaved and the lost. You agree to that? Sin among the saints is more serious. These were saints that God was dealing with.

### **B. Sin Against the Holy Spirit Is Especially Dangerous**

Number two: Sin against the Holy Spirit is especially dangerous. Do not lie to the Holy Spirit.

### **C. Always Be on Guard Against Hypocrisy in Your Own Life**

Point number three: Always be on guard against hypocrisy in your own life. And I'm certainly speaking to my heart, because when I stand here as a preacher, one of the great dangers is for me to pretend before you something that is not true in my own heart, my own life. But it's true about every mother's child. Let's not be pretenders. Let's not pretend a devotion that we do not have.

### **D. Don't Let Some Hypocrite Keep You from Serving Jesus**

And, concluding point number four: Don't let some big pretender, some hypocrite, keep you from serving Jesus. Ananias and Sapphira were not what they ought to have been, but friend, that early church didn't even slow down. They went right on keeping their hearts, their minds, on Jesus. And you keep your eyes on Jesus, and take your eyes off the faults of those for whom Jesus died. And I'll tell you the old ship of Zion is plowing heavenward, and her sails are full, and her flags unfurled, and I'm on board, and she's not going to sink if a few hypocrites are on board, too, amen?

So as we come to the Lord's table, let's don't pretend. Let's say, Lord, All to Jesus I surrender; all to thee I freely give. Now, don't be afraid to say that. Number one, you can't keep it anyway. And, number two, if He loved you enough to die for you, why wouldn't you give everything to Him? God wants to bless us, not to harm us. So we must give everything to Jesus.

Father, as we come to the Lord's table tonight, we pray, Lord, that you would look into our hearts, into my heart, into each heart. Lord, may we be pure. Deliver us from pretense. In your holy name. Amen.

# Lifestyle Evangelism

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** February 1, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 5:19–20

*“But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”*

ACTS 5:19–20

## Outline

Introduction

- I. All People Have the Same Heartaches
- II. All People Have the Same Hunger
- III. All People Have the Same Hope
- IV. All People Need the Same Help

Conclusion

## Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles and to find Acts chapter 5, as we continue in our series, “That Old-Time Religion.” We’re looking back at the Acts—not the Acts of the Apostles, or even, in the strictest sense, the Acts of the Holy Spirit, but, my dear friend, the Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He continues to do what He began to do in the Gospels.

Today, I want to ask you a question: Do you know that there is something that you are privileged to do that the angels are not privileged to do? There is something that you are commanded to do that no angel has ever been commanded to do. Look, if you will, please, with me in Acts chapter 5, and I begin in verse 19: *“But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”* (Acts 5:19–20)

Now the apostles were in prison, and an angel came and wonderfully and supernaturally opened the prison doors. However he got them out, he extradited them from prison, and said, “Now I want you to go stand and preach.” That is an amazing thing. You would think that if an angel could get men out of prison, the angel could go ahead and do the preaching. There are some things angels can do, and there are other things that God won’t allow angels to do.

Now, why is it that angels can’t preach the gospel of Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? Well, you see, when we preach the gospel of Jesus, or when we are soul winners, what we’re doing is this: we’re sharing what Jesus has done for us. Jesus said,

*“Ye shall be my witnesses.”* (Acts 1:8) Now a *witness* is a person who has had an experience. And no angel has ever been saved. No angel has ever been saved. An angel can’t witness to the grace of God, because no angel has ever been born again. You know we sing that song, “Angels Never Knew the Joy that Our Salvation Brings.” Thank God that we can do something that even angels cannot do! They can get people out of prison, but they can’t preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so I want us to look now, if you will, at verse 29. They are commanded to go and preach. Then it says, *“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”* (Acts 5:29) How many of you believe that—just nod your head—that we ought to obey God? All right, be careful, because you’re going to get yourself in trouble. All right, we ought to obey God. Now the angel said, *“Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”* (Acts 5:20) And then Peter said, *“We ought to obey God.”* Now as a result of that—look in verse 32—Peter said, *“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”* (Acts 5:32) The angel says, “Go.” Peter says, “We ought to go.” And then he says, “We will go, we do witness, and God has sent the Holy Spirit to confirm that witness.”

And now, notice the last verse in this chapter: *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 5:42) *“And daily in the temple, and in every house”*—that is, publicly and privately, they did not stop preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. Now to these early Christians, Christianity wasn’t a one-day-a-week thing. You know, there are some people who think that they’ve done God a wild favor if they get up and get here on Sunday morning. Did you know that? I mean, they really do. They say, “I’m serving the Lord: I’m going to church.” Hey, folks, this is just where we get ready to serve the Lord.

The Bible says, *“And daily...”* You know, for these early Christians, it was a daily experience. You read back over there in the early part of the book of Acts—don’t turn to it, but it’s in Acts chapter 2, verse 46—the Bible says, *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”* (Acts 2:46) They had daily fellowship. They didn’t just say, “Well, we’re going to get up and get there on Sunday morning.” It was daily fellowship.

Not only did they have daily fellowship; the church also grew daily. In Acts chapter 2 and verse 47, the Bible says, *“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* (Acts 2:47) Now to them, evangelism wasn’t a seven-day meeting in the summertime when we have a revival crusade, nor was it even on Sundays when people got saved, but day by day they were being saved. When they weren’t having church services, they were still having folks saved. They fellowshiped daily, folks were saved

daily, and they studied the Bible daily. Acts chapter 17 and verse 11 says they “*searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*” (Acts 17:11) The preachers would preach, and the people day by day would get their Bibles out and search their Bibles and so forth.

Now one more time we come to this use of the word *daily*. If you will, look again in Acts chapter 5 and verse 42: “*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*” (Acts 5:42) Now, who was this that was not ceasing to teach and preach Jesus Christ? You say, “Well, Pastor, it was the apostles.” Well, it was the apostles, but it was more than the apostles. It was the rank and file of that early church. And Peter said, “*We are his witnesses of these things.*” (Acts 5:32) And what he meant by that is that not just the apostles, but that we—all of us—are witnesses of these things.

Do you know what is wrong in the average church and—let me be a little more pertinent—in this church? Many of us are not sharing our faith. Many of us think that we have really served God if we come to church faithfully, if we live good clean lives, if we have a job in the church like teaching Sunday School or singing in the choir, and if we give our money—at least a tenth of our money—to God’s work; then we really think that we are pretty good Christians, isn’t that right? I mean, folks say, “Man, if you do that; if you come to the worship services; if you live a good clean life; if you study your Bible, and pray, and give your money, and have a place of service in the church, then you are serving the Lord.” Well, you may be serving the Lord; but, friend, unless you are vitally interested in this matter of bringing souls to Jesus Christ, and unless you are personally sharing Jesus Christ, then I hate to tell you this, but you are not right with God. You say, “Well, God didn’t call me to do that. God called me to be a preacher, a singer, or a Sunday School teacher.” Friend, there’s nothing wrong with you that a good revival or an old-fashioned dose of salvation wouldn’t cure.

God has called you to witness—and a Christian who is not witnessing is not merely missing a blessing; he is guilty of high treason against heaven’s King. You say, “Now, wait a minute, Preacher: that’s what we pay you to do; that’s what you are hired to do.” I beg to differ with you. You didn’t hire me to do anything. I am not a hireling. “*The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*” (John 10:13) I hear people say, “Well, we hired us a preacher.” You didn’t hire me. I was called of God to this church. You say, “Well, what’s the difference?” Well, when you hire somebody, you pay that person to do something that you don’t want to do. I didn’t want to rake the leaves this fall, so I hired somebody to do it. So somebody came and raked the leaves, and I paid him, because I didn’t want to rake the leaves. And I said, “You rake the leaves for me.” He took that money, and he raked the leaves for me.

Friend, you cannot give me money to win souls for you. No way can you hire me. As

a matter of fact, you don't even pay my salary. You say, "Now, wait a minute." No, you don't. You give your money to God. God pays me. Now I'm not trying to be arrogant about that, and I don't want to sound unappreciative, because I thank God for what God does through you and your faithfulness to Him that allows God to do it. But, you see, a preacher is not some sort of a hired gun who does the praying, the Bible study, and the soul winning for us, and we give our money, and therefore we excuse ourselves from our responsibility. It can't be done. You can't buy God off with money. Do you understand that? You have a certain responsibility. And the Bible says that they were doing this daily in the temple—that is, the public worship—and from house to house.

My heart almost jumps out of my throat as I stand in front of a congregation like this and I look at these people and I think, "Oh, my dear God, what would happen if these people became vital witnesses for Jesus Christ? What would happen in this city if people were to train themselves, to get filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and to have the courage to go out daily as a matter of lifestyle evangelism in sharing Jesus Christ?" I'm not talking about standing on a street corner and preaching, necessarily, unless that is your gift. I'm not talking about going door-to-door and soliciting neighborhoods, unless that's your calling. But I am talking about where you are in your daily activity, sharing Jesus Christ. And I pray God the Holy Spirit will lay that on my heart enough that I might lay it on your heart. So I want you to listen very carefully, because, you see, so many people when they come to church on Sunday morning are looking for the pastor to feed them. And he ought to, but they are looking for something to make them feel better, or they're looking for something to help them to live better, and they say, "You know, man, I really got something from that message; it really fed me; it stirred me. I'll be a better dad or a better mom. I'll be a better businessman. I'll know how to live more victoriously and all that." That's fine—good. I hope that I can do that kind of preaching, and I trust that I am doing that kind of preaching. But, my dear friend, if that is the bottom line, then it's about as selfish as you can get.

Let me illustrate what I'm talking about. I heard about a woman who took a course in first aid; and later on, when the class met again, they were having testimonials, and she said, "You know, I'm so glad that I took this course in first aid." She said, "Out in front of my house there was a horrible automobile accident. An old man driving a car evidently lost consciousness, went up the curbing, hit a huge oak tree, caved in the front of that car, and demolished that car. The man was thrown out on the street. His bones were fractured, he was in a state of shock, and his eyes were rolling around in pools of blood. He was pumping his life's blood out into the sand and onto the sidewalk." She said, "It was horrible, the most gruesome thing that I've ever seen. But," she said, "I was the first one on the scene, and I remembered my first aid." She said, "I remembered that if I would put my head between my knees, then I wouldn't faint." She said, "I'm so glad that

I took this course in first aid.”

Now, folks, that’s the kind of Christianity that a lot of folks have. That’s what they are looking for. They are living in a world that is broken, battered, bruised, bleeding, and blind. They are saying, “Give me something to make me feel better, Pastor, this morning. Give me something, and help me to live a little more victoriously. I don’t want to faint as I go through this wicked old world.” All right, that’s fine. I’m glad you won’t faint, because you’re not going to do much good in first aid if you’ve passed out. But there’s something more to it. We are to rescue the perishing and care for the dying. We are to lift up the fallen one and weep o’er the erring one. I wonder: Are you doing that? I hear so much today about spiritual gifts: “What is your gift?” “My gift is this.” “What is your gift?” Why do you think you have a spiritual gift? Those things, my friends, are not toys; they are tools. And *the Holy Spirit is not given for your enjoyment, but for your employment.*

Now the Bible says that we ought to obey God rather than men, and you said that you agreed with that. You nodded your head. You said, “Yes, we ought to obey God.” Well, I want to tell you, my dear friend, that if you are not witnessing, then you are not obeying God. So don’t just nod your head, because all that you will do is increase your own guilt, if you are not trying to share Jesus Christ. Now you might not do it the way that I do it. You may not be called to preach. But you are called to share. And a Christian who will not share is like a bus driver who won’t drive a bus. He is like a barber who won’t cut hair. He is a contradiction in terms. Now in your own way, in your own sphere, with your own giftedness, with your own ability, and with your own opportunity, every one of us is called of God, ordained of God, and will be equipped of God, if he will surrender to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it’s what I want to call “lifestyle evangelism.”

Now the Bible says, “*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not*”—I mean, they never stopped—“*to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*” You say, “That’s fanatical.” No, it’s not. That is ordinary, garden-variety Christianity—to share the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want to show you something. We’re going to skip ahead a few chapters, and then we’re going to come back to the chapters that we skipped; but I want to just show you something as an illustration of what I’m talking about. Let’s skip ahead to Acts chapters 8, 9, and 10, and we’re going to look at them very quickly and very hurriedly, and you’re going to have to listen in a hurry this morning. But I want to introduce you in these three chapters to three persons—three persons who were converted. Each of these chapters deals with the conversion of a significant person.

For example, in Acts chapter 8 and verse 27: “*And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians,*

*who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship.” (Acts 8:27) If you don’t mind underscoring your Bible, then just underscore that: “Behold, a man of Ethiopia.”*

All right now, I want you to turn to Acts chapter 9 and verse 1: *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord…” (Acts 9:1) If you don’t mind underlining your Bible, then just underline the phrase, “And Saul.”*

And then, turn to chapter 10 and verse 1: *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band.” (Acts 10:1) I want you to just underscore “Cornelius.”*

And what you have here are the stories of the conversion of these three men. In Acts chapter 8, you have the conversion of the Ethiopian. In Acts chapter 9, you have the conversion of Saul, who later became Paul the Apostle. In Acts chapter 10, you have the conversion of Cornelius. These three men were saved. And I want to show you something about their salvation, and then I want to make an application to you, and in your personal life, and to your lifestyle evangelism, as a result of obeying God and doing what God has commanded you to do—something that angels themselves cannot do.

## **I. All People Have the Same Heartaches**

Now, the very first thing I want you to notice is this—and I want you to get this down in your heart: All men have the same heartaches. Now, let me tell you why I said that. These three men who were saved were from widely different backgrounds. Now the man from Ethiopia—do you know where Ethiopia is? That is in northern Africa. He was an African. All right then, you go to Acts chapter 9 and you have the story of Saul. Do you know what Saul’s background was? Well, he was Jewish; he was from the Middle East, or Asia. And then the man in Acts chapter 10, his name is Cornelius. Where was he from? He was from Italy. He was an Italian. He was a European. I don’t believe that it was by accident, but in these three men you have the three great strands of people that came out of the ark. Noah had three sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth. The sons of Ham settled primarily in Africa, the sons of Shem settled primarily in the Middle East, and the sons of Japheth settled primarily in Europe. And so the Ethiopian was a son of Ham; Saul was a son of Shem—a Shemite or a Semite; and Cornelius was a son of Japheth—he was a European, a westerner.

Now they were from three geographical areas. They were from three ethnic backgrounds. And they were greatly different in appearance, in style, in taste, in culture, and in background. But I want to tell you something: In spite of this, all three had the same problem; they all had the same heartache. What was their problem? Well, their problem was this: While one was a son of Ham, while another was a son of Shem, and

while another was a son of Japheth, they were all sons of Adam. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, *“In Adam all die.”* (1 Corinthians 15:22)

I was preaching one time, and a lady came to me at the close of the service and she said, “Oh, you’re a Rogers, aren’t you?” I said, “Yes ma’am, I am.” She said, “So was I before I got married.” And she said, “I’m so proud of our Rogers ancestry.” She said, “I’ve done some study.” She said, “I’ve traced it back.” She said, “You will be pleased to know that the Rogers came over on the Mayflower.” I said, “That’s wonderful, madam, but I’ve done some research also, and I’ve traced it back further than that.” Oh, her eyes lit up, and she got out a pen and was ready to write. I said, “I want to tell you that I’ve traced it way back, and you will be surprised to know that we have descended from a crooked farmer and a drunken sailor.” The crooked farmer was Adam, and the drunken sailor was Noah, amen? That’s how far back we go.

And all of us—I don’t care what your background is; I care not, dear friend, your culture, and I care not your race; and I care not the geography from whence you come—I’ll tell you that down in your heart you’ve got a problem—and it’s sin. It is sin. And that sin brings heartache. Now outwardly, you may seem to prosper. But if you’ll take these people, as I’m going to show you, and just scratch them deeply enough, then you’re going to find out that all people have that same common heartache. Sin is a devastating, debilitating, damning, and death-dealing thing. And, friend, every person you see—listen—when you go out tomorrow, or this afternoon, and you see somebody walking down the street, you can say to yourself, “That man,”—I don’t care who he is, what his background is—“he’s got a problem; he’s got heartache, because down in his bosom he’s got a fatal disease called sin.” All people have it.

## **II. All People Have the Same Hunger**

Now, the second thing: Not only do all people have a common heartache, but all people have a common hunger. Now again, these people, not only were they different in their ethnicity, but they were also different in their background. For example, the Ethiopian, what was his job? He was a treasurer. The Bible says that he was a man of great authority. He had at his fingertips the wealth of a kingdom. I mean, Queen Candace had given him authority over all of her wealth. Can you imagine that much power being concentrated in one man? And yet if you will read this story in Acts chapter 8, then you will find out that he had been on a journey; this man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. Now, listen, folks. When you go from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, you’ve done something if you go by chariot, and that’s the way that he would have gone. He would have gone all the way there to worship, and he had come away still hungry. He still didn’t know the Lord. He had been to the most religious city on the face of that earth, and the wells of religion were dry. And he’s coming back. He’s in that chariot. He’s riding along. He has

a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, and he's studying that scroll, trying to understand it.

Now what I'm trying to tell you is this: In spite of all of his money; in spite of all of his prestige; in spite of the fact that he had reached the top of the ladder, he is still searching for God. There is a God-shaped vacuum in every man's heart, and money and power cannot fill it. They cannot fill it. Now you may know somebody who is very wealthy—I mean, they have everything a heart could wish for—and you might say, "That person really doesn't hunger for God. He doesn't act like he needs God." You scratch him deeply enough and you'll find out that not only does he have the same heartaches, but he also has the same hunger. He's hungry; he wants to know the Lord.

Sometimes we shy away from wealthy people, and we don't share Jesus with them. And there may be some wealthy person listening to me today, and I know, dear friend, that what you're craving for—your money, your silver, your gold, your minks, your Rolls Royce, your lavish home—cannot satisfy that deepest need of your heart.

I heard one time of a man who loved silver and loved gold so much that finally he wanted to decorate his bedroom. And he got wealthy, and he decorated his bedroom. He had his bedroom re-done. He loved gold so much that he just had a golden colored carpet put in, and he had some parchment-colored drapes put up. He painted the walls gold. He got a yellow bedspread. And he got himself some yellow pajamas. He just loved gold. And then he got sick: he came down with yellow jaundice. Well, they put him in bed up there, and the wife called the doctor, and the doctor came and stayed upstairs for a long time, then came back down. And his wife was a little concerned. She said, "Doctor, how is he?" The doctor said, "I don't know: I couldn't find him."

Now there are people who are just absolutely immersed in a world of materialism. But I want to tell you that they are hungry for God. And don't you be stampeded away from witnessing to that person.

Now, let me go on and talk to you. Here was a man who had what we would call monetary power. Now, the next man was Saul. Do you know what kind of power he had? Mental power. Now here was a man who was so brilliant—he was scintillatingly brilliant. Paul the Apostle would have the equivalency of a double Ph.D. today, if he lived. He studied at the feet of a man named Gamaliel. Paul was a lawyer, a doctor of the law; he was a member of the Sanhedrin, one of an elite few who had risen to the top in Israel. I mean, here was a man who if you had seen him, then you would have said, "That guy has it all together. I mean, he's got a brain, and he's got it all figured out." Now if you read that ninth chapter, and you read down there about three or four verses after the verses that I read to you, then you're going to find out that Saul was persecuting and prosecuting the Christians. He had authority. He was putting them in jail. And some of them were being killed for the name of Christ. Saul was behind it. And if you had seen him, then you would have said, "There's a guy that it won't do any good

to witness to. Number one: He hates Christianity. Number two: He's so smart that I could never get into an argument with him. I mean, boy, he could chew you up and spit you out. He knows everything about everything. And there's a guy who's so self-assured; he's so confident; he knows what he believes, and he's just got it all figured out."

But Jesus appeared to him. Jesus said to him, "It's hard for you, isn't it, Saul, to kick against the pricks?" (Acts 9:5) Actually, the word there means the "ox goad." An ox would pull a wagon, and a farmer would have a sharpened stick, and he'd just jab that ox, and the ox would kick back like that, because he had been jabbed. That's exactly what was happening to Saul. The Spirit of God was jabbing old Saul, and Saul, on the surface, looked so confident, so self-assured, like he had it all figured out; but on the inside, he was a raging volcano. And he knew that something was missing.

Now you would never have known it outwardly, but God knew it. All men have the same hunger—and I don't care whether it's monetary power or mental power. I'll tell you that the next man, Cornelius—as you read in Acts chapter 10—was a soldier. I mean, he had soldiers under him. He was a military man. He was hard-bitten guy. He had risen to the top. And he was a macho man; a big old squared-jawed fellow and a commander of men. You would say, "Boy, don't mess with him. That guy's not interested in the things of God." But you read the story, and you're going to find out that he was a guy who prayed to God always and gave his money. Why? I don't know why. Perhaps one night out on a lonely sentry duty when he was just a kid, just a young soldier, he looked up into the starry heavens and he said, "All of that didn't just happen. O God—whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you are—O God, I need to know you." And he was on a quest for God. And despite his might, his military power, his macho standing, and all of that, still you scratch him deeply enough, and there was a hunger for God.

You had better get that in your heart now, friend. When you go out tomorrow to live in lifestyle evangelism, and you see anybody coming down the street, I want you to know that people all have the same heartaches, and they all have the same hunger, because down in their hearts they need to know God, and the things of this world cannot satisfy. And they may not even know that it is God that they are searching for, but they need to know Him.

### **III. All People Have the Same Hope**

Now, the third thing I want to say, dear friend, is this—thank God for this: They all have the same hope—and His name is Jesus. Jesus will save anybody. That's the wonderful thing about the gospel. That's the reason that God put these three chapters together—chapters 8, 9, and 10: to show you that the hope of Africa is Jesus, to show you that the hope of Asia is Jesus, to show you that the hope of Europe is Jesus, and to show you

that the hope of the world is Jesus. We are to go into all the world. *It doesn't matter what race a man is, and it doesn't matter what occupation a man has: if he is going to be saved, friend, then he's going to be saved by Jesus, or he's not going to be saved at all.*

Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 8, and let's find out who it was that saved this Ethiopian. Look in verse 35: *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."* (Acts 8:35) He was saved by Jesus. Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 9. Who was it that saved Saul? Look in verse 5: *"And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus."* (Acts 9:5) It was Jesus that saved Saul. Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 10 and verse 38. Here's Peter's message to Cornelius. *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power."* (Acts 10:38) All of these men were saved by Jesus.

Now friend, listen. The hope of the world is Jesus. All men have a common hope, this same hope; there is no other way apart from Jesus. I've said before from this pulpit that *Jesus is not the best way to heaven; friend, He is the only way.* And the apostles had already said in Acts 4, verse 12, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

Now, listen. You don't have to be saved in a Baptist church. You can be saved in a Methodist church, a Presbyterian church, or any other kind of church that preaches Jesus. You don't have to be saved in a church at all. You can be saved in an automobile or in a submarine. You don't have to be saved according to a certain formula. But if you're saved, then you're going to be saved by faith in Jesus—no other way.

It's interesting here how these folks got saved. For example, the Ethiopian, he was riding along in a chariot, and Philip comes up and says to him, "Do you understand what you're reading?" He says, "No, I don't understand." "Well," he says, "how can I except somebody teach me?" And so the Bible says that Philip got up there along with him in that chariot, and they were riding along, and Philip says, "This refers to Jesus." And the Ethiopian says, "Well, here's water. What's going to keep me from being baptized?" Philip says, "Well, if you believe with all your heart, then you can." He says, "Well, I believe," and he baptized him. I mean, man, it just seems so ordinary, just so quiet. It's just like, "Yeah, I believe; I want to be baptized," and he's baptized.

You know, there are some folks who say that someone is not saved, because he didn't have that kind of an experience where he shouted, cried, and danced around, and all that. You know, there are some people who think that you're not saved unless you go through some emotional experience like that. A man said, "Bless God, I know I'm saved. When I got saved I was in the cornfield. I tore up half an acre of corn, I got so happy."

Wonderful—but he’s no more saved than a little girl who may come this morning and give her heart to Jesus—no more saved.

But then you think about old Saul. Saul is riding along there on his horse to persecute those Christians, and there’s a blinding light and a voice, and Saul is knocked off of his horse and all of that. Boy, what a cataclysmic experience! I want to ask you a question: Who was the most saved? Saul or the Ethiopian? You see, the incidentals vary, but they were both saved by Jesus. One was a *Quaker*; the other was an *earthquaker*. It doesn’t make any difference. They were all saved by Jesus. He is the common denominator. The hope of the world is Jesus. And, dear friend, we have that hope.

#### **IV. All People Need the Same Help**

Now, listen. All men have the same heartaches. All men have the same hunger. All men have the same hope. And here’s the bottom line—please listen to your pastor this morning: All people need the same help. They need somebody to tell them about Jesus. And in all three of these instances, every time there was human instrumentality. Even though God sometimes worked miracles, even though God arranged circumstances, and even though God gave visions, still God used human beings.

Who was it that brought the gospel to that Ethiopian? It was Philip. You read the story. We’ll preach on it later on, but Philip is down there in a revival meeting, down there in Samaria, and God gets Philip and brings him out here in the desert to speak to that opportunity on wheels; and that man got saved down there in the desert because a man came and shared Jesus Christ. An angel couldn’t do that. God had to have a man. They all need the same help. *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”* (Acts 8:35) Do you know what character quality that is? That’s availability. “I’m doing something else, Lord; but if you want me over here, then I’m available.” That’s a wonderful character trait.

Now, what about Saul? Now here is Saul, and even when the Lord knocks Saul off of his horse, it’s not complete until a soul winner comes. His name was Ananias. And the Lord said to Ananias, “You’re going to find Saul down there on a street called Straight, and I want you to go down there and preach to him.” “Who, me, Lord?” “Yes.” “Who’s going with me?” “Nobody.. “Is that the guy that’s been killing all the Christians?” “Right.” Every word that Ananias said came from his heart, because his heart was in his throat. He said, “All right, Lord, I’ll go.” And he goes. Hey, by the way, what character trait is that? Expendability. “No matter what it costs, I’ll go.”

And then the next person who got saved was Cornelius. And who was the soul winner? Peter. And do you remember that Peter didn’t want to go, because Peter was Jewish and Ananias was a Gentile, and the Lord had to get rid of Peter’s rotten

prejudice before he would go? Do you know what character trait that is? That, my dear friend, is adaptability.

But God took these people with availability, expendability, adaptability, and God used them. Listen. Everybody needs the same help. How can they hear without a preacher? Do you think it's all going to be done by getting everybody in an auditorium and letting Brother Rogers preach to them? It's not going to be done. Oh, my friend, it is so simple and yet so necessary that God wants you in your lifestyle to be available, to be expendable, and to be adaptable; to say, "Here I am, Lord: send me." I wonder if you would let him do that.

## Conclusion

People are hungry. Tom Clayton, former Minister of Family Enrichment here, told me a story that takes place down in Merritt Island. He was going to Columbia, South Carolina, and decided that he would ride the train. So he said, "I got on the train, Pastor, and I was riding along, praying for somebody to witness to." And he said, "A woman came and sat down beside me. Now I have nothing against makeup, but this woman had overdone it. It looked like she had put it on with a trowel, and she was heavily made up and kind of a hard; you know the type: kind of a hard-looking woman." And he said that he began to witness to her and found out that she was a hostess in a nightclub.

Well, he began to share the gospel of Christ, and she was very resilient, very brittle, and very hardened against the gospel. But after a while, that shell began to crumble, and down in her heart was a hunger to know Jesus Christ. But she didn't want to admit it, and so she tried to get out of the situation. She said, "Well, I'm going to the diner to get something to eat." He said, "I'll go with you." And so they got up, and he went with her to the diner, sat down, and continued with an open Bible to tell her about Jesus. After a while, the Spirit of God broke through that façade, and she began to weep, wanting to know Jesus. The mascara started to flow, and he said, "Would you like to be saved?" She said, "Yes, I would." So he said, "Are you willing to pray and to ask Christ into your heart?" She said, "Yes, I am." And so he began to lead her in the sinner's prayer.

Well, she was weeping, and here was a man with an open Bible. In the diner and in the train there were people, and they were very close, and they were sitting very close to them in those places. And there were people at the next table, and they were doing exactly what you would have been doing: they were eavesdropping. So they listened, and after a while, this woman prayed, she received Christ, and God lifted the burden. The sun began to shine on her face, the sunshine of God's love, and she got interested in the future, and she began to ask Tom, "Now, what?"

I had been preaching a series of sermons on the Second Coming of Christ, the end

of the world, and what God is doing in the Middle East. And Tom was full of Bible prophecy, and he began to talk to her about what is going to happen, how Christ is coming, and all of this; and he was dealing in the Old Testament and kept using the word *Israel, Israel, Israel, Israel*. Well, this man that was listening and the two women, they were Jewish. After a while, that man got so interested that he just broke into the conversation and he said, “How do you know all of this?” “Well,” he said, “I’ve been reading my Old Testament. Come here and let me show you.” And he opened his Bible, just like Philip did to that Ethiopian, and he began out of the Old Testament to present Jesus Christ. That Jewish man got very interested. Now Tom said, “Listen, sir. This woman has just received Christ into her heart as her Lord and Messiah. The Messiah has already come. Would you like to receive Him as your Lord and Messiah?” Do you know what he said? He said, “I would.” The two women who were with him said, “And we would, too.” He said, “All right.” He said, “If you are willing to pray and ask Christ to come into your heart, as this woman did, and to ask Christ to be your Lord and Messiah, then I want you to bow your head and begin to pray this prayer after me.”

At about that time, a man sitting at another table, who was doing exactly what you would have been doing, was eavesdropping. He said, “Wait a minute. Hold it.” He said, “I’ve never prayed that prayer. Neither has my daughter. Would it be all right if my daughter and I also prayed and asked Christ into our hearts?” And here was a revival meeting at about eighty miles an hour going down the track. Now, listen. Who would have known that those people had a hunger to know Jesus? The Holy Spirit knew it. Thank God that He had a man available. Thank God that He had a man expendable. Thank God that He had a man adaptable, who said, “I’ll share Jesus.”

It may not be that dramatic with you, but there is somebody that needs you desperately. All men have the same heartaches. All men have the same hungers. All men have the same hope. And all men need the same help. They need somebody to tell them about Jesus—and that somebody is you.

# We Ought to Obey God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 13, 1994**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–29**

*“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said,  
We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

ACTS 5:29

## Outline

Introduction

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## Introduction

Well, we're building a bridge, and this bridge is supported by three pillars. By the way, this bridge is on the one side where we are, and is anchored on the other side as to where we need to be—what we call a bridge to the future. And there are three pillars here that hold up this bridge. One is vision, that tells of God's plan, what God wants us to do. And it's our responsibility to so get alone with God that we can hear God and have a vision, and dream a dream—not a daydream, not autosuggestion, but to hear from God. For where there is no vision, the people perish. But once we've caught the vision—that's the plan—then we need the power. And the power is faith—to believe God. Because when we believe God, God comes in with His mighty power. And God energizes us to do what we need to do. And a vision without faith is not really a vision at all. But there can be no faith until we've had the vision, because faith is a response to God. Faith is getting a word from God and believing it.

But now, wait a moment. Yes, there must be a vision. Yes, there must be faith. There must be a plan, and there must be power. But here is where the rubber meets the road. There must be performance—plan, power, and performance. There must be obedience. You see, without obedience, vision and faith are empty words. Now, there should be, and can be, no real obedience, until we hear from God. And, we cannot obey without faith. But oh, if we would learn today the expedience of obedience!

Be finding in God's Word Acts chapter five, and in a moment we're going to begin reading in verse twenty-seven. But in Acts chapter five, we're going to find this word: we ought to obey God. That's the title of the message: We Ought to Obey God. Now, we have sung it: Trust and obey; for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. As a matter of fact, if you don't obey, you're really not trusting. Our English word believe comes from the old English, by live. What we really believe we live by. The rest is just religious talk. Trust and obey; for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. This church is no greater than the faith and obedience of its people. In your family, in your personal life, your personal life is no greater than your trust and your obedience. And I'm praying God the Holy Spirit will etch this message on the tablets of your heart, and cause the truth of it to reverberate and echo through your soul, until you learn that God did not just simply bring you here to sit in church on Sunday morning and hear precepts, but to translate those precepts into practices, and to believe God, and to show that you believe God, by obeying God.

You must see God and hear God—that's the vision. You must believe God—that's the faith. You must obey God—that is the performance, and the proof that you have both seen and believe God. We sang a mighty song this morning, Brother Jim: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." That was written by Martin Luther, the leader of the greater Protestant Reformation. And the theme of Martin Luther was this: that the just shall live by faith. We're not saved by works of any kind, but by the sheer grace of God—and hallelujah for that. But then, Martin Luther said this: "We're not saved by faith and works. We're saved by faith that works." I like that. We're not saved by faith and works; but we're saved by faith that works. And James said, "You say that you have faith, but you don't have works." He said, "That kind of faith is dead." That kind of faith is not real faith. Oh, if we can learn that men ought to obey God.

Now, before I read the Scripture, and we're going to start reading in about verse twenty-seven, but let me tell you what happened. There was a revival in Jerusalem. I mean that Jesus had gone up, the Holy Spirit came down, the apostles went out, and the lost were coming in. And I mean God was moving in Jerusalem in a mighty wonderful, wonderful way. Miracles were happening, and the apostles were there in the temple, and they were preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. And the Sadducees came and put them in jail and locked them up. But they were miraculously delivered from the

jail, and they went right back into the temple, and began to continue to do the same thing that got them into trouble to begin with. They went right back to the scene of the crime and perpetrated the crime one more time. Of course, the crime was no crime at all. It was preaching Jesus Christ. Well, the next morning the religious high muckety-mucks decided they would put them on trial. They said, “Go get them out of prison.” They said, “They’re already out. The doors are locked, and the guards are there, but they’re out. Somehow, we don’t know how, they’re out.” And so, they were very incensed, all of these people, that these country bumpkins, the fishermen, these men from Galilee, were there in the temple court preaching and teaching Jesus Christ, and great crowds were following them. And so, they got the leaders, the civil and religious leaders. They called a council. They went and brought these apostles, and now, we’re going to break in, in about verse twenty-seven:

And when they had brought them, they sat them before the council, and the high priest asked them saying, “Did we not strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” What a blessing! I wonder if we fill Memphis with ours. Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend this man’s blood upon us. They were talking about Jesus crucifixion. Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said—and here’s our text; look at it—We ought to obey God, rather than men. Do you agree with that? Say amen. We ought to obey God rather than men. And that’s the text for our message this morning. We ought to obey God. And, today, I will be happy, and I believe God will be pleased, if I can show you the reasons for obedience. And, if I can from the Scripture show you the requirements for obedience, and if God the Holy Spirit will enable me to share with you the results of obedience, and then you will say in your heart, I want to see God, and I want to believe God, and I want to obey God, and I want to get from where I am to where I need to be, I want those things to become a bridge to God’s future for my life. The railroad of redemption runs on two rails: Trust and Obey. It’s the old T and O. Trust and obey; for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

## **I. The Reasons for Obedience**

Now, let me give you three reasons why you ought to obey.

### **A. Obedience Is a Duty to Be Performed**

First of all, obedience is a duty. It is a duty that we ought to perform. You see, men ought to obey God. Why? Because God is God. He is the Sovereign. He is the Creator. He is the Lord, the King of Kings. And to refuse to obey is high treason against heaven’s king. To refuse to obey is a clinched fist in the face of God. Because God is God. And God is God. And because He is God, because He is sovereign God, there can be no refusal and no rebuttal. He is God. Jeremiah chapter eleven and verse three says,

“Cursed be the man that obeyeth not.” Now, when you got saved, you got in the King’s army, and we have a Commander-in-Chief. And if any of you men have been in the Army, or the Marines, when that sergeant comes in the barracks in the morning, he doesn’t say, “Now, please get out of bed.” You say, “Well, I don’t think I want to get up this morning, sergeant.” He says, “Well, okay. I’ll be back in about an hour, and, by the way, what would you like for breakfast?” You bunch of buzzards, wake up. Get up. This is not a request. It is a command. God is God, and it is His sovereign prerogative and right to command.

Now, listen. There’s only one alternative to obedience. What is it? Who knows? Disobedience. Now, don’t get the idea that you’re not going to obey, but you’re not going to disobey either. There’s only one alternative to obedience, and it is disobedience. Now, think with me. What obedience is, is merely choosing to believe and obey God. Now, every one of us is free to choose. No one can force you to obey. You’re free to choose, everyone. You’re not free not to choose. You will choose. You will either choose to obey or disobey. But, you see, you’re free to choose, but you’re not free not to choose. You will choose, right? Am I right so far? Sure, you will choose. Now, you are free to choose. You’re not free not to choose. Now, listen very carefully. You’re not free to choose the consequences of your choice. You’re free to choose. You’re not free not to choose. And you’re not free to choose the consequences of your choice. I mean, you’re free to jump out of a window or not jump out of a window. But once you jump out the window, the consequences take over. You see, you’re not able to choose the consequences of your choice.

Now, God told a man in the Old Testament to do something. His name was Saul. He was the king of Israel, a handsome man and a strong man. In many ways a good man, but he chose to substitute his will for God’s will, and he gave a silly excuse for it. And Samuel the prophet came to him. And, I want you to put this verse down in your margin—1 Samuel chapter fifteen and verse twenty-three. Here’s what Samuel the prophet said to a man who chose not to obey. Listen to it: For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king. No one can have God’s authority in his life if he’s a rebel. That’s what that verse means. Now, God says that this disobedience is three things. First of all, it’s witchcraft. You say, how could disobedience be witchcraft? Well, when you disobey, you put yourself in the devil’s territory. You open up to the devil. The Bible says, in Romans chapter six, whenever you yield yourself to someone, you become his servant. So, if you refuse to obey God, ipso facto, as night follows day, you are obeying Satan. And, when you obey, you are practicing witchcraft.

Now, there are a lot of nice people here today. You say, “Well, I may not be doing the will of God, but I never thought of myself as practicing witchcraft.” Yes, you are

practicing witchcraft, by disobedience. And not only does He say in that verse that it is witchcraft, but He also says that it is iniquity—iniquity. You see, to fail to obey a command of God is a terrible thing. The attitude of your heart is worse than the failure of the deed. When our little boy Steve was just a little fellow—that’s my firstborn son—he’d just gotten old enough to kind of toddle around and play in the room. And you know how maybe three or four years of age where you can begin to direct them, and they’re beginning to test your will, and you’re beginning to try to break their will without breaking their spirit. And there was a piece of paper on the floor, and Steve had dropped it there. And I said, “Steve, son, pick up the paper, and throw it in the trash can.” He said, “Nope.” I couldn’t believe it. He said, “No.” Well, I said, “Now, look, son, pick up that paper, and put it in the trash can. Daddy wants you to do that.” “No.” I mean, I’m so big; he’s so little. And, oh, it’s not a hard thing to do. And, do you know, the varmint had absolutely defied me. And after about the third time, I had to do something. I mean, it was a show of will. And, I had to apply the board of education to the seat of knowledge. Now, ladies, I didn’t use a board on him. That’s only a little turn of phrase, but I had to spank him. And Joyce came in, and she said, “Adrian, that was kind of a small thing to spank him for; I mean, why would you spank him for not picking up a piece of paper?” “ Oh,” I said, “Joyce, I didn’t spank him for not picking up a piece of paper. I spanked him for defying his father.” Right? You see, God may be telling you to do something. You say, “Well, that’s just a small thing. God, I don’t have to do that.”

No, friend, God says that disobedience, rebellion, is like witchcraft. It’s like iniquity. And then, He goes on to say it is idolatry. That’s what He said in this verse—1 Samuel fifteen, verse twenty-three. He says it is witchcraft. He said it is iniquity. It is idolatry. You say disobedience, yes. Why could it be idolatry? Well, what is an idol? An idol is anything you fear more, love more, serve more, or value more than God, right? So, it may be that your self-will is your idol. Maybe it’s the word of somebody else. Whatever it is, when you fail to obey God, don’t just think that disobedience is a small thing. It is sheer rebellion against God, and it puts you in the category of witchcraft. It puts you in the category of iniquity. It puts you in the category of idolatry.

### **B. Obedience Is a Debt to Be Paid**

You see, obedience is a demand to be performed. It is a debt to be paid. Look again, if you will, in this verse. He says here that we ought to obey God. Now, I’m talking about Acts chapter five and verse twenty-nine. We ought to obey God. Do you know where the word ought comes from? It comes from the word owe. We owe God something, and therefore we ought. Not only is God sovereign; He’s Savior. And, Peter goes on to talk about this God. Look in verse thirty: The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree; Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin. Has Jesus done that for you?

Then, can you refuse Him? You're not your own. You are bought with a price. And because you are bought, you ought. Because you're bought, you ought. You are not your own. You ought to obey God. We sing it, "But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt I owe. Here, Lord, I give myself away. 'Tis all that I can do."

### **C. Obedience Is a Delight to Be Enjoyed**

When you see He is both sovereign and Savior, you understand it is a demand to be performed, it is a debt to be paid, and it is a delight to be enjoyed. Don't get the idea, now, that God is some sort of a tyrant up there making cruel rules to make you squirm like a worm in hot ashes, trying to keep them. The Bible says His commands are not grievous. Every time God commands something, it is for your welfare and for your good. And when you see then, service, obedience, is not drudgery, it is a delight. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments"—John fourteen, verse fifteen—"If you love me, keep my commandments. You know, a slave obeys because he has to. An employee obeys because he needs to. A son, a loving son, obeys because he wants to. Isn't that right? What's the highest motive? Well, He's sovereign. We have to. He's Lord. We need to. But, oh, He is our loving Father—we want to. We want to. Men ought to obey God. Now, those are the reasons for obedience. It is a debt. It is a duty. It is a delight.

## **II. The Requirements for Obedience**

Now, let's talk a little bit about how we are to obey God. I mean, what are the requirements for true obedience? Well, they're right here in this passage of Scripture.

### **A. It Must Be Wise Obedience**

Number one, real obedience has to be wise obedience. You see, you have to hear from God. You have to know what God wants you to do, before you can obey. That's the reason you must listen to God. Now, these apostles said, "We ought to obey God." Well, what had God told them to do? Go back to chapter four, and look, if you will, in verse eighteen: and they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than to God, judge ye. But we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. It's quite obvious. They had had an encounter. They had seen and heard certain things. They had a vision, and then, they said, we can't be quiet. You might as well have told the sun not to shine as to tell these apostles not to speak. Because, why? They had heard God. Look in chapter five and verse seventeen, if you will: Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, which is a sect of the Sadducees, and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But an angel of the Lord by

night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, go stand and speak in the temple and to the people all the words of this life. You see, they were men under orders. They had a vision. They had seen things. They had heard things. God had spoken to them. And so, for some mortal to tell them not to speak or not to preach, they said, hey, who are we going to obey? Are we going to obey you, or are we going to obey God? It is better to obey God than it is man.

Now, that brings up a point. In order for you to obey God, you must hear from God. You must be listening to God. It must be wise obedience. Many Christians are doing things, calling it the will of God, and it's not the will of God at all. They're not obeying, because they are doing things for God that God never commanded them to do. It must be wise obedience. Do you have that? It must be wise obedience.

### **B. It Must Be Watchful Obedience**

Now, number two. In order for it to be wise obedience, it has to be watchful obedience. You see. You have to report for orders every morning. How can you know the will of God, if you're not listening? Have you ever noticed that when there's work to be done that some people make themselves scarce? Now, they say, well, I didn't refuse to do it. No, they didn't refuse to do it. Why did they not refuse to do it? They just got out of the earshot of any command to do it. And so, if they see there's work to be done, they don't say, "No, I won't do it." They just move over here where they can't have anybody tell them to do it. Now, you have to be listening for God. God, today, will hold you responsible for what you hear. And God will also hold you responsible for what you would have heard, if you had listened. Did you hear that part? You see a lot of times we think, well, God didn't tell me to do anything. Well, that doesn't excuse you. Here's a wonderful verse that blessed my heart this week, as I prepared for this message. Proverbs eight. Boy, write it down. This is a great one. Proverbs eight, verses thirty-two through thirty-four: Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children. For blessed are they that keep my ways. That is, you listen and obey. And then, listen to verse thirty-three: Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors. Is that not a great verse? Do you watch daily? I mean, are you listening? Do you wake up, and report for duty? Now, you're not excused for not doing the will of God, just because you've not heard the will of God. It is not that God is not speaking; it is, friend, that you may not be listening. So, ignorance of God's will is not an excuse.

So, how do you obey? Well, it must be wise obedience. You must hear the command of God. But for it to be wise obedience, it has to be watchful obedience. You have to report for duty. That's the reason in the mornings when I wake up, I try to say, "Lord, speak. Lord, I want to know. I'm here today, Lord, to do your will. What is it you want me to do? Lord Jesus, you are alive in me today. What is it that you want to

perform through my life?” Listen to the verse again: Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the post of my doors. That is, you come and open the door of the morning, and you say, “Lord, what are your commands today? What do you have for me to do today?”

### **C. It Must Be Willing Obedience**

It must be wise obedience. It must be watchful obedience. It must be willing obedience—willing obedience. You are to obey Him, not grudgingly, but gladly and quickly. While they were forbidding the apostles to preach, Peter was preaching. In the face of danger, it could cost him. Ours is not to reason why. Ours is not to make reply. Ours is but to do or die. Are you willing to do the will of God, whatever it is? By the way, if you're not willing to do God's will, whatever it is, you probably won't know it. You say, “Lord, show me what it is you want me to do, and then I'll make up my mind.” You say, “My mind is made up. I'm a piece of blank paper. Write on it what you will.” And when you are willing to hear God, then God will speak. When you come to Him unconditionally, no refusal, no rebuttal, you come to Him, and you say, “Here I am, Lord; I'm reporting for duty,” then you are a piece of white paper upon which God can write. And, when God writes on there, and God puts a period at the end of the sentence, don't you put a question mark. You just hear God, and listen to God. You are to obey Him with willing obedience, and listen—selective obedience is not obedience at all.

Joyce and I have a favorite cartoon that we saw a long time ago in a magazine, and it often comes up around our house. A man was showing off his dog, how obedient his dog was. His dog had been to obedience school. And so, he said to the dog, he said “Beg,” and the dog just looked at him. He said, “I said beg, Fido,” and the dog didn't. He said, “Well, all right, Fido, roll over.” Fido just looked at him. He said, “Roll over.” Fido didn't do a thing. He said, “Fido, play dead.” Fido just sat there, dumb dog. The man was so mad. He said, “Fido,” and the dog just kind of put his tail between his legs and slinked off under the house. He said, “All right.” He said, “If you don't want to beg, and if you don't want to roll over, and if you don't want to play dead, go under the house.” Selective obedience is not obedience at all. I mean, when we just choose what we want to do, we can't call it obedience. It might cost us.

I was reading about John Bunyan. John Bunyan was a seventeenth-century preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's hand was on him. He was a mighty intellect. But the church in England said to Bunyan, “Now, Bunyan, you can't preach without a license, and it is the state that will license preachers.” Bunyan said, “Oh no, if I let you license me, then that is some sort of an agreement that I would have with some sort of power that is not God's power. And, I'm not going to let you license me. I'm not going to put myself under the state.” They said, “Well, you can preach the same thing, but just let us license you.” He said, “No, I'll not do it.” He said, “God is sovereign, and

God has called me to preach, and I will preach. But I will not sign that document.” They said, “If you preach, we’ll put you in jail.” He said, “I’ll preach.” And he preached, and they put him in jail. And they put John Bunyan in a dirty, filthy jail, not even a bed to sleep on. He had to sleep on the cold ground in the innermost dungeon. He had a little girl that had epilepsy. They had no one to take care of them. He had a wife who was sickly. He had few visitors who would come. And, do you know what they did to Bunyan? They said, “Listen. All you have to do is just sign this piece of paper.” And they put the paper right outside of his cell door with a pen or pencil or a writing instrument, and said, “Just reach out and sign it; and the minute you sign it, you’ll walk out of this prison.”

His friends, his peers, were preaching. His church, however, had been nailed up. They were doing well. His wife was sick. His child had epilepsy. He was cold and miserable and filthy in that prison. But, you know, when he was in there, you know what he did? He wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress*, one of the greatest pieces of literature in the English language, something that has blessed and transformed the lives of so many. And do you know why we have *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and do you know why this man is not forgotten when all those other preachers in England were forgotten, and do you know why Adrian is standing up here today talking about John Bunyan? I’ll tell you why. He believed this text: We ought to obey God rather than men.

And, how is our obedience? It is to be wise obedience. We are to hear from God. It is to be watchful obedience. We’re to listen to God, in order to hear from God. And, it is to be willing obedience. These apostles knew that they were in danger—physical danger. I mean, they were not glib; they were not smart alecks, when they said, we ought to obey God rather than men. They had just seen a glimpse of God, and they’d seen how great God is, and they’d seen what Jesus Christ had done, that He’d literally been crucified, buried, and then raised again. Once they knew that Jesus had come out of that grave, their fear of death had disappeared. Did you know when a man is no longer afraid to die, for the first time he’s ready to live? These people have just simply said, “Hey, we’re going to obey God rather than man.”

### **III. The Rewards of Obedience**

Now, I’ve talked to you about the reasons for obedience. I’ve talked to you about the requirements for obedience. But, let me talk to you about the rewards of it. What happened to these people when they obeyed?

#### **A. Supernatural Power in the Life**

First of all, there was supernatural power in their life. Look, if you will, in verse twenty-nine: Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, we ought to be obey God, rather than man. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on

a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Savior, and to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Now, look in verse thirty-two: We are witnesses of these things. That's exactly what they were commanded to do, right? To witness. We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to them that obey him. Is that underscored in your Bible? The Holy Spirit that God hath given to them that obey him. When you begin to obey God, then choir, then orchestra, then Margaret, there's supernatural power in the life. God does not give the Holy Spirit to rebels. He doesn't do that. Why is it that some people have power with God, and other people don't have power with God? It is the matter of obedience. Do you want the power of the Holy Spirit of God in your life to raise your children to serve for God to lead your family to be the man, the woman, the child, the student, the athlete that you ought to be. Then begin to obey.

I have used this illustration many times. Have you ever tried to teach a child to drive? What's the first thing you show them before you show them the ignition switch, or the accelerator? Who knows? The brake. Now, suppose you say, "Hey, Dad, I'm not interested in that brake thing. Show me how to make this thing go. How fast do you think it will go?" You say, "Well, son, I just don't believe I'm going to take the keys out of the pocket. I mean, if you're not interested in the brakes, I'm not interested in the accelerator." Right? "I'm not going to show you how to make it go, if you're not interested in how to make it stop." And, precious friend, if you don't know the restraint of the Spirit, you'll never know the release of the Spirit.

God does not give His power, God does not give His strength, His Holy Spirit, to those who are rebels. And so, there will be supernatural power in the life.

### **B. Supernatural Joy in the Heart**

There'll be supernatural joy in the heart. Look in chapter five and verse forty-one. We're going to fast-forward just a little bit there. But look, if you will, in verse forty-one: And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Have you ever said, "Thank God I'm in trouble"? They did. Somebody has said, "If most of us were arrested for being a Christian, there wouldn't be enough evidence to convict us." Thank God these people rejoiced that the evidence was there, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Supernatural power in the life; supernatural joy in the heart. Is Jesus Christ real to you? I mean, how many really happy Christians do you know? A lot of Christians I know look like their picture on their driver's license. Why is not Jesus Christ real? Well, Jesus said—listen: he that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I'll manifest myself to him. When you begin to obey, God becomes real to you, and joy shows up in the heart. A disobedient child or a disobedient Christian is never a happy child or a happy

Christian.

### **C. Supernatural Victory in the Church**

When you begin to obey, there is supernatural power in the life, there's supernatural joy in the heart, and there's supernatural victory in the church. Look, if you will, in verse forty-two: And daily, in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Chapter six and verse one: And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied. You know what I do sometimes? I stand up here on Sunday morning. I look at this congregation, and I think, O God, what would happen—I mean, really, what would happen—if all of those of you up there in the balcony and those of you down here would say, I'm going to obey God? What do you think would happen at Bellevue? What do you think would happen in your family? What do you think would happen in your life, if you get a vision, you watch daily at His gates to hear what He wants you to do? You believe God. Without faith it's impossible to please Him. And then, you trust and obey, and you begin to do what He tells you to do—when our people begin to obey God in the matter of giving, and in the matter of forgiving, in the matter of witnessing, in the matter of waiting, when we're faithful in our attendance, faithful in our prayer life, when we obey God. Now, you don't have to. God gives you a choice, but you're not free not to choose. Jesus said, he that is not with me is against me. Are you going to choose for Him or against Him? And, you're not free to choose the consequences of your choice. But, if you choose to obey, I'll tell you, God will release His power in you. God will fill you with joy, and there will be victory in the church. There'll be supernatural power in your life, supernatural joy in your heart, and supernatural victory in the church.

### **Conclusion**

Now, folks I've preached as well as I know how. Next Sunday is Love Offering Sunday. And we, two years ago, presented to this church a plan. We called it the Master's Plan. Then we talked about our hands for the Master's Plan. This building we built out here is just only a part of that. We've got to get from here over to here. God has put us here to reach a city and a world for Jesus Christ. We want to see hearts and lives transformed, families transfigured, Jesus exalted. We're going to come next Sunday, and, oh, when we come next Sunday, I pray God we'll come with a vision of what God wants us to do, with faith to believe God that we can do what God wants us to do, and with obedience to do it. We'll do it as a church, because we'll do it as individuals. And this church is no greater than the sum total of the people listening to me. The church is not a lot of folks—it's individuals, all of us together. Trust and obey; for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. And the life of obedience begins when you obey the gospel.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed, no one moving. Don't stir. Don't get up. Don't leave. This is the climax of the service, not an afterthought. Begin to pray for those who may not know the Lord Jesus that may be around you. How many of you today would say, "Pastor Rogers, if I died today, I am absolutely certain, if I died today, I would go to heaven—not because of anything that I've done, other than I put my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for me; I have repented of my sin, and trusted Him, and His Spirit bears witness with mine that I'm a child of God, and, therefore, I know, by the Word of God, and the witness of the Spirit, that, if I died right now, thank God, I'd go straight to heaven?" May I see you hand? All right, thank you.

Now, if you couldn't lift your hand, right now, let me help you to get it settled, right now. I know you're interested in God, or you wouldn't be here. So, why don't you pray a prayer like this? Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised you from the dead. And now, I receive what you did for me, by faith. I trust you. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus. Pray that from your heart. Save me, Lord Jesus. And then, pray this: Lord, help me not to be ashamed of you. Help me now to make it public. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Expedience of Obedience

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: February 11, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–32**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Reasons for Obedience
- II. The Requirements for Obedience
- III. The Rewards for Obedience

Conclusion

## Introduction

Thank you, Brother Harold, and be finding in God's Word Acts chapter 5, and, when you've found it, look up here, and let me ask you a question. How many really happy and victorious Christians do you know? Now, we have sung, "Victory in Jesus," but, in reality, how many happy and victorious Christians do you know?

Second question: When you look in the mirror, do you see one of them? Are you really a happy and a victorious Christian? Now, don't give me the answer that would sound good, because I don't want you to answer out loud; I want you to answer internally but truthfully. Are you happy? Are you victorious? Well, it all depends. I love the song that says, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus—what?—but to trust and obey." And that's what I want to talk to you about today, is obedience.

I wonder if God has been speaking to you about something that He wants you to do, and you've not yet done it. For example, has God been telling you that there is a confession of sin that you need to make, some sin that you need to confess, and you haven't confessed it? Has God been telling you there's some restitution that you need to perform, someone that you need to go to and make amends with, and you've not yet done it? Has God been telling you there's some gift that you ought to give, and you've not yet given it? It may be even to a loved one. Dead noses smell no roses. If you're going to do it, you ought to do it. Is there a testimony, a witness, that you ought to give? Has God laid some soul upon your heart, and you know that you're God's appointed messenger to go speak to that person, and you've not yet done it? And then, you might wonder, why do I not have joy in my life? Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Now, let me give you the background for the passage of Scripture we're going to

read in just a moment. We're going to read verse 29 in just a moment. But the apostles had been witnessing. God had been moving. Jesus ascended. He gave the Great Commission. Jesus went up. The Holy Spirit came down. The apostles went out. The lost came in. They turned that world upside down and inside out for the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the whole shooting match, were upset at what they were doing.

And the high priest took these apostles, and put them in jail for preaching the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But an angel came that night and set them free. It's sort of a sanctified jailbreak. And the apostles had been commanded not to preach, not to teach, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there they are the next morning, out there in the same place, preaching and teaching Jesus. They'd been put in jail for that.

Well, they come to the high priest, and say, "I thought you put those guys in jail, and here they are out there on the street, preaching and teaching Jesus Christ." And so, they called them back again one more time. And now, we get to our text. Let's start in verse 27. "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straightly command you that you should not teach in this name? And, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Now, this man they were referring to is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." Now, if you don't mind marking your Bible, I'd like for you to mark that sentence: "We ought to obey God rather than men." I've marked it in this Bible that I'm preaching from this morning: "We ought to obey God rather than men." And then, skip down to verse 32, and here's what else they said: "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Now, twice in this paragraph he's mentioning obedience, and that's what I want to talk to you about today, is obedience, the expedience of obedience. The Christian railroad runs on two tracks, Trust and Obey. The old T and O is the railroad of redemption. And so, I want you to learn something about obedience, and I want to lay three basic things on your heart—some sub-points, but three major foundational points—today on your heart, because I want you to be happy, and I want you to be victorious. And I am reminding you that, when I'm speaking to you, I'm also speaking to myself.

## **I. The Reasons for Obedience**

Here's the first thing I want to lay on your heart. We should review the reasons for obedience. Now, if you don't have a good reason for obeying, you probably will not obey. So I think it's altogether fitting that we look at this passage, and review the

reasons for obedience.

Here's the first reason. Obedience is a duty, a duty to be performed. Now, notice what he says. "We ought to obey." We ought to obey. There is an ought to it. There's no contest. "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Now, men said to do one thing, God said to do something else, and they said, "Well, that's a no-brainer. We're going to obey God. We're not going to obey men, if what men say and do contradicts what God does." Does God have any right to command you? Of course He does. We ought to obey God. Why? Because God is a sovereign God, and we ought to obey Him. We get in trouble many times because we do not simply obey God.

Now, I want to give you an ancillary verse, and I'd like for you to write it in your margin. It's 1 Samuel chapter 15—1 Samuel chapter 15, verses 22 and 23. God had told a king to do a particular thing, and the king substituted his own will, his own way, his own ideas, for what God told him to do. And here the prophet of God rebukes the king, and here's what the prophet Samuel said: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" That is, there's no way that you can come here today and buy God, bribe God.

You say, "Well, I put a big offering in the offering plate." No, God wants not your sacrifices; God wants your obedience. "Hath God as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." What he means is, offering the very best animals on the altar. Now, listen to verse 23: "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft—remember that word—and stubbornness is as iniquity—remember that word—and idolatry"—remember that word.

Now, here's what God says disobedience is like. If you're a disobedient Christian, here's what disobedience is like. First of all, it is like witchcraft—it is like witchcraft. Now, are you disobeying something that God told you to do? May I tell you that you are practicing a form of witchcraft.

Now, you're not thinking you're practicing witchcraft, but disobedience puts you on the same side of the fence as Satan. That's what made the devil the devil, was his rebellion against the will of God. And so, disobedience is witchcraft. And before long, Saul, who had disobeyed the Lord, was consorting with a witch, if you know your Bible.

Secondly, disobedience is not only like witchcraft, but it's also iniquity. Disobedience is a clenched fist in the face of God. It is saying, "God, not Your will, but mine be done." Now, it may be a small thing, but disobedience over a small thing is not a small thing, because disobedience is a big thing, even if the thing is a small thing that you're disobeying.

When my little boy was just a toddler, he was in the living room of our home, and I said, "Steve, pick up the paper from off the floor," and he didn't do it. And so, I got his

full attention. I said, "Steve, would you pick up the paper, please. Daddy wants you to pick up the paper." He shook his head, walked off. I said, "Son, come back here and pick up the paper." He said, "No." Well, at that point, I had to dust his britches. His mother came in there, and said, Adrian, that's a small thing to give a child a spanking for, not picking up the piece of paper." I said, "Joyce, I wasn't spanking the lad for not picking up a piece of paper. I was spanking him for defying his father." Now, that's a big thing. The paper was a small thing.

There may be some small thing in your heart and in your life that God is prompting you to do, but if you're disobeying God, I mean, if you're defying God, over that small thing, that small thing becomes a big thing. God says it is witchcraft. God says that it is iniquity.

And then, God says it is idolatry—idolatry. That's what He says. Disobedience is idolatry. Why could it be idolatry? Well, what is an idol? Anything you love more, serve more, fear more, honor more than God is an idol, and if God wants you to do something, and you don't do it, it's because you've put something else before God, which is idolatry. Think about what disobedience is. It is witchcraft. It is iniquity. It is idolatry. If we were to see that men ought to obey God rather than men. There, it is a duty to be performed.

Secondly, it is a debt to be paid—it is a debt to be paid. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean, friend, Jesus has done so much for us. In this particular passage of Scripture, notice what he says, as he's giving his rationale for obeying. He says here, in verse 29: "We ought to obey God rather than men." And then, he explains it: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted, with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, and to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Think what Jesus Christ has done for me. Think what He has done for you. He suffered, bled, and died upon that cross. Now, to grace, how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be. But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe. Here, Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do. Look at Calvary, bloody Calvary, and then tell me if you have a right to disobey. No, it is a duty to be performed. It is a debt to be paid. And I'll tell you something else.

It is a delight to be preferred. Obedience is a delight to be preferred. Don't get the idea that the will of God is something you have to do. God's not going to force it on you. It is something you get to do. And, when you learn to obey, then you're going to learn the joy that everybody is talking about in the Christian life. There's no such thing as a happy, disobedient Christian. It is a contradiction in terms. Look in chapter 5, verse 41: "Then they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing, rejoicing, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." I am telling you that obedience and

rejoicing come together. It is a lie out of hell that doing the will of God is painful and makes you miserable. The Bible says, His commandments are not grievous.

Now, the reason that some of us don't obey the Lord, and understand there's joy in obeying the Lord, is we don't trust the Lord, and we have difficulty taking commands from a stranger that we don't know. You get to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will learn that His commands are not grievous. And, as Harold quoted a little bit early, "Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that He loves us."

Now, I want to say a fourth thing about obedience. Not only is it a delight that, if you were all, utterly selfish, you'd want to do the will of God; it is a delight to be preferred; but, friend, it is a decision to be practiced. Now, you must—you must—decide to obey.

Now, God will allow you to disobey. Have you ever heard anybody say, "Oh well, God's will be done—God's will be done. Everything is God's will. Just praise God. If God wants it to happen, it will happen. If God doesn't want it to happen, He won't let it happen." My friend, there's a Greek word for that, and it's baloney. I want to tell you something. Listen to me—listen. God's will is not always done.

Now, there are some people who say that God's will is always done in everything. God's will is not always done. If God's will is always done, why did Jesus teach us to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done"? No, there are a lot of things that are not the will of God, and God will allow you to disobey Him. And that does not diminish God's sovereignty at all. God gives man the power to rebel against Him, without diminishing God's sovereignty. God has given man a choice. You can choose to obey, or you can choose not to obey.

Now, some people stumble over this. They wonder why the world is in a mess that it is. They say, "Well, if God is all-powerful, why doesn't God just do away with evil and suffering? Well, if He doesn't do away with evil and suffering, maybe He's not all powerful." Or, they say, "Well, if He is all powerful, and doesn't do away with it, maybe He's not all-loving." No, God is all-powerful, and God is all loving, but God has given to man a choice. God has given you a choice, everyone of you. You can choose to obey, or you can choose to disobey.

Now, some people say, "Well, God can do anything." That's not true—that's not true. By the way, let me give you a little riddle. My grandson asked me this: What is more powerful than God? What is more evil than Satan? What is it that rich people think that they need? What is it that poor people have plenty of? And what is it, if you eat it, you will die? Got the answer to that? What is more powerful and better than God? What is more evil than Satan? What is it that rich people think they need? What is it that poor people have plenty of it? And what is it, if you eat it, you'll die? Answer to that question: nothing—nothing. Nothing is more powerful than God. Nothing is more evil than Satan. Rich people think they need nothing. Poor people have plenty of nothing. And, if you eat

nothing, you'll die. The answer to that whole thing is nothing—nothing.

Now, friend, there are, however, some things that God cannot do. If I were to ask, is there anything God cannot do, and you'd say nothing, you'd be wrong. Let me tell you some things that God cannot do. Now, we're talking about here that obedience is a decision. Let me give you some things that God can't do. I'll give you six things that God can't do.

Because God is omnipotent, God can't fail. God cannot fail. Ephesians 1, verse 11, says, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will." It's impossible for God to fail.

Number two: there's something else God can't do. God cannot do evil. Titus 1, verse 2: "In hope of eternal life, which God, which cannot lie, promised before the world began." God cannot lie. God cannot steal. God cannot do evil, because He's a holy God.

I'll tell you something else God cannot do. God cannot be tempted. James 1, verses 13 and 14: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil." God can't be tempted. You say, "I thought Jesus was tempted." Jesus was tempted in His humanity. He was not tempted in His essence as Almighty God. God cannot be tempted.

What else can God not do? God cannot deny Himself. Second Timothy 2, verse 13: "If we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself."

I'll tell you something else God cannot do. God cannot be unjust. That's the reason for the cross. Romans 3, verse 26: "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of Him that believeth in Jesus."

You see, there are some things impossible for God to do. It is impossible for God to forgive sin without a sacrifice. The reason that Jesus died on the cross is that He might be both just and the justifier. Do you remember what Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He prayed? "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But the silence from heaven said, "No, that is impossible—that is impossible." Had there been some other way than the cross, God surely would have taken it, before He allowed His Holy Son and His loving Son to die upon the cross. By God's very nature, God cannot overlook, or God cannot bypass, sin.

I'll tell you something else God cannot do—and I've been building to this point: God cannot force loving obedience—God cannot force loving obedience. God cannot make you love Him, because it is a contradiction in terms. Forced love is not love at all. God cannot force somebody to receive a gift. God will not force you to obey Him. That doesn't mean that God loses His sovereignty. That simply means that there are certain things, by God's very nature, that God cannot do. He cannot do these things. It's not that He cannot do them because He is limited in power. It is that He cannot do them

because of His very nature. Now, I'm telling you that you must choose to obey Him.

Now, you cannot obey Him unless He enables you to obey Him. We love Him because He first loved us. And it is God that works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Obedience to God is like breathing. Is breathing a gift of God? Well, you'd better believe it is, because God gives you lungs, and God gives you air, but you can smother, if you want.

Obedience is a gift of God in the sense that God gives you the will, God works in you, but there comes a decision, and God is not going to force you to obey Him. And don't you shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, if God wants it to happen, it'll happen." No! There is, dear friend, a decision to be practiced. You must say, "I will obey Him." And these are the compelling reasons for obedience.

## **II. The Requirements for Obedience**

Now, let's go to the second point. Not only should we look at the reason for obedience; we should recognize the requirements for obedience. Now, what are the requirements for obeying God? I want to mention some of them, if you would really obey God.

Number one: your obedience must be informed obedience. It must be informed obedience. How can you obey God, if you don't know what it is that God wants you to do? Now, these apostles had had a command from God. You're in Acts chapter 5—begin looking in verse 17: "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But...—watch verse 19—But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to all the people all the words of this life." Can't be plainer. They were told what to do. Go do it.

Now, the reason they were doing it is because they'd been told to do it. All true obedience is informed obedience. You must hear from God in order to obey God. Now, just don't go out doing things, just because you want to do them, and think you're living the Christian life. What God doesn't initiate God doesn't appreciate. God is going to tell you what to do. And God has never promised to bless any endeavor that He has not commanded. There must be, number one, informed obedience.

Number two: there must be intentional obedience. You see, doing right is not merely abstaining from doing wrong. It's very obvious that these apostles wanted to know the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. I try to present myself to the Lord every morning, and say, "Lord, I'm yours to command. I want to hear from You."

Last week, I heard Junior Hill, an evangelist, preach. He said something that really blessed me. He said, "When I wake up in the morning, I say, 'Good morning, General

Jesus. This is Private Hill reporting for duty." I like that. "Good morning, General Jesus. This is Private Hill reporting for duty." Have you reported for duty?

You say, "Well, it's not my fault. I don't know what God wants me to do." Well, it just may be your fault. Put this verse down—Proverbs chapter 8, verses 32 and following: "Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children; for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Are you hearing God? Are you reporting for duty? Are you saying, "Lord Jesus. This is General Jesus. Here I am, your private, reporting for duty."

Now, here's a third thing. It must be immediate obedience—immediate obedience. You see, they are telling these apostles, "Listen, we told you not to preach or teach in His name." Now, it's very interesting. Well, let's just look at it again. Look in verse 28: "Did we not straightly command you that ye should not teach in his name? And, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted." They just said, don't do that, and he's doing it. I mean, the minute he said, "We told you not to preach," bang, he's preaching. I mean, immediately—immediately. He's not waiting. He's not thinking about it. He is doing it. It is immediate obedience.

Now, let me tell you something. Procrastination is a form of disobedience—procrastination is a form of disobedience. Be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet. The best time to do the will of God is when you are aware that God wants it done. That's a lesson that I'm trying to learn more and more in my own heart and in my own life.

Friend, understanding can wait; obedience cannot. Understanding can wait; obedience cannot. Psalm 119, verse 60: "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Ours is not to reason why, ours is not to make reply; ours is but to do or die. And, when God puts a period, don't you put a question mark. Immediate obedience.

Number four: it must be inflexible obedience. Well, what do I mean by inflexible obedience? I mean, no matter what it cost—no matter what it cost. You cannot compromise with obedience. Now, these apostles knew that to obey God could mean death. Look back in chapter 5, verse 33. When these men had been preaching, the Bible says, "When the authorities heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." I mean, this is not a small thing when these men are preaching. They are preaching with the cloud of a death sentence over their head. Inflexible obedience—no matter what.

Now, selective obedience is not obedience at all. A man was bragging about his dog. He said, "What kind of a dog is it?" He said, "Oh, it's a very smart dog, very trained." He said, "Well, show me what he can do." He said, "Well, when I go somewhere, and I say to the dog, all I have to say is 'Are you coming with me or not?' and either he does or he doesn't. Very smart dog." Now, that's the way some of us are: we kind of decide what we want to do. And selective obedience is not obedience at all.

Next, it must be impassioned obedience—I mean, doing the will of God from our heart. It's obvious that you might as well have told the noonday sun not to shine as to tell these men not to preach, and not to share the Lord Jesus Christ, because they are full of passion—burning, blazing, emotional passion—for the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you have a zeal for God? God forgive our lukewarm, half-hearted, indifferent obedience. If you're going to serve Him, serve Him with joy. Romans chapter 6, verse 17: "ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you."

### **III. The Rewards for Obedience**

Now, let me go to the third and final thing here, as we're talking. We've talked to you about the reasons for obedience, and we've talked to you about the requirements for obedience, in this passage. Let me talk to you a little bit about the rewards for obedience. Remember, trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Let me tell you three things will happen when you begin to obey.

Number one: the spirit will be received—the spirit will be received. Look in verse 32. Here's what the apostles said: "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him"—"we are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to that that obey him."

Do you want spiritual power in your life? Friend, God is not going to give spiritual power to rebels. Why should God release the anointing power of the Holy Spirit upon your life when you're not living in obedience? God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. The Holy Spirit is there to get His work done. God cannot trust some people with spiritual power. I've often used this illustration.

How many of you have ever taught a teen to drive an automobile? Let me see your hands. All right. That'll brighten up your prayer life, won't it? Now, if you've taught somebody to drive an automobile, I was not there, but I think I know this much. I think that one of the first things you showed them was the brake pedal. Was that not true? You most likely showed them the brake pedal before you showed them the accelerator. And you most likely showed them the brake pedal before you gave them the ignition key. You said, "First of all, that's what stops this thing, honey." Isn't that right?

Now, suppose that teen said, "Hey, Pop, I am not interested in the brake. Show me how to make it go. I'm not interested in how to make it stop. I want to go!" You just take

the keys back, and put them in your pocket, and you say, "You're not ready yet." Now, listen.

You will never know the release of the Spirit until you know the restraint of the Spirit. You will never know the go till you know the no. You listen. God gives the Holy Spirit to those that obey Him. And, even if you're not a rebel, why should God fill you with the Holy Spirit?

I mean, a man pushes an automobile into the Texaco station. The fenders are flopping, the tires are flat, the gas tank has a hole in it, the distributor has been taken out of the car, the headlights are broken. The guy shoves it into the Texaco station. The man comes out—of course, they don't come out anymore—and he says, "What can I do for you?" You say, "Well, fill her up." He says, "What for?" O God, fill me with the Holy Spirit. God says, "What for? What for? Why should I give the Holy Spirit to you?" God gives the Holy Spirit to those that obey Him. If you don't have power in your life, I'm going to tell you, it's because you're living in disobedience.

Now, what are the results? Number one: the Spirit is received; number two: joy is achieved. Look in verse 41. The Bible says, "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." You're going to be a joyful Christian when you obey the Lord. Disobedient Christians are not joyful Christians. And we need some more joyful Christians. Say amen. I see a lot of folks look like the picture on their driver's license. We need some joyful Christians. When we obey, the Spirit is received. When we obey, joy is achieved.

And I'll tell you something else. When we obey, the gospel is believed. Look, if you will now, in verse 42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

Now, that's what we're calling our church to do: make Jesus known to our neighbors. "Daily in the temple—at Bellevue—and from house to house—now, Bellevue is not a temple; it's a New Testament church. I'm just making an analogy here—they ceased not to preach and to teach Jesus Christ." Why did they do that? Because they were obeying Him.

Has God given you a command to share Jesus Christ? Answer me. Yes! What is the alternative to obeying Him? It is disobedience. What is the result of disobedience? Is no spiritual power, and there's no joy in your life. God has given you a command to do it.

Now, if you do it, will God bless your obedience, will God give you the Holy Spirit, and bless what you're doing? Well, just go on to the next chapter: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." What? Listen—listen. When you obey Him, the Spirit is received, joy is achieved, and the gospel is believed.

There are enough people in this very room right now to turn this city inside out, upside down, and right side up for Jesus Christ, is that not true? If we became obedient Christians. You think, well, you've done God a wild favor when you get here on Sunday

morning. I mean, there are people who really call this. You say, "Well, this is the service." No, this is not the service; this is the service station. The service is out there. You're just coming to get your tank filled a little bit. You're coming to get some instruction. You're coming to get some encouragement.

Friend, God has called us to rescue the perishing, and care for the dying, and snatch them in pity from sin and the grave. To weep o'er the erring one, to lift up the fallen one, and to tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save. And no matter what else you're doing, if you are not sharing the Lord Jesus Christ, you're not an obedient Christian. I don't care how faithfully you attend. I don't care how eloquently you teach. I don't care how beautifully you sing. I don't care how generously you give. I don't care how scrupulously you live. If you're not sharing Jesus Christ, you're living in disobedience, and you are guilty of high treason against Heaven's King. Say amen. Now, that's true.

Now, we can't all do it the same way. We cannot all be preachers, but we can all be reachers. Some way, somehow, God wants this church to share Jesus Christ with this community. Now, if others are doing it, fine. We're glad to have the help. And they ought to have the same opinion. If Bellevue's doing it, fine. They're glad to have the help. But we cannot depend upon somebody else. We must say, "It is our responsibility. It is our duty. It is our joy. It is our privilege to do this."

Now, let me come to a conclusion, and I want to ask some questions. Again, I want to ask, has God been speaking to you? Has God been speaking to you? God has been speaking to some of you about moving your membership, getting active in a church. I talked to a man last week. He said, "My wife and I came for six years. We finally joined Bellevue." Boy, that guy doesn't make any quick decision.

Now, either Bellevue ought to be so bad they ought to go somewhere else, or, if it's all right, he ought to be in. If you're here this morning, I love you, bud. I told you when I met you—I ought to crack you aside of the head, so you know who I'm talking to. Listen. Is God telling you to do something? Remember that procrastination is a sin. Is God telling you to give something? Then do it. He put a dollar in the plate, and sang with might and main, when we asunder part, it gives us inward pain. "I'm going to give it one day; I just hate to let go of it. No! Do it—do it. Is there somebody that you need to make restitution with, somebody you need to go to and say, "I'm sorry"?"

I spoke crossly to Joyce yesterday. I hate to tell you this, but I did. I started to say she deserved it. She really didn't. I went upstairs, and tried to prepare a sermon, and God said, "Adrian, you know what you're supposed to do." I had to leave, go all the way down the stairs, da da da da da, into the bedroom, say, "Honey, I'm sorry. Forgive me."

You don't let things build up. You don't let them fester. You do exactly what you're supposed to do when you're supposed to do it. Has God been laying something on your heart, some restitution you need to make, somebody that you need to ask forgiveness?

Is there some deed of kindness that you know you're supposed to do? Why don't you do it?

Is there some spiritual thing that you need to fulfill? Some of you ought to be baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ. You know what the Bible teaches about believer's baptism. You know exactly what you ought to do, but you've never been baptized, for whatever reason. Maybe you think it's inconvenient. Maybe you don't want to ruin your hairdo. Maybe you don't want to go in front of all those people. Whatever. Listen, friend. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is—what?—sin. It is sin.

Now, I'm just saying, is there some point in your life where you are disobeying God? Remember that disobedience is as witchcraft. Disobedience is as iniquity. Disobedience is as idolatry. It is not failing to pick up the paper that is the problem; it is the rebellion against God that is the problem. Don't stonewall God. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. And you just can't just blow past something.

## Conclusion

Years ago, I told you a story I'm going to repeat. I read of a father and a son who were living together. The mother and the wife in that family had gone to heaven. It was a winter night. The father and the son were settled down. The fire in the fireplace was burning out, and the father said to his son, who was a grown boy, "Son, would you put another piece of wood on the fire? Go outside and get a log, and put it on the fire." The son said, "Dad, I'm busy; I'm doing something. I don't want to do it."

The dad said, "Son, listen. I'm your father. You're living here under my roof. You're supposed to respect and obey me. Son, I'm asking you to put another piece of wood on the fire." The boy said, "No, I'm not going to do it—I'm not going to do it."

He said, "All right. Now, son, this time I'm telling you to do it. Put another piece of wood on the fire, and if you cannot obey me, you cannot live under this roof." The boy said, "Is that the way it is? Well, all right, then I will not live under this roof. Goodbye," and walked out, and slammed the door, went out into the cold, and left his father's house, because he would not put another piece of wood on the fire.

He stayed gone for months, and he got to thinking, I am a fool, a sheer fool. My father loves me. He would do anything for me. He asked me to do a small thing, and, in my pride and arrogance, I said no, and I turned my back on my own dear father. I have defied my father. I have been a fool. I wonder if my father would ever forgive me. He went back home, knocked on the door. When his father saw him there, tears burst into the father's eyes. And he said, "Dad, I was such a fool. I was so full of arrogance and pride and selfishness and self-will. Daddy, I am so sorry for talking that way to you.

Daddy, could you find it in your heart to forgive me and receive me back into the house?" The dad reached out, like any dad would do, hugged him, kissed his neck, embraced him, and said, "My son, oh, my son, welcome home." And then, he said, "Son, before you sit down, put another piece of wood on the fire."

You know, there's no statute of limitations when it comes to obeying God. There are certain things, and you just don't say, "Well, I'm going to blow past." Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. And for you, if you've never been saved, that obedience comes with believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, when He comes again, He's taking vengeance and flaming fire on those who know not God, and who obey not the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, obey Him by giving your heart to Him, trusting Him as your personal Lord and Savior, and you will find the joy of obedience is wonderful, incredible. It's the life that you would choose to live because He loves you so much, and He'll never ask you to do anything that would harm you, or cause you to harm someone else. His commandments are not grievous. So I'm going to ask you, young man, if you've never given your heart to Jesus, to do it today. Young lady, do it today. Husband and wife, do it today.

We're going to sing an invitational hymn. The ministers of this church are going to stand at the head of each of these aisles. There'll be a minister standing under that banner up there that says MESSIAH to my left, the one that says REDEEMER to my right, and we're going to sing. And today—listen to me—today, if once and for all, now and forever, you will give your heart to Jesus, and you'll say Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for me—salvation is a gift; I just receive it by faith; I give you my heart, my life—if you will do that, I want you to indicate it by coming forward. There's something about making it open and public that settles it and seals it. Jesus said, "If you'll confess Me before men, I'll confess you before My Father. If you deny Me before men, I'll deny You before My Father."

When we sing the invitational hymn, don't look around to see what anyone else is going to do. You come if you're the only one who needs to. You just come, and here's what I want you to do. When you come down any of these aisles, or to one of those banners, you just say to the minister, "I am trusting Jesus." We'll take a Bible and guide you in this decision, and seal it in prayer, and you can go home today a child of God, heaven-born and heaven-bound. Others of you, if God's been speaking to you about church membership, lovingly, in the name of Jesus, I invite you to come. Some of you, if God's been speaking to you about believer's baptism, you need to come and say, "I want to make an appointment for my baptism." Some are coming, saying, "I want to place my membership here." Others coming, saying, "I'm trusting Jesus." Respectfully, I'm going to ask that no one leave during the invitation, unless it is an emergency. Let's stand together as we sing.

# Trust and Obedience

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: July 27, 1997**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–32, 41–6:1**

## Outline

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- I. The Reasons for Obedience
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  - A. It Must Be a Wise Obedience
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## Introduction

And open your Bibles to Acts, the book of Acts chapter 5. You know that song, “Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way”—what?—“to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Now, how many tonight—don’t answer it out loud because you would just say the right thing, rather than necessarily the real thing—but, how many tonight are downright happy in Jesus? Don’t say amen. Don’t lift your hand. But just think about it, because I want the answer to be real. When I’m talking about happy, I’m not talking about giddiness or silliness. I’m really talking about what the songwriter meant, and that is the joy of the Lord. Do you have that tonight? Are you an abounding, victorious Christian? Well, if not, I can tell you why not, and it’s in the title of that song. There’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. And that’s what I want to talk to you tonight about—and that is, “Trust and Obedience.”

Now, the disciples had been put in jail for preaching the gospel of Christ, but God, miraculously, pulled a big escape. They’re out of jail. They’re back on the streets. They’re preaching the gospel of Jesus again. And, we pick up our reading in Acts chapter 5 and verse 27: “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them—that is, them being the disciples—saying, Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?—and the name they meant was the name of Jesus—and, behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” The man that they were talking about was the man, Christ Jesus. They said, “You’re trying to implicate us in His death. And we commanded you not to preach any more in His name.” “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of

our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, and to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.” And then, skip on down to verse 42: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” Chapter 6, verse 1: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” And I’m just going to stop right there. But that gives us the tone and the flavor of what we’re talking about. I want to tell you, friend, that there is no substitute in the Christian life for obedience. Martin Luther said, “We are not saved by faith and works, but we are saved by faith that works.” And if your faith is not working, if you’re not obeying, you have good reason to question whether or not you have ever been saved.

## **I. The Reasons for Obedience**

Now, let me talk to you tonight about obedience, about trusting and obeying. And, first of all, let me give you some scriptural reasons for obedience, okay?

Reason number one: Obedience is a duty to be performed. Now, notice in God’s Word here in verse 29: “Then Peter and the other apostles said, We—now look at that next word—we ought—do you see that?—we ought to obey God...” Now, that means it is our duty to obey God, because he says, “we ought to obey God rather than men.” God is a sovereign God, and He is to be obeyed. He is to be feared, not man. He has every right to command me. He has every right to command you. And because He is sovereign God, I ought to obey Him. There can be no refusal, and there can be no rebuttal. Put down this Scripture—Jeremiah chapter 11 and verse 3—God said, “And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the one that obeyeth not the words of this covenant.” When you fail to obey God, when you fail to keep the covenant that God has made with you as a New Testament Christian, as well as those in the Old Testament who failed to keep the covenant that God made with the Old Testament believers, there is a curse upon us. He is absolute, sovereign God. Now, when you get saved, you’re in the King’s army. Those of you who’ve been in the army, you know, when you get into Boot Camp, they don’t come in the morning at 5:30 and say, “Good morning. Would you like to awaken at this time? If not, you may stay in bed. But we would like it very much if you would report in 30 minutes to the mess hall.” No. They say, “All right, you bunch of buzzards, get up; I mean, right now. It’s revelry.” And you roll out and you are at it!

Now, we’re in the army. There is only one alternative to obedience, and it is disobedience. You say, “Well, I’m free to choose.” You are free to choose, but you’re

not free to choose the consequences of your choice. And if you disobey God, you bring the wrath of God upon you; you bring the judgment upon you. By the way, I want you to turn to this scripture. It's in the Old Testament. Now, just mark Acts chapter 5 and turn in the Old Testament to 1 Samuel chapter 15. This is a key verse on obedience—1 Samuel chapter 15. God told Saul to utterly slay the Amalekites and to kill all of the flocks and herds that belonged to the Amalekites. Saul refused to do that. And Samuel spoke to him, and here's what Samuel said to King Saul. First Samuel chapter 15 and verse 22: "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice..."—if you were to come here tonight and put all of your life's savings in the offering plate—every penny that you owned—and yet you did not obey God, you would be doing the lesser thing than obeying God in a simple obedience—"...Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." And here's the reason for that. Look now in verse 23: "For rebellion..."—and, by the way, rebellion is the same word as disobedience. Disobedience is rebellion—"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft..." Now, why would he say that? Why would he say that disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft? Do you know what witchcraft is? It's devil worship. It is being like the devil. Well, what made the devil the devil? It was rebellion and disobedience. And so, when you have a rebellious spirit, when you have a disobedient spirit to any command of God, you have moved over into the devil's territory. You have put yourself in the realm of witchcraft. You may never have thought of that as being witchcraft, but God says rebellion is as witchcraft. And you're going to find out that Saul, who did this, before long, was actually practicing witchcraft. He went to a witch and got into a séance, and it began with a simple act of disobedience. "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity..." To fail to obey God is stubbornness, and God calls it iniquity. You see, disobedience is not just missing a blessing. It is a clenched fist in the face of God. It is stubbornness. You have to watch that in little children. They're born with it.

Our eldest son, his name is Steve. When he was just getting old enough to understand language and to learn to obey and disobey, I told him to pick up a piece of paper that he'd dropped on the living room floor. And he just went about his business and didn't pick it up. I called him back over and made certain that I had his attention—looked right in his eyes. I said, "Steve, Daddy wants you to pick up the paper." He just turned around and went off and didn't pick it up. Third time, I brought him back. I said, "Now, son, pick up the paper or Daddy's going to have to punish you." And he just defiantly looked at me, and turned around and walked off. Well, I knew we had a challenge right there. And, I picked him up and dusted his britches. Now, about that time, his mother came in, and she said, "Adrian, that's a small thing to spank a child for,

for not picking up a piece of paper.” I said, “Joyce, I didn’t spank him for not picking up a piece of paper. I spanked him for defiance to his father.” Now, it may be a small thing that God is asking you to do. It may not be a big thing at all. But if you fail to do it, did you know it is defiance to your heavenly Father. And God calls it witchcraft. God calls it iniquity. And then, God calls it idolatry. Look at it: “For rebellion...”—and notice that rebellion in verse 23 is linked with disobedience in verse 22—“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft—that is, it puts you over in the devil’s territory—and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...” Now, why would God call disobedience idolatry? Well, just simply this: if God tells you to do something and you don’t do it, why not? Because there’s something else in your life that is more important than God—something else in your life is more important than God. Now, what is that? That’s idolatry. An idol is anything you love more, serve more, fear more, than Almighty God. So what we may think sometimes is a small thing, just an act of disobedience, God says witchcraft. God says iniquity and stubbornness. God says idolatry. No wonder the apostles said, “We ought to obey God...” It is a duty to perform.

Number two: It is a debt to be paid. Obedience is a debt to be paid. The word ought—go back now to our text in chapter 5, Acts chapter 5—the word ought and the word owe—o-w-e—are linked together. We ought to do something because we have an obligation. We owe. We’re not our own. We are bought with a price. And because of Calvary, I have no choice but to obey God, because He has purchased me with His blood. We sing it, but “Drops of grief can ne’er repay the debt of love I owe. Here, Lord, I give myself away; ’tis all that I can do.” Obedience, my friend, is a debt to be paid.

But here’s a third thing. Obedience is a delight to be performed. You see, there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. That’s the reason Jesus said, in John chapter 14, verse 15: “If you love me—if you love me—keep my commandments.”

You know, basically, in life, there are three reasons why we obey. A slave obeys because he has to. An employee obeys because he needs to. A son or daughter obeys because they want to. Now, all three are true about us. We are His slaves; we have to—I mean, or face the consequences. We are in His employment. We are so dependent upon Him to take care of us. We need to. But let me tell you the chief reason that I obey the Lord Jesus Christ is because I want to. I love the Lord Jesus. Those are reasons for obedience. The apostles said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

## **II. The Requirements for Obedience**

Now, what about the requirements for obedience? Let me tell you what real obedience is. Let’s find out whether you’re an obedient Christian.

### **A. It Must Be a Wise Obedience**

It must be wise obedience. Do you have that? It must be wise obedience. You see, you have to hear God in order to obey God. Now, how are you going to obey God, if you don't know what God wants you to do? Now, go back to chapter 5 and begin in verse 18. The Bible tells about how these apostles were put in prison, in verse 18. And then, verse 19 says, "But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Can't be more plain than that. The angel said, "Here's your commission. Go do it." Now, look in chapter 4 and verse 18: "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of the Lord Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you. But we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Now, they saw things. They heard things. They were commanded things. And, therefore, they obeyed. Now, here's the point. Here's the question: To obey God you must hear God. There must be wise obedience. The problem with many of us is that we're doing for God things that He may not want done for Him, and failing to do things that He wants done because we're not listening.

Martha was in the kitchen cooking; Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, and she was learning from Jesus, and pleasing Jesus, and obeying Jesus. Now, what God doesn't initiate God doesn't appreciate. It must be wise obedience.

### **B. It Must Be a Watchful Obedience**

Now, in order for it to be wise obedience—listen carefully now—it must be watchful obedience. Let me give you a wonderful verse. I hope you'll carry this one home with you. Proverbs chapter 8, verses 32 through 34. Now, here's what God says, and He's saying this to each of us and to all of us: "Now, therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways—that is, that obey Me—Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." Do you know what that means? God says, "If you want it to be wise obedience, it must be watchful obedience. Every morning—every morning—you must report for duty. You must say to the Lord at the post of His door; that is, standing right there listening to Him, "Lord, I am Yours. I report for duty. I want to do Your will."

I make it a habit to present myself to the Lord in the morning. I make it a habit to write down the things that I feel that God is laying on my heart, that God wants me to do. I must wait. I must watch. Because not knowing the will of God is not an excuse. You say, "Well, I didn't know what God wanted me to do, so how could God hold me accountable. I didn't hear Him." The question is: Did you listen? Were you watching?

Were you waiting? Were you reporting for duty? You see, God will hold you responsible for what you hear, and God will hold you responsible for what you would have heard if you had listened. It must be wise obedience. It must be watchful obedience. You must have that quiet time, just simply to say, “Lord, speak, so I can hear.”

### **C. It Must Be a Willing Obedience**

And here’s the third thing. It must be willing obedience. It’s got to come from the heart. And it must be quick. Psalm 119, verse 60: “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” Here, they’re forbidding Peter from preaching. And while they’re telling him he can’t do it, he’s doing it at the same time. He is preaching while he’s being forbidden not to preach, because he is willing, so anxious to do it. He’s making haste to do it.

When I was a seminary student, I pastored a little church on the gulf coast of Mississippi called the Waveland Baptist Chapel. And our church building was about the size of this platform without the choir, and maybe a little smaller than that. It would seat about 60 to 75 people. And, I pastored that church for three years while I was in seminary. I went to seminary at New Orleans—3939 Gentilly Boulevard in New Orleans. I pastored the little church over at Waveland, the gulf coast of Mississippi, which is about 65 miles away. And I was in class in the mornings at 8:00, so I had to get up and make that trek over there. It’s a wonder I’m still alive, because I’d be reading books and driving in the fog, trying to get to school in the morning, and be honed up and ready for those pop quizzes. And go back in the evening, and every day, back and forth, like living on a yo-yo, really. I was just going back and forth, and pastoring that little church. They knew, and I knew, that I was there as a seminary student, and when I graduated, I would be looking for a fulltime pastorate. And that was the understanding. But, they were hoping that I would stay at the church. And, really, my heart was there, but I felt that God had another plan for me. And I had gone down to the post office, and there were two letters in the post office there in my post office box; one right on top of the other—two handwritten letters, as I remember them now—not typed. And they were from two little churches in Florida: one in Melbourne, Florida, and one in Fort Pierce, Florida. They were stacked one right on top of the other. And they said, “Mr. Rogers,” “Adrian,” or whatever they called me, “We have heard about you, and we’ve heard that you’re graduating from seminary. And we want you to be our pastor. We’d like to talk with you about being a pastor.” Now, these churches were both very small churches, both of them running just about 100 or so in Bible study and Sunday School. And, really, not that I was too good at all to go to a church of that size, but I’ll have to be honest with you. I was hoping for something a little bigger than a church that would run 100, after I had been some eight years getting an education. And I looked at that, and they said—

both of them said—“We feel led that you’re God’s man.” Well, I knew that one of them had to be wrong, so I figured both of them were probably wrong. And so, I wrote them back and I said, really, “Thanks, but no thanks.” Well, the smaller of those two churches wrote me back, and said, “No, you’re wrong; we’re right. You’re God’s man for our church. We want you to come.” That was the Fort Pierce church, Parkview Baptist Church, which, subsequently, I went to. I began to pray about that. And Joyce and I thought, well, if that’s God’s will, we’d better obey God. And so, I prayed about it, and I said, “Yes, all right. I will go to the Parkview Baptist Church.” And I made up my mind, and I said, “Now, Joyce, I’ve got to resign the little Waveland Chapel.” And I thought, now, how will I say it, because they will think that I just want to go back to Florida, and—which I did—but that wasn’t the reason. They’ll think I just want to go back to Florida. And, that wasn’t the reason, of course, that I would go. I really felt that that was God’s plan for me. So I said, “I’ll say it in such a way that they can’t, you know, they can’t come back on me.” So I stood up and I told them how much I loved them. And then, I told them about the church down in Florida, the Parkview Baptist Church. And then, here’s what I said. I said, “And a nail-pierced hand has pointed to Florida, and I must follow.” Now, folks, who could argue with a nail-pierced hand. I mean, I thought, that’s it! A nail-pierced hand has pointed to Florida, and I must follow. And I really felt that. I really felt that God had spoken to my heart. I’d wrestled with the Lord about that.

Now, I had not told the Florida church I would come, but I told the Mississippi Church I was going. I had walked out of the pulpit that Sunday morning, walked right to our little house where we were living. We’d not even had lunch, and the phone rang. The man on the other end, his name was Mr. Graham. I can almost hear his voice right now. He was on the Pulpit Committee of the First Baptist Church of one of the three largest cities in Florida. And he said, “We’ve heard of you. We want you to come and be our pastor.” And he began to talk about the staff and the buildings and all of the things that they had in that church. It was everything that I thought I wanted. And I heard myself saying, “And a nail-pierced hand has pointed to Florida.” I knew, as if God had put it in letters the size of the wall of that house in red, “This is a test—only a test.” And I said, “Mr. Graham, thank you, but I cannot even talk with you about it. God is sending me to Fort Pierce, Florida.”

I went to Fort Pierce, Florida, and we had the happiest six years of our lives. Never has God blessed more than He blessed at that little church that grew and grew and grew and grew.

You know, sometimes, folks, the devil will come to you in such a way that seems so good, so reasonable. But I found out that, when you know God’s plan, when you know God’s will, you don’t even question it. I said to Mr. Graham, I said, “Mr. Graham, I can’t even talk with you. I don’t even want to taste it. I don’t want to roll it around in my mouth.

Thank you, but good day.” And I’m so glad that God gave me at least enough gumption. I’m not really trying to brag on myself, but I’m sharing something that I learned even as a young preacher, that our obedience to the Lord, our obedience, friend, it must be wise obedience. It must be watchful obedience. It must be willing obedience, because of our Lord who has purchased us with His own blood. We must obey Him freely. We must obey Him fully. We must obey Him all of the time.

Now, what are the rewards for obedience? Well, look, if you will: First of all, there’s going to be supernatural power in your life. Go back to chapter 5, and look in verse 32. You’re wondering why you don’t have more power in your life. The apostle said, in verse 29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” And then, notice what he says in verse 32: “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost—now watch this—whom God hath given to them who do what?—who obey him, who obey him.” You say, “Well, I don’t have any spiritual power in my life. Why doesn’t the Holy Spirit work in my life?” Are you obeying Him? “We are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” If you are willing to obey Him, you will know the release of the Spirit in your life.

I’ve often used this illustration. When you teach a child to drive, and you put that child in the automobile, and you begin to show them the mechanism of the automobile, and you say, “Sweetheart, this is the key that starts the engine,” and you say, “That pedal over there is the brake pedal,” and they say, “Don’t tell me about the brake pedal; how do you make it go?” and you say, “Well, wait a minute. Let talk about the brake pedal,” “I’m not interested in the brake pedal. How do you make it go?” what do you do? You just take the keys right back out of the ignition, right? If they’re not interested in how to make it stop, you’re certainly not interested in showing them how to make it go.

And, friend, if you don’t know the restraint of the Spirit, you’ll never know the release of the Spirit. If your life is not a life of obedience to God, God is not going to give the keys to a wild and disobedient child. God is looking for obedient men and women that He can trust with spiritual horsepower. Most of us have about all of the power that God can trust us with.

You know, one of the reasons I believe that God has blessed Billy Graham as much as He has—Billy has been trustworthy. Billy’s been trustworthy. Most of us have about all of the spiritual power and authority that God can trust us with. “So is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” When you begin to obey God, there will be supernatural power in your life. I’ll tell you what else there’ll be in your life. There’ll be supernatural joy in your heart. Look in verse 41: “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing, rejoicing that there counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Most of us are not even worthy to suffer for Him. Somebody said, “If we were arrested for being a Christian, there wouldn’t be enough evidence to convict us.”

These people, thanking God that they were worthy to be, that they were rejoicing in that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Do you have joy, overflowing joy, abounding joy? If not, it is because you have not been obeying God. There are a lot of Christians in this congregation whose face looks like the picture on their driver's license. And the reason, very frankly, very plainly, is that there's something in your life that God has told you to do, and you're not doing it. There will be supernatural power in your life, there will be supernatural joy in your life, and there will be supernatural victory in the church, when God's people begin to obey Him.

Just look at the crowd here tonight. It's Sunday night. A couple of thousand people are here on Sunday night. Let's just leave alone the Sunday morning crowd, and the Wednesday crowd, and just take the Sunday night crowd. What would happen if all of those of us in this building tonight were to do as these early apostles did, and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men; we cannot but speak the things which we have seen or heard"?

Well, notice the supernatural victory in the church. Look, if you will, in verse 42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..."

Now, I preached this morning, gave an invitation. Maybe we had 20 or 30 decisions, maybe 40 in all of the services. And, I thank God for that. But, folks, that's addition. I'm looking for multiplication. I'm looking for multiplication. You know, this church right here, we could turn this city upside down for Jesus—did you know that? I mean, we literally could. But the reason that we don't do it is our people are not obeying God. There is not supernatural power in the heart. There's not power in the life. There's not supernatural joy in the heart, and not supernatural victory in the church, because we are not doing what these early apostles did, and that is to obey the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

Now, the message is finished, but I want to ask you a question now, and I want you to not answer it out loud, but answer it in your heart. Is there in your life at this moment a point of disobedience with God? Is there? Now, remember that disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Has God told you to confess and forsake something, some sin that you need to confess and forsake? Is God dealing with you about it? Could be a habit. It could be a practice. It could be a sin of omission, a sin of commission, and you're failing to obey God. No wonder you don't have power and joy and victory. Is there somebody that God is telling you to witness to, and you're refusing to do it? Is there? Is there somebody that God is telling you that you need to be reconciled to, and you're not going to be reconciled? Is there something God has told you, you ought to give, and you're not giving it? Is there something God is

telling you, you ought to pay, and you're not paying it? Is there a habit in your life that God is saying you need to break, and you're continuing in it? I'm not just talking about little hunches and little feelings you have. I am saying that God has spoken to you, and in your heart you're not obeying. Well, let me tell you what's going to happen. At that point, you have moved over into witchcraft, rebellion, iniquity, and idolatry. You say, "Pastor, I don't like that. It doesn't sound good." But it's true. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. I'm going to tell you this, and then I'm finished.

Years and years ago, I heard a story of a father and son. The mother in that family had died. The father and son were there in a little cottage. It was a cold winter night. The son was young and virile; the father was aged. And the fire on the hearth was about to go out. And the father said to the son, "Son, would you put another piece of wood on the fire?" And the son said, "Dad, I'm busy. " After a while, the father said, "Son, Daddy's asking you. Would you put another piece of wood, please, on the fire? The place is getting cold." And the son said, "Well, Dad, if you want more wood on the fire, put it on the fire yourself." He said, "Son, this is my house. You're my son. The Bible teaches for children to obey their parents. Now, I've asked you to put some more wood on the fire. This time I'm telling you: put another piece of wood on the fire." The boy said, "You can't boss me around like that. I'm not going to let you tell me what to do. I'm not going to do it." There was a real confrontation. The father said, "Son, if you will not obey me, you cannot stay here under my roof, eat my food, stay in this house, and live in sheer rebellion." The boy said, "Well, very well then. If that's the way you feel about it, good enough." And he got up, walked out of the house into the cold, and slammed the door behind him, and walked out on his aged father. It was one of those confrontations so foolish, so silly. That boy stayed away from home for a lengthy period of time. Finally, he came to his senses. He said, "I have been an arrogant, ungrateful, selfish, stubborn, mulish young man. My father loves me enough he would die for me. He's taken care of me, provided for me. And, over such a foolish thing I walked out of my father's house, out of my father's fellowship. I've been miserable. Why would I have done such a thing? I'll go back to my father." So he turned around and he went back to the old cottage. There was a light in the window. Hopefully, his dad was still alive. Hopefully, his dad was still in there. He beat on the door. The door opened, and there stood his father. Their eyes met, and the boy said this: He said, "Dad, I don't know how I could have been so wicked, so selfish, so foolish as to do what I did, to slam the door in your face, to spurn your love, to refuse to act as a son should act. Dad, I have come back as humbly as I know how, to ask you please, forgive me, and please restore me. And, Dad, please, if you can find it in your heart, let me come home." You know what that father did? That father said, "My son, I have been praying that I would hear those words. And, my son, I want you to come home. I love you. You are welcome, my son. Come in—

come in. And son, before you sit down, would you put another piece of wood on the fire?"

Friend, all of the tears and all of the repentance in this world will never take the place of simple obedience—simple obedience. There's no way you can say, "O God, I'm sorry; forgive me; restore me back into fellowship," until you come to that point where you know that you willingly, deliberately disobeyed God, and you turn that disobedience into obedience. And the minute you do, that river of joy will begin to flow.

# The Golden Key of Obedience

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: February 28, 1999**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–33, 41–6:1**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Compelling Reasons for Obedience
- II. The Costly Requirements for Obedience
- III. The Crowning Rewards of Obedience

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you like to be a truly happy and victorious Christian? Most Christians I know are not all that happy, and they're certainly not all that victorious. And, while I'm speaking, would you open your Bibles to Acts chapter 5—Acts chapter 5. We want to talk today about the golden key of obedience—the golden key of obedience. We've sung it so many times: Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Now, you know that we're saved by the grace of God, we're not saved by good works of any kind, but Martin Luther has wisely said, We're not saved by faith and works, but we are saved by faith that works. And if your faith doesn't work, you don't have the Bible kind of faith. Faith without works is d-e-a-d—dead. So, if you're truly saved by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it's going to show up in your works, for we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath foreordained, and we should walk in them. Trust and obey. The railroad of redemption is the old T & O—Trust and Obey, for there's no other way.

Now, let me just back up before I read our scripture—we're going to begin reading in a moment in verse 29, but let me tell you what is happening. The book of Acts tells about the expansion of the early church. Jesus was crucified. He rose from the grave, He gave the Great Commission to begin at Jerusalem, and then Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, sharing the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then He ascended up into heaven, and is now at the right hand of the majesty on high, in the high hills of glory. But He sent back the Holy Spirit to take His place, to energize us, and to guide us in the commission and the task of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The disciples believed that. They began to preach and teach in the name of Jesus.

Opposition arose, and the disciples were thrown into jail for preaching the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The high priests and the Sadducees were incensed with what God was doing with these people. They were filling Jerusalem with their doctrine; they were turning their world upside down, and so, they were put into prison, and then there was a sanctified jailbreak. An angel came and opened the prison doors, and they're right back in the temple, one more time preaching and teaching Jesus Christ. And somebody comes to the high priest, and he says, Did you know that those you put in prison, there's been a jailbreak? They're back in the temple; they're preaching again the gospel of Jesus.

Now, that's the background of our passage of Scripture. Let's begin in verse 27: "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council and the high priest, saying, Did not we straightly command you that you should not teach in this name? And behold you filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered,"—now, folks, tune in right here now—"and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

Now, would you just underscore that phrase "we ought to obey God"? "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins and we are his witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost,"—now, watch this—"whom God hath given to them that obey him." Do you see that? We ought to obey God. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. Jesus went up; the Spirit came down. The disciples went out; the lost came in. We need to repeat that Pentecostal pattern in this day and in this age. We ought to obey God rather than men.

## **I. The Compelling Reasons for Obedience**

You ought to obey God. Look at me now. You, listen. I'm talking to you. You ought to obey God. Do you agree with that? You ought to obey God. Now, listen. I want to give you some compelling reasons for obedience—compelling reasons for obedience. Number one: obedience is a duty—a duty to be performed—a duty to be performed. Verse 29 says, you ought to obey God. Now, the emphasis is He's God—He is God, He is sovereign, Almighty God; He has every right to command His creatures and to expect their obedience. Because He is sovereign God, there can be no refusals and there can be no rebuttals.

Do you know the only alternative to obedience is disobedience? Now, I want you to take your Bibles and write in the margin 1 Samuel 15, verses 22 and 23. There was a king, his name was Saul; he was gifted, handsome, strong; he had everything, but he failed in one crucial point, and it was the point of obedience. He had received a

command from God to utterly destroy the animals that belonged to the Amalekites. And Samuel had told him to do this, and then, when Samuel came back to speak to Saul and ask him if he'd done this, Saul said, Well, I've almost done it. He said, the people didn't kill all of the sheep, and they didn't kill all of the oxen, because we saved the best sheep, and we saved the best oxen, and we were going to sacrifice them to the Lord.

Now, I want you to see what God's man said to this king—1 Samuel chapter 15, verse 22: "To obey is better than to sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams." And then listen to this in verse 23: "For rebellion"—listen—"...rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Now, he says three things that disobedience is—listen to me: it is witchcraft, iniquity, and idolatry. If today you do not say yes to Jesus Christ, I point a finger at you, and tell you that you're trafficking in witchcraft, iniquity, and idolatry.

Why is it witchcraft? What is witchcraft? Witchcraft is simply following Satan. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." You cannot be on both sides of the fence. Listen to me. If you are not obeying Jesus, you are disobeying Jesus, and if you are disobeying Jesus, you are on the same side of the fence as Satan, and you, my friend, are practicing a form of witchcraft. That is following Satan. Now, people don't think of disobedience as witchcraft, but that's what Samuel said to Saul—it's witchcraft. And, after a while, Saul was actually consulting a witch.

But not only is it witchcraft; it is iniquity—iniquity. Do you know what disobedience is? Hey, folks, it's not just missing a blessing; it is a clenched fist in the face of God. It's high treason. And that is iniquity. Don't you think it's a light thing if Jesus Christ tells you to do something and you say no. God says that's iniquitous.

But not only is it witchcraft, and not only is it iniquity, but it is idolatry. You say, Well, I don't see how it's idolatry. Of course it's idolatry, because it means that there are some things or somebody more important to you than God, or else you would obey. You have an idol in your life. There's something that keeps you from obeying. You say, I don't have an idol. Listen. You might see your idol when you shave in the morning—just look in the mirror. There's some thing, there's somebody, that god may be you, that's taken the place of the Almighty. I am telling you, friend, that obedience is a duty to be performed.

But now, wait a minute—here's the second thing. Obedience is a debt to be paid. Do you know where we get the word ought? Do you know our scripture says we ought to obey God rather than men? Do you know the word ought and the word owe are connected—o-w-e? You see, we do what we ought because there's a debt we need to pay. We owe to our Lord. Not only is He sovereign God; He's saving God. Jesus purchased us with His blood on the cross. We are not our own; we are bought with a price. We owe to Him our obedience. Drops of grief can never repay the debt of love I

owe. Dear Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Obedience—listen—is a demand that is placed upon us by the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But not only is it a duty to be performed, and a debt to be paid; it is a delight. Listen. It is a sheer delight to be enjoyed. It is a delight to be preferred. Don't listen to the devil's lie. The devil will say—listen—if you let Rogers talk you today into doing the will of God, your life is going to be miserable. If you say yes to Jesus Christ, you're going to end up as a missionary rotting in the jungles of Pago Pago somewhere, or something. Hey, be careful! Don't let him put that stuff on you. Listen, friend. That's where the joy is, is obeying the Lord.

Just skip on down a little bit here in verse 41: After they had preached and all of this, the Bible says, "And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." What a joy. The will of God is not painful but joyous. The Bible says His commandments are not grievous. It's a lie out of hell that obedience takes away your joy. It is obedience that brings you joy. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Obedience is a delight to be preferred.

Do you know I think one of the reasons that people have such difficulty obeying Jesus? Well, it's hard to take commands from somebody who's a stranger to you. If you don't know Him, then maybe you don't want to obey Him. But when you know Him, and you know who He is, you realize that you ought to obey Him, because He wants to bless you. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.

So what is obedience? A duty to be performed. It's a debt to be paid. It's a delight to be preferred. You ought to choose the will of God, because the will of God is not only best for God and the kingdom; it is best for you. It is good, perfect, and acceptable.

## **II. The Costly Requirements for Obedience**

Now, here's the second thing I want you to notice. Not only the compelling reasons, but the costly requirements for obedience. It's not all honey and no bees. It cost these people to obey, and it's going to cost you to obey. Let me tell you what kind of obedience you need. Number one: you need intelligent obedience.

You see, you must hear God in order to obey God. The reason that some folks don't obey God is they've never heard God. Go back to chapter 5, verse 17: "Then the high priest rose up and all they that were with him, which were the sect of the Sadducees, and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison, but the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and said,"—now, watch it; here it is—"Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Now, when they were standing in the temple and speaking all the

words of this life, they were simply obeying. And why were they obeying? It is because they had heard God speak.

Now, your obedience must be intelligent obedience. God has not promised to bless any endeavor that He has not commanded. Too many Christians are going around doing for God things that He didn't want done.

Now, listen—not only intelligent obedience—are you listening to me? It needs to be intentional obedience—intentional. Now, the reason that some of you, you say, Well, God never speaks to me, so I'm not guilty of disobedience; He hasn't told me to do anything.

Now, wait a minute. Are you listening to Him? Have you reported to Him for duty? It may be that God is speaking but you're not listening. Put this verse down—Proverbs chapter 8, verses 32 through 34: "Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children, for blessed are they that keep my ways." Listen. "Hear instruction and be wise and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gate and waiting at the post of my door." Are you watching at His gates? Are you waiting at the post of His doors? Are you asking yourself, Lord, what is it that you want me to do? You see, intelligent obedience comes from intentional obedience. Do you know what I do many mornings? Many mornings—I guess, most mornings—I lift my hands to God in surrender. I say, I am yours to command; speak to me; I am reporting for duty. Have you done that? I mean, how can you expect to have intelligent obedience if you do not have intentional obedience? You're to listen to the Lord so He can speak to you.

Now, next, it must be immediate obedience. You see, they had commanded them not to preach or to teach in the name of Jesus. You want to see something that's almost humorous? Look in verse 28 again. Here's the high priest saying, "Did we not straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name?" They say, "Don't teach in this name, you got that?" "And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Now, watch this in verse 29: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." Now, watch what he does: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree, him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Savior for to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins." He says, don't preach, and Peter starts preaching. I mean, that's exactly what he's doing—I mean immediately. He says, You can't do this.

Peter says, We ought to obey God rather than men, and he begins to preach, and right there you have the outline of an incredible gospel message. And, at the self-same time he's telling him not to do it, he is doing it. Oh, listen, folks. We need to do it immediately. Did you know that procrastination is just another form of disobedience? Be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.

I have in my files somewhere a story that I clipped—it blessed my heart when I read it. Over in the Alps, a man built a monument to his dog because what had happened was this: he was standing on an alpine peak talking with a friend; his faithful dog was there. And the man just made a gesture pointing at another mountain, and the dog thought it was a command, and leaped to his death. The man built a monument to his dog, such immediate obedience. Ours is not to reason why; ours is not to make reply. Ours is but to do or die. And, when God puts a period, don't you put a question mark.

It needs to be immediate obedience, and it needs to be inflexible obedience. There can be no compromise with obedience. The apostles knew that for them to obey might mean death. Look in verse 33: "And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them." Now, they weren't playing games. They said, You preach any more, we're going to put you to death. So we just have to obey—inflexible obedience.

The problem with many of us is we have kind of selective obedience. We say, Lord, tell me what you want me to do, and I'll see if I want to do it. Reminds me of a man who had a dog, and a fellow said, That sure is a smart dog you have—he looks smart. He says, He is smart. When I get ready to go someplace, I ask him, Do you want to go or stay here? And he makes up his mind, either one he wants to do, and he does it—very smart dog. He either goes or he stays. I know some folks who kind of follow Jesus that way. They have not inflexible obedience; they have selective obedience, which, again, is a form of disobedience.

You know, there was a man named Bunyan—John Bunyan was a seventeenth-century preacher of the gospel. They wanted him to register, to pay the license in order to be a registered preacher, but he knew if he registered with the state, that would mean state control, and he knew that the state was not the head of the church, Jesus is the sovereign Lord of the church. And, on principle, John Bunyan would not sign.

They said, If you preach any more, we'll put you in prison, on principle. He would not cease preaching, and so they put John Bunyan in a foul, filthy, smelly prison. His wife was sickly. They had no means of income. His little daughter was epileptic. They put him in the prison. Other preachers had signed and registered, and they were out preaching, but John Bunyan's church doors were nailed shut. He had few visitors there in the prison.

You know what they did to John Bunyan? They put his pardon, his release from prison, just outside his cell door, and put a pen there. All he had to do was just reach out, take it, and sign it, and they would open the door. It was right there. They said, All you have to do is register, and that's it. He refused for the same principle I'm preaching on. We ought to obey God rather than men. And the next time you read Pilgrim's Progress, you remember that it was written by a man in prison who had inflexible

obedience. Trust and obey. Listen. The golden key is obedience. It is obedience.

Now, I want to say another thing. Not only does it need to be inflexible obedience; it needs to be impassioned obedience. We need to obey with a zeal, not grudgingly or of necessity. Do you have a zeal to obey God?

I was watching a basketball game yesterday. I went to watch the Bellevue kids play. Of course, I had a granddaughter. Two Bellevue teams were playing one against the other, but you know which one I was cheering for? I was cheering for Angie's team. I love both teams, and went over and had a prayer with them, and hugged them all, but I just had to be cheering for one team. And, you know, it was just a great thing to be there. Oh, I thank God for the sports program we have here, which is but a laboratory where we work out the things that we're teaching in Sunday School—character building.

I wish you could have seen the radiance on the hearts of these young girls. But folks, I want to tell you something. Our team was miserably behind—I'm talking about Angie's team—and in the third quarter they began to move forward. Now, they did lose the game ignominiously, but forget that. In the third quarter—in the third quarter—they started scoring, and got within two points of that other team that was way out ahead—light years ahead, and they got within two points.

You know, I got to thinking. I watched those moms and pops and grandparents, including myself, go wild there, go bananas over putting a bag of air through a basket. And I thought to myself when they made a basket and cheered, O God, give us that kind of enthusiasm when a soul gets saved—when a soul gets saved. Can you understand what is happening when one soul comes to Jesus—just one soul? Friend, there's a party in heaven; there's rejoicing in the presence of the angels when soul gets saved. Everybody says it's the angels that are rejoicing. No, it is rejoicing in the presence of the angels. Who's in the presence of the angels? Jesus, He's up there saying, There's another one; there's another soul. You know what we need in this church? A burning, blazing, impassioned obedience to Jesus Christ. Don't wait—don't wait. We do. We need to have obedience.

Now, listen. There are some costly requirements for obedience. If you're looking for a cheap way—an easy way, a lazy way—to serve God, forget it. We are called upon to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. God have mercy upon our good lord, good devil, mamby pamby type of Christianity. The average church member will not even come back on Sunday night because he wants to stay home, kick back, and watch some inane television show or something. How are we going to get that person across the ocean with the gospel of Jesus Christ? He won't even go to his next-door neighbor.

### III. The Crowning Rewards of Obedience

There are compelling reasons for obedience. There are costly requirements for obedience. One final thing, folks: I want you to see the crowning rewards of obedience. You see, our song that we sing, trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. What are the crowning rewards? Well, let's look in verse 32. I love this. They're preaching, and they say, We are His witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him. That's wonderful. We're witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost. You know, that's really what preaching is all about. Before I come out here on Sunday mornings, I get on my knees, and I pray, tell the Lord what I'm going to say, and if it sounds good in His ears, I don't care what you think about it. That's the truth. I'm not trying to please you. I tell Him, if it sounds good in His ears, I'm dependent upon Him to convict you.

Listen. You see, all this seeker-friendly evangelism, let me tell you something about that. We want to be kind, we want to be considerate, we want to be welcoming, we want to smile, we want to be nice and all of that; but friend, we are not going to pander to lost people trying to make them feel good in their sins. Now, listen to me. The Bible says, if I please men, I should not be a servant of God. I want to please Him because I'm dependent upon Him to convict you and to teach you. You see, here's what good preaching is. We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost.

Now, let's suppose that Bob is an old lost sinner. He was at one time—weren't you, Bob? All right now, Bob's a lost sinner, and I'm up here preaching, and he's looking at me, and the Holy Spirit's saying, What he's telling you is true; he's telling the truth. He's preaching the truth to you—that's the Holy Spirit. You see, I'm preaching, and we're witnesses to these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost. There ought to be two in the pulpit, Adrian and the Holy Spirit, all at the same time, isn't that true? I'm a witness, and while I'm preaching, the Holy Spirit of God is saying, Amen, that's true. That's the supernatural aspect of preaching.

Now, friend, listen. To whom does God give the Holy Spirit? To those that obey Him. Spiritual power is not for rebels. Spiritual power is not simply for you to feel good. Oh, people say, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit so I can feel good. Listen. Spiritual gifts are tools, not toys. God gives the Holy Spirit to those that obey Him, for there's a job to be done. And what is that job? We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost that God hath given to them that obey Him.

So, what are the crowning rewards? Number one: the Spirit is received. Number two: joy is achieved—joy is achieved. Verse 41 again—look at it: "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy—worthy—to suffer shame for his name." Thank you, Jesus, that they can see a difference. People that you work with, can they see a difference in you? Are you bearing the reproach of the Lord

Jesus Christ? You see, not only are we witnesses; we're part of the evidence.

You want joy, wonderful joy? Let me tell you what Jesus said about obeying His commandments. In John chapter 14, verse 21, He said this: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loves me; and he that loves me will be loved by the Father,"—now, watch this—"and I will manifest myself to him." People say, Well, Jesus is not real to me. I hear everybody talking about loving Jesus, and enjoying Jesus. Why isn't Jesus real to me? Listen to it again. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will manifest myself to him."

What are the crowning rewards of obedience? The Spirit is received. What are the crowning rewards? Joy is achieved. And here's the last one: the gospel is believed—the gospel is believed. Continue to read, and look in verse 42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to preach and teach Jesus Christ. And in those days,"—chapter 6, verse 1—"when the number of the disciples was multiplied." I love that. Stop making addition; now start making multiplication. Why? It's simple. They just said we're going to obey God rather than men. We are going to obey God.

Brother Whitmire, my heart almost leaps out of my chest when I look at the assembly that's here this morning and wonder what would happen if every mother's child sitting in this building would say, I'm going to obey God. I am telling you, if the people in this church—the staff, the choir, the deacons, the teachers, the committee people, and Mr. & Mrs. Bellevue—would say, I'm going to obey God, you know what would happen? I am telling you, precious friend, there would be multiplied thousands swept into the kingdom of God; I'm telling you. When we obey God, the gospel is believed.

## Conclusion

Frankly, folks, there are a lot of people that think they've done God a wild favor by getting here and sitting down on Sunday morning—do you know that? We went to church on Sunday. Friend, all you're doing here is just coming to get revved up and warmed up to obey—that's all, that's all. You say, I'm going to the service. No, the service is out there; you're going to a meeting right here getting ready to serve.

Now, are you listening to me? You have but two choices, not three—and that is to obey or disobey. And not knowing the will of God is no excuse. God will reveal himself to you. I'm going to preach about that tonight, about knowing the will of God. But you just have two choices. And if you disobey, that's witchcraft—that is iniquity, that is idolatry. I don't know whether God's calling you to a mission field or not; He just may be telling you today to go apologize to somebody. I don't know whether God is calling you to give a thousand dollars; He might be just telling you, teenager, go clean up your

bedroom. If you want to witness to your unsaved mother, why don't you live like a Christian at home?

I don't know what He's telling you to do, but I know one thing: if you will report, listening daily at His gates, listening at His doors, you are going to hear Him speak. And whether it is big or small, whatever it is, obey it. There's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. Men and brethren, we ought to obey God. Say amen. We ought to obey God. It needs to be intelligent, and intentional, inflexible, impassioned obedience.

Bow your heads in prayer. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, you know the Bible says, Paul said to the church of Thessalonica, that Jesus Christ is coming in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that obey not the gospel. You begin a life of obedience to Jesus Christ by obeying the gospel. How do you obey the gospel? You believe, because that's what He's commanded us to do, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and I promise you today on the authority of the Word of God that Jesus Christ will save you, and He will keep you saved; I promise you, if you will trust Him today as your Lord and Savior. Would you like to be saved? Maybe you didn't come here with any intention of giving your heart to Jesus, but you know there's a hunger in your heart today, and there's a disquietude because of your sin, and there's a burden, and you need more, and you know that you were made for more, and you know that you're only going to be here for a few years at the best. Then there's an eternity out there, and a death to die, and a judgment to face, and you know that you need to be saved. Now, you can be saved today. I want to lead you in a prayer, and I want you to pray this prayer silently but fervently in your heart. And, if you will pray it and mean it, God will save you, for the Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Pray from your heart, Dear God...—that's right, just speak to Him—Dear God, I know that you love me and that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you, Jesus. Would you tell Him that? I believe that you are the Son of God. I believe that you paid for my sin with your blood on the cross. Thank you for doing that. I believe that God raised you from the dead; I believe it. And now, by faith, I receive you, Jesus, into my heart, as my Lord and Savior. I turn from my sin to you, Lord Jesus. I yield my life to you. I'm very weak, but you are strong. Begin now to make me what you want me to be; begin now, and help me never to be ashamed of you. Give me the courage to make it public. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Expedience of Obedience

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: February 8, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:27–33, 41–6:1**

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## Introduction

**W**ould you take God's Word, please, and turn to Acts chapter 5. We're continuing our series, "That Old-Time Religion." Acts chapter 5 and while you're turning to it, and as soon as you have finished turning to it, would you look up here, and I want to ask you a question this morning: How many truly, happy, joyful, vibrant, and victorious Christians do you know? You might say, "Well, Pastor, not that many." I'm going to tell you the reason why we have so few. And really, folks, there are not a lot of people who are filled with joy. No Christian has a right to go around looking like the picture on his driver's license. But so many of us do. And what is the reason for this lack of joy? Well, that old song, "Trust and Obey," says: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." I want to talk to you about "The Expedience of Obedience." And I want you to read here, in Acts chapter 5. I begin in verse 29.

Now let me tell you when this passage took place. Peter and the other apostles have been teaching and preaching Jesus Christ, and it's caused quite a stir. It's caused quite an upset. Very frankly, it was a revival. And the civil magistrates and the religious authorities were trying to stop the revival. And so they commanded Peter and the other apostles not to preach anymore. And then, Peter begins in verse 29, which says, "Then

*Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:29–32).*

Now the reason that so many Christians, today, are not filled with joy, victory, happiness, and accomplishment in the Christian life is because they are unbelieving and disobedient Christians. “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” Now we’re not saved because we obey, but we obey because we’re saved. Martin Luther said, “We’re not saved by faith and works. But we are saved by a faith that works.” Jesus said, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46). And if you go to Heaven, dear friend, then I want to tell you that it’s gong to be because you trusted and obeyed. And if you don’t obey, then it’s a sign that you’ve really not trusted, because faith without works is dead. *When you go to Heaven, you’re not going to get there on the ladder of logic or on the rocket of reason, but on the railroad of redemption—the old “T and O”—trust and obey.* “For there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

## **I. The Reasons for Obedience**

### **A. He Is the Sovereign God**

Now I want to talk to you about obedience today—the missing ingredient in so many Christians’ lives. And first of all, let me give you the reasons for obedience—the reasons why you ought to obey. Now Peter says, “*We ought to obey...*” There’s an *ought-ness* to it. Why ought we to obey? Well, number one: because of who God is. He is the sovereign God. And He’s not a man. Peter says, in this passage of Scripture, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). Now a man may tell you to do something, and you may have some choice about it. But very frankly, folks, when God tells you to do something, you don’t have a logical, reasonable choice, because He is the sovereign God. He has every right to command His children. He is the God of creation. Jeremiah 11 and verse 3, says, “*Cursed be the man that obeyeth not...*” (Jeremiah 11:3). Because He’s the sovereign God, there can be no refusal and there can be no rebuttal.

There is only one alternative to obedience, and that is disobedience. And disobedience will bring the swift judgment of Almighty God. The Bible tells us in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, and verse 8, that when Jesus comes, He is coming “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

## B. He Is the Saving God

But not only is He the sovereign God. Let me give you another reason why we ought to obey Him: He is the saving God. He is the saving God. Look at this passage of Scripture again—verses 30 and 31: *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree”*—He loved us enough that He gave His Son to die for us—*“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:30–31). Oh, my dear friend, here’s a greater reason for obeying Him: Not only is He the sovereign God, He’s also the saving God who suffered, bled, and died for us.

Did you know that the word *ought* derives from the word *owe*? The word *ought* and the word *owe* are connected. Why do we obey Him? We owe it to Him. We’re not our own. We’re bought with a price.

But drops of grief can never repay the debt of love I owe;  
Here Lord, I give myself away; ’tis all that I can do. (Isaac Watts)

Men ought to obey God. He suffered, He bled, and He died for us. It is the basest form of ingratitude to fail to obey our great God.

Jesus said, in John 14 and verse 15: *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* God doesn’t want us to serve Him because we have to, but because we desire to and because our motive is love. Why should we obey? Because He’s the sovereign God—He’s not a man—and, because He’s the saving God. He has saved us and redeemed us.

## II. The Requirements for Obedience

Enough said on that subject. Let me move to the second subject. Not only do I want to talk to you, for a few moments, about the reasons for obedience, but let me just narrow it down a little bit and talk to you about the requirements for obedience. Would you like to obey? Would you like to be happy in Jesus? Would you like to have victory in your life? All right, now, let me tell you what kind of obedience we need.

### A. Intelligent Obedience

First of all, we need intelligent obedience—intelligent obedience. I mean, you can’t obey unless you know what it is that God wants you to do. Now you see, back in chapter 4, verse 20, the apostles had said, *“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20). We saw it. We heard it. We’re not just running around doing things for God without knowing what God wants us to do. You know, many folks are doing things for God that God doesn’t want done.

I heard about two little boys who were Boy Scouts. They went out to do their good deeds for the day, and they came back to the scout troop, and they were all bruised and

battered. And they said, “What happened to you?” They said, “Well, we helped a little old lady across the street.” “Well, why are you so beat up?” “She didn’t want to go.” Now there are a lot of people who are doing things like that for God—things that God doesn’t want done. Our obedience to God must be intelligent obedience. You must know the will of God.

## **B. Intentional Obedience**

And because it must be intelligent obedience, ladies and gentlemen, it must be intentional obedience. You must intend to obey. You must seek the will of God. You must want to know the will of God. Now if you don’t know the will of God, then that doesn’t mean that you’re excused, because you should know the will of God. You ought to intend to know the will of God. There ought to be a quiet time in your life, everyday, where you report in for orders and say, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Not: “Lord, what do you want others to do?” And not: “Lord, what do others want me to do?” But: “Lord, what would you have me to do? Lord, inhabit my humanity. Lord, think through my mind. Lord, smile through my countenance. Lord, work through my hands. Lord, love through my heart. Lord, speak through my lips. Here Lord, I report for duty.”

When I was a boy, and my dad used to get that there’s-work-to-be-done-around-this-house look in his eye, I would make myself scarce, and so would my brother. We would just kind of saturate the place with our absence, because there was work to be done. Now if our dad said, “Do this and do that,” we knew that, if we didn’t do it, then we’d be chastised. We’d be disciplined. But we figured out that, if he didn’t tell us, then we weren’t disobedient, because we weren’t there to be told. Did you ever do that when you were a kid?

Now some of us are the same way about God. We think, “Well, it’s not our fault that we don’t know the will of God.” Now I’ll tell you why it is your fault: You make yourself scarce when God wants to speak to you. You have not reported to the Lord. You’ve not said, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Do you have a quiet time? Dear friend, ignorance of God’s will is no excuse. Did you hear me? Ignorance of God’s will is no excuse. And God will hold you accountable for what you hear. And God will hold you accountable for what you would have heard, if you had listened.

## **C. Immediate Obedience**

Now listen. Your obedience—number one—it must be intelligent obedience. And because it must intelligent obedience, it must be intentional obedience. These apostles had set their hearts and their minds to do anything that the Lord Jesus wanted them to do. Now number three: because it is an intelligent obedience; and because it is an intentional obedience, it is immediate obedience. It must be immediate obedience. Now notice verses 27 and following, “*And when they had brought them, they set them before*

*the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Now watch this—"Then Peter and the other apostles answered, and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior" (Acts 5:27–31).*

Now I want you to get this point: While the high priest is telling Peter not to preach, Peter is preaching—I mean, at the same time. While the breath is still in the mouth of the high priest, saying, “Did we tell you not to preach this any more?” Peter’s saying, “God raised Him up. He’s the Lord. He’s the Savior.” The moment that he said not to do it, Peter’s doing it—I mean, the same moment. Now Peter is not questioning. There is no reserve. There’s no backup. There’s no lag in between. Now listen, folks. When God tells you to do something, don’t look around to see if the circumstances are favorable; and don’t wait around to see if you’ll do it tomorrow or the next day. Don’t just parade it past the judgment bar of your mind to see whether it’s reasonable or not—whether you ought to do it. Do it immediately. Did you know that procrastination is a form of disobedience? Did that sink in? Procrastination is a form of disobedience. You may not know why God wants you to do it. You just simply do it.

I read, years and years ago, of a monument built on a mountainside, to a dog. It was built there, by the master, in loving memory of that dog. What had happened is this: This man, with his dog and a friend, were standing there, near a precipice. And the owner of the dog was pointing something out to the friend, and he pointed like this, over the side of the mountain. That dog thought it was his master’s command, and leaped over the mountainside to his death—instant obedience to his master. I wonder if I’m like that—willing to obey my master. Obviously, the dog was only a dog. And obviously, the man was only a man, but let’s just apply that to the sovereign God who can never command us to do wrong.

When He speaks, we must answer Him. The reason that so many of us do not have victory in our lives is that we do not answer immediately.

Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!

Our God is marching on. (Julia Ward Howe)

That obedience to our Lord must be intelligent. And because it is intelligent, it must be intentional. And because it is an intentional obedience, it must be immediate obedience.

Ours is not to reason why.

Ours is but to do and die. (Alfred Lord Tennyson)

We must obey our Lord.

#### D. Inflexible Obedience

And then, let me say next, that this obedience must be inflexible obedience, regardless of the circumstances. Notice in verse 33—it talks about the enemies of the gospel, and the Bible says, *“When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them”* (Acts 5:33). That means that these men’s lives were in danger—actual, physical danger. And yet, in the face of that danger, with inflexibility, they stood and they said, *“We ought to obey God rather than men,”* regardless of the consequences. There can be no compromise with this obedience, even in the face of death. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

We had Joseph Tson, who was here, a great Romanian pastor of a large Baptist church in Romania. The communists came to Joseph Tson—some of you heard him tell this story—and they said, “Mr. Tson, we’re going to let you continue to preach, but you must register as a State preacher. And if you register, then we will allow you to preach. But if you don’t register, then you’ll not be allowed to preach.” Joseph Tson had to think about that: “Should I register with the communists? If I do, I will be able to stay as pastor of this church, and I will be able to preach. But,” he said, “if I register, then I no longer can say that God only is sovereign—now I must say that the State is sovereign. Now there will be a certain amount of control and strings on my message.”

He went alone with God to the mountain to pray. And he fasted and prayed, and fasted and prayed, and prayed it through, until he had the mind of God and a word from God. And God said, “Joseph, don’t register. Don’t do it.” Joseph Tson went back to his wife—she was here too—lovely lady. He said to her, “God has said that I am not to register.” They prayed it through. It would be worse on her than him, if they killed him. He would go to Heaven. She would be left behind to face it all. But they prayed it through. They got down on their knees and said, “We’re going to trust God. We’re going to obey God rather than men.”

The communist official came the next day. By the way, Joseph said that he and his wife went to bed that night and slept like babies. The next morning, the communist official came and said, “Mr. Tson, are you willing to register?” He said, “Sir, I will not register.” He said, “Mr. Tson, do you know what we can do to you?” He said, “I’m aware of what you can do to me. I’m aware that you have the power of the State, and I’m aware that you have the power, actually, to take my life. But ” he said, “I want you to know that your greatest weapon is killing. But let me tell you what my greatest weapon is: My greatest weapon is dying.” He said, “What?” “Yes, dying,” he said. He said, “What do you mean, Mr. Tson?” He said, “You see,” he said, “I preach the gospel by radio. I have preached the gospel by cassette tape. I have preached the gospel from the pulpit. I have preached the gospel in printed sermons; and, people know the life that I’ve lived, and they know the truth that I preach.” He said, “Now if you kill me, then you’re going to

baptize every message, every tape, every sermon, and every book that I've issued, in my blood. It will be sprinkled with my blood, and people will know that I believe what I have preached enough to die for it; and there will be more believers. So," he said, "I want to tell you that, if you use your weapon, then I'll be forced to use mine."

That communist official went back and said, "Leave Tson alone. He's crazy. He's crazy." Today, Joseph Tson, the head of Romanian Missionary Society, is beaming the gospel all over Romania, because here was a man who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

I think of John Bunyan, that great preacher of the gospel, back in seventeenth century England—John Bunyan, the non-conformist. They said to him, "Mr. Bunyan, you must register to preach the gospel, if you would preach the gospel in England." He said, "I'll have no strings on my message. I will not register." They put him there, in that prison—dark, damp, and dirty, with vermin and lice. He didn't even have a bed to sleep on. He had a little girl who had epilepsy. He had a wife who was living in poverty. They closed the doors of his church. Other preachers had signed—they were preaching, and their churches were open. But John Bunyan was there in prison, and he said, "I will not sign. I will not." They put the license right outside his jail cell. All that he had to do was just to reach through the bars, pick it up, and sign it—just sign it—and they would open the doors, and he would be free. But he stayed in that prison and he refused to obey men rather than God. And while he was in prison, he wrote the book that you ought to know and love—*Pilgrim's Progress*. And every time that you read it, you'll read that it's written by a man who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men"—which exhibits an inflexible obedience, because God is God. And even in the face of the fact that these could take counsel to slay them, they said, "We're going to obey God."

### **E. Impassioned Obedience**

Now friend, I want to tell you that, not only should that obedience be an inflexible obedience, but, dear friend, that obedience ought also to be an impassioned obedience—an impassioned obedience. Notice how they obeyed the Lord with great joy. I mean, look, if you will, here in verses 41 and 42: "*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*" (Acts 5:41–42).

Dear friend, they did it with a burning, blazing, passionate, and emotional zeal. Do you have zeal to obey God? I mean, not just do you obey Him, but also do you obey Him with gladness? The Bible says, "*Serve the LORD with gladness*" (Psalm 100:2). *I believe that the cause of Jesus Christ has been hurt more by Sunday morning benchwarmers than by all the infidels put together*—people who just kind of drag their

feet. They have no joy, no zest.

“Hmm,” some of them say, “well, I’m a moderate.” Friend, you can’t be moderate about Jesus Christ. You can’t be moderate about the Bible. You can’t be moderate about Heaven, nor about Hell. Jesus Christ said to that church at Laodicea, *“Because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked...I will spew thee out of my mouth”* (Revelation 3:16–17). That is, figuratively, “You make me want to regurgitate.” *God would rather have you out and out against Him than half-hearted, pretending to be for Him. A man who is faithful to his wife part of the time is not faithful at all.*

Dear friend, we are to be out and out for Jesus Christ. There’s to be a zeal for serving the Lord. We’re to serve Him with gladness, with all of our heart, with fullness, with joy, and with enthusiasm. God forgive our half-hearted obedience to the things of God. These disciples loved the Lord so much that the Bible says that they departed from this council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Some people believe that they’ve done God a favor when they get here on Sunday morning. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

### **III. The Rewards of Obedience**

Now last of all, I’ve talked to you about the reasons for obedience. He is the sovereign God. He is the saving God. I’ve talked to you about the requirements for obedience. We ought to obey God as these men obeyed God, so long ago. Now let me talk to you about the rewards of obedience, all right? What are the rewards of obedience? Well, there are many, but our text especially points out three that I want to mention to you today.

#### **A. Supernatural Power in the Life**

The first reward of obedience is supernatural power in the life—supernatural power in the life. Notice, in verse 32: *“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit”—are you listening?—“whom God hath given to them that obey him”* (Acts 5:32). *“So is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”* You say, “Well, I don’t have spiritual power.” Have you been obeying God? *Would you give the keys to a high-powered, expensive, brand new automobile to a rebellious and disobedient son? I don’t think so. I know that God is not going to lavish spiritual power upon rebels.* I know this: that when you bring your life into conformity to the will of God, when you say, “Oh Lord, my desire, my ambition, the driving motive of my heart and my life is to obey you,” then God says, “All right now, I’m going to release spiritual power through you.” Do you want power in your life? Do you have power in your life? Not without obedience, you don’t, and you never will.

## B. Supernatural Joy in the Heart

The second reward of obedience is this: not only is there supernatural power in the life, but there's supernatural joy in the heart. Look in verse 41: *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:41). You say to me, "Brother Rogers, I just don't have any joy in my Christianity. It's just dull. It's just boring. It's insipid. I just don't have any victory. Jesus Christ is not real to me." Well, if Jesus Christ is not real to you, then I'll tell you why: it's because you're not obeying Him. Let me give you a verse of scripture—John 14 and verse 21: *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..."* (John 14:21).

Now folks, let's just stop there, for a moment. Don't say that you love Jesus, if you don't obey Him. That's empty talk. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me"*—now listen—*"and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21). Do you know what the word *manifest* means, boys and girls? It means this: I'll make myself known to you; I'll be real to you. The reason that Jesus Christ is not real to many people is that they're not obeying Him, and He's not manifesting Himself to them. Can you say:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me  
And He tells me I am His own,  
And they joy we share as we tarry there  
none other has ever known. (Austin Miles)

Can you say, "It's real. It's real. It's real"? Not if you're not obeying. Not if you're not obeying. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21).

## C. Salvation Victory in the Church

There will be spiritual power in the life. There will be supernatural joy in the heart. And there will be salvation victory in the church. We're going to see souls saved by great numbers. I want you just to notice in verse 29: *"We ought to obey God"* (Acts 5:29). Well, what has God told us to do? It's to witness. Look in verse 32: *"And we are his witnesses of these things"* (Acts 5:32). Yes. Now look in verse 42: *"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"* (Acts 5:42). Now look in chapter 6, verse 1: *"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..."* (Acts 6:1). It makes sense, doesn't it? We ought to obey God. We are witnesses. *"They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ...[and] the number of the disciples was multiplied"* (Acts 5:42–6:1). When, my dear friend, there's supernatural power in the life, and supernatural joy in the heart, there's going to be

supernatural victory in the church. Now we're going to see great multitudes of people come to Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Now I want you to look at your pastor, right now, and understand that what I'm telling you, I'm telling you in love. But the majority of the members of this church are not obedient to the Lord. You're not. The reason that I know that you're not is that you're not witnessing. You're not sharing Jesus Christ. You haven't prepared. You say, "I don't know how." Well, learn how. You say, "Well, I don't have opportunity." Well, make the opportunity. I am telling you, ladies and gentlemen, that the only alternative for obedience is disobedience. Acts, chapter 6, and verse 1, says that the number of the disciples was multiplied. Evangelism in the average church doesn't even make good addition, but it's supposed to be multiplication. A church this size ought to see multiplied thousands saved every year. Isn't that right? We ought to. But it is not we who can do it, unless we obey the Lord. The best advice that was ever given to anyone was what Mary gave to the servants there at that wedding in Cana of Galilee, when she said to them, "*Whatever he saith unto you, do it*" (John 2:5). Do it. "*Whatever he saith unto you, do it.*"

Stephen Grellet was a missionary back in the pioneer days of the United States of America. He was a Quaker evangelist preacher and missionary. He was out on the western borders of our nation—at the foot of the Rockies. He was praying and seeking the face of God. He felt that inner urge—that word from the Lord—that said he was to go to a certain lumber camp and preach an evangelistic message. He checked it out, and felt in his spirit that it was a word from God. Has God ever just spoken to you where you just knew it was God speaking? He just felt that it was God speaking. And God said that he was to go.

So he went to this particular lumber camp, and he expected to preach a revival crusade. When he got there, there was not a soul in the lumber camp—not a one. He looked around, and he thought, "Well, maybe they're over at the mess hall." Stephen Grellet went over to the mess hall. He thought, "Maybe there'll be a cook there, or somebody." There was no one there. He said, "Lord, you've told me to come and preach. I don't understand it, but I'm going to be obedient." And he stood in that empty mess hall and preached his heart out. He just preached Jesus. He preached salvation. He pled for souls to be saved, in an empty place. And then, he gave an invitation for people to receive Christ. And then, had a benediction and went his way, satisfied that he'd been obedient—not understanding it all.

Years later, across the ocean, Stephen Grellet was on the London Bridge, standing there, when a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder and a voice said, "Are you Stephen Grellet?" He said, "I am." This man said, "I've been looking the world over for you. I want

to speak to you. Do you remember going to thus and such a lumber camp at the foot of the Rockies and preaching a sermon to an empty mess hall?" "Yes." "You thought no one heard you. But," he said, "I heard you." He said, "I was the foreman of the crew. We were out in the woods cutting trees. But I came back for another ax." He said, "I heard you in there preaching. And I stood behind a stack of wood, and I listened to you, and I was ashamed to make myself known. But what you said penetrated my heart and brought me under conviction. And," he said, "I went back into the woods, and I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. And," he said, "I went back and shared what happened with three other lumberjacks, and all three of them gave their heart to Jesus Christ. And," he said, "I want you to know, sir, that the four of us have become missionaries and evangelists, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ."

There was a man who was obedient—not knowing why—but just simply obedient. We are witnesses, doing what God tells us to do. Dear friend, when we begin to obey God—I mean, really obey God—we're going to get back to "That Old-Time Religion" and New Testament Christianity in this twentieth-century. "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Let us pray. Heads are bowed. Eyes are closed. Is there an area of disobedience in your life? Is God telling you to make restitution? Obey Him. Is God telling you to make confession? Obey Him. Is God telling you to witness? Obey Him. Is God telling you to tithe? Obey Him. Obey Him. We ought to obey God. He is the sovereign God. He is the saving God.

Father, I pray that you will bring us—every one—to a point, not only where we obey when we hear, but, Lord, where we will actually seek to hear what you want us to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# The Ecology of a Church

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: November 11, 1999**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 5:42–6:7**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth
  - II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems
  - III. Where There Are Problems, There Are God-Given Solutions
  - IV. Where There Are God-Given Solutions, There Will Be Even Greater Growth
- Conclusion

## Introduction

There is a classic passage that we come back to every time we ordain deacons, and it's found in Acts chapter 6, and we need to look at it again, for those who've never heard it, and for those who know it and need to be reinforced, because we need to understand how a church operates. Let me tell you again The Ecology of a Church.

So many times, if you come to Bellevue, you may be at first amazed at what happens. I am, and I am the Pastor. And then, you may not only be amazed, but you may be a little perplexed. You say, "Who does all of this? And how does it get done?" How does this church operate? Well, let me tell you what I believe a New Testament model is. A church is pastor-led. It is deacon-served. It is committee-operated. It is congregationally affirmed. Let me say that again: Its pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-operated, and it is congregationally confirmed. And you keep all of those in balance, and you are going to have a church that is an organization and an organism all at the same time.

Now, we believe that the second in that quadrant is the matter concerning the deacons: a church is deacon-served. The very word "deacon" means "servant." Now, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 5, verse 42: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." And that is the formula for a growing church. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations"—that is, the serving of commodities and food to the Grecian widows. "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them..."—now, the twelve, he is talking here about the twelve apostles—"...called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the

Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great [number] of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Now, I don't know whether you remember being a teen or not. But if you were a teenager coming through puberty into your teenage years, you suffered what we all suffered, and that is growing pains. And those pains sometimes were physical, and many times they were emotional, but sometimes it hurts to grow. And many of us remember the awkwardness of those years where we didn't know whether we were a little boy or a young man, or what we were. Growth sometimes causes growing pains. A verse of Scripture that reminds me of that is Psalm chapter 4 and verse 1—the Psalmist said there, “...thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress...” And that is true. Can you think of the times when you've grown the most? I dare say that the times when you grew the most spiritually is not when things were going the best for you, but when you had difficulty, when you had heartache, when you had tears, when you had needs, when you had stress—that's when you grew. “Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress...”

Now, not only do individuals have growing pains, but churches have growing pains. And any growing church is going to have some growing pains. And so, let me give you some principles here, and help you understand why we're ordaining these deacons, and installing other deacons tonight.

## **I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth**

First principle is this: that where there is life, there's growth. Where there is life, there is growth. Look again in verse 42 of chapter 5: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” Now, in Acts chapter 2, the Bible says, “...there were added unto them three thousand souls.” But addition is changed now to multiplication; growing not simply by addition, but they are growing exponentially. They are growing by multiplication.

Now, let me say this: there is nothing wrong with a small church. I have pastored churches where we would not have as many in the church on a big Sunday than we have in the choir behind me tonight. And they were wonderful churches. And God was

there, and I enjoyed the small church. And I love small churches. And in God's sight there are no big and little churches. But there is nothing wrong with a small church—thank God for it. But there is something wrong with any church, big or small, that is not growing, if that church is in the midst of unsaved people. We need to grow.

Somebody was asked to paint a portrait of a dead church. One person painted a portrait of a dead church. It was an old dilapidated building. It was falling down and so forth. But that portrait did not win the prize. The prize that was won was by a church building that was absolutely, immaculately clean, pristine in its appearance, every appointment, every accouterment just right, but if you looked in the baptistry, very closely, you could see a spider's web. They were not using the baptistry. An old spider had made himself or herself, whichever it was, at home there in that baptistry. That is a dead church. And I've told you before, we will grow and grow, or we will dry and die.

We will evangelize, or we will fossilize. Growth for the early church, and for this church, is not automatic. Brother Mark and I have been talking about this, how we need to get even more intentional about our growth. These early Christians planned for growth, they prayed for growth, they planted, they cultivated, they watered, and God gave increase. But again, where there is life, there is growth.

Now, you have your Bibles in your hand. Let's do a little research there. Go back to Acts chapter 2, verse 41, and look at it with me for a moment—Acts 2 and verse 41. I want to show you the kind of growth this church was having. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." How would you like to see three thousand souls saved in one day at Bellevue Baptist Church? I don't think that's impossible at all. As a matter of fact, I think we have to expect that someday we'll see three thousand souls come to Jesus in one day in one service. Why not? Why not?

All right now, look in chapter 4 and verse 4, and just turn over here a minute, and look here: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of men was about five thousand." Now, at first they had three thousand saved. Now, they're having five thousand saved in one service, and many more than that, because he's just counting the men here. He's not counting the women and the children. There could have been as many as ten thousand or twenty thousand saved in this one service. Just, he mentions only the men, and they're five thousand there.

Now, look, if you will, in chapter 5 and verse 14: "And believers were the more added to the Lord—he's stopped counting now and he's just saying, "multitudes"—multitudes of men and women." Thank God for that.

Now, go back to chapter 6 and verse 1, where we started: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Now, question: was this a growing church or not? It was a growing church. If you're not interested in church growth, there's

nothing wrong with you that an old-fashioned revival or a good dose of salvation wouldn't cure.

Now, folks, we're talking about bringing lost souls to Christ, and God's command to this church is to be fruitful and multiply. So, here it is: where there is life, there is growth.

## **II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems**

Secondly: Where there is growth, there are problems—there are problems. When God wants to multiply, the devil wants to divide. So now look, if you will, in chapter 6, verse 1: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring...” Isn't that an ugly word? Murmur. It's just an ugly word to say it. What happened is there were two types of Jews in a church. There were Hebrew Jews, who lived in Palestine, who spoken Hebraic, and then, there were Jews who lived in Greece, and, of course, they spoke Greek. And the two societies were having difficulty merging together. And those who were Greeks, the Bible here calls them “Grecians.” By the way, they made fun of George W. Bush for calling people who live in Greece, “Grecians”—well, he's just right with the Bible; it calls them “Grecians” right here in the King James Version of Scripture. Those who were Grecians felt that they were being neglected, that somehow they were not being served, they were not being ministered to as they should be ministered to, and arose a murmuring. Now, I want us to think a little bit, brothers and sisters, about murmuring, okay? The problem was legitimate. The method that was used was devilish, and deadly, and divisive. And it was murmuring. Listen to me. Never, never, never no never, no never, be a murmurer. God deliver me from any church that is filled with murmuring.

What is murmuring? It is a half uttered, half concealed complaint. It never comes in the right spirit, with the right attitude, to the right person. But it's underneath the surface. And the Bible is dead set against it. Every murmurer is sinning against Almighty God. Put in your margin Exodus chapter 16 and verse 8. The people in the Old Testament were murmuring against Moses, and Moses said, “This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full—they were complaining there because they were not getting enough to eat—that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him.” “The LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? Your murmuring is not against us, but against the LORD.”

If you murmur against church leadership, you know who you are really murmuring against? God. You say, “Adrian, you think you're God?” No, I don't have any doubts about that. But I believe that God puts leadership in the church. I believe that pastors and leaders are God's gift to the church. You say, “That's arrogant.” No, it's Bible. The Bible says, and He gave pastors and teachers, for the building of the body of Christ.

And when we murmur, we are really murmuring against God. And, in the Bible, let me tell you how God classes murmuring. God classes murmuring along with idolatry and fornication. I can't think of two worse sins than idolatry and fornication. Idolatry is worshiping a false god. Fornication is the most egregious sin of the flesh. But listen to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 7 and following. Paul is talking to the people at Corinth, and he said, "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." Twenty-three thousand died in one day because they were fornicating. "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the tempter." Did you see that? In this passage—if you want to check it out again, 1 Corinthians 10 beginning in verse 7—God ranks idolatry and fornication, and God ranks murmuring along with those three sins. Murmuring is the devil's way to divide when God wants to multiply. Never, no never, no never, no never dare to be a murmurer. As a matter of fact, God gives us a command. Philippians 2, verse 14, and here's what it says: "Do all things without murmuring..." That's a command, clear, plain, and straight. Now, you're going to have problems, and problems need to be addressed—never, however, with murmuring.

Now, you put people and progress together, and you're going to have problems. You ought to try to pastor a church like Bellevue. You know, you folks are all so different. You have different ideas, different tastes. Now, the music we did tonight, that was classic music. But when you get the men's quartet out here, that's not classic music. Now, I tell you, some of us resonate to the quartet music, and some resonate to the music we had tonight. There are all kinds of tastes and differences and ideas. Why? Because God made us so different. A church is a mosaic of different people. And we have different ideas. And no one's right and no one is always wrong.

Now, what about this problem? I say that the problem was a legitimate problem. But the method they went about dealing with it was very devilish; it was of the devil. The problem was not doctrinal; it was functional. The problem was not primary; it was petty. I've been around churches long enough to know that, generally, the problems in churches are not primary; they are petty. They moved our classroom. I wasn't notified. These are the kinds of things. I've known of churches that would get in a church fight on which side of the worship center the American flag would be, or something like that. These are petty things. Now, folks, anything that moves makes friction. And anything that grows must adjust. There are always more opportunities for problems in a growing church. But listen to me. I'd rather be a member of a growing church than a dead one. "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring..."

### **III. Where There Are Problems, There Are God-Given Solutions**

Number one: Where there's life, there is growth. Number two: Where there is growth, there are problems. Number Three: Where there are problems, there are God-given solutions. There are no problems that are too big to solve, just people too small to solve them. There's always a God-given solution when there is a problem, especially when that problem is caused by God's blessings and by God's growth. And so, begin now in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we—that is, the apostles, the counterpart of pastors—we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip..." and so forth.

Now, here's a very practical solution. Let me tell you this about the Bible. The Bible is deeply spiritual; it is intensely practical. And so should every Christian be both spiritual and practical at the same time. God is a God of order. And God told the Corinthian church, let everything be done decently and in order. We heard the song tonight, In the Beginning was the Word, that was talking about in creation when God spoke and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep, and the world at that time was a chaos, and the Spirit of God made a cosmos out of chaos. He brought order out of disorder. And the Holy Spirit always does that.

A church like Bellevue Baptist Church has wheels inside of wheels. Most of you have no idea how much organization there is in this church. But that church machinery, if I can use that analogy, has to be oiled with this oil of the Holy Spirit. That's what keeps it going. That's what keeps it moving.

Now, the main thing that we are built around is the message. I don't say the messenger, but the message of the messenger. If you take the truth that is symbolized by this pulpit out of this church, after all, it's just fragment. What holds us together is the truth, the preaching of the Word of God. Now, that's the reason. Look in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables." When this church ceases to emphasize the Word of God, it's the most unreasonable, nonsensical thing that we could do. Notice again in chapter 6, verse 4, the apostle said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." It was not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to serve tables. That wasn't it. God just simply gave them a different assignment. Up until this time, they were trying to handle this taking care of these widows who felt neglected; then they found that they were getting behind in their prayer time, they were getting behind in their Bible study, they were

getting behind in their soul winning, they were getting behind in their preaching, and they said, this doesn't make sense. I know as a pastor it is so easy to get behind. It is so easy to fail to do the main thing that I need to do. And I want to be as available to this congregation as I can be. But I heard a wise preacher a long time ago say the pastor who's always available isn't worth very much when he is available. And that is true. The best time I spend, I suppose, is not when I am here talking to you about God, but when I am with God talking to Him about you, in prayer, and filling my heart and my mind with the Word of God.

And so, why does God call pastors? Why does God give us church leaders? Put down Ephesians 4, verses 11 and 12: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints..." God gave you a pastor-teacher to perfect you. That means for the maturing of the saints, for the work of the ministry. Now, you are to be made mature, so you do the work of the ministry. You say, "That's what we hire you for." No you don't hire me; I'm not a hireling. I'm going to smile when I say this, but I'm God's gift to you. I'm God's gift to you. I'm His gift to you. I'm not a hireling. I'm not asking for applause. But I am saying this: that you cannot hire someone to be spiritual for you. God gives you a pastor to mature you, so you can do the work of the ministry. God's plan is that every mother's child in this building, and on this church row, be a minister for Jesus Christ; be you young or old, male or female, you have a ministry to perform. And the job of the pastor is to mature you, to help you to grow. And he says, look: "pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry—so that the saints can do the work of the ministry—and for the edifying of the body of Christ." And so, it's the pastor's job to equip you, and to put you to work.

Now, there must be, therefore, the service of the people. Look, if you will, in verse three: "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Now, if the pastor and the spiritual leaders are to be giving themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer, and to take that kind of leadership, then what about the service? And the word service here is a verb form for the word deacon—*diakonia*; it's the word we get our deacon for—for the deaconing of the saints. And that's what he is saying here in verse 3: that they will serve to serve the saints.

Now, we're going to install some deacons tonight, and we are going to ordain some deacons tonight. The early church did not casually, carelessly choose deacons. The early church very carefully and prayerfully chose its deacons. Now, you say, "Well, these are men who are chosen to serve tables; you can get just anybody to serve tables." Wrong. These men were not inferior men—these men were superior men. They were not chosen only to serve tables; this was an incident. They were chosen to serve

wherever they would need to be serving. Now, if you think that serving is a low job, let me tell you what Jesus said, in Matthew chapter 20 and verse 28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be deaconed unto, but to deacon, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Now, the word there that I called “deacon” is really a Greek word that may be translated deacon, we translated “minister,” because a deacon is a minister, a servant. He’s saying, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. And then again, in Mark chapter 10, verse 43: “But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your deacon”—your servant. Service makes you like Jesus. If you want to be great, learn to serve.

Now, what qualities does it take to be a deacon? Look again in verse 3. First of all, a man must have an honest report; he must have an established testimony. “Look ye out among you seven men of honest report.” That is, he already has a track record. He already has an established testimony. Leadership, whether it be from a deacon or a pastor, functions on the basis of confidence. You ought to have confidence in the men of God that are deacons. And you men have to be worthy of confidence.

A little boy saw the deacons coming forward in a service one time, and he said, “here come the beacons.” And that’s what you are: you are a beacon of light. And there must be an established testimony.

Number two: you are to be full of the Holy Spirit. Look at it again, in verse 3: “...full of the Holy Ghost...” If you’re going to serve, if you’re going to serve tables, if you’re going to serve in whatever capacity, you cannot do it, unless you are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. No one is fit for any job in this church who is not filled with the Holy Spirit. I don’t care what it is. You say, “How can you tell when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit? If they speak in a strange language?” No. Primarily, if they control the one tongue they have. Listen. Galatians 5, verse 22 and 23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Nobody ever made a law against those things. There is a mark that you, sir, are filled with the Holy Spirit, you, madam, are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Not only an established testimony, not only filled with the Holy Spirit, but full of wisdom. Look again in verse 3: “...full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom...” You know what I look for in a deacon? I look for smart men. I look for wise men. Listen. It’s better to have good men and wise men than smart men. Knowledge is important, but it may puff up; wisdom is paramount. And wisdom is the ability to use knowledge. Knowledge may be proud that it knows so much. Wisdom is humble that it knows so little.

What mighty men these were. Verse 5 tells us they chose Stephen. You know who Stephen was? You read in the Bible, in Acts chapter 7, one of the mightiest sermons ever preached was preached by a deacon—not an ordained pastor, but a deacon. He preached with such power that they rose up against him and stoned him to death. But

his death was what put a prick in the heart of the man named Saul that later became the apostle Paul. Stephen, a deacon, had a face that shone like an angel. He became the first Christian martyr. He was a deacon—not an ordinary guy, but an extraordinary guy.

And then, Philip, a laymen, was holding a revival meeting down in an area where God called him to come and go out in the desert, and meet one lost man, a high governmental official from Ethiopia, and Philip, perhaps, was the first missionary as well as Stephen being the first martyr, Philip the deacon probably opened up all of north Africa to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, the men that we have as deacons in this church are not just six and sevens; they are nines and tens. I mean, they're real men. The kind of men that we want for deacons are the kind of men that we can call and put on this church staff if God were to call them to be on our church staff. And many of our deacons have become church staff members. Our immediate former Associate Pastor, Bob Sorrell, was a deacon. Mark Dougharty, who is our Associate Pastor, was a deacon. Greg Addison, who is serving in a distinctive way, one of our newest staff members, was a deacon. David Scott, who keeps this church plant humming and going, is a deacon, was a deacon. Phil Weatherwax, who heads up all our inner city ministry, a deacon. Bryson McQuiston, called out of the deacon fellowship to come and serve here on our church staff, an ordained minister, was a deacon. And all of these men, none of them had been to seminary; the seminary was Bellevue Baptist Church. That was their seminary. That's where they were trained. And we have other men who are not ordained but on the church staff who have come out of our deacon fellowship. Like Craig Parker who serves with distinction and handles with impeccable ability the financial matters of this church. And other wonderful, wonderful men, these are former deacons that God laid His hand on and called, because our deacons are quality men. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there may be problems. Where there are problems, there are God-given solutions that are intensely practical and deeply spiritual.

#### **IV. Where There Are God-Given Solutions, There Will Be Even Greater Growth**

Now, listen to me. Where there are God-given solutions, there will be even greater growth. The problem was just a springboard for them to depend upon God and grow all the more. Look now, beginning in verse 4: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude—that's the reason I said it's congregationally affirmed—and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith..." and so forth. And now skip down to verse 7: "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly..." It's getting even better. Now, they were multiplying, but now they are multiplying greatly; it's just

moved up another notch. The problem didn't slow things down. They met the problem in a godly way. Problems are opportunities in reverse. When you see them correctly, deal with them forthrightly, prayerfully. God will see you through those problems. Remember Psalm 4:1: "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress..." I remember reading in the Old Testament, in the Book of Numbers, when Joshua and Caleb had gone into spy out the Promised Land, and we call this land, this building, and then this these acres, we call this our "Canaan." And here's what they said concerning the giants that were in the land—Numbers 14, verses 8 and 9: "If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread—B-R-E-A-D, a piece of cake—for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."

Problems I've learned in ministry. I used to think, one of these days I'm going to get all my problems solved, and then I'll start in the ministry, and I found out my ministry is those problems. But they are what nourish you; they are what causes you to depend upon the Lord. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress..." You get spiritually fat when you feed upon your problems. They are bread for us. That's what nourishes you. And those of you who're in business, your business have some problems? Thank God. If your business didn't have any problems, I'll tell you something: there will be somebody getting paid a whole lot less than what you are getting paid to work where you work. It's your ability to meet and to solve problems that constitute your job. If there were no problems, you wouldn't have a job, mister, lady. Thank God for the problems, and say, "Hey, here's an opportunity for me to be creative, for me to be a part of a solution and not a part of a problem." Because where there are God-given problems—and if God didn't cause the murmuring, then God caused the growth, the growth that caused the murmuring—then there are God-given solutions. So, we're not going to be pessimistic. A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty. And this is why they had the early deacons; this is why we had the first deacons. And we're going to ordain and put some deacons in place now, in just a moment. Some of these are new deacons who have never served in Bellevue Baptist Church before. Listen to me again. A church is pastor-led. A church is deacon-served. A church is committee-operated. A church is congregationally approved and affirmed. That's what makes Bellevue Baptist Church the wonderful church that she is.

## Conclusion

Now, let's think about the deacons that are here tonight because we are going to move right on here and ordain these. First of all, we have a group of deacons that are returning to active status, and you have the list of men, beginning with Mark Allen, and

going all the way down through Nathan Wright. These are the men, and these wives. You can read, as well as I can read, that these are they who have served as deacons—they rotate off. In the Bellevue system, you serve for three years, then you have to rotate off, and then you may be invited to come back on and serve again. So I'm going to ask all of these deacons who are returning to active status here, and their wives. We're not going to read their names, but I want them all to stand for just a moment. Would you stand? All right now, let me tell you something. These men have served God with such distinction that they were asked to come back on and serve again. It is both a compliment to them and to you. It is a compliment to them that they were counted worthy to come back. It is a compliment to you that they love you enough to say, "I will take of my valuable time, my energy, my resources, and I will sublimate them to the serving of this congregation." These men are saying, "I am willing to serve you." Would you like to thank them?

Remain standing. Father God, we receive these deacons as your love gift to us. Thank you for giving us such dear men to serve. Lord, bless them, their wives, their children. We know that they are only human. We know they have heartaches and tears, fears and problems like the rest of us. May they be, Lord, pure, clean, filled with the Holy Ghost, truly men of God. Bless their precious wives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# Called Out to Serve

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: November 3, 1996**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6:1–7**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth
- II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems
- III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions
- IV. Where There Are Solutions, There Is Greater Growth

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 6. Thank you, trio, that was beautiful. And that sets the mood and the stage for the message from God's Word. The Latin word *viva* means "life." It's the same, I believe, in Spanish. To revive means to bring the life back, to reawaken, to re-energize the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when that happens, when there is life, there's growth. And when there is growth, there are growing pains. Do you remember when you were a youngster and you were growing? You may have had growing pains emotionally, and you may have had growing pains physically. I know that one of our sons would wake up in the middle of the night and his legs would be paining him. And the doctor said, "Well, that's what we call "growing pains." And, when you grow, sometimes it's painful. That's true spiritually. When you grow spiritually, sometimes it's painful. A good verse for us to remember is Psalms chapter 4 and verse 1, which says, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress."

You think about the times when you have grown the most spiritually. Have they not been the times when you were going through deep and dark waters? "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." Human beings, physically, have growing pains. Spiritually, we have growing pains. And churches, when they grow, have growing pains.

We're going to read the story of the early church. We're going to find out that they had some problems. Does it surprise you that that New Testament church had some problems? Do you think the New Testament church was free of problems? I have a three-point sermon on problems. I've never preached it, but I've got three points and a poem, and I'll give it to you right now. The title of the message, "Problems." Point one: I've got them. Point two: You've got them. Point three: Everybody has them. Here's the poem: Adam had 'em! Now, that's the whole sermon. Everybody has problems. And

churches that grow have problems. It comes with the territory.

Now, the early church had some problems. And let's find out what they were. I'm reading from the Book of Acts chapter 6: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration—that is; in the handing out of the, the goods to live with: the food, the clothing, the necessities of life. They were not being ministered to. That is, the Greek widows were not being ministered to—then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we—that is, the apostles—may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full o faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Phillip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch: whom when they set before the apostles, whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great number of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."

Let me give you four or five propositions tonight, and see if you resonate with them, and see if they come from the Word of God.

## **I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth**

Proposition number one: Where there is life, there is growth. Look, if you will, in verse 1: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Now, what was the reason for this multiplication? Well, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down, the disciples went out, the lost came in, and Jesus was glorified. Where there is life, there is growth. Now, there's nothing wrong with a small church. I pastored a church when, if we had the size that we have in the choir tonight on Sunday morning, that would have been perhaps the biggest crowd of the year. Nothing wrong with a small church. But I want to say, there is something wrong with a church that's not growing, when it's surrounded with lost people. There's something desperately wrong with a church like that. God wants His church to grow. And God's command to the church is the same as it was to the human family: be fruitful and multiply. And so, this church grew. The Bible says the number of the disciples was multiplied.

And, growth, however, is not automatic. They prayed for it. They planned for it. They worked for it. They cultivated. They watered. But God gave the increase because, like farming, growth in the product of life. And numerical growth is the product of spiritual

growth. It is not a substitute for it, but it is the result of it. Let me just show you how this church grew.

For example, look in Acts chapter 2 and verse 41, if you will. Just go back to chapter 2 and verse 41: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” I want to have a day one day when we have three thousand souls saved and baptized. What a day that would be!

And then look, if you will, in Acts chapter 4 and verse 4: “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.” Now, they already had three thousand were added, and now you’ve got five thousand.

Then churn to chapter 5 and verse 14: “And the believers were more added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women.” They, evidently, they stopped counting.

First, three thousand; then, five thousand men; now, multitudes. And then, we come to the text that we were at this morning: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring...” You see, there is going to be growth if there is life. And we, as a church—as Bellevue Baptist Church—must continue to grow. We will grow and glow, or we will dry and die. We will evangelize or we will fossilize; but we cannot, must not, will not stop growing. Say amen. We’re going to grow spiritually. And, when we grow spiritually, we’re going to grow numerically, because here is the proposition: Where there is life, there is growth.

Now, you talk about a big church. You think this is a big church? We’re small compared to that early church, that first church there in the city of Jerusalem. Multiplied thousands were members of that church.

## **II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems**

Now, here’s the second proposition. First proposition, get it now—where there’s life, there’s growth. Second proposition: Where there is growth, there are problems. Where there is growth, there are problems. Chapter 6, verse 1: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring...” You see, when God wants to multiply, the devil wants to divide.

Now, what had happened in this church is that there were two types of Jewish widows. There were Grecian Jews. They were Hellenistic Jews. They spoke Greek. And then, there were the Hebrew widows, and they spoke Hebrew. But they were both—the Greeks and Hebrews—were both Jews, and they were widows. Now, in that day, it was absolutely incumbent that the church take care of the financial needs of the widows. They had no other way to take care of themselves. And so, the church was helping to feed these widows. And the Greeks, because they spoke a different language, felt like they were outsiders, and they felt that they were being neglected. And so, they began to murmur. Now, the problem—their neglect was a legitimate problem. The way that they

dealt with the problem was not legitimate; it was wrong. They murmured. And murmur is an ugly word. Murmur. Sounds ugly, doesn't it? And it is ugly.

What is murmuring? Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint. And, you see, when we murmur, we really are speaking against God. Remember what Moses told the Israelites in the wilderness when they murmured in Exodus chapter 16 and verse 8? He says, "For that the Lord heareth your murmurings, which ye murmur against him. For what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord."

And these Greek widows were really murmuring not against the apostles; they were murmuring against God who gave them the apostles. And God, in the Bible, does not treat murmuring as a small sin. As a matter of fact, God ranks murmuring with idolatry and fornication. First Corinthians chapter 10, verses 7 through 10—Paul is talking to the Corinthians, and he says, "Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the serpents." Now, he mentions here idolatry, fornication, and tempting Christ. And then he says, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."

Would you rank murmuring with idolatry? Would you rank murmuring with fornication? Would you rank murmuring with tempting Christ? The apostle Paul did. Are you a murmurer? Well, ask God to help you not to do it, because murmuring in a church is a terrible thing. It is Satan's way to divide, when God wants to multiply. No wonder the apostle Paul said, in Philippians chapter 2 and verse 14: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." That's a command from God. If you're a murmurer, go to God, and repent of murmurings—half-concealed, half-uttered complaints.

Now, this was the problem. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there are problems. When you put people and progress together, you have problems. Now, I want you to notice the kind of problem it was. It was not a primary problem. It was a petty problem. That is, they were not getting served as they wanted to be served. It was not doctrinal; it was functional. And I've been around churches long enough to know that those are the major problems in churches. Did you know that people murmur about such things as, "They moved our Sunday School class?" or, "Somebody removed our doilies," or, "Who got our eraser?" or these kind of things. It's amazing the small things, the little, petty things that people find to murmur about. This was not something about some theological doctrine as to the deity of Christ or something like that. And so, there are always more opportunities for these kind of things in a church that's growing, because, if you know physics, you know that anything that

moves makes friction.

### **III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions**

All right now, here's the third proposition. First proposition—listen: Where there's life, there's what? Growth. All right. And where there's growth, there's what? Problems. All right now, here's the third proposition: Where there are problems, there are solutions. Where there are problems, there are solutions. Look in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Now, this solution was so very practical. These pastor/teacher/preachers said, "We're divided. We can't get it all done. We have our chief assignment from God is to minister the Word and to pray. And, here we're having confusion. And God is not the author of confusion." The Bible teaches that we're to do all things decently and in order. And when you see the Holy Spirit first in the Bible, you find Him in the Book of Genesis. And what does He do? He makes a cosmos out of a chaos. There, He brings order into the universe. And the Holy Spirit will do that in a church. Church machinery is to be engineered and oiled by the Holy Spirit. And so, the Holy Spirit of God gave the apostles the right answer to this problem.

Now, that brings me to say this: every church has problems. The early church had them. We have them. Every church has. But there are no problems too big to solve; only people too small to solve them. And, if we will listen to the Holy Spirit and let the Holy Spirit of God guide us, He will guide us.

Now, what the Holy Spirit of God was interested in, primarily, was that the ministry would continue. Look, if you will, in verse 2: "...It is not reason that we should leave the word of God..." Look in verse 4: "But we will give ourselves—the ministers—continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And every preacher should do exactly that. He should give himself continually, to the ministry, to prayer, and the ministry of the Word. Sometimes people think that preachers are to be available for everything: to open every store, to start every soapbox derby, to do everything that they think ought to be done. He's sort of a functionary. But the preacher who is always available isn't worth a whole lot when he is available. He has to be alone with God. The best time I spend for you is not the time when I'm with you talking to you about God, but when I'm away from you talking to God about you, and trying to find the Word of God, and to get the message from God for this church. And that is true about our staff. The deacons are not there to free the pastor from work. They are there to free the pastor to work, to do the work that God wants done. Verse 4: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer

and to the ministry of the word.” It was not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to serve tables, but they knew this: that there is something that must be done. They were getting behind in their prayer life, their sermon preparation, their soul winning, and their preaching. And so, God, by the Holy Spirit, gave a solution.

Do you know what my chief duty is? My chief duty is not to do the work of the ministry. My chief duty is to equip you to do the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4, verses 11 and 12: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” Now, why did He give apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers? Verse 12: “For the perfecting of the saints...”—that is, to mature the saints. Well, why does He want to mature the saints? “...for the work of the ministry...” You see, my job is to mature you so that you can do the work of the ministry. And what will that do? That will “...edify the body of Christ.”

Now, so many times, we have the idea that Christian service is coming, sitting, listening to a man preach. But no! Coming, listening to a man preach is God’s way of getting you ready to do Christian service. And so, God wants our church to have every member to be a minister. But there are certain needs that have to be taken care of, certain acts of service, and so, God said, “Choose some deacons.” And, as you read this passage of Scripture, there are several Greek words that cluster around a Greek word diakoneo, which means “to serve.” And so, He said, “Seek out some servants, some people with a servant spirit.” I believe these were the first deacons in the church.

Now, they did not casually choose just anyone, because they set a standard for these people. These men were not to be inferior men. They were to be superior men, because it takes a superior man to serve. It takes a man like the Lord Jesus Christ to be a servant. Do you know why Jesus came? Put this down in your Bible—Matthew 20, verse 28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto—that is, to be deaconed—but to minister—to be a deacon—and to give his life a ransom for many.” The word here ministered, diakoneo, is the same word. Jesus was a deacon. He was a servant. Mark chapter 10, verse 43—He speaks of the leaders of the Gentiles who wanted to be high muckety-mucks, but He said, “It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister.” And the word there is deacon—shall be your deacon. That’s great. Service does not demean; it elevates.

Now, what kind of qualities do we need for deacons? Well, look in verse 3: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom...” Now, first of all, a deacon is a person who is to have an established testimony. He is to be a person of honest report. Now, he will not be sinless, but he ought to be blameless. I like what a little fellow said when he saw the deacons coming forward in a particular church to do some ministry. He said, “Here comes the

beacons.” Now, that’s what they ought to be. They ought to be a beacon with a light that is shining. Leadership functions on the basis of confidence. I appreciated that song that the choir sang today. He that rules among men must be just. And so, they’re to be men of honest report.

And then, they’re to be men who are full of the Holy Ghost of God. A deacon is to be a Spirit-filled man, according to verse 3. And you men that we are ordaining tonight, we assume and believe that you’re Spirit-filled, because nothing for Jesus can be done in the power of the flesh. If it is done in the power of the flesh, it will amount to nothing, for He said, “Without me, you can do nothing.”

Well, you say, “Adrian, how do you know if a man is full of the Holy Ghost?” Well, let me tell you what the Bible says is the mark of a man full of the Holy Ghost—Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” That’s what a deacon ought to be. You’ve just heard a description of a deacon. He is a man full of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, because he’s full of the Holy Ghost.

Now, not only is he to be a man with a good reputation. Not only is he to be a man filled with the Holy Spirit. But he’s to be a man full of wisdom. Frankly, some men can have a good reputation, and they can be full of the Holy Ghost, but they are not necessarily wise. I tell our deacons, “It’s far better for us to be good than it is to be smart. It’s far better for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and true wisdom than to have knowledge.” Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge. And, knowledge may be proud that it knows so much, but wisdom is humble that it knows so little.

Now, these men that were chosen by this early church were not ordinary men. They were extraordinary men. Notice in verse 5: “And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith...” Well, if you want to know who Stephen was, just continue to read in the next couple of chapters, and you’ll find out that Stephen was the first Christian martyr. Stephen preached an eloquent sermon. I am moved every time I read the story of Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost and power, who stood up for the Lord Jesus Christ, taught, witnessed, and died by stoning. And the Bible seems to indicate that Jesus was so moved that He stood up from His throne to welcome Stephen home. And then, he mentions Philip. We have a son who is now in heaven who’s named after this Philip, this soul-winning deacon, who was down in Samaria holding a revival meeting. He was a deacon holding a revival meeting in Samaria. And the Holy Spirit said, “I want you to go to Gaza.” He was the one who went out there and met that Ethiopian eunuch returning from Jerusalem, won him to Christ. And, according to tradition, that Ethiopian eunuch, who was the Minister of Finance under Queen Candace, went and took the gospel back to Northern Africa and opened the whole

revival in northern Africa. Who did these things? These were deacons.

I want to tell you, folks, that the deacons ought to be able to serve on this church staff should God call them. As a matter of fact, God does call a number of deacons out of our church staff. That young man there is one of our deacons that God has just called to be on our church staff. He's one of our newest church deacons, and Bryson McQuiston. And I thank God for him. Mark Dougharty, one of our fine deacon officers this past year, God has called to be on our staff, into the fulltime ministry. That man right there, Bob Sorrell, was the Chairman of our deacons. He's now our Associate Pastor, and has been so for more than fifteen years. God called him out of our deacons. What I'm trying to say is, folks, that a deacon is not somebody who can't do anything. A deacon is the kind of a man who could preach, as Stephen preached, and brought heaven down, and brought stones down upon him. A deacon is the kind of a man who could serve the Lord as Philip did. Now, not every deacon is going to be an evangelist. Not every deacon can preach that way. But I believe he ought to be a man full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, a man of good report. I told our deacons facetiously, if I were to drop a handkerchief and say, "Preach," you ought to be on the second point before it hits the ground. They ought to be men who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the kind of men that we are looking for.

#### **IV. Where There Are Solutions, There Is Greater Growth**

Now, folks, this was God's plan. Listen. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there are problems. Where there are problems, there are solutions. And, number four: Where there are solutions, there is greater growth. Continue to read. Look in verse 4: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the world. And the saying pleased the whole multitude..." And then it lists the men that they chose. And verse 6 says, "whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them—now watch this—and the word of God increased..."—now, they're already having multitudes saved—"and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly..."—now, before, it said they multiplied. Now, it's growing exponentially. The number is multiplied greatly—"...and a great company of priests were obedient to the faith."

You see, where we meet and solve problems, that just simply catapults us into greater growth. Problems are really opportunities turned inside out. Remember Psalm 4, verse 1: "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." Thank God for our problems. A pessimist sees a difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist—or let me say a Bible-believer—sees opportunity in every difficulty. God wants your life to grow. God wants this church to grow. And God has given us some deacons, men full of faith and the Holy Ghost and wisdom.

## Conclusion

And we're going now, tonight, to introduce to you the new deacons that we're going to be setting aside to do this service.

I'm going to ask these men if they will come here to the platform, along with their wives. These are those who are going to be ordained tonight, or are going to be installed tonight, and I want you to meet them. I'm going to ask them to come and form a line to my right. Now, gentlemen, if you'll come right now with your ladies and stand right here. I want you to meet these. That it is your duty—listen—it is your duty to know them, and to pray for them, because they are coming to serve Jesus by serving you, and holding up the pastor's hands. If you'll come, gentlemen. And they're going to say, each one of them, a brief word. Do not leave the auditorium unless it is an emergency, because this will be a blessing. We'll just start right here, with you, Pete.

# How to Turn Your Problems into Possibilities

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: February 15, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6:1–7**

*“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.”*

ACTS 6:1

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth
- II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems
- III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions
  - A. The Scriptural Ministry of Feeding the Word
  - B. The Practical Ministry of Feeding the Widows
    1. They Had to Be Men of Honest Report
    2. They Had to Be Filled with the Holy Ghost
    3. They Had to Be Full of Wisdom
- IV. Where There Is a God-Given Solution, There Is Even Greater Growth

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God’s wonderful Word and turn to Acts chapter 6, would you, please? We’re going through the book of Acts under the heading “That Old-Time Religion,” because we believe with all of our hearts that the need of the twentieth century is not something new, but something old—that old-time religion, which, by the way, is the new-time religion; and which, by the way, is the all-time religion; and which, by the way, is the any-time religion, and therefore ought to be the every-time religion. So we’re thinking about that old-time religion, and we’re finding out how they did it in the book of Acts, so that the power, the victory, and the revival that was in the book of Acts can be reproduced in our hearts and in our lives today, because we believe that if we believed and behaved as they believed and behaved, then we would achieve what they achieved. So we are going to be looking here in the book of Acts, and today I am going to be talking to you about “How to Turn Your Problems into Possibilities.”

Now I know that sounds like a little bit of pop psychology, but I believe that you're going to find it to be more than that. You're going to find it to be biblical truth. Now, you know, there are always these pessimists, and they go around and they see a difficulty in every opportunity. But a Bible Christian sees an opportunity in every difficulty. And we are going to see today that difficulties are just opportunities in reverse—if we see them through the eyes of God. And you're going to find out that every difficulty that came to that early church was used of God as a springboard just to cause them to grow all the more for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, let's look here in God's Word, and I'm going to begin reading in chapter 6 and verse 1: *“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”* (Acts 6:1–7)

Now, what was the problem? Well, very succinctly, the problem was growing pains. Do you know what growing pains are? Do you remember when you were a child, and you grew up trying to learn how to walk, and trying to please your parents; and when you got to be a teenager, you got so awkward, you had two left feet; you had pimples; you had buck teeth; you couldn't get your hair to do right; your voice was changing; and oh, you just felt terrible? But you were in a process of maturing and growing. We call that “growing pains.” And as a Christian, when you try to grow in the Lord, you think at first that you've been saved, and it's just so wonderful, and that you'll never have another problem. But then the Bible says, *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”* (1 Peter 2:2) And you learn that you have those same kinds of growing pains in the spiritual world that you had in the physical world. Any new Christian knows what it is to have growing pains; to stumble, to hurt, to have spiritual indigestion, the colic—everything else spiritually that you have physically as you're growing.

And, you know, those of you who have families that are growing know that a growing family has growing pains, amen? Boy, I'll tell you that my dad used to say that you can

have kids, or you can have things, but you can't have both. And that was true. And, you know, we'd break things and mess up—spots on the rug and all of these problems. But thank God for growing families: they are so fun. But a growing family has growing pains. And a growing church has growing pains.

Now that's what happened to this early church. It was growing—I mean, it was growing like it was shot out of a gun. There was great growth. And as a result, there were some problems. Now I want to give you four basic facts today. Now this can apply to almost anything. I'm going to apply it to the church, but it can apply to your personal life, and it can apply to your family.

## I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth

All right, number one: Where there is life, there is growth. Now, look, if you will, in chapter 6 and verse 1: "*And in those days...*"—what were those days? They were days of revival; they were days of life—"*And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied...*" (Acts 6:1) Now there was growth; there was a multiplication. Now in the early book of Acts, the Bible says, "*The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" (Acts 2:47) But no longer is it addition; now it is multiplication. They are growing by quantum leaps; they are growing by thousands. And that is wonderful, because I believe that every church that is surrounded by lost people ought to be a growing church, don't you?

Now there is nothing wrong with a small church, and there is nothing so necessarily great about a big church. Bellevue Church is a big church, but we don't always go around talking about the size of our church. Nobody wants to come to something just because it's big. I don't think that Bellevue Church is a great church because it's big; I think it may be a big church because it's great—but not vice versa. Some of the greatest churches on this earth are small churches. But I'll tell you something: There is something wrong with a church, big or small, that's not growing, if it's surrounded by lost people, because, dear friend, our mandate, our mission, is to reach souls for the Lord Jesus Christ. If we're not reaching them, then we're not doing what we're told to do.

I heard of an artist who was commissioned to paint a picture of a dead church. They thought that he would show a church with the roof sagging and with weeds in the yard. They thought he would show a church with the upholstery tattered and the carpet raveled. But he didn't. He showed a gorgeous building—fresh paint, sparkling windows, wonderful carpet, elegant looking, moderate-size crowd. They looked so well-fed, so well-heeled, and everything was just right. And the person said, "Why, that doesn't look like a dead church to me." He said, "Look closer at the picture." And he looked more closely, and he could see cobwebs in the baptistry. That, my friend, is the portrait of a dead church: a church that is not multiplying.

Listen. *A church will glow and grow, or it will dry and die. It will evangelize, or it will fossilize.* But it will not stand still. And I want to be a part of a growing church.

Now growth is not easy; growth is not automatic. Growth—you have to plan for it; you have to pray for it; you have to work for it. And you have to cultivate and water something if you want it to grow. But still, God must give the increase. Spiritual growth is the product of spiritual life, and numerical growth is the product of spiritual growth. And so I believe that God’s plan for this church—for any church—is to be fruitful and multiply.

In these days, you know, there are people who are so spiritual, and they say, “I just don’t believe in numbers.” Well, God is interested in numbers. Verse 1: “*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...*” (Acts 6:1) Some people just use little phrases like that to excuse their lack of spirituality or their laziness.

## **II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems**

Dear friend, where there is healthy life, there is growth. Have you got that in your heart? Okay now, let’s move on to the second point. Now where there is growth, there are problems. Okay, that’s the second point: Where there is growth, there are problems. Look in verse 1 again. The Bible says, “*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring.*” (Acts 6:1) Murmuring following multiplication.

Now murmuring is a terrible thing. What were these people murmuring about? Well, what had happened is this: There were some who felt neglected in the church and indeed may have been neglected. There were two categories of widows in the church: Grecian widows and Hebrew widows. Now even the Grecian widows were Hebrews; they were what we call “Hellenist Jews.” They were Jews who spoke the Greek language. And then there were the Hebrew Jews there in the church. And these people who were Greek-speaking Jews felt that they had been overlooked and thought that they had been neglected. They were being taken care of by the church, and there was no other way to take care of them. Unless the church took care of them, they wouldn’t be taken care of. But they had their feelings hurt.

Now there was nothing wrong with them seeking to have their needs met, and it is not to say that there may not have been a general problem. I don’t believe that it was a planned problem. I believe that it happened by just the fact that it got so busy; they were growing so fast and so forth—it just happened. But nobody intentionally meant to do harm, I don’t believe. But there was a problem. Now the problem was real, but the way they went about handling the problem was terrible. They began to murmur. “*There arose a murmuring.*” I want to tell you, friend, that when God sets out to multiply, the devil sets out to divide. You just keep that in your mind. When God wants to multiply,

the devil wants to divide. The devil, when he sees a growing church, will try to divide that church any way he can. And here he began to try to divide the church by murmuring.

Now, listen. I want to give you one word of advice about murmuring—look up here, and listen to your pastor: Don't do it. Now here's what the Bible says. That's not just Adrian speaking; that's the Apostle Paul. Listen to what the Bible says—Philippians 2, verse 14: *“Do all things without murmurings and disputings.”* (Philippians 2:14) Murmurings lead to disputings, and disputings lead to division. So, *“Do all things without murmurings.”* I want to tell you, dear friend, that murmuring is a horrible sin. If you murmur, then you're really speaking against God, because the Bible says that in everything we are to give thanks. (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Now you can't murmur and give thanks at the same time. The Bible says that His praise is to be continually on our lips. (Hebrews 13:15) Murmurers and praisers are not made of the same thing.

What is *murmuring* anyway? Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint—not that a person comes out and says to the right person, at the right time, in the right spirit, for the right reason, that something needs to be done. Well, that's always acceptable, and that's always good—when a person comes in the right spirit, at the right time, to the right person, and for the right motive; but murmuring—do you know what murmuring is? Now the Bible says, *“Do all things without murmurings.”* When you murmur—listen—you're really murmuring against God.

Let me give you a verse for your margin—Exodus chapter 16 and verse 8. The people had been murmuring in Moses' time. You see, murmuring goes way, way back, and here's what Moses said in the last part of that verse: *“For that the LORD heareth your murmurings...”*—well, that ought to be enough to scare us to death right there—*“the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.”* (Exodus 16:8)

Now, kids, if you murmur against your parents, then you're really murmuring against God. People, if you murmur against your employees, then you're murmuring against God. If you murmur against your teachers, then you're murmuring against God. If you murmur against your pastor, then you're murmuring against God. That doesn't mean that any of those are perfect; it just simply means that murmuring is never a way to address a problem. It is the devil's way, and the Bible says. *“Do all things without murmurings.”* Just don't do it.

Why, in the Bible, if you would read in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verses 7 through 10, you're going to find out that God ranks murmuring with idolatry, fornication, and tempting God. Listen to it: *“Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.”*

*Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” (1 Corinthians 10:7–10)*

Now here are the big four with God: idolatry—you say, “Well, I wouldn’t be an idolater”; fornication—“Well,” you say, “I wouldn’t do that”; tempting God—you say, “I wouldn’t dare!”; murmuring—“Murmuring, in the same context?” The Bible says that God destroyed them for murmuring. That’s not to say that these people might not have had a legitimate complaint; but, oh, my soul, how the devil used them to try to do a right thing in the wrong way! Just don’t murmur. *“Do all things without murmurings.”*

But what I’m trying to say is, where there is growth, there are problems. When you put people and progress together, you’re going to have problems. Now the problem here wasn’t doctrinal; it was functional. It wasn’t primary; it was over a petty thing—not that it wasn’t important, but it wasn’t one of those basic important things. You’re going to find out that the devil can get us divided sometimes more over incidentals than fundamental things. And so here it was just over who was getting served the best and the first, and all of that; who was being neglected, and who wasn’t.

### **III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions**

All right, so, point number one: Where there is healthy life, there is growth. Point number two: Where there is growth, there are problems. Anything that moves makes friction, and anything that grows has pains. No pain, no gain. Where there is growth, there are problems. Now that’s all right, brother. I’ll tell you what. I had rather be a part of a growing church with problems than a dead church that has none. I mean, their great big problem is that they are just simply dead. Sometimes people don’t understand that a church doesn’t have any real difficulties because it is *d-e-a-d*—dead. All right now, the third thing: Where there are problems, there are solutions. Now we always need to remember this: It doesn’t mean that because we have problems, we just fold up. But God always has a solution for every problem. Notice in verses 2 and 3: *“Then the twelve called the multitudes of disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason”—just underscore the word reason—“that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” (Acts 6:2–3)*

Now I want to say that the solution here was a reasonable solution. You don’t have to check your brains at the door to be a Christian. As a matter of fact, you’re going to find out that a man who is a real good Christian is going to be two things: he’s going to be deeply spiritual and intensely practical. Don’t you like that? Deeply spiritual and intensely practical. Here were very spiritual men who said, “Hey, this doesn’t make sense, the way that we’ve been doing this.”

Now up until this time, I believe the apostles had been spending time ministering to these widows, waiting on these tables, and distributing the food and all that; and they said, “Hey, this doesn’t make sense. We’re getting behind in our Bible study. We’re getting behind in our sermon preparation. We’re getting behind in our prayer life. We’re getting behind in our soul winning. We’re getting behind in the ministry of the Word of God. And we’re standing up sometimes, trying to preach, and we’re not even ready to preach, because we’ve been so busy doing good things that we’ve neglected the best thing.” And by the way, in life, the choice is not between good and bad; it’s between good and best—and that’s what had happened to these disciples. And they just simply said, “That doesn’t make sense. We’ve got to get a plan.” And God gave them a plan, and it was a wonderful plan.

Now, let me say this: The plan was to get better organized. Now there are some people who don’t believe in organization. Let me tell you something, friend: A lack of organization and disorder is carnality. Paul told the Corinthian church, “*Let all things be done decently and in order.*” (1 Corinthians 14:40) Now the reason why there was disorder in that Corinthian church was because of their carnality. When you see the Holy Spirit of God move, you’re going to see things function with order. As a matter of fact, the first time that you see the Holy Spirit in the Bible, what is He doing? He’s moving upon the face of the deep, (Genesis 1:2) and He’s bringing order out of disorder. He’s turning chaos into a cosmos. The Holy Spirit of God is the One who engineers the church machinery, and He’s the One who oils the church machinery.

Now the Holy Spirit of God had just told them something reasonable to do, and it was two-fold. I want you to pay attention. Number one: There was to be a scriptural ministry. And, number two: There was to be a practical ministry.

#### **A. The Scriptural Ministry of Feeding the Word**

Now, what was the scriptural ministry? Well, look again in verse 2: “*Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.*” (Acts 6:2) Now it’s not that they were to do it. As a matter of fact, I believe that they had been doing it up till now. It wasn’t that they wanted to be freed from work; they wanted to be free to work. And so, notice in verse 4: “*But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*” (Acts 6:4)

I learned a long time ago that the very best thing I could do for my people here at this church is to be prepared to preach. And if I’m not that, there are not a lot of other things that will ultimately matter very much. Some wise man said a long time ago that a preacher who is always available isn’t worth much when he is available. I agree with that—that a man has to be alone with God in the Word of God, studying and pouring out his heart to God in prayer for his people, and getting a word from God for his people. I

know that there are ministers who have all kinds of programs, and their people are doing all of these things, but they are not being free.

I heard a silly story about a man who went into a pet store and bought a parakeet. They had two parakeets. The man said, "I've got one for a hundred dollars and one for twenty-five dollars." He said, "They look alike to me. What's the difference?" He said, "Well, the hundred-dollar parakeet can sing and talk real well. The twenty-five-dollar parakeet doesn't sing that much, but he'll talk a little." The man said, "I'll take the twenty-five-dollar parakeet. I want to save some money." After a week, he went back to the pet store and said, "He hasn't said a word." The man said, "Well, did he peck for the little bell?" He said, "Well, you didn't say anything about a little bell." "Oh," he says, "he has to peck a little bell before he talks." He said, "Well, do you have any?" He said, "I've got one for five dollars." So he bought a little bell and put it in there. A week later, he came back and he said, "He still hasn't said a word." "Oh," he said, "well, did he run up and down the little ladder?" He said, "Well, you didn't say anything about a little ladder." "Oh," he said, "he's got to have a little ladder." And he said, "Well, how much is the little ladder?" He said, "I've got one for ten dollars." So he bought a little ladder. Then he came back the third week and he said, "Hey, that bird still hasn't said a word." "Oh," he said, "did he look in the little mirror?" The man said, "What little mirror?" He said, "You've got to have a little mirror. I've got one here for fifteen dollars." He sold him a little mirror. He came back the next week and he said, "Listen. That bird has not uttered a peep!" "Oh," he said, "did he swing on the little swing?" He said, "How much is the swing?" He said, "I've got a swing for you for thirty dollars." And he bought the little swing. Then he came back the last week and said, "Let me tell you about that bird." He said, "That bird pecked the bell. Then he ran up and down the ladder. Then that little bird looked in the mirror. Then he got in the swing and went back and forth. And then he shuddered, shivered, fell over backward, stuck his little feet in the air, and looked over at me and said, "Don't they sell any birdseed in that store that you go to?"

I heard that, and I thought about so many churches—the pastor has the people pecking bells, running up and down ladders, and swinging on swings. I want to tell you something, friend: Activity is no substitute for the Word of God, amen? I mean, you have to feed people.

Now there were people over here talking about physical food, and the widows being neglected, but the apostles said, "We're going to give ourselves continually to the ministry of the Word of God. We're going to be serving square meals from the pulpit. We're going to be preaching the Word of God." For the Bible says, "*Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*" (1 Peter 2:2) And I'll tell you that this church, or any church, will be strong to the degree that it maximizes and emphasizes the ministry of the Word of God—not only from the pulpit, but in our classrooms and in

our homes. We need to do that.

## **B. The Practical Ministry of Feeding the Widows**

But now, not only was there the scriptural ministry of feeding the Word; there was also the practical ministry of feeding the widows. And so they had to get a plan now of how to feed these widows, and so they chose some men to do this, and I want you to notice now that the job is to wait on tables. Okay now, what is the requirement that you need to wait on tables for Jesus? What are the qualifications that it takes to wait on tables? Well, let's see here. All right, verse 3: "*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*" (Acts 6:3) Do you know what it took to wait on tables?

### **1. They Had to Be Men of Honest Report**

Number one: They had to be men of honest report. That is, they had to have an impeccable character. I mean, there had to be something said about these men: that nobody could point blame at these men. As the Bible says in another place, deacons are to be blameless. (1 Timothy 3:10) These may have been the first deacons. The word *ministry* is used over and over again in this passage, and the Greek word is *diakonia*. And so these may have been the very first deacons. We don't know for certain that they were, but certainly they were men of service. Now they didn't choose just anyone; they didn't say, "Oh, well, we can get just anybody to do this." Not inferior men, but superior men were needed to wait on tables.

### **2. They Had to Be Filled with the Holy Ghost**

Now, let's go on down a little bit. Not only that, but they were also to be men filled with the Holy Ghost. "Well," you say, "I believe that a preacher ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when he preaches." I do, too. You say, "Well, I believe that a song leader ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when he directs worship." I do, too. You say, "I believe that musicians ought to be filled with the Holy Spirit when they sing." I do, too. I want to tell you something else. You ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when you work in the kitchen downstairs. You ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when you work in the sound booth. You ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when you stand at the door and hand out bulletins. You ought to be filled with the Holy Ghost when you do anything for Jesus.

Understand what I'm saying, dear friend. Don't you think that there is any ministry that you can do in your own power. Jesus said, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*" (John 15:5) And the problem is that we have so many people who are thinking, "This job is so small that I can do it by myself; I don't need the Holy Spirit of God in me to do it." And, my dear friend, whether you're typing a letter, whether you are delivering a parcel, whether you are vacuuming a floor, whether you are teaching a class—I don't care what

you do—you do it in the power of the Spirit of God. Do it with the Holy Ghost.

### 3. They Had to Be Full of Wisdom

Now, you see, these had to be men full of the Holy Ghost, and they had to be full of wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge. Sometimes when people get deacons, they say, “Well, let’s get a deacon who’s a doctor, a deacon who’s a lawyer, a deacon who’s a banker, a deacon who’s a financier, or a deacon who’s an entrepreneur. He’ll make a good deacon; he’ll show us how to run the church.” He might show us how to ruin the church. He might try to administrate the church as he would a business, and say, “Well, after all, this is business.” But it is God’s business, friend, and it’s different from any other business. Now he may be a deacon and be filled with wisdom; he may be a banker and be filled with wisdom; he may be a lawyer and be filled with wisdom—but if he’s not, he’ll do more damage than good.

You see, dear friend, let me tell you something: There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom, and wisdom is the ability to use knowledge from God’s point of view. *Knowledge may be proud that it knows so much, but wisdom is humble that it knows no more.* But listen, dear friend. Not everybody can have knowledge, but everybody can have wisdom. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”* (James 1:5–8)

Oh, but listen. This was not just a standard for these men; it is a standard for all servants. Do you want to serve the Lord? Listen. Have an impeccable character, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and have wisdom.

Now when you look in verse 5, among those that they chose were two people: one was named Stephen, and another was named Philip. And later on we’re going to study in our book of Acts about Stephen. Stephen preached one of the greatest sermons ever heard in the Bible. And listen. That was the kind of a guy that they got to wait on tables. Why, he was a miracle worker—and yet he was waiting on tables. And then they chose Philip. Listen. Philip was that man that won the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ and opened up all North Africa to the gospel. Of these deacons—if they were deacons—the first one was the first martyr, and the second one was the first missionary—and they were chosen to wait on tables—the first Christian martyr and the first Christian missionary.

Hey, do you think there is something too small for you to do, mister? Do you think that you’re so important that you couldn’t wait on tables? Do you think that you’re so important that you could not serve on a committee here at Bellevue Baptist Church? You’re too big for God to use, then. Thank God that God took some high-powered men—I mean some great men, high-powered men—and these men showed that they

were like the Lord Jesus Christ, because they were willing to minister in the small things and in the mundane things.

How wonderful! You can understand why this church went on for the Lord Jesus Christ—because there was the spiritual ministry of the Word to feed the Word; and then there was the practical ministry to feed the widows. And everybody did what God had called them to do. And it wasn't that some were inferior, and others were superior. It wasn't that some were too good to do what the other would not do, but each did what God assigned him to do. And the church began to grow, and the murmuring stopped.

#### **IV. Where There Is a God-Given Solution, There Is Even Greater Growth**

Now, let me get to the last point, and then all of my time will be gone. Let's review. Where there is healthy life, there is growth. Where there is healthy growth, there are problems. Where there are problems, there are God-given solutions. Now, listen. Where there is a God-given solution, there is even greater growth. That's the last thing: there is even greater growth.

Now, look, if you will, in verse 7 and see what happened to this: *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly."* (Acts 6:7) Now in verse 1 it says that they were multiplied. (Acts 6:1) Now it says that they were multiplied greatly. Do you know what that means? They were growing faster. They are growing now even greater than they grew before. Why? Because they met a problem, and they solved that problem in the name of Jesus. And listen. The problem was caused by growth; but when it was solved, there was even greater growth. That's the reason for what I told you—that problems are opportunities in reverse.

David said in Psalm 4, verse 1, *"Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress."* (Psalm 4:1) Listen. Do you want to be enlarged? Do you want to grow? Then you're going to be in distress. God is going to stretch you. There's no easy growth. But that's all right. Every problem that is met in the name of Jesus and solved in the power of God causes you to grow. I've met problems, and I've had to carry them to the Lord. I've had to obey the Lord. And sometimes I've had to learn. Sometimes I've had to repent. Sometimes I've had to adjust. But every time I've grown, I've thanked God for the problems. If I never had a problem, then I wouldn't know that He could solve them. But then when the problems come, we meet those problems in the power of the Holy Spirit. It will be true in your family, and it will be true in your spiritual life and in your personal life. It doesn't matter where it is, dear friend, when those problems come. And because you're a growing Christian, carry it to the Lord. Get His solution. Get the answer. And while you're in distress, God is going to cause you to grow. Don't be pessimistic. Don't let problems cause you to cave in.

I heard of a man who was driving through North Carolina and he came to a sign in front of a little town there, and right at the city limits it said this: “We have heard that there is going to be a recession, and we have decided not to participate.” I like that. “We have decided not to participate.” Listen. Don’t take counsel of your peers, and don’t let these problems cause you to cave in.

Thomas Alva Edison was a great man. One of the great things about him was his attitude. When he was almost eighty years old, he had a tremendous fire in his plant in New Jersey. I mean, it caused everything to burn down. It was uninsured, and he lost two million dollars—I mean, that was two million dollars in 1914! That’s when two million were two million. He lost two million dollars. All of his experiments and everything were in there. He lost all of that research. His son was twenty-four years of age, and Edison was an old, old man—as many will say, “past retirement age.” “But,” his son said, “I hated to come out there to see my dad, because I knew what was all in that factory.” He said, “It just broke my heart.” He said, “I went out there, and the old man was out there with the wind blowing in his white hair, and his face was all red from watching the fire; it was just glowing.” He said, “I didn’t know what he was going to say.” He said to me, “Son, go get your mother. She’s never seen anything like this.” And he went and got his mother to see the fire. Then he said that the next day he was out there poking around in the rubble—all of it gone. He said, “You know, there’s something wonderful about a fire like this: it just seems to wipe out all our mistakes and give us a fresh start.” Three months later, his company presented to the world the first phonograph.

Here was a man who was not defeated by problems, but just simply used them as a springboard. I’m using that just on the human level. How much more for those of us who know the Lord! Do you know why this early church bounded and grew as it did? Because every time the devil attacked, they went to God, and God counter-attacked. And their problems became a springboard for greater growth.

## **Conclusion**

Listen, friend. All hell can’t stop a church that will keep its eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God for a growing church. We’ve got growth problems around here. We’ve got three Sunday Schools and three worship services. And when you go out, people will be coming in. Thank God for that kind of growth. I had rather be a part of this kind of a church. I know where there’s life, there’s growth. Where there’s growth, there are problems. Where there are problems, there are solutions. And where there are solutions, there’s greater growth. And I’m glad to be right in the middle of it.

# Problems of the Early Church

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**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6:1–7**

## Outline

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## Introduction

Would you take God's Word, please, and open to Acts chapter 6, the story of the first deacons. And the story starts out with a church that was having growing pains. You see, growing pains are part of growing up. And, when we grow up, sometimes we have growing pains. Sometimes they are emotional growing pains. Do you remember how hard it was for you, when you became a teenager, and you went through puberty, and you had all of those emotional things and zits at the same time? All of that. And then, physically sometimes, we have growing pains; I mean, actual pains in our legs and extremities, and so forth, especially if we're boys. We're growing so fast we have just kind of aches and pains called growing pains. And, spiritually, you can have growing pains. Churches have growing pains. The Bible says that God enlarges us when we are in distress. When we are stretched and distressed, that's the time we grow. And so, therefore, the stretching, and the stressing, and the pain, and the growing—they all seem to coincide and come together.

The early church, a Spirit-filled, magnificent, mighty church of God, still had growing pains. And anything that grows is going to know some difficulty. Sometimes people think that, if you have a great church, the church is not going to have any problems. No, friend. If it is a great church, most likely it will be a growing church, and if it is a growing church, it's going to have some pain. Anything that moves makes friction, and anytime you change you have to make adjustments, and so there come problems with growth. And problems are just a part of life. As a matter of fact, I think I'll preach someday a three-point sermon on problems. I'll give you the three points: I've got them; you've got them; we've all got them. That's the three points. It has a poem that goes with it, too. Adam had 'em. Now, problems are just a part of life, and every church has problems. Believe it or not, Bellevue has problems.

## I. The Multiplication of the Disciples

Now, the early church had problems. But there are three things I want to tell you about the problems that the early church had. And, first of all, I want you to notice what I'm going to call the multiplication of the disciples. Look, if you will, please, here in Acts chapter 6, verse 1: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Let me just stop right there. "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Now, the growth of this church was so great that it stopped being addition and it started being multiplication. You know, in Acts chapter 2, the Bible says, "There were added unto them," and it mentioned the thousands that were added. But now it doesn't use the word added anymore; it uses the word multiply. Now, there's nothing wrong with a small church, but there's something wrong with any church that's in an area where there are unsaved and lost people and that church is not growing.

I heard of an artist who was commissioned to paint what he considered to be a dead church. And some artists who were in the competition painted old, rundown, dilapidated churches with the weeds in the yard, and so forth, but this artist painted a beautiful church building from the inside. It had all of the stain glass. It had the carpet. It had the mahogany pews. It had it all. And up there was a baptistry. And, if you looked at the church, you would say, "Well, that certainly doesn't look like a dead church." But, if you looked at the painting real carefully, there were cobwebs in the baptistry. Now, that, dear friend, is a dead church, a church that is not growing. We will grow and glow, or we will dry and die. We will evangelize, or we will fossilize. We are to grow. God wants a church to grow. Now, growth is not automatic. The early church planned for it, they prayed for it, they worked for it, they cultivated and they watered, but it was God that gave the increase. Now, God will do it, but He will not do it without us. But, at the final analysis, real church growth is the product of life. Where there is life, there is growth, and, therefore, a church grows primarily by prayer. Let me show you that numerical growth is the result of spiritual growth.

Let's just turn backward in the Book of Acts here for just a moment, and go back to Acts chapter 2 and verse 41. You have your Bibles there—I hope you have. Notice in Acts chapter 2, verse 41: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." One of these days, wouldn't you love to see three thousand souls saved here one day at Bellevue Baptist Church? It's altogether possible. There's nothing to keep that from happening, absolutely, sincerely, emphatically, not one thing to keep that from happening, for us to have here at Bellevue Baptist Church. I hope I'm here to see that, three thousand people saved in one day.

Well now, let's just fast forward a little bit, and go to chapter 4, and look, if you will, here in verse 4: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number

of men was about five thousand.” Now, first of all, there are three thousand saved, and now he just counts five thousand men. He doesn’t mention the women and children. At least, probably, there were twenty thousand in this because he’s mentioning, for whatever reason, the men alone here. And then, go, if you will, to chapter 5, and look, if you will, in verse 14: “And, believers were the more added to the Lord—look at this—multitudes of men and women.” He’s lost the ability to count now. First of all, three thousand; then, five thousand men; and now, multitudes are saved. And then, if you will, go now to chapter 6, verse 1, where we were just a few moments ago: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” Now, they’re growing experientially. The number is multiplied. You see, God’s command to the church is to be fruitful and multiply. Now, there are some people who don’t like a big church. Let me tell you something, ladies and gentlemen: They would not like this church in the New Testament, I can guarantee you. They would not like a New Testament church like the Day of Pentecost and following. God wants us to grow. God wants us to reach souls. If you’re not concerned about lost souls, you’ve got calluses on your soul. You’re backslidden. Now, the first thing I want you to see is the multiplication of the disciples.

## **II. The Murmuring of the Discontented**

Second thing I want you to see is the murmuring of the discontented—the murmuring of the discontented. Go back again to chapter 6, verse 1: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.” That is, in the giving out of food. And so there arose a problem in this church. That’s the reason why I said they had growing pains. Now, the Bible says that the number of the disciples was multiplied. Look up here, and let me tell you something. When God wants to multiply, what does the devil want to do? He wants to divide. God wants to multiply; the devil wants to divide. And so, here was a murmuring.

Now, what happened is this: In the church there were two types of widows. By the way, widows did not have social security. They didn’t have any government form of support. They had to be taken care of either by families or by the church. And there were Grecian widows and Hebrew widows in the church. Now, the Grecian widows got the idea that they were being neglected because they were not Jews. They were not Hebrews, and they began to murmur about it. They felt neglected. Now, the problem was legitimate, because somehow the apostles were not able to superintend and to care for the widows. Now, the problem may have been legitimate, but the method of dealing with it—listen carefully, church—the method of dealing with it was devilish and deadly. Do you know what it was? Murmuring. God save our church, God save Bellevue Baptist Church, from murmuring.

What is a murmur? It is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint. It's not a complaint to the right person at the right time with the right spirit for the right purpose. It's just something beneath the surface, a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint. Now, let me tell you something about murmuring. If you ever get in this church, or any church, and you murmur, you're doing the devil's work. Murmuring is not really against the church, or against the pastor, or against the deacons, or against the teacher, or against the program; murmuring is against God. God forbids murmuring. Murmuring is the opposite of faith and praise. Let me give you some Scripture.

In Exodus chapter 16, back in the Old Testament, the people began to murmur against Moses, and Moses said—this is Exodus 16, verse 8: “This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord...—listen—for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.” Why? Because God had given them Moses. And now they were murmuring against their leader, and Moses said, “Look, you're not really murmuring against us. You may think that you're murmuring against us, but what you're murmuring against is the Lord.” These widows who were murmuring over here in the first church, they weren't murmuring against Peter and Paul. Well, Paul wasn't there yet. They weren't murmuring against James and Matthew and Bartholomew. They were murmuring against the Lord. You'd be surprised how God treat murmuring. Are you a murmurer? Let me tell you that God ranks murmuring with idolatry. Listen to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, and I begin in verse 7: “Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play”—that means to cavort. They were living in sensual license. The Bible calls it there playing—“neither let us commit fornication...”—now, he's already mentioned idolatry. Now, listen—“neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.” Twenty-three thousand people were slain of God because they claimed to be people of God and committed fornication. Now, He says in verse 9—I'm in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 9: “Neither let some of us tempt Christ—that literally means test Christ—as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.” God sent fiery serpents to bite the people who put God to the test—that is, challenged Him. And now listen to verse 10: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” Now, here's the litany of sins. Are you listening to it? Idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring. So do you think that murmuring is a small sin? Murmuring is a very big sin. And the Bible tells us, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 14, “Do all things without murmuring.” That doesn't mean that if you have a problem, you can't address the problem, but you address the problem in the right way. Come to the right person with the right spirit, the right attitude, and directly, forthrightly, kindly, lovingly, and in the

Spirit of God, address the problem. But don't you be a murmurer in the congregation. And God's people said amen. Now, listen to that. You will be surprised how many churches today are hurt by murmuring. It is of the devil. Now, when you put people and progress together, you're going to have problems. But the problem in this church was not doctrinal, it was not moral; it was functional. They could not get the job done. And so, the people began to murmur over a functional problem. That's generally what causes murmuring in a church. "They moved our class and they didn't tell us about it," or, "They forgot to announce this thing." "Our opinion was not important." Now, friend, I want to tell you again—anything that moves makes friction, and there is more opportunity for this friction in a church that's fastly growing. There are more opportunities for problems. I had rather be a member of a growing church that has an opportunity for functional problems than a dead church.

Have you ever thought about how much Bellevue Baptist Church has grown? Have you ever thought about the adjustments that we have made? Do you know what our staff does in our staff meeting? Brother Mark can vouch for this, but you don't need him; your own good mind will tell you. You think of the growth that we have known together as pastor and people for the past 30 years. We're running now between eight and nine thousand in Sunday School. Thirty years ago, we were running 1,300 in Sunday School. We've seen growth. We grow and grow, and change, and redesign, and re-assign, and re-plan, and refigure, and it takes functional aptitude and prayer to do this. And so, there was the multiplication of the disciples. Then, there was the murmuring of the discontent, which leads to the third point.

### **III. The Ministry of the Deacons**

There was then the ministry of the deacons—the ministry of the deacons. Now, let's read, beginning in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Now, look at the word this. It doesn't say the business. It says this business. What business? Taking care of widows. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Now, what happened here was a very practical solution. Now, you'll find this out about the Bible. The Bible is deeply spiritual and intensely practical all at the same time. I love the Bible because it's very practical, but it is very spiritual at the same time. All Christians ought to be that way. There was a lack of order, and God is a God of order. We see God in the Book of Genesis turning a chaos into a cosmos. And wherever there is disorder that continues, then something is wrong. The Bible says, "Let everything be done decently and in order." One of the things that people remark about at Bellevue

Baptist Church is the way that the church functions, and I'm grateful for that. I don't take a lot of credit for that, but I do give a lot of praise to those who do it. I'm grateful for the order in our church. Now, order alone, and program alone, is not enough. The machinery has to be oiled by the Holy Spirit of God. But the Bible still says, "Let everything be done decently and in order."

And so, the disciples said, "How are we going to solve this problem?" I tell young married couples, and I tell churches and pastors, and everybody else; I told this group of pastors in the pastors' school that I recently taught, there are no problems too big to solve, just people too small to solve them. If, friend, a problem is caused by church growth, don't you think that the God who caused the growth is the God who can solve the problem? Would God give us problems that we cannot solve? Of course not! There is a solution. Now, it's very, very important. These disciples, these apostles, realized they must continue the ministry that God had given them and not get sidetracked. The devil will try to put a preacher out of business, if he can, by getting him to do things that are of secondary importance. Look in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said—now, watch this—It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." Now, they were not saying, "We're too good to do it." They just said, "It doesn't make sense. That's not what God called us to do. That's not what God equipped us to do." And then, look, if you will, down in verse 4. He said, "Now, you get some men to appoint over this business, the serving of tables." But look in verse 4: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word of God." Now, it was not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to do this, to serve tables, but what they found out was, while they were trying to take care of these Grecian widows and these Hebrew widows, that they were getting behind with their prayer, they were getting behind with their sermon preparation, they were getting behind with their soul winning, they were getting behind in their preaching and the ministry of the Word of God.

Many people think that the most important thing that I do is to preach here on Sunday. Well, that is important. But I'll tell you something that's also very, very important, and that's getting ready to preach on Sunday, to pray. Perhaps the most important time that I spend is not when I'm before you talking to you about God, but when I'm before God talking to God about you, trying to find out what God wants me to preach. Now, you may just think that I open my mouth and it comes out, but that is not so. I have to pray. I have to study. I have to labor. I have to work. I've been doing it for a long time. And I don't feel sorry for myself. It is my meat. It is my bread. It is my joy. It is my thrill. I don't know of anything I'd rather do. But it would be foolish for me to stop doing what I do, whether I am the pastor or anyone else is the pastor. The thing that keeps Bellevue Baptist Church going and growing is the ministry of the Word of God

and prayer. I hope you believe that. And our church, ultimately, is not going to be much better than this pulpit, and I don't mean this piece of wood; I mean what happens in this particular pulpit. By the way, this pulpit is the pulpit that Dr. Robert G. Lee preached behind. This pulpit is the pulpit that Dr. Ramsey Pollard preached behind. And, therefore, when we came out here, said I want to bring that pulpit out here, because it symbolizes the rich heritage of this church. Bellevue Baptist Church is a testimony and a testament to the preaching of the Word of God—of the Word of God.

I told this congregation when I first came, first sermon I preached to them, I said, "There are other people who can preach the gospel better than I can, but nobody can preach a better gospel than I can." And it is the Word of God that God blesses. It makes sense. And, therefore, the minister has to give himself to the study of the Word and prayer. I tell young preachers this: you have to be careful that you don't put a big S on your shirt and try to play Superman, and to be here and there and everywhere at the same time. The preacher who is always available isn't worth a whole lot when he is available. There has to be a time when he gives himself continually to the ministry of the Word and prayer. And, what did God give preachers to do? To do the work of the church? No! God gave preachers to preach the gospel so that the people can do the work of the church. I want you to put this verse down—Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 and 12. Now, listen to what it says: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." He's talking about what God has given to the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Now, pastors and teachers are grouped together. That literally means pastor-teacher, a pastor-teacher. That's what I am to be is a pastor-teacher. Now, what did He give pastor-teachers for? Well, that's verse 11. Listen to verse 12: "For the perfecting of the saints." Now, what does the word perfecting mean? It means the maturing of the saints. Why do you have a pastor-teacher? You have a pastor-teacher to perfect you; that is, to mature you. Well, why does God want to mature you? For the perfecting of the saints, "for the work of the ministry." You say, "Pastor Rogers, you're to do the work of the ministry." No. My job is to mature you to do the work of the ministry. Hello. Listen—listen. You say, "No, that's what we pay you for." No, no. Now, I don't want to be smart-alecky about this, but you don't pay me. You say, "Well, I thought we did." No, you give your money to God; God pays me. Now, you think about it. I'm not being smart-alecky. What I'm trying to say is, I am not a hireling. You don't hire me to serve God on your behalf so you don't have to do it. You may hire somebody else to cut your grass, but you can't hire anybody to pray on your behalf. You can't hire anybody to win souls on your behalf. You can't hire anybody to study the Bible on your behalf. You're to pray. You're to win souls. You're to study the Bible. And God gives the church ministers, pastor-teachers. Why does God give the church pastor-teachers? To mature the saints.

Why does God want the saints mature? So the saints can do the work of the ministry. Look at the person next to you, and say, "You are a minister." Do it right now. Just say, "You are a minister, you're a minister." Say, "You believe in women ministers?" You'd better believe it. We've got a church full of them. We could not function without our women ministers and our men ministers who serve the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't mean that you're to be the pastor of a church. God gives the church pastors and teachers to mature the saints. To mature the saints for what? For the work of the ministry. Now, when that stops, folks, it all implodes. And so, what does the devil want to do, Ken? He wants to take pastors and teachers, and get them off here in some administrative thing, as good as it may be, serving tables, helping widows, doing this or that. The devil doesn't care what I do, as long as I don't study, and get full of the Holy Ghost, and preach the Word of God, because, if you don't have that, you don't have mature saints. And, if you don't have mature saints, you don't have ministry. And so, here the devil says, "Well, let's just start a little murmuring over here, and let's see if we can sidetrack this church that is growing like it is shot out of a gun." But it didn't work. It didn't work, because, I say, these men were walking with God, and they were deeply spiritual and intensely practical at the same time. And so, they said, "Let's get us some men to serve the people of God."

Now, look, if you will, here in verse 3. The Bible says here, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word of God." Now, in this passage there is a word, *diakoneo*, that appears many times, and it's the word we get our word deacon from. He's saying, "Seek you out some servants." These men very well may have been the first deacons in the Bible. Now, I want you to notice they were not casually chosen. They were carefully chosen. They didn't choose just anyone. They did not choose inferior men. They chose superior men, because it takes a superior man to serve. Now, I hope that rings. It takes a superior man to serve. Jesus called Himself a deacon. Matthew 20, verse 28: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus came not to be deaconed unto, but to deacon, and to give His life a ransom for many. Jesus is talking to His disciples, and He tells about the lords of the Gentiles, the high muckety-mucks who want to be served, but here's what Jesus said, in Mark 10, verse 43: "But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister, be your deacon."

Now, what does it take to be a New Testament deacon? Well, let's look, if we will, and see what the qualifications for serving tables is. For serving tables? Look in verse 3 and see what the qualification is. "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report." First of all, there must be an established testimony, not a

Johnny-come-lately, someone of honest report. Leadership—and these men are leaders—functions best on the basis of confidence. The men who stood up here, those men who are returning to office—they're not perfect. Their pastor is not perfect. But they are men of character and of honest report. They're without blame. Not only are they to have an established testimony; they are to be full of the Holy Spirit—Spirit-filled men. Nothing for Jesus in the church should be done, can really be done, in the power of the flesh. We must be filled with the Spirit. And how do we know whether a man is filled with the Spirit? Not because he speaks in a strange language. Not everyone has the gift of tongues, even the biblical gift. Most of what we see today is not the biblical gift at all. But you can be Spirit-filled and not have any particular spiritual gift. But, if you're Spirit-filled, you will have the fruit of the Spirit. That is universal. And what is the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians 5, verse 22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law." That is the quality of the character of a deacon. Listen to it again. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." So what are these men to be? They're to have a good testimony. Number two: They're to be full of the Holy Spirit.

Number three—very important: They are to be full of wisdom. Do you see it there in verse 3? Full of wisdom. I have told our deacons many times, as I tell some of our major committees, it's better to be good than it is to be smart. It is better to be wise than it is to be shrewd. It is better to have wisdom than to have knowledge. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge. Knowledge may be proud that it knows so much; wisdom is humble that it knows so little. These were not ordinary men. These were extraordinary men. Look, if you will, here in verse 5: "And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch." These were quality men that they chose.

For example, let's mention the first two. Stephen—Stephen preached one of the mightiest sermons in the entire Scriptures. You find Stephen's sermon there, and they stoned Stephen, because he preached with such power and grace. They stoned Stephen. And Philip was a layman who preached to that Ethiopian eunuch out in the desert, opened up all of North Africa most likely to the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. These were quality men. I'm going to tell you something. When I get in our deacon fellowship, when I go to the deacon meetings, and I look around at the men who serve us as deacons, my heart leaps with joy. I praise God for the quality of these men. Now, I'm not trying to butter them up, but you can't be a deacon at Bellevue and just be a 6 or a 7. You've got to be a 9 or 10 spiritually.

I think of the men that are serving on our church staff right now who at one time

were deacons. I think of men like Randy Redd. I think of Greg Addison, who was on our church staff for a while, and now is pastoring a wonderful church in Arkansas. Incidentally, he's going to preach for us this coming Sunday night, a mighty man of God, an attorney that God called into the ministry. I think of David Scott. Have you ever wondered how all of these buildings and these facilities and everything keep going like they're going, and you look at our yards, our grounds, and everything? Who does all of that? Well, many do it, but who's over that? David Scott, an ordained minister. I think of Phil Weatherwax, one of our deacons, that God called into the ministry. Our outreach, our community missions, is being known around the world. I thank God for that. Who heads all of that up? My former associate, Bob Sorrell. By the way, on the way home from church today I heard Bob Sorrell being interviewed on the radio. Did any of you hear that? You didn't hear it? Well, you need to hear it. Bob Sorrell was being interviewed on WCRV by Byron Tyler. Bob Sorrell, mighty in the Scriptures, training and consulting with churches. He was a deacon. He was the chairman of our deacons. Mark Dougharty, sitting on the platform, our Associate Pastor, was a deacon. Bryson McQuiston was a deacon here. Craig Parker—we can't find anyone better than Craig Parker, who guides us in our financial and business affairs here, and business administrator—was a deacon here at Bellevue Baptist Church. I'm telling you, folks, that our deacons are the cream of the crop. I look at these deacons when I shake their hands, and I thank God for our deacons. But what are they? They are quality men, extraordinary men, who said, "Lord Jesus, I love You so much I want to serve the people of God. I want to be a servant of the servants of God."

Now, what happened? What was the result of this multiplication of the disciples, this murmuring of the discontent, this ministry of the deacons? Well, look, if you will, and you see what happened. And the Bible says, in verse 5: "And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose...these..." I've already mentioned this. Verse 6: "And when they set whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them—now, watch verse 7—and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly—now, we don't just have multiplication; we have great multiplication—and a great company of the priests were made obedient to the faith." Now, the devil tried to stop to church, but he didn't stop the church. All they did was to honestly, sincerely face the problem, pray, seek the will of God, do what God told them to do, and the church continued to grow with even greater opportunities.

Problems are opportunities in reverse, if we'll face them with the Holy Spirit. We're going to have problems. I'd hate to be a church that the devil wouldn't oppose. The devil is going to oppose Bellevue Baptist Church, and it may get worse, but we need to face every problem in the power of the Holy Spirit with wisdom and love, and see what God is going to do.

When Joshua was leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land, the spies came back and said, “Oh, we can’t do that. There are giants in the land!” They were Anakim. That was the name of them: Anakim, giants. God’s man said, “Listen. Don’t worry about them. They are bread for us.” Not B-R-E-D—B-R-E-A-D. “They are food for us.” This opposition. What is bread for? Bread is to nourish you. Bread is to make you strong. You will by bread. What was Joshua saying? “This opposition, when you feed on it, is going to cause you to grow and to be victorious. Eat your Anakim. It’s the breakfast of champions.” That’s what he’s saying.

Listen, folks. We can have problems. The early church had them. If you’ll read the epistles of Paul, you’ll find out that almost every church in the New Testament was having some kind of problem. Deacons are here not to cause problems; deacons are here to solve problems. Does that mean that deacons can only serve tables? No. A deacon can do anything. That’s service. I tell our deacons there’s no job that a deacon may not do, and there is no job that only a deacon may do. The deacons can’t say, “Stay out of this; this is deacon business.” There is no such thing as a job that only a deacon may do. They’re here to say, “Pastor and people, put me to work. To the best of my ability, I’m here to serve the Lord, and, God being my helper, I will always be a part of the solution. I will never be a part of the problem.” And God’s men and God’s women said amen.

## **Conclusion**

Now, we’re going to have the laying on of hands, and I’m going to ask these to come who are going to be newly ordained tonight, and I’m going to ask them to come and kneel here, and I’m going to ask that their wives stand by them, and I’m going to ask those of you who are designated for the laying on of hands to form a line over here, if you will. And you come all the way down to the end, Brother Rex. Folks, this is a glorious time. I don’t know if you can even begin to know what’s stirring in the hearts of these men, as they will kneel. And we will do as they did in the New Testament, and come lay hands upon these people, the laying on of hands representing Almighty God and the ministry of this church.

Gentlemen, will you kneel, please. And I’m going to ask the chairman of our deacons if he will lead. And, congregation, as the laying of hands takes place, would you be breathing a prayer. You can watch if you wish, but be breathing a prayer of thanksgiving to God for these, and God’s anointing, and God’s power upon them.

Now, I’m going to ask John Caldwell, who’s headed up the committee to help us to select and clear these deacons, Brother John, would you come, please, as the chairman, and lead us in an ordination prayer. And then, I’m going to ask the present deacon chairman if he will give to these men an ordination certificate.

John Caldwell prays.

Holy God, we come to You just in the blessed name of Jesus, and because of your precious shed blood, Father, we come. And, Lord, we lift these men to the throne of grace. Father, I thank you, dear God, for their lives. I thank You for their faithfulness. I thank You for their love for You, dear Father. And, God, we ask, in the name of Jesus, that You'll always keep us all pure, Father, and moral before You, dear God. Lord, even as Pastor has told us tonight, Father, God, we just pray that truly that we as deacons might be found faithful, dear God, to serve You, serve this Your church called Bellevue, Father. We thank You, dear God, for what You're doing here. And, Father, we pray that You'll never allow any of us to ever touch your holy heart, dear God, but, Father, that You'll continue to move and save souls just for Your glory. Bless these men. Bless their homes, dear God. Keep them all covered in the blood of Jesus, Father, because we ask it in His strong and precious name. Amen.

Amen. Gentlemen, would you stand. And Jeff Arnold, would you come, please—Jeff is the present chairman of our deacons—and give to these a certificate of ordination.

Congregation, let's express our appreciation. It is incumbent upon you to love and to pray for these men and their ladies. Gentlemen and ladies, would you be seated here for just a moment.

And we're going to conclude the service tonight with a gospel invitation. If you've never confessed openly and publicly your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to invite you to do it tonight. Now, you're saved by putting your faith where God has put your sins. Put your faith in Jesus, where God laid your sins. Jesus carried your sins to the cross, and with His precious blood He paid in full the sin debt, and makes salvation available to you, and you receive that by faith. And so, tonight, if you have received that, and have never made it public, this is your time to do it. We're going to sing an invitational hymn, and the ministers of our church are going to stand here at the front to welcome those of you who'll be coming forward. And you can come and say, "I'm trusting Jesus." What we'll do is give you some Scripture to stand on, answer any questions that we can answer, and seal it in prayer. Others of you here tonight may say, "I'm not saved yet, but I want to be. And I want somebody to take an open Bible and just guide me in this decision. I want to get it settled tonight. I want to be saved." Just come and say to the minister, "I want to be saved." And we'll take a Bible and guide you in this decision. And I promise you on the authority of the Word of God—listen—Jesus will save you tonight instantaneously. He'll be with you continually. He will keep you eternally, if you trust Him, okay?

Now, your soul is worth more than this whole wide world, and, if you're not certain that you're saved, you come tonight, and say, "I want to be saved." We'll guide you in this decision. You can leave here tonight a child of God, put your head on your pillow,

and go to sleep, and know, if you died in your sleep, you'd wake up in heaven.

Now, there are others of you who need a church home. And you're saved, and maybe your membership is elsewhere, and you want to come and place your membership here. We're not trying to wean you away from somebody else's church. But, if this is where God speaks to your heart, where God blesses, then you need to be a part. Everybody needs to be a part of a local New Testament church where they worship, a place of discipline and discipleship, and we want to invite you to come and say, "I want to place my membership here," if you love Jesus, and you believe as we believe, and you want to be a part of this fellowship.

Let's stand together. You step out and come on the first stanza.

# Growing Pains

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 31, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6:1–8**

*“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”*

ACTS 6:3

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth
- II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems
- III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions
  - A. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Witness
  - B. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Worship
  - C. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Wisdom
- IV. Where There Are Solutions, There Is Even Greater Growth

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God’s precious Word. Be finding Acts chapter 6. And, right away, you will recognize this as more or less of a classic passage on the office of deacon. I want to talk to you tonight on something I want to call, “Growing Pains.”

I don’t know whether you’ve ever experienced growing pains. If you are a normal adult, look back on your childhood, you can remember growing pains. You can remember some physical pains as your body was growing, especially in those pre-teen years. And when you got to be a teenager, you can remember some emotional growing pains, as you were trying to adjust to the awkwardness of teenage life.

And, spiritually, those of us who are on the road of spiritual maturity, we know something about growing pains also, because, just as you grow physically through pain, you grow spiritually through pain. A great verse is Psalm 4:1: “Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.” When you’re being stretched, you’re growing. And not only do individuals have growing pains physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but churches have growing pains. To grow is to have some pain. It was true of the early church. It is true of any church that grows. It is true of Bellevue Baptist Church.

I want you to listen to this story from the Word of God: “And in those days, when the

number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch; whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the Word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great number of priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”

## **I. Where There Is Life, There Is Growth**

Now, there are several things I want you to see. And the very first of things, the very first thing I would like for you to see is this: where there is life there is growth. Look in verse 1—the Bible says, “And the number of the disciples was multiplied...” No longer is it addition. It was addition in Acts 2. And now it is multiplication. Now, ours is a large church, and I’m grateful that it’s a large church. I want to hasten to say there’s nothing wrong with a small church. Small churches are wonderful. But there’s something gravely wrong with any church, small or large, that is not growing, if it’s in the midst of a lot of people who need the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s well been said, “We will grow and glow, or we will dry and die. We will evangelize or we will fossilize.” But we cannot afford, simply, to stop growing spiritually or numerically. God is interested in numbers. There’s a book in the Bible called Numbers. And we ought to be interested in numbers. We ought to be interested in growing.

Now, growing is not automatic, nor is growing easy. These early disciples prayed that they might grow. They planned that they might grow. They cultivated, and they watered, but it was God that gave the increase. But, in the last analysis, their growth was there because of their life. Numerical growth is the result of spiritual growth.

Let’s do something. Take your Bibles, and go back to Acts 2, and look with me in verse 41—Acts 2:41: “And they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if Bellevue had 3,000 additions in one day? Well, listen—listen. The same God that is our God today was their God then.

Now, turn with me, if you will, to chapter 4, and look in verse 4: Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of men was about five thousand.”

We go from 3,000 to 5,000 men. And you know something about church attendance? Generally, in a ratio, there are more women than men that attend. I suppose well over 10,000 people were added to the church in this particular one, in this wonderful movement.

And then, turn to chapter, 5, if you will, and look in verse 14: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” Now he stops counting. He just says, “It’s a multitude.”

And then, we go to chapter 6:1: “In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” You can tell that the church is growing exponentially. People sometimes talk about Bellevue Baptist Church, saying, “Bellevue Baptist Church is such a big church. I don’t want to belong to a big church.” I want to ask you a question: Why not? You certainly wouldn’t have wanted to belong to this church, would you? I’m telling you, the number was being multiplied. I want to belong to a church that’s like the New Testament church. The truth of the matter is that if we reach this community for Christ, and communities are reached for Christ around the world, we’re going to have to have a lot of churches like Bellevue Baptist Church to reach the people in this world. Many churches are going to have to grow. People ask me, “How big will Bellevue be when it’s big enough?” It’ll be big enough when all 5 ½ billion people on earth are saved! We need to keep on reaching souls. Put it down. Where there is life there is growth. And God’s command to the church is this: Be fruitful and multiply. The number of the disciples was multiplied.

## **II. Where There Is Growth, There Are Problems**

Second thing I want you to see. Where there is life, there is growth. Secondly, where there is growth, there are problems. Amen? You see, *when God wants to multiply, the devil wants to divide*. Look again in verse 1: “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmurings...” Where there is life, there is growth. And, where there is growth, there are problems.

Now, what happened is this: There were two types of Jews in the early church. There were the Grecian Jews, and there were the Hebrew Jews, and there was a division between the two. And, some of those who were of the Hellenistic or Grecian division felt that they were being overlooked, maybe somewhat discriminated against. And, these were widows. Widows, in that day, had no other means of support. There was no Social Security. These widows had to be taken care of by the church, if they were to live at all. And, they felt like somehow they were being overlooked. Look in verse 1: “...there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.” That is, in the giving out of welfare and food and necessities. They said, “We’re not getting as much as the Hebrew

Jews are getting.” Now, the problem that they had was a legitimate problem, but the method of dealing with the problem was devilish and deadly. It was murmuring.

Now, we preached about murmuring several nights ago. But what is murmuring? Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint. Now, there was a problem, and the problem needed to be addressed. *If the devil cannot keep you from doing a right thing, he'll try to get you to do a right thing in the wrong way.* And, as these people murmured, their murmuring was really not against the leadership of the church. The truth of the matter is it was murmuring against God. All murmuring is really against God, because murmuring is the opposite of praise and faith. Remember that Scripture we dealt with the other night—Exodus 16:8? “And Moses said, This shall be when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.”

God ranks murmuring in the Bible with idolatry and fornication. Listen to this—1 Corinthians 10, beginning in verse 7: “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted: and were destroyed of serpents.” Well, you say, “I would not commit idolatry. I wouldn’t commit fornication. I wouldn’t tempt Christ.” Well then, would you murmur, for listen to the next verse? “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” Murmuring is the devil’s way to divide when God wants to multiply. Paul said in Philippians 2:14: “Do all things without murmuring.”

I want every Christian, every believer in this church, to hear that. Do all things without murmuring. Why? Because when you have people and progress together, you are going to have problems. And the problem in this church was not doctrinal; it was functional. It was not primary; it was petty. Now, it was necessary that it be addressed; but it’s generally not the big things that divide churches today. It is the small things, the functional matters, the petty matters. “They moved our classroom. They divided our class. We were not notified. Our opinion is not important.” Well, no one should do things carelessly, but anybody can make mistakes. And, friend, the most dangerous thing that you can do to the fellowship of the church is to murmur. Remember this: that anything that grows must adjust, and anything that moves generally makes friction. And there’s always more opportunity for problems in a growing church than in a church that’s not growing. But I’d rather be in a growing church than a dead church. Say amen.

### **III. Where There Are Problems, There Are Solutions**

Now, where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there are problems.

Number three: Where there are problems, there are solutions. Look, if you will, now, in verses 2 and following: “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

Now, the solution here was a very simple solution, a very wonderful solution. You’re going to find out that the Bible is a very practical book. You’re going to find out that any man of God who walks with God is going to be deeply spiritual and intensely practical at the same time. God is a God of order. And so, God had an orderly way to deal with this problem. You’re going to find that when the Holy Spirit moves, He always brings a cosmos out of chaos.

He moved upon the darkness there in the early chapters of Genesis, and He took that chaos and He made a cosmos out of it. And, if things are out of order, disorder is generally a mark of carnality. I just looked at my desk, and it’s very carnal. The Bible says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” And so, the church organization is engineered by God, and the machinery is oiled by the Holy Spirit of God.

Now, learn this about this church, or any church: any church that is growing is going to have to adjust, but there are no problems too big to solve; only people too small to solve them.

Now, how was this church going to continue to function? Well, they needed two things. They needed spiritual food, and they needed physical food. Now, think about the spiritual food that they needed.

The, the apostles, the counterpart of the pastors and the preachers today, they had to continue the ministry of the Word of God. Look, if you will, in verse 2. They said, “...it is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables.” Now, it’s not that they were too good to do it. It just did not make sense. Look in verse 4: “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” They’re saying, “We can be more effective if we do that which God has called us to do, and that is to pray and minister the Word of God.” The early deacons were not there to free the pastor from work, but to free the pastor to work. It’s not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to serve. They had a different assignment. They were getting behind with their prayer, with their sermon preparation, with their soul winning, and with their preaching and the ministry of the Word of God. And they said, “This doesn’t make sense.”

I’ve learned a long time ago that a preacher who’s always available isn’t worth a whole lot when he is available. He needs to be alone with God. He needs to be in the Word of God. And the best time that I can spend on your behalf is not when I am before you, talking to you about God, but when I am before God, talking to Him about you, and filling my heart with the Word of God, and preparing to preach, and then ministering the

Word of God, and serving, and equipping you to serve.

So, the early apostles said, “Now, it doesn’t make sense that our ministry be cancelled out by doing these things.” And so, they need to continue to do what God had called them to do. So, there was the spiritual ministry—that is, for spiritual food. There was the practical ministry, for practical food for these widows. So, look in verse 3: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, who we may appoint over this business.” Not the business. They were not there to run the business of the church, but this business—to meet a need. Now, in this passage, there are a cluster of Greek words that have the word *deacon* or *diakonos* in them, which means “deacon” or “servant.” These men, these seven men, may have been the very first deacons. Now, not just anyone was chosen. They had to search for these men. These were not inferior men. These were superior men. It takes a superior man to serve. Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Jesus said He came to be a deacon. Mark chapter 10, verse 43: “But whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister.” And the word here minister literally means “your servant.”

Now, what qualities does it take for a man to be a deacon in any New Testament church?

#### **A. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Witness**

Number one: He has to have the right witness. He has to have an established testimony. He has to be a man of honest report, in verse 3. These men, who are sitting before you who are deacons, we have looked at them. We have watched them. We believe that they love God. We believe that they are clean and pure, because they must have the right witness. They must have an established testimony.

#### **B. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Worship**

But not only the right witness; they must have the right worship. They must be full of the Holy Ghost, full of the Holy Ghost. Nothing can be done for God in a church that will last, or amount to anything, that is done in the power of the flesh. In so many churches they make a tragic mistake. They take some businessman, or some rich man, or some influential person, and say, because of his business intelligence, or because of his money, or because of his influence, he will make a good deacon. And so, you get the ways of the world to invade the church. And he tries to lead the church in the same way that he might manage his business. What a tragic mistake! These men are to be spiritual men, full of the Holy Spirit. You say, “Pastor, how can you tell whether they’re spiritual men?” Well, Galatians chapter 5 and verses 22 and 23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,

temperance...” These are the kind of men that we want for deacons.

### **C. A Deacon Is to Have the Right Wisdom**

Not only must they have the right witness, and the right worship; they need to have the right wisdom. He says, “...full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” It’s far better to have good men than to have smart men. Knowledge is not nearly as important as wisdom. Wisdom is paramount. What mighty men these men were that they chose. Look in verse 5. They chose Stephen. You read, the next chapters, you’ll find out that Stephen, who was a deacon, preached one of the mightiest sermons that’s been preached in all of the Bible. Stephen became the first martyr. And then, notice they chose Philip. Philip was a layman, a deacon, but he was an evangelist. He preached the Word of God. He won the man to Christ that probably opened up all North Africa to the gospel. Stephen was the first martyr; Philip, the first missionary.

These are the kind of deacons we want. To be a deacon in this church means that you have met the highest standard. Many of our present staff are former deacons in this church. Bob Sorrell, my Associate Pastor, served as Chairman of the Deacons here. Phil Weatherwax, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Grenada, Mississippi, was on our church staff. Sam Simmons, Vice President of Mid-America Seminary, was one of our deacons. Craig Stockdale, who works here on our staff, one of our deacons. Curtis Bicknell, who runs our bookstore, one of our deacons. David Scott, one of our finest workers on our staff, was one of our deacons. Ron Jenkins, Craig Parker, and others. These are men that have come right out of our deacon fellowship to serve this church. We hold the highest standards.

And God had a plan for this early church. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there are problems. Where there are problems, there are solutions. And thank God for them.

## **IV. Where There Are Solutions, There Is Even Greater Growth**

Now, listen to this last thing, and I’ll be finished. Where there are solutions, there is even greater growth. Begin to read now in verse 4: But they said, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude...” and they chose these particular men. Now, look, if you will, in verse 7: “And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...” In verse 1 it multiplied; in verse 7 the growth multiplied greatly. The church met these problems head-on. They met these problems in a spirit of prayer, and the church grew even more. Problems are simply opportunities in reverse. Remember the psalm that I gave you to begin with—Psalm 4, verse 1: “...thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress...” The thing that causes us to grow is the ability to meet these problems in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Caleb saw the giants in the land of Canaan, Caleb said of those giants, “They are bread for us.” Not bred, but bread. “They are food for us. They are meat for us to eat.” What is bread? Bread is that which nourishes you and strengthens you when you eat it. And Caleb saw the problems, those giants in the land, as an opportunity to grow and be strong. And, as the early church met these problems, they became even stronger.

## **Conclusion**

God wants Bellevue Baptist Church to grow. And, friend, I can tell you, because there is a devil in this world, and because this church is made up of human beings, and non-perfect ones, we are going to have problems. But we, by the grace of God, are going to continue to grow. Where there is life, there is growth. Where there is growth, there are problems—growing pains. Where there are problems, there are always solutions. And when you apply God’s solution to the problem, there is even greater growth. From victory unto victory, His army shall He lead.

# The Mathematics of a Growing Church

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 20, 1988**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6:1–8**

**Sponsored by: Sponsor**

*“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.”*

ACTS 6:1

## Outline

Introduction

I. Multiplication

II. Division

III. Addition

IV. Subtraction

V. More Multiplication

Conclusion

## Introduction

I want you to take God's holy Word and turn with me please to Acts, the book of Acts chapter 6. We've come tonight to ordain some deacons, and I have a very pertinent passage of Scripture. And the title of my message is, "The Mathematics of a Growing Church." "The Mathematics of a Growing Church." I don't know how good you are in math. You might be like the little boy whose teacher was trying to help him in mathematics. And she said, "Johnny, if you reached in one pocket and you found \$2.50, and you reached into another pocket and you found \$9.00, what would you have?" He said, "I'd have on somebody else's pants!" Tonight, I want us to learn something about biblical mathematics that cause a church to grow. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows (that is, the Greek widows) were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves

continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and, ah, Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, ah, excuse me, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” Now, ladies and gentlemen, growing pains are part of growing up. Do you remember how awkward you were when you were a teenager just, ah, your early teen years, how many, what we would call growing pains, you had? Spiritually, the thing is true also. In, in a church or in your spiritual life, if you grow, you’re going to have some pains. They say in the gymnasium, “No pain, no gain.” Psalm 4:1. This is what the psalmist said. “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress...” You got it? When I was in distress, that’s when I was growing. No pain, no gain. And what is true of individuals, what is true physically is true spiritually, and it’s also true of churches. Growing churches are going to have problems. It is true of the early church. It is true of Bellevue Church. It will be true of any church that is growing. As a matter of fact, all people have problems, right? I mean, I could preach a, a three-point sermon tonight. I’ve got ‘em; you’ve got ‘em; everybody’s got ‘em. That’s the three points. And then the poem is, “Adam Had ‘Em.” And then we’ve got the whole sermon. I mean, dear friend, that’s, that’s it. Problems are part of the human race, but they’re especially a part of a growing church.

## **I. Multiplication**

Now I want you to think about the mathematics of a growing church tonight. And the very first word I want you to think of is multiplication. Look, if you will, in chapter 6:1: “. “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...” Now here was a growing church. You know, in Acts 2 the Bible says, “...there was, there were added unto them a certain number of souls...” But no longer is it addition. It is multiplication. Now I told our new members tonight as I met them in the Pastor’s Conference Room there’s nothing wrong with a strong, a, a small church. I thank God for small churches. I pastored small churches. Thank God for the small churches. They are the, the backbone of America. Nothing wrong with a small church. But I’ll tell you something else. There is something wrong with a small church that stays small when it’s in the midst of an number of lost people. There’s something wrong with that. A church is to grow. And the way the church is to grow is by winning people – men, women, boys and girls – to Jesus Christ. An artist was commissioned to pla, paint a picture of a dying

church. Some people thought that he would paint a picture of a church that, ah, had the front steps splintered, ah, church that was, the roof was decaying, a church that was half empty, but that isn't what he painted. He painted a magnificent church. The paint was fresh on the walls. The carpet was just right. Everything was decorously beautiful. And there was a good number of people there. But if you looked real carefully at the church, you saw cobwebs in the baptistery. That, my friend, is a picture of a dead church. You see, it's one thing to have a, a church full of people, but it's another thing to have a full church of empty people, a church that is not growing. Now listen. God is interested in numbers. There's sometimes people accuse Baptists and accuse Bellevue Baptist of being simply interested in numbers. God, in the book of Acts, tells about numbers over and over again. Evidently, the Holy Spirit of God was impressed with numbers. And it says here, "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Now it wasn't automatic. Why did this church grow? Church growth is not automatic. Church growth is not easy. I'll tell you why they grew. They prayed for it and they planned for it. They cultivated and they watered. But, nonetheless, God gave the increase when they did these other things. Now for those of you who perhaps think that a church ought to stop growing at a certain time, I want you to look at certain Scriptures with me. Look, for example, in Acts 2:41: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Dear God, one day give Bellevue Baptist Church three thousand souls in one day. It's not impossible. Not impossible. There's more reason that it should happen to us than it happened to them. We have far more resources, far more trained Christians. One day, three thousand souls. Now fast forward, if you will, to Acts 4:4: "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Now you know that generally in a church there are more women and children than men. Three thousand souls on Pentecost. Now five thousand souls. Now go to chapter 5, if you will, and verse 14 and look at it. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women." Do you see here a church that is exploding in growth? Think about it. Three thousand souls. Five thousand men. Now multitudes. And then we go to our text again tonight, chapter 6:1: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." I want to tell you that the command to the church spiritually is the same command that God gave to the race physically, and it is be fruitful and multiply, be fruitful and multiply.

## **II. Division**

We're talking about the mathematics of a growing church. The very first word is multiplication, multiplication. Second word. The mathematics of a growing church – division, division. Continue to read here. Look, if you will, in chapter 6:1: "And in those

days, when the number of the disciples were multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.” That is, in the taking care of the physical needs of the widows. Now when God wants to multiply, the devil wants to divide. What happened in the church was this: There were two kinds of Jews in this church. There were the Hebrew Jew, ah, two kinds of widows in the church. There were those who were Hebrew widows and there were those who were Grecian widows in the church this day. And because of that, there got to be a little bit of a feeling among the Grecians that they were left out, that somehow that the Hebrew widows had been favored just a little bit, and they began to murmur about it. Look at that word. It’s an ugly word. There arose a murmuring. Now the problem that they had was a legitimate problem, but the method that they went about to solve the problem was a devilish and deadly method. Do you know what they did? They murmured. Do you know what murmuring is? Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint. It’s not going to the right person in the right spirit forthrightly and boldly, kindly, spiritually and confronting a problem. It’s just a little whispering campaign. Now let me tell you how God feels about murmuring. I talked to you this morning about the attitude of gratitude. Murmuring is just the opposite. I mentioned this verse. It’s found in Exodus 16:8. When the people were murmuring in the Old Testament, here’s what God said. God said, “...for the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him...” This is what Moses is saying. “...But what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.” If you’re ever in a church and you murmur about the pastor, you murmur about the deacons, you murmur about the leadership, you murmur about the program, you’re sinning against Almighty God, and I’m going to show you clearly and plainly that you are. And the murmuring is primarily against God whose church it is. One of the most amazing things is this: That in the New Testament God ranks murmuring with fornication and adultery. And I want every murmurer to listen to these Scriptures: First Corinthians 10 beginning in verse 7: “Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” So, first of all, they were idolaters. “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.” Hey, folks, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ. Pretty bad stuff, huh? Now listen. “Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer.” God ranks murmuring with fornication, idolatry, and tempting Christ. Murmuring is God’s way to divide when God wants to multiply. I want to give you a plain text. It’s not a suggestion; it is a command and it is to every member of Bellevue Baptist Church. Hear it straight. Hear it plain. Hear it from the Word of God from the mouth of this preacher. Philippians 2:14: “Do all things without murmuring....” Did you hear it?

Say amen. I will never murmur. Say amen. That didn't get it. I will never murmur. Say amen. Remember that. The Bible says, "Do all things without murmuring...." It's not what the pastor said, not some pastor who doesn't want to be hassled. That isn't what, that's what God said. "Do all things without murmuring..." My dear friend, when God wants to multiply, the devil wants to divide. And the way the devil divides is by murmuring. Now the people murmured. You see, listen. When you put people and progress together, you're always going to have problems. Anything that grows and moves makes friction, isn't that right? Anything that moves is somehow going to make friction. Progress and people equal problems. Now that doesn't mean that God is not with us. As a matter of fact, the problems that come along mean that God is with us. I want you to notice what the problem was here in Acts chapter 6. It wasn't doctrinal. It was functional. It wasn't primary. It was petty. What it was about is who was waiting on tables and who was being neglected and who got waited on and who got served and who didn't get served. I've been a pastor now for 35+ years. I have observed a lot of things that happen in Baptist churches. But I would say that 95% of the problems that I've seen in a Baptist church are not primary, but petty. They're not over major things. They're over minor things. This was not a doctrinal dispute. This was not a large, serious dispute over some dishonesty or malfeasance. It was a petty thing. You're going to find out that churches will get more exercised over the color of the carpet, which side of the auditorium the organ is on, or they've moved our classroom. Hey, struck home! Let's, let's pull over and park right there. All right. You just poking around and somebody's going to say, "Ow." Now, look. They, ah, "We were not notified. Our opinion wasn't important. We were left out. I wasn't recognized." Those are the things – put it down – that cause that little murmuring. And you know who causes that murmuring is the devil himself. Again, I want to tell you anything that moves makes friction, and anything that grows constantly is going to have to adjust. There are always more opportunities for problems in a growing church, but I'd rather be a part of a growing church than a dead church. Say amen. Always. When you have a growing family, there are problems. Joyce and I think for, we've been married for a long time. I think we're just about to get the house straight after about 35 years. But I don't know I like it that straight. I still miss the broken things and the fingerprints on the glass. But the grandkids are going to take care of that pretty soon. But I'm telling you, dear friend, if, if you've got your house in order, you probably don't have a growing family. Isn't that right? I mean, the Bible says, "Where no oxen are, the stall is clean; but by there's much strength by the labor of the ox." Thank God for a growing church. Thank God. And so, the first thing you see in the mathematics of a growing church is multiplication. God wants to multiply. God wants it to grow. And God caused it to grow. And then you see division. The devil comes in and says, "I want to divide it." I've told you before and I'll tell you again, the

devil had rather start a church fuss than sell a barrel of whiskey any day. And the way he does it is not generally through a frontal attack. We can take that. Not over something major. It's through a subtle attack over something petty, something that's just kind of hard to get your hands on. It's like trying to nail jello to a tree. Murmuring.

### **III. Addition**

All right. Now the, the third thing - the mathematics of a growing church. Not only multiplication and division, but addition. These, ah, these apostles were in key with the Holy Spirit, and so they said, "Well, we need to add some folks here." And look in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." Twelve plus seven. They got them together. They added them together. There were twelve. They said, "We need seven more to help us." And the mathematics of a spiritual church take off. Now here was the, ah, here was the solution. I want you to see the solution. It was a very practical solution. One thing you're going to learn about the Bible is, it is deeply spiritual; it is intensely practical. Now God is a God of order. And wherever you see disorder that's probably a mark of carnality. The Bible says God is not the author of confusion, but of order in all of the churches. And so they had a problem. And the God of order.... And, by the way, you know, God is always bringing order out of chaos. The very first time you see the Spirit of God moving, the Bible says there was darkness upon the face of the deep. There was chaos. And the Spirit of God moved and brought a cosmos out of a chaos. That's what the Spirit of God does. He brings order. Bellevue Baptist Church is a highly organized church. It ought to be that way because we are a body and a body is organized. It has organs, and they all have a function, and they all work together. That's the way it's supposed to be. But the machinery of the church is to be oiled by the Holy Spirit of God. So God said, "All right, now look. People need two kinds of ministry. They need a spiritual ministry, the ministry of the Word, and these widows needs a physical ministry. They need somebody to help them get food." Now I want to remind you, in that day and in that time they didn't have relief societies like we have. There was no Medicare, Medicaid, ah, Social Security, and that. If, if, if these Christians didn't take care of these widows, nobody would. And so, first of all, the disciples were very logical about this thing. They said, "There must be the continued ministry of the Word of God." Look in verse 2: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said (now watch this. Look how they used their minds spiritually. And, by the way, when God renews your mind, He expects you to use it). It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables." Look, if you will, in verse 4: "But we will give ourselves

continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word of God.” Now I want you to understand this: It was not that the apostles were too good or too dignified to serve tables. They had been serving tables. But what they found out is while they were serving these tables and serving these widows, they were falling behind in their prayer, they were falling behind in their preparation, they were falling behind in their soul winning, they were falling behind in their quiet time with God, and the people were suffering. They said, “Hey, this isn’t reasonable.” Now there are some people who want a pastor to be always available. The man of God who is always available isn’t worth a whole lot when he is available. He’s got to be alone with God in prayer and in the Word of God if he’s going to have anything to say when he stands up on Sunday or Wednesday or whenever it is.

It’s not reasonable that he should be doing these other things that are going to sap his energy. I think I told you sometime ago about a man who went into a pet store and he saw a parakeet that was advertised for \$25.00, guaranteed to talk. The man said, “That’s a bargain.” He bought the parakeet and he took him home. And he waited and the parakeet didn’t say a word. He went back to the shop and said, “You said the parakeet would talk. He didn’t talk.” He said, “Well, did you get him a little bell to peck?” He said, “You know, he’s got to peck the bell before he talks.” “Well,” he said, “no.” He said, “How much is a bell?” He said, “Ah, \$10.00.” “Well,” he said, “okay. Give me the bell.” Went back, put the bell in the cage, and still nothing happened. He went back. He said, “Look. I’ve bought the bell,” and he said, “He still hasn’t said a word.” He said, “Well,” he said, “did you get the little ladder?” He said, “What do you mean, the little ladder?” He said, “Yes, you know, he pecks the bell and runs up and down the ladder before he says a word.” “How much is the ladder?” “\$12.00.” Well, he bought the ladder, came back. He said, “Look, he’s still not talking.” “Oh,” he said, “you probably failed to get the little mirror. You know, first he pecks the bell and then goes up and down the ladder. And then he looks in the mirror. Did you get the mirror for \$14.00?” He said, “No, give me the mirror.” And he bought the mirror. He came back. He said, “He, he still doesn’t talk.” “Oh,” he said, “well, you probably didn’t get the little swing. You know what he does is, he pecks the bell, runs up and down the ladder, looks in the mirror, swings on the swing. Did you get the swing?” He said, “No. How much is the swing?” He said, “\$20.00.” He got the swing and put it in there. And then, finally, he went back to the pet store. He said, “Did your parakeet speak?” He said, “Yes.” He said, “He pecked the bell. Then he ran up and down the ladder. Then he looked in the mirror. Then he got on the swing and went back and forth. Then he looked over at me and said, ‘Don’t they sell any bird food in that store,’ and fell over and died.” Have you ever been a member of a church where they’re pecking bells, going up and down ladders, ringing bells and looking in mirrors, but not getting fed? I mean, listen, folks. That’s the way to kill a

church, to starve it! A church needs to be fed. They need to be fed the Word of God.

These apostles said, “It, it’s, it’s not reasonable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables.” But there’s some practical things, as well as spiritual things. Look in verse 3. They realized there were some practical things. “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint (now watch it) over this business.” Not *the* business. Pay attention. “. . .this business.” What is this business? The business of serving tables. As a matter of fact, in this passage of Scripture you’re going to find a cluster of Greek words, and all of these are variations of the word diakono or diakonos, the word we get our word *deacon* from, and they mean “serve” or “servants” or “serving.” These men most likely were the first deacons of the New Testament church. The very word *deacon* means “servant.” Now they didn’t just choose anyone. These were not inferior men. These were, as I’m going to show you, superior men that were chosen. They could have gotten inferior to do something else, but they had to get superior men to serve because I’m going to tell you what: it takes a superior man to be a servant. Now let that sink in. Matthew 20:28. Jesus said, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. . .” Do you know what the word *minister* means there? It means to serve. Jesus came to serve. Mark 10:43: “But is shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister (your servant).” Now we’re going to ordain some deacons tonight and install some other deacons. I want to tell you what it takes to serve tables. Do you want, do you know what it takes to serve tables for Jesus? I want you to look here in this verse, verse 3: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men (first of all) of honest report. . .” A deacon is to have an established testimony. A little boy saw the deacons coming to take the offering in a particular church. He said, “Here comes the beacons.” That’s what they ought to be. They ought to be beacons, testimonies, shining lights for the Lord Jesus. All leadership and all true servanthood functions on the basis of confidence. They have to be men, according to verse 3, of honest report. That is, they’re to have an established testimony. Number two: They are to be full of the Holy Ghost. You men that we’re installing, and you men that we are ordaining, if you’re not willing to let the Holy Spirit of God fill you, I beg of you, I employ you, be honest enough to refuse this office. You are to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Well, you say, “How can a man know that he’s filled with the Holy Ghost?” Well, God’s given us a great way in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” That’s the character description of a deacon. Not only full of the Holy Ghost, but full of wisdom. So many churches make this mistake: They get the, the sharp businessmen, the moguls, Mr. Got Rocks, Mr. Moneybags, Mr. Computer Mind, and they make these men deacons. Now a spiritual man can have all of that and be a

deacon, but that doesn't make him a deacon. I want to tell you, it doesn't say get smart men. It says, "...men full of wisdom..." It is better, my friend, to be wise than to be smart. Better to be good than to be cunning. Knowledge is important; wisdom is paramount. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge. Knowledge sometimes is proud that it knows so much; wisdom is humble that it knows so little. These men are to be men of wisdom. What mighty men these were. I want you to notice in verse 5. Look in that list of men. Stephen is in that list of men. Stephen was the man you're going to find out in just a few chapters, in Acts 8, who preached one of the mightiest sermons that was ever preached in the Bible – and he was a deacon. If you'll look in that same list, you're going to find Phillip. Phillip, who was a layman and a deacon, was also an evangelist. He was probably the one that opened up all North Africa to the gospel when he won that Ethiopian to Christ in Acts 8. Now, my dear friend, these were not ordinary guys. These were extraordinary men. The men that we're ordaining tonight, and the men that we are installing tonight are men of the highest caliber. It takes the highest caliber of men to serve tables. It takes great men to do this. As a matter of fact, I believe that the men who are to be ordained and installed tonight as deacons are the same quality of men that we would have on our church staff should God call them. As a matter of fact, we have many that God has called into the ministry out of our deacon fellowship. Bob Sorrell, our Associate Pastor, former Chairman of our Deacons here. Phil Weatherwax, our Business Administrator, former deacon here. Sam Simmons, Vice President at Mid-America Seminary and now the Interim Pastor at First Baptist Church, West Memphis – one of our former deacons. Jim Gillentine, who serves on our church staff here as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ – one of our deacons. Craig Stockdale, one of the finest, young, ah, men in our entire church staff who helps look over all of the Canaan facilities and those grounds out there, is doing a wonderful job – one of our former deacons. Curtis Bicknell, who runs our bookstore out there. And there's not a finer bookstore I know of anywhere in the world, and God has given it to us right here. Curtis Bicknell, one of our deacons that God called into that work. David Scott, who is on our staff here, one of the finest men of God, one of the finest ministers that I know of anywhere. He came, my dear friend, out of our deacon fellowship. What I'm saying is this, my friend. Here was multiplication. Then the devil tries division. And then the apostles bring addition. They say, "Just give us, just give us some more men. Take the twelve and add seven and we're going to get this job done."

#### **IV. Subtraction**

Now, my dear friend, the next thing I want you to notice is not addition, but subtraction. What happened is this: The problem was solved. Look, if you will, in verse 5: "And the saying pleased the whole multitude..." And here is the diminishing of the problem. Here

is the subtraction. Here is the taking away of the problem. There are no problems too big to solve; just people too small to solve them. These people, full of the Holy Ghost, found out how to get rid of a problem, how to subtract a problem, how to get it out. Problems really are just simply opportunities in reverse. Let me just go to the last point again very quickly. Not only subtraction, but we're right back now to multiplication. Notice here what happened in verse 6: "Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them (now watch), and the Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly (now watch)...." Verse 6, ah, chapter 6:1: "...the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Now look in chapter 6:7: "...and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly..." Do you see it? Do you see what happened? Do you see that the problem was simply an opportunity in reverse? When God allows us to have problems, when we go to God in prayer, when we meet those problems in the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we just simply grow all the more.

## **V. More Multiplication**

Multiplication, division, addition, subtraction, and now more multiplication. They're just growing faster and faster. Not just multiplying now. They're multiplying greatly. Who knows how many members they had! B. H. Carroll, great church historian, said they had over 50,000 members in the first six months. A great church because they were following the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God. Do you know what problems are? Problems, my friend, are what cause you to grow. When they were about to go into the Promised Land, Caleb and Joshua went out there and saw those giants. Everybody else said, "We can't go into that Promised Land because of the giants." Do you know what Caleb and Joshua said? They said, "Let us go up at once. These people are bread. They are a loaf of bread. They are a piece of cake." Now what is bread for? Bread is to eat it, to eat. What happens when you eat it? You grow. You're strengthened. Everybody else saw that problem as something to keep them out. They saw that problem as something to nourish them and to cause them to grow. That's what happened in this early church. The problem was a piece of bread to them. They ate it and they grew.

## **Conclusion**

We're going to ordain some deacons tonight. I want to tell you deacons that this is going to be a significant year for us here at Bellevue Baptist Church. Don't fold your Bible quite yet. I'm almost finished, but not immediately. Listen. As we move from this place to out yonder, we're going to have more potential to rub people raw than I can think of, okay. Your class might get divided. They may even lose your doily. That's right. I mean,

they may even lose the doily that goes on the lectern. Possible. The first Sunday you might not even be able to find your class. Fourth Sunday, you still might not find it. Who knows what might happen? But if God be for us, who can be against us? We're not going to murmur. We're multiplying. We're growing. That's a sign of the grace of God, the power of God. It was God that caused this growth. God caused the multiplication. The devil tried the division. God's people used the addition, found the subtraction, and went on with the multiplication. That's the mathematics of a growing church. Let's bow in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Father God, thank You for this deacon ordination service tonight. And I pray, dear God, that You'll make it meaningful and beautiful. In Your holy name we pray, amen. Now just before we have the laying on of hands, we're going to give a gospel invitation. There may be some here tonight who want to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Some here tonight who want to be saved. Or some here who want to place your membership in this church. I'm going to ask that absolutely no one leave unless it is an emergency. This is the most vital part of the service right now. Standing at the head of each of these aisles will be a minister of God to receive those of you who are coming to receive Christ. When you get up out of your seat, you just come down one of these aisles if you want to be saved tonight.

# Stephen

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 1, 1998**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 6**

**Sponsored by: Sponsor**

*“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”*

ACTS 6:8

## Outline

Introduction

I. Stephen Was Full of Wisdom to Speak for Christ

II. Stephen Was Full of Power to Stand for Christ

III. Stephen Had Faith to Suffer for Christ

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you find Acts chapter 6. And as you're finding it, look up here and let me tell you something. Where there is life there will be growth. And where there is growth there will be problems. And where there are problems there are solutions. And when those solutions are put in place, there is greater growth. And that's the way the early church grew. They were growing. The number of the disciples was multiplied. Our growth today makes good addition, but theirs was multiplication. The number of the disciples was multiplied.

And then there arose a murmuring among some Grecian widows who thought they were being neglected in the church. Don't you just dislike the word murmur? That's an ugly word – murmur. And they were murmuring. And that's kind of a half concealed, half uttered complaint. And they began to murmur because they felt that they were being overlooked in the distribution of commodities. And so the pastors, the spiritual leaders, the teachers and the preachers said, “This is not a good thing. And here we are trying to distribute food and necessity to these widows, and we ought to be spending time praying and seeking the face of God, getting ready to preach and ministering the word of God.” And so, the Holy Spirit of God said, “Why, what you need to do is to get some deacons. You need to get some servants. You need to get some men of God who can take care of these mundane things and serve in these matters.” And that was such a wonderful idea. I want you to see how the word of God puts it in chapter 6, verse 3. They said, “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report,

full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” Now it doesn’t say “over the business.” It doesn’t mean they’re to run the business of the church. But “over this business,” the serving, helping these widows in their necessities. And then they said, the ministers, the apostles, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the multitude: and they chose Stephen [now I want you to underscore the word Stephen], a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost...” I’m going to stop reading right there because our emphasis tonight is going to be on Stephen. Ha, there were others, but I want us tonight to think about Stephen.

Now go down, if you will, to verse 8: “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. And there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.”

Now here was a man named Stephen. Brother deacons, I want to remind you that he was a deacon. And he is a model deacon for me tonight and for you, because tonight we’re going to ordain some deacons and we’re going to install some other deacons. And so I want us to think of Stephen as a Spirit-filled deacon, and I want to say to you that I would like to hold him up for an example to you. But I want to say that while I’m holding Stephen up as an example to you and I’m pointing that finger out, three are pointing at me. And I got on my knees and I thought about this message before I preached it, and said, “Dear God [to myself], is that the kind of a man that you are?”

But not only do I want to hold Stephen up as an example to these deacons who are being installed, and as an example to the pastor and the staff, but to all of the congregation, because God really doesn’t ask anything of His, of a deacon that He really doesn’t ask of all of us. He just simply is saying that a deacon ought to be a man who reaches the qualifications and the standard that is really there for every Christian.

So, let’s just let this apply to these deacons with specificity tonight, but let it apply to each one of us also. So here is Stephen. Stephen is a man gifted, grace, and anointed with great wisdom, great power, and great faith. We’re going to see that tonight because, that is so manifested in his life.

Stephen begins to witness and to share the Lord Jesus Christ, and right away he gets opposition. Opposition doesn’t mean that we’re out of the will of God; it may mean that we are right in the middle of the will of God. And so there is real opposition against this man’s preaching.

Notice in verse 10: “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Now since they could not resist him, they argued, organized against him. They’re going to try to destroy him. “Then they suborned men, which said, We

have heard him speak blasph, blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” Of course, that was a lie, but they had men who were suborning, ah, this testimony. “And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place [that is, against the temple] and against the law: For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council looked stedfastly on him, and saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”

Now they’re looking at him, and he’s looking at them, and his face now is shining like an angel. Now his defense is so powerful, they cannot overcome his defense as he speaks. He is so full of wisdom. He is so full of power. He’s so full of faith, they decide they’re going to have to destroy him. And, ultimately, they do stone him to death.

You know, lawyers have said that if you’re arguing a case, and if the facts are on your side, you argue the facts. Now if the facts are not on your side, but the law is on your side, you argue the law. If neither the facts or the law are on your side, then you attack your opponent.

Well, certainly, the facts were not on their side. And the law was not on their side. So what, the only thing left for them to do was to attack this Stephen, who was a deacon.

Now they, they stone him, ah, to death. But Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. Now remember the qualification. Look back at chapter 6, verse 3: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” And then look in verse 8: “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” Then look again in verse 10: “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.”

There are three qualifications that stand out to me that I have prayed over tonight, and I want to present to you deacons and brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **I. Stephen Was Full of Wisdom to Speak for Christ**

First of all, Stephen was full of wisdom to speak for Christ. Look against in verse 10: “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Now if you were to read Acts chapter 7, you would find the wisdom of this man Stephen, and you would find that as he made his defense against the council, that he had an uncommon knowledge of the Word of God. Now he gave a great discourse on biblical history. But he was able to take biblical history and present the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ through biblical history, and he was able to do it with the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. And the wisdom that he had as he stood before the council was a

supernatural gift of God. Now I believe that before long those of us who are leaders in the church, and that would include you deacons, are going to have to defend our faith before councils. We're going to have to defend our faith before magistrates. Legal people will come against us and say, "You cannot speak anymore as you've been speaking. You cannot call abortion a crime. You cannot call homosexuality a sin. You cannot say that adultery is wrong. That is wrong. That is something that you cannot do and you must not do." And we may be put in jail. We may have our livelihood taken from us. You say, "Pastor Rogers, I don't know that I am ready to be brought before a council like that. I don't know that I have what it takes." Well, let me give you some comfort. This comfort comes from Luke chapter 21 and verses 12 through 15. These are the words of your Lord and Master, your King and Prince, the Lord Jesus, and He is talking about us living in this day, I believe. And He says, "And before all these things [He's talking about the end of the age], they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony." That is, God says, "When they begin to persecute you, the tables are going to turn and it's going to be a golden opportunity for you to witness for the Lord Jesus. Now here's what He says. Now you listen to this. "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate what ye shall answer." Suppose they were to take, ah, your grandchildren and line them up, and say, "If you do not deny the Lord Jesus, we will kill these children." Or suppose they were to say, "If you do not deny your faith, we will dismember, mutilate these children," what would you do? Well, you say, "Pastor, I don't know what I would do. That's a real problem." The Lord says, "Don't even think about it. Don't even think about it. Don't try to settle in your heart what you would do about these things. "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer." Well, now here's a promise from our King. Listen to it. "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." Isn't that great? He says, "Don't worry about it. When it comes, I will tell you what to say." That's exactly what we saw happening with Stephen right now.

They brought him before the council. They suborn false witnesses against him. We're all going to be given opportunities like this, I believe, in these last days, and it will turn to us for a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. God will supernaturally give you the tongue of the learned and the mind of Christ, and you yourself will be surprised at what you hear yourself saying.

You see, here was a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and he spoke with such wisdom. Look again in verse 10: "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke."

Now we're not here to outsmart the world; we're here to stand up for Jesus and to

speak with wisdom. Now that doesn't mean that we're going to be wise to get out of trouble; it may mean that we're going to be wise to get into trouble. It doesn't mean that we're going to be loved. They certainly didn't love Stephen. They stoned him. But here, here is a man of God, a deacon filled with the Holy Spirit, and, first of all, I want you to see that because he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was full of wisdom to speak for Christ.

## **II. Stephen Was Full of Power to Stand for Christ**

Now here's the second thing that I see as I look at this. Not only was he full of wisdom to speak for Christ, but he was full of power to stand for Christ. Look again, if you will, in verse 8: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Now, Stephen begins to turn the table on these people, and rather than being on the defense, he takes a stand and he gets on the offense. Look in chapter 7, verse 51. Here's a man before the council. And I can see Stephen. His face is like an angel, but that doesn't mean that his face was soft and effeminate. Oh, no. Look at him. "Ye stiffnecked," he says, "and uncircumcised in heart and ears..." They were so proud of their Jewish circumcision. He says, "You, you're uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your father did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye haven't, ye have been now the betrayers and murderers." He is accusing the council of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, the betrayal of the Messiah. He is taking a stand. He's no longer the defendant; he is the prosecuting attorney. And he's doing this by himself. They brought him before the council. He doesn't have anybody else there with him, and he is standing alone.

We're going to have to teach our children to stand alone, did you know that? They're going to have to learn how to stand alone before New Age and humanistic professors and school teachers. We're going to have to teach them to stand alone out in the date life and in the social life of this world. We're going to have to teach our businessmen and ladies how to stand alone in an office where there is gambling, profanity, ah, liquor, dishonesty. You're going to have to stand alone.

Now we can sit in an auditorium like this with several thousand and feel at home, but Stephen didn't have several thousand around him. He was full, he was full of wisdom to speak for God, and he was full of power to stand for God, and he stood alone.

I'm praying for my grandchildren, that they will stand alone in this day and this age. I'm thinking of a young lady who was going out with some other young people, and one of them suggested that they stop at sort of a roadhouse and go in and, and drink some booze. This girl realized she was in the wrong company. She said, "No, I don't want to go in there." She said, "I have somebody with me who would not enjoy going in there." And the boy who was with her, said, "No, I wouldn't mind it." She said, "I wasn't

speaking of you. I was speaking of the Holy Spirit of God who lives in my heart. Would you stop this car and let me out. I'll get my way home." Courage to stand alone for the Lord Jesus Christ. I wonder, are you going to have that kind of a courage, or are you going to be one of those who goes along to get along? Stephen wasn't. Stephen wasn't trying to win some popularity contest. Thank God that he had this courage.

Now that didn't mean that he got out of trouble. As a matter of fact, they stoned him. But, you see, again, Stephen remembered the words of the Lord Jesus. What did Jesus say in Matthew chapter 10, verse 18? Jesus said, "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy soul and body in hell." Stephen's courage was supernatural. Real courage is not the absence of fear; it is the mastery of fear, knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ is with us and He will not forsake us.

Some of us may die for our faith. Don't be afraid to die. No man is ready to live until he's no longer afraid to die. If you're mastered by fear, you will not be able to stand alone. Paul told young Timothy in 2 Timothy 1, verses 7 and 8: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Stephen had the spirit of power; therefore, he did not have the spirit of fear. And then Paul told Timothy, "Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God."

Stephen had power to stand alone. He had wisdom to speak for God. He had power to stand for God. Now this is not an evangelist. This is not a pastor. This is a deacon we're talking about.

### **III. Stephen Had Faith to Suffer for Christ**

Third thing I want you to notice. Notice only did he have wisdom to speak for Christ, and not only did he have power to stand for Christ, but he had faith to suffer for Christ. They were to choose again men full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and here was a man who was full of faith. His faith did not keep him from suffering. His faith enabled him to suffer. Look, if you will, in chapter 7, verse 54. He's preached a wonderful sermon, and the Bible says, "And when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God [it was Stephen who was calling upon God, not them], and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice,

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Now some of us may wonder why did Stephen suffer? I think the great question is not why did Stephen suffer; I think the great question is why some of us don't? I mean, how is it, how is it that we're able to go through life and be so cozy with this world that this world does not come down on us like a hammer? Do you think that if you're filled with the Holy Spirit that it means a life of ease? A lot of young preachers like to be filled with the Holy Spirit so they'd be like, ah, Peter on the Day of Pentecost and get 3,000 souls. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and got 3,000 stones. They stoned him for his faith.

Now he was a witness. Did you know that the word witness and the martyr are the same word in the Greek language? Now a man does not become a martyr by dying for Jesus; he becomes a martyr by living for Jesus. Stephen was not a martyr because he died for his faith; he died for his faith because he was a martyr. Persecution does not make martyrs; it reveals martyrs. Here was a man full of faith and he could stand for the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, faith enables you to suffer. Faith does not, necessarily, get you out of difficulty. Hebrews 11, verses 32 and following. The writer of the book of Hebrews is, has been giving this great tribute to the heroes of the faith, God's Hall of Fame, and there's a panoply of heroes that he speaks of. And then he gets down to the end and he's like most of us preachers – he's run out of time. So he said, “And what shall I more say? For time would fail me to speak of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and Jephthae; and of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.” He had over-prepared, hadn't he? He had so much he couldn't get it done. And then he speaks of these “Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escape the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Boy, if that's all there were to it, we'd all say, “Sign me up! Man, I want that kind of faith.” Ha, ha, ha. We all love the victories of faith.

Daniel and the lions' den. Boy, we love that story, ha, ha. We love the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. We all the love the story of David and Goliath, and we love the story of Moses and the Red Sea. We love those. But there are other stories here.

We read on in Hebrews 11, verse 35: “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others [listen to me], and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had a trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” And the Bible says they did that by faith. You see, it's one thing to have faith to escape; it's another thing to

have faith to endure. It's one thing to have faith for deliverance; it's another thing to have faith for death. It's one thing to have faith to be healed; it is another thing to have faith not to be healed and still to praise God if it is His will.

You read in the Bible about the great men of faith. Zachariah the prophet was stoned to death. Tradition tells us that Isaiah was put into a hollow tree and then sawn in half by Hezekiah. We know that the early Christians were fed to the lions. And I've been to the Coliseum and the Circus Maximus to see where those early Christians died for their faith. Here was Stephen, a man of God, full of faith, wisdom, the Holy Ghost, power, and yet he is put to death.

What is faith? Faith is not receiving from God the things you want; it is accepting from God the things He gives. It wasn't that had Stephen had more faith he could have gotten out of difficulty. No. The very name Stephen means crown. I have a son, my first son; his name's Stephen after this very man. Crowned one. Stephen died a victor. He did not die a victim. He died a conqueror. And when he died, there were no regrets. When you die, will it be a life of regret.

I went to visit a deacon on his deathbed. He said, "Pastor, I want you to get everybody else out of the room. I want to talk to you by myself." I said, "What do you want to say to me?" He said, "Pastor, I want to tell you something. I'm dying; I know I'm dying." And he said, "Pastor, I am not afraid to die. I know Christ as my personal Savior." But then he said to me, "Pastor, I am ashamed to die because I've never led a soul to Jesus Christ." On his deathbed! "I am not afraid to die. I know I'm going to heaven. But, Pastor, I am ashamed to die because I've never led a soul to Jesus Christ."

"Must I go and empty-handed; must I meet my Savior so. Without one soul with which to greet Him; must I empty-handed go?"

Stephen did not go empty-handed. He was a soul winner. As a matter of fact, if you'll read, if you'll read this story, the Bible says when they got ready to stone Stephen, they laid their garments down at the feet of a young man named Saul. Ha. Do you know who that was? That was the man who would become Paul, the mightiest Christian who ever lived. And Saul, this young, proud Pharisee, the Bible says, "He was making havoc of the church, havoc." He was taking Christians and putting them in prison, hailing them to the judge and to death. He wasn't using hyperbole when he called himself, "the chief of sinners." And Paul on the road to Damascus, on his way to persecute Christians, saw a light brighter than the noonday sun, and heard a voice from heaven, and it said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you, is it not, to kick against the pricks, against the goad?" They had a long, sharp stick that they would jab the flank of the oxen with to make him pull the load. And the oxen would kick against that goad. Do you know what that goal was? Ever in his mind he saw the picture of Stephen. He saw angel face.

He heard angel face say, "Father, lay not this sin to their charge. Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit. Ha. I see the heavens opened. I see Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father." That was the goad Saul never got rid of it. He could not get that out of his mind, because here was a deacon, a deacon, who had wisdom to speak for Christ. He had power to stand for Christ. He had faith to suffer for Christ.

## Conclusion

And, folks, I'm speaking to me tonight because I believe that in these days to come you're going to need wisdom, you're going to need power, and you're going to need faith. And don't think I'm an alarmist. I'm telling you, just as surely as I'm standing here, you're going to need those qualities; some of us to a greater degree than others.

There was a man who was an eloquent speaker. He was an atheist. And he was brilliant. And he got a big auditorium, like this auditorium, and he filled it up with people and line upon line, thought upon thought, logic upon logic, he seemed to just decimate our faith, to ridicule the things that Christians have historically believed in. And, friend, he was, he was good at what he did. He knew how to do it. And he had everybody there cowed and nobody would even open their mouths against the brilliance of this man who was set on fire of hell, with the wisdom of hell, as he speaking. And when he finished, he stood up, put his chin out with a little arrogance, and he says, "Is there anybody who can refute what I've said? Is there anybody who wants to stand up and argue against what I've said?" Everybody just sat there. Ha. It was quiet. Nobody would say a word. But then a, a little lady stood up in the back; in the balcony, really. And in her little quavering voice she began to sing, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross! Lift high His royal banner - it must not suffer loss. From victory unto victory His army shall He lead, till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed."

Then she started the second stanza. And when she started the second stanza, some more began to sing with her. "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone! The arm of flesh will fail you - you dare not trust your own. Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer. Where duty calls are danger be never wanting there."

By this time, the entire auditorium was on their feet, and they sang this stanza: "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long; This day the noise of battle - the next, the victor's song. To Him that overcometh a crown of life shall be: He with the King of glory shall reign eternally." And, ah, somebody said, "Where is the atheist?" And they said, "He has sneaked out the back door."

Friend, in this day, this age we need to sing, "Stand up for Jesus." And I want us to do that right now. Would you stand and, ah, let's just stand and sing, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus."

# Learning to Stand Alone

*By Adrian Rogers*

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**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 6:3–15; 7:51–60

*“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”*  
ACTS 6:8

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Filled with Wisdom to Speak for Christ
- II. Filled with Power to Stand for Christ
- III. Filled with Faith to Suffer for Christ

Conclusion

## Introduction

We’re continuing our series in the book of Acts entitled “That Old-Time Religion,” and today we’re talking about standing. Now I thank God for the power that we have when we stand together. One will chase a thousand; ten will chase ten thousand. Thank God for the power that we have to stand together. But wait a moment. You know, the time may come when you’re all by yourself, when you don’t have your brothers and sisters in Christ around about you. And we’re not going to be able to stand together. You’re going to have to also learn to stand alone. The title of our message today is “Learning to Stand Alone.”

There’s coming a time, dear friend, when you are going to have to be one against the crowd, and you’re going to be all by yourself against great odds. It may be at school that you’re going to have to stand alone, and you may have in your college class an atheistic, agnostic cynic for a professor. You may be the only Christian in that class, and you’re going to have to stand up for the Lord Jesus. Some of you businessmen, tomorrow, you go back to the company and back to the office, and where you stand, you’re going to have to stand alone, because there will be pornography; there will be obscenity; there will be blasphemy; there will be dishonesty; and there will be materialism. And you as a Christian, in the name of Jesus, will have to stand alone. Some of you in your social life will have to stand alone.

I heard of two couples who were out double-dating, and one of them suggested that they stop and go into one of these dives—we call them, I guess today discotheques or

something like that; they go in there, and the young lady in the back seat with her date said, “No, I don’t want to go in there. I have someone with me who would not enjoy that place.” And the boy who was with her said, “Oh, I don’t mind going in there.” She said, “I wasn’t talking about you. I was talking about the Holy Spirit of God that lives in my heart.”

There are times when we are going to have to stand alone, because we are twice-born people in a world of once-born people, and we’re going to find ourselves going against the tide. And as we get closer to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we’re going to find that the opposition is sharpening, and the hostility is emerging more vicious and more furious than ever, and we will have to stand alone. And by the way, the Bible says that we are to stand. It says to *“take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”* (Ephesians 6:13) Our job, our duty, and our privilege is to stand for Christ.

I heard about a little boy who had a horse, and this horse was just a nag, an old flea-bitten horse; you know, one of those sway-back jobs, an old horse. And a friend, an older man, was kind of teasing the little boy and asking about his horse, and he said, “Son, tell me about your horse.” The little boy loved his horse. He said, “Tell me about that horse. Can that horse run fast?” He said, “No sir, but he can stand fast.”

Now, listen. Today that is the great need: to be able to stand fast. In a few moments I’m going to read to you some Scripture about a man whose name was Stephen. The very name *Stephen* means “crown”—*stephanos*. What a man this man was! He was one of the first deacons. The Bible says that he was full of the Holy Ghost and power, (Acts 6:8) and he preached one of the greatest messages ever preached. Now I don’t have time to read all of that message to you, but the synopsis of that message is in Acts chapter 7. (Acts 7:2–53) It was a message packed with spiritual dynamite and had such power and such wisdom in it that the people could not resist, as we’re going to see, the wisdom and the power with which Stephen spoke. Now, remember, he was a layman; he was a deacon—but he had mighty power. He had so much spiritual power in his life that he was able to perform miracles. Well, the people were infuriated at the message of Stephen, and they began to gnarl and gnash their teeth and to rush on him, wanting to take his life.

Now that’s the background of the passage of Scripture, and we begin reading here in chapter 7, verse 54: *“When they heard these things,”*—now *“when they heard these things”* is talking about the religious leaders of that day—*“they were cut to the heart...”*—you see, *“the word of God is...sharper than any twoedged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12)—*“they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”* That means that they were just grinding their teeth; they were so angry that they were snarling at him. I want you to be able to see their contorted faces. *“But he, being full of*

*the Holy Ghost...*—and that’s the key; underscore that phrase—“*But he*”—that is, Stephen—“*being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice,*”—they just shriek; this is more than they can take—“*and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.*” Now this is very important that you understand this. Saul, who is mentioned here, is later to become the Apostle Paul, and it’s the key to the whole thing. “*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*”—just like the Lord Jesus when Jesus died and He said, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23:34) As when they crucified Jesus, Stephen prayed for them when they stoned him. “*And when he had said this, he fell asleep*” (Acts 7:54–60)—that is, he died. Sleep is the biblical description for the death of a Christian. And so here is Stephen, who dies for his faith, and Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr.

Now, how was he able to do this? I mean, what enabled this man to live such a wonderful life? The Bible says that he had a face like an angel—that’s the kind of a face he had. He was just a remarkable man, this man Stephen, if you go back to chapter 6 and verse 15: “*And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*” (Acts 6:15)

What is there about this man Stephen that made him so remarkable? Well, remember the scripture that I read to you before and said that he was full of the Holy Ghost? You underscored that; I asked you to underscore that. Well, look back in chapter 6 again, and let’s just do a little review about what this man was like. In chapter 6, verse 3, they are selecting the first deacons, and here are the requirements: “*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost...*”—there’s that phrase again; would you just underscore it?—“*full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*” (Acts 6:3) And verse 5: “*And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen.*” (Acts 6:5) Stephen was a man full of the Holy Ghost. Now again we’re going to find out in another scripture later that it mentions that Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost. As a matter of fact, three times it says that he was full of the Holy Ghost.

Now the secret to learning to stand alone, first of all, is to be full of the Holy Ghost. Well, what does it mean to be full of the Holy Ghost? Who is the Holy Ghost, anyway? Well, He is God. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—God the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with God. Now I want to ask

you a question. Are you filled with the Holy Ghost? If you are not, then you will never learn to stand alone for the Lord Jesus. The secret is to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Every Christian ought to be consciously filled with the Holy Ghost.

Now, don't get the idea that to be filled with the Holy Ghost is something for some few Christians—for the preacher, for the evangelist, for the missionary, for the special singer. Oh no, no. *“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.”* (Acts 2:39) And the Bible commands every one of us to be filled with the Spirit. And if you're not filled with the Spirit, then you're disobedient to God.

Sometimes we get the idea that a Spirit-filled Christian is a super-Christian and that he's different from the rest of us. Friend, the average Christian may not be filled with the Holy Spirit, but the normal Christian is. *I heard of a shoeshine boy who was shining shoes, and a man said to him, “Son, what's the average tip that you get?” He said, “A dollar.” The man thought that was kind of high, but he gave him a dollar. The shoeshine boy scratched his head and said, “Sir, you're the first man to ever come up to the average.”* I want to tell you something, friend: We're not talking about the average; we're talking about the normal Christian. The normal Christian is someone who has been filled with the Spirit.

Now, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Well, when you get saved, God's Holy Spirit comes into you. There is no such thing as getting saved, and then after you've been saved, receiving the Holy Spirit. You receive the Holy Spirit the moment that you're saved. The Bible says in Romans 8:9, *“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”* (Romans 8:9) You don't even belong to Jesus if you don't have the Holy Spirit in you, because when you're saved, you become a partaker of the divine nature, and that divine nature is the Holy Spirit in you, you see.

But listen. When you get saved, He comes in as resident; but when you're filled, He becomes president. Now it's one thing for you to have the Holy Spirit; it's quite another thing for the Holy Spirit to have you. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means not only does He abide, but He presides; He controls your life. And when He controls your life, there are three other things that you're going to be full of. Now when you're filled with the Holy Spirit, there are three other things that you're going to be filled with, and that's going to be the secret of standing alone.

Now I want you to notice, if you will, chapter 6, verse 3: *“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men...full of the Holy Ghost”—now, watch this—“and wisdom.”* (Acts 6:3) All right, when you're filled with the Holy Ghost, you're going to be filled with wisdom. Now, notice verse 8: *“And Stephen, full of faith”—when you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you're going to be filled with faith—“and power”* (Acts 6:8)—when you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you're going to be filled with power. All right, do you have it?

Filled with the Holy Spirit—and because you’re filled with the Holy Spirit, you’re filled with wisdom, you’re filled with faith, and you’re filled with power. Now when you have that wisdom, that power, and that faith, then, and then only, are you able to stand alone for God.

Now, pay attention, because it is not somewhere way off yonder that you may be called to stand for Christ; it may be indeed this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

## **I. Filled with Wisdom to Speak for Christ**

Now, point number one: To stand alone, we need to be full of wisdom to speak for Christ. Now, notice chapter 6 and verse 10: *“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”* (Acts 6:10) Do you see that? Underscore it: *“They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”* Now as you study this seventh chapter of this book of Acts, you’re going to find out that he gave a tremendous message, and his message was a review of Bible history; it was a short course on Bible history. Well, anybody can memorize the facts of the Bible if they have a halfway intelligent mind. But it is not his knowledge that they were talking about; it is his wisdom. Here was a man who had unusual, supernatural wisdom. Where did he get that wisdom? It was a supernatural gift that had come from God. I mean, they couldn’t withstand the wisdom. It’s not that this man had a PhD from a university; he was just an ordinary man. These people were just common, ordinary people, but God gave them this wisdom.

I want you to put in your margin Luke 21, verses 12 through 15; just write that in the margin. Let me give you a promise. For those of you who are afraid that you’re not going to be able to know what to say, let me give you a promise from Jesus. Jesus is talking about being persecuted, and He says this in Luke 21, verse 12: *“But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you...”*—that means that they’re going to treat you rotten; when they *“lay their hands on you,”* that means they begin to snatch you around—*“they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake.”* That is, “They’re going to come and get you. You’re going to be brought before the magistrates, and it’s because you love the Lord Jesus. It’s because you won’t bend, budge, or bow that they’re going to bring you in.” And Jesus said, *“And it shall turn to you for a testimony.”* This is going to be your big opportunity. You, Mr. Average Christian, are going to have a chance to preach the message. You’re going to be before the court. You’re going to be in prison. You’re going to be before the religious leaders. And you’re going to have to speak. You say, “Pastor, I am not ready. I don’t know what I’d say.” Suppose they say, “Deny Christ, or we’ll kill you. Deny Christ, or we’ll kill your children. Deny Christ, or we’ll put you in prison. Deny Christ, or we’ll take

your goods.” You say, “Pastor, I don’t know what I’d say.” Listen to what Jesus said: “*Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:*”—don’t go to bed and think tonight, “Oh, what would I say? What would I say? What would I say?” Jesus said, “Forget it. Don’t worry about it. Just settle it in your heart not to worry about it, “*not to meditate before what ye shall answer.*” And here’s the promise—“*for I will give you a mouth and wisdom...*”—Jesus said, “I’ll do it when the time comes, when you need it”—“*I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*” (Luke 21:12–15)

I want to tell you that Scripture was fulfilled with Stephen right here. He was brought before the council. And Jesus gave him a mouth, and Jesus gave him wisdom that all of his adversaries could not gainsay or resist. You’re going to have an opportunity, perhaps sooner than you realize, to speak for Christ, and you’re not going to be prepared. There’s no university that can prepare you, and there’s no seminary that can prepare you. But Jesus will supernaturally equip you and endow you. And you’re going to be amazed at what you hear yourself say. You’re going to say, “Did I say that?” The Lord is going to give you the tongue of the learned, and you will hear things coming out of your mouth that are going to be supernatural.

I want to remind you that the life of this man Stephen was a supernatural life. God gave him wisdom to speak for Christ, and the Bible says that “*they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*” (Acts 6:10) We’re not here to outmaneuver the world, and we’re not here to outsmart the world; we’re just here to let Jesus live in us, and when the time comes, to speak through us. And, friend, when you’re filled with the Holy Spirit of God, He’s going to do that.

Now they may not like it at first, but still we’ll give the message. They didn’t like it when Stephen spoke with wisdom. It was his wisdom that they couldn’t stand. You know, Jesus said that we’re the salt of the earth. He said, “*Let your speech be always...seasoned with salt.*” (Colossians 4:6) Now we know that salt preserves, salt cleanses, and salt flavors; but I’ll tell you something else salt does: it irritates, doesn’t it? Have you ever rubbed salt in a cut? It burns. And when you rub the salt of the gospel in the putrefying wounds of this old world, they are going to smart. These people didn’t like it, not because what Stephen said was right or wrong, but because what he said was right. They couldn’t resist the wisdom that he had. That salt will take its effect.

Joyce and I, a couple of years ago, were teaching in a Bible conference in Hawaii—into every life a little rain must fall—and we were teaching in a Bible conference in Hawaii and just had a wonderful time. We mixed it with a vacation and just had a great time. And coming back through Honolulu, we were checking the bags. And a man looked at my bags checked there and he said, “Ah, Memphis, Tennessee.” He said, “I know a man from Memphis: he’s kind of crazy.” I said, “Oh? What’s his name?” He said,

“Ed McAteer.” He said, “This man came through here and was talking about Jesus all the time—Jesus, Jesus.” He said, “Kind of a crazy guy.” He said, “You know, he was just pushing this thing of religion and just talking about Jesus.” “Well,” I said, “I happen to know that man.” I said, “He’s a good Christian.” I said, “I want to tell you about Jesus”—and I began to talk to him about Jesus, and Joyce witnessed to him about the Lord.

Later on, when I got home, I wrote him a long letter, sent him some tapes, and sent him a book that I’ve written, *The Secret of Supernatural Living*. And after about a week, I got a letter—not from him, but from another man. It said, “Guess what?” It said, “We were going through Honolulu, and we were checking our bags, and we met a man. We found out that he knew you, and we told him about Jesus. We just thought you’d like to know we just followed up on your witness.” I thought, “Isn’t that wonderful? Here’s a guy who’s been hit three times.”

About a year later, I got another letter from a man—a man way off, I think, in Iowa somewhere. He said, “I just wanted you to know that I was going through Honolulu, and I was checking my bag and met a man named John. He said that he knew you and said you had talked to him about Jesus.” And he said, “I just wanted you to know that I told him about Jesus, also. I thought that you’d like to know.” Then about two weeks ago, I was in a restaurant here in Memphis, and a man called me over to the table. He said, “I need to tell you something.” I said, “What’s that?” He said, “I went through Honolulu and I was checking my bags, and a man named John told me to tell you that he’s received Christ as his personal Savior and Lord.”

Now, dear friend, the salt, at first, may irritate, but it will also penetrate, and it will also purify. Thank God for the gospel and for the wisdom that God gives us to stand alone and to speak for Christ. By the way, this man John had been a Buddhist before he found the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord. Thank God for wisdom to speak for Christ. That’s what it takes to stand alone. And you have to be filled with the Holy Ghost to have that wisdom, because it’s supernatural. And Jesus said, “I’ll tell you what to say.”

## **II. Filled with Power to Stand for Christ**

But now, listen. Not only was he full of wisdom to speak for Christ; he was full of power to stand for Christ. Notice over here, if you will, please, in Acts chapter 7, verses 51 and 52. Stephen says to them, “*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.*” (Acts 7:51–52) Can you imagine that? He’s standing before the council. He’s standing

before those who have the right—or at least the power—to put him to death. And they eventually did put him to death: they stoned him. But here he is with great courage. Oh, he's speaking. He has the power to stand for Christ, knowing that he's going to get in trouble, knowing that it's not going to go easy with him. He's not taking the easy way out.

“Well,” you say, “he had a lot of courage naturally.” No, he didn't. He was just like you. Nobody likes the idea of being persecuted, being put to death, and having people to be their enemies; nobody likes that idea. But let me tell you courage is. *Courage is fear that has said its prayers*—that's what it is. You see, courage—real courage—is not so much the absence of fear as it is the mastery of fear. Here is a man who has supernatural courage, so he is not too afraid to tell the truth.

I heard of a man in a court of law; he had been battered, bruised, and beat up by a man, and both of them were there in the courtroom, and the judge was trying to identify the assailant. And he said to the victim, “Would you describe the man that beat you up?” He said, “No, your honor, I'd rather not do that. That's what I was doing when he beat me up.”

Now these people, what Stephen is doing here is describing them. I mean, he describes them. He says, “You are stiff-necked. You are uncircumcised in heart and ears. You resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do you.” But he is standing, and he's standing alone. Again, like his wisdom was supernatural, his courage was supernatural. I want to give you a verse of Scripture again to put in your margin. It is Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28. Here's what Jesus said: “*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*” (Matthew 10:28) Now, what did Jesus mean by that? Jesus meant that if you kneel before God, then you can stand before any man. That's the reason I said that *courage is just fear that has said its prayers*—that's all. Just listen. Don't fear them. Don't be afraid of them.

“Well,” you say, “I'm not wired that way.” Well, folks, neither am I. But Stephen was a man who was full of the Holy Ghost. You see, it was supernatural. His wisdom was supernatural, and his courage was supernatural. Because he was filled with the Holy Ghost, he was filled with wisdom. Because he was filled with the Holy Ghost, he was filled with power. And therefore he could stand, and he could stand alone for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now if you have fear, then listen. If the devil can find fear in you, then he'll know that you'll never stand alone. You will fold up when you ought to stand up. Young Timothy was beginning to do that, and the Apostle Paul had to write to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verses 7 and 8, and reminds Timothy, “*For God hath not given us the spirit of feary but of power...*”—you see, listen: Stephen was filled with power, and

therefore he was fearless—*“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God”* (2 Timothy 1:7–8)—wisdom to speak for Christ, power to stand for Christ.

Now, listen, dear friend. If the devil can see fear in your eyes, then he’s going to intimidate you. You must not be afraid. *Only when a man is no longer afraid to die is that man ready to live.* Now, get that down in your heart: *Until you are no longer afraid to die, you’re not yet ready to live.* Strangely, when you come to the place where Jesus said, *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,”* (Matthew 10:28) then you are going to be like Stephen and you’re going to be able to stand alone. I want to remind you that that was not because Stephen in and of himself was so great. He was not. He was an ordinary man, but he had extraordinary power. He was full of the Holy Ghost; and because he was full of the Holy Ghost, he had wisdom to speak for Christ and he had power to stand for Christ.

### **III. Filled with Faith to Suffer for Christ**

Now there’s a third thing that you’ll need to stand alone, if you’re going to be like Stephen. Not only did he have wisdom to speak for Christ, and not only did he have power to stand for Christ; but, my dear friend, he had faith to suffer for Christ. The Bible also tells us that he was *“a man full of faith.”* (Acts 6:5) Now, you know, we get the idea sometimes that if we’re full of faith, then we’re not going to suffer; that our faith is going to get us out of all kinds of difficulty. Friend, faith doesn’t get you out of difficulty; it gets you into difficulty. *Jesus did not come to get you out of trouble; He came to get into trouble with you.* I want you to learn this: Faith will not keep you from suffering; it will enable you to suffer.

You see, here was a man who suffered. Look, if you will, in verses 57 and 58—chapter 7, verses 57 and 58: *“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* (Acts 7:57–58) There’s his faith, because, dear friend, he knew that he had seen the Lord. He understood that there’s more to life than this world, and so he saw another world, and that enabled him to suffer.

Now you can’t suffer for Jesus if you’re not that intimately acquainted with Him, if you don’t know Him, and if you’re not looking forward to life with Him. But listen. Some of us get the idea that if we take a stand for Christ, then somehow God is going to deliver us and we will not suffer. No, I’m telling you that it costs to serve Jesus. It costs

every day. It costs every step of the way. It cost Stephen his life. If you're looking for a cheap way, an easy way, or a lazy way to serve God, then forget it.

You know, every now and then somebody says to me, "Oh, this man was a great saint, a great Christian: why did he suffer?" Listen. The great question is not why some Christians suffer; the great question is why some Christians don't. For Jesus said, "Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12)—all! Now if you don't suffer any persecution for Jesus, then it's about time you asked why.

I want to talk to you preacher boys in the seminary over here. You say, "Man, I want to be a Spirit-filled preacher." Why? "Well, I want to be like Peter was on the day of Pentecost. I want to preach and get three thousand souls." Well, wonderful. I want to tell you about somebody else who was filled with the Holy Spirit: Stephen. He preached, got three thousand stones, and was filled with the Holy Ghost also. And the Bible says that he was "*a man full of faith*"—so much faith that he could work miracles. But his miracle-working power did not deliver him from persecution. He suffered. "*And all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*"

Now, let me tell you something here, and I want you to pay attention: The word *witness* and the word *martyr* are the same word in the Greek language. Did you know that? In the Greek language, *witness* and *martyr* are the same word. Now Stephen was the first Christian martyr—that is, the first person to die for his faith. But pay attention: he did not die for his faith. Well, let me back up and put it this way: He was not a martyr because he died for his faith; he died for his faith because he was a martyr. Jesus said, "You are to be my martyrs." Now whether you die or not makes no difference. Again, listen. *Persecution does not make martyrs; it only reveals them.* Do you understand what I'm talking about? You are a martyr, or you are not, right now. I mean, what's in your heart right now? Do you have the spirit of a martyr in your heart right now? Jesus said, "Ye shall be my martyrs." (John 3:28) Stephen was not a martyr because he died for Christ; he died for Christ because he was a martyr. He had faith to suffer for Christ.

You say, "Well, I thought faith is supposed to relieve us and set us free from all of these things." Well, I'm going to preach about that tonight, but let me just get you to turn to Hebrews chapter 11 and verses 32 through 34 for just a moment. I believe that is written about Stephen. Listen to what it says: "*And what shall I more say?...*"—now here's the writer of Hebrews coming to the end of his sermon; he's not finished yet. Does that remind you of anybody you know? He's already talked about all these great heroes of the faith, and he wants to talk about some more, but he has run out of time. Somebody said: "There was a young poet from Japan, whose poetry no one could scan. When told it was so, he said, 'Yes, I know. But I always try to get as many words in the last line as I can.'" Now that's the way that this writer of Hebrews was. He was running out of time, and so he says this. Listen to what he says—"*And what shall I more say?*"

*for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms,*”—boy, don’t you love that? Boy, subduing kings—*“wrought righteousness,”*—boy, that sounds like what I want to do—*“obtained promises,”*—praise the Lord—*“stopped the mouths of lions”*—yea, amen. *“Quenched the violence of fire,”*—boy, we like that—*“escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”* (Hebrews 11:32–34) Boy, any of us would be able to say *amen* all the way through that. We say, “Lord, that’s what I want to do through faith.” That’s what they did through faith. We all love Daniel in the lion’s den. We all love the Hebrews in the fiery furnace. We all love Moses in the Red Sea.

But wait a minute: they did something else through faith. Continue to read in verses 35 through 37: *“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured,”*—now, how were they tortured? Through faith—*“not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned…”*—remember Stephen was stoned? How was Stephen stoned? By faith. He was *“a man full of faith”*—*“they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”* (Hebrews 11:35–37) How? By faith.

Now, you look at your pastor, and I want to tell you something now, if you want to stand alone. The great question is not: Do you have faith to escape? The great question is: Do you have faith to endure? The great question is not: Do you have faith to be delivered? The great question is: Do you have faith to die? Stephen was a man full of the Holy Ghost and full of faith—and he died, and he died by faith. The great question is not: Do you have enough faith to be healed so that you can praise God? The great question is: Do you have enough faith not to be healed and to still praise God? Amen? That’s faith, dear friend. Let me tell you what faith is: *Faith is not primarily receiving from God what you want; it is accepting from God what He gives.* That’s faith. “Others by faith,” the Bible says, “suffered, were stoned, and were tormented.” And when you see that, you’ll be able to stand alone.

I’m going to continue that thought tonight, and I don’t want you to miss it. I want you to be here. But let me tell you something, friend. The time is coming when we’re going to have to stand alone. I mean, we’re going to have to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ—and the way to do it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And when we’re filled with the Holy Spirit, we’ll have wisdom to speak for Christ, we’ll have power to stand for Christ, and we’ll have faith to suffer for Christ.

## Conclusion

Years ago I heard the story of an infidel, an atheist, who was in a great auditorium like this one, and he was speaking against the gospel, against Christ, and against the Bible. He was a brilliant man—learned, erudite, and charming. But he had a mind like a sharp sword, and he was cutting up and slashing the Christian faith, and doing a masterful job of it. When he had finished, there was a silence; and then this man, with a swagger about him, said, “Is there anyone here who would like to stand up now and speak a word for the Christian faith?” They all sat there with their heads bowed over, until a little girl sitting up in the balcony, a teenage girl, stood up and she began to sing, with a sweet and a pure voice, a melody in her heart. She began to sing this:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss.  
From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,  
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.*

By the time she had finished singing that, there were others standing and singing with her—some of them with tears in their eyes. She went into the next stanza:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;  
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.  
Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer;  
Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.*

And by that time, most of the people were standing and singing. And then she began the third stanza of this song:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long;  
This day the noise of battle, the next the victor's song.  
To those who vanquish evil a crown of life shall be;  
They with the King of glory shall reign eternally.*

—GEORGE DUFFIELD, JR.

By that time, they were all standing, and they were all singing. And somebody said, “Where’s the atheist? Where’s the infidel?” He had ducked his head and gone out the side door.

I want to tell you that, ladies and gentlemen, the time is now to stand up for Jesus. If you have to stand alone, then stand alone. And let Him give you wisdom to speak for Christ. Let him give you power to stand for Christ. Let him give you faith to suffer for Christ.

You look at the bruised and the broken, battered body of Stephen. It wasn’t over then. He closed his eyes in sleep; and the next moment, Jesus is saying, “Welcome home, Stephen, my martyr. Welcome home. Oh, thank you, Stephen, for not denying

my name. Thank you, Stephen, for being true to me.” I’ll tell you something else: There was a young man there whose name was Saul who never got over what he saw, and Saul never found rest until he found rest in Jesus. And Jesus said, “It’s hard for you, Saul, to kick against the pricks, isn’t it?” And the greatest missionary and theologian that the world has ever known received life through the death of Stephen. Stand up for Jesus.

# How to Practice the Presence of God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 10, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 7:47–49**

*“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?”*

ACTS 7:48–49

## Outline

Introduction

- I. God’s Primary House: Adam
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  - B. A House Desecrated
  - C. A House Desolated
  - D. A House Destroyed
- II. God’s Pattern House: The Temple
  - A. A House Designed
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Conclusion

- A. A Lesson Concerning Salvation
- B. A Lesson Concerning Spirituality
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## Introduction

Take God’s Word and find Acts chapter 7, and in a moment I’m going to begin reading in verse 48 and read a few verses. But let me ask you this question as you’re finding that: Do you find it difficult sometimes to conceive of God as being “with you”? Do you think of God, maybe, as in heaven; maybe peering through the clouds, moving things

around on earth, like a man moves checkers when he plays checkers? So many people conceive of God that way, and you can tell it. For example, they say, “When I prayed, my prayer didn’t get above the light bulbs.” Well, maybe they have failed to understand that God also lives beneath the light bulbs.

I want to talk to you about, “How to Practice the Presence of God.” And the subject today is a subject that I don’t know of anything else I’d rather talk about, or anything that is more meaningful to me personally, or that I believe could be more helpful to you as a Christian, than to wrap your heart and mind around this basic, biblical truth in the Christian life that, very frankly, I did not know for a long time as a Christian: “How to Practice the Presence of God.”

Where does God live? I mean, if you wanted to write Him a letter, do you know the address? Do you have the zip code? Does God live in a building like this? We call this the house of God. Is this the house of God?

Look, if you will, in verse 47: “But Solomon built him an house. Nevertheless, the most High...”—that’s another word for Jehovah God—“the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as saith the prophet. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me, saith the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?” Where on earth does God live?

It may surprise you to know, as we take this book, the Bible, and study it, we’re going to find out that God has lived in a series of houses. God creates a house, designs a house, lives in it for a while, and then, if the house gets dirty, God moves out. You say, “Pastor, I don’t understand what you’re talking about.” Well, you’re going to learn a principle throughout all of this message, and it is this: that God will not live in a dirty house. Now others will.

I heard of some college boys, and the college team had a mascot that was a goat. They had no place to keep the goat, and some of the boys volunteered to keep it in the dormitory in their room. They said, “You can’t do that.” They said, “Why not?” They said, “Because of the smell.” “Oh,” they said, “the goat can get used to that!” Now college boys may live in a dirty house, but God will not.

God has lived in a series of houses. Let me tell you what God’s first house was. God’s first house was a man, and his name was Adam. And Adam was a house, and God lived in Adam. In Genesis 2:7, the Bible says, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul.” That’s Genesis 2:7. And there you see the first house. And God designed that first house.

Now all through this message you’re going find four words that begin with the letter D, so I want to put them in your mind right now. The first is the word *design*; the second is the word *desecration*; the third is the word *desolation*; and the fourth is the word

*destruction: design, desecration, desolation, destruction.* Now keep that in mind, and we're going to see a theme that goes all the way through this Bible study. And again, I want to say, if you get a lock on what I'm about to say—not because I say it, but because of the truth of it—you're going to be incredibly blessed and exceedingly helped.

## I. God's Primary House: Adam

### A. A House Designed

Now Adam was a house designed. God designed Adam. And Adam was a house of three rooms. The outer room was called his body; the inner room, his soul; the innermost room, his spirit. Now God formed Adam of the dust of the ground, and that is his body, and God gave him physical life. God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and that is his spirit. The word *breath* and the word *spirit* are the same word: the spirit of life. Adam became a spiritual creature. And then the Bible says, "and he was a living soul." Now there you have the three parts to Adam's nature and the three parts to your nature. All human beings are body, soul, and spirit. Sitting in your seat is a body, soul, and spirit. That's the reason the apostle Paul said, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it." "And I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless." In that seat is body, soul, and spirit. Speaking to you is body, soul, and spirit. Now God made Adam a house—not a house for Adam; Adam was a house—and that house was a house for God to live in.

Let me explain it. Adam's body was what we would call the outer man. The Bible calls our bodies a house. It was a house. And with his outer man, with his body, he knew the physical world and had physical life; roughly speaking, the world beneath him.

But Adam also had an inner man. That inner man is his soul. The Greek word for soul is *psuche*. It's the word we get *psychiatry* from. It's the word we get *psychology* from. It's the word we get *psychic* from. The soul is the mind, the emotion, the will. It's what makes you you. It's your personality. It's your sense of humor. It's your taste, your likes, your dislikes: all the little idiosyncrasies and proclivities that make you the wonderfully unique individual that you are. That's your soul.

Now your soul is on the inside. You can see my body. You can't see my soul, but you can feel my soul as I talk, because you can hear my mind, my emotion, and my will. And that's an expression that my body is making of the real me that's on the inside. And so with your body, you have physical life and you know the world beneath you. With your soul, you have psychological life. You know the world around you and the world within you. Got it? Got it!

Now what about your spirit? I used to think that soul and spirit were basically the

same thing: six of one, half a dozen of another. But I did not read the Bible very carefully, because Hebrews 4:12 says, “The Word of God is quick and powerful; sharper than a two-edged sword”—that divides between—“dividing asunder between soul and spirit.” And remember our verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless.” So your spirit is different from your soul. Both are invisible; both are inseparable, but they are not identical.

With my body, I have physical life, and know the physical world, the world beneath me. With my soul, I have psychological life, and I know the social world, and the world around me and within me. But with my spirit, I have spiritual life, and I know the world above me. You see, you’re created to relate to three worlds: the physical world, the social world, and the spiritual world.

I know the world beneath me, the world around me, and with my spirit, I know the world above me. For the Bible says this: that God is a spirit, and they that worship Him worship Him how? In spirit and in truth. Or again, the Bible says, “God’s Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we’re children of God.” Now what makes you more than a clever animal with a thumb juxtaposed to your fingers and something that can walk aright, what makes you absolutely unique and distinct, is that you have a spirit.

Animals don’t have a spirit. Animals have a body. Animals have a soul. But animals don’t have a spirit. Now in the book of Genesis where it speaks of the living creatures, it’s literally, the word is *living souls*. They have a soul. Your dog has a mind, emotions, and a will, but he doesn’t have a spirit. No dog can pray. No dog can know God. No dog can worship. He can wag his tail. He can have a big time, but he can’t know God.

You see, plants—and aren’t these beautiful?—plants, they have a body, but they don’t have a soul. Animals have a body and a soul, but they don’t have a spirit. Only man, made in the image of God, has a spirit.

Now Adam was a house of three rooms, and God likes a three-roomed house. The outer room was his body, the inner was his soul, but the innermost room was where God dwelt. God says, “I will dwell with him that is of an humble and contrite spirit.” Adam’s innermost being was, the human spirit was, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

When the Bible says that God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, how did He walk with Adam? Did He walk along beside him? Well, God doesn’t have a body, a physical body. He walked in him and with him. Adam was a house of God, and God lived in Adam, and He walked and talked in Adam.

You see, God does things by threes. I mean, God is a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—isn’t He? Everything that God has made represents the tri-unity of God. For example, space. Space is what? Height, width, and depth. Now height is not width, and width is not depth, and depth is not height; but all are part of the same. You can identify all of them, but you cannot separate them. You see, that’s the way God is. God is

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father; yet all are one. They are not identical, but they are inseparable. All are God. And take time, for example. Time is past, present, and future. Now the past is not the present, the present is not the future, and the future is not the past. All are one, and yet all are easily identified. Everything that God has made reflects the tri-unity of God: space, and time, and man. You were made to be a house for God to live in. Adam was God's first house. Adam was God's primary house. And so the first D is a house designed. You got it?

### **B. A House Desecrated**

Now the second D is a house desecrated. God said to Adam, God gave Adam a warning. Not a threat, but God gave Adam a warning. God said, "Now Adam, there's going to be a tree in the Garden of Eden. Don't eat of it. If you do eat of it, the day that you eat thereof, you will surely die." Well, Adam disobeyed. Adam did eat of the fruit of that tree. And the Bible tells us in Genesis 3:6 that Eve took the fruit, she ate, she gave it to her husband and he ate, and therefore sin came into that house. Sin sullied and dirtied the house. And so here's a house designed, a house of three rooms. And then here's a house desecrated. God said, "Don't do it," but she did it. God said, "Don't do it," but he did it. And so sin came in and dirtied the house that God was living in.

### **C. A House Desolated**

Now here's a third thing that happened: a house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated. What happened when Adam sinned? I'll tell you what happened when Adam sinned. God just simply moved out! God won't live in a dirty house. And so God had said to Adam, "Adam, in the day that you eat, you will surely die."

Now what is death? What is death? Death is not the separation of the soul from the body. If I were to give a gasp, have a massive coronary right now—God forbid—but fall down right now dead, maybe one of you medical doctors would come up here and look for the vital signs, and you'd say, "Well, he's dead!" But you'd be telling a lie. I couldn't be dead, because Jesus said, "He that lives and believes in Me shall never die." I live, I believe in Him: I can't die. You're looking at a man that is impossible for me to die. All I would do is just simply move out of this house, you see. I would move out. The real me would go to heaven. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Death is not the separation of the soul from the body; death is the separation of the spirit from God. Have you got it? That's what death is. God said to Adam, "Adam, in the day that you eat, you will surely die." Well, if you read your Bible, Adam lived for more than 900 years. And yet God said, "You're going to die that very day." How did he die? He didn't die physically; he died spiritually. And when he died physically 900 years later, his spiritual death caught up with him, and he died physically.

Let me tell you how Adam died—and it's very important that you remember this, very important. But you'll forget it. But I'll remind you later, all right? Adam died immediately in his spirit, progressively in his soul, ultimately in his body. Have you got it? He died immediately in his spirit, progressively in his soul, ultimately in his body. What God literally said to Adam was, "dying, thou shalt die"—"dying, thou shalt die." That is, it was a process. He died immediately in his spirit, progressively in his soul, and ultimately in his body.

Now very much like flowers, cut flowers, we take cut flowers and we say, "Aren't they beautiful? Oh, you have live flowers." No, they're not live flowers; they're dead flowers. You go out. You say you're going to have a live tree this year. You go out and cut a tree down. Beg your pardon—it's not a live tree. It may look live, but it died. And when did it die? It died the moment you cut it off from its source of life, from the roots, didn't it? Now around New Year's, what happened will show up. You may take that tree out of the woods, and decorate it, and bring it into your house and it'll look mighty good, just like some dead folks decorate themselves and come to church on Sunday morning. They look real good, but they're dead. And I'll tell you why they're dead. Because they're cut off from the source of life and they are dead. They're decorated, but they are dead, and they died the moment they were cut off from the source of life. And then, later on, what happened shows up when those needles begin to fall.

A house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated. Do you know what death is? God just simply moves out.

What does it mean to be lost? You don't have to be a bank robber to be lost. You don't have to be a murderer to be lost. You don't have to be a blasphemer. All you have to do is just be minus God—just minus God. God moved out. And the Bible says concerning God, in John 1:4: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." So when the Lord went out, the life went out. And when the life went out, the light went out. Got it? When the Lord went out, the life went out. And when the life went out, the light went out.

Now where had God been dwelling in Adam? God had been dwelling in Adam's spirit. Now when God moved out of Adam's spirit, what took over? Who was next in the chain of command? The soul. What is the soul? The mind, the emotion, and the will. Now no longer is Adam a spiritual man; he's a soulish man. Now what motivates him is not the Spirit of God. He's not led by the Spirit of God. He is led by his mind, his emotion, and his will. And let me tell you how most of the people in this city, and in your city, and every city, operate: by mind, emotion, and will. Their mind says, "I think I ought to do this." Their emotion says, "I feel like doing it." Their will says, "I'll do it." That's the way they operate. They are not led of the Spirit of God. The Bible says, "As many as are led of the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

#### D. **A House Destroyed**

But now here's a house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated, and then a house destroyed. Adam ultimately died, and his body went to the grave. Now that's the primary house that God built. God had moved out.

## II. **God's Pattern House: The Temple**

Then God built another house. The next house that God built was the temple or the tabernacle. These were different forms of the same kind of structure. And in the scripture that I read to you there from Acts 7, Solomon said, "Look, I made You a house to dwell in, God." And Solomon built a wonderful temple, and it was also a house of three rooms. If you take away all of the extra accoutrements, the temple and the tabernacle are basically three rooms. There was the outer court, the inner court, and the innermost court.

Now all this was a colossal illustration just to help us to understand God is not interested in piles of stones. He uses them, but listen. He owns the universe. But He gave a temple to be a wonderful illustration. That outer place, which was the place of sacrifice where the brazen altar was: that represents your body, the outer man, because we present our bodies a living sacrifice. The next room, the inner room: that represents your soul, because that's where the people met, and had fellowship, and knew one another as they worshiped, just like we're doing here today. But then there was a third room in that temple—and what was that called? Who knows? It was the Holy of Holies. It was the innermost room. And what dwelt in the Holy of Holies? The *Shekinah* glory of God. God there dwelt between the cherubim there on that mercy seat there in that ark, and the glory of God was in that room. God moved into that room, the Holy of Holies. We call it the inner sanctum: the outer court, the inner court, and the innermost court.

#### A. **A House Designed**

Now this was a house designed of God. God told Moses when he built the tabernacle, and God told Solomon when he built the temple, "You make it according to the pattern that I gave you." Now they didn't just think it up. God was the architect of that building. God designed that building, because it was a house designed, a house of three rooms, because all that God is and does reflects His tri-unity. The outer room, the inner room, and the innermost room: a house designed.

#### B. **A House Desecrated**

But now wait a minute. Not only a house designed, but a house desecrated. Remember what Jesus said when He walked into that temple and saw the moneychangers in there? Remember how He was moved with anger? Remember what Jesus said? Jesus said, "It is written that My Father's house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples, but

you've made it a den of thieves—a den of thieves.”

### **C. A House Desolated**

A house designed, a house desecrated, and then a house desolated, because God won't live in a dirty house. So what did God do? God just simply moved out. And in Matthew 23:38, Jesus said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Now notice in Matthew 21 He called it “my Father's house,” but in Matthew 23 He says, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” You see, it was God's house, but God moved out, and God said, “You can have it; it's your house.”

Now they went on and continued to worship in it. They went on and offered their sacrifices. They went on and burned their incense. They went on and sang their songs, and offered their prayers, but God was a billion light years away spiritually. He said, “It's your house.” Now they were still being religious in it. And it'll be a great day in America when people stop enduring religion and start enjoying salvation. You can be religious, but that doesn't mean that God has anything to do with it. God said, “That's all yours. That's not mine. My Father's house is a house of prayer, but it, your house, is left unto you desolate.” A house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated. It's left desolate.

### **D. A House Destroyed**

And then, a house destroyed. In Matthew 24, the disciples brought Him out there, and they were going to show Him the temple, like He'd never seen it. And they said, “Lord, look at this temple. Isn't this wonderful?” And Jesus said, “There will not one stone be left upon another.” Remember that? Not one stone. And that's true. I've been there. I've seen. Not one stone left upon another. That magnificent temple, that house that Herod built—it's gone! Why? A house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated, a house destroyed.

## **III. God's Perfect House: Jesus**

All right, there was God's primary house—that was Adam. There was God's pattern house—that was the temple. It was a pattern. It was a lesson. Then the next house was God's perfect house. And you know what house that was? A man, again, and His name is Jesus, the last Adam, who came to restore what the first Adam lost and what the temple was here to teach us about.

Now was Jesus a house of God? Indeed He was. In John 2:19 to 21, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple,”—destroy this temple—“and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it in three days?” But then John said, “But He spake of the temple of His body.” Now Jesus said, “Destroy this temple.” He's talking about Himself.

“Three days, I’ll raise it up.” They said, “Are you crazy? It took almost 50 years to build this thing.” They did not understand that Jesus was talking about another temple, that Jesus Himself was a temple. And I want you to go back to the Ds with me.

### **A. A House Designed**

First of all, a house designed. Jesus’ body was the handiwork of the Almighty God. The prophet said, “A body thou hast given me; a body thou hast prepared me.” His body was the perfect design of Almighty God. That’s the why of the virgin birth. He was born, conceived in the womb of Mary. He came as He did—virgin-born—to be what He was—sinless. He was what He was—sinless—to do what He did—die for our sins. He did what He did—die for our sins—that we might be what He is—a son of God. He became a son of man that we might become sons of God. He was born of a virgin that we might be born again. He came to earth that we might go to heaven. He, Jesus, had a house designed.

### **B. A House Desecrated**

But not only a house designed—listen—a house desecrated. “Oh, no,” you say, “not that house.” Yes, that house—that house. Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 53, “All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on”—whom?—“him”—what?—“the iniquity of us all.” My sin, your sin, our sin, was placed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sins sullied and dirtied that house. Peter says, “He bare our sins in His own body.” Our sins, the vileness of our sins, was placed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And that’s the reason you ought to love the Lord Jesus.

There’s hardly anything that moves me more than Gethsemane. And when I think of Gethsemane, even now the tears come to my eyes, as I think of Gethsemane, as Jesus prayed, “Oh, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” What was in that cup? All of the sins of all mankind. You think not of all the nations in the world. Think of America. Think not of all of the cities in America. Just think of Memphis. Think not of all of the sins in Memphis, but think of the sin of lying. Think not of all of the days in Memphis, but just one day. Just think of the lies that will be told in Memphis today. Think of the blasphemy that will happen in this city today. Think of the sexual perversion that will happen in this city today. And then compound that by all of the sins, and all of the cities, all of the ages, all of the filth, all of the blasphemy. That was all distilled in a cup, and the Son of God drank it, and He became sin. And when He became sin, God the Father had to treat Him just like He would treat any sinner. The Bible says, “God spared not His own Son.”

And not only did Jesus bear our sins, but Jesus, the Son of God, became the object of the Father’s loathing.

### **C. A House Desolated**

A house designed. A house desecrated. Now watch this: a house desolated. When Jesus hung on that cross, and when flaming fingers of fire spread across the darkness, when the earth rocked and reeled, when Jesus was taking the brunt of my sin, He cried out, “My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me?” I’ll tell you why. God can’t live in a dirty house, and God moved out!

A house desolate. Jesus died alone. Do you understand that? He didn’t have the Father’s comfort. He died alone! When David walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he could say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I’ll fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Jesus couldn’t say that. He was forsaken of God and man, suspended between heaven and earth. A house designed. A house desecrated. A house desolated.

### **D. A House Destroyed**

And a house destroyed. He knew it would happen. And that’s the reason He said in John 2:19: “Destroy this house; three days I’ll raise it up.” He knew it would be destroyed. He knew that. He knew how God works.

Now God’s primary house was Adam, God’s pattern house was the temple, God’s perfect house, the Lord Jesus Christ. But did you know God has one more house? Did you know that God has stopped moving? Did you know that God has moved in and He’s not moving out any more? Let me tell you what God’s permanent house is. You want to see it? Just take a look right here. And there, and there. You know what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3? “You are the temple of God.” First Corinthians 6:19: “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which you have of God, and you’re not your own; for you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” God has moved into us, and God is not moving out any more. God doesn’t move any more. Jesus said, concerning this body, this temple, “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you”—how long?—“forever”—“that he may abide with you forever.” God has stopped moving.

You say, “Well, I don’t understand that. You say God won’t live in a dirty house, and yet I know that I’m not sinless. I know that I have failed. I know I have done wrong. Why won’t God move out?” It’s a very interesting and a wonderful question. I’ll tell you why God won’t move out. Because when Jesus died for you, Jesus paid for your sins—past, present, and future—and the Bible says, in Romans 4, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” Isn’t that wonderful? God will clean house, but He won’t move out.

## **Conclusion**

Now listen: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” The sin that

Jesus died for will never be put on your account if you've received Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. He just can't do it. He will not do it. He will not put that sin on your account. The Bible speaks of the spirits of men made perfect. And so let me just talk to you about that. Very quickly, let me just give you some lessons, and I want you to get these lessons down deep, deep in your heart.

#### A. **A Lesson Concerning Salvation**

First of all, there's a lesson concerning salvation. Now listen carefully. What is salvation? Salvation is not getting man out of the earth into heaven; it is getting God out of heaven into man. Now that's the difference. So many people think of salvation as getting your sins forgiven so you can go to heaven. Getting your sins forgiven is preparation for salvation; going to heaven is the by-product of salvation. But salvation is getting God back in here.

Remember when Adam died? Remember how he died? When the Lord went out, the life went out. And when the life went out, the light went out. When the Lord comes back in, the life comes back in. And when the life comes back in, the light comes back in, see? That's what salvation is. It's just getting God in here—getting God in here. There's a lesson concerning salvation.

#### B. **A Lesson Concerning Spirituality**

There is the lesson concerning spirituality. What is a spiritual person? A spiritual person is a person who practices the presence of God. Don't get the idea that we come to church to be spiritual. We don't come to church to worship; we bring our worship to church. We bring our worship to church. When you get saved, every day is a holy day and every place is a sacred place. And God doesn't dwell in houses like this. He dwells in this house. There are some people who wouldn't think of smoking a cigarette in here who would go outside and light up. It would be better to blow smoke on *this* thing than *this* thing.

Now friend, you are the house of God. You're the temple of God. Listen. If you're going to have anything that's holy, "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which you have of God?" And so you're to live a supernatural life because God lives in you. And a Christian who is saved is naturally supernatural and he's supernaturally natural. I like people who are supernaturally natural. I like people who are the same in a motel room as they are in the worship service. You don't just come to church and act religious. You know what Jesus called actors? Hypocrites.

Sometimes I'll be getting ready to preach. I'll be in a service, and I'll be sitting there, like I am next to Bob Sorrell, and maybe it'll be the host pastor in a church. I'll be in a revival crusade. He'll be talking to me like a regular guy. And then he stands up to make an announcement and it sounds like he's got a steeple stuck in his throat. You know,

what's happened to that guy from there to there? I mean, why did he change so? Listen, folks. God lives in you! And every day is a holy day. Every place is a sacred place. And every deed, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God, whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whatsoever you do." Practice the presence of God.

### **C. A Lesson Concerning Security**

Not only is there the lesson concerning salvation, and the lesson concerning spirituality, but oh, blessed friend, there's a lesson concerning security. Thank God, God stopped moving. In John 14 "he"—the Holy Spirit—"will abide with you forever."

Now God moved out of Adam. He's not going to move out of me. What's the difference? I have something Adam did not have, unless Adam got saved—and I really believed he did—but I'm talking about his salvation. You see, Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was innocent, but I am righteous. Not my own righteousness; imputed righteousness, imparted righteousness. What's the difference between being innocent and being righteous? Well, innocence is just what the word implies. He's never yet sinned. But righteousness is the gift of God. It is the impartation of the holy nature of God. I have something better than Adam had. I had rather be a saved sinner than an innocent angel. Oh, friend, we have security in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has stopped moving. He lives in us.

And therefore, what is the lesson concerning service? What is service to God? Well, service to God is not doing something for God; it is letting God do something through you. You say, "Well, you're just playing with words." No, I'm not. No, I'm not. Listen. Listen to this preacher today. God lives in you. And the God in you is adequate for every demand that will be placed upon your life today and for the rest of your life. And the next time you need love, don't say, "Lord, give me love." Say, "Thy love, Lord." The next time you need patience, don't say, "Give me patience." Say, "Thy patience, Lord." The next time you need wisdom, say, "Thy wisdom, Lord." Christ is made unto us wisdom, redemption, sanctification. All that you need is in the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus is in you. And the Bible says in Him we're complete. And every demand of God upon your life is a demand upon the Christ who lives in you.

There's only one person who's ever lived the Christian life. Do you want me to tell you what His name is? It's Jesus. And if the Christian life is lived in your neighborhood, in your home, He'll still be doing it, but He'll be doing it in you. And the life that you live, it'll be Christ in you living that life. Hey, isn't that a wonderful lesson? Isn't that great?

Oh, you see, God lives in us. He's not up there peering through the clouds. He doesn't dwell in houses made with hands. He lives in you. And every day—every day—is a holy day, and every place a sacred place.

Let's bow in prayer. Lord, I pray today that You will seal the message to our hearts. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

# How to Practice the Presence of God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 10, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 7:47–49**

*“Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?”*

ACTS 7:49

## Outline

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## Introduction

Would you take the Word of God and be finding please Acts chapter 7, and in a moment I'm going to begin reading in verse 47. Now you know that we've been dealing with a series of messages entitled, "Back to the Basics." We've talked to you on such subjects

as “How We Know the Bible is the Word of God,” “How to Be Saved and Know It,” “How to Know That You Are Eternally Secure,” “How to Handle Temptation,” “How to Have a Cleansed Life,” “How to Walk in Maturity”—we’ve been dealing with all of these things. But today, I don’t know of anything that excites me more than the subject and message of today. And I can tell you that if you will learn what I have to say today, not because I say it, but because of the truth of it, it will radically, dramatically and eternally change your life. I don’t know of any subject that excites me more than what I am talking about today, and it is this: “How to Practice the Presence of God.”

Now so many of us think of God as sort of an absentee landholder, that somehow we are down here on earth, and He has saved us, forgiven our sins, and given us a shove, and said, “Do the best you can,” and He’s up there in heaven peering down through the clouds, and every now and then we’re sending prayers up to Him, and saying, “O God, as you sit at master control up there, do something to help me down here, because I am in great, great difficulty.” And so sometimes we pray, and say, “But you know, I pray, and my prayer never got above the light bulbs.” Have you heard that expression? Do you know your problem? That’s where you think God is: above the light bulbs. Friend, He’s beneath the light bulbs as well as above the light bulbs. And that’s what we need to learn. We need to learn where God is and where God lives.

Now look, if you will, in verse 47: “But Solomon built him an house. Nevertheless, the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?”

If you wanted to write God a letter, do you know His address? Do you have the zip code? Where does God live? Where on earth does God live? Sometimes we say, well, this is the house of God. We call this building the house of God. This is not the house of God. Now it’s God’s house, in the sense that He owns it, but the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. But this is not God’s address.

As a matter of fact, God has been living in a series of houses, and I want to talk to you about those houses today, because you’ll learn this lesson, you’ll learn a great, great truth. The truth is that God designs a house, He moves into it, and if the house gets dirty, He moves out, because God won’t live in a dirty house.

I heard of some college boys who wanted to keep the team mascot, which was a goat, in the college dorm. Someone said, “You can’t do that.” They said, “Why not?” They said, “What about the smell?” “Oh,” they said, “the goat can get used to that.” College boys will live in a dirty house, but God will not live in a dirty house.

Now let me give you four words that we’re going to build our thoughts around today, and I want you to get them in your mind. And we’ll let them start with the letter “D”. And it might seem a little complicated at first, but soon you’ll catch on. The first is the word

*design*. The second is the word *desecration*. The third is the word *desolation*. And the fourth is the word *destruction*. We'll repeat those later on as we go along, but you're going to find out that there is a pattern from the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament. And those words are going to help you understand what the pattern is. First of all, God designs a house. Then, that house gets desecrated. Then, God moves out, and the house is desolated. And then, God turns around and destroys the house, and the house is destroyed.

## I. God's Primary House: Adam

Now God has lived in a series of houses. The first house that God lived in I'm going to call God's primary house, and it was a man. His name was Adam.

### A. A House Designed

And do you know what Adam was? Adam was basically a house of three rooms. Genesis chapter 2, verse 7, the Bible says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the earth, and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Now "the breath of life" means the spirit of life, and there you have the tripartite or the threefold nature of man. Man is body, soul and spirit. Now you sitting there in your seat this morning are body, soul and spirit. Why? Because you're made in the image of God, and God is triune, and all that God has made reflects the tri-unity of God. We worship one God who has revealed himself as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You, made in God's image, have a threefold nature. First Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 23 says this: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Adam had a body made of the dust of the earth. He had a spirit. God breathed into him the spirit of life. He became a living soul.

Now let me explain the difference of these and show you that God prefers a house of three rooms. Adam had a body and with his body he had physical life and he knew the physical world; roughly speaking, the world beneath him—because we have to live and function here on Planet Earth. And so that's obvious. We know what the body is. It's sort of the spacesuit we wear on Planet Earth.

But what about the soul? Not quite so obvious. Because the soul is invisible. The soul lives inside the body. Another word for soul is *self-ego*. The Greek word for soul is *psuche*. It's the word we get *psychiatry* from. It's the word we get *psychology* from. It's the word we get *psychic* from. The soul is basically the mind, the emotions, and the will. The soul is the you that lives inside this body. It's your sense of humor, your personality, your likes, your dislikes, your idiosyncrasies, your proclivities—all of those things that make you the wonderfully unique individual that you are. That is your soul. There's not

another just like you, and you live in here in this house.

Now you can't see my soul, but you're learning about my soul when you hear my body express what's in my soul right now. Well, okay, so far, so good. But what about the spirit? I used to think that soul and spirit were basically the same thing; six of one, and half a dozen of another. But Hebrews 4:12 says what? "The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, dividing asunder between soul and spirit." "I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless."

Now what is the difference between the spirit and the soul? Both are invisible, both are inseparable, but both are different one from the other. For example, plants have a body, but they don't have a soul. Animals—it may surprise you to learn—have a soul. The Bible speaks of the living creatures that God made, and that translation would be "the living souls" that have the breath of life. Animals have a soul. Your dog has a soul. Your dog—your dog—has a mind, emotions, and will. But animals don't have a spirit. What makes you unique is that you have a spirit.

Now with your body, you know the world beneath you; with your soul, you know the world around you and within you—the physical world, the social world, the psychic world; but with your spirit, you know the world above you. You see, the thing that makes man unique is that man has a spirit, because man is made in the image of God, and God is a spirit.

And therefore, the spirit of man is the place where God dwells. God has reserved that room in this three room house for himself. And the Bible says, "God says, 'I will dwell with him that is of an humble and contrite spirit.'" And when we get saved, God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. And the way you worship God is in spirit. That's the reason no animal can worship. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in how? In spirit and in truth. Now animals can never enjoy God. They can never know God. But man can, because man in the image of God has a spirit, and that's the way he knows God.

And so God created a house for him to live in, and that house was Adam. God occupied that part of Adam called the spirit, and when the Bible says that God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, how did He walk with him? Well, not in a physical body, because God is a spirit. God walked in Adam's body, and dwelt in Adam's spirit, and God dwelt with Adam, and Adam was a house of three rooms inhabited by God Himself. That is a house designed.

## **B. A House Desecrated**

But now wait a minute. Second "D"—a house desecrated. Remember that God had told Adam and Eve, "There's a tree—don't eat of it. The day that you eat of it you will surely die." Now that wasn't a threat; it was a warning. "Don't eat; you'll die." Well, they did eat, and they did die. But how did they die? They desecrated the house. They

sullied the house. They dirtied the house. And sin always dirties a house.

### C. **A House Desolated**

And so, a house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated. What happened is this: God moved out. God just simply moved out of Adam. God said, "I'm not going to live in a dirty house." And so God moved out of Adam.

Now pay attention. God said to Adam, "In the day that you eat you will die." Well, did Adam die the day that he ate? Be careful how you answer, because the Bible records that he lived 900 plus more years. And yet the Bible said that, "the day that you eat, you will die." Well, did he die, or didn't he die? Well, yes, he died, but how did he die? He died—pay attention—he died immediately in his spirit, progressively in his soul, he died ultimately in his body.

Now it's very important you understand that. What is death in the Bible? The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." What is death? Death is not the separation of the soul from the body, not if you know the Lord.

I mean, if I were to give a gasp and fall down here on this platform, and cease to move, and some doctor came up and examined me, and let's say I had a massive coronary or something like that and my body is no longer functioning. The doctor took those vital signs, he might say, "The pastor is dead." But he'd be telling a lie. You're looking at a man who can't die. I cannot die. Jesus said that, "he that lives and believes in me shall never die." All I would do would be simply move out. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." I'd be kicking up gold dust in glory. Friend, listen. I wouldn't be dead; I would be more alive than ever. I would be with the Lord Jesus Christ. I would just leave this body.

Death is not the separation of the soul from the body. Listen. Death is the separation of the spirit from God. Very important that you understand that. Death is the separation of the spirit from God. And when God moved out of Adam, Adam died that day, because God moved out. You remember John chapter 1, verse 4? The Bible speaks of the Lord, and the Bible says, "In Him"—in the Lord—"was life, and the life was the light of men."

When the Lord went out, the life went out. And when the life went out, the light went out. Got it? When the Lord went out, the life went out; and when the life went out, the light went out. And so now Adam has an empty room. It's called his spirit. And now his spirit that had received life from God is a dead spirit. He's spiritually dead, but the soul is still active. And so the soul, next in the chain of command, takes over. And rather than being a spiritual man, he's a soulish man.

And how does a soulish man operate? Remember what the soul is? The mind, the emotion and the will. I tell you how most of the people on Planet Earth are operating. They are spiritually dead, but their soul is still operating. Their mind says, "I think I ought to do such-and-such." Their emotions say, "I feel like doing it." Their will says, "I'll do it."

That's the way they operate. That's the way most of the people in this city are operating. They are no longer led by the Spirit of God. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." But these people are minus God in the spirit. To be spiritually dead, you don't have to be a bank robber, a murderer—just minus God, just absent from God. And so you're just doing what comes naturally. You think, "That's right." You are a soulish person. You're not a spiritual person.

#### **D. A House Destroyed**

So there's a house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolate—God moved out—and a house destroyed. Remember, Adam died immediately in the spirit, progressively in the soul, ultimately in his body. After a while, his body died and went back to the dust, because the seeds of death were already in him. But when did his body die? When did he die? The moment he was cut off from God.

Now before long, we'll go buy a Christmas tree, many of us. Some will say, "Well, I'll get a live tree." Be careful what you call a live tree. If you cut it off from its roots, you've got a dead tree. Now you might call it a live tree, but wait till New Year's. The needles begin to fall. It's dead. When did it die? Not New Year's. It died the day it was cut off. You decorate it and bring it in your house; it looks better in your house than it did in the woods. A lot of people decorate themselves and come to church on Sunday morning, but they're dead. They're dead; decorated, but dead. I mean, they are cut off from God. And so they don't have life. They're dead spiritually. And what happens spiritually shows up ultimately physically. Adam died immediately in his spirit. He died progressively in his soul. He died ultimately in his body. Now that's God's primary house or God's beginning house.

## **II. God's Pattern House: The Tabernacle/Temple**

Now God built another house and that's the one I read about in the Scripture. Solomon said, "But I've made a house for you to dwell in, God." That house was the temple and the tabernacle, I'm putting them together because they're basically two forms of the same kind of thing.

#### **A. A House Designed**

And it was a house of three rooms. God said to Moses and to Solomon both, "Be sure that you make it according to the pattern." God was the architect. God was the architect. It was a house designed, and it was a house of three rooms, because God is a triune God.

And so there was the outer court, there was the inner court, and there was the innermost court. The outer court corresponds to your body. Let me tell you about the temple. What was the temple here for? It was a colossal illustration, a great pattern, to

help us to understand things. And so in the outer court there was a place of sacrifice because we present our bodies a living sacrifice. That corresponds to the body. The inner court is where they met, worshiped, and fellowshiped. That corresponds to the soul, just like we know one another through our souls. The innermost place, what was that called? The Holy of Holies. And who lived in the Holy of Holies? God—God. That's where the Shekinah glory of God was, and so God reserved that room, that cubicle, that Holy of Holies, that inner sanctum, for Himself. And that corresponds to the human spirit.

#### **B. A House Desecrated**

Now I want you to see this house. It was a house designed. God said, "Make it according to the pattern." It was a house desecrated. Read there in Matthew chapter 21. Jesus remonstrated with those people of that day, and He said, "It is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people, but you have made it a den of thieves."

#### **C. A House Desolated**

A house designed, a house desecrated, then a house desolated. You read there in Matthew 23, Jesus says, "Behold your house is left unto you desolated." In Matthew 21, He said, "My Father's house." In 23, He says, "your house." That is, God had moved out. No longer, my house; it's your house. "You can have it," He says. And "Your house is left unto you desolate."

Now they still thought it was God's house. They were still meeting there. They were worshipping. They were offering. They were giving their incense. They were singing their songs. They were going through their prayers, but God, spiritually, is a billion light years away. Did you know that there are a lot of folks today who are going through the same forms but God is not present? Did you know that? It'll be a great day in America when people stop enduring religion and start enjoying salvation. I mean, they're going through the form. They went through all the form, but it wasn't God's house. Jesus said, "It's your house. You can have it. I have moved out."

#### **D. A House Destroyed**

A house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated, and then what? A house destroyed. You read in Matthew 24, the first two verses, they took Jesus out and said, "Oh, Lord, look at the stones of this temple." "Not one stone will be left upon another—not one stone will be left upon another." A house destroyed. That's the pattern—that's the pattern. God moves out, turns around and destroys that house. Got it?

### **III. God's Perfect House: Jesus**

Now God built a third house—a third house. Not God's primary house, not God's pattern house, but God's perfect house. Again, a man. Do you know what His name was?

Jesus. Read John 2, verses 19 through 21. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They said, “You’ve got to be kidding. Took us 46 years to build this thing. You think you’re going to raise it up in three years?” They ridiculed Him. But John says, in verse 21, “They knew not that he spoke of the temple of his body.”

### **A. A House Designed**

He was a temple. Jesus was a temple, and He was a house of God, a house designed. The Scripture says, speaking of Jesus, “A body thou hast prepared me.” He was a perfectly designed person, born of a virgin. He had to be designed as He was to be what He was—perfect. He was perfect to do what He did—die for our sins, because an imperfect sacrifice could never atone for sin. And He did what He did that we might be what we are—saved, born again, with our sins paid.

### **B. A House Desecrated**

A house designed, now wait—a house desecrated. You say, “No, not that house.” Yes. That house was desecrated as no house has ever been. Isaiah chapter 53 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him”—what?—“the iniquity of us all.” And Peter tells us, 1 Peter 2, verse 24, “He bare our sins in his own body.” And all of the sin of the world was heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ. You’ll never understand Gethsemane unless you understand this. Jesus in dark Gethsemane is praying, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But the silence from heaven says there is no other way, that Jesus had to drink that cup. And what was in that cup? All of the filthy, vile sins of all of the world, of all time, had distilled in that cup, and Jesus had to put that nasty, blasphemous cup to His lips and drink it to the bitter dregs. “Him who knew no sin God hath made to be sin for us.” And this house was desecrated.

### **C. A House Desolated**

And Jesus knew that when the house became desecrated, it would become desolated, because Jesus knew that when He took our sins, God would have to treat Him like He would treat us. The Bible says in Romans 8 that “God spared not his own Son.” When Jesus Christ was on the cross, we read that Jesus cried out and said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” I’ll tell you why. God can’t live in a dirty house, and God the Father moved out. And God the Son alone on dark Calvary, suspended between heaven and earth, endured the wrath of God. And not only did Jesus bear our sins, but Jesus became the object of the Father’s loathing. And God moved out, and He died alone.

When David died, David could say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” But Jesus couldn’t pray that. He died alone. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Why? Because God

can't live in a dirty house, and God moved out.

#### **D. A House Destroyed**

A house designed, a house desecrated, a house desolated, and then a house destroyed. Jesus knew it. That's why He said, in John chapter 2, verse 19, "Destroy this house, and in three days I'll raise it up." "Well," you say, "men did it." But wait a minute. God was using those men. You read Isaiah chapter 53 and you'll understand who crucified Jesus. "It hath pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to death." Why? Because Jesus was bearing our sins, and bearing our sins, he bore our suffering, our separation, our shame, and all the hell that comes with our sins. Jesus took it to Calvary. A house designed. A house desecrated. A house desolated. And a house destroyed.

### **IV. God's Permanent House: Us**

That brings me to the next and the last house that I want to talk about. Not God's primary house, not God's pattern house, not God's perfect house, but God's permanent house. Did you know that God has stopped moving? Did you know that God has moved in, and He's not moving out any more? That your home is not a hotel with checkout times? Your house is not a hotel with checkout time 12 noon. He has moved in to stay in. In John chapter 14, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter that he may"—what?—"abide with you"—what's the next word?—"forever." Forever. That Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to reside in us.

Do you want to know where God's permanent house is? Just look up here; I want to show it to you. You're looking at it. There, and there, and there, and there, and there, and there, and there. First Corinthians chapter 6, verses 19 and 20: "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which you have of God? You're not your own, for you're bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." God has moved into you and He stopped moving. "Well," you say, "that brings a real question. If God would move out of dirty house, He sure can't live in me, because even though I love Him, I am not perfect." But the Bible speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect." You see, what happens is this: because Jesus took all of your sin. When Jesus went to the cross, He took your sin—past, present, and future. He took it all, and the Bible says, therefore, because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross, in Romans chapter 4—one of the greatest statements in all of the Bible—"Blessed is the man to whom Lord will not impute sin." Not one half of one sin can ever be marked against your name to cause Him to move out.

Now that doesn't mean that God won't clean house. But it means in the part where God dwells, in the part where God dwells, in the spirit, no sin can be marked up against you. Oh, friend, when you understand this, you'll hardly be able to sit still. When you

understand where God lives, where God dwells, God has moved into people. In the Old Testament, He had a temple for His people. In the New Testament, He has a people for a temple. We are the temple of God, and God lives in us.

## **Conclusion**

Now let me give you about three or four quick lessons and I'll be finished. And I pray God, the Holy Spirit of God, will etch these things upon your consciousness, and rivet them to your soul, and cause them to reverberate through your spirit.

### **A. A Lesson Concerning Salvation**

Lesson number one—concerning salvation: Learn what salvation is. What does it mean to be saved? “Well,” you say, “to be saved is to get your sins forgiven.” Wrong. “Well, to be saved is to go to heaven when you die.” Wrong. Now you have to get your sins forgiven to be saved, and going to heaven is wonderful, and I'm going. But that's a fringe benefit. Salvation is not getting man out of earth into heaven. It is getting God out of heaven back into man. That's what being saved is: just getting God back in here. Not just being religious, not joining a church, not trying better; it is getting God back here. Remember, when God moved out, the Lord went out, the life went out, the light went out. When Jesus comes back in, the Lord comes back in, the life comes back in, and the light comes back in; and God begins to dwell in you, and you inhabit Him. That's what salvation is.

Wouldn't that be wonderful if God could move into you today? You've been living by your mind, your emotion, and your will, and the Holy Spirit of God will come back into you to energize you, and show you, and to lead you, and to give you all that He wants to give you. The lesson concerning salvation.

### **B. A Lesson Concerning Security**

There's a lesson concerning security. God stopped moving. That's the reason why I know I'm secure. The Holy Spirit abides with me forever. God is not moving out. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” That's what God says. And what does He mean by that? He means just what He said: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” There's absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God. “For I am persuaded that never death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth or any other creature shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. God's not moving out anymore.

You say, “What's the difference between us and Adam?” He moved out of Adam; He won't move out of me. Why? Adam was innocent. I am righteous. Listen. I had rather be saved by the grace of God than be Adam, innocent in the Garden of Eden. I had rather

be a saved sinner than an innocent angel. Because God has moved into me. Adam is only innocent. I am righteous. God has imputed and given to me righteousness. The lesson concerning security. You say, "You don't look so righteous."

### C. A Lesson Concerning Sanctification

Okay, the lesson concerning sanctification. How did Adam die? Well, he died immediately in the spirit, progressively in the soul, ultimately in the body. How are we redeemed? We are justified immediately in the spirit, sanctified progressively in the soul, glorified ultimately in the body. Isn't that neat? Isn't that neat? See?

So God's not finished with us. That's the reason the apostle Paul said, in Philippians chapter 1, verse 6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." What God has started, He's going to finish. And so God has started in your spirit. He justified immediately in the spirit, sanctified progressively in the soul, glorified ultimately in the body, and one of these days He's going to change our vile bodies like unto His glorious body. "And it doth not yet appear what we shall be like, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall him as he is." No wonder the psalmist said, "I shall be satisfied when I awaken in thy likeness."

So you see, there's the lesson concerning sanctification. Just because we're saved, we're not yet perfect, but God is not moving out. God instead has one room that he keeps clean, and then He cleans house the rest of the time, I mean, friend, He's beginning to work on us to make us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

### D. A Lesson Concerning Spirituality

And there's a lesson concerning spirituality. What is spirituality? What does it mean to be spiritual? Well, every now and then, we come to church and we act spiritual. Quit acting. God doesn't like actors. He calls them hypocrites. People from the parking lot, they come in here, they sort of change. They say, "Well, the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silent." Well, friend, the Lord's in His holy temple in the parking lot, and it happens to be you. A lot of people wouldn't smoke in here, but you'll light up when you go out there. Well, if you're going to blow smoke on anything, blow it on *this*, not *this*. You are the temple of God. A lot of people will use language out there they wouldn't use in here. Listen. When you get saved, every day is a holy day and every place is a sacred place. And every deed ought to be an act of worship. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God." That's what spirituality is.

When a person gets saved, he's naturally supernatural and supernaturally natural. And in all spiritual things he's natural, and in all natural things he's spiritual. Have you ever seen folks kind of act spiritual? They just kind of drip with it. They act spiritual. What I mean by that is this: they put on those tones.

Sometimes I'll be preaching and I'll be sitting up there on the on the platform with a preacher, and I'll be his guest and he'll be talking to me like a regular guy, and then he stands up to make the announcements and he sounds like he's got a steeple stuck in his throat. Now what happened to him from there to there? I'll tell you. He began to act spiritual.

You don't act that way, friend: you are spiritual. You are a temple of God. God lives in you; He walks in you. Every day is a holy day. Every place is a sacred place. Thank God for this place. It's been dedicated to a purpose, and we treat it with respect. But friend, this is the house of God. Got it? Got it.

### **E. The Lesson Concerning Service**

Now there's one last lesson, and I want to just give it to you. It's the lesson concerning service. Don't you dare insult God by saying God can't use you. You see, God never has wanted you to do anything for Him. He wants to do something through you. And I remind you again: There's only one person who has ever lived the Christian life, and His name is Jesus. And if it's lived in your house, He'll still be living it. As He inhabits your humanity, He will display His deity, and it will be Jesus Christ who is living that life.

You need love? Don't say, "Help me to love." Say, "Thy love, Lord." You need patience? Don't say, "Well, I wish I had more patience." Just say, "Thy patience," because He lives in you, and every demand upon your life is a demand upon the God who lives in you. As He inhabits your humanity and displays His deity, you are a temple of God. And all He wants you to do is to be constantly yielding to Him and constantly depending upon Him. And every demand upon you is a demand upon the Jesus that is in you, and the life I live "I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Isn't that neat? Isn't that wonderful? So it's not humility when you say, "God can't use me"; it's blasphemy. Because it's failing to recognize that He is in you wanting to display Himself. Where does God live? What? Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, which you have of God?

Now I just want to ask you, Dan, Isn't that wonderful? I don't mean the sermon; I mean the truth. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that glorious? I mean, isn't that grand? What other faith, what other religion, can have what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ? Or if people understood what we have in Jesus, you couldn't keep them away with a machine gun. But sin has blinded them, and they go their own selfish little way, wanting to be Lord over their own house. And Jesus said, "Your house is left unto you desolate and it's going to be destroyed." "But my Father's house is a house of prayer for all people." Father, seal the message to our hearts today. Oh, we love you, Lord, and help us to love you better. And oh, God, how I pray today for any who may be here who are not saved, that today they might give their hearts to Jesus.

# Counterfeit Christianity

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: March 18, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8**

*“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.”*

ACTS 8:9

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Don't Be Dazzled by the Satanic Force of False Religion
- II. Don't Be Deceived by the Superficial Faith of False Religion
- III. Don't Be Destroyed by the Selfish Focus of False Religion

Conclusion

## Introduction

Be finding the book of Acts chapter 8. We've been going through the book of Acts—Living Supernaturally. But we know also that, when God works, Satan works also. Here's a question: true or false—Satan is against religion? Don't answer it out loud. Some say true; some say false. Of course, the answer is false. Satan is not against religion.

You're going to find out that Satan uses religion; it is one of his chief tools in his bag of tricks. As a matter of fact, if you've studied the Bible, you're to find out that the very first temptation in the Garden of Eden was a religious temptation; it was a temptation, not to be ungodly, but a temptation—will you believe it?—to be godly. He said, Look, Eve. If you do this, you'll be like God. It wasn't a temptation to fall down; it was a temptation to climb up, to be as God. But do it my way. The devil, you see, is into religion up to his ears.

Now, there was a revival in Samaria. Let's read about it. Look in verse 5: “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did, for unclean spirits crying with loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.”

There's always joy when Jesus is present. There's always joy when there is real

revival, joy unspeakable and full of glory. But notice, in verse 9, how the subject changes: “But...”—just underscore the word but. You know, when God opens the windows of heavens to bless us, the devil opens the doors of hell to blast us. And, whenever there is revival, you can expect Satanic opposition—“But there was a certain man called Simon which beforehand in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man”—talking about Simon—“is the great power of God. Unto him they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with sorcery. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon...”—now, this is Simon the sorcerer—“Then Simon himself believed also, and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and wondered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done.”

Now, I’m going to stop right there. We’re going to pick up the reading in just a moment, and, actually, we’re going to go right on down this morning, I hope, right on through verse 25 of this chapter. But I want to talk to you about Counterfeit Christianity.

Now, last week, we talked about superficial Christianity, and that is dangerous, and there’s something just as dangerous, if not more dangerous, and it is counterfeit Christianity. When God moves, the devil also moves. As we’ve said before, Satan tried to close the church from the outside, and that didn’t work—it just drove the church to her knees—so now he’s going to try to close the church from the inside. And he does it, first of all, with superficial saints, Ananias and Sapphira. But now he also does it with counterfeit religion.

And the devil is a counterfeiter, and what he does, rather than to deny the faith, he counterfeits the faith, and that is doubly dangerous. Now, I’m going to tell you something: if you live for God, you’re going to have opposition, whether you are an individual or a church. I’ve often said, if you’ve never met the devil, it’s because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around, and, rather than being in collusion with the devil, you’re going to find yourself in collision with the devil.

Now, there’s great joy in that city, but Satan now begins to work. There are three things I want to lay on your heart as we think this morning about Counterfeit Christianity. And believe you me, these things are very real, and if there were ever a generation that needs to hear what I have to say, this is the generation that needs to hear of the dangers of counterfeit Christianity. Three things I want to warn you about.

## **I. Don’t Be Dazzled by the Satanic Force of False Religion**

Number one: don’t be dazzled by the satanic force of false religion. Now, I chose the word dazzled carefully. Don’t be dazzled by the satanic force of false religion. False

religion has great force. Look in verse 10. It speaks of this sorcerer, and the Bible says, “to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

There was force in what this man was doing, and they were all dazzled by it. Notice verses 9 and 10: “There was a certain man called Simon which before time in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

Now, here was a man who was using sorcery. Sorcery’s just another word for witchcraft. And, by the way, witchcraft is alive and well in the world today. Witchcraft is alive and well in America today. Witchcraft is alive and well in Memphis today. Witchcraft is alive and well in many churches. You say, Oh, no. Yes. And many people are dazzled by this. And they fail to understand that there is supernatural power.

What Simon was doing was not just a bag of cheap tricks. It’s not just that he was an illusionist—he was in league with the devil. Adrian, do you believe that there’s anything to witchcraft? Absolutely. Do you believe that some of these people have supernatural powers? Beyond the shadow of any doubt.

As a matter of fact, the world is getting ready for Satan’s superman, 6-6-6, who’s soon going to come on the scene, and one of his chief tools is going to be sorcery and witchcraft. And put in your margin 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 9. It speaks of the coming Antichrist, the man of sin, and it says, “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan,”—listen to this now—“with all power and signs and lying wonders.” All power, signs, and lying wonders. What does that mean—lying wonders? It means miracles that will deceive. You know, sometimes people will get into sorcery, witchcraft, whatever, and they say, Well, there’s really something to it, Pastor, as if that exonerates it, as if that somehow indemnifies it, as if somehow that substantiates it. There is something to it, but, friend, what there is to it is devilish.

Now, again, during the Great Tribulation, demonic forces are going to be loosed on the earth, and leading the nations of the world toward Armageddon. Put this verse down—Revelation chapter 16, verse 14. The Bible describes some unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the beast, the dragon, the false prophet; and here’s how the Bible describes these in verse 14: “For these are the spirits of devils,”—now, listen—“working miracles which go forth unto the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.”

Demonic spirits leading the kings, the rulers, the potentates of this world, bringing them to Armageddon. The key verse is “the spirit of demons working miracles.” We’ve already seen that Samaria was a place where people were demon-possessed. And, when Philip came to the revival, many unclean spirits or demons came out of people.

There is a deadly demonic force in the world today.

Some years ago, we had a missionary in our church—not this church, the church I pastored in Florida. That missionary told one of the most remarkable stories I've ever heard. The man was a godly man. He was not a liar, not an exaggerator, but from my judgment one of the most self-sacrificing godly missionaries I've ever met. He told about in Africa going back into the bush, and he told about a witch doctor there that had come to faith in Jesus Christ, and this witch doctor who had been practicing sorcery and magic, and had been in league with Satan, now had given his heart to Christ, and was saved. And the missionary and a native went to visit this man to confirm him in the faith. They had a wonderful visit. They fellowshiped in the Lord, and afterward, the missionary was going back, and he noticed there was a fire, and this witch doctor had some of his religious magic paraphernalia, there and was going to burn it in the fire. Of the things that he had, he had some gourds—do you know what a gourd is? It's a hardened pod that grows on vines, and people use them for different artifacts.

He had some gourds, had some feathers and things tied to them. The man was getting ready to throw them in the fire. The missionary said, What are those? Well, he said, these are things that I do witchcraft with. I'm going to burn them. The missionary said, You're just going to burn them? He said, Yes. He said, I'll tell you what. The people back where I live, they don't understand these things; they've never seen these kind of things. Would you give them to me? I want to take them back and show the people. The witch doctor said, No, you don't want them. He said, Why not? He said, They have power in them. He said, I don't believe in that, but, he said, I would like to have them so to take them back to show the people the superstitions. The witch doctor deferred to the American who was supposed to know everything, the spiritual leader. He said, Well, all right, take them.

This missionary said to me, We took those gourds, and on our way back, we had to stop and camp. We pitched our tent, and, in the middle of the night, I heard a noise, something in the tent. He said, I looked down, and those gourds I had laid between our cots—my companion's and mine—and he said, Those gourds were quivering and vibrating. He said, I realized what a fool I had been. I got up that night, built a fire, and burned them. Not mere superstition—there is devilish demonic, magical power in the world today.

Now, don't be deceived—don't be deceived. Don't be dazzled, friend, by the power of false religion. It is real. Pharaoh's magicians performed miracles when Moses performed miracles of God. So, as we think about counterfeit Christianity, the first thing I want to write on your heart is this: don't be dazzled by that. If some magician, some soothsayer, some astrologer, some necromancer, some fortune-teller, comes and does things that you cannot understand, don't go trailing after him, because you say, Well, I

know it's real! That is the point. It is real. That doesn't mean to follow after it; it means to flee from it.

## **II. Don't Be Deceived by the Superficial Faith of False Religion**

Now, here's the second point. First of all, don't be dazzled by the satanic power of false religion. Number two: don't be deceived by the superficial faith of false religion. Not all false religion is in the occult. Sometimes it moves right into the church. Now, I begin to read in verse 13. Now, remember Simon, now, has been a sorcerer; he's been practicing witchcraft. But now, notice verse 13: "Then Simon himself believed also." Well, Philip has been preaching Jesus, and now here is this sorcerer, this man full of demons, who's been practicing witchcraft, and the Bible says he believed also. "And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip and wondered,"—underscore this next phrase now, if you don't mind writing in your Bible—"beholding the miracles and the signs which were done. Now, when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive for them the Holy Ghost, for as yet he was fallen upon none of them, for they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is the progression—progression—of Pentecost.

Now, these people in Samara are receiving the Holy Spirit as they did at Jerusalem. Now, notice in verse 17: "Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." Now, watch verse 18: "And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Now, I'm going to stop reading there just simply to say this: that Simon—quote—believed—end of quote—but he was an unbelieving believer. He was not a true Christian. His faith was superficial, not real faith. He is believing, not in the master; he's believing in the miracles. He sees the power being manifest there by that New Testament church, and so he wants to be a part of it, but he never has met the Lord Jesus Christ. You say, Pastor, it says he believes. Wasn't he saved? Read verse 21 again, and look at it: "Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right with God."

Now, I wrote a book, the title of the book, Believe in Miracles, but Trust in Jesus. Trust in Jesus. God works miracles. Satan counterfeits miracles, and works devilish miracles. Never put your faith in miracles; put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Simon never did really truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not all belief is saving belief. You

may be a member of this church, you may give mental assent unto the facts of the gospel, but you have never met Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to put in your margin John chapter 2, and I want to begin reading in verse 23—John 2, verse 23. Let me give you the background of this passage of Scripture. Jesus had done some miracles in Jerusalem, and in Cana of Galilee, and other places, and people saw it. And when people saw the miracles that Jesus did, they began to follow Him. Not because they wanted Jesus, not because they repented of their sins, but they just saw the miracles, and they followed Him for the miracles' sake. They were what I call miracle mongers.

Now, listen to this—John 2, verse 23: “Now, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover in the feast day, many believed on him...”—there's our word again—“believed on him when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus”—now, listen—“did not commit himself unto them.” Now, you don't see it in the English, but in the Greek, the word believe and the word commit is the same word, just translated differently. You could say, many committed themselves to Him, but He did not commit himself to them. Or, many believed in Him, but He did not believe in them. They—quote—believed in Him like Simon the sorcerer, but He did not believe in them. Now, listen to it; let me read it again: “And many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them, for he knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.” Jesus knew these were not true believers.

There are many of you in this building—it breaks my heart to say it, but I believe it, and many who are listening through television—you say, I'm a believer. But you're not saved. You know the plan, but you don't know the man. You've seen what God has done, but there has never been a change of heart. You say, Well, doesn't the Bible say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved?” Yes, it does. The Bible also says, the devil believes and trembles. You see, there's a superficial faith. There's a kind of faith that never really comes and bows the knee to Jesus Christ, never makes Jesus Christ Lord. It is the superficial faith of false religion.

Let me read to you something that came from the Commercial Appeal just a few days ago, actually last January. I tore it out. Here's what it says: Spirituality gaining over doctrine. So, here's a battle now—spirituality, doctrine—and the word doctrine here means truth. And let me read this to you. Journalists rarely get to use terms such as White House, New Age, and séance in the same story, but they did in 1996 when the news broke that Hillary Rodham Clinton and her sacred psychologist, Jean Houston, were using meditation and visualization techniques in order to chat—listen to this—with Eleanor Roosevelt. Commentators smirked, and said this behavior was wacky, if not cult-like.

Now, here is the First Lady, in the White House, practicing a séance, contacting the dead in the White House. Now, listen to this. This is in your newspaper not too long ago. And, it says, commentators smirked, and said this behavior was wacky, if not cult-like. But the article goes on to say, the big news was that most—quote—born-again evangelicals were taking the news in stride. It's crucial to understand that what unites most of the people who call themselves born-again Christians is their claim to have had a highly personal experience that has changed their lives.

You are born again because of certain feelings and emotions and experiences, not because you believe any particular set of doctrine, or because you share certain beliefs about moral issues. Born-again Christians are increasingly becoming part of the American mainstream. A third of America's 77 million baby boomers call themselves born-again Christians. Many born-again boomers believe they have made a spiritual decision that is right for them but not necessarily for everyone. Half affirm that the various religions of the world are equally good and true, and the younger the born-again Christian, the more likely he or she was to say this. A third of the born-again believers said they believe in reincarnation and astrology.

Now, what is this article saying? These are people that say, Oh, yes, I'm a believer, but they don't believe necessarily the doctrines of the Bible. They don't necessarily believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven. They believe in astrology. They believe in reincarnation. All of these things are emphatically taught against in the Word of God. Now, we have today a generation of people who are—quote—very spiritual, but they do not believe the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Now, God has sent me here to tell you that you'd better get a bulldog grip on God's Word and God's truth. Thousands of church rolls are padded with moral worldlings who had spiritual experiences, who have never been born again. Simon the sorcerer said he believed. Philip said, You have no part nor lot with this; your heart is not right with God.

Now, have you had some experience, some something, that you call being born again? Suppose you come to the end of your life. Suppose you stand before God, and God says to you, Why should I let you into my heaven? You would say, Well, when I was on earth, I had a great experience. An angel, a heavenly being, came into my bedroom, and told me that I was heaven-bound, that I am ready for heaven; an angel appeared unto me. Satan could be there and sneer, and say, You fool; I was that angel. You say, Pastor, is that possible? Put in your margin 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 14: "And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light." If you have an encounter with an angel, how do you know you're not having an encounter with the devil himself? Satan himself is transformed as an angel of light.

Oh, you say, Lord, I'm fit for heaven because I had a vision. I saw the heavens ablaze from pole to pole. I was engulfed in light. I know that I'm ready for heaven.

Again, I reference you to Revelation chapter 13, verse 13 and following, speaking of the dragon: “And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast.” The devil—the devil—can make fire fall from heaven.

You say, Well, an angel spoke to me. I had a vision. I was engulfed in light. I tell you, it'd be a whole lot better if you were to stand before the Lord, and the Lord said, Why should I let you into my heaven? and you were to say, in John chapter 5, verse 24, because Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life,” and on the basis of your Word, and on the basis of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my faith in Him, I seek entrance into heaven. And heaven's gates will swing wide, and he'll say, Enter into the joy of your Lord. Listen, friend. You had better beware of the superficial faith of false religion. This man, Simon, was a “believer,” but he wasn't saved.

### **III. Don't Be Destroyed by the Selfish Focus of False Religion**

Now, here's the third and final thing. We're talking about counterfeit Christianity today. Remember the force of false religion, the satanic force. Remember the superficial faith of false religion. Here's the third thing. Don't be destroyed by the selfish focus—the selfish focus—of false religion. Do you know what the fuel that empowers false religion is? It is selfishness. Now, you don't have to think too hard as you read this story to see that Simon is full of himself. He is focused on himself.

Read verses 9 and 10: “There was a certain man called Simon which before in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out”—now, underscore this—“that himself was some great one.” And then, skip on down to verse 14: “Now, when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost,” and so forth. Now, notice verse 18: “Then when Simon saw that through the laying of, on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” Here was a man who was so full of himself.

Listen. What is self-centeredness? Let me give you a synonym for it: it is pride. Do you know what made the devil the devil? Self-centeredness. What made the devil the devil is pride. Isaiah chapter 14, verses 12 through 14—put in your margin. Isaiah is speaking to Lucifer, the devil, and here's what he says: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning. Thou art cut down to the ground which didst

weaken the nations.” And now he describes the process that made the devil the devil. “For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.” Five times: I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. What did Jesus teach us to pray? Not my will; thine be done. What did Satan say? Not thy will, mine be done. All false religion is self-centered. It focuses on self.

How do you think that Satan got Eve to take of the forbidden fruit? He appealed to her pride. He said, you’ll be like God; you can be like God. All religion that is false religion—put it down big, plain, and straight—the focus is selfishness. First Timothy chapter 6, beginning in verse 3—Paul was talking to Timothy about truth and wholesome doctrine, but then here’s what he says: “If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud.”

What drives liberalism in seminaries? Pride. What causes unbelief in the Word of God? Pride. What made the devil the devil? Pride. What is the root, the fuel, the source of all false religion? It is the focus on self; it is selfishness; it is pride, beyond the shadow of any doubt. Therefore, if you want that which is real, you go to the Word of God, you lay your intellectual pride in the dust, and you cry out to Jesus for mercy.

It’s obvious that Simon was in this thing, not for what he could give, but for what he could get. Look in verses 19 and 20. He said, “Give me this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God might be purchased with money.”

False religion and self-centered religion brings two things. Let me tell you. The root is pride. Let me tell you the fruit. You want to know what the fruit of all false religion is? Well, I want to show you right here. Peter says to him, in verse 23, “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” That’s a good verse. Learn this about false religion. The fruit is bitterness and bondage. The very word gall means poison. False religion is a poison. Peter said, Look, Simon. I’m going to diagnose your heart. You are bitter, and you’re in bondage. I perceive that there is in you this bitterness and this bondage because your heart is not right in the sight of God. Bitterness and bondage, verse 23. That is so true.

Did you know why so many churches have trouble? Because there are people who are bitter and who are in bondage. They have met religion, but they’ve never met Jesus. They’ve never been broken at the foot of the cross. They’ve never laid their pride in the dust. They have come into a church, not for what they can give, but for what they can get. They’ve never met Jesus. The Spirit of God is not in these people, and they are

troublemakers everywhere they go, because their religion has never satisfied them, and it never can. They are disillusioned, and they have unfulfilled desires, and they got in for the wrong reason, and they never, never, never, never, never have satisfaction. Everywhere they go, they're like Simon, full of bitterness, full of bondage. They're troublemakers in church—in churches.

Now, even in his repentance—so-called repentance—this man is full of self. Notice Peter says, Look, you are in the bond of iniquity. And notice what Simon said in verse 24: “Then answered Simon and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me.” Now, why didn't he pray? Why didn't he pray? Because he didn't know the Lord. “Pray he to the Lord for me, that none of these things which you have spoken come upon me.” He didn't say, Pray for me that I'll get my heart right with God. No! All he is doing is wanting to escape trouble, difficulty. There's no change in this man's heart; there's no change in this man's life. It is self-centered, even, repentance.

Do you know the difference between a true child of God, when he sins, and an unsaved person? The unsaved person fears the consequences of his sin. The saved person is broken-hearted because he's broken the heart of God. Not only have I broken God's law; I've broken God's heart, and it grieves me. But the unsaved person says, Man, I'm in trouble. He'll go to some psychologist, some counselor, somebody else, say, Pray for me; pray for me, preacher. My wife has left me. Pray for me here. Pray for me here. Pray for me here. I don't want this trouble. What they need is God. All false religion is self-centered.

There is the satanic force, there is the superficial faith, and there is the selfish focus of false religion. And I want to tell you again, that the devil is not opposed to religion. He's in it up to his ears. It'll be a great day in America when people stop enduring religion and start enjoying salvation—to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

A woman was in her house. A knock came on the door. She opened the door, and there was a man there, and he said to her, Lady, do you know God? She was flustered, taken aback. She stuttered and stammered, was embarrassed; she just stepped back and shut the door. The man bowed his head and walked away. Later, her husband came home. She said, Darling, let me tell you what happened today. She said, A man knocked at the door of our house and he asked me a question. He asked me if I knew God. I didn't know what to say. I shut the door in his face. I'm so sorry. I wish I could find him and apologize to him.

Apologize? he said. You should've slammed the door in his face. What right did he have to ask you such a question? Why didn't you tell him we are members of the biggest, most influential church in our city? She said, Husband, he didn't ask that. He

asked if I knew God. Well, why didn't you tell him we're reputable people; we have a good reputation; we're well-known in this community? He didn't ask that. He only asked if I knew God.

That's what I want to ask you today: not, Are you a member of Bellevue Baptist Church?; not, Do people think you are fine?; not, Do you have manners and culture?; not even, Do you have religion? Do you know God? Are you saved? Oh, my friend, you can be. You should be. Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I want to lead you in a prayer, and if you've never prayed this kind of a prayer, you can pray it from your heart. Maybe you've been sort of an unbelieving believer. Maybe you've had an intellectual faith, and maybe you've been impressed with miracles and things, but you've never really bowed to Jesus.

Would you pray this prayer: Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you. Tell Him that. Lord Jesus, I trust you. I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with your blood on the cross. I believe you walked out of that grave, and now I receive you, by faith, as my Lord and Savior. I take myself off the throne, and I enthrone you, Lord Jesus. Now, right now, I do. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Jesus. Pray that from your heart: Save me, Lord Jesus. Did you ask Him?

Then, pray this way: Thank you for doing it. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You're now my Lord, my Savior, and my God, and I will live for you the rest of my life—not in order to be saved, but because I have been saved. I receive salvation as a free gift, preparing to serve you the rest of my life. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Devil's Religion

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: March 15, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8:5–24**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Beware of the Devilish Power of False Religion
- II. Beware of the Devilish Pride of False Religion
- III. Beware of the Devilish Pretense of False Religion
  - A. Real Faith Is Authenticated by Its Object
  - B. Real Faith Is Authenticated by Its Objective
- IV. Beware of the Devilish Poison of False Religion

Conclusion

## Introduction

**W**ould you take your Bibles, please, and turn to Acts—the eighth chapter? And, you will remember that we're in the Book of Acts under the general heading "That Old-Time Religion." And, in just a moment, we're going to be reading in verse 5. But, before we do, I want you to find it and look up here, and I want to ask you a question—I don't want you to answer it out loud, but I want you to think about it. Here's the question: Is the devil for religion or against religion? Well, I want to tell you, friend, that he is very much for religion. As a matter of fact, the devil uses religion to oppose the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, the title of our message today is "The Devil's Religion."

Now, the theme of the Book of Acts is that old-time religion, but I want to tell you, dear friend, that old-time religion—the Bible religion—is going to receive some old-time opposition: the devil's religion. And, as a matter of fact, it is really old-time opposition, because it began in the Garden of Eden. And, I remind you that the first temptation that came to humankind, when Satan crawled his slimy, corroding path into the pages of history in the Garden of Eden—that very first temptation—was a religious temptation. What did the devil say to Eve? "If you eat this fruit, then you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). That's what he said. It was in the realm of religion. He was saying to her, "I'm going to tell you how to be godly my way." It wasn't a temptation to fall down; it was a temptation to fall up—to be like God. It was a perverted religion. And, the devil has always been in the religion business up to his ears.

We see that today in the passage of Scripture that I have entitled "The Devil's Religion." Begin reading with me in Acts chapter 8 and verse 5: "*Then Philip went down*

*to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city”—and, by the way, there’s always joy when there’s revival. But, I want you to notice verses 9 and following—“But”—that means “in contradistinction; over and against that”—“But there was a certain man, named Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me” (Acts 8:5–24).*

Now, listen very carefully. I want to tell you four things about the devil’s religion, and what I have to say is not merely interesting. I trust that it will be interesting, but whether it is or whether it isn’t, it is vital. And, if ever a generation needed to be warned against false religion—what I call “the devil’s religion”—it is this generation. In the last days, there will not be a lack of religion; there will be more than ever. The Bible prophesies the last days as days when men will “have a form of godliness, but they will deny the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). That is, they will have religion without reality. They will have form without force. They will not know God; and yet, they will be very religious. Most Americans don’t need more religion; they need to turn from religion to Jesus

Christ. Now, listen. Pay attention. Here are the four things that I want to tell you about the devil's religion and four warnings I want to give you.

## **I. Beware of the Devilish Power of False Religion**

Number one: Beware of the devilish power of false religion. Do you have that? Beware of the devilish power of false religion. Look with me, if you will, in verses 9 and 10: *“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery”*—underscore the word *sorcery*—*“and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great”*—underscore this—*“power of God”* (Acts 8:9–10)—the devilish power of false religion. Here was a man who was practicing witchcraft. Here was a man who was practicing what the Bible calls “sorcery.” Now, was this just a bag of cheap tricks? Was this man a slight-of-hand artist? No! Here was a man who had tapped into devilish, unholy, supernatural power—so great that everybody said, “The power that is on this man is the power of the great God.” And, everybody in that city had been swept away by this man—Simon the sorcerer.

Where did he get that power? If you don't mind writing in the margin of your Bible, then I want you to write in the margin of your Bible this scripture: 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, and verse 9. In that passage, God described the devil's superman who's to come—the antichrist, that man of sin who will one day rule the entire world, the antichrist. And, the Bible describes him in these words: *“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9)—power, signs, and lying wonders. This is going to be the hallmark and the devil's stock in trade—that he has power to perform signs and wonders and to deceive people. Let me give you another passage of Scripture. Write down “Revelation chapter 16 and verse 14.” The Bible speaks of unclean spirits, and then this is what the Bible says: *“For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles”*—*“spirits of devils, working miracles”* (Revelation 16:14).

I have little doubt in my mind that this man—Simon the magician—worked miracles. I believe that he did it by devilish, unholy power. We have a generation that is being—and will be—swept into Hell by a demonstration of satanic, miraculous power. By the way, these people were deceived, and that's the devil's duty and the devil's delight—to deceive people, to keep people out of Heaven.

Suppose that you were deceived by one of the devil's miracles. Suppose you died. You stood before the Lord, and there the Lord is—He has you at His great tribunal. And, you stand before Him, and the Lord asks you that all-encompassing question: “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” And, suppose you were to answer, “Well, Lord, there was a time when I was seeking You. I really wanted to know religious truth, and I had a

vision. Do you remember, God, when You sent that angel to visit me? Remember, Lord, there was a great, glorious, shining, magnificent, holy angel—an angel of light? And, that angel came and said to me, ‘My child, you’ve found favor with God, and I have been dispatched from Heaven to tell you that you have a place for eternity with the Father in Heaven.’ That’s why, Father, I expect to enter into Heaven.” Suppose, at that moment, the devil appeared on the scene, and suppose the devil said to you, there, standing in front of the judgment of Almighty God, “You poor, deluded fool. That was no angel; that was me! I was the one who spoke to you.”

“Oh,” you say, “Pastor, that would be impossible.” Oh, you think so? Listen to this scripture, and write it down in the Bible—2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 14: “*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light*” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Did you know that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light? That’s what the Bible says—that he is not necessarily some scaly monster with a forked tail and hooves—cloven hooves—and horns. No, no. The devil could be very beautiful—holy looking—as an angel of light. Friend, if an angel were to come and tell you that you were saved, how would you know that it wasn’t the devil in disguise? He has power to do miracles.

Suppose that you stood before the judgment of God, and God said, “Why should I let you into My Heaven?” And, you said, “Well, Lord, You remember that miracle I saw? Remember, Lord, when I was praying, and I said, ‘Lord, give me a sign,’ and the heavens rolled back? And, You remember, Lord, how that glorious fire came out of Heaven? What a glorious light! O God, it was a miracle, and I knew that You had heard my prayer, and I knew that I was right with You.” And, suppose, again, the devil said, “You poor, deluded fool. That was me; I did that.”

You say, “Pastor, could the devil do that?” Put in your margin “Revelation chapter 13 and verses 13 and 14”: “*And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles that he had power to do*” (Revelation 13:13–14). The devil has the power to make fire come down out of Heaven in order to deceive people.

“Well,” you say, “Pastor, how on earth is a man going to know then? I mean, if an angel telling you that you’re saved doesn’t mean that you’re saved, if seeing a ball of fire come down out of Heaven doesn’t mean that you’re saved, then how can you know that you’re saved?” My dear friend, the Bible says, “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy*” (2 Peter 1:19). That’s the reason—and that’s the Word of God. More sure than any vision and more sure than any ecstasy is the Word of God—and that’s the reason why 1 John chapter 5 and verse 13 says, “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life*”

(1 John 5:13). We have God's Word, and you'd better learn to stand on the Word of God.

If I were to stand before the Lord, and the Lord asked me, "Adrian, why should I let you into My Heaven?" I would say, "Because, Lord, You have said to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and I've believed. And, You've said in Your Word, in John chapter 5 and verse 24, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death until life"* (John 5:24). And, if the devil is there, then I'll say, "Devil, read it yourself. The argument is between you and God's Word, and I know who's going to win that argument."

Learn to stand on the Word of God. I'm telling you, ladies and gentlemen—listen to me—there's a time coming when the devil himself is going to perform such miracles upon this earth that he'll make you think that white is black, that black is white, that up is down, that down is up, and you'll cut your mother's throat and think that you're doing God a service. He's such a deceiver—he is a deceiver. The Bible says that he deceives the whole world. And, you beware—beware of the devilish power of false religion. It is not just that people are preaching the wrong thing. They will come with such a demonstration of power and miracles that you'll say, "Why, that must be of God." *"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders"*— (2 Thessalonians 2:9) that's who the antichrist is going to be.

## **II. Beware of the Devilish Pride of False Religion**

There's a second thing that I want to warn you about in this passage of Scripture: not only do you need to beware of the devilish power of false religion, but you also need to beware of the devilish pride—the devilish pride—of false religion. Look again in Acts chapter 8 and verse 9: *"But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria"*—now, watch this—*"giving out that himself was some great one"* (Acts 8:9). Do you see it? Do you see it? Here was Simon the sorcerer, who was egocentric rather than being God-centered. Here was a man who was inflated with pride and ego.

The hallmark of all satanic and false religion is pride. It was pride that made the devil the devil. You want to find the genesis of the devil? You want to know how the devil became the devil? Well, Isaiah chapter 14 and verse 12 gives us this biography of the evil one, and listen to what happened to the devil and what made the devil the devil—Isaiah 14, beginning in verse 12: *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!"*—now, watch this; you're going to find that five times the devil will say, "I will." Listen to it—*"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the*

*stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12–14). I will, I will, I will, I will, I will. He’s self-centered. “I will.” Do you know what the devil said? He said exactly the opposite of what the Son of God said. The devil said, “Not thy will, but mine be done—not thy will, but mine.” All false religion is based on will-worship and self-will. This is the way that the devil tempted Eve with the first temptation in the Garden of Eden. He said to Eve, “If you will do this, then you can be your own god. You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). This was the appeal to pride.*

All false religion and all devilish religion is built on pride. That’s the reason why Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verses 3 and following, *“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud”—“He is proud” (1 Timothy 6:3–4).* It was pride that made the devil the devil. And, we have a generation of people who are religious, but their religion, rather than being God-centered, is self-centered; it is ego-centered. And, my dear friend, you need to examine yourself right now and find out whether you have ever repented of your sin, been broken in the dust before the Lord Jesus Christ, and dethroned the self and enthroned Jesus Christ. Most of the people in America are egomaniacs—religious, strutting their way to Hell, thinking they’re too good to be damned. They have never repented of their sin. They’ve never made Jesus Christ Lord. It is a man-made religion. It is rooted in ego. It is rooted in pride. And, it, my dear friend, will condemn and damn a race of people.

### **III. Beware of the Devilish Pretense of False Religion**

Now, there’s a third thing that I want you to notice: I want you to know not only the devilish power of false religion and the devilish pride of false religion, but thirdly, I want you to notice the devilish pretense of false religion. Notice beginning now in verse 13 of this same chapter (Acts)—well, let’s begin in verse 12: *“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”—*How wonderful! They believed in Jesus, and they were baptized because Philip preached the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Wonderful! But now, notice verse 13—*“Then Simon himself”—*now, this is the sorcerer—*“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and the signs which were done” (Acts 8:12–13).*

I want you to listen very carefully. In these verses, there are two kinds of believers that are described: true believers and false believers, possessors and pretenders. The first group, described in verse 12 (Acts 8:12), was made of possessors. The second group was made of pretenders. Simon never was saved, and I’m going to show you in a

moment, clearly, that he wasn't saved. He was an unbelieving believer. Now, the difference was in the object of their belief. One group—those who were saved—believed in the Master.

Simon believed in the miracles. Simon was a man who was interested in power that he could get hold of, something that he could use, and he had been practicing witchcraft and sorcery. And then, he saw the apostles, who had the power to lay their hands on people, and people would receive the Holy Ghost. He said, "That's an amazing thing. I want that kind of power in my life." And so, he tried to buy that power. I want you to notice verse 18 and following: "*And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee*"—now folks, I want to be kind, but I want to tell you in just plain English what Peter said, and I'm not stretching it. He said, "You and your money both go to Hell." That's what he was saying—"*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness*" (Acts 8:18–22). He wasn't a saved man; he was a lost man. He had no part—no lot whatever—in this matter. His belief was not in the master, but in the miracles—not in the person, but in the power, because false religion is egocentric; it is always rooted in what I can get and not in what I can give. There are always people who want miracles—not because they love God, but because they love miracles. It's a false faith. It's a faith that will not save. It's a faith that will condemn and lead to Hell.

There are always those miracle mongers. Do you remember reading in John, the second chapter, where Jesus turned water into wine and did other miracles? And, the Bible says there in the end of John chapter 2 and beginning about verse 23: "*Many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did*"—but then, the Bible says—"*But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man*" (John 2:23–25). And, when the Bible says, "*Jesus did not commit himself unto them*" (John 2:24), it's the same as saying the word *belief*. They believed in Him, but He did not believe in them. He didn't commit Himself to them. Why? He knew that they didn't really trust Him. They only believed in the miracles. They only wanted what He could do; they didn't really want Him. They were like Simon with a self-centered religion—an easy "believeism" that does not commit itself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I believe that God heals, and I want to make that abundantly clear. I believe that God heals people supernaturally. But friend, that cannot, and should not be, the focus of any ministry. If I had the power—and I am not a healer—but if I had the power

to bring somebody down here in a wheelchair, a paraplegic, lay hands on that person and that person would be instantaneously, miraculously, supernaturally healed, then word would get out in this city, and next Sunday, you couldn't put people in here with a shoe horn. They would be here, mister. And, I mean, if I began to do that, then there would be people coming down in great numbers. I mean, if it was real and if it was authenticated, they would be all over this place: "Touch me; heal me. Touch me; heal me." But, you preach Jesus, preach salvation, preach repentance, preach being broken—then oh, no. "Preach power. Give me this power. I want this—I want this."

Let me tell you that, dear friend, the difference between a false faith and a real faith is found in two things. It's authenticated by two things. Number one: Real faith is authenticated by its object; and number two, it's authenticated by its objective.

#### **A. Real Faith Is Authenticated by Its Object**

What is the object of real faith? Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ. I hear people say, "Well, well, just believe." I say, "Believe what?" They say, "Have faith." I say, "Faith in what?" Faith is no better than its object. Faith in faith is only positive thinking. It is self-centered. It has roots in man, rather than rooting in God. Have faith in Jesus, as said in the Book of Mark: "*Have faith in God*" (Mark 11:22). Dear friend, it is not faith that moves mountains; it's God that moves mountains—not faith in faith. Faith is no better than the object. And, you put your faith in the Lord. Now, the difference between Simon and those other people—those other people had faith in Jesus. Simon had faith in miracles.

#### **B. Real Faith Is Authenticated by Its Objective**

All right. Now, watch—watch—not only is faith authenticated by its object, but it is also authenticated by its objective. What is the purpose of faith? It's to bring us into a relationship with God. Faith is not some way that man's will is done on earth, but faith is some way that God's will is done in Heaven. Faith is not something that uses God; faith is where God uses you—where you come to God, and you're broken at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you say, "Lord, let Your life and Your will be done in me. Not my will, but Thine be done." Faith, my dear friend, is for official use only. It is for God to do what God wants done on this earth.

Oh, how many people would like to have some power? It's all self-centered—it's all self-centered. They are in religion for what they can get and not for what they can give. They have never knuckled under to Jesus Christ. They have never repented, as Peter told Simon to repent later on, but they have joined churches, been baptized, gotten in the church for what it can do for them. It's false religion. It's devilish pretenders who have never been saved. And, the thing that breaks my heart is that churches are filled with them—great pretenders. "*Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name*

*done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22–23).*

You beware of the devilish power of false religion. It has power in it. You beware of the devilish pride of false religion. It is ego-centered, rather than God-centered. You beware of the devilish pretense of false religion. The devil will sometimes join a church. Simon did. He got baptized. He believed, but he wasn't a believer in Jesus, and he did not have a genuine faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus will save, but faith that's not in the Lord Jesus will condemn and take you to Hell.

#### **IV. Beware of the Devilish Poison of False Religion**

Now, the fourth and final thing: You beware of the devilish poison of false religion, because false religion poisons everything that it touches. I want you to notice also, here, when Simon said: *“Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:19–20).*

Have you ever heard of P.T. Barnum—P.T. Barnum of the Barnum Bailey Circus fame? P.T. Barnum, who thought there was a sucker born every minute—that guy? When Charles Haddon Spurgeon—many believe Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers who ever lived—when Charles Haddon Spurgeon was preaching so mightily and so powerfully in London, Barnum heard about it, and he thought, I wonder if there's some way that I can merchandise that? So,” he thought, “well, I'll just get the great Spurgeon to come to America. I'll put him in a big hall, and I'll charge people to come hear him. And, I'll get him to lecture. Evidently, he's a very gifted and articulate speaker. There's some way that we ought to be able to make some money on that.” So, he wrote Spurgeon, offered Spurgeon a proposition, and told Spurgeon that if he'd come, then he'd make him a wealthy man.

Spurgeon wrote him back—sent him a wire, fired him back a wire. Spurgeon didn't say anything. He just put one verse of Scripture in the wire. Do you know what it was? It was Acts 8, verse 20: *“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money”—signed “Spurgeon.” Amen. “You and your money can go you know where if you think that the gift of God can be purchased with money”—“Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee”—now, watch it—“For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:20–23).* The word *gall* may be translated into “poison”—the poison of bitterness. Gall was a poison. Beware of the poison of false religion.

There are two things that false religion brings: bitterness and bondage. You're in the

gall of bitterness and the bondage of iniquity. Every man, every woman, every boy, and every girl that's swept up into false religion ends up in bondage and in bitterness. In bondage—why? Because, the devil has ensnared them, and there's no deliverance from their sin. No false religion can make a person free. There's only bondage in it. There's nothing more tedious and more binding than false religion. And, why are they bitter? I'll tell you why they're bitter—because they're unfulfilled; they're unsatisfied, and they're uncontrolled and unsatisfied, and they become more and more bitter.

Listen to me: the sweetest, most wonderful, most godly, gentle, genteel, loving, and pure people that you'll ever find on the face of this earth are found in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that the favorite sport of some people is Christian bashing, and they just love to talk about all the hypocrites and all that in the Church and everything. I've been preaching long enough to know that God is real and that God's people are real. I know that, folks. You'll never convince me that the dear saints I know don't know the Lord Jesus Christ and that they are not genuine, real, gentle, and loving.

Now, having said that—and I want you to remember that I said that—I want to say, also, that the meanest, the wickedest, the cruelest, and the bitterest people that you will often find are religious people who don't know God. They are bitter and in bondage. They're like old Simon. Peter said, "You're full of bitterness. You're in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23). My dear friend, if you'll think about it, all over our world today we're having wars over what? Religion. The devil's not against religion; the devil's in favor of religion that leaves people in bondage and in bitterness and that will take them to Hell because they've never had a Biblical relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sometimes in a church or in a business meeting, some bitter person will stand up and cause all kinds of problems in a church. He doesn't know the Lord of Glory. He talks about his rights. What rights does a dead man have? He's been crucified with Christ if he's saved. That man has a right. He's a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ when he's born again. But, an egocentric person talks about his rights. Somebody said, "You teach a man his rights, and you'll have a revolution; you teach him his responsibilities, and you'll have a revival."

People in bondage, people in bitterness, religion without reality, Church without Christ—listen, there is devilish power in false religion. It is rooted in devilish pride. It shows in devilish pretense. It results in devilish poison—the gall of bitterness. And, the answer is to repent. Now, some people need to repent of the sins of the flesh, but a lot of people need to repent of the sins of the spirit—not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and not receiving Him.

## **Conclusion**

My time is gone, but let me just tell you about a woman. She was at home one day, and

there was a knock on her door. And, she opened the door, and there was a man standing there. This man had a Bible in his hand, and he said to the lady, “Madam, may I have a few moments of your time?” She said, “What do you want to talk about?” He said, “Ah, Madam, I want to ask you a question: Do you know God?” She got flustered. She didn’t know what to say. She groped for words for a moment and couldn’t think of what to say. She got so embarrassed that she just shut the door and left him standing there. She went all the way back into the bedroom as if she was afraid of him, and she thought that she’d never had an experience just like that. And, it bothered her all afternoon. When her husband came home, she said, “Let me tell you what happened to me today.” She said, “A man came and knocked on our door, and he asked me a question: Do you know God?” She said, “It so bothered me—I got so flustered—I didn’t know what to do, and I shut the door in his face.” She said, “I wish I could find him and apologize to him for doing that.” He said, “Apologize! You should have slammed the door in his face. The nerve—coming to you and asking you a question like that! Why didn’t you tell him that we’re members of the most prestigious church in this town?” “Well,” she said, “he didn’t ask that. He asked if I knew God.” “Well,” he said, “why didn’t you tell him that you’re a moral, upstanding, and upright person—that you have your religion?” She said, “Husband, he didn’t ask that. He asked if I knew God.”

That’s what I want to ask you: Do you know God? I’m not asking you, are you a member of this church or any body’s? And, I’m not asking you how religious or upstanding you are. Simon the sorcerer was religious, and he was in bondage and in bitterness. He didn’t know Jesus.

Let’s bow our heads in prayer.

# The Devil's Religion

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** July 25, 1999

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 8:5–25

*“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.”*

ACTS 8:9

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word and turn, if you would, please, to Acts chapter 8. And, I want to repeat what I said a few moments ago—that the devil is not opposed to religion. Many of us think that he is, but he is not. He is in the religion business up to his ears. And, if you'll use a little common rationality, think about it—the very first time we're introduced to Satan is in the Garden of Eden when he's tempting Eve. And, what was the temptation to Eve? It was a religious temptation. It was not a temptation to be ungodly. The truth of the matter is it was a temptation to be as God, to be like God, but just do it the devil's way—to have the devil's religion. It wasn't a temptation to fall down, although that's what she did. It seemed like it was a way to climb up, to get even higher than she already was. The devil always uses false religion.

Now, this is particularly true when there is a revival. When God is moving in great revival power, the devil counterattacks. He does not counterattack, necessarily, with infidelity and unbelief, but he comes against a true revival with false power and a counterfeit revival.

Let's take God's Word and begin to read about a revival. Acts chapter 8, verse 5: *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them”*—I love

that. That's what we're to do: preach Christ—*“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city”*—true revival always brings joy, *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8)—*“But”*—notice that. Just put an... Underscore the little word *but*—*“there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God”*—so old Simon had people thinking he was something special, and he had deluded the entire city of Samaria—*“And to him they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries”*—that is, with witchcraft—*“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then [they] laid...their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and...the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And...when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”* (Acts 8:5–25)

Now, get the idea. Here's Philip. We have a son in heaven who's named after this man. He's preaching in the city of Samaria, and the fire from heaven falls. The early apostles had wanted to bring down a little heavenly napalm and scorch them, but Philip went down there, and spiritual fire fell. And, there's a great revival in Samaria, and there's great joy. And, true revival is always marked by great joy. But, the devil comes immediately to oppose that revival. Notice what it says after it says in verse 8, *“there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:8)—then notice verse 9: *“But...”* (Acts 8:9) He's always

there, sticking his nose in, trying to stop the spread of the gospel. And, the primary way he does it is, not by contradiction, but by confusion, by false religion.

There are three things I want you to learn about false religion tonight, because you're going to meet it in this day of New Ageism. And, remember this: the New Age is not new; it's one of the mustiest things around. And, what we have here is New Age in an old age.

## **I. Beware of the Devilish Power of False Religion**

The first thing I want you to beware of is, I want you to beware of the devilish power of false religion. Put it down: the devilish power of false religion. There is power in false religion. Look, for example, in verses 9 through 11: "*But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery*"—now, that means "witchcraft"—"*and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one*"—now, this man had power, and the people were convinced. Notice verse 10—"*To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because...of a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*" (Acts 8:9–11) Question: Was he a super-magician? Did he just have a bag full of tricks? Was all of this sleight of hand, hocus pocus, flim-flam, smoke and mirrors? No, he had linked himself up with the devil.

I wrote a book entitled *Believe in Miracles but Trust in Jesus*. I prayed over the title of that book. As a matter of fact, I told my grandchildren, "I'll give you a hundred dollars if you can give me a good title for this book" before I got the title. They missed a hundred dollars because I was shaving one morning, and it came to me. I said, "That's what I want—*Believe in Miracles but Trust in Jesus*. God has the power to work miracles, but never put your faith in miracles because the devil also can work miracles. Believe in miracles, but you trust in Jesus.

Now, I want you to put these scriptures down. Second Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 9—the Bible speaks of the man of sin, the antichrist that's going to come in the last days. And, if we're living in the last days, the antichrist may be alive and well and breathing—maybe living in Memphis; we don't know. But, here's how the Bible describes him, the antichrist: "*Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*" (2 Thessalonians 2:9) Power, signs, and lying wonders—Satan has the power to do this.

Now, put down "Revelation chapter 16, verse 14." And there, the Bible talks about the nations of the world being gathered together toward that battle, that great battle, the Battle of Armageddon, and it describes demon powers and says they were like frogs coming out of the mouth of the beast, and the false prophet, and the dragon. (Revelation 16:13) And, he goes on to describe them: "*For they are*"—listen. This is

Revelation chapter 16, verse 14—*“For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”* (Revelation 16:14) *“They are the spirits of devils”*—*“spirits of devils”*—*“working miracles.”* (Revelation 16:14) Now, that’s the reason that you need to beware of false religion. You need to beware of the devilish power of false religion. Don’t scoff at some of these miracles. The devil has power to do miracles. And, if you’re depending miracles to authenticate your faith, you can get fooled very easily.

Suppose you wanted an assurance of your salvation and you said, “Lord, I just don’t know whether I’m saved or not. Would you give me some sign that I’m saved?” And, suppose there appeared to you a mighty, glorious, shimmering, shining angel in dazzling light and that angel were to say to you, “My child, the Father in heaven loves me so much that He dispatched me to speak to you personally to tell you that you are beloved of Him; you are special. And, I am the messenger of Jehovah to tell you that you’re absolutely, totally saved and that God has His hand upon you in a special way.” Well, you’d feel pretty good if that happened, wouldn’t you? But, suppose you stood before the Lord, and the Lord said, *“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity”* and *“I never knew you.”* (Matthew 7:23) You say, “No, Lord, that can’t be! Lord, that can’t be! Why, why, Lord, there was an angel—no *ifs*, *ands*, and *buts* about it—an angel that came to me and told me that I was saved.” And, old Satan might appear. And, with a sneer on his face, he would say, “You fool! I was that angel.” Listen to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 14. The Bible says, *“For Satan himself is transformed [as] an angel of light.”* (2 Corinthians 11:14) I’m telling you, apart from the Word of God, Satan would have you like putty in his hands if you’re depending upon miracles. This man bewitched the whole city of Samaria. They were saying, *“[He] is the great power of God”* (Acts 8:10)—“I look at what he is doing. God is with him.”

Suppose you’re not praying for an angel; you’re praying for another sign. You say, “Dear God, I just need to know. I just need to know, God, that you are with me. Lord, give me a sign in the heavens. Do something celestial, something supernatural. Give me a sign.” And, suppose when you prayed, something more beautiful than the Northern Lights were just a flash from pole to pole—some great, dazzling light that lights up the whole sky. Then you were to see a ball of fire like the Shekinah glory just coming down out of heaven, down, down, down, down, and you would say, “O my God, you would do that for me? Thank you, Lord. Now I have blessed assurance.” And, you’d stand before the Great White Throne to be judged, and the Lord would say, “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity; I never knew you.” (Matthew 7:23) “But God, no! God, no! Lord, I asked for a sign, and I had a sign. I saw fire from heaven.” The devil could say to you, “You fool! You fool!” Listen to Revelation 13, verses 13 through 14, speaking

of the devil: *“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast,”* (Revelation 13:13–14)

Now, what I’m saying to you is you beware of the devilish power of false religion. Don’t you get carried around by some traveling evangelist, somebody on television who seems to be working miracles and doing all sorts of strange things. Do you want to have the assurance of your salvation? I’m going to tell you where you’re going to get it: right here, the Word of God—the Word of God. First John 5:13: *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that [you] have eternal life.”* (1 John 5:13) “I gave you the Word of God.” Jesus said in John chapter 5, verse 24: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”* (John 5:24) And, the next time the devil gets on your trail and tells you you’re not saved, and you’re looking for some assurance that you are saved, don’t look for a sign; don’t ask for a feeling—you stand on the Word of God. That’s the way I got my assurance. I said, “Lord, this is what you said. You cannot lie. You said if I would trust you, I’m saved. I do trust you. I don’t ask for a sign. I don’t look for a feeling. I stand on your Word.” Have you got that? Beware of the devilish power of false religion.

## **II. Beware of the Devilish Pride of False Religion**

Now, here’s the second thing about the devil’s religion you need to know: not only beware of the devilish power of false religion, but beware of the devilish pride of false religion. All false religion is rooted in pride. Go now, look in verses 9 and 10, and see the pride of this man: *“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria”—now, watch this—“giving out that himself was some great [man].”* (Acts 8:9–10) Here is a man filled with pride. All false religion is rooted in pride and ego. Pride is what made the devil the devil to begin with, and it is the hallmark of all false religion. False religion is, at its core, self-centered. Salvation is Christ-centered. Philip came preaching Christ. Simon Magus was pointing men, not to Jesus, but pointing men to himself.

And, how much was he like his father, the devil? Remember how the devil became the devil? Pride. It was pride that made the devil the devil. Listen to Isaiah chapter 14, verses 12 through 14. Isaiah says, *“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”*—now, he’s talking about Lucifer and his final judgment, how he’s fallen—*“For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also [on] the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will*

*ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*” (Isaiah 14:12–14) Can you hear the pride there? Five times he says, “I will, I will, I will, I will, I will.” He flung this into the face of Jehovah. “Not thy will, but mine be done.” And, this was the temptation that Satan placed before Eve. What was it that made Eve sin against God? It was the same temptation. What did Satan say? *“I will be like the most High.”* (Isaiah 14:14) What did he tell Eve to do? “Take of this forbidden fruit; then you will be as God.” (Genesis 3:5) Do you see what it is? All false religion is rooted in pride.

Do you know why we have liberalism in theological seminaries? One reason: pride. Let me give you some scripture that teaches that. The Bible says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verses 3 through 5—Paul is talking about sound doctrine, and then he tells young Timothy this: *“If any man teach otherwise”—*that is, “other than what you have been taught”—*“If any man teach otherwise”—*talking about teachers now—*“and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, He is proud”—“He is proud.”* (1 Timothy 6:3–4) That’s the reason he does it. You see, a theological professor, if he just simply says, “The Bible says... And, this is what it says, and this is what I’m going to preach and teach,” well, where does he get his strokes out of that? I mean, he’s just saying what God says. Who says, “Oh, you’re so brilliant. Oh, you’re so wonderful”? All he’s doing is just giving out what God says.

When I first started working with Jim Whitmire... Jim and I have been working together since 1964; we’ve been working together. He knows what I think. He knows when I like the music and when I don’t. He knows when I want to sing another stanza. I just look at him, and he knows that. And, we’ve just been working together this long, serving the Lord together. And, I love him with all my heart. I’ll tell you, he’s the best minister of music in the whole wide world, this man right here, in my humble but accurate opinion. But, he said to me when we first started working together—he said, “I don’t understand you.” He said, “All the other pastors I’ve worked with, they quote this man, or try to prove by philosophy, or try to prove by rationalism, or try to prove by this or that.” He said, “You just preach the Bible”—“you just preach the Bible.” He said, “You just say, ‘That’s what God’s Word says.’ That’s it.” He said, “I don’t understand it.” You remember telling me that? And, I thought, “Well, what else is there to preach?”—“What else is there to preach?”

But, you see, people will take human ingenuity—and that’s the reason, I believe, that most books on theology are written from one theologian to another theologian, and down here below are the people trying to play...they’re playing keep-away with them. You see, *“If any man...consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ... He is proud, knowing nothing.”* (1 Timothy 6:3–4) That’s what the Word of God says. It is pride that is the root of all liberalism, modernism, false religion, New

Ageism—all of it. It is substituting “thus saith the mind of man” for “thus saith the Word of God.” It roots in human pride.

And, you beware of the devilish power of false religion. This man had devilish power. You beware of the devilish pride of false religion. And friend, if there’s pride in your heart, take it out. Ask God to remove it. You remove it. Now, God can do it, but you’d be a lot better, smarter, if you’d do it yourself. I always cringe when somebody prays, “O God, humble us.” I think, “No, Lord. I’d just rather do it myself. Please, I’d just rather do it myself.”

Do you know what the Bible says in the book of James? *“God resisteth the proud, [he] giveth grace [to] the humble.”* (James 4:6) Do you know what grace is? Grace is both the desire and the ability to do the will of God. That’s what grace is. It is both the desire and the ability to do the will of God. Do you know what God does if you’re proud? God not only does not help you, but actually, God brings Himself in battle array against you. You try to go this way; God stays this way. You try to go this way; God goes this way. You try to get around Him; He stops you. Why? He’s not going to help you along your way. *“[He resists] the proud.”* (James 4:6) You get over here, and you say, “O God, I can’t do it without you. I humble myself before you. God, I cast myself upon you.” God just lifts you up, and He carries you along. God gives both the desire and the power to do His will to those who are humble. Humble yourself in the sight of God. *“Resist the devil...he will flee from you.”* (James 4:7) Friend, I am telling you that all false religion is rooted in pride. There’s the devilish power of it. There is the devilish pride of false religion. Lay your pride in the dust.

### **III. Beware of the Devilish Pretense of False Religion**

Number three: Beware of the devilish pretense of false religion—not only its power and its pride, but its pretense. Now, false religion has a lot of pretense in it, and that’s the reason that you need to be very, very careful. Look, for example, in this passage, starting in verse 13: *“Then Simon himself believed also”—do you think he was saved? He was not—“Simon himself believed”—that’s what it says—“believed also: and when he was baptized”—man, he came forward and went to the counseling room, got instruction, went into the baptistery, and got baptized, if that’s the way they did it then, and he was baptized. And then, he joins up with the evangelistic tour—“...and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done”—verse 14—“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria...received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)”* (Acts 8:13–16)

Now, there’s a little theology here about how the baptism of the Holy Spirit began—

first, in Jerusalem; then, Judah and Samara; and then, the uttermost part of the earth. And, this was the Samaritan Pentecost, as it were, and it came about by the laying on of the apostles' hands, as the young church is in transition. And so, Simon is seeing these people. As the apostles would lay their hands on them, they would see them receive the Holy Ghost. And Simon, who loved this sort of a thing, was amazed at it. And so, verse 18: *"[So] when Simon saw that through [the] laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give [to] me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God [could] be purchased with money"*—now, watch this. Verse 21—*"Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."* (Acts 8:18–22) Now, that doesn't seem to fit with what it says up higher—that he was a believer. (Acts 8:13) You see, what kind of a believer was he? He was an unbelieving believer. Simon's faith was not in the Master; it was in miracles. He saw the miracles that Philip was doing. He saw the signs and wonders, and he said, "I want to get in on that." He was a miracle monger, but he was not saved.

Now, learn this: all belief is not saving belief—all belief is not saving belief. Let me give you a classic example of this. It's in John chapter 2. In John chapter 2, Jesus came doing miracles. He turned water into wine. Remember that? Well, you don't remember it; you weren't there—you remember reading about it. You remember reading about that. He turned water into wine. And, when Jesus did these miracles, then He got a group, an entourage, a bunch of groupies that were following Him. Oh, they wanted to be on His team. And, I begin in John chapter 2, verse 23: *"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day"*—now, watch this—*"many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did"*—*"[they] believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."* (John 2:23) All right, question: Were they saved? "Well," you say, "the Bible says, 'Believe on Jesus, and you'll be saved,' (Acts 16:31) and they believed; they must be saved." But, continue to read. The next verse says—*"But Jesus did not commit himself unto them"*—and the word "commit Himself" in the Greek language is the same word: "He did not believe in them." They believed in Him. They committed to Him, but He didn't commit to them. Well, why didn't He? For the Bible says in the next verse—*"But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men"*—you can't fool Jesus—*"And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."* (John 2:23–25) The inference is so clear: they were following Jesus for the miracles. They believed in Him, but it was not a saving faith; it was a faith in miracles, not in Jesus. They did not love Him for who He was; they simply loved Him for what He did. And, they had an outward faith, but they did not have an

inward faith. And, they were following Jesus for what they could get out of it, just like Simon Magus, following Jesus when he saw these miracles.

Listen. “Boy,” he said, “these guys are better than I am. I don’t know what they’ve got, but I want to get on this. I want to get on this team. I want to be a part of this.” But, Peter said, “Your heart’s not right with God. You’re full of bitterness and gall.” (Acts 8:22–23) What he wanted to do—he wanted to merchandise miracles. He gave them some money. He said, “Look, this is great! Here’s some money. Teach me how you do this. I want to do this.” (Acts 8:18–19) He was in it for what he could get out of it. He didn’t want to serve God; he wanted to use God. That’s false religion. I believe that the hottest part of hell is reserved for people who merchandise miracles. And, these people, and some of these so-called “healing crusades” and other things, they make merchandise of people. It is absolutely pathetic. But, there are people who follow people just like they followed Simon Magus.

¶ Now, by the way, one time... You know the name P. T. Barnum? He’s the guy that says, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” P. T. Barnum was a showman, and he was one of the progenitors of the Barnum & Bailey Circuses. And, he heard of Spurgeon. Spurgeon was an incredible pastor-preacher—prodigious intellect, great ability to preach. And, Spurgeon had just taken England by storm. P. T. Barnum, who lived in America, read about Spurgeon. He said, “Boy, if I could get Spurgeon over here, I could draw all kinds of crowds. We could make a lot of money.” So, he wrote Spurgeon a letter, and he said to Spurgeon, “Would you come to America? And, I’ll give you a contract and I will make you a wealthy man if you will come to America and let me sponsor you.” What do you think old Spurgeon did? Spurgeon sent P. T. Barnum back a wire, but he didn’t answer it in his own words; he just quoted scripture. And, he quoted the scripture that is before you right here, and it’s in verse 20. He said, “*Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God [could] be purchased with money.*” (Acts 8:20) That’s the way Spurgeon wrote old P. T. Barnum. That’s it! Well, what he’s really saying is, “You go to hell, and take your money with you. You can’t buy the power of God.”¶

This is what Simon was trying to do. He is full of pretense. He doesn’t have real faith. What is the difference between this kind of false faith that Simon had and true faith?

#### **A. Faith Is Authenticated By Its Object**

Well, true faith, number one, is in the right object; it is validated by its object. Never put faith in faith. Faith in faith is only positive thinking. And, when you analyze that, it’s really just faith in yourself. The Bible says in Mark 11, verse 22: “*Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.*” (Mark 11:22) Now, your faith has to be, not in miracles, but in

the God of miracles. Friend, it is not faith that moves mountains; it is God that moves mountains. You put your faith in God.

### **B. Faith Is Authenticated By Its Objective**

Now, faith is authenticated by its object, and faith is authenticated by its objective. What faith does—real faith does not use God; it puts one's self at God's disposal. It does not put God at our command so we say, "Look, I can do this, and I can do that," but it puts us at God's command. Do you have genuine faith? I hope you do, because if not, you'll meet Simon Magus one day in hell unless you gain genuine faith.

## **IV. Beware of the Poison of False Religion**

Now, here's the final thing: beware not only of the power of false religion; beware not only of the pretense of this false religion and the pride of this false religion; but also, beware of the poison of it—the poison of it. Look, if you will, finally, here in verses 23 through 25, and here's what Peter said to Simon: *"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and...the bond of iniquity."* (Acts 8:23) Now, that's the poison of it. The word *gall* here may be translated "poison"—"you're poisoned." False religion brings two things: bitterness and bondage. Do you have that? All false religion, the devil's religion, always, always, always brings bitterness and bondage. That's the reason you have so many religious wars. Do you know the most bitter people on the face of this earth are religious people without Jesus? They're bitter. They're mean. Religion can be hateful and spiteful. That's the reason why people don't need religion; they need to turn from religion to Jesus Christ. And, I'll tell you what it does: it poisons them on the inside. People who get into false religion, do you know where they end up, ultimately? They end up unsatisfied. They end up disillusioned. They end up unfulfilled, and they end up uncontrolled because their false religion can never satisfy them; it can never meet their deepest need. What they're longing for they cannot find; and so, they get into all kinds of bitterness and all kinds of bondage.

You know, I've been around churches long enough to know that there are some people in churches who are bitter and they're in bondage, and you know the problem? They've never been saved. I met a deacon this morning in the visitor's reception. He said, "Pray for us at our church." He said, "I'm the chairman of the deacons." He said, "Our church is in some awful trouble. We're having trouble in our church." Why do you have trouble in the church? People in bitterness and bondage. It's the poison of false religion. People like Simon. Maybe they've been baptized; they're members of the church, but they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, there was no genuine repentance in Simon's heart. He didn't really get saved because he didn't repent. And, Jesus said, *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3,5) And so, Peter, when he senses what is right, he says, *"Repent*

*therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, [that] perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee*” (Acts 8:22); that is, “You just simply need to get saved.”

## Conclusion

Now, what I’ve talked to you about today is religion that is false, and I’m telling you that every time God moves in great power, the devil will counterattack, not, primarily, by denying the gospel, but by distorting the gospel, even as we preached this morning. Now, don’t think because a man does miracles that God is with him. Beware of the devilish power of false religion. Don’t think because everybody’s falling at a man’s feet that God is with him. Beware of the devilish pride of false religion. Don’t think because a man has walked down an aisle, professed faith in Christ, and been baptized that God is with him. Beware of the devilish pretense of false religion. And, don’t ever think for one moment that false religion, the devil’s religion, can get into a church or a community or any place else without causing bitterness and bondage. It is gall. It is bitterness. It is bondage.

Now, you know the truth because I’ve been preaching to you from the Word of God. And, I want to tell you this, dear friend: the devil only counterfeits that which is real, and that which is real is this: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He left heaven; came to this earth; took my sin, your sin, and our sin upon Himself; carried our sin to the cross, suffered, bled, and died for our sins; paid the full sin debt. And, the Bible teaches that if we will repent of our sin and trust Jesus, He will save us. And then, He’ll come into us and begin to work in our hearts and one day take us home to heaven.

¶ A woman was in her house. A personal worker, a soul winner, knocked on the front door. She came to the door, and he kindly introduced himself to her. And, he said to her, “Madam, may I ask you a question?” She said, “Why, yes.” He said, “Madam, do you know God?” She didn’t know how to answer. She got a little flustered. She said, “Pardon me?” He said, “Do you know God?” She got so flustered she just slammed the door and went back into the house. When her husband came home that night, he looked at her, and she was obviously distraught, nervous. He said, “What is wrong with you?” She said, “Well, there was a man that came to our house. He knocked on the door, and he asked me a question. I didn’t know how to answer the question. It frustrated me. It...it...” “Well, what did he ask you?” “He asked me if I knew God.” “Well,” he said, “he had no business asking you that.” “But husband, he did, and I didn’t know what to say.” “Well,” he said, “why didn’t you tell him that we’re members of the finest, biggest church in town?” She said, “He didn’t ask me that. He asked me if I knew God.” “Well,” he said, “why didn’t you tell him that we’re good people, that we’re honest and upright, that we’re some of the finest citizens in this community?” She said, “Husband, he didn’t ask me that. He asked me if I knew God. I wish I could go find him

and apologize to him for shutting the door in his face.”<sup>†</sup>

I want to ask you a question in all politeness but sincerity: Do you know God? I'm not asking, are you a member of Bellevue? I'm not asking, are you a nice person? Do you know God?

Would you bow your heads in prayer? And, if you could not say, “Yes, praise God—hallelujah!—I do know God,” I want to lead you in a prayer tonight. And, right now, tonight, in this building, we can get it settled. Right where you are you can receive Jesus. You don't ask for a sign. You don't need an angel to tell you you're saved. You don't need fire from heaven. You have the Word of God. *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”* (John 5:24)

Pray this prayer: “Dear God, dear God, I need you, and I want you. I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you right now—right now, this moment, like a little child, with all of my heart. I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised you from the dead. I believe that you died to save me, rose to save me, are willing to save me, and will save me if I trust you. I do trust you—I do; I do right now. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I stand on your Word. I receive you with all of my heart as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus.”

Did you pray that prayer? Did you? Did you? Were you sincere? Then begin now to thank Him. Pray like this: “Thank you for saving me, Jesus. I don't deserve it, but I receive it by faith like a little child. You're now my Lord, my Savior, my Master, my God, and my Friend. And, Lord Jesus, because you died for me, I will live for you, and I will make this public tonight if you will give me the strength. In your name I pray. Amen.”<sup>†</sup>

# Don't Go to Heaven Alone

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** May 2, 1976

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 8:26–35

*“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”*

ACTS 8:35

## Outline

Introduction

- I. God Uses Human Instrumentality
  - A. The Quality of Availability
  - B. The Quality of Expendability
  - C. The Quality of Adaptability
- II. A Threefold Experiment
  - A. Be Inclined to the Calls of the Spirit
    - 1. The Opportunities of the Spirit Are Often Unknown
    - 2. The Opportunities of God Are Often Unexplained
    - 3. The Opportunities of God Are Often Unusual
  - B. Be Insistent for the Cause of the Spirit
  - C. Be Instant to the Commands of the Spirit

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles please, and turn, if you will, to Acts chapter 8. We're preaching through the Book of Acts, "The Church Triumphant," and we want to speak to you on this subject: "Don't Go to Heaven Alone." Take somebody with you. I want to talk to you about how to win men, women, boys, and girls to Jesus Christ.

One of the grandest stories of evangelism is found in the eighth chapter of the Book of Acts, beginning in verse 26—Acts 8, verse 26: *“And an angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went; and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Isaiah, the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran there to him, and heard him read the prophet, Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he*

*said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he besought Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:26–35).*

Now you will remember last week that we talked about God’s plan to reach all men of all races through all ages, and we talked to you about chapters 8, 9, and 10. And we said, in chapter 8, there was the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch; and, in Acts chapter 9, there was the story of the conversion of Saul; and, in Acts chapter 10, there was the story of the conversion of Cornelius. And these three men—the man from Ethiopia, representing the descendants of Ham; the man from the Middle East, representing the descendants of Shem; and the man from Italy—the Italian, Cornelius—representing the descendants of Japheth—represent all of the strains of the Earth, all of the races of the Earth; and it shows how God’s plan of getting the gospel out to all people was being fulfilled there by that early church.

## **I. God Uses Human Instrumentality**

Now I want us to study, in particular, one of these conversions, this morning; and, we’re going to study the one I read about: the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Now you see, when God gets ready to save somebody, He always uses human instrumentality. Let me say that: God always uses human instrumentality. God never reaches out of Heaven and simply convicts, and converts, and saves a person without human instrumentality being involved somehow. That is the plan of God.

Did you know that we have an ability and a joy that angels don’t have? That’s to win souls. Did you know that? Did you know that angels can’t do what we can do? And did you know that winning a soul is something that we can do now that we’ll not be able to do when we get to Heaven? There’s something, there’s a joy that Earth has that Heaven knows nothing about, and that’s the winning of souls. And my, how you ought to be interested—not only in going to Heaven, but taking somebody with you!

### **A. The Quality of Availability**

Now notice that God used three instrumentalities to win these three men. When God wanted to win that Ethiopian eunuch, He used a man named Philip. We’re going to study him a little bit more, in just a moment. But He used Philip. Now Philip was in a great revival in the city of Samaria, and God called Philip out of the city of Samaria and

said, “Philip, I want you to go out into the desert, out into the wilderness; I’ve got an assignment for you.” And do you know what? Philip went. And do you know what that quality was that Philip had that I need and that you need? It’s the quality of availability. May I tell you, if you want to be a soul winner, what the best ability is? It is availability. Philip was ready.

### **B. The Quality of Expendability**

And then, after God had won the Ethiopian eunuch, then God got another soul winner to win Saul. Now remember, God had already spoken to Saul, and knocked him off his horse, and he was blinded, and he had a confrontation with the Lord; but it was not complete, because God uses human instrumentality.

And we’re not going to study it, but I just want to tell you about it. God chose a man named Ananias—just an obscure layman—and said to Ananias, “Ananias, I have a job for you.” “Yes Sir, Lord, what do You want me to do?” “I want you to go to Damascus; there’s a man named Saul. He’s in the house of Simon the tanner; he’s praying. I want you go to the house of Simon. I want you to go and witness to him, that he might receive his sight, be filled with the Holy Spirit,” and so forth. And Ananias said, “Wait a minute, I want to check it out. Let me make sure I’ve got a prospect card right here. Is this the same Saul that’s been putting Christians to death? Is that the guy?” “Yep.” “Who’s going with me?” “Nobody.” “We’re supposed to go out two by two, Dr. Rogers said.” “No, look, you’re going by yourself.” “You mean, I’m going to see this guy Saul, that fellow who’s been putting Christians to death, the one who stood there when Stephen was stoned?” “That’s right. Going by yourself—that’s right.” “All right, Lord, You say so; here I go.”

Do you know what that quality is? That, dear friend, is expendability—not availability, but expendability. And if you ever want to be a soul winner, not only are you going to have to have availability like Philip had, but you’re going to have to have expendability like Ananias had. Are you willing to spend and be spent? Are you willing, no matter if it costs blood, sweat, and tears, to be used of the Lord to win souls? If so, you might become a soul winner. Do you know too many of us are “chicken” when it comes to witnessing? Listen. It’s true—it’s true. We need more of the spirit of the French Foreign Legion. Do you know what their motto is? “If I stumble, pick me up; if I falter, push me on; if I retreat, shoot me.” Now that’s what we ought to have in God’s Invasion Army; that’s the spirit we ought to have here. That is, the spirit of expendability.

### **C. The Quality of Adaptability**

And then, the third soul winner was a man named Simon Peter, and God used Simon Peter to go down and talk to old Cornelius. Now Cornelius was a good man. He was an Italian. He was an army officer, a centurion over the Italian band, and so forth.

And he was ready to be won, and the Lord wasn't having all that much trouble with Cornelius. You know who the Lord was having trouble with? The soul winner Peter. Listen. Let me tell you something, friend: Do you know where the real fault is? You're looking at it, right here. Did you know there are thousands of people in the city of Memphis who could be won, if God could get us right?

Did you know that? And God had more trouble with the soul winner than He had with the lost man who needed to be saved. And here's the problem: Peter was a Jew, and Cornelius was a Gentile; and, that Jew didn't want to have anything to do with that Gentile. And God had to give Peter a vision. Do you remember when God let down a sheet out of Heaven, and it was filled with all kind of animals? Some of them Peter called *unclean*, and God said to Peter, "Arise, slay and eat." And Peter said, "Not so, I've never eaten anything that's unclean." And God said, "Peter, what I've called clean, don't let any man call unclean." God was just teaching him that He was getting him ready, as a Jew, to witness to a Gentile; and finally, Peter went and witnessed to Cornelius, and Cornelius was saved.

Now you want me to tell you what quality I call that? That is the quality of adaptability. He was willing to change in order that he might be used. Are you willing to change in order that you might be used? Or, had you rather hold to your crusty tradition? Jesus had more trouble with the traditional crowd than anybody else. They were trying to put new wine in old wineskins, and Jesus said it can't be done. Now there are some things that never change—things like the gospel, the deity of Christ, the Word of God. But friend, traditions come and go; and, if you would be used of the Lord, in this day and this dynamic age in which we live, there are three qualities that are described in these three soul winners in these three chapters that every person that wants to be used of God must have. The first is availability; the second is expendability; the third is adaptability. Some folks don't want to adapt.

A fellow has written a book called *The Seven Last Words of a Dying Church*. You know what they are? "We never did it this way before." The seven last words of a dying church: "We never did it this way before." Friend, there's a world out yonder, and the Bible says we are to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit to every creature. And the job of Bellevue Baptist Church is not done until every soul on the face of God's green Earth has heard the message that Jesus saves. And if we were available, if we were expendable, if we were adaptable, we might get the job done in the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Now I want to move just to the first of those abilities—availability; and I want us think about that. I just want us to concentrate on the one, this morning, talking about winning someone to Jesus Christ. And I would like for us to look at Philip, who, incidentally, was a deacon. I tell our deacons, "Brother, you're not fit to deacon if you're not willing to

witness.” Amen? Brother, deacons are not a bunch of guys who come and sit in some room and say “aye” and “no” when the vote is taken. *Deacons are to be men filled with the Holy Spirit who can witness; and you ought to hold a handkerchief up, and drop it, and say “preach,” and a deacon ought to be on the second point before it hits the ground.* Brother, he ought to be full of the Holy Spirit of God and ready to witness.

Philip was a deacon, but he was a kind of deacon who was holding a revival meeting. And there was a tremendous, glorious revival going on in Samaria. And God chose Philip to go out into the desert and to witness to one man, an Ethiopian eunuch. So I want you to notice how Philip and the Holy Spirit cooperated together to get the gospel to this man. Now listen. The ministry of the Holy Spirit of God is primarily a ministry of cooperation. He will not do it without you. You cannot do it without Him. He will not do it without you; you cannot do it without Him. Now notice it is His ability and your availability. It is His power; it is your personality. It is His work, but it is your witness. That’s God’s plan—not God doing it all, not you doing it all, but God doing it through you. As we’ve said before, in a Christian, Christ lives again. The Church is the Body of Christ. And the Lord has said, *“Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me”* (Acts 1:8).

What do you think would happen if all of the members of this church were Spirit-filled witnesses? Just look around. What do you think would happen if all the members of all the churches were Spirit-filled witnesses in this city? See, we’re not doing what our Lord has taught us to do. Now being a witness, being used of the Lord to bring people to Jesus Christ, is a ministry of learning to cooperate with the Holy Spirit of God.

## **II. A Threefold Experiment**

Now there are three things I want you to try in a little experiment. I’m going to give them to you very carefully, in a moment, so you can write them down. There are three things I would like for you to write down and say, “By the grace of God, this week, I’m going to do these three things.” And I’d like for you to tell me at the end of this week what God has done through you—as you meet me in the halls, or wherever it is—what God has done through you, as you have tried these three things. I want you to experiment with these three things in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, because I believe if you do these three things, make these three commitments this morning, and make them anew every morning this week, God is going to dramatically change your life.

### **A. Be Inclined to the Calls of the Spirit**

Number one: Be inclined to the calls of the Spirit. Notice chapter 8 and verse 26: *“And an angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”* (Acts 8:26). And

then, notice in verse 29: *“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”* (Acts 8:29). Now both verse 26 and verse 29 show us that Philip had ears to hear the Word of the Lord. You see, there was a tremendous revival, as we’ve said before, going on in Samaria, and Philip was the “Billy Graham” of that revival. And God said to Philip, “Now I want you to leave right in the middle, when everything is just popping, snapping, crackling. I want you to leave, and I want you to go out into the boondocks. I want you to go out in the desert.” And God doesn’t even tell him why. God just simply tells him to go. And he goes down into the desert. It didn’t seem reasonable. It didn’t seem logical; and yet, he went, because he was inclined to the calls of the Spirit. That is, he had a heart tender enough, perceptive enough, to hear what God wanted him to do.

### **1. The Opportunities of the Spirit Are Often Unknown**

Let me give you three reasons why you must be inclined to the calls of the Spirit. The opportunities of the Spirit are often unknown. You see, God had a great plan. Do you know who this Ethiopian eunuch was? He was a muckety-muck in the government down in Ethiopia. He was the kind of a guy that was so full of influence that, if you could get him saved, he would be a spiritual ramrod to bring the gospel to all North Africa; and according to tradition, he did. God knew what He was doing. God had a certain plan. God had a certain logistic. Philip didn’t know anything about it, but God knew something about it. You see, the ways of God are often unknown. You don’t know the future. You do not know what a marvelous opportunity God may have on your calendar written down for you tomorrow—I mean, something that might blow your mind, if you were sensitive enough to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

### **2. The Opportunities of God Are Often Unexplained**

See, you need to be inclined to the calls of the Spirit, number one, because the opportunities of God are often unknown. And secondly, let me say this: The calls of God are often unexplained. God didn’t tell Philip why. He didn’t say, “Philip, there’s an Ethiopian down there that I want you to witness to. There’s a big shot in the government that I want you to witness to.” He just said, “Arise and go”; and he got up and went. Would you do that? Do you know so many of us say, “Why, Lord?” And when you ask “Why, Lord?” immediately, you’ve started to disobey in spirit. You don’t need to say, “Lord, show me what You want me to do, and I’ll do it.” You just say, “God, I’ll do it now.” Whatever it is, you say, “If You explain it, fine; if You don’t explain it, fine. But God, I’m going to do it.”

Now make sure this isn’t something you’ve hatched up, something you’ve cooked up by autosuggestion and so forth, and you run out ahead of God. It’s just as bad to run ahead of God as it is to run behind God. But when you hear God speak and when you’re close enough to God to hear God speak, you need to obey what God tells you to

do, whether He explains it or not, because the blessings of God are often unknown, and they're often unexplained. The Bible says, "Abraham went out not knowing where he went." Abraham traveled under sealed orders. Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to travel under sealed orders?

### **3. The Opportunities of God Are Often Unusual**

Let me tell you, thirdly, not only are the opportunities of God often unknown and often unexplained, but they are often unusual. I mean, God doesn't work just exactly the way we think God ought to work. God sometimes works in an unusual way. Sometimes, folks stand up, and make an announcement, and say, "Next Sunday, we'll have services as usual." Wouldn't it be wonderful if somebody said, "We'll have services as unusual?"

You know, wherever Paul went, you couldn't write down and say, "At such and such a time, they'll be singing the doxology." You know, we talk about other people having a ritual. We've got one of our own—little traditions we go through, and you can almost set your clock by them. Now there's nothing really wrong with that to a point, until we get frozen into those things where we think that's the way it has to happen. Well, God works sometimes in this place today, and we just started having revival, and folks got saved, and you had to miss dinner? As a matter of fact, we didn't even get time to have church training, and we didn't preach tonight; we went on to about two this morning. Would you be willing for that? You say, "I've got things to do." Yeah? See, that's where your priorities are. We are not willing for God to do the unusual. As long as God does it according to our timetable: "Lord, it's getting close to twelve o'clock; hurry up." "The clock chimed twelve; the church gave up her dead."

Now listen. The Holy Spirit is sovereign; the Holy Spirit can do what He will. And here was a man who was inclined to the calls of the Spirit, so that the Holy Spirit enabled him to do the unknown, the unexplained, and the unusual. And he did it. Would you make up your mind, by the grace of God today, that your heart would be so warm and so sensitive, that you would be so akin to the Holy Spirit, that you would be able to hear the voice of the Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit doesn't shout like I do. He's a still small voice. And the reason that we don't hear is not that God's not speaking, friend; we're just not listening. We are so interested in the mundane, the secular, our plans, our ways, our schedules that we fail to listen to Him.

#### **B. Be Insistent for the Cause of the Spirit**

The first thing I want you to say this week, all week, is, "I will be inclined to the calls of the Spirit." Secondly, not only was Philip inclined to the call of the Spirit; he was also insistent for the cause of the Spirit.

Notice in verse 35: "*Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus*" (Acts 8:35). Did you know that the Holy Spirit is very

single-minded? Did you know that the Holy Spirit has but one cause? Do you want to know what the cause of the Holy Spirit is? Look in John chapter 15 for a moment. Just keep one finger there, in Acts chapter 8, and turn to John 15, and look in verse 26. Jesus is prophesying the coming of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus said, *“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me”*—now, this is the cause of the Spirit—*“he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness”* (John 15:26–27). Now see His ability and my availability. *“He shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness”* (John 15:27). His ability; my availability—this is the cause of the Spirit. He’s very single-minded. He’s not interested in two things, three things, four things, five things, but one thing—and that is the glory of Jesus Christ. Look in chapter 16 and verse 14. Jesus, speaking of the Holy Spirit, said, *“He shall glorify me”* (John 16:14). All right, what is the cause of the Spirit? *“He shall testify of me,”* Jesus said. *“He shall glorify me.”*

You know, there are some folks who get in a movement, and they call it by the Holy Spirit; they say, “We’re the Spirit this,” or, “We’re the Spirit that,” or, “The Spirit-led so and so, and so and so.” Friend, you beware of any movement that has the Holy Spirit for a figurehead. You understand what I am saying? Did you hear what I said? You beware of any movement that has the Holy Spirit for a figurehead. Jesus said, “He shall not speak of Himself. He shall glorify Me” (John 16:14). And the mark that a person is filled with the Spirit is not that he’s always talking about the fact that he’s filled with the Spirit. The mark that a man is filled with the Spirit is that he’s always talking about Jesus Christ. The mark that a church is filled with the Holy Spirit is it sings about Jesus; it preaches about Jesus; it testifies about Jesus; it loves Jesus.

Would you like to be insistent to the cause of the Spirit? Would you say, “Not only would I be inclined to the cause of the Spirit, but I would be for one week; I will bring my business, I will bring my mind, I will bring my talents, I will bring my images into focus to one thing: that Jesus Christ will be glorified for a week. Jesus will be glorified. I will link my life with the cause of the Spirit. I will be insistent about it. I will say, ‘This one thing I do; live or die, sink or swim, Jesus will be glorified?’” When you get that way, friend, you’re going to start to be used. Have you wondered why it is that some people win more souls than others? Do you think it’s because they are lucky and have more opportunity? “Oh, look, they’re lucky! Look how lucky Philip was! He got there when an Ethiopian was ready to be saved; wasn’t he lucky!” Do you think he was lucky? No, he wasn’t lucky. God knew He had a man He could depend upon.

See, let me tell you how the Lord works. Are you listening? Here’s the way the Lord works: First of all, the Lord finds Him a lost sinner out there with a receptive heart, and He starts bombarding that sinner. He starts causing events to take place in his life: He has a near automobile accident; he has a sorrow; he has a blessing; he sees a beautiful

sunset; he hears a song. The Holy Spirit is just the agent. He's sitting at master controls, just working all of these things, until that man suddenly has a heart that is inclined, a heart that is ready.

That's what happened to this Ethiopian eunuch. He had been to Jerusalem to worship; he had been to the most religious city on the face of the Earth and had come away empty, because the wells of religions had run dry. And he hadn't been satisfied, and he was hungry. The Lord said, "He's just ripe. He's ripe for the picking," and the Holy Spirit had been working on him. And now when the Holy Spirit sees he's just ripe, He looks around for a man whose heart is ready, a man who's inclined to the calls of the Spirit, and who's insistent for the cause of the Spirit, and He gets that man and that lost man together, and there's a salvation that takes place. That's not luck, friend; that's the Holy Spirit who engineers it.

You wonder why some folks are used and you're not used, and pray, "Oh, God, use me." *You get yourself usable, and God will wear you out.* God will wear you out. Oh, the eyes of the Lord are searching to and fro in the Earth trying to find men, women, boys, and girls that He can use.

Don't you know that all over the city of Memphis there will be people tomorrow whose hearts are hungry, who want to know Jesus? Don't you high school kids know that, when you go to high school tomorrow, there will be some kids there who went to church today, and they didn't find a thing but straw and bones, scorpions and stones, and their hearts are hungry? They went to church; they found religion, but they didn't find Jesus. And if you're praying God the Holy Spirit is going to get you and that lost sinner together, you kids ought to be winning kids to Jesus Christ everyday in high schools. And you can't keep Christianity out of the schools, unless you can keep Christians out. Amen?

You ought to be sharing the message of Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit is preparing somebody in your office; and God the Holy Spirit is preparing somebody there, where you work; and God the Holy Spirit wants to find somebody that He can use, somebody who will be insistent to the cause of the Spirit. That's the way God does it. Oh, it's time we got excited, folks, about winning people to Jesus Christ!

It's amazing to me what gets folks all excited. A Russian came to the United States during the football season, and they took him to a great bowl game. And afterward, they asked him what he thought about it. Do you know what this godless atheist said? He said, "I've never seen so much first-rate enthusiasm for such a second-rate cause."

What's the most important thing? I say, what's it all about? Why did Jesus Christ hang naked on a cross in agony and blood? The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost. Friend, getting souls saved is what's it's all about. The Bible says, "*He that winneth souls is wise*" (Proverbs 11:30). You've got members in your

family that are lost. One day, the clods will fall on that casket, and every clod will say, “Lost, lost, lost.” You’ll say, “My God, why didn’t I witness?” I want to tell you, friend, that it’s time we got excited about what excites God, and that’s bringing people to Jesus Christ. Insistent to the cause of the Spirit. Why don’t you try this week and say, “I’ll make my life a life of one thing; this one thing I do.”

### C. **Be Instant to the Commands of the Spirit**

And the third and final thing: Not only was he inclined to the calls of the Spirit and insistent for the cause of the Spirit, but he was instant to the commands of the Spirit. Notice in chapter 8, verse 29. Look at it again—Acts chapter 8 and verse 29: *“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran there to him...”* (Acts 8:29–30). Ran; didn’t walk, didn’t amble, didn’t perambulate, didn’t crawl. He ran. Why? Friend, that chariot was moving on. You see, look, there was a split-second there, when God wanted instant obedience. Had he waited, the chariot would have been gone. He was instant to the commands of the Spirit. When the Spirit said “Go,” he went.

A little boy got a toy car for Christmas, and was playing with it on the rug, and finally it stopped working. And his daddy said, “Son, what’s wrong with it?” He said, “Daddy, I think the go is broken.” I think that’s what’s wrong with three-fourths of our church members. Jesus said, “Go—go join thyself to this chariot.” You see, we don’t know how many days, how many hours, how many weeks, how many months we have left. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is preparing somebody; and, if you’re sensitive enough, you can seize upon that golden opportunity.

I have a feeling that had Philip been the kind of a Baptist that some of us are, he would have argued with the Lord. He would have said, “Well, I can’t go. Look, he’s a rich man; I’m a poor man. I’m just a preacher. There he is in his big gold Cadillac chariot. I can’t go up there.” But riches didn’t keep him from going. Or, he might have said, “He’s of a different race than I am,” and he was; but race didn’t keep him from going. Or, he might have said, “Look, he’s reading; I don’t want to disturb him.” He was reading. Have you ever seen how the Holy Spirit engineered it? The minute he got to that verse that talked about Jesus, God said, “Now get him; get him right now. That’s the time; stick him, right now.”

You see, God was watching over that thing; God had it done just right. Suppose Philip had waited, had hesitated? You see, not only was the time late; the time was ripe. Say, wouldn’t you like to be so tuned up, wouldn’t you like to be so right with God, that you could win souls like that? That God is so moving in your heart, and in your life, and God is so moving in their life, that at the right moment rather than just blundering, you could be led of the Spirit, winning people to Jesus Christ? Oh, how many golden

opportunities we might let pass by!

*Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet;  
Our God is marching on (Howe, Julia W.).*

We'd better be ready to march with Him.

## **Conclusion**

So three things I want you to do this week: be inclined to the calls of the Spirit; be insistent to the cause of the Spirit; be instant to the command of the Spirit. And don't go to Heaven alone; take somebody with you. Let's bow in prayer.

# Wherever He Leads

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** March 8, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 8:26–37

*“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.”*

ACTS 8:26

## Outline

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- I. You Must Perceive the Call of God
  - A. God’s Ways Are Often Unknown
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- II. You Must Preach the Christ of God
  - A. He Showed This Man That He Was a Sinner
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- III. You Must Practice the Commands of God

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles, please, and turn this morning to the Book of Acts, the eighth chapter. We’re making our way through this book under the title, “That Old-Time Religion.” Now in order to face the future, we need to understand the past. If we want to understand what the Church ought to do in the twentieth century, then let’s find out what it was in the first century.

When I was a young man in high school, I felt God moving in my heart. I thought, perhaps, that the Lord wanted me to preach the gospel. I cannot tell you how that germ thought got, first of all, into my heart and into my mind. As a matter of fact, if there would be anything that I did not consider myself to be, it would be a preacher or any kind of a public speaker. As a matter of fact, the thought terrified me of standing up in front of people and speaking. Well, yet, the Lord put that germ thought into my heart and into my mind. And at first, it was there as a question. I thought, “Lord, do you want me to preach?” And then, after a few months, it was more than a question—it was a thought: “Lord, I think that you want me to preach.” And then, after it became more of a thought, it became a conviction, and I began to pray: “Lord, if you don’t want me to preach, then

you'd better let me know." And then, it finally became a decision.

I was at Ridgecrest, North Carolina; we were having our Baptist assembly there, and I was there in the summertime, and they were singing a song during the invitation: "Wherever He leads, I'll go." And God touched my heart, and said, "Adrian, I want you to preach My gospel; it's settled." And I stepped out to that invitation, and said, openly and publicly, what I knew was true in my heart and in my life that God had laid His hand upon me, and He wanted me to preach His gospel. And as a high school boy, I said to my Lord—I said it then, and I meant it; I meant it then, and I mean it now—"Wherever He leads, I will go."

Now I want to speak to you on the same subject today, and that's the title of our message today: "Wherever He Leads." But I don't want just Adrian to have said it. I want everybody here to say it and mean it: "Wherever He leads, I'll go." Now He may not lead you across the ocean. He may not lead you to the pulpit. But He will lead you. And He has a plan for you.

Now I could ask, today, how many missionaries are here, and I don't want you to lift hands, because it might embarrass you, after I tell you what I'm going to say next. Because, I want to say that every one of us who is saved is a missionary. To say *missionary* and to say *Christian* is to say the same thing. Now a missionary is somebody who has been saved from sin. Now some of us are sent across the ocean, and some of us are sent next door, but if we are saved, then we are sent, and we need to say, "Wherever He leads, I'll go." Now I want to give you this morning, as we study God's Word, something to encourage your heart—something to say and to mean it—not to be afraid to say it. And by the way, if there was ever a time when you ought to say it, ladies and gentlemen, it is now.

I spoke recently with the sheriff of our county. He told me of the drug epidemic here in Shelby County. I did some more research. I found out that, this year, 80 billion dollars will be spent on illegal drugs. Do you know how much a billion dollars is? Can you imagine what will happen with 80 billion dollars in illegal drugs? I found out, also, that one out of every four teenage girls will become pregnant, if statistics hold. That's a frightening thing—a statistic that we've heard, and perhaps we have become almost calloused to it. One-and-a-half million little babies will be slaughtered, murdered in their mother's womb. And how it ought to break our hearts! Everett Koop, who is the Surgeon General of the United States, said, "Unless something is done by the turn of the century, 100 million people will die of AIDS"—100 million by the turn of the century, which is not far away.

These are desperate days. These are desperate days. The problem is that the times are desperate, but God's saints are not. We sit back, and we feel like, if we come to church on Sunday morning, then we've done God a favor: "O God, what a good boy am

!! I went to church on Sunday morning. I even put something in the offering plate.” Now I want, by the time we finish this message, for you to have said it and meant it: “Wherever He leads, I’ll go. Whatever He commands me, I will say.”

Now I want you to begin to read here with me, please, in Acts chapter 8 and verse 26: “*And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip...*”—now, if you will remember, Philip was a deacon, one of those first seven deacons chosen back there in Acts chapter 6, a man full of wisdom and the Holy Ghost. And he wasn’t an ordained minister, in any sense of the word. He was what we would call a missionary, in the strictest sense of the word—“*The angel of Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet*” (Acts 8:26–28). Now *Esaias* is just the way of saying “Isaiah, the prophet.”

## I. You Must Perceive the Call of God

Now the very first thing that I want to say is this: If you would be used of God, if you would say, “Wherever He leads, I’ll go,” number one, you must perceive the call of God—you must perceive the call of God. Now here in verse 26, the angel of the Lord came and spoke to Philip, and said, “Philip, this is what I want you to do. I want to be very frank with you.”

God’s never spoken to me by an angel, that I know of. Now sometimes, maybe we’ve met angels, and we didn’t know that they were angels, because the Bible speaks of “*angels unawares*” (Hebrews 13:2). I mean, there are people who may be God’s angels, and we didn’t know that they were angels; but, God has spoken to my heart, and God will speak to your heart. God has many ways to speak, but God has a plan for you, and God will use you, if you’ll get useable.

Some people say, “Why doesn’t God use me?” Well, let me tell you something, folks: It may be that you’re not useable. God *never leaves a* surrendered vessel unfilled. *And God never leaves a* filled *vessel* unused. You surrender yourself, and He’ll fill you with the Holy Spirit. I mean, He will—He will. Now even God can’t fill that which is already filled. I mean, you’ve got to empty out that self, that ambition, that pride, and that sin, and say, “Lord, fill me,” and God will fill you. And what God fills, He uses.

Now God will use you. God has a plan for you, just as He had a plan for Philip, so long ago. And Philip was an ordinary person that God used in an extraordinary way. And let me say something about the working of God, and how God does that.

## A. **God's Ways Are Often Unknown**

First of all, God's ways are often unknown. Philip had no way of knowing that he was going to be used of God to win, as we're going to see in a moment, a very important and strategic man. Philip was getting ready to witness to one of the most influential men in all of North Africa, and, as you're going to see, a man that was used of God to open up all of North Africa to the gospel. Philip had no way of knowing that. All he knew was that God had spoken, and He said, "Go south to Gaza." He said, "Yes, sir; I'll go."

Now you have no way of knowing how God is going to use you if you will obey God. As a matter of fact, it would probably sometimes blow our gaskets if we knew what God had planned for us in the future.

I told you, several weeks ago, about a man named Kimball that led Dwight L. Moody to Jesus Christ. About a century ago, Kimball was a Sunday School teacher, and he led Moody to Christ. Now who was Moody? You young people may not know who Moody was, but he was the Billy Graham of his day. But he was different from Billy Graham. Billy Graham is very suave and very cultured—very educated and intelligent. Moody was an orphan at the age of four. He didn't have an opportunity to get a formal education. As a matter of fact, this may encourage some of you: In the last letter that Moody wrote before his death, there were almost 40 grammatical errors in that letter. He murdered the King's English, but he didn't disappoint the King. Brother, he loved the Lord of lords and the King of kings. And Moody was a mighty man, proficient in the gospel, but he was basically an uncultured, unlettered man. He was used of God to move two continents—both America and Europe—for Christ.

Moody went to England, and there, can you imagine this shoe clerk—that's all that he was—who preached in Cambridge? And there, in Cambridge, was a young athlete. His name was C. T. Studd. Now he was one of the greatest athletes of all time. Now over there, cricket was to them—and is to them—what football is to us. He was a cricketer. He was a star. He was in the Cambridge Eleven. He was a man of great ability, great charm, and great wealth. C. T. Studd's father was a personal friend to the Queen of England and was a multi-millionaire. And Studd had it all. I mean he had the looks; he had the mind; and, he had the money. He had it all. He had the athletic ability. But when he heard Moody preach, God touched his life. C. T. Studd resigned from athletics, and no longer was he a member of the Cambridge Eleven, playing cricket. He was called to another seven—the Cambridge Seven—who went to China and began one of the mightiest movements modern missions has ever known.

Do you know what Studd said—this man so greatly used of God? Under the influence of Moody, here's what he said—they asked him, "What motivated you to do what you did—to leave that wealth, to leave that prestige, to leave it all?" He said this:

“If Christ be God and died for me, then there is no sacrifice I can make too great for Him.” “If Christ be God and died for me, then there is no sacrifice too great for me to make for Him.” God’s ways are often unknown. The man who led Moody to Christ had no idea that Moody would be used as he was.

You may not know, but Philip had no idea that he was going to be used of God to win this strategic man. But he obeyed. That’s so thrilling; that’s so exciting.

## B. **God’s Ways Are Often Unexplained**

But let me say that, not only are God’s ways unknown; I also want to say that God’s ways are unexplained. God did not have to give to Philip any reason for going. He just simply said, “Go,” and Philip traveled under sealed orders. And perfect obedience *does not need to know* why. Now God may not speak to you through an angel, but He is going to speak to you.

Now let me tell you how the Holy Spirit works. It’s so interesting. First of all, the Holy Spirit begins to work on an individual—an unsaved sinner. He begins to soften that sinner’s heart for the gospel. Maybe He brings influences, or whatever, to that person, and then God finds a man over here, or a woman over here, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, that He can use, and God gets the two together. Now here’s Philip, way up in Samaria, and here’s the eunuch, way down here in Gaza, and God brings the two together.

And you know, as you study the Bible, and great salvation experiences in the Bible, that happens so often. For example, Jesus said, in John chapter 4 and verse 4: “*And he must needs go through Samaria*” (John 4:4). I mean, He felt a divine compulsion to go through Samaria. It didn’t say, “Let’s just go through”—“*He must needs.*” And He went through Samaria. And there was that Samaritan woman there—she had such a thirst for the Lord Jesus—and she was saved. That was a divine appointment. You can read, in Acts chapter 10, where there was this man named Cornelius, who was a Gentile of the Italian band. He had a thirst—a hunger—to know God. And you can read how God took Simon Peter, and God brought the two together.

I’ve seen it happen in my own life so many times, where God just supernaturally leads me to a person who needed the gospel of Jesus Christ, when my heart was right and their heart was hungry. I was sitting on a plane in Tulsa, and I’d been praying and seeking the face of God, and there was a vacant seat near me. And I just prayed, “Lord God, I make myself available. If I can help the person who’s going to sit in that seat, just, Lord, help me to help the person who is going to sit in that seat. I’m available Lord.” And I pray for the person before they ever get on the plane.

Well, I waited, and after the plane filled up, that seat was still vacant. The last person, to my knowledge, to get on that plane was the lady who came and sat down

beside me. And she just plopped down. She had a big bundle of things in her hands. And she got out a Bible. I thought, “Well, that’s unusual for a person to be carrying a Bible.” I often carry one on the plane—as a matter of fact—just almost all the time. I had just put my Bible in my briefcase. I’d been reading there, from Revelation 12:11, where it says: “*And they overcame him*”—that is, the devil—“*by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*” (Revelation 12:11). I’d been studying that scripture—pondering on it, looking—my heart was full of that particular scripture.

Now this lady gets on, and she brings out a brown Bible just like the one I put in the briefcase. I said, “Well, I have a Bible like that.” She said, “You do?” She said, “Mister, could you possibly please help me?” I said, “What kind of help do you need?” She said, “Oh, is there some verse on overcoming the devil?” I reached into my briefcase, got out my Bible, and showed her that verse. Do you know what she said? She said, “This is the most amazing thing.” She said, “Before I got onto this airplane, I prayed that God would cause me to sit by somebody who could help me.”

And I thought, “Isn’t that wonderful?” Here I’m praying, “O God, let me be a blessing to this person.” Here she’s saying, “O God, send me somebody to help me.” You may think that’s a coincidence. Folks, I don’t think it’s a coincidence. I just think that’s the way we ought to be living a whole lot more of the time. How God works on both ends of the spectrum! Somebody said, “You get right with God, and you almost have to backslide to keep from winning souls.”

You have to perceive the call of God. Listen to what God is saying. And here, when Philip saw this man, he ran to this man. I want you to see how he obeyed God, how sensitive he was to the Holy Spirit of God. Look, if you will, in verses 27 to 30, here, in this chapter: “*And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, and eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him*” (Acts 8:27–30).

Now notice: Philip doesn’t wait. He doesn’t argue with the Lord. So many times, we miss opportunities because they are passing us by. How graphically that’s illustrated. Here’s a man in the chariot. Philip had to run and catch him. A few moments later and it would have been too late. Now Philip would have reasoned within himself and said, “Now wait a minute. He’s Ethiopian, and I’m Jewish. We’ve got a race problem here.” Or, he could have said, “Look, he’s rich, and I’m poor. There’s a socioeconomic problem here.” Or, he could have said, “He’s reading, and he may not want to be bothered,” and there could have been just sort of a...what’s the word I’m thinking of? Maybe, a manners problem. But you see, what Philip did was just simply to answer the Lord when

the Lord spoke. And he didn't let race, riches, reading, or anything else come between him.

*Oh, be swift, my soul to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!*

*Our God is marching on. (Julia Ward Howe)*

Now listen. You need to get yourself that sensitive to the Lord. You need to be walking in the stream of the Spirit, because here was a man who'd been to Jerusalem to worship. Now he's coming back. He'd been to the most religious city on the face of the earth, and the wells of religion were dry. His soul was still thirsty. He's reading the prophet Isaiah. As we're going to show you, in just a moment, he was right to the heart of the gospel. He was reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. The timing is exquisite. The chariot is passing by; the man is right there in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. He's right in that part that speaks about Christ dying for our sins. There is just a split second—just a split second. The timing is perfect, and Philip obeyed.

Have you ever wondered how many opportunities that you've missed? Hmm? Because you were not that sensitive to the Holy Spirit of God? Oh, friend, listen. We need to say, "God help me to be sensitive. Help me to be courageous. Help me, O God, to perceive the call of God." It's so important that you do this, my dear friend, if you would be a missionary.

## **II. You Must Preach the Christ of God**

Now the second thing—the second thing: Not only must you perceive the call of God, but, dear friend, you must preach the Christ of God. You know, there are a lot of folks who call themselves missionaries today, and they're building buildings, digging wells, planting crops, and they're educating people, and all of that. Folks, that's good—if that gives you an opportunity to preach the gospel. If it doesn't, then it's just a colossal failure. We have some people—we have some people today—who are preaching what they call *liberation theology*. And all it is, is socialism with a little religion sprinkled on top of it. And they're not preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to understand, dear friend, what a real missionary does. I want you to see what Philip did here. And it's so exciting. All right now, look, beginning in verse 30: "*And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?*" Now just underscore that phrase, because it's our job to make the Word of God plain—that's our job. Now listen. We are not really, in the truest sense, the soul winners—the Holy Spirit is the soul winner. Now He is a soul winner through us, and to that degree, we are the soul winners. But you understand what I'm saying now. *Our job is not to be successful; our job is to be faithful. Our job is to make the message clear and to help people to understand.* And they can't understand, unless we show them how. "*Understandest thou what thou readest? And*

he said, *How can I, except some man should guide me?*” (Acts 8:30–31).

Now incidentally, let me just say right here, ladies and gentlemen, that an angel said to Philip to go down there. Well, why didn’t God send an angel down there to tell this man how to be saved? Because, angels can never testify of salvation, because they’ve never had it. Angels never knew the joy that my salvation brings. Listen. We are privileged to do something that angels cannot do. And I’ll tell you something else: We’re privileged to do something now that we won’t be able to do when we get to Heaven—and that’s to win souls.

This man says: *“How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?”* Now notice verse 35: *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus”* (Acts 8:31–35).

We must perceive the call of God. We must preach the Christ of God. *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”* He didn’t preach to him about race. He didn’t preach to him about economics. He didn’t preach to him about the social and political situation in Ethiopia. He preached unto him Jesus.

And there were three things he helped him to understand. And these are the three things that I want you to understand today, if you are not saved. And if you are saved and you want to help somebody else be saved, then it’s so simple. There are just three things—listen. Folks, when you hear somebody preach the gospel, and they make it complicated, then you know that, probably, God’s not in it. The gospel is not complicated. I mean, *the* gospel *is simply* glorious *and gloriously* simple. When you get somebody, and he’s preaching the gospel, and you say, “Man, he must be intelligent. I didn’t understand him.” Wait a minute—just because the river’s muddy, doesn’t mean that it’s deep. Listen. Regarding Jesus, the Bible says, *“The common people heard him gladly”* (Mark 12:37). Gladly, they heard Him. Here was Philip, and Philip is making known, to this Ethiopian, the gospel.

And there are just three simple facts in Philip’s message—to be in your message, or anybody’s message.

#### **A. He Showed This Man That He Was a Sinner**

Number one: Philip showed this man that he was a sinner. He showed this man that he was a sinner. He showed this man that Christ had died for his sins. This same 53rd

chapter of Isaiah says: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6). There is no doubt in my mind at all that Philip took him to the remedy—why the Lord Jesus died like a lamb to the slaughter. He was dying for our sins. Nobody, nobody, nobody has ever been saved who has not, first of all, admitted that he or she is a sinner.

Now in the average congregation, you have two categories; you have two classes of people who don't get saved. There are those who think they are too good to be saved; they think that the gospel is for the thief, the prostitute, the murderer, the harlot, or the dope addict. They don't think the gospel is for them, because they are nice, cultured people. They don't think that they need to be saved. Then, on the other hand, there are people who think that they are such horrible, terrible sinners that God won't have anything to do with them. And they think, “Oh, I wish I could be like those nice church people, but I'm just out of it. God won't have anything to do with me.”

My dear friend, listen to me today. Listen to me today. *There is nobody so good that he need not be saved, and nobody so bad that he can't be saved.* Amen? But we have to understand what the Bible says, that, *“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23)—that Christ died for our sins.

I was reading, recently, that over in England they had a beauty contest, and they were using—in England—they were using it to promote a product. And it was an unusual beauty contest, because it was for women who were over 40. Now they had a wonderful prize, but no one won the prize. Do you know why? Nobody entered the contest. Not a woman who considered herself a beauty would admit that she was 40—not a one. They couldn't get anybody in the contest, because none of these women would admit—if they were beautiful enough to win the prize—that they were 40.

There are some people who will never possess salvation because they will not admit that they are sinners. And I don't mean just admit it—but acknowledge it before God: “O God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.” My dear friend, you're a sinner by birth, a sinner by nature, a sinner by choice, and a sinner by practice, and, *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). And Philip made known to this Ethiopian that Christ had died for his sins. You see, dear friend, you won't get saved until you admit that.

There is an old story of a king who was visiting a slave galley ship, where they chained the slaves to the oars and made them pull the oars. And people were put in those ships; they were prison ships. For prisoners of the state and for people who had done horrible things like crimes, this was their sentence—to pull at the oars beneath the decks, and to be the engines of those ancient ships. This king visited one of those ships, and he asked a man, “Why are you here?” He said, “Sire, I'm here not really by my fault. The reason I am here is because I was framed, and I wasn't guilty, but I was lied on in a law court.” And the king said, “Oh, that's tragic. That's such a shame.” And

he went to the next man, and he said, “Why are you here?” “Oh,” he said, “Your Honor, I am like the other man.” He said, “I am innocent.” He said, “I was simply in a crowd when a crime was committed, and I was arrested with the others. Have mercy on me.” And the king said, “Oh, that’s tragic, my man, that you should be in such a situation.” And he went to one man after another, and they all had some tale like that, except for one man.

He said, “And why are you here?” He said, “Sire, I’m here because I’m a criminal. I have sinned against my God. I have sinned against my king. I’ve sinned against my fellowman. And now I’m suffering the just reward for my deed.” When the king heard that, he said, “You nave—you rascal—what are you doing here among so many honest men? Guards, release him and get him out of here.” Oh, dear friend, when we protect our innocence, we condemn ourselves; but, when we say, “Have mercy upon me—a sinner,” we’ll know the king’s forgiveness.

### **B. He Showed This Man That Christ Died for His Sins**

Now I’ll tell you something else that you’ll have to understand: Not only do you have to understand, and not only did Philip help this man to understand that he was a sinner, but Philip helped him to understand that Christ died for his sins: “*As a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth... Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus*” (Acts 8:32, 35). No matter what else you preach, dear friend, if you don’t tell people that Christ died for their sins, then you’re not a missionary; you haven’t preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he preached how that Christ died for our sins.

Have you understood that He took your place? “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him*”—on Jesus—“*the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus took my sin and went to Calvary. I take His righteousness, and I go to Heaven—that’s what the gospel is. You say, “Oh, that’s so simple.” That’s exactly right, dear friend. It’s so simple that sometimes a little child will see it and a college professor will stumble over it.

I heard of a woman who was a washerwoman. She got saved, and she didn’t have a great education. There was a skeptic, a sinner who knew her, and he said, “Well, Betty, I hear you got religion last week. Tell me what it’s like to be a saint.” She said, “Well, I’m not sure that I know what a saint is.” He said, “Well, tell me what happened to you.” “Oh,” she said, “I learned of something called the grace of God and that Jesus died for me, and I accepted Him as my personal Savior and Lord. And He’s forgiven my sins and saved me.” “Oh,” he said, “you’re saved.” He said, “Tell me what does it feel like to be saved?” And she said, “Well I don’t think I could explain it to you where you could understand it. But,” she said, “to me, it’s as though I’m standing in Jesus’ shoes and He’s standing in mine.”

I don't believe a theologian with an earned degree could explain it better than that. Dear friend, I'm standing in Jesus' shoes, and He's standing in mine. Christ died for our sins. And my dear friend, if you're here today without Jesus, or listening by television without Jesus, He died for your sins. He died for you, and your sins are paid for in the blood of Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

### C. **He Taught This Man That Salvation Is by Grace Through Faith**

Now listen—listen. The third thing that Philip taught this man is so simple. It's so simple—that salvation is by grace through faith. Look—look at it right here. They come to a place, and the Ethiopian is wondering about being baptized. Verses 36 and 37: *"And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said,"*—now, just underscore this—*"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God"* (Acts 8:36–37).

Do you know what Philip had taught him? That salvation is by grace through faith. Now it's so simple. Philip taught him that he was a sinner. Philip taught him that Christ died for his sins. And Philip taught him that he was saved by grace through faith. Couldn't you teach people that? I mean, folks, you don't have to be a PhD to teach that. That is so simple, and it is so glorious that we are saved by faith. Well, actually, we are saved by grace, through faith, as we trust the Lord Jesus. That's the reason why the Apostle Paul said, in Romans chapter 1, and verse 16: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"* (Romans 1:16). That's the reason that Paul and Silas were able to tell that man in that Philippian jail, in Acts chapter 16 and verse 31: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and they house"* (Acts 16:31).

Let me ask you a question: Can a person know that they are saved? Absolutely. You're looking at a man who knows that he is saved. "Well," you say, "you sure are cocky. You sure to do have a lot of confidence in yourself." No, I don't. But I know that I'm saved. And the way that I know I'm saved is because salvation is by grace through faith.

If you have your Bibles, and you want to see something that will bless you, then just open them up to Romans chapter 4 here for just a moment. Let me show you what I'm talking about—how you can know that you are saved. In Romans chapter 4, now look at it—Romans chapter 4 and verse 16—just the first part of that verse: *"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure"* (Romans 4:16). I'm just going to stop right there: *"It is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure."*

Now what does that mean? Well, you see, dear friend, if there were any other plan

of salvation, then you couldn't be sure. Suppose God said, "Everybody who wants to be saved—read a chapter in the Bible." Some people can't. Suppose God said, "Everybody who wants to be saved—live a good life." None of us has ever lived a perfect life. These people who are depending upon their good works to get them to Heaven, they have the idea: "Well, if you're living good enough, when you die, then you are going to go to Heaven." Oh, my dear friend, listen. Is there anybody who would stand up here and say that today, yesterday, or tomorrow, they are going to be perfect or have been perfect? No—not a one of us.

"Well," you say, "I've been pretty good." Pretty good? God demands perfection. Suppose you're hanging over a chasm 2,000 feet deep, and you are suspended by a chain of 100 links, and 99 links in that chain are forged steel, and one link is made of crepe paper. How safe are you? We have a proverb: "A chain is no stronger than it's weakest link." Dear friend, if one link in that chain depends upon you, then you'll never be sure. Just one link—I mean, it's not you and God. It's God all the way.

Let me give you a verse of Scripture. Some people, they have a hard time understanding it when they hear it. It's Romans 11:6: "*And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*" Did that make sense to you? Sounds confusing, doesn't it? All right, slow down. "*And if by grace,*"—Romans 11:6—"*then It is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.*"

What is grace? God's riches at Christ's expense—G-R-A-C-E. Grace is God doing it all, and us doing none of it. Now if it is by grace, then it is no more of works.

*I cannot work my soul to save,  
For that my Lord hath done;  
But I will work like any slave,*

*For the love of God's dear Son. (Author Unknown)*

But I don't work in order to be saved. I work because I've been saved. "*And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise...*"—now listen—"*otherwise grace is no more grace.*" The minute that I add works to it, then grace is no more grace.

Now suppose that brother Bob over here, he gets very wealthy, and he says to me, "Adrian, I'm going to buy you a Mercedes automobile." "I want one with all of the trimming—everything." I mean, he's going to buy me a Mercedes. I say, "Well, Bob, that's fine. I don't want any ordinary Mercedes." "No sir, I'm going to get you a fine one." So he buys for me...what's a new Mercedes? Forty thousand dollars? Let's say that he buys me a 40,000 dollar Mercedes. I don't want a cheap one. And so he says, "Now Adrian, this is for you, because I love you." And I say, "Now Bob, you're just giving me this?" "Just giving it to you." I say, "Now Bob, wait a minute. I just can't let you do that.

Bob, here's a quarter. Let me help you." And I give Bob a quarter. So he pays 39,999 dollars and 75 cents, and I pay two bits. And I'm driving that car, and somebody says, "Nice car you got, Adrian." I say, "Yeah, Bob and I bought this car." Huh? And I add my two bits worth of effort to what he did.

Friend, you try to add your two bits worth of effort to what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary, and you'll insult the Giver. The minute that you add your works to it, you destroy the idea of grace. *"But if it be of works, then it is no more grace"* (Romans 11:6). If it's by grace, then it can't be of works; and, if it's by works, then it can't be of grace.

Now those of you who are trying to be saved by your good works, no wonder you don't have the assurance of your salvation. The Bible says, *"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure"* (Romans 4:16). *I know that I'm going to Heaven, but mister, I wouldn't trust the best 15 minutes I ever lived to get me to Heaven. Did you know that? Not the best I ever lived—much less the worst 15. But I am going to Heaven by the grace of God.*

These people get all confused about this thing. They say, "Oh no, no, let me tell you; let me tell you that it's grace and works—just like a rowboat. You get in the rowboat and you want to cross the stream, and so, you pull on one oar—it's called *works*—you just go round in a circle. And you pull on the other oar—it's called *faith*—and you'll just go around the circle the other way. "Ah, but," they say, "faith and works just get you right across." That sounds good, but there's a fatal flaw in that, dear friend: I'm not going to Heaven in a rowboat.

Friend, I am going to Heaven by the grace of God—*"And if by grace, then it is no more of works"* (Romans 11:6). Listen—listen. What Philip preached to this man was this: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:31). Now folks, that's what people have to understand. When he got up there, and he said, "You understand what you're reading?" he helped him to see that he was a sinner. He helped him to understand that Christ died for his sins. And he helped him, dear friend, to understand that salvation is by grace through faith.

### **III. You Must Practice the Commands of God**

One last thing, and I don't have time to develop this—I'll develop it tonight—but listen. Not only must the missionary perceive the call of God, not only must he preach the Christ of God, but he must also practice the commands of God. If you read the story on through, then you'll find out that Philip got this man baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ. This man had a believer's baptism. For, you see, the Great Commission tells us not only to preach Christ, but to obey Christ. The Great Commission says, "Go ye therefore unto all the world, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

I wish I had more time to talk about that. Dear friend, when you are baptized, it's your way of showing openly and publicly that you have been saved. But you must be saved, in order to be baptized. And if you haven't believed first with all of your heart, you're not ready to be baptized. "The eunuch said, 'See, here's water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?' And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may'" (Acts 8:36–37). *If you were baptized before you were saved, dear friend, that's like having your funeral before you die. You're not baptized in order to be saved; you're baptized because you're saved. A true baptism follows a true salvation.*

When this man was baptized, the Bible says he went on his way rejoicing. Baptism and joy are linked in the Bible. And the reason that some of you who claim to be saved don't have any joy is you've not been obedient about the matter of baptism.

## **Conclusion**

Now if we're real missionaries, then we're going to receive the call of God; we're going to preach the Christ of God; and, we're going to practice the commands of God. I want every head bowed.

# Every Christian, an Evangelist

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** February 18, 2001

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 8:26–39

*“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”*

ACTS 8:35

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Be Sensitive to the Direction of the Spirit
  - A. God’s Ways Are Often Unexplained
  - B. God’s Ways Are Often Unforeseen
- II. Be Swift for the Demands of the Spirit
- III. Be Steadfast in the Desire of the Spirit

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you take God’s precious Word and find the book of Acts, and then turn to chapter eight? “Every Christian, an Evangelist”: Could the pastor be speaking to me today, or is this one of those messages for someone else, but not for me?

A sales manager was trying to lift up the vision of some of his sales force, and he went into the meeting, and he took a piece of white poster board about so big that had one black spot in the middle—just a dot in the middle. And he said, Let’s have a little creativity. He asked the first person, What do you see there? He said, Well, a black dot. The next, What do you see? A dot, a dot, a dot. That’s all anyone saw. And he said, Isn’t it strange that all of you saw the black dot; none of you saw the white all around it. Now, I think so many of us see that black dot of self-concern, when the Savior said, “Lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields; they are white already unto harvest.”

God has a plan for you, and He wants you to get your eyes off of that self and onto others, and I pray God that this message will be used of God to help you to do that, because I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but I want to tell you something. And, if I do hurt your feelings, you come up to me and apologize, and I’ll forgive you. Now, listen. No matter how faithfully you attend, no matter how generously you give, no matter how circumspectly you walk, no matter how eloquently you may teach, no matter how beautifully you may sing, if you’re not endeavoring to bring men, women, boys and girls

to Jesus Christ, you're not right with God. Did that hurt your feelings? If you're not endeavoring—I'm not talking here about being successful; I'm talking about your desire, your endeavor—if you're not endeavoring to bring men, women, boys and girls to Jesus Christ, you're not right with God. Why? Because you're guilty of high treason against your king. Jesus has commanded us to go and make disciples. It's not a request, not a suggestion; it is a command. And so, every Christian is to be an evangelist.

God did not save you to be a member of Christians Anonymous. You are to be bringing others, at least, endeavoring to bring others to Jesus Christ. And, folks, in 50 years, most of us will be gone from here; in 25 years, a great number of us will be gone; in 10 years, a great number of us will be gone; next year, we'll not all be here. We're going to stand before the Lord. I mean, we're going to report in.

I was at the bedside of a dying man—a good man, loved God, a denominational worker. I went to see him because he was dying. I knew he was dying; he knew he was dying. He looked up at me, and he said, and he called me Pastor. He said, Pastor, I am not afraid to die. I've given my heart to Jesus; I've been twice-born; I am saved; I know that I'm going to heaven. But then he teared up, and he said, Pastor, I'm not afraid to die; I am ashamed to die. I know, before long, I'm going to meet my Lord, and I've not been a soul-winner. I've worked, I've been a member of my church, I'm a respected member of the church, I've worked, I've served this denomination, I'm supposed to be a leader of other people, but I have not been a soul-winner, and now I'm going to meet my Lord. Think about it. Must I go and empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so? Without one soul with which to greet Him? Must I empty-handed go? That's not the way you want to meet Jesus. You want to come with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you, golden grain to lay at the Master's feet.

Now, the story we have today in the Word of God, from Acts chapter 8, is the story of a man named Philip. I named one of my sons after this man—Joyce and I did; our little boy who's in heaven is named Philip, after this particular man, because we respect this man so much. Philip was a deacon; he was what we might call the first missionary. And Philip was up in Samaria preaching the gospel, and multitudes were being saved. God was doing incredible things. It was a great, great campaign. Though he was a deacon, he was practicing what I say today—that every Christian is an evangelist—and he was an evangelist.

Now, not all of us who are going to be evangelists are going to be preachers; we can't all be preachers, but we can all be reachers. This man was a preacher, and a deacon, and he was being used of God mightily in a crusade, and the Spirit of God came to him. The Bible says, an angel—the word angel means a messenger. I don't know how God brought this message, whether it was a literal angel, or whether God the Holy Spirit spoke to him through some individual, but a messenger came to him, and

said, Hey, Phil, I know we're having a great revival here in Samaria, but I want you to go down to Gaza, down to the desert, and you'll find out why.

Well, let's pick up the reading here. Look in verse 26: "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise and go to the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." That is, get out of the hill country; get out of the mountains; leave the revival, and go down there to a barren place. "And he arose and went, and behold, a man of Ethiopia..."—now, Ethiopia is north Africa—"a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure." Now, this man was the secretary of the treasury; he was a man not just an ordinary man. This was one of the high-ranking officials in the government of Ethiopia, "and had come for to Jerusalem for to worship, and was returning and sitting in his chariot, read Isaias the prophet." Isaias—I'm reading from the King James Version of the Scripture—Isaiah the prophet. And, "then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot, and Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he should come up and sit with him. The place of the Word which he read was this, 'He was lead as a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so open he not his mouth. In his humiliation and judgment he was taken away and who shall declare his generation? For his life was taken from the earth.' And the eunuch answered Philip and said, I pray thee, Of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or some other man?" Now, here's the key—verse 35: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Now, we're going to see later on that this Ethiopian came to Christ, he was saved, and I believe was the instrument to open up all North Africa to the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, we have here a story, but we have more than a story. We have a pattern to show you how God can use you, and listen to me—are you listening? God never leaves a fully surrendered and cleansed vessel unused. God never leaves a fully surrendered, cleansed vessel unused. You want to be used? Would you like to be a witness? Would you like to be an evangelist? Would you like to meet the Lord Jesus Christ, bringing your sheaves with you? Would you like to rejoice in this life, and in the world to come? Would you? I know you would. I'll say yes, Lord, yes. So let me lay several things on your heart that will help you, if you would do this, and they're going to come right out of this story.

## **I. Be Sensitive to the Direction of the Spirit**

Number one: be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit—be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit. We've been talking today about following Christ. Now, if Christ is leading, and

you're not listening, then you're in difficulty. You see, from a human viewpoint, what the Holy Spirit told Philip to do did not really make a lot of sense. He's in this incredibly wonderful revival in Samaria, and God tells him to leave Samaria and go to Gaza.

Now, let me tell you several things—at least three things about the direction of the Spirit that you need to be sensitive to.

#### **A. God's Ways Are Often Unexplained**

You need to understand that God's ways are often unexplained. I mean, God did not say, Now, Philip, I want you to go down there; there's an opportunity on wheels, there's a man of great importance that I want you to meet down there. God did not say that to him; he just said go, and it's just as if Philip went under sealed orders. Now, I don't mean that you're to go off willy nilly, here, there; but are you sensitive enough that, if the Holy Spirit of God says to you, Go, you go?

You see, perfect obedience does not need to know why. When I came to this particular church, Bellevue Baptist Church, almost 30 years ago, very frankly, I did not know why. I was in Florida, pastoring at Cape Kennedy; God was blessing, we were, the church, was growing exponentially; I was happy, they loved me, I loved them; I'd only been there for eight years and the pulpit committee here at Bellevue Baptist Church began to speak to me about coming here. I prayed over it, I fasted, I sought the will of God. I had nothing against Memphis, Tennessee; I didn't know much about Memphis. The only thing I knew about Memphis is, when I looked at a map, it looked like a place that God put to hold the world together, just here, that's just some land there—Memphis, Tennessee. But I could not get out of my spirit the fact that God wanted me to come. Now, looking back over my shoulder, I can understand a whole lot more clearly why God wanted me to come than I could looking over the horizon. We don't see the will of God by looking over the horizon; we see the will of God by looking back over our shoulder, and saying, Hitherto hath the Lord led. I think we could all say that.

#### **B. God's Ways Are Often Unforeseen**

God's ways are often unexplained, and God's ways are often unforeseen. Philip had no idea of knowing what God had for him when he went down there. He did not know what God had for him to do to lead this man, this incredibly important man, to the Lord Jesus Christ. And who knows—listen—who knows what tremendous opportunities God may have for you in the future? And who knows that next individual you lead to Jesus Christ, who that will be?

I've often used this illustration. On April the first, 1885, a Sunday school teacher, named Mr. Kimball, laid a trembling hand on the shoulder of a 19-year-old shoe clerk. This 19-year-old shoe clerk became an orphan at the age of four; he didn't have much

education. But Kimball went back to the shoe racks, and told this clerk about Jesus, prayed with him, and the man received Christ. His name was Dwight L. Moody. If you're familiar with Moody Bible Institute, or Moody Magazine, that's the man that this is named after. And Moody came to Christ, and was gloriously saved, wanted to share Jesus with others, and he began to share Jesus in the inner city with boys and girls through the Sunday school movement. And God blessed him in an incredible way.

And one day he went to hear a man named Henry Varley preach. Henry Varley said, The world is yet to see what God can do with a man totally surrendered to Him. Moody said to himself, I'll be that man—totally surrendered to Him. God began to bless Moody; he became an international evangelist, again no education. The last letter he wrote, they found 38 grammatical errors in the last letter that he wrote. But yet, this man was used to shake both continents. He went overseas and preached there in the church of a man named F. B. Meyer. F. B. Meyer was a cultured Brit, and he preached in Meyer's church, and he told some stories, and he didn't use perfect English. He told what we would call today some tear-jerking stories. For example, he told the story of a man who knew that he was going to die, and led every member of his Sunday school class to Christ before he died. Everybody was weeping. Meyer was mortified. He was kind of a finger bumper, you know. He thought, Oh my, when will this uncouth American ever stop? How did I ever let him into my pulpit? And, later, however, after the service, F. B. Meyer was having tea with one of his ladies, and he said, And how goes it with you, Madam? She said, Wonderful, Brother Meyer, since Moody has been here, I have led every lady in my class to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. F. B. Meyer testified that day, he said, I learned from Moody the language of the soul, and my life was changed.

Later, Meyer came to the United States. Moody had gone from the United States to England. Meyer came from England to the United States to preach. He was preaching at a Bible college, and he was preaching to students, and he was talking about total surrender. There was a man out there named Wilbur Chapman who was ready to drop out of school, thought he wanted to be a minister, but would not be willing to pay the price. F. B. Meyer, without knowing Chapman, made this sentence. He said, If you're not willing—if you're not willing—to do what God wants you to do, God will start with you where you are. Would you tell God in a moment of honesty, O God, I am not willing, but I am willing to be made willing—I'm not willing, but I'm willing to be made willing? Chapman said, God, that is me; I'm really not willing, but I'm willing to be made willing. Make me willing. And God made him willing. He became a great evangelist who was used mightily of the Lord.

And, when he got ready to retire, I guess, as it were, he needed some help, or as he was getting older, he found a young man who had recently been saved, a former professional baseball player called W. A. Sunday, known as Billy Sunday. And he said,

Chapman said to Sunday, Would you come and help me in this ministry? Sunday began to help Wilbur Chapman. He would even put up the tent, put out the chairs, put out the songbooks, and every so often he would preach. When Chapman finally came to the end of his own ministry, he said to Billy Sunday, Sunday, I want you to take it and go. Sunday took it all, he even took Wilbur Chapman's sermon notes to preach from, and Billy Sunday began to hold incredible revival meetings. Billy Sunday was the evangelist that is the counterpart of Billy Graham today. He was known nationally and internationally. And thousands came to Christ. It's said that Sunday led over a million people to Jesus Christ. You say, Well, that's an exaggeration. Okay, let's say half a million. I don't care, whatever you say, Sunday was mightily used of the Lord.

Sunday, Billy Sunday, went to Charlotte, North Carolina, and held a revival crusade that shook Charlotte. Out of the Sunday revival crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina, a prayer meeting began, and the men in Charlotte began to meet weekly to pray for the world. And they prayed week after week after week, and then their prayer began to get crystallized, and then they prayed a prayer like this: O God, O God, send another revival to Charlotte that will shake Charlotte and shake the world. In 1934, an evangelist named Mordecai Ham came to Charlotte, North Carolina, and he held a revival crusade there. The crowds were great. A 16-year-old farm boy, lanky lad, came, and, just maybe, as he told me later on, this lad, to look at some girls, just to see who was there. But God was also there, and this boy, sitting out front, decided, Well, it's too hot out here in front; I'll get in the choir, so the preacher can't see me—like these sinners back here are doing. And so, I'll get behind this man, and so, this boy named Billy—you've guessed it, Billy Graham—Billy Graham was up in the choir, but the finger of God found Billy Graham up in the choir, and Billy Graham gave his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and Graham has been used, as you know, more than any other man that I know in all of history to bring souls to Jesus Christ.

Wonderful story, but it's an unbroken chain. It starts in the rack room of a shoe store with a Sunday school teacher leading a 19-year-old uneducated boy to Jesus Christ. You don't know—you don't know—what you're doing when you bring somebody to Jesus Christ. Just one individual—what is wrapped up in that one individual? God says to Philip, Philip, leave Samaria; go down here to the desert. There was the man that's going to open up all North Africa to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, what is this telling us? This is telling us that we need to be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit—we need to be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit. Let God's Holy Spirit lead us.

Now, let me tell you how the Spirit of God operates. Here's how the Spirit of God operates. First of all, God's Spirit finds a man whose heart is open, or a woman whose heart is open, to the gospel of Jesus Christ—somebody who is ready for Jesus. Was this man ready? You'd better believe he was ready. The Ethiopian had been to

Jerusalem, the Bible says, to worship. He was seeking God. He had been to the most religious city on the face of the earth, but the wells of religion were dry, and he's coming away religious, but lost. He's even got him a copy of the Old Testament; he even has the most remarkable book in the Old Testament in his lap. He is reading from Isaiah the fifty-third chapter, what I call the Gospel according to Isaiah. I mean, could it be a more ripe time? Not only is he reading Isaiah chapter 53, but he's come to the crux, the kernel of Isaiah 53, that speaks of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ: He's led as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a lamb, He opens not his mouth. At that precise moment is when Philip found him. You think that was accidental?

Now, God works on an individual until that individual is ready and ripe. And then, God works on another individual, and God says, You're my man. I've got a man over here ready, I've got someone softened up, I've got somebody hungry, I've got somebody needy, would you come now from Samaria? You come out here down to Gaza, down to the desert; I want to get you two together. God works on the sinner, and God works on the soul-winner, and, when we're sensitive to the direction of the Spirit, God gets us together.

Jesus said, I must needs go through Samaria. Why would Jesus, who was on His journey, need to go through Samaria? Because of the woman at the well. There was a divine appointment. And, if you don't know Bible history, Jesus met a woman at the well, when He was on a trip. He went the way that most people would not go, met that woman, led her to Christ. Cornelius and Simon Peter—God worked on Simon Peter, and said, Simon, you get rid of your racial prejudice; there's a Gentile you need to go witness to. God worked on the Gentile named Cornelius, and said, I am going to send somebody to tell you how to get saved, and then, by divine alchemy, God gets the two together.

Now, what does that mean? When you're sensitive to the direction of the Spirit, I'm telling you, God's going to lead you to somebody who needs Jesus. Those of you who are students, tomorrow, you're going to find some student, if you'll be sensitive; perhaps God is preparing some student for you to witness to. Those of you who are businessmen, if you're sensitive, God's going to lead you to somebody, maybe not tomorrow, but in His timing. God's going to lead you, if you're sensitive; God is going to be working on an individual. Perhaps tomorrow, student, there's somebody who went to church Sunday, went to the wells of religion, came away dry, maybe they know the Bible, they don't know how to be saved, and if you are sensitive—what I'm trying to say to you is this—listen to me. You say, Well, God never brings anybody to me that I can witness to. Oh? Could it be that you're not listening?

Manley Beasley, who preached from this pulpit, used to say, You get right with God—listen—you get right with God, and you have to backslide to keep from winning

souls. I mean, when you get in the stream of the Spirit, when God is working in the unsaved heart, and God is working in the heart of the soul-winner, God will get them together.

So, are you leadable? What we're talking about, following the Lord—are you a follower of the Lord? God has a plan for you.

## **II. Be Swift for the Demands of the Spirit**

Now, here's the second thing I want to say. Number one: be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit. Number two: be swift for the demands of the Spirit. Now, look, if you will, in verses 29 through 30: "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot,"—now, watch this—"and Philip ran"—he ran, Philip—"to him and heard him read the prophet Isaias, and said, 'Understandest thou what thou readest?'" Now, had he not run, he would've missed this opportunity on wheels. He had to run to catch this Ethiopian. And he could've had plenty of excuses. I know there are times when God has prompted my heart to witness, and I didn't do it, and the opportunity went past. Nearly always find some reason not to do it.

If Philip had used these excuses, he could rationalize why not to do it. He could've said, Well, he's rich, he's important; I can't approach him. Or, he could've said, He's reading, and I don't want to interrupt him. Or, he could've said, He's of another race; it wouldn't be appropriate for me to speak to him. But Philip ran, because—listen—the time was ripe, but the time was short. We miss a lot of golden opportunities because we're not swift—we're not swift—to the demands of the Spirit, and they slip through our fingers. God is teaching me this. I sometimes argue, or sometimes stonewall God, or sometimes just walk away, and I miss opportunities. Be swift, my soul, to answer Him; be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on. Somewhere I read of a barrel of fish packed in ice. On the side of the barrel of fish it said, If not delivered in three days, never mind—never mind. Opportunities are passing through our fingers.

And here I'm so grateful that, not only was he sensitive; he was swift.

## **III. Be Steadfast in the Desire of the Spirit**

Number three: be steadfast in the desire of the Spirit. Now, what is the desire of the Spirit of God? Well, would you let the Spirit of God be your desire? What is the desire of the Spirit of God? Well, listen—John 15, verses 26 and 27: "When the comforter is come,"—that's another word for the Holy Spirit—"whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness." When the Holy Spirit is come, He will testify of me, Jesus said, and you will bear witness. Remember when we began this study on the book of Acts, we studied Acts 1:8, when Jesus said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me. Ye

shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” What is the desire of the Spirit? That you share Jesus.

Now, look, beginning in chapter 8 verse 30: “And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he should come up and sit with him, and the place of the scripture which he read was this, ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, like a lamb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth, in his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation, for his life was taken from the earth?’ And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this: of himself or of some other man?”

Now, here’s the key—I told you already—verse 35: “Then Philip opened his mouth and preached unto him Jesus.” What is the desire of the Spirit? What is the office work of the Spirit? That we share Jesus. What did Philip talk to this man about? He didn’t talk to him about denominations. He didn’t talk to him about racial issues. He didn’t talk to him about politics in Ethiopia, or in Jerusalem. He talked with him about Jesus. That’s the message that we need today, is the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a lot of people today who are doing a lot of wonderful things, but they’re leaving Jesus out. Now, here he had the desire of the Spirit. What is the desire of the Spirit? It is that we share the Lord Jesus. Why should we have the direction of the Spirit, and then not have the desire of the Spirit? No, that we share the Lord Jesus Christ.

And find out how Philip shared the Lord Jesus Christ. He told him some basic things. First of all, he told this Ethiopian that he was a sinner. Isaiah chapter 53—that was his text—and Isaiah chapter 53 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Two weeks ago—less than two weeks ago—I had the joy of taking this same passage, Isaiah chapter 53, and leading a young Jewish businessman to Jesus Christ. And I read this verse: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him—on Jesus—the iniquity of us all.” We need to understand, we need to teach people today, just as Philip taught this Ethiopian, that he could be saved, but he needed to be saved. And there are none so good they need not be saved, and none so bad they cannot be saved.

So, the man said, How can I, except someone teach me? Philip said, Do you understand? You want people to be saved—they have to understand—they have to understand—that they are a sinner. They have to understand that Christ died for them. He took this text, and showed how Jesus, the Lamb of God, like the lamb to the slaughter, died upon the cross, took our place on the cross, as a substitute. See, a holy God cannot overlook sin. That sin must be paid for. I read somewhere of a housekeeper

God saved, and a man who wanted to ridicule her religion said to her, Well, how does it feel to be a saint? She said, I'm not sure I know what a saint is, but, she said, I know this much: I'm saved by grace, and I'm looking forward to heaven. Oh, he said, you've been saved, have you? Well, what's it like to be saved? She said, I probably cannot explain it where you could understand it, but, she said, I'll tell you what it feels like to me. It feels like I'm standing in Jesus' shoes, and He's standing in mine. I want to tell you, a theologian could not have said it better. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." He takes our place, that we might take his.

What do you need to understand in order to be saved? What is the desire of the Spirit? We're sinners, and we need to be saved; we're like sheep gone astray—Jesus, the Lamb of God, led to the slaughter for us. And, secondly, that salvation is by faith; it's not of works of any kind. It is the gift of God. How do I know he preached this? Well, in Acts chapter 8, look in verse 36: "And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here's water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?'" and Philip said, 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.'" You've got to have believers baptism—not baptism before you believe: believers baptism. It is not that baptism saves you, but baptism, as I'm going to show in a moment, is an illustration and demonstration of your salvation.

For notice what he said: Mr. Treasurer, you must believe with all your heart, and then you will be saved. Salvation is by grace through faith. We heard that wonderful song today, Amazing Grace. Listen. None of it depends on you; it is all God. Do you understand that? That's grace. Romans 11:6, "If by grace, it is no more of works, otherwise work is no more work, and if by works, it is no more grace, otherwise grace is no more grace." That makes sense, if you don't read it. What he's saying is this: it's either grace or works, not grace and works. If you were hanging over a precipice, 2,000 feet below are jagged rock, and there's a chain of one hundred links, 99 of them made of forged steel, one of them made of crepe paper, how safe are you? As safe as that one link. Now, friend, if any part of your salvation depends upon you, you're not going to make it—you're not going to make it. It is by grace.

What did this man preach to him? He preached to him that he's a sinner, that Christ died for him; if he will put his faith where God has put his sins, that he will be saved. Now, you know the sign that he really believed that is that he was willing to be baptized. Look, if you will, in Acts 8 now; look in verses 38 and 39: "And he"—that is, the Ethiopian—"commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water—both Philip and the eunuch—and he baptized him. And, when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing."

What is the motive for this baptism? Number one: obedience. Have you been baptized? Have you? Jesus commanded baptism. He gave the Great Commission: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the age.” You want Jesus to be with you? Obey His commandments; teach His commandments. Baptism is one of them. Baptism is not necessary to salvation, but it is necessary to obedience, and obedience is necessary to joy. He went on his way rejoicing.

Baptism is a form of confirmation. I mean, it’s just making real to this man what happened to him. Here he is, a man of great authority, in the chariot, riding along. He gets saved. He says, See, here’s water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. He said, All right, stop the chariot, get out, now, what do I do? He said, You stand here, fold your hands like this—I don’t know how they did it—but said, now, I’m going to have you fold your arms like this—I don’t know exactly what he did, but it was enough water for them to be baptized. He didn’t sprinkle water on him; they went down both into the water, and he baptized him. The Greek word is, he immersed him, *baptizo*, which means to immerse—he immersed him.

Why did he do that? Well, I’ll tell you one thing. He was demonstrating the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are buried with Him by baptism, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we all should walk in newness of life. And he was demonstrating to all his entourage—he’s not traveling alone; I mean, this man is a government official, there’s a great entourage. Can you imagine what it meant to them to see this high muckety muck get out of the chariot, and go down there, and let a man plunge him beneath the water? It was a testimony that something has happened, and it was a testimony to others, but a confirmation to himself. When he went under the water, he’s saying, the old Ethiopian is dead and buried; when he comes up out of the water, it pictures a new person raised to walk in newness of life.

## Conclusion

I wish I had more time for this story, but I’ve got to bring it to a close. Listen to me, folks. Listen. What a privilege God has given us—say amen. What a privilege God has given to us. We have a privilege that angels don’t have: that’s bringing souls to Jesus Christ. And we have an opportunity that we will not have in the world to come: that is, to bring souls to Jesus Christ.

Now, God is calling you to be an evangelist—every member an evangelist. And you need to be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit, you need to be swift to the demands of the Spirit, and you need to be, friends, steadfast for the desire of the Spirit, and that is

that you lift up the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if God—listen, listen—if God brought Philip out of Samaria down to the desert, why? He brought him there because there was somebody there that needed the gospel. I am bold enough to say that you're not here by accident today. God put this message on my heart, because I prayed over it, and God brought you here. You know why? He loves you. He wants you to be saved. You see, God is working in your heart. Do you find a hunger in your heart? That's the Holy Spirit of God. And I tell you, I promise you on the authority of the Word of God, if you'll trust Jesus, He will save you today instantaneously, He will be with you continually, and He will keep you eternally, if you will trust Him today.

Bow your heads in prayer—every head bowed, every eye closed. I want to lead you in a prayer. If you're not certain that you're saved, let's get it certain right now. Pray this prayer: O God...—just pray it, pray it silently but fervently—O God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you. I know I'm a sinner. I know, Jesus, that you died for my sins. I receive you by faith now. I trust you. I don't ask for a feeling. I don't look for a sign. I trust you. Come into my heart now. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me. Save me, Jesus. Pray that from your heart: Save me, Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then pray this way. Thank you for doing it, Lord. I receive it by faith. Now, give me the courage to make it public. Help me not to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Believer's Baptism

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 13, 1991**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8:35–39**

*“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”*

ACTS 8:36

## Outline

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## Introduction

Humble your hearts. Bow your head, and bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that we're to *“gird up the loins of [our minds].”* (1 Peter 1:13) And so, would you put away every vain, foolish, and frivolous thought and bring your heart and your mind to Jesus right now?

Lord Jesus, gladly, fully, freely, solemnly, and joyfully, we confess you are Lord to the glory of God the Father. Holy Spirit of God, we consciously yield ourselves to you. Come in all of your fullness and help us to worship in spirit and in truth. O our God, meet every human need by your divine power. We love, praise, and adore you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Would you take God's Word and turn with me, please, to the eighth chapter of the book of Acts—the book of Acts, chapter 8? In a few moments, I'm going to begin reading in verse 35, and really, I'll be breaking into the middle of the story because what has happened is this: that Philip is God's evangelist and God's preacher and he's been down in Samaria holding a mighty revival crusade. But, the Lord said to Philip, “Philip, I have an assignment for you,” and God, by the Spirit, led Philip out into the desert away

from a great revival crusade, out in the desert. Now, Philip did not know why, but he was traveling under sealed orders. It's far more important to know who than to know why. And so, Philip obeyed, and when he got out there, there came an entourage. There was a man of great authority who was traveling in a chariot. Surely, he had all of those people who were traveling with him that a wealthy and important personage would have. And, he's sitting in a chariot, and he's reading the Bible. This particular man had been to Jerusalem from northern Africa. He had been there to worship. He was seeking God. But, the wells of religion were empty, and he'd come away dry. But, he had in his hands, in his possession, a scroll, and he is reading that great, great passage from the prophet Isaiah about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Isaiah chapter 53, that I call "the gospel according to Isaiah." And, this man is reading, and he's puzzled. He doesn't know who the prophet is writing about.

About that time, God the Holy Spirit says to Philip, "Go join yourself to the chariot." And, the Bible says that Philip made haste, and I'm glad he did because here was an opportunity on wheels. (Acts 8:30) And, Philip went up into the chariot, and the man asked him—he said, "Can you help me? Who is this speaking of?" And now, begin in verse 35: *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, [here's] water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest...he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"—and may I just say parenthetically, so do I. Amen—"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."* (Acts 8:35–39)

I'm going to be speaking to you today on this subject: "Believer's Baptism"—"Believer's Baptism." Tonight, we're going to have a great baptismal service. As a matter of fact, the whole service tonight will be baptizing and rejoicing and praising God. And, I thought, if we're going to do that tonight, I ought to take the service this morning and show you from the Bible what the Bible has to say about Bible baptism, about believer's baptism, about blessed baptism.

May I say, dear friend, we dare not minimize the subject of baptism? When the Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry, He commenced His ministry by being baptized. That's the way Jesus began His public ministry. Now, Jesus only had a public ministry of about what? About three-and-a-half years. Oh, there are many, many things He could have done, but He selected baptism to begin His public ministry, and He was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. That's the way He commenced His ministry. How

did He conclude His ministry? How did He bring it to a conclusion—that is, His earthly ministry? He commanded us to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19) Now, my dear friend, if Jesus commenced His ministry by baptism, concluded His ministry by commanding baptism, I want to be very, very, very careful that I do not minimize, negate, or forget what the Bible has to say about baptism. And, I want you to listen, because everybody in this building today has had believer's baptism or needs to get saved and have believer's baptism.

## **I. The Method of Believer's Baptism**

Now, I want you to look at the passage of Scripture, and, first of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call "the method of believer's baptism." Look, if you will, in verse 36: *"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water"*—friend, it takes water to baptize—*"See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"*—that is, "Why can't I be baptized?"—*"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"*—now, watch verse 38 because now we're going to be talking about the method of baptism—*"And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."* (Acts 8:35–38) I read this passage this morning in a number of different translations. One translation gives it this way: "And he immersed him"—"he immersed him"—because the word *baptizo* means "to immerse" or "to dip." They both went down into the water.

Now, just keep your bookmark there, if you will, and just turn left in your Bible to the book of Mark. And, if you will, let's look in Mark chapter 1 and verse 9, and I want you to see the way the Lord Jesus was baptized. Mark chapter 1 and verse 9—now, of course, Jesus Christ is our example in all things—Mark chapter 1 and verse 9; look at it: *"And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan."* (Mark 1:9) Now, you know how far it is from Nazareth to Galilee, where Jesus was baptized—how far it was from where Jesus lived in Nazareth to where John was? About sixty miles. Jesus made a trip of sixty miles to be baptized. Now, notice in verse 9 again: *"And it came to pass...that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan"*—do you see the little word *in*? That may literally be translated "into Jordan." He was not baptized near Jordan, by Jordan, with Jordan; it says He was baptized in Jordan; literally, "into Jordan." And, notice in verse 10—*"And straightway coming up out of the water"*—now, common sense tells you that if He came up out of the water, He was down in the water—*"[and] he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from*

*heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” (Mark 1:9–11) Now, God the Father was well pleased with the baptism of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was baptized by water, by immersion, in the River Jordan, just as the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized here in Acts chapter 8.

Now, go back to Acts chapter 8, if you will, again. May I tell you, dear friend, the reason we have gone to the expense of building a baptistery into this church building is that it takes water—and it takes a lot of water—to baptize? We could have saved some expense by not putting a baptistery in this building, but we could not baptize people unless we had—at least, we could not baptize them indoors as we’re accustomed to doing—unless we had much water. You cannot baptize with a teaspoonful of water. It takes much water.

By the way, while we’re doing this, let’s just turn to John chapter 3. Let me show you something here in John chapter 3. Just turn to this, and look, if you will, in verse 23—John chapter 3, verse 23. Who was it that baptized Jesus? Who? John the Baptist. Now watch, if you will, in verse 23. This is John 3, verse 23: *“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because”*—it was such a beautiful place. Because it was so convenient? Because that was near where he lived? Oh, no. Look at it—*“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there.”* (John 3:23) It just takes a lot of water, folks, to baptize. I mean, sometimes it’s inconvenient to baptize people. John had to go out there in a wilderness place. I’ve been there and looked over and seen where John baptized the Lord Jesus Christ in the muddy River Jordan.

Now, here was an Ethiopian eunuch. He’s traveling along. You know that he’s a wealthy man, a man of great authority and prestige. You know he has jugs of water and wineskins and so forth with him. But, my dear friend, he had to wait until they came to a pool of water, and he said, *“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”* (Acts 8:36) That is, *“What doth hinder me to be immersed?”*

Several years ago, I went to Africa, and I went to Kenya. And, I went with my friend, Jim Hutton, a wonderful missionary, out to where the Maasai are—these tall, noble, warrior people who can throw a spear with such accuracy, who live in mud huts. And, we went out over the the terrain of East Africa there, as we’re traveling through Kenya, and there was such an amazement to me—things I’d never seen in the wild: to see ostriches just go prancing by, and to see zebras bolt and run, and to see great herds of wildebeests trampling over the terrain, and to see these beautiful gazelles as they’re running, and to see all of the wildlife out there. What an amazement! And, we kept going deeper and deeper until we got off of the dirt road and there’s no road at all, and finally got way, way, way out on the backside of nowhere, there are the foothills of the Kilimanjaro. And, there was a little green tent. That was Jim Hutton’s headquarters.

And, he was out there leading these people to Jesus Christ, telling them how the Lord and Savior was the Savior of the world. And then, after he would do that, he would baptize them. And, I was amazed to see his baptistery. Do you know what it was? He had dug a trench in the ground—just a hole in the ground. It looked so very much like a grave. And, how fitting that is because the Bible says, “*We are buried with him by baptism.*” (Romans 6:4) Then, he had taken some plastic, this green-like material, and had lined that muddy hole in the ground with that. And then, he had hauled water in, in the back of his Land Rover, and filled that trench with water. And there, he would lay those people in beneath that water in believer’s baptism. Was it difficult for him to do that? I know it was. But, my dear friend, was it worth it? Of course it was, because, dear friend, baptism—Bible baptism—takes water in order to baptize a person by immersion.

I can remember the first person I ever baptized. I, as a young preacher, a nineteen-year-old boy, I was called to be the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fellsmere, Florida. Now, my dear friend, it was the first, last, and only Baptist church of Fellsmere because it’s a very small town out by the edge of the glades, a sugar mill town. I went and witnessed to a lady, Mrs. Willie Verine, on Saturday night. I pled with her to give her heart to Jesus. She said, “I just don’t know how to trust.” Well, I didn’t know what to do with... She believed the gospel. She believed that you’re saved by trusting Jesus. And, I said, “Well, will you trust Him?” She said, “I don’t know how.” I just felt like saying, “Well, just trust! Just trust Him!” She said, “I don’t know how.” The mother bear trying to teach the little baby bear to walk, and the baby bear said to the mother bear, “Do you put out your right front leg, or your left front leg, or your right hind leg, or your left hind leg first?” She said, “Oh, shut up and walk.” Now, I just felt like saying, “Trust. Just trust Jesus!” But, it was so hard for her.

I left her that night. The next morning when I saw her in church, her face was like the noonday sun. She said, “I have done it! I have trusted Christ. He saved me.” And, it was my joy to baptize her—the first person I ever baptized, Brother Bob, as a young preacher, just a nineteen-year-old boy. We didn’t have a baptistery inside the church like our beautiful baptistery here, but we went out there to a canal ditch there that was cut through, that flatland out there in order to drain and to irrigate. And, it was a ditch about as wide as from here to where those two gentlemen are seated, and there were the bulrushes growing and the things that grow along the side. And, a little handful of our believers were there. It was on a Sunday afternoon. I’d never baptized a soul before in my life. And, I went down that slippery bank and stood in water about this deep, and I motioned to Mrs. Verine to come down that bank. And, the ladies held her hand and walked her down there. I remember when she hit that water. She said, “It was so cold.” The water was cold, even for Florida, and she just took a breath, you know. And, I waited for a moment. And then, what a joy it was—oh, what a blessed joy it was—to

bury that person that I witnessed to and help bring to Jesus in the water of believer's baptism. Oh, my dear friend, it takes water. It takes immersion in water.

Now today, I'm afraid that we have substituted convenience for the Bible. I expect to see some church some day take members in on the telephone and baptize the photograph. Friend, baptism is by immersion. The very word *baptize* is basically an untranslated word. I preach from the King James Version of the Scripture. I love it, but every time you find the word *baptize*, it's basically an untranslated word. When King James in 1611 had this Bible translated from the original languages, he had a group of scholars who were true scholars. But, not only were they scholars; they were linguists who appreciated the beauty of the English language. And so, they put the cadence, the rhythm, the beauty into the King James that we enjoy so much. But, when they came to this word—this Greek word *baptizo*, which is a Greek word—to put it into English, they were a little chagrined because the church that the king belonged to practiced sprinkling and they knew that *baptizo* doesn't mean “to sprinkle”; it means “to immerse.” And so, they said, “Well, if we translate it ‘sprinkle,’ we won't be true to the meaning of this word. But,” they said, “on the other hand, if we translate it ‘immerse,’ it will be an embarrassment to the king who has commissioned us to do this.” So, basically, they just didn't translate it; they transliterated it. That is, they took a Greek word and crammed it into the English language, and a new English word is born: *baptize*. But, when you read “baptize” in your Bible, you're reading, basically, an untranslated word. The word translated means “to immerse.” And, I took time this morning to read it in several translations, and one of the translations that I read this morning went ahead and translated it and translated it “immerse.” That's what the word means.

The Bible method of baptism is immersion. “*They went down both into the water...and he [immersed] him.*” (Acts 8:38) That is the method of baptism. And, by the way, let me just say this: this is not something new. If you travel in Europe and see cathedrals that were built before the thirteenth century, you will find baptisteries in those cathedrals where they baptized people by immersion. All Christians at the beginning baptized people by immersion.

## **II. The Meaning of Believer's Baptism**

All right. Now, secondly, let me talk to you not only about the method of baptism but the meaning of baptism. You say, “Well, why are you such a stickler about the method?” Because the method and the meaning are inextricably interwoven. You cannot have the meaning of baptism without having the method of baptism. Baptism has a message in it. It speaks primarily of three things.

### **A. It Pictures Our Past Redemption**

First of all, it speaks of our past redemption—our past redemption. What I mean by that

is, baptism is a portrayal of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, what is the gospel? Well, if you know the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, you know that Paul said, “This is the gospel that we preached unto you, how that Christ died for our sin, that He was buried, that He was raised again the third day according to the Scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4) That, my friend, is the gospel. Right? Right! The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, with that in mind, turn with me to Romans chapter 6—Romans chapter 6, please—and let’s begin in verse 4. Romans 6, verse 4: *“Therefore we are buried with him”—that is, “with Jesus”—“Therefore we are buried with him”—Jesus—“by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”*—now, verse 5 is the key verse; watch it—*“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”* (Romans 6:4–5) Do you see it? He’s talking about baptism, and he says, *“If we have been planted”—buried, immersed—“in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”* (Romans 6:5) Now, baptism is the likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus literally died on a cross. Jesus was literally put in the heart of the earth in a tomb. Jesus literally came out of that tomb. Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a liquid tomb. And, when a person is baptized and he’s put beneath the water, that symbolizes a burial. When he comes up out of the water, that symbolizes a resurrection. Now, it symbolizes primarily the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every time a person is baptized, he is preaching that he believes what literally happened is that Jesus died, that Jesus was buried, and that Jesus rose again.

Do you believe that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again? Say, “Amen.” You believe that, don’t you? If you were the devil and could take any truth—any truth you wanted—out of the world, out of the Church, what would the truth be that you would take out? What would it be? If I were the devil, I’d want to take gospel truth out—I would want to take the truth of the gospel out. Well, what is the truth of the gospel? What is the gospel? That Jesus died, was buried, and He rose again in order to save us. That is the gospel. Why do you think God commanded us to be baptized? Every time anybody gets saved that is to show people over and over and over and over and over again what the gospel is—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall...also [be] in the likeness of his resurrection.”* (Romans 6:5) And, my dear friend, you cannot show the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by sprinkling or pouring or anything else. It takes immersion. It takes being planted in the likeness of His death and being raised in the likeness of His resurrection.

Now, people will say, “Well, any old picture will do. If it’s a picture, any picture will

do.”

Suppose you'd never seen my wife, Joyce, and you say, “Pastor, do you have a picture of your wife?” And, I reach in my billfold and bring out a picture of a racecar or a waterfall or an office building. You say, “Is that your wife?” I say, “Well, any picture will do.” No, my dear friend, listen—listen: If it doesn't look like her, why carry it around and say, “That is a resemblance of my wife. That is a likeness of my wife”?

Baptism is in the likeness of His death, His burial, and His resurrection. And so, my dear friend, first of all, when we are baptized, we proclaim our past redemption. When I was baptized, I said to all of those who saw me baptized, “I want you to know that I believe with all of my heart that Jesus died for me, that He was buried, and that He rose again.” That's what I'm saying. I am preaching a sermon without saying a word. So, it speaks, first of all, of my past redemption.

*Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me;  
Buried, He carried my sins far away;  
Rising, He justified freely forever:  
[And] one day He's coming—O glorious day!*  
—JOHN WILBUR CHAPMAN

### **B. It Pictures Our Present Regeneration**

Now, not only does it picture my past redemption, but, my dear friend, it pictures my present regeneration. It also pictures my present regeneration. Look, if you will, in chapter 6, verse 4: “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” (Romans 6:4) My past redemption: Christ died, was buried, and rose again. My present regeneration: “*even so we also...*” (Romans 6:4) You see, dear friend, not only did Jesus die for me, but I died with Him. When I got saved, the old Adrian Rogers died. Why did he die? When did he die? He died two thousand years ago when Jesus died, for the Bible says in Galatians 2:20: “*I am crucified with Christ.*” (Galatians 2:20) His death had my name on it. He died as my substitute. He died for me, and I died with Him. And, the debt of my sin was paid by Jesus Christ. And now, dear friend, when He rose and came out of that grave, He brought me with Him. And, I'm raised to walk in a new life, and, you see, what that just simply says is that the old Adrian died and the old Adrian has been buried with Christ. And, that pictures it. Do you know what my baptism was? Do you know what your baptism was? It's a funeral. You're saying goodbye to that old man, goodbye to that old way. The old Adrian is dead, buried with Christ. Isn't that great? It's a funeral. The only mourner there was the devil. He hated to see me die. But, dear friend, I have died to the old way, and I have been raised to walk in a new life. And, what does baptism picture? It pictures my past redemption, my present regeneration.

Now, some people got baptized before they ever got saved so they weren't truly baptized at all. Some of you have gone through the ritual, but you've never been saved; and so, you haven't been baptized. Some of you went through the ritual, and then you got saved after you went through the ritual. You haven't truly been baptized, either. You have been dipped, but you haven't been biblically baptized because, my dear friend, if you were baptized before you were truly converted and saved, that would be like having your funeral before you die. You have it backward. The Bible never says, "Be baptized and believe." The Bible always says, "Believe and be baptized."

Now, let me give you some verses. We don't have time for you to turn to these because we're running out of time, but I want to show you how belief always come before baptism. Acts chapter 2 and verse 41: "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.*" (Acts 2:41) First of all, you must receive the Word of God in order to be baptized. Acts chapter 10, verses 46: "*For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*" (Acts 10:46–47) You see, first of all, they received the Holy Ghost, and then they were baptized. In Acts chapter 16, you have the story of the Philippian jailor who got saved, and in verse 31 they told him how to get saved: "*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved... And they [spoke] unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*" (Acts 16:31–33) First, he heard the Word, and then he was saved. The same with this Ethiopian eunuch—he said, "See, here's water. Why can't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36) And, Philip said, "Well, you've got to believe with all of your heart in order to be baptized." (Acts 8:37)

### **C. It Pictures Our Prospective Resurrection**

What does baptism picture? It pictures my past redemption: He died, was buried, rose again. It pictures my present regeneration. I died with Him. I was buried with Him. I rose with Him. I am now living in the power of His resurrection. What else does it picture? Not only my present regeneration, but my prospective resurrection. You see, dear friend, it also pictures that one day—though I may die, and they'll carry me out to some cemetery, and they will put me beneath the ground, and they will put a carpet of grass over me and perhaps a bronze marker or something there to say, "Here lies this man"—one of these days, our Lord Jesus is going to "*[come] in the glory of [the] Father with the holy angels.*" (Mark 8:38) And, there will come "*the voice of the archangel, and...the trump of God: and the dead in Christ [will] rise first.*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16) And friend, just as I came up out of that water, I'm going to come up out of this ground. I'm going to be raised with the Lord Jesus in a glorified body. That's what baptism is all about.

My dear friend, the whole thing is pictured in baptism: it pictures what Jesus did for

me, it pictures what happened inside of me, and it pictures what's going to be done with me through the ages of the ages. And, that's the reason that believer's baptism is so important. It symbolizes so much. It's so gloriously wonderful. Now, it doesn't cause it to be true; it just shows that it is true. It is an emblem and a symbol.

### **III. The Motive for Believer's Baptism**

So, let's move very quickly to the last thing very quickly. My dear friend, I've talked to you about the method. I've talked to you about the meaning. Let me talk to you about the motive. Why, therefore, should you be baptized?

#### **A. It Is a Commitment to Proclaim**

First of all, my friend, it is a commitment that I proclaim. When I am baptized, I am proclaiming to everybody that I belong to Jesus Christ. I am baptized with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is my way of saying that I am a new person. I have identified myself with Jesus.

I wear this ring. You see that ring? Do you know what that ring means? It means that I belong to that pretty thing sitting up there in the choir. Her name is Joyce. And, I want you to know I'm not ashamed of Joyce. I'm not ashamed that I'm married. I'm committed to Joyce. She is mine; I am hers.

And, my dear friend, baptism is your way of saying, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I belong to Jesus Christ. I am not ashamed of Jesus Christ." It's a commitment to proclaim. Are you ashamed to be baptized and identify yourself with the One who died for you—suffered, bled, and died in agony upon the cross?

I heard of a little boy who got saved in a church where they had children's church. And, they told him to go over to the big church and tell the pastor he'd been saved and needed to get baptized. He went over and said to the pastor, "I have been saved, and I need to get advertised." I like that: "I've been saved, and I need to get advertised."

My dear friend, it is a commitment to proclaim.

#### **B. It Is a Conversion to Portray**

It is a conversion to portray. Every time somebody is baptized they are preaching a sermon without saying a word. They are preaching the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! What an opportunity!

#### **C. It Is a Command to Perform**

And, last of all, my dear friend, it is a command to perform. This is not just something optional. Jesus said, "*Go ye therefore, and [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even [to] the end of the world.*" (Matthew 28:19–20) Do you want the Lord to be with

you? Then obey His commands. You're not baptized in order to be saved; you're baptized because you're saved. But, Jesus said, "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things [that] I say?*" (Luke 6:46)

Friend, do you want joy? If you'll look at our scripture, you'll find out that after this man got baptized, you know what happened to him? "*He went on his way rejoicing.*" (Acts 8:39) And, while baptism does not bring salvation, dear friend, it is an answer of obedience to our Lord. And, when you obey our Lord, that's when the joy begins. If you're having trouble, difficulty, in your Christian life and you're not growing—you're saying, "What's wrong with me?"—why don't you go back and check up—not just with the command to be baptized, but any command in the Word of God. And friend, when you begin to obey, God begins to manifest Himself to you.

## Conclusion

But again, don't ever substitute baptism for a walk with the Lord.

We have a denominational employee who—he's in heaven now—but he was in Washington at the Smithsonian, and they were looking there in that part of the Smithsonian where the dresses of the wives of the presidents are. And, they have these mannequins that represent the various wives of the presidents. I've seen it; perhaps you have. Lady Bird was the sitting president's wife. Lyndon Johnson was president at this time. And, this denominational employee was there, and he had his children there. And, he was saying, "Now, that's the President's wife who's now the President. Her name is Lady Bird." Well, what he didn't know was, standing right next to them, was Lady Bird Johnson. I mean, she was right there. And, she heard them talking, and she just said, "Pardon me, but I'd like to introduce myself." And, she introduced herself. What a thrill it was for this man and his children! There was the mannequin over there, and there was the gown; but here's the lady. "Well," they thought, "boy, are we blessed! This is wonderful!" But, let me tell you the incredible thing that happened: this man told the story—I've never been able to forget it. He said, "While we were there talking to her—I mean, literally talking with her—an amateur photographer came up and this is what he said to her." He said, "Lady"—talking to her, the President's wife—"would you move aside, please? I want to get a picture of Lady Bird." And, he moved her out of the way and took a picture of that mannequin and never knew right there she was. My dear friend, that's only a symbol. Jesus is the real One. Don't you ever get wrapped up in a symbol and miss knowing Jesus.

Let's bow in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Father God, I pray today that many will come to Jesus and be saved. In His wonderful name. Amen.

# Start Right: Believer's Baptism

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 3, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8:35–39**

*“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”*

ACTS 8:36

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Method of Baptism
- II. The Meaning of Baptism
- III. The Motive for Baptism

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word and turn to Acts chapter eight, would you, please—Acts chapter eight. You know, how you end up has a lot to do with the way you begin. Certainly it's true in a race. It's true in your pursuit of education. Many times, it's true in a business. Certainly true in building a church. And, it's really true in your Christian life.

And so, I want to talk to you today about how to start right. And, very frankly, some of you have still not started right, because you have not obeyed what the Bible has to say about believer's baptism.

Now, let me give you the background for this passage of Scripture before I read it. God has taken his deacon, evangelist, preacher, Philip, and he's taken him from Samaria where there was a Bible crusade going on, and the Spirit of the Lord said, "Philip, I want you to go down to Gaza. I want you to go down to the desert. I have a special assignment for you there." So Philip went down there and he saw a man riding in a chariot. Now this man was a man of great authority. He was a man who was a treasurer for Queen Candace of Ethiopia. And he's riding in the chariot, and he has the Word of God open, and he is reading the prophet Isaiah.

Now, he has been to Jerusalem to worship, but he still has not found the Lord. And the wells of religion were dry there in Jerusalem, and he's reading, would you know it, he's reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which is the gospel according to Isaiah. It's in the Old Testament. He's reading this. And the Lord says to Philip, "Philip, that's the one. That's that opportunity on wheels. I want you to go now and witness to this man."

And so, the Bible says that Philip went; he ran, found the chariot, introduced himself, and found that the man was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the man asked Philip a question. He said, "What does all of this mean?" And Philip said, What an opportunity! Let me tell you what this means. And, now we break in the story in verse thirty-five. This is Acts chapter eight, verse thirty-five: Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture—Acts chapter eight, verse thirty-five—Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. That's the same one this choir has been singing about all morning—and preached unto him Jesus.

And, as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. He answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And I want to say, parenthetically, so do I. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord called away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.

I love this. Philip preached unto him Jesus. He didn't preach to him denomination. He didn't preach to him race relations. He didn't preach to him economics. He didn't preach to him about politics in Ethiopia. He preached unto him Jesus. And, when a man believes on Jesus, as soon as possible, he baptized this man.

Now, there are two grave mistakes that are made about baptism. One mistake is that baptism, since baptism doesn't save us, it's not important. That is a mistake. The other mistake about baptism is this: where there some who say, if you don't get baptized, you can't go to heaven. That's a mistake also. The truth is neither of those. While baptism is not necessary to salvation, baptism is necessary to obedience. And obedience is necessary to joy and growth and fruitfulness in the Christian life. And we, as believers, dare not minimize what the Bible has so emphasized.

How did Jesus begin His public ministry? Anybody know? Well, you ought to know. He began His public ministry by being baptized. Jesus began His public ministry by being baptized. How did Jesus conclude His public ministry? By commanding baptism. He began it by being baptized. He only had a ministry of about three-and-a-half years, and He began it by being baptized—in His baptism. He identified Himself with us.

In our baptism, we identify ourselves with the Lord Jesus. But, Jesus commenced His ministry by baptism. Jesus concluded His ministry by commanding baptism, and what He has so emphasized I dare not minimize. So, keep that in mind, and let's look together in the passage, and other passages today, about believers baptism: How to start right. Because listen very carefully. There are some of you who have never yet

been baptized, and you need to be. There are some of you who've been Christians for thirty and forty years, but you've been baptized, well, you've really not been baptized the right way, for the right reasons. So, I want you to listen very carefully.

Now, I'm not going to talk to you about what Baptists believe about baptism. What Baptists believe about baptism has nothing to do with it. I want you to see what the Bible teaches. And, if the Bible teaches it, then I expect you to agree with it. If the Bible doesn't teach it, I don't expect you to agree with it. We're not talking about some denominational preference here; we're going to be looking into the Word of God. So get your Bible out, lick your fingers, get you a piece of paper, to make some notes on, and let's look at it.

## **I. The Method of Baptism**

The very first thing I want you to see, therefore, is the biblical method of baptism. What is the biblical method of baptism? Look in verses thirty-six and following. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water. That takes water. And the eunuch said, See, here's water. What doth hinder me to be baptized? The word baptizo means, as we're going to see, means "immersed." What doth hinder me to be immersed? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered, and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still. Now watch it. And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him—that is, he immersed him—and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord called away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.

Now, it is incredibly obvious that the Bible method of baptism is by immersion: placing a person under the water, and bringing them out of the water. The Scripture says they both went down into the water. It was the same way with the baptism of the Lord Jesus. This was not an incidental way or an optional way. I want you to see how Jesus was baptized. Now, put your bookmark there in Acts chapter eight, and turn to Mark chapter one—Mark chapter one. And, if you don't turn, then put this verse in your margin, so you can refer to it later.

Mark chapter one, beginning in verse nine. Now, this is the baptism of the Lord Jesus. Now, we're to walk as Jesus walked. Mark one, verse nine: And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized of John in Jordan. Now Jordan is a river. It doesn't say He was baptized near Jordan. It says He was baptized in Jordan. Doesn't say He was baptized with Jordan. It says He was baptized in Jordan. And, the Greek preposition "in" literally means "into" Jordan. And, look in verse ten: And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open. Now, if He came up out of the water, you tell me where He was. He was down in

the water.

He came up out of the water. He saw the heavens open, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. He was baptized by immersion.

Now, Jesus was not baptized by immersion because it was convenient for Him. As matter of fact, it wasn't convenient. It was about a sixty-mile trip one way that Jesus took to be baptized by John. You see, why did He go to the river Jordan? Because there was a lot of water there. It takes a lot of water to baptize.

Now, I want you to put this verse also in your margin. And, this is one of the clincher verses. There are some verses that just make it extremely clear. This one is in John three, verse twenty-three. And, it also refers to the baptism of Jesus. Now, I want you to listen to it. This is John three, verse twenty-three, and it says, And John—now, listen—And John was also baptizing in Annon near to Salem. That's John 3:23. John also was baptizing in Annon near to Salem. And then he gives the reason: Because, now, I want you to look at your Bible, and see what the reason is. Because of the beautiful scenery isn't what it says. Because it just happened to be convenient—that isn't what it says. Why did John go all the way down to the river Jordan, out there in the wilderness? He was baptized in Annon near to Salem, for one reason. Why? Because there was much water there—much water there.

Now, John could have baptized everybody in Jerusalem with a fifty-five gallon tank of water, if it were by sprinkling or pouring. But John went to this place, because, friend, it takes water, and it takes a lot of water. There can be no mistaking about it. It takes a lot of water to baptize somebody. That's the reason we built this baptistry into this church. Because, friend, it takes a lot of water to baptize. You can't baptize somebody the biblical way with a few drops of water coming off a rose peddle somewhere. John was baptizing in Annon near to Salem because there was much water there.

I visited our wonderful missionaries in Kenya, Jim and Peggy Hooten. And Jim took me out there in his Land Rover. And we went on the hard road, and then we got on the gravel road. And then, we got on no road. And then, we kept on going further and further out there to the foot of Kilimanjaro, there in the Massai country where those great tall magnificent Massai warriors are. Jim Hooten had a tent out there. That was his church. And he was telling those warriors about the Lord Jesus. And then, he said, come over here; I want to show you this. And he had dug a pit in the ground that looked so much like the grave that I have stood beside so many times when I would preach funerals. He'd line that pit with plastic and he had brought water on his Land Rover and filled that pit with water, and there he was baptizing those those Massai, in that grave there. It looked like a grave, because indeed that's what the baptistry is. It is a liquid tomb, as we're going to see later on.

I thought of the difficulty sometimes that we go through in baptism. You know it would be so much simpler if we could just do it the easy way, I mean, if we just sprinkle folks or pour a little water on people's heads.

The first church I pastored was the First Baptist Church of Fellsmere, Florida. And don't let the impressive title impress you, because it was the first church, the last church, and the only Baptist church in that little town. About as many people in the town as are in the choir up here, maybe a few more. And the first person I led to Christ as a pastor was Ms. Willie Verein. Her first name was Willie. Sweet lady. Somebody told me that she was interested in the things of God. I went and visited her, and I tried to tell Willie about Jesus. She said, I know what you say is true, but how do you believe? I said, Well, just believe. She said, but how do you trust Him? I said, just trust Him. And I was so frustrated because I wanted to say, oh, Willie, just trust the Lord. She never seemed to quite get it. And, I said, well, let me pray for you. And I prayed for her, and left, and she had this burden on her face. When I saw her the next morning when she came in the church, she had a face that was shining like the noonday sun. And, she said, Oh, Pastor, I got saved last night. I trusted Jesus after you left. I trusted Him. He saved me. And so, I had to baptize Willie—got to baptize her.

We didn't have a baptistry in that church. We didn't have any running water in that church. We didn't have any restrooms in that church—a little church building there. I was just a nineteen-year-old boy pastoring that church. First lady I'd ever baptized. I didn't know where to grab hold. I didn't know what to do. I said I wish I'd watched my pastor a little more. We didn't have a Dale Palmer to baptize like we have here, who's so slick, and wonderful, and smooth. And, I said, well, I'm going to baptize her. Where are we going to baptize her? Well, we'll baptize her in a canal out there by Fellsmere, where they drain those sugarcane fields. And I remember that day—went down there, went down that slippery bank, and there was a little swimming hole there where the kids would swim, and the bulrushes were there, and the frogs and all of those things there. And for Florida, it was kind of chilly. I think it was February, and we went down that bank. I remember when Ms. Verein, when she put her feet in that water, she said ..... — like ice. But oh, the joy of baptizing that woman as a believer in Jesus Christ! You know, we could have done it so much more simply, but, oh, we could not have done it more biblically. As a baptizer, I remember one time I advertised in another church I was pastoring, We're going to have a baptismal service. We didn't baptize as regularly as we do here. And the people came. It was Sunday afternoon, and, Brother Jim, I went in there to look, and there was no water in the baptistry. We had a pipe that went into that baptistry about as big as my thumb. It looked like it would take forty years to fill that thing up. Actually, it took all afternoon. And the people were there, and the people were ready to get baptized.

I said, O God, give me wisdom—what shall I do? Had an idea. I called the fire department. I said, I have got an emergency. What is it? I said, I've got to have some water, and in a hurry. They sent a pumper truck over there, and put that big hose in there. And, in no time, we had that baptistry filled with rusty water. And I got those folks baptized. Now, I want to tell you, folks, it would have been a lot simpler just simply to sprinkle a few drops of water upon somebody's head, but it would not have been biblical. They need much water. They went down again into the water. They came up out of the water. That is the biblical message. The Word baptizo means "to immerse." There's another word for sprinkle—"rantitso." There's another word for pour: "luo." But the word "baptizo" literally means to immerse. It was an ordinary word, not necessarily a religious word. Two little boys would be out swimming. One of them say, "I'm going to dunk you." But, if he were speaking Greek, he'd say "I'm going to baptize you." Nothing to do with religion.

A woman washing her dishes, she might say to her daughter, "Baptize those dishes." That is, put them under the water. Just the word itself, the literal meaning of the word, means "to immerse." Did you know that when you pick up your Bible and read the word baptism, that it's still an un-translated word?

What happened is this: King James of England, when he was going to take this Bible and have it translated into the language of the people, from Greek to English, he got some scholars, and said, we want you to translate the Bible. In 1611, we got the Authorized Version, the King James Version, of Scripture—the one that I preach from. I love it; I think it's beautiful. It has the lilt, the poetry, the symmetry. I just love the King James Version of the Bible, and I preach out of the King James Version of the Bible.

Well, these were good scholars who were translating, but when they came to the word "baptizo," because the Greek meaning of the word is "to immerse," but the king did not practice immersion, the church that he was a member of did not immerse. Now, why didn't they immerse? Well, they learned it from the traditions of men rather than the Word of God. And, these scholars said, Now, we have a problem. We're between a rock and a hard place. If we translate this word "immerse," it will be embarrassing to the king. But, if we translate it anything but "immerse," anyone who knows Greek would laugh us out of the kingdom. So, you know what they said? We just won't translate it. We won't translate it at all. So, rather than translating the word, they transliterated the word. What is transliteration? That means to take a word from one language and put it into another language. And every time you read the word "baptize" in your Bible, it's still to be translated. It's not yet been translated; it's just simply been transliterated. It is a Greek word jammed into English because those fellows didn't have the courage to make it say what it literally says. But you go get any Greek dictionary and look it up, and you're going to find out the word itself means "to immerse." So, every time you read that, you

can just put in there "to immerse." That's what the word itself means.

And, early Christians practiced baptism by immersion, all of them did. As a matter of fact, if you go to the cathedral, sometimes when you go to Europe, if you'll go to those cathedrals that were built back before the thirteenth century, you'll find they have the baptistries in them like this one. I've gone and stood in those baptistries where they have baptistries just like we have baptistries, where they baptize those people in obedience to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## **II. The Meaning of Baptism**

Now, that's the method of baptism. Well, you say, Big deal—who cares about the method? I care about the method. Why? I'll tell you why I care about the method, because the method is wrapped up in the meaning. The method and the meaning are inextricably interwoven, and you cannot change the method without destroying the meaning.

Now, what is the meaning of baptism? Well, baptism speaks about what God did for you when He saved you. I want you to take and turn to another passage of Scripture. I want you to turn to Romans chapter six—Romans chapter six. This is a key passage. And, if you're in Acts, just fast-forward to Romans chapter six, and I want you to begin reading with me in verse one: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How should we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? Now, that's the key to the whole passage.

When we get saved, we die to sin. That's the old way and being saved is dying to the old way. God forbid that we who have been saved should continue to live sinful lives. And, then he explains it in verse three. Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death. Therefore, we are baptized with Him by baptized into death. We're talking about the meaning of baptism now. Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Now, look in verse five. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His resurrection. Now, here is your biography, so pay attention to it. Here is pictured your past, your present, and your future.

Now, what is your past? Well, here it is right here, verse four. We are buried with Him by baptism into death. When you get baptized that pictures that the old person you used to be died. There was a teenage boy who lived in West Palm Beach, he gave his heart to Jesus Christ, and when he did, that teenage boy died. His name was Adrian Rogers. And the old Adrian died. When did he die? Well he actually died not as a teenage boy, but he died 2000 years ago when Jesus died on that cross, because his death had my name on it. He took my sin, He carried my sins to the cross, He was hung

up there for me, He suffered, bled and died in agony for me and He bear my sins in His body on the cross. He paid my sin debt. He paid it in full. And, when He died, because of faith in Him, I died with Him.

And, that's so wonderful because, you see—look in verse six—that our old man, that's the old Adrian, is crucified with Him. I was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

When Jesus died Hallelujah I died. And, so when I got baptized, they put me beneath the water. You know what that was? That was my funeral. What do you do with a dead man? You bury him. We are buried in baptism. Isn't that what it says? Look in verse four. Therefore, we are buried with Him.

Now, if I died physically, you drug me out the graveyard, put a few grains of sand on my hand and said we buried the preacher, that'd be a disgrace, leave me out there to bake in the sun. At least, put me under. My dear friend, we are buried with Him by baptism. That was my funeral. The only mourner there was the devil. He hated to see me die, that spoke of my past. Thank God, listen, Hallelujah, my sin is in the grave of God's forgetfulness. Isn't that wonderful?

Listen, your sin is gone. You don't need to be haunted by the ghost of guilt. When Jesus died, you died. Baptism is a picture of your burial. Just as Jesus Christ was put in that grave, you were put in a liquid tomb. That speaks of your past. But now, look, if you will, in verse four again: But, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Jesus didn't stay in that grave; He came out of that grave. And, I didn't stay under that water. Thank God for that. I came up out of that water. You see, we don't believe in submersion. We believe in immersion. The difference is, you submerge something—it may stay there. You'd better thank God for the difference.

We come up out of the water; and that pictures our new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. We should walk in newness of life. And, my baptism says I have a brand new life. Christians are not just nice people. They are new creatures. And, baptism portrays that.

When you come up out of that water, you're saying, I have come out of the grave of that old life. I have been raised to walk with the Lord Jesus. Because I've been born again, I have a new life.

Now, not only does it speak of your past—you're buried; not only does it speak of your present—a new life; but it also speaks of your future. Look in verse five: For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. One of these days I am going to die physically. One of these days they are going to put me in that grave. But I want to tell you that that grave that could not hold the Lord Jesus will not be able to hold me. And, I am going to be in the likeness of His resurrection. And the God that raised Jesus Christ from the grave is the God

who's going to raise me up. And, therefore, we don't need to fear death.

I heard of some caterpillars who were crawling around on the ground, and they saw a former caterpillar up there, a beautiful butterfly, flitting overhead. And one caterpillar said to the other caterpillar, you'll never get me up in one of those things. And, I want you to know, one of these days, friend, we are all going to be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air. And, we'd be as foolish to be afraid of death as a grubby, wormy caterpillar would be to be afraid of being a butterfly. We're going to be in the likeness of His resurrection.

That's what baptism pictures: it pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for us. It pictures our death, burial, and resurrection with Him.

Now, I want to ask you a question: If you were the devil, wouldn't you want to take that message out of the church? Wouldn't you want people to forget that. You see, what is the gospel? The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He was raised again the third day. That's the gospel—1 Corinthians fifteen. That is the gospel. That's the core of all that we do. Why is it that the Bible commands that we be baptized? Because God wants to constantly make real to us what happens when we get saved. We die with Christ; we're buried with Christ; we rise with Christ; we live with Christ; we're going home to be with Christ. That's what it's all about. And, baptism is the graphic illustration of that.

Well, you say, Pastor Rogers, it's only a symbol; any symbol will do. Oh? Suppose you said to me, Pastor, do you have a picture of your wife? I'd say, Yes, I've got a picture of my wife. May I see it? Well, yes. And, I pull out a picture, and maybe there's a picture of a racecar, or maybe a waterfall, or maybe a lassie. You say, Is that your wife? Well, I say, not exactly, but any picture will do. That's ridiculous. If it doesn't look like her, then why do I call it a picture of her—if it's not a likeness of her?

Baptism, the Bible says—look at your scripture—it is in the likeness of His death; it is in the likeness of His resurrection. That is symbolized. The emblem of that is immersion. That is the meaning.

### **III. The Motive for Baptism**

Now, you'll understand what I'm saying when I say that the method and the meaning are so wrapped together. Very quickly, I want to say one more thing: what about the motive for baptism? Why should we be baptized? Three reasons. Now, if you've not yet been baptized, here is the motive for baptism.

First of all, it proclaims your commitment to Jesus—it proclaims your commitment to Jesus. The Bible says, "We are buried with Him." It says, "Jesus, I'm identifying myself with you, openly and publicly." You say, Does it make you a Christian? No. But it sure does show you're a Christian.

You see that ring I wear right there? That ring right there, that ring, you know what that ring means? That means I love Joyce. And, friend, I do love her. I am a one-woman man. I love that gal. And that ring says, I love her, and that ring says, I belong to Joyce. It doesn't make me married, but friend, it shows I'm married, and it shows I'm not ashamed to let everybody know I'm married. I'm not trying to pass myself off as something or somebody that I'm not. I belong to another person. I belong to a girl named Joyce that I love with all my heart. And, when you get baptized, you're saying, I belong to Jesus—I belong to Jesus.

When He was baptized, He identified himself with us; and, when we get baptized, we identify ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

A little boy got saved in a church where they do children's church, and so the director of the children's church said, go over to the big church and tell the pastor you've been saved and you want to get baptized. He didn't quite understand it, so he went over there, and he told the Pastor, I've been saved, and I need to get advertised. I like that—I like that. That's exactly it. I have been saved, and I need to get advertised. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, it is a commitment to proclaim. It is a conversion to portray. Not only commitment to proclaim, but a conversion to portray. Listen, everybody. Here's my testimony. I want you to know what has happened to me. Thank God, this is my way this is my way of testifying. I want everybody to know that when Jesus died, I died. When He suffered for me, He bled for me, He died for me, He rose for me. I am in Him. I want everybody to know that I have been saved. Now, I can tell you over and over and over and over again about people who've been saved by seeing somebody else being baptized. They see their friend, their old buddy, their old companion, up there getting baptized. Some society lady sees another lady up there with a thirty-five dollar hairdo going under. They say, what's she doing? What is all of that? Has she become a religious fanatic? She says, Oh no, I've been saved. I have been saved, and I am proclaiming, not only do I belong to Jesus, but what Jesus has done for me. It is a commitment, friend, to keep. It is a conversion to show. But, thirdly, it is a command to obey.

Now, pay much attention. In the Bible, baptism is not a suggestion; it is a command. Write these scriptures down: Matthew 28:19 and 20. These are not the words of a Baptist preacher per se in the twentieth century. These are the words of our sovereign Lord in the first century: Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things—now, listen to this—whatsoever I have—what's that next word?—commanded you—whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

Look in Acts chapter ten, verses fortysix and following. Peter had preached the Word of God to the household of Cornelius. God gave them the supernatural gift of languages, for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, in verse forty-seven: Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Which tells me you can receive the Holy Spirit before you're baptized, which means you certainly are saved before you're baptized. And He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord—not suggested, He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. And then, the Bible says, they prayed with him to tarry certain days.

You know, obedience always brings joy, and it brings fruitfulness. Many Christians are lacking in their Christian joy because they've not been obedient. In this eighth chapter of Acts where we began, after this man was baptized, the Bible says that, when Philip left him, he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts chapter sixteen, the household of the Philippian jailor, when these folks got baptized, the Bible says, they rejoiced, believing in God with all of their heart. Obedience brings joy and fruitfulness.

Now, there are some of you who're saying, God, help me to understand the Bible. Lord, help me to be fruitful in my Christian life. Well, I want to ask you a question: Have you already obeyed what you already know? Why should God give you more light, till you've lived up to light that you have? Why should God give you joy and fruitfulness, when you don't begin right?

I am telling you, friend, that the motive for baptism, if there were no other motive except that Jesus Christ commanded it. I want to say again, that while baptism is not necessary to salvation, it is necessary to obedience. Being baptized doesn't make me a Christian any more than wearing this ring makes me married. But it shows that I am married. It shows that I belong to a girl named Joyce. Baptism shows that you belong to your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It's only a symbol. And don't ever let the symbol take the place of the reality.

Let me just tell you this story and I'll be finished. We had a denominational worker who lived in this town who took his family to Washington. Have you ever gone to the Smithsonian? You go to Washington, go the Smithsonian. It is incredible. And he was in that part that dealt with American history, and this is back when Lyndon Johnson was President of the United States, and he was in that portion of that Smithsonian where they have the wives of the Presidents, and the wives of the Presidents are wearing these very special dresses. It's a very interesting thing. And at this time, Lyndon Johnson was the President of the United States. And this man worked for our denomination, had his children there, and he was showing them this thing, and there was a lady who was standing next to them. And he was telling them, now, there's Lady

Bird Johnson right there. And then, he turned and looked, and do you know who was standing right next to him? Lady Bird Johnson. Right there. They were looking—I mean it was it was just incredible. He said, how could God be so good? Let me be here in Washington showing my kids this, and here is the wife of the President of the United States. And they fellowshiped and they talked. He said, this is wonderful. But, here's the funny part.

About that time, a man came and set up his camera. And, he said to this denominational worker, his children, and to Lady Bird Johnson, would you folks mind moving aside? I want to get a picture of Lady Bird. And the President's wife never said a word; she just stepped to the side. And there that man focused his camera on a waxed figure, and Lady Bird, the President's wife, standing over here in the shadow.

## Conclusion

Now, I want to say to every one of us. Baptism is only a picture. Don't fail to focus on Jesus. Don't put Jesus to the side and focus on the picture. It's only an emblem. It's only a symbol. Thank God for it. Thank God for who it represents. But *baptism, whether a spoonful or a tankful, can never save anybody. You're saved by trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.* And, if today you'll give your heart to Jesus, and say, Jesus, I receive you, you'll be as saved as you'll ever be. And, if you don't get saved, you can be baptized so many times the tadpoles will have your Social Security number, and you still won't be saved. Salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bible says sweetly, simply, sublimely, surely, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. And I promise you from the authority of the Word of God today, if you'll trust Jesus, He'll save you. I mean He'll save you today.

# Doors to the World

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: March 8, 1992**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 8; 9; 10**

*“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”*

ACTS 10:38

## Outline

Introduction

- I. All Men Have the Same Heartaches
- II. All Men Have the Same Hungers
- III. All Men Need the Same Help
  - A. Availability
  - B. Expendability
  - C. Adaptability
- IV. All Men Can Know the Same Hope

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you take God's Word, and open, please, with me to Acts—the book of Acts chapter eight. Actually, we're going to be looking in chapters eight, nine and ten. Now, don't get worried—obviously we're not going to be able to deal with every verse in those chapters. But in those chapters we're going to see the conversion of three men who represent to be the entire world. The title of our message is, "Doors to the World"—“Doors to the world.”

Our world population is rapidly growing. Did you know that every 2.8 seconds, a child is born. Think of it. Every 2.8 seconds there are 10,300 people born every hour. Two hundred and forty seven thousand are born into this world every day. Ninety million are born into this world every year. That's incredible isn't it? We're in the midst of what we call a population explosion.

For example, from creation till 1850, there were only one billion people in the world—from creation till 1850. And then, my dear friend, from 1850 to 1930, a lot shorter time, there were 2 billion people. And then, from 1930 to only 1960, there were 3 billion people. And then, from 1960 to 1975, there were 4 billion people. And today, there are 5

billion plus. And soon, if Jesus tarries, 6 billion people. Call it a population explosion.

And many of them have never heard the truth: Jesus loves me this I know. Let me give you a staggering thought. Of all of the people who have ever lived since the beginning of creation, more than half of them are alive today—all of the people who have ever lived from the beginning of creation. Over one half of them are alive today. And we have an opportunity and an ability to take the gospel like we have never had before.

And it just thrills me to think, and those of you who help us to do this on Love Worth Finding—it thrills me to think. And not only can we speak to thousands in this auditorium this morning, but to multiplied thousands by the miracle of the media. And I know that the devil would love to keep God's Word off the airwaves. Thank God for the ability to reach around the world with the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And what has Jesus Christ commanded us to do? Well, our mandate is to take the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the darkest corners of this earth. And God has given us open doors. We're to bring souls, bound in the golden chains of the gospel and lay them at Jesus feet.

Now, in Acts chapters eight, nine and ten, what you have is the conversion of three notable persons. For example, look in chapter eight and verse twenty-seven. "And He arose and went, and behold, a man of Ethiopia." Just underscore that phrase, behold, a man of Ethiopia. Now, where is Ethiopia? That's Africa. That's what we'll call the third world.

And then, look, if you will, in chapter nine and verse one: "And Saul," I'm just going to stop with that phrase, "and Saul," because in chapter eight you have the conversion of the man of Ethiopia, from the third world down in Africa. "And Saul." Well, Saul, where was Saul from? Well, he was from the Middle East. He represents Asia. He represents the Eastern Bloc nations. "And Saul."

And then, if you will, look in chapter ten, verse one. "And there was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a Centurion of the band called the Italian Band. He was from Italy. He represents the West. He represents Europe.

And what we are going to see in these three chapters are the conversions of three men. And how I pray God the Holy Spirit will use this to lay a world on your heart, as he has used it to lay a world on my heart. You're going to see the conversion of an Ethiopian. You're going to see the conversion of Saul. And you're going to see the conversion of a man named Cornelius.

Now, these men were from such different backgrounds. But I want you to see that they had four things in common. Are you ready?

## I. All Men Have the Same Heartaches

First of all, these men had the same heartaches. All men have the same heartaches. Now you think about the difference of these men. The man from Ethiopia was a descendant of Ham. You remember that Noah had three sons that came out of the ark—Ham, Shem, and Japheth? Do you remember that? Nod your head; look intelligent. Ok, now look—Ham, Shem and Japheth. And they settled in different geographical areas of the world. And the descendants of Ham settled primarily in Africa. And this man of Ethiopia, he was a descendant of Ham.

Now, Shem, his descendants settled in the area of the Middle East. We call them Shemites, or Semites. And Saul, being a Jew, was a descendant of Shem.

The descendants of Japheth settled in Europe, and we think of the Italians, and those in the West, as Japhetic people. And then, Cornelius was a son of Japheth.

Isn't it interesting that in this trinity of chapters, we have a microcosm of the world: a son of Ham, a son of Shem, a son of Japheth. But, you say, Pastor, you said they all have the same heartaches. Right. Because, while one was the son of Ham, and one was the son of Shem, and one was the son of Japheth, they were all sons of whom? Adam. And the Bible says, in Romans chapter five and verse twelve, "In Adam all died."

Friend, you can meet any man on the street, and I don't care the color of his face or the origin of his birth, I can tell you the problem in his heart, and it's sin. It's sin. It doesn't make any difference whether he's a son of Ham, a son of Shem, a son of Japheth. Whether he's from Africa, whether he's from Asia, whether he's from Europe, whether he's from the United States, it makes no difference. And I'll tell you, my dear friend, that you have a problem and it is s-i-n—sin. I don't care what your pedigree; I don't care what your birth; I don't care where you came from—I know your problem. It is sin—it is sin.

We're so proud of our ancestry, aren't we? I told you about a lady one day who met me, and when she learned that my name was Rogers, she was so excited. She said, are you a Rogers? I said, yes ma'am. Oh, she said, so was I before I got married. My maiden name was Rogers. And she said, you know, I have studied our ancestry. She said, you will be interested to know that the Rogers came over on the Mayflower. I thought I'd tease her a little bit. I said, well look. I've traced it back further than that. She got so excited. I said, listen, I've traced it way back. You will be interested to know that we came from a crooked farmer and a drunken sailor. The farmer was Adam, and the sailor was Noah. And that's how far back we go. My dear friend, that's how far back you go. We all go back to Adam, and in Adam all die.

There is a problem; it is a universal problem. The problem in Africa is sin. The problem in Asia is sin. The problem in Europe is sin. The problem in Memphis is simply sin. That's the reason that the social gospel never meets the need. The social gospel is

not the gospel at all. People are trying to change man's environment.

Now, I'm for better environment, but I want to remind you that it was in a perfect environment that man got in trouble—in the Garden of Eden. You couldn't have a better environment than that. I mean, if environment is the answer, why, my dear friend, we could deal with the situation, just put people in a better environment. The truth of the matter is, the more we have, the more we tend to forget God. Environment is not the answer. My friend, Jesus Christ is the answer.

A man has a problem in his heart. And a while back, we had a war on poverty. Now, we've lost that phrase; we'll get a new one after a while. But it's not a war on poverty that people need; it's a war on sin. Because, you see, my dear friend, sin is the costliest thing around.

We're talking now about billions of dollars that we're going to spend trying to deal with AIDS—the AIDS epidemic. We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg. You talk about catastrophic health care costs. That's going to cause a great increase in taxes and human misery, and cause so many to go down into the grave in anguish and pain. And everybody says, hey, where is the answer? What are we going to do?

My dear friend, forgive me for seeming over simplistic: just start living by this book. The answer is so simple. If people would live by the laws of this book, the AIDS problem would diminish in several years. Be gone. Just by living by this book.

The problem in the world, my dear friend, is nothing more, nothing less, than s-i-n—sin. Sin. You see, all men have one problem and that problem is sin. We are all sons of Adam. Now, the social gospel. He says, we've got to help people to do better. But man doesn't need primarily a boost from beneath; he needs a birth from above. He needs a new heart.

All men have the same heartaches. I don't care how much money they have, I don't care the color of their face. I care not about their origin of birth. All men have the same heartaches. Do you have it?

## **II. All Men Have the Same Hungers**

Second thing I want you to see: Not only do all men have the same heartaches, but all men have the same hungers. All men have the same hungers. Now, if you look at all three of these men, you're going to find out that they were all three spiritually hungry.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. For example, look at the Ethiopian. Acts chapter eight and verse twenty-seven—look at it: "And he arose"—when it says, he arose, it's speaking of Philip. "And He went, and behold, a man of Ethiopia, a Eunuch of great authority." I mean, this was a high muckety-muck, folks. He's not a six or seven; he's a ten in the world of government. "Of great authority. And under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure." I mean, friend, he's got his

fingertips on the economic situation of a kingdom. He is in charge of all of the treasure of the queen. He is in great authority. But notice what it says: And he had come to Jerusalem for the worship.

Now here was a man from the world of government and from the world of economics. He was a big shot. He had wealth, he had power, he had prestige; but there was an emptiness in his heart. His money, his wealth, his power, his prestige, had not met the longing in his heart, for the Bible said he had gone to Jerusalem to worship. He made a trip all the way to the Middle East, and he couldn't go on a 747, my dear friend. He couldn't ride in a Mercedes Benz. No matter how much money he had.

Out across the desert he went. He had gone to Jerusalem for one thing, and that was he was seeking God. But he had gone to Jerusalem, and the wells of religion were dry. And he's coming back now, reading the prophet Isaiah, trying to understand, trying to have his longing in his heart met. But money had not satisfied him. Power had not satisfied him. He has a hunger. Let's leave him.

Let's go to the second man. Look, if you will, in chapter nine, now, verses one and two. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus, and to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them down to Jerusalem."

Here was Saul. Saul is in the world of not politics, not finance; Saul was in the world of philosophy. He was a scholar—and a real scholar. He would have the equivalency of a triple PhD today. He was fluent in many languages. He was a religionist. He was a man of culture. He was a man of breeding—erudite, self-confident, scholarly. And had you seen Saul there that day, he was threatening Christians. He has authority from a high priest to take Christians and lock them up and put them in jail. And many of those, after they have been put in the jail, were put to death. Everybody was afraid of Saul—the proud Pharisee, Saul.

Had you seen Saul there, you would have said, here is a man who has it all figured out. Here is a man who is so self-confident in his philosophies. And in his eye, he is. But, my dear friend, inside, he was a bowl of jelly. You would never have seen it. Just like that professor who may have taught you philosophy in college. Oh, wasn't he so smart? Wasn't he so suave?

But look, beneath the surface—chapter nine, verse five—Jesus appears to him, and he says to Jesus, "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Now what does that mean? What on earth does that mean? Jesus appears to Saul, this proud Pharisee on the road to Damascus. There's a bright light. The Lord speaks. He says, who are you? I am Jesus. Hard for you, isn't it Saul? You're having a difficult

time, aren't you, Saul? You see, Saul had this man who seems so confident. This man who has seen Steven stoned could never forget the face of Steven that shone like an angel. It was like a prick, like an ox goad. It just kept on, kept on, kept on, kept on, into the spirit, the soul, the being, of Saul. Outwardly he was confident; but inwardly he had a hunger to know God. And religion and philosophy had not satisfied him.

Third man I want you to see—Cornelius. I want you to see also that Cornelius was on the quest. Look, if you will, in chapter ten, verses one and two: "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band"—now watch this—"a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always."

Now, he wasn't saved. He wasn't born again. He was generous. He prayed. He was devout. But he is not yet saved, and I'll show you that he's not yet saved. But here's the point that I want you to see. Here was a man who was a leader of a victorious army. Never had there been an army more victorious than the army of Rome to this time. They had conquered and subjugated the world, and the world lived under the iron boot of Rome. And here's a man with medals on his chest. Here's a square-jawed man. Here's a man's man. He lives in the world, not of philosophy, and not in the world of finance; but he lives in the world of fight. Rome knew how to crush her enemies. But all that power had not satisfied his heart.

And he prayed to God. He was a devout man; he gave his money. Why? Because like the Ethiopian, he was on a quest. Because like Saul, he was on a quest. He was hungry. I don't know how he got this hungry for God. Perhaps one night on a lonely sentry duty he looked up into the skies, and he said, all of that just didn't happen. Someone has made all of this—a God of might and power. And then he looked into his heart, and he felt that hunger, and he began to pray. O God, whoever you are, what ever you are, where ever you are, O God, I need you—I need you.

Isn't it interesting? These three men from such different backgrounds: one from the world of government, one from the world of philosophy, one from the world of the military—all three of them are on a quest of God. And none of them had been satisfied without it. Monetary power did not satisfy the Ethiopian. Mental power did not satisfy Saul. Military power did not satisfy Cornelius.

### **III. All Men Need the Same Help**

Friend, I can tell you this about every man that you meet: I've traveled around the world—not completely around it but all over the face of it. I've met a lot of people. They come from different backgrounds. But may I simplify something for you? Every man you'll ever meet has the same heartache—it's sin. Every man you'll ever meet has the same hunger—it's God, it's God. I don't care where he comes from, he's got the same

heartache. No matter where he was born, he's a son of Adam. And no matter what he does, he needs God. All of these men, they're on a quest. They are on a quest for God.

Now may I say a third thing—third thing. They all needed the same help. They all needed someone to help. And, my dear friend, who was it that helped? Well, look if you will, in chapter eight and verse twenty-nine. Look at it—chapter eight and verse twenty-nine. Here's a man named Philip. And God is speaking to Philip. "And then the spirit said unto Philip, go near and join thyself to this chariot." When I shared this scripture with you before, I asked you to circle the word go. If you have not circled it, circle it. Go near. Just circle the word go.

All right then, turn to chapter nine, and look with me in verse eleven. This is a man named Ananias.

Now, first of all, there was a man named Philip, and God says to Philip, go to that Ethiopian—chapter nine, verse eleven. And God is speaking to Ananias: "And the Lord said unto him, arise and go. Just circle the word go. Would you do it? Right there—9:11. All right now, turn to chapter ten and verse twenty. Here's Simon Peter. And God speaks to Simon Peter—look in verse twenty. "Arise therefore, get thee down and"—what's the next little two lettered word? "...go."

Do you see it? What did God tell Philip to do? Go. What did God tell Ananias to do? Go. What did God tell Peter to do? He said, go. What did Jesus say to every one of us? Go ye therefore. Go ye therefore. Isn't that what He says? Friend, you can't spell Gospel unless you begin what? G-o. You can't spell God unless you begin what? G-o. Go. Go. Go. You see, they all need somebody to help them. God didn't just zap these men. God used human instruments. These men had the same heartache. They had the same hunger. But they all needed the same help. They needed somebody to point them to Jesus Christ. Each one of them is told to go.

By the way, who was Philip? He was a deacon. How many deacons here? Lift your hand. Deacons, let me see if you come to church—hold it—I want to take roll here. Thank you. There's one on the back row; he must be backslidden. All right—all right now, I'll see you after church, brother. Philip was a deacon. Now, what did God say to deacons? Go. I want to tell you, dear friend, if you are a deacon in this church, and you don't have a soul winner's heart, you ought to resign—you ought to resign.

Ananias. Who was Ananias? We don't know. He's just an unknown layman. How many of you are just a lay worker in this church? Let me see your hand. Just a lay worker? Come on. That's all of you. You're workers. You. How many of you are lay workers in this church? Everybody lift your hand. I mean, listen. If you're in the church, you're a worker or a shirker. All right now, listen. I don't mean that you have to be on a committee somewhere. What is the command to every layperson in the world? Go.

Peter—what was Peter? He's a preacher. How many ordained ministers in this

congregation? Let me see your hand. Ordained ministers? What's the command to you? To go. You see, no one is excluded. I don't care if you are a deacon; I don't care if you're a layman; I don't care if you're a pastor. The command is to everyone. You say, well, God didn't call me to go; He called me to preach, or God called me to teach, or God called me to sing. There's nothing wrong with you, my dear friend, that an old-fashioned revival, or a good dose of salvation, would not cure. Listen. A Christian who refuses to go is not missing a blessing; he's guilty of high treason against heaven's king.

You say, well, where am I supposed to go? Wherever He tells you to go. Might be next door; it might be around the world. How am I to go? Well, some of you can go with your money. Some can go with your prayers. Some can go with your children. Some can go with your influence. Some can go with your testimony. Some can go with your physical body across the sea. It doesn't matter how you do it—you do whatever God called you to do. But everybody in this building is supposed to be a part of a great enterprise, and that is telling this world about Jesus Christ. You say, well now, wait a minute; I've got other things to do. Friend, there are three abilities that God needs out of you. You'll let God do these three things through you—He'll use you. You want to know what those three abilities are?

#### **A. Availability**

The first ability is the best ability; and that is availability. Philip, who spoke to this Ethiopian, if you'll read the background, Philip was down in Samaria, in the middle of a revival meeting, and he was led by the Holy Spirit out of Samaria, all the way up there to the Gaza Strip, out there in the desert, to meet one man, because he was available to God.

Now, suppose Philip had been down, like Billy Graham holding a crusade somewhere in some city, and God says, Billy, just leave that crusade, and go out there in the desert. You have to make certain you heard God. But I mean, he knew he heard God. You see, he's available—he's available to God. Availability—that's the best. Are you available? I mean, were going to be asking you this week to make some commitments to missions. Well, it won't make any sense to ask you to make a commitment if you're not available. Are you available? Are you willing to say to God, any time, any place, anywhere, any cost, I am available? Availability. Be swift, my soul, to answer Him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is watching.

#### **B. Expendability**

Second. Not only availability, but expendability. You see, God said to Ananias, I want you to go and speak to this man Saul. Oh, well, Lord, you're talking about the same Saul that's been putting people in prison? Yeah, that's the one. Are you talking about the same Saul who helped Stephen be stoned? Yep, that's the one. You want me to go

talk to him? Yep, I do. When do you want me to go? Right now. Huh? Well, Lord, who's going with me? No one. Lord, would you repeat that? My hearing's not what it used to be. Who's going with me? No one. Go to Saul. And Ananias went.

Do you know what that is? That, my dear friend, is expendability—expendability. No matter what it costs, I am willing to go. It doesn't make any difference—I am willing to go. Expendability.

Garibaldi united Rome. He was a great military leader. One time when things were going bad for Garibaldi, he needed an army. He gathered his ragtag followers around him. He called them his red shirts. And this is what Garibaldi said to them, and I want you to listen to them. He said, I am going out from Rome. I offer neither quarters, nor provisions, nor wages. I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles, and death. Let him who loves me, not only with his head, but with his heart, follow me. And they went out, and took it.

Jesus Christ, I think, would say the same thing to each one of us. I am looking for followers—not followers who love me with their head only, but with their heart. Expendability. It costs to serve Jesus. It costs every day. It costs every step of the way.

### C. **Adaptability**

Availability. Philip had it. Expendability. Ananias had it. I'll tell you a third thing it takes. It takes adaptability. Adaptability. The Lord says to Peter, Peter. Yes, Lord. You ready, Peter? Sure am, Lord. What do you want me to do? Well Peter, there's a gentile down over here, and I want you to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to that gentile. Well, now wait a minute, Lord. I'm a Jew; he's a gentile. You know, the Jews, we don't fellowship with those gentiles, Lord. Get somebody else, please. The Lord says, Peter, I want to show you something. And He lets down a sheet out of heaven. And in that sheet are all kinds of animals that Peter had called unclean. And the Lord says to Peter, Peter, get up and kill some of these things and eat it. Oh, he said, O Lord, no. Lord, I have never eaten anything unclean. God said to Peter, "Peter, what I have called clean, let no man call unclean."

You see, Peter had to get rid of some of his prejudice, had to get rid of some of his bias, had to get rid of some of his uselessness. He had to get rid of some of his stubbornness. He had to learn to adapt.

Do you know why this church is a growing church? Because you're not afraid to change. And I thank you. And I think that's been a hallmark of Bellevue church down through the years. We're not going to change the gospel for anybody. We're not going to change the Word of God for anybody. We're not going to compromise the lordship of Christ for anybody. But we'll do anything, any place, anywhere, to reach people for Jesus Christ, and say amen.

Somebody's well said, the seven last words of the church are these: We never did it

that way before. Times are changing. Times are changing. And God is giving us abilities and opportunities that He's never given before. And the doors are wide open, as we have learned this week from our dear friend Paul, and the group from Romania.

And what do we need? Oh, my dear friend, what do we need? Well, we need those same things. We need those same things. We need simply availability, expendability, adaptability—whether you be a deacon, whether you be a layman, whether you be a preacher.

#### **IV. All Men Can Know the Same Hope**

One last thing. All right, you ready? All men have the same heartaches. All men have the same hungers. All men need the same help. They need somebody to go and tell them about Jesus. Last of all, all men can know the same hope. Who is the hope of the world? His name, my dear friend, is Jesus. Let me show you something here—are you ready for a blessing? Turn to Acts chapter eight, and let's see who it was that met the hunger and the heart of that Eunuch. Chapter eight and verse thirty-five—look at it: "Then Philip opened his mouth and began the same scripture and preached unto him"—race relations? Preached unto him Economics? Preached unto him social reform? Look at it. "He preached unto him, saying, Jesus"—Jesus.

Now, I want you to see something else. Turn to chapter nine and verse five. Let's see who it was who met the need of this proud Pharisee. "He said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said unto him, I am"—what? "Jesus"—Jesus.

Now I want you to turn to chapter ten, verse thirty-eight. Find out what this Peter finally told this Gentile. He told him how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him. Jesus—Jesus is the answer.

#### **Conclusion**

Friend, this world needs Jesus Christ. There is no other need like the need for Jesus. You and I have the answer. A. B. Simpson said a hundred thousand souls a day are passing one by one away, in Christless guilt and gloom, without one ray of hope or light, with future dark as endless night, they're passing to their doom.

Who is the answer? Let me answer that by sharing with you a letter; then I'll be finished. In World War II, a soldier in the South Pacific wrote his mom. Listen. Just look right here. Wrote his mama this letter. She read it. This is what it says. The heading—Somewhere in the South Pacific. He wasn't able to give the direct destination. Dear Mom, it is comparably quiet here, where I am today. But no one knows how long it will be. Mom? If this letter reaches you, it will mean that I cannot write another one, for I am putting this letter away with my things. And asking, Mom, that it be sent to you. I just

want to say, Mom, don't grieve for me. I know my redeemer lives. My trust is in Him who loves me and gave himself for me. And because He lives, I too shall live. Don't ever say of me, he's gone. Say, he lives. Because, Mom, when you read this, I shall be very much alive, waiting for you till Christ comes.

I don't know about you, but that blesses me. I would to God, that every boy, and every mama could have that assurance. Folks, listen to me. Listen. You can walk down the streets of this city or any city, and any man you meet, I don't care the color of his face, he's got the same heartache. Any man you meet—I don't care how successful he is, he's got the same hunger. Any man you meet—I don't care whatever else you may think he needs, he needs the same help; he needs somebody to help him to Jesus. Any man you meet can have the same hope. Jesus is all this world needs today.

Blindly men strive, for sin darkens their way, oh, to pull back the grim curtains of night, for one look at Jesus, and all will be light. Doors to the World—help us to go through them, Lord.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Every head bowed. No one moving. Would you say, O Lord, O my God, I want there to be in my life availability. O my God, I want there to be in my life expendability. I want there to be, my God, in my life adaptability. Here I am, Lord. Send me—with my money, my prayers, my children, and my life, my influence. Use me, Lord. Use me. Father, in Jesus' name I pray, and we pray. Amen.

# A Blueprint for Success

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: December 16, 1990**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 9:1–6**

*“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”*

ACTS 9:6

## Outline

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## Introduction

Turn to Acts chapter 9. And, when you’ve found it, look up here and I want to ask you a question. Turn please to Acts chapter 9. Now, here’s the question. If you could meet Jesus Christ face to face, I don’t mean talk to Him in prayer, although He’s real in that way and I understand that. But, I mean, if you could meet Him face to face. Here is Jesus Christ standing there in a body, literally, face to face with you and you could ask Him anything you wanted to ask Him, any question. I mean, just there it is. You could ask the Lord Jesus whatever you wanted to ask Him, what would you ask Him? Well, I think I know what you would ask Him. I think you would ask Him the same thing that the

Apostle Paul asked Him. “Lord, what do you want me to do?” I really believe that’s what you would ask Him. “Lord, I want to know your will for my life and please dear Lord, tell me what it is you want me to do.”

Look at this passage of Scripture, beginning in verse 1. *“And Saul,”*—that was the name of Paul before he got saved—*“yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way”—*that is any who were believers, people, followers of the Lord Jesus—*“whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”* And, when they were put in fetters and chains and brought to Jerusalem, they were coming to Jerusalem for trial and perhaps imprisonment or perhaps even death. *“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* (Acts 9:1–6). And, that my dear friend, is the text that I want to use this morning. “Lord, what will thou have me to do?”

What is success in life? What is success? If you had to write a definition of success, what would it be? May I tell you what success is? And, I can say this, I think, without equivocation. Success is the progressive realization of the will of God for your life. That’s what it is. It’s not how much money you have; it’s not how famous you are; it’s not how healthy you are; it’s not how many friends you have, how many toys you have acquired. Success is nothing more, nothing less, than the progressive realization of the will of God for your life.

Now, here’s what the Apostle Paul said to the Lord Jesus when he had an incredible opportunity to ask him face to face, “Lord, what do you want me to do? Lord, what would you have me to do?” Not, “Lord, what do you want others to do?” Many of us are pretty good at that, aren’t we? Or not, “Lord, what do others want me to do?” But, “Lord, what would you have me to do?”

So many times as a pastor in counseling situations I am asked this question, I suppose more than any other question. “How can I know the will of God for my life?” And, I dare say that if you are a spirit-filled Christian, if you are a person serious about serving God, then that is a question that is paramount in your life. And, yet we have so many people floundering around not knowing the will of God.

Somebody said, “We live in an age of guided missiles and misguided men.” And, man has been described as a clever creature that has lost his way in the darkness. And, the reason is that we are not asking the question that the Apostle Paul asked.

Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 23 puts it this way. *“O LORD, I know that the way of*

*man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). The way of man is not in himself. "Lord, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Now, I want to talk to you about how to know success in life which is the progressive realization of the will of God for you. Or, we could just put it in other words, "How can I know God's will for my life?" That's really what I'm talking about. When I'm talking about success it is for you to know the will of God for your life and to accomplish that will, day by day.

Now, there are several things I want you to notice with me as we look in this.

## **I. God Has Promised to Reveal His Will to You**

First of all, God has promised to reveal His will to you. Now, put that in your mind and put it in your notes if you're taking notes. God has promised, God has promised, to reveal His will to you. Now notice, if you will, in verse 6: "*And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*" (Acts 9:6). Now, God doesn't want you floundering around like a ship without a mast or rudder, a compass on a dark and stormy night. God has a plan for your life. Now, let me just give you some other verses while we're in the neighborhood here. And, you just jot these down. We won't have time to turn to them. I've looked them up for you.

But, Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10 the Bible says, "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10). That means that God has a plan for your life. He has before ordained certain good works for you. Or, let me put it this way. Psalm 37, verse 23: "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way*" (Psalm 37:23). Isn't that wonderful? "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, he delighteth in his way." God has a plan for you step by step.

Or, how 'bout this one? Psalm 32 and verse 8: "*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye*" (Psalm 32:8). That is, God's eyes are going to be over you, guiding you step by step along the way. Or, what about this verse from Isaiah chapter 58 and verse 11: "*And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not*" (Isaiah 58:11).

Now, friend, it cannot be plainer than this. God told the Apostle Paul, when he was yet Saul, "I will show you what you must do." And, again, we see this wonderful promise and the threshold of a new year.

Proverbs chapter 3, verse 6: "*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall...*" he shall, he shall, "*direct thy paths*" (Proverbs 3:6). I have the Father above me controlling all things. I have the Savior beside me directing my footsteps. I have the Spirit within me

impressing my heart to know the will of God.

Now, may I tell you that God has a plan and it is just for you? Now, God's will really comes in three forms.

### A. **God's Sovereign Will**

First of all, there's God's sovereign will. I mean, there's just where God rules in the affairs of men. And, whether you choose God or not makes no difference. God's ultimate sovereign will be done and God will work out His purposes.

And, many times we do not understand the sovereign will of God. It is strange and mysterious. And, that we cannot know we just simply see it. If you're looking for a verse on that, it is Deuteronomy chapter 29 and verse 29: *"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Now, there're certain secret things. I mean, you might as well forget 'em. You're not going to figure them out. Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or, who hath been His counselor? That's God's sovereign will, that's God's mysterious way.

### B. **God's Standard Will**

But, then, God has a standard will. A standard will. And, God's standard will applies to all of us. I mean, there's certain things in the Bible God says, "Thou shalt and thou shalt not." It's God's will, for example, that you live a clean life, that you don't commit adultery. It is God's will, for example, that you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. It is God's will that you do this and you don't do that. It—I mean—there are certain things that are very plain, very simple, in the Word of God. You don't have to pray and say, "Lord show me your will." God says, "There it is. That is my standard will." Alright, so there's God's sovereign will. There's God's standard will.

### C. **God's Special Will**

And, then, my dear friend, there is God's special will. Now, God's special will is His desire for you. For example, He had a particular thing that he had called the Apostle Paul to do. Look, if you will, in verse 15 of this same chapter. *"But the Lord said unto him..."*—that is to Ananias who is going to be a messenger to Saul—*"...Go thy way: for he..."*—that is Saul—*"...is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel"* (Acts 9:15).

Now, God took a man named Paul, he was Saul at first, and God said, "I have a special will for him. He is to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He is chosen, I have a special will."

Now, in my own life I can see God's sovereign will, God's standard will, and God's special will for me. Let me just choose an example. I was born in West Palm Beach, Florida. My mom and dad are here today. I didn't really choose them. They didn't really

choose me. We both got what we got, O.K.? I was born into their family and God in His sovereign will put those particular genes and chromosomes together and gave me to them and them to me. That's God's sovereign will.

And, we're all here by the sovereign choice of God. We didn't plan that; we just accept that. That's God's sovereign will.

All right, but then there was God's standard will. God wanted me to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. And, the Lord is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). And, that standard will for me is the same as for you or anybody else. God wanted me saved. It was God's will that I be saved. God is not willing that any should perish. Now, I have the choice to reject that will, but thank God I had the grace, oh, thank God He opened my heart. The grace, thank you Lord, to receive that will and to be saved. See, that's God's standard will.

But, then there's God's special will. In West Palm Beach, Florida, there was a little girl named Joyce. I looked over at her in the sixth grade, and my heart went thumpety-thump, and by the eighth grade I was twitterpated just looking at that girl. Her name's Joyce. She's here today too. And, I used to take her to church and then come home and leave her at her house, which was two blocks from my house, and walk on home and pray, "Oh, God let me marry Joyce. Oh, God, let me marry Joyce. God, give me that girl." And, God heard my prayer. And, I believe that God chose her for me. And, that was God's special will, God's special will for me. And, I believe that God called me into the ministry. I believe that was God's special will for me.

And, God has a special plan for every man, woman, boy and girl in this place. You say, "How could God be interested in me? The great God who made the universes, how could He be interested in me like a fleck of spray in an ocean of existence?" Well, He is interested in you. He loves you; you are special to Him. You are not an accident. You are an incident. You are special in the mind of God.

I'm like that little girl who was endeavoring to pray what we call The Lord's Prayer. And, she prayed it this way, "Our Father which art in Heaven, how does He know my name?" Oh, but He does. He knows you. He knows you down to the nth degree.

The Bible says, *"But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered"* (Luke 12:7). And, God does not deal with people as in a mass; He primarily deals with us individually. He has as many plans as He has people. He has as many methods as He has men.

## **II. Mistakes People Make with Regard to Knowing the Will of God**

Now, let me just say something here. There are some common mistakes that people have concerning success and knowing the will of God.

### A. **“God Is Going to Give You a Road Map for Your Life”**

One of these is that God’s gonna give you a road map for your life. He’s gonna say, “This is what you’re gonna be doing. When you’re twenty you’ll do this and when you’re thirty you’ll do this and you’ll go to this city and you’ll do this and so and so and so.” I don’t believe that for one moment. God’s plan for you is not a road map; it is a relationship. A relationship. God does not reveal the future to you, God reveals Himself to you. God simply reveals Himself to you.

Now, when God led the children of Israel in the wilderness, they didn’t know where they were going primarily. The Bible says, *“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire”* (Exodus 13:21). Sometimes it seemed like they were going around in circles. But, that was none of their business. The only thing they had to know is that pillar of cloud and that pillar of fire in sight. Amen?

And, you see, the thing to you right now is not can I say, “I understand all that’s happening to me right now?” You may not. It may not make any sense to you at all. It doesn’t have to make any sense to you, not at all. But, you must be able to say, “Nothing is between my soul and the Savior.” Are that pillar of cloud and that pillar of fire in sight? Now, don’t make the mistake of thinking God’s gonna give you a road map.

### B. **“God Is a Celestial Killjoy”**

Secondly, don’t make the mistake of thinking that God is some sort of a celestial killjoy. So many people don’t know the will of God because very frankly, they’re afraid of it. They say, “Well, you know, if I were to give my heart to the Lord, no telling what He might do to me.” I mean, if I were to say, “Lord, here I am. You can do anything with me, anywhere, any place, any cost any time, no telling, I might end up as a missionary in darkest Africa.” You got it. You might. Well, you say, “That’d be terrible.” No, that’d be wonderful. You see, listen. God’s will, when you understand it is what you really desire to do when He reveals it to you. And, anybody who gets to do what he desires to do is really a fulfilled person. Don’t be afraid of the will of God. God is a loving Father. The Bible says, *“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart”* (Psalm 37:4).

### C. **“God Only Speaks to Certain Categories of People”**

A third mistake that people make is that God only speaks to certain classes and categories of people. You say, “Well, certainly God has a will for the missionary and God has a will for the pastor and God has one for these kinds of special people.” My dear friend, let me tell you God has a plan for the plumber as well as the preacher. God has a plan for the mason as well as the minister. It, God’s plan is for the salesman as well as for the singer. It makes no difference. Again, God has a plan for everyone.

#### D. “You Must Have a Dramatic Experience”

Another mistake that people make is they think they have to have some sort of a dramatic experience like the Apostle Paul had. The Apostle Paul did have a dramatic experience. But, that’s not God’s normal way. This is recorded in the Bible concerning the Apostle Paul. But, as we read the book of Acts we find out that while God sometimes does the unexpected, most of us should look for God to do the normal thing rather than the abnormal and the supra normal.

One of my favorite verses on knowing the will of God is 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 11 and 12. Now, this concerns Elijah and he was seeking the will of God. *“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains...”*—that is, it tore the mountains—*“...and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD...”* Now, friend, that’s some wind that breaks rocks. *“...but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice”* (1 Kings 19:11–12). And, that still small voice was the voice of God.

And, friend, it may not be the cyclone, it may not be the earthquake, it may not be the inferno that shows you the will of God. It may be just that still small voice.

#### E. “God’s Will Is Only for the Young”

Then, I want to say there’s another mistake concerning the will of God. We get the idea that the will of God is only for the young. We say to young people, “We’ll have seminars for young people, how to know the will of God for your life.” Friend, we ought to get our golden agers and teach them how to know the will of God for your life. If you’re ninety years of age here today, God has a plan for you; for the remainder of those days that He has for you. And, you dare not miss it. You say, “Well, I could’ve been a preacher, I could’ve been a missionary, I could’ve done this, I should’ve done that.” Forget that, that’s gone.

Joel chapter 2 and verse 25 God says, *“I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten”* (Joel 2:25). That’s gone. If you miss the will of God, repent of it and show God that you’ve repented by saying, Here I am Lord, reporting for duty.” And, those of you who are retired, don’t get for a skinny moment that you’re retired from Jesus or retired from serving God. All that means is you just have more time to serve God. It’s all that means. My dear friend, God has a plan for you.

#### F. “God Is Hiding His Will”

Another mistake that people make is that God is hiding his will. People think that the will of God is like an Easter egg hunt. Now, my dad is here today. My dad used to go off to work and say, “Now Adrian, you and Buddy”—that’s my brother—“you clean the yard,

you do this and this and this and this.” And, if we didn’t do it, when he got home, there was that time of reckoning.

But, you know, wouldn’t it be strange if my dad had said to me, “Now, Adrian there’s something I want you to do very much and if you do it I’ll reward you, and if you don’t do it I’m gonna punish you.” Well, I’d say, “Dad, since you explained it, what is it you want me to do?” Well he said, “I’m not gonna tell you, that’s for you to find out.” Now, what kind of a father is that? What kind of a Heavenly Father has a will and a plan for us but He doesn’t reveal it to us?

My dear friend, God is not hiding His will from you. It’s not some sort of an Easter egg hunt. God will show you. He says in Psalm 32, verse 8: *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye”* (Psalm 32:8). Now, the reason, very frankly then, that many of us do not know the will of God for our lives and do not find real success in our lives is that very frankly, we do not do what the Apostle Paul did. Do you know what the Apostle Paul did? The Apostle Paul, before he was even yet the Apostle Paul, responded to the Lord just like that.

Now, he said, his very first say statement is in verse 10: *“What shall I do, LORD?”* And, the Lord said to him, now watch it, *“Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do”* (Acts 22:10). Now, God didn’t tell him all of His will. But, God told him go to the city. He didn’t tell him anything else. He said, “You get there, I’ll show you something else.”

Now, my dear friend, the way to know the will of God that you don’t know is to do the will of God that you do know, O.K.? You go do what I told you to do right now. Go to the city, that’s all, just go to the city. It’s hard to steer a ship that’s not moving.

Now, God wants to guide you. Can God guide you? I mean, can God guide you? Listen, He says, “I will guide thee with mine eye.” God guides, He doesn’t shove.

Have you ever seen anybody guided with their eye? When my children were little I used to; they’d sit up. I’d have them on the front row. My daughter’s sitting right down here on the front row right over here right now. But, when she was little and the rest of ‘em little they’d be sitting about right there where Angela and Rachael are sitting with Janice. And sometimes you know Rachael right now is being good so and so is Angie, I’m watching.

But, you know, I would look out there and maybe see them sometimes just cutting up. I’d be in the middle of a sermon and I’d look at them and you wouldn’t know it but they’d know it. Which means, “If you don’t straighten up I’m gonna fix your wagon when we get home.” Now, nobody else would know that. But, they would know it. You know why they would know it? Cause I could guide them with my eye. I mean, they knew what Daddy meant by just simply looking with his eye.

That’s the kind of relationship that we’re to have with the Lord; a ready, willing,

watchful, and submissive attitude.

Listen my dear friend, the Bible says in John chapter 7 verse 17: *“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself”* (John 7:17). You must will to do the will of God.

Psalm 25 verse 9 says, *“The meek will he guide in judgment”* (Psalm 25:9). Do you know what the word meek means? It means those who are teachable. A boy drops out of school when he’s fourteen because he says, “They can’t teach me anything.” He’s probably right. He’s probably right, they can’t. But, it’s not their fault, it’s his fault. You’re to be open to the Lord.

Romans 8 verse 14: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”* (Romans 8:14). Are you leadable? The Holy Spirit is a still, small voice. He doesn’t shove and He doesn’t shout.

Do you have a quiet time where God can speak to you? Well, my dear friend, you get useable. You get yieldable. You get meek and God will speak to you. A lot of people want to be filled with the Holy Spirit but they’re not useable, they’re not yielded, they’re not ready.

I imagine a man going up to a service station. He he’s got an automobile and it doesn’t run because he’s pushing it. It’s got two flat tires; the headlights are broken out. The radiator is leaking and it’s empty. And, there’s no oil in the crankcase. The gas tank is rusted through— got a hole in the bottom of it. The windshield is broken. The doors are caved in. The fenders are flopping. And, he pushes it in to the service station. And, the attendant comes out in amazement and looks at it and says, “Huh, what can I do for you?” You say, “Fill ‘er up.” What would he say? “Ha, what for?”

Oh, God we pray, “Lord, fill me God, show me!” God says, “What for?” Why is God going to show you; why would God fill you with His Spirit when you’re in a shape like that? My dear friend, are you yieldable? Are you open? Are you meek? Are you willing? If you are, God will show you.

Now, if you want to know the will of God, you’re serious. Make up your mind; you’ll do it before you know it. You say, “Lord, show me and I’ll do it.” Forget that. Just forget it. Just forget it. You say, “Lord, I will do it, I sign the contract at the bottom. Now, Lord, unroll the scroll. I’ve already signed it at the bottom.” Have you ever done that? Just signed it at the bottom? I mean, that’s gonna include your children. It’s gonna include your finances. It’s gonna include your health. It’s gonna include your profession. Have you ever done that? You see, the Bible says, *“...the meek will he teach his way”* (Psalm 25:9). A meek person is somebody who is yielded to the Lord.

When you present yourself, the Bible says in Romans chapter 12 verse 1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Romans

12:1). Then you will know, He says, *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...”* And then He says, *“...that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:2). You say, “Well, Pastor, I want to know about it first.” O.K., I’ll tell you about it first. Are you ready? It is good, perfect, and acceptable. That’s all you need to know. Romans Chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. That’s all you need to know. It is good, it is perfect, and it is acceptable. It is the will of God.

### **III. Six Practical Ways That God Guides**

Now, let’s go on and let me give you six very practical ways that God will speak to you just as He spoke to the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul said, “Lord, what will you have me to do?”

#### **A. God Guides Through Miracles**

Number one, and I must say this, God may speak to you through miracles, through visions, through ecstasies, He may give you a vision. He gave the Apostle Paul one on the road to Damascus. And, I cannot discount that. God may speak to you in a dream. God may speak to you by a vision. God may do to you what He did to the Apostle Paul. He may. But, He does not normally do that. I do not discount that, but, and by the way, if you have any vision.

You say, “Well, last night in the middle of the night I had a vision.” Well, you better make sure it was a vision, not a nightmare. I mean, maybe you just ate sour kraut and ice cream before you went to sleep.

These things that are called visions always have to be checked out by other things. I don’t discount that. That’s one way that you can know the will of God.

#### **B. God Guides Through the Word of God**

Second way that you know the will of God is by the Word of God.

Now, the Apostle Paul, though right in our text we don’t read anything in this particular passage that I have before me about the Word of God. I can tell you this much about the Apostle Paul, his name was Saul beforehand. Even though he did not understand the Scriptures at first, he was steeped in the Scriptures. That’s that reason that after he got saved, he immediately became a preacher of the Word of God. He had an incredible knowledge of the Word of God. And, it was the Word of God that had spoken to him even prior to this.

If you will go back several chapters you’ll find out that Saul was there when Stephen preached one of the greatest sermons ever preached. And, it was that sermon that got Saul convicted. As a matter of fact, Jesus said to Saul on the road to Damascus, *“it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks”* (Acts 9:5). What he meant was, “It’s hard for you

to kick against that scriptural, spirit-filled sermon that Stephen preached before he was stoned.”

All right, so God gives you the Word of God. Now, thank God, most of us have something better than even the Apostle Paul had. We have this complete canon of Scripture. I mean, we have the Old Testament and the New Testament and thank God we can hold it in our hands. And, God is going to guide you through Scripture.

Psalm 119 verse 105: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105). Thank God you can take the Bible and just shine it along as you go. The Bible says, “Be careful, don’t step there.” You say, “Thank you Lord.” The Bible says, “Look at that opportunity.” You say, “Thank you Lord.” Thy Word, it’s a lamp, it’s a light, and it just shines as you go.

The Lord will show you how to go and where to go. Thy Word, thy Word, thy Word is a lamp.

You, are you serious about knowing the will of God? Don’t tell me you are if you’re not serious about the Word of God. Don’t tell me you’re serious about the will of God. My dear friend, get in the will of God.

For example, some of you out here are wondering whether you ought to divorce your husband and marry someone else. Let me give you the answer. No. No. Why? It’s contrary to the Word of God. Don’t, don’t. Pray about it.

You pray about it, the devil will give you an answer to your prayer and you’ll say, “Thank you Lord.” And, you’ll think it’s the Lord. No, my dear friend, God’s got His Word. Never ask guidance about what God has already commanded or what God has already forbidden.

### **C. God Guides Through Providence**

And, then a third way that God will guide you. Not only is through miracles, and not only through the Word of God, but God will guide you through providence.

Now, here’s the Apostle Paul, he’s just gotten saved; he’s not yet the Apostle Paul. And, look if you will in verse 23 what happens to him now. And, the Bible says, *“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket”* (Acts 9:23–25). Here’s this once great proud Pharisee, I can see him huddled up in a little wicker basket. And, they’re lowering him down over the wall. How did he know they were going to kill him? God showed him. God showed him. What we think was a happenstance was really God’s providence.

You see, God guides us and God provides. You know what the word providence means? It’s is made up of two words, “pro” and “video.” It means to see ahead of time. Pro-vidence. To God foresees. God leads us by His providences.

As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul later on in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verse 9 speaks of how God led him. He said, *“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries”* (1 Corinthians 16:9).

I’ve seen God open doors in my life. I am here as your pastor because God opened a door for me. Well, had you not called me, I couldn’t have come. God opened a door for me. And, I’ve seen God open doors in small things and big things in my life and your life.

And, sometimes a door may seem closed when it’s not really closed. It doesn’t mean that it’s all honey and no bees. The Apostle Paul said, *“There’s an effectual door open unto me, but there are many adversaries.”* Many adversaries.

The door to the room of opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition. And so, my dear friend, there is what I want to call the providence of God or the open door.

#### **D. God Guides Through the Holy Spirit**

Then there’s the Spirit of God that leads. Look, if you will, in verse 17 of this same chapter. When Ananias came to this man Saul, before he became Paul, we read this, *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 9:17).

Thank God, oh dear friend, that sometimes He speaks through miracles. Sometimes He speaks through His Word, especially to us. Sometimes He speaks to us by open doors and providences; what the world would call happenstances. And, He does. But, oh, how He leads by His Spirit.

Put these verses down. Romans chapter 8 and verse 14, Saul, who received the Holy Spirit had learned something and he wrote this: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”* (Romans 8:14).

And, then that same Saul wrote later on in Galatians chapter 5 and verse 18: *“But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law”* (Galatians 5:18). I want to remind you, dear friend, that the Holy Spirit is like a gentle dove. He does not shove, He does not shout, He whispers and He guides.

#### **E. God Guides Through the People of God**

Number five, He leads us by the people of God. Look, if you will, in verses 26. The Bible says in verse 26, *“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple”* (Acts 9:26). Now, notice this. *“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord”—*that is, how Saul had seen the Lord—*“in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at*

*Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).*

I’m so grateful that there was a man named Barnabas who laid his hand on the shoulders of the Apostle Paul to make a way for him. I’ve had people, friends, to guide me all of my life. I have some wonderful deacons in this church who guide me. And, I say to our deacons, “Listen, I don’t have a pastor. You’re my pastor.” I love these deacons. I listen to them. I have staff members. The gentlemen on this platform, right now, every one of them are wise and gifted men. If they were to put their hand on my shoulder and say to me, “Adrian, this is what I think. Adrian, have you ever thought of this?” Or, “Adrian, I think that you might be going in a direction that’s not wise.”

Do you know what I would do? I’d say, “Well, I’m the Pastor. Who do you think you are?” No, I wouldn’t. I’ll tell you exactly what I would do. I would listen so keenly. I would say, “Is that right? Do you really feel that way? Let me carry it to the Lord.”

Proverbs chapter 24 and verse 6: *“For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety”* (Proverbs 24:6). Thank God for this church. Thank God that you have a pastor who doesn’t think he knows everything. Thank God for a multitude of counselors. And, that’s where we have strength in this church.

And, dear friend, you have friends who can guide you. But, you make certain that they’re mature and walking in the Spirit. And, always remember, even though you have human counselors, the Holy Spirit of God is the final counselor.

#### **F. God Guides Through Wisdom**

Next of all, there is the wisdom of God to guide you. Look, if you will, in verse 20 of this same chapter. The Bible says, *“And straightway he...”*—that is Saul—*“...preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”* (Acts 9:20–21).

But, now notice verse 22: *“But Saul increased the more in strength...”* What kind of strength was it? You mean he’s getting bigger muscles? Oh, no. It’s wisdom! *“...and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ”* (Acts 9:22). It was this same Paul later on who wrote in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 15 and 16: *“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15–16).

What is wisdom? Wisdom is seeing life from God’s viewpoint. Let me tell you what Dr. J.I. Packer said that wisdom is. And, you listen carefully. “Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it.” Now, friend, that’s a power-packed statement. So, I’m gonna give it to you again. “Wisdom is the power to see...”—that’s one step—“and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it.” That,

my dear friend, is wisdom.

And, all of these are ways that God will speak to you to know and to do His will. Now, I'm finished but let me tell you something. God's will is for your welfare as well as for His glory. God's will is what you would choose for yourself if you had enough sense to choose it. Don't be afraid of the will of God. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.

Now, listen. You are free to choose the will of God. You are free to choose against the will of God. But, you are not free to choose the consequences if you choose against the will of God.

For example, I'm in a building. There's a ten-story building. There's an open window. I am free to choose to step out of it, but once I do I am not free to choose the consequences, O.K.? You say, "Well, I'm free!" Yes, you're free alright, my dear friend. You're free to hit the ground.

## **Conclusion**

Let me tell you something, friend. You are free to choose the will of God or to refuse the will of God but you're not free to change the consequences of such a choice. God's will is best. "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

Heads are bowed; eyes are closed, no one stirring. What is success in life? It's the progressive realization of the will of God for your life. And, step number one is to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord.

How many here today would say, "Brother Rogers, I know that I know that I know if I died right now today, I'd go to Heaven." May I see your hand? Lift it up. Take it down. Now, if you couldn't lift your hand today and to say that, "I know that I know that if I died right now I'd go to Heaven." I want to help you right now to receive Christ.

You could pray a prayer like this, "Oh, God I'm a sinner and I'm lost and I can't save myself and I need to be saved and I want to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you Jesus. Right now, with all of my heart. Come into my heart; forgive my sin. Save me Jesus." And my dear friend, He will. He'll give you a brand new life. He'll give you a home in Heaven and He'll give you power that you've never known before. If you'll just choose Him, you'll choose life.

Father, I pray that many will do that today, in Jesus wonderful name, Amen.

# How Jesus Changes People

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** November 5, 1997

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 9:1–6, 17–20

*“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.”*

ACTS 9:18

## Outline

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- I. A New Enthronement
- II. A New Enlightenment
- III. A New Empowerment
- IV. A New Encouragement
- V. A New Employment

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you open your Bibles to Acts chapter 9? In Acts chapter 9, you have a story of the conversion of the Apostle Paul and how the Lord Jesus Christ changed him. The title of the message is just simply that—“How Jesus Changes People.” Somebody has well said that “nature forms us, sin deforms us, schools inform us, prisons reform us, but Jesus transforms us.” And, we’re talking about how Jesus transforms people.

Now, if your name is on the church roll but you haven’t been transformed, I’ve got news for you: you’re not going to heaven! The Bible says, *“If any man be in Christ [Jesus], he is a new [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) I tell people, *“If your religion hasn’t changed your life, you’d better change your religion*, because it’ll make a bad man good and a good man better.” Everybody will be changed when they meet the Lord Jesus—radically, dramatically, eternally, visibly, spiritually, emotionally changed, when we meet the Lord Jesus Christ. And, I’m not just talking about the change that comes when we get better; I’m talking about an intrinsic change. *We’re not talking about a tadpole becoming a frog; we’re talking about a frog becoming a prince by the kiss of grace.* We’re talking about a miracle—a change—that is supernatural, radical. We’re not talking about joining a church and trying to do better; we’re talking about something intrinsic, supernatural—that kind of a change.

Now, the man that we're going to be studying about tonight was a young, proud Pharisee. And, even before he met the Lord Jesus Christ, he was religious and he was impassioned. He was an intellectual giant. He was very ambitious, and his chief goal—his chief goal—was to destroy Christianity. He wanted to take Christianity out of the land, root and branch. He wanted to destroy it. And, he brought this giant intellect, he brought his fierce emotions, and he brought his determined hatred against the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ—even taking Christians, having them put into jail, and being an accomplice in the murder and the martyrdom of Christians.

Now, he was on his road to Damascus to do just that. It was noonday, and there, a light appeared to him that made the light of the noonday sun pale like a candle. It was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who spoke to this man. Let's read the story, beginning in verse 1: *"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way"—and, by the way, that's what they called believers: "people of the way"; that is, Jesus said, "I am the way..." (John 14:6) These people had a new direction, a new way of life—"if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem"—can you imagine them being put in chains and carried all the way from Damascus to Jerusalem?—"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what [will] thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."* (Acts 9:1–6)

Now, the Lord speaks from heaven to this young, proud, arrogant Pharisee, and he is dumbfounded. He doesn't know who or what—"What's going on?" And, the Lord asks Saul a question: He says, *"Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* (Acts 9:4) You see that question there in verses 4 and 5: "Why are you persecuting me?" I can imagine Saul saying, "Whoever you are, I'm not persecuting you; I'm persecuting the Church." Well, of course, you and I know the lesson right there is that to persecute the Church is to persecute Jesus. Why? Because we are His Body.

Now, you need to understand this, and all of us need to understand this: that when the body suffers, the head suffers; and when the Church suffers, Jesus suffers. And, if you persecute the Church, you persecute Jesus. And, I might say, correspondingly, it follows as night follows day, if you neglect the Church, you neglect Jesus. If you scorn the Church, you scorn Jesus. If you love the Church, you honor Jesus, because the Church is the blood-bought Body of the Lord Jesus Christ and you cannot honor the

head and dishonor the body.

“Saul, why, *why*, do you—why do you—persecute me?” That’s the first question. And then, in verse 5, the second question is, “Why are you persecuting yourself?” Look in verse 5: and He said, *“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”* (Acts 9:5) Now, what does that mean? Well, He’s talking here about something very common in that day. An ox, who would be yoked to a wagon, would sometimes be obtuse and recalcitrant and would not do what he was supposed to do. Well, if you took a stick and hit an ox across the back with the stick, you’d just simply break the stick. You wouldn’t bother the ox very much. If you were to take a whip and whip the ox, he would not be that particularly impressed with your whipping. But, there is a part on an ox’s heel called a “fetlock” that’s a very tender thing. And, the ox driver had a thing called a “goad,” and if he wanted the ox to move, all he would do is to take that goad—that sharp goad—and stick the ox right there in that fetlock; and the ox would feel that and kick back against it. Now, that’s what He’s talking about. He says, “It’s hard for you—isn’t it?—it’s hard for you to kick against the prick?” (Acts 9:5)

Now, what was that? Well, you see, this man had participated, in an earlier chapter, with the martyrdom of the first Christian martyr, whose name was Stephen. And, when Stephen was stoned, Saul was there, grinning, holding the garments of those who were murdering Stephen. And, the Bible says that before Stephen died, he kneeled down and he prayed, and he said, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...[and] Lord [Jesus, don’t] lay...this sin to their charge.”* (Acts 7:59–60) And, the Bible says that the face of Stephen shone like an angel. (Acts 6:15) Can you imagine what Saul must have thought like...must have thought about that? I mean, he... I can imagine, when he tried to sleep at night, he saw that angel face, he saw the blood, he saw the stones. He felt all of this; he heard the prayer ringing in his ears: *“Lord [Jesus]”*—“Lord Jesus”—*“lay not this sin to their charge.”* (Acts 7:60) And, the death of Stephen was not a waste; it was what brought Saul, I’m sure, under deep, deep conviction. We’ve often said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. The bottom line of this whole thing is that when a man is without Christ, he is persecuting the Church; he’s really persecuting himself.

Now, Jesus asked a question; and then, Paul asked a question. He says, *“Who [are you], Lord?”* (Acts 9:5) And then, he says, *“Lord, what [would you] have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6) He spent the rest of his life learning the answer to those two questions—who Jesus is and what Jesus would have him to do. Jesus says to him, “You go to such-and-such a city. You tarry there. I’ll send a messenger to tell you what to do.” (Acts 9:6) And, the messenger came, a man whose name was Ananias. And actually, in that episode, we find five things that are the marks of any new believer in Jesus Christ and the marks of a believer no matter how long he has been a believer in the Lord Jesus. And so, I want you to measure yourself against these five things and see if the same five things

that were true about the Apostle Paul are true about you, if you have become a new creation like he was.

## I. A New Enthronement

First of all, there was a new enthronement. Do you have that? A new enthronement. You see, he says in verse 5: *“Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus.”* (Acts 9:5) Now, go down to verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord”—“the Lord”—“even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me.”* (Acts 9:17) Now, what happened to the Apostle Paul is just simply this: that Jesus Christ became his Lord; he is under new management. May I ask this question? I say, may I ask you this question? Listen to me, and don't let the question go by. Is Jesus Christ Lord in your life? Now, if He is not, you have no right to call yourself a Christian. It is my duty to inform you that you need to be saved.

Now, so many times we hear people talk about “receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.” Now, Jesus is Savior, but the Bible does not use the terminology “to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.” The Bible says we're to “receive the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, He is Savior, but He is also Lord. As a matter of fact, He's called “Savior” twenty-four times in the New Testament. He's called “Lord” four hundred and thirty-three times. And, it's my duty to inform you that if He's not your Lord, He's not your Savior. Romans 10:9: *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”*

Someone wrote these words:

*Ye call Me Master and obey Me not,  
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,  
Ye call Me Way and walk not,  
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not,  
Ye call Me wise and follow Me not,  
Ye call Me fair and love Me not,  
Ye call Me rich and ask Me not,  
Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not,  
Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not,  
Ye call Me noble and serve Me not,  
Ye call Me mighty and honor Me not,  
Ye call Me just and fear Me not,  
If I condemn you, blame Me not.*

—ANONYMOUS

He is Lord! And, when the Apostle Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, there was

a new enthronement. Jesus Christ was Lord!

Now, that doesn't mean that you're perfect when you make Him Lord. It doesn't mean that you will not grow and surrender. **But, salvation is not a cafeteria line where you say, "I'll have a little Saviorhood today but no Lordship, thank you."** As a matter of fact, I hear people say, "Now that you've received Jesus as Savior, would you like to make Him Lord?" No! He is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we trust Him as Lord and Savior.

## **II. A New Enlightenment**

Now, not only was there a new enthronement; there was also a new enlightenment. Now, notice again verses 17 and 18: *"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee [by] the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight"* (Acts 9:17)—a new enlightenment. The Lord struck him blind on the road to Damascus. The Lord struck him blind as an object lesson to show him the greater spiritual darkness that had been in his mind. Here was a man—a great intellect. He had the equivalency of a triple Ph.D. He was proficient in many languages, studied at the feet of Gamaliel, and he was a student of the Bible, but he was blind. And, Jesus said, *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see."* (John 3:3)

Now, now, Saul was blind physically, but his physical blindness was illustrative of his greater spiritual blindness. Now, Paul, after he met the Lord Jesus, took the same Old Testament—listen to me carefully—he took the same Old Testament that he had been studying for years, and years, and years under the best scriptural teaching of that day... He was a proud, young, intellectual Pharisee who studied at the feet of the greatest teacher of that day, Gamaliel. But, when he met the Lord, that Old Testament burst aflame in his hands. And, he looked there, and he saw Jesus Christ on every page: he saw Jesus in the prophets; he saw Jesus in the Psalms; he saw Jesus in Moses; he saw Jesus in the Law; he saw Jesus in the Old Testament sacrifices; he saw Jesus in the tabernacle; he saw Jesus in the ceremonies. Jesus Christ was everywhere. The Apostle Paul took his Old Testament after he was born again, he went into Arabia with the Old Testament in his knapsack, and when he came out of there, he came out of that place with Romans and Ephesians, First and Second Thessalonians in his heart, because God had given him a new insight. You see, friend, God opens your eyes. You see things. You understand things that you could never know and will never know until you're twice-born.

## **III. A New Empowerment**

There's a third thing he had that was new: not only a new enthronement, not only a new enlightenment, but he also had a new empowerment. Look in verse 17: he says,

*“Jesus...appeared unto thee [by] the way as thou camest, [and] sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight”—that’s the enlightenment—“and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17)—that is the empowerment, because when there comes an enthronement and an enlightenment, there needs to be an empowerment to live the Christian life. And, when the Lord Jesus Christ saves you, He doesn’t merely give you truth and say, “Live up to it”; He comes into you to energize you by the Holy Spirit of God. And, and, that’s the secret of the Christian life—is living the Christian life in the power, the anointing, of the Holy Spirit.*

The Apostle Paul wrote later in Romans chapter 8 and verse 2: *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [has] made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2)* Paul had been in bondage. He was in bondage to legalism. He was in bondage to sin. And, it was the Holy Spirit of God that brought a new law into his life and a new liberty. He said in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 17: *“Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (2 Corinthians 3:17)* You see, Christianity is a changed life. That’s what I’m talking about. But, it is a changed life because it is an exchanged life. Galatians 2, verse 20: Paul said, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life...I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)* That’s the reason he said, later on, in Philippians chapter 4, verse 13: *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13)—because there was a new empowerment.*

I can tell you this as a personal testimony. I was saved as a teenage boy. I was sincere. I gave Jesus my heart. He came into me. A half a century later, Jesus Christ has been and is now a bright, living, burning reality and power in my life. And, there is no way under God’s green earth that I could have served Jesus Christ for half a century without the Holy Spirit in my heart. The Lord that enlightened me is the Lord that has empowered me.

Now friend, it’s one thing for the Holy Spirit to come into you and be resident, but you’ll never know that power and that joy until He is President, ’til you’re filled with the Holy Spirit of God. And, we need to say it, and sing it, and mean it:

*Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!  
Hold o’er my being absolute sway.  
Fill with thy Spirit ’til all shall see  
Christ only, always, living in me!*

*—ADELAIDE A. POLLARD*

Ephesians 5, verse 18: *“be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)*

#### IV. A New Encouragement

This man, who had a new enthronement—“*Lord, what [will you] have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6)—this man, who had a new enlightenment—the scales fell from his eyes, and he saw things he’d never seen before. This man, who had a new empowerment, now also has a new encouragement. Look again, if you will, in verse 17: “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul”—now, you have to understand who this is that’s saying this and to whom it’s being said. This man was “*breathing out threatenings and slaughter.*” (Acts 9:1) He’s a murderer. He’s a blasphemer. And now, he is a brother—“*Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received [his] sight forthwith*”—now, watch this—“*and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*” (Acts 9:17–19)

Here’s a man who now enters into the fellowship of believers. He is baptized as a baptized believer in a New Testament church. He is now a brother. He is with his brothers. He is receiving strength. He is receiving encouragement from that church there in Damascus. And, every blood-bought child of God needs the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who have enthroned the Lord Jesus, those of us who have been enlightened by the Lord Jesus, those of us who’ve been empowered by the Lord Jesus—we need to be encouraged by the Lord Jesus, and how He does that is through the Church. The Bible never teaches a “Lone Ranger Christianity.” Immediately, God the Holy Spirit saw to it that this man was with brothers and sisters in Christ, and Ananias could put his hands upon this man and say, “Brother Saul.”

The Bible never teaches a “Lone Ranger Christianity.” The Bible says in the book of Hebrews, we are not—we are not, we are not—to “*[forsake] the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but [we are to be] exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*” (Hebrews 10:25) The days are going to get darker, and darker, and darker, and darker, and we, as Christians, are going to have to get closer, and closer, and closer, and closer, and encourage one another. I don’t mean with a fortress mentality, and I don’t mean with a pessimistic mentality. But folks, you need me; I need you, and we need one another. And, when you come to the house of God to worship on the Lord’s Day and on Wednesday night, you’re saying two things: you’re saying to everybody who’s present, “God is important to me, and you folks are important to me—you folks are important to me. I care about you, and that’s why I’m here to associate myself with you.”

I went to California a number of years ago and visited, out there, the giant sequoias. Have you ever done that—to see these incredible trees in California? We saw... Now,

Joyce and I went and saw the General Sherman—an incredible tree. It's over two hundred feet high. That's a twenty-story building. It has a seventy-foot circumference. That is, you'd have to have a tape measurer seventy feet long to wrap around that tree. It is two millenniums old—two thousand years old. It goes back to New Testament times. You would think that a tree that is that big, that tall, that old—you'd think it would have a root that would go down the center of the earth, wouldn't you? Almost. Did you know that the roots are right on the surface of General Sherman? And, all the sequoia roots are right on the surface. Well, how do they—how do they—stand so long? Well, they grow in groves—they grow in groves—and their roots interlock. They hold one another up, and that's exactly what we, as Christians, are to do. You're to shore me up; I'm to shore you up. You're to encourage me; I'm to encourage you. We are a family, and we are together.

Paul was baptized. Verse 18 tells us that. He was a part of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, I'm grateful for all the parachurch ministries and all of that, but folks, I want to tell you, the one institution that Jesus founded is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, if you belong to any institution—I don't care whether it's Billy Graham, Stephen Olford, Love Worth Finding; if you belong to Promise Keepers, if you belong to Bill Gothard, if you belong to anything else—and it takes away from your love, and service, and finance, and commitment to the local church, in my estimation, you've sinned against Almighty God. Jesus founded the Church.

Every so often people write me and say, "Well, I want to send my tithe to Love Worth Finding." I say, "Don't you do it. You send your tithe to your local church." If I thought that Love Worth Finding and our ministry was siphoning off resources, and help, and strength from the local church and becoming a substitute for the local church, I wouldn't be in that ministry. I believe in the Church. And, you need to believe in the Church, and you need to love the Church. And, I'll tell you, the church you need to love is the one you belong to. Be faithful and loyal to the Church, and be a part of encouragement that comes through being a part of this church.

Here was a man. There was a new enthronement: he enthroned the Lord Jesus. There was a new enlightenment: the scales fell from his eyes. There was a new empowerment: he was filled with the Holy Ghost. There was a new encouragement: he was a part of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **V. A New Employment**

There was one other thing about him, and I'll be finished: he had a new employment. Look, if you will now, in verses 20 and 21: "*And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*" (Acts 9:20) Now, that's something. Now, wait a minute—he hadn't been to seminary yet. Nobody's disciplined him. He hasn't seen EE.

He doesn't know anything about that. Right away!

Let me ask you a question: When you light a candle, when does it start giving light? When it's burned halfway down? Immediately, when it's lighted. When do you witness for the Lord Jesus Christ? When you get saved—when you get saved. You say, “Well, I don't know how.” Well, if you've been saved, you can tell what happened to you, friend, and you can begin to share. And, and, I want to tell you, a Christian with a glowing testimony is worth a library full of arguments anyway—when you know the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was in a revival years ago in Pensacola, and I'm not going to name the church 'cause it would be embarrassing for the pastor. You just might know this man. This was the Reverend Doctor So-and-so. And, he was a fine man, and I loved him. But, I was with him, and he told me that he just didn't know how to be a soul winner; he just didn't know how to witness. And, in that same meeting, I saw children bringing adults to Christ—children bringing adults to Christ. Now folks, listen, here was a man—a trained cleric, a pastor—who's not a soul winner. Now listen, I want to say it gently; I don't want to be mean, but I want you to listen to me: if you don't have a desire to bring people to Jesus Christ, you'd better check up and see if you've ever been saved. I'm serious.

I know when I got... The first thing to happen to me when I got saved is I wanted my brother to be saved; I wanted my sister to be saved. My dad and I got saved in the same service. My mother was saved. I wanted my brother and sister saved. I began to pray for them. I wanted my schoolmates saved. When I played football, I wanted the football players saved, and I prayed that God would make me a soul winner. And, I can remember going out as a teenage boy—just saying, “Lord Jesus, I'm not going to—I'm not going to—sleep 'til I lead a soul to Christ.” Burning in my heart from the moment I received Jesus Christ—from the moment I received Jesus Christ—was a desire to see other people saved. Now, that doesn't make me great. It would make me ungreat if that weren't there; it would make me... I mean, it would be unusual—it would be abnormal—for a Christian not to have this employment.

Now, we can't all do it the same way. You can't preach from the pulpit always, or sometimes, or maybe never. We can't all be preachers, but we can all be reachers somehow, some way. You say, “Well, God didn't call me to be a witness. God called me to give. God called me to pray,” or, “God called me to sing,” or, “God called me to write,” or, “God called me to teach. But, God didn't call me to be a soul winner.” *There's nothing wrong with you that an old-fashioned revival or a good dose of salvation wouldn't cure.*

All of us are to have a new employment. Our duty, our privilege, our joy is bringing others to Jesus. Now, we can't all do it the same way, and we don't all have the same giftedness. But, the worst thing about many folks is not that they're not successful; the

worst thing about many who name the name of Jesus is they don't even try. Some people think they've done God a wild favor when they get up and get here on Sunday morning. They call this the "service." Well, the service begins out there. I love you to come to church; you ought to come to church, but you ought to have a soul winner's heart. And, you know, sometimes I get so busy preparing sermons, and administrating, and going to meetings, and wrestling with problems that it dawns on me that I have not been face to face, heart to heart, life to life, bringing people to Jesus. And, I have to get hold of myself and say, "Adrian, don't preach to others and tell them to do things you're not doing." And, you may have to get a hold of yourself and say, "Where is that zeal that I first knew when I came to Jesus to share the gospel?" Immediately—immediately—Paul began to preach and teach Jesus Christ.

There's a story I read a long time ago about the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. Before Dr. W. A. Criswell was the pastor, George W. Truitt was the pastor. How many of you ever heard of Dr. Truitt? Let me see your hand. My goodness, that's something. George W. Truitt, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. And, they had a little girl to come forward in the service. And, as we do, they had counselors to counsel—and especially with children, because we don't want children to be vaccinated with a mild form of Christianity so they don't catch the real thing. But, children can be saved, but they have to be dealt with carefully. And, our guide—our job—is not to block children or shove children, but to guide children. And, children can be saved and should be saved, and it ought to be normal and natural for little children to come to Christ. But, this girl came forward. And, they got this little girl, and they asked her questions. And, she was intimidated by these big men asking these questions, and she stumbled over a few of the questions. And, one of the men said to this little girl, "Young lady, we're so glad you've come, and we're so glad that you have this hunger in your heart to know the Lord Jesus and to be saved. And, God bless you for that. And, but we're going to ask you to wait a while before you get baptized. We just want you to be certain that you're saved and that you know the Lord Jesus." And, her little chin started to quiver, and a big tear just came down her cheeks. And, one of the men said, "Precious young lady, that's all right. We didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It'll be all right if you're not baptized right..." "Oh," she said, "I wasn't crying about not being baptized." She said, "I was just thinking about my brother. He needs to be saved, too." And, one of the men said, "Brethren, I move we baptize her now." See, that's the mark—that's the mark—of being saved, being born again. Is it real to you? Friend, if it is real to you, by every means possible, you're going to want to share the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord.

## Conclusion

Those are five marks, as far as I'm concerned, to be true not only about the Apostle Paul but about any of us who name the name of Jesus.

Another name that some of you may know is Stuart Hamblen. Stuart Hamblen was a rough cowboy. He got saved in a Billy Graham Crusade in Los Angeles. That's the first big crusade that Graham had (and kind of put Billy Graham on the map). And, Stuart Hamblen, Dr. Vincent, was a friend of big John Wayne. Dr. Vincent—where's Bob Vincent? Right here. He's a friend of John Wayne. Did you know that the chairman of our deacons and John Wayne were buddies? And, Dr. Vincent has witnessed to John. But, Stu Hamblen witnessed to John Wayne, and he told John how he'd been saved. And then, he said, "John, that could happen to you. It's no secret what God can do. What He's done for others He'll do for you." And, John said, "Stu, that's beautiful. That'd make a good song." And, Stu Hamblen wrote that song, "'Tis no secret what God can do. What He's done for others He'll do for you." And, what I'm—what I'm—here tonight to tell you is what God did for Paul two thousand years ago He did for Adrian and He'll do for you. *"If any man be in Christ, [he's] a new creature."* (2 Corinthians 5:17) Amen?

Father, thank you for your Word tonight, and thank you, Lord, for these five marks of a believer in Jesus. And Lord, I pray that not only will they be real in my heart, but, God, I pray before these my people that they will be renewed and refreshed in my heart and intensified in my life and in the life of this church. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Now tonight, would you like—would you like—to acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Maybe you were saved washing dishes at your kitchen sink. Maybe you're driving down the road in your automobile and said, "Lord Jesus, I need you. Come into my heart and save me." Maybe you were walking through the woods. Maybe you kneeled by your bed. Maybe you were in your office. But, you asked Jesus Christ to save you. You know what you need to do now? You need to make it public. You need to be baptized just like Paul was baptized, and you need to be a part of the Church just like Paul was. You need the encouragement, the strength, of the Church.

Maybe you've never been saved. Maybe you're here tonight and you've never really, really had that change that I'm talking about. Maybe you've been religious and a church member but you've never had that change. Maybe you've been irreligious and not a church member and have never had that change. But tonight, you're saying, "I want Jesus—not just religion. I want Jesus."

# Hearing and Doing the Will of God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: March 10, 1996**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 9:1–11, 17–27**

*“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?  
And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city,  
and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”*

ACTS 9:6

## Outline

### Introduction

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    1. God’s Will Is a Road Map
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### Conclusion

## Introduction

Be finding the book of Acts, chapter 9, would you please? And, when you've found it, I want you to look up here. Today is World Missions Week, the last Sunday, and I want to be talking today about hearing the missionary call, or hearing and doing the will of God. Now, we're all called to be missionaries. Not all are called to be fulltime vocational missionaries, but whether it's across the street or around the world, we are called to carry the light. I know that if you're a child of God and understand the Bible, you believe that.

If I were to ask you, who is the world's greatest missionary who ever lived—or who was he, if he's not alive today—I think we would all say, if we know anything about the Bible, his name was Paul—a missionary named Paul. Without a doubt, I don't think, without equivocation or contradiction, we would have to say that Paul was the world's greatest missionary, and what I want us to do today is to hear how God laid the missionary call on the heart of the Apostle Paul. Now, as we do that, it's going to speak to us because we're going to find some principles as to how God works and how God speaks.

You know, when I go places and get into what we call the “Q and A” (“question and answer”)—course in politics it's “question and avoidance”—but when we get into what we call “Q and A,” almost invariably this question will come up: “How can I know the will of God for my life?”—“How can I know the will of God for my life?” And, that is an excellent question, and there is a biblical answer. Now, all of us, whether or not we're called to the mission field, must know the will of God for our lives. Success in life is not necessarily making a lot of money or being famous, but it is the progressive realization of the will of God for your life. That's success. And, who does not want to be successful?

Well, you're in Acts chapter 9. Begin reading in verse 1: *“And Saul”—now, that was Paul's name before he got saved, and God changed his name later on to Paul, but—“Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest; And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way”—and “the way” is the way of the cross. They called early Christians “people of the way”; and so, he's talking about Christians. So, he's going to the synagogues to see if he can find any Christians—“whether they were men or women, [that] he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem”—that is, he's going to put them in chains, arrest them, bring them to Jerusalem to be tried—“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven”—that's what we're talking about now: that light that we're to carry. Here's the light from heaven around Saul—“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the*

*Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” (Acts 9:1–6)*

The two greatest questions that anybody could possibly ask are these: Who are you, Lord? And Lord, what would you have me to do? Now friend, those are two great, great, great, great questions, and you dare not miss the answer to those two questions. Just who is this person called Jesus? And, just what does He want of my life? *“Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 9:5) “[And] Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)* These were honest questions, and they got an honest answer. And, I’m telling you on the authority of the Word of God, if you will honestly and submissively ask those same two questions, the God who answered Paul so long ago is the God who will answer you today in this twentieth century. *“Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 9:5) “[And] Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)* Now, you must ask Him this question because in and of yourself you will not get the right answer apart from Him. Jeremiah chapter 10, verse 23: *“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jeremiah 10:23)* Take all of your wit, and wisdom, and ingenuity, and good intentions—you don’t have what it takes. You need for God to speak to you and for God to show you His will for your life.

## **I. The Purpose That God Reveals**

Now, there are three simple things I want us to learn today as we look at this passage of Scripture. First of all, the purpose that God reveals—the purpose that God reveals. Notice in verse 6 he says here, *“And it shall be told thee what thou must do”—“it shall be told thee what thou must do.” (Acts 9:6)* God will let you know His will for your life. Now, whether it’s to be a missionary or to be a mechanic, whether it’s to be a preacher or to be a plumber, God’s plan for you will be told to you, whether you’re young or whether you’re old. God has promised.

Now, let me give you some scriptures that teach that God promises to guide. For example, Ephesians chapter 2, verse 10: the Bible says, concerning all of those of us who are saved, the Bible says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which [he]”—God—“hath before ordained”—that is, “planned”—“that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)* Or, you might take Psalm 37, verse 23: *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” (Psalms 37:23)* God has ordered your steps. God has ordained a way for you to walk; and, therefore, God has promised to guide you. Psalm 32, verse 8: *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” (Psalms 32:8)* You’re to have such an intimate relationship with God that He can just look at you.

I was talking to my grown son the other day, and he reminded me of something that happened when he was a little boy. I didn't remember it, but he remembered it. He said, "Dad, I was sitting out there in church; and you looked at me, and I knew I was gonna get a whipping when I got home." He said, "I knew when I got home, I was gonna get a whipping." Now, he remembered this. He's forty-something now. But, he said, "I remembered just a look." And, of course, all of those of us who are married know how our wives can give us that look; it says, "Whatever you're talking about, stop!" You know what I'm talking about? It's just guiding with your eye. That's that intimate relationship that people who are in love and people who know one another establish. And, God says, "*I will guide thee with mine eye.*" (Psalms 32:8) Here's the purpose that He reveals—to guide us.

Here's another verse: Isaiah 58 and verse 11: "*And the Lord shall guide thee continually*" (Isaiah 58:11) And, one that we spoke on not very long ago—Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 6: "*In all [of] thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall—direct thy paths.*" (Proverbs 3:6) You have the Father above you, the sovereign God who is controlling all things. You have the Spirit within you, impressing your heart. You have the Savior alongside of you, directing your footsteps, and you're not to be left like a ship without a compass or a rudder on a dark and stormy night. God has a plan for your life.

#### A. **The Three Categories of God's Will**

Now, actually, concerning God's will, we could put God's will in three categories.

##### 1. **God's Sovereign Will**

There's first of all what I just call "God's sovereign will." Folks, listen, nothing has gotten out of control in this world. Everything Satan has done—all of the wicked machinations, all of the plans of men, all of the rebellious all-rebelliousness, all of the hatredness, and hatred, and hellishness, and all of that—still over all God rules and God reigns. And, I want to tell you that God's sovereign will is ultimately done, and "*the kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord, and...his Christ.*" (Revelation 11:15) You can bank on it. That is God's sovereign will.

Now, you may not understand the way God does things. There are many mysterious things in God's sovereign will because the Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 29 and verse 29: "*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children.*" (Deuteronomy 29:29) There are some secret things. There are some sacred mysteries that God has not revealed. You just have to trust in God's sovereign will. Many questions go unanswered. Just leave that to God. That's Deuteronomy 29:29. Got that? That's His sovereign will.

## 2. God's Standard Will

And then, there's God's standard will. God just has a standard will for everybody. It's not God's will that you should lie, or steal, or cheat, or rape, or commit adultery, or whatever. God has a standard that is revealed, and He's not gonna change it for you or for me. There are certain codes of conduct. There are certain ways that we're supposed to live. That's the will of God. That's God's standard will.

## 3. God's Special Will

But then, there's God's special will. There's His sovereign will. There's His standard will. And then, there is His special will. God has an individual plan for you. *"The very hairs of your head are...numbered."* (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7) And, no two snowflakes are alike. And, God has a very special will for you and for your life. You're absolutely, totally unique, and God has a special, wonderful plan for you just as He had for ol' Paul so long ago.

Now, let me see if I can illustrate this. First of all, it was God's sovereign will that I be saved—let me personalize it—God's sovereign will that I be saved. Did you know that He knew I was gonna be saved before He made the world—that I was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world? I didn't choose Him; He chose me. I cannot understand it. That is a mystery to me. But, there is the sovereign will of God that I have been called and He set His affection upon me. That is God's sovereignty. Now, it was His standard will that I marry a Christian. He didn't want me to marry an unsaved person because the Bible says we're not to be *"unequally yoked together with unbelievers."* (2 Corinthians 6:14) So, His sovereign will that I be saved, His standard will that this saved boy marry a Christian, but it was His special will that I marry Joyce—special will that I marry Joyce, not just that I marry a Christian. God chose Joyce for me. God knew that Adrian needed Joyce. Now, I didn't understand that when I saw her in the fourth grade. And, I took a liking to her and dropped a love note by her desk in the sixth grade and used to pray when I'd walk home from school afterward, "O God, let me marry that girl." And, thank God I did. But, I believe that she was handcrafted, handpicked, hand-chosen for me. So, there's God's sovereign will. There's God's standard will. Then, there is God's special will for your life.

Now, God has a special plan for every life here. Now, you might think that you're incidental, but you're not incidental. You may think that you're accidental; you're not accidental. You are very special to God. You wonder, how could God be concerned about you with almost six billion people on the face of the earth? It would be like the president of some corporation being concerned about some fleck of foam out on the Atlantic Ocean right now, or some speck of dust somewhere in the universe. But, God knows your name. You are special to Him, and He has not forgotten you.

## B. Six Myths Concerning the Will of God

As a matter of fact, there are six big mistakes that people make concerning the will of God—six myths. And, you need to learn these myths so you won't be "mythstaken" trying to find the will of God for your life. What are the six big myths that people have concerning the will of God for their life?

### 1. God's Will Is a Road Map

Well, first of all, they have the idea that God's will is like a road map—that God's going to give you some sort of a road map and God is going to say, "You do this today, and you do this tomorrow, and you do this next week, and then ten years from now you'll be doing this and twenty years from now you'll be doing that." That is not so—that is not so. God never gives you that kind of a road map, and I'm so glad He doesn't. It would take the adventure out of it. It would take the romance out of it. No, *God's plan for you is not a road map; it is a relationship.*

You see, when the children of Israel were going through the wilderness, God didn't give them a map through the wilderness. You know what He gave them? He gave them the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. (Exodus 13:21) Isn't that right? He said, "Just keep your eye on the cloud in the daytime. Keep your eye on the fire at nighttime"—that is, "Just follow the light! Just follow the light!" This cloud was the glory cloud—His Shekinah glory. This fire was the burning Spirit of God. And, my Lord knows the way through the wilderness; all you have to do is follow.

So, that's one myth—that God will give you a road map. God does not give you a road map. And, you don't have to see the future; you just have to make certain that you've got the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in sight today. Just like the headlights on your car—they don't go two miles down the road, but they go far enough down the road for you to see just where you are right now. And, when you get to that next spot, the headlights will go just a little further.

### 2. God's Will Is Not Best

Now, here's another myth that some people make concerning the will of God: that God's will is not best. You know some people are afraid of the will of God? They think that God's will is second best. They think that God is some sort of a cosmic killjoy, and they say, "Oh man, I hope I don't have to do this. Boy, I sure hope that God doesn't call me to be a missionary." Or, "I hope God doesn't want me to..." Listen, folks, God loves you. God's plan is wonderful. He is a loving Father. He delights to bless you. The Bible says, "*Delight [yourself] in the LORD: [he'll] give [you] the desires of [your] heart.*" (Psalms 37:4) That's the reason Romans chapter 12, verse 1 says, "*Present [yourselves] a living sacrifice...[and you will] prove what is that good, [perfect, and acceptable] will of God.*" (Romans 12:1–2) Free translation: "You'll prove that God's will is best." God's will is not

something that you have to do; God's will is something glorious that you get to do.

### **3. God Only Had a Plan for Certain People**

Here's a third myth that some people have: that God only calls certain kinds of people, that God only has a plan for some kind of people, like missionaries, and pastors, and ministers of music, and church workers. No, friend! God has a plan for everybody up here. Listen to me. Those of you on the back row, listen to me: God has a plan for your life. Whether you're a missionary, I say, or a secretary; whether you are a pastor or a plumber; whether you are an evangelist or a banker, God has a plan for your life.

### **4. When God Reveals His Plan, It Will Be Dramatic**

Now, here's another myth: that when God reveals His plan to you, it's going to be some dramatic thing when you find God's will for your life. It may be dramatic. Some people have had dramatic calls. The Apostle Paul had a dramatic call. He was knocked off his horse and stricken blind, as we see right here—this Damascus Road experience. But, not everybody has a Damascus Road experience. As a matter of fact, most people don't. I didn't, and most people do not. First Kings chapter 19—here's Elijah up in the mountains—I'm going to read verses 11 and 12: *“And [God] said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the [mountainside], and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.”* (1 Kings 19:11–12) The great storm, an earthquake, a roaring fire—but that wasn't God; God was in a still, small voice.

And, you know, so many times God speaks to us in a still, small voice. And, you know the reason that we must be quiet? Because if you're quiet... You can't hear a still, small voice unless you're quiet. An earthquake can get your attention whether you're quiet or not, but, you know, most of us need just to learn to be still and know that He is God. Don't get the idea that if God speaks to you, it's gonna be some radical, dramatic earthquake or some violent storm. No, it may not be.

### **5. God Only Speaks to Young People**

Here's another myth. Here's the fifth myth that causes people sometimes to miss the will of God. They have the idea that God only speaks to young people. I mean, some of you here are sixty, seventy, eighty. You say, “Well, I wish I'd have been listening. I wish I'd have heard this sermon when I was a kid.” Friend, God has a will for you. God has a will for your life. God has a will for every breath you take, every moment you live, whether you're gonna live one more year, two more years, twenty more years, thirty more years, fifty more years. God has a plan for you, and if you're an older person, don't you dare check yourself out. God has a plan for you.

You say, “Well, God called me when I was a kid to be a missionary. I stonewalled God. I missed the plan of God for my life.” God is not finished with you. Friend, God will forgive, restore, and God will use you now where you are with what you have, regardless of the past. Let me give you a wonderful verse that deals with that. Joel chapter 2 and verse 25: “*And I will restore to you the years...the [locusts have] eaten.*” (Joel 2:25) I love that God says, “I’ll give you another chance. I will send you.” So, don’t get the idea that if you miss God’s will, you can never again find it. God is the God of the second chance. You can find that over and over again in the Bible.

## **6. God Hides His Will**

Here’s the sixth of these myths, and it is this: that God hides His will from us so we must find it. God doesn’t hide His will; God reveals His will. You know, sometimes we have the idea that God’s will for us is like a big Easter egg hunt. God says, “I have something I really want you to do, but I’m gonna hide it from ya. Now, you’ve got to find it.” You don’t find the will of God; the will of God finds you. You report for duty. God says, “I will instruct you. I will guide you.”

Suppose you have a child that you wanted to do something special. You had some plans for your child; and so, you say to your child before you go to work—let’s say you’ve got a fourteen-year-old son—and you say, “Son, today I want you to do something very special for me. And son, if you will do it for me, when I get home, I’ll reward you handsomely. But son, if you don’t do it, when I get home, I’ll punish you severely.” He says, “Well, Dad, since you’ve explained it to me, what is it you want me to do?” “I’m not gonna tell you. That’s up to you to find out.”

Now, you think about that. You know, God says, “Here’s something I want you to do. If you do it, you’ll be rewarded. If you don’t do it, you’ll suffer loss.” “Well, fine, Lord. Show me what you want me to do.” “I’m not gonna tell you.” No, friend. Listen, God will reveal Himself to you.

## **II. The Prerequisites That God Requires**

Now, so, there is the program that that God plans—now, the prerequisite for finding that plan. So, whatever it is—for your business, for raising your children, for whatever it is—what are these prerequisites? What are these provisions?

### **A. Willingness**

Well, number one: You’ve got to be willing. Look in verse 6: he says, “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6) He wanted to know the will of God. Do you know why many of us don’t know the will of God? We don’t wanna know.

We go to God asking God to ratify and rubberstamp our plans just like a person goes to an architect and says, “I want you to design a house.” But, very few people ever

go to an architect and say, “I just want you to design a house. You choose.” They say, “We want this style. We want this many rooms. We want this and that. We want a sunroom. We want a playroom. We want an eat-in kitchen,” or whatever it is, however you design it. Now, here it is. But, what are you doing? You’re saying to the architect, “Look, we don’t have enough sense to do this ourselves, but we know what we want. What we are wanting is just simply for you to kind of ratify and dress up what we’ve already designed.”

Now, that’s the way a lot of folks come to God. They say, “Lord, I’ve got this idea in the back of my mind. Now Lord, I want you to show me how to do that which I’ve already made up my mind that I want to do.” And, they call that “submitting to the will of God,” but it’s not really submitting to the will of God; it is just simply asking God to ratify what you’ve already made up your mind to do.

I think I’ve used this story before about a man who was a vagabond. He used to just travel here and there, up and down the lanes and of the world, and somebody asked him—said, “What do you do?” He said, “I just go wherever I desire.” He said, “I just kinda follow my nose.” And, somebody said, “Well, what do you do if you come to a fork in the road?” “Oh,” he said, “I find an old stick, and I just throw it up in the air. Whichever way it lands, that way I go.” He said, “You know, sometimes I have to throw it up as many as five times to make it land right.” And, some of us are that way. We say, “Just, Lord, whatever your will is, I want to do it,” but in the back of our mind, down deep in our heart, we’re asking God simply to ratify what we want to do.

Now folks, I’m telling you, if you want to know the will of God for your life, there must be willingness on your part. You have to ask that question honestly, as the Apostle Paul asked it in verse 6: “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6)

## **B. Meekness**

And, right on the heels of that willingness, there must be meekness. Now, notice what he says. He says, “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6) Here’s a man who immediately recognizes the Lordship. Now, what does the word *meekness* mean? Meekness means that you respond to guidance. When a horse was meeked in olden days—meeked—it meant that that horse could wear the bridle and the saddle. To break a horse, the old timers used to say they had made him meek. They didn’t take away his strength. They didn’t cripple him or hobble him, but they made him where he wouldn’t respond to the bit and the bridle. Now, listen to this verse. You wanna be guided? Put this verse down: Psalm 25 and verse 9: “*The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*” (Psalms 25:9) Are you meek? I mean, today, in this message, God may be trying to put a bridle on you. God may be trying to put a bit in your mouth. And, you’re a maverick; you’re a wild stallion, and you don’t want to be broken by the Lord. You’ll never know the will of God for your life.

### C. Openness

There must be willingness. There must be meekness. And thirdly, there must be openness. You must listen. Have you asked Him? You say, “I don’t know the will of God for my life.” Well, are you open to it? Have you literally asked this same question that the Apostle Paul asked of the Lord: “[Lord,] *who art thou?*” (Acts 9:5) and “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6) God will speak if you’re open to hear His voice. But, I remind you, when God speaks, it may not be with a shout. It may be with that still, small voice that Elijah heard there in the mountains; and, therefore, you’ve got to have that quiet time.

So many times when we pray, we don’t really listen to the Lord. In my prayer this morning, on my knees, the Lord showed me I was self-centered, and He said, “Adrian, you’re just trying to lead me around. I’m not gonna be led; I’ll lead you. Now, you listen to me, and you surrender to me.” And, so many times when we come to pray, we say, “Speak,” or “Listen, Lord. Your servant is speaking,” rather than, “Speak, Lord. Your servant hears.” And, so you must be, friend—you must be—open to hear the will of God.

### D. Yieldedness

And then, last of all, there must be this yieldedness. Look, if you will, in verses 8 and 9 here of our chapter: “*And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight...neither did he eat [or] drink.*” (Acts 9:8–9) Here’s a man who’s now being led around. This was the great, mighty man who was taking other people prisoner. Now, he’s been taken prisoner by the grace of God. Are you yielded to the Lord? It’s very akin to the word *meek*—but just yielded to the Lord. I mean, so many of us want to be Spirit-filled. People are always praying, “God, fill me with the Spirit.” Well, may I ask you a question? Why should He fill you with the Spirit?

I want you to imagine a scene right now. I want you to imagine a man who is pushing a car right this moment into a service station. Now, this car has no battery in it. This car has four flat tires. This car has a hole in the gas tank, and half the wires are disconnected. And, it’s just a rattletrap, and he’s pushing it into a service station. And, the attendant comes out, and he looks at this rattletrap; and he says, “May I help you?” And, you say, “Yeah, fill ’er up. Fill ’er up.” Now, what do you think that man would say? I think he’d say, “What for?” Isn’t that right? “O Lord, fill me! Fill me! Fill me!” I think God says, “What for? What for? Why should I fill you with my Spirit?”

Are you ready to do the will of God? Be yielded to it. The way to know the will of God for your life is to sign the contract at the bottom and then say, “Lord, you fill it in”—“you fill it in.”

### **III. The Practical Ways of Knowing the Will of God**

Now, I've talked to you about the purpose of God. I've talked to you about the prerequisites that God requires. Let me talk to you about some practical ways now that you can know the will of God for your life, and—very quickly—we see these things in the life of the Apostle Paul. And, we're gonna apply them to your life.

#### **A. The Miracles of God**

First of all, it may be miraculous—it may be miraculous. In verses 3 through 5 of this passage that we have before us, there was a light that shined out of heaven, a voice. And, God sometimes speaks that way, and God may speak to you that way. And, never discount that. This is not the normal way, but there is a handful of times in the Bible where God speaks to people miraculously, and God may speak to you miraculously. All right, that's one way. Got it?

#### **B. The Word of God**

Now, here's another way that God will speak to you—and God will always use this way—and that is through His Word. You see, this man named Saul had already been steeped in the Scriptures; he'd already heard the great sermon that Stephen had preached when he was there. Saul was there and heard Stephen preach this great soul-winning sermon. Besides that, on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to him directly and said, “[I'm] Jesus whom thou persecutest.” (Acts 9:5) Now, it's very evident that the Word of God was working in this man's life. “Well,” you say, “God hasn't spoken to me directly.” That's where you're wrong, friend. Everything in this book is the Word of God as much as if He had articulated it to you by opening His mouth and speaking to you, just as God spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus.

Every word of God is pure, and as you get in the Word of God, you're going to find the will of God. So much of the will of God is found right in the Word of God. People come and say, “Pastor, I'm in love with Susie. She's not saved, but I'm saved. But, I want to marry her so I can lead her to Christ.” No. No. Why? Because the Bible says, “*Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*” (2 Corinthians 6:14) You don't have to pray about something that God has revealed to you so clearly; just read the Word of God. Never ask guidance about something which God has forbidden or God has commanded. That is arrogance and will only bring the judgment of God upon your life.

#### **C. The People of God**

Now, there are the miracles of God. There's the Word of God. Now, here's another way that God will lead you, and that is the people of God. Notice here chapter 9, verse 10: “*And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of*

*Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.” (Acts 9:10–11) And, God sent a man named Ananias to lay his hands on this man named Saul and to tell Saul that God was calling him into a special service. Verse 17: “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house...putting his hands [upon] him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 9:17)*

Now, what is the point here? I could read more, but the point is that when God was speaking to Saul, He was also speaking to someone else. And folks, you’re going to find out that when God is calling you to do something, God will be ratifying that in the hearts and lives of other people. That’s the reason that a church is so important. That’s the reason that none of us are Lone Ranger Christians. That’s the reason when we ordain somebody here to the gospel ministry, we have an ordination council of godly people to listen. That’s the reason we present it to the church—because, friend, we find the will of God in context with other believers. Sometimes a man thinks he has the gift of preaching, but the only problem is that nobody else has the gift of listening. And, you’re going to find out that when God is calling you to do something, God will be confirming that to somebody else and with somebody else. And, therefore, God has not made you where you can operate by yourself. Proverbs chapter 24 and verse 6: *“For by wise counsel thou shalt make...war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.”* (Proverbs 24:6) Always remember that the ultimate Counselor is the Holy Spirit. Make certain that any counsel that you get is from a wise, mature, Spirit-filled Christian.

#### **D. The Spirit of God**

Now, here’s another way God will lead you. What’d we say? We said the miracles of God. What did we say? We said the Word of God. What did we say? We said the people of God. Now, here’s another way that God will lead you—I’m just talking about practical ways—and that is the Spirit of God. Look, if you will, in verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way, and [entering] into the house...putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, [has] sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 9:17) If you want to know the will of God, you’ve gotta be Spirit-filled. Romans 8, verse 14: *“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* (Romans 8:14) Galatians chapter 5, verse 18: *“But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.”* (Galatians 5:18)

Now, remember how the Spirit of God works. The Spirit of God guides. The Spirit of God leads. The Spirit of God does not shove. I said a few Sundays ago, if you feel some compulsion, if you feel some force with a hand between your shoulder blades shoving you, that is not the Spirit of God. He’s that still, small voice. He leads. He guides. He entreats. That’s the way the Spirit of God has always worked in my heart.

Now, He, the Holy Spirit, is God's umpire in your heart. When you're out of bounds, He blows the whistle. Colossians chapter 3, verse 15 says, "*Let the peace of God rule in your [heart].*" (Colossians 3:15) That is, "Let the peace of God referee in your heart." When you're out of bounds, He blows the whistle. He's the referee. He's the umpire. He arbitrates. He rules in your heart.

Are you walking in the Spirit? I mean, are you Spirit-filled? Have you so yielded to God that the Spirit of God has possessed you as the purchased possession? Then, the Spirit of God will lead you. Here was Saul, who received the Spirit of God.

#### **E. The Wisdom of God**

Now, here's another way that God leads: not only the Spirit of God, but the wisdom of God. Look, if you will now, in verse 20: "*And straightway he*"—that is, Saul—"preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; *Is not this he that destroyed them which [callesth] on [his] name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at [Jerusalem], proving that this is very Christ*" (Acts 9:20–22)—that is, that He is "very Messiah." It's obvious that something has happened to this man. He is so transformed he is now speaking with incredible wisdom. Where did he get this wisdom? Well, the Holy Spirit of God gave him that wisdom. The Bible says, "*If any [man] lack wisdom*"—this is in James chapter 1, verse 5—"let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

Now, don't lose me now. Listen to me now. Don't drop out right now. This is very, very important. When you have the Spirit of God, then you have the wisdom of God. And, what is wisdom? Wisdom is thinking God's thoughts after Him. Wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view. Wisdom is being saturated with the Spirit of God and the Word of God so that now your whole paradigm of thinking is changed and you begin now to see things from God's point of view. And, God will give you wisdom.

Now, look up here, and let me tell you something: most of the will of God for your life is found right between your ears and in your heart. Don't be afraid to use your mind. We have the mind of Christ. Why would God give you the mind of Christ if He didn't expect you to use it? J. I. Packer said this: that "wisdom is"—quote—"the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it."

#### **F. The Providence of God**

Now, let me tell you one other way that God will lead, and that is His providence. God will open and close doors for you. Look, if you will, here in verse 23 and following, and I must bring this message to a close. "*And after...many days were fulfilled, the Jews took*

*counsel to kill him: But their [lying in wait] was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down...the wall in a basket. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were...afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and [how] he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly...in the name of Jesus.” (Acts 9:23–27)*

Oh, I wish I had more time to tell you this, but listen to me—listen to me. Here was a man. He asked this question: “Lord, what’ll you have me to do?” And, God began to work in his life. God began to work in his life through the Word of God. God began to work in his life through the people of God. God began to work in his life through the Spirit of God. God began to work in his life through the wisdom of God. God began to work in his life through the providence of God. And, this man is just guided—he is just guided.

## **Conclusion**

Now, that brings me to say this. I want you to listen to me very, very carefully because I’m going to sum up everything that I’ve said right here, and don’t miss it. Are you ready for this? The will of God for your life is Jesus. Now, you say, “Oh, that doesn’t make sense. That’s a preacher’s statement.” No, you listen: the will of God for your life is Jesus.

Now, you say, “Explain that, pastor.” You see this hand? What is the will of the body for this hand? This head—this head. This hand is not to have a will of its own. Where is the will of the hand found? In the head, right? Got it? Nod your head. Okay, got it? Who is the head of the Church? What’s His name? Jesus. So, what is the will of God for the Church? Jesus—Jesus. Do you know what this hand has to do? Just one thing: to know the will for the body, and that is to respond to the head. Isn’t that it? Now folks, it’s really pretty simple when you think about it, isn’t it? The will of God for your life is to say, “Lord Jesus, here I am.” *“Who art thou, Lord?...I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” (Acts 9:5)* “Lord, what [will you] have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) You can’t remember anything else I’ve said, folks—that’s it! The will of God for your life is J-E-S-U-S. Come to Him and say, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) And, whether it’s a missionary or minister or preacher; an evangelist, a banker, a lawyer, a secretary, an athlete—whatever it is, just obey Him. Do you want to know the will of God for your life? *Success in life is the progressive realization of the will of God for your life.*

Let’s bow in prayer. Would you ask this question this morning: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Would you ask that question? Now folks, He might just tell you something very simple. He just might tell you to apologize to somebody. He just

might tell you to witness to somebody. He might just tell you today to place your membership here or to present yourself for believer's baptism. The way to understand God's will for your life in the part that you don't understand is to obey the part you do understand. It may be very small. It may be a very small thing. It's hard to steer a ship that's not moving. You just begin to obey the will of God as you know it.

# How to Know the Will of God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: October 17, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 9:1–22**

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Conclusion

## Introduction

**H**ow to Know the Will of God." Now take God's Word, and find the book of Acts. And turn, if you would, to chapter 9. The book of Acts chapter 9. And when you've found it, look up here. I want to ask you a question: If Jesus Christ were to meet you face-to-face—literally, bodily, physically were to appear in this room to you—well, first of all, you'd fall on your face and worship in adoration. But suppose you could say, "Lord Jesus, there's one thing I want to ask You." What would it be? Suppose He said to you, "What do you want to know?" What would you ask Him? What would your question

be?

Do you know what I think it would be? I think you would ask Him this question: “Lord, what would You have me to do? What do You want me to do?” Now that episode literally happened. He appeared to a man named Saul, and that’s what Saul asked Him. Look, if you will, in verse 1: *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem”*—in plain English, that means he had authorization to take Christians, put them in chains, and bring them back to Jerusalem to be persecuted—*“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the goads. And he, trembling and astonished, said”*—now here’s the question—*“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”* (Acts 9:1–6).

The two greatest questions that anybody could ever ask at anytime: Question number one: “Who are You, Lord?” And question number two: “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Those are the two greatest questions. And the Apostle Paul spent the rest of his life finding the answer to those two great questions—just who Jesus is and what Jesus has for him to do. And those are the two questions that I want you to ask, today. Because, man today has been described as a generation of misguided men in an age of guided missiles. We are clever creatures who have lost our way in the darkness.

I was reading recently about a young ensign, who had made his first trip on a destroyer across the ocean. He had impeccable training, and so, it was assigned to him to take the destroyer out of the harbor and bring it back to the United States. It was his first endeavor to do such a thing, and he wanted to do it right. He was a very bright boy. And in a moment, the deck was buzzing with action. He was barking commands here, and barking commands there. And everything was moving like a Swiss clock as that destroyer made its way out the harbor. And you know, that’s a very meticulous thing and a very treacherous thing to get a big boat out of a harbor. But they set sail, and they were on their way in record time, when someone came to the young ensign and said, “You have a message from the captain.” And he thought it strange, because it was a radio message. But he read it, and the captain said, “Young man, you’ve done an excellent job. You’ve done it with great speed, with dispatch, according to the book. But,” he said, “there is an unwritten rule that you’ve overlooked. The next time you set sail, make certain the captain is on board.”

Now what he had done was to leave the harbor and leave the captain back on the

shore. And I want to say to you, friend, that no matter how wise your plans are and how capable you are, before you set sail anywhere, you'd better make certain that the Captain is on board—that you are in the will of God.

Now that's what we're talking about, today: "How to Know the Will of God." Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 23, says: "*It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). I have three propositions, this morning, from this passage here on the life of Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul. There are three things. I pray that God the Holy Spirit will engrave them upon your heart.

## I. Guidance Is Promised

Number one—and what a blessing this is—number one: Guidance is promised. God has promised to guide. Now look, if you will, in verse 6, the last part: "*And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*" (Acts 9:6). I don't think Jesus could have given him a better promise than that one, right there. "It will be told you."

"Well," you say, "that's what the Lord said to Saul. He didn't say that to me." Well, let me give you some more verses. Jot these down. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10—the Bible says: "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:10).

"*Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*": What does that mean in plain English? God has a plan for your life. Psalm 37 and verse 23—listen to this one: "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and he delighteth in his way*" (Psalm 37:23). Let me give you another one: Psalm 32 and verse 8—God said: "*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye*" (Psalm 32:8). Isn't that a wonderful promise? Listen to this one—Isaiah chapter 58 and verse 11: "*And the LORD shall guide thee continually*" (Isaiah 58:11). Listen to this one—Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 6: "*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*" (Proverbs 3:6).

Friend, guidance is promised in the Word of God. How blessed those of us are who know the Lord! *We have a Father above us, controlling all things. We have the Savior beside us, directing our steps. We have the Spirit within us, impressing our hearts.* And we can know the leadership of our Lord. We can know His will.

### A. God's Sovereign Will

Now God's will comes to us in three ways. First of all, it comes to us as His sovereign will. Now God's sovereign will is always done. You can't stop it. God is God, and God accomplishes what He desires to do, because there is none who can withstand the Lord. That is His sovereign will, and God's sovereign will is mysterious. It

is unknown. I can't know it. You can't know it. It is known entirely to God alone. Deuteronomy 29, verse 29: *"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever"* (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The secret things belong to God. Friend, you'll be a happy person if you'll just resign from being God and let God be God. Just go ahead and let God be God. There are certain things you will never understand until you get to Heaven, if you understand them then. *"The secret things belong unto the LORD our God"* (Deuteronomy 29:29). That's God's sovereign will. God is sovereign. I've told you before: Not a blade of grass moves without His permission.

### **B. God's Moral Will**

Now there's a second will, and that's God's moral will. God has a moral will. There are certain things that God says are right. And there are certain things that God says are wrong. For example, it is wrong to commit fornication. It is wrong to steal. It is wrong to murder. It is wrong to lie. Pride is wrong. All of these things are wrong.

There are certain things that are right. Love is right. Righteousness is right. Honesty is right. Kindness is right. Consideration. This is God's moral will. It's not going to change for me. It's not going to change for you. There is a fixed standard of right and wrong, because God has said so.

All right? That's His moral will. And that moral will is found in the Word of God. No stutter, no stammer, no apology, no hesitation; no *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*—that's it. God says, "This is right and this is wrong." That is the will of God. He's not going to change it for you. He's not going to change it for me.

### **C. God's Particular Will**

But then, there's a third kind of a will, and that's what we're talking about, now. And that is God's particular will. That is God's special will for you. God had a particular will for Saul. For example, look, if you will, at verse 15: *"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake"* (Acts 9:15–16).

That is, God had a very special plan for this man. God said, "My plan for this man is he's going to be an apostle to the Gentiles." He is a very special man. He's a chosen vessel. Now that's very important to me—that God chose him particularly to be a chosen vessel. And God has a special will for every one of us. God has a particular will for every one of us.

For example, it was God's sovereign will that the man named Adrian Rogers was a part of the elect of God. Hallelujah! I don't understand it, but I rejoice in it. That's God's

sovereign will. God sovereignly set His love upon me and saved me. I thank God for that. But then, there was God's moral will that I marry a Christian. Now the Bible says to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). So I know that God had a moral will that, if I got married, I'd marry a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But God had a particular will also, and her name is Joyce.

You see, God's sovereign will worked in my life. God's moral will was in my wife. I knew that I wanted to marry a Christian girl. But oh, when I would walk Joyce home after a date, or after we'd been to church, or after we'd been to some high school function, or football game, or something, I would walk home, and I'd pray, "O God, let Joyce love me. O God, cause her to love me. O God, one day, I want to marry that girl." And I believe, with all of my heart, that God answered my prayer, because it was in His will. And I believe that God gave me that wonderful, special girl. So God has a plan for your life. God has a particular will for your life.

Now why would God be interested in you or me? It just shows His great love. It's like we were just a fleck of spray in an ocean of existence, and yet, God knows us. He knows our going in, our coming out, when we sit down, when we rise up. The very hairs of our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30). O friend, God cares. God loves, not all of us; God loves each of us.

A little boy was quoting that prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer, and he said, "Our Father, who is in Heaven, how does He know my name?" He knows your name. Of all 5 ½ billion, or how many people there are, every one of them is precious to Him. Now God's will is promised. Leadership—guidance—is promised. Do you have it? God has promised to guide you.

#### **D. Six Myths About the Will of God**

Now there are six mistakes—six myths—about the will of God. And I want to clear these up, today. I hope we can just take these out of your mind forever. Here are six myths that need to be destroyed:

##### **1. Myth # 1: God Will Give You a Road Map for Your Life**

That God will give you a roadmap for your life. He does not do it. He didn't do it for the Apostle Paul, here, and He won't do it for you. God will not give you a roadmap. *God's will for you is not a roadmap. It is a relationship.* When He led the children of Israel through the wilderness, how did He lead them? Did he give them a map? No, He gave them a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, and said, "Follow that. Just stay in a relationship with Me" (Exodus 13:21).

So many of us would like a map to say, "We're going to go from here, this way, that way, and then we're going to end up there." But God won't do that, and I'm glad He doesn't do it. Because, friend, that takes the romance out of it. That takes the

excitement out of it. It might put a certain fear and apprehension into it, if we knew what tomorrow holds for us. I'm glad we don't. I'm glad we don't.

When I was a college student, another preacher boy came and sat down beside me, and he said, "Adrian, guess what I did last week?" I said, "What?" He said, "I went through Memphis, Tennessee, and I stopped in to see R. G. Lee." Now if you're new here in Bellevue, R. G. Lee is one of the former pastors of our church, and was, indeed, one of the greatest, finest, most godly, gifted ministers who has ever walked the face of the earth. I really truly believe that. And for that neophyte, that embryonic theologian, to say that he had stopped by, and gone in to see Dr. Lee, just absolutely astounded me. I thought, "Well, how did you get in? And why would he waste his time with a twerp like you?" And all of those things, I was thinking; but thinking, all the whole time, "Boy, I sure would like to do that." It'd be like you saying, you know, "I went through Washington, and stopped in to see the President," or something. And so I said, "Well, tell me about it." He told me about how he had an outer office and a secretary. And he said, "I asked her if I could go in and see him, and she said, 'Well, yes, you can go in for a few minutes,'" and so forth. And I thought, "Well, how would she know who he would see?" and all of that. I asked those questions in my mind. I tried to conjure up that office. And I said, "What did you do?" "Well," he said, "we talked a while, and he prayed for me."

That was very interesting to me. I just tried to imagine the whole scene. The years came and went. Subsequently, I became the pastor of this same church. I happened to be sitting in that same office, sitting behind the same desk, when the secretary buzzed on the intercom and said, "Pastor, Dr. Lee's out here, and he wants to know if he can come in and see you for a few minutes." "Yeah, let him in."

You know, I am so glad that, as a college student, Brother Jim, I didn't know that. I mean, I'm glad. It would have *blown my gaskets*—absolutely would have *blown my gaskets*. I would never have ever been able to get anything done the rest of my life until that time. God's will is not a roadmap. It is a relationship.

## **2. Myth # 2: God Is a "Celestial Killjoy"**

Myth number two: Take out of your mind the idea that God is some sort of a *celestial killjoy*—that, if you do the will of God, that's the end of your joy. You know, there are a lot of people who don't want to know the will of God, because they're afraid of what they might find out. They say, "You know, if I told the Lord I'd do anything He wants me to do, well, no telling what He might do to me."

Suppose you've got a fourteen-year-old boy, Dad, and he comes to you and says, "Dad, I'm convinced you're a good man, a godly man, a wise man. And Dad, I've just decided that, from now on, whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. And your wish is my command." Now I doubt many fourteen- or fifteen-year-old boys are saying that, around Memphis, today. But suppose, he just said, "Dad, I want to know what you want me to

do. I want to do what you want me to do.” Now what would you do, Dad? Would you go to your wife and say, “Boy, did you hear what Junior said? Now let’s see what we can do to make his life miserable. Boy, he’ll be sorry he ever said that. What is the meanest, worst thing we could make him do?” You’ve been thinking about buying him a new bicycle—that might tip the scale. *Friend, don’t be afraid of the will of God. The will of God is what you’d want for yourself, if you had enough sense to want it.* God is a good God. God loves you. God is not a *cosmic killjoy*.

### **3. Myth # 3: God Only Speaks to a Certain Category of People**

Now here’s the third myth that I want to destroy: and, that is you get the idea that God only speaks to a certain category of people, that God has a will for pastors, and missionaries, and ministers of music, and people who work on church staffs, and those kinds of things; but God does not have a will for the ordinary person.

I want to say to every mother’s child listening to me in this building, and you precious friends listening to me on television, God has a particular will for you, whether you be a missionary, or a secretary; whether you be a pastor, or a plumber. God has a will for every life. And don’t get the idea that God’s will is for a particular type of people.

### **4. Myth # 4: God Always Shows You His Will Through Dramatic Experiences**

Now there’s another myth I want to destroy, and take out of your heart and mind: and, that is when God shows you His will for your life, it’s going to be some dramatic experience like the Apostle Paul had on the road to Damascus. Now it may be that way, but it may not be that way. Remember when God spoke to Elijah, and there Elijah was, up in the mountains, and there was a wind, and God wasn’t in the wind; and there was a fire, and God wasn’t in the fire; and there was an earthquake, and God wasn’t in the earthquake? And then, the Bible tells us in 1 Kings chapter 19 there was a still small voice, and that was God (1 Kings 19). Now God sometimes does speak in earthquakes. Sometimes, God does speak in fires. Here, the Apostle Paul had a kind of an earthquake experience on the road to Damascus. But you let God be God in your particular life. Some folks are *Quakers*, and some folks are *earthquakers*. God speaks quietly to some folks, and God, I guess, some of us, God just has to get our attention. But don’t buy into the myth that you must have some sort of a dramatic earthshaking experience.

### **5. Myth # 5: God Only Shows His Will to Young People**

Next, another myth I want to take out of your heart and mind is that God shows His will to young people, but not to older people. You know, we are always telling young people, “Oh, young person, you’ve got to find the will of God for your life, because your life is before you.” I want to say, *“Whether you’re nine or ninety-nine, you ought to be seeking the will of God every day of your life.”* If God were finished with you, He’d take

you on to Heaven. God has a plan for your life.

You say, “Well, God called me to be a preacher when I was young; I missed it. God called me to be a missionary when I was young; I missed it.” So what? Find God’s will now. God says, “I will restore the years the locust has eaten.” God has a will for everybody who can hear me, today.

### **6. Myth # 6: God Hides His Will**

Now last of all, here’s a myth I want to destroy: that, somehow, God hides His will. Somehow, God hides His will so that we must find it. *Let’s go back to that boy again, and he’s standing in front of his dad this time. And his dad says, “Son, there is something I want you to do; and if you do it, I’m going to reward you handsomely. And Son, if you don’t do it, I’m going to carry you to the woodshed, and apply the *board of education* to the *seat of knowledge*.”* You say, “Well, Dad, since you explained it that way, and you really want me to do this thing, Dad, what is it you want me to do?” He says, “I’m not going to tell you. It’s up to you to find out.” Now what kind of a father would do that?

Friend, God does not hide His will from us. God, in all of these Scriptures that I’ve given you, says that He wants to reveal His will—that God wants to show His will. The will of God is not some sort of an Easter egg hunt. Listen. In the truest sense of the word, *you don’t find the will of God; the will of God finds you, when you’re walking in the Spirit.* God is not hiding His will from you.

So now, let’s just wrap all of that up under one heading, and say that guidance is promised. Got it? Got it.

## **II. Guidance Is Provisional**

Secondly, guidance is provisional. Now there are certain provisions that come into play before you can know God’s guidance.

### **A. There Must Be Willingness**

For example, number one: There must be willingness. Look again, in verse 6: “*And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6). Now that just presupposes that he wanted to do what God wanted him to do. Some people want to do their will and have God rubberstamp it. There are some folks who come to an architect; they think they want a house. They want the architect to design it. But what they want the architect to do, really, is to redesign what they have in their mind. And that’s all right in building houses; but it’s not all right in building a life.

*I heard about a man who was sort of a vagabond. He just went everywhere by the will-o’-the-wisp. Somebody asked him where he would go. He said, “Well, just wherever I want. I just do whatever I want to do.”* Someone said, “Well, when you come to a fork

in the road, and there's a road that goes this way, and a road that goes that way, how do you determine which road you're going to take?" "Oh," he said, "I just pick up a stick off the ground, and I throw it up in the air. Whichever way it lands," he said, "that's the way I go." They said, "Is that right?" He said, "Yeah, sometimes, I have to throw it up as many as six times to make it come down right."

You know, that's the way we are. We say, "O Lord, whatever You want me to do, I'm just willing to do it." But it's a lie. It's a lie. We don't really mean it, friend, when we say, "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6).

### **B. There Must Be Meekness**

Now friend, if you want to know the will of God, there must be—number one—willingness; number two—there must be meekness. Meekness. You know what he said? He said: "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). That is, "You are in control. I'm not in control." Do you know what *meekness* is? *Meekness* means that you are teachable. How many teachable people are here, today? In Psalm 25 and verse 9, the Bible says—and listen to this, because this is a key verse—Psalm 25, and verse 9: "*The meek will he guide*" (Psalm 25:9). Now are you meek? If you're not willing, and you're not meek, you won't know God's will.

### **C. There Must Be Openness**

Now here's a third thing: Not only was there willingness and meekness, but there was openness. He sought the will of God. He's praying. He's saying, "Lord, show me your will." Have you been open to the will of God? Now don't just simply say, "Now if God wants to show me, He can." Have you earnestly, sincerely, prayed, and said, "O God, I want to know Your will?" Do you report for duty? Do you think it's up to God to put His hand on your shoulder, and snatch you, and turn you around? Or, after you've met the Lord Jesus, are you going to be like Paul and say, "God, what is it? What is it, Lord, You really want me to do?"

Let me ask you a significant question. You've been saying, "I've been stumbling around. I can't find the will of God. I don't know the will of God." May I ask you a very personal question? How much time are you spending alone with God, with your Bible, in a quiet time, reporting for duty?

It may be that God is speaking, but you're just not listening. And even when you pray, you're not listening. Rather than saying, "Speak Lord, Your servant hears You," you're saying, "Listen, Lord. I'm talking." And you're just praying and telling God something. There must be openness.

### **D. There Must Be Yieldedness**

Now again, here's another provision. There must be yieldedness. Look, if you will, in

verse 8: *“And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus”* (Acts 9:8). Can you imagine that? Here’s a man that is taking everybody else captive, and now, like a little lamb, he’s a docile man. They take him by the hand, and they lead this man. He is yielded. You know, the Bible says that we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice. Can you say it this morning and mean it? “Thy will—no hesitation, no reservation, anywhere, anytime, any cost.” Can you say that? Are you yielded to the will of God?

We say, “God, I just want to know Your will.” Are you ready to do it, if He showed it to you? *Imagine a man pushing an old automobile into a service station. All four tires are flat. The crankcase is cracked. There’s no oil in the crankcase. The headlights have been broken out. The battery is gone. All the fenders are dented and flopping. And this man shoves this car into the service station. It has a gas tank, but there’s a hole rusted in the bottom. The attendant comes out wide-eyed and amazed. And the man says, “Fill her up.” If you were pumping gas, what would you think? I think what you’d say is, “What for?” Isn’t that right? “What for?” “O God, show me Your will.” God says, “Why? Why should I show you My will? You’re not prepared to do My will. You don’t really mean it when you say you want to know My will.”*

Friend, are you yielded to God? And don’t come around here saying, “Oh, I want to know the will of God,” unless there is that willingness. Unless there is, friend, that meekness. Unless there is that openness. Unless there is that yieldedness. All of those things were there, when the Apostle Paul prayed, and he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

### **III. Guidance Is Practical**

Now here’s the third thing I want you to see: not only is guidance promised, not only is it provisional, but thirdly, it is practical. Now God has given some very practical ways that you can know the will of God, and we’re going to find them. They’re right here. And I want you to look at them.

#### **A. God Leads by Miracles**

One way that you can know the will of God is by miracles. And I would be dishonest if I left this out. Look in verse 3: *“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”* (Acts 9:3–4). And God may speak to you in a vision. God may speak to you in a dream. God may speak to you with an audible voice. God may speak to you, and guide you, with a miracle. And I want to hasten to say He does not normally guide this way. But He does, sometimes.

Now since we have the New Testament, and the Bible is completed, these kinds of

miracles are not greatly needed today. And that is not God's normal way. But I mention that because it's here, in the Word of God. God may speak to you that way. But if you have a vision, a miracle, a dream, or whatever, you had certainly better check it out by the other things that I'm about to give you, and see if it squares—that it's not mere autosuggestion.

## **B. God Leads by His Word**

Number two: God will speak to you, and God will guide you, with His Word. Now did God guide the Apostle Paul with His Word? You had better believe it. Number one: He was a rabbi, and he was steeped in the Word of God, the Old Testament. Number two: He had just heard a sermon, and that sermon was by one of the greatest preachers who ever lived—an anointed, Spirit-filled man of God, whose name was Stephen. And when the Holy Spirit of God appeared to Saul, He said, "It's hard for you to kick against the goads of God's Word." Paul was loaded with the Word of God. And it is the Word of God that guides. Let me give you a verse: Psalm 119, verse 105: *"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105). And much of the will of God for your life, friend, is found in the Bible.

Now for example, I said that it's not God's will that you marry an unbeliever. If you're dating a person, and that person is not saved, then why date somebody you couldn't marry if you fell in love with them? You know God's will, many times, from reading the Bible. And you say, "Well, God is leading me to divorce my wife and marry somebody else." That's a lie. It's a lie. It's right here, in the Word of God. And it is sheer arrogance for you to pray, and say, "God show me Your will," when God has already shown you His will.

## **C. God Leads by His People**

Now I want to mention a third way that God will lead you: Not only by the Word of God, but God will lead you by His people—by the people of God. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man, named Ananias, coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem"* (Acts 9:10–13).

Now every word that Ananias was saying, right then, was from his heart, because his heart was in his throat. God said, "You're going to go down there, and speak to this man." "Who's going with me?" "You're going by yourself, Ananias." *"And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto*

him, *Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me*" (Acts 9:14–15).

Now here's the point: When God was speaking to Saul, and God was saying, "Saul, I'm going to show you My will," God also took a man named Ananias, and used Ananias to confirm the will of God. Now God will do that. The Bible says that in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom. Proverbs 24 and verse 6: "*By wise counsel thou shalt make thy war, and in multitude of counselors there is safety*" (Proverbs 24:6). Now what does that mean? It means that when God is speaking to you about something, God will often confirm it to somebody else. Because: "*In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*" (2 Corinthians 13:1). And don't you be so proud, and don't you be so arrogant, that you're afraid of the counsel of other people.

When I was ordained to preach, I had an ordination council, and that ordination council asked this question: "What would you do if we refused to ordain you?" You know what this young nineteen-year-old boy said? Boy, I drew myself up, wrapped a robe of righteousness around me, and I said, "I'd preach anyway." Boy, I thought that sounded good. I said, "You know, I don't depend upon you guys. It's God that has called me." But I'll tell you, after having been on the trail this time, if I had some wise and godly men around me that would say that, you know what I'd do? I'd say, "Gentlemen, let me pray some more." Oh, friend, in a multitude of counselors, there's wisdom.

*It's a terrible thing for a man to think he has the gift of preaching, and nobody has the gift of listening.* Amen? Now listen—listen. The Bible teaches that we're going to know the will of God in the context of other things 'round about us.

#### **D. God Leads by His Spirit**

Now there is the people of God. I'll tell you another way that God will confirm His will to you, and that is the Spirit of God. Look in verse 17: "*And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 9:17). The Spirit of God, from that time on, was leading this man. It was this same man who wrote, in Romans chapter 8 and verse 14: "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*" (Romans 8:14). And the same man wrote, in Galatians 5, verse 18: "*But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law*" (Galatians 5:18).

The Spirit of God will lead you. You will hear His voice. Jesus said: "*My sheep hear my voice*" (John 10:27). And let me tell you how the Holy Spirit leads. If you ever see a person compelled and driven, they're probably being driven by the devil. God does not shout, and God does not shove. God whispers, and God leads. He leads His sheep. He's not driving them to the slaughter. He is leading them to the pasture. And you had better get sensitive enough that you can hear the Spirit of God and know the voice of

God.

### E. God Leads by His Wisdom

I wish I had more time to deal with that. But let me give you the last way that you can know the will of God: not only the Spirit of God, but the wisdom of God. God will lead you with sheer wisdom. Notice in verse 20: *“And immediately”*—speaking of Saul, now—*“he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God”* (Acts 9:20). *“Now wait a minute. You mean, right away, here’s this man, right away, he’s preaching Christ?”* *“But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them who called on this name in Jerusalem, and came here for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”*—but, notice verse 22—*“But Saul increased the more in strength”*—he’s not talking about physical strength now; he’s not *pumping iron*—*“and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ”* (Acts 9:21–22).

Where did he get this wisdom? Where did it come from? God gave him supernatural wisdom. James chapter 1, verse 5: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5). Oh, friend, the will of God is found between your ears, right here. “Oh,” you say, “no, that’s naturalistic. You shouldn’t use your mind.” Well, why do you say you shouldn’t use your mind, when the Apostle Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 2:16, that *“we have the mind of Christ?”* The Bible says we’re to present ourselves unto God, *“a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed”*—by what?—*“by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12:1-2). The renewing of your mind.

Do you know what wisdom is? *Wisdom is seeing life from God’s point of view.* Friend, when you pray, and you get the Spirit of God in you, and you get the Word of God in you, and you get the supernatural life of God in you, you will begin to have wisdom. *Knowledge comes by looking around, but wisdom comes by looking up.* And God will lead you, and God will give you wisdom. I don’t know how to explain it any other way than that, but it is supernatural when a person is walking in the Spirit. He says, “I have the mind of Christ,” and he’s not afraid to trust what he has *up here*. That is not naturalistic. That is supernatural.

Friend, wisdom is not getting all wet around the lashes and warm around the heart; it is having a mind that is stayed on God, full of the Word of God, and led by the Spirit of God. And the Bible says that God will guide you with wisdom.

### F. God Leads by His Providence

There’s one other thing—I just want to put it in here—that God leads with, and that is the providence of God. Now at about this time, if you’ll read this chapter, there were

some people who decided they had had enough of this man, and they were ready to destroy him. But he heard about it, and they let him down over the wall in a basket. Do you remember that story? There's the great apostle in a basket. Well, well, well. You talk about humility! Oh my! There he is, in a basket. Well, how did he learn about that? Well, you see, in the providence of God, word came to him: "Saul, they're trying to kill you, friend." And the providence of God led him.

You know what God does? God opens doors, and God closes doors. And the meek, He just simply guides. And what you think is happenstance is God's plans and God's ways. And God just simply guides us through this world. And many times, we don't even know it was the providence of God, until years later.

## Conclusion

Now I must quit. I wish we had about three hours to talk on this subject, but I must quit. But listen to me, friend. Don't be afraid of the will of God. *The will of God will not take you where the power of God cannot keep you.* And the will of God is the absolute best thing for you, for your wife, and for your children. And listen very, very carefully, right now. *The way to know the will of God for the rest of your life is to do the will of God, right now.* It's hard to steer a ship that's not moving.

*You see, the way to understand the part of the Bible you don't understand is to obey the part you do understand.* The way to know about the future is to obey God, right now. And if you're interested in having the will of God in your life, I want you to say what the Apostle Paul said so long ago: "Lord, who are You?" and, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Let me tell you who He is: He's the Son of God, who died for your sins. And what He wants you to do, right now, is to receive Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior. And I promise you, on the authority of the Word of God, if you'll give your heart to Jesus Christ, today—number one—He will forgive every sin; number two—He'll come into your heart and send His Spirit into you; number three—when you die, He'll take you to Heaven; and, number four—you'll have a wonderful time getting there.

It's just wonderful to know Jesus Christ. But oh, friend, He doesn't take rebels to Heaven. You must say, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). Not "what You'll have someone else to do," and, not "what someone else will have me to do," but, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

Bow your heads in prayer. Father, I pray that You'd bring this message home to our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# All Things New

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: March 22, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 9:17–22**

*“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.”*

ACTS 9:18

## Outline

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- I. Paul Had a New Lord
- II. Paul Had a New Life
- III. Paul Had a New Liberty
- IV. Paul Had a New Love
- V. Paul Had a New Labor

Conclusion

## Introduction

Now, would you take God’s Word, please, and be finding Acts chapter 9. Because that’s what we’re going to study in just a moment. You know, we’re studying the Book of Acts under the general heading “That Old-Time Religion,” because we’ve found out that if we want to learn how to face the future, then we’re going to have to look to the past. If we want to know what God is going to do and wants to do, then we need to look back and see what God has done when His people trusted Him so long ago. And, the blueprint and the pattern for the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Church are found in that first-century Church. And so, we’re studying the Book of Acts, finding out what our Lord did in that early Church, under the heading “That Old-Time Religion.” Now, in just a moment, we’ll read together the scripture, but it’s a long chapter. I want to just give you the title of the message and the setting for the scripture, and then we’ll read the scripture.

I want to speak to you today on this subject: “All Things New”—“All Things New.” For the Bible says: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Nature forms us. Sin deforms us. Schools inform us. Prisons reform us. But, only Christ transforms us. In Christ, we become new. A Christian is not just somebody who has become nice; he’s become new. He doesn’t just turn over a new leaf; he receives a new life. Now, a Christian is not like a tadpole that has become a frog—he’s gone through a series of

changes, but basically, he's the same creature. No, a Christian is more like a frog that has received the kiss of grace and has become a prince—that's what we are. We are changed radically and dramatically.

I heard of a lady who was coming out of a beauty shop, and she saw a lady there at the door. She said, "Oh, Mary Jones—Mary—what a joy to see you! Mary, it's been years since I've seen you. Mary, you look so different. Why, you've slimmed down. You've lost weight, and you fixed your hair different. You've made your face different. Oh, you even look taller than you used to look." "Well," she said, "I'm not Mary Jones." "Oh," she said, "you even changed your name."

The Apostle Paul got saved—so saved that he even changed his name. His early name was Saul. And now, he becomes Paul—the greatest missionary, the greatest preacher, and the greatest evangelist, I believe, that the world has ever known. And, he was changed by the grace of God. And, what God did for him God wants to do for you, if He has not already done it. And, I want to tell you how God can give you a brand new life.

Now again, before I read the scripture, let me give you the background. Paul was a scintillatingly brilliant, well-trained, young Pharisee. He had deep, passionate emotions. He had rigid standards. He had his philosophy of life all worked out. He had a bitter hatred against Christ and the Church. He was persecuting the Church; he had official sanction to do it. He had letters from the high priest to arrest Christians and to put them in bondage. Many of them were put in prison, and some of them were being killed for their faith. And, the Apostle Paul was persecuting and making havoc of the Church.

He's on the road to Damascus. It is high noon. And suddenly, there is a blazing light at high noon. The Apostle Paul said that it was brighter than the noonday sun. Now, if you burn a candle when the sun comes up, then the candle looks dim; but, the noonday sun was blazing, and it looked dim in the light that shone around the Apostle Paul. It was so bright that it blinded him. He fell from his horse, and the Lord Jesus spoke to him and said, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:4). Saul said, "*Who art thou, Lord?*" (Acts 9:5). And, He said, "*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*" (Acts 9:5). He said, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). He said, "You go to a place in the City of Damascus, to a certain house on the street called Straight, and I'll send somebody there to tell you what you should do" (Acts 9:6). Saul goes off to this place and waits.

And now, the Lord finds a man named Ananias, and the Lord comes to this disciple and says, "Ananias, I have a job for you to do. I want you to go to the house of Simon. I want you to find a man named Saul, and I have a message I want you to deliver to him." Ananias may have said something like this: "Lord, there's another man named Saul. He's the one who's persecuting the Christians. It's interesting that they have the same

name.” “It’s not another man, Ananias; it’s the same man.” “Well, who’s going with me?” “No one. You’re going by yourself.” Now, every word that he said came from his heart, because his heart was in his throat at about that time. He said, “Well, all right, Lord. If You want me to go, then I will go and deliver Your message to this man.” And, that’s the background for the passage of Scripture here that I’m going to read to you, in a moment. And, in this passage of Scripture, you’re going to find five marks of a man made new.

All right. Let’s begin reading here in Acts chapter 9 and verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ”* (Acts 9:17–22). All right, let’s think of it—the five marks of a man made new.

## **I. Paul Had a New Lord**

Mark number one: Saul had a new Lord. Look again in verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 9:17).

Remember when Saul first met the Lord Jesus? He asked the two greatest questions that any body in this word could ever ask: *“Who art thou, Lord?”* (Acts 9:5) and *“Lord, what [would you] have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6). Somebody said that the Apostle Paul spent the rest of his life finding the answer to those two questions: *“Who art thou, Lord?”* (Acts 9:5) and *“Lord, what [would you] have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6). What wonderful questions! I would to God that everyone in the whole wide world could ask and have those questions: Who is Jesus, and what does Jesus want us to do?

Now, the Apostle Paul didn’t ask, “Lord, what do You want others to do?” And, he didn’t ask, “Lord, what do others want me to do?” but rather, *“Lord, what [would you] have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6). Now, the fact of the matter is that Jesus had become his Lord. Now friend, a mark of a man made new is that he’s under new management; he has a brand new Lord.

There's some silly preaching and teaching going on in the world today, where people say something like this: "Now that you have accepted Christ as your Savior, why not make Him your Lord?" Hey friend, if He is not your Lord, then He is not your Savior. Okay? I want you to understand this. Don't get the idea that salvation is like a cafeteria line, where you say, "I believe that I'll have some salvation today, but no Lordship, thank you."

Now, the Bible doesn't put the emphasis upon receiving Christ as Savior; the Bible puts the emphasis upon making Jesus Lord. And, when you make Jesus Christ Lord, He is, therefore, your Savior. Now, I'm not saying that He doesn't save; indeed, He does save, but in the Bible, while the Bible mentions Him as Savior 24 times, it mentions Him as Lord 433 times. When they spoke of the Lord Jesus, they called Him "the Lord Jesus." Nobody is saved who has not made Jesus Lord. Listen, friend, you cannot have what He gives—salvation—unless you receive what He is—and that is Lord. Okay? The Bible says in Romans 10, verse 9: "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus*"—and, it literally says in the Greek language—"*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (Romans 10:9). Now, is He the Lord of your life? If He is, dear friend, then you have a right to believe that He is the Savior of your life. You cannot have what He gives unless you receive what He is.

Someone wrote these words: "Ye call Me Master and obey Me not. Ye call Me light and see Me not. Ye see My way and walk Me not. Ye call Me life and desire Me not. Ye call Me wise and follow Me not. Ye call Me fair and love Me not. Ye call Me rich and ask Me not. Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not. Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not. Ye call Me noble and serve Me not. Ye call Me mighty and honor Me not. Ye call Me just and fear Me not. If I condemn you, blame Me not."

Is He your Lord? Is He your Lord?

*Lord of every thought and action,  
Lord to sin and Lord to stay,  
Lord in speaking, writing, giving,  
Lord in all things to obey (author unknown).*

Is He your Lord? The Apostle Paul said on that Damascus road, "What would you have me to do, Lord?" (Acts 9:6). He's under new management. One of the marks of a life made new—a new Lord.

## **II. Paul Had a New Life**

Second mark: Paul had a new life. Look again, if you will, in verse 17: "*And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath*

*sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight*”—now, notice again in verse 18—“*And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales*” (Acts 9:17–18). He was able to see. You see, “*The LORD is my light and my salvation*” (Psalm 27:1), the psalmist says. When you receive the Lord, you receive with the Lord a new life. You’re able to see things that you’ve never seen before.

Now, this was in the physical realm. Saul was literally blinded, and he was literally healed—supernaturally healed of blindness. But, the Lord puts it here to give an illustration and an emphasis to the greater fact that Jesus is the light of the world. And, “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see*” (John 3:3). That’s what Jesus told Nicodemus: “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see*” (John 3:3). Don’t scold a blind man for not seeing. You’ll never argue any body into being a Christian. There needs to be a miracle. When a person comes to our Lord in surrender, God just brings the scales from his eyes, and he sees things that he never saw before. He understands things that he could not possibly understand apart from the Lord.

Now, Paul was brilliant—I mean, he was stunningly brilliant. He had the equivalency of a double PhD. He had a faculty in many languages. He had saturated himself in the scriptures, but he didn’t know Jesus. And then, when the scales fell from his eyes, he saw in the Bible things he’d never seen. Why, he went into Arabia. He put the Old Testament in his knapsack and went into the desert, and when he came out of the desert, he had Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Romans in his heart. He looked into that Old Testament, and in the tabernacle, he saw Jesus. In the Levitical offerings, he saw Jesus. In the ceremonies, he saw Jesus. In the law, he saw Jesus. In the prophets, he saw Jesus. In the psalms, he saw Jesus. The whole Bible was full of Jesus, but he’d never seen it before. Now, the Lord’s just taken the scales from his eyes. Friend, when you get saved and you get a new Lord, you’ll get a new life. And, the Bible will burst aflame in your hands, and you’ll be able to see with the light of the Lord Jesus those things that you’ve never seen.

Brother Jim, down in Florida, we had a young man who came to our services one time to mock everything. You will remember that his name was George. He was an atheist. He had written in the newspaper, “When people stop believing in a non-existent God to send them to a non-existent Hell, then one more time the world will be populated by people rather than by sheep.” It was a caustic letter. He came to the services to mock, but God was there, and those people so prayed that the power of God was there, and it just cut through all of his arguments. And, it’s as though the Lord just revealed Himself to this young man, and he was saved. He came to me later and sat in my office. He said, “Pastor Rogers,” he said, “it’s the most amazing thing.” He said, “Before I knew Jesus,” he said, “I was so sure there is no God.” And, he said, “Now, I can’t even remember the arguments—can’t even remember the arguments.” A new light—the

scales fell from his eyes. Friend, I want to tell you that the Lord will give you light, and He'll give you insight into things that you could never know apart from divine illumination.

### **III. Paul Had a New Liberty**

I'll tell you a third thing that the Apostle Paul had when he was made new: not only did he have a new Lord and a new light; but also, because of those things, he had a new liberty. Look, if you will, again, in verse 17: *"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 9:17).

Now, what does that mean? Well, 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 17 says, *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"—"[there's] liberty"* (2 Corinthians 3:17). He received a new liberty. He received power. Here was a man that had been bound by the law of sin and death. Oh, he'd been struggling; he'd been trying. And, he was religious, but the more he struggled—he was like a man in quicksand—the deeper he sank. But, he said in Romans chapter 8 and verse 2: *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Romans 8:2). There is a new liberty that comes through the Holy Spirit—to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, I want to emphasize, dear friend, that a Christian is not just somebody who endeavors to turn over a new leaf and to be nice. God infuses us. God energizes us. God puts within us His power.

You see, I said that the Christian life was a changed life. Let me draw the focus down a little tighter and say not only is it a changed life; it is an exchanged life. Paul said in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). He's saying that "Jesus, through the Spirit, has inhabited me. His divinity has inhabited my humanity, and now I am filled with the life of God." Oh friend, listen, so many of you are out there saying, "You know, I'd like to be a Christian, but I just know that I don't have it in me to live a Christian life." Friend, I don't. You don't. They don't. We don't, and nobody has. The Christian life is what God does in us and through us. He's the One who gives us that liberty. He has not asked you to do the impossible. He's just simply said, "You come to Me. Let Me be your Lord. Let Me be your light, and I will be your liberty. I will give you strength. I will give you power."

Now listen, the Spirit-filled life, therefore, is not for those super saints, for those who have graduated, or for those who've lived a long time in Christ. Do you know what the Apostle Paul was at this time? Friend, he wasn't the mighty apostle; he was a little baby

Christian—I mean, brand, spanking new; a brand new Christian. And, Ananias said to him, *“Be filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 9:17). Every Christian ought to be filled with the Spirit when he gets saved and is born again. And, if you have been saved and you’re not filled, then you ought to be filled today. The mighty apostle wrote in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 18, because of what God had done in him, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18). That’s not a request; that’s not a suggestion. That is a command—to be filled with the Spirit. It is foolish and wicked to try to do God’s work without being filled with the Spirit.

How can you be filled with the Spirit? It’s not complicated. We’re not talking about visions and ecstasies. We’re not talking about weird feelings. Listen, if you will say what Paul said and mean it, then you’ll be filled with the Spirit—just, “Lord, what do You want me to do? I am available to You.” What we surrender He takes. What He takes He cleanses. What He cleanses He fills, and what He fills He uses. Would you say it? Would you pray it today?

*Have Thine own way, Lord!  
Have Thine own way!  
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!  
Fill with Thy Spirit, ’till all shall see  
Christ only, always, living in me! (Pollard, Adelaide A.)*

#### **IV. Paul Had a New Love**

Now, let me give you the fourth mark of a man made new: not only did he have a new Lord, see a new life, and gain a new liberty; but oh, dear friend, he had a new love—a new love. Begin reading now in verse 19: *“And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus”*—now, look at that—*“with the disciples which were at Damascus”* (Acts 9:19). Now, let your eyes go back to chapter 9, verse 1: *“And Saul, yet breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest”* (Acts 9:1). Now look, a few days ago, he is threatening them. He’s breathing out slaughter. The word literally means “murder.” I mean, his heart was filled with bitterness, vindictiveness, and malevolence toward those who are called Christians. And, those he once loathed he now loves. He’s with them. He’s blind. The scales fall from his eyes. The first sight he sees is the face of Ananias. The first words he hears are these: “Brother Saul” (Acts 9:17). Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that wonderful? I mean, here’s love; here’s fellowship.

You see, there are some people that get the idea that you can get saved and that you can be a Christian without loving the brotherhood, without loving the fellowship, without loving the saints of God, and without loving the Church. Hey, folks, that’s

impossible—that's impossible. If you love Jesus, then you're going to love what Jesus loves. You see, look, I mean, be reasonable—be reasonable. When you get saved—what happens to you when you get saved? Well, you receive the Spirit of God. Okay. Now, what is the Spirit of God? What is the nature of God? You read in 1 John 4:16 this: *“God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”* God is love. Now, how can I have God in me and not have love in me, huh? Can't do it. God is love. If I say that I'm born again—if I'm a man made new—then *“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 5:5). He's filled with the Holy Ghost; *“the love of God is shed abroad in [his heart]”* (Romans 5:5). No wonder He loved them. You see, it's the nature of God.

And, the nature of the Church says that we're going to love the Church. What is the Church? The Church is the Body of Jesus. Now, think with me. When the Apostle Paul was on that road and Jesus appeared to him, do you know what Jesus said to him? He said, “Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). You know what Saul could have said? “I don't know who You are or whoever You are, but I want You to know that I haven't got anything against You. I'm persecuting these Christians. It's not You that I'm persecuting. It's these Christians that I'm persecuting.” But, do you get the inference? Do you get the lesson? Friend, when you persecute the Church, you persecute Christ. Why? Because, Christ is the head, and the Church is the Body.

Now friend, listen, when the body suffers, the head suffers. And, to persecute the Church is to persecute Jesus. To ignore the Church is to ignore Jesus. To honor the Church is to honor Jesus. Are you understanding what I'm saying? There's no such thing as saying, “Christ—yes, and the Church—no.” You see, it is the nature of the Christian to love, and it's the nature of the Church that the Church and Christ—listen—that the Church and Christ are not identical but are inseparable, like a head and a body. And, you cannot love Jesus without loving what Jesus loves. Oh, how important it is that we have this new love! This verse says that he was with those disciples, and he was made strong. We need one another.

I have been to California and have seen the giant Sequoia. Have you ever done that? You ought to see those trees. You ought to go out there and see General Sherman. That tree is as tall as a 20-story building—I mean, with a 70-foot circumference, a giant. It's been growing since the time of Christ. You would think a tree that big would have a tremendously deep taproot that would go down, down, down, down, to keep it standing so tall and so long. But, you know what I discovered recently? Those trees don't have deep taproots at all. Their roots grow very close to the surface, and the experts say that the reason why they have survived and the reason why they have grown so tall and so long is that they grow only in groves. Their roots all intertwine with the others, and when the winds come, they hold one another up. That's the idea.

Oh, friend, would you be a giant for God? You'll be so in the fellowship of the Church where we're intertwined, and where we love one another and care for one another. And, the Bible says that they received this man, and he was strengthened. He had a new love—a new love. When you love Jesus, you're going to love His Church. The Church that the Apostle Paul once persecuted he now fellowships.

## V. Paul Had a New Labor

Let me give you the last mark of a new life in Christ, and it is this: that he had a new labor. Look at him, beginning in verse 20: *“And straightway”*—that means “immediately”—*“he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ”* (Acts 9:20–22). Now, what had been his labor before? To destroy the Church. What has been his labor now? To build the Church. What had been his labor before? To minimize Christ. Now, what is he doing? Maximizing Christ. Friend, the mark of a man made new is this: that he wants others to know about his Savior. He's an evangelist. He's a soul winner.

I can give you a personal testimony, when, as a teenage boy, the Lord Jesus Christ found me and saved me. Bless His holy name. I had immediately—immediately in my heart—a desire that others would know the Jesus whom I know. I wanted my brother Buddy to know Jesus. I wanted my sister to know Jesus. I wanted those guys that I played football with to know Jesus. And, from that time to this, there has been a burning, blazing, passionate, and emotional desire in my heart that others would come to know the Jesus whom I know. It's absolutely inconceivable to me that a person could say that he's been saved and not want others to know what he's received.

I mean, here's the Apostle Paul. He meets the Lord Jesus, and there's such a change that they say, “Look at him. Who is this? Why, he came to destroy the Church, and now, he's building the Church. And now, he's preaching Christ and proving that Christ is the Son of God.” It's the mark of a man made new. It's the mark of the new life in Christ that we want to share Jesus Christ. We may not all do it the same way. We cannot all do it the same way. I don't believe that there'll be another Apostle Paul 'till Jesus comes. But, I'll tell you what: we can all have the same passion that Paul had. We can all have the same love—the same desire.

## Conclusion

Listen—listen—here's the mark of a man made new: there's a new Lord; because of

that new Lord, there's a new light; because of that new light, dear friend, there is a new liberty, a new love, and a new labor.

Some years ago, Billy Graham was preaching in California, in Hollywood. And, kind of a hard-living, rough-living, Hollywood cowboy actor named Stuart Hamlin came and heard Billy Graham preach. Stu Hamlin was saved. Like the Apostle Paul, he had a life made new. He'd found his good friend John Wayne and said to him, "John, I want to tell you what happened to me," and he witnessed to John Wayne. And, he said, "John, you ought to give your heart to Jesus." Then, he looked John Wayne in the face and said, "John, it's no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you." And, John Wayne said, "Stu, that's a beautiful phrase. You ought to make that into a song:

*Tis no secret what God can do.*

*What He's done for others, He'll do for you (Stuart Hamlin).*

Friend, I want to tell you that what the Lord did for the Apostle Paul He'll do for you. 'Tis no secret what God can do. What He's done for Adrian Rogers, He'll do for you. *"For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:12–13). "[And] therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

Let's bow our heads in prayer.

# Who Is the Man Jesus Christ?

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: June 3, 1990**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:34–43**

*“And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”*

ACTS 10:39

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Who is the Man called Jesus Christ?

May I tell you that Jesus Christ is an historical fact. Now let me say this. There are some people who doubt that Jesus Christ ever even lived. I mean that there ever was such a person, be He God or not that even walked on the face of this earth. May I tell you that only ignorance talks that way.

Leave the Bible alone. Jesus Christ is an historical fact. I'm talking about secular history. Flavius Josephus, one of the greatest historians of all time, he had a great career in the first century. He was a student. He was a priest. He was a military commander. He was a diplomat. And he was a historian. He's been described as perhaps the most distinguished and most learned Jew of his day. He wrote a great set, a compendium of volumes called, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, twenty volumes that tell the story of the Jews and the history of the world from Creation to the destruction of Masada. And historians go to Josephus, Flavius Josephus, and they read to find out what the times were like.

Now he commented on the times of the Lord Jesus Christ and in one of these volumes, he wrote about the social unrest in Judea when Pontius Pilate was the Roman procurator, about AD 26 to 36. Let me give you a paragraph from this historian. Not

from the Word of God—from a historian. Not one of the writers of the Bible, not a Christian. He says, and I quote, Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man for he was a doer of wonderful works. A teacher of such men as have received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate at the suggestion of the principle men among us had condemned Him to the cross, those that loved Him at the first ceased not to do so, and the race of Christians so named from Him are not extinct even now.

Now notice what he said about Jesus. He said he was a wise men. He said He was a miracle worker. He said that He was a teacher. He said that He was crucified unto Pontius Pilate and that He was the founder of a race of people known as Christians. Now there's another historian, Suetonius, and Suetonius was the official historian of the imperial house of Rome. That is, he was the official Roman historian. In AD 49, he wrote at the request of the emperor, Claudius, who had banished all of the Jews from the city, an account. And this is what he said. He expelled the Jews from Rome on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging at the instigation of Christus. That is another name for Christ—Christus.

Now nobody suggests that Christus was ever in Rome in person. It was the introduction, however, of His spiritually radical teaching. I'm talking now about a historian who is talking about a man named Christ. There was another historian. His name was Tacitus. He was the Roman governor of Asia. You will remember that Caesar Nero, about AD 64, when the city of Rome burned, was accused of burning the slums in Rome so he could rebuild the city of Rome. Nero, in order to take the heat from himself—no pun intended—blamed it on the Christians. Now this is what Cornelius Tacitus, the Roman governor of Asia, a noted historian, wrote, and I quote:

To dispel the rumor, Nero substituted his culprits and treated with the most extreme punishments some people popularly known as "Christians," whose disgraceful activities were notorious. The originator of that name—Christus—had been executed when Tiberius was emperor by order of the procurator, Pontius Pilate.

Now what I'm trying to say is all of these secular historians have to deal with the man named Jesus. Plyniums, called Pliny the younger, was a contemporary of both Tacitus and Suetonius, and he was the governor of Bithynia. And he also was a historian. I want you to listen to what he said, and I'm quoting from him. He says, and I quote: I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians.

Now there are some people who, if they were named Christians would be put to death. I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians, and they said "Yes." I asked them a second and third time, warning them of the penalty if they persisted. I ordered them to be led off to the execution, and what was their crime? They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an

antiphonal hymn to Christ as God and binding themselves with an oath, not to commit any crime but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery, and adultery—from breaches of faith, from repudiating of trust, when called upon to honor it.

Now I just read to you some snatches of history. I've read to you what secular historians have said, contemporaries of those were living at the time of Christ, and contemporaries immediately after that time, and they all speak of Jesus Christ as an historical fact. Now these were not Christians. These were enemies of the faith. But they had to reckon with Jesus Christ and so do you. Ladies and gentlemen, let me just put it down big and plain and straight—Jesus Christ was and is an historical fact.

Now, what are we going to do with Jesus Christ? You cannot deny the fact that there walked upon this earth a man known as Jesus Christ. He walked upon this earth. Someone has written these words and they may sound beautiful and you may think that they're wonderful. These are the words: "If Jesus Christ is a man, and only a man, I say that of all mankind, I will cleave to Him and cleave to Him always. If Jesus Christ is a god and the only God, I swear, I will follow Him through heaven and hell, the earth, the sea, and the air." Now that sounds wonderful, but let me tell you something, friend. If Jesus Christ is a man and only a man, He is a liar, a fake, a fraud and an imposter. And no one should follow Him.

Jesus Christ was an historical figure. Now you have to ask yourself—What kind of a man was He? Was He a liar who said He was the Son of God and was not? Or was He a lunatic who thought He was the Son of God and was not? Or was He the Lord Who was Who He said He was? You cannot escape—He was an historical figure. And He was either liar, lunatic, or Lord. He was deceiver, deceived, or deity.

Now, let's go back to our Scripture. We're in Acts chapter 10.

What would you do if a group of people got together in a house, people who were not Christians, and had no reason to be Christians apart from your testimony. What would you do if they got together in a house and invited you to come and speak to them? What would you do if they came and invited you to tell them about why you believe in Jesus Christ? What would you say? Well, that's exactly what happened to Simon Peter.

There was a man named Cornelius. He was a Gentile. He was an army officer. He had a vision from God—an angel had come to him and told him to send for Simon Peter in Caesarea and Simon Peter will come and tell you and your house words were by you can be saved. So Cornelius, this Roman army officer, got his family together. He brought in his servants, he brought in his friends, and in walks Simon Peter and he says now to Simon Peter, "Tell me why you believe in Jesus Christ." Why you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I want you to notice what Peter did in verse 34,

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no

respector of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

Now God is not a racist. There is no respector of persons with Almighty God. Now so often I am interviewed and if I get a secular interviewer, many times he wants to put me in a hot box. He wants to embarrass me and most of them have learned to ask this kind of a question: “Mr. Rogers, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Only Way to heaven?” Well, what’s the answer to that? “Yes.” All right, they’ve got me there. Got me, I’m glad to say it! I wish I could stand on the top of the Empire State Building with a megaphone to be heard around the universe and say it. I believe it. Secondly, “Do you believe therefore that a Jew without Jesus Christ is lost?” Now do you see what the intent is? It’s to make me sound like some sort of an anti-Semite. To make me sound like I am against the Jews. Make me sound like I am a narrow, bigot if I say, “Yes, I believe that a Jew without Christ is lost.”

But if I say, “No, I don’t believe he’s lost, I would deny the Gospel and deny what I believe.” Let me tell you how I answer then and anybody who may be listening right now by radio, and any of my Jewish friends who maybe listening—when somebody asks me, “Do you believe that a Jew without Jesus Christ is lost,” I say, “Dear friend, I believe that one of my own children without Jesus Christ is lost.” Doesn’t matter whether he’s a Jew. It has nothing to do with it. It has nothing to do with whether he’s a Gentile. With God, there’s no respector of persons. Nobody is saved because he’s a Gentile and nobody’s lost because he is a Jew. People are saved or lost according to what they do with the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Not a matter of race, or face, or place, but grace, dear friend.

Don’t ever let anybody put you in that corner, because the Bible says “With God there is no respect of persons.” You understand that? Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.

And so, here is Peter the Jew, with Cornelius the Gentile. And you’re going to find out that God will make them one in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now Peter, asked to present Jesus Christ, Who is an historical personage, gives three lines of witness. There are three lines of evidence that I want you to see, I want you to get in your heart, in your mind, why we know that we know that we know that we know that Jesus Christ is not liar, or lunatic, but Lord. This historical person—how do we know who He is?

## **I. The Personal Witness of the Saints**

First of all, there is the personal witness of the saints. Look to what Peter says in verse 39. He says, “And we are witnesses of all things which he did.”

Now Simon Peter includes the other apostles and he says this, “we are witnesses.” There was the personal witness of the apostles. Now remember, there were eleven of

them without Judas. And all eleven of them had a united witness that is indisputable. They were with the Son of God for three and one half years. What a jury they must have made! What a jury in these witnesses. And may I tell you, dear friend, that that jury with unanimity said that Jesus Christ is Lord, and they testified to three things about the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **A. They Were Witnesses of His Virtuous Life**

First of all, they testified about His virtuous life. Look if you will in verse 34, “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Now what does He say about Jesus Christ, especially in this verse, verse 38? That Jesus Christ “went about doing good.” He performed miracles and they were all good miracles. Simon Peter says, “I was there! He turned water into wine. I drank some of it. He walked on water! I saw Him do it. He raised a little girl from the dead. The daughter of Jairus. I was there and saw Him. He healed the lepers. I saw Him heal the lepers. He cast out demons. I saw Him cast out demons. He went up on a mountain; He was transfigured. I was an eyewitness of His majesty. There was a voice that came from heaven saying, This is My beloved Son. I heard that voice!”

Dear friend, they were witnesses of the virtuous life of the Lord Jesus. What a life Jesus lived! There is not one attribute that was lacking in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was witnessing to a Jewish doctor one day and I said, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah?” “Oh,” he said, “No, we’re waiting for a Messiah.” And I said, “My dear friend, why wait? What could anyone have that would improve on Jesus Christ?” How could you improve on the Person of Jesus Christ? Simon Peter stood before Cornelius and he said, “Let me give you my testimony.

#### **B. They Were Witnesses of His Vicarious Death**

First of all, as to the virtuous life of the Lord Jesus. He went about doing good.” But not only did he testify of His virtuous life, but He also testified of His vicarious death. Look if you will in verse 39 of this same chapter. “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:”

Now if He went about doing good it is obvious that He didn’t die for His own sins; He

died for the sins of others. He went about doing good, and yet He was hanged on a tree. That is, He was made a curse. There was His mock trial, and then He was crucified. My friend, His death is an established historical fact.

Simon Peter said, “We saw Him laid away in the tomb that day.”

### **C. They Were Witnesses of His Victorious Resurrection**

But there’s a third thing that he said “we’re witnesses of.” Not only His virtuous life, not only His vicarious death, but listen to me, His victorious resurrection. Look if you will in verse 40 again, “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”

Now what was the keynote of the apostolic preaching? What is it that makes Christianity from any other religion? What is it that sets Christianity apart from other religions, of rituals and rules? It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Well, somebody says, “But these eyewitnesses... what if they were hallucinating?” Well the Bible says over 500 saw Him at one time. We have some judges in our congregations. And judges, what would you do if 500 people came into your courtroom and said the same thing? Over 500 at one time!

Well, you say, “Well, He was a ghost. It wasn’t a real resurrection.” Simon Peter says in this passage that we ate with Him. We actually touched Him who did eat and drink with Him after His resurrection.

Well you say, “Wait a minute. It was a lie.” Well, why would Simon Peter lie about it? I mean, after awhile they’re going to crucify him upside down for his belief. Most all of these witnesses died because of their belief. A man may live for a lie, but very few will knowingly die for a lie. They died. Why? Because death held no more terror for them. Simon Peter stands before Cornelius. Cornelius knew that Jesus was a historical fact. The question is—Is He is the Lord or He is a liar, or a lunatic?

## **II. The Prophetic Witness of the Scriptures**

First of all, there was the witness of the saints—Simon Peter said, “we are witnesses of His virtuous life. We are witnesses of His vicarious death. We are witnesses of His victorious resurrection.” He is the Judge of the living and the dead. Now there’s a second line of evidence. Not only the personal witness of the saints, but the prophetic witness of the Scriptures. Look if you will now in verse 43, one of the great verses in all of the Bible. “To him give all the prophets witness,”

Now first of all, Simon Peter and the apostles say “we’re His witness.” But now watch it. “To him—to Jesus—give all the prophets witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Let me tell you something: when he said “all the prophets,” he’s talking about the Old Testament. He’s talking about the Word of God from Genesis through Malachi. The New Testament had not yet been written. And what Simon Peter says is this, “Cornelius, the book called the Bible, the Old Testament, every body in the Old Testament was writing about the Lord Jesus.” “To Him give all the prophets witness.”

My dear friend, the Bible is about One Person—the Hero of the Bible is Jesus Christ. If you read the Bible, Old Testament or New Testament and you don’t find Jesus Christ, you have missed the Message of the Bible. It is about the Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful unity.

Acts chapter 10 verse 43 sums up the Old Testament: “To Him give all the prophets witness.” Now the Bible, the Old Testament, was written by a number of different authors. The Bible was written over a period of about 1500 years. And yet, there is a cohesion that this One Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know the other day, we called our son in Madrid. Mama Bear is burning up our telephone, our bill is going to be big, but that’s an amazing thing, that in Memphis, Tennessee she just picks up the phone. Now when she picks up the phone to talk, she eliminates everybody that doesn’t have a phone. And then when she dials the first digit that deals with the country, the country of Spain, she eliminates all other countries. And then when she dials a couple of more digits, that eliminates all the cities in Spain. And then she’ll dial a couple more digits and that eliminates a lot of people in a particular city in Spain. And then, when she dials that last digits, there’s nobody left but one home. That’s the home of our David. Isn’t that amazing? Five billion people on the face of the earth, and across the ocean you can pick up a phone and start dialing numbers and start closing the focus.

Now friend, that’s what the Old Testament does. In the third chapter of Genesis after man had sinned, the Bible says there’s going to be a Redeemer and Genesis 3, verse 15, He’s going to be the Seed of the woman. All right, that eliminates angels and animals and any other creature. Right away, we’ve just eliminated so many people. It’s got to be a man and a male. And then we read in the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis that He’s going to be of the Seed of Abraham. Boy, the focus comes in a little closer. And then we read that not only is He going to be of the seed of Abraham, but He’s going to be of the tribe of Judah. And the focus gets a little tighter. And then we read that He’s going to be a descendant of Jesse, and the focus gets a little tighter. And then we read that this one is going to be born in Bethlehem. It gets a little tighter. And then to make it impossible that it could be anybody else, He’s going to be born of a virgin. Couldn’t be anybody else. Oh, dear friend, do you see how the Bible just narrows it—He’s going to be born of a race, and then of a nation of that race, and then a tribe of that nation, and then a family of that tribe. Then a specific woman is going to give birth.

There's only one person on the other end of the line, folks, His Name of Jesus. Can't be anybody else because dear friend, "to Him give all the prophets witness.

This Book, the Old Testament, is incredible, the pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis chapter 22, you see Isaac going up on Mount Moriah with Abraham, where God told Abraham to take "your only Son Isaac and there offer him for a burnt offering in a place that I will show thee." And of all of the places in the world, Abraham takes Isaac to Mount Moriah, which is the same mountain where Jesus was crucified. Mount Calvary and Mount Moriah are the same place. And there in that wonderful story in Genesis 22, the crucifixion is picture.

Dear friend, if you open your Bible to the book of Leviticus, on every page you'll find pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Leviticus, when the people would sin, the high priest would lay his hands on the head of a goat and confess the sins of the people and then that goat would be carried away into the wilderness. He was the scapegoat. He pictures the Lord Jesus Christ who has borne my sins away never to be brought up against me anymore.

In the Old Testament they would take a little dove, a mourning turtledove that made that mournful sound called a mourning dove. And they would sacrifice that dove. That speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the man of sorrows. Then on other sacrifices, they would take a snow-white pigeon and sacrifice that pigeon. That represents Jesus, the sinless and harmless Savior. In other sacrifices, they would take fine flour and they would bruise it and beat it and grind it and then bake it. That pictures the Lord Jesus Christ bruised and beaten for us. Then they would pour oil on that flour that represents the Lord Jesus, anointed with the Holy Ghost because oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit. Then they would take and sprinkle frankincense, and that frankincense represents Jesus our intercessor because that incense ascends to God. Then there would be an Old Testament priest who would offer those sacrifices and the Old Testament priest prefigures and points to Jesus Christ, our High Priest. They did this in a building called the tabernacle because the Bible says Jesus was made flesh and tabernacled among us. The wood of that tabernacle speaks of the humanity of Jesus. The gold of that tabernacle speaks of the Deity of Jesus. The veil in that tabernacle spoke of the flesh of Jesus. The altar in that tabernacle spoke of Christ our sacrifice. The showbread in that tabernacle spoke of Christ our sustenance. The golden lampstand in that tabernacle spoke of Christ our Sight. The incense in that tabernacle—Christ our supplication.

In the Book of Numbers, Moses lifts up a brazen serpent. And in the New Testament, the Bible says, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up." In the Book of Ruth, Ruth needs someone to redeem her and Boaz comes and redeems Ruth the Moabitess. Outside the covenant promises

of Israel, and Boaz the kinsmen redeemer is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Psalm 2, Jesus is called the Son of God. In Psalm 22, His crucifixion is so described that 800 years before crucifixion was even known of, it is written as the standing at the foot of the cross. In Isaiah chapter 53, you have the Gospel according to Isaiah. He was wounded for our transgression. He was bruised for our iniquity. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. It is the Gospel according to Isaiah. In Daniel the ninth chapter, Daniel speaks of the Messiah, He calls Him “the Prince to Come,” and Daniel in the ninth chapter gives the exact, precise date of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Micah, it is told clearly and plainly that He would be born in Bethlehem. The Book of Zechariah, we see the wounds in His side, and the wounds of the nails in His hands. Zechariah tells plainly of the second coming of Jesus Christ. In Malachi, we see that John the Baptist is to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all through the Bible, there is but one plan of salvation—God made skins of animals to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, talking about the shed blood and the covering that the Lord Jesus give us. For Cain and Abel, there was a spotless lamb to take away sin. When God told Noah to build an ark, He said put pitch on the outside and the inside of that ark, and the word for pitch, “Cathar,” is word which means atonement. Put atonement on the outside, atonement on the inside, because the ark was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. The water was judgment. But not one drop of judgment could come through that atonement in that ark of safety, which was the Lord Jesus Christ. The Passover Lamb, the sprinkling of the blood upon the door, and God said, “When I see the blood, I will Passover you” for Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.

And Simon Peter stands before Cornelius and he says, “Cornelius, you want me to tell you whether this man, Jesus, Who is a historical fact. Do you want me to tell you whether He’s liar, Lord, or lunatic? First of all, there’s the witness of the saints. We were eyewitness of His glory. Not only the personal witness of the saint, but the prophetic witness of the Scripture. All the Old Testament is about the Lord Jesus Christ.

My dear friend, there is no way possible anyone could rig it. No way possible. And I’ll give you the third reason now. Here’s where God steps in to give Simon Peter some help. Look if you will now in verses 44 and following, “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter—that is the whole bunch of them—because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”

### **III. The Powerful Witness of the Spirit**

Now, there is the personal witness of the saints, the prophetic witness of the Scriptures and then my dear friend, the powerful witness of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and the Word of the redeemed and He says, "Amen! It is true." Dear friend, I thank God that I don't have to try to talk you into it. For anything I could talk you into, somebody else would talk you out of. But thank God there's One in the glory, when His Word is preached, Who says "Amen!" Amen. It is true. And the Holy Spirit of God fell on these people and convicted them in their hearts.

Now they spoke with tongues. Why did they speak with tongues? People don't always speak with tongues when they get saved. This was the Gentile Pentecost. We had the Jewish Pentecost in Acts 2. Now in Acts 10 you had the Gentile Pentecost. What God is saying here is there is no respect of persons, whether it'd be Jew or whether it'd be Gentile, that the Gospel is for all. There were Jews there present who needed to see that the same God Who poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was now pouring out the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles.

And dear friend, I've never spoken with tongues, but I'll tell you God has poured out His Holy Spirit upon this poor servant, and I know that I know that Jesus is Lord. Thank God for the witness of the saints. Thank God for the witness of the Scriptures. And hallelujah for the witness of the Spirit!

Romans chapter 8 and verse 16, "the Spirit Himself beareth witness." The Spirit Himself beareth witness. "...that we are the children of God."

1 John 5, verses 9 and 10, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth upon the Son of God hath the witness in himself and he that believeth not God hath made him a liar."

You said, "God, the witness that You've sent is not true," because you he believeth not on the record that God gave of His Son. And, my dear friend, when you hear Jesus Christ preached, the Holy Spirit says "He's the Son of God," and you say "No, He's not," you're calling God a liar, my dear friend. He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar.

### **Conclusion**

I have said that Jesus Christ beyond the shadow of any doubt is a historical figure. Now was He liar, Lord or lunatic? There's the personal witness of the saints, the prophetic witness of the Scripture, the powerful witness of the Spirit, that says He is Lord.

# Sharing the Light

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: August 17, 1979**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:34–45**

*“And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”*

ACTS 10:39

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Personal Witness of the Saints
  - A. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Virtuous Life of Jesus
  - B. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Vicarious Death of Jesus
  - C. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Victorious Resurrection of Jesus
- II. The Prophetic Witness of the Scriptures
- III. The Persuasive Witness of the Spirit
  - A. The Holy Spirit Witnesses to Us
  - B. The Holy Spirit Witnesses in Us
  - C. The Holy Spirit Witnesses Through Us

Conclusion

## Introduction

Well, amen. I don't know whether I'm going to be able to preach or not. That's great! Praise the Lord. Would you be finding the book of Acts chapter 10, and, in just a moment, we're going to begin reading in verse 34. I want to ask you a question: What would happen if a man were to come to you and say to you, I have been a pagan, but I've heard about Christianity and I would like to know the truth concerning Christianity? Would you come to my house and would you share the truth? I'll tell you what I would do if you'll come. I'll get all of my family, and I will gather my friends. If you will come to my house and tell me what it's all about. Tell me why I should be a believer like you.

Now, what would you do if somebody were to give you that invitation? I know what some of you would do: you'd say, That's wonderful. I'll go get my pastor. What would you do? What would you share? What would you say if somebody were to invite you over to their house to explain why you believe what you believe?

That's the story that we have today. The man was Cornelius. He was a pagan. He was a Centurion, a Roman army officer. An angel had told him, if you send for Simon Peter, Simon Peter will come and tell you how you and your house can be saved. So

Cornelius sent for Simon Peter. Simon was living there in Joppa in the house of another man named Simon, Simon the tanner. God had to work on Simon Peter to get him to go, and even had to talk, even to go into a Gentile house because Simon Peter was a Jew, and the Jews really didn't have much dealing with the Gentiles in those days. And so, the Lord had to work on Simon Peter, and the Lord worked through an angel on Cornelius, and the Lord worked through a vision on Simon Peter. But there was something that even an angel cannot do—that is to share Jesus Christ.

Now, Peter comes to Cornelius's house, and there Peter begins to tell Cornelius why he should believe on Jesus, and he gives him three lines of evidence, three witnesses. Those same three witnesses are alive and well today in this city, and if we share Jesus Christ, in my estimation, we'll share Jesus the same way that Simon Peter shared him, and with the same evidence that Peter had so long ago.

Look, if you will now, in verse 34. Peter begins now, as he's received into this house, to share with this Roman army officer the gospel of Jesus Christ: "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ:"—and then I love this statement—"He is Lord of all: that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who sent about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things..."—just underscore that phrase—"And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up from, raised up the third day and shewed him openly; not only to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead. And to him give all the prophets witness,"—underscore that phrase—"to him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. And while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word"—underscore that—"the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." And there you have the threefold witness. There you have the personal witness of the saints. There you have the prophetic witness of the Scriptures. And there you have the persuasive witness of the Holy Spirit.

Now, folks, I want to tell you, that's the way we do it today. Now, let's look at these three lines of evidence, and see what we could say if we ever get invited into a home to share Jesus Christ and to have that kind of a golden opportunity. First of all, there was

the personal witness of the saints. Look at that again in verse 39: “And we are witnesses of all things which he did.” These apostles—Peter includes himself, and he includes all of his friends, his buddies, his pals, his compatriots, his peers—and Peter says, Listen, Cornelius. We were eyewitnesses. This is not a fable. This is a fact. We saw it with our own eyes. You see, these apostles had the united witness of 11 men. If you were to get a jury and you wanted a diverse, balanced jury to adjudicate any manner, you could not have gotten a more balanced or more diverse jury than these 11 men that Peter is talking about when he said, we are witnesses. You think about them.

First of all, there was John. John was young; he was observant, he was sensitive. Then there was Peter. He was burly and rough, a hard-working fisherman. Then, there was Simon Zelotes. He was a political activist. He was a political zealot. That’s where he gets his name. He’s what some would call today a right-winger. And then, there were Nathaniel and Thomas. Both of these men tended to be skeptical. And they wanted to see. They had inquiring minds. And then, there was Matthew. Matthew was a political businessman, hard bitten. You’re not going to put anything over on Matthew. Then there was Andrew. Andrew was gentle and compassionate, liked the little guy. And then, there was Philip. Philip was a thinker. Philip was calculating. He figured out how much bread it would take to feed 5,000. And then, there was James. You talk about a straight shooter. You talk about a guy who tells it like it is, there was James. All of these 11 men, diverse, and yet they have all agreed on one thing: Jesus is Lord. The verdict of the of the jury was absolutely, totally unanimous.

## **I. The Personal Witness of the Saints**

Now, what did they testify about? What were they eyewitnesses of?

### **A. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Virtuous Life of Jesus**

Well, first of all, they were eyewitnesses of the virtuous life of Jesus. Look, if you will now, beginning in verse 34: “Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.” And then, he begins to tell in verse 38, “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power who went about doing good”—just underscore that—“...and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” And he says, “we are witnesses of all these things.” Now, he said, we saw His virtuous life. We were witnesses of it. He changed water into wine. How do I know? Peter says, I drank some of it. He walked on the water. How do I know? I saw him walk on the water. Not only did He walk on the water; I did. He raised Jairias’ daughter from the grave. I saw him heal the sick. I saw with my own eyes lepers cleansed. We were there with him on the Mount of Transfiguration. He was transfigured before our very face. We heard with our ears Almighty God speak out of the heavens, and say, “This is my beloved Son.” We were eyewitnesses of His virtuous life. This one

totally unique, never another like him. He went about doing good.

### **B. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Vicarious Death of Jesus**

But not only were we eyewitnesses of His virtuous life; we were eyewitnesses of His vicarious death. Look again in verse 39. And the Bible says, “we were witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.” He went about doing good, and how did we reward Him? We crucified Him. The one who did good was made a curse. Because the Bible says, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. And He was nailed up by those searing nails on that that hellish machine called a cross. And He poured out His life’s blood. And Peter said, we saw Him die. He was dead. We were there. He was taken down from the cross. We were witnesses, not only of His virtuous life—He went around doing good—but of His vicarious death—He was hanged on a tree. He was slain.

### **C. They Were Eyewitnesses of the Victorious Resurrection of Jesus**

And then, Simon Peter says, “And we were witnesses of His victorious resurrection. Look, if you will, in verse 40: “Him God raised him up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after He rose from the dead.” Peter says, listen, we saw it. We saw Him crucified. We saw Him buried. We saw Him raised from the dead. It was not a hallucination. Five hundred people don’t have the same hallucination at the same time. He was not a ghost. We ate with Him. We drank with Him. We’re not telling you a lie. We’re telling you the truth. Do you think that these apostles were liars? Do you think that Peter was a rascal? Do you think James was an aid? Do you think that Andrew was a con artist? These witnesses, why did they witness this way? For personal gain? No, they were going to prison. For ease? No, most of them would be martyred. They were going to get into trouble. Some men may live for a lie, but few men will die for a lie. Men don’t tell lies to get into trouble. They tell lies to get out of trouble. When these men were talking about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they knew that they were going to get into trouble. But here was the witness that Simon Peter gave. Simon Peter there said, Cornelius, let me tell you something, friend. We saw the sinless, virtuous life of the Lord Jesus. We saw His vicarious death. We saw Him die. We saw His victorious resurrection. We saw the risen Lord. We ate with Him after His resurrection.

Now, that’s the personal witness of Simon Peter. And, friend, you ought to have a witness like that. You have experienced the Lord Jesus. What you’ve not seen with the physical eye, you have understood with the eye of faith. You have seen the light. And I tell you, a Christian with a glowing testimony is never at the mercy of a pagan with an argument. We are witnesses. Has Jesus Christ done something for you? Don’t tell me you can’t witness. People say, well, I just can’t witness. Of course, you can witness! Do

you know what a witness is? A witness is somebody who tells what he's seen and heard. That's all a witness is. Jesus didn't say, You'll be my lawyers. He said, You'll be my witness. And I believe the reason that some people don't witness is, very frankly, they haven't seen or heard anything. That's it! They've got nothing to witness about. But a Christian with a glowing witness is worth a library full of arguments. Amen? We are witnesses of these things.

## **II. The Prophetic Witness of the Scriptures**

First of all, Peter used the personal witness of the saints, but he backs that up, because how is Cornelius going to know that this is not really just Peter's own auto-suggestion and wishful thinking? Well, Peter gives a second line of evidence. Not only the personal witness of the saints, but the prophetic witness of the Scriptures.

Now, I want you to see what he does here. It's a very interesting thing. He has this golden opportunity to witness. Look in verse 43, now, of this same passage: "To Him, Jesus, give all the prophets witness that through His names whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."

Not only our personal witness, but the witness of the Holy Scriptures. This verse sums up all of the Old Testament: "To Him give all the prophets witness." The theme of the Old Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ. And fulfilled prophecy, precious sweet friend, fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest proofs that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And all of the prophets—not some of them, all of the prophets—speak in unanimity with no contradiction, and they all say that Jesus is Lord. It is estimated that there are more than 300 direct Old Testament prophecies that prophesy the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the first time. The fulfillment of these 300 prophecies in one person, apart from divine inspiration is an absolute, total mathematical impossibility.

You know what the skeptics say? They say, It may appear that He fulfilled these prophecies, but actually it was a scheme. Jesus just managed it all. He acted it out. He rigged it so that it would seem that He fulfilled these prophecies. He managed it. Well, come up close; I want to tell you something. He did manage it—He did manage it.

Let me show you what He managed. First of all, He managed where He would be born. Did you manage where you were going to be born? He managed where He would be born—Micah 5:2 in the Old Testament: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." And then, we read in the New Testament, in Matthew 2, verse 1: "Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea"—yes, He managed that centuries before He was born. In eternity past, He managed that. He managed that before He would ever be born. Isaiah would give intimate details of His birth, and prophesy His virgin birth, and, in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and be

with child,” and then, the fulfillment of that prophecy. The Lord Jesus was born of a virgin. Isaiah told about His life in Isaiah chapter 53: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Isaiah prophesied the Lord Jesus, His bleeding, bruised, broken body, the stripes laid upon His back. Isaiah prophesied it all. Isaiah prophesied that when He was buried He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb. Isaiah prophesied that He would be crucified between thieves. Listen. Isaiah chapter 53, verses 9 through 12: “He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.” How did Isaiah know that Joseph of Arimathaea would take the body of Jesus? Read there in Matthew 27, verse 57: “And when the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple. And he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus.” And then, it goes on to tell how Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb, how He was crucified there between the two thieves with the wicked—Matthew 27 and verse 38.

And then, another thing that Jesus arranged: He arranged that Judas would betray Him for 30 pieces of silver, because we read, in Zechariah chapter 11 and verse 12, “And I said unto them, if ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.” And then, read in the New Testament the fulfillment Matthew chapter 26, verse 15: “And said unto them, what will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you?—this is Judas speaking—and they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.”

Yes, friend, Jesus arranged—arranged—to be born in Bethlehem. He arranged that He would suffer, bleed and die on that cross. He arranged that, in Psalm 22, His crucifixion is so described that it sounds as though somebody is sitting at the very foot of the cross. And so, Simon Peter says to Cornelius, “Cornelius, let me show you something, friend. Let me tell you why I believe in Jesus. Let me give you my personal witness—what I saw, what I experienced. Now, let me, number two, give you the prophetic witness. Let me take this Bible. Beginning in Genesis and going on through to Malachi, let me show you, sir, how Jesus Christ wonderfully, gloriously, magnificently fulfills the Scriptures. I want to say again, it is an absolute mathematical impossibility that these Scriptures could be fulfilled, apart from divine inspiration and the deity of Jesus Christ.

### **III. The Persuasive Witness of the Spirit**

Now, there’s a third witness. First of all, there’s the personal witness of the saints. Thank God for that. Then, there’s the prophetic witness of the Scriptures: “To him give

all the prophets witness.” But now, while Peter’s speaking, the Holy Spirit begins to move on the heart of Cornelius. And that is important. Because in Acts Chapter 5, the apostles said, we are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him. Isn’t that right? And didn’t Jesus say, in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, and ye shall be witnesses unto me after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.

You see, this is the preacher’s secret. I am not dependent upon my rhetorical and oratorical ability to convince you. Anything I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of. You know, sometimes people say to me, Do you know, it’s a shame that you got into the ministry? You’d make a good salesman. Folks, I’m not interested in being a good salesman. I’m not interested in just convincing you through any kind of logic or any illustration. I am absolutely dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God to convince you when I preach—just as Simon Peter was so long ago, because there was the personal witness of the saints, there was the prophetic witness of the Scriptures; but here’s the crowning thing: there was the persuasive witness of the Spirit.

Look, if you will, please, in verses 44 and following, now, in this same passage of Scripture: “And while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” I love it! While Peter is speaking, the Holy Spirit is there saying amen—amen, that is true. You see, He is the one who really persuades us.

Now, how does the Holy Spirit of God do that?

#### **A. The Holy Spirit Witnesses to Us**

Well, first of all, the Holy Spirit of God witnesses to you. By the way, put your bookmark there, and turn, if you will, to 1 John chapter 5 for a moment, and look, if you will, in verse 9—1 John chapter 5 and verse 9—or else listen carefully as I read it to you. Now, we’re talking about the persuasive witness of the Spirit. And here’s what John said; here’s John’s argument. He says, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.”

Now, what does that mean? We all know what it is to trust. We trust everyday. You chair, you’re trusting the people who made that chair. You get in an airplane, you trust the pilot. You go in for surgery, you trust the Doctor. You go to a restaurant, you trust the cook. We live by trust. We receive the witness of men. We could not exist in society without receiving the witness of men. Now, he says, the witness of God was greater. What is the witness of God? That is the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, verse 9 begins, “If we receive...” The word if has the sense of since we received. Because we received the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. It is God the Holy Spirit that convicts you that what I say is true. While Peter was speaking, while Peter used his personal testimony, and while Peter used the Word of God, the Holy Ghost fell on them. That’s wonderful. That is glorious. That’s the reason the apostle said, in Acts chapter 5, “We

are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him.”

You know what? When I preach, I’m really not all that concerned as to what you think about me. I hope that doesn’t insult you, but it’s true. I preach for an audience of one. If He likes it, it’s okay with me. If He likes it—you know why? Because I am dependent upon Him to convince you, so I must have the smile of heaven. And before I preach, I get on my knees as I did this morning, and say, Lord God, I want your anointing. And before you witness, Brother David, or Brother Jim, you must say, Holy Spirit of God, speak through me. There was the personal witness of the saints—thank God for that. There was the prophetic witness of the Scripture—thank God for that. But oh, the persuasive witness of the Holy Spirit.

### **B. The Holy Spirit Witnesses in Us**

Now, you’re still in 1 John chapter 5—notice this: first of all, He witnesses to us—in verse 10—He witnesses in us. Notice what he said, in verse 10: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” First of all, He witnesses to you, and you believe on Him, and now the witness lives on the inside. That’s the reason I said a Christian with a testimony is never at the mercy of an infidel with an argument. Why? Because you’ve got the internal witness.

Now, suppose Bob and I are over here eating apple pie a la mode. And suppose over here Jim and David are looking at us, and they’re saying, well, they’re a couple of fanatics over there. And they’re saying, we don’t believe in apple pie. There is no such thing as apple pie. And, if there is apple pie, it isn’t any good. Now, Bob and I are over here having a wonderful time. You know why? We’ve got the witness in ourselves. Amen? That’s what the Bible says. The Bible says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Jesus is real to those who know Him.

### **C. The Holy Spirit Witnesses Through Us**

First of all, the Holy Spirit of God witnesses to us, and then the Holy Spirit of God witnesses in us. And when the Holy Spirit of God witnesses to us, and in us, then He witnesses through us, you see. Then we become persuasive.

Simon Peter knew what he was talking about. Simon Peter said, Cornelius, I’m glad to have this opportunity. Let me tell you, we were eyewitnesses. Let us tell you what we saw, what we experienced. That’s the personal witness of the saints. Now, let me tell you what the Bible says—that’s the prophetic witness of the Scriptures. Let me show you how Jesus Christ wonderfully, gloriously fulfills all of the Scriptures. And now, the Holy Spirit comes with the persuasive witness of the Spirit, and takes what Simon Peter had to say, and drives it, rivets it, into the heart of this man, Cornelius.

Well, go back to Acts chapter 10, and let’s see what happened there then as a result

of that. In Acts chapter 10, they began to speak with tongues. Notice in verses 45: “And they of the circumcision...”—that’s another way of saying the Jews—“which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Well, how did they know that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost? “For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.” Now, this was the Gentile Pentecost. At Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, you had the Jews, devout Jews from every nation under heaven. And God gave them the ability to speak, as a sign to the Jews, a supernatural language. And now, there are Jews present, wondering, can the Gentiles be a part of the church of God? And God says, Oh, yes! I’m going to give you a miracle sign to show that Gentiles also are a part of the church of God. And this was the Gentile Pentecost. This is showing that, hey, folks, what this is showing is that the old-time religion is the all-time religion, the any-time religion, the every-time religion. It is for everybody. Red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.

And do you know what Peter said when they said, we believe? Peter said, all right now, get baptized. You read it. Read it. He commanded them to be baptized. And I’m going to say to those of you who are in this building today, if you truly believe, if you believe that Jesus suffered, bled and died, that He was buried, that He was raised from the dead the third day—when you believe that, you’re going to want to be baptized in obedience to Him, because He has saved you, and you’re not going to be ashamed of Him.

## Conclusion

Now, let me just wrap this up by talking about evidence, and I’ll be finished. How do we know—how do we know—who Jesus is? I mean, are we fools? Are we sentimentalists—sentimentalists? Is this sentimentality? No? How do we know? Folks, what we believe is real. Millions of people—millions of people—will say, Jesus Christ transformed my life. I’m one of them. I was saved as a teenage boy. Jesus is more real to me today than you are.

There’s the personal witness of the saints. Number two: there is the prophetic witness of the Scriptures. The more I study the Scriptures, the more I find hidden beauty, not hidden flaws. I’ve been studying this book seriously for over 40 years. The more I see, the more I see there is yet to see, the more I love that book. The more I’m convinced it’s the Word of God. And the hero of the Bible is Jesus. To Him give all the prophets witness. And, friend, the more I walk with Him, the more the Holy Spirit of God whispers to my heart, He is the one. He is the one. He is the one. The Holy Spirit of God witnesses to us, and He is witnessing in us. You say, Well, Adrian, you haven’t proven anything to me. I don’t intend to prove anything to you.

Let me tell you about faith. Faith is rooted in evidence. But faith goes beyond evidence to be faith. And then, faith becomes its own best evidence. I know because I know. I believe because I have believed. As those three young men sang, I have seen the Light. I have seen the light. And I want you to know Him. I want you to know Him today and not know about Him—know Him, receive Him, receive from Him eternal life.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Now, if you're not absolutely certain that you're saved, I want to guide you in a prayer. And in this prayer, you can receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. If you know that you're saved, would you begin to pray for those round about you who may not know that they're saved.

Lord Jesus, I pray now that you will open hearts. Holy Spirit of God, I pray that you will witness to people as they pray. And, if you want Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, would you pray this way: Dear God, I know that you love me. I know that you want to save me. Jesus, I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Lord Jesus, I believe that you're the Son of God. I believe that you went about doing good. I believe that you died for my sin on that cross. I believe that God raised you from the dead. And I now, by faith, like a child, receive you as my Lord and Savior. Come into my heart. Forgive me. Cleanse me. Live in me. Begin from this moment to make me the person you want me to be. And help me, Jesus, to never, never ever to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Learning to Share Your Faith

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 20, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:34–48**

*“And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”*

ACTS 10:39

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Personal Confidence of the Soul Winner
  - A. They Spoke of the Virtuous Life of Jesus
  - B. They Spoke of the Vicarious Death of Jesus
  - C. They Spoke of the Victorious Resurrection of Jesus
- II. The Powerful Confirmation of the Scriptures
- III. The Persuasive Conviction of the Spirit
  - A. The Holy Spirit Witnesses to You
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Conclusion

- A. Our Faith Is Not a Blind Faith
- B. The Gospel Is for All, and Therefore It Is for You
- C. If You Believe, You Need to Be Baptized

## Introduction

Amen. My prayer is today that you will see Him through the eye of faith, that you will see the invisible, know the unknowable, and do the impossible, living for Him, because you've seen Him with the eye of faith. He is alive. He has walked out of that grave. He is risen, and risen indeed. We want to welcome you today.

I want you to take God's Word, and find, if you would, the Book of Acts. We're talking about living supernaturally. And turn to Acts chapter 10. In a moment, we're going to be looking, beginning in verse 34. But, as you're finding it, look up here, and let me ask you a question. Let me give you a scenario.

The scene is set. There is a man who's not a part of your particular race; certainly, he's not a part of your denomination, because he's not a Christian. He's what we would call a pagan, but he is interested in Christianity. As a matter of fact, not only is he interested in Christianity; he is seeking. Not only is he interested and seeking, but he

has a deep hunger in his heart to know about God through Christ. And he has invited you to his house. Now, here's what he's done. He's prepared refreshments. He has his neighbors there, and he has his family there, and then he invites you over, and he says to you, "Would you please explain your faith? Would you tell me about Jesus? Would you tell me why and how you believe in Jesus Christ?" That would be a great opportunity, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it? It would be a great opportunity. Now, suppose that's you. I want you to put yourself into this situation. There it is. This man has invited you over to his house for you to tell him, his family, and his loved ones, why you believe. Would you be prepared to do that? If not, I have failed as a preacher, if you're not prepared after this message is over, because I want to tell you exactly what a man named Peter did.

Simon Peter went to the house of a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile. He was a Roman army officer. And an angel had visited Cornelius. And the angel said to Cornelius, "Cornelius, you send for Simon Peter, and he'll come, and he'll tell you how you can be saved, how you can know God personally." Now, that's the setup, and Simon Peter is there getting ready to share his faith.

Question: Do you share your faith? Now, you say, "Well, I keep the faith." Well, not only should you keep it; you ought to give it away. As a matter of fact, if you don't have a desire to give it away, I think perhaps you ought to give it up. I mean, if you don't care to share, how can you call yourself a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ? If you knew the cure for cancer, you'd share it, wouldn't you? If you knew the answer to war, you would share it, wouldn't you? Friend, we know the answer; at least, we say we know the answer. Do you really care? Do you know how to share the Lord Jesus Christ? We're going to look here and see what Simon Peter did, and he gave three convicting lines of argument, testimony, proof, about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want you to take those three lines of evidence and convincing, and I want you to inculcate them in your heart and in your life, so when the opportunity comes, you can share the Lord Jesus Christ. And let me tell you something. You have an opportunity and a privilege—listen—that even angels don't have. Now, if an angel visited Cornelius, and said to Cornelius, "You go send for Peter, and he'll tell you how you can be saved," why didn't the angel just tell him? Think about it, friend. You and have a privilege that angels don't have. Do you agree with that?

Now, I used to play football. Sometimes I'd get my hand on the pigskin. I was always grateful when there was somebody doing some downfield blocking. But no matter how much downfield blocking there is, somebody has to carry the ball. And if somebody doesn't carry the ball, you're not going to score.

Now, God will send the Holy Spirit, and angels to do downfield blocking for you, but you've got to carry the ball—you've got to carry the ball. Thank God there were some

angels who were doing some great things here, but Simon Peter had to carry the ball, and so do you, and I pray God you'll not fumble it. Let's see what Simon Peter said. Let's begin in verse 34.

He comes to Cornelius' house, and this is what happened: "Then Peter open his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." Peter had his eyes opened. He found out that this thing called Christianity is not just the Jewish religion, nor is it the Gentile religion, nor is it the Baptist religion, nor is it the religion of the south. It, my friend, is the old-time, all-time, new-time, every-time religion. There is one faith, and it is good for all. It is broad. It is broad in its availability. I want to tell you, friend, that whoever you are, wherever you are, if you're listening now, later by radio, if you're listening through television, God loves you. There's no respect of persons with God. God is not saying, concerning heaven, "Eenie meenie minie mo; this must stay, and this can go." No. God wants everybody saved. I believe that. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Jesus loves the little children of the world; red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.

Now, while it is very broad in its availability, it is very narrow in its source. The source is the Lord Jesus Christ. Look in verse 36: "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ." There's no other way: "peace by Jesus Christ." And then, He says this: "He is Lord of all." Do you believe that? I do, with all of my heart. He is Lord of all! Now, Peter didn't say to Cornelius, "Now, Cornelius, I'm a Christian. And Cornelius, you're not a Christian, but you know, God is a loving God, and Cornelius, I believe in pluralism, and so I believe in inclusivism. And so, Peter says to Cornelius, "Cornelius, you have your religion, and I have mine. Isn't it wonderful that we're all going to heaven, just by different roads?" Well, it's not wonderful, and it's not true. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there's none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus"—that's Acts 4, verse 12. And Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes unto the Father but by me."

You say, "Well, Adrian, that's narrow." It's just as narrow as Jesus is narrow. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." If Jesus Christ is not the only way, He's none of the ways. If Jesus Christ is not the only way, Jesus Christ is a liar. Jesus Christ is a fake, a fraud, an imposter, and what other ways there may be, He's not one of them, because a liar is no one's Savior. No, Jesus has cornered the market on salvation—did you know that? He has cornered the market! He is Lord of all. So, with God, there's no respect of persons. Anybody, any place, anywhere, any time, can be saved, but if they are saved, they're going to be saved through Jesus Christ. There's no other way to be saved.

Now, that's the way Peter begins his testimony to Cornelius, and he says, "Look.

Jesus alone—Jesus alone—can satisfy your hunger, Cornelius. Jesus alone is God’s answer to your sin. Jesus alone can give you the meaning of life and death. Jesus alone can take the sting out of sin. Jesus alone can take the pain out of parting. Jesus alone can take the dread out of dying. Jesus alone can take the gloom out of the grave. Jesus alone can give a hope that is steadfast and sure. Friend, there is no respect of persons with God, but Jesus is Lord of all. This is the way that Peter starts talking to this Gentile man. And then he gives three lines of persuasion. I want to lay them on your heart, and I want you to use them. The next time you get in a sharing opportunity, you’ll have them.

## **I. The Personal Confidence of the Soul Winner**

Number one: There must be the personal confidence of the soul winner. There must be the personal confidence of the soul winner. Now, if you’re not sure about your own faith, you’re not going to make a soul winner. First of all, you’ve got to have that personal confidence. Look in verse 39 of this chapter. Peter says to Cornelius, “And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God, to be the judge of the quick and the dead.” The key there is, “We are witnesses of these things.” Look again in verse 39: “And we are witnesses of all things which he did.”

Now, folks, listen to me. There is no reasonable way on earth to dispute the witness of these early apostles. You think about these who were witnessing, these eleven. They gave a united witness of what they’d seen and heard, and they said, “We are eyewitnesses.”

Now, actually, they were a motley group, actually, they were a very different group of people. Think about the category of persons. There was John, the apostle John. We would say John was young, and very observant, and sort of philosophical. There was Peter, a loudmouth fisherman. There was Simon Zelotes, who was a political zealot. Nathaniel and Thomas—they weren’t pushovers. They were kind of skeptical. There was Matthew who was a hard-bitten businessman, a little dishonest in his business before he got saved. There was Andrew, who was kind and compassionate, and liked little children. There was Philip, who tended to be very shrewd and calculating. There was James, who had sort of a straightforward, no-nonsense disposition. Here they are, and yet they are all unanimous on Jesus.

Did you know in our congregation we’ve got so many strange folks and different folks? You may be sitting near one of them. You may be one of them. I mean, look on either side. If it’s not them, it’s you. Think about this church. People come to Bellevue

Baptist Church, and they say, “What holds you people together? How do you have this unity? Where does this spirit come from? What is the glue that holds Bellevue together?” I’ll tell you: It’s not a what; it’s who. His name is what? Jesus—Jesus. We’re so different. We’re so different. Those two guys over there: they are very strange, but I love them. And the Jesus in me loves the Jesus in them, and the Jesus in them loves the Jesus in me.

Here are these. They are all witnesses. They are all unanimous. What a jury these eleven witnesses made, as they testify of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, they were unanimous, really, about three things about the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can be different on a lot of things, and you know we are different as a church. Just let me say this on the side: we’re so different. You know, there are some people who love to clap when they hear something good. Other people say, “That’s not spiritual to do that.” Some people who like choruses, and they say, “Man, that’s really with it.” Other people say, “I love the hymns.” Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Neither one. You know, I’ve told you before, I’ve been thinking when the usher comes in, he could sit, meet you at the door, and say, “Clapping or no clapping?” you know, and you sit on either side. If you want to clap, clap; if you don’t want to clap, don’t clap. We’re not going to judge one another about these things. Those things are all surface, right? They don’t make that much difference. But let me tell you three things that these people did: they were unanimous about these.

#### **A. They Spoke of the Virtuous Life of Jesus**

Number one was the virtuous life of Jesus—the virtuous life of Jesus. Look in verse 38—here’s what he begins to tell Cornelius. “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” They said, “Look. We saw Him go about and do good. His miracles indeed are true.” Peter said, “Yep, He turned water into wine. I drank some of it. Yes, I believe He walked on water. So did I. Why, yes, I believe He raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. I was there. I saw Jesus as He healed lepers. I was there. I was on the mount when He was transfigured. I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son.’” Peter said, “We were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” Now, He was absolutely unique in His virtuous life. He went about doing good. But here’s something else they said about Jesus.

#### **B. They Spoke of the Vicarious Death of Jesus**

Number two: not only did they speak of His virtuous life, but they spoke of His vicarious death. Look in verse 39: “And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.” Peter said, “I saw His life. He went about doing good. I saw His death. I saw Him die. I saw Him

give up the spirit. I saw Him as they laid Him in the tomb.” And He didn’t die for His own sins, because He was one who went about doing good. His death is an established, historical fact.

### **C. They Spoke of the Victorious Resurrection of Jesus**

But here’s a third thing they witnessed: not only His virtuous life, not only His vicarious death, dying for our sins—because He went about doing good; He had no sin of His own to die for—but the third thing they were witnesses of was His victorious resurrection. Look now in verse 40: “Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him—underscore that—after he rose from the dead.” Now, you say, “Peter, you were hallucinating.” He said, “Look, friend, you don’t eat and drink with a hallucination.” You say, “Well, still you might have been in a trance.” Peter says, “Look, five hundred people at one time saw Him. Do you think five hundred people are in a trance together? He’s not a ghost. We touched Him. We handled Him. We talked with Him. We ate and drank with Him. I’m not telling a lie,” Peter says. Of course, he’s not telling a lie. Why? Because Peter was willing to die for his faith. And he did die.

Now, listen to me, friend. You’re a reasonable person. People may sometimes live for a lie, but no one will willingly and knowingly die for a lie, if he knows it’s a lie. These people were totally convinced. And so, Peter says, “Therefore, this Jesus that walked out of the grave is the judge of the dead and the living.” Look in verse 42: “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and the dead.” You see, you can’t hold court if the judge is dead, and you can’t hold court if the defendant is dead. But the God who raised up the Lord Jesus Christ is going to raise up the dead, and they’re going to be judged by Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the judge of the living and the dead.

I was in Moscow on Easter, shortly after Communism had disintegrated and had imploded. Joyce and I were there on Easter morning, preaching there from Red Square on a big platform on nationwide television. What an incredible opportunity to preach the Lord Jesus Christ there in Moscow on nationwide television. It was spitting snow a little bit, and I said to Joyce, I said, “Joyce, we’re not going to be in Moscow on Easter without visiting the tomb of Lenin. I just want to see him there in that tomb.” And there they were. We watched the changing of the guard, as those soldiers marched up and down, goose-stepping, or whatever they do, saluting with all that circumstance. We went into that tomb where Lenin, the leader of the Soviet peoples, now dead, was in a crystal sarcophagus. They had embalmed his body, and kept it in wonderful condition. And there inscribed is this writing: “He was the greatest leader of all peoples, of all countries, of all times. He was the lord of all humanity. He was the savior of the world.” One thing I want you to notice: it’s all past tense—it’s all past tense. He was the lord. He

was the savior. He was the greatest. I want to tell you, Jesus is the greatest. Jesus is the Lord. He is the Savior.

Now, here are these disciples, and they come from all walks of life. Peter speaks for all of them, because the others were not there. But Peter says, “Look, we saw it. We saw His virtuous life. We saw His vicarious death. We saw His victorious resurrection. And this is what we want to share with you.” Now, here’s the point. Peter was totally convinced. Question: Are you totally convinced? You see, not only are we witnesses; we ought to be part of the evidence. And a Christian with a glowing testimony is never at the mercy of a pagan with an argument.

## **II. The Powerful Confirmation of the Scriptures**

Now, here’s the second thing: not only was there the personal conviction of the soul winner, but there was the powerful confirmation of the Scriptures. Now, when you go out to share Jesus Christ, yes, you ought to have some personal convictions, but you need something to back it up. You need some powerful confirmation. So now, look, if you will, in verse 43. And now, Peter said, we’re witnesses; and then notice what he says: “To him—to Jesus—give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Peter says, “It’s not just what we are telling you,” but he said, “look, Cornelius, take the Old Testament Scriptures. Read what all of the prophets have said. Not some of them—all of them—testify of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are all unanimous. That’s one of the great proofs of the authenticity of our Savior, that the Old Testament, in perfect unity, with no contradiction, in over 300 Bible prophecies, prophesies the Lord Jesus Christ. And I’m going to show you tonight, and I don’t want you to miss the message tonight, but I’m going to take off on this point tonight. And I want to show you that it is a mathematical impossibility that the Scripture could be fulfilled by chance, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, he says, “To him—to Jesus—give all the prophets witness.” Critics say, “Well, Jesus just deliberately arranged to make it look like He fulfilled these prophecies.” Well, I want to agree with them. He did arrange it. Think about that.

Let me tell you how He arranged it. First of all, He arranged to be born in Bethlehem. Did you arrange where you were going to be born? Micah chapter 5, verse 2: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel.” Now, friend, way back in the Book of Micah, God prophesied where the Lord Jesus was going to be born.

And then, here’s something else Jesus managed. He managed to be born of a virgin. Did you manage who your mother would be? And had you managed who your mother was going to be, would you have managed that she was to be a virgin? Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a

virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Immanuel.”

I’ll tell you what else He managed. He managed to describe His death by crucifixion seven hundred years before He was born, and before capital punishment by crucifixion was even heard of. It was a Roman form of capital punishment. The Jews stoned. But notice in Psalm 22, verse 16: “they pierced my hands and my feet.” Yes, He managed that.

Also, He managed to have two thieves crucified with Him, one on one side, the other on the other, in fulfillment of the Scripture. Isaiah 53, verse 9: “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.”

Another thing He managed, He managed to be betrayed by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. Zechariah chapter 11 and verse 12: “and so they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.”

And then, the classic management of all. He managed to walk out of the grave the third day. Yes, He arranged it all, friend, and to be seen of 500 witnesses. Now, what did they testify of? They testified—the Scriptures testified—of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **III. The Persuasive Conviction of the Spirit**

So here is Simon Peter. He’s got Cornelius out there. He’s got this audience. Here he is. First of all, Peter says, “Let me give you my testimony. Let me tell you what I’m convinced of: His life, His death, and His resurrection. Now, secondly, let me show you what the Holy Scriptures say, the Old Testament prophecies, what they say about this one called Jesus.”

And then, he comes to the third line. Here’s the third line of persuasion, and I want you to notice this because all three of these converge. And the Bible says, “A threefold cord is not easily broken.” Any one of these would be powerful, but put these three things together. First of all, there is the personal conviction of the soul winner. Secondly, there is the prophetic power of the Scriptures. And then, thirdly, there is the persuasive conviction of the Spirit—the persuasive conviction of the Spirit. Look now in chapter 10, verse 44: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision...”—the word circumcision means Jews—“they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.” I’ll say more about the tongues in just a moment. But here’s Peter preaching. Peter’s talking about his personal conviction. And then he’s talking about the Scriptural confirmation. And while he’s doing this, the Spirit of God comes down, and while Peter is talking, the Holy Spirit is saying, “Amen, that’s

right. You listen.”

You see, here’s the wonderful news. God does not have to make you a great persuader. I have people tell me sometime, “You would have made a great salesman.” Maybe so, I don’t know. I might have been a flop. But you see, preaching is not being a salesman. Witnessing is not being a salesman. I’ve said it thousands of times: anything I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of. But when I’m preaching, I want the Holy Spirit of God to be going up and down these aisles, saying, “Amen, you’d better listen to him. He’s telling the truth.” You see, the Bible says that when we are filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit witnesses with us. And put in your margin Acts 5, verse 32: “And we are witnesses of these things; so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” I would not think of walking out here on this platform to preach without a conscious anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. I wouldn’t dream of it. I mean, I get on my knees and pray for the anointing before I come out here, because, in spite of my own personal convictions, and in spite of the confirmation of the Scriptures, there’s still another ingredient that’s needed, right? That’s the Holy Spirit of God to speak to your heart. And it’s so wonderful when God’s Holy Spirit sweeps across a congregation. That’s the reason we’re not just an organization; we’re an organism, and God’s Holy Spirit is here.

Let me show you how the Holy Spirit works.

#### **A. The Holy Spirit Witnesses to You**

First of all, the Holy Spirit of God witnesses to you. Let me give you a verse for your margin—1 John chapter 5 and verse 9: “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. Now, what you’re hearing is the witness of a man. You’re hearing Adrian. But, oh, greater than this preacher, far, far, far, far greater is the witness of God. Now, the Holy Spirit of God is to take the things of Christ and to show them to you. Now, you may be here today, and you say, “Well, I’m not a believer, and it’s not my fault that I’m not a believer.” Well, you may not be a believer, but it is your fault if you’re not a believer. You say, “I can’t believe.” Yes, you can. Your problem, sir, is not in your head; your problem is in your heart. How do I know that you can believe? Because the Holy Spirit’s here. If you’ll open up yourself to the Holy Spirit, He will do for you what no one else can do for you. You’ll never be argued into the kingdom of heaven. But God will allow some person who’s had a personal experience with Christ, like myself, share what Jesus Christ means to him. God will give the Holy Scripture to ramify that. And then, God will send the Holy Spirit to say, “Yes, that is true.”

#### **B. The Holy Spirit Witnesses in You**

First of all, the Spirit of God witnesses to you. And then, the Spirit of God witnesses in

you, when you get saved. First John 5, verse 10—put that down: “He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself.” That’s wonderful.

Did you know that right now in my heart I have such assurance—not because of scholarship, certainly not because of attainment, but I have the witness in myself. Now, if you’ve never eaten apple pie, and I’ve just had a big slice of apple pie, you might say, “There’s no such thing as apple pie,” or you might say, “If there is such a thing, it doesn’t taste good, and it doesn’t satisfy.” That’s your problem, not mine. I have the witness in myself, amen? You see, the Bible says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

### **C. The Holy Spirit Witnesses Through You**

How does the Holy Spirit of God witness? First of all, He witnesses to you. And then, He witnesses in you. And then, He witnesses through you. That’s the reason Jesus said in Acts 1:8: “Ye shall receive power, after the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” He will witness through you. And how wonderful that is.

Now, why, at this particular time, was the gift of tongues there? Well, you have to remember this was what we would call the Gentile Pentecost. Now, God poured out His Spirit upon the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and now this is a new departure. Now, here are Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit is being poured out upon the Gentiles, just as we’re going to see in the next chapter. They said, “Just as it happened to us in the beginning.” And so, God now is giving a sign to these Jews that these Gentiles have been made a part of the body of Christ. And He’s broken down the middle wall of partition. No longer is there Jew and Gentile, but one new man in the Lord Jesus Christ, and tongues is a sign gift of that. Now, we’re not trying to repeat Pentecost any more than we’re trying to repeat Bethlehem, any more than we’re trying to repeat Calvary. All of those were once for all, but we want to enjoy all of those. You see, God poured the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and then reconfirmed it to these Gentiles in Acts chapter 10.

If people are praying, “O God, send the Holy Spirit; Lord, send the Holy Spirit,” that’s foolish. Don’t pray that. I got a bike one time at Christmas, a 24-inch candy apple red Schwinn bicycle with cream stripes on it. It was beautiful. Now, I got that on Christmas Day. Suppose I started saying about January, “Mom and Dad, can I have a bike? Mom and Dad, would you give me a bike?” They say, “Son, we’ve given you a bike. Get on it and ride it.” Friend, the Holy Spirit has come. The Holy Spirit has come. Don’t keep asking God for what He has given you, but appropriate what He has given you. The point here—I don’t want to get down too deep in that, but here is the point. Here Simon Peter, he comes here before these Gentiles. What a golden opportunity he has—and what does he do? Well, there is his own personal testimony. He tells them of his own confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ: what he has seen, felt, and experienced. And then,

behind that, he gives them the Scripture, and says, “To Him give all the prophets witness,” and he tells them how Jesus Christ has fulfilled this. And then, to crown it all, the Holy Spirit of God comes down, and convicts, and convinces. Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that wonderful.

Now, friend, I hope that you have a testimony. I hope that Jesus Christ is a bright, living reality to you. I hope that you could skillfully take the Scriptures and with an open Bible show how Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the world. And then, I would pray that your life would be pure and clean, that you’d be obeying God, so that the Holy Spirit of God would say amen to what you say.

## **Conclusion**

Now, I’m going to close the message. I want to lay three thoughts on your heart, and I want you to listen very carefully.

### **A. Our Faith Is Not a Blind Faith**

Number one: Our faith is not a blind faith. I don’t believe in blind faith. Blind faith is really a contradiction in terms. Our faith is not a blind faith. God gives us reasons for believing. Listen to me. Faith is rooted in evidence. Faith goes beyond evidence. It has to in order to be faith. God never proves anything to you, but He gives you all that you need to believe. Faith is rooted in evidence. Faith goes beyond evidence. And then, faith becomes its own best evidence. “He that believeth hath the witness in himself.” When Christ comes into you, then you know these things to be true.

### **B. The Gospel Is for All, and Therefore It Is for You**

Here’s the second thing. The gospel is for all, and, therefore, it is for you. You can be saved today, if you want to. “To him give the prophets witness.” Look in verse 43 again—look at it: “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall have remission of sins.” Say to yourself, that means me. I am the one that He’s speaking of, because I am whosoever. If you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you will put your faith where God has put your sins—on the Lord Jesus Christ—you will receive remission of sins. And you’ll not rise in the judgment to meet a God that you do not know.

### **C. If You Believe, You Need to Be Baptized**

And the third thing is this: If you do believe, you need to do exactly what Cornelius did. Notice in verse 47. Peter said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” If you realize that you can put your faith in Him, God has given you evidence, and you exercise that evidence, you put your faith in Him, you realize that you are the one to whom He’s speaking, you’re the whosoever, then the

next thing you need to do, you need to come down one of these aisles, and say, 'I'm trusting Jesus Christ, and I want to present myself as a candidate for believer's baptism.' And the next time we have a baptismal service that's appropriate for you, we can baptize you. I cannot imagine in my wildest dreams Cornelius saying, "Well, Peter, that's a convincing case. I really believe it. And, yes, yes, I'll trust Jesus as my Messiah. But you know, I just don't think I want to be baptized." I can't even imagine that. No. I can't imagine anybody who says I follow the Lord Jesus Christ who will not obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was fulfilling the Great Commission where Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, would you say to the Lord, "Lord, I believe in You; I do believe that You died for my sins; I do believe that God raised You from the dead; and I receive You now by faith as my personal Savior and Lord? I trust You. And Lord, I will present myself for baptism. I will not be ashamed of You, because You died for me. In Your name I pray. Amen."

# Learning to Share Your Faith

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 20, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:34–48**

*“And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”*

ACTS 10:39

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and turn, please, to the book of Acts chapter 10. We’re continuing our study, Living Supernaturally. When you’ve found Acts 10, look up here, and I want you to imagine a scenario, and you are right in the middle of it.

Imagine a man who is not a Christian, not a member of your race, much less your church or your denomination, but he is inquiring about faith. He wants to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ, so this is what he has done. He has gathered all of his family, his neighbors and his friends, he has them all over to his house, and then he invites you to come and to share your faith, and to tell why you believe in Jesus Christ. Would you be prepared to do that? If not, I hope you’ll be prepared at the close of this service, because that’s what happened to a man named Simon Peter.

There was a man named Cornelius. Cornelius was a Gentile, and he’s a Roman army officer, and God had spoken to him, and God said, Cornelius, go send for a man named Peter, and he’ll come to your house, and tell you how to be saved. And so, Peter, under direct orders, and by special invitation also, went to the house of this man Cornelius to share his faith.

Now, suppose that had been you. Would you have been ready? Would you have been prepared? What would you say? What will you say to an opportunity that you may have this afternoon or tomorrow? Now, my sermon this morning will be a colossal failure, either for me or for you, if you cannot come away from this message saying, I know what I would say, and I believe I know how I would say it. So that's what I want to do, is to prepare you for this opportunity that may come. Because, precious friend, you are to share your faith.

Do you believe in that? I hope you do. You ought to share your faith. As a matter of fact, if you have no desire to share your faith, I wonder if you're really saved. Now, we tell people to keep the faith. Not only should you keep it; you ought to give it away. And, if you have no desire to give it away, perhaps you ought to give it up. If you knew the cure to cancer, you'd want to share that, wouldn't you? The best news this world has ever known is the saving gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And I can give you this testimony: from the day that I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, to this very moment, there has always been a desire in my heart to share Christ. That's one of the ways I know it's real. I've not always shared Him, as I ought. I've not always been wise, I've not always been diligent, but there has been down in the recesses of my heart always a desire to share the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, here's Cornelius, he has his friends and neighbors over, he has his children there, he has everybody there, and in walks Simon Peter to give his testimony. Now, he gives a threefold testimony, or a threefold confirmation of the gospel, and I want to lay those three things upon your heart today. But before we get to those, I want you to get the introduction. Look in verse 34: "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." I love that.

Now, Peter is a Jew. He's come to a Gentile house. Up until this time, no Jew would enter into a Gentile house like this, to have fellowship with him, to share spiritual things with him. But God had to work on Simon Peter, and say, Simon, I love the world, I love all the people of the world—red, yellow, black, white, they're all precious in my sight. And whoever you are today, whatever your background, I want to tell you, God loves you. With God, there is no respect of persons.

And then, notice in verse 35: "But in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. For the word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all." Now, look up here, and let me tell you something. The door to salvation is very wide. There is no respect of persons. Whosoever will may come. And we're going to see, in verse 43, the Bible says that, if anyone will believe on Him, he'll receive remission of sins. So you say to yourself this morning, I can be saved, if I want to be saved. God did not say that some people can be saved, and other people cannot be saved, that some are in a select group; no,

there is no respect of persons with God—none whatsoever. The Lord is not willing that any should not perish. If you go to hell, a broken-hearted God will watch you drop into hell. It is not God's plan that you die and go to hell. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

But the second thing is, if you're going to be saved, you're going to be saved by Jesus or you're not going to be saved at all. That's what that verse says: He is Lord of all. Jesus is not a good way to go to heaven; Jesus is not the best way to go to heaven: Jesus is the only way to go to heaven—the only way, the only way—and, if Jesus is not the only way, He's none of the ways. He's not just one of the ways; He's either the only way or none of the ways. For what did He say in John 14, verse 6? "I am the way, the truth and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Now, that's either true or false, right? If it's true, He's the only way. If it's false, He's a liar, and He's not any of the ways. So, you can't just kind of tip your hat to Jesus; you have to bow your knee to Jesus.

And so, the door is very wide, but the way is very narrow. You come to the God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus alone has the answer, Cornelius, to life's pressing questions. Jesus alone can forgive your sin. Jesus alone can give you a hope that is steadfast and sure. Jesus alone can take the sting out of sin, the pain out of parting, the gloom out of the grave, the dread out of death. Jesus alone is the answer. I believe that with all of my heart. So the door this morning is very, very wide. Oh, but the way is very narrow. He, Jesus, is Lord of all.

Well, why should Cornelius believe that? Why? For Peter just to walk in and say, Look, Cornelius, Christ is Lord of all. He gave three lines of evidence to convict and convince Cornelius, and He wants to use those three lines of evidence through you to bring others to Christ, or else to bring you to Christ today. The Bible says a threefold cord is not easily broken.

Now, I want you to see the first of these things that Peter used when he came to this incredible opportunity. And, by the way, it is such an opportunity. Did you know, to win souls is not only a command of God, but a great privilege, a wonderful opportunity? An angel had visited Cornelius prior to this, and the angel said to Cornelius, Cornelius, you go and get that man Peter, and he will come and tell you how you and your house can be saved.

Now, wait a minute. There's an angel—there's an angel—talking to Peter, and telling Peter to go get Cornelius. Question: Why didn't the angel just tell Cornelius how to be saved? God never gave the Great Commission to angels; He gave it to human beings. We have a privilege that angels don't have—do you know that? No angel can be a soul winner. God never sent an angel to be a soul winner; God has sent you. You have a privilege that angels don't have. Now, thank God the angels can clear the way; thank

God the Holy Spirit can go before you.

When I played football, every so often, I'd get my hand on the football and head toward the goal. You know what I was always grateful for? Somebody doing some downfield blocking, somebody just clearing the way for me. But, friend, no matter how much downfield blocking there is, somebody has got to carry the ball. Now, God will do the downfield blocking for you, but you've got to carry the ball. And, if somebody's not carrying the ball, no matter how much blocking there is, you're not going to score, unless somebody carries the ball. And what I want you to do today is to do that, and not to fumble the ball. God will clear the way, but you have a privilege—you have a privilege—and an obligation, and a joy, that even angels don't have.

All right, what is this threefold cord?

## **I. The Personal Confidence of the Soul Winner**

First of all, there is what I want to call the personal confidence of the soul winner—the personal confidence of the soul winner. As you listen to Simon Peter here, as he shares his faith, he doesn't do it with any stutter, he doesn't do it with any stammer, he doesn't do it with any trepidation. He's not walking on eggshells and Jell-O; he has a rock-ribbed personal confidence. I want you to notice how this confidence is shown right here.

Look, if you will, in verse 39—Peter says, speaking of himself and the other apostles, “And we're witnesses of all things which he did...”—that's Jesus—“which he did, both in the land of the Jew and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day and showed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before a God even to us”—now, notice the confidence Peter has—“who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it was he which was ordained of God to be the judge of the living and the dead.”

Now, here he is. Peter says, Look. We are witnesses. When he said, we're witnesses of these things, he was talking about the apostles. Can you imagine what a jury the apostles would have made, had they been put in the jury box and asked to adjudicate whether Jesus Christ is the Son of God or not? Think of the apostles.

First of all, there was the apostle John—he was young, philosophical, and very observant. Secondly, there was Peter—he was a brash, loud-mouthed fisherman. Next, there was Simon Zelotes—he was a right-wing political zealot. Then, there were Nathaniel and Thomas—they were inclined to be doubters; we call him Doubting Thomas. And then, there was Matthew—Matthew was a tax-collector, kind of a hard-bitten businessman. Then, there was Andrew, who was shy and gentle and who got along well with little children. Then, there was Philip, who was kind of shrewd and

calculating. And then, there was James, who was very straightforward and had a no-nonsense disposition. They, these eleven men, would have made a wonderful jury, would not they? And here they are, all eleven of them. They're so very different, but there was one thing they were all unanimous about, and that's that Jesus is Lord. That's very interesting.

Look at our congregation. Did you know, if you start at this side, and go all the way across here, we're so different. You come from different backgrounds. You have different accents. You have different educations. You have different tastes. You have different political ideas. You like different kind of entertainment. You even like different kinds of worship services. We're not all exactly alike on any service. Some people would rather have more hymns. Others would rather have more choruses. Some think we ought to clap more; some think we ought to clap less; some think we ought not to clap at all. Some think the services ought to be longer; some think they ought to be shorter; some think that we ought to meet at a different time. Hey, folks, you couldn't be a pastor of a church like this without knowing all of that. We are very different, and some of us are strange. As a matter of fact, one out of every three persons here is kind of strange, so look on either side. If it's not them, it's you. We're different.

What holds us together? The same thing that held these eleven apostles together: His name is Jesus—His name is Jesus. You take Jesus out of Bellevue Baptist Church—there is no Bellevue Baptist Church, we would not come here and be the kind of people that we are, have the love that we have, and the joy that we have, the unanimity that we have, and the force and the power and the joy that we have, apart from Jesus—is not that true? These eleven men are bonded together, welded together, one in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And let me tell you what they were all three completely sold on. Are you ready? What did they all have the same confidence about?

#### **A. They Spoke of the Virtuous Life of Jesus**

First of all, the virtuous life of Jesus. Look, if you will, in verse 38. Peter begins to talk about how “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good.” They saw him. They saw His life. They saw that He was infinite goodness. And He did miracles. Look: “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him.” They saw both His character and His works. They were eyewitnesses of these things. I can just hear Peter saying, Look. Yes, I know He changed water into wine. I drank some of it. I know He walked on water, because I got out of the boat and walked on water with him. I know He raised the dead. I saw with my own eyes. I know He healed lepers. I saw the transformation with my own eyes. I know He was transfigured. I was with him on the mountain. I was an eyewitness of His majesty; I heard the voice from heaven.

## **B. They Spoke of the Vicarious Death of Jesus**

So, they, first of all, were unanimous on the virtuous life of Jesus. But not only were they unanimous on the virtuous life of Jesus, they were also unanimous on the vicarious death of Jesus. Look in verse 39: “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree.” Peter said, I saw him dying in agony and blood. I saw when they took His lifeless body down from the cross. I saw him wrapped in linen grave clothes. I saw him placed in the tomb. We were eyewitnesses of His death. His death is an historical fact.

## **C. They Spoke of the Victorious Resurrection of Jesus**

And they were all convinced of the third thing: not only His virtuous life, and His vicarious death, but His victorious resurrection. Look in verse 40: “Him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.” Well, Peter, where do you get this confidence? Are you sure you’re not hallucinating? Peter, are you sure He wasn’t a ghost? A ghost? Man, we ate and drank with him. We touched him. Well, Peter, are you sure it was not a hallucination? Are you kidding me—a hallucination? He was seen of more than five hundred people at one time.

Well, Peter, how can we be sure that you haven’t just cooked up this whole story? How can we be sure that you’re not just telling a lie? A lie? Man, I would die for what I’m telling you. And later on, Peter did. Men may live for a lie, but no man will willingly, knowingly die for a lie. Friend, people tell lies to get out of trouble, not to get into trouble. These people, with no hope of personal gain, knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, just like the couple sang this morning, we have seen Jesus, I tell you He is alive, and they were convinced of His virtuous life. They were convinced of His vicarious death. They were convinced of His victorious resurrection.

And so, here is the soul winner. The soul winner has this confidence. Do you have that confidence? Do you have a confidence concerning the life, the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ? If not, you’re not going to make a very good soul winner. You’re going to witness with stutter and stammer and apology, but oh, what a bold witness, when you say, I know that I know that these things are true. And, if you don’t, if you’re not solid on these things, I can tell you that you’re not going to be the kind of a witness that you ought to be. I’m so grateful that we serve a risen Savior.

Joyce and I were in Moscow, Russia some years ago, right after the Soviet Communist system disintegrated and fell apart. I was invited to go to the city of Moscow, to preach in Red Square on Easter morning on nationwide television. Can you imagine an opportunity like that? Easter morning there in Red Square, what Ronald Reagan had called the evil empire, and there on nationwide television, to share the Lord Jesus Christ. And we saw so many come to Christ on that wonderful Sunday Easter. It

was spitting snow there in Moscow. We were there in Red Square, where Lenin's tomb is. I said to Joyce, We're going to see Lenin's tomb on Easter, because the tomb of our Savior is empty; we're just going to go to Lenin's tomb. And we walked there into Lenin's tomb. And there are the words concerning Lenin. Listen to it: He was the greatest leader of all peoples, of all countries, of all times. He was the lord of a new humanity. He was the savior of the world. Did you catch that little word was? He was the greatest leader. He was the lord of the new humanity. He was the savior of the world. Now, let me put Jesus in the equation. He is the greatest leader of all people. He is the Lord of a new humanity. He is the Savior of the world, because He died, and He has risen again. Thank God for our dear Savior.

## **II. The Powerful Confirmation of the Scriptures**

Now, do you have that confidence? There is the personal confidence of the soul winner. If you don't have that confidence today, you need to get it, and you can have it. I'm going to tell you how in just a moment. But now secondly, remember I said a threefold cord is not easily broken. Here's the second thing. There's not only the personal confidence of the soul winner, but there is the powerful confirmation of the Scriptures. You see, it's not enough for you to say, Well, I know this, or I feel that, even if you're an eyewitness, because someone may say you misinterpreted what you saw, or maybe you made it up, or maybe it's autosuggestion. So God gives us something else. Not only does He give us this personal confidence, but He gives us a powerful confirmation, and that is through Holy Scripture.

Look in verse 43. Now, Peter's talking to Cornelius in his household. He's speaking of Jesus, and then he says this: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him should have remission of him." Now, listen to it: "To him give all the prophets witness." What was Peter talking about here? He's talking about the Old Testament, and he's saying all of the prophets in the Old Testament are unanimous about Jesus. Not some of the prophets, but to Jesus all of the prophets give witness.

Now, Peter says, Look, we're all unanimous; we're witnesses. But now, not only is there the witness of the soul winner; there's the witness of the Scriptures. The Scriptures give witness. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Now, you're a thinking person. May I tell you that there are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament that were directly fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ. And, by the way, I'm going to be speaking on those tonight, and you dare not miss the message: Christ in the Old Testament, the Jesus of the Old Testament. I don't even have time to touch on it hardly this morning. But there are some people who see these Scriptures fulfilled, and they say, Well, that's only because they've rigged it, that's only because Jesus and His

apostles rigged it; they arranged it for Him to fulfill these prophecies.

Well, you know what I agree with them. He did arrange it. Let me tell you what He arranged. Let me tell you what He managed. First of all, He managed to be born in Bethlehem. You think you could manage the place where you were going to be born? Micah chapter 5, verse 2: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me—yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me—that is to be the ruler of Israel.” Yes, He managed the place where He was going to be born.

I’ll tell you what else He managed. He managed to be born of a virgin. You think you could manage that? He managed that. You didn’t choose your mother; He chose His, and He chose to be virgin-born. Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14—Old Testament: “Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.”

I’ll tell you something else that He managed: He managed to have His crucifixion described seven to eight hundred years before He was born, when death by crucifixion was not even known. The form of capital punishment that the Jews used was stoning. But Psalm 22 speaks of Jesus, and it says this: “They pierced my hands and my feet.” Seven hundred to eight hundred years before Jesus was even born. He managed to be crucified. Yes, He managed that. And He managed to have two thieves crucified with Him, one on either side, and subsequently to be buried in a tomb reserved for the rich. Isaiah 53, verse 6, “And he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death because he hath done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth.”

I’ll tell you something else He managed: He managed that Judas would betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. Zechariah 11 and verse 12: “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price, and if not, forbear. And they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. Now, yes, He managed that to happen.

And then, the classic arrangement that He managed, after three days He managed to walk out of that grave alive, the Savior of the world, and He was seen by more than 500 witnesses. Now, friend, most of these prophecies, if not all of them, were fulfilled, not by His friends, but by His enemies, those who had the most to gain by their not being fulfilled. Yes, thank God the Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Scripture.

Do you know enough Scripture to take the Bible and convince somebody about the Lord Jesus Christ?

### **III. The Persuasive Conviction of the Spirit**

There’s the personal confidence—Peter said we’re witnesses of these things. Secondly, there’s the powerful confirmation of the Scripture. Now, thirdly, there is the persuasive conviction of the Spirit. Look down in verse 44: “While Peter yet spake these words, the

Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” Oh, I love that. Now, here it is: Peter’s giving his testimony; he’s saying, Look, I’ll tell you what I know. Here’s my confidence; here’s my rock-ribbed assurance. And then, he says, Look, it’s backed up by the Scriptures. “To him give all the prophets witness.” And now, while he’s doing this, the Spirit of God comes upon them.

How wonderful that is. And, O God, send your Spirit today; Lord, in all of your fullness and power, in this service, to convince and to convict. Many times I’ve told you anything I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of. That’s the reason before I preach I cry out to God, and say, O God, anoint me, because I want the Holy Spirit of God to bring that final threefold strand. There’s the personal confidence of the soul winner, there’s the powerful confirmation of the Scriptures, and then, there’s the persuasive conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Do you know what Holy Spirit conviction is? When the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you, and the Holy Spirit says, That’s true. How do you know that Jesus is the Son of God? How do you know that the Scriptures are true? How do you know that those who say Jesus has transformed their lives, how do you know they’re really transformed? Because the Holy Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit of God—is the one who convicts you.

I’ve had people tell me, Hey, you would have made a good salesman. I don’t know whether I would have or not. But I don’t want to be a salesman, when it comes to the gospel. I’m not trying to just argue you into signing on the dotted line. I want the Holy Spirit of God to convict you of these things that I’m preaching. And the Holy Spirit of God will. He will. I’m not dependent upon eloquence. I’m not dependent upon logic. I am not dependent upon personal magnetism. All is vain, unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.

You know, in Acts chapter 5, the apostles were witnessing, and they said something wonderful. They said, “We are witnesses of these things, and so is also…”—now, listen to this—“so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him.” I love that. I fall back on that scripture so many times. We are witnesses. I am witnessing to you. I’m telling you my heart. I’m telling you all that I know, as best I know how. But I’m not dependent upon that alone; I’m dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God going up and down these aisles and through these pews, and saying, You’d better listen to him; he’s telling you the truth. This is of God—you’d better listen. See, I’m a witness, but so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him.

Now, let me tell you how the Holy Spirit of God witnesses—and these are in 1 John chapter 5. But the Bible says, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.”

#### **A. The Holy Spirit Witnesses to You**

Now, we all receive the witness of men. If you eat, you put some faith in the cook, right?

How do you know your wife's not going to serve you a little strychnine and arsenic this afternoon? When you get in an automobile, somebody else is driving—you put your faith in the driver. How do you know this is not the day he's determined to drive off a bridge? You get on an airplane—you put your faith in the pilot. Most of you don't even know the name of the pilot when you get on the airline. You don't even look behind the door to see if you like his looks. You just get on.

Now, what's he saying? Listen. We could not live without putting our trust in other people for certain things. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. God speaks to you. That's the reason, when a person tells me, Hey, I can't believe, he's lying. There's nobody who says, I can't believe, who's telling the truth. Jesus did not say, You cannot come unto me; He said, You will not come unto me that you might have life. If you want to believe, you can believe, because God will enable you to believe. Your problem is not in your head; your problem is in your heart.

The Bible says, "Beware, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." He doesn't say an empty head, but an evil heart. If you want to believe, you can believe. Why? Because the Holy Spirit of God will enable you to believe. He will witness to you. God is speaking to you today. Now, would you open your heart, and let God speak to you? You can stonewall God, but if you will receive the witness of men, if you put your trust in feeble man, with all of his failures and foibles, surely you can put your trust in Almighty God, in the Word of God. "We receive the witness of men; the witness of God is greater"—1 John 5:9.

### **B. The Holy Spirit Witnesses in You**

And then, not only does the Holy Spirit of God witness to you, but the Holy Spirit of God witnesses in you—and I love this. The Bible says in the next verse there, 1 John 5:10, "He that believeth on the Son hath the witness in himself." Now, the Holy Spirit of God spoke to me, and I believe in Jesus, and now the witness that was witnessing to me is witnessing in me. I have the witness in myself. The Holy Spirit of God lives in me right now, and enables me to believe. And did you know, because I have the witness in myself, I'm not at the mercy of some pagan, of some infidel with an argument. You could argue to me about hypocrites, or all kind of contradictions in the Bible, or anything else that you want to argue about, you're not going to stampede me, because I have the witness in myself.

### **C. The Holy Spirit Witnesses Though You**

Now, suppose I just had a big piece of apple pie, and somebody comes along and says there is no such thing as apple pie. Or somebody else says, well, if there is, it doesn't taste good, and doesn't satisfy. Well, that's not going to shake me—you know why? I have the witness in myself. You see, the Bible says, taste and see that the Lord is good.

So, He witnesses to me, then He witnesses in me, and, when He witnesses to me and witnesses in me, it's then that He witnesses through me. You see, this is what an effective witness is. An effective witness is somebody who has had an experience with God. Jesus didn't say, you're going to be my lawyers. A lawyer argues a case. A witness tells what he's seen and heard.

That's the reason Peter has such confidence. You see, Peter is there; he's saying, Look, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. We ate with Him, we walked with Him, we talked with Him, we saw Him risen. I have absolute confidence. There's the personal confidence of the soul winner, and then there is the powerful confirmation of the Scriptures. We have the Holy Scriptures there in the fulfilled prophecies that say who the Lord Jesus is, and then, on top of that, there's the confirming persuasion of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes these first two things, and He comes, and He says to the household of Cornelius, these things are true—these things are true. Jesus said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me.” God did not tell me that I have to go out and witness in my own strength. God gives me the Holy Spirit as an ally. Remember, we are witnesses to these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him.

Now, if the Holy Spirit of God is not bringing conviction through your life, it may be that you're not living in obedience, because God does not give the Holy Spirit to rebels, but to them that obey Him. Now, here's an interesting thing. While we're at this particular passage, notice in verse 44: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word, and they of the circumcision”—that means the Jews which believed—“were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Now, how did they know that the Holy Ghost was poured out on the Gentiles? “For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we?”

Pastor Rogers, do you have to speak with tongues in order to be saved? Of course not! Are tongues a sign that you are saved? No. Why? What is tongues? It's the ability to speak in a language you've never learned, a supernatural utterance given of God as a sign. Now, the first evidence of this, the first happening of this, was on the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, and there were Jews there. But now, here's a new dimension to the gospel. Now, Peter's going to the Gentiles, to the household of Cornelius. This is the Gentile Pentecost. And the Jews were there; they were amazed, they said, Would you look at that—God has given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles the same way He did to us. And what God was saying is, now there's one new body; it's called the church—Jew and Gentile are alike.

Now, that was a sign gift. We don't have to have that gift repeated. We're not trying

to repeat Pentecost any more than we're trying to repeat Bethlehem or Calvary. Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary God for us; Pentecost is God in us. It was a sign gift. We're not praying and asking God for another Pentecost. We're not praying and asking God for the Holy Ghost. He has sent the Holy Spirit. He has. I got a bike for Christmas when I was a little boy, a 24-inch Schwinn, candy apple red, with cream-colored stripes on it. I got it Christmas Day. Now, suppose I'd come to my parents about New Year's, and said, Mom and Dad, would you please give me a bike? I need a bike. Please give me a bike. They'd say, Son, we've given you a bike. Get on it, and ride it, okay? God has sent the Holy Spirit. We don't have to keep on asking God to do what He's already done. All this was a sign that now God has poured out His Spirit upon the Gentiles, and Jew and Gentile are now one body in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, you know what happened? You know what happened? Peter said to these people, Can any man forbid water that these should be baptized, because the Holy Spirit has come upon them as He came upon us? Now, look. They believed, and then they were baptized. Have you been baptized? Have you? Well, let me ask you: Have you believed? Now, if you've believed, then the next step is for you to make it public, and, on the first opportunity, to follow Jesus in believer's baptism. Now, if you've not believed, why not? You can, if you wish. There's the personal confidence of the soul winner, a man named Adrian. There's a powerful confirmation of the Scriptures; the Scriptures have proven conclusively that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is the persuasive conviction of the Holy Spirit—He's here today. And all you have to do is say, Yes, to the Lord Jesus Christ. "To him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believes in him should have remission of sins"—verse 43.

I was getting on an airplane a while back, and the steward or the stewardess—I don't remember which—said something like this: This plane is bound for Cincinnati, Ohio. If Cincinnati, Ohio, is not in your plans for this afternoon, you need to de-board now. Well, friend, I want to tell you, without Jesus, you're going to hell. And, if hell is not in your plans, you need to de-board now. Give your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want you to ask yourself this question, everyone: If I get to where I'm headed, where will I be when I get there? Everybody's headed somewhere. If I get to where I'm headed, where will I be when I get there? I'll tell you, on the authority of the Word of God, if you'll put your faith where God put your sins—on the Lord Jesus Christ—He will forgive every sin, He will come into you, cleanse you, and save you, and when you die, or when He comes again, He'll take you home to heaven.

## **Conclusion**

A threefold cord: most of us in this building today have given our hearts to Jesus, and we'll tell you, dear friend, that it's real—that it's real. Number two: we have the Word of

God that is so reliable. Number three: the Holy Spirit is here to say, Yes, that is true—that is true. Now, what would I like for you to do, and what does God want you to do? God wants you to give your heart to Christ, and to make it public. Now, we're going to sing an invitational hymn, and I'm going to ask the ministers of our church to stand all the way across here at the front, at the head of each of these aisles. Then I'm also going to ask a minister to stand under that banner over there to my right that says Redeemer, this one to my left that says Messiah, for those of you in the balcony. We're going to stand, and we're going to sing a song that says something like this: Lord, I believe; Lord, I receive; then, Lord, I confess you now. Don't let the devil intimidate you. The Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." I want you just to leave your seat and come forward.

You say, Pastor, what would I do when I go down there? What should I say? If you can mean it, just say this: I'm trusting Jesus—I'm trusting Jesus. What will happen? Well, we'll rejoice. Number two: we'll give you some Scripture to stand on. Number three: we'll seal it with you in prayer. We'll not embarrass you in any way. You'll see that you'll be treated with utmost respect. But we want you to have the joy of knowing Jesus, to know that you're heaven-born and heaven-bound.

Some of you have been saved; you've never been baptized. You don't have to be baptized to go to heaven, but if you haven't been baptized, why not? It's God's way to give Jesus glory, to give sweet affirmation and confirmation to you. Perhaps you need to come and say, Look, I know I'm saved, but I want to be baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ. Come down the aisle, and say, You know, I want to make an appointment for my baptism, and we'll make an appointment for your baptism, and you can be baptized as a believer in Christ.

There are others of you who are baptized believers, and your church membership is elsewhere. I don't know what's reason for it: maybe you just moved here, maybe for some reason you've been looking for another church home. For whatever reason, if you know Jesus, you believe as we believe, and need a church home, and everybody needs one—if not this one, one somewhere—I want to invite you to come forward, and say to the minister, I want to place my membership here. We'll tell you how you may become a member. If you've not been baptized, as we understand it, we want the joy and the privilege of baptizing you.

Some are coming, I trust, saying, I'm trusting Jesus. Others are coming, saying, I want to make an appointment for my baptism. Others are coming, saying, I want to place my membership here. Respectfully, I'm going to ask that no one leave during the invitation. If you're with a friend that needs to make a decision, you may volunteer to come forward with your friend. How beautiful that is. All of us are going to be in a spirit of prayer. As we stand and sing, don't look around and see what anyone else is going to

do; you just move on down the closest aisle, and say Yes to Jesus. Lord, I believe;  
Lord, I receive; Lord, I confess you now. Let's stand together.

# How You Can Be Sure

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: March 29, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:38–48**

## Outline

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## Introduction

**T**ake God's Word, and find the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Acts—the Acts of the

Apostles, as some Bibles say (the part added by men to describe that book). Many even read “The Acts of the Holy Ghost,” although the Holy Ghost is active all throughout the Book of Acts, but really, the Book of Acts is what Jesus is continuing to do. It's the book of the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ not only so long ago, but right now in this 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We are talking under this theme: “That Old-Time Religion.” And, not only is it the old-time religion; we told you that it's the “new-time” religion. And, not only is it the “new-time” religion; we told you that it is the “all-time” religion. And, therefore, it is the “any time” religion—that is, any time that you need the Lord, He is available to you. And, therefore, it ought to be the “every-time” religion. You ought not to turn anywhere else but to that old-time religion, which is the “new-time” and the “now-time” religion.

Now, you say, “Well, you seem to be so sure about that.” Yes, I am sure—I am sure—and I want to talk to you today about how you can be sure. And, I'm going to give you today, from God's Word, three marvelously wonderful witnesses that will attest to

you that Jesus Christ is the saving Son of God. And so, you can have knowledge regarding salvation so that you won't have to say, "I think so... I hope so... Maybe so." I will tell you how you won't have to be a question mark with your head bent over, but rather how you can be an exclamation mark, standing up straight and tall, saying, "Yes, praise God! I am sure. I know that I know."

Now, let me give you the background for our passage of Scripture. Cornelius was a Gentile. Up until this time, the Gentiles had not been added to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of those early believers were Jews. Now, Cornelius was a Roman army officer. He's from Italy—garrisoned there in Palestine. He has a hunger to know God. And, supernaturally, God had gotten this Roman army officer and the apostle Peter together. Now, Cornelius wants to know about the Lord. And so, Cornelius comes—he comes to Peter—and God has arranged the appointment. It is sort of a blind date, and God has arranged it. And so, Cornelius is there, right in front of Peter. And, Cornelius has gotten all of his friends, his neighbors, and his relatives, and he just, as it were, comes and sits down in front of Simon Peter, and says, "All right, here we are. Tell us about it—just tell us. We want to know about the faith. We want to know how to be saved. We want to know how to be certain. Tell us."

Now, that's where we're going to begin reading our scripture, Acts chapter 10, now, and I want you to begin reading with me in verse 38. Peter began to tell Cornelius...and I'm going to break in the middle of a sentence for brevity—and here's what Peter begins to talk about: *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses"*—underscore that phrase—*"we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses"*—underscore that again—*"unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead"* (Acts 10:38–42). Now, I'm going to give you these three witnesses—three indisputable witnesses—that tell us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that, by trusting Him, you can be saved.

## **I. The Personal Witness of the Saints**

Witness number one is what I'm going to call "the personal witness of the saints." Write it down, if you're taking notes, "the personal witness of the saints." In verse 39, Peter says: *"And we are witnesses"* (Acts 10:39).

Now, I want you to imagine a jury, and you're trying to get on that jury—you're impaneling the jury. You want the jury to be impartial, but you want the jury to render a

good verdict; and so, you're going to try to get a broad section of the community. You're going to put that broad sectioning in this jury box, and you're going to give them the facts and ask them to come to a conclusion. Well, that's what our Lord did when He took these apostles.

Now remember, these apostles had been with our Lord for three or four years. They lived with Him. They walked with Him. They were companions. They ate together. They fellowshiped together. And, I want you to think about what a group they were.

### **1. The Apostle John**

For example, there was John. John was a young man. He was a visionary. He was sort of a philosopher-type of fellow.

### **2. The Apostle Simon Peter**

Then, there was Simon Peter—just the opposite of John—the big fisherman, the hard-working fisherman. He smelled of fish and so forth. He was just kind of a... I imagine that he had pretty salty language before he got saved, because he slipped into it after he got saved. He knew how to curse and swear.

### **3. The Apostle Simon Zelotes**

Then, on top of that, there was Simon the Zealot—Simon Zelotes. The word *zealot* means “right-winger.” Simon was just a little to the right of Jerry Falwell. Simon the Zealot—I mean, he was a political activist; he was a Zionist. He was for Israel. And, he was there.

### **4. The Apostle Matthew**

And then, over against him was Matthew the Publican. Do you know who Matthew the Publican was? Matthew the Publican was a tax collector. And, Matthew had sold-out to the Roman government. Now, Palestine had been occupied by the Roman government. Can you imagine how you would feel if the Russians took us over, and one of our own became a tax collector for the Russians, and it was unfair—what it was about—at the same time? They thought of him as a turncoat. Can you imagine having Simon and Matthew on the same jury and trying to ask them to reach a unanimous verdict about anything? Well, they were there.

### **5. The Apostle Nathaniel**

And then, on top of that was Nathaniel. Nathaniel—he was a cynic. Remember? He was the man who said, “*Can...any good thing come out of Nazareth?*” (John 1:46)—just a cynic.

### **6. The Apostle Thomas**

And then, there was Thomas. He was a doubter. He said, “I’ll not believe unless I see the print of the nails in His hands and in His side” (John 20:25).

## 7. The Apostle Philip

Then, there was Philip. Philip—he was a figurer. Jesus said, “How are we going to feed these?” “Ah,” he said. “It will take so much money to feed these 5,000.” He had one of these little calculators in his mind. He was one of these guys who had everything figured out and pigeonholed. He was a facts and figures type of guy.

## 8. The Apostle James

There was James. James was a hard-bitten businessman. He was a no-nonsense guy. You read the Book of James, brother, and I’ll tell you, you’ll find out what kind of a guy James was.

## 9. The Apostle Andrew

And then, there was Andrew. Well, Andrew was such a nice guy. I mean, he’s the guy running around patting little kids on the head and saying, “There’s a little lad here. He’s got five loaves, and a few fish, and so forth.”

Hey, I want to tell you, folks, that you could not have gotten a wider mixture than these eleven, and they come out with unanimity as witnesses about the Lord Jesus Christ. And, they witnessed primarily to three things: first of all, they witnessed to His virtuous life; secondly, they witnessed to His vicarious death; thirdly, they witnessed to His victorious resurrection. I want you to notice what their witness was about.

### A. They Witnessed His Virtuous Life

First of all, they witnessed His virtuous life. They witnessed: “*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth*”—I’m reading verses 38 and 39—“*with the Holy Ghost and with power*”—watch—“*who went about doing good*”—this is His virtuous life—“*healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses*” (Acts 10:38–39). They saw it. Peter said, “Don’t tell me that He didn’t turn water into wine; I drank some of it. Don’t tell me that He didn’t walk on water; I was out there with Him. Don’t tell me that it’s hearsay. Don’t tell me that it’s a fable. Mister, it’s fact. Don’t tell me that He didn’t raise that little girl from the dead; I talked with Him after God raised her from the dead through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Don’t tell me that these miracles are not real. I know that they are real, for I was there. Listen, I was an eyewitness of His Majesty when He was transfigured. I heard God speak from Heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son.’” Now, this is what Peter said: “*we are witnesses*” (Acts 10:39)—“we witnessed His virtuous life. We were with Him for three or four years, and not one flaw did we find in His character. But, we saw the miracle-working power of God.”

### B. They Witnessed His Vicarious Death

“Secondly, we were also witnesses of His vicarious death.” Notice, if you will, in verse 39: “*And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in*

*Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree*” (Acts 10:39). Peter says, “We were there—standing back in the crowd—but we saw them as they drove those nails into His quivering hands. We heard Him as He cried and sobbed in anguish: *‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’* (Matthew 27:46). We were there when He said, ‘I thirst.’ We were there when He prayed, ‘Father, forgive them.’ We were there when He said: *‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’* (Luke 23:46). We were there when He gave up the ghost. We were there when they took Him down. We were there when they put Him in the tomb. We saw Him die. He didn’t die for His sins; He died for ours. He became accursed for us. He took our place. We were eyewitnesses.”

### C. They Witnessed His Victorious Resurrection

“But, not only that—not only His vicarious death; we were eyewitnesses of His resurrection.” Look again, if you will, in verses 40 and 41: *“Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead”* (Acts 10:40–41). Peter says, “Listen, this is not fable; it is fact. God raised Him, Cornelius, from the dead. How do I know? I saw Him.” “Well, how do you know, Peter, that it wasn’t a hallucination?” “I’ll tell you how I know that it wasn’t a hallucination: we all saw it. You don’t get 11 men to hallucinate at the same time. But, not only that—more than 500 saw Him at one time.” Can you imagine a courtroom when you are trying to attest to the historical facts of something, and you bring 500 witnesses in who say, “We all saw the same thing. We all experienced the same thing”? “Well,” you say, “maybe you saw something, but maybe it was a ghost.” Peter says, “It was not a ghost. We sat down and ate with Him.” You read it right there: “We ate with Him. I mean, we actually touched Him and handled Him. We ate with him.”

“Oh,” you say. “That’s all a lie. Somebody just wrote it here.” Do you think that it’s a lie, dear friend? You’d better go back and read in secular and profane history and find out how these people died—these early Christians. They died for what they believed. These eyewitnesses died. This same Peter was crucified upside down. Now, you listen to me. You’re a reasonable person. *Some people will live for a lie, but no man will willingly die for a lie.* These people died for this faith. I’ll tell you why: because they had learned to laugh at death, because they knew that Jesus Christ had come out of that grave.

Now friend, the history of the Church—the testimony of the saints of all of the ages—is one dramatic truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Are you trying to tell me that Peter, Paul, James, and John were knaves, rascals, thieves, and charlatans? These men? No. They said, “We are witnesses, Cornelius; we are telling you what these eyes have seen and what these hearts have experienced.” That’s witness number one that

you might know—the testimony of the saints—not only those saints, but also these saints and this saint: “Brother, I know what I’ve experienced. I know what I’ve found.” And, by the way, a Christian with a vibrant testimony is never at the mercy of a skeptic with an argument. They said, “We know what we have seen.”

## II. The Prophetic Witness of the Scriptures

All right. Now, secondly, not only was there the witness of the saints—that’s what I’m going to call the “personal witness of the saints”—but also, there is the prophetic witness of the scriptures. Look in verse 43—verse 43 is one of the key verses in the entire Bible; it ought to be underlined in your Bible: *“To him give all the prophets witness”*—that’s the second witness—*“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). Now, dear friend, this verse gives us the key to the Old Testament. Do you want me to tell you what the Old Testament is about? It is about Jesus. *“To him give all the prophets witness”* (Acts 10:43). And, do you know what the Old Testament is saying? It’s saying, “Jesus saves.” And, that’s what Peter said: *“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him”*—Jesus—*“shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). Dear friend, the Bible has one hero—His name is Jesus—and it has one message: Jesus saves. That’s it—that’s it. It’s not written primarily to give us the history of Israel. It’s not written primarily to tell us about ceremonies, rituals, and all of these things. It is written to tell us that Jesus saves.

You say, “That’s what the New Testament is written about.” No, friend, the New Testament is written about that, but Peter is talking about the Old Testament right here. He is talking about the prophets. *“To him”*—to Jesus—*“give all the prophets witness”* (Acts 10:43). You open your Bible, and as soon as you crack your Bible open, Jesus steps out of the pages. Right there in the Garden of Eden, when God slew innocent animals and made a covering of skin for Adam and Eve, it pictured the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Cain and Abel had that argument over religion and Abel slew an innocent lamb for the atonement of his sins, Abel’s lamb spoke of the Lord Jesus. In Genesis 3:15, where God spoke of the seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent’s head, that spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Genesis, where God says to Abraham, “I’m going to bless all of the world through your descendants—through your seed”—not *seeds*, but *seed*—who is the seed of Abraham? The Lord Jesus Christ. In Genesis 22, when Isaac was offered there on Mount Moriah—that’s a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for those who have eyes to see it.

In Exodus chapter 12, the Passover lamb is Jesus; Christ, our Passover Lamb, is sacrificed for us. In Leviticus—in all the offerings in the Book of Leviticus—all of those offerings were about the Lord Jesus Christ, that scapegoat that was there. They would

take two goats. One goat would be pure; that pictured Jesus dying for our sins. They would take another goat, and the priest would lay his hands on the head of that goat, confess the sins of the people on the head of that goat, and then somebody would take that goat and lead that goat away out into the wilderness never to return again, picturing Jesus carrying our sins away. Christ is the sinner's scapegoat. They would take a mourning dove, a turtledove, with its sad mourning song, and kill it, speaking of Christ, the man of sorrows. They would take a white pigeon and sacrifice that white pigeon, speaking of Christ the Lord Jesus, the pure, gentle, and sinless Son of God. They would take, dear friend, fine flour for a meal offering. That fine flour for a meal offering pictures Jesus—bruised, beaten, and baked by the fires of Hell for us, for Jesus walked the burning corridors of Hell for us. They anointed that flour with oil, picturing the anointing of the Holy Spirit that was upon the Lord Jesus Christ. They mixed frankincense in, which speaks of the intercessory prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of that was about the Lord Jesus Christ.

They said, "Build a tabernacle." This tabernacle was about the Lord Jesus Christ. The acacia wood of that tabernacle speaks of the humanity of Jesus. It was overlaid with gold, which speaks of the deity of Jesus. It had badger skins on the outside, which said that from the outside, it was not beautiful. *"He hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him"* (Isaiah 53:2). But, on the inside, there was all of that fine gold and fine twined linen, and there was that scarlet, that blue, and that purple there in the veil. The veil spoke of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you came into that tabernacle, first of all, there was a brazen altar, which speaks of Christ, our sacrifice, because animals were slain there. And then, you come to a laver, which speaks of Christ, our sanctification. You go in a little further, and there's a table with bread on it—the showbread, which speaks of Christ, our sustenance. Over here's a candlestick, which speaks of Christ, our sight. Here's an altar of incense, which speaks of Christ, our supplication. In here are the Holy of Holies and the Mercy Seat, which speak of Christ, the satisfaction for the sinner's sin, where the blood was sprinkled there. It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ. Every priest in the Old Testament pictures the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, who intercedes for His people and makes intercession for us.

Dear friend, if you read the Bible, then you'll find in Psalm 2, where the psalmist speaks of the very Son of God and how the kings and the rulers of this world don't want anything to do with the Son of God. And, how true it is today! Read it in Psalm 2. Read Psalm 22—Psalm 22, my friend, reads like a person standing at the foot of the cross, though it was written centuries before Jesus Christ was born. Read that prince of the prophets, Isaiah, who dipped his pen into the golden Glory and wrote the 53rd chapter of Isaiah—the Gospel according to Isaiah. It's wonderful. Read, in the Book of Micah,

where He shall be born in Bethlehem, if you will. Read, in the Book of Zechariah, where they pierced His hands and His feet. Read in Zechariah, where He's coming again and every eye shall see. Oh, dear friend, read in the Book of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, where he prophesies that John the Baptist shall come. I am telling you, dear friend, that all of that Old Testament is about Jesus—all of it. *"To him give all the prophets witness"* (Acts 10:43). What a testimony—what a testimony—to the unity of the Bible! What a testimony to the inspiration of the Bible! What a confirmation of our faith is the Bible! No man could write a book like this.

How would you like to paint a portrait with 40 different people and not one of you seeing whom you were painting and what the others were painting? And yet, you had to paint him exactly like each other. That's what these Old Testament prophets did—many of them not even seeing what the other was painting. Listen, the Bible was written over 1,500 years by 40 different authors in three different languages and by people from all walks of life. And yet, *"To him"*—to Him (to Jesus)—*"give all the prophets witness"* (Acts 10:43).

And, don't get the idea, dear friend, that there are several plans of salvation in the Bible. Don't get the idea that people in the Old Testament were saved one way and people in the New Testament were saved another way. The message of the prophets is that Jesus saves—Jesus saves, dear friend. When God made coats of skin for Adam and Eve, it was saying that Jesus saves. When Abel slew that lamb, it was saying that Jesus saves. When Isaac was offered on Mount Moriah, the message was Jesus saves. The Passover lamb's message was that Jesus saves. Ruth's kinsman redeemer's message was that Jesus saves. The message of Moses' serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, is that Jesus saves. All of it—all of the way through—is that Jesus saves. And, Jesus said, *"Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad"* (John 8:56). And, the Bible says that *"the gospel [was preached] unto Abraham"* (Galatians 3:8). There's never been but one plan of salvation—and it's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, people in the Old Testament were saved by looking forward to Jesus, and we are saved by looking backward to what Jesus did. And, we're all saved by looking upward to the Lord, who lived then, who lives now, and who is the Savior of the world.

### **III. The Praise Witness of the Spirit**

What a witness—what is testimony—is the Bible, friend! You can't get around and over the Bible. What a book this is! What a glorious book, it is! And, I'm telling you, friend, that you can be sure, number one, by the personal witness of the saints; number two, by the prophetic witness of the Scripture; and number three, by the praise witness of the Spirit.

Now, I want to show you something. Look here, if you will—continue to read here in

God's Word, beginning in verse 44: *"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, and as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God"*—the word "magnify God" means to "praise" God (this is the praise witness of the Spirit)—*"Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days"* (Acts 10:44–48).

Now, what happened is this: Peter gives the first witness; the Scripture gives the second witness, and the Holy Spirit gives the third witness. Now, while they were hearing this—now, watch what happens—Peter is saying in verse 43: *"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name"*—through faith in His name—*"whosoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins"* (Acts 10:43). That is, "You are saved, Cornelius, by believing in Jesus. Salvation is by grace. You just believe in the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved." Cornelius, right there—his heart is so hungry. I mean, he didn't have to talk Cornelius into anything. He wanted to be saved. He just believed. That's what he had come to do. He wanted to know. And, he just believed; and when he believed, he received. Immediately, he received the Holy Ghost. And, Cornelius received the Holy Ghost and begins to speak in tongues.

Now, tongues are foreign languages that one has learned. It was a sign-gift that God gave in these days. Now, why did God give Cornelius the sign-gift of tongues? I'll tell you why: God now is enlarging the Church to include the Gentiles. The whole story of Cornelius is that the Gentiles are now being added to the Church, and both Jew and Gentile are becoming one Body. The first time that we saw these tongues was in Acts 2, when, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and they all spoke in tongues. That was the Jewish Pentecost. And now, in Acts 10, we have the Gentile Pentecost. And, God now is saying to Peter, "Peter, you know what you received back here in the Book of Acts—in chapter 2? Cornelius got the same thing that you have. Now, the same God that saved you, Peter, has now saved Cornelius, and the same sign that I have given to you, I am giving now to Cornelius."

Now folks, listen, tongues are given as a sign to confirm what God is doing. Now, pay close attention—close attention—the important thing is not the speaking of tongues. That was the outward evidence of the internal work of God in the hearts of these people. The amazing, wonderful thing was that God was giving the Holy Spirit to live within the hearts of men. And, these tongues were issued in here as an inaugural sign— as the inaugural sign—showing that God had worked in the heart of Cornelius.

## Conclusion

Now, what does all of that mean? Well, it means this, folks—now listen; listen—when you believe in Jesus, God gives a witness. Do you know what the Bible says in the Epistle of John? *“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself”* (1 John 5:9–10). Isn’t that wonderful? You see, the same thing is in Romans chapter 8 and verse 16: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Romans 8:16). Now, you’ve got the three witnesses—watch: you’ve got the personal witness of the saints; you have the prophetic witness of the Scripture; and you have the praise witness of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God inside of you just says, “Jesus is Lord. Praise Him.” They began to magnify God as they believed, and as they believed, they had that internal testimony.

You want me to tell you how I know? I know, first of all, because somebody witnessed to me, just like somebody witness to Cornelius, and said, “It’s real.” I also know because God’s Word testifies, and I also now know because I’ve got the witness in myself. He lives in me, folks, and I give Him praise. Listen, faith is rooted in evidence. Thank God for the evidence. Faith goes beyond evidence—it has to, in order to be faith. But then, faith becomes its own best evidence. And, I believe because I believe. I know because I know. And, God’s Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I’m a child of God.

Do you have that internal evidence? Is the Lord Jesus Christ to you a bright, living reality? I’m not talking about an emotional feeling; it’s not an emotional feeling. How does God know something? Does God know something because He feels it emotionally? Is that the way that God knows? You say, “Of course not.” Well, does God know something because somebody tells Him? Of course not. God’s not waiting on you to tell Him anything before He knows it. Well, does God know something because He figures it out? He doesn’t have to figure it out. He just automatically knows, doesn’t He? He knows because He knows. Now, how do I know that I know God? Because I feel it? No. Because I learned it? No. Because somebody else tells me? No. God’s Spirit just bears witness with my spirit. I just know. Do you know what I’m talking about? You just know that you know because there’s that witness of the Spirit in your heart. *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Romans 8:16). There’s the witness of the saints, the witness of the Scripture, and the witness of the Spirit—*“and a threefold cord is not [easily] broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

Let’s bow our heads together in prayer.

# The Christ of the Old Testament

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 20, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 10:43**

*“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name  
whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”*

ACTS 10:43

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Portraits of Jesus in the Old Testament
  - II. Prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament
- Conclusion

## Introduction

Well I love the Bible, all of the Bible, and I want us to think tonight about someone that I love, as well as something I love because. The something I love is the Word of God, and the someone I love is the Lord Jesus who is revealed in the Word of God, and tonight I want to talk to you about the Jesus of the Old Testament.

Now, turn to Acts chapter 10, and look at one verse. We mentioned it this morning, and we're just going to pull over and park tonight in Acts chapter 10 and verse 43. Peter's testifying in the household of Cornelius about the Lord Jesus, and here is a significant thing he says about the Lord Jesus: "To him"—that is, to Jesus—"give all the prophets witness." Now, when he said, all the prophets, he's talking primarily about the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been written, and Simon Peter tells this Gentile, this Roman officer, to Jesus, all the Old Testament prophets have given witness.

Would you like to be able to understand the Old Testament? Would you like to get into some of the mystery rooms of the Old Testament? Well, there is a master key that unlocks the key to the mystery rooms of the Old Testament, and that master key is the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you will find a Christo-centric approach to the Old Testament, it will burst aflame in your hands. As a matter of fact, if you read the Old Testament and you don't find Jesus, you need to go back and reread it, because you missed the message. The Old Testament is a Him book; it is about Him—H-I-M. It's about the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what we want to do tonight is, first of all, find some portraits of Jesus in the Old Testament, and then we want to find some prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament—two words.

## **I. Portraits of Jesus in the Old Testament**

First of all, we're going to think a little bit about some portraits of Jesus in the Old Testament. I think we'll save some time tonight if you'll make notes, and don't flip back and forth in your Bible unless you're one of our young people who are much better than the old coots. I'm an old coot, too, so I can say that. All right now, listen.

Here's what Jesus said to those who were challenging Him as to His authenticity and to His Messiahship. Jesus looked them straight in the eye, and He said in John chapter 5 and verse 39, "Search the scriptures, for in them you think that you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of me."

Now, I want to remind you that when Jesus Christ said that, there was no New Testament, as we know it. It was being formed, but it was not yet written. When Jesus said, "Search the scriptures, for in them you think that you have eternal life," He was talking about the Old Testament. Now, without Jesus, the Old Testament—listen to me—is a book, number one, of unexplained ceremonies—they won't make sense. Number two: it is a book of unfulfilled prophecies. And, number three: it is a book of unattainable standards. Listen to me again. Without Jesus, the Old Testament is a book of unexplained ceremonies, it is a book of unfulfilled prophecies, and it is a book that has an unattainable standard. You try to live by the Old Testament without the Lord Jesus Christ—friend, you will not make it.

Now, the Old Testament was completed about 400 years before Jesus Christ was born. The Old Testament, the Jews by that time had divided the Old Testament into three categories. I want you to learn them. First of all, what they called the law, and then the prophets, and then the writings. Got it? Say law, prophets, writings. Now, that's the whole Old Testament—divided up into these three categories. Now, put this verse down—Luke chapter 24.

Jesus is on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection. There are two forlorn disciples there. They did not understand all that had happened. Jesus walks alongside of them, they don't recognize Him in His resurrection form, and perhaps He's withheld His appearance to them, because He wanted to teach them a lesson, but here's what He says in Luke chapter 24, verse 44: "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you,"—now, listen to this—"that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms." Now, I called it the writings; here He calls it the Psalms. The Jews took the Psalms and all that followed, and they called those the writings. And then, the Bible

says, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.” Now, how were they going to understand the Scriptures? Well, they were going to understand the Scriptures by finding in the Scriptures all of the things that pertained to Him.

In the law, in the prophets, and in the Psalms—or the writings—all of these things that pertain to Him. The law: basically, the first five books of the Bible, what we call the Pentateuch, or five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. And then, the prophets—you know who the prophets are. And then, the writings, or the Psalms. Now, the Jews lived under a theocracy and a monarchy. Theocracy is the rule of God. *Theos* means God, so God ruled, and they didn’t have a king. Then, they tried out for a king, and God gave them Saul, and a succession of kings. So they lived under theocracy and they lived under a monarchy.

Now, in the theocracy and the monarchy, there were three types of individuals that were anointed, christened—or Christed, if you will. Christ means the anointed one, the one who’s been christened. Now, the first of these three that were anointed was the prophet. They anointed a prophet. If a man was going to be a prophet in Israel, he was Christed; he was anointed. And then, there was the priest; the person who was to serve as a priest, he would be anointed. And then, there was the king. If a person was to be a king, he was anointed. So who was anointed? The prophet, the priest, and the king. Now, you’re going to find the Lord Jesus Christ typified by all of the prophets, all of the priests, and all of the kings, because who is Jesus? He is what? Prophet, priest, and king. All of the Old Testament history—all of it. It’s all about the Lord Jesus Christ—Messiah is pictured as prophet and priest and king.

And so when we get to the New Testament, we find the fulfillment. For example, in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—we see Jesus as the prophet, preaching the kingdom of God. In the epistles, you see the Lord Jesus Christ. And, in the Acts, you see Him as the ascended priest interceding for the people of God. And in the book of the Revelation, you see Jesus Christ as the coming king, coming to rule and to reign. And so, you see that all of the Old Testament pictures Jesus: prophet, priest, and king. All of the New Testament shows Jesus as the fulfillment; He is the prophet, priest, and king. And so, everywhere in the Old Testament you will find portraits of Jesus.

Now, I just want to mention a few of these, and some of these will be an enigma to you—you won’t be able to understand them—but let me run through them, and just think about them for a moment. You’re going to find Jesus as the second Adam, because the first Adam prophesied Him. Jesus is a prophet like Moses, because Moses typified Him. Jesus is a priest like Aaron and Melchizedek, because they prefigured Him. Jesus is a champion like Joshua, whose name literally means Jesus; he’s the Old Testament counterpart of Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the offering of Isaac there on

Mount Moriah, where Jesus literally died. Jesus is a king like David. Jesus is a wise counselor like Solomon. Jesus is a beloved, rejected, exalted son and world bread supplier like Joseph. Jesus is pictured in the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus is the sacrifice upon the brazen altar in the tabernacle, in the temple. Jesus is the mercy seat in the sanctuary, where the Shekinah glory of God dwells. Jesus is the water that came from the rock. Jesus is the manna that fell from the sky. Jesus is the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness. Jesus is the Passover lamb. Jesus is the scapegoat, bearing away the sins of the people. Jesus is the lion of Judah. Jesus is the good shepherd—the Lord is my shepherd. Jesus is that root out of a dry ground, born of a virgin. Jesus is the fruitful branch. Jesus is that one without form or comeliness, yet altogether lovely. In all of the Old Testament, it is who? His name is Jesus. I'm telling you, folks, the Old Testament, without the Lord Jesus Christ, would be a dead-end road leading to nowhere, and yet, as you look at the Bible, and back off and see it, you see really Jesus everywhere—prophet, priest, and king—type, illustration.

An artist took the Constitution of the United States, and he painted the letters of the Constitution very carefully, and shaded each letter, and as you looked at the Constitution of the United States of America, you could read it, and read it all as the framers intended it to be, but if you stepped back and looked at it, you would see that the artist had so shaded the letters that you saw a portrait of George Washington. Now, that's what you find in the Old Testament. You'll find all of these laws and ceremonies and practices, and these types, illustrations; but as you step back, there He is: Jesus the Son of God.

## **II. Prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament**

So you see Jesus in the Old Testament; you see portraits of Jesus in the Old Testament. Say portraits. Now, secondly, you're going to see prophecies of the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament. These who wrote the Old Testament were called prophets.

And fulfilled prophecy is one of the great proofs of the deity of Jesus Christ. Now, God began to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus with over 300 prophecies concerning Him—300 in the Old Testament. Now, there can be no mistake that Jesus is the Messiah.

The law of mathematical probability makes it totally impossible that Jesus is not the Messiah, or that anyone else could claim to be the Messiah, according to the law of probability. Now, the law of probability is not an abstract law. Those of you who have insurance policies—life insurance—your life insurance policy is based on the law of probability. Those people in the insurance business, which was your business, Brother Mark, before God called you into the king's business, it's based on the law of mathematical probabilities. For example, the insurance people will take a healthy 30-

year-old man, and for a modest sum that he might pay on a monthly basis, they will insure his life for a million dollars. That is, if he dies, they give to his survivors a million dollars. He may be paying 50 dollars, more or less, but they will give him one million dollars. Is that because they like to give away money? No, they know with exactitude what the law of probability is that this man will die in his thirties, and so they can afford to do that, and they know that they're going to make money. They risk billions—billions, I say—of dollars on what we call mathematical probability.

Now, I've used this illustration before, but it's so fitting here I must use it to show you how the law of mathematical probability works. I have a dear son who lives in Spain. My son is a missionary there, and he is a true man of God. Joyce and I love our David and his wife Kelly, and Jonathan, and Stephen Paul, with all of our hearts. We love him so much that you ought to see our phone bill. Now, suppose I go to call David overseas. Now, do you think that I can pick up the phone and just randomly dial some numbers and expect to get David? I mean, what would be the chance—some 6 billion people on the face of the earth, I just pick up a phone and start punching some numbers, and, ipso facto, there's David who answers the phone? No, let me tell you how this works.

First of all, when I pick up the telephone, I eliminate everybody on earth who doesn't have a telephone. All right, so I've narrowed the field quite a bit. Now, I dial 011. You know what I do when I do that? I eliminate everybody that lives in America, because that's the overseas number. And then, I dial 34. Well when I do that, I eliminate all the other nations in the world, except Spain. And then, I will dial 600. And, when I do that, I will eliminate all of the other sections in Spain. And then, I began to dial a series of successive numbers. Each number that I punch will eliminate other people who don't have that number, or the next number, or the next number, or the next number, and I continue to narrow the focus, until finally I've pushed the last number, and a baritone voice answers the phone and says, Diga—it means, speak up. I say, Buen día. He says, Daddy? Yes, I know who it is; I recognize his voice. It is my beloved son.

Now, do you think that the law of probability would say that I could just pick up the phone and begin to tap out numbers blindly, and my son, of six billion people on the face of the earth, would pick up the phone? What would be the chances of that happening? Well, the chances are nil. Now, let's take that same illustration, and see if we can dial up the Son of God. Let's just say, I want you to see how God keeps narrowing the focus till there is only one person who can answer on the other end. Not my son, but God's Son.

For example, God said, in the Old Testament, that Messiah was to come from a race; Messiah's not to be an angel, He's to be a man. Messiah is to be a human being. Genesis 3, verse 15—here's what God said to the serpent: "And I will put enmity"—that means warfare—"between thee and the woman." By the way, women still don't like

snakes today. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed...”—the word seed means descendant—“between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This is the first prophecy in all of the Bible. It’s found right there on the threshold of the Bible, and it is called by theologians the proto-evangelium, which means the first evangelistic message. And here, a battle is prophesied. The seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent, and we’re seeing that battle go on through all history.

Not only is the battle prophesied, but a birth is prophesied. Here is the seed. You know, in the Bible, the word seed is used more than 100 times, and it always refers to the offspring of a male.

But here God speaks concerning the woman: the seed of the woman. The old rabbis used to scratch their heads at this, and say, No, no, no; it’s the seed of the man. Yet, here in Genesis 3:15, it’s called the seed of the woman, a prophecy of the virgin birth. Not only a battle, not only a birth, but a bruising is prophesied. That seed of the serpent is going to bruise his heel, Messiah’s heel, but Messiah is going to crush his head. Isn’t that an amazing thing? I mean, right there in the beginning of the Bible, you find that Messiah is going to be a human being; He’s the seed of the woman. But not only is He going to be a race—we’ve just picked up the phone and dialed the first number.

Number two, there will be a section out of that race, because, as time went along, there was a man named Noah. God put Noah in the ark, Noah came out of the ark, and Noah had three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth. These three came out of the ark. Well, from whom is Messiah going to come? Genesis chapter 2, verse 26: “And he said, Bless thee the Lord God of Shem.” Messiah is going to be a Shemite, or a Semite. God chose Shem, and when God chose Shem—listen to me—He then narrowed the focus this much more, and eliminated two-thirds of all of the people on the earth. Messiah will come from Shem.

But not only does God choose a seed, and not only does God choose out of that seed a section, but out of that section God chooses a nation. Because about 2,000 years before Jesus was born, God came to a man named Abraham, and God said to Abraham, I’m going to make a nation out of you. Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 to 3: “And now the Lord God said unto Abram,”—that was his name before God changed it to Abraham—“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, into a land that I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee, and in thee—listen, in Abraham—“shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Now, we’re continuing to dial. First of all, a race. Secondly, a section of that race.

Thirdly, a nation out of that section of that race. Now, but this man Abraham had two

sons, one named Isaac, and one named Ishmael. Well, which one is going to carry the line? Well, Genesis chapter 17, verse 19: “And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant.” And so, God takes the descendants of Abraham, and God divides them, and God tightens the focus again, and God says, now, Messiah is going to come from a race, from a section of that race, from a nation of that race, and from a particular son in that nation.

And then, God tightens the focus even more, and God says there’s going to be a tribe out of that section, because, as you know, Isaac had two sons: Jacob and Esau. Well which one of these is God going to choose? Well, as God chose Isaac, now God chooses Isaac’s son: not Esau, but Jacob, and, when God did that, He eliminates 50% of all of those elect. God chose Jacob—Numbers 24, verse 17: “The prophet said, I see him, but not now. I shall behold him, but not nigh. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” And so here is Jacob, he has twelve sons, but God just chooses one of those sons, and that son is Judah. Listen to me. Genesis 49, verse 10: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

And so, here God chooses a race, and then God chooses a section of a race, and then God chooses a nation out of that section, and then God chooses a tribe out of that section, the tribe of Judah, but God is not finished yet. God keeps punching numbers on His heavenly telephone, and now God takes the tribe of Judah, and God chooses a family out of the tribe of Judah. What is that family? Well, that family, out of that tribe, out of that nation, out of that section, out of that race is the family of Jesse. Isaiah chapter 11, verses 1 and 2: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Now, the rod, the ruler, the kingdom, is going to come from a particular family, the family of Jesse. Messiah is going to be a descendant of the family of Jesse, and all the other families of Judah now are eliminated.

And now, God’s not finished; God is going to tighten the focus a little more. Not only is Messiah going to come from Jesse, but God says Messiah is going to come from a household of that family, of that tribe, of that nation, of that section, of that race. What is the family? The household is going to be the household of David. Second Samuel chapter 7 and verse 6: “Now, therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I took thee from the goats and from following the sheep to be a ruler over my people over Israel.” Second Samuel chapter 7, verse 12: “And when they days be fulfilled, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, yet I will set up thy seed after thee which shall proceed out of thy bowels,”—that is, a descendant of David—“and I will establish my kingdom.”

Now, Jesse had eight sons, and seven-eighths of them were eliminated. God just keeps on narrowing the focus. Messiah is to come from the household of David. He's not finished yet; we have the house of David. But now there's got to be a certain woman out of the household of David—out of that household, out of that family, out of that tribe, out of that nation, out of that section, out of that race. This woman is to be a virgin—Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14: “Behold, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” Not any daughter of the household of David, but there has to be a virgin who conceives in her womb a child. Now, are you listening to me? A Word is born of that virgin, out of that household, out of that family, out of that tribe, out of that nation, out of that section, out of that race.

God's not finished yet. He can't be born anywhere; He's got to be born in Bethlehem. He can't be just an ordinary person; He has to be hated and sold for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed. He has to be crucified by the piercing of His hands and the feet, and He has to be raised from the dead. And when you dial all of these numbers and pick up the phone, who do you have? Jesus, the Son of God. I'm telling you, folks, if you tell me that that all just happened, it's just happenstance, you've got rooms to rent upstairs unfurnished.

Now, listen. There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Jesus. I have mentioned less than 15. There's a man named Peter Stoner who deals with the law of probabilities, and he is a great mathematician, and he takes the prophecies and applies the law of probability, and here's the illustration that he gives that we can understand, at least somehow get some mental picture of. Peter Stoner said, if you were to cover the state of Texas with silver dollars from border to border, three feet deep—now, that'd be a lot of silver dollars; the Texans would like that, wouldn't they?—three feet deep, border to border, silver dollars, put a mark on one silver dollar, then blindfold a man, and drop him down anywhere in the state of Texas, and let him stay there and shuffle through those silver dollars—if he reaches in and finds that one silver dollar, mathematically, that would be the same probability that just eight of these prophecies would be fulfilled by one individual. I mentioned 15, and there are over 300. Friend, when you start taking the law of probability, and start adding numbers—just one, two, and just add numbers that reach from here all the way across this auditorium and not stop ending.

You see, you find the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Jesus is there in portrait. All of the symbols, all of the emblems, all of the ceremonies—they all picture the Lord Jesus. He's the prophet; He's the priest; He's the king. And then, you look at the fulfilled prophecies, and you say, how can this happen apart from divine inspiration?

## Conclusion

Now, let me come to a conclusion tonight and tell you two things. Number one: you can trust the Word of God—you can trust the Word of God. Secondly, you can trust the God of that Word. I mean, if you trust the Word of God, you certainly ought to trust the God of that Word.

Now, the Old Testament says that somebody is coming. The New Testament says that somebody has come, and the book of the Revelation says that somebody is coming again. Now, the New Testament tells you how Jesus, who is coming, gets you ready for His Second Coming, how you can know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

I'm not trying to prove to you that Jesus is the Messiah. As I told you this morning, it lies beyond proof. True faith is rooted in evidence. True faith goes beyond evidence. True faith becomes its own best evidence. If you try to figure God out, you will die and go to hell, and not have God figured out. The Bible says, "Can a man, by reasoning, find out God?" Why is that? Well, nothing will hold anything beyond its own capacity. In other words, you can't put two gallons of liquid in a one-gallon jug. And, do you think that you can cram God into your mind? No, your mind doesn't have the capacity to contain God, and so don't try to eliminate God that you don't understand. You see, in order for me to have a God that I can worship, He must be a God greater than my mentality. If I could understand God, God would be no bigger than my intellect, which is far too small a god for me to worship. Now, if we could understand God, we wouldn't need God, but friend, I want to tell you something: We don't have to understand Him to know Him.

When I was a little boy my dad used to go off to work. I didn't know where he went, nor what he did, but I knew he was my dad, and I knew him personally, and I loved him. You don't have to understand how God runs the mighty universe to put your faith and trust in Him. Somebody asked Mrs. Albert Einstein, Do you understand the theory of relativity? She said, No, but I understand Dr. Einstein; I know him. And, friend, I'm telling you by faith you can know the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I had a thousand lives to live, I'd give Jesus every one of them. Would you bow your heads in prayer? How many of you tonight can say, Pastor Rogers, I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord, and I know that I know if I died tonight I would go to heaven? I don't know it because of some emotional feeling that I have; I don't know it because I have lived a good life. I know it because I have repented of my sin. I have trusted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. God's Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God, and I know that if I should take my last breath before this service ends, I know that I would be absent from my body but present with my Lord. I'm grateful for that, Pastor, and I'm not ashamed to give you a testimony by lifting my hand. I you know that you're saved—would you just lift your hand way up, if

you know it, you absolutely know it. Now, take your hand down.

Now, some of you couldn't lift your hand. Let me speak to you. You may be saying, Pastor, I don't have that assurance, but I am interested. If I were not interested in spiritual things, I wouldn't be here tonight, but I've not come to the place where I know that if I died I'd go to heaven. Oh, I've got wonderful news for you. Because salvation is a gift, you can pray tonight and receive the gift of salvation, and God will save you instantaneously tonight. Not only will God save you instantaneously, but from this time forward He will be with you continually, and He will keep you eternally. But you must receive Him. The Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That word believe doesn't mean just intellectual belief. The devil believes that way. It's a Bible word that means trust. You can believe an airplane can fly, but you don't trust it until you get on it. Trust the Lord Jesus.

May I lead you in a prayer tonight, and you can invite Jesus into your heart. Would you pray a prayer like this? Dear God...—that's right, just speak to Him. Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you, Jesus. Would you tell Him that? If you're listening through radio right now, would you tell Him that? Maybe you're in an automobile. Just pray that prayer. I do trust you, right now. I receive you into my life. I yield my life to you in faith. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Begin now to make me the person you want me to be. I believe that with your blood you paid my sin debt. Thank you, Jesus. And now, I just turn my life over to you. Lord Jesus, because you died for me, I will live for you. And help me, Lord Jesus, never ever to be ashamed of you. Give me the courage to make it public. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Christ of Every Crisis

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: May 6, 2001**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 12:1–10**

*“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.”*

ACTS 12:1

## Outline

Introduction

- I. Respect the Mystery of God’s Providence
  - II. Request the Ministry of God’s People
    - A. The Frequency of the Prayer
    - B. The Fervency of the Prayer
    - C. The Fellowship of the Prayer
    - D. The Faith of the Prayer
    - E. The Focus of the Prayer
  - III. Rest in the Mastery of God’s Peace
  - IV. Rejoice in the Majesty of God’s Power
- Conclusion

## Introduction

Turn to Acts chapter 12, please, and I want us to think today about “The Christ of Every Crisis.” Now, we all have troubles—we all have troubles. They come every day, but every so often we come to a crisis—I mean an industrial-strength crisis—and we really don’t know where to turn, unless we turn to the Lord.

And, a crisis may come unexpectedly. It may come ferociously, just out of the blue—I mean, a full-blown crisis. Somebody said, “If you can keep your head when all of those round about you are losing theirs, it just may be a sign that you don’t understand the situation.” Or, it may be—it may be—that you do understand some things that I’m going to be sharing with you today from the Word of God.

Chapter 12, verse 1: *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him”—that is, Peter—“in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter”—that literally means “after Passover”—“to bring him*

*forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And [the] chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself...bind on thy sandals...so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not”—“and knew not”—“that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. [And] when they were past the first and...second ward, they came unto the iron gate [which] leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.” (Acts 12:1–10)*

Now, stop there. We'll take up the reading here a little later, but let me give you the background again, reiterate what happened. Herod was a wild, a ruthless, a wicked, and a vile man. He wanted to torture, to vex, to disturb the Church. He had already taken James, the brother of John, and had put him to death. He saw that pleased the multitude. He said, “All right, I'll get the big guy; I'll get Peter.” And so, he put Peter in prison, said, “After Passover I'm going to bring him out, and I'll make him a foot shorter at the top. I'll take off his head.” Herod was absolutely ferocious, vile, wicked, and cruel. Now, that's the situation, and it was indeed a great, great crisis.

How do you handle a crisis? What do you do in times of crisis? Well, I want to give you four thoughts today—and put them down because you will need them. You may need them right now. Some of you who are listening to me right now are in the very midst of a genuine crisis. But if not, you will be.

## **I. Respect the Mystery of God's Providence**

Number one: We should respect the mystery—understand the word now. We should *respect*, not *reflect*; we should *respect*—respect the mystery of God's providence. As you look in this chapter, there's one word that comes through; it is *providence*. That is, you're going to see the hidden hand of God. God is going to be working in a mysterious way, an inexplicable way. God is going to be in the shadows arranging things, moving things that people cannot see, and that may be very true in your life right now. God is working, but you cannot see God working. You may be in the middle of chaos right now—nothing seems to be making sense; everything that you thought you had nailed down is coming loose, and the devil is pulling nails.

Now, listen to me: just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean that it does not make sense. Many of us have many questions. As we look at this chapter, we

would say, “Well, why did God let Herod be king anyway? Isn’t God God? How could God let a rascal like Herod be the king? If I were God, I’d turn him into a frog. And why should James be killed and Peter released? Why is that? Does God have favorites? Is God capricious, or has God lost control? And why do all of these things happen?” Now friend, I want to tell you something: we do not live by explanations. *Life is not a problem to be solved; it is a mystery to be lived.* And, you have to back off sometimes and just simply see what I’m going to call “the hidden hand of God,” and you need to respect that.

¶ Have you ever watched a painter paint a picture—put his colors on canvas? Sometimes I get great recreation watching this old man who paints while you watch. He can in one half hour do a beautiful painting. Some of you have seen him. He’s an old guy. He’s got some sort of an accent. I don’t know what kind it is, but he says, “Yeah, ha. I put this on, yes.” And, he’s just splashing the colors on that canvas, and he’s mixing this, says, “I think a little more yellow, yeah.” And, he’s just putting it there. And, you know, I look, and I say, “Man, that guy’s so good. How does he do that? Everything just turns out good.” And then, the guy reaches in, and he’ll get some colors; and he’ll go *swoosh!* I think, “Oh, you ruined it! You ruined it.” He put some big old splashy thing on it; maybe it’s going to be a tree in the foreground. I said, “Mister, you really messed up. Let’s see how you’re going to get out of this.” And then, all of a sudden, it just comes together. It’s a masterpiece.

Sometimes we look at what God does as God puts His colors on the canvas, and we say, “Lord, you’re really doing good.” And then, all of a sudden, God just goes *swoosh!* “Lord! You have messed things up.” Have you ever felt that way? “God, how did you let this happen?” Now, it doesn’t make sense to me when I watch that man do it, but it makes sense to him. And, just because things are not making sense to you, do not think that they don’t make sense. And, just because you can’t see God working doesn’t mean God is not working.¶

Here is Herod’s ungodly power. Here is James’s death. Here’s Peter’s release. You have all of these things working together. We call that “the sovereignty of God”; we call that “the providence of God.” And, you just put there in your margin “Romans 8:28”: “*And we know*”—we know. We K-N-O-W. We know—“*that all things work together for good to [those who] love God...who are the called according to his purpose.*” (Romans 8:28)

Now, most of us have the idea that we go through life, and life is all good, and then life gets bad; then it gets good again. Generally, it’s not that way. Life is not like forty miles of bad road or good road, and then ten miles of bad road, and then sixty miles of good road. No, generally life is generally more like a railroad track—one rail good and one rail bad, and the good and the bad seem to be running parallel. Do you ever notice

that? I mean, wonderful things are happening—blessings and bad things—at the same time? There seem to be certain troubles in life, and we can't always just make them work out together. Good and bad seem to run on parallel tracks.

Now, many of us don't understand that, so we're wanting to get to the time of life when there won't be any bad things happening. You know: "So I'll be glad when all of this is over; and so, then we can do what we want to do." If you're in school: "I'll be glad when school's over. Then I can start doing what I want to do." If the children are little: "I'll be glad when the children are grown so then I can do what I want to do." When I'm sick: "I'll be glad when I get well so then I can begin to serve God as I want." No, no. The good and the bad—they are there, and they are working together. Sometimes we would like to just maybe live life without the bad.

¶ Here's a girl who marries a boy, and the parents say, "Don't marry him. Sweetheart, the boy doesn't have the character. He doesn't have what we believe it takes to make a good husband." But, she says she loves him, she's going to marry him. And so, the parents try to make the best they can out of the situation. They want to love their prospective son-in-law. They get married, and a little baby comes along. Then, after a while, he turns out to be a philanderer—he turns out to be the person the parents were afraid that he might be—and he leaves her. Well, I want to ask you, mother, if you could, would you just turn the clock back and say, "I don't want her to marry that boy"? If I could just turn the clock back and say, "No, they won't get married," would you do it? Be careful how you answer because if you say "yes," you're going to have to give up that grandbaby, that little baby that you've come to love so much.¶

You see, isn't life mysterious? Isn't life mysterious? There are the bad things, the good things. God, in the crucible of His wisdom, He mixes these things together for His glory. "And we know that all things work together for good." (Romans 8:28) You don't live by explanations. Friend, you will never ever explain God. You live by promises. And so, you'll never get it all figured out. You know, if you're a kid, you wonder, "Why does God put the vitamins in spinach and not in ice cream?" You let God be God. You should respect—listen to this—the mystery of God's providence. Allow God to be God. And, just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean it doesn't make sense. And, if you're in a crisis, don't demand to understand, okay?

## II. Request the Ministry of God's People

Number two: You should request the ministry of God's people. Now, what is the ministry of God's people? It is prayer. Look now in verse 5: "*Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*" (Acts 12:5) That is a great verse on prayer. Look at it again: "[*But*] Peter therefore was kept in prison"—"*Peter therefore was kept in prison*"—"but prayer was made without ceasing of the

*church unto God for him.*” (Acts 12:5) Now, there seems to be no hope for Peter. Peter is in maximum security. The prison is guarded on the outside with two guards by the door. There are sixteen guards who are guarding Peter. He must have been fairly important for sixteen personal guards to guard him. And, besides all of that, he’s chained to a guard on this hand and he’s chained to a guard on that hand. I would say, brother! Talk about a man who is in a pickle! He’s in a pickle. And, on top of that, he is sentenced to death, and a wicked king says, “Soon, I’m going to execute you.”

Now that, friend, is a crisis. You may think you have a crisis, but Peter is really in a crisis. There seems to be no hope for Peter. Every door is shut—every door except one, and that’s the one that goes straight up. That was the door they could not shut—that you, we, can pray. In a crisis, there’s always prayer. And, when there’s no hope on the horizontal level, there’s always hope on the vertical level.

Now, I want us to look at this prayer, and I want us to just pull over and park here for a moment, because when there’s the mystery of God’s providence, there’s the ministry of God’s people.

#### **A. The Frequency of the Prayer**

Now, watch it. I want you to see, first of all, what I’m going to call “the frequency of the prayer.” Look at verse 5: *“prayer was made without ceasing.”* (Acts 12:5) Now, they prayed, and they did not stop praying. And, they may have asked, “Why doesn’t God answer our prayer?” Peter’s kept in prison, and God doesn’t seem to be in a hurry to get him out. But, God is trying to teach them a lesson about prayer, and one of the great lessons about prayer is persistence. The Bible says, “Ask, seek, and knock,” (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9) but it literally says, “Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking.” And, in Luke chapter 18 and verse 1, the Bible says, *“And [Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1)—that is, “not to stop praying.” And, you need to learn that God’s delays are not denials, okay? There’s the frequency of the prayer.

#### **B. The Fervency of the Prayer**

And then, also notice the fervency of the prayer. Got it? The fervency of the prayer. This word “without ceasing” may be translated “intensely.” They were praying intensely. I wonder, what do we know about intense prayer? I’ll tell you one thing: when you’re in a crisis, you learn how to pray with intensity, don’t you? Many of us prayed this morning, but I daresay that there are those in this building today, if I were to ask you, interrogate you, you could not tell me with specificity what you prayed for this morning. It’s just sort of a general prayer with no real intensity. I love Jeremiah 29, verse 13, where God says, *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13)

One of the things that I'm trying to cure myself of is casual prayer—prayer that is not intense, prayer that costs little. Do you know the Bible calls prayer “wrestling”? Romans chapter 15, verse 30: Paul said, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake...for the love of the Spirit, that [you] strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”* (Romans 15:30)—“that you strive together.” Have you ever thought of prayer as striving, as wrestling? How much genuine agonizing do we do in prayer? If you really get into intercession, you’re going to find out that the devil will fight you and oppose you. Prayer is work. I’d rather preach for an hour than to pray for a half an hour, so far as the labor that it takes for genuine prayer.

There’s the frequency of the prayer. There’s the fervency of the prayer. Sometimes we don’t feel like praying, so we’ll say, “We’ll not pray.” Friend, if there’s ever a time that you need to pray, it’s when you don’t feel like it. Now, you pray ’til you do feel like it, but pray. Pray not only frequently, but fervently.

### C. **The Fellowship of the Prayer**

And then, there’s the fellowship of the prayer. The Bible says that it *“was made...of the church.”* (Acts 12:5) Look in verse 5 again: *“prayer was made without ceasing of the church”* (Acts 12:5) That is, they came together to pray. Didn’t Jesus say, *“Where two or three [of you] are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20) and, *“If [any] two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it [will] be done for them of my Father which is in heaven”?* (Matthew 18:19) God is pleased when His children pray, but God is more pleased when His children pray in fellowship. There’s nothing that will bind us together as a church more than praying. If you’ve ever had a prayer partner, you know that your heart and his heart, or her heart, are linked together. There are times when God comes, when the Church prays, that is glorious and wonderful. It is what we call “the fellowship of prayer.” This prayer was made of the Church for Peter.

### D. **The Faith of the Prayer**

And then, I want you to notice the faith of the prayer. The prayer was unto God—it was unto God. *“Prayer was made...unto God.”* (Acts 12:5) They were not praying to one another. They were not praying to impress one another. So many of our prayers are little memorized prayers.

¶ I heard about a young lawyer, just got his degree, opened up his brand-spanking new law offices. He didn’t have any clients, didn’t even really have a secretary, but he had his shingle out front. He heard footfalls in the hallway, thought his first client was coming, so he picked up the phone like he was busy and said, “Hello. Yes. No, I’m sorry; I can’t. No, no, perhaps next Thursday. I have a heavy corporation case coming up on Wednesday, and so forth, but perhaps we can arrange it.” And, he put the phone

down. By this time, the man was standing in front of his desk, and he said, “Yes, sir. What may I do for you?” He said, “Well, I’m from the telephone company. I came to hook up your telephone.” Many times our prayers are that way—trying to impress somebody else, but there’s no one on the line.†

These people, they weren’t trying to impress anybody else. They were desperate. Their prayer was unto God. (Acts 12:5)

You know, today I think the reason we don’t pray with frequency and fervency is because we think we can do it without prayer. You know, perhaps the worst thing about us is not our prayerlessness, but our pride. I mean, we have our machinery, we have our plans, we have our methods, we have our pastors, we have our choirs, we have our Bible fellowship, we have our buildings, we have this, we have that; and so, we come to church and think, “Well, we’ll do it. We know how to do it.”

And, you know what the devil does? The devil stands in the corner and smirks, says, “You can have your buildings. You can have your choirs. You can have your fellowships. You can have your preacher. You can have all—everything you want. You can even have your Bible studies, as long as you leave out the power of God that comes with fervent prayer that will not take ‘no’ for an answer.” The devil mocks at our schemes, laughs at our organizations, ridicules our talents, but he fears our prayers.

Now, these people are going to pray. Peter’s in prison. They’re going to pray. They can’t get a petition, bring it to the government. They don’t have money to bribe Herod to get him out of prison. They don’t have political influence. But, they’re gong to pray. And, the world may laugh, but friend, the devil didn’t laugh. Someone has wisely said, “The devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.” There is the focus of the prayer. The prayer is unto God. (Acts 12:5) And, God is God, and God controls the universe. We need to learn that—that when we’re speaking, when we’re praying, we are praying to God. And so, there’s the faith of the prayer.

### **E. The Focus of the Prayer**

And then, there’s the focus of the prayer. Look in verse 5 again. The Bible says, “*therefore...prayer*”—prayer—“*was made without ceasing of the church unto God*”—now, watch this—“*for him.*” (Acts 12:5) They were praying for Peter. It was a prayer, not only with intensity, but with specificity.

What did you pray for this morning? Do you know, so many of our prayers are so vague, if God were to answer them, we wouldn’t know it, and if God didn’t answer them, we wouldn’t have to admit it. “Lord, save the lost this morning.” Well, if somebody gets saved, you can say, “Well, I prayed for somebody to be saved, and a lost person got saved.” How do you know that was your prayer? How do you know that wasn’t my prayer, somebody else’s prayer? You know, we have these vague, general prayers. At

least when they're praying for Peter and the answer came, they knew it was an answer to prayer. Isn't that right? It was made for him. (Acts 12:5)

‡ Have you ever had anybody, when you visit somebody, and they say to you, "Y'all come see us sometime. Y'all stop by. Y'all come see us sometime"? They don't mean that. I'll tell you what, if they say this: "Hey, man, I've got some of the finest steaks you've ever seen in the freezer. Could y'all come by next Saturday at five and we'll have a cookout?" they mean it. That's with specificity.‡

What are you praying for? What are you asking God for? When you say, "Lord, I want you to do this or do that," if God were to answer your prayer, would you even know it? You see, there's the focus of the prayer. It was for Peter, and God answered.

Now, when you're in a crisis, respect the mystery of God's providence. Friend, request the ministry of God's people. We have a prayer ministry in our church, and if you have a crisis, you call, and people will pray. We have prayer that goes around the clock, and we want to pray for those particular needs.

You know what voicemail is? Do you enjoy voicemail, as you call and you get a recording? Aren't you glad heaven hasn't installed voicemail? Can you imagine praying and hearing the following: "Thank you for calling heaven. Your prayers are important to us. Please select one of the following options: press '1' for a request; press '2' for thanksgiving; press '3' for complaints; press '4' for all other inquiries. I'm sorry that all the angels are helping other sinners right now. However, your prayer is important to us, and we will answer it in the order in which it was received. Please stay on the line. If you would like to hear King David sing a psalm while you're holding, press '4.' If you're checking on a loved one that has been assigned to heaven, press '5' and then enter his or her Social Security number followed by the pound sign. If you get a negative response, please hang up, and try area code '666.' For reservations in heaven, please enter 'J-O-H-N' followed by the numbers '3-1-6'"—you'll get that later—"For answers to nagging questions about dinosaurs, the age of the earth, life on other planets, and where Noah's ark is, please wait until you arrive. Our computer shows that you have already prayed once today. Please hang up and try again tomorrow. The office is now closed for the weekend to observe a religious holiday. Please pray again on Monday after 9:30 a.m. If you're calling after hours and need emergency assistance, please contact your local pastor. Thank you for calling heaven." Aren't you glad it's not that way? Aren't you glad that there's a God who says, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee." (Psalms 86:7)

### **III. Rest in the Mastery of God's Peace**

Here's the third thing: When you're in a crisis, number three, we should rest in the mastery of God's peace. Now, there's the mystery of His providence; there's the

ministry of His people, and there is the mastery of His peace in the midst of the storm. Look in verse 6: *“And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night”—* watch this—*“Peter was sleeping”—*good night! Peter’s sleeping—*“between two soldiers, bound with two chains”—*I don’t know whether they were asleep, but here’s old Peter asleep—*“and the keepers before the door kept the prison”—*there he is. The next morning he’s to be executed, and there he is asleep. And, you know, he’s sleeping so sound that the angel has to punch him in the ribs to wake him up. Look. Look, if you will, in verse 7—*“And, behold, the angel of the Lord came [in] upon him, and [the] light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up.”* (Acts 12:6–7) Can you imagine? “Hey, Pete, wake up! Wake up!” “Huh?” Here’s Peter, sound asleep the night before his scheduled execution. This is peace. This is peace in the midst of the storm.

I thought about this as I read this. I said, “How could Peter sleep in such a crisis?” Well, number one: He’s no longer afraid of death. He’s seen the risen Christ. I’ve told you before, *a man is not ready to live until he’s no longer afraid to die*. He—Peter—has seen the risen Christ, and for this man, death holds no real terrors for him. Number two: He knows that God’s people are praying for him. That’s one of the great things that helps me in my ministry: I know you’re praying for me—not all of you, but most of you, many of you, some of you. One of you? You are praying. What strength there is! What joy! What victory! I have a sense so many times when I’m doing what I’m doing—there is this peace, this buoyancy, and you know that it’s because God’s people are praying. Peter knew those folks were bombarding heaven for him, and that’s the reason he was asleep. And also, he is aware of God’s presence, because he knew that the Bible says, *“He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”* (Psalms 121:4)

I heard about a man who was in a crisis, and he thought about this verse of Word: *“He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”* (Psalms 121:4) He said, “Well, Lord, there’s no need for both of us to stay up all night. Good night. I’m going to sleep while you stay awake.” The Bible says, *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”* (Isaiah 26:3)

Friend, listen to me. Turn your problem over to Him. Roll it on the Lord—I don’t care how big it is. There’s the mastery of God’s peace. *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.”* (Isaiah 26:3) Again, Paul says in Philippians 4: *“Be careful for nothing”—*that means “don’t worry about anything”—*“but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God”—*listen to it—*“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall [guard]”—*“shall keep”—*“your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6–7) They thought they were guarding Peter in prison. No, God’s peace was guarding him. God’s peace had garrisoned about.

#### IV. Rejoice in the Majesty of God's Power

All right, respect the mystery of God's providence. Request the ministry of God's people—prayer. Rest in the mastery of God's peace in the midst of your storm—I don't care what it is. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."* (Isaiah 26:3) Take your eyes off the storm and put them on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, last of all, rejoice—rejoice—in the majesty of God's power.

Now, do you think that God was out of control when James was killed? Do you think that God was out of control when Peter was put in prison? No, no. God is on His throne. Let's begin in verse 7 now: *"And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him"—that is, upon Peter—"and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And [the] chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals...so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. [And] when they were past the first and the second ward"—they keep on walking right on past these guards—"they came [to] the iron gate [which] leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of [its] own accord."* (Acts 12:7–10)

Do you remember the first time—well, no, not you youngsters, but some of you are my age—do you remember the first time you saw an automatic door? I can remember it. I saw somebody shake their head. Betty, you shook your head. Well, you know, my brother and I went downtown. We walked up to that door, and it would open. We'd go back outside, come back again, walk to that door, and it would open—most amazing thing I'd ever seen. Well, that's not new. Here it is right here in Acts chapter 12. This door, this iron gate, just opens of its own accord, and Peter walks on out. It is an incredible story of God's power.

But now, I want you to notice this: *"they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith"*—I'm in verse 10—*"the angel departed from him."* (Acts 12:10) The angel took him only so far and then said, "All right, Pete, so long." I want you to see how God's power is working here. Some people might have thought that God was weak and couldn't do anything, or that God was unconcerned and did not care. And, you may feel that in your problem. You may say, "Where is God? Where is God? Is God able?" or, "Doesn't God care?"

And, it's a very interesting thing that Peter's deliverance came at the last moment. I mean, God is very leisurely in this thing. As a matter of fact, all of this story is marked by leisure. When the angel comes in: "Hey, Pete, wake up. Tsk ts. Get up"—hits him in the rib—"Come on, son, get up." "What time is it?" "Never mind what time it is. We're going to make a jailbreak. Now Pete, put on your clothes. Pete, put on your sandals. Now Pete, put on your coat." I mean, if you're making a jailbreak, do you get dressed up

as you're going out—I mean, putting on your shoes and everything? What he's saying: "Hey, Pete, we're going out in class. We're not sneaking out of this place. We're going out in real class." There's such leisure about the whole thing. God moves in majesty and leisure. And, they walk out—and through the first gate, the second gate; here's the iron gate, first ward, second ward. Here's the iron gate—just swings open. And then, the angel leaves him.

Now, there is something very interesting. After that iron gate opens, Peter is going to go where the prayer meeting is, and the people are there at the house. The door is shut; the front gate is locked, and they're having a prayer meeting now. Well, Peter now has made this prison break, and he realizes it's not a vision; it's for real. So, he goes there where they're having the prayer meeting. He knocks on the door. A little maid comes, and she looks through the peephole. "Whew! It's Peter." She doesn't even say, "Peter, come in!" She goes back and says, "Hey, folks! God has heard our prayer: Peter's at the door." They say, "Rhoda, you must be having a vision. Would you go leave us alone? We're praying for Peter to get out of prison." Here's Peter over here: "Let me in!" Do you know, it was easier for him to get out of prison than it was to get in that prayer meeting. That's an amazing thing! If the Lord could open a prison gate, don't you think He could cause that garden gate to open, or whatever it was? I want you to learn a lesson: prayer is never an excuse for laziness.

Now, there was no way that Peter could open that prison gate, but there was a way that other gate could've been opened. We can't change water into wine, but we can fill earthen pots, can't we? We can't raise Lazarus from the dead, but we can take the grave clothes off, can't we? You see, there are certain things that we can do, and prayer is never an excuse for laziness. And, we need to understand that we're to pray to God for daily bread, but the Bible also says, "*If [a man won't] work, neither should he eat.*" (2 Thessalonians 3:10) Don't you love the balance of the Word of God? But, here is God moving in majestic power. God is still on His throne.

## Conclusion

Now, in the last part of this chapter—and we don't have time to get to it—old King Herod is stricken dead because of his arrogance and his pride and is "*eaten of worms.*" (Acts 12:23) It's a gruesome type of thing, but you see the hidden hand of God in all of it.

And, listen to me: if you are in a situation and God doesn't deliver you, remember He didn't deliver James. It's not because He can't. And, if God is not working according to what you can see, it doesn't mean that God is not working. And, if evil seems to succeed, just remember that the success of evil is only temporary. Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather temporarily fail with a cause that must ultimately succeed than to temporarily succeed with a cause which must ultimately fail."

Now, if you're in a crisis—and some of you are in a real crisis—let me give you four things to remember: Number one, don't demand to understand; you'll never figure it out. Number two: Remember the resource of prayer. Number three: Put your eyes upon God and rest in His love. And, number four: Expect God's power to move in His own time and in His own way. And friend, He will do it. He's the Christ of every crisis.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, how many in this building could say, "Pastor Rogers, you've been talking to believers today, to Christians..." How many of you could say, "I truly am a believer, a born-again Christian"? How many today could say, "Pastor Rogers, I know—not I think or I feel, but I know—that I'm saved. I've been born again. I've been saved by the power of God. I have a Bible reason for saying it, a changed life that shows it, and God's Spirit witnesses with my spirit that I'm a child of God. And, I know by God's grace, if I should die today, I would go straight to heaven, not because I feel it sentimentally, but because I have a Bible reason for knowing it"? If you can give me that testimony that you know that you're saved beyond any shadow of any doubt, would you lift your hand? All right now, take it down. I didn't do that so I could see; I just wanted you to think about it.

Now, if you couldn't lift your hand, I want to pray for you. I know you're interested in spiritual things or you wouldn't be here today. And, I want to tell you today that God brought you here because He loves you. I don't believe your attendance here today is an accident. God wants you to be saved, and the Bible says, "If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust Him, He'll save you." (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9) He paid for your sin with His blood on the cross. Your sin debt has already been paid. He rose from the dead. He has ascended the high hills of glory. He presents Himself now to you through the Spirit. If you trust Him and receive Him, He'll forgive every sin; He will enter your life to give you power, and peace, and joy, and victory. And, when you die, or when He comes again, He'll bring you home to heaven.

If you want to be saved, you can pray a prayer like this: "Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I'm lost. I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you right now with all of my heart. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus"—pray it from your heart and mean it—"Save me, Jesus." And then, thank Him for doing it, and tell Him that you'll not be ashamed of Him, that you'll make it public, that you will follow Him.

Lord, I pray that many will do that today. In your name I pray. Amen.†

# Victory Through Prayer

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** April 5, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 12:1–11

*“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”*

ACTS 12:5

## Outline

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## Introduction

Take God’s Word, and find with me, please, Acts chapter 12. We’re continuing through the Book of Acts under the theme “That Old-Time Religion.” And, I will remind you that that old-time religion is the “new-time” religion, the “all-time” religion, the “every-time” religion, and the “any-time” religion. Today, I want to talk to you about prayer—not just “now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep” kind of prayer, but victorious prayer. As you read the Book of Acts, ladies and gentlemen, there is the shout of victory, the ring of victory, and the shout of triumph on every page in the Book of Acts. These people learned how to pray, and they saturated their lives with prayer. And, God gave the victory.

Now, compare that with the average Christian today. Compare that with the average church today. Compare that with Christendom, as a whole, today. We are failing in our battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And, the reason that we fail, ladies and gentlemen, is that, primarily and fundamentally, we do not know how to pray. There’s not a failure in your life or in my life that is not a prayer failure, if you properly analyze it. There’s not a need in my life or in your life that could not be met if we knew how to pray and would practice what we know. There’s not a sin in my life or in your life that proper prayer would not have avoided. As Jesus said, *“Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into*

*temptation*” (Mark 14:38). How important it is that we learn how to pray!

The 12th chapter in the Book of Acts has a wonderful lesson on prayer, and we’re going to look at it. I want us to begin reading now in verse 1: *“Now about that time Herod”—and, by the way, Herod was a vile, venomous king—“about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword”—he’s a murderous man, you see—“And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers”—that’s 16 soldiers—“to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison”—but now, I want you to notice the key to this passage—“but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of its own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the LORD hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews”* (Acts 12:1–11).

## **I. The Freedom of Their Prayer**

Now, there are some things that I want you to learn about victorious prayer, and the very first is this: it’s what I’m going to call “the freedom to prayer”—“the freedom to prayer,” or, “the freedom of this prayer.” Now, you notice the Bible says that Peter was in prison, but prayer was made. Now, can you imagine how hopeless it is for this man—I mean, outwardly? Here he is in a dark dungeon—in a deep, secure dungeon. He’s such an important prisoner that there are 16 people that are assigned to him personally to guard him. Furthermore, they want to make so certain that he doesn’t escape that they have chains on him. He’s chained on one side to a soldier, and he’s chained on the other side to a soldier. Now, they’re going to put him to death. Murderous old Herod has already killed James with the sword. I imagine that he beheaded James. And, he saw that he gained so much popularity with the enemies of the gospel that he said, “I’ll do

the same to Peter. He's the big fisherman. They all like him. I'll put him to death, and I'm going to do it in just a few days." And, he announced the day that Peter is to be executed.

Now, what are these disciples going to do? I mean, how are they going to get Peter out of prison? Are they going to organize a mob and storm the prison? Not a chance with that little handful motley crew. Well, what are they going to do? Are they going to get some petitions up? Are they going to say, "Now look, we are influential citizens in this city, and we demand that you release Simon Peter?" They had no influence. What are they going to do? Are they going to take a collection, get a lot of money, and go in and bribe Herod? They didn't have any money. "*Silver and gold have I none*" (Acts 3:6), and what they had, they had distributed to feed the poor in order to take care of those who were in distress in that time. What were they going to do? I'll tell you what they were going to do: they were going to pray.

Now, the intelligencia would sneer and say, "Look at these silly people down on their knees in prayer." I'll tell you one person who didn't sneer—and it was the devil. It has well been said that Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. There is an animal named the gnu—G-N-U: that's the way that you spell it—and when he's attacked, he drops to his knees. Would to God that the Church could learn the same thing, dear friend. It is the freedom to pray. Every other door was closed, but there was one that was opened; it went straight up. And, they could pray.

Now friend, the devil may do many things to inhibit you, but there's one thing that he can't do: he can't stop you from praying. I mean, there may be iron doors all around you, there may be chains all over you, there may be people all against you—but you can pray. We talk about how kids can't pray in school—that's ridiculous. You can pray anywhere, any time, and in any place—in prison, in school, in the office, any place—you can pray. Isn't that wonderful—the freedom to pray, the freedom to pray? "*But prayer was made*" (Acts 12:5). Ladies and gentlemen, prayer should not be our last resort; it ought to be our first thought—our first opportunity. There is the freedom to pray. Would to God that we could learn how to pray and to take advantage of the opportunity of this freedom!

## **II. The Faithfulness of Their Prayer**

But, I want you to notice something else: I want you to notice, not only the freedom of that prayer, but I want you to notice what I'm going to call "the faithfulness of that prayer." Look again, if you will, in God's Word in verse 5: "*Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing*"—without ceasing. Notice the faithfulness of this prayer. They prayed; they prayed; and they prayed some more. They did not quit praying. Do you know what's wrong with many of our prayers? We have a take-it-or-

leave-it attitude toward prayer. We ask God to do something for us, and if God doesn't seemingly answer right away, then we just kind of stop praying. But, these people didn't. They prayed; they prayed, and they prayed again.

Now, I don't know why God doesn't always immediately answer our prayers. There's a mystery to prayer. But, I'll tell you this much about it: our God says that we are to keep on praying. As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus gave a special parable. It's found in Luke chapter 18 and verse 1. Don't turn to it right now, but you might put it in your margin. But, that story begins, *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1). That means not to stop praying. *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Galatians 6:9). Jesus said, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"* (Matthew 7:7). And, in the Greek language, He is literally saying, "Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. Don't quit!" *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1). They prayed constantly. They prayed frequently. They prayed faithfully, "Lord..." They prayed without ceasing—the faithfulness of their prayers.

Sometimes it takes a long time to get your prayers answered. There've been two porno palaces in our city that I have prayed against for a long time, because I have to drive past them when I go home. Now, I have certain prayer habits. One of the habits is this: I pray in different places about different things. When I pass a particular church, frequently I will pray for the pastor of that church, and I'll pray for the ministry of that church. If there's somebody whose house I pass by, I'll pray for that person as I drive past their house, as I think about them. When I would drive past these two porno places, I would put a curse on them. Now, the Bible says that with our mouth we can bless, and with our mouth we can curse. I didn't cuss them. Jesus cursed a fig tree; He put a curse on it. I didn't curse the people—I love the people. God loves the people. We're not angry at people; we're angry at sin. And, in the name of Jesus, I would say, "O God, O God, in the name of Jesus, I put a curse upon that business that's destroying homes and that business that is wrecking purity and spreading disease and vileness. O God, I curse that in the name of Jesus. Lord, I ask You to remove that." It dawned on me the other day, as I drove past, friend, that the buildings are not even there—I mean, not one stone is left upon another. I mean, even the very places have been dismantled. Now, I have to confess that I prayed for a long time, and I would sometimes say, "Lord, why? Why don't You hear my prayer? Why do I wait so long?" But, I've learned that God's delays are not God's denials. *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1). There's the faithfulness of their prayers. They prayed continually.

### III. The Fervency of Their Prayer

Now, I want you to notice something else: I want you to notice the fervency of their prayer. Look again in verse 5: these words *“without ceasing”* (Acts 12:5) may be translated into “fervently”—“fervently.” It’s one of those kinds of words that have double meanings, and it means that they prayed with intensity; they prayed with fire and with fervency. I’ll tell you something else that’s wrong with many of our prayers: we pray with such casualness—with half-heartedness. Half-heartedness is an insult to God. The Bible says in Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 13: *“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”*—*“with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13). *“A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways”* (James 1:8). These people prayed fervently.

I read of the Lord Jesus—about when Jesus prayed—and the Bible says in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 5, and verse 7: *“he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears”* (Hebrews 5:7). When’s the last time that you prayed with tears? I read about when our Lord Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane—that the perspiration, the sweat, was as drops of blood upon His brow, as the minute capillaries ruptured (Luke 22:44). He was in such intensity as He prayed. Prayer is hard work. That’s the reason that many of us don’t pray: it requires concentration, and it requires effort. It’s harder to pray than it is to preach. It’s harder to pray than it is to study. It’s harder to pray than it is to sing. It is harder to pray than almost anything, because prayer is work. I’ll tell you, dear friend, prayer is warfare. When you pray, you enter into spiritual warfare; you enter into the heavenlies. And, the devil will oppose you when you’re praying. Now, the devil doesn’t mind everything else we do as long as we leave out prayer. He’ll say, “Go ahead and have your magnificent choir program. Go ahead and have Living Pictures. Go ahead and have your sermons. Go ahead and have your Sunday School. Go ahead and have your fellowship. Go ahead and have your visitation program. Go ahead and do all of it as long as you leave out the power of Almighty God that comes through fervent prayer.” The devil sneers at our organization; the devil laughs at our personalities, but he fears our prayer. And, that’s the reason, dear friend, that when you go to pray, you’re going to feel opposition.

Do you ever feel opposition when you pray? Of course you do. The flesh doesn’t want to pray. The Bible says the flesh is in enmity against God (Romans 8:7). There’s that old nature that doesn’t want to pray. And, not only do you have that inward predisposition against prayer in your flesh, but you have that outward opposition against prayer. And, the devil will cause your mind to wander. The doorbell will ring. The beans will burn. The baby will cry. It doesn’t matter what’ll happen—something will happen to keep you from praying. Why? Because it is warfare—it is warfare.

Let me give you a verse of Scripture. Paul said in Romans chapter 15 and verse 30:

*“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me”—notice the words “strive together with me”—“in your prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30). Strive—that’s a word that means “to labor.” Friend, there’s the rest of faith, but there is the fight of faith, also. We need to learn how to pray fervently—to mean business with God. I want to tell you one more time that *God does business with those that mean business*. “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).*

There have been times when I’ve known that I didn’t want to pray. Don’t look so pious—you’ve been the same way. And, I’ll tell you, dear friend, that when you don’t feel like praying, that’s the time that you’d better pray. You pray when you feel like it; you pray when you don’t feel like it, and you pray until you do feel like it. I have found out that sometimes my carnal flesh doesn’t want to pray, and I just make an announcement—I say, “Dear God. I don’t feel like praying, but I know that You want me to pray, and I’m going to pray. And, if I die on my knees, then I’m going to stay on my knees until I make contact with You.” And, by about that time, I’m already there—at about that time, when I just make up my mind that fears may beset me and foes may oppose me, yet I will enter in. There’s the fervency of that prayer. God knows I need more.

In Tibet, they have what they call a “prayer wheel.” They write their prayers on slips of paper and put them in a little cup or a little dish. And, they balance that dish on the end of a stick, and they whirl it around like that. And, they just hold it over their heads—just whirling it around like that—and their prayers are in that dish. Every time that the dish goes around, it’s supposed to be a prayer. They call that a “prayer wheel.” You say, “That’s silly.” Well, I know Baptists who do the same thing—only the wheels are in their heads. I mean, they just repeat little prayers, little rote memorizations. God doesn’t hear that prayer. Jesus said, *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 6:7)*. I mean, we need to pray, dear friend, with a fervency—to mean business with God, to strive together in your prayers.

#### **IV. The Fellowship of Their Prayer**

The freedom of the prayer—they could pray. The faithfulness of their prayer—they prayed without ceasing. The fervency of their prayer—they did business with God, because, dear friend, they were desperate. I want you to notice, also, what I’m going to call “the fellowship of their prayer.” They prayed together. Now, notice: *“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5)*. And, by the way, these are the only people that really have the promise that their prayer is going to be answered. Turn with me, if you will, to 1 John

chapter 5. Let me show you something. John is talking about being saved, and he says here in 1 John chapter 5, verses 13–15: *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him”* (1 John 5:13–15). Now, who is the “us” to whom he’s referring? It refers to those who have believed on His name—to those who are saved. Prayer is for people who can pray in Jesus’s name.

Prayer is for the Church. Jesus said to His Church in Matthew 18, verses 19 and 20: *“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 18:19). What a wonderful, wonderful promise that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us in prayer! And so, we need to learn how to pray and to trust the Lord. Matthew 18—let me read that passage of Scripture to you—Matthew 18, beginning with verse 18: *“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:18–20). And, that tells us that if prayer was made of that church so long ago, then prayer needs to be made of this church. I mean, we need to pray, folks. Your Sunday School class needs to be an enclave of prayer. Your deacon group needs to be a time of prayer. Your fellowships ought to open and close with prayer. Committee meetings need to be saturated with prayer. The orchestra—when you meet, you ought to pray. The choirs—before you get ready to sing, you ought to pray, and I don’t mean just say, “Lord, bless us.” Now, I mean pray! Everything we do ought to be saturated with prayer. This church ought to run on the engine of prayer—the fellowship of prayer.

## **V. The Faith of Their Prayer**

Now, I want you to notice the faith of their prayer. The Bible says, again, that their prayer was made unto God (Acts 12:5). Notice again, if you will, in verse 5: *“Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God”—“unto God”* (Acts 12:5). This was the faith of their prayer. They weren’t praying to impress one another. They realized that they were coming into the throne room—that they were speaking with God.

On a few occasions, I’ve had the privilege to meet with the President of the United States. That’s a great privilege. And, I thought, “What would I say? How will I maximize

this time?” Try to consider, now—if I’m going to speak to a man who is this important and who has this much power, should I not think in my own heart and in my own mind, “What I will say?” Should I not prepare myself? Ladies and gentlemen, when we pray, we come into the throne room of the Sovereign of the universe. How thoughtlessly, how carelessly, and how flippantly, I’m afraid, that some of us come before Almighty God in prayer. Their prayer is unto God—unto God.

I was in my study one day, and I had a thought that I believe was the most staggering thought that I’ve ever had in my life. I cannot tell you the weight of that thought as it settled on me. It just shook me to my core; it was the most staggering thought that I’ve ever had. I can still remember the impact that it had on me—and still has on me. I’m going to tell you what it was, and when I tell you what it was, you’re going to say, “Everybody knows that.” And so did I, but yet, I cannot tell you the impact that the thought had on me. Are you ready for it? Here it is: God answers prayer. I thought, “My soul, is that true? I mean, is that true—that the One who made the universe, the God of all eternities, will hear me, and I can have influence in His court? Me—He will hear me! I can pray, and He will hear me and answer me.” And, He’s the One who said, *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* (Jeremiah 33:3). Folks, what a thought! I mean, what a thought—that we can have that privilege to pray to God!

Now folks, listen, if that’s not true—if God doesn’t answer prayer—then why don’t we just quit playing games and all go home, okay? But, if it is true—and it is true—then we’d better learn how to pray, amen? I mean, we can have an audience with the King of kings. *“But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God”* (Acts 12:5). That’s the faith of their prayer.

*Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much (John Newton).*

Thank God for the faith of that prayer.

## **VI. The Focus of their Prayer**

And then, I want you to notice what I’m going to call “the focus of that prayer.” *“But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him”* (Acts 12:5). Whom? Peter. He’s in prison. He’s going to be beheaded. We need to pray for him: “God, we pray for Peter, who is in prison.” The focused prayer—a very specific prayer.

Many of us pray such a generalized prayer that we never have to admit whether God heard our prayer or not, isn’t that true? “Lord, save the lost. Lord, bless the sick. Lord, comfort the bereaved.” Somewhere, somehow, somebody who’s been lost is going to

be saved, and somebody that's sick is going to get well, and you don't know whether it was your prayer or not, right? You see, that's kind of a safe prayer. But, we need to pray these specific prayers so that we will have to admit whether God answered our prayer.

The average person, if you asked him what he prayed for yesterday, couldn't tell you. And again, it's the prayer wheel—just repeating these particular things. But, when you get concerned—you can tell when a person is concerned and when they mean business—they get specific. *You know, have you ever heard anybody who has said something to you like this: "Hey, you all come see us some time. One of these days, you'll all have to come over"? They don't mean it. Let me tell you how you can tell when they mean it: they say, "Hey, look, I've got five of the thickest steaks that you've ever seen in the freezer. Saturday at 5:00—I'm going to have the coals hot. We're going to barbeque those steaks. Can you all be here at 5:00 on Saturday?" Now, they mean business, right? They mean business. That's the difference—the difference. Not just: "You all come just see us some time"—"God, bless the lost."* No, listen, you get specific. "O God, my neighbor—my neighbor—needs Jesus. O God, here's a problem, and God, You know it. And Lord, we lay it before You. And now, God, we expect You to answer and give us what we need. And, if this isn't what we need, then show us it's not what we need and give us what we need. But, we're praying, Lord, for something specific." Here is a prayer that is brought into focus.

Now, you ought to have in your heart, or in your Bible, a list of prayer requests with dates (a prayer record of when you entered it). And, when God answers it, you can give Him the glory and give Him the praise. So, get specific and focused in your prayer, because *prayer that is channeled is prayer that is powerful*. Prayer was made for people.

## **VII. The Force of their Prayer**

Now, last of all, I want you to notice what I'm going to call "the force of that prayer"—"the force of that prayer." What happened? Well, I'll tell you what happened: God answered it, and God delivered Peter from prison. Now, Peter's there in prison, and he's asleep. Would you be asleep if you knew that the next day they were going to execute you—sleeping between two smelly soldiers, chained to one on one hand, and chained to the other on the other hand? And, there's Peter—he's sound asleep. I mean, Peter was so asleep when that angel came in there, that—if you'll read it—the Bible said that the angel smote Peter and said, "Peter, wake up! Get up!" (Acts 12:7). He gave Peter an elbow in the side. He actually had to shake him in order to rouse him. He had to raise him up. I mean, Peter's sawing logs. Why?

I've tried to think about it, and I think that I know one reason why: John 21. (Peter is a young man when this happened to him.) John 21:18: Jesus said, "When you're an old

man, they're going to lead you around." Peter thought, "Well, they say that they're going to kill me, but I'm not old yet. Jesus was talking to me about when I'm an old man. So, whatever's going to happen, I'm not going to die." I don't know—I don't know—why Peter was so calm. Maybe that was just it, dear friend. You know, I think we'd have a lot less sleepless nights if we knew the Word of God, believed the Word of God, and stood on the promises of God. But, for whatever reason, here is Peter, and he is asleep. And, this angel says, "All right. Now get up," and then he says, "Put on your shoes. Put on your clothes, and gird yourself" (Acts 12:8). I like that: "We're not sneaking out—we're going out in class. Dress up." Peter gets something, and he dresses up. And then, the chains fall off. Peter rises up (dressed up), and he and the angel walk out. And, as they start to walk, they pass this guard and another guard. Everybody else is evidently asleep, blinded, or in a stupor—whatever happened to them. And then, they come to this huge iron gate—I mean, a big iron gate. Now remember, this is a prison; this is a fortress. Those gates, like having an electric eye, just open. Peter and the angel walk right out. That's the force of this prayer.

Now, the answer to this prayer was late; it came at the last minute. God was on time, however. Don't you get antsy—don't—only was it late; it was leisurely. God moves in majesty, and they walk out. But, I want to tell you something: it was also limited. The interesting thing is this—and we're going to preach more on this—but the iron gates opened by their will. But, when Peter got outside that iron gate, you're going to find out that he said, "Where will I go?" "Well," he said, "I'd better go to the prayer meeting." Now, they were meeting at Mary's house. That was Mary, the mother of John Mark. And, they're having a prayer meeting there. And so, Peter goes there, and there's a door out there, also. There's a door to the courtyard, and it's a wooden door, I imagine. Peter knocks on the door of the gate. They have a maid. She goes to the door, and she looks out. She says, "Would you imagine? Look, that's Simon Peter." They're in there, praying for Simon. "Hey, folks"—she just leaves him standing there—"Peter's at the door." They say, "Well, no. Look, Peter's in prison. It must be...that must be his ghost. That's an angel or something. Hey, Peter, is this really you?" "Yeah, it's me." "He says that it's really him." And, the Bible says there that Peter is knocking, and knocking, and knocking, and knocking. He's got red knuckles. (The Bible doesn't say that, but that's the original Greek.) All right. Now look, here he is knocking; they're over there praying. Point: God is not going to do for you what you can do for yourself. Peter could never have opened those iron gates, but they could open that wooden door, right?

Now, prayer is no substitute for common sense; it's no substitute for labor, and it's no substitute for work. Jesus said, "You roll away the stone," and then He said, "Lazarus, you come forth." They could roll away the stone, but they couldn't raise Lazarus. You understand what I'm saying? Friend, Peter could not have opened that

iron gate, but they could have opened that wooden door. Now, God does not do for us what we ought to do for ourselves, but we can never do for ourselves what God alone can do. And, when we begin to merge prayer with obedience and common sense, then God begins to work. There's no cheap way, there's no easy way, and there's no lazy way to build a church. And, we must visit, and we must call people if we want our Sunday School class to grow, but we also must pray against the enemy. We must learn, dear friend, that there's a force in prayer—there's a power in prayer. It's not a substitute for work. It's not a substitute for common sense. But, when we begin to pray, then we see what God alone can do. When we depend on organization, we see what organization can do. When we depend upon planning, we see what planning can do. But, when we depend upon prayer, we see what God can do.

## **Conclusion**

Let's bow together in prayer.

# Operation Discovery

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** October 25, 1981

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 15:8, 28; 16:4–10

*“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us.”*

ACTS 15:8

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

We're talking today about Operation Discovery, and I want you to take your Bibles and find the sixteenth chapter of the book of Acts. Sometimes it's called "the Acts of the Apostles"—really, the acts of the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles. Acts chapter 16—and I want us to look at a very interesting passage, beginning in verse 4. Now, this talks about what the apostles did as the Holy Spirit worked in them and through them. Now, Acts chapter 16, verse 4. I'll pause just for a moment for you to find it, because one of the most beautiful sounds in the world is the turning of the pages of the Bibles. You know, I just love a Bible church, and I can tell, when I go to other churches and preach, whether or not it's a Bible church when I announce the text whether people get their Bibles out and start looking. I just thank God for you and that you've come to church with an open Bible in your hand.

Acts chapter 16 and verse 4: *“And as they went through the cities, [and] they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders*

*which were at Jerusalem”—and then, look in verse 5—“And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily”—now, that’s what we want. And now, verse 6—“[And] when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, [And] after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.” (Acts 16:4–10) Now, that is the reading of the Word of God.*

Some time back, a Mexican peasant, who had lived in just a tarpaper shack, moved out of that tarpaper shack and built him a beachfront home. And, he built it out of concrete and cinderblock and moved his family into that home. And, the authorities got to wondering, “Where did he get the money to move out of that tarpaper shack and to move into that beachfront villa?” And, they investigated, and they found out that he had sold to a jeweler two bars of gold—twenty-four-carat gold. And, the jeweler had given him five thousand eight hundred dollars for those two bars of gold. But, as they investigated, they found that those two bars of gold were more like one-half million dollars in value, and they thought, “Where did he get this gold?” And so, they brought in the experts and the archeologists from Mexico, and they started studying these bars of gold. And, they concluded that they were part of Montezuma’s gold. Now, you will remember that, in the 1600s, that Montezuma, there in Mexico, had one of the largest fortunes in gold ever known to man. He had amassed perhaps more gold than anybody else. And, Cortez came in and decided that he was going to get rid of Montezuma and his rule, and he did. And, Montezuma was vanquished, but they never did discover what Montezuma did with all of that gold and what happened to Montezuma’s gold. And now, here’s a Mexican peasant, and he had two bars of that gold.

Now, are we very close to discovering where the rest of it is? Well, who knows? And, I’m not suggesting that you leave right now and start looking. That’s not what I’m talking about. There is something even more exciting than Montezuma’s gold, and it is the potentiality that is in you. And, I want to lead you today in what I call “Operation Discovery” and help you to discover God’s will for your life, because there is no greater discovery than the will of God for your life. There is no greater riches than to attain God’s will for your life. The greatest discovery is to know the will of God. The greatest attainment is to do the will of God for your life.

As you study these chapters—and incidentally, we’re going to be not only in chapter 16, but chapter 15 of the book of Acts, and we’re going to be looking at some verses...some selected verses because, obviously, we can’t study all of them this

morning—but as we look at these verses, one thing is going to be obvious; one thing is going to be very evident: that the hand of God was upon these people. They were guided by the Holy Spirit of God. They were controlled by the Holy Spirit of God. They had that glorious discovery of knowing God’s will, that glorious adventure of doing the will of God. They had discovered something more wonderful than all of Montezuma’s gold put together. And oh, how I want you to discover! But, as I look around today, many people are not discovering the will of God. We live in an age of guided missiles and misguided men.

Now, three things I want us to notice as we’re going to be in this passage this morning: first of all, I want you to notice the means of the Spirit’s control; and then, secondly, I want you to notice the manner of the Spirit’s control; and then, thirdly, the mandate of the Spirit’s control—what that should mean to us after we discover the means of His control (how He controls us) and the manner (the way in which He does it), then what it should mean to us. Are you ready? Let’s study that together now.

## **I. The Means of the Spirit’s Control**

First of all, I want to mention the means of the Spirit’s control, and I want to give them to you first of all lest you miss them later on, and then we’ll go back and pick them out of the Scripture. Let me tell you how the Spirit of God guides—how the Spirit of God wants to control our lives and lead us in Operation Discovery. The means of the Spirit’s control are these: number one, the fullness of the Spirit; number two: the fellowship of the saints; number three, the faithfulness of the Scriptures. Now, let’s look.

### **A. The Fullness of the Spirit**

First of all, I want you to look with me, please, in chapter 15 and see the emphasis that chapter 15 places upon the Holy Spirit, as we think a little bit about the fullness of the Spirit. Read, for example, Acts chapter 15, verse 8. Now, Simon Peter is explaining to the apostles... And incidentally, may I say that they were having...they were having a summit meeting in Jerusalem? What had happened is this: that Christianity that began primarily with the Jews was now leaping out of the bounds of Judaism and the Gentiles were receiving Christ. The Gentiles were being saved, and these Jews didn’t know how to handle it. So, they held a top-level meeting there in Jerusalem to talk about what they were going to do about these new Christians. And, Simon Peter’s talking about what happened to those Christians, and he says here in chapter 15 and verse 8: *“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness”*—that is, the Gentiles—*“giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us.”* (Acts 15:8) He said, “Believe it or not, these Gentiles have the same Holy Spirit that we received when we received the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And then, look, if you will please, in verse 28, and you get the same kind of a thing. They made a decision, and here's the way they described what they had decided to do: *"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things."* (Acts 15:28) Why, the Holy Spirit was so real to them it seemed as though He were in the very conference room with them as they were holding conference. *"It seemed good to the Holy [Spirit], and [it seemed good] to us."* (Acts 15:28) "What do you say? What do you say? What do you say? And, what do you say, dear Holy Spirit of God?" just like He was one of the conference members. Oh, how real the Holy Spirit was to them!

And then, back in chapter 16, look in verse 6: *"[And] when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia"*—there again, the Holy Spirit said, "Nope, can't go in that direction." And then, look again in verse 7—*"[And] after they [came] to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not"* (Acts 16:6–7)—said, "You can't go that way either." Now, the point I'm making just by picking these random verses is this—and I hope you can see the point; I hope it will be very obvious—that the Holy Spirit of God was very real to them. The Holy Spirit of God was guiding them, for the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 8, verse 14: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* (Romans 8:14)

Now, we are not meant to grope in darkness; we are meant to walk in the light, and we are to have a guide, for Jesus said, *"When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you."* (John 16:13) We are to have a guide. But, let me tell you something: I said one of the means—one of the means—of the Spirit's control is the fullness of the Spirit, not just the presence of the Spirit. When you get saved, He comes in to abide, but when you surrender, He comes in to preside. And, you see, He cannot guide unless you allow Him to preside. He must preside before He will guide. You must say, "Here, Lord," as Debbie sang, "I give all to you—not just a part, but all of my heart." You know, we quote that verse, *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,"* (2 Corinthians 3:17) but let me tell you how to more adequately quote that, because the original language more adequately says this: "Where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty." Is the Spirit Lord in your life? There must be, number one, the fullness of the Spirit. There must be an attitude of surrender to God's Holy Spirit.

## **B. The Fellowship of the Saints**

But, number two, as we're talking about the means of the Spirit's control, not only must there be the fullness of the Spirit, but there must be the fellowship of the saints. Now, I want... As I read these scriptures again, remember they were having a top-level meeting. They had to know the will of God. They had to know the way of God. The

fellowship and the future of the Church depended upon it.

Now look, if you will, in chapter 15, verse 22, for example: *“Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren.”* (Acts 15:22) The point I’m trying to say is it pleased the apostles, the elders, and the whole church. There was a consensus of opinion. Look, if you will, in verse 25 again: *“[And] it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you.”* (Acts 15:25) Isn’t that good? Don’t you like the ring of that? Don’t you like the oneness, the unanimity of it? *“It seemed good [to] us.”* (Acts 15:25) There was just a commonality of good feeling about it. *“It seemed good [to] us, being assembled with one accord.”* (Acts 15:25) *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psalms 133:1) And then, look in verse 28—chapter 15, verse 28: *“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.”* (Acts 15:28) That is, there was that fellowship of the saints that confirmed that fullness of the Spirit. A spiritual consensus was sought.

Now, dear friend, I believe that God’s people can know the will of God not with a Lone Ranger type of Christianity. I believe that we need one another to know the will of God. I believe that you need me, and I need you, and we need one another. Christians are not meant to operate in a vacuum; Christians are meant to operate in a body. *“We are members one of another.”* (Ephesians 4:25) And so, when they had these great questions, not only was there the fullness of the Spirit; there was the fellowship of the saints.

And, I want to tell you something, friend: don’t look for all the church members to be unanimous about anything. Now, it was because some of the church members had gone off in a wrong direction that these people were meeting here at Jerusalem. But, I’m going to say something here, and you pay attention: if you are setting out on a course of action and godly, mature, and Spirit-filled Christians do not feel good about it, you’d better back up and take another look. I don’t care what you say the Holy Spirit is telling you. If godly, sincere, Spirit-filled, mature Christians do not have a consensus with you about it, you had certainly better back up and take another look—I don’t care what you think the Holy Spirit is telling you. For the Bible says, *“[Test the spirits and] try the spirits whether they are of God.”* (1 John 4:1) And, you’re going to find out that not only is there the fullness of the Spirit, but you’re going to find out there is the fellowship of the saints in knowing the will of God.

I remember when they ordained me as a nineteen-year-old boy to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. I was prepared for one question I thought they were going to ask, and sure enough, they asked it. And, almost every ordination council asks this question. After they asked me all of those other questions, I sat there, you know, all ready. I was a

real *embryonic theolog*, you know—just ready to answer those questions. And so, they asked me this question: they said, “Adrian, if we refuse to ordain you, what would you do?” Well, I said, “I’d preach anyway because I’m not here to please men; I’m here to please God. And, if God chose me, and God ordains me, and God empowers me—I’m God’s servant and not man’s servant—and I’d preach anyway.” Boy, I felt good about that answer. It sounded so holy. It sounded so great, sounded so right. And, for fifteen years I thought I’d given the right answer, but as I have become a more mature Christian, I realize that was not the right answer. I tell you now what my answer should have been: my answer should have been—as I looked at those godly men who had walked with God and loved God and loved me enough to sit on that ordination council, I should have said, “If you men don’t think that I ought to be ordained to the gospel ministry, I want to go back and pray it through again. And, I want you to tell me why you think I ought not to preach, and I want to learn.”

I want to tell you, dear friends, that we need to listen to the voice of mature Christians, Spirit-filled Christians. They don’t rule alone. But, you’re going to find out that these early Christians said, “*It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us,*” (Acts 15:28) and there was a consensus. There was a oneness of Spirit. And, I’m so grateful that God the Holy Spirit has given us brothers and sisters to help us to know the will of God for our lives.

### C. **The Faithfulness of the Scriptures**

But, not only was there the fullness of the Spirit and not only was there the fellowship of the saints, but there was also the faithfulness of the Scriptures. Look, if you will please, in chapter 15, verse 13, as we talk about the faithfulness of the Scriptures. Well, let’s... And, this is Acts chapter 15, verse 13: “*And after they had held their peace*”—that is, they were having a...they were having some discussion, and everything got quiet—“*James answered*”—now, James seems to have been the leader in this confab—“*James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name*”—now Simon, I take it to mean Simon Peter. That was his name—“*Simeon*”—or, “*Simon*”—“*hath declared how God did at...first...visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name*”—that was history. They saw what God was doing. But now, notice verse 15—“*And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written*”—that is, the written Scriptures, the words of the prophets—“*After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.*” (Acts 15:13–17) Do you know why they felt so good about it? Not only was there the

fullness of the Spirit, not only was there the fellowship of the saints, but there was also the faithfulness of the Scriptures. They said, “Look, we’ve got some Bible to back this up. The Word of God confirms what we’re doing. The Word of God tells us that the Gentiles need the gospel, and the Word of God tells us that the decisions that we’re making about the Gentiles is so good.”

Dear friend, every God-guided Christian is going to be a Scripture-governed Christian. Now, you put it down big and put it down straight that God the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the saints can never lead you contrary to the Word of God. Just put it down. God is going to use this book also to confirm to you His will for your life. You see how important it is, therefore, that you know the Bible. And, these are the means of the Spirit’s control—the way the Spirit guides you. He’ll not guide you contrary to the Word of God.

Now, an airplane lands out here at our big airport out here, and when that airplane lands, several factors come into being. First of all, there’s that air traffic controller who’s up there in the tower. And then, there is the pilot and the copilot. And then, brother deacon, do you have a navigator on board, too, or just a pilot and a copilot? Who’s that third guy up there? What’s he doing? Telling you stories? See, are there three in the cockpit? Two? Three? I’ve got a pilot down here. I should have checked him before I started to preach. Anyway, a bunch of guys up there, all right. I don’t know what they’re doing. Maybe we ought to throw a couple overboard, but here they are—they’re coming in there. There’s the air traffic controller. There are the men sitting up there in the cockpit. And then, have you ever looked inside one of those things and seen that panel of instruments up there? I mean, all kinds of instruments up there. And, and, there are charts lying in their laps, and maps, and all of those things. Now, that’s what it takes to get that airplane to its destination.

Now, let me see if I can make a parallelism here. The air traffic controller is the Holy Spirit of God, but He never goes on strike, and He never gets tired or weary, and He never gives a wrong direction. The air traffic controller is the Holy Spirit of God. Now, the fellowship of the saints—that’s the captain and the co-captain and the other guy who sits up there on that jump seat. And, they’re up there; they’re...they are putting their heads together. And, I think it would be a terrible thing if the captain said, “We’re going to do one thing,” and the co-captain said, “We’re going to do something else,” and that other guy said, “We’re going to do something else”—I mean, if there’s confusion in the cockpit. There ought to be a unanimity of spirit among those fellows if they’re going to land that airplane.

But also, there are the instruments. Now, wouldn’t it be something if the air traffic controller said one thing and the pilot, and copilot each said something different, and then the instruments said a third thing that was contrary to what the air traffic controller

said? He says, “You’re coming down,” and the altimeter says you’re going up. Now, you talk about putting a... It would be...it would be... The pilot would go on strike then and say, “I need...I need some more money. It’s too...it’s too hectic.” The air traffic controller is saying one thing, the instruments are saying another thing, the charts say another thing, and the copilot says something else. No, look, there needs to be that unanimity.

You see, look, the Holy Spirit of God—He guides us like that air traffic controller. Those people on the crew—they need to be in one spirit, and then they confirm it all by the instruments. The instrument is the Word of God. And friend, if you think that the air traffic controller is telling you one thing, and you’re in unanimity in the cockpit but all of the controls say something else, you’ve got big problems—I mean, you’ve got problems, and so do the rest of us riding with you. I want to tell you, dear friend, that it is wonderful when the air traffic controller, and the pilot, the copilot, and the instruments all say the same thing.

## **II. The Manner of the Spirit’s Control**

Now, I want to say, dear friend, that God has given us the means to guide us: there is the fullness of the Spirit, there is the fellowship of the saints, and there is, my dear friend, the faithfulness of the Scriptures, God’s controls to bring us right to His appointed destination. And, this is the means of the Spirit’s control. This is the way that we come into Operation Discovery and find out something greater for us than Montezuma’s gold. But now, secondly, not only do I want you to see the means of the Spirit’s control, but I’d like for you to see the manner of the Spirit’s control—how, when He controls us, how does He do it?

Well, first of all, let’s look in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 16—chapter 16, verses 6 and 7. I read a portion of this a while back. Acts chapter 16, verses 6 and 7: *“Now when they had gone [through] Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came...to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; [And] there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.”* (Acts 16:6–10) Now, let me show you here from this scripture the manner of the Spirit’s control, and there are three things, if you’re making notes: first of all, there is the restraint of the Spirit; secondly, there is the revelation of the Spirit; and then, thirdly, there is the release of the Spirit.

### **A. The Restraint of the Spirit**

Now, first of all, notice the restraint of the Spirit. Look in verse 6: *“[And after] they had*

*gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, [they] were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia*—now, that’s very interesting. They started to go to Asia, and the Holy Spirit said, “Nope, you can’t go to Asia”—“*[And] after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit*”—shook His head. He—“*suffered them not.*” (Acts 16:6–7) He said, “You can’t go! We do not want you to go to Asia.” I mean, the Holy Spirit said, “I do not want you to go to Asia. I do not want you to go into Bithynia,” and the Spirit of God said, “No.”

Now, I don’t know how the Spirit of God spoke to them, but I do not believe it was an audible voice. The Spirit of God has never spoken to me audibly, but the Spirit of God has spoken to me many times and said, “Adrian, there are things I don’t want you to do.” It’s what I call a “check in my spirit.” Have you ever felt a check in your spirit? You know, when God’s Holy Spirit is leading you, there’s a tingle in your spirit? Do you ever feel a tingle? I mean, that excitement—it’s just that tingle. But then, have you ever felt that jangle? Not a tingle—it’s a jangle. It’s just a check in your spirit. There’s just something—you say, “This is not good. This is not right. God’s Spirit is not bearing witness with my spirit.” They assayed to go. They wanted to go. They thought they ought to go, but the Spirit of God said, “No.” And, thank God, they listened. Thank God Paul was sensitive enough to the Holy Spirit to know the restraint of the Spirit.

Now, listen to me: you are not going to know the release of the Spirit until you know the restraint of the Spirit. Until you can hear the Holy Spirit saying to you, “Don’t do that,” you’re not going to be able to hear the Holy Spirit saying to you, “Do that.” And, the reason that many of us do not know the release and the revelation of the Spirit is because we have never been able to know the restraint of the Spirit.

Now, let me give you an example. How many of you have tried to teach somebody to drive? Let me see your hand. Okay. What’s the first thing you showed them when you tried to teach them to drive? The accelerator? What? The brakes. Absolutely. “Say, there’s the brake. There it is right there. That’s what stops this rascal, right there—the brake. Put your foot on it. Press hard. That is the brake.” See, now before you ever show them the accelerator, you show them the brake—that is, if you’ve got good sense, if you’re still here this morning. You show them the brake. You say, “This is what stops it. This is what makes it stop.” And, after you show them what makes it stop, then you show them what makes it go and how to make it steer. Now, you must, before they can use the accelerator, they must learn to use the brake. Has the Holy Spirit of God been able to show you where the brakes are? No wonder you haven’t found out where the accelerator is if you’ve not let Him issue into your life the restraint of the Spirit.

I believe that some people are more greatly used of others because God has shown them, and they have been able to yield to, the restraint of the Spirit. Have you ever wondered why God uses Billy Graham like He does? You know, there are other

preachers who can preach as well as Billy Graham, and Billy Graham says that; he knows that. He said to me one time—he said, “Adrian, I’m not a great preacher.” He said, “I’m not. I know I’m not.” He said, “If God has given anything, it’s just merely to communicate the gospel.” But, God uses Billy Graham. Now, why does God use Billy Graham? I think one of the great reasons that God uses Billy Graham is Billy Graham has known the restraint of the Spirit. Do you know, there have been all kinds of forces that have pulled on this man to try to get him, for example, to go into politics. He told me one time they offered him the senatorship of a certain state—just said, “We will appoint you senator when...” And, and, he said, “No.” They have tried to get him into movies. They tried to get him into business. They tried to get him sidetracked to this thing or that thing or get into some other fighting this or pushing that. But, God has called him to preach Christ, and he’s done it. And, I thank God that he has known the restraint of the Spirit, and because he’s known the restraint of the Spirit, God has given him the release of the Spirit.

Do you know, I think most of us have just about all God can trust us with—really. We have just about all that God can trust us with. And, the reason that God cannot trust us with more release is that we have not known more restraint. And, here was the Apostle Paul, and I thank God for his sensitivity. When the Holy Spirit of God said, “Don’t go,” he didn’t go. Many of us would have argued and said, “There’s a need—there’s a need—up there in Asia.” I want to tell you something—and you preachers listening to me and you young people who think that God might be calling you: the need is not the call—the need is not the call. There are thousands of needs, millions of needs, trillions of needs. Say, “Oh, they need me. I must go.” Well, they needed him in Asia, but they also needed him in Macedonia. And, it was God’s will that he go to Macedonia because God had a plan for opening all Europe up to the gospel. And, God did not want him to go north; God wanted him to go west. And so, God led him in a different direction. And so, dear friend, you just can’t simply go wherever there’s a need. If you do, some missionary recruiter will come up and talk about the need in Tanzania, somebody else will talk about the need in France, somebody else will talk about the need in Mexico. And, you go to this need. You go to that need. You go to this need. Dear friend, you have to get a word from God—you have to get a word from God. And so, there must be, number one, the restraint of the Spirit.

## **B. The Revelation of the Spirit**

But, not only was there the restraint of the Spirit; because there was the restraint of the Spirit, there could be the revelation of the Spirit. Look in verse 9, and...well, verse 8: *“And they [passed] by Mysia [and] came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. [And] there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over*

*into Macedonia, and help us.” (Acts 16:8–9) Now, there was the revelation of the Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit spoke to Paul. And, in Paul’s Operation Discovery, he had a vision.*

Now, does God give everyone a vision? Absolutely not! When the Spirit forbade them to go into Asia, he didn’t have a vision. Other things that Paul did, he didn’t have a vision. Sometimes God may speak in a spectacular way. Sometimes God may give a vision. Sometimes it may be a still, quiet voice. (1 Kings 19:12) The point of the emphasis right here and the point of the point is this: that God spoke to him. Now, don’t you tell God how to speak to you, and don’t demand a vision. Don’t demand the spectacular. Don’t demand the supernatural. But, do this: however God wants to speak to you, let God speak to you. God the Holy Spirit will speak as He chooses best, but He will speak. He will guide, for the Bible says, *“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* (Romans 8:14) And the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. And so, there was, after the restraint of the Spirit, there was the revelation of the Spirit.

Sometimes it may be in a vision. Sometimes it may be in a sign. You invited me to come and be your pastor here, and I tell you, I was in a bit of quandary some nine years ago because, frankly, Joyce and I were deliriously happy in our church in Florida and God was blessing in a wonderful way. And, we came up here and talked with that loving and kind pulpit committee, and you expressed such love, those of you on the pulpit committee, to us, and talked about the need here. And, we went back, and I was praying and pondering these things in my heart and saying, “God, I want you to speak to me about this thing.” I went home, and I sat by...down at my desk after I’d come in. All my mail had piled up. I’d been gone on vacation. Somebody had put a magazine on my desk, a trade journal of some kind. I don’t even remember what it was. I wish I had saved it now. And, I just flipped it open at random, and there, in big boxcar letters, it said across the top, “Assignment: Memphis”—just like that. I couldn’t believe it. “Assignment: Memphis.” Well, I don’t know whether that was God the Holy Spirit speaking through that or not, but it certainly did give me a jolt and caused me to ponder some things in my heart and in my mind as I looked at that.

God may speak to you through a vision. God may speak to you through *“a still small voice.”* (1 Kings 19:12) The Bible says, *“The path of the just is as [a] shining light, that shineth more and more unto [a] perfect day”* (Proverbs 4:18)—that is, like the sun comes up. First of all, it’s just grey dawn. And then, it’s bright morning. And then, finally, it’s full noon, and you know the will of God for your life.

### **C. The Release of the Spirit**

But, there is, my friend, the restraint of the Spirit, and then there is the revelation of the Spirit. And then, there is the release of the Spirit. Notice in verse 10, after Paul had had

this vision... Now, I read in verse 10: *“after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel to them.”* (Acts 16:10) Oh, isn't that wonderful?

How would you like to live with assurance? I mean, with assurance—*“assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us.”* (Acts 16:10) Oh, how great, how marvelous to have a discovery! Operation Discovery. This is God's will for our lives. The dear Holy Spirit of God now is controlling our lives. We have listened to the restraint of the Spirit. We have received the revelation of the Spirit. Now, we enjoy the release of God's Holy Spirit. And, I want to tell you, dear friend, when God guides, God blesses in such a wonderful way. And, God moved the Apostle Paul there toward Greece, toward Macedonia, and all of that area was opened up to the gospel. How wonderful to know the release of the Holy Spirit.

### **III. The Mandate of the Spirit's Control**

Now, I must close this simple message with the third point. I...we have talked about the means of the Spirit's control: the fullness of the Spirit, the fellowship of the saints, and the faithfulness of the Scriptures. We've talked about the manner of the Spirit's control: we've talked about how the Holy Spirit of God puts a restraint on...the restraint of the Spirit; and then, the revelation of the Spirit; and then, the release of the Spirit. But, let's talk, finally and very quickly, about the mandate of the Spirit's control. Now, if the Holy Spirit of God is here to control our lives, if He is here to guide us, what does that mean to us? What sort of a mandate does that place upon our lives? Twofold: Number one, there must be obedience to the Spirit; number two, there must be the dependence upon the Spirit. Have you got that?

#### **A. There Must Be Obedience to the Spirit**

There must be...there must be obedience to the Spirit. Now friend, when the Holy Spirit of God shows you something, and when the Holy Spirit of God speaks to your heart, then you must answer. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *“And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.”* (Acts 16:10) It was immediate. *“Oh, be [quick], my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet.”* (Julia W. Howe)

Are you that way? You want me to tell you something that I have observed after being a pastor for quite a few years? That most people do not need a revelation from God. That is not their problem. That is not where the average church member fails. Most of us need obedience to God. That's where we're failing. And, the reason that God may not be speaking to you now is that you haven't been obeying in the past. *“[To him] that [has] shall be given...[and to] him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he [has].”* (Matthew 25:29) Some of you won't even present yourself for believer's

baptism when you know that you know that God wants you to be baptized as Jesus was baptized; and then, you're wondering why you're floundering around in the dark, why you can't find God's will for your life. And, you're saying, "God, show me your will." He said, "I've already told you this, and you won't do this. Why should I show you anything else?" "[To him] that [has] shall be given...[to] him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." (Matthew 25:29)

My dear friend, it's hard to steer a ship that's not moving. And, when you hear the Holy Spirit of God speak to your heart and He puts the slightest emphasis upon the rudder of your life, you do it! Do it! Obey Him! The Bible says in Acts chapter 5 that God gives the Holy Spirit "to them that obey him." (Acts 5:32) And, the Bible says in Psalms 25, verse 9: "The meek will he guide with judgment: and the meek will he [show] his way." (Psalms 25:9) Do you know what that word *meek* means? It means those who are obedient, those who are steerable, those who are guidable, those who say, "Yes sir." And, you find God's will and do it in the little things, and you'll know it in the big things. You find God's will and do it every day, and you'll know it for the rest of your life. I want to tell you, dear friends, the mandate of the Spirit's control is obedience to the Spirit. "Where the Spirit...is [Lord], there is liberty." (2 Corinthians 3:17)

## B. There Must Be Dependence upon the Spirit

But, not only must there be that obedience to the Spirit; correspondingly, when there is that obedience to the Spirit, there may be—and there will be—that dependence upon the Spirit. You're going to find—and I don't have time to develop it, but as you read the rest of the book of Acts—you're going to find out that the Holy Spirit did marvelous things through these people, because here is the secret. Are you ready for it? Where He guides, He provides. That's it—that's it. Obedience to the Spirit can then lead to dependence upon the Spirit. You see, God the Holy Spirit will never lead you anywhere, any time, to do anything but what God will give you the strength to do it. And, pay attention to this, because I want to say with all of the emphasis, function, emotion of my soul that the word of...that *the work of God is never held back by a lack of resources, only by a lack of obedience.* Did you hear that?

You say, "Oh, if we only had this, if we only had that, we could do something." No, no, no, no. Listen, this church has all the resources it needs if we'll obey God. Our people start tithing and start trusting God and doing what God wants them to do—we have the resources. You see, listen, there is no bankruptcy in heaven. God owns it all, and if God wants to, He could...He could drop in our lap Montezuma's gold if He needs to. I mean, God owns it all—"the cattle [on] a thousand hills," (Psalms 50:10) and somebody said, "the taters in those hills." It's all God's. And, the idea, the pro... There's no recession in heaven. I don't care if gasoline goes to fifty dollars a quart; there's no

recession in heaven. God is God! And, *when God guides, He provides*. And, whatever God tells us to do and wherever God leads us, then God's going to take care of us. And, you see, the mandate of the Spirit's control is there must be obedience to the Spirit. And, when there is obedience to the Spirit, then there can be dependence upon the Spirit. And, when there is dependence upon the Spirit, then, ladies and gentlemen, we enter into Operation Discovery—that God is leading us, and we can say with them, “feeling assuredly that God is leading.” (Acts 16:10) Isn't that a way to live? Oh, I want to tell you again, dear friend, the greatest discovery is the will of God. The greatest adventure is doing the will of God. That's Operation Discovery for your life.

## Conclusion

Have you ever heard of John Marshall? John Marshall was a prospector out in California in the gold rush. You know, 1849 he was out there. He had his little pan. He was in Sutter's Creek, and he was sifting the sand there, panning for gold. And, he turned that pan in Sutter's Creek, and he looked down in that pan; and there, glistening in the sunlight was what every prospector wants to see. It was gold—and lots of it. And, the gold rush was on, and they came from all over to that part of California. And, many people became millionaires. But, what about John Marshall? In 1880, they found the body of John Marshall in an abandoned mine shaft. He died in poverty. He died a derelict. He died unfulfilled in abject poverty, abandoned mine shaft, a derelict. And yet, he was the one who discovered it all. Do you know the mistake that John Marshall made? After he discovered that gold, he failed to file his claim. Do you know how you can file your claim this morning? By receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. Oh, the riches of God are yours, and all of heaven is yours. And, God's plan for your life is yours; it belongs to you. But, you must file your claim by receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your Savior to know Him. And, when you know Him, then you can have the fullness of the Spirit, then you can have the fellowship of the saints, and then you can prove the faithfulness of the Scriptures by receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Let's bow our heads together in prayer. Father in heaven, I just pray today that many in this building will say an everlasting “yes” to Jesus Christ and be saved and that those of us who are Christians, Lord, might make the glorious discovery of knowing your will for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# The New World Order

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: September 29, 1996**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 15:13–18**

*“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”*

ACTS 15:18

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The World Is Out of Order Because the Church Is Out of Place
- II. The World Is Out of Order Because Israel Is Out of Place
- III. The World Is Out of Order Because Satan Is Out of Place
- IV. The World Is Out of Order Because the King Is Out of Place

Conclusion

## Introduction

Acts chapter 15. God had begun to save some Gentiles, and the church was concerned because they thought that Christianity was Jewish thing. They found out that a lot of Gentiles were coming to know the Lord Jesus. So they called a conference in Jerusalem to find out what the will of the Lord was and what God was up to, and I begin in verse 13. James, who seemed to take the leadership, seemed to have the mind of God in this matter: “And after they had held their peace”—I’m reading in verse 13—“And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” Now, that’s us, folks. That’s the church. God visited the Gentiles. They got of the Gentiles a people for His name. That’s why we’re here—to glorify His name. “And to this agree the words of this prophets: as it is written, After this...”—that is, after He takes the church and builds the church—“After this, I will return.” We’re looking forward to that, aren’t we? After this, He’s coming back, and we’ll “build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down.” Now, the tabernacle of David means the throne of David, the rule of David, the reign of David, and it’s going to be done by David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus.

Now, he’s talking about what God’s plan for the Jew is, that when the church is taken out, then God’s going to begin to work again to restore national Israel. “I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the

Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”

Now, verse 18: “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” That is, God has a plan, and it’s known to God from the beginning of the world right on. It’s known to God. God has a plan for this world. He has a plan for the church, has a plan for the Jew, He has a plan for the Gentile, and it is known unto God. Now, there is no panic in heaven, and we need to understand this.

I want to talk to you tonight about the new world order, as we’re talking about a worldview for the last days. We hear so much today about a new world order. And actually I moved this message up a little bit because of the turmoil that’s in Jerusalem. I had planned to bring this message a little later on. But we’re hearing much in the newspapers and from the politicians about a new world order. Well, it is not a new world order. It is the old disorder that has been in the world, and will be in the world until Jesus comes. And while the politicians talk about order, we see national maps that are being changed overnight, we see nations rise; we see nations fall. Not so very long ago, we saw the collapse of Soviet Communism, and the words that were on our lips were, “Who would have believed it?”

We’ve been astounded as we’ve seen the upheavals, and yet there is more and more disorder. Some people say, “Do you think we’re finished with the Soviet threat?” No, we’re not. The Soviets are in turmoil. They still have nuclear weapons, and their national leader is very, very ill at this time and may not survive, and there are many radicals there who would like to move into that vacuum. We used to speak of the Russians as the Soviet bear, the Russian bear. Well, you know that a bear is dangerous. A wounded bear is even more dangerous, and a wounded bear that is ravenously hungry is the most dangerous. And, you know, of the old Soviet Union, the republics now are turning on one another, and there’s devastation and war and revolt. And Islamic fundamentalist forces are moving into those vacuums, and there is so much chaos that’s in that eastern bloc of nations.

The reason why we cannot make a cosmos out of this chaos is what C. S. Lewis said. C. S. Lewis said, “You can’t make a good omelet out of bad eggs.” And the more we stir, the more we try to arrange things, it seems like the worse we get. And all of us have the idea in these last days that we’re looking into the muzzle of a loaded cannon. But behind it all is Almighty God. And, James says, as he quotes the prophets, “Known unto God are all of his works from the beginning of the world.” And so, we need to understand this, because if we don’t understand it, we can get very discouraged. Politically, nation rises against nation. And we see them—they seem to be taking their pruning hooks and turning their pruning hooks into spears and swords, rather than vice versa. And then, religiously, we see false cults and cultic craziness that seems to be exploding, bizarre New Age superstition. Morally, we have reached the very cesspool of

iniquity. Sin abounds. Alcohol, rape, murder, crime, dope, teenagers being engulfed in the use of narcotics. I am greatly, greatly alarmed as I read the statistical report about teenage sex and teenage drug use. All of this, while our politicians talk about a new world order.

Now, there are four things that are out of place, and until those four things get in place, this world will never come to order. Let me tell you why the world is in disorder, and what will bring it into order.

## **I. The World Is Out of Order Because the Church Is Out of Place**

Number one: the world is out of order because the church is out of her rightful place.

The church is the bride of Christ, and where does the bride belong? With the groom.

Now, right now, we, the church, the blood-bought bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, are not with the Bridegroom. Now, spiritually, through the Holy Spirit, He is in us, but, folks, we are not by His side. Do you know what the all-consuming purpose of the Father is? That is to present the church, the bride, to His Son, and that has not yet been done. You see, we are now engaged to the Savior. We are not yet married to the Savior. We have been betrothed to the Savior. Put this Scripture down: 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 2. Paul talked to the Corinthian church and he said this: “For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste—that means a pure—virgin to Christ.” And so we are to be like a virgin coming to the wedding, when Jesus comes again.

Now, all of the Old Testament typology about the church being the bride of Christ is rooted in the imagery of an Oriental wedding. In an Oriental wedding, the groom would take the initiative, and that’s the way I believe it ought to be today. The groom takes the initiative. I know when I set my eyes upon the girl named Joyce, I was the one who took the initiative. I don’t think she had really noticed me, but I had sat a few desks behind her, and she was off to my right in the next row about four desks up. I couldn’t keep my mind on my schoolwork. I was in the sixth grade. I kept looking at that girl. And so I wrote a poem—it was a masterpiece. And, I wrote that poem, and I walked by her desk, and I dropped that poem on her desk. She picked it up and read it. For a while, I wondered if it meant anything to her, or if she kept it. But, folks, she still has it. That was many, many years ago, and I tell her many times that she loves me because I first loved her. That’s the way it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. He took the initiative for His bride. We sing that song, “From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride.”

Now, after a bridegroom would take the initiative, he would then pay a price for his bride. There was a dowry, and he would purchase his bride. And so, you and I have been purchased by the heavenly Bridegroom. And again we sing, “With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.” Now, after He purchased us, then He gave us a

token of His faithfulness which was the Holy Spirit. In modern days when we fall in love and want to get married, when our bride is betrothed to us, we give to her an engagement ring. Well, God has given to us an engagement ring, and we read about it in Ephesians 1, verses 13 and 14. The Bible says, speaking of Jesus, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.” Did you know in the Greek culture today, this word that is written in our Bible called earnest is the same word in the Greek culture for “engagement ring” today? Our Lord has given us the engagement ring, the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.

After Joyce and I had determined that we would get married, I bought an engagement ring. I was working my way through college. I did not have anyone to send me through school. I wanted to get married. I went to college on a football scholarship, but later decided I'd rather pastor a little church. And, the First Baptist Church of Fellsmere, Florida, called us, and I believe they were paying us thirty dollars a week, and I was a single man at that time—paying me thirty dollars a week to pastor that church. I had to drive 300 miles, there and back. I had no car expense or any other expenses. That was it—a flat 30 dollars a week, and so I had to do some other work to pay for my school expenses. And so I cleaned tables, and did other work—worked in various jobs around the community in order to pay my way through school. But I also wanted to buy an engagement ring. I can remember going into the jewelry store. I'd never bought anything in the jewelry store before, but I went into that jewelry store and found that ring that I wanted to give to Joyce. Now, folks, it's a very small ring, and it's a very flawed diamond, and so many times I have asked Joyce, “Would you let me buy you another diamond?” I cannot even begin to get her to consider it. That ring is very precious to her, and I'll tell you why—because at that time it cost so very much to me. Though it may have been minimum to somebody else, it was maximum to me. And I would go in each week and pay a little on that ring, and with great joy, I gave to her—to Joyce, to my bride—that ring. I was just a boy. I'd not yet reached my twenties, still working my way through school. But I gave her that ring, and it cost so much to me, and it meant so much to me. Wouldn't have cost a lot to other people, but it was more than I had right then. And we need to understand what the Lord Jesus paid for us, and the price that He paid. He sought us. He bought us. Then He gave us the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. But, you see, we are the bride of the Lord Jesus, and Revelation chapter 19, verses 7 and 8, talks about that time when the marriage is going to take place, when the bride is going to be by her Bridegroom's side.

Let me read it to you. This is Revelation chapter 19, beginning in verse 7. Here's

what the Bible says: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness—or the righteous acts—of the saints.” Now, in order for the bride to be ready—that’s us, folks—we’re going to have to have some beauty treatments. You know, I have often said that every bride is beautiful. I’ve done a lot of marriages, and I can honestly say every bride is beautiful. And as you’ve heard me say before, I’ve seen some that just did make it, but they’re all beautiful. And, God wants a beautiful bride. And, you know, women can make themselves beautiful. Just give them enough time, enough money, they can do it! Almost all of them can. One man tried to deduct his wife’s beauty treatments on his income tax. They said, “You can’t do that.” He said, “Why not? It was a total loss.” But, they can really make themselves beautiful. And the church—the church—is going to make herself beautiful. Now, actually, in three treatments.

First of all, redemption—that deals with the inner beauty, that we get the nature of the Lord when we’re saved, but He’s not finished with us yet. Then, at the rapture, we’re going to receive transformed bodies, and we’re going to be made like the Lord Jesus. And then, when He rewards us for our service, the Bible says our wedding gown is going to be the righteous acts of the saints. That’s the gown that we’re going to wear, and so, when Jesus comes, the trumpet sounds, the angel choir will begin to sing, “Here comes the bride”—and we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And, we’re going to have a wedding in the sky. We sing about that: “Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll. The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend. Even so, it is well with my soul.” And so, folks, listen. The church, right now, is out of place. You are out of place. This world is not your home! Now, a fugitive is running away from home. A vagabond has no home. A stranger is away from home. But a pilgrim is headed home. We’re pilgrims. We are headed home. So, what’s wrong with the world? Number one, the church is out of place. We belong by the Bridegroom’s side. And soon and very soon, we’re going to be swept up to meet the Lord in the air. Amen?

## **II. The World Is Out of Order Because Israel Is Out of Place**

Let me tell you something else why the new world order will not work. Not only is the church out of place, but Israel, the people, are out of place. You see, not only does the bride belong by her groom’s side, but Israel, the rightful owner of the land of Israel, belongs in the land. The owner belongs in the land. Now, let me tell you this about the world also. There will never be world order until Israel is restored to her land and there is peace in Jerusalem.

Now, what is happening in Jerusalem right now is what the Bible has prophesied would happen. The Bible prophesied and does prophesy that in the last days Jerusalem will be the international hot spot. As I read the news last week, I could not help but think about God's Word and what God has said. Now, folks, remember this: God is not finished with the Jewish nation. They are still the chosen people. And God says He's going to take the church out. He's going to take the church out. And after He takes the church out, He's going to return and build again the tabernacle of David. God is not finished with the Jew! And Jesus is still the Jewish Messiah. Israel, what we call the Holy Land, is still their rightful land. The Jews have been scattered far and wide around and across the earth, but God has a plan for the Jew. "Known unto God are his works from the beginning of the creation."

Now, let me tell you not only God's plan for the church, but what is God's plan for Israel. We don't have to guess about it. We don't have to stutter, stammer about it. God gave the land of Israel to Abraham and to his descendants. Put these verses down: Genesis chapter 17 and verse 8. God is speaking to Abraham, the father of the faithful. And God says, "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee..." Now, the word seed means your children—your descendants, your progeny, your heirs. "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession." Now, God didn't say, "I'm going to give it to you and then take it back." He said, "I'm giving all the land of Canaan, Abraham, I'm giving it to you and to your descendancy for an everlasting possession." "And I will be their God."

Now, God made this promise to Abraham. Abraham had a son whose name was Isaac, and God confirmed the promise to Isaac. Here's what God said to Isaac in Genesis chapter 26, verses 3 and 4. God is speaking to Isaac, and God says, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and I will bless thee—that is, Isaac—for unto thee and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father." Now, God gave this land to Isaac, and He swore with an oath to Abraham that it would be given from Abraham to Isaac and to their descendancy. Now, God continued to promise through a son of Isaac whose name was Jacob, and not to Esau, but to Jacob. Put these Scriptures down: Genesis chapter 28, verses 13 and 14. And the Lord is speaking now to Jacob: "And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Now, He's talking to Jacob, who later becomes Israel, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee—now He's talking to Jacob, and in thee—and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Now, that's all summed up in Psalm 105, verses 6 through 11. Listen to what he says: "Ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob his chosen. He is the Lord our God: his judgments are in all the earth. He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations, which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance."

Now, folks, it could not be more plain. God has given that land that we call the "Holy Land" to the Jews. God gave it to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob and to their descendants, and God said to a thousand generations it is an everlasting covenant. But God said there would be some problems with His people, the Jews. And you want to know why we have this present chaos, why this so-called world order never comes to order? Because the Jew is out of place, and they have been dispossessed from a great deal of the land that God gave to Abraham, and God prophesied it would happen.

God says, first of all, that they're going to disobey Me. Put these Scriptures down—Ezekiel chapter 36 and verse 17: "Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way"—they were in their land, but they defiled it—"...and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman." And God is saying the way they lived was repugnant to Me. And God said, "Because of their disobedience, they will be dispersed." Listen to this. Ezekiel chapter 36, now, verses 18 and 19: "Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them." God said, "They shed innocent blood, and I judged them." And that's the same reason God's going to judge America, unless we repent.

So, what's happened? They disobeyed. God said, "I dispersed them. I scattered them. I judged them." And then, God said they would be disgraced. We continue to read in Ezekiel 36, verse 20: "And when they entered into the heathen, unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land." They were the chosen people, but they were a disgrace to God! And they profaned the name of God as they went out. But God says there is going to come a miracle for the Jew. God has resolved that He's going to bring them back into the land. Continue in Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 21: "But I had pity for mine holy name!" Now, God is concerned with His own honor, and God has made a covenant. So God says, "But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel,

but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes."

Did you know that one of the great revivals is going to come to the world when people see what God does with the Jew and with the land of Israel. And I believe we're on the threshold that God says, "For my name's sake, I am going to be sanctified. I am going to be glorified, and the heathen are going to see what I do." And so, what is God going to do? Well, not only does God resolve, but God says, "They're going to return." Look, if you will, in chapter 36, verse 24: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." Now, that's been happening before our very eyes. Many of us can go back to May 15, 1948, when the republic of Israel was constituted, and a nation was born in a day. And we've seen the Soviet Jews begin to return, and Jews from all over the world begin to migrate back to the Promised Land. But God not only says they're going to return, but God says, "There is coming a day in which they will look upon the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. They will be spiritually born again."

Notice again in this same passage in Ezekiel chapter 36, now in verses 25 to 27. "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Don't let anybody tell you, precious friend, that God is finished with Israel. He is not. God says He's going to take out the church as a people for His name, and the bride will be with the Groom. God says, "I will return, and I will build again the tabernacle of David." God says, "I'm going to take away the stony heart. I'm going to put in them a heart of flesh."

Now, here's what the Bible says in the New Testament concerning this. Put this down—Romans chapter 11, verses 25 and 26. The apostle Paul is speaking, and this is what he says: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits." Now, he's talking to Gentiles. He said, "Gentiles, don't be dumb, and don't be boastful. Don't be ignorant. Don't be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel." Now, some wonderful Christians are Jews, and some precious Jews are Christians. But, "blindness in part is happened to Israel." And when you talk to a Jewish friend and try to share Jesus the Messiah with them, they don't see it. And they're not lying when they say they don't see it. They don't see it! "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." There is coming a time when the fullness of the Gentiles will come

in. That is, when the last soul in the church has been saved, and God is finished with His plan with the Gentiles. And verse 26: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it, as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and he shall turn away ungodliness from ...”—now, this is very important you notice this next word—“from Jacob.” He doesn’t say from Israel—that’s the name for spiritual Israel. But Jacob is always used for fleshly Jews. He’s going to turn away the ungodliness from Jacob.

Now, the world order that you see today is destined to failure because of the problem of Jerusalem. Now, the tunnel that has just recently been opened is a tunnel that I have been in. I’ve been in that tunnel several times. First time I went into the tunnel, as so far as I could tell, it was not open to anybody. I just found a hole in the wall and went in it, and kind of got nervous when I got in there, because I didn’t have anybody to guide me. And there were labyrinthine ways and deep shafts, and I went in further and further. And I was afraid I’d fall in a pit or I’d get lost back in there, but I didn’t want to stop going because I was just intrigued. And I came back out, and I found later on that you could go through that tunnel if you had a guide, and though it’s very difficult to get in there. And so the last time that we went to Israel, we managed to get in, after a lot of difficulty, and to go through that tunnel that goes along the Western Wall that is in the news today.

A very intriguing thing. We have some very interesting movies of the inside of that tunnel. But, the matter of the tunnel is not fundamental. That’s only incidental. That’s only an excuse to foment trouble in the Middle East, because here’s what the Bible says, in Zechariah chapter 12, verses 2 and 3. God says this, and one of the great proofs of Bible history, a prophecy, is found here in Zechariah chapter 12, verses 2 and 3: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered against it.” It’s easy to see public opinion turning against Israel because of this tunnel. Everybody says, “Close the tunnel.” All the nations of the world say you ought to close the tunnel.

But the tunnel is not really the issue. The issue is Jerusalem itself, and Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel. God has made it so. It is the city of peace, and, however, the Arab nations and the Islamic faith says that Jerusalem belongs to us. The Jews say it is God’s gift to us. God gave it to Abraham, God confirmed the gift through Isaac, He confirmed the gift through Jacob, and it is an everlasting possession. So what are we to do? We are commanded to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. There won’t be peace on earth. There will never be a world order until there’s peace in Jerusalem. Put this Scripture down—Psalm 122 and verse 6: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall

prosper that love thee.” Do you want to prosper? God says, if you bless the Jew, He will bless you. You curse the Jew, He will curse you. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love thee.” And, God has an everlasting love for the Jewish people.

I love the Jewish people. Some of the finest friends that I have are Jews. They do not know Christ as Messiah and Lord, but they are precious, wonderful, magnificent individuals, and I enjoy fellowship with them on the plane that human beings can enjoy fellowship together. Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 3: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” He’s talking to Israel now. “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” And, friend, you ought to love what God loves. We’re to pray for the salvation of Jewish people. Romans 10, verse 1, the apostle Paul said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.” And there’s going to be a remnant of Jewish people that will be saved. Romans 9, verse 27: “Isaias also, also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.” Now, the reason there will not be a proper world order—there will be no order until the bride is by the Groom’s side and until the owner is back in the land possessing the land. We are indebted to the Jews for the Bible. We’re indebted to the Jews for the Savior. We are really indebted to the Jews, from a human viewpoint, for our salvation, because John chapter 4, verse 22, says, “For salvation is of the Jews!” It is from and through the Jews that we have received the Word of God and we have received the Messiah. Of course, ultimately, we have received that from the Lord.

### **III. The World Is Out of Order Because Satan Is Out of Place**

Now, let me tell you a third reason that we’re not going to have a world order until the things that are out of place get in place. The bride is out of place. That’s the church—she belongs with the Bridegroom. The owner’s out of place—the Jew. He belongs in his land. Satan is out of place, because the criminal belongs in prison. The criminal belongs in prison. You see, the Bible teaches right now that Satan is roaming this earth. Now, we have a school of prophecy called “amillennialism” that says that Satan is already chained. Well, friend, if he’s chained, he’s got a mighty long chain around his neck.

I want you to know this. The Bible says in 1 John chapter 5, verse 19, “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” But the word wickedness may, with a masculine ending, may be translated, “The whole world lies in the wicked one.” And the word lieth means it is cuddled in the bosom of Satan. Satan has this world in his arms, and the spirit of Satan is at work through the people of this world. You’re never going to get order out of this world as long as Satan’s spirit is working. Put this verse down—Ephesians chapter 2, verse 2. Paul is talking to the church at Ephesus, and he describes in this way: “Wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course

of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

What is wrong with the people of this world? They are possessed with the spirit of Satan. The world stumbles in darkness, and this darkness has been orchestrated by the prince of darkness, and the prince of confusion, who is Satan himself. And the Bible says, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 4: “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not.” But Satan is not always going to have the run of this world. There’s coming a time when he is going to be cast where he belongs, in prison. Put this scripture down—Revelation chapter 20 and verse 10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Now, this is prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled, but John, the seer, sees it as though it has already been fulfilled, but he sees Satan out in the future being cast into the lake of fire. Now, I hear people talk about the devil in hell, but the devil is not in hell. The devil is the prince of the power of the air. He will be put in hell, but there is no world order until the criminal’s put in prison. He needs to be taken off the streets and put in the prison. Now, the Bible talks about that time, when Satan will be cast into the pit, into prison. And all of those who follow him will be cast in there with him. You say, “Well, that sounds cruel.” Well, don’t listen to me; listen to Jesus—Matthew 25, verse 41: “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Now, you don’t have to go to hell if you don’t want to. As a matter of fact, if you do go to hell, you’ll be an intruder. Hell was not even prepared for you. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. But there will be no world order until the bride is with the Groom. There will be no world order until the owner is in his land. There will be no world order until the criminal is in prison.

#### **IV. The World Is Out of Order Because the King Is Out of Place**

Now, there’s one fourth thing I want to say, and then I’ll be finished, as we’re talking about a Christian worldview. There will be no world order until the King is on the throne—until the King is on the throne. Now, Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In this world, there’s no room for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is an outcast. He’s an outcast in government. Jesus is an outcast in education. He is an outcast in society. And man has enthroned and enshrined himself in a material kingdom. We’re working for a millennium, but it’s pandemonium, because the King is not on His throne. People don’t want Jesus to rule over them.

Listen to these verses. I ponder Psalm 2 many, many times. I’ve scribbled so much on it in my Bible that I can hardly read the original words. But Psalm 2 speaks of a time when the King is going to be put on His throne. The Bible says concerning these who

cast away the Lord Jesus and say, “We don’t want anything to do with Him.” The Bible says, in verse 4, concerning our Lord, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath.” Now, when He speaks in His wrath, that’s talking about the Great Tribulation and the battle of Armageddon. “Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” And then, verse 6 says this, and I have it circled in my Bible. Now, this is God speaking: “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” Now, the King is not yet there, but God says, “I’m going to put My King upon My holy hill.” And I love the word yet. And it means, yet in spite of the ranting of the atheist, the scorn of the humanist, the ignorance of men, and the scheming of Satan, all that they can do, yet God is going to put His King upon His holy hill.

Last week, Joyce and I did something we haven’t done for years. We played checkers. I won. But we were playing checkers, and we began to move those checkers on the board. I moved my man in the king’s row, stuck out my chest, and said, “Crown him. Crown him.” And you know, the kingdoms of this world are being moved around like checkers, but soon God’s going to move His Son into King’s row, and say, “Crown Him.” And He’ll be King in Zion. And I’m so pleased with that, I can hardly wait! And you ought to be looking forward to that time. You know, you have been looking forward to it, and maybe never even really thought about it.

How many times have we prayed as Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 10, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done where? On earth as it is in heaven.” Question: Has that prayer ever been answered? Do you think God’s will is being done on earth today? Look around at the dope, the crime, the rape, the murder, the child abuse, the blasphemy. Do you think that’s God’s will? Do you think God’s will is being done on earth as it is in heaven? Of course not! I want to ask you another question. Do you think it will be? Of course! Do you think Jesus Christ would’ve had us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” if He never meant to answer that prayer? Do you think He would’ve taught us to pray a prayer that will not be answered? I tell you, God said, “I am going to put My King upon My holy hill in Zion.” He’s going to move Him into King’s row, and say, “Crown Him King.”

Friend, the bride belongs with the Groom. The owner belongs in the land. The criminal belongs in prison. And the King belongs on the throne. Don’t you agree? And soon and very soon we’re going to see that happen. I can hardly wait for that! I have so many very favorite scriptures, but I’ll give you one right now. It’s 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 15. It speaks of our Lord, and it says, “Which in his times he shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.” The King belongs upon the throne. And that’s coming! Revelation chapter 11 and verse 15: “And the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of

this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Then, folks, you’re going to have a new world order, when the King is on His throne.

## Conclusion

Now, you know, there are a lot of people who don’t agree with what I’ve said tonight. And, there are people who just would take exception from every one of these four points in this message tonight. I was reading a while back when Babe Ruth, the “King of Swat,” the most famous baseball player who ever lived, was in his very zenith. He was in a park that was filled with people. He came to bat, and the first pitch came over, and he never swung. The umpire said, “Strike.” The next pitch came over, and the bambino swung, and he missed it. “Strike two!” The third pitch came over; he never swung, the umpire said, “Strike three. You’re out!” And the Babe turned around and looked at him, and he said, “There are 40,000 people in these stands who would say that was a ball.” And the umpire said, “Yes.” But he said, “Mine is the only opinion that counts.” And, friend, you know, no matter what the people of this world have to say, there is One whose opinion counts, and it’s His Word that we’ve been reading from tonight. And I cannot wait for the time until our Lord comes and we are going to have a new world order, when the church and Israel and Satan and Jesus are in their rightful place. And “Jesus shall reign where the sun doth his successive journeys run. His kingdom spread from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more.” Folks, it has a good ending, and we’re on the winning side. Amen? Let’s pray.

Seal the message, Lord, to our hearts. And, Lord, I just pray for people in this building tonight who may be in the wrong kingdom, who may not know the Lord, who have the burden of sin, who are facing an uncertain future—really a certain future in hell, if they only knew it. Lord, help them to be saved tonight. I wonder how many in this building would say, “Pastor Rogers, I am not a Christian, but I need to be. I’m concerned about my soul. I want to be saved before it’s everlastingly too late. And in the prayer that you’re about to pray, I wish you’d remember me in prayer. If I can know that I’m saved, I want to know it. I just want you to pray for me, that I might know Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.” Now, this is between you and me and the Lord. No one stirring. No one looking around. But if you would say, “Pastor Rogers, I am concerned about my soul. I do not have the assurance that I’m saved. I want that assurance. Please pray for me.” I’ll not point you out. I’ll not embarrass you in any way. No one else is looking. This is between you and me and the Lord. But if you’d say, “Pastor Rogers, please pray for me. I’m concerned about my soul,” would you slip up your hand and then take it down? Hold it up where I may see it, and then take it down. Just lift it up high. Are there others? Just lift it up where I may see it, and then take it

down. "Please pray for me. I am concerned about my soul." Thank you, you may take it down. Are there others? "Please pray for me. I want to know that I'm saved. I want that assurance." Anyone else? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed.

Are there those here tonight who would say, "Pastor Rogers, I am a Christian. I know I'm saved, but I'm not even pleased with my life the way I am living, and I know the Lord is not pleased. And I need a personal renewal, revival, restoration with God. As my friend and as the pastor of this church, would you pray for me?" Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you hold up your hand? Yes. Quite a number. Take them down. Now, I can't remember all those faces and hands, but God does.

Next, I wonder if there are some here tonight who would say, "Pastor Rogers, I attend Bellevue. I'm not a member. I want God's will done in my church membership. Would you pray with me that as a Christian I might know and do God's will concerning my church membership." May I see your hand? Hold it up. You're not a member here, but you want God's will. Are there others? Just hold it up for a moment and take it down. Yes, God bless you.

And, Father, I want to pray for these who say that they want that assurance of their salvation. Lord, my prayer is that You will open their hearts tonight. Help them, Lord, not to delay, but help them, God, tonight, by faith, like a little child, to put their trust in You, to receive You, Lord, just by faith. Not to look to feeling, but just to stand on Your Word and trust You, Lord, tonight. Bring them, Lord, to Jesus, tonight. Give them courage. Give them understanding. Open their hearts. Whatever they need, dear Lord, I lift them to You. I bind away Satan from them. I bind the blinder who would blind them from the Gospel. Lord, for these precious ones who've said, "I need a personal renewal, revival, in my heart," God, I pray that this will be more than an uplifted hand, but even the act of lifting their hand would be, dear Lord, a means of Your working in their heart to convict them, Lord, that they might repent of all known and every known sin, and, Lord, yield totally, 100 percent to You. Oh, Father, for these who may have needed this and didn't even have the courage to lift their hand, I pray, Lord, that You would work in their hearts. And then, dear Lord, for those who need a church home—if, Lord, it is Your will that they belong here, would You give them the courage to come tonight and say, 'I want to place my membership here.' For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen."

# The Simplicity of Salvation

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: February 5, 1995**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 16:16–34**

## Outline

Introduction

I. The Meaning of Salvation

II. The Man of Salvation

III. The Method of Salvation

Conclusion

## Introduction

Whether the story is true or not, there's a story told about the great football coach Vince Lombardi, who, after a very poorly played game, gathered his team together for the next practice, decided he would go back to the very basics, and picked up a football, and held it out in front of those professional football players, and said, "Sirs, this is a football," and he started from there, and began to tell them again the first principles of the game of football.

Well, I want to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, this is salvation, just to be as plain as we can because salvation, while it is simply glorious—is gloriously simple. And, you don't have to have a PhD to understand it. Now the Bible puts no premium on ignorance, and I'm not asking you to be non-intellectual, but on the other hand, the Bible does not penalize intellectualism. You ought to study, you ought to learn, and there's much to learn about salvation, and you can learn and learn and learn, and never learn at all. But in this matter of being saved, there is a wonderful simplicity.

I want you to listen to the story now, and begin in Acts chapter 16 and verse 16: "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel..."—that is, a young lady—"...possessed with a spirit of divination..."—that means she was a fortuneteller—"...met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying." That is, some people used her very much as a pimp would use a prostitute. They were making money from this poor demon-possessed woman. Now, "The same followed Paul and us..."—that is, this little demon-possessed girl, a damsel, I suppose she was a teenager—"...followed Paul and us..." Dr. Luke is one in the entourage who's writing this, and he says, "she was following after us," "and cried, saying, these men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." Now, wait a minute Pastor, I thought you said she was demon-possessed. Sounds to me like she is saying the truth. Well, she is

saying the truth. The devil is so very clever that he was trying to associate what this girl was doing with the gospel; that is, he was trying to confuse the whole thing, and to give to the gospel the patronage of hell. The devil is very clever, and so, this was a ploy just to discredit the gospel, and really to give credit to the soothsaying.

“And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit...”—Paul realized that his battle was not with flesh and blood, but with a spirit within this woman, with the devil himself—“...Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.” That is, here was an exorcism. Here, Paul cast the demon, the fortune-telling demon out of this girl.

Now, many times fortune tellers are sheer fakers, you know, Madam Tonga, knows all, sees all, hears all, honk your horn so I’ll know you’re out here. They’re fakers, they’re frauds, but there are many of them who are demonically possessed, and this one had a literal demon, and Paul cast her out. Now, verse 19, “And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” So they tried to get a race thing going. And they tried to get an economic thing going, and they tried to get a matter of tradition being impugned going, and so they stirred the people up. “And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes...”—that is, they tore off their clothes—“and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them...”—that is, they had lacerated them; there were raw and open wounds on the back of these two preachers—“they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison...”

Now, this is not just the prison; this is the hole, this is the worst part of the prison. And, they’re not just in prison now; they are locked in the stocks, their feet are clamped down with these clamps, they’re like animals in a trap. Now, I want you to imagine yourself being there and see what you would do.

Now remember, they’ve already been beaten. Their backs are raw and bleeding. Now, it’s midnight, and at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. Now, look at the word “heard”—it literally means, the Greek language has the idea of listening intently. They’re listening to this. And suddenly, there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bands were loosed—that is, all of the chains that were chaining these men fell off there. Whether that was miraculous, or as a result of the earthquake, it doesn’t say, but we do know that all of the bonds—

the chains, the shackles—fall off of all of the prisoners. “And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, do thyself no harm: for we are all here. And he...”—that is, the keeper of the prison—“called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said...”—and here are the seven words that every soul winner loves to hear, “and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”

Now, the story of two preachers who were put in jail for preaching the Gospel. Don't get the idea that you're always going to be honored when you preach the Gospel. Don't get the idea that this world will love you if you stand up for Christ and the Gospel. It will break your neck if it can. So, Paul and Silas have false charges trumped up against them. Because they have delivered this demon-possessed girl, they are savagely beaten and they are thrown with open wounds, not merely into the jail, but into the innermost part of the jail.

Now, this jail was no country club like some jails that we hear about, some prisons that we hear about today. If you think that the worst jail that you can imagine is bad, well, it's probably not as bad as this one. Jails in Bible times were intolerable. There was no running water. No sanitary facilities. Human refuse on the floor. Rats, lice, vermin, stench—and all around in a prison like that, you could hear the groans of the dying, and the curses of the living.

Now, it's midnight, and Paul and Silas are there. I want you to use your imagination. See them, their feet in the stocks. I want you to see them; their backs are raw and bleeding. They're there hungry and thirsty. They're there in the darkness, in the dungeon, in the stench, and it's midnight. It's midnight, and what are they doing? Well, I wonder what you would be doing. I wonder what a lot of us would have been doing if Paul and Silas would have been like some of us. We'd hear Silas say to Paul, “Paul, you awake?” “What do you mean, am I awake? You expect, you think I can sleep in a thing like this?” “Well, Paul, you don't have to get steamed up about it. It was your idea to come to Philippi in the first place.” “Well, who told you that you had to come? You volunteered to come.” “And well, you know, I could be at home, Paul.” “Well, so could I. I could have been the president of Jerusalem Awning Company. You know, I'm a pretty good tent maker.” And, these guys could have been complaining: “Well, really, it's God's fault, anyway; I mean, here we are serving God. God, is this any way that you treat your

servants?” Now, that isn’t what they did. They began to praise God. I mean, it was an incredible thing. Now, I know that they had already witnessed to this jailor. Had they already witnessed to this jailor, he never would have asked them after the earthquake, “What must I do to be saved?” Now, the Bible doesn’t tell us how they witnessed to him, so we have to use our imagination a little bit; but I have an idea that when he was putting them in prison, they said, “Well, you know you’re putting us in prison, but there is an eternal prison for the devil and his angels, it’s a place called hell.” And I can imagine, when they put the chains on Paul and Silas, and put them in the stocks, they said, “Well, you know one of these days ole Satan is going to be bound just like this.” Perhaps their open wounds were very obvious, maybe they told him about Jesus who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Then, when he locked the door, they said, “Well, we want you to know, you can lock us in, but you can’t lock God out. He’s in here with us, and the Lord’s going to take care of us.” And, just before he went, they said, “Friend, we want to tell you something—we want you to know we’re praying for you. We’re praying for your family. We’re praying that you might come to know the Lord Jesus Christ that we know as our personal Lord and Savior. Goodnight, jailor. May God bless you. I hope you come to know the Lord Jesus.” They witnessed. Not only was there proclamation. According to the Word of God here, there was prayer. They were praying at midnight, and they knew how to pray in a time of difficulty and a time of heartache. I really don’t believe they were praying, asking God to get them out of jail. I think they were praying for the salvation of those prisoners, and praying for the salvation of the guard. It seems obvious, because, after the earthquake, they didn’t leave. They didn’t take the earthquake as an answer to prayer to get them out of jail.

In prison, they were preaching, and they were praying, and they were praising. They were singing at midnight in the jail. Can you imagine that? I mean, put yourself in the place of a prisoner there in the jail that night. I mean, everybody is cursing and groaning and screaming and complaining. And suddenly they hear a duet. Two guys are over there singing, and saying, “Lord God, thank you, Lord. O God, thank you for who you are. Lord Jesus, we love you. Paul, let’s sing, ‘Victory in Jesus.’ Silas, as soon as we sing that, were going to sing, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”” And the Bible says that they were listening. The key is the prisoners heard it. What a rebuke that ought to be to all of us.

You know, it’s amazing how we complain, isn’t it? We complain sometimes, the auditorium is too cold. The music is too loud, or somebody didn’t recognize us when we served on a committee, or we didn’t get our ideas through. Folks, don’t complain. Say, “Amen.” Don’t complain. Don’t murmur. Somebody done you wrong? You’ve never been treated like these men were treated. And in the midst of it all, they’re praising God. They

are sharing Jesus. They are praying. They are praising. And, I'll tell you what, Brother Jim, this was a concert that God was listening to, and God said "amen" with an earthquake. Maybe they were singing, "Jailhouse Rock." God said "amen" with an earthquake. He sent His earthquake angel down there, and said, "Go down there and shake that place." And, as a result, this jailor decided he was going to commit suicide, and the reason why was that he was given the duty, the requirement, the make certain that these prisoners, these very important prisoners, were kept and did not escape. Now, in Bible times, if a prisoner escaped, the jailor was frequently put to death. Well then, why would he kill himself? Why wouldn't he just let them do it? If more than one prisoner escaped, he was tortured, and then put to death. And so, he just decided, "I'll do it myself, and, rather than be tortured, I'll just simply kill myself." Now, here's the thing. Paul and Silas, when they saw what was going on, they said, "Hey, don't do that. Don't hurt yourself. We are all here." He didn't say, some of us are here. He didn't say, Paul and Silas are still here. None of the other prisoners had gone. "We are all here." They all remained. Why was that? Well, I have an idea that the preaching of Paul and Silas, and the miracle of that earthquake, not only convinced the jailor when he learned what it was all about, but convinced those other prisoners too. And that tells me something about who we are and what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we will be true to Christ, no matter what Satan does to us, he cannot stop the power of God. Those people didn't stop the revival; all they did was just move the location of it. I mean, there was a revival going on there in Philippi, and it just moved right on in to that jail. And there was a revival at midnight right there in that jail. And then, the jailor, when he sees what happens, he asks this question: "What must I do to be saved?" Now, I want you to think with me about the simplicity of salvation.

## **I. The Meaning of Salvation**

First of all, I want you to think about the very meaning of this word salvation. What must I do to be saved? Now, we divide people in to all kinds of classes—upper class, middle class, and lower class; Democrats and Republicans; white and black; rich and poor; young and old—but when God looks at us, He divides us into two categories—saved and lost—saved and lost. And either tonight you are saved or you're lost.

Now, this man wanted to be saved. What did he want to be saved from? To be saved means to be delivered. What did he want to be delivered from? Not the earthquake—that was over. Not from the punishment, because none of the prisoners had gone. What does it mean to be saved? What are we saved from? Well, let the angel who spoke to Joseph tell you what to be saved from. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people..."—from what?—"...their sin." To be saved is not even really to be saved from hell. It is to be saved from sin.

Now, that's an old-fashioned word, isn't it—sin? Today, the behavioral psychologists and the humanists, they've done away with the idea of sin. They don't think that people are really guilty. They want to call sin weakness, or error, mistake, misjudgment, psychological malfunction, maladjustment, whatever. But sin is an old-fashioned word. What is sin? What is it we're saved from? Sin is the transgression of the law. First John 3, verse 4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." God has given His law. God has given His Ten Commandments, and, friend, if you break God's law, you are a sinner. And we have all broken God's law. Is there anybody here who would say, "I have never told a lie one time?" Is there anybody here who will never say, "I have never ever taken anything that does not belong to me"—even if it was a nickel off your mother's dresser, a toy out of the neighbors yard, or an answer in a school test? Well, let's just take a test. How many of you have ever, at least one time, said something that was not absolutely true? Let me see your hands—ever told a lie. How many of you have ever taken anything that did not belong to you? Whether, again, whether it was a nickel off your mother's dresser, whether it was a toy out of a yard, whether you robbed a bank, you have, one time, taken something that did not belong to you. Let me see your hand. Wait a minute; hold them up, I want to look. Now, what I have tonight is a congregation of liars and thieves. That's right. And, I'm one. You're one. Well, you say, "Yeah, that's true. That's true. But I mean, you know, I don't do that all the time. And, I haven't done the other bad commandments. I mean, I haven't committed adultery; I haven't killed." The Bible says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Isn't that what that says?

See, God is a holy God. Now, we kind of laughed and it kind of sounded kind of funny a little bit there, you know. But sin is really not funny. Sin is a transgression of the law of God. You say, "But I haven't broken all the commandments." You get stopped for speeding, or let's say you've run a stop sign, and a policeman stops you. And he begins to write a ticket, and you say, "But, wait a minute—let me tell you about all the times I did stop." What does that have to do with it? "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Sin is the transgression of the law.

Sin, according to the Bible, is failure to do good. Listen to James chapter 4 and verse 17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." You see, we're condemned not only for what we've done, the transgression of the law, but we are condemned for what we've not done. Is there anybody here who would say, "I have always done—always—the best I knew how?" Not a one can raise his or her hand. We are saved from our sin. Sin is human goodness without God.

Now, a lot of us say, "Well, yes; yes, I did steal, and I did lie. Yes, I have not always done everything I know that I ought to do. But, Pastor, let me tell you some of the good

things I did do.” Now, friend, when you depend upon that human goodness, that also is sin. Listen to Proverbs 21 and verse 4: “A high look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.” Here’s a man who’s not serving God. He’s out there plowing his field. And God says, “That’s sin.” How could plowing a field be sin? Who gave him the dirt to plow? Who gave him the seed to put in the ground? Who gives him the sunshine? Who gives him the rain? Who gives him the strength? God does! And if he doesn’t acknowledge God, even his plowing is sin. An ungrateful spirit, even, you said, “Well, man, I am an honest worker. Look at the good work I am doing out here. I’m growing food for people. God says, “I call that sin. You’re so proud of yourself.” I’ve said many times, hundreds of times, the worst form of badness is human goodness when human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth.

You love a fresh fruit salad? I do. And I hate to use this illustration—I hope you’ve already had your dinner, maybe you won’t want it. But suppose in a kitchen, somebody is making a salad—a fruit salad, the best fruit, most succulent and fresh—and that person is using the best ingredients there. But let’s suppose that person has open, running sores on his or her hands that is mixing your salad. Do you want it? You say, “No, thank you. And, I don’t think I’ll ever want another one. I don’t want it.” “Well, the fruit’s fine.” “Yeah, but look who touched it.” You see, an unsaved man or woman contaminates everything he or she touches—everything we touch. Even the plowing of the wicked is sin. When he puts his hands on that plow handle, he contaminates it, because he is a sinner. Sin is the transgression of the law. Sin is failure to do good. Sin is human goodness without God. Listen to what God says about your human goodness—Isaiah 64 and verse 6: “But we all as an unclean thing, we all, but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Now, God doesn’t say, “Your bad things are as ‘filthy rags.’” The word ‘filthy rag’ here is the word for a bandage that would wrap a leper’s sore. And God says, “That’s what I think of the things you’re so proud of.” We sit in church high-minded, thinking we’re too good to be damned.

Now, we are saved from sin. You see, we’re sinners. And the result of sin is judgment and death. Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...” And so—to be saved means to be saved from sin, from the penalty of sin—we’ll not die and go to hell. From the pollution of sin—we no longer have that contamination that contaminates everything we touch. From the power of sin—once you get saved, Satan has no authority, sin has no temptation, and the world has no attraction that you cannot break, because now you have victory on the inside. And I can testify, I got saved as a teenage boy, and I have not lived a perfect life. I have failed. I have stumbled. But I’ll tell you one thing: I know that I know that when I

got saved, a power came into me that has enabled me to live a different life. And every time—not one time, but every time, without exception—I’ve said, “Lord Jesus, give me grace and strength to overcome.” He has every single time—every time. Because I have been saved from the power of sin. And if I’ve stumbled and fallen, it is not because there was no power there to deliver me. It’s simply because I refused to receive what He had offered me.

## **II. The Man of Salvation**

Now, we’re thinking about the meaning of salvation. It means to be delivered from sin, from the penalty of sin, from the pollution of sin, from the power of sin, and, one day, from the very presence of sin, when we are called up to meet the Lord in the air.

Second thing I want you to notice—not only the meaning of salvation, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”—but I want you to notice the man of salvation. Look, if you will, in verse 31: “and they said...”—now slow down right here—“...believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” They said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Now, salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when they said, “the Lord,” that means He’s the Master. When they said, “Jesus,” that means He’s the Mediator. When they said, “Christ,” that means He’s the Messiah. In this one man is master, mediator, and messiah. You know what the word Lord means? It means He’s King of all creation. As Lord, He demands our love, and our worship, and no body can be saved who refuses Christ as Lord.

Believe on the Lord Jesus. Jesus is His human name. So that means that God, the Lord, became a man. He is the Lord Jesus. He is both God and man. And that makes Him the Mediator. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Jesus is His human name. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus”—that little boy. So He is the Lord—that’s the Master. He is Jesus—that’s the Mediator. And He is the Christ—the word Christ means the anointed one—God’s appointed, God’s anointed, the one that God sent. He is the Messiah, the Christos. One man is Master, Mediator, Messiah. Don’t just go past that, when they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” He is the God-man appointed and anointed of God—Master, Mediator, Messiah. He is the Man of salvation.

Now, you are not saved by the plan of salvation; you are saved by the man of salvation. You see, you can know the plan and go straight to hell. The devil knows the plan, and he is destined for hell. He doesn’t want you to understand it. Salvation is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **III. The Method of Salvation**

Now, I’ve talked to you about the meaning of it. I’ve talked to you about the man of it.

Now, let's talk about the method of it. Look again in verse 31—I'm talking now about the simplicity of salvation. And they said—what's the next word?—"believe"—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." It doesn't say believe about Jesus. He says believe on Jesus. What does that mean? It means trust Him—trust Him.

Now, I had a deacon down in Florida, a multi-millionaire, one of my dearest friends—that man loved to travel. He could go almost anywhere he wanted to go, but you know, he never would fly. He always drove. You know why he wouldn't fly? He didn't want to get on an airplane. Some of you can identify with that. And I would say to him, "Why don't you fly here, and why don't you fly there?" And, Jim, you know whom I'm talking about. He wouldn't do it. I said, "Look, you know that you're safer probably in that airplane than you would be in an automobile. I mean, you just, you've got cars whizzing past you every second on that super highway. Somebody could pass out, be drunk, and head into you, or you could pass out, or have a blow out." He said, "I know it." But, he said, "Pastor, I know that an airplane can fly because I see it fly." And he said, "I know I'll be safer, but there's just something in me; I just can't trust it." And I never laughed at him about that. I kind of felt sorry. He said, "Just, I know it, but I just cant trust it."

Now, some people are like that about the Lord Jesus. I mean, you believe the facts, but you just can't trust Jesus. You could, but you say you can't. You just refuse to trust the Lord Jesus. Salvation is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not believing that a plane can fly; it is getting on it. John 3, verse 18: "He that believeth on him is not condemned. But he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3, verse 36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Galatians 3, verse 26: "...ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Folks, look up here. Salvation is believing on Christ, trusting in Christ—not believing about Christ. It's not a matter of feeling. So many people want to get a feeling. The Bible only uses the word feeling, so far as I can tell, about two times in the entire New Testament. And never does it say, feel a certain way and be saved. If you depend upon feeling for the assurance of your salvation, the assurance of your salvation will go up and down with the condition of your liver. "Adrian, are you married?" "Yes." "Well, how do you know you're married?" "Well, I feel married." That doesn't prove I'm married, to say I feel married. Sometimes I feel married; sometimes I'm not even thinking about feeling married. I know I'm married because I made a commitment to Joyce very similar to the one I made to Jesus when I took Him as my Lord and Savior.

It's not a matter of faith and works. He didn't say to this jailor, "if you believe and get baptized, then you can be saved." Now, he did get baptized, but they didn't say, "Believe and get baptized." They said, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt

be saved.” It’s not faith and works; it’s faith that works. The Bible says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man shall boast.” And I’m telling you that tonight you can do what a Philippian jailor did so long ago. You can simply, by faith, say, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart and save me.” And you will be saved before you get up out of your seat. I mean, you’ll be saved right there.

## Conclusion

I was on an airplane, and I sat down by a man, and he was a member of a denomination that believes you have to be baptized in order to be saved. He was a very fine man. We talked for a while. He knew who I was. I said, “Sir, do you ever witness?” He said, “Of course.” I said, “Are you interested in sharing your faith?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Well now, I’d be very interested in knowing how you share your faith.” I said, “For example, suppose the pilot on this airplane comes on the intercom, and says, ‘We’re over the mountains. I’ve lost power. We’re in a glide pattern. We’re going to hit the mountainside soon. I don’t know what else to do except to tell you you’ve got five minutes to get right with God.’” I said, “Suppose I’m sitting next to you. Suppose I’m a businessman. I’ve been cheating on my wife. Cheating, padding my expense account. I have been taking God’s name in vain. But I know there’s a God. I believe there is a heaven and a hell. I don’t want to die and go to hell. And suppose I turn to you and say, ‘Sir, are you a Christian?’ and you say to me, ‘Yes, I am.’ I say then, I say to you, ‘Sir, the pilot says we’re going to die most likely in five minutes. Can you tell me, sir, what must I do to be saved?’” The same question, “Sir, what must I do to be saved?” Now, remember this man believed that you had to be baptized in order to be saved. You know what he said to me? And he sat there for a while and didn’t say anything. And then he said, “Well, you know, there are certain things that you’ve got to do.” I said, “Well, tell me what they are, because I want to be saved.” And he said, “Well, you know, you’ve got to live a certain way.” I said, “Well, I haven’t done that. I mean, I’ve been a sinner, and I just, you know, I talked about all of these things that kind of a man would have done.” And he said, “Well, you know...” I said, “Listen, sir. We’ve got two and a half minutes. And we’re about to hit. Tell me. I don’t want to die and go to hell. Tell me. Tell me. What must I do to be saved?” You know what he said? He said, “I wouldn’t have a message for you.”

Friend, I am so glad, everlastingly glad, that I can tell someone in an airplane, or submarine, or on a desert, or anywhere else, in a prison, just what Paul and Silas told that man: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”—saved from the penalty of sin; saved from the pollution of sin; saved from the power for sin; saved radically, dramatically, instantaneously; and forever saved by His power divine.

Let's stand and sing that. Jim, lead us. Saved by His power divine. We know that chorus. Let's just sing it together.

Saved by His power divine.  
Saved to new life sublime.  
Life now is sweet and my joy is complete  
for I'm saved, saved, saved.

Now, sing it one more time, and this time, task yourself, "are you singing the truth?" Are you singing the truth? Let's sing it one more time.

Saved by His power divine.  
Saved to new life sublime.  
Life now is sweet and my joy is complete  
for I'm saved, saved, saved

Now bow your heads in prayer. If you cannot say it absolutely and know beyond the shadow of any doubt that you are saved, I want you to get it settled tonight. And I want you tonight to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Not believe about Him, but trust Him. Trust Him tonight. Would you pray a prayer like this? Dear God, I'm a sinner, and I need to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me, if I would trust you. I do trust you, right now, this moment, with all of my heart. Like a child. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then, pray this way. If you're sincere, say, Lord, I trust you to do it. I believe you paid my sin debt on the cross. I believe you are Master, Mediator and Messiah. I believe you died for me. I believe you are God's appointed and God's anointed one. I believe God raised you from the dead. I just trust you now as the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust you. I trust you. Save me. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for doing it, Lord Jesus. And now, Lord Jesus, help me to make it public. In your holy name. Amen.

# The Simplicity of Salvation

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** July 26, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 16:23–31

*“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”*

ACTS 16:30–31

## Outline

Introduction

- A. The Proclamation of the Gospel
  - B. The Prayer of the Gospel
  - C. The Praise of the Gospel
  - I. The Meaning of Salvation
    - A. Penalty of Sin
    - B. Pollution of Sin
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  - II. The Man of Salvation
    - A. Lord—Master
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    - C. Christ—Messiah
  - III. The Method of Salvation
- Conclusion

## Introduction

Well, amen. Now, take your Bibles, please, and turn to Acts chapter 16 and in just a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 23 of Acts chapter 16. You will remember that some while back we were in a series of messages on the book of Acts entitled *The Old Time Religion*, and then we just put a parenthesis in that series. And, now we're ready to start back again, talking about that *Old Time Religion*. Now, I remind you, dear friend that the old time religion is also the new time religion because, dear friend, it's for every age. And, not only is it the old time and the new time, it's the anytime religion. Folks, it will work for all people. And, therefore, it ought to be the all time religion.

And, we're talking, today, about *The Simplicity of Salvation*, how to be saved and to know that you're saved. And, it's really not all that difficult to understand. I want to ask you a question, if you had a boy or a girl, a little child, and that child were lost, and you had an opportunity to send that child a letter and to tell the child how to get home,

wouldn't you make it as simple as you could? Wouldn't you make it plain?

Now, sometimes, you hear preachers supposedly preach the gospel and you don't understand what they're saying. Folks, there's something wrong. The Bible says of the gospel in Isaiah chapter 35 and verse 8, talking about the king's highway, it says, "...*the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*" (Isaiah 35:8). Do you know what that means in plain English? A stranger without good sense can find his way on the gospel road. It's very plain. Oh, it's wonderful. It's simply glorious, but it's gloriously simple. And, sometimes, the intellectual giants will stumble over it when the little children will find it. For the Bible says God, "*hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*" (Luke 10:21).

Now, I'm not putting a premium on ignorance, or a penalty on intellectualism, when I tell you, dear friend, that the gospel is simple. God wants it to be simple because God is not willing that any should perish, but that all shall come to repentance. And, I believe that sometimes so many of the books on theology are written from one theologian to another theologian. And, down here beneath are the people and it's all just going over their head. It's like they're trying to play keep away with big double-jointed obtuse words. And, God just kind of spells it out plain because He wants people to be saved. He wants people to come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. So, today, I want to give you a story in the Bible that makes it so plain and so clear how a person can know beyond the shadow of any doubt that he or she has been saved.

Now, let's begin to read this story and it talks about Paul and Silas who have been put into prison for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, right away we're going to break into the middle of the story because it's a long chapter. But, what they had done is this that they had delivered a demon-possessed girl who was a fortuneteller, and there were some people who were prostituting this girl's ability to tell fortunes, were using her to make money.

When Paul and Silas saved her, she got out of the fortunetelling business and because of that, they trumped up false charges against Paul and Silas. And, Paul and Silas are thrown into prison. By the way, did you think if you served God you wouldn't have any trouble any more? Jesus didn't come to get us out of trouble. He came to get into trouble with us. Amen? And, so here they are, they're in trouble because they're in the will of God.

Now, notice verse 23, "*And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely*"—That is, they commanded him, "Don't you let these guys get away"—"Who"—that is the jailor—"*having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison*"—Not on the outside. He puts them down in the deepest part of the dungeon. And, then as a double security—"*and made their feet fast in the stocks*"—That is, he locks them right in the chains. Now, they're in

the stocks—“*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”—The seven greatest words any preacher can hear anybody say or ask—“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”—“*And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (Acts 16:23–31).

Now, I want us to talk about that. Here are Paul and Silas in prison. Now, notice they've been beaten. Their backs are lacerated. They have raw and bloody wounds on their backs. They had been stuffed into a dungeon. Now, if you think that jails are bad in this day, in that day, folks, they were intolerable. No running water, no such thing as a toilet, excrement on the floor, rats, lice, vermin, the stench is unbearable, no outside light. They are surrounded by the groans of the dying, the moans of the living, cursing and swearing. These men, weak, haven, having been beaten, with their legs cramped, sitting in one position not able to move, their backs bleeding, their wounds unwashed, at midnight, there in the prison.

Now, what would the ordinary Christian be doing? “God, can't you take care of your servants any better than this? I wonder if there is a God. If there is a God, why are we here in prison?” Paul and Silas, perhaps, arguing with one another. Silas saying, “Paul, who's idea was this?” Paul saying, “Would you shut up? I've got enough trouble.” “Well, Paul, I think you're a failure.” “What do you mean, 'a failure'? I could have been President of Jerusalem Tent and Awning Company.” None of that. They are praising God. They are singing, praising God. I don't know everything that happened before this jailor said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” But, I want to mention three things that happened. One was proclamation. One was prayer, and one was praise.

#### **A. The Proclamation of the Gospel**

Now, the proclamation you don't really see there. You kind of have to read between the line a little bit to see that. But, when this man came in and said to them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” That means, he had been preconditioned to be saved. That means, he knew there was something called salvation. And, he knew that these men knew how to be saved, so that tells me already they had witnessed to him. They had proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ to him. I just believe it was something like this.

When they were beating Paul and Silas, Paul and Silas said, “You see these wounds? That reminds us of Jesus. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was

bruised for our iniquities. You see these stripes? With His stripes we are healed.” When they shoved Paul and Silas into that dungeon, they may have said to the jailor, “Look, you’re putting us into a dungeon, but we’ll only be here a little while. There’s another place called Hell. It’s prepared for the devil and his angels and those that don’t know our Lord will suffer for eternity in a place called Hell.”

When they put those bonds on Paul and Silas and put them in the stocks, they said, “We’ll only be here for a while, but I want to tell you, the devil incarcerates men and chains them in the chains of sin and only Jesus can set people free.” When he put them in there and turned the key, they may have said to him, “Sir, we want you to know that you’re locking us in, but you can’t lock Jesus out. He’s going to be in here with us. And, sir, we want to tell you something else. We know you probably are obeying orders. We know that you don’t understand what you’re doing, but we want you to know, sir, two things, God loves you and we love you too. We want you to know something else, that all night long, we’re going to be praying for you, mister, that you’ll come to know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.” These were the kind of men who shared with this man. I know they shared with him because he finally came in and said, “All right, tell me about it. What must I do to be saved?”

### **B. The Prayer of the Gospel**

But, not only was it proclamation, there was also prayer because the Bible says, “At midnight they prayed.” And, what were they praying? If I know anything about Paul and Silas they weren’t praying, “Lord, get us out of jail.” They were saying, “Lord, get the jailor out of jail. He’s in a worse fix than we are. He needs you. He needs to be saved.” They weren’t saying, “Lord, get these bonds off of us.” They were saying, “Lord, get those shackles of sin off of him.” They were praying and they were interceding for him and these others.

### **C. The Praise of the Gospel**

And, not only were they proclaiming the gospel and praying, but also, dear friend, they were praising. The Bible says, “At midnight they sang...” Songs at midnight. You know, only Jesus can give you that kind of a song. The devil can give you songs when everything is going just fine. But, I want to tell you Jesus can give you songs in the darkest night. Jesus gives joy that the world can’t give, and the world can’t take away, and so they’re just praising the Lord. And, the Bible says, “And, the prisoners heard them.” Now, the Greek word for “heard” is a special word. At least it is a word that indicates that they were listening with attention, that they were giving their attention to this because, you see, it was a very strange situation.

I mean, in prison, you might hear men curse, but not pray. You might hear men whimper and complain and groan, but not praise. These men were different. The

prisoners were saying, “What is this?” They’re hearing this praise. And, God heard it too. And, when God heard them pray, God said, “Amen,” with an earthquake and it shook the prison. It was a special earthquake. The walls didn’t fall, just the doors opened. And, the chains and the stocks fell off their arms and their feet and they’re free.

At this moment, when the jailor realized what has happened, he takes out his sword, he’s about to fall on it and commit suicide. Why? Because in that day when a jailor is given a charge to keep a prisoner and he was given a double charge, a special charge, “Don’t you let these two fellas out.” If a prisoner escaped, they took the jailor’s life. What would they do if more than a prisoner escaped? They tortured him and then took his life.

So he said, “I better do it myself.” He drew out his sword and would have killed himself because he just supposed they’d all been gone. At that moment, Paul cries out and says, “Hey, don’t do that. We’re all here. Don’t hurt yourself. We are all here.” Now, get that. Not just Paul and Silas, but they’re all here. Why didn’t the other prisoners leave? I believe that God had touched their hearts. They knew that something supernatural was happening in that prison and they wanted to stay to see what it was.

Now, that’s an interesting thing to me because, dear friend, when they put Paul and Silas in that prison, they put them in prison for preaching the gospel and they said, “We don’t want any more of this. We don’t like this revival. We’re going to stop it.” Folks, they didn’t stop it because I believe the jailor got saved, I know he did, and they jailor’s family got saved. The Bible tells us they did as we’re going to see in a moment, and it could be these prisoners got saved also, at least, I know, we got their attention.

You see, they didn’t stop the revival. All they did was just change the location, amen? You can’t stop God. You can’t stop what God is doing if we obey God and this was all a part of God’s plan to get the gospel to this Philippians jailor and he was saved there that night because he asked this great, great question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

## **I. The Meaning of Salvation**

Now, I want us to think about that and first of all I want us to think about the meaning of salvation, the meaning of salvation. What, what did he mean when he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” That word “saved” is a Greek word *sōizō*, and it means, “deliverance,” deliverance from trouble. To be saved means to be delivered from trouble, to be saved out of difficulty. Well, what kind of trouble was he in? When he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” He wasn’t talking about being saved from the earthquake that was already over. He wasn’t talking about being saved from the government that was going to punish him for letting the prisoners go because none of the prisoners had fled. What was he talking about?

What does it mean to be saved according to Bible terminology? Well, let an angel

answer this. An angel said of the Lord Jesus, “...*thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21). To be saved means to be saved from sin. That’s what it means. When you’re saved, you’re saved from sin. Now, “sin” is a word we don’t use much any more in modern terminology. People don’t believe that the problem is sin, therefore, they don’t see the need to be saved from sin. They want to be saved from their difficulties. They want to be saved from their problems, but the Bible doesn’t say, “You’re saved from your difficulties and your problems.” You are saved from sin. Now, the word “sin” is out of date. We’ll call it psychological maladjustment. We’ll call it a mistake. We’ll call it a misjudgment. We’ll call it a glandular malfunction. We’ll call it an economic accident. We will call it a stumble, but we don’t like the word “sin.”

Can you imagine going up to the U.N. and saying, “Gentlemen, the problem in the world is sin”? Can you imagine going to one of the great universities and saying, “The problem in the world is sin”? They’d laugh at you. They don’t like the idea of sin because today we have become a generation of secularists and humanists. And, do you know what they believe? That the problem with man is this, that man is the sum total of his environment and his bodily chemistry. That’s all. Just the situation he lives in and just the chemistry of his mind. And, so he is to be pitied, but not to be blamed. He may be ill but he’s not evil. He may be weak, but he’s not wicked. He’s like a computer that’s just been programmed wrongly. But, the Bible says that the problem is sin. It’s sin.

Now, what is sin? Well let me tell you what sin is. The first definition of sin I think most of us will agree with. The Apostle John tells us that, “...*sin is the transgression of the law*” (1 John 3:4). Sin is the transgression of the law. God has given us Ten Commandments and when we break those commandments, we sin. Well, I think all of us can understand that, we just break God’s commandments. And, most people will say, “Yes, I agree. That’s sin.”

I mean, if you’re a Christian person or Judeo-Christian background you’ll say, “Yes, that is sin.” But, most of us don’t think we’re such bad sinners there. But, the Bible goes on to say, “*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10). You say, “Well, I don’t think I’ve broken many of the commandments.” If you’ve broken any of them, in God’s sight, you’ve broken all of them. You say, “I don’t understand that.” Well, let me ask you a question. If you were dangling over a fire, suspended by a chain of ten links, how many links in that chain would have to break before you fall in the fire? Ten? Just one? How many of God’s Holy Commandments do you have to break in order to become a sinner in the sight of a righteous and a Holy God? Just one. And, so, sin is the transgression of the law.

But, now let me move to a little more difficult definition of sin. Sin is not only what we do that is wrong, but sin is what we fail to do that is right. The Bible says in the book of

James, "...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Sin is not only doing the things that you ought not to do, it's not doing the things that you ought to do. Is there anybody here who would say, "I've always done everything I ought to do"?

But, now wait a minute, I want to narrow the focus a little closer. Not only is sin transgression of the law. Not only is sin the failure to do what we ought to do. But, the Bible also teaches that human goodness without God is sin. Now, that's the one most people are going to stumble over. In the book of Proverbs, let me give you a marvelously interesting Proverb. In the book of Proverbs chapter 21 and verse 4, the Bible says, "*An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin*" (Proverbs 21:4). "A high look." Some folks, you know, they strut sitting down. "A high look, and a proud heart." Well, we say, "I can understand that." But, now notice the next thing, "And the plowing of the wicked is sin." You say, "I don't think I understand that." "The plowing of the wicked is sin."

Here's a farmer in the delta, over here in Arkansas, somewhere over here in Tennessee, and he's out there on his tractor, plowing. God says, "That is sin if he doesn't know me." You say, "There's nothing wrong with plowing." That's right. "Nothing wrong with growing produce, soy, corn, or cotton." You're right, and yet God calls it sin. You say, "Why?" Well, let me give you another verse of Scripture here, in Isaiah chapter 64 and verse 6, "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...*" in His sight (Isaiah 64:6). Now, notice, he didn't say, "Our sin is as filthy rags in His sight." "Our righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight."

Now, if this is confusing to you just stay with me for a little while because this is what most folks need to learn in order that they might come to Jesus and be saved. You're not going to Hell just for the bad things you do, you're going to heal for the good things you do without God. The plowing of the wicked is sin. Our righteousness is as filthy rags, and do you know what that word "filthy rags" literally means? It described the bandage that wrapped the oozing, running putrefying sores of the leper, that loathsome thing that you would burn.

God says, "In my sight, that's not what I think about your so-called badness, that's what I think about your so-called goodness." Well, you say, "I don't understand that. How can it be a sin for a man to plow a field?" Because an unsaved man is in himself wicked and therefore everything he touches he contaminates. Do you like a fruit salad? Fresh fruit, oranges, bananas, grapes, apples? Who of us doesn't like a fruit salad? I want you to imagine a beautiful fruit salad with me today, but I want you to imagine the person who's mixing that salad for your dinner with vile open sores on his hands, mixing you a salad. Do you want it? You lost your appetite? Nothing wrong with the grapes. Nothing wrong with the bananas. Nothing wrong with the apples. There's something

wrong with the cook.

Nothing wrong with plowing, but the man who plows contaminates everything he touches. His righteousness is as filthy rags. I've said it before, I'll say it again, the worst form of badness is human goodness when that human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law. What is sin? Sin is failure to do good. What is sin? Sin is human goodness that keeps us from God's righteousness. Even our righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight.

### **A. Penalty of Sin**

Now, what does it mean to be saved? It means to be saved from the penalty of sin. You see, the Bible says, "*For the wages of sin is death...*" (Romans 6:23). "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die...*" (Ezekiel 18:20). God has laid down His law and law without penalty is only advice. And, God is not giving advice. "The soul that sinneth it shall surely die." But, when you're saved, thank God, the penalty of sin is gone and no longer do we die and go to Hell, we're saved from the penalty of sin.

### **B. Pollution of Sin**

But, more than that, we're saved from the pollution of sin. Remember again we said that a person who is unsaved pollutes what he does because he himself is polluted? But, when you're saved, not only does God say, "I'll no long send you to Hell." God actually takes that sin out and He puts His righteousness in. We are made the righteousness of God in Christ.

He gives us a new nature and that pollution of sin is gone. I heard of a man, one time, who was pardoned by the Queen of England from prison. A friend had the privilege of delivering the pardon. He went in to this man who had languished in the jail cell for so long and said, "Listen, I've got wonderful news. The Queen has pardoned you. You're a free man." The prisoner showed no emotion. He showed no elation. He said, "Don't you understand? You're a free man. The Queen has set you free."

At that moment, the prisoner unbuttoned his shirt and drew it back and said, "Look at that." And, in his bosom, in his chest, was a cancerous growth that was eating away his life and would soon cause his death. He said, "Ask the Queen what she can do about this." Folks, it's not enough that you be kept out of Hell. You need to be saved not only from the penalty of sin, but from the pollution of sin. I want to tell you that's what Augustus Toplady meant in that song "Rock of Ages" when he said, "Be of sin the double cure saved from wrath and make me pure." Amen. Make me pure.

### **D. Power of Sin**

You see, we're saved from the penalty of sin, we're saved from the pollution of sin, and we're saved from the power of sin. Sin shall no longer have dominion over you. That's

what the apostle Paul says.

And, the devil has no authority. The world has no allurements. Sin has no attraction that the child of God cannot now overcome through Jesus Christ who gives us the victory, day by day. And, we don't have to obey the demands of sin any more because now the Savior lives within us.

That's what it means to be saved. And, friend, one of these days we're going to be saved from the very presence of sin. We're going to be taken out of this world to a place called Heaven and I believe in Heaven. Some people believe that Heaven is just some model in form of sentimentality. But, Jesus said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:2–3). And, where is He? In a place called Heaven. And, the Bible says, *"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Revelation 21:27). And, we're going to be saved from the very presence of sin to a place called Heaven. And, I don't mind telling you I'm glad I'm saved. I'm glad I'm saved.

## **II. The Man of Salvation**

Now, listen, what does it mean to be saved? It means to be saved from sin, from sin. Second, not only the meaning of salvation, but I want you to think about the man of salvation. What did they say? Listen, they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved."

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." When they said, "Lord" they meant, "He's master." When they said, "Jesus" they meant "He's mediator." When they said, "Christ" they meant "He's Messiah." That's who He is, master, mediator, Messiah. Lord Jesus Christ. "Lord" means, "boss."

### **A. Lord—Master**

You cannot be saved unless you're willing to make Him Lord of your life, unless you're willing to step off the throne and enthrone the Lord Jesus Christ. He becomes your master, your boss. You must confess Christ as Lord. That doesn't mean that you have the strength. It means that He has the strength, but you must be willing to say, "Jesus, you're Lord. I crown you Lord of all." Lord, He's master.

### **B. Jesus—Mediator**

Jesus, He's mediator. The name Jesus is His earthly name. It means "Jehovah saves." It speaks of one who died on the cross, with His blood.

You see, God just can't overlook your sin. In order for God to pardon your sin, that

sin must be paid for. There was a man named Jesus. God became flesh. He took upon Him flesh and in His flesh He died on the cross for our sins. They told this jailor, no doubt about it, that Christ paid the sin debt and therefore, He is Jesus, the mediator. There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Not only is He master. Not only is He mediator, but He is Messiah.

### C. Christ—Messiah

The word *Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew Messiah, which means, “God’s anointed one,” “God’s chosen one,” “God’s sent one.” There, there’s no other way to be saved. God only has one Messiah. He only has one Christ. Oh, listen, friend, neither is there salvation in any other. “...for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Baptist church can’t save you. And, the Methodist church can’t save you. And, the Catholic Church can’t save you. And, the Presbyterian Church can’t save you, but Jesus can save you. Jesus can save you.

“Oh,” you say, “Well, I believe in the plan of salvation. I’m saved.” No you’re not. *You’re not saved by the plan of salvation. You’re saved by the man of salvation.* His name is Jesus. You say, “Well, I’ve got a proper creed.” A creed can’t save you. Christ will save you. Dear friend, salvation is not a creed, not a code, not a cause, not a church but Christ. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” I’m telling you, dear friend, He is the universal Savior. When this poor pagan said, “What must I do to be saved?” They didn’t hold up good deeds. They didn’t hold up good works. They held up Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, master, mediator, Messiah. Believe on Him.

## III. The Method of Salvation

Now, let’s go to the last thing. I’ve talked about the meaning of salvation. I’ve talked about the man of salvation. Now, let me talk to you very plainly and very, very simply about the method of salvation. How do you get saved? Again, it is so plain. It is so simple. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Can you make it plainer than that? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

Now, what does it mean to believe? Not mere intellectual belief. “...the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). They’re certainly not saved. The Bible word “believe” means “commit” yourself. Not believe about Jesus, believe on the Lord Jesus. You say, “What’s the difference?”

Well, down in Florida, where I used to pastor, I had a deacon friend. He was a very wealthy man, but he wouldn’t fly on an airplane. I mean, he knew airplanes could fly because he’s got eyes. He can see them fly, but he never would get on one. Now, this man had enough money he could buy a ticket anywhere in the world and go and never miss the money. And, he loved to travel, but everywhere he went he drove his automobile.

I said to him, "Brother Doyle, you ought to fly." He said, "Not me." I said, "Well, why not?" He said, "I've just got a problem." He said, "You see that thing?" talking about those airplanes. He said, "Now, look. Intellectually I know it can fly, but emotionally I just can't get on it. I just can't do it." And, he would drive everywhere he went. But, finally, one day, he said, "I'm a grown man. Everybody else is flying. Statistically it's probably safer to fly than to drive." He said, "I am going to fly." And, he bought a ticket and he got on that airplane and buckled himself in. Now, I am sure it was white knuckles all the way, but he made it and now he flies everywhere.

Now, what was the difference? Before he believed about an airplane, when he got on he believed on the airplane. Okay? That's it. What does the word "believe" on the Lord Jesus Christ mean? It means, "commit yourself to Jesus Christ." Just commit yourself to Him, by faith, like a person gets on an airplane and you'll be saved. And, He'll do the saving. You supply the sinner. He supplies the Savior. And, God, my friend, will save you. I promise you on the authority of the Word of God.

Now, the devil will come and he'll say, "Well, it's not that simple. You do your part and God does His part. It's part works and part faith in Christ." That's a lie of the devil. And, you'll never have the assurance of your salvation. You understand it's all of grace through faith. Listen to me, Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9: "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8–9). The moment anybody, are you listening, anybody, any place, any time, says to the Lord Jesus, "I trust you to save me," and means it, that person is saved instantaneously on the spot.

I think I told you some while ago about a trip I was taking on an airplane. I sat down beside a very nice gentleman. He and I got in to conversation. He knew who I was. He'd seen me preach on television and we had a good time. He was a member of one of these denominations that believe you have to be baptized in order to be saved. And, that baptism, somehow accomplishes, or helps to accomplish, salvation. Now, he was a very sincere man. I didn't want to get in a big argument about it. I did want to witness to him. I didn't want to just club him over the head, so I thought, "Now, how can I do this?"

So I said to myself, "Well, we talked about teaching the Bible for a while." And, I said, "Let me ask you a question. Do you ever share your faith?" "Oh, yes, I do." I said, "Well, I share mine too." And, I said, "I want you to tell me how you share your faith and then I'm going to tell you how I share my faith."

I said "Now, let's play a little game. Let's suppose that the pilot has just come on the intercom and told us this airplane is going down. I don't mean to a runway either. I mean, we're crashing. And, let's suppose he told us that we have enough altitude to keep us in the air for five minutes. Now, let's suppose I'm a business man, a business man who has been running around on his wife, a business man who's been doing

dishonest deals, who's been taking God's name in vain, and I'm sitting next to you. And, the pilot makes that announcement and I turn to you and I say, 'Sir, are you a Christian?' And, you say, 'Yes, I am.' And, I say, 'Well, I was raised in a Christian home, but I am not a Christian. I know I've lived a sinful life and now we're both about to die. Sir, before this plane hits the ground, can you tell me how I can be saved and go to heaven?'"

I said, "What would you tell that man?" He said, "Well, now." He said, "Well, you know, you've got to live a Christian life." I said, "Well, now, Sir, I haven't done that." I was talking for, you know, the imaginary man. I said, "You know, I've been unfaithful, and I've drunk, and I've lied and I take God's name in vain. If I have to live a good life, no hope for me because I haven't done that. Tell me, Sir, tell me how to be saved." He said, "Well" I said, "Look, we've got two and a half minutes left." And, do you know what he said to me? He's a dear man, it broke my heart for him to say this, he said, "There wouldn't be any hope for you. Wouldn't be any hope for you."

And, of course, you understand his theology. If baptism is necessary for salvation, how is he going to baptize me in an airplane before we hit the ground? But, I want to tell you, my dear friend, that I told him, "Now, let me tell you what I preach. I preach that 'whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' And, 'whosoever' means any body, any time, any place, anywhere. And, when you add any kind of condition then you take the 'whosoever' out of the Bible and you have to say, 'Whosoever shall believe and shall be near water and shall have a preacher close enough, then that person can be saved.' But, I preach a gospel that I'm everlastingly glad that I can preach and that is 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

## **Conclusion**

What did they tell this man when he asked this question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And, they said, "Believe, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Hallelujah for that gospel. That's a wonderful gospel. And, I'm telling you today with all of the unction, function, and emotion of my soul, if you will trust, if you will commit yourself to this Jesus, today, He will save you from your sin.

Father, I pray today that many in this auditorium will commit their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ and be saved. Holy Spirit of God open understanding to the gospel. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

# Challenges to the Cross

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: August 10, 1997**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 17:16–34**

*“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”*

ACTS 17:16

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Challenge of Superstitious Idolatry
- II. The Challenge of Stiff-Necked Bigotry
- III. The Challenge of Sophisticated Philosophy

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word this morning and be finding please Acts chapter 17—Acts chapter 17—and when you've found it, look up here. Let me tell you this: that a good test of your character is what you do, how you act, how you behave, when you are alone in a big city. Now, this particular passage of Scripture tells about the apostle Paul. He is alone; he's by himself; he is in the great city of Athens. He's waiting for his compatriots and co-laborers, Timothy and Silas, to catch up with him. Actually, he's had to literally plead for his life for preaching the gospel in another place, so he's walking up and down the streets of Athens, Greece. And, as he's there, his heart is stirred and grieved, because he sees in that city great, great wickedness. He saw, for example, idolatry, with its false teachers who were pushing soul dope. He saw in that city the pagan temples. The temples were filled, but the people were empty.

Athens was one of the great cities of the ancient world. Athens was the cultural city of that day. As a matter of fact, if you visit Athens today, you can see the remnants, the ruins, and even the ruins of the buildings that were built in that day were colossal. They are splendid. You look up there at the Acropolis, and on the Acropolis are the remains of the Parthenon, perhaps the most architecturally perfect building that has ever been constructed. All of this is just a part of what the Athenians call the Golden Age of Pericles. What a city Athens was! And Athens was not only the cultural center; Athens was the intellectual center. Athens was the place where the philosophers got together. It was the place where the universities were. Actually, it was the intellectual capital of

mankind. Art, literature, and philosophy—all of these are the stuff out of which Athens was made. It was the native home of Socrates, the native home of Plato. It became the adopted home of Aristotle, and Xenon, and other of the philosophers. And Paul is there now in this great city. But because of all of the gifts of this city, because of its culture, because of its intellectualism, because of its history, it was filled with cynicism, it was filled with snobbery, it was filled with bigotry, and it was filled with idolatry. As a matter of fact, historians tell us that Athens had more than 30,000 gods. Somebody said—a cynic—it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens, Greece.

Now, here's Paul. He's walking up and down the streets of that great city. He is basking, as it were, in the shadow of all of this culture, all of this learning, all of this pride, all of this bigotry. The Bible says that his heart was stirred within him. Begin reading with me in verse 16, if you will: "Now, while Paul waited for them at Athens," waiting for his brothers, now, "his spirit was grieved in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." Now, the apostle Paul faced three challenges in the city of Athens that we face in the city of Memphis, Tennessee, three challenges two thousand years ago that we face today in the twentieth century. And these are challenges, not to us personally, but to our faith. I've entitled the message, Challenges to the Cross—Challenges to the Cross. And, as you go out tomorrow morning, in this city or whatever city you happen to be listening to this, you'll face these three challenges that Paul faced so long ago in ancient Athens.

## **I. The Challenge of Superstitious Idolatry**

First challenge: Paul faced the challenge—there was the challenge of superstitious idolatry—superstitious idolatry. Again, look in verse 16—the Bible says, "He saw that the city was wholly given to idolatry." And then, look in verse 22, if you will: "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said, You men of Athens, I perceive in all things you are too superstitious." So what was it that they faced? They faced superstitious idolatry. The graven images were everywhere. Well, you say, Pastor, we've advanced past that. Oh no, we haven't. We live in a city, and your city is a city that's filled with false gods. We just simply give them different names.

What is an idol anyway? Let's find out whether you are an idolater. I dare say we have a great number of idolaters in this building right now, and even a greater concentration of idolaters outside of this building. What is an idol? Let's just determine an idol. An idol is anything that you love more, anything that you fear more, anything that you serve more, anything that you trust more, than Almighty God—is an idol. May I say that again: Anything that you love more, anything that you fear more, anything that you serve more, anything that you trust more, than Almighty God is an idol. Or let me put it this way: whatever is in first place in your heart is your god. It may be your family,

it may be your business, it may be your pleasure; but if you cannot say it and mean it that Jesus Christ is number one in your life, I say it kindly, but I say it frankly, You, sir, you madam, are an idolater. The Bible says we're to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto you. I love my wife Joyce with all of my heart, but she knows—she gladly knows—she's not number one in my life; she's number two. Jesus Christ is number one; and I can love her with a love that I could not love her with if she were number one, because Jesus Christ is in my heart and in my life.

May I say this: that the greatest sin that a man can commit is the sin of idolatry. Why? Because what did Jesus say the great commandment was? Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, with all of your being—that is the first and great commandment—and, therefore, if you do not love Him that way, the first and great sin is the breaking of the first and great commandment. And, therefore, idolatry is the greatest sin of all; it is having something, someone, some program, some plan, something other than Almighty God in first place.

And not only is idolatry the greatest sin, but I want to say that idolatry is a renunciation of the whole purpose of life. Why did God put this planet in space? Why did God create Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? I mean, what is it all about? God made us to know Him, to love Him, and to worship Him. That, my friend, is the purpose of life. And if you don't do that, not only have you committed the greatest sin, but you have renounced the whole purpose of life.

Now, we said our city is full of gods, idols; we have just given them different names. In Paul's day, they worshiped a god named Mammon. What was the god Mammon? This was the god of material possessions. Now, if you are devoted to riches, wealth, things—I say devoted to them, I didn't say if you have them—if you're devoted to them, then you are an idolater. At graduation time, well-meaning speakers will come and speak to the graduates, and they will tell the graduates that they want them to be successful, and they will often say something like this—I'm talking about well-meaning people—they will say, "Make all of the money you can, just so you make it honestly." That's terrible advice—terrible advice—because if a man is making all of the money he can, whether he makes it honestly or not, if he's making all the money he can, he's going to be making money when he ought to be doing something else. He's going to be making money when he ought to be worshiping, when he ought to be praying, when he ought to be with his family, when he ought to be on a vacation. You see, a man who makes all the money he can is transgressing the Word of God, and the advice that Paul gave when he said, "They that will be rich will pierce themselves through with many sorrows."

But I tell you, dear friend, that we live in a generation, a society, that serves the god

Mammon. Think about the drug pushers. You think he wants to turn kids onto drugs? No, he doesn't really care whether they're on drugs or not; he wants the money that he gets from selling drugs. Think about the liquor dealer. He doesn't want people to be drunk in the gutter, covered with flies; he doesn't want a man to come home and abuse his wife and children, not necessarily. What he wants is the money he gets from selling liquor. The pornographer, he really doesn't care whether he warps and distorts and diseases the minds of men and women and children; it's a multi-billion dollar business. What does he want? He's a moneygrubber; he wants the money that comes from it.

The gambling business down here in Tunica, friend, well, what are those people down there serving? They're serving the god Mammon. This was in our local newspaper. Friend, this is a joke! It says—here's a full page. We turn players into winners. Good night, if they did that, they'd go out of business! Hey, folks, if you believe that, you need to will your brains to the Smithsonian. Do you think that they turn players into winners? What do you think builds all those hotels down there? Millions and millions and millions of dollars. I'll tell you: not winners; losers do it. You can't have winners without losers; and friend, if there are more winners than losers, they go out of business. Good night! "We turn players into winners." No, they play, but turn—shall I say it?—suckers into losers. You say, Well, it's just a legitimate industry. No, it is not. All legitimate business is win-win. I make a widget; I sell it to you. You get the widget; I get the dollar. I have a dollar; you have a widget. You win; I win. Gambling is win-lose. You cannot have winners unless you have losers, and then, this is so funny, down here in I mean small print—small print—down here it says this: know when to stop before you start. Well, why would I want to stop? I'm winning. Good night! Let me tell you, if it's so good, why do you know...? Let me tell you when to stop: before you start, before you start. The god Mammon—he's with us today; he just has a different name.

And then there's another god—that was the god Bacchus. This was the god of drunkenness and drugs and debauchery. He's very much alive today in the city of Memphis.

And then there was the god Aphrodite, or Venus. That's the god of sex. We live in a sex-saturated society. Adultery, fornication, sodomy, sexual perversion—all of these things are sin. Somebody said, America spends over six billion dollars a year on the goddess Aphrodite. That's the way she's worshiped. Old gods with new names.

They worshiped the god named Mars. He was the god of power, revenge. He is the god that's turned this world into a bloody battlefield. Sometimes even our highways are the slaughter pens.

They worshiped the goddess named Sophia—that was the goddess of intellectualism, of wisdom, of philosophy, the goddess of knowledge. And what do we do today? We worship at the shrine of our computers. Salvation for mankind today is

man's inevitable progress.

Now, Paul faced idolatry, and every preacher of the gospel will face idolatry. We don't have time to do it this morning, but you turn to Romans chapter 1, and you'll find how we got into this mess. You know what Paul said there in Romans chapter 1? That we worship the creature more than the Creator. Let me prove that to you this morning. If I were to stand on this platform this morning and say something that denigrated somebody's race, this television station, the one you're listening to, would be inundated with calls. He can't say that, he cannot be bigoted, prejudiced and talk down anybody's race—and I would not, I shall not, God being my helper. I have no desire, none whatsoever. But I'll tell you something else: comics and others can stand up and denigrate God, blaspheme Almighty God, say anything they want about the service and the worship of God, and who seems to care? Now, if you misunderstand my point, it's because you're not listening to me. I am not in any way condoning any kind of racial prejudice, but I am saying that we have worshiped the creature more than the Creator, and you know that is true. We have humanized the whole thing. Do you know what an idol is? An idol is but a magnified sinner. What men do is to take their worst proclivities, their worst desires, whether it be revenge, whether it be lust, whether it be power, whether it be greed, they take those things and they make a god out of them. An idol is a magnified sinner. And then, they begin to worship their own lusts, their own desires; and now it is legitimized, because nothing is too good for a man's god. Idolatry, I say, is the great sin.

## **II. The Challenge of Stiff-Necked Bigotry**

Now, Paul faced another challenge. Now, we could just pull over and park, and talk about idolatry for a long time, but let me say, not only did Paul face superstitious idolatry, but he also faced stiff-necked bigotry. Look, if you will, in verse 17: "Therefore, disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons in the market daily with them that met with him." Look at the word dispute. Paul said, I'm going to go into the synagogue and I'm going to preach Jesus Christ there, but it turned into an argument; it turned into a dispute. The people there said, We're not like these idolaters; we don't worship sticks and stones; we know that there is one true God; and so, they looked down with disdain upon these idolaters and these who glorified vice and creeping things. But the problem is that they have religion without reality. You say, Well, most of the people in America need religion. Folks, Athens had religion. People in America don't need religion; they need to turn from religion to Jesus Christ. I remind you, it was the religious crowd that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Paul faces this self-righteous, stiff-necked bigotry. And you'll face that when you go out to preach the cross of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, the bigot will call you a bigot. He'll say,

Who are you to try to tell me what to believe? Who are you to say that there is only one God? Who are you to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven? Well, friend, either He is or He isn't, and if He isn't, He is a liar, a fake, a fraud, an impostor, and not even worthy of our respect at all, because He said that He was. And, we're going to face that today; we're going to face that kind of bigotry who thinks that you and I are all un-American if we don't put our arms around everybody else and say that their religion is just as good as ours.

And so here is the apostle Paul—he's facing idolatry, and he's facing this resistance to the gospel by the self-righteous people. Paul knew how they felt, because he himself had been that kind of a person before he met Jesus Christ.

### **III. The Challenge of Sophisticated Philosophy**

I'm going to push on to the third thing, because I'm afraid that time will get away from us, but I said that Paul in the city of Athens faced three challenges to the cross. He faced superstitious idolatry, he faced self-righteous bigotry, and he faced sophisticated philosophy. Look, if you will now, in verse 18 of this same chapter. We just read 17—now verse 18: "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him, and some said, What will this babbler say? Others, he seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection, and they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest of is, for thou bringest certain strange things to our ears. We would know, therefore, what these things mean." So here is the apostle Paul now—he looks at the idolatry, he faces the bigotry, and now he comes to the philosophy. Now, remember, that Athens was the intellectual center, and philosophers abounded.

Now, what is philosophy? Well, the word philosophy literally means a lover of wisdom; a philosopher, to love wisdom. A philosopher is, theoretically, at least, a lover of wisdom. Somebody said that philosophy is that system of thought that tells us what we already know in words we can't understand. Maybe there's some truth to that, but I want to say this: that philosophy is not the answer to this world's problems. It turned ancient Greece into a graveyard, and it will turn this nation into a graveyard. The philosophers don't have the answers. Schopenhauer, who denied the God of the Bible, said—he was a philosopher—he said that life is a curse of endless cravings and endless unhappiness. That's the best his philosophy could offer. Huxley, who also denied the God of the Bible, Huxley, who at the end of his life stepped back and looked at it all, here's what this brilliant philosopher said—he said, "It seems like we are a cancer on the globe." Bertrand Russell—you go to college and study philosophy, you'll study old Bertrand Russell—what did Bertrand Russell have to say? He lived his life in

philosophy. He finally confessed, he said, and I quote, Philosophy proved a washout for me. And H. G. Wells, brilliant historian, brilliant philosopher—after he'd studied it all, here's what he said—quote: “Unless there is a more abundant scheme before mankind, this scheme of space and time is a bad joke, an empty laugh, braying across the mysteries.” After the philosophers have brought all of their study, they still have a question that cannot be answered except by Jesus Christ: what is the meaning of life? No wonder the late great Dr. Robert G. Lee, former pastor of this church, said, Philosophy is a chunk of cloudbank buttered with the night wind.

Paul met there superstitious idolatry. Paul met there self-righteous bigotry. Paul met there in Athens sophisticated philosophy. And you'll meet it; you college students at the University of Memphis and other places will meet it. There were two particular philosophies that were there that day. I want you to see what they were, that Paul preached, and you're going to see them. Look, if you will, in verse 18: "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him." Now, I'm glad that he mentions the Epicureans and the Stoics, for while there were many philosophers there—remember Plato, Aristotle, Xeno—the other philosophers were there; this was the headquarters of it. But Epicurus had taught for about 300 years a philosophy, and those who followed him were called Epicureans, and Xeno had taught a philosophy and those who followed him were called Stoics. Now, what were the Epicureans? What did an Epicurean believe? Well, he didn't believe in a personal God. He didn't believe in accountability. He believed that you're going through this life, this life is basically all that there is; and so, live it up; get all of the pleasure from food, from sex, from possessions, grab it as you can; it's the good life, the good life. Now, if you think these things are old, you remember the beer commercial about a decade ago, you only go through life once—what?—grab all the gusto you can. That's the Epicureans. I mean, the beer people did a better job than old Epicurus did. You only go through life—of course, both of them were a bad job—but you only go through life once: grab all the gusto you can. Folks, you know any philosophers like that? Now, they may have never taken a class in philosophy, but I'll tell you everybody has a philosophy, and there are a lot of Epicureans who live in Memphis, Tennessee, right? Sure. I mean, they are living for pleasure, they are living for the sensate things of this world; they're sensuous. And so, if you want to put just a word for the Epicureans, just put pleasure.

And then, what about the Stoics? Just put a word for them: pride—pride. The stoics were the unmoved. They prided themselves at being above it all, intellectual, unmoved; pain, sorrow—they disciplined themselves not to be bothered about these things, to be as, as we use the word today, stoical about them. And they reeked with self-sufficient pride. Now, all of the philosophies of this world can basically be summed up in these two things: pleasure and pride—pleasure and pride. Paul faced that.

Now, had you been in the city of Athens that day, and there sits the Parthenon, there's the Aeropagus, here's Mars Hill where the judges sit, and the philosophers stroke their beards, and listen, and Paul, on fire for the gospel of Jesus Christ, walks into that city, and he begins to tell them that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and He's the only Savior of the world. Took a lot of cheek for that, didn't it? Took a lot of courage for that. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ—right there in that center he begins to preach Jesus Christ. The philosophers said, Hey, let's hear what this babbler will say! And, by the way, that's what some of you are saying: Let's listen to this babbler this morning. I know that: let's hear what this babbler will say. They want to hear the apostle Paul as he begins to answer them, and I love what Paul preached. Begin here in verse 19, and I want you to see what Paul preached. I wonder what you would have preached if you had been there that day on Mars Hill in front of those high muckety mucks. Well, begin in verse 19: "And they took him and they brought him to the Aeropagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears. We would know, therefore, what these things mean, for all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing. Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious, for as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God, whom therefore ye ignorantly worship. Him declare I unto you." Now, Paul is going and looking at the names of these silly gods; maybe he has a notebook, writing the names of these gods down. Up and down the streets of Athens, and then he says, Would you look at this! Here's one to the unknown god, in case we missed it, and we just don't want to leave him out—the unknown god.

They were covering all of the bases like the lady who married four husbands in a row. She married a banker, and then she married an actor, and then she married a pastor, and finally she married an undertaker. Somebody asked her, Well, why'd you do all of that? She said, Well, I just want to cover all the bases: one for the money, one for the show, one to get ready, and one to go. And so, she just covered all of the bases. Now, that's what these people are doing right now.

They're covering the bases. They said, Well, in case, we don't want to offend any deity, so here's an altar to the unknown God. And Paul said, Yes, He's an unknown God to you, but I'm going to tell you who this God is. And I want you to listen to what this spiritual intellectual giant said to these people right here, the message that he preached. Now, remember, they'd had the teaching of Socrates and Plato and all of these, but here's what he says. Begin in verse 24 and 25. The first thing he's going to say is this: that this unknown God to you is the God of all power who has made everything, and therefore He stands above and distinct from all of creation." Read it in verse 24 and 25:

"God, that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands"—you can't corner him in your temple, and you can't put in on your shelf—"neither is worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things. He is over and above all creation." So many that day were pantheists, they worshiped sticks and stones and earth and dirt and fire; but God made all of this, He is above all of this. But do you know that's creeping back into our society today, the fact that all of this universe is somehow sacred and divine? In our schools today in the United States of America, Easter is out of bounds. You know what we have today? Not Easter; we have Earth Day—Earth Day. No longer Father God; now Mother Earth, so we can all worship dirt. That's where we are, but Paul said, This God—this God—made it all; He is above it all. And with that statement he banished all of the gods of Greece.

Here's the second thing he said about Him. He said He is the God of infinite love, who made you, made man to know Him and to worship Him. Look now in verses 26 and following: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and have determined the time before hand and the bonds of their habitation that they should seek the Lord." Why did God make man? God made man to know Him and love Him and worship Him, "that they should seek the Lord and happily they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being." He's not some distant, unmoved, impassive God up in heaven; He is the great God who made you. He breathed into your nostrils the breath of life, He made you a living soul, and He swung this planet in space so it would be a habitation for man, to make a man who would love Him and worship Him.

Here's the third thing Paul told them. This God of infinite power, this God of infinite wonderful purpose is also a God of infinite purity and absolute righteousness who demands that all men everywhere repent. Look, if you will, in verse 30: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." How many pulpits in America are preaching that message today? Do you know the message America needs to hear today with its idolatry, with its bigotry, with its philosophy? Repent. Repent! The word repent is a change of mind that leads to a change of life, and Jesus said—not Adrian, Jesus said—"Except you repent, you'll all likewise perish." This is a God of power who made it all. This is a God of purpose who put man there to worship Him and know Him. This is a God of purity and holiness, who says you must repent, because I'm a holy God, and I cannot fellowship with sin.

And then, this is the God of eternal salvation who raised Jesus from the dead. Look, if you will, in verse 31: "Repent, because ye have appointed a day in which ye will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he raised him from the dead." He preached the death,

burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins. You have to admire Paul, don't you? Can you see him? I mean, in front of all of these, can you see him there?

## Conclusion

There was a man who had served God who fell into sin. It breaks my heart to even think about it, because he was a good man. He was put under discipline. After several years, he was given a chance to give his testimony, and this is what he said. He said, I've thought about what I did, how I disgraced my Lord. He said, I imagine myself at the River Jordan where John the Baptist was baptized. He said, I saw a long line of people being baptized, and John was going down the line, and he would ask a man, What are your sins? And the man would honestly confess his sin. John would write those sins on the tag and put it on that man's shoulder. Go to the next man—what are your sins, sir? Write them on the tag, and put it on his shoulder. To the next and the next and the next and the next—a great, great, great long line, each one giving his sin, the tag there on his shoulder. And then, John comes to the Lord Jesus Christ who came to be baptized of John the Baptist. What is your sin, sir? And the Lamb of God said, I have no sin. John says, I have need to be baptized of you. But then, this man said, I imagine Jesus going to the very end of that line, and saying to that man, Give me your tag. What? Give me your tag. And He puts it on His shoulder. Bob Sorrell, give me your tag; He put it on His shoulder. David Scott, give me your tag. Jim Whitmire, give me your tag. Adrian, give me your tag. "And him who knew no sin, God hath made to be sin for us." And Jesus, baptized in the river Jordan, symbolized going down into the chilly waters of death, burying our sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Aren't you glad He did that? That, my friend, is what Paul preached, and that is what I preach. You can deny it, if you will. The Bible says, when Paul preached that message, some mocked. You can laugh your way into hell, but you can't laugh your way out. And he said, some said, We'll hear you later. While there was derision, there was delay, but some believed.

I've preached long enough to know this morning there'll be some mockers here, and there'll be some delayers here, but, oh, I pray God there'll be some believers this morning, who will say to Jesus, Lord Jesus, thank you; I believe you're the God of heaven and earth; I believe you took my sin to the cross. Thank you for taking that tag from my shoulder, and carrying my sin, carrying my sin to Calvary.

Are you saved? I didn't say, Are you a Baptist? Are you saved? If you were to die today, do you know that you would go to heaven? Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you pray a prayer like this? Lord Jesus, I know that you love me; I know that you want to save me. You died to save me; you promised to save me, if I would only trust you. I do trust you, Jesus. Tell Him that; tell Him that right now. I do trust you, Jesus. I will not trust anything else. I've turned

from any idolatry. I've turned from any self-righteous bigotry. I've turned, Lord Jesus, from any ungodly philosophy. My hope is built on nothing less than your blood and righteousness. Save me, Lord Jesus. Pray it! Save me, Jesus. Did you ask Him? Then pray this way: Thank you for saving me, Jesus. Begin now to make me the person you want me to be, and help me never to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Standing Firm in a Pagan World

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: January 4, 2004**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 17:16–34**

## Outline

Introduction

I. You Will Experience Challenges to Your Faith

II. You Can Express Confidence in Your Faith

III. You Should Expect Converts to Your Faith

Conclusion

## Introduction

Thank you, ladies. That was wonderful. Praise our great God.

Find in the Book of Acts chapter 17. And when you've found it, look away, look up here, and I want to say a word to you about something that's very meaningful to me and really very disturbing to me. And here's the thought. We are moving away from a Christian consensus in America. Now, it is true that there are many who love the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that there are many who believe the Bible to be the Word of God and Jesus Christ the only Savior. But those who do surveys, like the Barna Institute and others, have told us something that is very alarming. The Barna Research Report said that nearly two out of three adults in America contend that the choice of one religious faith over another—listen—the choice of one religious faith over another is irrelevant. And why do they say this? Because they say all religions teach the same basic lessons about life. And, increasingly, Americans are believing that Jesus Christ is fine, wonderful indeed, but He is only one option among many options. And what we're calling that today is pluralism, and that we're called upon to accept all religions as equal, and somehow we're un-American if we don't put our arms around others and other faiths, and say, "Your religion is just as good as mine." As a matter of fact, they tell us that tolerance is wrong. We're not supposed to tolerate them, for that assumes that we don't agree with them, but that's okay. No. Now, they want to go beyond tolerance to acceptance and approval, and it is an insinuation that we think something is wrong with their faith, if we even tolerate it. Now, ladies and gentlemen, what are we to do? Are we to wring our hands, or are we to give up in despair, or are we to give a credible response to these challenges to the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? In this message, I want to tell you that what we are to do is to raise the flag of our faith, and expect others to salute it, others to believe in the Lord that we believe in.

Now, the episode that I'm going to talk to you about today is taken here from the 17th chapter of the Book of Acts. It's an episode in the life of the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul is in the great city of Athens, the intellectual, cultural center of the ancient world. He is waiting for his comrades to join him. So Timothy and Silas are on their way, and Paul is alone in this big city. Have you ever been alone in a big city? May I tell you this: the test of your character is what you do when you're alone in a big city. Paul is alone in this big city. He's waiting for his friends. And so, while he's in the city of Athens, he's walking the streets of Athens. And, as he's walking the streets of Athens, his spirit is stirred within him. He finds something moving, because he sees the depth of depravity and the wickedness of that city. Paul saw false teachers who were peddling soul dope, a narcotic for the soul. He saw pagan temples that were filled with empty people. Now, I want to remind you that ancient Athens was the cultural center of that ancient world. The glory of Athens was overwhelming.

I've visited modern Athens many times, and I always want to go to see the ruins of the Acropolis, to see there the Parthenon, and all of the other things that were left over there from the city that was there in Paul's time, and even before Paul's time.

Paul had come to the city after what was called the Golden Age of Pericles, and this city was absolutely overwhelming to see. Paul looked up at a mountain called the Acropolis, and there sitting on the Acropolis was the most architecturally perfect building, perhaps, that man has ever created, the Parthenon, dedicated to the sex goddess, Athena. And Paul saw the Parthenon that was there.

And then not only was it the cultural center of the world, but Athens was the intellectual center of the ancient world. It was the intellectual capital of mankind. Art, literature, philosophy—this was the stuff that ancient Athens was made of. It was the native home of Socrates and Plato, names that are spoken with reverence in the realm of philosophy. Not only was it the native home of Socrates and Plato, but it became the adopted home of Aristotle and Epicurus and Zeno. And these philosophers were there. As a result of this cultural superiority, as a result of this intellectualism, it was a city that was filled with cynicism. It was a city that was filled with snobbery. It was a city that was filled with debate. And Paul is there, and Paul is going to share Jesus Christ, and he's going to meet strong resistance. And we're going to learn some lessons, because what happened so long ago, friend, is happening today in our society. This scripture that we're going to study is not just what has happened; it is what is happening. It is not just what God has said to others so long ago; it is what God is saying to our society today, because history is like a broken phonograph record; it just keeps repeating itself.

There are three things that Paul met in ancient Athens, and those are the three things that you will meet, whether you live in Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Dallas, or

Memphis, or Miami. What three things did Paul meet there in Athens so long ago?

First of all, he met superstitious idolatry. Secondly, he met sterile orthodoxy. Thirdly, he met sophisticated philosophy. And God gave him an answer for these. Now, let me tell you what you're going to experience today as you stand for your faith in a pagan society. And get ready, and get your children ready, because, friend, it's all around us. Here's what will happen as you go out to live for Christ.

## **I. You Will Experience Challenges to Your Faith**

Point number one: You will experience challenges to your faith—you will experience challenges to your faith. Don't get the idea that you're just going to sally forth and not be challenged. Today, if you are a Bible-believing Christian, you will experience challenges to your faith. What did Paul experience as a challenge? I've already told you, number one, superstitious idolatry. Now, look, if you will, in Acts chapter 17 and verse 16: "Now, why now, while Paul waited for them at Athens—that's Silas and Timothy. He's waiting—Now, while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given over to idolatry." And then go down and look in verse 22: "Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious."

There were idols everywhere; pagan images everywhere. Someone said it was easier to find a false god in Athens than it was to find a human being. They had some 30,000 different gods that they worshiped in ancient Athens. Well, you say, "Pastor, I thought you said that day would be like our day. We don't have 30,000 different gods." No, we have more! We have more! This city, and every major city in America, is filled with idolatry. The difference is we give our idols different names.

What is an idol? Get it down big, plain, and straight. Here is an idol. Now, listen. An idol is anything that you love more, fear more, serve more, or trust more than Almighty God. May I tell you that again? Listen to me. An idol is anything that you love more, fear more, serve more, or trust more than Almighty God. An idol is whatever is in first place in your life. That is an idol, whatever your heart clings to. Whatever your heart trusts in, that is your idol. Now, may I tell you this, that idolatry is the greatest sin that a man, a woman, a boy or a girl can commit. Why? Because it transgresses the greatest commandment. What is the greatest commandment? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul, all thy strength, all thy mind." That's the first and great commandment. Idolatry, therefore, has to be the greatest sin because it breaks the greatest commandment.

Now, I said that we have, perhaps, more gods than they did in that day. And we'll face those gods. You'll face them tomorrow as you go out into this great city. We've just changed the names. The names have been changed to protect the guilty. Let me give

you some of the modern gods that have old names.

For example, the god of materialism. They had a god of materialism. They didn't call it materialism; they called this god mammon—mammon. Now, there are many in this city who worship the god of mammon. Their lives are devoted to wealth. Their lives are devoted to business. Their lives are devoted to success and achievement. And there are some in this audience. If you were to be absolutely honest, if I were to ask you what is the major thing in your life, it would be your possessions. Now, you may be in church this morning, you may tip your hat to God, but God's not going to take second place. God is not some sort of a moonlighting god with a duplex for a throne. Many of you worship this matter of mammon. And it's all over.

Think of how mammon, the god of mammon, has influenced our lives. The drug dealers—what motivates them? The god of mammon. They're willing to destroy our youth for the love of money.

The pornographers—what motivates them? With their filth, they are willing to destroy the nation's morals for money.

The liquor industry—what motivates the liquor industry? Stealing away America's brains, the god of mammon.

Public officials who betray America's integrity for money are worshiping the god of mammon.

The gambling industry worships the god mammon. I saw Harrah's, this casino down here, that advertised on a billboard, "We make winners." Friend, if you believe that, you ought to will your brain to the Smithsonian. If they make winners, they're out of business. They have to make losers. How foolish can people be? What motivates the gambling industry? The god of mammon—that's only one god.

There's another god, the god of alcohol. Well, you say, "Is that a god?" Yes. The ancient people gave this god a name. His name was Bacchus, the god of liquor, the god of alcohol, the god of drunkenness, drugs, and debauchery.

We worship in America the god of sex. They gave this god a name. Her name was Venus, Aphrodite, Athena. This was the sex goddess, the god of sexual lust and promiscuity. In America, is not sex a god? We live in a sex-saturated society. And now it seems like the sluice gates of hell have been broken on us today and around we are immersed in a swamp of adultery and fornication and homosexuality, pornography, which they call a victimless crime. There's no such thing as a victimless crime.

What about the god of violence? Do we worship the god of violence? Look at some of the video games your kids are playing. They worship the god of violence. They just gave him the name Mars, which was the god of power and strength and revenge.

Well, you say, "I'm more intellectual than that." Well, perhaps you worship the god of

wisdom and knowledge. They named this god Sophia, the goddess of wisdom, and they worshiped it. And, today, we worship at the shrine of our computers and our cyclotrons and our universities.

Idolatry. Paul faced idolatry. Americans face idolatry. Anything you love more, fear more, trust more, serve more than God is an idol. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” We have no right to worship anything other than an idol, other than Almighty God.

What is an idol? An idol is just a magnified sinner. A man takes his worst vices and lusts, and he worships them, and nothing is too good for a man’s god. The apostle Paul tells us about it, in Romans chapter 1, verses 24: “Wherefore God also gave them up uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed—and that word literally means exchange—the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

I want to ask you a question. Which would be easier for a person to do on television or radio or in the newspaper today: say something disparaging about somebody’s race, ethnicity, or to blaspheme God? Now, don’t misunderstand the illustration. I’m not saying that we ought to say something derogatory about somebody’s race or ethnicity. I’m not talking in favor of racism. But I want to ask you a question. Which would be easier? It would be far easier—far easier—to blaspheme God than to say something derogatory about some human being—is that not right? Why? Because we worship the Creator less than we worship the creature. Now, Paul, first of all, he faced sophisticated idolatry. And when you leave this building, friend, you’re going to face it head on.

The second thing Paul faced this day in Athens was self-righteous orthodoxy—self-righteous orthodoxy. Look in verse 17: “Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the...—underscore this—the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met him.” Now, Paul is not facing idolatry; he’s facing those who believe in the one true God. But they are self-satisfied. They do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. These are the respectable sinners. There are many in this building like that today and listening to me. You look down upon others with their superstition, but you’ve never seen yourself in need of a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul had been this same kind of a self-righteous bigot till he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and had his life transformed. But you’re going to meet many in this city who may not be open idolaters, but they’re going to be self-righteous, and they’re not going to see their need of the Savior.

There’s a third category that the apostle Paul met this day in Athens, and this was sophisticated philosophy—sophisticated philosophy. These are not superstitious

idolaters, these are not the self-righteous orthodox, but these are they who see themselves as intellectual giants. We're going to face those. Look in Acts chapter 17, verse 18: "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? Others some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."

Now, I've already told you that Athens was not only the cultural but the intellectual center of the world at that time, and philosophers clustered to the city. Philosophy abounded. Now, what is philosophy? The word literally means a love of knowledge. Somebody said, "Philosophy is that system that tells us what we already know in words we can't understand." Has philosophy met the need of a man's heart? Let me read to you what some noted philosopher said about philosophy. Schopenhauer, world famous philosopher, got to the bottom line, and he said this: "Life is a curse of endless cravings and endless unhappiness." Well, for him, philosophy was a dead-end road. Huxley, a brilliant man, Julius Huxley wrote this: "It seems to me...—he's looking at the human race, and he says—It seems to me that we are a cancer on the globe." That's philosophy. Bertram Russell, arrogant, conceited, but honest enough to say, "Philosophy proved a washout to me." H. G. Wells—have you heard that name?—the noted historian and philosopher said this—and I quote: "Unless there is a more abundant scheme before mankind, this scheme of space and time is a bad joke, an empty laugh braying across the mysteries." Our own Dr. Robert G. Lee, former pastor of this church, said, "Philosophy is a chunk of cloudbank buttered with the night wind." He knew that philosophy, the love of knowledge, can never satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart. And here's the apostle Paul there in the great city of Athens, and he sees this idolatry, he sees this orthodoxy, he sees this philosophy. What kind of philosophy was it?

Well, there was, first of all, the philosophy of pleasure. Look in Acts 17:18: "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans..." Who were the Epicureans? Epicurus lived about 300 years before Christ, and he had a philosophy that said this, simply: that you really can't make sense out of life. The search for reason or for pure truth, by reason, is impossible. You're never going to find absolute truth. And so, what Epicurus said is this: Enjoy yourself. This is all you have. This is all you can be sure of. And so he says the wisest thing is pleasure based on your own personal experience. And we talked today about Epicureans, lovers of pleasure. And, we see this all around.

What are people in our city living for? What is their philosophy? It's just a philosophy of pleasure. As a matter of fact, one said, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die." That's the Epicurean. Some years ago, a beer company put it in a slogan. You will

remember the slogan, “You only go through life once, so what? That’s right. “Grab all the gusto you can get.” “You only go through life once; grab all the gusto you can get.” That’s the Epicureans. Now, folks, this stuff is not new to us; it’s one of the moldiest, dustiest things around. There was the philosophy of pleasure taught by the Epicureans.

Go back to verse 18 again. And there was also the philosophy of pride. “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics encountered him.” Now, who were the Stoics? They were led by a philosopher named Zeno. And what did the Stoics believe? Well, it’s sort of a form of fatalism, that everything is just happening to us, that we really don’t have any real choice. They were really pantheists; that is, believing that everything is God, and God is everything, and, therefore, we are just caught up and swept up in it, and life has no real, vital meaning. And so, you just sit back and endure it. It was really a form of intellectual pride. And they just smirked at those who thought that they had some answer. It was self-sufficiency built on nihilism. Stoicism—just sitting around.

Now, the Stoics and the Epicureans are with us today. The twin philosophies of pleasure and pride, they’re with us today. I mean, these ancient gods are with us today. These philosophies are with us today. This sterile orthodoxy that feels no need of God is with us today.

## **II. You Can Express Confidence in Your Faith**

Now, here’s the second thing I want to lay on your heart. Not only are you going to confront these things; number two: you can express confidence in your faith. I want you to believe this. I don’t want you to throw up your hands and say, “Well, what is the use, then? We’re up against odds too great for us.” Oh no, you’re not. You can express confidence in your faith. Look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 17, verses 19 through 21: “And they took him—that is, Paul—and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what new doctrine whereof thou speakest?” They always wanted their ears tickled. They said, “Let’s let this stranger talk.” “For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: for we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” They said, “Let’s hear what this babbler will say.” They had a place there called Mars Hill—I’ve been up on Mars Hill many times—where they would come and make their discourses. Paul has an opportunity now. Remember, he’s in the city of Athens. He’s seen all of this. And they say, “Hey, bud, let’s hear from you.” If that had been you, what would you say? Would you be ready to give an answer? Now, Paul is given a great opportunity to speak. Remember now that he’s looking around at the accoutrements of the Golden Age of Pericles. Remember now he’s in the shadow of the philosophers, Plato, and Socrates, and Zeno, and Epicurus. Remember now that all of

this indescribable beauty is all around him. But the apostle Paul knew that this human wisdom and beauty were magnificent foolishness without the Lord Jesus Christ. Religion was a mockery and beauty was vain without the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Paul looks at them. He almost says something humorous. He realizes they had covered all of the bases. Look, if you will, down in verse 22: “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. For I passed by and beheld your devotions, and I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.” Paul, walking down the street: here’s a god here, here’s a god here, here’s a god here, here’s a god here, a god here. And then, in case they missed it, they put a god on the shelf and said, “The unknown god—we don’t want to offend him, whoever he is. We’re going to worship him. You see, what they were doing was covering all the bases, like the woman who married four men in succession. First of all, she married a banker. And then, she married an actor. Then, she married a minister. And then, she married an undertaker. One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, four to go. She’s covering all the bases. That’s what they were doing.

Now, Paul begins to speak, and I want you to see what Paul says about God, and we’re going to have to hurry. What would you have said? Paul begins to mention the one true God. He begins to stand for the faith in a pagan society. Number one, he says this: that God is the God of creative power. Look in Acts 17, verse 24. He says, “God made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is the Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth life, giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” What Paul said about this God is He made everything. He’s the God of creative power. Therefore, He stands above and distinct from creation.

Now, what has happened in America today is this: we’ve gone from Father God to Mother Earth. Have you noticed how much religion there is based on the earth today? In our public schools today, we cannot celebrate Easter, but we can celebrate Earth Day, so we can go out and worship dirt. Think about it.

Paul, with this one statement, he banishes all of the gods of Athens, and he says, “You can’t put this God in a corner in your temple. You can’t put this God on a shelf. He is the God of creation.”

But, also, number two: He’s the God of personal love. Look in verses 26 and following: “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the earth, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations—now, notice this. Why did He create them?—that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be

not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being.” He is a God of infinite love who loves us. Why is idolatry the greatest sin? Because it is a repudiation of the very purpose of life. Why do you exist? Why this planet? Why this creation? God made you. God created you. And God created you to know Him and to love Him. And down in your heart—down in your heart—you have a desire to know Him and love Him.

I have a pastor friend, Nelson Price. Brother Jim, you know him. Nelson Price pastored in Marietta, Georgia. He had a friend named Claude Brown. Claude Brown had a trucking firm. As a matter of fact, it’s nationwide. They have some 150 offices in 150 cities across America. Claude Brown, before he employs anybody, gives them a polygraph test. One of the questions on the polygraph is, “Do you believe in God?” It’s a lie detector test. He has a sworn affidavit from the man who gave the polygraph test. He said in every instance—in every instance—when a person professes to be an atheist and he comes to that question and he says, “No, I don’t believe in God,” the polygraph says he’s lying. Every one! Every one! He’s lying. Why? Because down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter, feelings lie buried that grace can restore.

What is Paul saying? He is the God of creation. He is the God of infinite love who made us to know Him and worship Him. And He is the God of supernatural salvation. Look in verse 31: “Because God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man who he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead.” Now, Paul is talking about the resurrection of the dead. He’s talking about a Savior, therefore, who suffered, bled, and died on a cross, was buried, walked out of the grave, and shown to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead. He’s not ashamed to preach the resurrection of Christ there on Mars Hill. Some thought he was insane, but he did it. I have more that I want to say on that, but I want to rush on to the third point.

### **III. You Should Expect Converts to Your Faith**

You should expect converts to your faith—you should expect converts to your faith. Listen. There are going to be challenges to your faith. But expect converts to your faith. When you share the Lord Jesus Christ, I can tell you, after many years of ministry and preaching, there are people who will believe. Notice in Acts chapter 17, verses 32 and 34: “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed.” And let me just stop right there. The gospel has power to change lives. This morning, and every time when I preach, any time you witness, there will be one of three responses. First of all, there will be derision. Some mocked. Some laughed. Are you willing to be laughed at for your faith? Did you

know that some people would rather face a lion than face ridicule? What a fearful weapon that derision is. They laughed at the apostle Paul. Now, Paul was brilliant. He had the equivalency of a triple Ph.D., but he was willing to be thought a fool for Christ's sake. Some of you ladies are being laughed at by your unsaved husbands. Some of you kids at school may be laughed at, especially in the universities, by your sophisticated professor because you're an old-fashioned Bible believer. Some of you businessmen may be laughed at because you keep a Bible on your desk, and bow your head in prayer in the cafeteria, and thank God for your food. You will be laughed at. Harry Ironside, former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, was on a ferryboat, and they were going from Oakland to San Francisco, and they were singing and fellowshiping and praising God. And a man challenged them and said, "What are you doing?" He said, "We're worshipping God." He said, "You're a bunch of fools." He said, "That's true." He said, "We're a bunch of fools, but we're fools for Christ's sake. Whose fool are you? Whose fool are you?" Some laughed.

And then others said, "We will hear you again." Not only derision, but delay. They just put it off. But the Bible says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." And there are some of you who are not going to laugh, but you'll just simply say, "Well, not today. Perhaps tomorrow. Some other time, I'll give my heart to Jesus Christ"—one of the devil's favorite ways to send a soul to hell. Someone has wisely said, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." If you ever intend to give your heart to Jesus, do it now. There was derision. There was delay.

But there was decision. And the Bible says, "and others believed." And I've been preaching this book long enough to know, ladies and gentlemen, there is power in the gospel. And I know that not every seed will sprout, but I know, when you preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, when you show this God to be the God of creation, the God of personal love, the God of salvation, the God who made it all, there's something in the human heart that will say, "Yes, that is the truth, and I will accept that as my truth."

## **Conclusion**

Years ago, after the Civil War, there was a steamboat in the Mississippi River that made a trip from Vicksburg down to New Orleans, and that boat left every Wednesday. It was the plushiest riverboat on the old Mississippi. One night, a fire broke out on that steamboat, and the captain said to the first mate, "Go down the halls, the corridors, awaken the people, tell them the ship is on fire. Do it as quickly as you can." They had no alarm system. This first mate got up and began to run down the hall of that ship, knocking on the door and saying, "Get up! Get up! Get up! The ship is on fire!" Do you know what happened? There were some who thought it was a joke, and they just laughed and went back to sleep. They thought perhaps it was a prank. There were

others who got angry. They thought perhaps some drunk didn't know what he was talking about. They rolled over and went back to sleep. There were others who were sleeping so soundly they never, ever even heard the knock. And there were others who awakened, gathered their things, got out before the fire closed the corridors and saved their lives.

Derision—don't laugh your way into hell. Delay—don't turn over and go back to sleep. Decision—give your heart to Jesus. Friend, listen to me. I didn't come here to make a talk. I came here to tell you about Jesus, to tell you that God loves you, and He wants to save you, and He will save you, if you'll trust Him. If I could do it for you, I would, but I want you to come to Jesus and do it today.

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. If you want to be saved, Christ stands at the door. If you will hear His voice and open the door, He will come in. Would you pray a prayer like this: Dear God, I need You. I want You. Jesus, You died to save me. You promised to save me. You shed Your blood to save me, if I would trust You. I do trust You. I believe You're the Son of God. I receive You into my heart today, now, this moment, now, as my Lord and Savior. I give You my life, and I receive Your life into me. Save me, Lord Jesus. And begin now to make me the person You want me to be. And give me the courage to make it public. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Now, look up here. We're going to sing an invitational hymn. The ministers of our church are going to stand at the head of each of these aisles all the way across the front. For those of you in the balcony, there'll be a minister under that banner over there that says Redeemer, and this one over here that says Messiah for those in the balcony. And, as we sing, I'm going to ask you, if you prayed that prayer, to make it public by coming forward. There's something about coming forward, an open, public acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, that helps settle it and seal it, that shames the devil, gives Jesus glory, gives the church joy, and gives you that assurance. I'm going to ask you to do it. Come forward. You say, "Pastor, I've never done that. What should I do? What would I say?" I want you just to say, "I am trusting Jesus." We'll take an open Bible, re-affirm your decision, answer any questions we can answer, and seal it with you in prayer. It'll take just a moment. It'll be the greatest thing you've ever done—give your heart openly and publicly to Jesus.

Now, there are others of you who are already saved. You've gotten that settled, but you've never been baptized. You need to be baptized as a believer in Christ, just like these were baptized this morning. I want you to come and say, "Look, I know I'm saved. I want to make an appointment for my baptism." And we'll make an appointment and baptize you as a believer in Christ.

Others of you may need a church home. And I want to invite you to come and say, “I want to place my membership here,” if you’re saved and you believe as we believe. We don’t ask you to be perfect. There’s not a perfect member of this church. We ask that you be sincere and want to be a growing Christian. Respectfully, I’m going to ask that no one leave during the invitation unless it is an emergency. If you’re with a friend that may want to make a decision, you may volunteer to come forward with them. How beautiful to see one friend bring another friend to Jesus.

Now, congregation, let’s pray right now. Bow your heads in prayer. Lord God, I pray in the strong name of Jesus that You will bring the lost to Him, in whose wonderful name we pray. Amen.

Let’s stand together. You step out right now and make your way down here to the front. Come on to Jesus.

# Standing Firm in a Pagan World

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 4, 2004

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 17:16–34

*“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”*

ACTS 17:16

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## Introduction

Thank you very much. God bless you. Teresa and girls, we thank you. God bless you for that. Be finding in your Bibles Acts chapter 17—the book of Acts, chapter 17. And, when you’ve found it, look up here and let me tell you something that alarms me and concerns me very much. According to the Barna Research Institute, there is something happening in America and in our spiritual world that is frightening, even alarming.

According to Mr. Barna, nearly two out of three American adults say that the choice of one's faith is really irrelevant since all religions basically teach the same message. That is, it's a smorgasbord; you can pick and choose, and it really doesn't make all that much difference what you believe. So, Christ is just one of many options, and you can choose to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ if you want. But, we live in a day of pluralism. Now, what pluralism means is, in their idea, that we're all un-American if we don't put our arms around them and say, "Your faith, your religion, is just as good as ours." As a matter of fact, today even tolerance is passé. They say, "We don't want to be tolerated. That infers we've done something wrong. We want to be accepted and affirmed, no matter what we practice or how we believe."

Now, that is happening in America. You may not understand it in the culture and the society, in the neighborhood, which you live, but it is a very real fact. And, what I want to talk to you about today is "How to Stand Firm in a Pagan World," and give you some ammunition and to give you some hope because we don't need to stutter or stammer—we can understand what we believe, why we believe it, and we can hoist the flag of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ very high and expect people to bow their knee to Jesus Christ. And, we have good reasons for believing what we believe.

Now, the episode that I'm going to study with you today takes place in the life of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was an intellectual genius. He was a spiritual giant. And, Paul found himself in the great city of Athens—not Athens, Georgia; Athens, Greece—and he's alone there in the city. By the way, the test of your character is what you would do if you were alone in a great city of wickedness and vice. Paul is there. He's waiting on his buddies, his pals, Timothy and Silas, to come; and so, he's walking through the city of Athens. The city of Athens in that day almost defies description. It was indescribably beautiful. It was the cultural center of the world. They had come through a time known as the Golden Age of Pericles. They built some of the most colossal buildings and monuments. And, when Paul was there, the Parthenon was sitting up on a mountain called the Acropolis—the Parthenon, an architectural marvel. Today, architects will tell you that it is probably the most perfect building ever constructed. It was already an antiquity in Paul's day. It was dedicated to the goddess Athena, where we get the name Athens. Athena was a goddess of fertility, a sex goddess, and here was this beautiful temple.

But, not only was it a cultural center; it was a very intellectual city. It was the university city. It was the composite of intellectualism, and people came from all over to go to Athens to study, or to discourse, or to talk about things. There, Paul saw these philosophers there. But, Paul walks down the streets of Athens, and his spirit, his soul, is stirred within him because Athens was filled with idolatry and there were these false teachers who were peddling soul dope there. There were the pagan temples, and they

were gorged and filled with empty people who did not know the Lord. What it must have been like for Paul to be there in that city!

I say, it was a city of intellectualism. The philosophers were there. It was the native home of Socrates and Plato, and other great philosophers adopted Athens. Aristotle said, “I want this to be my home”; and so, he moved there to Athens. And, Epicurus, and Zeno, and the other great philosophers had gathered there. And, as a result of their culture, their beauty, their idolatry, their philosophy, they were filled with pride, arrogance, cynicism, argumentation, and yet, self-confidence. And so, Paul is walking through the streets of Athens. And again, I tell you that his heart is stirred. His soul burns that these people might know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, here’s the thing; listen to me carefully: everything that Paul met in Athens you’ll meet in modern America—all of it, the same thing. You know, the Bible says in the book of Ecclesiastes, “There’s nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) History is kind of like a broken phonograph record: it just keeps repeating itself. And, when you walk out of these doors into this city, or if you live in Athens, or if you live in Miami, or if you live in Chicago, or if you live in Dallas, or if you live in Tokyo, you will meet the same things that Paul met two thousand years ago. And, the passage that we’re studying is not just what has happened; it is what is happening. It is not just what God has said; it is what God is saying. It is not what God said to them—listen—it is what God is saying to you. So, I want you to pay attention because you need to learn how to stand for the faith in a pagan society. Now, Paul faced three things, and you’re going to face those same three things.

## **I. You Will Experience Challenges to Your Faith**

First of all, I want you to notice you will experience—write it down—you will experience challenges to your faith. Paul experienced three of them, and I want you to see what they are.

### **A. Superstitious Idolatry**

First of all, he experienced superstitious idolatry. Now, look in Acts chapter 17, verse 16: “*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens*”—he’s waiting for his buddies to get there, Timothy and Silas—“*while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred [within] him, when he saw the city*”—now, underscore this phrase—“*wholly*”—that means “totally”—“*given to idolatry.*” (Acts 17:16) And then, look in verse 22: “*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.*” (Acts 17:22) That’s the reason I said he faced superstitious idolatry. There were graven images everywhere. Paul is walking down the street. Here’s an idol here. Here’s an idol there, an idol here, an idol there. Somebody said, “It was easier to find a false god in Athens than it was to find a human being.” Athens had some

thirty thousand gods.

“Well,” you say, “we’re not that way, Pastor Rogers.” Oh yes, we have more! “Well,” you say, “We don’t worship idols today.” Oh yes, we do. Now, get the point: nothing has changed. The names have been changed to protect the guilty, but we still have idols today. What is an idol? Now, I want you to get this in your heart and in your mind: *an idol is anything we love more than God, anything we fear more than God, anything we serve more than God, or anything that we trust more than God*—is an idol. *Anything we love, we fear, we serve, or trust more than God is an idol.* We’re told to “seek...*first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*” (Matthew 6:33) And, God said, “*I am the LORD...God...[I’ll not] have [any] other gods before me.*” (Exodus 20:2–3) Whatever is in first place in your life is an idol. Put it down big, plain, and straight: whatever is in first place is an idol. And, may I say that the greatest sin that a man can commit is idolatry? Why? Because what is the great commandment? To “*love the LORD [our] God with all [of our] heart.*” (Deuteronomy 6:5) Therefore, if that is the first and great commandment, the greatest sin would be to break that commandment, and idolatry breaks that commandment. Now, it is a renunciation of the whole purpose of life, for God made the entire universe and put you in it to serve Him. And, if you don’t serve Him, you are doing a renunciation of the total purpose of life and committing the greatest sin.

Now, you say, “Pastor Rogers, do we really have idols?” Yes, we’ve just changed the names. Let me show you some of the idols that we have in America today.

### **1. The God of Materialism (Mammon)**

For example, the idol of materialism. Now, we call it “materialism.” Back in that day, they gave this god a name and made an idol to him. His name was Mammon. Remember what Jesus said: “*[You] cannot serve God and mammon [at the same time].*” (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13) Mammon is the god of materialism. And, there are many idolaters—some in this building today. What do you worship? I mean, what is number one in your life? Possessions? Riches? Wealth? Success? Achievement? Now, you may come to church on Sunday morning and tip your hat to God, but that won’t do. God will not be a part-time God. He’s not going to take second place. He’s not a moonlighting god with a duplex for a throne; He’s God. And, if your heart is wrapped around possessions, you are an idolater.

That’s what is wrong in our society today. The god of mammon has taken over. Why do the drug pushers do what they do? Why are they willing to destroy the lives of our youth? The god of mammon. Why do the pornographers do what they do to wreck our nation’s morals? For the god of mammon, for money. Why is the liquor industry doing what it does with its product brewed with tears, thickened with blood, flavored with death? Why? Simple: money. Why do public officials put their hand in the public till and destroy America’s integrity? For money. Why the gambling industry? Why all of this

down here at Tunica? M-O-N-E-Y, the god of mammon. I saw an ad here—Harrah's, a big ad. You know what they said? The unmitigated gall! The audacity! They said, "We make winners." Now folks, if you believe that, you ought to will your brain to the Smithsonian. They don't make winners; they make losers. If they make winners, they go out of business. Sure, some people win, but they have to make losers in order to stay in business. Hey, hello, think: What is the purpose of all of this? In America, we have our idols. There's the god of mammon.

## **2. The God of Alcohol (Bacchus)**

There's the god of alcohol. Now today, we don't call the god of alcohol what they called him. They called him Bacchus. Have you heard of a Bacchanalian orgy? That is a drunken party. Well, we worship the god Bacchus today—many people do. And, this is the god of drunkenness, and drugs, and debauchery.

## **3. The God of Sex (Venus)**

We worship today the goddess of sex. Now, they had names for their god, their idol of sex. The name was Venus, Aphrodite, Athena, but it's the same old god. Our society is given over to the idolatry of sex. Today, we are encouraging unnatural vices and filthy appetites, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, pornography. Somebody says, "Well, pornography—that's a victimless crime." There's no such thing as a victimless crime. It's a contradiction in terms.

## **4. The God of Violence (Mars)**

What about the god of violence? You say, "We don't worship the god of violence." Look at some of the video games today. See what is feeding the hearts and minds of kids today. They had the god of violence. They just named him Mars, the god of power and the god of revenge.

## **5. The God of Wisdom and Knowledge (Sophia)**

"Well," you say, "I'm above all of that. I'm an intellectual." Well, you may be worshipping a false god, the god of knowledge and the god of wisdom. They had a name for that god; her name was Sophia. It's the phrase we get "sophistication" from. And, there are a lot of people who are sophisticated: you wouldn't bow down before a stick or a stone, but you are an idolater. We worship at the shrine of our computers and the manual of our science. Now, Paul faced idolatry, and we are going to face idolatry today.

### **B. Self-Righteous Orthodoxy**

Now, not only did he face superstitious idolatry, but he faced, also, self-righteous orthodoxy—very important. Look, if you will, in verse 17: "*Therefore disputed he in the synagogue*"—now, this is the synagogue; this is where they taught about the one true God—"with the Jews, and with"—now, notice this—"the devout persons, and in the

*market daily with them that met with him.”* (Acts 17:17) He disputed with them. That means they did not receive him; they did not accept him. They had their religion. They had their sterile orthodoxy. They believed in one true God, but they did not know Him because they had no propitiation for their sins. They had no Savior. They did not understand the prophecies of the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, here Paul is going into the synagogue, the place of religious worship, the place of orthodoxy, and having to contend for the Lord Jesus Christ. And, in America today there are those who would never count themselves idolaters. They say, “I’m orthodox,” but they don’t know Jesus. It’ll be a great day in America when people stop enduring religion and start enjoying salvation.

Here’s the Apostle Paul now. Paul had once been a proud Pharisee, petted, praised for his religiosity. But then, he met the Lord Jesus Christ, and there was a transformation. And, in our city, you’re going to meet the superstitious idolaters; and in our city, you’re going to meet the sterile orthodox who don’t really know yet the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, who will be trudging to church Sunday after Sunday ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

### C. **Sophisticated Philosophy**

There’s a third category that Paul met, and we’ll meet them in our city—and that is sophisticated philosophy. Paul met genuine philosophers. These would not call themselves idolaters as such. Look in verse 18: *“Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”* (Acts 17:18)

Now, you have to understand these are the intellectual top-waters. These are the most erudite of the day. These are the learned. These are the philosophers. And, along comes the Apostle Paul. Now, by the way, Paul never checked his brains behind the door. Paul had the equivalency of a triple Ph.D. He was a world traveler, proficient in languages. He knew history. He knew theology. He knew all of it. But, they called him a babbler because he’s preaching Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. But, he’s facing these philosophers.

#### 1. **The Philosophy of Pleasure (Epicureanism)**

First of all, the Epicureans. Who was Epicurus? He lived about three hundred years before Christ. And, Epicurus was a philosopher, and he made up his mind that no one by sheer reason can determine pure truth; it’s just impossible. So, he threw up his hands; he said, “You will never know truth as such.” So, what is the alternative? Well, the alternative, therefore, is to live in pleasure because this is all we know. It’s right here. And so, live in pleasure. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for”—what?—“tomorrow you

die.” You don’t know what’s coming. You can’t figure it out. So, squeeze all of the juice out of life that you can.

A beer commercial picked up on this a while back. You think these things are ancient? They’re not ancient. A beer commercial—you will remember it: “You only go through life once, so”—what? That’s right—“grab all the Gusto you can.” That’s it. That’s Epicurus. “You only go through life once; grab all the Gusto you can.” This is called “heathenism” by the philosophers of today. It’s called “the good life” by other people. It’s called “the Playboy philosophy” by other people. Hey, folks, these philosophies are still with us. There was Epicurus. He was there.

## **2. The Philosophy of Pride (Stoicism)**

And then, there were the Stoics. Who were the Stoics? Well, the Epicureans were given over to pleasure. The Stoics were given over to pride. Now, they, too, had come to the idea that you really can’t understand everything in life. And so, their leader was a man named Zeno, and he had come to the idea that God was everywhere—impersonal, unknowable. He was what we call a “pantheist,” that God is in everything: the wind, the trees, the earth—I’m God; you’re God; they’re God; it’s God; we’re God. And so, what they had done is just a form of fatalism, just to say, “What will be will be. We’re caught up in it. We’re swept along in it.” So, they sat back with intellectual pride and looked down upon others in their source of knowledge, and they were self-sufficient and proud.

Now, if you put those two philosophies together, they just about wrap up everything you learn in the modern university today. Either it’s the philosophy of pleasure or pride. Either it is Epicureanism or it is somehow Stoicism. That’s the way our world is today. Now, this is what Paul is facing. On the one hand, he is facing this superstitious idolatry. On the other hand, he’s facing this sterile orthodoxy. On the other hand, he is facing this sophisticated philosophy. And folks, that’s what you’ll face. That’s what you will face as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, because I want to say that there’s nothing really new.

## **II. You Can Express Confidence in Your Faith**

Now, here’s the second point I want to lay on your heart: not only will you experience challenges to your faith, but you can express confidence in your faith. You don’t have to be ashamed of what you believe. You can express confidence in your faith. Now, notice, if you will, Acts chapter 17, verse 19: “*And they took him*”—that is, Paul. Here’s Paul in this big city in Athens. They didn’t know him from Adam’s housecat. But now, notice—“*And they took him, and brought him [to the] Areopagus, saying*”—the Areopagus was the place where they debated things—“*saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest...? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers*

which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)” (Acts 17:19–21) They loved to argue. They loved to debate. They’re like the modern-day talk shows. And so, they wanted to hear or to tell some new thing.

Now, they take Paul, and they set him up there and say, “Paul, speak to us.” What an opportunity! What would you have said? What would you do if you were here, surrounded by all of this human wisdom, surrounded by all of this incredible beauty? What would you do? Paul knew that this human wisdom and beauty were but magnificent foolishness. He knew that their religion was a mockery, and he knew that their beauty was vain without the Savior.

Now, they were so superstitious they had covered all the bases. Look, if you will, in verses 22 and following: *“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill”—*by the way, Mars Hill is a stony hill there where they debated. I’ve climbed up on Mars Hill and read this passage many times, what I’m holding in my hand right now—*“Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, [You] men of Athens, I perceive that in all things [you] are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. [That] God...made the world and all things therein.”* (Acts 16:22–24)

Now, what happened? Paul is walking down the streets of Athens. And, here’s a niche with a god over here; here’s a niche with a god over here. Here’s a temple for a god over here; here’s a temple. And then, they wanted to cover all of the bases. They hoped they didn’t insult any god so they just put a little icon up there, a little niche, a little idol, and wrote an inscription underneath: “To The Unknown God.” “Thank you very much, sir. We didn’t mean to offend you. To The Unknown God.” What they were doing was covering all the bases.

† They’re like that woman who married four men in succession: she married a banker; then she married an actor; then she married a minister; and then, she married an undertaker. One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go. She was just covering all the bases.†

Now, here’s what they were doing: they were just saying, “All right, in case we missed a god... To The Unknown God.”

Now, Paul has the opportunity of a lifetime. He’s standing there in the midst of this great city, standing there with all of the philosophers and all of the learned people. And, Paul opens his mouth, and he begins to express his faith. And, when you see what Paul said, you’re going to understand what I’m saying—is that you can express confidence in your faith. What did Paul say about the Almighty God?

#### A. He Is the God of Creative Power

All right, number one: He said He’s the God of creative power. Look, if you will, in

verses 24 and 25. He says that *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is [the] Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands”—*you can’t corner Him in a temple—*“Neither is [He] worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing”—*you can’t buy Him or bribe Him—*“seeing he giveth life, and breath, [to] all things.”* (Acts 17:24–25) He made everything. He stands above everything. He is distinct from creation. It’s not that everything is God. It is that God made everything.

Now, in America today, we’re moving more and more away from the fact that God is Creator. Have you noticed the emphasis is not, today, on Father God but on Mother Earth? Have you noticed that? For example, in school, in the springtime, we’re not allowed to celebrate Easter—not in our public schools any more—but we can have Earth Day so we can all go out and worship dirt. Paul said, “No, listen, God made it all, and He is the God of creation.” And so, you can’t put Him on a shelf. You can’t put Him in a corner.

### **B. He Is the God of Infinite, Personal Love**

Number two: Not only is He the God of creative power; He is the God of personal love. He’s not distinct, transcended, afar, nor is He a part of everything. He is a God who loves us infinitely. Notice verses 26 through 29. This God *“hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on...the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek [after] the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being”—*a great statement—*“as certain...of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art [or] man’s device.”* (Acts 17:26–29) This is the God of creation who has an infinite love for us. And, what is the purpose of creation? It is that we might know Him. *“In him we live, and move, and have our being.”* (Acts 17:28) We will never be satisfied until we find our satisfaction in Him.

I have a pastor friend, Nelson Price, who had a friend over in Georgia whose name is Claude Brown. Claude Brown owns a trucking firm, a big trucking firm with 150 offices across America. Before Claude Brown would hire a person, an employee, they gave him what we call a “polygraph test,” known as a “lie detector test.” And, this person would have to take the test. The man who gave these polygraph tests gave a sworn affidavit to Claude Brown that said this: “Not one time have I ever given a polygraph to a man who said that he was an atheist who, when I asked the question, ‘Is there a God?’ and he said, ‘No,’ but what the polygraph said he’s lying.” Every time—every time—when a man said, “I don’t believe in God,” the machine said, “You’re lying”—“you’re lying.” Why? Because this God who made us put in us an innate desire to know Him.

*Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore.*

—FANNY CROSBY

### **C. He Is the God of Absolute Righteousness**

He is the God of created power. He is the God of infinite love. He is the God of absolute righteousness. Look, if you will, in verse 30: *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”* (Acts 17:30) Now, God is a God of love, but He’s also a holy God. He cannot have fellowship with sin. Jesus said in Luke 13:3: *“except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”* (Luke 13:3) And, what is repentance? It’s a change of mind. About what? About sin, about self, about salvation, about the Savior. We turn from what we used to be to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **D. He Is the God of Supernatural Salvation**

And then, He’s the God of supernatural salvation. Look, if you will, in verse 31: *“Because he hath appointed a day, in...which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* (Acts 17:31) He’s already preached on the death, burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What he has done—what he is doing—on Mars Hill is preaching a Savior, a God who stepped out of heaven, took human flesh, hung naked upon a cross, paid our sin debt, was put in a cold tomb, walked out of the grave living, risen, victorious, a Savior. And, Paul said, “You have a date with Him.” He’s *“given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”* (Acts 17:31) God is a God of love but of justice and judgment, and this is what Paul preached.

## **III. You Should Expect Converts to Your Faith**

Now, here’s the third thing I want to lay on your heart. What I said is that you will experience challenges to your faith. You will. Number two: You can express confidence in your faith. Our faith will stand the test. Number three: You should expect converts to your faith. If you will witness, people will come to Jesus Christ. In a pagan society, they will still come. Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 17, verses 32 and following: *“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead”*—now, watch this; number one—*“some mocked”*—number two—*“others said, We will hear thee again of this matter”*—number three—*“So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed.”* (Acts 17:32–34) Now, those are the three ways that people respond to the gospel. These are ways that people will respond to this message this morning.

### **A. There Will Be Derision**

Some will mock. Some will laugh. I’ve been preaching long enough to know that some

ridicule. One of Satan's chief tools is ridicule. His desire is to make Bible-believing Christians the laughing stock of the world. And, some people can stand up against almost anything except derision. They'd rather face a den of lions than to be laughed at. And friend, don't worry about it when this world laughs at you. They mocked the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says of Jesus, *"They laughed him to scorn."* (Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:40; Luke 8:53) Are you better than He is?

Now, you have to stand up against this derision. If you're a Christian wife and your husband laughs at you, stay true to Jesus. If you're a college student and your professor mocks your faith, stay true to Jesus. If you're a businessman and want to put your Bible on the desk and live for Christ and bring Jesus into your business, let them laugh and let them mock. Ridicule is the devil's substitute for reason, and laughter is his substitute for logic. Some laughed. *"Some mocked."* (Acts 17:32) That's derision.

### **B. There Will Be Delay**

Others delayed. They said, *"We will hear thee again [on] this matter."* (Acts 17:32) Now friend, there are those who will delay. There are those who will put it off. Some in this building—you'll not laugh at what I say, but when I give an invitation, the devil will walk up, and whisper in your ear, and say, "He's right. You need to be saved, but today is not the day." Why not? He won't tell you why not because there's no reason why not. The devil will give you a thousand and one excuses, but he can't give you any reason. Why should you put off being saved? *You know, people say, "Get right with God; you may die." Friend, get right with God; you may live!* And, you can live with the Lord Jesus Christ and know the Lord Jesus, but you're going to die. And, the Bible says, *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."* (Proverbs 27:1) The Bible says, *"To day if [you'll] hear [God's] voice, harden not your [heart]."* (Hebrews 3:15; 4:7) There was the response of derision. There was the response of delay.

### **C. There Will Be Decision**

But, there was also the response of decision. *"Certain men [joined to] him, and believed."* (Acts 17:34) I want to tell you that's the only wise and the righteous thing that you can do. It's the best thing that anybody can do when they hear the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the same message that Paul preached so long ago.

What are you going to do today? Are you going to mock? What are you going to do? Are you going to postpone? Or are you going to believe in the one true God who sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?

## **Conclusion**

¶ After the Civil War, there was a riverboat, a steamer, that used to go from Vicksburg to New Orleans. It would leave every Wednesday. It was the plushest of the river

steamers. One time, in the middle of the night, a fire broke out on the Robert E. Lee, and the captain said to the first mate, "Wake the passengers. Tell them to get up. We need to flee for our lives." And so, the first mate ran through the corridors of that steamboat knocking, saying, "Wake up! Wake up! The ship's on fire! Get up! Get up! The ship's on fire!" You know what happened? There were some who laughed. They thought it was a joke. "Maybe some drunken fool is playing a joke." There were others who leisurely took their time, or maybe just rolled over and fluffed up their pillow and delayed to do anything. There were others who got up and gathered their possessions and went through the corridors to safety before it was too late.†

I didn't come here this morning to make a speech. I didn't come this morning just to teach a lesson. Listen to me. I came this morning to tell you that God loves you and He wants to save you. If I could give my heart to Jesus Christ on your behalf, I would, but I cannot. I've preached as best I know how. I have delivered my soul. I want to tell you there's one true God. He is the God who created everything. He is the God who loves you. He is the God who is perfectly righteous and commands us to repent. He is the God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And, you're going to meet Jesus Christ either in salvation or judgment, but you're going to meet Jesus. Don't you want to meet Him in salvation? Don't you want to receive Him as your Lord and Savior?

Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I want to lead you in a prayer. And, in this prayer this morning, you can ask Jesus Christ to save you. And friend, how much He loves you! And, He wants to save you, and He will save you. Would you pray a prayer like this? "Dear God, I know that you love me, and I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you." Maybe you've been an idolater and you're willing to turn from your idolatry. Maybe you've been self-righteous and you're willing to turn from your self-righteousness. Maybe you have some foolish philosophy and you're willing to turn from that to Jesus. Would you do it right now? Would you say, "Lord Jesus, I open my heart. I receive you now into my life as my Lord and Savior and Master and Friend. And, Lord Jesus, I give you my life by faith. I trust you to save me, Lord. You died to save me. You rose to save me. You live to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust you. I do trust you, Jesus. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me. And, begin now to make me the person you want me to be, and help me never to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen"?

Now, look up here. If you prayed that prayer with me, here's what I'm going to ask you to do: I'm going to ask you to do something that will help settle it and seal it. I'm going to ask you to come forward and make it public. "Well, pastor, didn't Jesus just save me if I asked Him to save me?" Yes, if you were sincere. "Well," you say, "pastor, how can I know if I'm sincere?" Listen: Are you willing to make it public? You see, here's

the thing: you're not saved by walking an aisle; you're not saved by shaking a pastor's hand, but it is what it indicates that saves you. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me, I'll be ashamed of you." (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26) Jesus said, "If you'll confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8) You see, the Scripture says, "[When we believe] on him [we'll] not be ashamed." (Romans 9:33; 10:11) Friend, *the faith that will not lead to confession will not lead to heaven.* When you make it public, you're giving Him the glory, you're giving the Church the joy, you're putting the devil to shame, and you're doing something that helps settle it and seal it in your heart.

So, if you prayed that prayer, when we're going to rise and sing in a moment, I'm going to ask you to make your way down one of these aisles here to the front. Standing all the way across the front at the head of each aisle will be a man of God, a minister of our church, to welcome those of you who will be coming. Now, if you're in the balcony, there'll be someone standing under that banner up there to my right that says, "Redeemer." For those of you on this side and those on this side, a friend will be waiting to receive you where it says, "Messiah"—that banner over there. And, as soon as we begin to sing, "Just as I am—without one plea, / But that thy blood was shed for me... O Lamb of God, I come [to thee], I come," I want you just to come.

"Well, pastor, what will I say when I go down there? I've never done that." Just say, "I'm trusting Jesus." "Well, what will happen?" We'll rejoice. We'll give you some scripture to stand on. We'll answer any questions we can answer with an open Bible, and we'll seal it in prayer. It'll take just a few moments. You'll be so glad you did. Don't let the devil intimidate you. The devil, as I said, can give you many excuses but no reason for not doing it.

Others of you here today have been saved but you need to be baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ, and you've never had believer's baptism; that is, being baptized by immersion after you were saved. You need to come and say, "I want to make an appointment for my baptism," and we will baptize you as a believer in Jesus Christ at an appointed time.

Others of you are saved and baptized; your membership is elsewhere—you'd like to be a member of Bellevue Baptist Church. And, everybody ought to be a member of a local New Testament church—if not Bellevue, one somewhere that preaches the gospel. You're welcome at Bellevue. If this is where you attend and where God speaks to your heart, most likely it's where you need to belong. And, I want to ask you to slip out of your seat and come forward and say, "I want to place my membership here," and a minister will tell you how you may become a member of this church.

Some are coming, saying, "I'm trusting Christ"; others, "I want to make an appointment for my baptism"; others, "I want to place my membership here." Now, don't

look around to see what someone else is going to do. You do what God lays on your heart.

Congregation, let's pray. Father God, as a congregation, we pray today for our friends who need to make open, public decisions about these matters. Holy Spirit, together we ask that you will work. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Now, we're going to stand in just a moment and sing. If you're with a friend who would like to make a decision, you may volunteer to come forward with them. And, during the invitation, be in a spirit of prayer. Don't disturb other worshippers by leaving during the invitation unless it is an emergency. And friend, as soon as we begin to sing, you step out. Let's stand together.†

# Three Challenges to the Cross

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** August 2, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 17:16–34

*“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”*

ACTS 17:16

## Outline

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## Introduction

The book of Acts tells us about that old-time religion which is to be the new-time religion because it is the all-time religion and ought to be the every-time religion. And, so I want us to learn today something that’s going to help us to live in this twentieth century for the Lord Jesus and in a few moments we’re going to begin reading in verse 16. But, I want to ask you a question first. Have you ever been to a big city, a place you’ve never been before, and you were absolutely alone, had no friends in that big city, just walking the streets of that big city? Some of you have. I have and it’s a strange feeling.

That’s the situation that the Apostle Paul found himself in. Paul is now in Athens and he’s on a missionary journey, but Timothy and Silas have been left behind. And, Paul is by himself and he’s walking the streets of this intellectual capital of the world. It’s one of the most beautiful cities ever built. But, when Paul walks down the street of that city, he sees things, hears things, and feels things that stir him to the depths. His heart was broken and at the same time there was an anger because he saw people peddling false religion, soul dope, just as people peddle dope in the streets of big cities today. And, he was grieved. The Bible says that the way he felt, he had a paroxysm, the very Greek word that we use for “paroxysm,” “he’s stirred to anger.”

Well, let’s read about it. Notice in verse 16, *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly”—or completely—“given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain*

*philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection” (Acts 17:16–18).*

When Paul walked down the streets of Athens, he met three challenges to the cross, and by the way, that’s the title of the message, *Three Challenges to the Cross*. He met three challenges that you’re going to meet as you walk down the streets of this city or anybody in any city in America will meet. You’re going to find out, dear friend, that this book of Acts is not mere ancient history. It is as up to date as tomorrow’s newspaper. And, the same three things that Paul met you’re going to meet tomorrow morning and you’re going to rub shoulders with.

First of all, Paul met superstitious idolatry. Secondly, he met stubborn bigotry. And, thirdly he met sophisticated philosophy. Now, I want you to see what he met. We’re going to look at it because you need to be forewarned and forearmed. You need to understand what you’re going to encounter tomorrow, as a soldier of Jesus Christ and you need to learn how Paul met these things so that you can meet them.

## **I. Superstitious Idolatry**

Now, first of all, verse 16 tells us that Paul met superstitious idolatry. Look at it again. “Now, while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly, that is completely given to idolatry.” Well, you say, “Adrian, we don’t worry about idolatry here in our beloved city. Nobody is worshipping idols here.” Friend, that is where you are wrong. Our city and sometimes our churches are filled with idolatry.

Now, what is an idol? When I give you a definition of an idol, then you are going to understand why I say our cities and our churches are filled with idolatry. An idol is anything you love more than God. An idol is anything you serve more than God. An idol is anything you fear more than God. An idol is anything you trust more than God. Now, is there anything you love more than God? Then you’re an idolater. Is there anything you fear more than God? Then you’re an idolater. Is there anything you trust more than God? Then you are an idolater. If there’s anything that you serve more than God, you are an idolater. For Jesus said, “...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33). Not second, not third, but first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. And, God said through Moses, “*I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:2–3).

Now, let me talk to you a little bit about these gods that are worshipped by modern Americans right here in our city and in other cities. Let me tell you how an idol comes about. First of all, let me say this, that mankind is incurably religious. It is instinctive in man to worship. Not in animals, but in man, because man is made in the image of God.

And, *“Deep calleth unto deep...”* (Psalm 42:7). That is, there is in every man’s heart a God-shaped vacuum. That’s the reason that no matter where you go on the face of this earth, you’re going to find people worshipping. Now, pay attention. If man does not worship the true God, he will worship a false god, but he will worship. Every man will worship. If he doesn’t worship the true God, he’s going to worship a false god because man is incurably religious.

Now, what is an idol? Let me tell you what an idol is. An idol is a magnified sinner, a magnified sinner. Now, what happens is this—that man takes his own worst desires, his own base proclivities, and he takes those things and he so magnifies them that he makes a god out of them—his lust, his greed, his fears, his hates, his desires—he somehow just takes those things and magnifies them and then begins to worship them. Paul said over there in Romans chapter 1 verse 22: *“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man”* (Romans 1:22–23).

So what an idol is just man’s vices. Even if you look at the Heaven idols made of wood and stone, their, their grotesque faces, their distorted bodies, their marvelous physiques, all of these are just the highest ambitions and desires and ideals and lusts of mankind just magnified. So what an idol is really is just a magnified sinner. Man deifies himself and then because he deifies himself he worships himself really when he is worshipping his idol. And, nothing is too good for a man’s god. Do you see? Nothing is too good for a man’s god. So, if man can make a god out of sex and then he worships sex, well, he’s got to put himself into it. It’s a pretty neat thing, when you think about it. If a man makes a god out of money, well then he worships money, and nothing is too good for his god, so he gives himself to that god.

You see, first of all, the man molds the idol and then the idol molds the man. It is axiomatic that we become like what we worship. You worship God, you become like God. You worship Jesus, you behold His face, you’re changed to the same image. You worship an idol, you become like what you worship. First of all, the man molds the idol and then the idol molds the man. You say, “Well wait a minute, I don’t believe we have all of these idols that you’re talking about in our city.” All right, let me show you what I’m talking about.

The ancients worshipped a god whose name was Mammon, M-a-m-m-o-n. And, that was the god of wealth, the god of possession. We have people today who worship that god. Oh, they don’t call him Mammon, but they are committed to riches, they’re committed to wealth, they’re committed to success, they’re committed to achievement. Now, nothing wrong with riches. If you love riches more than God, then you serve the god Mammon.

Aristotle Onassis, that wealthy Greek shipping magnate. He said this, “All that

matters in this life is money.” It is the people with money who are the royalty in our generation. Well, that’s what he said. Well, if he said, “That’s all that matters.” I’d say, “He was an idolater.” I say, “He was an idolater.” Now, when he died, he died with only his daughter by his side, bitter and broken, because his god failed him. There are multiplied thousands in our city who worship the god of Mammon.

The ancients had another god. They named him Bacchus. He was the god of wine, the god of drink. Now, since they liked to drink, they said, “Well, let’s make a god out of him.” I’ve been to the temple of Bacchus there in Lebanon, up in Baalbek, the wonderful ruins, magnificent temple they built to the god of wine. Do we worship that god today? Of course we do. Billions of dollars are spent paying homage to that god. He has his temples on every corner around our city and people to go in to worship that god through debauchery, and drink, and drugs. That’s the god Bacchus. He’s not an old god, He’s with us today.

They had another goddess, her name Aphrodite. That’s what they called her. Or, Venus, the same god, she was the sex goddess. She stood for licentiousness and lust. They actually had temples where they would go in and commit acts of fornication and adultery in worship to that god. I mean, literal temples with temple prostitutes. Well, you say, “Do we have that goddess with us today?” Oh, absolutely, absolutely. There’s a whole empire, the Playboy Empire that is built on the worship of that god. And, people are worshipping the goddess of sex and lust and licentiousness.

Don’t tell me that we don’t have idols today. Of course we have idols today. They worshipped another idol, her name was Sophia, the name meaning wisdom. They worshipped the god of learning. It’s the word we get sophisticated from. And, they worshipped that god. Well, you say, “That’s a little more honorable god.” Anything that takes the place of Jehovah God is dishonorable. I don’t care what it is. We have people today in our great vaunted universities. They bowed down at the shrine of their computers. They are so proud of their learning. Without God it is but splendid nothingness, that’s all it is. Their Bible is the science textbook. Their salvation is the inevitable progress of mankind. Their Heaven is the plastic utopia that they hope somehow to create.

We boast of our great wisdom while civilization is tumbling in on our heads and we don’t even know what we’re going to do with a war-torn world. We don’t know that the whole thing is about to come apart over there in the Persian Gulf and we’re faced with the specter of AIDS and problems that are so far beyond us it’s staggering. And, yet we strut around and talk about our wisdom. Friend, what has it brought us, as we worship the God of wisdom? Now, we don’t call her Sophia today, we just call it intellectualism.

But, what I’m trying to tell you, dear friend, that anything that a man loves more than God is an idol. Anything that a man serves more than God is an idol. Anything that a

man fears more than God is an idol. Anything that a man trusts more than God is an idol. And, our world is full of idols.

They worshipped another god. His name was Mars. The god Mars was the god of war. He was the god of revenge. He was the god that, of lusts for power and bloodshed. Do we worship that god today? Watch the ordinary television program and see how much violence, and sex, and brutal sex is mixed into that.

I was reading in the newspapers this past week that in Los Angeles, if you're on the freeway you better be careful. Don't, make a face at anybody, don't shout at anybody, be very careful you don't cut anybody off on the freeway, because out there, you know what they're doing now? They're keeping guns under their seat. Pow! They shoot you! I mean, they literally will shoot you because the way of peace they have not known. Violence and bloodshed. I am totally convinced, I've seen it right here in our own fair city, I've seen it at intersections, I've seen people get so angry that I was quite convinced if it were not against the law, if they could've done it and gotten by with it, they would have killed the person in the other car. I mean, literally, "*...feet...make haste to shed blood*" (Proverbs 1:16). People who worship the god Mars. They don't call him Mars, it doesn't make any difference what they call him.

I'm trying to say to you, dear friend, that anything you love more, serve more, trust more than God is a, an idol in your life and it'll bring the judgment of God. And, Paul walked down the streets of Athens and he saw all of these gods. Now, back in that day they were a little more superstitious. I mean, they made their gods of sticks and stones. Somebody said, "It was easier to meet a god on the streets of Athens than it was to meet a man." They had thirty thousand at least of these idols that they were worshipping. And, Paul met in that day what I call superstitious idolatry.

## **II. Stubborn Bigotry**

But I want to tell you what else he met. Not only did he meet superstitious idolatry, but he met stubborn bigotry. Now, it's a completely different thing, but yet just as hard to deal with. Notice verse 17, "Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons." Now, the word "devout" means, "religious," but religious of a different kind. These were not idolaters. As a matter of fact, they were a hundred and eighty degrees from idolaters. They looked down their long noses at the idolaters. It was unspeakable, unthinkable to them that men would glorify their vices and then worship things—vermin, and beasts, and sticks, and stones—that was unthinkable. These were people who were monotheists. These were people who believed in the one true God, Jehovah God, and furthermore, they had the Bible, they had the Scriptures, they had the Old Testament.

But, Paul went into that synagogue and he began to preach to them Jesus Christ.

Would they hear him? No, they would not. Why? They were so sure they were right and they were so sure he was wrong. They had a stiff-necked bigotry. Now, Paul ought to have been able to understand that because he'd been just like them at one time. Did you know, dear friend, the hardest man to win to Jesus Christ is the man who doesn't see his need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many times he has a religious bigotry.

Now, you say, "How do you know they were bigoted?" Well, I'll tell you how I know, because, dear friend, normally and naturally they should've come to Jesus Christ and I'll tell you why. Because the entire Old Testament is about Jesus Christ and it is written to present Jesus Christ so that when Jesus Christ was presented they would come to Him. For the Bible says, "...*the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ...*" (Galatians 3:24). That's all the Old Testament was, just somebody to walk you to school. That's all, just to bring you to Jesus Christ.

But, there was stubbornness, and the Bible says that Paul disputed with them. That is, he would give them the gospel and they'd give him something back. And, he'd give them the gospel and they'd give him something back. Rather than being open to the gospel, they were hardened and close-minded about the gospel because they thought they were fine just like they were. They were so close, but so far away. And, there are so many like that you'll meet today. You'll go to talk to them about being saved, about knowing Jesus Christ, about a personal relationship with God through Christ and they'll tell you in no uncertain terms, "Look, I'm not a pagan, I have my religion." But, friend, most of the people need to turn from religion to Jesus Christ. It was a religious crowd that crucified Jesus and the hardest person to win is that person who doesn't see his need. And, sometimes they're so blind.

I was reading about a man the other day who showed up—this literally happened—a man who was a memory expert and he was supposed to speak at a luncheon and when time came he wasn't there. When they finally found him, he said, "I forgot." A memory expert, going to speak at a luncheon telling everybody how to improve their memory. And, I also read about an insurance company whose buildings burned down and they discovered they were not insured.

Oh, friend, there's so many people like this in the world today who have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof and you'll meet them in the streets of Memphis, Tennessee. You'll meet them in your city, wherever it is you live, those who are listening by television, and it is sort of a bigotry, saying, "Leave me alone, I like what I've got, don't bother me." They have a sign around their neck. Some of them come to church on Sunday morning, I can read the sign. It says, "Please do not disturb." They are settled in their mind. Now, Paul met that kind of opposition to the gospel.

### III. Sophisticated Philosophy

I want to tell you a third challenge to the gospel that the Apostle Paul met that day. Not only was there what I call this superstitious idolatry, and not only was there this stubborn bigotry, but there was finally a sophisticated philosophy and perhaps this was the hardest of all to deal with.

Now, notice this sophisticated philosophy. Notice verse 18, “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him and some said, what will this babbler say?” The word literally means “seed picker,” like a bird picking up seeds. “What will this babbler say? To some he seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.”

Now, what is philosophy? Well I’ve told you that the idol Sophia, the goddess Sophia, was the goddess of wisdom or learning. So *philo* means “a lover of wisdom.” Philo and Sophia, put them together, you have philosophy. And, so, a philosopher is a lover of wisdom. He’s a person who takes pride in his learning. And, there are those who are not idolaters as such, and there are those who are not bigoted as such, but they are philosophers. They are lovers of learning. And, dear friend, they never do really come to know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because of their foolishness, which keeps them from Jesus.

Somebody said that, “A philosopher is somebody who tells us what we already know in words we can’t understand.” And, that may be true. Dr. Robert G. Lee said, “Philosophy is a chunk of cloudbank that has been buttered with the night wind.” The philosophy leaves people so empty without Christ.

Schopenhauer, who was a philosopher, said when he got to the bottom line of his philosophy, “Life is a curse of endless cravings and endless unhappiness.” Huxley, a philosopher, historian, and a thoroughgoing evolutionist, when he looked at the whole thing, you know what he said about us? He said, “It seems that we are a cancer on the globe” talking about us. That brilliant but ungodly man, Bertrand Russell, said of philosophy at the end of his life at the age of ninety, “Philosophy proved a washout to me.” A washout. That is, a dead-end road at the end of ninety years, the love of wisdom without the love of God.

Now, there were two kinds of philosophers that Paul encountered, especially there in Athens. First of all, there was the philosophy of the Epicureans. Epicures lived about three hundred years before Jesus. He was a teacher, brilliant man. He made Athens his adopted home. Plato, Aristotle, Epicures, Xenon—these were the philosophers who taught in Athens. And, Epicureans taught this, that God doesn’t exist or that if he does exist, you can’t know Him. There is no personal God and since there is no personal God, then life has no purpose, and that would certainly follow. And, if life has no purpose, then life has no meaning, and that would certainly follow. And, therefore, if

there is no knowable God, and if life has no purpose, and if therefore life has no meaning, what's the wisest thing you can do? Well, just feel as good as you can until you die. Pleasure. An Epicure is a person who lives for pleasure. And, so he said, "Just make yourself comfortable, be as comfortable as you can, get as much pleasure as you can, live for pleasure."

Now, Epicures, when he said this, he was basically a gardener, a farmer. What he thought was the good life was just out growing things and living in the garden and so forth, a very plain and simple life. But, remember that he had said that pleasure is the end of all things and so when you tell somebody that, they're gonna take it and run with it. By the time of Paul three hundred years later, they had said that, "Pleasure was the grossest sort of immorality and gluttony." And, so their motto, in a sentence, was, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die."

Well, you say, "Do we have that philosophy with us today?" Sure. Sure. You're gonna meet them all over this city, just like that. As a matter of fact, Madison Avenue has taken that philosophy. There was a certain beer company that learned a lesson from Epicures and slogan zed this whole thing. And, I'll tell you, you'll recognize it when I give it to you in just a moment. Have you ever heard this? "You only go through life one time, grab all the gusto you can." Grab all the gusto you can get, you only go through life once. Grab all the gusto you—that's Epicure. That's the Epicureans. That's what they're saying, "Just live it up. I mean, after all, you're gonna rot in the ground and it's all gonna be over. Eat, drink, and be merry." Hey, folks, that's all around us. "Sure it is. If it feels good, do it."

All right then, there were the others. Now, this philosophy was the philosophy of pleasure. There were the others, the Stoics. You read about the Stoics there in verse 18. Who were the Stoics? Well, actually they were the disciples of Xenon. And, Xenon taught from a porch and the Greek word for "porch" is *stoa*, so they called them Stoics. And, the Stoics were those who believed in Pantheism. Pantheism is *pan*, meaning "everything," and *theos* meaning "God," so a *pantheos* a person who believes in pantheism is, believes that God is in everything and everything is God. That is, this entire universe is God. Everything is God and God is in everything, therefore, there is no personal, knowable God.

When you let all of the air out of it, these were materialists, pure, and simple materialists. And, therefore they felt themselves just as victims of whatever happens. Who are these people today? They're the humanists. They're the humanists. They don't believe that there is a God who is imminent, and working, and knowable in mankind. They just believe that we are the sum total of the body chemistry and the environment. Therefore the Stoics felt there was nothing really they could do about anything. They're all just sort of victims of fate. Just wait and let it happen. So, therefore they said to

themselves, “Look, don’t get too elated over joy and don’t get disturbed over grief. Just intellectually be above it all.” And, it’s just a form of Stoicism, just sort of grin and bear it and live by grim determination.

Are people like that around us today? Hey, folks, they’re everywhere. Everywhere, getting up in the morning, taking an aspirin, drinking a cup of coffee, running off to work, living to, just drawing their breath, and drawing their salary, and getting bounced about. There’s no meaning to life, no purpose to life, they are just simply trying to get through. I’m telling you, dear friend, as the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “...*there is no new thing under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). And, this Apostle Paul went to Athens so long ago and there in Athens he met superstitious idolatry, he met stubborn bigotry, and sophisticated philosophy.

Well, how did he meet it? Well, let’s see what happened here, it’s very interesting. Now, notice in verse 19, “*And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus*”—That is, that was the place, the speakers’ forum—“*saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?*” (Acts 17:19). Well, I tell you what, you drop a handkerchief and tell Paul to preach, he’ll be on the second point before it hits the ground. They said, “*For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)*” (Acts 17:20–21). They wanted something to tickle their intellectual itch, so they said, “Well, let’s hear what this babbler will say.”

Now, notice in verse 22, “*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill*”—I’ve stood right on this same place, Mars Hill, and read this passage of Scripture many times, just standing right there in Athens—“*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said...*” And, by the way, what a sight that is. You stand on Mars Hill, you look over to your left and there is the Parthenon. It was an antiquity in the time of Paul. The most perfectly structured building architects tell us in all of the world, even in its ruins it is indescribably beautiful. Athens was a place filled with art and literature and wisdom and learning. It had come through what was called the golden age of Pericles, everything magnificent. Here, here’s this little Jew named Paul. He’s standing up there in the midst of all of this, with the centuries behind him and all of these learned men. He’s not intimidated one little bit. They say, “Tell us, Paul.” He says, “Thank you very much, I believe I will.”

And, notice in verse 22, “*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*” (Acts 17:22–23). Now, what they had done in Athens was this. They I said they had thirty thousand gods, but in case they missed one, they had one extra called the unknown god. They just said, “You

know, we don't want to offend him if he's out there and we missed him."

So, they're kind of like the lady who I heard about who had married four husbands in succession. First of all she married a very wealthy banker, then she married a very famous actor, and then she married a notable preacher. Finally she married an undertaker in that succession and somebody asked her, "Why did you marry those husbands?" She said, "Well, one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go." Now, she had it all figured out.

Now, that's the way these Athenians had done. They were just thinking this thing through and they said, "Well, in case we have offended this god, we will make an altar to him." Now, Paul used that as a preacher just to get their attention. He said, "I noticed, that you are worshipping a god, the unknown God, and that's the only one that I want to tell you about, the one you don't know. And, I'm gonna tell you just who this God is." And, very quickly, I want you to see what Paul told them about this God. Because, dear friend, as we go out tomorrow, this is the God that we're going to declare in this city and in every city I trust.

First of all Paul says, "He's the God who created you." Look if you will in verse 24, "*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth*"—with this one statement he banished all of their idols. Notice here—"*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*" (Acts 17:24). You're not gonna corner this God in a temple. You're not gonna be able to make this God out of sticks and stones. He is the great God who created all things. And, dear friend, we ought to realize that. Surely we ought to tell these philosophers and these others that you cannot have a creation without a creator.

George Gallup, the famous American statistician said, "I can prove God with statistics alone." He said, "Take the human body." He said, "The function of the human body, apart from a designer and a creator, is a statistical monstrosity." A statistical monstrosity. He said, "It's impossible." Well of course, dear friend, you don't have to have George Gallup, you've got the Word of God. But, what I'm trying to say is that Paul says that first of all he is the God who created you.

But, then he goes on to say to these people, and we're going to have to go very quickly. He's also the God who controls you. Look in verse 26, "*And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...*" And, by the way, that's a great scientific statement. People used to think that people of different races had different kinds of blood. Did you know that? And, even when your granddaddy was a little boy they thought you couldn't give—some of them thought, the populous—that you couldn't have a blood transfusion from a person of a different race. But, here, way back before the day of microbiology, Paul said, "*And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before*

*appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” and so forth (Acts 17:26).*

Now, what is he saying? He’s saying, “Listen, this God who created you, is the God who controls you. He’s not some pantheistic god, he’s not some distant god. He’s a God who is active in the affairs of men. He is the sovereign God who watches over the affairs of this world. I wish I had more time to talk about that.

But, also he said to him, he’s also the God who convicts you. Look in verse 27, *“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him”—Now, watch it—“though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being”—He is the God. This God is the God who convicts you. That is—“as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:27–28).* That is, we are made in the image of God and therefore there is a longing to know God, to know the one true God. He is the one who convicts us. For Christ is *“...the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).*

There’s a man in Atlanta, Georgia, has a trucking firm. His name is Claude Brown, a fine Christian. I think he has perhaps a hundred and fifty businesses across America, a very successful man. I was reading the other day that when he has a prospective employee, he gives him a polygraph test. We would say today a lie detector test. And, here’s an interesting thing, I was astounded when I read this, and yet I shouldn’t have been. One of the questions he asks is, “Do you believe in God?” And, the polygraph technician has sworn an affidavit to this point, that every person who says, “No, I don’t believe in God” every single one of them, it registers he’s lying, every one of them, every one of them. When they say, “No, I don’t believe in God.” It says, “You do too. You do too.”

You see, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).* Not in his head, in his heart. Now, Paul says, “Listen, this is the God who created you. This is the God who controls you. This is the God who convicts you.” And, then he says, “This is the God who commands you.” I want you to see it in verse 30. *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).*

Paul said this, “Listen, listen, there’s a judgment coming. There is a God. He’s not some stick, he’s not some stone. And, you philosophers who don’t understand this God, this God became a man, He lived and died on the cross for our sins. He was buried, He’s raised again from the dead. Receive Him and you’ll be saved. Reject Him, you’ll stand before Him at the judgment. He’s a God who commands all men everywhere to repent.” And, I want to tell you what Paul told them. If you’ll repent of your sins and trust Christ, you’ll be saved.

What was the result of all of this? Look in verse 32, *“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter”*—Some laughed and some procrastinated—*“So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed”* (Acts 17:32–34). Every time I preach the gospel that happens. Do you know what’s happening today? Some people listening to me by radio and television, some people listening later by tape, some of you here, some of you are just kind of laughing. “Poor, ignorant, Baptist old preacher, he’s not with it.” You sit there and you can kind of snicker. I don’t want to be smart when I tell you this—or smart alecky—you can laugh your way into Hell, you can’t laugh your way out once you get there. Some mock, the mockers we have.

Others said, “Oh, we’ll hear you at a later time.” That’s where many folks are gonna die and go to Hell. *“He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”* (Proverbs 29:1). *“Boast not thyself of to morrow...”* (Proverbs 27:1). *“Boast not thyself of tomorrow.”*

But, thank God others believed. I can’t make you believe, but I want to tell you this, that God loves you. He’s the God who created you, He’s the God who convicts you, he’s the God who commands you and calls you and says, “Repent, believe, be saved.” Will you do it? Will you say, “Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Forgive my sin, and save me”? Friend, the same Christ that saved me will save you. The same one that’s saved millions will save you today if you trust Him. And, I promise you on the authority of the Word of God, if you’ll trust Him, He’ll save you.

## **Conclusion**

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. No one stirring, no one looking around. How is a person saved? Well you might pray a prayer like this, “Dear God, I’m a sinner and I’m lost. And, I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, You died to save me, and you promised to save me if I would only trust you. I do trust you, Jesus, right now.” Would you tell Him that? “I do trust you Jesus, right now. Come into my heart and save me. And, Lord Jesus, I will take a public stand for you. I will follow you in obedience, because you are my Lord.” Tell Him that. “In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

# What's Wrong with Gambling?

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** June 7, 1987

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 19:21–29

*“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.”*

ACTS 19: 24–25

## Outline

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Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Holy Word and turn with me tonight to Acts 19, and in a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 21. I want to talk to you on this subject, "What is Wrong with Gambling?" Now, I want to say something about the Apostle Paul, he was quite a preacher, and everywhere that Paul went there was either a revival or a riot. Something happened when Paul went to a town. In this particular instance there was a riot, but they knew he was there, and they knew that The Word of God had power when Paul went to Ephesus so long ago. Somebody has well said when we preach something ought to happen—we ought to either make people glad, or sad, or mad. They ought to go out either glad, mad or sad. In the average church they just go out. Somebody said, "The clock struck twelve and the church gave up for dead."

Paul had power in his life, and because he had power in his life he found himself often in confrontation. We're going to see that confrontation right now in Acts chapter 19, verse 21. *“After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been*

*there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.”—now, in plain English there was a big stir about the Christians—“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;”—in plain English, he made them a lot of money—“Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion...” (Acts 19:21–29).*

Now, you’re going to find out that Christians that stand for Christ are going to cause conflict. We’re the salt of the earth, and not only does salt cleanse and purify and preserve, but salt irritates. And, if you’re a true Christian you’re going to find out—because you are twice-born in a world of once-born people—that most of the time you are going to be going against the tide, they’re going to despise you. Now, if they don’t despise you, if you don’t find yourself going against the tide, if you find yourself getting along with most of the people most of the time, you better check up, because you’re so much like the world they cannot tell the difference.

## **I. What Caused the Conflict with the Ephesians?**

### **A. There Was a Profit Motive**

What happened here was that Paul was preaching Christ, and when he began to preach Christ it began to damage the occupation of those who served a false goddess, and her name was Diana. Now, these people were not quite as religious as they seemed to be about Diana—this false goddess—but Diana had made them a lot of money, because they made little shrines to Diana, and they were selling these shrines everywhere. There were a lot of craftsmen who were making these little idols, these little shrines to Diana, and every time a person got saved he stopped that business. He didn’t need a shrine, he didn’t need an idol, he didn’t need to worship Diana anymore.

And, so these people were having their business hurt and because they were having their business hurt, they came against Paul and a riot ensued. As a matter of fact, 25,000 of them filled up the amphitheater there. I’ve been to that amphitheater—it is still in existence—and I thought when I stood there about this chapter in the Bible and old Paul so long ago.

Well, today we are in conflict, and again we're in conflict with a false God. Isaiah 65, verse 11 is an interesting passage of scripture. I want to read it to you, not in the King James because you do not get the meaning in the King James, I want to read it to you in the RSV. And, God speaks in Isaiah 65, verse 11 of those who *"...forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny"* (Revised Standard Version, Isaiah 65:11). Fortune was the name of one god, Destiny was the name of the other god. The people of Israel were trusting the false gods of chance, rather than the true God of glory. They had a god named destiny, they had a god named fortune, and they worshipped that god just as they were worshipping a false god here in the nineteenth chapter of Acts.

Now, when Paul began to preach Christ he came up against people who were motivated, and impelled, and moved by three things. Number one: they were motivated and impelled by a desire for money. There was a profit motive behind their opposition to the Gospel. Notice verses 24 and 25: *"For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth"* (Acts 19:24–25). Now, Paul was in opposition with them, and they were in opposition with him, and when you let all of the air out of it there was money behind it. These people who oppose the gospel in that day opposed the gospel on this basis—what buttered their bread determined their conduct. It was not the principle of the thing, it was the money.

## **B. There Was a Propaganda Machine**

But, not only was there what I call a profit motive, but there was also that day a propaganda machine. Because of this prompted motive, the propaganda machine got to going. I want you to notice how this man speaks. He pushes every emotional button that he could possibly push. In verse 25, already he spoke of money. And, then look in verse 26, and I'm going to read through verse 28: *"Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:"*—now, he's pushing another button, he's calling Paul bigoted and narrow. He's saying Paul is very narrow-minded. And, then notice in verse 27: *"So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed..."* (Acts 19:26–27). Now, he's appealing to their patriotism, and he's appealing to the religion, he's appealing to their pocketbooks, he's appealing to their patriotism.

Demetrius was a master at manipulating public opinion, and you're going to find out that whenever you have anything to do with the gambling crowd they're going to first of

all be dealing with a profit motive, and secondly they're are going to be dealing with a propaganda machine.

The propaganda on any gambling referendum always runs at full speed against what I consider to be the truth, and the will and the ways of God. Now, we'll never trust this vile world to present the truths that we'll hear from our pulpit, and perhaps we shouldn't expect them to. It's interesting to me that in 1982 Jane Fonda's book, her exercise book, was number one on the New York Times best seller list, number one for a month. Yet, that same month Francis Schaeffer's Christian Manifesto sold twice as many books as Jane Fonda's exercise book and it wasn't even mentioned, it wasn't even mentioned. This vile world is no friend of grace, and don't expect them to tell the truth. They know the right buttons to push, they know how to use loaded terminology, they know how to speak of Christians as right wingers, fundamentalists, Puritans, Sectarianists, those with mindless orthodoxy, blue nose Puritans, censors and whatever. Demetrius did it here to protect his goddess. There are people who will do it to protect the god of chance.

### C. **There Was a Mob Psychology**

But, then on top of that, not only was there a profit motive and a propaganda machine, there was also a mob psychology—he got the people whipped up. Notice in verse 28: “And when they heard these things, they were full of wrath and they cried out shouting or saying, Great is Diana of Ephesians! And, the whole city was filled with confusion...” (Acts 19:27–28). Can you imagine 25,000 people in one place shouting, “Great, great, great is Diana of the Ephesians!” That's what they did. Oh, you're going to see a lot of mob psychology, everybody is going to be asked to go along. I preached this morning that the biggest religion in America really is the cult of the crowd. They worship at the altar of conformity; their chief hymn is “everybody is doing it.” But, I want to tell you something friend, 25,000 people shouting *alive* doesn't make it the truth. There they were shouting, all of them, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

Well, I've been asked to give a clear scripture concerning gambling, and I will but before I do I want to tell you this, that the Bible is not a book of minute laws. The Bible is a book of great principles. For example, you'll not find any scripture in the Bible that says: “Thou shalt not drive through a school zone at a 110 miles an hour,” but you will find a scripture that says thou shalt not kill. Now, if it were a book of minute laws, you'd have to have a freight car to carry it around with you. So, God doesn't give us minute laws, God gives us great principles, and I'm glad because you can find loopholes in laws, and rules are for kids.

The year was 1908. Carlyle Institute and Harvard University were football rivals. They were going to have the big game. The coach at Harvard University was a football purist—he believed in the fundamentals of football. He believed in playing football the

hard-nose way. But, the coach at Carlyle, he wasn't what we would call a purist, he depended upon what we call today "razzle dazzle." In that day they called it "whiff whaff," and that's what he depended on to win games. He would sit up all night with the rulebooks—studying the rules—studying the rules to see if there is some way that he could bend the rules to win a game. The week before, Carlyle had played Syracuse and Warner—who was the coach at Carlyle—Coach Warner thought of a scheme. It was an ingenious scheme. When the Carlyle team came on the field, Coach Warner had taken every jersey of his team, and had sewed on every jersey a football made of cloth. It was about the size of a football, it was the color of a football, it looked like a football, and it was just sewed on there in cloth. So, when they came out of the huddle and broke, it looked like every man had a football. Well, when Syracuse looked at them they couldn't tell who had the ball. They were always tackling the wrong man, because the guy that had the ball looked like everybody else, and everybody was running around just like this. Pretty smart. Before the big game the coach at Harvard, the Harvard coach said to the coach at Carlyle, "Are you going to use those trick jerseys?" He said, "There's nothing in the rulebook against it." The coach at Harvard said, "All right." So, the next day they came out on the football field—and Coach Warner had all the boys at Carlyle—and there they were with their fake footballs sewed on their jersey. Harvard came out, and Harvard was wearing crimson red jerseys that they normally wear, but it was a home game for Harvard and the home team supplied the footballs. And, when they reached in the bag and pulled out the first football, it was crimson red and Harvard won the game.

Now, I tell you that silly story—it's a true story—but I tell you the story of how people can bend and manipulate rules. You see, you give me a rule and I'll show you a lawyer who can do something with it. The Bible is not a book of minute laws, it is a book of great principles, and so when we're dealing with gambling don't expect to find a verse in there that says, "Don't play blackjack." You won't find it in the Bible, but I'm going to give you some principles.

Before I do, I want to define gambling, because many people don't understand what gambling is. When you talk about gambling, you're not talking about taking a risk; taking a risk is not gambling. You take a risk when you get out in the streets of Memphis. The Bible speaks of the "quick and the dead." Life is a risk, business is a risk, even serving Jesus has a risk to it. In Acts 15, verse 26 the Bible speaks of: "*Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Acts 15:26). Moffatt translates that as, "They risk their lives for Jesus." It means that these men did not play it safe, they put their lives on the line for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not wrong to live adventurously. Jesus Christ judged a man, in a parable, who hid his talent in the ground because he wanted to play it safe. Every farmer who plants a crop takes a risk because there may

be a drought. The Bible says, “He that considereth the wind will not sow” (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

Every man that ventures into a business—or almost every man—takes some kind of a risk. There are people who would tell you that buying stocks, buying bonds, investing in business is gambling. It is not gambling. There is a difference between betting on a horse race and investing money in stocks, or planting a good crop. Let me tell you the difference. When you gamble in the classic sense of the word, for every winner in gambling there must be a loser. Now, get that in your mind, that’s the difference. For every winner, there has to be a loser. Gambling is predicated on one person getting what another person has, that’s gambling. When you invest in bonds, or livestock, or farming, something different occurs. The money that you invest goes to build factories, to pay wages, to create goods and services, which in turn produces more wealth to reward the investor. In gambling, nothing is created: it is the exchange of money, it is one person attempting to get into his hands that which used to belong to someone else.

## **II. Principles Transgressed by Gambling**

### **A. Gambling Transgresses the Principle of Honesty**

I’m going to talk to you, therefore, about some principles—not some rules—that are transgressed by gambling. Number one—and by the way, when I’m finished you’ll be able to understand why the father of our country, George Washington, said, “Gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief,”—that’s what George Washington said. All right, what’s the first principle? The first principle that gambling transgresses is the principle of honesty, honesty. Do you want a scripture? Exodus chapter 20, verse 15: “*Thou shalt not steal*” (Exodus 20:15). Another scripture, Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17: “*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s*” (Exodus 20:17).

Now, I submit to you that gambling breaks the spirit of that command, because in a sense gambling is robbery by mutual consent. It is the exchange of wealth—not as a gift—with nothing given back in exchange. “Well,” you say, “but both people agree to it, that makes it different.” That doesn’t make any difference.

Suppose Mike and I decide to agree to get in a duel? Suppose we take pistols, and he puts his back to mine, and we go twenty paces and turn around and fire. Because I kill him, and he agreed to be in a duel, do you think that makes it right?

That we have mutual consent to murder one another, that I have mutual consent from you that I’m going to try to get what belongs to you and you’re going to try to get what belongs to me, without either of us giving the other anything for it means simply that both of us have in our heart a desire to get what belongs to the other person into

our hands, and it transgresses the spirit of the Bible that says, “Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:17). That there’s mutual consent makes no difference. That’s the reason somebody said, “He who gambles and wins is a thief, and he who gambles and loses is a fool.”

Now, suppose two men meet in an alley, one of them goes into that alley with a gun and he takes what belongs to that other man in that back alley, and comes out with what belonged to that other man. We say he’s a thief. Now, suppose two men go into an alley and, rather than one of them having a gun they have some dice, and one of them comes out of that alley with what belongs to another man. What’s the difference? In the first place, there was one thief. In the second place, there were two—both of them were trying to get what belonged to the other man, wanting what belonged to someone else, taking what belonged to someone else, only this time they believed in the God of fortune, the God of destiny, the God of chance to help them to do this. Gambling transgresses the principle of honesty.

### **B. Gambling Transgresses the Principle of Love**

Secondly, gambling transgresses the principle of love. Jesus said, in Matthew 22, verse 37 and following, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*” (Matthew 22:37–39). You cannot love your neighbor as yourself when you’re seeking to take from your neighbor that which belongs to your neighbor. Do you know what gambling is? Gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of someone else’s pain and loss. Now, get it in your mind—gambling, winning in gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of someone else’s pain and loss. Remember this, and never forget it, no one can win in gambling without someone else losing, do you understand that? It absolutely, totally transgresses the principle of love. To win is to lower yourself and to victimize your neighbor.

But, love also tells us that gambling becomes a compulsive habit—such a compulsive habit that one out of every ten gamblers becomes a compulsive gambler—and there are estimated in the United States today ten million gambling addicts, whose addiction is as real as the addiction to alcohol. That is the reason that there is an organization known as Gambler’s Anonymous, to take care of these kinds of people. The individual gambler almost always suffers financially, with the result of hardship to his wife and his children. They’re innocent persons, but they’re real victims, and the law of love says they should not be real victims. Gambling preys upon the poor, those who can least afford to gamble are often the most tempted to gamble.

Our city has people near the poverty level. Many of them will see gambling as a chance for instant wealth, they spend their dimes, their quarters and their dollars for the

million and one chance—or whatever chance it might be—that they are going to have that magic moment that is going to make them wealthy. And, if you don't think that gambling is a form of regressive taxation, you need to do some studying and see how many of these people who can least afford to gamble do gamble. It is not by incident or accident that the tables at Atlantic City do their biggest business on the days when the Welfare checks are cashed. It is a form of regressive taxation, it brings misery.

Nevada is talked about as the gambling capital of the nation. It has a capital crime rate that doubles the national average and a suicide rate that triples it. Love says there is something wrong with something like that. Love says that gambling is a parasite, which disproportionately victimizes the poor. Almost all taxes that come from gambling are regressive, in that they fall most heavily upon the poor.

I believe that when you get to the bottom line gambling costs, but I'm going to tell you something else, if you could show me that the coffer's of this city and this state would be better because of gambling I would still be against it. I would pity someone if you favor taxing men's weaknesses and profiteering from human misery. I am telling you dear friend that the principle of love says it is wrong and the principle of honesty says it is wrong.

### **C. Gambling Transgresses the Principle of Honest Labor**

I'll give you a third principle that teaches that it is wrong, and it's the principle of old fashioned work, W-O-R-K. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, and verse 10: *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Ephesians chapter 4, and verse 28: *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him"* (Ephesians 4:28). Gambling is an economic fraud, it produces no real wealth. It is a social leech, it is a parasite. The revenues that go to the gambler must have first been created by legitimate business, and therefore ought to go back to other legitimate business.

Virgil Peterson, while he was the crime director of the Chicago crime commission, said this, and I quote, "Gambling produces no wealth, it merely redistributes it from the hands of the many into the hands of the few." Gambling invariably leads to higher police and welfare costs. Harry Reid, chairman of the Nevada game and control commission, told *U. S. News and World Report*, and I quote, "Any state trying to follow Nevada's lead will find the social costs far outweigh any economic effects." That's the chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Commission. Any city needs gambling for its economy like a drowning man needs a drink of water.

### **D. Gambling Transgresses the Principle of Trust in God**

I want to mention the fourth principle that is transgressed. There's the principle of honesty, the principle of love, the principle of honest labor. Then fourthly, gambling

transgresses the principle of providence and trust in God. Again, I remind you of Isaiah 65, verse 11 where God warns against those “who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for fortune and filled cups of mixed wine for destiny” (Isaiah 65:11). That’s wrong. I heard a laymen testify tonight that his life’s verse was Matthew 6, verse 33: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matthew 6:33).

The gambler develops a dependence on the goddess of luck rather than the providence of God. And, by the way, our very word luck comes from the name of a pagan goddess. Something that causes me to lose a blessing is for me to be going somewhere to preach, or to a convention, or whatever and somebody says to me, “Well, good luck.” I say, “Whoop de do! Brother, I don’t want good luck, I want God.” I want the blessings of God. The gambler worships at the shrine of the goddess of fortune, he puts his faith in luck.

“Well,” you say, “now wait a minute, I believe it’s good recreation.” Well, what is recreation supposed to do? I believe in recreation; as a matter of fact I’m planning on getting some. But, real recreation will relax, real recreation will renew, real recreation will refresh, real recreation will restore. You see, legitimate sport has its place. People say, “I think it’s beautiful to see the horses run.” Indeed it would be if that’s all there were to it. There are times when all of us need entertainment. Good recreation is a blessing to be enjoyed. Gambling is a curse that brings vice and crime as it grows in its power over an individual and the community. Anywhere where gambling holds sway, one is going to find immorality, greed, licentiousness, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissent, envy, drunkenness and crime. Those things are not the things that renew, restore, refresh and relax. Compulsive gamblers are unhappy people. The saddest faces you see on this earth are in the casinos, are those people who are trying to find recreation through gambling.

## **Conclusion**

Friend, it puts a dependence upon the wrong god that can never satisfy the need of the human heart. This last point won’t appeal to anybody except the Christian, but to the Christian, I’ll tell you dear friend, you’ll find your thrills in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me wrap up this message. Gambling creates nothing, contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values, it mocks work, it finances crime, it robs children, it enslaves people and it poisons whatever it touches.

Now, let me talk to you about two sure things. Number one: you can be sure your sin will find you out. Number two: you can be sure Jesus will save you if you ask Him, that’s a sure thing. No risk and no gamble. Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:28). Seek him first, put him first,

you'll be glad that you did. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

# What's Wrong with Gambling?

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 24, 1993**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 19:21–32**

*“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen.”*

ACTS 19:24

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Principle of Honesty
- II. The Principle of Love
- III. The Principle of Work
- IV. The Principle of Providence

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take God's Word and find the Acts. The book of Acts—A-C-T-S—the book of Acts chapter nineteen, and I want to begin reading in a moment in verse twenty-one. What we have here is the story of the apostle Paul who got in trouble with the city fathers because he opposed something that was going on and preached Christ. Now, I begin reading Acts chapter nineteen and verse twenty-one.

And after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem saying, after I have been there I must also see room Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him Timotheus and Erastus but he himself stayed in Asia for a season and the same there arose no small stir about that way. Now what that means is there was a riot. And the riot was because of what Paul was preaching. And everywhere that Paul went there was either a revival or a riot it seems. There was no small stir.

Now here's what it was all about. Look in if you will in verse twenty-four. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen. Now, Ephesus, where Paul was the center of worship for Diana and the temple of Diana, the goddess—the Greek goddess—was there. And there were people making silver shrines. And not only were they making silver shrines, they were making a bundle. It brought no small gain to the craftsman.

Now it's an ill wind that blows no one any good and these guys were really knocking

it down. Whom, he—that is, Demetrius—called together with the workman of like occupation, and said, Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people saying there be no gods which are made with hands. That is, he's preaching against Diana. So that, not only this, our craft, is in danger to be set at naught, but also that the temple of the great goddess of Diana should be despised and that her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they'd heard these things, they were full of wrath and cried out saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater. That doesn't mean a theater in a closed building like we have, but an amphitheater. As a matter of fact, I've been to this very amphitheater. The ruins of it are still there in Ephesus.

And, when Paul would have entered into the people. The disciples suffered him not and certain of the chief of Asia which were his friends said unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theater. And, some cried one thing, and some another, for the assembly was confused and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

Now, I'm going to stop reading there but just simply to say that the apostle Paul threw a rock into a hornet's nest when he went to Ephesus and began to preach the truth. And, what he did when he preached the truth was to stick his finger in the eye of those, those who were making a lot of money through their false religion.

Now, you're going to learn this. That if you take a stand for the truth, you're not always going to be popular. You'll be popular with some people, but you're not going to be popular with a certain crowd and don't expect to win any awards for popularity if you serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember this, we are twice born people in a world of once born people, so we're going to be going against the tide much of the time.

Now, as a Christian, you should never try to cause trouble, but you should always expect it, because we're salt, and salt, when it is rubbed into wounds, it irritates even while it's healing. And truth, when it is laid alongside error, always causes controversy.

And so that's what happened here in Ephesus and there were three things that really drove the situation there at Ephesus. Number one was money—the profit motive. It's always there. Look in verses twenty-four and twenty-five: For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana brought no small gain unto the craftsman. And, he says, in the last part of verse twenty-five, Sir, as you know that by this craft, we have our wealth.

Now, these people did not want Paul to say what he was about to say, because what buttered their bread determined their conduct. I spoke this morning about principles. But

friend, it was not the principle of the thing,; it was the money. We often hear people say, it's not the money, but the principle of the thing. But with these people, it was not the principle of the thing. It was the money.

You'll learn this. The most vital nerve in the human body is the one that runs from the heart to the pocket book, and what Paul had done is put his finger on this on this vital nerve here.

Now, not only that, but there was a great propaganda machine turning out propaganda in favor of Diana here, verses twenty-five and following. I want you to notice how he begins to stir the people up. He says, in verse twenty-seven, So, that not only is this our craft is in danger to be set at naught, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and then her magnificence should be destroyed whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

Now, he's using loaded words. This man Demetrius is a master at mind control. He's pushing the right buttons. He is appealing to three things. Number one, their religious freedom. Number two, their patriotism. And number three, their pocket books. He he's using words here very shrewdly. Now, you can read this and find out that Demetrius was a good speaker. And you're going to find out that in this battle against gambling that we're really in a propaganda war and if somebody is here from the media, one of the things they will call me is number one a part of a religious riot. Something else they will call me is a fundamentalist, and somewhere in the article, if they write long enough, they'll use words like Puritanism, sectarianism, mindless orthodoxy, blue-nose puritan, censor and other things. I mean those words will just be sprinkled all in there. And then for those who in favor of gambling, there will be high sounding praises of economic growth and tourism and prosperity, ta-da-da-da-da.

Well, then on top of that, this thing of mob psychology gets in here and he gets the people going where they begin to shout and they're saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Notice that, in verse twenty-eight, he gets them all whipped up. Can you imagine, that that amphitheater seats 25,000 people. Can you imagine 25,000 people shouting, Great is Diana of the Ephesians? Everybody's looking around saying, well it must be right, because everybody's for it. This is morality by majority.

The biggest religion in America is the cult of the crowd. The altar of that religion is conformity. And the chief hymn is "Everybody's doing it."

Well, let's talk about gambling, and see what the Bible has to say about gambling. Is it right? Is it wrong?

I want to remind you what I told you this morning. The Bible is not a book of minute laws primarily. It is a book of great principles. And, we're going to find out, are there some Biblical principles that make it wrong for any Christian to gamble and unwise for any society to endorse gambling.

Now, before we do that, I want to define gambling. When we're talking about gambling, we're not talking about taking a risk. You cannot live without taking a risk. You can't be a farmer without taking a risk. The Bible says, He that considereth the wind will not sew. That is, if you're waiting till you are guaranteed perfect weather to be a farmer, you'll never be farmer. Isn't that right? You won't invest in the stock market if you're waiting till you have something where you know you can't lose money. You're not willing to risk your money in the stock market; you probably won't make any money in the stock market.

Now, I don't have any stocks. I don't know enough about buying stocks. I invested one time in an avocado mine and that didn't work so I just not investing in the stocks, but there there's you take risk when you go in business. If you open up a business to sell frozen yogurt or anything else, there's a certain amount of risk. And the Bible is not against taking risks. The Bible actually encourages you to take a risk. Did you know that? He that considers the wind will not sew. As a matter of fact, to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, you have to risk your life sometime.

Acts chapter fifteen, verse twenty-one. The Bible says, these men have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, they put their lives at hazard. Moffitt gives it, they have risked their lives. As a matter of fact, our Lord Jesus gave a parable about a man who hid his talent in the ground because he was afraid to invest. He was afraid that he might lose it, so he wouldn't take a risk. There's nothing wrong with taking a risk. There's nothing wrong with being an adventurer in business, investing in bonds and in stocks.

Now, I tore this out. And, by the way, I have got a ton of material here tonight and I won't be able to use it all, and some of it, there's so much of it, I may use it almost haphazardly. But I tore this out of USA the other day. This is a man who happens to be the reporter for sports, business, and special projects for USA today. His name is Michael Hstrand. And what he is saying is, look, how can you be against gambling if you put money in stocks and bonds? No, friend, that is not gambling. That's taking a risk. Now there's a difference.

I want to quote some from this man. He says, as Senator Dennis Deconseny, Democrat of Arizona, put it recently, gambling is a significant threat to American youth who may grow to view sports gambling as acceptable behavior. Now, here's what this man says in reply to that. In other words, mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be stock brokers, or investors, or anybody who rolls the dice in the crap shoot known as our economy. Children better learn to stay away from the media's financial coverage. It's filled with money managers, predicting where the interest rates have bottomed out, and you should buy or refinance a house, or whether you should postpone purchases, because airlines or carmakers will cut prices.

News reports use tipsters telling you to bet a stock will go down or a crop won't come in. And, when you short-sell stocks or buy commodities futures, nobody says you're corrupting. So, pore over those mutual fund prospectus and corporate annual reports in search of buying print raises you understand and listen to your stock broker. Maybe you don't have a handle on how currency fluctuations could sway biotic stock. He's pitching as well as you know. Say how the Buffalo Bills and Dallas Cowboys match up. But at least it's okay with everybody to bet on that biotic. Just hope the Cowboys win. And he goes on with this.

Now. Anybody that's got anything but spaghetti between his ears knows there's a difference between betting on a horse race and investing money in stocks or planting a good crop. You see, in gambling, for every winner there must be losers. What gambling is predicated on is one person getting what belongs to another person. In gambling, money simply changes hands. Gambling is a win-lose situation. For every winner, there has to be a loser. In a business, it is a win-win situation. You are investing in business to meet another person's needs, so that your needs will be met.

When you invest in the stock market or in some business, the money goes to build factories, to pay wages, to create goods and services, which in turn create new wealth, and that rewards the investor. In gambling, nothing is produced. Now, the states want to have a lottery. And, there are those who want to have a lottery here in Tennessee, and in order to get the lottery, they have to have a lot of people who will give money with the hope of winning. But only a handful will win, and the vast, vast, vast, vast, vast, vast majority of them will lose.

Do you know what the state, therefore, when it produces the lottery, is in the business of doing? It is in the business of producing losers. Now, you think about it. The state, in order to make the lottery work, must produce millions of losers. That's what it's all about. In business, you're trying to produce winners, not losers. Gambling is win-lose. Business is win-win. No wonder George Washington, the father of our country, said that gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, and the father of mischief.

Now, I want to give you some principles tonight—four or five principles, right out of the Word of God. Not minute laws. There's no law in the Bible that says, don't play the horses, or don't dabble in roulette, or don't buy a lottery ticket. There's something far more wonderful than that. Let me give you some principles.

## **I. The Principle of Honesty**

Principle number one: Gambling transgresses the principle of honesty. Let me give you some verses. Exodus chapter twenty, verse fifteen: thou shalt not steal. Exodus twenty, verse seventeen: thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy

neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything—now, listen—don't covet anything that is your neighbor's. Gambling breaks the spirit of this commandment, because gambling—you let all of the air out of it—is a form of thievery. It is robbery by mutual consent. Now hear me out. Listen carefully. Gambling is robbery by mutual consent. It is the transfer of wealth—wealth not earned and wealth not given—without giving anything back in exchange.

When people gamble, if I were to gamble with you, I would hope what belongs to you, I would hope to get that into my control without your having received anything from it. That's the spirit of thievery.

Now, the fact that you agree to give me a chance to do that, the fact that we have the spirit of thievery by mutual consent, makes no difference, so far as the morals are concerned. Suppose two men agree to a duel. They have an argument, and they agree to shoot it out. Well, what that is, is murder, by mutual consent. That doesn't make dueling right, because two men agree to take an opportunity to kill one another. It doesn't make gambling right, because two people agree that I'm going to try to get what belongs to you without giving you anything for it. And, you agree to try to get what belongs to me without getting anything for it. Somebody has said this, and said it well: He who gambles and loses is a fool. He who gambles and wins is a thief. I am trying to get what belongs to you in my hands without giving you anything for it.

Let me give you an example. Suppose two men meet in a dark alley. One of them has a gun, and he comes out of that alley with what belongs to the other man. What do we call him? We call him a thief.

Now, suppose two men meet in a back alley and they have a pair of dice, and one comes out of that alley with what belongs to the other man. What do we call him? We call him a gambler. But what is the major difference? In the first instance, there was one thief. In the second, there were two. You see, both of them had the same spirit that the man has with the gun. The fact that there's mutual consent makes no difference.

## **II. The Principle of Love**

What gambling does, it transgresses the law of God, which is the principle of honesty. The Bible says, thou shalt not steal. Here's a second principle that it transgresses. Not only the principle of honesty; it transgresses the principle of love. Let me give you a verse—Matthew chapter twenty-two, verses thirty-seven through forty: Jesus said unto him, thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Now, do you know what the major motive of gambling is? Listen to it carefully. Now,

let me tell you what gambling is. Gambling is pleasure and profit at the cost of someone else's pain and loss—pleasure at someone else's pain and loss. You cannot win at gambling unless someone else loses. Now, when I want you to lose in order that I might win, that is not love. I cannot love you, and try to get what belongs to you in possession, when you don't receive anything for it. Does that make sense to you? Say amen, if it does. I want to know if I'm connecting. Listen. If you win at gambling, you lower yourself, and you victimize your neighbor.

Did you know that there are a great number of people who are victimized by gambling? Did you know that we have in America 10 million compulsive gamblers? Compulsive gambling is a problem, just like compulsive use of narcotics or liquor—the same symptoms as the alcoholic and the dope addict.

Somebody handed me this just this afternoon: Memphis Health Care News. This is not a Sunday School Quarterly. This is monitoring the pulse of our healthcare community. Listen to this. Mental Health Professionals Gear Up for Gamblers. Legalization of gambling in cities near Memphis may produce at least one unexpected side affect: more customers for area psychological treatment centers and mental health facilities. According to John Gorwardin, about three to four percent of the population is at risk for becoming addicted to gambling. Still, these relatively few individuals can have a sizeable impact on society, he says. The average compulsive gambler is 46,000 to 96,000 dollars in the hole by the time he seeks help. His family is ruined financially. His work productivity has fallen through the floor. And he may have even resorted to theft or embezzlement to get out of debt, and so forth.

These are the health professionals saying, we're getting ready for it. You see, love says, I don't want to do that to any individual. The person who suffers is not just simply the gambler. I'm not talking about the recreational gambler; now, I'm talking about the compulsive gambler. It's his family that suffers. It's children that suffer. It's these innocent persons are real people. And it is the poor. It is the poor people who suffer the most. They're the ones most psychologically tempted. The ones who can least afford it are the most tempted to gamble.

People in genuine poverty, and there are plenty of them in our area, often see their only hope for wealth in a lottery ticket or in a casino of somewhere, where, somehow, they're going to turn their dimes and their quarters and their dollars into mega-bucks by the goddess of chance. They're waiting for that magic moment.

I was reading this afternoon that in New Jersey, one third—listen to this—one-third of the families with incomes of less than 10,000 dollars spend one-fifth of that income on the lottery—one-fifth. These are families with incomes of less than 10,000 dollars. Why? Because they've been told that's the way out. It's not by accident that the tables in Atlantic City do their best business on the days when the welfare checks are received.

See, gambling is a form of regressive taxation. Love for people—love for people—is a principle—the Word of God—to love people. How are we going to try to build an economy on something that wrecks and ruins the lives of so many people? Nevada—oh, Nevada, the gambling capital of our nation—did you know that the suicide rate in Nevada is double the national average? No, the crime rate doubles the national average. The suicide rate triples the national average in Nevada.

How can we say that we're operating by the principle of love? Somebody says, well, there may be some people who may get hurt, but I still think it'll be good for the economy. Well, I've got a word for you. If that is your motivation, if you are in favor of taxing men's weakness and profiteering in human misery, I would hate to have your heart beating in my chest. There is something vitally, even if it did pay, even if it did somehow help the local economy, and yet at this cost of human misery, I would pity you. Love says that gambling is so vitally wrong.

And, you know the group, here's something else from USA Today. Here's a man, Rachel Scheuster, he's written—the title of this headline: The Problem is Growing Among Youth: Lotteries, Computers Lend Air of Approval to Betting. Not only is gambling more available today; it is also socially sanctioned and promoted by the states, said New York psychotherapist Linda Burman, with ten percent of her compulsive gambling practice made up of 21-year-old and under betters. The next generation is feeling that gambling experience.

This article goes on to say the National Council on Problem Gambling also is teaming with the NCAA and perhaps the pro leagues to address gambling among youth. Durham Jacobs, an expert on teenage betting, wants states with lotteries to invest more in compulsive gambling programs. The gaming industry and government can no longer say they didn't know there is a problem. This is a product safety issue, not a moral issue. The use of this product—lotteries, gaming—may be hazardous for some people. Folks, that's not a Sunday School quarterly. That's USA Today. They're just simply saying, folks get hurt. Why am I against it? Gambling—the principle of love—love—says that it is wrong.

### **III. The Principle of Work**

I'll give you the third principle now. Talked about the principle of honesty. Talked about the principle of love. There's a third principle, and it's the principle of work. The Bible does not teach getting wealth by gambling. The Bible teaches getting wealth through work, and industry, and business.

Now, when the state gets in the business of gambling, or getting revenue from gambling, then the state has to look favorably upon gambling. In the lotteries, the state itself has to begin to advertize the lotteries. In New York City, you can look around and

see signs like this: Play Your Hunch—You Could Win A Bunch. Now, that's not the gambler saying that; that's the government saying that. I think it might be better if they were to put up signs to say, fight poverty—go to work. But, you know, we get the idea that, somehow, some way, that that we're gonna strike it rich. You've got a much better chance of being struck by lightning than winning the lottery.

Second Thessalonians three, verse ten: For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. Now, God knows that the government, the churches, and every one of us who names the name of Christ ought to have a compassionate, loving attitude toward those who're impoverished, to help them in every way that we possibly can.

But gambling does not help these people, ultimately; it ultimately hurts them. Ephesians chapter four, verse twenty-eight, says this: let him who stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hand the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. If you want to help the poor, the very best thing you can do to help the poor is, number one, to not become one of them. But, on the other hand, go to work, and use that talent that you have to make money, to give to him that needs. Gambling is an economic fraud. It produces no real wealth. It is a social leach.

Are you saying, Pastor, that people don't make money out of gambling? Friend, they make a ton of money. I mean the money is flowing in Mississippi, and they're carting it out by the wheelbarrow loads. Somebody is making money. I'm talking about the community, the society as a whole. You know what that is? That's the Texas Monthly. That's a photocopy of the Texas Monthly. That's not a Sunday School quarterly either. That's a big paper that they sell down in Texas, and it costs two dollars and a half. You can buy it on the newsstands. That's a recent addition. Do you know what it says? It says, "Sorry, Sucker: How Texas Bet on the Lottery and Lost." Not a Baptist preacher saying that. They're talking about what an economic fraud the lottery has been to Texas. I don't have time to read all that for you. But it's there.

I mean, listen, folks. The Bible teaches industry, integrity, and work. Virgil Peterson, director of the Chicago Crime Commission, said—and I want you to listen to this quote: Gambling produces no wealth. It merely redistributes it from the hands of the many to the hands of the few. Did you get that? It produces no real wealth. Or, you say, there are some restaurants who're gonna do good. You'd better believe it. Or, there are some motels that are gonna do good. You'd better believe it. We're going to get some taxes. Oh? Well, friend, when you get to the bottom line, you're going to find out that the taxes, and what is collected, and what is spent cleaning up the human misery—when you get to the bottom line—you're in the hole, ultimately in the hole.

There was a donkey who was approached by a flea, and the flea said to the donkey, I've got a business proposition for you. And, the donkey says, what is it? And the flea

said, I would like to sit upon your back, and suck blood. And, if you let me suck your blood, for every gallon of blood I suck, I'll give you back a pint in revenue. The donkey said, it sounds like a good deal to me. You make the application.

Gambling produces no wealth. It merely redistributes it from the hands of the many into the hands of the few. Harry Reid, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Commission, told US News and World Report—listen to this: any state trying to follow Nevada's lead will find out that the social cost will far outweigh any economic benefits. That is not me. You say, what does Adrian know about it? Friend, that's Harry Reid, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Commission. Any state trying to follow Nevada's lead will find the social costs far outweigh any economic benefits.

Our city needs a casino at Mud Island like a duck needs a bathing suit. I'd like to see them put some good wholesome family entertainment where people can go with their children and their family and not have to be in that environment.

I'm going to tell you a fourth principle that gambling transgresses. Now, the first one, the principle of honesty—when you gamble, you're trying to get what belongs to somebody else in your possession. Have you got that? That's without giving him anything for it. You're trying to get what belongs to him. That's the spirit of a thief. The fact that it's by mutual consent makes no difference. There are just two of you immoral, when you get in that situation.

Number two, it transgresses the principle of love, because it's the most regressive form of taxation there can be. It harms, it hurts the poor the most. And there are those compulsive, addictive gamblers, and it's not just those gamblers. It's their children, and their families, that are so often hurt.

I tried to tell you this morning. The ultimate question is not, Will it hurt me? But, Will it hurt somebody else?

And then, it transgresses the principle of work. Oh, the Bible teaches that there is a principle of industry and work that is honest, and noble; and, even when you invest in the stock market, you're investing in the lives of workers, industry, and business.

#### **IV. The Principle of Providence**

Now, fourthly, gambling transgresses the principle of providence. The gambler wants to live by luck, rather than providence. Now, if you're not a Christian, this would not apply to you. And, by the way, what I have to say, probably, will not persuade most people who want to gamble. I'm talking to believers now. And, don't expect that we're going to put society in our mold. If you think we're going to save society, friend, that's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. I'm just trying to tell you why you as a Christian—for me, this is wrong, and I would to God that others wouldn't do it.

And, I'll do everything I can do to speak out and stand up, but many of these things

are not even going to be considered. What I'm about to say wouldn't even be considered by a person who does not know and love the Lord. Gambling transgresses the principle of providence. Isaiah chapter sixty-five and verse eleven. Interesting verse. It speaks of those who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain, and who set a table for fortune, and fill cups of mixed wine for destiny. I've read that out of the RSV because it's clearer, at this point.

What is fortune? That's the God of chance—the goddess of luck. You see luck—the very word luck, the very word luck. As we have a casino named the Lucky Lady. Did you know that the very word luck is derived from a pagan goddess? If there's anything that gives me a pain, it's for me to go off somewhere in a revival crusade or something, and for some well-meaning brother or sister to say, well, Pastor, good luck. Don't tell me, good luck. Say, God bless you, Pastor. God go with you. May God guide you, and guard you, and help you.

But, you see, a gambler is depending upon chance. The Bible says that we're to rest upon providence. Matthew chapter six and verse thirty-three: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." Well, you say, but, Pastor, look, all I've got is ten bucks. If I want to spend it on gambling, if I want to spend it on ice cream, that's my business. It's just recreation to me. I don't care if I lose it. I can afford to lose it. That's the way I get my jollies. I can afford it. Do you know who you're thinking about? You. That's the whole point. You are not thinking of other people. Now, you're putting your confidence in chance, and you're putting your motivation in yourself.

Now, I'm not against somebody who says, I think it's beautiful to see the horses run, also. Now, I like the dogs. I like the dogs, too. But don't try to equate that with gambling any more than you would equate mountains with Busch beer. Come to the mountains. You know, it's really crazy, isn't it? They say, Oh, everybody loves to see the horses run. Well, hey, guys, if you want to see the horses run, get some horses and watch 'em run. It's gambling—that's what people are talking about. There's no law against horses running—you know that.

True recreation, as we said this morning, will relax, refresh, renew. Have you ever been in a casino? I have. Not to gamble. I was in a casino one time when I went down to Bahamas to witness to Muhammad Ali. I went down there to talk to him about Jesus, and did, but he was staying at a place called Paradise Island—a big casino there. I had to go through that place. Friend, I want tell you something. I thought I was in the belly of hell. And, you know what I did, I just stepped back, Brother Jim, and I looked at the people. I have never seen such a grim bunch of people in my life. If that is recreation, deliver me.

I mean, now, they might say that they're having fun, but, folks, I'm telling you, that

was a somber looking group. True recreation is a blessing to be enjoyed. Gambling is a curse that brings vice and crime.

Have you ever noticed that everywhere there's gambling, the flesh holds sway. Gambling finds itself matched with immorality, greed, licentiousness, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissention, envy, drunkenness and crime. You say, oh, Pastor Rogers, well, that's not true. Why, you keep telling us how much control they have. Don't worry, we've got this control. Well, you don't have to control a Sunday School picnic that way.

I'm telling you, folks, where there's something rotten, you're going to find a lot of buzzards. All of these things come in. There's less laughter and gaiety in a casino than any other public resort. The Christian doesn't need to get his thrill from covetousness and dishonesty.

I had so much stuff. I can't give you all that. I mean I have been reading, clipping newspapers, for a couple of years, getting ready for this sermon. And I said, I'm just going to leave all that there. Let me just sum it up. Here's the bottom line. Gambling contributes nothing to the common good. It undermines values. It mocks work. It finances crime. It robs children. It enslaves people. And, it poisons whatever it touches.

And, if you'll just take the four principles of honesty, love, work and providence, you'll find out that the Bible is very much against risk-taking. The Bible's very much in favor of that, but it's against gambling, which says, I want to get what belongs to you into my possession by sheer chance. The fact that you agree to have it done just means that you have the same kind of a bad spirit that I have when I want to have it done, because you're hoping to do the same thing to me.

## **Conclusion**

I'm gonna wrap up the message tonight and tell you there are two sure things. Number one, be sure your sin will find you out. Number two, be sure that Jesus will save you, if you trust Him. Give Him your heart. Trust the Lord Jesus. There's a hope that is steadfast and sure.

Now, I started this message tonight talking about Ephesus. And you remember they were there, and Demetrius the silversmith, when Paul came and preached the truth, they tried to make Paul look like he was the bad guy, just like they tried to make Vice-President Quayle look like he was the bad guy, when he said something about unwed mothers and Murphey Brown. Well, hey, they'll come down on me, they'll come down on you; but now I want you to listen. I've been back to Ephesus where all this took place. And do you know what? Ephesus is a ruin, and Demetrius is dead, and all those silversmiths are gone. 'Tis one life, 'twill soon be past. You know the rest of it. Only

what's done for Christ will last.

I don't want to go through life trying to get what belongs to somebody else in my possession, without them either giving it to me, or me working for it. I don't want to go through life trying to get my pleasure and profit at somebody else's pain and loss. I want to help meet your need, so you can meet my need. I want to be in a win-win situation, not in a win-lose situation. Gambling is always win-lose, and in the lottery, the government is in the business of producing millions of losers. I think the government ought to be in the business of producing millions of winners. Thank you. I'm glad I called off "no clapping" for tonight.

Do you know Jesus? You know, we who are Christians, we've got something wonderful—to know Jesus. I don't expect the people to believe what I have to say tonight. Not that I'm a pessimist—I just know the power of greed. The only thing that will deliver people from that power of greed is Jesus Christ. And the only thing that will deal with this monster called more that lives within the human heart is Jesus, who satisfies the deepest human need. And, friend, when you receive Christ, you're not gambling with your soul. He's a hope that's steadfast and sure. Father, I pray that many tonight will come to Christ and be saved. In His wonderful and holy name I pray. Amen.

# The Secret of True Greatness

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** December 25, 1977

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 20:17–35

*“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

ACTS 20:35

## Outline

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## Introduction

Take your Bibles tonight, please, and turn to Acts 20—Acts 20—as we’re speaking tonight on this subject: “The Secret of True Greatness.” And, those of you who are familiar with the book of Acts know that in Acts 20, the Apostle Paul is with the elders of the church at Ephesus, and he is recounting his ministry with them there, and he’s telling about the wonderful things that happened, the exciting things that happened, and sometimes the painful things that happened to him while he ministered in their midst at the church at Ephesus.

And, I begin reading in verse 17: *“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him”—that is, to Paul—“he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you*

*publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over...which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye [selves] know"—"ye yourselves know"—"that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:17–35)*

What is true greatness? Now, the world measures greatness by certain standards: beauty, brains, brawn, and bucks. And, if you have some of these—or, at least, a lot of these—then they'll say you're great. Oh, maybe: "She's a great beauty queen" or, "He's a great athlete" or maybe, "a great scholar," "a great businessman." But, does God—is God—really impressed with these things? I don't really believe so. The Bible says in Luke 16:15: *"that which is highly esteemed among men is [an] abomination [with] God."* (Luke 16:15) And, so many things we think are so wonderful God does not necessarily think are so wonderful; and yet, we spend our lives trying to be great in the eyes of men, while the Bible says, *"Seekest thou great things for thyself? [to] seek them not."* (Jeremiah 45:5) And so, you don't have to be Hertz and be number one, or you really don't even have to be Avis and try harder to be number one; you can just kind of relax and stop competing with one another.

You know, I think that Vince Lombardi was held up as a great man, and I think, in many respects, he was a great man. But, I think there's a philosophy that Vince Lombardi had that is not necessarily the best: Vince Lombardi said, "Winning isn't

everything; it is the only thing.” And, there are a lot of people who go through life feeling that way—that they’ve got to be number one; they’ve got to be the biggest; they’ve got to be the best; they’ve got to be the strongest; they’ve got to be the richest; they’ve got to be the best known. They want to be great, and what they achieve sometimes is greatness, but it’s not greatness in the eyes of God, only in the eyes of men. And, one of these days, the mossy fingers of decay and time will pull down their monuments, and the canker and the worm will eat away at all of their goods, and their fame will disappear in the grave. And, they weren’t great at all.

Now, a great life is the kind of a life that lingers after you’re gone. A great life is the kind of a life that, when you are gone, there are people who are going to miss you, because you really left something in this world. *I heard about a fellow named Willy who was quite lazy, and he had a job—at least, he occupied some space around a particular company. And, when he died, a friend of his said, “I’d like to come and apply for Willie’s vacancy,” and the boss said, “Willie didn’t leave any vacancy.”* Now, I think that when you go, you ought to leave at least a vacancy. There ought to be a vacuum where you used to be. There ought to be something very wonderful about your life that lasts after you die.

Now, let me say this: that you can live a great life—I say, you can live a great life. Yes, you! You say, “Well, Paul might have lived a great life. He lived in a certain era of time, and things were propitious for him to be great. And, he had a great education, and he had a great opportunity. But, I can’t be great. I just live in a little apartment, Brother Rogers. I live on a pension. Nobody knows my name. I’ll never make Who’s Who; I didn’t even make Who’s Not. People just don’t even know me, and I can never be great.” Well, I want to tell you tonight that you can be great—truly great—great in the eyes of God. Jesus never said, “Don’t be great.” He just said, “Make certain that it’s real greatness that you get.”

I believe the Apostle Paul was a great man, and I believe there are three things here in this scripture that I read to you that make him such a great man. And, the secret of his life was commitment—commitment. Now listen, everybody is committed to something. I don’t know what you’re committed to, but I know that you’re committed to something—you’re committed to something. And, if you’re committed to the right thing, your life will be great. If you’re committed to the wrong thing, your life will be a dismal failure, even though men may call it “great.” I want you to notice what Paul was committed to and why Paul’s life was a great life.

## **I. Paul Was Committed to a Great Person**

He learned the secret of a great life, for, first of all, Paul was committed to a great person. Look in verse 19: Paul says, “*Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and*

*with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.”*  
(Acts 20:19) The thing that made Paul’s life a great life was that Paul was committed to a great person. The aim of Paul’s life was to serve the Lord.

Now, that cost Paul something. It’s not easy to serve the Lord; it costs. You know, we sing, “It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day, / It pays every step of the way.” (Frank C. Huston) Well, that’s true, but it also costs to serve Jesus; it costs every day. Look what it cost the Apostle Paul.

### **A. It Cost Paul Tears**

In the first place, it cost him tears. Look in verse 19: “*Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears.*” (Acts 20:19) Paul served the Lord day and night with a broken heart. And, if you serve the Lord—really serve the Lord—and if you live a great life, you’re going to weep some. When was the last time you ever shed a tear over a soul that was mortgaged to the devil? When was the last time—when is the last time—that the sins of this city broke your heart so much that you wept over the city of Memphis? When’s the last time you wept over the coldness of your life, the barrenness of your soul winning? Friend, listen, when you serve the Lord—if you really serve Him—you’re going to serve Him with tears.

Now, if you go back and read the ministry of the Apostle Paul while he was in Ephesus, you don’t read anything about his tears. It doesn’t say, “And, Paul broke down and wept.” We wouldn’t even know that Paul wept at all when he was at Ephesus if Paul himself had not written about it. He served the Lord with tears. I tend to think that the reason it’s not recorded in the record is that he shed these tears in private. I know in my own life, I weep far more in my study than I weep in the pulpit. I weep far more in my prayer life in private than I weep in public. And, I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that the secret of a life that counts with God is a life that has a broken heart, and I believe the things that break the heart of Jesus ought to break our heart. And so, the Apostle Paul was committed to a great person, and because of that, it cost him tears.

### **B. It Cost Paul Trials**

And, not only did it cost him tears; it cost him trials. Continue to read in verse 19: “*Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations*”—now, that word *temptations* means “trials,” “testing.” It doesn’t mean that he was tempted to sin, though he may have been. That’s not what this means. It’s the kind of a testing and the kind of a trial that comes by having people be angry at you, and people tell lies about you, and people oppose you. He mentions the—“*temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.*” (Acts 20:19) Paul had some real enemies because he served the Lord. Not only should his sorrows be our sorrows, but if we’re serving the Lord, His enemies will be our enemies. And, if you want to live a great life, and if you

want to serve the Lord, then you'd better be ready for some temptations. You'd better be ready for some testings. You'd better be ready for some trials. For if they hated your Lord and you serve Him, they're going to hate you.

And, I just want to tell you something, ladies and gentlemen: if I can read the signs of the times at all, the days are right in front of us when true Bible believers are going to be persecuted like they've never been since you and I have been alive on this globe—true Bible believers. It's started. You see what is happening. You read the newspapers. There's a movement out now to get Billy Graham—to get him. They are writing all kinds of twisted news about Billy Graham. There's a move out to mock, to ridicule, to ruin Anita Bryant. There's a move out to mock the things that we hold holy. And, you'll find in the newspapers, and you will find in the comic strips, you will find in the variety shows, you will find in the movies a lampooning, a ridiculing, an opposition of the people of God; and so, you'd just better buckle your pew belt and get ready for a rough ride. There are going to be some trials, some temptations. And, the people who are going to be looked upon as the oddities in these last days are what they call "fundamentalists." Those are people who believe something; those are people who believe this book. The Apostle Paul served the Lord. He served the Lord, first of all, with tears; and then, he served the Lord with trials.

### **C. It Cost Paul Toils**

And then, he served the Lord with toils. Notice again beginning in verse 20: *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Acts 20:20) The Apostle Paul put his religion, his sentiment into shoe leather.

Now, there are some of you who will stand here on Sunday night and sing, "Oh, how I love Jesus," but you don't love Him, and I'll tell you why you don't love Him: because you never tell anybody about Him; you never try to win anybody to Jesus Christ; you never, never, never paid the price even to learn how to be a soul winner, much less to go out from house to house and door to door. I wonder if you're even saved. You're not a soul winner. You don't bring people to Jesus Christ. How can you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and not be a soul winner and not work at it? If you're looking for a cheap way, an easy way, a lazy way to serve God, forget it, for there is no such thing. The Apostle Paul loved the Lord, and because he loved the Lord, it cost him tears. And, because he loved the Lord, it cost him testing. And, because he loved the Lord, it cost him toil. House to house and publicly, he was talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you a soul winner? Andrew Murray said there are two classes of Christians: soul winners and backsliders. "Oh," you say, "well, Brother Rogers, of course you ought to

win souls. That's what we pay you to do." Friend, I want to tell you something: you don't pay me. You give your money to God; God pays me. And, I want to tell you something: you can't hire me to win your souls for you. There's not enough money. And, when you come to the Judgment, you're not going to be able to say, "Well, we got us a preacher, and we paid him; and that's what he's supposed to do." **I want to tell you, a Christian who won't witness is like a barber who won't cut hair. He's like a bus driver who won't drive a bus.** You want to live a great life? Then you need to serve the Lord. Attach your life to a great person, and He is a great person.

#### **D. It Cost Paul Tenacity**

But, not only was there the matter of tears, and toil, and testing; there was the matter of tenacity. Look in verses 23–24, or beginning in verse 22: *"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying...bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."* (Acts 20:22–24)

Paul said, "I know it's bad and it's going to get worse, but I'm going to stay on course. I am not going to quit. None of these things move me." You want me to tell you how great you are? You can tell the size of a person by what it takes to stop him. Paul said, "I know it's going to be rough. I know that I'm going to have trials, and afflictions, and bonds, and sorrow, and heartache, but they don't move me. I'm going to finish my course." He was a great man. Somebody said that you could build a jail in front of the Apostle Paul—he'd go right through it and come out the other side with the jail doors under one arm and a convert under the other. He just kept on going. He did not stop.

And, I'm speaking to some who have quit. There used to be a time when you tithe, but you don't tithe any more. You used to be a prayer warrior, but you don't pray any more. You used to faithfully sing in the choir, but you sit out now. You used to teach Sunday School, but you don't do it any more. You used to serve here in the church, but you say, "Let somebody else do it now." You've quit. You're a slacker, a shirker, a quitter. And, Jesus said, "When a man puts his hand to the plow and looks back, he's not fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) Thank God that Paul served the Lord not only with tears and toil and testing, but with tenacity. He kept on.

I believe at this threshold of a new year you need to say, "O God, forgive me for letting you down. Forgive me, O God, for veering off course. And, O God, by your grace, it will be great in '78. I'm going to serve you in a way that I have never served you before—with a tenacity like the Apostle Paul served you." Now, dear friend, that's the secret of a great life.

Arturo Toscanini, the great choral conductor, was conducting Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and when he had finished, this man, with his marvelous artistry, had so caught that audience up that they were absolutely overwhelmed. They were spellbound. They began to cheer. They began to whistle, and to clap, and even to stomp their feet. They were so moved by the artistry of this great conductor and by the music of Beethoven. They clapped, and clapped, and clapped, and clapped. After a while, Toscanini turned around and motioned for the orchestra to stand, and they stood. And, the people applauded more. And then, he turned around and looked at them with rather a fierce eye and a somewhat stern voice and said, "Gentlemen, gentlemen." They got quiet: Was something wrong? Was he angry at them? Had someone missed a cue? Had someone perhaps hit a wrong note? No, he wasn't angry. He was just so overcome with the sheer moment. He said in a hoarse but forceful whisper, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, I am nothing," and that was quite an admission for a man like him who was blessed with a real ego like he had. "I am nothing." And then, he went on to say, "And, you are nothing, but Beethoven is everything—everything, everything." No, Jesus is everything—everything, everything. And, if we would be great, we must say, "I am nothing, and you are nothing; Jesus is everything. And, as long as I think I'm something, then Jesus is not everything. But, I'm willing to be nothing; then, Jesus Christ can be everything in my life." The thing that made the Apostle Paul's life a great life was, number one, he was committed to a great person.

## **II. Paul Was Committed to a Great Purpose**

Number two: Not only was he committed to a great person; he was also committed to a great purpose, and that great purpose was building the Church. I want to begin reading now in verse 25: he says, "*And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more*"—he's telling the church at Ephesus goodbye—"*Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you...the [whole] counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over...which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*" (Acts 20:25–28) Not only was Paul committed to a great person (Jesus), but a great purpose, and that is the Church of God. And, I'm not talking about a denomination; I am talking here in the great, overwhelming sense of the Church. Every true church is a church of God. His purpose—the purpose of the Apostle Paul—was to build churches, to grow churches, to found churches, to establish churches wherever he went. His life was wrapped up in this one thing: church building.

Now, we have some organizations that are in the world today, and I thank God for them. There's Campus Crusade for Christ, Jews for Jesus. There's Campus Life.

There's the Billy Graham organization. There are a lot of organizations like this—many of them fine and good organizations. But, I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, when all of the dust has settled and when it's all over, you're going to find God doing His greatest work, His mightiest work, through the local New Testament church. And, don't forget it—don't forget it. If, after you have been faithful to Bellevue; and if, after you have presented yourself for service to this church; and if, after you have brought your tithes on God's day to God's house, if you happen to have some extra energy, if you happen to have some extra money, if you happen to have a place of service in some of these other organizations, that may be well and good. I support them myself. But, I want to tell you, my first love, my greatest love, my deepest love is the Church of Jesus Christ. You'd better start putting your emphasis where God put His emphasis.

#### **A. The Church Is Important to God**

The Church is a divine institution. God built the Church. God establishes the Church. The Church is important to God. I want you to notice what this verse says. This verse speaks, in verse 28, of the Church of God, *“which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* (Acts 20:28) It's kind of open season on the Church, but you be careful when you criticize the Church, because it's not my Church; it's not your Church—it's His church. Jesus didn't say, “You will build My church.” He didn't say, “I'll build your Church.” He said, *“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* (Matthew 16:18) The Church has been purchased with the blood of God. That means that Jesus was God when He died upon that cross, and the blood that was spilled there was God's blood. The Church of God, *“which he hath purchased with his blood”* (Acts 20:28)—one of the great verses that speak of the deity of Christ.

#### **B. The Church Is Important to Satan**

And, not only is the Church important to God; the Church is also important to Satan. Notice here in verses 29–30: *“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock”*—that is, from the outside there are going to come enemies; there are going to come forces. The devil is going to level his fiery darts against the Church, his battering rams of hell against the Church, from the outside (verse 29). But, look in verse 30—*“[And] also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”* (Acts 20:29–30) And, every church will always be attacked from without and from within. The devil will never stop attacking a true Church of God. And, don't think, dear friend, that everybody in Memphis is supposed to love Bellevue; they're not. It would be strange indeed if they did. It would prove that we were not preaching and standing for the right thing.

### C. The Church Is Important to Paul

The Church is important to God; that's what verse 28 tells us. Verses 29–30 tell us that the Church is important to Satan. And, the Church is important to Paul. Notice in verse 31: *“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20:31) Paul said, “I gave myself to it day and night, night and day, day and night, night and day. I gave myself to the building up of the Church.”

If it's so important to God and so important to Satan that he opposes it, if it were so important to the Apostle Paul that he gave himself to it in such a great way, ought not the Church to be important to you? I hope you love this church so much that you'd be willing to die for her. You ought to love the Church, and you ought to love the church that you're a member of. And, that's not chauvinistic, and that's not selfish. I want to say that I love my family a little bit more than I love other families because my family is my family. They're the family God expects me to love and God expects me to take care of. *“If any [man] provide not for his own, [especially] those of his own [household], he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”* (1 Timothy 5:8) And, you ought to love this church above all churches. Folks, if you don't love it, who's going to? And, I want to tell you, if you want to have a great life, then you commit your life to a great person: Jesus. And then, you commit your life to a great cause, a great purpose: the Church.

### III. Paul Was Committed to a Great Principle

And then, the third thing that made Paul's life a great life was that he was committed to a great principle—a great principle. Begin reading again in verse 32: *“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among...them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. [Yet] ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember”—and here's the great principle—“and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (Acts 20:32–35) That is the great principle: the principle is giving. Now, you want to live a great life? Then, there's a great principle, and that principle is that *“it is more blessed to give than [it is] to receive.”* (Acts 20:35)

Now, the world doesn't believe this. The world thinks that blessing comes in getting. But, the Bible says that *“it is more blessed to give than [it is] to receive.”* (Acts 20:35) Now, it doesn't—the Bible never says that it's not a blessing to receive. Didn't you get blessed when you got some gifts today? Sure, you did, but you got a bigger blessing out of giving than you did receiving. I know I did. I know I was pleased when I received some things, but, you know, I just enjoyed sitting back and watching my children and my

wife open the things that I'd gotten for them. I got a bigger blessing out of giving than I got out of receiving, and this is true in all of life if your heart is in the right place. "*It is more blessed*"—"more blessed"—"*to give than [it is] to receive.*" (Acts 20:35) The world lives by the principle of getting, and that's why the world is so wrong.

And, those of us who traveled in Israel and the Holy Land—we visited the lovely Sea of Galilee shaped like a harp. I don't believe there's a more beautiful body of water on the face of the earth. I never shall forget the first time I saw the Sea of Galilee as I came up over a mountain pass there. And, the bus turned, and I looked over to my right and gave a gasp. There, sitting like an azure jewel nestled in the pink mountain, was the Sea of Galilee. And, I wanted, as much as I love the water, I wanted to get down to it. I wanted to put my hands in it. I wanted to put my feet in it. I wanted to taste the water of it. I wanted to see what it was like—sparkling, clear, clean, abundant with fish, a beautiful body of water fed by the snows of Mount Hermon. But oh, if you follow the River Jordan that empties out of the Dead Sea—or, out of the Sea of Galilee—you'll find that it goes down a tortuous path to another sea that connects with the Sea of Galilee, and that other sea is called the Dead Sea. It's located in the lowest spot on earth, thirteen hundred feet below sea level. I've been there, too. I've been in that sea, too. Oh, but what a difference! The Dead Sea is just what the name says that it is: it's dead. It's full of salt and brine. And, not a fish swims in it, not a bird seems to care for it, no vegetation, except just some very sparse shrubs, grow around the bank of it. It's noxious; it's poisonous. It's dead.

What's the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea? Both of them have principally the same source of water, but Galilee receives but it also gives. The Dead Sea just receives, but it doesn't give. It takes, and it takes, and it takes, but it doesn't give. And, because of that, the evaporation has left just a concentration of poisonous salt there in what we call "the Dead Sea." I hope that you want to be more like the Sea of Galilee. Yes, it's blessed. It's a blessing to receive. You've got to receive to live. But oh, how much more blessing—how much more blessed—it is to give. Jesus said, "*It is more blessed.*" (Acts 20:35) This has been called the "supreme beatitude."

You say, "Well, Brother Rogers, I don't have a whole lot to give." That's where you're wrong. When we're talking about giving, we're not simply talking about money. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul here is not primarily talking about money. He says he labored to support the weak. (Acts 20:35) That is, he was talking about giving of his sweat, giving of his toil, giving of his energy. We all have things to give. We all have our measure of money to give. But, we have time to give. We have talents to give. We have love to give. We have concern to give. We have respect to give. We have joy to give. We have esteem to give. We have thoughtfulness to give. We have prayer to give. You want to live a great life? Then, live by a great principle—that "*it is more blessed to give*

*than to receive.*” (Acts 20:35) And, you see, really, the measure of your receiving is going to be measured by your giving, for Jesus said in Luke 6:38: “*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together...shall men give [unto] your bosom.*” (Luke 6:38) And, you “*give, and it [will] be given unto you.*” (Luke 6:38) And so, whatever you want, you ought to give. You give according to your need, for the Bible says, “Whatever you sow, that you’ll also reap.” (Galatians 6:7) Do you need money? Then give money.

Joyce and I have always done that. You know, I went away to college. I didn’t have any money to go to college on. I think when we got married and went on our honeymoon... Where is Joyce? She’s sitting here somewhere. We had, I think, forty dollars. That was it—I mean, that’s the whole shebang. That was it—forty dollars. And, we spent that on a honeymoon and had a big honeymoon, too. We enjoyed it. We had a wonderful time. And, I got a job, I was working in school. I’ve done so many things. It’s amazing some of the things—the jobs. I think I was recounting this the other day to you—some of the things that I’ve worked at in order to get through school. I pastored a little church. They paid us thirty dollars a week, and we had to drive three hundred miles to get it. They didn’t give us any automobile expense, and you can see at ten cents a mile, we weren’t making very much. And actually, we weren’t making anything, hardly, but yet God just seemed to supply. As a matter of fact, they finally decided they ought to give us a raise, and they raised us up to thirty-five dollars a week. And, Joyce and I really debated whether we ought to take that. We said, “Well,” and she said, “Well, we can just give it back to the church. Let’s take it and then turn around, and we’ll just give it back,” you know. And so, then we decided, well, we’d give two dollars and fifty cents back and keep two dollars and fifty cents. We thought maybe the Lord wanted us to have two dollars and fifty cents, and that’s the way we thought. But, God has just so blessed, and so blessed, and so blessed—it’s just been amazing. We’ve always tried to give, and God keeps giving to us. I can’t understand it, except it’s just surely His grace.

If you want money, give money. The other day we were kind of low in our bank account, and as a matter of fact, we owed some money—pretty good little sum for us. And so, Joyce and I decided—well, she said, “We’d better—we’d better—find somebody to give something to.” We just looked around for something to give. And listen, you can’t out-give God—you can’t out-give God. “*Give...it [will] be given unto you.*” (Luke 6:38)

Some of you say, “Well, I don’t have any friends.” Well, friend, if you want some friends, give friendship. Give what you want. If you want love, give love. Whatever you want, give it away. Whatever you sow you’ll reap. There is a locked-in law of likeness. If you want hate, give hate. If you want people to be selfish with you, you be selfish with them. If you want people to smile at you, smile at them. See how you start it? All right. Now look, folks: it’s just that way—it’s just that way. Whatever you give is what you’re

going to get. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than [it is] to receive.”* (Acts 20:35) And oh, don’t wait ’til you can afford it. You say, “Well, Brother Rogers, one of these days when I can afford it...”

*The bride, bent with age, leaned over her cane;  
Her steps uncertain need guiding.  
While down the church aisle with a toothless smile  
Came the groom in a wheelchair gliding.  
And who is the elderly couple thus wed?  
You’ll find when you closely explored it  
That this is that rare, most conservative pair,  
Who waited ’til they could afford it.*  
— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Oh, dear friend, I’m glad we didn’t wait ’til we could afford it to get married. We still probably wouldn’t be married. Oh, don’t wait—don’t wait to give. Give, give, give! It’s the secret of living—is giving. The thing that made the Apostle Paul such a great man was he was committed to a great principle, and that principle is the principle of giving.

You know, we hear, “Well, give ’til it hurts.” Oh, my soul! That’s wrong. Harry Johnson reminded us that that’s wrong. The Bible never teaches to give ’til it hurts. The Bible says, to the contrary, in 2 Corinthians 9:7: *“God loveth a cheerful giver.”* (2 Corinthians 9:7) And, as a matter of fact, that word *cheerful* comes from the Greek word *hilaros*, from which we get our word *hilarity*. “God loves a hilarious giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) Give ’til it tickles you. That’s the way you ought to give: just give ’til it tickles you, ’til you get tickled about it, ’til you have proven that the Lord means what He says in His Word when He says, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* (Acts 20:35)

## Conclusion

Now, people may never know of you like they knew about the Apostle Paul, but I just want to tell you, here is a formula for a great life, and it’s very simple. Paul was committed to a great person—Jesus; committed to a great purpose—the Church; and committed to a great principle—that *“it is more blessed to give than [it is] to receive.”* (Acts 20:35)

Let’s bow in prayer. Father, we pray that you’d help us to understand that there are no little persons in your kingdom, that sometimes we look at people according to the standards of this world, but the things that the world esteems you may not esteem. Help us, Father, to live lives that can truly be called great in your sight. And, help us to say that we’re nothing but that Jesus is everything. For we pray in His name. Amen.

# Things That Really Matter

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** March 2, 1997

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 20:17–38

*“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”*

ACTS 20:24

## Outline

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## Introduction

Well, take your Bibles and be finding Acts chapter 20, and in just a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 32. And, I trust you brought a Bible with you. If you did not, there may be one there in the pew before you. If you’ll take it out and turn to Acts chapter 20, in just a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 32. And, what we’re talking about today is “Things That Really Matter”—not just for tomorrow, but for all eternity.

¶ A man has written a book talking about how to be successful, and it has an incredible story in it. It’s the story of a professor who stood before his class, and he had a jar, a wide-mouthed jar. And, in that jar he’d put some large stones, and he filled it up to the brim with these large stones. And then, he asked his class, “Is the jar full?” And, some of the students carelessly said, “Yes, the jar is full.” It was up to the very top with those large stones. He said, “No, the jar is not full.” And then, he took some scoops of

gravel and put them in the jar and shook it 'til the gravel filled all the crevices there. Then he asked the question: "Now is the jar full?" Well, they were a little wary. They didn't want to answer. But, one or two said, "Yes, now it's full." He said, "No, it's not yet full," and he took some sand, and poured the sand in over the gravel, and shook it, and compacted it, and smoothed the sand off up at the top. "Now," he said, "is the jar full?" Very few would lift their hand any more, but maybe one said, "Well, it looks full." He said, "No, it's not full." And then, he took some water and poured the water in over the sand 'til it came up to the brim. And then, he said, "Now is the jar full?" And, they had to admit it certainly looked full. Then he asked this question to this class: he said, "Now, what is the truth, the lesson, in what I have just done?" One student lifted his hand and said, "Well, the lesson is that sometimes in life you can put so many things in your life that there's no room for anything else." He said, "No, that is not the lesson. Here is the lesson: if I had not put the big rocks in first, there would have been no room for them later on." Listen to me, folks: "If I had not put the big rocks in first, there would have been no room for them later on."<sup>4</sup>

What are the big rocks? What are the things that really matter, things that you may be leaving out of your life—a lot of smaller things that have filled the capacity of your life, and you have left out the things that really matter, the big rocks? That's what we're going to be talking about—things that really, really, really matter.

Acts chapter 20, verse 32—the Apostle Paul has been visiting with the elders at the church of Ephesus, and they've been having a time. He's been teaching them, disciplining them, mentoring them; and now, he's getting ready to go. He's going to leave them. He's going to have a final farewell. They know that perhaps the next time they meet it'll be on the shore of eternity; and so, here's what he says to them: "*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and...give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands*"—I can see him as he lifts up those old, scarred, gnarled hands—"ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me"—that is, he said, "I took care of myself, and I took care of others"—"*[And] I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said*"—how the Lord Jesus said—"It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all"—I can just... Can't you see that scene? Here's the old, grizzled warrior, the old Apostle Paul. He's kind of on his last legs, and he's been with them. He founded the church there, and now they know that he's going. And, he holds up those hands and says, "Now look, folks, I used these hands to minister to you and to others." Then he prays for them. And then, the Bible says in verse 37—"And they all

*wept sore*”—it was a time of tears—*“and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him”*—not only a time of tears; a time of tenderness—*“Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”* (Acts 20:32–38) Well, there it is. What a dramatic moment. What a poignant moment, as they take this old man. Through their tears, they’re walking down. They put him on the ship. They stand on the shore, and they wave goodbye.

I wonder what people are going to say when they wave goodbye to us—maybe when they put us in the grave? What will they remember about us? I mean, what are people going to say about you when they bury you? Are they going to say, “Well, he ran a big business. He had a nice lawn. He sure did keep his automobile polished”? What are they going to say about you? What will matter? What are the things that really, really, really matter? What are the big rocks, that—different from the sand, and the gravel, and the water—the things that you’d better be certain are in your life?

Well, you know, this twentieth chapter of the book of Acts is kind of Paul’s philosophy of life. He is looking back to those Ephesian elders, and he’s just reviewing his life; and he is giving something of the things that made him and motivated him to be the man that he was, so that when he could go on, he would leave something behind. And, when you die, folks, you’re going to leave all that you have and take with you all that you are.

## **I. The Manner of Paul’s Life**

Well, the first thing—let’s go back up to verse 17 of this same chapter. Can we do that? Look in verse 17, and you’re going to find the manner of Paul’s life. What was it? He said in verse 17: *“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came [unto] Asia, after what manner”*—underscore this—*“after what manner I have been with you [in] all seasons.”* (Acts 20:17–18) He had a consistent life, and he talks about the manner of that life. Now, what was the manner of that life? Well, first of all, if you want to have a life that really counts, if you want to be missed when you’re gone, what should the manner of your life be? May I submit to you it ought to be the manner of Paul’s life? It ought to be the manner of my life and your life.

### **A. A Life of Humility**

First of all, it was a life of humility. Look in verse 19: *“Serving the LORD”*—*“serving the LORD”*—*“with all humility.”* (Acts 20:19) True greatness is absolutely, totally impossible, in my estimation, without genuine humility.

Now, humility is not thinking lowly of yourself. Humility is not related to thinking lowly of yourself—that is, to think that you’re no good. You are something valuable. Jesus died for you. You are a child of God. You are a prince, a king, a priest. Jesus is not

ashamed to call you His brother. (Hebrews 2:11) That means you're next of kin to the Holy Trinity. You've been redeemed. You are the righteousness of God in Christ. Humility is not saying, "I'm no good. I'm worthless." That's contrary to the Word of God. The Bible calls you a saint.

Humility is related to service—*"serving the LORD with all humility."* (Acts 20:19) This word *serving* here is the Greek verb form of the noun *doulos*, which means "bond-slave." Paul said, "I became a bond-slave." That is humility. I think the best illustration of this humility is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. You read there in John the thirteenth chapter—the Bible says, before Jesus washed His disciples' feet, the Bible says, "Jesus, knowing that He came from God and that He went to God"—knowing His heavenly origin, His heavenly destination, knowing who He was—"laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel, took a basin, and washed His disciples' feet." (John 13:3–5) Here the Lord of glory is washing the smelly feet of fishermen. He is taking the place of a lowly servant. True humility is linked to service. Friend, *I've never seen a person so small that God could not use them, but I've seen plenty who thought they were too big for God to use.* God wants to use you. The thing that really matters in life is serving the Lord. And, how did he serve the Lord? He served the Lord with humility.

### **B. A Life of Heartache**

But, not only a life of humility—a life of heartache. Look also in verse 19, would you, please? Look at it. He says here in verse 19: *"Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears"*—*"with many tears."* (Acts 20:19) You'll never have a great life, you'll never have a life that matters, you will never put the big rocks in the jar until your humility is married to a broken heart.

The Apostle Paul was a man of tears. I wonder, as you read the newspapers, as you see what is happening in this world today, I wonder if the things that break the heart of God break your heart? It's interesting. If you read the life of the Apostle Paul at Ephesus, you don't read anything about him weeping. And yet, later on, he says that he wept. I think probably he wept more in private than he did in public. I know that I weep far more tears in my study than I weep in the pulpit. But, I wonder, do you have a broken heart? We're talking about making a world of difference. Have we learned to weep over the world? Have you learned to weep over your lost neighbors? When's the last time you ever shed a tear for some soul that was mortgaged to the devil?

William Booth founded the Salvation Army. They were having a meeting, and nothing seemed to be happening. They were having a convocation, and the work seemed to be at a standstill. They wrote William Booth, and they said to him, "We've tried everything. We don't know what to do." He sent them back a terse telegram. It said, "Try tears." Try tears. Try weeping.

Now, you say, “Pastor, I just don’t feel like weeping over the lost,” and I’ll tell you why you don’t—because you’re so rotten full of yourself rather than the Spirit of Jesus. “When [Jesus] saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion.” (Matthew 9:36) The psalmist said in Psalm 119, verse 136: “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.” (Psalms 119:136) The psalmist saw people transgressing the law of God, and it broke his heart. Jeremiah saw his nation going astray, like we see America going astray. My heart is broken for America. Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 9, verse 1: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jeremiah 9:1) He said in Lamentations 3, verses 48 and 50: “Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. [My] eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission. Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven.” (Lamentations 3:48–50) He said, “O God, I weep, I weep, I weep for my nation.” Jesus, coming down from the Mount of Olives, going to the holy city that had become the hellish city, Jerusalem, Jesus wept great, salty tears and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how [oft] would I have gathered [thee], even as a hen [doth] her [chicks, but] ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37)

Do you know what this Bellevue Baptist Church needs more than anything else, or at least perhaps as much as anything else? A broken heart—a broken heart. And, don’t look around and say, “I wonder if the person next to me has a broken heart.” Just look inward.

### C. A Life of Hardships

Paul had a life of humility. He had a life of heartache, and he had a life of hardships. Look, if you will, in verse 19 again. This is Acts chapter 20, verse 19: “Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears”—now, notice the next word—“and temptations.” (Acts 20:19) Do you see the word *temptations*? Now, the word *temptations* here does not mean “an inducement to evil.” He knew that, but that’s not what he was talking about here. The word *temptations* here means “trials, hardships”—the things that he had to go through in order to get out the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It means “testings.” He was tested. He was hated for the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, “Many [testings]”—many trials—“which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.” (Acts 20:19) What it meant is this: that they had a scheme; they had a plan. They were going to take him; they were going to kill him. They had beaten him; they had tortured him. We talk about “suffering for Jesus.” We sit in a beautiful, air-conditioned, upholstered auditorium like this one. Most of us know little about paying a price. Do you think that you’re going to live a great life with everybody loving you? The Bible says, “The servant is not [better] than his lord.” (John 13:16; 15:20) Jesus said, “If they hated me, they will hate you.” (John 15:18) You will never have a life that counts and you’ll

never get the big rocks in the jar unless you're willing to pay a price.

What was the manner of his life? A life of humility, a life of heartache, a life of hardship. You say, "Pastor, I don't like that." Your flesh doesn't like it. Most of us had rather not hear a message like that. But most of us, when they put us in the ground, are not going to be all that much missed, and our life is not going to be all that different and make a difference in this world. The water, the sand, the gravel will be there, but the big rocks will be missing. That was the manner of his life.

## **II. The Message of Paul's Life**

Now, here's something else, another big rock that he put in the jar—not only his lifestyle, but his message; not only the manner of his life, but the message of his life. What was the message of his life? Look in verse 20 and following. He says, *"How I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save"—or, "except"—"that the Holy Ghost witnesseth [that] in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself...that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."* (Acts 20:20–24) That's the message of his life. Now, notice the message of his life.

### **A. The Content of His Message**

Notice the content of it. He calls it in verse 24: *"the gospel of the grace of God."* (Acts 20:24) Notice how he preached it. He says in verse 21: *"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Acts 20:21) He said, "I went from house to house—every place, every person. I took this message: repentance toward God; faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Do you know what is happening today? And, it breaks my heart to say it: there is something in America known today as "the church growth movement." And, I certainly believe in growing churches. I want our church to grow, and I thank God that it has grown. But, young preachers coming out of seminary are taught methods to make churches grow, and they have a thing called "user-friendly evangelism." Well, if it means keeping the church steps where people can get in, if it means having a warm greeting, if it means being nice and kind and making people feel at home, I'm for that one hundred percent. But, if it means watering down the message, it's the most dangerous thing that can happen in America today. We're told, "Now, don't tell people that they're sinners. Make them feel good when they come to church. Find out what their needs are and meet them. Well, I want to tell you what their need is: their need is to be saved from

their sin—to know if they don't get saved, they're going to die and go to hell—H-E-L-L, hell.

You say, “Well, now, wait a minute. I thought the day of hellfire preachers had passed.” Do you know who the greatest hellfire preacher in the Bible was? Jesus! Jesus had more to say about hell than any other subject. And, you know what bothers me today? I'm afraid that in some of our churches, the thing is going to work and we're going to have full churches of empty people, people who've never been saved. We don't need a new and a modern gospel for a new and a modern age. The Apostle Paul said, *“Testifying both to the Jews, and...to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 20:21) And, it is my duty to tell you that if you've not repented of your sin and given your heart to Jesus Christ, you, sir, are lost and will be lost for all eternity if you don't get saved.

This was the message of his life. The content of his message was that Christ died upon an old rugged cross to take away of our sin.

### **B. The Conviction of His Message**

But, I want you to notice not only the content of it; I want you to notice the conviction of it. He says in verse 22: *“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: [Except] that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me”*—he says, “I know I'm going—I'm going to suffer.” But, notice verse 24—*“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify...of the grace of God.”* (Acts 20:22–24) Paul had a mandate from heaven. Nothing could stop him. Nothing could turn him to the right. Nothing could turn him to the left. He had a bulldog grip of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll never have a great life and you'll never get the big rocks in the jar, my friend, unless you live a life of conviction. Paul said, “They may kill me.” For Paul, it was better to die for conviction than to live with a compromise. He's going to Jerusalem. His face is like a flint. Yes, he knew that they were going to kill him.

One of the great missionaries of our generation was a young man named Jim Elliot—one of the most gifted, articulate young men that we've ever read about. I read *Through Gates of Splendor* many, many years ago. I underlined a statement that young Jim Elliot said. He was the one who died as a martyr at the hand of the Auca Indians. And, before he died, he had written these words: “A man is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” We can't keep our lives; I mean, we're going to die. But, here was a man, like the Apostle Paul, who said, “None of these things move me.”

### C. The Confidence of His Message

There was the content of his message, the conviction of his message, and the confidence of his message. What was the confidence of his message? He says in verses 25 through 27—look at it: *“And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore”*—listen to this—*“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”* (Acts 20:25–27) The Apostle Paul held up his hands—not only hands that had labored and ministered, but he said, “You see these hands? These hands are free from the blood of all men.” Why? “Because,” he said, “I’ve testified both to the Jew and also to the Greek repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:26,21)

What is Paul talking about when he says, “My hands are clean”—*“I am pure from the blood of all men”*? (Acts 20:26) He’s referring back to Ezekiel chapter 33, verse 8. Put it in your margin. The Holy Spirit said to Ezekiel—Ezekiel 33, verse 8—the Holy Spirit said to Ezekiel, *“When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”* (Ezekiel 33:8) Now, what is this talking about? Well, in the verses prior to this, he says, “Son of man, I made you a watchman on the wall.” (Ezekiel 33:7) Now, what is a watchman? In that day, when a city would have walls around it, they would have turrets. And, up on that turret would be a watchman, and he would be scanning the horizon, looking for the enemy. If he sees an enemy coming, what is the watchman to do? He’s to say, “Look, the enemy is coming! Get ready! Prepare yourself! Arm yourself!” That was the job of a watchman—to warn the people in the city. Now, God said to Ezekiel, “Ezekiel, I have made you a watchman on the wall.” Now, He said, “If you fail to warn the people, they will die in their iniquity. But,” He said, “I will require their blood at your hand.” (Ezekiel 33:7–8)

Now, look up here, and let me tell you something. Those of you on the very back row of this building, you look right at me. Teenager, look right at me. If you are saved, if you name the name of Jesus Christ, God has anointed and appointed you to be a watchman on the wall. You sit in school with somebody who’s not saved; sir, you go to work with somebody who’s not saved; lady, you live in a neighborhood with somebody who’s not saved—you are the watchman on the wall. That person is lost without Christ. They’re going to die in their sin, but God says if you don’t speak to them, He’s going to require their blood at your hands. (Ezekiel 33:8)

Do you know what historians tell us? That even the enemy would hold contempt for the watchman who did not warn the people. If a watchman, seeing the enemy come, would run and hide and take care of himself without sounding the warning, the enemy would know it. They would find this man in his hiding place. They would go into the city

and utterly decimate the city. And then, they would take the cowardly watchman, pull him out of his hiding place, and give him the job of stacking the dead bodies in the city square. As he would take the bodies of his mother, his father, his wife, his children, his neighbor, and stack those bodies, and know that he was stacking those bodies because he had failed to give the warning, he would cry out himself and wish that they would kill him. I don't want to meet the Lord Jesus with bloody hands. Do you? I don't want to meet the Lord Jesus saying, "There was my neighbor. There was my brother. There was my sister. There was my friend. There was my teammate. There was a person I knew. I knew the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I never shared the gospel of Jesus Christ."

God is calling every mother's child in this building to be a soul winner. You say, "Well, God didn't call me to be a soul winner. God called me to be a preacher," or, "God called me to be a musician," or, "God called me to be a staff member," or, "God called me to be a deacon"—"God called me to do this or that." *There's nothing wrong with you that a good dose of salvation or an old-fashioned revival wouldn't cure.* If you're not interested in bringing souls to Jesus Christ, you are guilty of high treason against heaven's King. He has given us the Great Commission.

What made this Apostle Paul the great man that he was? The manner of his life and the message of his life. What was his message? *"Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Acts 20:21) And, he said, "They may hurt me. I'm going. I know pain, and tears, and suffering, and heartache, but that doesn't move me. But," he said, "I'll tell you one thing: I am free from the blood of all men." (Acts 20:22–26)

Now folks, we've lost that message—did you know it?—in this day of feel-good Christianity. We're coming, sitting there—"feed me, pastor; feed me. Teach me something new. I want to learn some little nuance. I want to learn some little goodie down there in the Bible that I've never heard before." And, you've got a neighbor that's lost and going to hell, and you won't even cross the street to talk to your neighbor about Jesus Christ. May God have mercy upon your pitiful life! You say, "Well, I come to Sunday school every Sunday." Well, send up a flare. May God help us to get the big rocks in the jar.

### **III. The Motto of Paul's Life**

The manner of his life, the message of his life, and I want you to see one last thing—I want you to see the motto of his life.

#### **A. The Motto Freed Him from Idolatry**

Look, if you will, in verses 33 and following. He says here in Acts chapter 20, the close of this thing, *"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the*

*weak*—now, here’s the motto of his life—“*and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Acts 20:33–35) I wonder how many people in America believe that. I wonder how many in this auditorium believe that.

“Well,” you say, “Adrian, I don’t know whether I agree with you on that.” Well, you don’t have to agree with me. It’s not my idea. Jesus said it. Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Acts 20:35) This was the philosophy of his life. A great life—a life that matters—is a life that is interested, more concerned, in giving than in getting.

You see, this motto freed him from covetousness. Look in verse 33. He said, “*I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel.*” (Acts 20:33) Do you know what the Bible calls covetousness? Listen to me very carefully because we have a generation that is eaten up with covetousness. Do you know what the Bible calls covetousness? Are you ready for it? Idolatry—idolatry. You say, “Well, I’m not a covetous person.” Well, you may not be, but I want to tell you something: any possession that you have that Jesus Christ is not Lord over is an idol in your life. Listen: any possession that you have that Jesus Christ is not Lord over is an idol in your life.

#### **B. The Motto Freed Him from Idleness**

This motto freed him from idolatry, and it freed him from idleness. Look, if you will, also, in verse 35: “*[How I’ve] shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus.*” (Acts 20:35) Look in verse 34: “*these hands have ministered unto my necessities.*” (Acts 20:34) Paul was not a lazy man. Paul said, “If I have strength, God has given me that strength to help the weak.”

God has not given you the abilities and the talents that you have just to help yourself. God has made you a blessing. God has blessed you to make you a blessing. We all have so much to give. You say, “Well, I don’t have a lot of money, pastor, to put in the World Missions Offering.” You’ve got more than money to give. Give your time. Give your talents. Give your love. Give your concern. Give your respect. Give your joy. Give your esteem. Give your thoughtfulness. Give your goods as well as your money.

On a tombstone these words were written—now, you think about this in the light of our World Missions Offering: “What I spent I lost. What I kept I left to others. What I gave away remains with me”—“What I spent I lost. What I kept I left to others. What I gave away remains with me.” The only thing you’re going to hold in your cold, dead hand is what you’ve given away. “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” (Acts 20:35) And, by the way, if you want to receive more, you need to give, because the Bible says that “as you purpose in your heart, you’re to give... God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7) Don’t give ’til it hurts. Don’t even give ’til it stops hurting. Give ’til it starts feeling good. And, the Bible says, “*Give, and it [will] be given unto you; good*

*measure, pressed down, and shaken together...[will] men give into your bosom.” (Luke 6:38)*

## Conclusion

Oh friend, let me tell you something: we’ve got a world that’s hurting. I mean, we have a world that is hurting. We have a city that is hurting—and I’m not just talking about the inner city; I’m talking about these suburbs like Bartlett and Cordova and Germantown. I’m talking about people that you work with. Now, we’re talking about people overseas, but we’re also talking about the next-door neighbor. Look up here. Do you really care? I mean, is this just a game? Is this something like a great big country club that we come to? Or, do you really care?

¶ There’s a story that haunts me. It comes out of World War II. The Nazis had gone into a little Polish village. They’d rounded up the Jews, and they put them up against the wall to machine-gun them. But, first of all, they made them dig their own grave. Now, these Jews, with their own hands, had dug a shallow grave. And then, that Nazi soldier took that machine gun and began to cut them down, and they fell like cordwood into that grave. A little ten-year-old Jewish boy was there with his parents. And, when the people began to fall, he fell also, but not a bullet touched him. He fell in the grave, and the blood of his parents drenched this little boy. He lay there like he was dead. They began to shovel the dirt over this mass of fallen humanity. The grave was so shallow. There were pockets of air. He could breathe.

He stayed there for a while, caked with mud and blood, then, after several hours, clawed his way out of that grave. This ten-year-old Jewish boy went to the home of one of those who was not a Jew in that community, knocked on the door. When the lady opened the door and saw him standing there naked, caked with blood, she knew that he was one of the little Jewish boys that had been marked for death. She screamed and said, “Go away!” She knew that it would be dangerous for her to harbor that little boy. The little fellow went from another house to another house to another house—the same story: when they saw him, they shut the door on him. Their hearts were moved with compassion to a degree, but they said, “No, you can’t come in here. It’s dangerous. Go away!” Finally, this little guy—cold, naked, shivering, caked with blood and mud—knocked on the door of a house, and a lady saw him and started to shut the door. He said, “Wait a minute. Don’t you recognize me? Don’t you know who I am? I am the Jesus you say you love.” “Oh,” she said, “my child, come in—come in.” You see, Jesus said, *“Inasmuch as [you’ve] done it unto...the least of [one of] these my brethren, [you’ve] done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40)* ¶

Do you love Jesus? If you love Jesus, you’re going to love what Jesus loves. Now folks, I’m telling you, it’s time we got serious about this thing called Christianity. It’s time

we got the big rocks in the jar, amen?

Father, seal the message to our hearts, and Lord, speak to every heart. In the name of Jesus. Amen.†

# How to Measure a Man

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: September 14, 2003**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 20:17–38**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Compelling Faith of Paul's Ministry
- II. The Concentrated Focus of Paul's Ministry
- III. The Controlling Force of Paul's Ministry

Conclusion

## Introduction

Be finding Acts chapter 20. For the ordination message, I want us to think a little bit about, how do you really measure a ministry? Or, how do you measure a minister? Do you do it by the size of the church? By the size of the budget? By the number of baptisms? By his oratorical ability? By leadership skills? How do you measure the man?

Brother Cary, you're going into the ministry. I want to give you some ways I believe that you need to measure yourself. There are some standards that you need to set, as said by none other than the apostle Paul.

Paul was on a missionary journey, and he came near Ephesus, and he sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus. And they went out to meet him, and he rehearsed his ministry there at Ephesus. And then, in Acts chapter 20, let's go down to verse 36: "And when he had thus spoken...—after he had rehearsed his ministry there at Ephesus—when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all." That must have been some kind of prayer meeting. Here's Paul and all of the elders of that church, that wonderful church that he helped to found at Ephesus. Now, notice this: "And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship." He's saying goodbye, and this is a farewell. They're not going to see him anymore, and they are going to miss him with all of their heart. You know, some folks don't even leave a vacancy. When they're gone, they're not missed because they don't amount for much. Jamie Parker is leaving us, and I'll tell you, we'll miss Jamie Parker. We'll miss him with all of our heart. When, Cary Vaughn, if he stays here—I don't care how many years—when he leaves, my prayer is that he will have lived such a life that he will be greatly missed.

I heard of one pastor who was leaving his church to go to another church, and there

was a lady who was weeping. He tried to console her. He said to her, “Oh, don’t worry, you’ll get a better pastor next time.” She said, “Oh, no, don’t say that. That’s what they said last time.”

A man ought to be missed. What makes a ministry? How do you measure a ministry? How do you measure man? By brains? By brawn? By bucks? These are the things the world uses as a measure; or, if you’re a female, by beauty. How do you measure someone? Well, it all depends on what they give their lives to.

Now, most of you know, if you don’t already know, that I’m sort of a football fanatic, but I haven’t given my life to football. There is an NFL coach. He was, he’s not any longer; but an NFL coach who said these words. I’m not even going to use his name, lest per chance he did not say what I heard that he said and I will have libeled this man, but I really believe this is what he said. He said to me, “Winning football is everything.” He said, “I don’t have time to spend with my family as I ought,” but he said, “If I have to lose my family to have a winning team, so be it.” That’s sad, isn’t it? That’s sad. “If I have to lose my family to have a winning team, so be it.” Well, Jesus said, “That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination unto God.”

The apostle Paul had rehearsed, Cary, his ministry with those people at Ephesus. And I’m going to sum it up under three headings the things that Paul was committed to. You can tell what a man is worth by what he is committed to.

## **I. The Compelling Faith of Paul’s Ministry**

Number one: I want you to see the compelling faith of his ministry. The compelling faith of his ministry was a risen Christ. Look, if you will now, in verse 17. Back up and see what he had rehearsed from them: “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, You know, from the first day that I came unto Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons—now, watch this—serving the Lord”—serving the Lord. What was Paul doing? Serving the Lord. Cary, we’ve not asked you to serve Bellevue Baptist Church. God forbid. We’ve asked you to serve Jesus. And, as you serve Jesus, you will be a blessing to us. The aim, the compelling faith of his ministry, was to serve the Lord. His faith was in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, how did he serve the Lord? Look, if you will, in verse 19—“with all humility of mind, and with many tears.” Now, as you read the Book of Ephesians, and you study the ministry of Paul there in Acts, you don’t read anything about tears, but Paul was a man with a broken heart. He wept. I can tell you that I weep more in my private life, and in my prayer life, than I weep when I’m in this pulpit. But no man can serve God without tears. Cary, men throw broken things away. God never really ever uses anything until it is broken. And I pray God that the things that break the heart of Jesus will break yours.

Not only tears, in verse 19, but trials. Look again, if you will, in this wonderful chapter. He says, "...and temptations." The word temptation here does not mean a solicitation to do evil, but what the word temptation means is testings and trials and tribulations. And I want to tell you something else, Mr. Cary Vaughn. You're not going to be loved by everybody. And, if you stand up for the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're truly true to Jesus, you're going to have some real enemies. Sometimes, people say to me, "Oh, Pastor Rogers, everybody loves you." I just say, "Good night, you don't even begin to know." Bible-believers always have been, always will be, hated, and get ready for it, congregation, it is coming. If you cannot sense it in the air, you just don't have your antennas up. Tears, and trials; but notice his testimony. Look, if you will, beginning in verse 20: "How I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, Paul was a man of God, but he was a man who put his faith into shoe leather. I have no confidence in a preacher who preaches soul winning from the pulpit and doesn't practice it in his personal life. Paul said, "In my public life, and from house to house, door to door, I've been sharing the Lord Jesus Christ." No man is fit to preach in the pulpit who does not have a personal soul winning ministry. I thank God, young man, that you've been a leader in that. And I want to say there's no cheap way, there's no easy way, to do it. Now, these early Christians were all at it, and they were always at it. That's what I want for Bellevue Baptist Church. Dr. A. T. Pierson said that witnessing is the whole work of the whole church for the whole age. And, actually, what he preached too was a message of repentance and faith. It wasn't an easy-believism. It wasn't user-friendly, to the degree that it cooled down the message. And may that never be said of any of our staff, any of our deacons, any of our laity, any of our teachers. We don't need to be belligerent; we don't need to be harsh. We need to let our speech be seasoned with salt. But we can never, ever tamper with the message. We don't need a new and a modern message for a new and a modern age.

Then I want you to notice, not only his tears, and his trials, and his testimony; but notice his tenacity. Brother Cary, this is what I want for you. Look, if you will now, in verse 22: "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions are by me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

You can tell the size of a man, Cary, by what it takes to stop him. I've been in the ministry now for more than half a century. I can tell you there have been tears and trials.

There have been temptations. There have been foes. There have been problems. There have been heartaches. But I pray God, He'll never let me back up, or let up, until I finish my course. God have mercy upon these preachers, and I see them all the time, who were once in the ministry, and now they're doing something else; Sunday school teachers, who were once teachers, and now they're doing something else. It's all right to do something else, if God moves you out of a Sunday school class to another kind of a ministry. And deacons, who were once faithful, who are not faithful anymore. I spoke about this last week. Quitters, shirkers, slackers, when the going gets hard, they quit. You can tell the size of a man by what it takes to stop him.

Here was a man who had tenacity. He had a bulldog grip on the truth. And I want you to notice, not only his tenacity, but his triumph. Look, if you will again, in verse 24 of this same chapter, that he says at the end, "that I might finish my course with joy." I love that. Remember last week I talked to you about this—last Sunday morning. No matter how far ahead you are in a race—no matter how far—if you stop running, you'll lose the race. No matter how far ahead you are in a game, if you stop contending, you're going to lose the game.

Now, what made this man, Paul, such a man? He was committed to a great person, and his faith was in the Lord Jesus Christ, serving the Lord.

Toscanini was a great choral conductor. One time, he was conducting the symphony orchestra, Beethoven, his 9th symphony. The orchestra was perfect. The crowd went wild. They stood, and they applauded, and they applauded. Arturo Toscanini turned around and saw the orchestra, as they stood and bowed. He took his baton and he rapped on the music stand. They looked up. Had they done something wrong? Had they missed a cue? Was someone on the wrong note? What was wrong? Arturo Toscanini said to those people, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, gentlemen, I am nothing; you are nothing, Beethoven is everything, everything, everything." Well, friend, that's only music. I want to tell you, sir, you are nothing; I am nothing; Jesus is everything. Jesus is everything. And may we give Him the glory.

## **II. The Concentrated Focus of Paul's Ministry**

Number two: I want you to notice the concentrated focus of his ministry. Where did he focus his ministry? Well, look, if you will, beginning in verse 25: "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore, I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers—now, listen to this—to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For this I know—for I know this—that after my departing shall

grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, and draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace.”

Now, what was the focus of his ministry? Well, it’s right up here: “to feed the church of God—to feed the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

Now, what was the ministry that Paul had? It was a church ministry. One of my dearest friends was Dr. Bill Bright. Bill Bright, who founded Campus Crusade for Christ, has gone to heaven. I have the privilege of knowing Billy Graham, and I’ve been in Billy Graham’s house, and eaten with Billy and Ruth in their home. I’ve had Billy in programs where I have presided. I’ve spoken with him in programs. I love Billy Graham. I love Bill Bright. I have spoken with the Promise Keepers. I’ve been in the Promise Keepers rallies, great rallies in great stadiums. I hate to say it, but even the stadium like the one in Knoxville I’ve been in, in those things, and I thank God for those ministries. I thank God for all of them. We call them para-church organizations. They have their place. But, Cary, you listen to me, and, folks, you listen to me. Jesus Christ founded the church—the church—and, if there’s any ministry that you are giving yourself to, any ministry that you’re serving, any ministry that you’re undergirding, that takes away from your love and your ministry to your church, in my humble, but accurate, opinion, you’re making a mistake. Now, I’m not opposed to these other ministries. I love them. Joyce and I give of our money over and above, after we’ve made a tithe, and a love gift, and a mission offering, to Bellevue Baptist Church, we give to these other ministries. But you listen to me. Para-church movements come and para-church movements go, but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will survive. Jesus built the church. You don’t build His church. I don’t build His church. He said, “I will build my church.” And, if you’re a member of Bellevue Baptist Church, Jesus expects you to be loyal to this church. The apostle Paul was committed to Jesus, and because he was committed to Jesus, he was committed to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, listen. The church is important to God. Look, if you will, in verse 28: “Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”—he’s talking now to the elders, the pastor. Now, watch this phrase. It’s one of the most astounding phrases in all of the Bible—“to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Now, you say, “Now, wait a minute, pastor. God doesn’t have blood. God is a spirit.” But it says, “feed the church of God which he—God—hath purchased with his own blood.” God had blood when Jesus walked on this earth. Jesus was God in human flesh, and the blood that was shed there

at Calvary, poured out there at Calvary, that was the blood of God. It had to be the blood of God. Why? Because, you see, the bloodline is determined by the father, not by the mother. A baby may have one type of blood, the mother have another type. Don't get the erroneous idea that somehow the blood is interchanged in the womb between the baby and the mother. It is not. Not one drop of blood is interchanged between that baby in the mother's womb and the mother. The baby has completely different blood. Well, who was the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? He was engendered in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit, not by Joseph. So who's blood was it? The blood of God. It was the blood of God. I'm telling you, every mother's child in this place—you listen to me—God Almighty shed His blood for you. You are the church. God loves the church. "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

You kids in the choir, listen to your pastor, would you, please. I beg you, in the name of Jesus, be different than the average teen. Love your church. Be faithful to your church. Follow your pastor. Follow your deacons. Love your teachers. Follow your leaders. Be faithful. God bless you for doing it. We need to raise up now a generation of young people who are going to follow on and fill the shoes of many who were once loyal to the church. But today, there's sort of a willy-nilly, take it or leave it, like the church is a shopping mall. You go down there when you need something. The church, Brother Cary, is important to God.

And I want to tell you something else. Not only is the church important to God, but the church is important to Satan—the church is important to Satan. Look, if you will, in verse 29. Paul says, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise"—not only shall there be problems from without, but there's going to be problems within—"speaking perverse things to draw away disciples. Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." The church is important to Satan. Satan wants to wreck the church. Satan wants to stop what Bellevue Baptist Church is doing. Satan knows, to hurt the work of God, he must destroy the church.

But, Brother Cary, not only is the church important to God, and important to Satan; the church was important to Paul. Look in verse 31 again: "Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." The apostle Paul loved the church. You see, why did he love the church? Because he loved Jesus. And, if you love Jesus, you're going to love what Jesus loves. The church is the bride of Christ.

Now, there's a girl that I love with all of my heart. Her name is Joyce. If you were to say, "Well, Adrian, we like you; we just don't like Joyce," that wouldn't settle too well with me. If you were to say, "Well, Adrian, I'm going to hurt Joyce, but I'm not going to

hurt you.” You lay your hand on her, and you’re going to deal with me. I may not be the man I once was, but you might be surprised what’s left.

I am telling you that the church is the bride of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And Paul loved the church because Jesus loves the church. And, if you love Jesus, you’re going to love the church.

Paul was on his way to persecute the church one time when he met the Lord Jesus. He had a vision of Jesus. Paul was a Pharisee who hated the church, and Jesus said, “Saul”—that was his name then—Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Saul might have thought, I’m not persecuting you, whoever you are; I’m persecuting the church. But the truth of the matter is very clear. To persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. Correspondingly, to love the church is to love Jesus. Correspondingly, to neglect the church is to neglect Jesus. I’m glad, Cary, that God has given you the responsibility to work in a wonderful church, Bellevue Baptist Church.

### **III. The Controlling Force of Paul’s Ministry**

Now, here’s the third thing I want you to see, and then we’re going to have the laying on of hands. I want you to see the controlling force of his ministry. What was the controlling force of his ministry? Look in verse 32: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yet ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. And I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Now, what was the controlling force of his ministry? It was grace—grace that receives and grace that gives. Look again in verse 32: “I commend you unto God, and to the word of his grace.”

The ministry is the best calling; it is the worst profession. You will not make it, apart from the grace of God. I’m not feeling sorry for myself, but I’m telling you, years ago, I would have gone into something else, apart from the grace of God. It is grace that we sang about tonight. It is God’s grace that will keep you. It is God’s grace that will strengthen you.

Back in 1979—didn’t you tell me that’s when you got saved, ’79? It seems like a few days ago to me—back in 1979, our Southern Baptist Convention was in a great uproar over liberalism that had come in stealthily, but maliciously, undercutting, undermining the very basis on which our denomination was built. And some of us felt that something needed to be done about it. And we felt that if we could elect presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention who were godly, committed conservatives, who would themselves appoint other men to key committees that would ultimately change the boards, which

would change our institutions, we could change this great Southern Baptist Convention around. Now, the dictum of history is this: that once denominations and institutions go liberal, they never turn around. You just have to start a new one. But some got the idea that perhaps we could change our beloved Southern Baptist Convention. That was in 1979. And they came to me, and they said, “Adrian, you’re the man to lead the charge. You’re the man that we want to elect as President of the Southern Baptist Convention.” And I began to get phone calls, and letters, and visits, and the pressure began to build and to build, and I kept saying, “No, no, this is not for me.” We were building new buildings downtown. My children were in high school. Our church was burgeoning in growth. That was something I did not want to take on my shoulders, because, very frankly, becoming the President of the Southern Baptist Convention is like having another full-time job superimposed on your regular job. The only difference is they don’t pay you for the second job. So I kept saying no. A lady called me, Cary; a lady that you may have heard of, maybe have never heard of, but you old timers know her. Her name—Miss Bertha Smith. Miss Bertha Smith—bless her heart—one of Southern Baptists’ premier missionaries. She was part of the great Shantung Revival. Miss Bertha, when it came to spiritual matters, took no prisoners. I mean, she knew what was right and what was wrong, and she didn’t mind telling you. We called her Miss Bertha. Miss Bertha called me on the phone. She said, “Brother Adrian, God wants you to allow your name to be put in nomination as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention.” I said, “Miss Bertha, I can’t do that.” She said, “Now, why, Brother Adrian?” I said, “Miss Bertha, I’ve got this and this and this and this.” She said, “Brother Adrian, one time Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great preacher, thought he had too much to do. And he went out into the woods to pray. And he opened his Bible, and he read where the apostle Paul heard from God these words, ‘my grace is sufficient for thee.’ God had said to Paul, ‘Paul, my grace is sufficient for you.’” And Miss Bertha said, “Spurgeon looked at that and he began to think about it, and he said, ‘grace? Lord, your grace, your grace for me? Your grace is sufficient for me?’ and he got so happy he began to giggle and laugh, and he laughed all over the woods. And he thought he was tired, but he came out like a soldier to do what God wanted him to do.”

## **Conclusion**

I want to tell you, son—may I call you son?—you love Jesus as Paul did. You center your ministry in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let that be the focus, and let God’s grace be the fuel, and God will use you mightily, I promise.

Now, I want you to come up here and kneel. And I’m going to ask that the men on the Ordination Council, and our guests, I’m going to ask you to come and line up over here for the laying on of hands. And I’m going to ask your former pastors if they will

come. I'm going to ask Brother Jamie if he would come.

Now, the laying on of hands is highly symbolic, and it is deeply spiritual. This young man has come to serve you by serving Jesus. It is so incumbent upon you that you pray for him, and for Lalanina, and that you receive them, and that you undergird them, and, as much as is possible, you see that they have all that they need to get the job done.

Gentlemen, if you will, with the laying on of hands, and I hope that you'd be very brief in doing it.

Now, as we continue in prayer, I'm going to ask that these two brothers, who have been pastors, will come and lead us. First of all, we're going to ask Brother Bob Lane if he'll come and lead us in prayer.

We acknowledge your presence, O God. We thank you, because we've been witnesses to your work for this fine young man saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, called out by Your Spirit, ordained by Almighty God, affirmed by the laying on of hands of these who are present. And, Lord, may we dedicate ourselves to remember, and to put ourselves in the way, that we also will make him successful in that which You and Your church has called him to do. Bless him. Keep his family continually. And cause much glory of God to come from the good works that will flow forth from Cary and from this church, which he loves. We pray in Jesus' blessed name. Amen.

Remain with your heads bowed now, and John Webb is going to come, another pastor that has invested so much in the life of this young man, and pray for him, and for us.

Our Father, tonight we have laid hands on Cary Vaughn, because we are convinced You have laid Your hand upon him. And, Father, we pray, in the name of Jesus, Your hedge of protection around him. And I pray over him, Father, that You would make him and keep him faithful to You. I pray that You would give him a fruitful ministry. Bless him. Bless this great church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Cary, would you stand, dear brother. And our Associate Pastor wants to come and present you with a Bible on behalf of our church.

Cary, it is a great privilege on behalf of our pastor and our church to present you with this Bible. You know, for 100 years, this church has stood solidly on the Word of God, and our pastor has built his ministry on the Word of God. You know, it's been my privilege to walk with you through the last couple of years, as you were praying through God's call on your life. When I first met you, I only knew you as someone who played Jesus in our Passion Play, but I learned to know that you are a man who not just plays Jesus, but you deeply love the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's a real joy and a privilege to present to you this Word. I pray that you would love the Word. That means you've got to stay in it daily, and that you would live it out day by day, and make application of it to your life and to your ministry. Cary, we love you, you and Lalanina, and it's a great joy to

be a part of this ordination service. God bless you.

And Lalaria and Brother Cary, we have a Certificate of Ordination, and it has all the proper wording on it, and it's signed by the Ordination Council. I hope somewhere you'll hang it where you can see it from time to time, and to look at the names, and know that we love you, and that we'll be praying for you. And, correspondingly, we want you to pray for us.

Congregation, let's thank God for these.

All right now, we're going to let this young man and his wife slip out, because we're having a reception afterwards in the Fellowship Hall. And they'll slip out this way right now before we have the invitation.

We're going to have a gospel invitation. That is, if you want to give your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you're saying, "What is all of this about?" I'll tell you what it's all about. Jesus is Lord. He died to save sinners, and He died to save you, and He will save you. The same God that saved Lalaria, the same God that saved Cary, the same God that saved the men on this platform, is the God who wants to save you, and He will save you. And don't think that others can be saved, and you cannot. They're just like you are. And it's the grace of God that saves. The Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." So many times, people think, well, you know, I'm just not sure I can live it. You are 100% correct. You can't. That's what it's all about. He does that in you and through you. And you're not going to sprout wings and get a halo the minute you give your heart to Jesus. You'll be a baby. You have to learn how to walk and talk and feed yourself, and, ultimately, to work and to help others. But it all comes when you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. The Bible calls that being born again. So, if you believe that you're a sinner, and know that Christ paid for your sins on the cross, and know that salvation comes when you put your faith where God has put your sins, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and, if you'll trust Him only and Him always to save you, I'm going to ask you to leave your seat and come forward. Standing at the head of each of these aisles all the way across the front will be a man of God to welcome you, no matter which aisle you come down. And you just say to that man, "I'm trusting Jesus." We'll rejoice, give you some Scripture to stand on, answer any questions we can answer, seal it in prayer, and you can go home tonight twice-born, a child of God, ready for heaven, and ready for life. Others of you, you need a church home. Just as I told Cary, the church is the God-ordained institution through which He wants to do His work. We would love to have you be a part of the Bellevue family of friends. And, if you love Christ, and need a church home, and you know that you're saved, you come and say, "I want to place my membership here," and we'll tell you how you may be a member of this wonderful church. As we sing, and this youth choir leads us, on the very first stanza, you step out and come.

Let's sing.

# The Church of God

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: November 13, 1994**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 20:27–28**

*“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”*

ACTS 20:28

## Outline

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## Introduction

I want to mention to you about ten concepts that I have in my heart. And, by the way, would you be finding Acts chapter 20, and let's look in verse 27. The apostle Paul is talking to a church that he loved at Ephesus, and he says in verse 27, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” That's one of the most challenging verses in the Bible to me. And I want to declare to you the whole counsel of God. And I endeavor to make my preaching balanced, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, evangelism and the Christian life, devotion and duty, to preach the whole counsel of God. And then Paul turned to the pastors of the Ephesian church, and he said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he—God—hath purchased with his own blood.” And, incidentally, that's one of the great, great proof texts for the deity of Christ, because it was Jesus who shed His blood, and yet, the Bible says that God purchased the church with the blood of God—“...feed the church of God, which he—God—hath purchased with his own blood.”

Let me tell you what my dream for this church is, what the vision, what is on the

other side of the bridge. What do I want us to be and to become and to continue in?

## **I. Bible Truth**

Well, first of all, we must be solidly rooted in Bible truth. Paul said, “I’ve not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” I’ve been in the ministry long enough to know the power of the Word of God. And I know that I know that the Bible is the book that built this church. If you’ve not yet done it, you need to go out front in the portico, and look at the bronze Bible out there, and read what Dr. Robert G. Lee said about the Bible and about Jesus Christ—the living Word and the written Word. And as long as these stammering lips of mine have breath, and as long as this mind of mine will work, as long as these vocal chords will vibrate, as long as my heart will beat, I want to pledge to you I will preach the Word of God to you. And we want that Word taught, learned in this church.

The New Testament church believed the Bible. They didn’t debate it. They didn’t argue over it. They proclaim it. They poured it forth like white, hot lava. And the Word of God is the cradle in which everything else we have rests.

## **II. Godly Leadership**

Second principle is godly leadership. Nothing rises higher than leadership. And so, he looks here to the leadership of the church in verse 28, and he says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers—that’s the word that’s translated bishop—to feed the church of God...” That’s the verb form for the word for pastor. These people, these leaders, are to oversee, to shepherd, to pastor, to feed the church of God.

Now, Christ is the head of the church, but He uses human leadership. This church has only had three pastors since 1927. We believe in pastoral leadership. When I came to this church, three things that I found, I’ll be everlastingly grateful for. I found, number one, a group of people that loved one another. I found, number two, a group of people that believed that the Bible was the inerrant, infallible Word of God. I found, number three, people who believed that the pastor is God’s man to lead the church. And I’ll tell you, no pastor could have a better start, a better beginning, than that. And from the time we came in 1972 to this time, you’ve had your hearts open toward us, and you have been willing to follow leadership. The primary work of godly leaders is not a business mind—not money, not prestige, not cleverness, but holiness. The pastor is to be a holy man. The staff are to be holy. The deacons are to be holy. The teachers are to be holy. And that is the prime requisite for leadership.

Now, let me tell you how a church is to function, and how Bellevue Baptist Church is to function, and how things happen around here, and why they happen. I tell this to the

deacons frequently, but I want to tell you again how God intends for a church to be led. A church is pastor-led. It is deacon-served. It is committee-operated. It is congregationally-approved. Pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-operated, and congregationally-approved.

#### **A. The Church Is Pastor-Led**

The pastor is the leader. He's not the boss. I'm not the boss of the church. He's not a dictator. Every now and then, people say, "Well, you know those pastors of those big churches. They're all dictators." I always laugh. If I were a dictator, things would be different around here, I guarantee you. If I were a dictator, they'd all tithe. If I were a dictator, some people wouldn't be watching television at night till their eyes get big as coconuts and their brain the size of a pea. They'd be here in the house of God. A dictator rules by force. That's why he's a dictator. Do you know the only leadership I have in this church? What you give me. That's all. I can't force you to do anything. I can ask you. I can plead. The only leadership I have is what you allow me to have. But I am to lead. The Bible calls the pastor a shepherd. He's a bishop. He's an overseer. And so he is to lead. The church is to be pastorally led, and that includes the other elders on the church staff. Corporately, we have been called of God, gifted of God, appointed and anointed of God, to lead.

#### **B. The Church Is Deacon-Served**

Then, the church is to be deacon-served. Now, that does not demean the deacons. The very word *diakonos*—*deacon*—means "servant." Is that a low place? No! It is a high place. Jesus said, "He who would be chief among you, let him become the servant of all." That's the way to be chief, is to serve—loving service. And, thank God for the deacons of this church. I tell the deacons if they will love Jesus, and I love Jesus, and they love me, and I love them, there's very little the devil can do to hurt this church. We'll always have problems, but, thank God, the church will be so solid at the core. And, you can thank God for your deacons. We have the greatest group of God-fearing, Spirit-filled, soul-winning, praying men assembled as deacons of this church that I have ever known in my life. You don't get to be a deacon at Bellevue Baptist Church just because you're Mr. Got Rocks. You don't get to be a deacon at this church just because you're Mr. Personality. You don't get to be a deacon at this church because you're a back-slapper. You're to be faithful. You're to love God. You're to be holy. You're to tithe. You're to attend. You're to be a soul winner. You're to abstain from alcohol and tobacco. You're to be pure and love one woman. Therefore, you find the office of deacon. And, as we continue to grow, it is so important that our deacons be this kind of a man.

#### **C. The Church Is Committee-Operated**

And then, the church is committee-operated. How does all of this happen? Have you

ever wondered who does everything? Have you ever wondered who puts the banners up there, and the signs on the wall? Have you ever wondered who turns on the lights, and turns them off? Who organizes the choirs? Who does everything around here? How does it get done? Do you ever think about that? And you walk around and just see everything. You say, “Well, how does all this happen?” People do it. They do it through committees. Now the word committee is not found in the Bible, but the word commitment is found all over the Bible. “That which you’ve learned of me, commit thou to faithful men.” A committee is a group of faithful people who are organized to get a job done. If the church is like a body, then my hand is analogous to a committee. My hand is a committee of five to hold things, to do things. And these things, these fingers, they fit together; they work together. And so, therefore, at the impulse of the head, they move. Now, if you ever hear of anything called a committee-led church, you know that church is headed for big trouble. Churches are not to be committee-led. What if you had a hand-led body, or a foot-led body? Wouldn’t that be terrible? No. The head leads the body. Jesus is the sovereign head of the church. The pastor is the under-shepherd of the church. The deacons are the servants of the church. And then, there are groups organized together around desire and ability to get the job done. These are committees. And so, somebody said, “A committee is a group of the unable, appointed by the unwilling, to do the unnecessary.” But, not around here.

#### **D. The Church Is Congregationally-Approved**

It is pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-operated, and congregationally approved. When they chose the first deacons, the Bible said, “The saying pleased the multitude.” What keeps the pastor from being a dictator? The congregation—all of us together. The head can’t go anywhere the body won’t carry it. And so, there is that wonderful ecology where we together say, “Yes, we believe that God has given us a leader.” Yes, thank God, He’s given us deacons to serve. Yes, thank God, He’s given us all of this. But together, corporately, Jesus is still the sovereign head of the church, not any individual. And He is the head, and, corporately, we’re the body. That’s the way we work around here. Do you like it? That’s the way it ought to be. I believe that’s Bible leadership.

### **III. Lay Involvement**

Now here’s the third thing—and my desire for our church, and in the years to come—and that is, we need to have more and more lay involvement. Now, one of the great problems in modern-day Christendom, and it can be a real problem here at Bellevue Baptist Church, is sort of a spectator Christianity. We get the idea that we come on Sunday morning to watch the choir perform, or listen to the choir, and listen to the pastor. But, friend, my job is not to do the ministry; my job is to equip you to do the ministry. Turn to Ephesians chapter 4—would you, for just a moment?—and look in

chapter 4. Look, if you will, in verse 11. The Bible speaks of these gifts to the church: “And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...”—do you see that?—“...and he gave some pastors and teachers...” This is one unit here. It’s not pastors, and then teachers. It’s pastor-teachers. That’s what the Greek literally implies. I am to be a pastor-teacher. And that’s the reason you’ll find from the pulpit when I preach, I’m always teaching. And when I lead, I’m always teaching, because my job is to be a leader-teacher. That’s what pastor-teacher means: a leader-teacher.

Now, why did He give you a leader-teacher? Well, continue to read here. We’re in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 12: “And he gave some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints...”—my job is to perfect you. And that word perfecting means to make you mature. Well, why would you be mature?—“...for the work of the ministry...” Now, who is doing the work of the ministry? Those who are being perfected. Who are those who are being perfected? The saints. The pastor-teacher is to minister the Word, to mature you, so that you can minister and do the work of the ministry, and that will edify or build up the body of Christ. And my goal, my desire, for you is that every member of this church will discover, develop, and deploy his or her gift.

Now, God did not just call you to come and sit in this church, and think that you’re doing God a wild favor when you come and listen to a sermon. The Bible says that you are to do the work of the ministry. You say, “Well, Pastor, that’s what we hire you to do.” Well, I’ve got news for you. I’m not a hireling. The hireling flees; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. When you hire somebody to do something, that means you don’t want to do it, so you hire him to do it. You cannot get anybody to do your ministry for you. My job here as a called man of God is to help you to do the ministry that God has called you to do. And the Bible says, “God hath set every member in the body as it hath pleased him...” And, do you know when you get the idea that you’re supposed to minister, at that time you’re going to begin to pay more attention to the sermons?

I travel on airplanes quite a bit. And that stewardess gets on there and she goes through that little speech. I’ve got it all memorized. I mean, I can tell you—I never pay any more attention to her when she does that. I’m still reading the newspaper. I don’t stop. I don’t listen. She tells where there’s a card in front of you, tells how to make a raft out of your seat, and how to open that door, and how the little lights...—I pay no attention to that. But I’ll guarantee you, if that pilot says, “This thing is going to do down,” I’ll rip out that card and begin to read it. Man, listen. You can always tell who’s on the airplane for the first time. Boy, they’re all ears when she’s going through that thing, right?

And, you know, many times, we think, “Well, what he’s saying, I’ll never put it into practice. It’s just all academic.” But, when you know that God has called you to minister

and to serve, that's when you get busy about listening to the Word of God, and it becomes more than just sheer academics here in the Word of God. And one of the great desires and goals of my heart and my life is that the people of this church find their place in the ministry, because, when you don't do your job, somebody else will do your job for you, and things get out of whack.

Do you know one the greatest pitchers—listen, Ashley—one of the great pitchers and best talkers who ever was in baseball was Dizzy Dean. How many old-timers remember Dizzy Dean? How many of you kids never heard of him? Okay. See there. You're getting old, Bob. All right. Dizzy Dean was a great pitcher. But you know what happened? Strange thing. When Dizzy Dean was playing baseball, a man hit the ball, and it hit Dizzy Dean right on that toe, right on his big toe. And do you know, when he got hit on his big toe, it put his arm out of commission. You say, "Well, how did it do that?" Actually, he had to get out of baseball because of this. Because when a baseball pitcher throws the ball, he ends up on this foot, and he has to put all of his weight and his force on there, and on that toe; that's the last point of contact, as he's putting his emphasis, his follow-through, as he throws the ball. His toe was so sore he began to overcompensate with his arm, and he ruined his arm because he was hit in the toe.

You know, when one member suffers, every member suffers. Did you know that? When one member doesn't do their job, the whole thing is not as balanced as it ought to be. What would a church be like when every member of this church says, "Lord God, You put me in the body; maybe I'm an arm; maybe I'm a toe; but I'm going to be faithful doing what you called me to do"? That's on the other side of the bridge. And, one of the greatest opportunities we have here is just to reach into this great potential of prayer and love and witness and giving. In the average church, 20% of the people give 80% of the money. In the average church, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. That's on the other side of the bridge. That's what we want to get there to do, is to get our people involved for their sake, and God's sake.

Here's another thing that I have as a dream for this church, for Bellevue Baptist Church—and that is we begin to penetrate this community for Jesus Christ. I was in a church in Florida, and as I drove off the parking lot, on the backside of the welcome sign was a sign that the church members could read as they were leaving church. It says, "You are now entering the mission field"—as they were leaving the church grounds. Every member is a missionary. We need to get this city on our heart. I preached this morning about those apostles, and do you know what they were accused of? They were accused of filling Jerusalem with their doctrine.

Now Love Worth Finding is indeed love worth sharing. One of the finest programs that we have ever introduced in this church is Making Friends Forever. Now, we introduced that program, and then, we came right along with Love Offering. Do not think

that Making Friends Forever is a forgotten program. It is not! And our job, our duty, our responsibility, is to reach others, and to reach the last, the least, and the lowest.

I had a friend to work out a plan to help us to reach people in need in this community, and here's what this plan says: "Bellevue cares for those who are lost. Bellevue cares for those who need food and clothing. Bellevue cares for those who are strangers in our land. Bellevue cares for those who are sick. Bellevue cares for those who are in prison. Bellevue cares for our city, which is crying for help, and the need for male leadership, and the need to rescue young people from gang activity, the need to shelter the homeless, the need to assist struggling inner city churches, the need to model and strengthen family life, the need to establish ministry-based evangelistic churches and missions throughout this city, and preaching points throughout this city. And then, to reach out from here to a lost world. That's on the other side of the bridge. That is our duty, our joy, our goal, and that is to penetrate this community, and fill this city with our doctrine.

I want this church, this fellowship, this congregation, to be a caring community, to be an oasis of love. You cannot live the Christian life in isolation. Over and over in the Bible, we find those commands, those reciprocal commands, what we call the "one another" commands. Love one another. Care for one another. Edify one another. The two symbols of this kind of ministry are the towel and the basin, where we're willing to wash one another's feet.

Now we're a big church. And never let it be said, because we're a big church, we don't care. Let it be said, because we're big, we have more ability and more responsibility to care. And, frankly, that's where the Bible study classes and the Sunday School classes come in. Now, come up close, and I want to remind you of something that I told you several years ago. The major responsibility of the Sunday School is not teaching the Bible. You say, "I thought that's what Sunday school was for." No, it's not. That's not the major responsibility; that's the minor responsibility. The major responsibility of the Sunday School is care and outreach.

Now, think with me. If the major responsibility of Sunday School is Bible teaching, why not just bring them all in here and let the pastor teach them? Put them all in here and just teach them. Well, you say, "Yeah, but, but something would be missing." Sure, something would be missing. Nobody would know when you're absent, when you're sick, care for you, call you by name, love you, put their arms around you and weep over you, and so forth. That's where we have those Bible study classes. And if you come to Bellevue and you just come to this big worship service, you're going to be blessed, but you're going to be spiritually unbalanced.

Now, here's another goal that I have for us. I want us as a church to put a major, major emphasis on the family. Bellevue is a family of friends, and it must be a friend to

the family, and we must hold the ideal, which is godly mothers and godly fathers and obedient children in a nuclear family. I've already met several precious people today who have said, "I'm in the midst of a divorce. I've just gotten divorced." I'm meeting people from single families, blended families, and we want to say, "We care, and we love, and we have a place and a ministry to you." And, especially, especially, to single mothers who are having such a tremendously hard time in the world today. How lonely they are. How fearful they are. And what a great need that we have. And we need to minister to the whole family, and hold the standard high. But we need to teach men how to be men, and godly men, and fathers, and leaders, and daddies. And, as we're planning this year's program, we're having a major mega ministry to men this coming year, to help men to be the men that they can be, and to lead their families. And, I want our staff to set the pattern.

Next, one of my goals, as we reach the other side of that bridge, is to have an increasingly strong Bible-teaching and Bible-preaching ministry. Now, I said it's all based on the Word of God, but we must communicate that not with platitudes, not philosophy, not poems. What makes a great church? There must be more ministry than the pulpit ministry. We have incredible ministries. We have our women's ministry, our men's ministry, activities ministry. We have our hospital ministries. We have our television and radio ministries. But all of that—all of that—centers right here. It is the pulpit that is the unifying force of any church. Now, it cannot all be done here, but there must be that pulpit ministry of the Word of God, and then, correspondingly, the satellite ministry of our Bible-teaching ministry. Though I said that the major responsibility of the Sunday School is not teaching Bible, that does not mean that is not a responsibility. And do you know what keeps a church out of trouble, primarily? Strong Bible teaching—strong Bible teaching. When there's not strong Bible teaching, people have a tendency to want to do their own thing, and they are not bound by, and loyal to, the Word of God. And, I want us in this day when everybody is trying every other thing to build churches, we're going to be just like that man that had that cello. And he had his finger there, and he was just going back and forth. And somebody said, "You never move your finger up and down like the others do. Why not?" He said, "They're looking for it; I've found it." Now, folks, people are trying all kinds of things, but we're going to stay with the Word of God.

Now, here's another thing, and I'm almost finished. But on the other side of that bridge we must have a willingness to change. While there are some things we will never change, there are other things that we must be always willing to change. And we must preserve change. Bellevue is stability in motion. This church is so incredibly different than it was 20 years ago when I came, but yet there are some things that are still the same. Forms are not sacred. Jesus said, "You don't put new wine in old wineskins." And

people, by nature, don't like change.

I clipped this the other day. I want you to listen to it. Did you know that in 1968 the Swiss made 80% of all of the watches in the world? Did you know in 1980 the Japanese made 80% of all of the watches? In '68, the Swiss made 80%; in 1980, the Japanese made 80%, and the Swiss had less than 10. Do you know what happened? The Swiss engineers developed a new kind of watch called the Quartz, with a quartz crystal in it. And they went to the Swiss, these were Swiss engineers, and they said, "Here's a new way to make a watch." And the old Swiss watchmakers said, "We are not interested. We have been doing it this way for years, and we will continue to do so." They went to the Japanese, and the Japanese said, "We will take that." And now, the Japanese make 80% of the watches. Now, the important thing is not the mechanism of the watch. The watch is there to tell time. And we must be very careful that while we stay on time that we, on the other hand, are willing to change and to innovate.

Now, tradition is wonderful sometimes, but some people, by nature, don't like change. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit of God, has every right to redirect us, and the Spirit always takes precedent over structure, and procedure follows need. And, as our needs change, our procedure will change.

Now, I'm almost finished. Now, let me tell you something else that is in my heart. I want to lay on your heart to be the kind of a church that God wants us to be, and it deals with that middle column there. And, we need to be constantly stretching our faith, believing God for big things, and not to be at ease in Zion, and to settle down. The Bible says, "The people who know their God shall do exploits." And to have faith is to risk. And, we need to ask ourselves, what are we believing God for?

They were having a Methodist camp meeting. The old-time Methodists used to have those camp meetings. It was a wonderful camp meeting. They had the best preachers there, the bell ringers. And the man who was to speak right after dinner got ill. There was a young, upcoming preacher there, and many saw that he was a gifted young man. They said, "Let's let him fill the place." And so, the bishop went over, so I'm told, to that young man, and said, "The Reverend Dr. So-and-So is sick, and we're appointing you to preach right after lunch." "Oh," he said, "Well, I didn't come prepared." He said, "I don't have any notes." He said, "I didn't even bring a Bible. I just came to listen." "Well, do you want this opportunity, or don't you?" Well, he said, "Well, yes, I guess so."

Boy, he had a miserable meal. I mean, in just a little while, he's going to be up in this camp meeting, filling in for this heavy hitter. He said, "I've got to find a Bible." And he walked around, and he found a Bible, and picked it up, and began to leaf through it. It was the bishop's Bible. And he looked in there, and he saw some sermon notes. There were the bishop's notes. The bishop was going to preach later on. He said, "Aha, that's a great message. I believe I'll preach that." So he glanced it over, and stood up, and

preached the bishop's message. And the people said, "Hey, that is wonderful preaching. Never heard such a great message," and they were all saying amen. And afterward, they were all crowding around him, patting him on the back. One by one they came, until the bishop came, and said, "Young man, that was my sermon you preached." The young man said, "Well, bishop, you remember what you told me when you asked me to preach, and I said I didn't have any notes or anything. Remember what you told me, bishop? You said, 'Just trust God.'" Well, the bishop said, "Well, what am I going to do?" He said, "Just trust God."

You know, I don't think we ever really trust God till we get to where we have to, isn't that true? I mean, when we got ready to come out here, we decided to do this, I was scared to death, but it was a good scare. I mean, I even asked, I asked my children, I said, "What would you think of it if your Daddy is spoken ill of in this business meeting, because, you know, you've loved me. You haven't said too many bad things about me. And I thought that you may think this is the craziest thing we've ever done." I said, "What would you think if your Dad is criticized?" They said, "Well, it wouldn't bother us." I said, "Well, thanks a lot!" But, we took a risk! But I believed it was God's will, and it was God's will.

And, on the other side of that bridge are people who will say we're going to believe God for big things and great things—"Not seeketh thou great things for thyself. Seek them not. But the people who know their God shall do exploits."

We've got to have and develop in our church a spirit of sacrificial giving. And, at Bellevue Baptist Church, we need to teach our people how to make money, how to invest money, how to save money, how to share money, how to spend money, and how to give money. And, I want us to have programs, and I've already assigned our staff this responsibility, of getting a program that will not be just a once a week, but a year-long program, to help our young couples to be financially free, and to teach our membership the spirit of sacrificial giving.

I'll rush on. On the other side of that bridge is the greater emphasis on worshiping God. I mean, why do we get folks saved? What is the bottom line? You say, "Getting them to heaven?" No! It's giving glory to God. This church, Brother Jim Whitmire, and choir, and deacons, needs more and more and more to become a worshiping community where we come to worship God. I am so blessed by our choir. I am so blessed by our music. I could hardly get to the platform and speak this morning, I was so full of tears after our choir sang, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." My heart was so filled when you said, "The One who is greater than Satan is the Lord Jesus, our Lord Sabaoth." And I said, "Yes, that is true!" And I brimmed up, and I filled up, because I really do love Jesus. I really do, and I want us to love Him more. And I want, when we come here. that He'll be the hero—He'll be exalted, His name will be lifted up. And, as

we come, we give our dear Lord the glory. That's what we're going to do in heaven: we're going to worship Him.

## **Conclusion**

Well, these are some things that I have on my heart there on the other side of that bridge. Oh, we're doing them here; but in a richer, fuller way—that's the burden that I have. My desire is that we'll preach the whole Christ, Lord Jesus Christ—Master, Mediator, Messiah—from the whole Bible—Old Testament and New Testament—to the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—energizing the whole church, and reaching the whole world. And, folks, I want you to come and go with me, and I want to go with you. And, I want us to love this church, and believe God, and be one body in Jesus, okay? Okay. Father God, seal the message to our hearts, and help us, Lord, to be the body of Christ here in Memphis. In Jesus' wonderful name we pray. Amen.

# Bountiful Living Through Bountiful Giving

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: February 23, 1992**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 20:32–38**

*“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

ACTS 20:35

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Bonds That It Breaks
    - A. It Frees Us from Covetousness
    - B. It Frees Us from Idleness
    - C. It Frees Us from Selfishness
  - II. The Blessings That It Brings
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## Introduction

Take God’s Word please and turn to Acts—the book of Acts chapter twenty, if you would. In a moment we’re going to begin reading in verse thirty-two. Every so often you get an insight into the character of a man. What makes a man great? What is the driving force of his life? What is the motto that motivates him?

As a matter of fact, all of us have one—sometimes we have articulated it. Sometimes we have not. But there is something there that impels us and drives us. I believe the greatest man that ever lived outside the Lord Jesus Christ was the Apostle Paul and we’re going to look here today and find an insight into his character, the philosophy of his life, the motto that motivated him. And the thing that gave him joy.

Now folks, before long, most of us will be dead or Jesus will have come and taken us to heaven. Long, I’m talking about five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years. In a brief time, just like that, we’ll be gone. And when we go, we’ll leave behind all that we have and we will take with us all that we are. Now if that is true, and it is true, what is it that will make us something worth being?

Well, look, if you will, here in Acts chapter twenty, verse thirty-two. Paul is saying farewell to the saints, and he says this: “And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands”—I can see ole’ Paul as he holds up his hands “you know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities”—that is I took care of myself—“and to them that were with me.” Not only did I look out for number one, but I took care of those others who were with me. “And I have showed you all things how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus.”

Now here’s Paul’s philosophy; here’s his motto; here’s what motivated him. Listen to it: “And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Please now, underline that in your Bible, if it’s not been underlined. “It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all and they all wept sore and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more and their accompanied him unto the ship.” They hated to see him go. Oh, they said, Paul, we are going to miss you.

And why was he so loved? Because of the motto of his life which is this: It is more blessed to give than receive.

Now, we make a living by what we get out of life. But we make a life by what we give back to life. And Paul had learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Now I want us to look at that today. I want us to look at that sentence. It is more blessed to give than receive. And I dare say that human nature tells you that is not true. Human nature tells you that is not true. That it is more blessed to give than to receive. But may I tell you these are the words of Jesus Christ and we know that they are true.

The title therefore of my message is, “Bountiful Living Through Bountiful Giving”—“Bountiful Living Through Bountiful Giving.” Not my philosophy of life, not really even Paul’s—just one that Paul had adopted, really, the philosophy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Three things I want to point out to you, why I believe it is more blessed to give than to receive, and why the Lord Jesus said this.

## **I. The Bonds That It Breaks**

Number one, because of the bonds that it breaks. You see, we all come into life with in sort of a prison of greed and selfishness. And this philosophy just breaks those bonds. For example, let me show you how this philosophy will free you.

### **A. It Frees Us from Covetousness**

First of all, it will free you from covetousness. Look, if you will, in verse thirty-three. He said, “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel.” Why could he say that? Because he believed Jesus when Jesus said it is more blessed to give than receive.

Do you know covetous people are miserable people? They go through life with a catcher’s mitt in both hands. That is, they are wanting to receive. They never want to give. Their motto is get all you can, can all you get, sit on the lid, and poison the rest. And they just, they just really are trying to rake it all in one way. Paul, say hey, I don’t get bent out of shape if you have more than I have. Doesn’t bother me if you live in a nicer house. You drive a better car; you have more in the bank. I don’t worry about that.

### **B. It Frees Us from Idleness**

Listen. I have learned it is more blessed to give than to receive. It freed him from covetousness. Say what else it freed him from. It freed him from idleness.

Look in verse thirty-four. “Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me. And I have showed you all things that so laboring, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak.” Then he says, “It’s more blessed to give than to receive.” Well friend, if it’s more blessed to give than to receive, you have to have something to give, and in order to have something to give, you have to work.

God never intended that you be idle even you guys and gals who are retired. God doesn’t want you to be idle. That just gives you more time to serve the Lord by serving others. Put this verse in the margin—Ephesians chapter four and verse twenty-eight: “Let him that stole steal no more. But rather let him labor, working with his hands.” That’s exactly what Paul is saying. “Let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good.” Now, notice why. “That he may have more to satiate his lust with.” Oh no. “That he may have to give to him that needs.”

Hey don’t say I’ve got enough money, so I’m going to quit making money. Keep on making it, so you’ll have more to give. That’s what Paul says. That’s what Paul says. Just keep on making it. Keep on making money. Let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give. You see this motto freed Paul from covetousness. And it freed him from idleness. And we need to be free from idleness. You know the most tiring thing in the world is to have nothing to do. You don’t want to be idle. Thank God for this motto.

### **C. It Frees Us from Selfishness**

But here’s the main thing it freed him from. It freed him from selfishness. And really when you’re freed from covetousness and idleness you are freed from selfishness and Paul here is a free man. The very problem in America according to Dr. Fred Lowery is

me-ism—me-ism. We have an I problem—the big I. The middle letter in sin is what? I. Middle letter in pride is what? I.

They tell me in South America there's a bird called the MeMe bird, a literal bird. They call it the MeMe bird because that's the sound it makes. That's the song it has. MeMe. MeMe. MeMe. MeMe. Have you ever seen one? I've never seen one with feathers, but I've seen a lot of them. I mean, friend, the MeMe bird.

Put it down, dear friend, that happiness and selfishness never exist in the same person. Happiness and selfishness never exist in the same person. Now, our Lord says it is more blessed to give. And that word blessed literally means it is more happy to give than receive. Our nature is, though, that we just want to get, and not to give.

Let's have an experiment. Hold out your hand and make a fist right now. Everybody go ahead. Make a fist, and tighten it up, and hold it real tight like you got something in there that you don't want to lose. Squeeze it. Hold it tight now. Don't relax. Now just relax and let it open. Which feels better? Doesn't that feel a lot better? Now just imagine your spirit that way. Imagine your spirit this way. And imagine your spirit that way. That's the spirit. That's the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, where He says it is more blessed to give than to receive.

You want to be miserable, do you? Then go ahead, just think about yourself—what you want, what people are saying about you, what you ought to have done for you. Unhappiness comes from mirrors. Happiness comes from windows. So always be looking at yourselves, focusing on yourself. You'll not learn what the Lord Jesus Christ taught when Jesus said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. Go to the window and look out, and see others, and see the world, and begin to pour your life in other people, and see if the joy doesn't begin.

## **II. The Blessings That It Brings**

Now, why, my dear friend, is this a wonderful motto? Number one, because of the bonds that it breaks. It frees us from covetousness. It frees us from idleness. It frees us from selfishness. Tell you a second reason why it's a wonderful motto. Not only because of the bonds that it breaks, but because of the blessings that it brings—the blessings that it brings.

Not only does it set you free, but, dear friend, it blesses you. You see you can't bless others without being blessed. The Lord says it is more blessed to give than to receive. That means it's blessed to receive.

I'm blessed when I receive. Aren't you blessed when somebody gives you something? I am. Do you want to be a blessing to me? That's fine. That's fine. It's a blessing—it's a blessing to receive. Do you want to bless somebody? You can bless them by giving to them. It's a blessing to receive. Our Lord doesn't say it's not a

blessing to receive. We've been blessed, all of us, by receiving. Our Lord just simply says, it is more blessed—more blessed, it's a double blessing—when you give. Because you can't give anything, you haven't first of all received.

Paul said I have delivered unto you that which first of all I received. So you got a blessing when you got it, didn't you? No matter how you got it. When your employer gave it to you. Whether your employer gave it to you. Whether it came as an inheritance, whether it comes as a gift, you're blessed. You're blessed if you're receiving anything. I mean, everything that you have, you received, right? What do you have that you didn't receive? So, Paul said, "I have delivered unto you that which also I have received." So, it's a double blessing—the blessing of receiving, and the blessing of giving.

When you give anything to anybody else, it's already second-handed, cause you've used it, you've got a blessing out of it. It's already second-handed. You've already gotten the blessing out of it. And now you are getting a bigger blessing, when you're passing it on to somebody else. And the wonderful thing—hey listen, folks. Look here. The wonderful thing is this: that you don't have to be rich, and you don't have to be talented, to be a giver.

Now please, listen. You think, Yep, if I had something to give, I would. Friend, you do have something to give. And here's the thrilling thing about it: that God can use you. God can use you where you are. God can use you with what you have, and God can use you now. You don't have to wait for better circumstances. You don't have to wait for more abilities. You don't have to wait for better opportunities, or more commodities.

God has given you something right now that you can give. Well, you say, I don't believe it. All right, let's check up. Open your Bibles—just put your bookmark there in Acts chapter twenty and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter one, and begin with me in verse twenty-six—1 Corinthians chapter one and verse twenty-six. I want you to see what God says here. "And ye see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh"—that means not many PhD's—"not many mighty"—that means not many all Americans—"not many noble"—that means not many George Bushes—"are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise."

The word foolish is the word we get our word moron from. It doesn't mean moronic; it just means non-intellectual. Anybody here feeling a little foolish? Congratulations, you just passed. All right, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. This word here, weak, means physically weak—anemic, without strength. Anybody here feeling a little weak, have palpitations this morning, a dull headache? Get up and gone? God has forsaken you? Well, congratulations. God chose you. "And base things of this world." Feeling a little lowdown this morning, ignored? Nobody knows you are here?

Friend, listen. God has chosen you. You are the kind God is looking for. It's not your scholarship; it's your relationship. Friend, it's not your ability; it's your availability. It's not who you are; it is whose you are that counts. And he says, "things that are not"—are not. That means the nobodies.

Are you overlooked here today or you think you are just one in a few thousand people? God has your name, rank, and serial number. And friend, God chose you this way. Why did God take people like this? Why does God want to use people like this? He says that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Years ago, I read the story of a great violinist who had gone to an antique store and found a violin, and purchased it for five thousand dollars. Now this was many years ago, so it would be multiplied, many more thousands of dollars today. And he announced in a great concert hall that he was going to play this magnificent instrument. And he was known as a great violinist. And the hall was packed. And he took the violin, and tucked it under his chin, and began to play. And as he played that violin, you could hear a baby cry. You could hear the birds in the trees singing. You could hear the laughter of little children. You could hear the song of angels as he played that violin. Everybody was enraptured.

And then after they played this magnificent instrument, so they thought, then he held it up by the stem and broke it on the podium. They were aghast. I mean, he's destroyed this instrument. There was a smile. He reached into his violin case and took out another violin. And he said, ladies and gentlemen, the violin that I just broke was not this instrument, obviously, but was a three-dollar-and-a-half fiddle—a three-dollar-and-a-half fiddle. And then, he said, it's not so much the instrument that makes the music, as it is the man who draws the bow. Very interesting.

You know, sometimes we think, oh, if I were a Stradivarius, maybe God could make music with me. Friend, you see your calling; not many mighty, not many noble, are called. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world. Listen, my dear friend. God gets more glory out of using ordinary people than He does superior people, because then it is very obvious that the glory, the power, the strength, is His. Don't you insult God by saying God can't use you, and don't you insult God by saying you have nothing to give.

Friend, you have so much to give. I was thinking this past week about those in the Bible that God has used that we would say didn't have much to give. Little lad—a few loaves and fishes. That's all he had. He gave it, and Jesus fed five thousand with it. I think of Mary. She had an alabaster box of perfume, perhaps all that she had. She broke it at Jesus feet; she gave it. Was she blessed? Wherever the gospel is preached, this is spoken of as a memorial to her. And that sweet perfume fills the air.

A little widow. Jesus was watching when she was going throughout the treasury. She put in her widow's mite. What we would say, two pennies, today. Was she blessed?

Friend, I dare say that multiplied millions of dollars have been given to the cause of Christ by what that little lady did that day. She didn't have much, but she gave it.

I was reading about a woman named Dorcas. Some of our Sunday School classes today are named the Dorcas Class. And you know what was so great about Dorcas? She just went about helping other people. The Bible says she was full of good works and alms, which she did. And when she died, everybody was weeping, and this is what they said in Acts chapter nine and verse thirty-nine. And all the widows stood by him, weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. Everybody said, look what Dorcas did. Dorcas made that for me. Dorcas made me this apron; Dorcas made me this blouse. She made that. And with a needle she had just sewed herself into the hearts of those people. They were weeping. Maybe there's a little seamstress here today. You say, well, I don't have anything to give. You could be a Dorcas.

Friend, listen. This verse is not for the Rockefellers and the Astors and the, you know, the high muckety mucks, and Lady Got-rocks. This is for you. This is for you. It's for all of us. It is more blessed to give than it is to receive.

Now, friend, that's the way to joy. Did you know that happiness, you never find it by looking for it? You don't. Show any show me anybody who is trying to be happy, and I'll show you somebody who who's not. If you ever go to a resort where people are going on a vacation, walk up and down the street. Don't look at the scenery; look in the faces of the people who are there. Friend, you'll see better-looking faces on bottles of poison. Listen. Those people are the grimmest people and they are there to have fun, they are there to be happy and they realize that you can't get happiness by going from one place to another place. You just can't do it.

You see, you can take your happiness with you on a vacation. A vacation is a wonderful thing. But it doesn't get happiness. Happiness is not something that you get by looking for it.

Happiness is something that you stumble over on the road to service. It is something that you get when you give. You just sow and you reap what you sow. Put this verse in your margin—Luke chapter six and verse thirty-eight. "Give and it shall be given unto you." "Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down, shaken together running over shall men give into your bosom." He's not just talking about in heaven; He's talking about men giving unto your bosom. Now, He's not talking about when angels or somebody in glory doing it. He's talking about it right now. For with the same measure that you meet with all it shall be measured to you again.

You want joy? Give joy. You want happiness? Give happiness. You want friendship? Be a friend. You want love? Give love. You want attention? Give attention. Whatever you sow, you are going to reap. Give—it shall be given unto you again. That's what the

Bible teaches.

People who try to be happy make a big mistake. And I think one of the biggest mistakes is when they get married in order to be happy. I cannot tell you how many people have made that mistake. And that's why they have so many divorces. People think that they will marry for happiness. Marriage won't make you happy, if that's what you marry for, to be happy. Because you're marrying for what you can get out of it rather than what you get.

One psychologist said that some people come to marriage, they look upon marriage, the same way a tick looks upon a dog. He looks at that dog for what he can get out of him. And that's the way they come to marriage. The only difference is in marriage they are two ticks and no dog. And it just doesn't work. Doesn't work. My dear friend, you come to a marriage not for what you can get but for what you can give. It is more blessed to give than it is to receive. But when you began to give, then suddenly you discover you're blessed. You discover that joy. You discover that happiness.

J. D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men that ever lived, at the age of fifty-five, Rockefeller was dying. The doctor said he had but months to live. He could not digest food. He was hungry, but he had an ulcerated stomach that gave him constant pain. By his own testimony, he said, I did not have one hour of uninterrupted sleep for five years. Fifty-five years of age—very wealthy, very miserable. He decided, well, since I'm going to die, I might as well do something I've needed to do and wanted to do. Anyway, I'm going to start giving away some of the stuff that I have. And he started giving it away. That so radically and dramatically changed his life, his ulcer healed, his blood disorder evaporated, disappeared, for whatever reason. This man who only had months to live lived for thirty-five more years. And he said the secret—I learned to give, I learned to give.

### **III. The Bridges That It Builds**

More blessed—more blessed—to give than it is to receive. Now, why did he say this? Number one, the bonds that it breaks. Number two, the blessings that it brings. Number three, the bridges that it builds—the bridges that it builds. Go back and look, if you will, now, at our text, if you would, in Acts chapter twenty and notice the story. Notice the love that these people had for this man Paul. It's just incredible, the great love that they had for him. Is Acts still in your Bible? It jumped out of mine. There it is, all right.

Now look, if you will, in verse thirty-five. He says, "And I have showed you all things how that so laboring ye ought also to support the weak"—oh there are so many weak people, so many suffering people, so many hurting people—"and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken he kneeled down and prayed with them all and they all wept

sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." They loved him. There was a bond of fellowship. They were one in the bond of love. Oh, the bridges that it builds when we do this.

Now don't think that when we are talking about giving we are just talking about money. I've already mentioned this, but I want to mention it again. Money may be the least gift that you get. It's important to give your money. Now, I hope that you will be very faithful in giving your money. But sometimes we give money instead of ourselves.

And, you know, there are people who need more than your money. They need you. There are people that are so hungry for somebody to care, somebody to love, somebody who will give understanding. Don't think, dear friend, that money alone is all you give. For example, let's talk about understanding. There are people who just want to be understood. They want somebody to listen to them. People who are so lonely, people who want somebody to listen to them. I dare say that where you live or around where you work there is somebody like that that you could give that kind of care to them.

Give understanding. Those of you who are parents, oh, you need to give this to your kids. Do you know why the kids say, I just can't talk to my parents? And parents say, what do you mean, you can't talk to me? He can talk to me anytime he wants to talk to me. Kid says, I just can't talk to my parents. Mom and dad, could I say something to you? Could I talk with you? Sure, you can talk to me. Sure, sit down. Well, you know, I was thinking about the rules that you have laid down in this house, and well, you say that I have to be in. Well, what do you mean that the rules we laid down? Listen, kid. Those rules are for your welfare. I knew I couldn't talk to my parents. We think we are listening. Give understanding. There are people who need understanding.

I'll tell you what else you can give, my dear friend: you can give acceptance. That doesn't mean that you give approval. There's a difference. Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus accepted people, not because He liked what they are doing.

Friend, listen, Jesus does not change us so He can love us; He loves us in order to change us. They crucified Him because He was a friend of publicans and sinners. Give understanding. Give acceptance. Give love.

What is love? Love is not how you feel. It may result in emotion. But love is a commitment that says I will do you good regardless of what you do to me. Love is a commitment that says I will give you what you need and not what you deserve. And friend, if this world would learn to give love, what a blessing it would be, and what a blessing it would be not only to the givee, but to the giver.

Open up your life. Begin to give to other people and you will build bridges, where you are going to find out that people truly will love you back. And there are going to be

ties built between you and... You know people don't honor people in this world. They don't honor people who are great receivers. They honor people who are great givers—the great givers.

You think about it. Jesus said, it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. More blessed, because of the bonds that it breaks. More blessed, because, my dear friend, of the blessing that it brings. More blessed, my dear friend, because of the bridges that it builds. Jesus said it—Jesus said it. Don't just go through life taking and not giving.

A man was out in a desert and so, I'm told, he was thirsty. And he came to one of these old pumps, one of these old pitcher pumps. And there was dust and everything all around the pump was dry, the plunger in it, that was dry. There was a note there. Said, friend, buried underneath the big rock is a jug of water. It's down about two feet. Dig down and you'll find it.

And, when you find it, there is enough water in that jug to prime this pump. And there's plenty of water in this well. And, he said, pour the water in the pump, and begin to pump, and you'll have all the water that you'll need. But, the note said, before you go, be sure to fill the jug, and bury it again for the next person who comes along. It was signed, Desert Pete. And it said, p.s., don't go drinking the water in this jug. Use it to prime the pump.

Now, friend, Desert Pete, in a way, put the philosophy of Jesus in a very crude way. God doesn't give you things just to be giving you things. You see, somebody has left something for you. And you use that, yes, to prime the pump to get your need met. But always remember, it's more blessed to give than to receive. Don't just go drinking all the water for yourself.

You know, sometimes people criticize churches because they talk about giving. Let's have an experiment. How many of you have ever heard the church criticized about giving, let me see your hand? Every one of you lift your hand. Everybody. They don't like to talk about giving. You know why people don't like to talk about giving? Because they are so rotten selfish. Isn't that true? They are so rotten selfish.

One man said concerning the church, give, give, give—that's all I ever hear, give, give, give. His Pastor said, thank you for the best definition of Christianity I've ever heard.

For God so loved the world that He what? He gave. What? His only begotten Son. Oh friend, God sent Jesus to die for you. God gives you eternal life. But like any gift it'll do you no good whatsoever unless you receive it. It'll only increase your judgment. You can be saved today by trusting Jesus Christ. The Bible says, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. That word believe doesn't mean intellectual belief alone. That is there, but it's more than that. It means heart faith. It means commitment.

## Conclusion

Trust Jesus. Trusting, commit your life to Him. Number one, He'll forgive your sin. Number two, He'll give you a new nature. He'll move into your life. And number three, when you die—I didn't say if you die—when you die, He'll take you to heaven. The only if is if Jesus comes first. He'll take you to heaven.

Would you like to be saved—would you? It is more blessed to give than it is to receive. It's more blessed to give your life to Jesus than it is anything else.

Would you give Him your heart, your life, right now? Would you say, Lord Jesus, I trust you to save me. Lord Jesus, I've been putting it off long enough. Today, I'm going to commit my life to you. I'm going to, once and for all, now and forever, just give you all that I am and have, and hope to be. Come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me, Lord Jesus. Father, I pray that many will say that today. In His wonderful name. Amen.

# How to Measure a Man

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: August 30, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 20:17–38**

*“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

ACTS 20:35

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## Introduction

Now, would you take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 20. We're continuing our series in the book of Acts entitled *That Old Time Religion*. And, so we're trying not necessarily to modernize our church. Actually we're trying to get our church back to the first century so we'll know how to live in this twentieth century because that old time religion is also the new time religion. And, that new time religion therefore is the all time religion. And, that all time religion ought to be the any time religion. And, the any time religion ought to be the every time religion.

We want to find out really how we are to live and operate in these last days. Now, we are going to ready here in Acts chapter 20 beginning in verse 17 is a very poignant scene. The Apostle Paul is revisiting the mission field. And, he comes to Miletus and there he gathers with him the Ephesians' elders. And, he has a time walking with them

down memory lane. They talk about the good times that they had together. How God had blessed and poured out His blessing. Paul rehearsed it all. And, then here's what happened in verse 36: *"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship"* (Acts 20:36–38).

Now, use your imagination. I mean, dear friend, they were one in the bonds of love. They had been through so many prayer meetings, evangelistic crusade together. They had so many victories in Jesus. Their hearts were melted together and now they are having a prayer meeting. They are all on their knees. And, God moves into that prayer meeting. And, there is such a sweet spirit.

And, then as they get to praying they realize this is the last prayer meeting on earth they will ever have with Paul the Apostle. And, they begin to weep. There are not just a few tears. They are convulsing. The Bible says, "They wept sore" (Acts 20:38). And, then they begin to hug old Paul's neck. The Bible says they just fell on his neck. And, they are weeping and squeezing him, and just hugging him because they know never again on this earth will they see Paul. And, then they walk down to the wharf, where the ship is there. And, Paul gets on that ship. And, as it begins to sail they are just standing there just boo-hooing and just weeping because Paul is leaving, their dear, dear friend. And, he's going to be sorely missed.

Now, a question for you. When you are gone are you going to be missed? I mean, other than by your family. Are you going to be missed? Will it make any difference? By that, you are going. You are going. I mean, you may move out of this city but you are going either by rapture, or you are going by death, but we're all going. We're all going. And, the question is when you go what difference will it make? Is your life going to have any kind of an impact? I heard of a man who had surgery and he woke up in the recovery room and all of the windows were covered with curtains. The blinds were drawn. He called the nurse. He said, "Nurse, open the windows, I want to see outside. Who closed the blinds anyway?" She said, "Just calm down." She said, "I closed them." She said, "There's a big fire across the street and I didn't want you to wake up and think the operation was not a success."

Some of us are going to wake up and find out that our entire life was not a success. We wasted our life. And, we're going to go out into eternity with a wasted life. And, by the way, when you go you're going to leave behind you all that you have and you're going to take with you all that you are. And, I wonder really what you will take with you. You know, when the world measures a man, the world measures a man by brains, or by brawn, or by bucks. How do you measure a man? I mean, what really counts?

I was on an airplane, I was reading an article about the *Guinness Book of World*

*Records*, what people do to make an impact on society. And, I read about one man over in France. His name is Michael Lotto. Do you know what his claim to fame is? Eating glass and eating metal. He grinds it up and eats it. Mixes it in with his Wheaties, or whatever he eats. And, that's what he eats. And, since 1966, he's eaten 10 bicycles. That's true. He ate a supermarket cart in four and a half days. He ate six chandeliers. He ate a Cessna Light Aircraft. A whole airplane. Now, can you imagine this fellow reporting into Jesus? "My son, what did you do when you were down there on earth?" "Lord, I ate an airplane." What a claim to fame. I mean, what really counts? What really matters? How do you measure a life? How do you measure a man?

Well, if you will look back in this twentieth chapter of the book of Acts you're going to find three things that I think are the measure of the man. How do you measure a man? Well, first of all, you measure him by the manner of his life. Begin with me in verse 17: *"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews"* (Acts 20:17–19).

## **I. The Manner of His Life**

Now, what was the manner of his life?

### **A. A Life of Humility**

Well, first of all, his life was a life of humility. Look in verse 19: "Serving the Lord with all humility" (Acts 20:19). I thought about this as I prepared to say—And, I believe it with all of my heart—that nobody has a life worth living, nobody has a life that can be called a great life, there is no true greatness without true humility, without true humility. "Serving the Lord," he says, "with all humility" (Acts 20:19). What is humility? Humility is not putting yourself down. It is not saying that you are no good because that is not true about you, friend.

As Chris sang, Jesus paid too great a price for you to say that you are no good. I'll tell you who you are. Friend, you're a child of God if you are saved. I'll tell you who you are. You are a prince and a king. "He hath made us to be a kingdom of priests." You are a holy priest. I'll tell you whom you are if you are saved. Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brother, so you are next of kin to the Holy Trinity. Don't get the idea that humility is not loving yourself. For the Bible says that "we're to love others as we love ourselves." And, if you don't love you, I'm afraid of you because you don't know how to love me. We're to love others as we love ourselves.

What is humility? It's not degrading yourself, it's not putting yourself down. Let me tell you about humility here. Humility is an honest estimation of yourself that says about

you what God says about you and it results primarily in serving. Notice in that verse he says, “Serving the Lord with all humility” (Acts 20:19). The word “serving” is the verb form of the noun *doulos*, which means, “Bond slave.” Do you know what the mark of humility is? Service. Serving others. A humble person is a person who serves other people. Serving the Lord with all humility.

When God measures a man’s life He does not measure the man’s life by how many servants the man has, but by how many men the man serves. “Serving the Lord with all humility” (Acts 20:19). Now, folks there are a lot of you whose lives are going to amount to little more than a zero with the edges trimmed off and I’ll tell you why. You’ve never learned to serve. You come to church on Sunday morning, you soak, but you don’t serve. You need to find a place of service in this church, or in this community, or in your home. And, you need to say, “Lord God, make me a servant,” because unless you’re a servant you’re not going to be truly missed when you are gone.

### **B. A Life of Heartache**

Now, listen, not only was there a life of humility, but there was also a life of heartache. Because he says in verse 19: “Serving the Lord with all humility and tears” (Acts 20:19). The Apostle Paul had a broken heart. The Apostle Paul was a compassionate man. The Apostle Paul knew how to weep. He knew how to enter into the sorrows and the hurts of other people. That’s the way to be missed. You live for self and self-alone and you try to insulate yourself from the cares and the toils and the problems of this world. You’re not going to be missed.

But, you show me a person who knows how to sympathize, a person who knows how to empathize, a person who has the compassion of the Lord Jesus in his heart and in his life. I want to ask you a question? Do the things that break the heart of Jesus break your heart? Do you know how to weep? When is the last time you shed a tear over some soul that is mortgaged to the devil? Now, when you read about the ministry of Paul you don’t read about him weeping. The only way you know about it here is because he told you here. I believe most of the time he wept in private. I can say for my own life I shed far more tears in my study than I do in my pulpit. And, I’m telling you, dear friend, that Jesus was a man of tears, and Paul was a man of tears, and Jeremiah was a man of tears, and we ought to be people of tears.

### **C. A Life of Hardship**

The Apostle Paul said, “I serve the Lord with humility. I serve the Lord with heartache.” And, then he says, “I serve the Lord with hardship.” He speaks there in verse 19 of the many trials that befell him. The King James uses the word *temptations*, but it literally means “trials.” It literally means that there were people who disliked him. There were people who opposed him. There were people who literally bodily physically harmed him

because of the stand that he took for the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no way, no way, that you can have a life that will count and make an impression on this world without making some enemies. No way. Dear friend, unless you are willing for those three things to be in your life—humility, heartache, and hardship—you’re not going to have the kind of a life that Paul had. And, it’s not going to be the kind of a life that counts.

“Oh,” you say, “I don’t want that kind of a life.” Well, maybe you don’t. Maybe you just want to be all wrapped up in yourself. But, I’m going to tell you, dear friend, when you’re gone, it’s not going to make much difference. Nobody in this world will say, “That’s the way to have a great life.” I believe Johnny Carson would say, “That’s the way to have a great life.” I don’t believe that the barons on Wall Street would say, “That’s the way to have a great life.” I don’t believe that the wood mulchers would say, “That’s the way to have a great life.” Humility, heartache, and hardship. Nobody wants that, do they? No they think the great life is something else. But, dear friend, I want to say, “That is a great life.” That is the manner of his life. Paul says, “You know the manner of my life.” That was the measure of his life.

## **II. The Message of His Life**

Now, let me say not only was his life measured by the manner of it. But, also his life was measured by the message of it. Because you see, not only do we live a certain way, but we say a certain thing. That is we’re to leave behind us a message. Every one of us will be known for something when we are gone. They will think about us. Do you know what I want them to think about when they think about me? The gospel of Christ. I want them to say, “That man’s life was centered in the only message that really matters.”

### **A. The Content of the Message**

Now, notice the Apostle Paul. Paul says in verse 20, he says, “*And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house*”—that is in every place—“*Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks*”—every person—“*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:20–21). That was the content of his message; that encapsulates his life: Repentance and faith, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was known primarily as a gospel preacher. It was a narrow message. He didn’t stutter, he didn’t stammer, he didn’t equivocate. He kept on preaching that message. That was the content of it.

### **B. The Conviction of the Message**

I want you to notice the conviction of it. Notice in verse 22: “*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:*

*Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me*” (Acts 20:22–23). Paul says, “I’m going back to Jerusalem. The Spirit of God wants me to go. I’m bound in the Spirit.” That is, “I know it’s God’s will for me to go. And, I know when I get there I’m going to have heartache and trouble.” “...Bonds and afflictions abide me” (Acts 20:23). But, now watch verse 24: “*But none of these things move me*”—That is, “I don’t get stampeded by any of these things”—“*neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). You want a life that counts? Dear friend, you’re going to have to have a message that has the right content and the right conviction. Paul said, “I’m bound in the Spirit” (Acts 20:22). He said, “None of these things move me. You’re not going to stop me.” (Acts 20:24).

Paul had a bulldog grip on certain things. Are you that way? Do you know what’s wrong with the average Baptist? He has opinions and not convictions. Paul had convictions. He said, “I am bound in the Spirit. I am going to finish my course with joy. I will do it” (Acts 20:22). Now, he said, “I know what I’m going to” (Acts 20:24). It eventually led to his death. But, Paul had rather die with a conviction than live with a compromise. How about you? Most of us had far rather live with a compromise than to die with a conviction. But, you can understand why Paul was the man that he was.

### **C. The Confidence of the Message**

And, how this shames me as I think of the content of his message. As I think of the conviction of his message. But, then I think of the confidence of his message. Paul died confidently. Notice what he said here in verse 25: “*And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:25–27). Praise God, Paul was confident. Paul said, “You’re not going to see me any more. I’m going on to Heaven.” He said, “I’m going to tell you one thing, I’m pure from the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26).

What did he mean by that, “I’m pure from the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26)? Well, you know Ezekiel said that we’re like watchmen upon a wall and if we see the enemy coming and we do not warn the people inside the city about the enemy they are going to die, but their blood will be required at our hands. You see, he’s talking about soul winning. If we don’t tell our friends, our neighbors, our brothers, our sisters about the Lord Jesus Christ and they die and go to Hell, their blood is on our hands.

Let me illustrate. Suppose your child has some nameless disease. That disease was gnawing away at his life and you knew that your child was going to die. And, then suppose that you had a doctor and that doctor prescribed a particular medicine for your

child, and your child radically, dramatically got well. And, then suppose an epidemic of that same disease broke out in your city and you knew the name of that doctor. And, you knew that that doctor could prescribe the medicine and save the lives of those children. And, you did nothing to tell anyone and those children died. Would not their blood be on your hands? Now, friend listen, if we know the only message that this world needs and we don't tell it, to me we're guilty of high treason against Heaven's King and we're going to meet the Lord with bloody hands.

The Apostle Paul knew that before long he was going to have to meet the Lord. And, he said, "I am pure. I am free from the blood of all men. I am not going to face my Lord with bloody hands" (Acts 20:26). Now, listen folks, some of us, are going to face the Lord with blood on our hands. Souls that we should have witnessed to that have died and gone to Hell. And, it's our fault. It's our fault. Paul had a confidence, he had a confidence about his message. He said, "I've not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. I'm free from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). I wonder how many can say that.

I see the Apostle Paul. He's in his cell tired and aware for his execution is come. The burley guard comes to the cell door. "Paul, come." "Where we going?" "You're going to the chopping block, Paul. We're going to execute you, Paul." And, he comes with a chain to bind Paul. Paul says, "You don't need to put that chain on me. I can walk. It's all right. Don't worry. Let's go." And, so the guard takes Paul and they begin to walk down toward the Tiber River. There, the execution place, that river that will soon drink the blood of the great Apostle. There he goes, the greatest Christian who ever lived.

Can you see the little humped backed dew? Hobbling along, his body bent, broken, scarred from the whippings, the stoning, the imprisonments, being pickled in the Mediterranean Sea. Little gray head, squinty eyes, he is walking along. The guard says, "Do I hear music? Are you humming?" He says, "Oh yea, I didn't know you were listening to me. Just a little song that we love to sing, 'It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.'" And, the guard says, "You're a, you're a strange one."

And, they bring him down there and the executioner says, "Well, tie him to the chopping block." He says, "You don't need to tie me. It's all right." And, he kneels down and puts his neck on the chopping block. They say, "Aren't you afraid, Paul?" "Oh," he said, "I've done this before." "You can't." "Oh," he said, "I die daily." And, so, they put his head on the chopping block. "Any last words, Paul?" "Oh yes, I'm glad you asked. Here are my last words, Jesus Christ is Lord." And, the ax falls and the head rolls over into the basket.

The next scene is Heaven. He is looking into the face of Jesus. And, he says, "Lord Jesus, you know I wasn't strong. I was ugly. I didn't have a good voice. But, Lord, I kept the faith. I finished my job. Lord, I fought a good fight. Lord, these hands are pure from

the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26). How would you like to meet the Lord like that? Many of us are going to meet the Lord with bloody hands. And, I believe the Lord Jesus would say to him, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord,”* thank you, Paul, for being true to Me (Matthew 25:21).”

### **III. The Motto of His Life**

My friend, that’s the measure of a life. Listen, not only the manner of a life, but the message of a life. I want to mention a third thing I believe that made them miss the Apostle Paul so much. Here’s the way you measure a man. By the manner of his life. You measure a man by the message of his life. And, then you measure a man by the motto of his life. Every man has a motto for his life. Maybe he’s put it into words, maybe he hasn’t. But, there is something that impels him, there is something that motivates him, there is something that drives him, there is something that constrains him. Here was Paul’s constraint. Look if you will beginning in verse 33: *“I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:33–35). Now, folks, if that’s not yet underlined in your Bible, you need to underline it. Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus how he said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). This was the motto of Paul’s life. *“Remembering the words of Jesus, it is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

The Apostle Paul was a great man because he spent life not primarily as a receiver, but as a giver. Therefore his life was blessed. The people in life are divided into two categories. There are the takers and the givers. The takers eat better, the givers sleep better. Listen, *“...it is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). When you die all you’re going to take with you is what you’ve given away. Friend, what you’ve spent is gone forever. What you did not spend will be left for others. But, what you gave away is yours forever. *“...it is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35).

Now, I want you to see what that motto did for him. I want you to see what that philosophy did for him.

#### **A. It Freed Him from Covetousness**

Number one, it freed him from covetousness. Look if you will in verse 33: *“I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel”* (Acts 20:33). One of the Ten Commandments is *“Thou shalt not covet...”* (Exodus 20:17). The Bible says that, *“...covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5).

What is wrong with para-mutual gambling? You were given a brochure when you came in. Talking about wagering, gambling, horse racing. We’re going to be, this month,

in a horrendous battle here in our city. What is wrong with gambling? Gambling is built primarily upon the principle of covetousness, which is wanting what somebody else has, getting that into your possession. Let me tell you why gambling is wrong. I want to put it into a simple sentence. I want you to get it, get it big, get it plain, get it straight, why is gambling wrong. Gambling is wrong because it is built on this principle: gambling is profit and pleasure at the cost of someone else's loss and pain.

Did you understand that? Gambling is profit and pleasure at the cost of somebody else's loss and pain. Remember this if you don't remember anything else, no one can win at gambling without someone else losing. Do you understand that? It's so simple. People say, "What's wrong with it?" You are trying to get what belongs to somebody else without a fair exchange. That's what's wrong. It is based on covetousness. When you win at gambling, you lower yourself, and you victimize your neighbor. Paul says, "I remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' Therefore I coveted nothing that belongs to somebody else" (Acts 20:35).

### **B. It Freed Him from Idleness**

It freed him from covetousness. But, not only did it free him from covetousness, it freed him from idleness. Look if you will in verse 34: "Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands"—he held up his hands—"have ministered unto my necessities"—That is, "I worked for my needs"—"and to them that were with me. And, I have showed you all things how that so laboring you ought to support the weak." (Acts 20:34). Now, what is Paul saying? Paul said, "There are people who are weak, there are people who can't work, there are people who have needs." And, Paul said, "I worked so that I might help the needy." Now, the Bible says that, "if a man won't work, neither should he eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But, there are some people who can't work and those of us who can work need to work to help those who are weak.

### **C. It Freed Him from Selfishness**

Let me tell you something else about para-mutual gambling, what's so wrong with it. It victimizes those who can least afford to be victimized. They say, "Well, it's a form of voluntary tax." It's a regressive tax. It is the poor, it is the needy who consistently spend the greater part of their income on gambling. It produces no wealth. It is only a transfer of wealth primarily from the hands of the poor and the needy into the hands of the more wealthy. There are some people who will make money on para-mutual gambling, but not many, and not the poor and not the needy. And, the Spirit of Jesus is "it is more blessed to give than to receive." If you want to help needy people don't build a racetrack; give them something. In the name of Jesus give. Help, but don't hurt. Don't build a system based on greed.

What was the motto of Paul's life? "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts

20:35). It saved him from covetousness. It saved him from idleness. And, friend, it saved him from selfishness. Nobody has a great life that lives a selfish life. Nobody. The Apostle Paul lived a life of giving, not taking, of helping, not hurting, of loving, and lifting, and caring.

## Conclusion

During World War II in a Polish village, the Nazis came into that village, accused all of the Jews in that village of crimes against the state. Brought them out of their houses, brought them out into a particular field, and made them dig a ditch that would later become their grave. Then they stripped them of all of their clothes. They lined those Polish Jews up against a wall. They got their machine guns and began to mow them down just bullet after bullet flying into that quivering flesh. And, the people fell like cordwood, head over heels into the grave.

A little ten year-old boy was standing there naked with his mother and daddy. The bullets just ripped their bodies open and the blood splattered everywhere. And, as they fell the little boy just fell with them also, but he was not touched by one bullet. He fell in the grave and lay still. They assumed he was dead because he was splattered with blood and they began to push the dirt over these people and buried that little ten-year-old boy alive.

His face was in such a position that he caught a pocket of air. And, there the ground was not packed that hard. And, he could actually breathe under the ground, lying on the mutilated bodies of his loved ones. After several hours, it was now dark, he began to dig out his own grave. And, he clawed and dug his way to the surface. Actually dug his way out of his grave. He was naked, clotted with blood, clotted with dirt. He went to the house of a neighbor and knocked on the door and the woman came, she saw that little boy there covered with blood and dirt, caked with the remains of his grave. She recognized him as one of the Jewish boys and knew that he'd been marked for death.

She screamed at him, "Go away!" and slammed the door in his face. The little boy dragged himself to another door and knocked on the door and begged for help. And, the same thing happened. The woman in terror said, "No, I cannot help you. Go away." He went to one-third door and knocked on the door. And, when the woman opened the door she looked at him and her face froze. But, before she could say anything, he said to her, "Don't you recognize me. I am the Jesus that you say you love." She broke and said, "Come in. Come in." At the risk of her own life she sheltered that ten-year-old child. Jesus said, "*...Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*" (Matthew 25:40).

There is no easy way to have a great life. I'm telling you, dear friend, "...it is more blessed to give than it is to receive" (Acts 20:35). And, there's some of us when we are

gone we're not going to be missed. But, there are others when they are gone they are going to weep sorely. Those that know the things that count. And, primarily you measure a man's life, you measure the man by the manner of his life, the message of his life, the motto of his life. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). I want to remind you one more time, when you die you are going to leave behind all that you have and you are going to take with you all that you are.

# How to Have a Good Conscience

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** March 17, 1996

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 23:1

*“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren,  
I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*

ACTS 23:1

## Outline

Introduction

- I. A Defiled Conscience
- II. A Deadened Conscience
- III. A Depraved Conscience
- IV. A Weak Conscience
- V. A Good Conscience
  - A. Confess Every Sin
  - B. Ask Forgiveness from Those That You’ve Wronged
  - C. Make Restitution Wherever Possible
  - D. Refuse the Accusation of the Devil

Conclusion

## Introduction

Would you turn, please, to Acts chapter 23? And as you’re turning, I want to talk to you about your conscience tonight and how to have a good conscience—how to have a clear conscience. Do you know, if you have a clear conscience, you can face about anything? Did you know that? Sooner or later, you’re going to come into trials and difficulties. And in Acts chapter 23 you have the story of the apostle Paul, and he is before the high priest, and he is in great difficulty. Actually, he is in danger—physical danger, danger of imprisonment and death, and he’s being questioned. And I want to draw your attention just to verse 1: “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. I have lived in all good conscience.”

Now, what is your conscience, anyway? Somebody said that your conscience is what feels bad when everything else feels good. But the truth of the matter is the word conscience is a compound word: con, meaning “with,” and science, “to know.” It’s that which enables you to know things. Your mind, your intellect, and your spirit come together and begin to speak to you. And animals don’t have a conscience. Now, you

may think your dog has a conscience when your dog cringes, and when it's done something wrong, but that's not a conscience; it's just fear. Conscience is something that only human beings have. No animal has a moral conscience.

Now, let me say this about your conscience, however. Your conscience is not the law of God, and it is not the voice of God. So your conscience is not infallible. Your conscience is not infallible. You can only say, "Let your conscience be your guide," as God guides your conscience. Your conscience is like a thermostat. It works wherever it's set. Now, if you were a headhunter in some savage jungle, your conscience would not be bothering you, if you were trained from a child to be a headhunter, because that's where the thermostat would be set. And so, it's foolish to say, "Let your conscience be your guide."

Or your conscience, not only is like a thermostat; your conscience is like a sundial. The sundial will register the light you shine upon it. If you look at a sundial with a flashlight, you're not going to get a proper reading. And so, a false light can make it register wrongly.

Or your conscience is like a skylight. It's not like a light bulb. It doesn't give light, but it can let in light. But if the skylight is dirty, if it's grimy, then the skylight is not going to let in the right light.

## **I. A Defiled Conscience**

Now, actually, the Bible talks about different kinds of consciences. First of all, there might be what we would call a defiled conscience. And I'm going to hurry through these very quickly, so I just want you to jot these Scriptures down, and don't look them up, so we can get more done in a short time. But you may have what the Bible calls a defiled conscience. Titus 1, verse 15: "But unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

Have you ever seen people for whom nothing is pure? You can say something around the job and they'll make a dirty joke out of it—that everything is twisted, everything is turned; I mean, even good things become corrupt things. Why? Because their conscience is defiled! And so, a man may do something, and he says, "Well, that doesn't bother me. My conscience doesn't bother me," and yet, he is living in sin. The reason for that is his skylight is so grimy that his thermostat is set so low. His conscience is defiled. Now, that's one kind of a conscience.

## **II. A Deadened Conscience**

Here's another kind of a conscience: Not only a defiled conscience, but you can go a step worse, and have a deadened conscience. First Timothy chapter 4, verse 2, the

Bible says this—it talks about some, and it says they're "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." The conscience is cauterized. It's seared. It's burned. Have you ever burned yourself and the skin there, after it heals, there's a scar there, and the nerve endings are deadened there, because it has been seared? Now, some people have a conscience like that. Their conscience is burned out, been burned out with sin, and, therefore, it's a deadened conscience, and it doesn't warn them. It doesn't alarm them. I heard somewhere about an old prospector whose dog was barking and barking and barking. The old prospector couldn't sleep, so he got up and got a shotgun and killed the dog. And, in the middle of the night, the intruder came in and killed the prospector, because he had killed the watchdog. He had deadened the watchdog. Your conscience is a watchdog. It can be deadened. It can be seared. Maybe you have a seared and a deadened conscience.

### **III. A Depraved Conscience**

But now, there's a third kind of a conscience. Now, look. There's the defiled conscience. There is the deadened conscience. But there can even be a worse state, and that is a depraved conscience. Now what is a depraved conscience? Hebrews chapter 10, verse 22, speaks of "...an evil conscience..." That's worse than a deadened conscience. What is a depraved conscience? That's one that hates what is good, and approves what is evil. Isaiah spoke of these kinds of people in Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 20: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Our world today is filled with people who literally have depraved consciences. They talk about research with using parts from little babies that have been aborted. Some have even gone so far as to say we ought to grow little babies like this so we can harvest the parts and use them for research, because we'll do this in the name of humanity. A person who believes something like that has a depraved conscience—a depraved conscience.

I read in this week's *Commercial Appeal* about a man named Howard Stern. He is a foul-mouthed, filthy, depraved man who makes his living with obscenities and filth. And he said, "I'm probably the best person in America. I'm probably the most righteous man in America." And here's why he said this, and I copied it down. He said, "Virtue is honesty, which makes me the most virtuous person in America." Think about it. Now, you know what's wrong with him? He has a depraved conscience. Now, he may believe that after a while, because his conscience has gone from being defiled to deadened to depraved. Now, we have in America sin that used to slink down back alleys, now it struts down main streets. That's a depraved conscience.

## IV. A Weak Conscience

But then, if you get saved, God radically changes your conscience, but you may have, as a Christian, even having been converted, what we call a weak conscience. Now, in 1 Corinthians 8, verses 10 through 12, Paul talks about Christians who were eating food that had been dedicated to idols, and the question is whether or not a Christian ought to eat food that had been used in idol worship. You could buy meat in the pagan meat market cheaper than in the regular meat market. It had been used in temple worship. And so, there was a big debate about it, whether or not Christians ought to eat this meat that had been offered to idols. And Paul is saying it's better to leave it alone, and here was his reasoning. He said, "For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ."

Now what is a weak conscience? Well, if a seared conscience is one that is insensitive, a weak conscience is one that is hypersensitive, over-sensitive. Now what Paul was saying is really, there's nothing wrong with eating meat that's offered to idols. He says, the idol is nothing. He says, there's nothing wrong with the meat. But there are some people whose conscience is so weak that they can't—it's over-sensitive.

You see, your conscience is like a circuit breaker. Now, we have a circuit breaker in our family room that works fine most of the time. But, every so often, when the family is there, we decide to have breakfast in the family room, and Joyce brings her griddle in the family room to make pancakes, and that circuit breaker will click off, because it's just a little weak. I mean, after a while, everything just goes out. Now, the circuit breaker is good. The circuit breaker is what keeps you from burning the house down. But you don't want one that keeps you from cooking pancakes. And, and it's a weak circuit breaker. It too sensitive. We've got to have it changed out sometime. Now, here's the thing.

Here's the rub. The person with the weaker conscience always thinks he has the stronger conscience. That's what Paul is saying. He said, "You know, these people who have this weak conscience who are so easily offended, they really think that they have the stronger conscience." Listen to Romans 14, verses 1 through 3: "But him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." Don't argue with him about things that are doubtful. "For one man who believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs." It's the vegetarian, the man who won't touch the meat—He's the weak one, not the strong one. Now, Paul says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not..."

Now, if you are a stronger brother, you're going to get hacked off at these weaker brothers always pointing a finger at you, always telling you, "Touch not, taste not,

handle not. Don't do this. Don't go there. Don't..." And they will judge you. And that will rankle you. And you're liable to despise him. So, he says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth..." The weaker brother really thinks he is the stronger brother, and he's always judging the stronger brother. It's a strange thing. And so, what is Paul's advice? Paul says, "If you have a weak conscience, don't override it. If you believe something to be wrong, don't do it. Even if your conscience is weak, don't do it." Romans 14, verse 23: "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." So, never encourage a weaker brother to violate or to override his conscience. If you're a weaker brother or sister, don't override your conscience. But you're going to find out that people with a weak conscience, people who are oversensitive, they tend to be hypercritical, and they will be people who will be tending toward depression and melancholy. Now, what do we do? We don't condemn them. We love them. We give way to them to a certain extent. They will judge you. You cannot despise them, because if you do, you'll wound their weak conscience.

## **V. A Good Conscience**

Now, let's come to the last thing. We've talked about having a defiled conscience, a deadened conscience, a depraved conscience, a weak conscience, even if you're a Christian. But Paul stood before the council, and said, "I stand before you with a good conscience." Well, what is a good conscience? Well, Acts 24, verse 16—you might want to turn to this one. Just turn over a page or two. Here's what a good conscience is: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man."

Now, in the trials of life, just as Paul was facing a trial, in the trials of life, whether it's a council of men, or whether it's some sickness, some sorrow, some heartache, there's nothing that will give you good standing like a good conscience that'll help you to go through any difficulty.

Bill Gothard, who is a dear brother and a friend of mine, said this: "A good conscience is that inner freedom of the spirit and assurance from knowing that you have a transparency toward everyone, that no one is able to point a finger at you and accuse you of wrongs toward him that you've never made right." Would you like to hear it again? Okay. Thank you. "That inner freedom of the spirit and assurance from knowing that you have a transparency toward everyone, that no one is able to point a finger at you and accuse you of wrongs toward him that you've never made right." When you do this, it gives you great liberty. Now, it doesn't mean that people are not going to accuse you. They will accuse you of things that you're not guilty of. That's not going to bother you.

Again, put this Scripture down, if you're putting down these Scriptures, because you may want to study them at home—1 Peter chapter 3, verses 13 through 16. Peter is talking about suffering for Christ, and he says, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you of a reason of the hope that is in you with fear, with meekness and fear—now, listen to this—Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, that they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation—or your good behavior—in Christ."

Now, what a good conscience does, it just removes fear. Anybody gossips about you, anybody lies about you, anybody persecutes you, it just simply removes fear. But, if you have a bad conscience, you're constantly afraid. Adam and Eve had a bad conscience. So, when God came walking in the midst of the garden, they hid themselves. They didn't want fellowship with God.

Why is it that some people won't go to Bible studies? Why is it that some people don't even want to read the Bible? Why is it that some people don't enjoy worship services? Why is it? They have a bad conscience; for the same reason that Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. There are people who literally despise coming to church. We had a man that we baptized tonight, and I'm going to let him give his testimony later on. But he said, "There were times in church I was miserable," and he said, "I had no desire for the Word of God." He said, "I got saved, and now," he said, "the Word of God is just leaping off the pages into my heart, and I love to be in the worship service. I love the invitation time. Before, I didn't love it at all. As a matter of fact, it made me very queasy and uneasy." What happened? What happened? The conscience has been cleared by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, a bad conscience is one that constantly puts fear in your heart. King David said in Psalm 53—and King David had a bad conscience until it was cleared—he said, "My sin is ever before me." I imagine when King David knew that his sin was out there and he didn't have that transparency, anybody who would come in with a paper, he'd say, "I wonder what this is. I wonder if somebody has got an affidavit against me." He'd see some people over there huddling. "I wonder, are they talking about me?" If they had phones in that day, every time the phone rang, he'd jump. Why? Because he had a bad conscience, until he got it right, as we read there in Psalm 53. But, oh, when your conscience is right, when you're clear—I mean, sickness, sorrow, persecution, lies—it doesn't matter, as long as you know that you have a good conscience devoid of offense toward God and toward man.

Now, let me tell you how to have a good conscience, very quickly. First of all, you

must get saved—you must get saved. Hebrews 9, verse 14: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience...” The blood of Christ purges your conscience. Why? Because the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin, and the blood of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit purges your conscience. That’s so very important that you get saved.

Now, what if you get saved, and your conscience is purged, your sins are put in the grave of God’s forgetfulness, and then, after you get saved, you fall back into sin, and you become a backslider? Listen to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 22: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Now, he says, “Draw near with full assurance, having your conscience cleansed.”

Do you know what happens to people when they have a bad conscience? I’m talking about saved people. They lose their assurance—they lose their assurance. A bad conscience takes away that happiness, that joy, that you ought to have in the Lord Jesus, even after you’ve been saved.

#### **A. Confess Every Sin**

Now, here are the steps. You want to have a good conscience tonight? First of all, if you’re not saved, get saved. If you are saved, and you’re backslidden, confess every known sin before God. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Proverbs 28, verse 13: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

I like to start the day, every day, saying, “God, search my heart. Is there any unconfessed, unrepented-of sin in me?” What a tremendous way to start the day—saying, “I’m clean. I am clean by the grace of God. I am clean.” Confess every known sin.

#### **B. Ask Forgiveness from Those That You’ve Wronged**

Number two—number two: Ask forgiveness from those that you’ve wronged. When you get right with God, you must get right with one another. Matthew chapter 5, verses 23 and 24: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Now, you cannot get right with God and stay wrong with your brother. You want a clear conscience? Get right with God. Then go ask forgiveness of those that you’ve wronged. Whether or not they offer that forgiveness is their problem, if you ask for it in sincerity. It’s not your problem any longer.

#### **C. Make Restitution Wherever Possible**

Number three: However, make restitution where possible. Zacchaeus did—Zacchaeus said, “If I have wronged any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold.”

One day, I was praying as a Christian. God had already called me to preach. And God reminded me of something I'd done as a child. We had a boarder in our house, a lady who stayed in our house. She rented a room. When she was gone—I was a little fellow—I went in her room, opened the drawers, began to rifle through her things, and I found some coins. She had a coin collection. I took some of them. They weren't mine. I stole them. I don't even know what happened to them. I can't remember. But I was a grown man, and God said, "Adrian, you took something that wasn't yours. You stole it." I knew this woman. She was a friend of the family. She looked up to me so much. But I had to write her a letter and send her some money. And I said, "Vera, I don't know how to tell you this, but I just stole something from you, and I'm so sorry, and I want to ask you to forgive me. And here's the best way I know how is to make restitution. And, if I need to do more, I want to do it." But I'll tell one thing. I'm not afraid to look her in the face—not afraid to look her in the face. I'm not afraid to meet her now at the judgment. I'm not afraid to meet her in heaven, because you get clear with God; then, if you've wronged somebody, you ask for forgiveness. If you can, you make restitution.

#### **D. Refuse the Accusation of the Devil**

And then, you refuse the accusation of the devil. The devil is an accuser. Paul was being accused there at the council. The devil will accuse you. The Holy Spirit will convict you. Do you know the difference between accusation and conviction? The Holy Spirit convicts you of sin that you've not yet confessed, and brings you to confession and cleansing. The devil accuses you, and not to bring you to confession, but to drive you to despair. He will accuse you about sins that have already been forgiven, and already cleansed, and that are under the blood of Christ. And you don't have to take it.

### **Conclusion**

Friend, get your conscience clear, and live with a clear conscience. It is a wonderful, wonderful way to live. The apostle Paul said again in Acts chapter 24, verse 16: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men."

Bow your heads in prayer. Father, I pray tonight that You would help us as Your people to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men. And, Lord, that we might say it, sing it, and mean it: "Nothing between my soul and the Savior." In Your name we pray. Amen.

# Facing the Trials of Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: September 22, 1985**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 23:1–11**

*“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren,  
I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*

ACTS 23:1

## Outline

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  - A. A Good Conscience
  - B. A Defiled Conscience
  - C. A Seared Conscience
  - D. An Evil Conscience
- II. He Was Theologically Clear
  - E. The Resurrection Is a Truth That Disturbs
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- III. He Was Spiritually Close
  - A. God Gave Paul a Word of Comfort
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  - C. God Gave Paul a Word of Confidence

Conclusion

## Introduction

Take your Bibles please and turn to Acts 23 tonight. Acts 23. I want to give you the background for this passage of Scripture before I read it to you. Now Paul is the center of a controversy. He's been preaching the gospel. He's caused no little problem. There's been a stir. Paul has been arrested. And he's a very notable prisoner. The chief captain has Paul on his hands. He's really not even sure of the charges that have been leveled against Paul. And so they bring a convocation, the Sanhedrin there, to face Paul.

Now Paul at one time had been a member of the Sanhedrin. This was the highest, ah, Jewish court, and Paul, before he was saved, had been a member of that group. I want to remind you it was the same group that had had Jesus crucified. It was the same group that had authorized the stoning of Stephen and put Stephen to the death. Paul

had been a member. He was no longer a member. He is now looked on as a traitor by this auspicious politically powerful group, those who had power to do him great harm. And yet, Paul stands there. He's on trial. But he stands before them with great poise, with great confidence, and with great assurance, and he faces this trial, and he comes sailing through with victory.

Now I want to talk to you tonight about how to face the trials of life, "Facing the Trials of Life." Because sooner or later, the unseen sheriff from the city of circumstances is going to be at your doorstep with a summons. And you will be called upon to face one of life's trials. And when you do, the judge may not seem fair at all. And the witnesses may seem prejudiced and false. And the jury may seem very hard-hearted. And you're going to be able to come through that trial with victory because that will be God's plan for you, as God says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

Now we need to learn how to face the trials of life. I begin reading here in Acts 23. Let me begin in, in verse 1: "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council (now this is the, the, the council that he stands before), said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried in the council, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

Now there are several things, three things to be precise, that enable Paul to face this trial. And he came through. He just sailed right through. And I want to mention those three things because I pray God they'll be a part of your life when some trial, some testing comes to you. And I don't know what that testing may be, but it may be in the

area of sickness, it may be that somebody will accuse you of wrongdoing, it may be some great disappointment, it may be a financial reverse where your bank account is down and your blood pressure is up. I don't know what it might be. But sooner or later, all of us, as I say, are going to receive a summons to face one of the trials of life.

## **I. He Was Morally Clean**

Now the first thing that enabled Paul to face this trial with such great confidence and great poise is this: He was morally clean. He was morally clean. Look, if you will, in verse 1: "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Now just underscore the phrase, "good conscience." Paul's conscience did not bother him. When he came into this circumstance, when he was in great difficulty, he could say, "There is one thing I have. I've got a good conscience."

Now what is your conscience anyway? Somebody has said that the, your conscience is that part of you that feels bad when everything else feels good. Well, I don't know that that's a good definition of conscience. But conscience is a judge that accuses or excuses our actions. And all of us have that judge within us that's called a conscience.

Now our conscience is our judge, but it is not our master. The conscience, our conscience can tell us when we've done wrong, but it cannot make us do right. Now the Bible mentions several kinds of conscience. For example, Paul here mentions a good conscience.

### **A. A Good Conscience**

Now what is a good conscience anyway? Well, it's, the Bible tells us what a good conscience is. Look in chapter 24:16 and you'll find what a good conscience is. Let's see if you have one. Paul said, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." I mean, there's no offence toward God. There's no offence toward anyone else. That's what a good conscience is. Bill Gothard, who is a great Bible teacher in my estimation, said that a good conscience is, and I'm quoting now, "...that inner freedom of spirit and assurance from knowing that you have a transparency toward everyone; that no one is able to point a finger at you and accuse you of wrongs toward him that you've never made right." That is, you can meet anybody and not be afraid of what they might say to you or what they might accuse you of. There's nothing between you and any individual or between you and God that you've not made right. And this gives you a tremendous liberty when trials come.

Now just mark Acts 23 and I want you to turn to 1 Peter 3. We were in this passage tonight in Love Worth Sharing, but I want us to go back to it, and I want you to see

something here as we talk about the liberty that a good conscience will give you. First Peter 3 and let's begin about verse 13. Paul says here, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you of a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (now what this): Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."

Now what Paul is saying is the same thing that Peter is saying. Peter is saying, "When you're on the hot seat, when you're being accused, when people are coming against you, it is so important that you have a good conscience. That good conscience removes fear."

Now when, when a circumstance and a trial comes to me, and I know there's sin in my life, I'm wondering is God judging me? Are people going to find out about me? But if I'm absolutely clear and transparent, I don't have any skeletons in my closet, I don't have anyone that I'm afraid to meet, then I have a good conscience. And because I have a good conscience, when I face one of the trials of life, I am not stampeded by the sinister minister of fear.

Now Adam and Eve didn't have a good conscience. And so, when God came walking in the midst of the garden, they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. They didn't want to be where God was.

Did you know there are some folks who are not here in church tonight because they don't have a good conscience? I mean, they know that God's going to be here, and they just frankly don't enjoy the music. They don't enjoy the sermons. You'd be amazed how you, how much more you will enjoy God when your conscience is right. When your conscience is not right, you try to hide from God. The reason that many of us don't pray more than we do pray is because we just feel that there's something wrong with us and God, and we're not willing to make it right, and, therefore, we don't feel like praying without making it right. And a good conscience is one that just makes you so free.

David had a bad conscience when he committed adultery and before he got right with God. David said in Psalm 51, "My sin is ever before me." That is, David just had problems of fear in his life. When he would see two people talking, he would wonder, *I wonder if they know. I wonder if, if they're talking about me* when he'd see two people whispering. Someone would come in with a document. He'd say, "Oh, I wonder if I'm found out." If they had telephones back then, he'd jump every time one rang because he, his sin was ever before him. There was something he'd not made right.

But a person who has a clear conscience will generally be a person who doesn't need a sleeping pill to go to sleep at night.

*Trust me, no tortures which the poets feign  
Can match that fierce, the unutterable pain  
He feels, who night and day, devoid of rest  
Carries his own accuser within his breast.*

—JUVENAL

### **B. A Defiled Conscience**

There's a good conscience. There's another kind of conscience, and the Bible calls that a defiled conscience. Look, if you will, with me in Titus 1 for a moment. Titus. Timothy and then Titus. Titus 1:15: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Now what is a defiled conscience? A defiled conscience is one that has, ah, a wrong set of values. You see, I've often heard people say, "Let your conscience be your guide." Well, now wait a minute. Your conscience is like a sundial. A false light can make it read anything. Your conscience is like a thermostat. It will operate wherever you set it. Sometimes a man may be doing wrong and he'll say, "Well, my conscience doesn't bother me." Well, that's not the last question because your conscience can be defiled. You can only let your conscience be your guide as God guides your conscience.

### **C. A Seared Conscience**

There's a good conscience. There's a defiled conscience. And then there's another kind. Turn backward to 1 Timothy 4:2 and you're going to find out there's a seared conscience. First Timothy 4:2. Paul here speaks of some who will be "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." That is, your conscience becomes cauterized. It is burned. You can burn your conscience out. You can, ah, you can, ah, so abuse your conscience, you can so sin against your conscience that your conscience as, has, has become seared as with a hot iron. And just as where you have a scar where there is scar tissue where there's been a burn and that skin is not sensitive. It has no feeling in it. You can come to that place where your conscience is so seared that it, that you don't feel it.

The Indian definition of a conscience is that a conscience is like an arrowhead within a man's chest. And when he's good, that arrowhead sits still. But when he's bad, the arrowhead turns round and round and the corners hurt him. But if he's bad long enough, the corners wear off and he doesn't feel it any longer. And that's, that's why we're talking about here is a, a seared conscience.

### **D. An Evil Conscience**

There's a good conscience. There is a defiled conscience. There is a seared conscience. But there's one other kind of conscience that's even worst than that. Turn, if you will, to Hebrews 10:22. Just turn right there to Hebrews 10:22 and let me show you

another kind of conscience here. The Bible says, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” An evil conscience.

What is an evil conscience? That’s the worst kind. An evil conscience is one that literally approves evil and disapproves right. Isaiah talks about an evil conscience when he says in Isaiah 5:20, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” Did you know that we’ve come to a day and an age where what men used to call good is now called evil, and what people used to call evil is now called good? Can you remember when, ah, something square was good? You know, you talked about a square meal, a square deal. But now if you try to be good, they’ll call you a square. They’ll say, “He’s so square he must have been born in a box.” Because we have a generation now where the heroes are the ungodly and where the godly are somehow the villains.

Now Ananias, the high priest here, go back, if you will, to this passage of Scripture in Acts 23. Ananias, the high priest, had an evil conscience. He said when the apostle Paul stood up to speak, Paul said, “I’m here with a good conscience, a conscience avoid of offence toward God and man.” Ananias, the high priest, said, “Smite him on the mouth!” And they struck Paul right on the mouth. Ananias disapproved what was good and he approved what was evil.

Now when you stand before the sheriff from the city of circumstances, when you come to stand before the judge in the trials of life, it is absolutely imperative that you have a good conscience. If you don’t have a good conscience, you’re going to be wondering, *is this happening because of my sin?*

When Joyce and I went through deep sorrow at the loss of our baby, we sought our hearts and we were also to say, not braggingly, but we were able to say, “Lord, You know we have a good conscience, a conscience void of offence toward man and a conscience void of offence toward You.” And I cannot tell you what a blessing and a strength that was to us. And had I been living in open sin and rebellion against God, I know to this day I would still be wondering, was that the judgment from God? But I just thank God that we were able to write Romans 8:28 over it, because there was in, in that, that circumstance, that trial what I want to call a good conscience. So when the trial comes, and it will come, make certain that your heart is right. The blood of Jesus, the writer of Hebrews tells us, can purge an evil conscience.

## **II. He Was Theologically Clear**

Now Paul faced the trial of life, number one, because he was morally clean. Secondly, he could face that trial because he was theologically clear. Look, if you will, in,

beginning in verse 6. And he says, “But when Paul, when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees’ part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.”

Now we’ve often heard it said that politics make strange bedfellows, and that is certainly true. In this instance, there were two groups of politicians that got together in a “Stop Paul” movement. There were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Now if we wanted to describe them, the Pharisees would be the fundamentalists of that day, and using fundamentalism in a bad sense of the word. And the Sadducees, would be the liberals of that day. Now that is, the Pharisees, they just believed the Bible. They didn’t live by it, but they gave lip service to it anyway. The Sadducees, they were liberals. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. They didn’t believe in angels. They didn’t believe in demons or spirits of any kind. And Paul was a very wise man. And Paul knew that it wasn’t because of himself personally that he was on trial. Paul knew that it was the truth that he was preaching that caused the trouble. And the proof and the truth that Paul was preaching was the resurrection from the dead.

And so, Paul senses that, and so he says, “I’m here because of the resurrection of the dead.” He says, “I am a Pharisee (look in verse 6), the son of a Pharisee of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.” He said, “That’s why I’m here because I’ve been preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Now I want you to notice several things.

#### **E. The Resurrection Is a Truth That Disturbs**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a, is a truth that really disturbs. That’s why they were all disturbed. Now had Paul been a liberal preacher, had Paul not be theologically clear, had Paul just hedge his message and not preached Christ risen, ascended, then he would have had no problem. But it was because he preached the resurrection of the dead that the people were disturbed.

Now let me tell you this: Jesus Christ will always disturb. You can’t be neutral about the Lord Jesus Christ. You either have to say yes or no about Jesus. You can’t just tip your hat to Jesus. Either He’s Lord, liar, or lunatic. And if He’s Lord, then you’ve got to

serve Him. If He's liar or lunatic, you have to reject Him. And so, when, when you preach Christ, it ought to cause revival or a riot. And so, ah, it's a truth that disturbs. But not only is a truth that disturbs; it's a truth that divides.

Now verses 7-9 tell us that there were, ah, the Sadducees on one side and the Pharisees on the other side. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. Now the apostle Paul was wise enough to know that two opposing views cannot be both right. And either Christ rose from the dead and there's a resurrection or either He didn't raise from the dead and there is no resurrection. And so, when Paul just tossed this bomb into the midst of them, there got to be a feud between the two of them, and both cannot be right. And so, they were divided. There was a division because of this idea of the resurrection of the dead. Notice in verse 9: "And there was all, arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken unto him, let us not fight against God. And there arose great dissension..."

#### **F. The Resurrection Is a Truth That Divides**

Now the resurrection of Jesus (listen to me) is a doctrine, a truth that disturbs. It is a truth that divides. Don't ever get the idea that a preacher is supposed to be a peacemaker. Don't ever get the idea that Christians are not to cause division. The ecumaniacs have never seen this, but the Bible teaches that Jesus did not come to bring unity. Matthew 10:34 and following, Jesus said, "Think not that I've come to send peace on the earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword." Somehow people think that if we're Christians, we're all supposed to put our arms around everybody else and say, "Your religion is just as good as my religion, and we're all un-American if we don't get along together." But not only is Jesus Christ the great unifier who unifies His people around Him, but He's the great divider, and we'd better learn this. There was a dissension because of the resurrection.

#### **G. The Resurrection Is a Truth That Delivers**

But not only is it a truth that disturbs and a truth that divides; it is a truth that delivers, and in verse 10 we find Paul was delivered. They just got him out of there and put him back in a place of safety. Somehow when Paul came around to preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's resurrection power got hold of Paul and delivered Paul. And so, folks, I want you to see that when you come to one of the trials of life, you had better not only be, ah, morally clean, but you'd better be theologically clear. Now Paul knew there was coming a resurrection. This is the reason he could live so dangerously. The glories of the future dimmed the distresses of the present. This, it was the hope of the resurrection that gave Paul such poise. You can face the present when

you know that the future is secure.

### **III. He Was Spiritually Close**

Now there's one other thing that helped Paul. Not only was he morally clean, and not only was he theologically clear, but he was spiritually close. Look, if you will, in verse 11: "And the night following, the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Now Paul has been taken from this crowd. He's been put in the prison. Here the Bible calls it the castle. It's really a prison. He's down in the dungeon. Where are Paul's friends? Well, they've all gone. Paul is by himself and he's, ah, he's lonely. His closest friends have disappointed him and, and have forsaken him. But at that time, Jesus appears to him, and there's a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The song says, "*Just when I need Him, Jesus is near.*" And what did Jesus do when He came to Paul?

#### **A. God Gave Paul a Word of Comfort**

First of all, He gave him a word of comfort. He says in verse 11, "...Be of good cheer, Paul, be of good cheer..." Jesus Christ Himself spoke to Paul when Paul faced the trial of life. And Jesus cheers our hearts. I don't know about you, but, ah, there are times when it gets hard on me, and sometimes I get lonely. Sometimes I think I'm misunderstood. Sometimes I think that I'm misused, falsely accused. And it's those times that I get alone with Jesus and I have a vision of Jesus. I've never seen Him with my eyes, but I see Him with the eye of faith. I've never heard, heard Him with my, ah, literal ears, but I hear Him speak peace to my heart. And, and He smiles on me and lays His hand on me and, and He speaks peace to me. And that gives me such tremendous comfort that it really doesn't, ah, matter that much what is happening around about me. A songwriter said, "*Why should I feel discouraged whenever shadows come? Why should my heart feel lonely and dream of heaven and home? When Jesus is my portion, my constant Friend is He. His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*"

And so, there was a companion. He was spiritually close. Jesus spoke to him and gave him joy. I was riding down Poplar a while back and I saw a bumper sticker. I'm a great reader of bumper stickers. I enjoy bumper stickers. And this one said, "Smile! Jesus loves you." And I said, "Oh, how wonderful. A Christian." So I, I pulled up ahead to get a look, and I saw this lady driving this car. And honestly, folks, she looked like she was having a gall bladder attack. I've never seen more misery written on one face than on the face of that woman. And I backed up again to see if I'd read that bumper sticker correct. My thought was, *She needs to take it off the bumper and put it on the dashboard.* Now, folks, listen.

## **B. God Gave Paul a Word of Commendation**

What, Jesus said to Paul was, “Paul, be of good cheer.” He gave him a word of comfort. And then, listen to what He did. He gave him a word of commendation. He said, “You have testified of Me in Jerusalem.” Now here’s Paul in prison. Here’s Paul in trouble. But the Lord says, “Hey, Paul, I know about it. Don’t worry about it, son. You have done exactly what I want you to do.” Now many of us would have said, “Well, I, I wonder what Paul did so wrong that he’s there in prison?” He hasn’t done anything wrong. He’d done everything just right. I was talking to a pulpit committee one time. They were looking for preacher. And I said, “Well, I know where you can, ah, I know of a good preacher.” They said, “Well, tell us about him.” I said, “Well, he’s, he’s kind of old.” Well, they, that, that cooled them down right away. And I said, “He’s not got good health.” That cooled them down a little more. And I said, “But he, oh, he’s a great preacher. He’s a mighty evangelist. He’s one of the finest theologians I know, lives a pure, godly life.” Well, they got hot again. But I said, ah, “He’s, he travels a lot.” Well, they cooled down a little bit. And I said, ah, “He, ah, he’s, he’s been in some, ah, some real trouble. I, he’s been in jail three or four times. Now it wasn’t it fault, but he has been in jail.” Well, they, ah, they said, “Well, look, ah, do you know anybody else?” I said, “Well, don’t worry.” I said, “You couldn’t get him anyway. He’s already in heaven. His name’s the apostle Paul.” Now there are a lot of people, a lot of pulpit committees who wouldn’t call Paul, I mean, because he doesn’t have the right seminary degree and he hadn’t, ah, you know, he doesn’t have all the pedigree, and so forth. Paul was in prison! But Jesus said, “Paul, I know that you’ve testified of Me in Jerusalem.”

## **C. God Gave Paul a Word of Confidence**

There was a word of comfort, “Be of good cheer.” There was a word of com, commendation, “You’ve testified of Me in Jerusalem.” And there’s a word of confidence, “...so must thou bear witness also in Rome. Paul, I’m going to see you through. In spite of all of these dangers, in spite of all of these trials, in spite of all of these difficulties, Paul, they’re just going to harden you. They’re going to toughen you. And they’re going to be used as a springboard. In spite of dangers and delays and disappoints and difficulties, Paul, you’re going to make it. You’re going on to Rome. You’re My man.” Now listen, folks. When a trial comes, if you can have these three things, I honestly believe you’ll make it. If you’re morally clean – you’ve got a good conscience. If you are theologically clear – there’s the hope of the resurrection. And if you’re spiritually close – if Jesus Christ will stand by you and you’ll stand by Him, you’re going to make it.

I read a story. It really blessed me. It was about a man named Dreckerd, John Dreckard. He lived in a little town in England, a little village. He worked in a textile mill. He lived in a very simple home. He was a clerk in a textile mill. He, every morning he would his bicycle to work, and then he would come home at 5 and work in his garden till

suppertime. His one claim to fame was this: John Dreckard could grow roses. And he had a rose garden in the back of his house, and he would work on those roses. And for 5 consecutive years John Dreckard had won a blue ribbon for growing roses. And one year he had the most beautiful rose he had ever seen in his life. It is though it were sculpted by God Himself. He just had a way with roses. He could talk to them and they would understand what he was saying. And so, it was the day before he was going to take that rose and transplant it, put it in the pot, to carry it down to the rose show there in that little village. He had a six-year old son. And that six-year old son that evening came into the house, and that son with the clippers had clipped that rose and brought it to his daddy with great excitement, the petals already falling to the ground, and said, "Look, Daddy, what I've brought you." The daddy started to scold the boy and then he thought better. And he put his arms around that little boy and hugged him up close and said, "Son, that's beautiful. Thank you, son. It's so pretty." And he kissed his little boy. The next day at the rose show, all of those roses were there. And in John Dreckard's pot there was no rose. There was a stick. And on that stick was a picture of that six-year old boy. He won an honorable blue ribbon. And there were some there who said that that was the most beautiful rose in the rose show, that picture of that six-year old son. And I thought about that. You know, folks, there's sometimes our plans are like that rose. They fall to the ground and they're disrupted, and things don't happen the way we think they ought to happen. But in their place God puts a sweeter rose, His own Son, the Rose of Sharon. And He's the sweetest rose of all.

## **Conclusion**

And so, the Lord said to Paul, "Paul, I'm going to take all of this. I'm going to stand by you. I'm going to write Romans 8:28 of, over it. And, Paul, you're going to Rome." It maybe tomorrow that the sheriff from the city of circumstances will arrest you and bring you before the judge for one of the trials of life. And I pray that you'll be morally clean, theologically clear, and spiritually close. Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word. Lord God, I pray tonight that if there are those in this building who are not saved, who don't know Jesus, that tonight they might come to know Him.

Now while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I wonder if there are those in this building tonight who would say, "Pastor, I'm going through one of the trials of life right now, and I just really believe I, I need to get right with God. I need to be spiritually close. I need to be theologically clear. I need to be morally clean. I need a good conscience. I just want to be right with God. I'm saved, Pastor, but I need special help. I'm going through a very difficult trial right now. Would you please pray for me?" Just slip up your hand. I want to pray for you. Well, that's a great number of people tonight, and I want to pray for you right now. And I'm going to get on my knees right now and pray for you out

of my heart. And I'm going to ask the brothers and sisters in Jesus just to pray for these tonight who are going through a trial and a difficulty.

Oh dear God, I pray for these whose hopes and plans may have been dashed and disrupted, something like John Dreckard's rose. But I pray, dear God, in the place of that rose that You'll put heaven's fairest Rose, the Lord Jesus. Lord, I pray that You'll help people tonight if there is any unconfessed, unrepented-of sin, O God, to deal with it, that they might have a conscience void of offence toward God or man. And, heavenly Father, I pray tonight if there are any tonight who don't have that clear hope of the resurrection, a hope for the future that will dim the problems of the present, that You'll give it to them. And I pray, dear Lord, that as You stood by Paul so long ago, Lord, You'll just stand by these people who've lifted their hand for prayer. O God, give comfort. Lord God, we know that sermons and rhetoric and advice and even spiritual principles can never take the place of the Son of God. So, Lord, would You Yourself speak peace to every heart. Thank You, Lord God. In Jesus' precious name.

# How to Cope with Criticism

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: September 6, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 23:1–11**

*“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren,  
I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*

ACTS 23:1

## Outline

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- I. A Righteous Life
- II. A Resurrected Lord
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Conclusion

## Introduction

All right, take God’s Holy Word and turn with me please to Acts chapter 23. We’re continuing our study in the book of Acts entitled “That Old-Time Religion.” And, I want to tell you, folks, if you practice some old-time religion, you’re going to get some old-time persecution. Did you know that? If you don’t know it, you’d better learn it. I want to talk to you today about “How to Cope with Criticism.” Not just any criticism, but criticism that you will receive if you stand for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I wonder if you are indeed enduring criticism for Christ. If not, don’t pat yourself on the back, for the Bible says, *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Timothy 3:12). There’s no way, no way in this world of once-born men can you be a twice-born man, woman and survive without being criticized. You cannot live godly in this kind of a world without being criticized. The Lord Jesus said, *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you”—Not “if,” but—“when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...”* (Matthew 5:11–12). Now, it must be false and it must be for His sake. Some of us get criticized for

things we really deserve to be criticized about, amen? But, if you are criticized for standing for the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are persecuted, praise God, that's exactly the way it ought to be and the Bible says, "Great is your reward in Heaven" (Matthew 5:12).

Now, sometimes what we get is not persecution, it's punishment. Now, you know the difference between persecution and punishment. Persecution comes when bad men persecute us for doing good. Punishment comes when good men punish us for doing bad. Now, we have to learn the difference. Some of us, the criticism we get and the persecution, or the punishment we get, we deserve. But, I'm talking about those who suffer for righteousness' sake, those who, because of their stand for the Lord Jesus Christ are misunderstood, maligned, persecuted, sometimes physically accosted. Jesus said, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Matthew 5:12).

Now, the Apostle Paul knew what it was to be criticized, castigated, and condemned. As a matter of fact, the Scripture that we're about to read to you out of this twenty-third chapter of the book of Acts has the Apostle Paul who is standing before a high court. Now, the high court is the Sanhedrin. Now, these were not just a normal group of people, they were extremely powerful. This was the same group that had caused Jesus to be put to death. It was the same group that had caused Stephen to be stoned. I want to remind you of something else. Paul used to be a member of this group. Paul was one of the few people who was a member of the Sanhedrin and now he's no longer a member of the Sanhedrin. They look upon him as a traitor, as a turncoat. And, now he's standing before this council.

So, let's pick up our reading here and look if we will in verse 1: "*And Paul, earnestly beholding the council...*" (Acts 23:1). Now, let's just don't go any further than that right now. "Paul earnestly beholding the council" (Acts 23:1). That is, he's looking them straight in the eye. He's standing there with confidence, he's standing there with poise, he's standing there with conviction. And, "*said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth*"—that is, slap his face—"Then said Paul unto him, *God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people*" (Acts 23:1–5). Evidently, Paul did not even know that the man who was speaking to him at this particular time was the high priest, he certainly was not acting like a high priest.

All right now listen folks. The Apostle Paul was criticized, he was persecuted, physically abused for his stand for the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet he went through this criticism triumphantly. Now, you are going to be criticized if you live for Jesus, especially in the last days. You are going to be persecuted if you life for the Lord Jesus. So, I think

it would behoove you today to pay a lot of attention to the message because I'm going to show you how to cope with criticism and to have peace with persecution. You're going to be able to do it exactly the same way that Paul did, and let me mention the three things that come out in our passage of scripture that really show me what Paul had in his life that enabled him to cope with criticism.

## I. A Righteous Life

Number one is what I want to call a righteous life, a righteous life. Look in verse 1. Paul in verse 1 speaks of his conscience. He says, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Now, the Apostle Paul had a righteous life. That righteous life came out of a good conscience.

Now, what is *conscience*? *Conscience* is that inner voice that judge that God has put within our breast that accuses us, or excuses us for our actions. Now, conscience can't make you be good, it can't make you be bad, it's just the alarm that goes off when you are bad, or it's that peace that affirms you when you do right. Now, we hear people say, "Let conscience be your guide." Well, you can let conscience be your guide sometimes, but not all of the time. You can only let conscience be your guide to the degree that God guides your conscience. You see, the Bible mentions all kinds of conscience.

Paul here said, "I have a good conscience" (Acts 23:1). Well, how do you have a good conscience? Well, look if you will over here, just turn the page and look in chapter 24 and verse 16 with me. Paul mentions it again. He says, "*And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men*" (Acts 24:16). Now, what is a *good conscience*? A *good conscience* is a conscience that is free of offense toward God and toward men. Now, friend, if you don't have that kind of a conscience, you'll never be able to stand criticism and you'll never be able to endure persecution. A conscience free of offense toward God and toward men.

Let me ask you a question. May I get very personal with you? Nod your head. All right, thank you. Is there in your heart right now any, any unconfessed sin? Any? A-n-y, any unconfessed sin? If so, you don't have a good conscience. Your sins are an offense to a Holy God and you'll not be able to stand criticism if you are not as pure as the driven snow.

Now, let me ask you a question. Is there any problem between you and a brother or sister that you've not made right? I'm not talking about what they have done to you, I'm talking about what you have done to them. Have you offended somebody? Is there anybody who can point a finger of accusation back at you and say something about you that you have not endeavored to make right, that you've not confessed, that you've not repented of, that you've not made restitution about? If so, you don't have a good conscience. You don't have a good conscience. You see, listen folks, it is a clear

conscience, it is a good conscience that enables you when people criticize you or persecute you to say, “That’s all right, I know there’s nothing between my God and I know there’s nothing between my brother and I, fire away. It’s okay.”

You see, Paul said, “I’m standing here with a good conscience and that gives you a tremendous liberty.” It gives you a tremendous freedom. You don’t have to worry about somebody saying, “Hey, what about this and what about that see.” We can’t be sinless, but folks, we ought to be blameless. You know what that means? When we do sin, we confess it, we forsake it, we make it right, we make restitution. “If we have, bring our gift to the altar and remember there that our brother hath ought against us, we leave our gift at the altar and we go and we make it right with our brother...” (Matthew 5:23–45 Scofield?). Does that seem like that’s too much to be right with God and right with man? Is that too much? Folks, that’s the element. That’s basic Christianity and when you have that, it’s amazing how you can stand criticism, but you don’t have it. You see, if your conscience bothers you, then criticism will bother you.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and they sinned, they wounded their conscience, they hid from God and God came walking in the midst of the garden and cried out, “*Adam, ‘...Where art thou?’*” (Genesis 3:9). And, Adam and Eve were in the trees and the bushes hiding themselves from God. Adam said, “*...I hid myself*” (Genesis 3:10). Why? His conscience critic condemned him.

Do you know why folks don’t like to get in a worship service? Do you know why they don’t like to be in a praise service? Do you know why they don’t like to hear you talk about Jesus? Do you know why they don’t like to hear the Bible preached? Their conscience bothers them and they run from God just exactly as Adam and Eve ran from God there in the Garden of Eden. That’s the reason some folks just don’t enjoy coming to church. You get right with God, you’ll enjoy the worship services. You get your conscience bothering you, you’ll feel condemned every time the preacher preaches. You’ll feel like he’s talking right to you. You’ll say, “Why did he get so personal?” Now, dear friend, it’s just simply that conscience that is bothering you.

I heard of a deacon used to sit on the front row and say, “Amen, amen, amen.” And, the preacher liked that. You know, that just encourages preachers. And, after a while this deacon got some sin in his heart and in his life and rather than being on the front row he found himself on the back row, almost out of the church. And, one time the preacher met him in the vestibule and said, “Deacon, don’t you know how you used to sit up front and say, ‘Amen?’ You used to enjoy the service, now you just seem to try to get as far back as you can. Why is that, deacon?” And, the preacher said, “Don’t you know that saying, ‘Amen’ to a preacher is like saying, ‘Sic em’ to a bulldog?” He said, “Pastor, it’s hard to say, ‘Sic em’ to a bulldog when he has you by the seat of the trousers.”

Now, folks, David sinned against God and his conscience was wounded and he tried to run from God and he tried to get away from God. I imagine that David, after he committed adultery and murder, if they'd had telephones in that day, every time the phone rang he'd have jumped that high. He'd see two people over here whispering, he's wondering, "Are they talking about me?" You see, folks when you're right with God there's no unconfessed sin. When you're right with your fellow man, nothing that you've not made right, then criticism, criticism doesn't bother you.

Now, you have to have a good conscience. There's all kinds of conscience. Let me show you what the Bible has to say about conscience. Let's just put a little parenthesis in here, study conscience for a moment. Did you know that the Bible says you can have a defiled conscience? Titus chapter 1 and verse 15: *"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled"* (Titus 1:15). Now, that's the reason that you can't let conscience always be your guide because your conscience is like a thermostat—it can be set to operate anywhere. You know, it's like a sundial. You can look at a sundial with a flashlight and make it register any time at all. And, if your conscience is defiled, then you can't let your conscience be your guide. Somebody said, "Well, my conscience doesn't bother me." Well, that doesn't mean what you're doing is right, it just simply may mean that your "conscience is defiled"—you've set it at the wrong standard (Titus 1:15).

Now, not only can you have a defiled conscience, you can have what the Bible calls a seared conscience. 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 2, the Bible speaks there of some *"having their conscience seared with a hot iron"* (1 Timothy 4:2). It's like you take that branding iron, and you put it down on that quivering flesh, and it burns that mark on that flesh of that animal. That animal is seared, he's branded with a hot iron, there's no feeling there at all. You can take that brand mark and put a pin in, a needle in it, he won't feel a thing because the nerve endings have been burned out.

Now, you can do the same thing with your conscience. You can so sin against your conscience that your conscience, it burns out and it doesn't operate. The Indians used to say that, "Conscience is like an arrowhead within every man's breast. When you do bad, the arrowhead revolves around and the sharp corners hurt you." "But," the Indian said, "If you do bad long enough, the sharp corners wear off and you don't feel it any more."

When I was a kid I read a story about an old prospector who had a watchdog. In the middle of the night the dog growled and barked and the old prospector told the animal to be quiet and went back to sleep. And, the old dog growled and barked again and the prospector cursed him. The third time the animal barked the old prospector got up and shot his dog and went back to sleep, only to be murdered in the night by the intruder that the dog was trying to warn him of.

And, so many people actually crucify their conscience, so many people kick their conscience to death. It's what the Bible calls a seared conscience. You see, you may have a warped conscience. The Bible calls that "a defiled conscience" (Titus 1:15). Or, you may have a deadened conscience. The Bible calls that a seared conscience. Or, you may have I suppose the worst kind of a conscience is what the Bible calls an evil conscience. In Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 22 the Bible speaks of "...an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22).

Do you know what *an evil conscience* is? *An evil conscience* is a conscience that literally approves evil. I mean, do you know that some people are so warped and so twisted that they actually call good bad and bad good? Isaiah chapter 5 and verse 20: "*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*" (Isaiah 5:20). People can get so warped, so distorted that they don't know the difference between right and wrong and they actually think that wrong is right and right is wrong. "Woe unto them that call evil good" (Isaiah 5:20). That is "an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22).

I was listening to the radio this morning as I was shaving and I was listening to a news magazine report. And, they were talking about what the scientists and what the researchers want to do with the tissue of aborted babies. They want to take the tissue of aborted babies and use it in research. They want to use the tissue of these babies in the laboratory, even to the degree that some are thinking about having babies, aborting them, and selling that tissue for research. And, then a very learned man with many degrees came on and said why he thought that was a good idea and I thought of our verse, "Woe unto them, woe unto them that put good for evil and evil for good" (Isaiah 5:20).

Do you think it would be all right for me to take this man's life and experiment on him and take his life and just butcher him up? Some people who think it's all right to butcher babies. "Woe unto them, woe unto them that put good for evil and evil for good" (Isaiah 5:20). And, people today will play enough tricks on their mind and get so far away from that which is right and that which is wrong that they literally approve evil with a good conscience or with seemingly a good conscience.

But, I want to tell you something, folks. You may have "a defiled conscience," you may have a seared conscience, you may have an evil conscience, and if you have any of those, you'll not be able to cope with criticism—not in the Bible way (Titus 1:15). But, the Apostle Paul said that day, "I stand here with a good conscience" (Acts 23:1). When you have that, when you know that your life is void of offense toward God and void of offense toward man, then you can cope with criticism and you can have peace in persecution, not only peace, you can have joy. So step number one, if you would learn how to cope with criticism, if you would learn how to stand in these days, you must have

a righteous life, a righteous life. A righteous life.

## II. A Resurrected Lord

Number two, the second thing that enabled Paul to stand as he did that day was not only a righteous life, but a resurrected Lord. Look if you will here in verse 6. Paul, *“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question”* (Acts 23:6). Now, Paul knew something. He knew that it wasn’t really Paul that they were upset with. It wasn’t he himself that they were aiming their barbs at, it was his Lord. He said, “I know why I’m here, I am suffering this criticism, I am enduring this persecution because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead. I have been preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

### A. A Truth That Disturbs

Now, folks, let me tell you something about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is a disturbing truth. It is a truth that disturbs. I mean, you think about it, just think about it. If that is true, and it is, I’m not saying, “if” with a doubt in my mind. If that is true, that a man walked out of his grave, rose from the dead, you’ve got to deal with that, right? I mean, if that is true, that Jesus Christ literally came out of that grave. If that is true, and it is, then that’s a disturbing truth.

I mean, you just can’t be neutral about that. I have to agree with the person that said, “If Jesus Christ is still in that grave, nothing really matters. But, if Jesus Christ came out of that grave, nothing but that really matters.” Now, you think about it. That is a disturbing truth. You can’t just say, “Well, maybe he did, maybe he didn’t, makes no difference to me.” I mean, if you’re a thinking person, you’re going to have to face the fact of the resurrection—either it is true or it is not true. It is a disturbing truth.

### B. A Truth That Divides

And, not only is it a disturbing truth, it is a divisive truth. It is a truth not only that disturbs, it is a truth that divides. Look if you will in verse 7: *“And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both”* (Acts 23:7–8). So, you have here a classic confrontation. You had the Sadducees who didn’t believe in demons or angels, didn’t believe in a resurrection. And, then you have the Pharisees who believed in demons, and angels, and the resurrection.

So what you have is the fundamentalists and the liberals. They had gotten together, that’s right, that’s what you have right here, and in this case neither one of them knew

Jesus. The only thing that got them together, they'd all gotten together in a "Stop Paul" movement. You ever heard the saying that, "Politics makes strange bedfellows"? All right, here's some strange bedfellows now. The Sadducees and the Pharisees who wouldn't give one another the time of day have gotten together now to stop Paul. And, so Paul just kind of throws a bombshell in their lap. He says, "I'm here because of the hope of the resurrection." Now, at that moment there arose a great division because there were some who did believe in the resurrection though they didn't believe in Jesus, they didn't believe He was the Messiah. Others who didn't believe in the resurrection at all, and the idea of the resurrection caused division.

I'm trying to tell you this, folks, that when you preach the resurrection of Jesus Christ, really preach it, it's a disturbing truth, it is a dividing truth. A truth that disturbs, a truth that divides. There was a dissention there.

Now, you see, look, two things that oppose each other can't both be right. The ecumenicists have never seen this. They all believe that we ought to just kind of homogenize all the world's religions and everything will be all right. And, they say, "Well, you know, after all that's the way we're gonna have peace." You know what Jesus said in the book of Matthew? He said, "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth...but a sword*" (Matthew 10:34). "I didn't come just to blend everything together, I came to separate right from wrong, light from dark, sheep from goats, truth from error. I'm not just trying to blend it all together.

Hey, look, folks either He came out of that grave or He didn't. Now, which side are you on? You can't just ball it all up and say, "It doesn't really make any difference." Let's just put our arms around everybody and say, "It's all hunky dory, we all believe the same thing." No, no, no. When you take a stand for truth you're going to have a head-on collision with error. Always. It's okay. That's why you get criticism.

### **C. A Truth That Delivers**

But, now wait a minute. It is a truth also that delivers. You see, it was a truth that disturbed them, it was a truth that divided them, but it was also a truth that delivered the Apostle Paul. You see, he said, "Look, for the hope of the resurrection of the dead I stand here." Now, Paul knew the same thing that was causing him persecution was the same thing that was giving him peace. Paul said, "You know, you can do what you want." As a matter of fact, a little later down in this chapter there were some people made a vow they were not going to eat or drink or sleep until they'd killed Paul. Paul says, "That's okay, there's the hope of the resurrection."

You see, when a man gets persecuted, when a man gets criticized, if he can see through that empty grave to being one with the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christ has conquered the grave, then that helps him to stand. Now, if you don't have that kind of a hope, you're going to cave in. It's a truth that delivers. I'm gonna tell you something.

You are not ready to live until you're ready to die. When a man is no longer afraid to die, strangely, for the first time in his life he is ready to live. When a man is no longer afraid to die, strangely, for the first time in his life he is ready to live.

And, here the Apostle Paul says, "Hey, okay, I've got all you folks coming against me, but I'll tell you what I've got, I've got a resurrected Lord." "For the hope of the resurrection of the dead I stand here." Have you got that? Have you got that? Do you have that bedrock assurance? You see, Paul was morally clean and theologically clear. He had a righteous life and he had a resurrected Lord. And, because of this, they were coming at him, they were coming at him, but they didn't move him, they didn't blow him away. He stood and looked them right in the ace. He had something that enabled him to stand against criticism and to have peace in persecution.

### III. A Reassuring Lift

I'll tell you a third thing he had. Not only a righteous life, not only a resurrected Lord, but God gave him a reassuring lift. I want you to look if you will in verse 11 of this same chapter here. "*And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*" (Acts 23:11). Boy I really like that, I really like that. You know what the Lord did to His man who was being persecuted, to His man who was being criticized, castigated, and condemned? Boy, He just came and put His arm around the shoulder of Paul. I don't know whether this was a literal appearance of the Lord, or a vision, or just the Lord came to him just in his inner person, but the point is that Jesus is never more real to you when you stand for Him, when you suffer for Him.

You say, "He's not near to me." Well, friend, stand for Him. Stand for Him and you'll know what the Bible calls "*...the fellowship of his sufferings...*" (Philippians 3:10). The koinonia of His suffering. The Lord says, "Hey, you suffered for me, then I'm going to come near to you. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego got in that fiery furnace, Jesus jumped right in there with them and the Lord just comes alongside of His servant. Hey, folks, when Jesus is there—I mean, when he's really there—then you can cope with criticism and He will be there if you've got these other two things. I mean, dear friend, if you're morally clean and theologically pure, you're going to be spiritually close. I mean, here's the Lord. The Lord is just there by him speaking to him. I don't know where his other friends were. Paul is by himself here, but not by himself because Jesus is there. Just when I need Him, Jesus is near.

And, what does Jesus do?

#### A. A Word of Courage

First of all, Jesus gives him a word of courage. He says, "Be of good cheer" (Acts 23:11). The word *cheer* means actually "courage." "Paul, don't be afraid." And, our Lord

gave him stamina, our Lord gave him strength, our Lord gave him might in the inner man. It's not that Paul was so great, it's that Jesus was so great. Jesus had said to Paul, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." And, the Lord was there with him and the Lord will be there with you. He'll even tell you what to say. He says in His Word, "Don't worry what you're gonna say, it will be given you in that hour what to say. God will give you the tongue of the learned."

### **B. A Word of Commendation**

He spoke a word of courage and a word of commendation. He says, "Paul, you've testified of Me in Jerusalem. Thank you, Paul." You now, the Lord knew what Paul had done. Now, Paul was in trouble. I'm so glad that God is the judge and not men. Do you know, if men had been the judge, they'd say, "What's wrong with that preacher anyway? Why can't he stay out of trouble?" And, everywhere Paul went there was either a revival or a riot, sometimes both. And, some people would've criticized him for getting into trouble. They'd say, "Evidently he's never read Dale Carnegie. Why can't this guy stay out of trouble?"

## **Conclusion**

I had a pulpit committee come to me one time. They said, "You know, we need a pastor for our church, can you help us?" I said, "I know just the guy you need. He is a fantastic preacher, boy, just tremendous." Well, boy, I had their attention. And, I said, "A theologian, man, this guy, he is, I suppose, the world's greatest theologian. Has a great missionary zeal, evangelistic spirit." Boy, I really had their attention. They were getting out their pens to write his name and address down, but I said, "He's got health problems, he's often sick, and he's kind of old." Well, eyebrows went up a little bit.

I said, "Another problem with him, he's been in jail several times." They began to shake their head. He's been in some street demonstrations and some riots. Boy, they were really shaking their heads now, they don't want him, you know. They said, "Well, we don't know whether he's the man we want or not." I said, "Well, don't worry, you couldn't get him, he's already in Heaven. His name is Paul the Apostle." Amen?

Did you know the average pulpit committee would not want Paul the Apostle as their pastor? He wouldn't be suave enough, he wouldn't be, well met, hail-fellow type of guy, backslapping type of a guy. Hey, folks, you show me the guy who can rub shoulders with the people of this world and not rub any salt in their wounds. No offense, no effect. No offense, no effect.

"Paul, you testified of Me in Jerusalem. Thank you, Paul, thank you, Paul." See, there was a word of courage, "Be of good cheer" (Acts 23:11). There was a word of commendation, and friend, there was a word of confidence, "And, you must bear

witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). What’s God saying? “Paul, they can’t stop you, their little old criticism can’t stop you. You’re My man. You’re going to Rome. Philippians 1 verse 6: “...*he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6).

Paul didn’t know this song, but I think if he’d known it he’d have been able to sing, “Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. His grace hath led me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.” Now, folks, listen just as surely as you’re looking at me standing here right now, just as surely as you hear my voice, just as surely as there is a God in Heaven, in this day and in this age, if you live in modern society a godly, Christ-honoring, Spirit-filled life, persecution, and criticism is going to come your way. “All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

And, may God help you at that time to have a conscience, a void of offense toward God and man, a good conscience. May God help you at that time to have a bulldog grip on the truth that Jesus Christ is the Lord who walked out of that grave, resurrected. And, may God give you a sense of the presence of the Lord Jesus who will come alongside you and say, “Thank you,” and put His arm around you and say, “I appreciate your faithfulness to Me.” When that happens, hmm, you’ll not only be able to cope with criticism, friend, you’ll rejoice in it. Not that you go around baiting people with a Messiah complex. You just live right, it’ll come. And, God will help you and you’ll be victorious all the way.

# The Danger of Delay

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: October 2, 1994**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 24:24–27**

*“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”*

ACTS 24:25

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sermon of Paul
    - A. He Reasoned with Him of Righteousness
    - B. He Reasoned with Him of Self-Control
    - C. He Reasoned with Him of Judgment to Come
  - II. The Counterattack of Satan
    - A. The World
    - B. The Flesh
    - C. The Devil
  - III. The Miscalculation of Felix
- Conclusion

## Introduction

Find the book of Acts, comes right after the Gospels—and turn to chapter twenty-four. Today, I want to talk to you about procrastination. The title of the message, “The Danger of Delay.”

I want to ask you a question. Do you have difficulty with procrastination? Do you put things off until a better time when it's more opportune? Or do you just say, well, tomorrow I'm going to do something about procrastination. Do you procrastinate?

I think that if there's a message that I need to learn in my daily life, it is to do today what I think if there's a message that I need to learn in my daily life, it is to do today what I ought to do today and not wait until tomorrow.

Now, I'm going to be preaching today about salvation. And, I hope and I pray and am praying that God would use this message to speak to some who are in this very building who are lost and the heart's desire, the prayer that I have is today they will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Today. I mean today in this hour, in this service, that they will step from death to life, from judgment to salvation, from condemnation to

regeneration, that they will receive Jesus Christ today, now, this hour in this service. Now, not everyone who is listening to me is a born-again child of God. Those of you who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ can be put in one of three categories.

First of all, there will be the out-and-out sinner. Now, why you may be in a church service, I don't know. Why you may be listening on television, I don't know, but maybe you're just a sinner. You're a sinner and you're proud of it. You shake your fist in the face of God and you say, God, if there be a God, You're not big enough to make you serve You. I don't want your gospel. I don't want the Savior. I don't want to be saved. I stand against all that that man is preaching. I don't want it. It is not for me.

Now, there none like that here today I hope unless you've come to ridicule, and if you have, may God have mercy upon your soul. That's the out-and-out sinner, and there are some, I've met them. They're everywhere. They hate Christ, they hate God, they hate the revival, they hate pastors, they hate evangelists. They're out and out one hundred percent against God. Yes, they're going to die. They're going to stand before God in the judgment.

But there's another category of persons that may hear me today and God to hell. These are not out and out sinners, but to the contrary, these are people who are very nice people, good people, good citizens, kind, good mother, good fathers, in human relationships they're good people. I mean by their own measurements, they're good people. They don't think that they need to be saved. They think that the gospel is for the thief. They think the gospel is for the Harlot. They think that the gospel is for the drunkard. They think that the gospel is for the murderer, the rapist, or whatever, but they don't think the gospel is for them. Most of the people in America are egomaniacs, strutting to hell, thinking they're too good to be damned. And, there are a lot of people like that—these people—not out-and-out sinners. These are people who just simply think they do not need to be saved. And, there's some like that who will hear me today.

But there's a third category. These are the ones that I'm speaking to today primarily. Not, the out and out sinner and not the self-righteous person. I'm talking to the person today who knows he is a sinner, who knows that he is lost, who knows that he needs to be saved and in his heart believes that Jesus Christ is the Savior and he intends to be saved, but he procrastinates. He puts it off. He says, I will do it, but not this Sunday, not this hour, not this service. Someday, tomorrow, I will give my heart to Jesus Christ. And, in my estimation, more people go to hell because of that than any other thing. The sin of procrastination has blasted more dreams, blighted more lives and wrecked more hopes, damned more souls than any other sin. Now, the scripture that I have to read to you today begins in verse twenty-four. It's the story of an episode in the life of the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul was in trouble for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I've told you many times that Jesus Christ did not come to get us out of trouble. He came to

get into trouble with us. And the apostle Paul is in trouble. He's in trouble for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and now, he is haled before a magistrate, a judge whose name is Felix. Now, Felix is a very important person and he is filled with a sense of his own self-importance, but he had a curiosity about spiritual things as you do or else you would not be here. You'd not be listening to this message by whatever means you're listening to it.

Now here's the apostle Paul, and he's standing before Felix, and I take up the story now in verse twenty-four. "And, after certain days when Felix came with his wife Drusilla who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ."

Now, the subject therefore is the faith that's in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he—that is, Paul—reasoned of righteousness, temperance—that literally means self-control—and judgment to come. Felix trembled—that is, he was under deep conviction—"and answered, go thy way for this time and when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." That is, he simply procrastinated. He delayed. He was under conviction, but he said to Paul, not now. Go thy way for this time and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. "He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul that he might loose him," that is, he wanted a bribe to set Paul free, "whereof he sent for him the oftener and communed with him."

But now notice verse twenty-seven, "but after two years, Portius Festus came to Felix' house, into his place, into his room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a favor, that is a pleasure, they left Paul bound."

Now, here's the apostle Paul. He's standing before this man. Paul is in prison and Felix is the judge. Felix hears the apostle Paul preach a message. He's brought to the very threshold of salvation, but if I understand the import of the text that I just read to you, Felix in this moment is in hell. I mean, this very moment he's in hell, and he's been there for two millennia, because he came to the threshold of salvation, because he heard a message like the message I'm going to preach to you today, and he procrastinated, he delayed, he denuded; he put off giving his heart to Jesus Christ. And the prayer of my heart, the deep concern of my heart—O God, help me to say it—is that those who are listening to me right now who do not have the absolute assurance of your salvation, who do not know that you know that you that you know that if you died today you'd go to heaven, that you will no longer delay, that you will give your heart to Jesus Christ, and that you will hear the Word of God that says, "Behold now is the day of salvation." Today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your heart.

Now the scripture that I've read to you breaks itself into three distinct categories.

## **I. The Sermon of Paul**

First of all, there was a sermon that was preached to this man and I want you to hear

the sermon that the apostle Paul preached to him. And by the way, had you and I been there we might have tried to coach Paul. We might have said, Now Paul, be very careful what you say to this man. This is your chance, Paul; he can set you free. Paul, remember he's the judge. Remember, Paul, you are in the prisoner's dock. Paul, if I were you I would flatter this man a little bit. Paul, tone down your message, be careful. I mean, after all Paul you're a scholar, you're a world traveler. Tell him about your world travels. Give him a little bit about your philosophy of life. Tickle his ears, Paul. After all Paul, he can set you free. But I tell you, Paul was not into user-friendly evangelism at this point. I want you to see what the apostle Paul had to say to him. I want you to see what Paul was talking about in verse 24. He was talking about the faith in Christ. Verse 25, he had, like a good Baptist preacher, a three-point message. I want you to see what it was. "And he reasoned"—he reasoned; that is, it was not just flattery. There was a thought out reasoning in his message. "And he reasoned"—point number one—"of righteousness"—point number two—"of temperance"—that is, self-control—and point number three—"judgment to come." Now, here is the judge on the throne, but here is the apostle Paul who is talking to the judge about judgment. Not judgment here and now, but judgment that is to come. I want you to look, and I want you to listen, and I want you to weigh what the apostle Paul said to Felix so long ago. Because what the apostle Paul said to Felix so long ago is what God is saying to you now through the stammering tongue of a man named Adrian. I want you to listen.

#### **A. He Reasoned with Him of Righteousness**

First of all, he reasoned with this man of righteousness—of righteousness. Now, here was a man who was stuffed full of himself. He was full of self-righteousness. Incidentally, if you'll just go back to the beginning of this chapter and see there was another man who was there who also, who was the prosecuting attorney as it was, he was an orator. And he had also talked to Felix, and he had buttered Felix up. He bragged on Felix; he had told Felix what a wonderful man he was. Look, if you will, in chapter 24, verse 1: "And, after five days, Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul." That is, he's the prosecuting attorney. He's saying, Felix, I'm going to tell you who this man Paul is. But now notice, before he even begins to talk about Paul, he begins to brag of Felix: "And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him"—that is, Paul—"saying—to Felix—Seeing by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy provision"—by the wonderful things that you've done, most excellent Felix. And so, he says, "We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." Do you see what this rascal is doing? Do you see how he's just stroking old Felix? He's just saying, man, you're the most wonderful thing since sliced bread. You're just so wonderful, and you're so kind, and

you've been such a good ruler, and you've been such a good judge. And old Felix is sitting there; he's really liking it. But now, the apostle Paul comes. The apostle Paul, who's on trial, and Paul speaks to him about righteousness—true righteousness—and what Paul is going to do is to show this man the worthiness of self-righteousness. Now, remember what I've said to you a few moments ago, that most of the people in America are egomaniacs strutting to hell, thinking they're too good to be damned. I've said it many times, and I want to say it again: the worst form of badness is human goodness when human goodness becomes a substitute for the new birth. So many people never see their need for the gospel. And some who are listening to me today may never dream that you need to be saved.

I want to give you some scriptures, and I want you to jot them down. Proverbs 21:2: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the heart." You look at what you do, but God looks at what you are. You may say, I live a good life, but God looks on your heart. Listen to this—Proverbs 20:6: "Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find?"—that is, an honest man. I hear people say, well, I'm just as good as those folks down there at your church. I'm looking for a man honest enough to say, I'm just as bad as those folks down there at your church. Friend, we are a society of sinners who finally realized it, and have come together to do something about it. The church is not a museum for good people. It's a hospital for bad people. It's a place to come and meet the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this verse, if you're a self-righteous person—Isaiah chapter 64 and verse 6: "But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousness are as filthy rags." And do you know what that word filthy rags literally means? The bandage that was on the putrefying sore of the leper, that is what God thinks not of your badness; that's what God thinks of your goodness. That's what God thinks of your righteousness. Listen to it again: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and our righteousness are as filthy rags, and we do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away." Now, what Paul is saying to this man when he talked to him about righteousness is this: Felix, in men's eyes you may have done many noble things, many good deeds, but in the sight of a righteous and holy God, all of your good deeds are like filthy rags. Felix, Almighty God demands perfection, and I don't have it, Felix, and you don't have it. There are about 5 ½ billion people, I believe, on the face of the earth today, almost 6 billion. If you were to line them all up, pass by each one of them, and extract from each one of them the very best qualities in that individual until you have extracted from 5 ½ billion people the very best quality from each one, and if you were to take all of those qualities and combine them into one individual, that one individual would have to bow at Jesus Christ in order to be saved. There is no good in human nature. We need to get this down. And so, Paul is talking to him about righteousness. And, I know what Paul told him. You say, Adrian,

how do you know what Paul told him? You don't have the sermon. I have what Paul preached in other places about righteousness. Do you know where righteousness comes from? And God demands righteousness. Righteousness comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this scripture—2 Corinthians 5:21—listen to it: “For he hath made him”—talking about Jesus—“He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin”—Jesus knew no sin—“but He made Him to become sin”—that is, He took our sin upon him—“that we might be made”—listen—“the righteousness of God in Him.” Do you know, when God looks at me right now, He does not see my filth, my sin? He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He looks upon me as He looks upon His own dear Son. That's what Paul told Felix about righteousness. He said, Felix, your only hope is the imputed righteousness that is given you in the Lord Jesus Christ, and Felix, the only way that righteousness can be imputed to you is for you to put your faith in Christ.

Look at it again. Look, if you will, in verse 24: “And he heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” Now, listen to this verse—Romans 4, verse 5: “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” You're not saved by joining a church. You're not saved by getting baptized. You're not saved by giving your money. You're not saved by obeying the Ten Commandments. You're not saved by keeping the Golden Rule, and living by the Beatitudes, and the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible says you are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to it again—Romans 4, verse 5: “But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly. His faith is counted for righteousness.” Now, that's the first thing that Paul preached to this man about righteousness. That's the first thing that I want to say to you, and to every mother's child who hears me: You are a sinner—a sinner by birth, a sinner by nature, a sinner by choice, and a sinner by practice. There's no good in any of us. In our flesh dwells no good thing. And we need to understand that God is absolutely perfect. God demands absolute righteousness. And the only righteousness, therefore, that you can have is the imputed righteousness that is given to you when you turn from your own self-effort, and by faith embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. That was point one in Paul's sermon: righteousness.

#### **B. He Reasoned with Him of Self-Control**

Then, the other point in his sermon—in order to show this man that he needed this righteousness, he talked to him about temperance, about self-control, and he showed this man that he was out of control. Here was a man who was a slave to sin. Look, if you will, in verse 24: “And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla”—let's just stop right there. Who was Drusilla? Drusilla was one of the three daughters of King Herod—King Herod Agrippa. Historians tell us that she was one of the greatest beauties in the entire world. She was married when she was about 14 or 15 years of age. But Felix was not her lawful husband. He took her, evidently, because of her great

beauty, and because of his power, and maybe even for political liaison. He took this woman that was unlawful for him to have, and began to live with her a life of sin. He was out of control morally. He was out of control professionally. He was a judge. We have some judges who are members of this congregation. I want to ask you, how does this sound to you? The Bible says, in verse 26, “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.” Do you know what that means? He was looking for a bribe. Now, no judge says, you give me some money, and I will set you free—not an honest judge. This man was a rascal. This man was a dishonest judge. He was out of control in his family life, his personal life, his moral life, his professional life. Here was a man that was a slave to sin. His hands were filthy with the sins of the flesh. And Paul begins to talk with him about this. Paul does not back up. Paul shows this man how he’s bound by the chains of sin. Paul was in chains of iron, but Felix in chains of sin. And, I want to say to you, friend, that we are sinners. I want to reiterate it again. Second point of Paul’s message was the righteousness that God demands, and the sinfulness in Felix’s heart.

### **C. He Reasoned with Him of Judgment to Come**

Now here’s the third thing Paul talked to him about: He talked to him about judgment, and judgment to come. At this moment, Felix is living a life of ease. At this moment, Felix is high, wide, and handsome. But Paul reminds him that a judgment day is coming. Felix, you’re judging me, but one day God will judge you. Felix, I’m in your hands now, but one day you will be in God’s hands. You say, what did he preach about judgment? Well, I’ll tell you what he preached in other places. In Romans 14:2, he said, “So then, every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.” Look up here, and listen to what I have to say to you. I pray God He’ll rivet this in your heart. One of these days, beloved, one of these days, friend, you will stand before God. Did that get in? Judgment is not now; judgment is to come. And so many of us think that because we’re living high, wide and handsome like Felix, beautiful wife by his side, a soft cushion to sit on, power, and people saying, Oh, you’re so wonderful. We think that somehow we have it made. That’s the reason the apostle Paul said, in Romans 2, verse 5, speaking to sinners who don’t understand their need: “but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.” That is, you’re just collecting wrath. You’re just simply putting it in the bank. What Paul was saying to this man is that judgment is coming. The pleasures of sin are but for a season, but the wages of sin are for eternity. The pleasures of sin are but for a season; the wages of sin are but for eternity. Now, here was the message, a three-point message. You don’t have to be a theological professor to understand it. Righteousness, temperance and judgment—that’s what Paul preached to this man. And, what effect did it have? It brought him under deep conviction.

Look, if you will, in verse 25: “Felix trembled.” Oh, thank God for that. Thank God for that. He didn’t yawn in the face of the message. The message penetrated his heart. The apostle Paul, anointed with the Holy Spirit, with words set on fire from heaven, with truth like jagged lightning, had struck this man’s heart. Righteousness, temperance, judgment to come. You, sir, will stand before God. This judge trembled like a leaf in a storm. He is under conviction. I wish he had gotten saved. This was his time to be saved. This was his opportunity. Do you know, friend, there are opportunities—there are times—that we dare not let pass? Let me give you a verse of Word—Isaiah chapter 55, verses 6 and 7—listen to it. Do I have your ears? Listen to it: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” Do you know the plain, clear implications of that text? There are times when He may not be found. There are times when He may not be near. That is, do not pass your opportunity. Here was a man who trembled like a leaf in a storm, but he did not give his heart to Jesus Christ. Now, that was the sermon that Paul preached. That’s what Paul did.

## **II. The Counterattack of Satan**

Now, let’s see what Satan did. Because you see, Satan never gives up anybody or anything without a fight and without a struggle. And, I’m well aware of that. And, I know that there are those who are listening to me, and I know there are precious people who are listening to me by television. But I know that when the preaching comes, the pressure comes—not only pressure by the Holy Spirit, but pressure by the devil. And now the devil begins to assemble and marshal all of the artillery of hell against this man to keep this man from being saved. And he brings three mighty weapons against this man to keep him from being saved. What are the three weapons? The world, the flesh, and the devil.

### **A. The World**

I want you to see that. The world began to war on Felix. I mean, he’s thinking about the bribe. He’s thinking about what others will think of him. He wants to be well thought of by the Jewish nation. He wants to do them a favor. And so, he’s beginning to think about what others think. He has prominence. He has power. He has prestige. How hard it would be for him to lay his pride in the dust and admit his need. I mean, after all, he is most noble Felix. The orator has already told him how wonderful he was. Do you know what will keep some of you today from giving your heart to Jesus Christ? I hate to say this, but it is your rotten pride. You don’t want anybody to know that you need the Lord. You don’t want to go down there and admit that you need to be saved. I mean that you can’t save yourself, that you’re not good enough. And, the world says, don’t do that. Why, you’re fine. You’re noble. Everybody in this community knows what a fine person you are.

## B. The Flesh

But not only did the world come against this man; the flesh came against him. Remember this, he's living with a sensuous woman. He has an easy lifestyle. He has a soft job, and bribes are coming to him, evidently, from every hand. And the devil will say to you, don't go down there and give your to Jesus Christ. Why, you'll have to give up stuff. Pastor, if I give my heart to Jesus Christ, there are some things I'll have to give up. Yes. Now, you come up here and listen to me. The only thing He'll ever ask you to give up is that which will hurt you. "The Lord thy God is a sun and a shield and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Every time God says, Thou shalt not, God says, don't hurt yourself. And every time God says, Thou shalt, God says, help yourself to happiness. And if it will make you healthy, happy, wholesome, holy, God says, I love you, my child. God is not a vengeful God up there, making rules and laws to make you squirm like a worm in hot ashes trying to keep them. God loves you. God doesn't need anything—He's God. His commandments are not grievous.

## C. The Devil

The devil wants you to think negatively about God. And so, the world wars against him. The flesh wars against him. And then, Satan himself begins to speak to this man. You say, where does Satan speak to him? Because Satan now puts an idea into his head. Look, if you will, in verse 25—Satan said, tell him this: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Where did that idea come from? It was born in hell. I need to be saved. Yes, Paul, what you say is true, so true that I tremble; but, Paul, I will not do it today.

Someone has imagined a convocation of demons meeting in the underworld. These demonic forces are there with Satan, their commander-in-chief. They're trying to get strategies to curse the world, to populate hell, to damn humankind. And they're having a strategy meeting in the underworld. One demon said, I have a plan. Let's go up and down the land and tell people, there is no God. The demons were not impressed with that plan, and one of them said, that sounds good, but only a fool can say there's no God. I mean, look at everything. We know that out of nothing, nothing comes. I mean, it's very obvious that there's a God. I mean, anybody except a fool knows there's a God. Well, another said, Well, let's just tell people that the Bible is not true. Well, there was a little applause for that, but someone said, but wait a minute. The Bible is so self-authenticating, there's such power in the Word of God and the fulfilled prophecy, and the wonderful unity, and the ever-living qualities of the Bible, the Bible, it just keeps on surviving. No matter what we do, it just keeps on keeping on and keeping on, and preachers still preach it. It has power. That's not the best strategy. Another says, I know what we'll do. Let's tell them that Jesus Christ was a good man, but let's just get them to believe in Him as one of the world's great religious leaders, but not the one and only Savior of the world. Some said,

that will get a lot of folks. But that's not the best plan, because, I mean, how can you explain Jesus Christ? How can you explain the resurrection? He's shown to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Another, who was the most nefarious demon of them all, one of the master minds in the underworld, stood up. They all got quiet and turned their attention to him. He said, I have a plan. He said, let's tell them there is a God. They'll like that. And, he said, let's tell them that the Bible is the Word of God. That will give them sort of a confidence. And, he said, let's also tell them that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. They were all shaking their heads saying, No, we wanted... Oh, he said, now wait a minute. Hear me out. Let's tell them there's a God. Let's tell them that the Bible is the Word of God. Let's tell them that Jesus is the Savior. But then, let's just tell them they have plenty of time. They thought for a while, and began to applaud. They said, hey, that is a good plan. That is a good plan. We will damn more souls with that plan than any other way. And so, Satan whispers into Felix's ear: Felix, what he says about righteousness, judgment, temperance is true. You need to think about it a little bit, Felix. Just tell him to go his way. Tell him that when you have a more convenient season, you'll call upon him.

### **III. The Miscalculation of Felix**

Now, I want you to see what happens. Look, if you will, in verses 25 and following: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. And he hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him." He still is listening, but something happens. Notice in verse 27: "But..."—I have that circled in my Bible—"But after two years, Portius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a favor, left Paul bound." When God puts that contradistinction "but" there, he's saying there was no change in this man's life. This man who had come under conviction had gone two years and had not yet given his heart to Christ. History tells us that Felix committed suicide. He went to Italy. He looked into a beautiful lake, and saw his reflection there, and then plunged into that lake to drown. What happened to Felix was this: he had a terrible miscalculation. He believed the devil's lie that a more convenient season would come. Listen to God's Word, and never tell me that you've not heard it—because you will hear it today. Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 15, God warns, God says to everyone, "Today, if you will hear God's voice, harden not your heart." Proverbs chapter 27 and verse 1, God's Word says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Why should you give your heart to Jesus Christ today? Why? Why should you now give your heart to Jesus Christ? Hear me. Because, if you don't, you will lose today. Even if you could be saved later, you'd lose

today. People say, get right with God; you may die. Friend, get right with God, you may live—to have Jesus, to know the joy and the peace and the power and the purpose of knowing Jesus Christ today.

Tell you something else: you ought not to presume upon tomorrow, because you may not live to tomorrow. One of the sports figures that I've admired the most and had the privilege to know somewhat personally was Pete Maravich. Pete Maravich, he was an incredible basketball player. I mean, All-Pro and everything. The moves that they do today, they learned from Pete Maravich. Pete Maravich's daddy was a basketball coach. He made Pete practice. Pete slept with a basketball, carried a basketball to school, dribbled it on the way to school. After a while, his dad put him in the car and made him lean out the window and dribble the ball while his dad would drive the car. The guy was magic with a basketball, but basketball didn't satisfy Pete Maravich, and he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. And he told me, Adrian, all of the rest of that stuff was a mouthful of ashes. He said, I tell you, I'd never found satisfaction. I tried everything. I did not find satisfaction, till I found it in Jesus. Pete Maravich was 40 years of age. He was playing basketball with James Dobson and some other people out on the basketball court. And they were fooling around, and shooting baskets, and playing a little basketball. And James Dobson said, How do you feel Pete? Pete Maravich said, I never felt better in my life. And James turned around and looked, and he was there on his face the next moment on the floor, lying on his face. He said, I thought he was fooling around. But he was dead. I never felt better in my life. Dead.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, you know, Preacher Rogers, I've got plenty of time to get right with God. Well, you might—you might. But God says, what is your life that but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away? Don't tell me that you have tomorrow. You don't know. And you don't know when Jesus is coming. Listen to Matthew 24, verse 42: "Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord will come." And you don't know that when tomorrow comes, if tomorrow comes, that the Holy Spirit conviction will still be there. Remember Hebrews chapter 3, verse 7: "Today, if you will hear God's voice, harden not your heart." Friend, every time that you say no to Jesus Christ, your heart gets harder. Anything that people do for a long time, they get proficient at it. If you play more tennis, you get better at tennis. Presumably, if you play more golf, you get better at golf—although there are people who would argue with that. But whatever you do, whatever you do, the more you do it, the more proficient you get. And did you know that comes with denying the Lord Jesus Christ? Did you know that if you say no to Jesus Christ today your heart will get just a little bit harder? Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your heart. There comes a time when your heart may get so hard, that you'll not understand, you'll not hear. Felix

trembled at first, but he didn't continue to tremble. Sometimes people will come to church, and they'll say, you know, preachers don't preach like they used to when I was a boy. Some of them do. You just don't hear like you used to when you were a boy. Your heart has gotten hard.

## Conclusion

So, what is the message today? The message today is, O precious friend, God loves you. And, if you would come to Jesus today and be saved, you could have the rest of your life, however long it would be, to live for Jesus and to gather rewards in heaven. And then, oh, you don't have to worry about dying in your sleep, dying in an automobile accident, dying of a sudden heart attack. Dorothy stood on the steps of our church at Merritt Island. She was a precious, godly, beautiful lady. I see her right now. I'm standing over here; there's Dorothy. I see the scene. She's standing over here; she looks up at me. She says, Pastor, that was a wonderful message. See you tonight, Pastor. God bless you Dorothy. And then, in a few moments, Dorothy going over the Banana River bridge, met a car on the wrong side of that bridge, and was face to face with Jesus Christ. Pastor, I'll see you tonight. Some of you may intend to be back tonight, but you may not be. What is your life but a vapor that appears for a little while? Never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never put off giving your heart to Jesus. I wouldn't go without Jesus 24 hours for a billion dollars. You say, I'm not lying. There's a God in heaven who knows what I'm saying, I mean every word. I mean every word. I would not for one billion dollars go without Jesus Christ 24 hours. Number one, I wouldn't sell him for a billion dollars, and number two, I might die in that 24 hours.

Why would you go without Jesus? God demands righteousness; Christ supplies it. Only through the Lord Jesus can your life be brought into control, and judgment is surely coming.

Father, seal the message to our hearts. And I pray, dear God, that today many will give their hearts to Jesus. And if you're here today, and you're not absolutely sure that you're saved, would you pray a prayer like this? O God, I need righteousness, and that righteousness is found in Jesus. Thank you that Jesus took my sin, that I might take His righteousness. And by faith now I open my heart, and I receive Him, the Lord Jesus, into my heart, as my Lord and Savior. Come into my life, Lord Jesus. Forgive me, cleanse me, and save me. And, Lord, help me to make it public today. In your name I pray. Amen.

# The Problem of Procrastination

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 31, 1988

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 24:24–27

*“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”*

ACTS 24:25

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sermon That Convicted Felix
  - A. The Standard That Paul Revealed
  - B. The Sin That Paul Revealed
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- III. The Postponement That Condemned Felix
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Conclusion

## Introduction

Find in God's Word please Acts chapter 24 and in a few moments we're gonna begin reading in verse 24. If you don't have a Bible with you, most likely there's one there in the pew before you. Take it out and find the book of Acts, chapter 24 and when you've found it, look up here for a moment. I want to ask you a question. Do you have trouble with procrastination? Now, don't look so pious, nod your head. I know I do and, starting tomorrow, I'm gonna do something about it. As a matter of fact, I think all of us are plagued with some form of procrastination, but some of us have a form of procrastination that is actually harming us and doing great damage to us.

Harper's Bazaar gave a little test with five questions to find out whether or not we're procrastinators. We'll find out, we'll ask you these questions. Number one, do you always hand in work at the deadline, or later, but never early? All right, here's one even more convicting. Do you postpone starting a diet until some set time in the future, a time

that keeps changing? Hmm. Three, do you use fatigue or a headache for a reason for not getting things done, “Too tired, don’t feel good.” Three, or four, do you clutter up your daily schedule with little things so that you don’t have time to do the big important thing that you’re trying to avoid? Last, do you delay in seeing a doctor about symptoms because you hope they’ll go away? Well, we laugh about it, I guess we laugh about it because it hurts so much. We laugh about procrastination, but I want to tell you, dear friend, that procrastination is more than the thief of time, it is the grave of opportunity and it may be the road to Hell.

Now, a great many people will listen to me today. I’ll preach this message three times in this sanctuary, it’ll be preached by radio, television, and later on listened to by tape. And, not everybody who listens will be saved. I mean, not everybody who listens to these programs are saved people. We want them to be saved, but even those who are unsaved, many of them will not be saved and for three basic reasons.

Some will not be saved because they’re just out and out sinners. I mean, they don’t believe what I preach, they don’t want to believe it. They hate God, they hate Christ, they hate the Bible, they hate the church, they don’t intend to be saved. Why they listen, I don’t know. I don’t think there are any like that here today. If there are, may God have mercy on you.

But, there are a second category of persons who will hear, not be saved, and these are not out and out sinners, these are self-righteous people. They think the gospel is for the thief, the murderer, the prostitute, the pervert, the down and out, but not them because they’re nice cultured people. They live good lives, they do good deeds, they’re even religious, so therefore they don’t see their need of being saved. And, I suppose there are a great number like that.

But, I believe that the largest categories are the category of persons who are lost, and who will not be saved, who listen to a message like this are those people who are what I would call procrastinators. They do not intend to go to Hell, they sincerely intend that one day they will be saved, but not today. They put it off and refuse to receive Christ now, thinking that they will receive Him later on. I believe that the sin of procrastination has blasted more dreams, and blighted more lives, and wrecked more careers, and damned more souls than perhaps any other sin.

Now, I want to read a Scripture to you that deals with a man who procrastinated, put off giving his heart to Jesus Christ, and in all likelihood is in Hell today. Acts chapter 24 and verse 24: *“And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he—that is Paul—“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”*—And, there’s the postponement, there’s the

procrastination—*“Go thy way for this time. When I have a convenient season I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound”* (Acts 24:24–27).

Now, here’s the setting. Paul is a prisoner of Caesarea and the Roman judge is a man named Felix. And, Felix has some religious proclivities and some inclinations. He wants to understand the faith concerning Jesus Christ. It’s not as though Paul pounced Felix, Felix actually called for Paul. And, he said, “Paul, I want you to tell me about Jesus Christ.” And, Paul did. Paul preached a Christ-centered, pertinent message to this man. The conviction of the Holy Spirit was so strong that Felix trembled like a leaf in a storm. He was right at the threshold of salvation, but then he did something that so many people do. He said, “Now, Paul, go your way for a time. When I have a convenient season, then I’m going to call for you.” That is, “Paul, I know you’re right, I’m under conviction, all of that, but I’m not going to do it now. I’m going to wait for a better time.” What Felix called “...convenient season...” (Acts 24:25). And, so the devil trapped him, and so today he is in Hell.

I want us to look at three things today as we look at this passage of Scripture. We think of the problem with procrastination.

## **I. The Sermon That Convicted Felix**

I want you to see, first of all, as we consider Felix. I want you to see the sermon that convicted him. Now, when Felix called for Paul, he said, “Paul, you tell me about Jesus.” I’ll tell you, you drop a handkerchief and say, “Preach,” and Paul would be on the second point before it hits and ground. And, so here’s what he said. He said, “Now Paul, tell me about Jesus.” And, I want you to see the sermon that Paul preached and it was the sermon that convicted him. Look in verse 25: “And as he reasoned of righteousness”—that was the first point—“temperance”—that was the second point—“and judgment to come...” (Acts 24:25). Felix trembled. That was the sermon that convicted him. Now Paul, like a good Baptist preacher, had three points in a sermon, and it was a sermon, number one concerning righteousness, number two concerning temperance, number three concerning judgment to come.

Now, all you have is the outline, but the Bible says, “Paul reasoned with him about these things.” That is, Paul took each one of these points, and Paul expanded them, and reasoned with this judge about those things. Now, I suppose had you and I been there that day we would’ve said, “Now, now, Paul, you’re before Felix, he can set you free, and you’re in danger if you’re not set free of losing your life. So, Paul, tone it down, flatter him a little bit, stroke him a little bit, don’t point your finger in his face, use all kind

of courtesy, talk to him about your world travels, Paul. And, talk to him about philosophy and if he wants a little money, slip it to him.” But, Paul, be careful. Now, Paul didn’t do that. Paul preached a rip-roaring message to this man, so much that he trembled. You would’ve thought that it was Felix before Paul rather than Paul before Felix. You would’ve thought Paul was a prosecutor and a judge and Felix was the prisoner.

I was reading about a terrible accident that transpired in England, and there was a road that was an unfinished road. Some people traveling that road got into a wreck and were killed. And, the thing got into court and they were arguing the case back and forth in court and the prosecutor was saying, “The road was not properly marked as a dangerous road.” And, the defense was saying, “It was marked and we had a red flag up there warning people.” And, they went to get that flag and produce it for the evidence and when they got the flag, the red flag, it wasn’t a red flag, it was a light pink flag. It had been red, but they’d used it so much that the elements had weathered it and rather than being a red flag of warning, it was pale pink and nobody paid any attention to it. I believe that in many pulpits today there is a pale pink flag that is being waved rather than a red one.

Thank God for the Apostle Paul, who did not hedge his message, he did not trim his message, he preached to this man three things.

#### **A. The Standard That Paul Revealed**

First of all, I want you to see the righteousness that he revealed, the righteousness that he revealed. He said to this judge, “Now, Judge, I know perhaps you think that you’re a good man, but let me tell you the standard that God has set. It is absolute righteousness, and I’m going to tell you something else, Mister Judge. You may think that you’re righteous because you’ve done a few good things.” But, he says to him, and I don’t know that he quoted this Scripture, but I imagine he may well have quoted Isaiah chapter 64, verse 6: “...*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...*” (Isaiah 64:6). And, he says, “Now, now, now, Judge, you’re sitting there, wrapped in your royal robes, you’re sitting there in all of your opulence, but I want you to know that God sees you dressed in filthy rags.” And, the word *filthy rags* literally means “the bandages that a leper might wear and then discards.”

Now, he says, “ Judge, that’s not what God thinks of the bad things you do. That’s what God thinks of the good things you do apart from Christ. Your righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight and you’re never going to be saved by doing good deeds.” And, then he says, “Now, Judge, I want to tell you where righteousness is.” And, I don’t know that he used this statement, but I imagine that he probably did because he quoted it later in the Word of God in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21: “*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin*”—“*that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*” (2 Corinthians 5:21). And, he told this judge that self-righteousness is non-existent

in God's sight. I mean, it does, it prevails not in God's sight. And, then he told this judge how the Lord Jesus Christ took our sins, carried them to the cross, and purchased forgiveness for us.

Then I believe a third thing he told him was this, he surely told him this as he reasoned. That, "Judge, the only way that that righteousness can become yours is by faith." I want to give you another verse from the Apostle Paul that he used in another place. Romans chapter 4 and verse 5, and if that was in his heart, I'm sure he must've told Felix this: "*But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*" (Romans 4:5). Don't you believe Paul told him those things? "Felix, your righteousness is no good. Felix, God has provided righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ who took your sins to the cross, died for you, and, Felix, you're not going to get it by working for it." "...to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

### **B. The Sin That Paul Revealed**

And, so first of all, you see the standard that Paul revealed, which is righteousness, and then secondly you see the sin that Paul revealed. Now, it's very interesting because not only did Paul reason with him about righteousness, but about temperance. And, the word *temperance* here literally means "self-control," "self-control." That's what it literally means. And, if there was ever a man out of control, it was Felix. Felix was a sensual man. For example, the Bible says he was with his wife there Drusilla. Do you know who Drusilla was? Drusilla was one of the most beautiful women who ever lived. She was said to be the most beautiful woman of her day. She was one of the daughters of King Herod Agrippa, that murderous old king. You remember what happened to him in Acts chapter 12, "*...he was eaten of worms...*" (Acts 12:23). Well, this was the daughter of Herod Agrippa. She got married the first time when she was fourteen or fifteen, but Felix had set his eyes upon her, stole her away from her husband, and took her to be his woman.

But, not only that, he was a politician, he was a man who had a fat job, and what buttered his bread determined his conduct. If you will read this story all the way through one more time you're gonna find out that one of the reasons that he talked with Paul—along with wanting to know about salvation—was that he was hoping to get a bribe. He was hoping that Paul would give him some money that he might release him. Now, no judge is supposed to do that. I mean, it's obvious, here was a man who was willing to take a bribe. And, as you study the entire character of this man, later on you see him pandering to the Jews, I mean he crucifies his conscience for public opinion. The Bible says he was "*...willing to content the people...*" (Mark 15:15). Not that he did it according to principle. What I'm trying to say is, as you read this story, as you look at it,

you see here was a man who did not understand temperance.

### C. The Summons That Paul Revealed

Now, what Paul is saying to him, and I want you to follow Paul's logic—Paul would've been a good lawyer—what Paul is saying, "Here is God's standard, it is absolute righteousness. The only righteousness that you can have therefore is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, here's your conduct. You, my dear friend, are out of control. You are a sinner by nature, by birth, by practice, and by choice." And, then the third thing that he said, not only was there the standard that Paul revealed and the sin that Paul revealed, but the summons that Paul revealed. He said, "...righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come..." judgment to come (Acts 24:25). "Now, here's what God demands, here's what you are, and therefore there's a judgment coming. You're going to face God."

Now, you see, that's important for this man to understand this because here he was on the throne—high, wide, and handsome—he has all of this power, he has all of this pomp, he has all of this circumstance, he has all of this luxury, and what Paul is saying to him, "Now, Felix, don't judge by appearance, don't judge by what happens now, judge by what is going to happen." You see, judgment is not now, it is coming. Don't ever get the idea that God judges an unsaved man now. He doesn't. Well, you say, "Don't the unsaved get in trouble because of their sin?" Anybody gets in trouble because of their sin. I mean, if you live a life of promiscuity, you may come up with a terrible debilitating disease. You, take drugs or drink, it's going to take its effect in your body. You jump off a ten-story building, you're gonna hit the ground. But, that is not primarily the judgment of God, that's just a built-in judgment. I mean, every kick has a kickback. That's just a built-in judgment, but the true judgment is coming. "...Judgment to come..." is what Paul said (Acts 24:25).

One of the most terrifying verses I believe in all the Bible is Romans 2 verse 5: "*But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath...*" and of perdition of ungodly men (Romans 2:5). What does that mean? There's a day of wrath coming. There's a day of judgment coming, and people with hard hearts just simply store it up, they treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the righteous judgment of God that is coming. And, so here is the preaching that Paul does. I mean, it's a stern sermon. He reveals a standard, he reveals a sin, he reveals a summons that sin is coming that the judgment is coming. And, so here was a man whose hands were filthy with the sins of the flesh, whose heart was in need of a Savior, and Paul does not back down or let down.

Well, when Paul finishes this sermon, look what happens in verse 25: "...Felix trembled..." (Acts 24:25). Now, why did he tremble? He wasn't afraid of Paul, Paul probably was there in chains. He wasn't afraid of Paul, he was under Holy Spirit

conviction. Thank God that the Holy Spirit of God does that. I would to God we had more trembling today because of our sin and because of the judgment that is to come, because of the righteousness that God demands. "...Felix trembled..." (Acts 24:25). What a wonderful time that would've been for him to have been saved. Wouldn't that have been wonderful if he had said, "Well, now, Paul, right now I want Christ as my personal Savior." You remember in Acts chapter 16, what the Philippian jailer did. The Bible says, "...trembling... and...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:29–31). But, here's what Felix does. He comes right to the threshold of salvation, he is under the conviction of sin, but he says, "Paul, wait a minute, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee'" (Acts 24:25).

## **II. The Pressures That Confronted Felix**

Now, there's a second thing I want you to see. Not only the preaching that convicted him, but I want you to see the pressures that confronted him. The pressures that confronted him. I've told you before from this pulpit that the devil never gives up any body or any thing without a struggle. Now, when the Holy Spirit of God moved into Felix to convict him, the devil moved in to confront him. And, the devil did not want Felix to be saved and so he begins to unleash all of the artillery of Hell and there were three mighty forces that warred against this man's soul. We think of them as the three enemies that all of us face—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

### **A. The World**

Now, you think about it. First of all, worldliness. The world warred on this man. Think of it. Here he is down in Caesarea, he's down there in a place of prominence, a place of power, a place of position, a place of praise. He has it, I mean, he's a big shot. Now, in order for him to get saved he has to humble himself, he has to admit that he's wrong, he has to admit that he needs Christ. Hey, folks, there are a lot of people right here today who get under conviction but the devil says, "Don't go down front and make a fool of yourself. Maintain your pride. I mean, you go down there, well that's like saying you have a need." And, today we're told, don't let anybody know that you have a need. Why, if you go down to the front everybody will say, "I wonder what he's been doing." That's what the devil says to you. And, so pride sits in the seat with every sinner. Now, we call that worldliness and the world worked on him.

### **B. The Flesh**

But, not only did the world work on him, the flesh worked on him. I mean, remember, there's Drusilla, hmm, there's a sensuous life he's living. There are the bribes that he's been getting, there's the soft job that he has, there are all of the pleasures of the flesh that he might be asked to give up. By the way, dear friend, the only thing God will ever

ask you to give up are the things that'll hurt you, that's all, that's all. If it'll make you healthy, happy, wholesome, holy, God says, "Help yourself." *"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11). But, while the world worked on him and pressured him.

#### The Devil

And, then the flesh worked on him and pressured him, but then, dear friend, that's when the devil worked on him and pressured him. You can read between the lines here and you can see how Satan is whispering in his ear and saying to him, "Now, Felix, hey, buddy, cool it, cool it, you're acting emotionally. Just tell Paul that you'll think about it. Just tell him it's not convenient right now to make that decision."

There's an old story, if you've been listening to preaching very long you've heard a preacher tell this story at one time or another because it's an old, old story. It's an imaginary story of a convocation of demons who met to find out the best way to damn the souls of men. They were having a strategy meeting, a planning meeting. One demon stood up and said, "Let's tell people there is no God, and if there's no God they won't need to repent and get saved." Some said, That'll damn some, but that's not the best plan because the evidence for God is overwhelming. The fool says there's no God." Why, it's just obvious that God exists, so he didn't get much applause.

Another demon stood up and said, "Well, let's tell them that while God exists, the Bible is not true, it's a bundle of blunders and a book of lies." Some applauded, but others said, "Well, that'll damn some souls, but you know, inspiration for the Bible is so self-evident. There's the fulfilled prophecy, there's the wonderful unity of the Bible, there's the applicability of the Bible, there's the everlasting qualities of the Bible and all of these things and that's not the best plan. It'll get some, but that's not the best plan."

Another demon stood up and said, "Well, let's tell them that Christ is not the Savior. Let's preach the Christ of good works. Let's just humanize Jesus and make him, rather than a Savior, a model, a leader. Tell people if they'll just be good and try to live a good life like Jesus lived and so forth, they'll be saved." And, some of the demons applauded but others said, "Now wait a minute. Some will buy that, but the Holy Spirit of God convicts people that Christ is the Savior of the world, and people know that they're sinners, and they know that they need a substitute to die for them. When they hear it, it just bears witness."

And, so finally a chief demon, an arch demon stood up. There was silence, a silence of horror in that sulfurous cavern where they met and this chief demon said, "Let me tell you what to do. Admit that God exists, admit that the Bible is the Word of God, admit that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, even admit to people that they need to be saved. But, just tell them not to do it today." And, there was Hellish applause. The

demons said, “That is the best plan of all.”

Now, obviously that’s a fictitious story, none of us have sat in at a convocation of demons and listened to a business meeting, but as you study history and you study the Bible and the warnings of the Bible, you know indeed that souls by the bushels have been sent to Hell because they have simply postponed the day of salvation. Here was pressure, real pressure upon this man and so he simply says, “Paul, not now, later.”

### **III. The Postponement That Condemned Felix**

All right, the third point. First point, the preaching that convicted him. Second point, the pressures that confronted him. All of you are going to feel these things if you’re not saved. Third thing, the postponement that condemned him. The presumption—let me put it that way—that condemned him. Look if you will in verse 27. The Bible says here that “...after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound” (Acts 24:27). What does that tell us? It tells us he never did get saved. He never did get saved. He says, “I’m looking for a convenient time. I’ll hear you again.” But, he never received Christ.

As a matter of fact, history tells us that he died a suicide, he died a suicide. He was down in Italy, and he was looking into a placid lake, a clear lake, and he saw his reflection in that lake, and evidently he began to reflect on his life and the misery that was in his life, and he plunged into that lake and drowned a suicide. You know, that’s so ironic. You know what the name *Felix* means? It means “happy,” happy, but he had no happiness, he had no joy. He continued day after day, week after week, month after month, it turned to years, he never received Christ. But he said, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). And, he made three tragic miscalculations.

#### **A. Mistake #1: Convenience Will Come**

All right, number one, that convenience will come, that convenience will come. He had the idea that now is not the best time that tomorrow is a better time. Tomorrow is not a better time, and now is the best time, and I’ll tell you why, I’ll tell you why. Dear friend, if you wait till tomorrow, you’re gonna lose today. Now, think about it. We tell folks, “Hey, get right with God, you may die. Get right with God, you may die. Get right with God, you may die.” Let me change that. “Get right with God, you may live, you may live, and friend, to live with Jesus.”

Now, I want to tell you, if there were no Heaven—there is—but if there were no Heaven, and if there were no Hell—there is—but if there were no Hell, I mean, if the Bible clearly said, “There is no Heaven to be gained, there is no Hell to be shunned,” I would still want to be a Christian. I mean, if this life is all there is, surely, I’d want Jesus right here, I would. In this life I would want the Lord Jesus Christ. Don’t feel sorry for me

because I'm a Christian. Being a Christian is not some penalty that you pay in order to get to Heaven. I mean, in this life there's joy and peace in knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. You will lose today. I mean, do you think Felix gained so much when he went for the world, the flesh and the devil? It brought him no happiness, it brought him no joy, his life ended in misery.

But my dear friend, listen, tomorrow may not come, tomorrow may not come.

Proverbs chapter 27 verse 1 says: *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"* (Proverbs 27:1).

I'm gonna do something real mean here, Brother Bob, I'm going to ask a question. How many of you in this auditorium are forty or under, let me see your hands, isn't that mean? All right, forty or under. Hey, baby face, you didn't lift your hand, did you? All right, now, forty or under. All right now let me ask you another question, how many of those of you who are forty or under feel real great right now? let me see your hand, come on, be honest, you feel good, good, wonderful. So did Pete Maravich when he died. Pistol Pete Maravich, one of the greatest basketball players that ever lived was playing basketball, an athlete. Do you know what his last words were? "I feel great." Great. I mean, you youngsters out here, you have the idea, "Well, you know I've got plenty of time." No you don't, my dear friend. "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). Here's a man saying, "I feel great!" Thank God he knew Jesus, thank God he knew Jesus, thank God he'd repented of his sin, and stepped over to the other side.

You don't know when you're going to die. Don't have the idea that convenience is going to come. There's always the problem of sudden death. You say, "Well, I was in an automobile accident, but I got out alive, I was close to death, but I didn't die." Or, "I was in a plane disaster, but I didn't die. I was close to death but I didn't die." No, you weren't close to death, 'cause you didn't die. You're closer to death now than you've ever been. I mean, every one of us in this room is closer to death now than we have ever been. Five thousand Americans die every day. Some by, die by disease, some die by disaster, some die by decay, they just get old, and some die by design, but they die. Death lays his icy hands on the old man and he dies, we know that, but sometimes the young mother will kiss her helpless babies goodbye and step into eternity. And, sometime even a little child has to drop his toys and grapple with the iron strength of death. Friend, listen. People are dying. Listen to your watch tick. Did you know every time your watch ticks an American dies? One person dies a second, sixty per minute, thirty-six hundred per hour, eighty-six thousand souls a day, thirty million souls a year. And, one of those ticks on that watch is yours and one of them is mine.

Listen to these Scriptures. 1 Chronicles 29 verse 15: *"...our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding"* (1 Chronicles 29:15). Job 7 verse 6: *"My days are*

*swifter than a weaver's shuttle...*" (Job 7:6). Psalm 39 verse 5: "*Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth...*" (Psalm 39:5). Psalm 102 and verse 3: "*For my days are consumed like smoke...*" (Psalm 102:3). Psalm 102 verse 11: "*My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass*" (Psalm 102:11).

Friend, how foolish Felix was to say, "I'll wait for a convenient time." Convenience may not come, convenience may not come. And, then not only, dear friend, is it foolish to say, "I'll wait for a more convenient season" because you'll lose today and death may come suddenly, but friend, Jesus may come at any moment, I mean, at any moment. Matthew 24 verse 42: "*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come*" (Matthew 24:42). You don't know, just be ready at any moment.

Listen to this, Matthew 24 and verse 44: "*Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh*" (Matthew 24:44). Are you ready? I mean, if the trumpet should sound and Jesus should come right now? The Bible says, "Be ready." "Well," you say, "I don't think he's coming today." That's the best sign I know of that he might, for the Bible says, "...in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). I mean, he's coming like lightning, like a bolt out of the blue, not out of the cloudy sky, but out of the cloudless sky, like a bolt out of the blue, our Lord is going to come.

## **B. Mistake #2: Conviction Will Continue**

Well, what was his first tragic mistake? That convenience will come. What was his second tragic mistake? That conviction will continue. He presumed that conviction would continue. Here was a man trembling, here was a man under Holy Spirit conviction. Now I want to remind you that conviction was of the Lord. But the Bible says, "*...My spirit shall not always strive with man...*" (Genesis 6:3). You can say, "No" to God and that conviction can pass away. Let me give you a Scripture. Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 7: "*Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts...*" (Hebrews 3:7-8). If the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you in this service or by this tape later on or by a television broadcast, a radio broadcast, if the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you and you say, "No," it will harden your heart. Every time you say, "No" to Jesus Christ, your heart gets a little harder. And, there will come a time, dear friend, when your heart will be so hard that the Holy Spirit of God cannot and will not speak to you. Listen to Hosea chapter 4 and verse 17: "*Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone*" (Hosea 4:17). What does that mean? God is saying, "Here's a man who has lived in idolatry, he's lived in sin so long that he's married to his sin." God says, "Leave him alone." Three times in Romans chapter 1 you read where "*...God gave them up...*" (Romans 1:26). "*...God gave them up...*" (Romans 1:26). "*...God gave them up...*" (Romans 1:26).

Listen to this Scripture in John chapter 12 verse 37: "*But though he had done so*

*many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him*” (John 12:37). It’s as though John is amazed. He says, “All of these miracles are done, yet they believe not on him. And, then in verse 39 it says: *“Therefore they could not believe...”* (John 12:39). Do you get that? Verse 37 says, “They would not believe.” And, then verse 39 says, “They could not believe.” You see, here Felix says, “Well, Paul, you go your way, when I have a convenient season I’ll send for you.” But, the Spirit of God had convicted him, he was trembling, and the Bible says, *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near”* (Isaiah 55:6). Don’t get the idea that you can trifle with the Holy Spirit. Don’t get the idea that you can just whistle and God will come running. You can bandage your eyes and keep a bandage on so long that when you take that bandage off you will be blind.

### C. **Mistake #3: Conflicts Will Cease**

My dear friend, Felix made a mistake. Number one, that convenience will come. Number two, that conviction will continue. I’ll tell you his third mistake that he made. He felt that conflicts would cease—that somehow it would be easier later than it is now. The devil never gives up anybody or anything without a fight. But, my dear friend, listen, it will never—are you listening?—It will never be easier for you to be saved than right now. Mark it down. Never, never. Listen to me, I’m certain of what I’m saying. There will never be a better time for you to be saved than now. You might be saved later, but there’ll never be a better time for you to be saved than now. Why? *“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”* (Hebrews 4:7). *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”* (Proverbs 27:1). *“...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

When you say, “I’m waiting on a convenient season,” I want you to remember this. Tomorrow you will have more sin to repent of. Tomorrow you will have less time to repent in. And, tomorrow you will have a harder heart to repent with. Tomorrow you will have less time to repent in. Tomorrow you will have more sin to repent of. And, tomorrow you will have a harder heart to repent with. Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, *“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”* (Hebrews 4:7).

What was the mistake that Felix made? That convenience will come, that conviction will continue, that conflict will cease. “Tomorrow.” He just simply puts it off, he’s hoping that tomorrow is going to be the time to come to the Lord. It will not be so.

George W. Truett was one of the greatest preachers the Southern Baptist has ever known. He was the pastor of the great First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. One time in an evangelism conference in Florida George W. Truett told what happened when he was a youngster. In his town where he was they had a revival meeting. A preacher came in to preach, he preached in the daytime in the little school and at nighttime he preached in the church. When that preacher preached, George Truett gave his heart to

Jesus Christ and was saved. George sat in school by a boy next to him in the classroom and George told that boy what had happened in his heart and said to that youngster, “I want you to come to the service tonight.” The boy said to him, “Not tonight, George, later.” George Truett went to the service.

The little boy didn't come to school the next day. George Truett, on his way home, stopped by the house to see what happened to his best friend. His mother said, “He's sick, so I kept him in.” The next day George Truett went by and his mother said, “We think he has pneumonia.” They didn't know how to treat pneumonia as well as today, they didn't have sulfur drugs and these other things. “We think he has pneumonia.” The next day when George Truett went by, they said “He has double pneumonia and the doctor says he's very gravely ill.” The next day when George Truett went by to see him the mother said, “The doctor says he's dying; if you want to see him alive, you may come in.”

George Truett said he went in to that room to see his boyhood chum. He said, “The boy was there in the bed, there was the fever and the sickness, the weakness, but he was moving his lips.” George said, “I knew he was trying to say something to me, and I put my ear down to hear what he was saying, and this is what he was saying. ‘Not tonight, George, tomorrow. Not tonight, George, tomorrow. Not tonight, George, tomorrow.’ That's all he said, over and over and over again.”, And George Truett said, “I sat there,, and watched him die and all he could say is, “Not tonight, George, tomorrow.””

George Truett said, “I left that room determined that I would urge people to come to Jesus while they could, to receive Christ.” I think that's one of the things that made him the great preacher that he would stand in the pulpit and beg people to come to Jesus while they can. “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). The Holy Ghost says today, the Word of God says today, experience says today, this preacher says, “Come to Jesus today.”

## **Conclusion**

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, eyes are closed. No one looking around, no one stirring, please, not a soul. I want to ask a question. How many in this great auditorium this morning can say, “Pastor, I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. God's Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I'm a child of God and I know that I know that if I died right now I'd go to Heaven. Not of good that I have done, but because I have repented of my sin, I have trusted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. God's Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I have been saved and I have a life, thank God, that backs it up”? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. May I see your hand, would you lift it up. All right, take your hands down.

Not everybody could lift his or her hand. I believe the Holy Spirit of God today has spoken about righteousness, temperance, and judgment. And, I believe also that the devil, the world, the flesh, and the devil have said, "Don't do it right now." But, I believe the wisest thing that anybody can do today is give his or her heart to Jesus. If you're not absolutely certain if you died right now you'd go to Heaven, I want you to give your heart to Jesus today. I want to pray for you.

Father, I pray in this service that many will say, "Yes to Christ." Lord, that they will trust Him and be saved. Bind away the powers of darkness. Lord, just shower your love down on us and help people to see, Lord, how much you love them and how you welcome them today in Jesus name, Amen.

# The Problem with Procrastination

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** July 5, 1998

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 24:24–27

*“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”*

ACTS 24:25

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## Introduction

Acts chapter 24, and we're going to begin reading in verse 24. Now, the scene is Caesarea. Paul has been lied on and accused falsely. He's brought before the governor, whose name is Felix, and Felix is putting him on trial, trying to find out what to do with the Apostle Paul. Now, Paul is facing this man who has great authority and great dignity. He was a nobleman. And, we're going to listen to Paul as he makes his defense. And so, Acts chapter 24 and verse 24: "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he—that is, Paul—reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix, trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: whereof he sent for him

the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."

Now, the thing that I want you to pay particular attention is in verse 25, the last part, "...Go thy way for this time: when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee." That is, he's simply procrastinated; put off to what he hoped would be a more convenient season.

Now, do you have trouble with procrastination? I do, and I think many of us do. And many of us can identify with the man who said, "Tomorrow, I'm going to stop procrastinating." And I think many of us kind of feel that way.

I was reading something the other day of a man who was going through his dresser drawer, and in his dresser drawer he found a ticket for a pair of shoes that he had taken to the shoe shop to have them resoled. And the ticket had a date that was ten years old. He said, "Well, I imagine they've thrown out my shoes. Certainly, after ten years, I can't go and expect to reclaim these shoes." But on his way to work he saw the shoe shop. He just thought that he would wheel in and find out. So, sheepishly, he walked up to the counter and put the ticket down, and he said, "I've come for my shoes." The man took the ticket, went into the back room, stayed there for about ten minutes, and came back out, and said, "They'll be ready tomorrow."

All of us—all of us—have difficulty with procrastination. And, in some things it's a bad habit, but in some things it is a tragic habit, because procrastination is the thief of time, it is the grave of opportunity, and it may be the road to hell.

Now, there are four categories of persons who will hear me preach tonight and refuse Jesus Christ. And out of the people who will hear me; there will be some people who, if I know anything about preaching, will refuse Jesus Christ and be lost. Some will be, perhaps, in this building. Others will be listening by radio, perhaps, driving through our city. You will hear this message, but you will refuse Jesus Christ. Four kinds of categories.

First of all, there will be those who do not understand or who do not believe the gospel. And, therefore, because they do not understand it, they don't believe it, they will refuse Jesus Christ.

Another category of person is the out-and-out sinner. He may believe the gospel, but he's wed to his sin. And he says to God, "You're not big enough to make me change my ways. I choose my sin against You." He's going to die and go to hell.

Another category of persons is the self-righteous person. He's not an out-and-out sinner. He thinks he's too good to be damned. And many people in America are egomaniacs who are strutting to hell, thinking that the gospel is for the thief, the murderer, the pervert, the adulterer, but not for them. They're good people, decent people, so they think. And these people are going to be lost and go to hell.

But a great majority of the people who will hear the message tonight and refuse the Lord Jesus Christ are not those who misunderstand or don't believe. They're not out-and-out sinners. They're not even self-righteous who think that they don't need to be saved. They're procrastinators; people who understand that they do need to be saved, but simply think, I will not be saved tonight. I will not be saved in this service. I will wait. Sometime, somewhere, perhaps, I will give my heart to Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul has been put in prison for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I said to you, he comes before this man Felix. And I want you to notice three things about this procrastinator who, so far as I know, is tonight in hell.

## **I. The Preaching That Convicted Felix**

First of all, I want you to notice the preaching that convicted this man. Do you have that? The preaching that convicted this man. The Apostle Paul preached to him. And the way that Paul preached to him is a way that preachers ought to preach to sinners today. You'll find that in verses 24 and 25. Listen to it: "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." Now, if you're a preacher and you want to preach the faith in Christ, here's a good three-point outline, and it came from the greatest gospel preacher who ever lived, the Apostle Paul. "And as he—Paul. Here's the first point—he reasoned of righteousness—here's the second point—temperance—and here's the third point—and judgment to come, Felix trembled..." Now, that's the way you preach the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, a lot of preaching is not what it ought to be today. We have so-called "user-friendly" evangelism, and we're trying to make people feel at home and want the need of the gospel without preaching the way that Paul preached. We never taught people that they're sinners. We've never taught them to tremble at Sinai, so no wonder they don't want to come to Calvary.

But I was reading of a terrible accident in England. And there was a barricade, and people had run past the barricade, and they had run over a barricade into a crevice, and many people were drowned and killed. And so there was a court, and the person who was to have put up the barricade was being charged with negligent homicide. And he said, "No, I put a red flag there to warn the people that they should stop." And so, the prosecution asked that the red flag be brought into court. And they brought the red flag into court, and it was just a pale pink. It had been in the sun so long that it had faded, and was a faint warning to few people. And I'm afraid that a lot of preaching is, rather than being a red flag, it's just sort of a pale pink.

Now, had you and I been there, we would have perhaps coached Paul, and we would have said, "Now, Paul, be a little user-friendly. This is your chance, Paul. This

man is a big shot. You'd better flatter him, Paul. You'd better tone down the message, Paul. You better be careful. Paul, you're an educated man. Tickle his ears and talk to him about philosophy. Paul, you're a world traveler. Talk to him about some of the sights that you've seen." But Paul preached a three-point message, and I want you to see what Paul preached.

#### **A. The Standard That Paul Revealed**

I want you, first of all, to see the standard that Paul revealed, which was righteousness. Paul preached to that man about righteousness. And what he was doing was showing to Felix, the worthiness of his own self-righteousness. You see, there was another man. Go back to chapter 24. Tertullus, who began to butter Felix up because he wanted Felix to do certain things for him. "And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying—now he's talking to Felix—Seeing that by thee—Felix—we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence. We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." Can you see him buttering up this guy? Now, that's one man. "Paul, why don't you do this? Paul, why don't you tell him how good and how great he is?" Now, Paul doesn't do that, but Paul speaks to him about the righteousness that God requires.

Paul, knowing the Old Testament, I'm certain knew Proverbs 21:2: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts." Paul knew Proverbs 20 and verse 6: "Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness, but a faithful man, who can find?" Paul certainly knew Isaiah 64 and verse 6: "But we're all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and we do all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

What Paul said, when he preached to this man, was this: "Felix, you may have done many great and noble and wonderful things in your own sight, but your goodness, your righteousness, is as filthy rags in the sight of Almighty God. Felix, God demands perfection. God demands righteousness. And God has provided righteousness, and that righteousness is available in the Lord Jesus Christ." That same Apostle Paul would write in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21: "For he hath made him—that is, Jesus—to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And I'm sure that, as Paul preached to Felix, he explained that to him how Jesus Christ took our sins that we might take His righteousness. And he would say to Felix, "Felix, your only hope—your only hope is—for you to have the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ." Precious friend, tonight, if you're listening by radio, listening later by a tape, or if you're in this place, let me tell you how to be righteous. It's found in Romans chapter 4 and verse 5: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith has counted for righteousness." If you'll put your faith where God put your sin, on the Lord Jesus Christ, God will look at your faith, and God will say, "That

man, that woman, that boy, that girl I count as righteous. Not because of their self-righteousness, but because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.” The first point in Paul’s gospel message was righteousness. That was the standard that Paul revealed.

### **B. The Sin That Paul Revealed**

Here’s the second thing: the sin that Paul revealed. Not only did Paul talk to him about God’s standard of righteousness, but Paul also talked to this man about his sin, about temperance. The word temperance means self-control. And Felix was a man that was out of control.

Now, notice the Bible says that his wife was Drusilla. Who was Drusilla? She was a world-renowned beauty at that time. She was married at 15 years of age. But Felix had persuaded her to leave her first husband and come and live with him. He was a sensuous man living in gross immorality. But, on top of that, he was a politician who was guilty of bribery. He got Paul, the notable prisoner, before him, and the Bible tells us right here that he brought Paul in, hoping that Paul would give him some money. And, if Paul had bribed him, if Paul had given him a large sum of money, then he was going to release Paul. And so, you see this man, while he was sitting on a throne, while this man was an important big shot, inwardly he was eaten up; he was out of control. Paul spoke to him about temperance, and Paul said, “In your moral life, and in your professional life, you are a sinner, and your hands are filthy with the sins of the flesh.” Now, Paul, standing before Felix, was bound in chains of iron, but Felix is bound in chains of sin. And Paul didn’t butter him up, but Paul spoke to him not only about righteousness, but about sin.

### **C. The Summons That Paul Revealed**

And then, not only did Paul speak to him about these things, but notice also not only the standard and the sin, but the summons that Paul revealed. Paul preached to him about judgment to come. Paul became the prosecutor, and Paul said, “Sir, you’re coming to judgment. You may be living high, wide, and handsome right now, but you are coming to judgment.” That same Paul would write in Romans chapter 14, verse 12: “So then every one of us shall give an account of himself unto God.” And I want everybody that has breath in his lungs, every one whose heart is beating, every one whose ears are open, every one whose mind is working to listen to this Baptist preacher tonight. You are going to stand before God one of these days. Saved or lost, you’re going to stand before God. “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” And Paul spoke to this man about judgment to come.

Now, the problem with this man is that he somehow felt that, because he was not being judged right now, perhaps he had escaped judgment. One of the most frightening

verses in the Bible is Romans chapter 2, verse 15, which says, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasureth up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and the perdition of ungodly men, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” You’re treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Now, here was a man living in sin, and the pleasures of sin are but for a season; the wages of sin are for all eternity. And the Bible tells us, in verse 25, that Felix trembled. It must have been some kind of a sermon. I can see that little, old, squinty-eyed, hump-backed Jew, Paul, standing there in chains. He’s speaking to this man of righteousness. He’s speaking to this man of temperance. He’s speaking to this man of judgment. And the Holy Spirit of God fell upon him, and he literally trembled. But then, he makes a horrible mistake. He says, “Paul, enough now. Go your way. When I have a more convenient season, I’ll call for you.”

## **II. The Pressures That Confronted Felix**

And so, you see the preaching that convicted him. He was convicted. But I want you to see, secondly, the pressures that confronted him. Because the same pressures that confronted Felix so long ago is the pressure that is confronting you tonight as you listen to this message. Teenager without Jesus, the same three pressures.

You see, the devil never gives up anything or anybody without a fight. And when Adrian stands in the pulpit to preach, the devil puts a demon on your shoulder to whisper into your ear. And there are three things that try to keep you from giving your heart to Jesus Christ and to cause you to procrastinate.

### **A. The World**

The first is the world. I mean, here was a man, Felix. He had a soft job. He had a place of prominence and power and prestige. And for him to be saved, this man, this pompous man, would have to lay his pride in the dust, and have to humble himself. And the world, with all of its pressure, said, “Don’t make a fool of yourself.” When I finish preaching tonight, I’m going to give an invitation. I’m going to ask you to get up out of your seat, leave your seat, come down here in front of all of these people, and acknowledge that you’re a sinner, that you need Jesus Christ, and that you’re trusting Jesus and Him alone to save you. Now, the people of this world say, “Don’t make a fool of yourself. Don’t humble yourself. Maintain your dignity.” The world fought against Felix.

### **B. The Flesh**

I’ll tell you what else fought against him. Not only the world, but the flesh. Now, the flesh is that inward proclivity that we have toward sin. Remember now, he was living with a sensuous woman. He had an evil lifestyle. He had a soft job. Bribes are coming to him

at every hand. And so, his flesh says, “Hey, don’t give that up.”

### **C. The Devil**

But then, not only was there the world and the flesh that warred against him; there was the devil himself. Whenever a man gets under conviction, the demons of hell begin to counterattack that man. There’s an old parable, not a Bible parable, but people have told it from time immemorial, or since they’ve been preaching the gospel, about a convocation, an imaginary story about a convocation of demons who got together to connive, to plan how to damn the world. And one demon said, “Well, the way to damn the world and send men to hell is to tell them there is no God.” And the devil, the chief of the demons, head over them all, said, “Well, a few will believe that, but the evidence for God is overwhelming.” So that didn’t receive much applause in this council room of hell. Another said, “Well, let’s admit that there is a God, but let’s say that the Bible is not His Word. Let’s cast down upon the Word of God.” And the devil said, “Well, that’s a better plan. And, some will buy into that, but the Bible is so full of fulfilled prophecy, and it is so wonderfully put together. That’s not a good enough plan, because the Bible is so self-authenticating. And another demon said, “Well then, let’s tell them that Jesus Christ is not the Messiah, the Son of God.” “Well, that will certainly damn people, if they don’t believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, but He’s shown to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, and there’s so many evidences. He’s shown to be alive by many infallible proofs.” And then, another demon, who was particularly nefarious, stood up, and said, “Well, I have a plan. Listen to me. Let’s agree that God exists, and let’s just tell people He exists. Let’s even go so far as to tell them that the Bible is the Word of God, and not fight against that. And, why, let’s even allow them to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. But let’s just whisper into their ears that they have plenty of time to put it off.”

That’s exactly what Felix did. And when this demon, according to this parable, this make believe story, said that, a wicked laughter rang through the regions of darkness. Perhaps more people have been sent to hell by procrastination than any other sin.

### **III. The Presumption That Condemned Felix**

Now, here’s the third thing I want you to see. I want you to see the presumption that condemned this man. I want you to see how he presumed. And some of you may presume the same way. Look again in verse 25: “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way. When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” Now, that was his presumption. He presumed that he would have a convenient season, and that one day, perhaps, it would be the right time for him to be saved.

Tradition tells us that Felix never got saved, that he committed suicide in a beautiful lake in northern Italy. He made three terrible miscalculations.

### A. **Mistaken Presumption #1: Convenience Will Come**

Number one: that convenience will come. Some of you think, perhaps, that one of these days it'll be more convenient to come to the Lord. You know, tomorrow promises much, but it never gets here. How ignorant to look for a more convenient season. Put this Scripture down—Hebrews 3, verse 15: “While it is said, today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” When does God want you to be saved? Today, not tomorrow. Listen to God’s Word. Today is the only time on God’s calendar. Tomorrow never gets here. Yesterday is gone. Proverbs chapter 27 and verse 1: “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

Look up here, and I’m going to tell you something, and I’m aware that God is listening to me. I am not lying to you. If you were to put a stack of thousand dollar bills here on this platform, cover this platform with them, and let that stack reach to the ceiling—I don’t know how many millions of dollars that would be—you would tell me, “Adrian, you can have all of that if you will simply set aside your faith in Christ for 24 hours”—now, first of all, that would be impossible, because, once a man is saved, he’s always saved, but if it were possible—I’m telling you, you could stuff this building with gold, and I would not turn Jesus Christ aside for 24 hours. I would not do it. Number one: I would not dishonor Him so much. Number two: I would not put my soul in jeopardy, because I might die during that 24 hours. “And what should it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul.” The Bible says, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” This may well be the last sermon I will ever preach. It may well be the last sermon that you will ever hear. How foolish to boast yourself of tomorrow, because if you do, you’ll lose today—you’ll lose today. They say, “Get right with God. You may die.” Get right with God. You may not die. And, you’ll lose the joy of knowing the Lord. You can lose today.

Why would you want to lose one more day not knowing the Lord Jesus Christ? I’ve frequently said, I’d be a Christian if there were no heaven, just to know Jesus Christ in this heart.

And then, secondly, you may be facing sudden death. You don’t know when you’re going to die. I serve on the board of Focus on the Family. James Dobson is a close friend of mine. James Dobson told me about playing basketball with Pistol Pete Maravich. Pistol Pete Maravich was one of the greatest basketball players to ever hit the hardwood. He could do things with a basketball, absolutely unbelievable. I knew Pistol Pete Maravich. I’ve prayed with him, and talked with him, and fellowshiped with Pistol Pete Maravich. Pistol Pete became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jim Dobson and Pete Maravich were on the basketball court playing basketball. And Jim Dobson turned to Pete, and said, “Pete, how do you feel?” And this 40-year-old said, “I never felt better in my life,” and then fell on his face dead. “Never felt better in my life,”

and then fell dead. Thank God, he's in heaven.

Now, I don't know how you feel tonight, but don't you get the idea that you have plenty of time. You may not. You may be, you think, in the pink of health, but I'm telling you the Bible says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow..." Five thousand Americans die suddenly every day by disease, disaster, by design of their own hands. Death is a monster that lays his icy hands on old men and women, but sometimes on young mothers who kiss their helpless babies goodbye. Sometimes little babies have to drop their toys and grapple with the iron strength of death. If you have a watch, listen to it tick. With every tick of your watch, a person dies, one person a second; 60 a minute; 3,600 an hour; 86,000 souls a day; 30 million a year are dying, and one of those ticks is yours. When you were in your mother's womb, your heart began to beat. Abortion stops a beating heart. When you were in your mother's womb, your heart began to beat. Then you were born. Your mother held you, pushed your little beating heart up against her heart. That heart continued to beat. Then you got strong enough to go outdoors, and to run and play, and your little heart got stronger and stronger, as it was beating. Then you became a teenager. Then you saw that girl, and your heart just began to get so excited about the things that thrill teenagers. And you became a man, and your heart is pumping strong. And you had children of your own, and your heart continues to pump. You're getting older now, and you go to see the doctor, and you say, "Doctor, you know, my heart's got kind of a little funny thing in it there, doctor." He listens to it. He says, "Well, I think I'll put a pacemaker in you." Thank you, doctor. It begins to beat again regularly, but one of these days you say to your wife, "Honey, I, honey, I don't, I, I, I don't feel..." and it stops. And at that moment, you are in heaven or hell, right then. But I want to tell you, you may not be an old man, and it'll die, stop like that. You may be on the way home from church tonight. And I've often told about Dottie there at Merritt Island. I can see her right now as I stood on the steps of that church, and shaking the hands out of the people, shaking people's hands as they left the church. I can see Dottie, one of the sweetest women in our church. She sang in our choir. She said to me, "Pastor, wonderful sermon. I'll see you tonight, Pastor." She never got home. Going over the Banana River Bridge, a car was on the wrong side. They met head on.

When I was in Waveland, five people in a car going home from church, head on collision—last sermon they ever heard. Many times I have preached the last sermon a person has ever heard before they stepped out into eternity.

You may be like Pistol Pete. You may be like Dottie. You may think, Oh, I know when I'm going to die. The Bible says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

What a fool—what a fool—a man is, a woman is, to put off Jesus Christ. Listen. You may lose today. You may be facing sudden death. Jesus Christ may come today.

There's a strange feeling in the air. The cup of iniquity is full, and Jesus Christ, many believe, is about to come back for His church. And when He does, if you're not saved, you're going to be left behind. Matthew 24 and verse 42 says, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Matthew 24, verse 44, says, "Therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." It's never the wrong time to do the right thing.

Some of you here tonight may be looking for a more convenient time. You may say, "Well, I'd give my heart to Jesus, but I'm way back in the back," or, "I'm up in the balcony. I'll just wait for a more convenient time." May God have mercy!

### **B. Mistaken Presumption #2: Conviction Will Continue**

No, listen. What—what, what—presumption did he make? What was the wrong presumption? That convenience would come. And another presumption that conviction would continue.

Here was a man who was trembling. He had heard the voice of God. That's the reason the Bible says, in Hebrews chapter 3, "Today, if you'll hear God's voice, don't harden your heart."

Did you know anything you do long enough you get pretty good at? The more you do it, the more proficient you become at it. Did you know that you can become very proficient at rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ? You can harden your heart against God. Every time you hear a preacher tear his heart out and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and you postpone giving your heart to Jesus Christ, your heart is just a little harder. Tomorrow you will have more sin to repent of, less time to repent in, and a harder heart to repent with. Don't ever—don't ever—put off giving your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't presume that conviction will continue. There can come a time that your heart will get so hard that God will give you up. Hosea chapter 4, verse 17, says, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone."

### **C. Mistaken Presumption #3: Conflicts Will Cease**

And you may also—you may also—presume that conflicts will cease, that one of these days it will be easier to give your heart to Jesus. Listen to your pastor. There'll only be more sin tomorrow to repent of, less time to repent in, and tomorrow sin will have a stronger hold, and your heart will be harder.

## **Conclusion**

Let me tell you this story, and I'm going to be finished. The man who preceded Dr. W. A. Criswell at the great First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, was George W. Truett. George W. Truett was one of the best known preachers of his day. One of the things that gave George Truett the great power in the pulpit was his heart. He had a great

heart; I mean, God just filled Truett when he preached, and many would come to Christ. And the thing that helped mold Truett's heart was something that happened to Truett when he was just a boy.

Now, Truett knew the Lord when he was just a boy. And they were having a revival in their church. And Truett had prayed about being a soul winner. And he had a little friend that he went by to invite that friend to come to the revival. And when George Truett went to that friend's house, his mother said to him, "Well, he's not feeling well." Actually, Truett invited him the first time, and he said, "Well, not tonight, George. I'll come later. Invite me again." And George went by the next day to invite this little boy to the revival meeting. And the boy said to George Truett, "No, not tonight. Ask me again." He went by the third time, as I remember the story, and his mother said, "Well, he's not feeling well. I've put him in bed. And come back the next night." Truett went back the next night, and his mother said, "He's very ill. He can't go to the revival meeting." Truett went back the next night, and his mother said, "The doctor is here. The doctor says that he's dying. If you want to see him alive, you may go into the room." Truett said he went into the room where his friend was. He'd asked him again and again and again, and the boy said, "Not now. Later." George Truett could see his lips moving. Truett tried to talk to him. It didn't look like the boy understood, but his lips were moving. George Truett put his ear down to hear what his little friend was saying. Now, remember, Truett's just a boy. This boy is just a boy. He put his ear down to hear what his friend was saying. And, teenagers, his friend was saying, "Not now, George. Later. Not now, George. Later. Not now, George. Later." And the boy died. As far as Truett knew, most likely, so he died and went to hell.

And do you know what the Holy Spirit is saying to you today? "Today, if you'll hear God's voice, harden not your heart." Do you know what the devil is saying to you? "Not now, but later." And with every bit of fiber in my being tonight, I want you to say, "Today, I'll give my heart to Jesus." The Holy Spirit says today. The voice of reason says today. The voice of experience says today. The Word of God says, "Today, if you'll hear God's voice, don't harden your heart."

Would you bow your heads in prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, listen one more time. Righteousness: the only righteousness that you can ever have, is the righteousness that Jesus Christ supplies for you. Temperance: the only way that your life will ever come under control is for you to give your heart to Jesus Christ. Judgment: the only way that you can escape judgment and go to heaven is for you to give your heart to Jesus Christ. Don't presume upon tomorrow. Don't presume that you'll have plenty of time. Give your heart to Jesus.

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, how many in this building today could say, "Pastor Rogers, I absolutely know by the Word of God and the Spirit of God that if I died tonight, I would go straight to heaven," may I see your hand? All right. Take

them down. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, this is between you and me and the Lord Jesus. How many would say, “Pastor Rogers, I could not lift my hand a moment ago, but if a person can know it, I want to know it; I am concerned about my soul; I don’t want to procrastinate; I need to know that I’m saved, and in the prayer that you’re about to pray, I wish you would remember me in prayer”? I’ll not call you by name. I may not even know your name. I’ll not embarrass you. Nobody’s going to come to you. This is between you and me and the Lord. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. But if you would say, “Pastor Rogers, I want you to pray for me, that I might have the assurance of my salvation, whatever it takes, I want to know that I’m saved,” would you just slip up your hand and hold it up for a moment, and then take it down? God bless you. Take it down. Others? Hold it up where I might see it. Yes. Say, “Pray for me, Pastor. I’m not certain that I’m saved, but pray for me.” Anyone else? Yes. How many would say, “Pastor Rogers, I don’t know whether my friend lifted his or her hand here tonight, but I have a friend that’s here tonight that I’m concerned about—would you just pray for my friend? Hold up your hand. Yes. Yes. Okay. Now, how many would say, “Pastor Rogers, you’ve been talking about procrastination and those who are lost getting saved; I’m saved, but, Pastor Rogers, I’ve been procrastinating about this matter of witnessing to my unsaved friends, I have not been the kind of a witness that I ought to be, and, as a Christian, would you just pray with me that God would lay souls on my heart, and that I might be the soul winner God would have me to be”? Just slip up your hand if you feel that way. There’s a great number.

Now, Father, I pray for these who have lifted their hand and said, “I’m not certain I’m saved tonight.” Lord God, I pray in the name of Jesus that tonight, this very night, they will say an everlasting yes to You and be saved. Open, dear Lord, their hearts. Grant me, God, repentance. Father, help them not to listen to the lies of Satan, but to come tonight to Jesus Christ. For these who have loved ones that they’re burdened about, Lord, You know where they are. Maybe these loved ones did not even have the courage to lift their hand. Maybe they’re intimidated. But, Lord, their friends here who are saying, “Pray for my friend,” and, Lord, I pray for these. You know who they are. I do not. But, Lord, I pray for a congregation, each of us who lifted his or her hand, and I lift my hand before You, God, and I pray, God, that You’ll make me a better soul winner. Give us all a greater burden for the lost, and help us to quit procrastinating in this matter of witnessing. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen and amen.

# The Sin of Procrastination

*By Adrian Rogers*

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**Main Scripture Text: Acts 24:24–27**

**Sponsored by: Sponsor**

*“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”*

ACTS 24:25

## Outline

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## Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and turn with me, please, to the book of Acts chapter 24, and we’re going to begin reading in verse 24. Do you have difficulty pro, with procrastination, do you? Do you put things off? Ha, ha, ha. Oh my. You know, starting tomorrow I’m going to stop that! I think many of us feel about the same way. We, we are procrastinators. *Harper’s Bazaar* has given some ways that some tests to see whether or not, we are procrastinators. Let’s see how well you do. Do you always hand in your work at the deadline or later, but never early? You, sir, are a procrastinator. Do you postpone going on a diet until some set time in the future, and that time just keeps changing? Hm. All right. Do you use fatigue or a headache as a reason for not getting things done? You’re probably a procrastinator. Your headache is probably not the reason. Do you, ah, clutter up your daily schedule with little things, so that you really

don't have time, so you say, to do the big thing, the important thing, the necessary thing, but really the thing that you're trying to avoid? You're a procrastinator. Do you delay going to the doctor about symptoms because you hope if you don't go to the doctor you won't have to go – the symptoms will just go away? Well, you're probably a procrastinator. And I think there's some procrastination in all of us, and it's not just some little idiosyncrasy. If we procrastinate to do what we ought to do, to us it's a sin, for the Bible says, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is (what?) sin." Sin. I want to talk to you today about the sin of procrastination, because procrastination is more than the thief of time. Procrastination is the grave of opportunity. But even more seriously, procrastination is the road to hell. Now there are three classes of persons who will listen to me today and then die and go to hell. And I have no doubt in my mind but what some who will hear this very message will one day be in hell. Now there are three categories of persons who will hear this message, and yet one day will be in hell.

#### **A. The Out-and-Out Sinners**

Now, first of all, there's just the out-and-out sinner. There's some people I'll not convince or anybody else will convince. They hate God. They hate Christ. They hate the Bible. They call themselves unbelievers, but they really have an antipathy toward God. And, in effect, they shake their puny fists in the face of God boldly, braggingly, brazenly saying, "God, if there be a God, You're not big enough to cause me to serve You." These people are egomaniacs strutting to hell.

#### **B. The Self-Righteous**

And then there's the self-righteous person. He's not an out-and-out sinner. He's just the opposite. He's a nice man, nice woman. Ah, she's a nice woman. They live in nice homes. They have culture and manners. They go to church. They read the Bible. They pray. They do all of these kinds of things. They're kind and good and generous and loving and beneficent, and they think that the gospel is for the thief, the harlot, the prostitute, the murderer, the down-and-out. They think that they don't need to be saved because they have never seen themselves as lost. And I believe that there are probably not a lot of out-and-out sinners here today, but I believe there are a lot of self-righteous people here today who are lost. And I'll tell you, my dear friend, the devil had just as soon send you to hell from the pew as he had the gutter. Do you realize that? So many people are filled with self-righteousness, so they never see their need of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there are folks like that here today. And if they don't get saved, they'll die and go to hell.

#### **C. The Procrastinators**

But by far the major group of those who will hear this message and be lost are not out-and-out sinners nor self-righteous people. They are procrastinators; people who realize

that they are lost. And they know in their heart they need to be saved. And down deep they intend to be saved some day, some day. And, oh, I believe that procrastination has sent more people to hell than any other sin. Procrastination has blasted more dreams, blighted more lives, wrecked more careers, ruined more homes, and damned more souls than any other sin. So I want to talk to you today about the sin of procrastination. Begin reading. The story, the setting is this: The apostle Paul is at Caesarea. He has been accused of sedition and heresy and inciting riots and all kinds of malfeasants, and he is there in the prison at Caesarea. And there is a certain civil magistrate named Felix who calls for the apostle Paul to question him to see whether or not he should be released or whether not he should be adjudicated guilty and receive even more punishment. So we begin reading here in Acts chapter 24 and verse 24: “And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” Oh, I wish I had a tape recording of the sermon that Paul preached about Christ. Can you imagine what that must have been? “...he heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned (that is, as Paul reasoned) of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled...” Now the apostle Paul had a three-point sermon. Point number one was righteousness. Point number two: temperance. Point number three: judgment to come. And I tell you, it must have been some kind of a sermon because this magistrate begins to tremble like a leaf in a storm. :...and he answered, Go thy way for this time...” Now he’s saying to Paul, “Paul, ha, ha,” he’s trembling. “Paul, just go your way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftner, oftner, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came to Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” This means he had been trembling under conviction, and yet for two years he had done nothing about his relationship with Jesus Christ. All right. Now Felix, I believe, who at one time was at the very threshold of salvation, is now in the pit of hell. And I want us to see what happened to Felix. And I pray God it will not happen to you. Would you listen to me - all of you, those on the very back rows, please, in the name of Jesus listen. If you’re not saved, oh, for God’s sake, for Christ’s sake, for your sake, listen. If you are saved, listen through the ears of someone else and begin to pray for those who postpone salvation.

## **I. The Preaching That Convicted Felix**

First of all, I want you to notice as the apostle Paul spoke to this man named Felix, I want you to see the preaching that convicted him. What did the apostle Paul preach? You know, had you and I been there, we would have said, “Now, Paul, you’re in front of a very important man, and your destiny is in this man’s hand. You are the defendant

and he is the judge. Paul, go easy. Paul, don't offend him. Paul, you are a world traveler. Why don't you talk to him about your world travels? Why don't you tell him some of the beautiful sights that you have seen? Flatter him. Give him some philosophy, Paul. Let him know, Paul, that you're really a nice guy." That's what some of us would have done had we been Paul standing there. I read some years ago about a terrible, terrible accident in England in London, and there was a, it was an automobile accident. And there should have been a red flag of warning to keep the cars, ah, to know that there was danger ahead. And, so the prosecution was saying the flag was not posted. The defense was saying the flag was posted. Finally, they brought the flag into the courtroom for evidence, and the flag had been posted all right, but it wasn't brilliant red; it had faded to a very pale pink. I'm afraid a lot of preaching is that way today. I'm afraid that a lot of preachers who ought to be standing in the pulpit and hoisting a red flag of warning are just kind of waving a pink flag that brings no conviction. Thank God the apostle Paul didn't do that. I want to tell you, he took a red flag and waved it right in the face of old Felix. Three point message.

#### **A. The Standard That Paul Revealed**

First of all, I want you to see the standard that Paul revealed. The Bible says that Paul reasoned to him of righteousness. Are you listening? Righteousness. You see, Felix needed to understand that he was not a righteous man, because just before Paul had come to see him there was another man who had come to see Felix, and he had really buttered Felix up. Look, if you will, in chapter 24:2. Now there was a man named Tertullus. "And, when he had called for, Tertullus to accuse him (that is, Tertullus was the prosecuting attorney accusing Paul), saying (now here's Tertullus speaking to Felix accusing Paul), Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence. We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness." Now here's the prosecuting attorney. And, boy, is he buttering the judge. Oh, he's saying, "Felix, what a wonderful guy you are." But Paul speaks to him of righteousness. You put these verses down, my dear friend, in the margin of your Bible: Proverbs 21:2: "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts." Put this one down, Proverbs 20 and ver, verse 6: "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" Put this one down, Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Did you hear what it says? Our righteousness – the things that we boast in are as filthy rags. And what Paul was saying to this man was this: "Felix, you may have done many noble things. You may have done many good deeds. But they are no more than filthy rags in the sight of a righteous and a holy God. Felix, God demands perfection. And the most righteous man on earth is not

righteous enough without the Lord Jesus Christ. God demands perfection, Felix. And, and that perfection is available only through the Lord Jesus Christ.” Put down this verse, 11 Corinthians 5:21. The Bible says of Jesus, “For God hath made Him, who knew no sin (Jesus was sinless), God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” I’m sure that Paul told Felix this. “Felix, your righteousness is as filthy rags. But God has provided righteousness for you through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is given to you, imputed to you, when you trust Jesus by faith.” Listen to this: Paul surely must have given him this verse, Romans 4:5: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Paul spoke to him about righteousness. “God demands it, Felix. You don’t have it, Felix. Christ has provided it with His own precious blood.”

### **B. The Sin That Paul Revealed**

But notice not only the standard that Paul revealed, which was righteousness, but notice also the sin that Paul revealed. Because right after Paul talked to Felix about righteousness, he then talked to Felix about temperance. Do you see it? You see right here where it says, “And he reasoned of righteousness (and then what?) temperance...” Now that’s the sin that Paul revealed when he talked of temperance, because do you know what the word *temperance* means? It means self-control. And Felix was a man out of control. You can read it very carefully and see. First of all, he’s sitting there with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess. She was the daughter of Herod. History tells us that she got married when she was 14 or 15 years of age to another man. She was indescribably beautiful; one of the most beautiful women of all times. And Felix, by his power and by his wealth, by his persuasion of office, he took her, another man’s wife, to be his wife, and that was the one sitting there with him at that time. Also, if you continue to read, you see that he kept bringing Paul back because he says he hoped that money would be given to him. Did you read that there in the text? Now here’s a judge with the dependent out there living in immorality, taking some money under the table. Paul spoke to this man about righteousness and then he spoke to him about temperance, which means self-control. Here was a man whose life was out of control. His matrimonial life, his professional life. His hands were filthy with the sins of the flesh. Paul may have been bound that day with chains of iron, but Felix was bound with the chains of sin.

### **C. The Summons That Paul Revealed**

The standard Paul revealed. The sin Paul revealed. And the summons that Paul revealed. Because not only did he speak to him of righteousness and not only did he speak to him of temperance, but he also spoke to him of judgment to come, judgment to come. Now it was very important that he spoke to him of judgment to come because this

king as this time, or this ruler at this time, he wasn't worried about judgment. Why, he is the judge. He's sitting on the throne. He's in his velvet chair. He has his attendants there. He's living high, wide, and handsome. But Paul says, "Felix, God demands righteousness. You're out of control. And judgment is coming." Do you know that many of us, because judgment is not here now, we think we're getting away with our sin? But the Bible says in Romans 2:5: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasureth up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and the perdition of ungodly men." What does that mean? It simply means that judgment is not here yet, but judgment is coming. Now if you're not a saved person, and you're putting off coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, you're living dangerously. And I want to remind you that you may be having a big time. The pleasures of sin are but for a season. The wages of sin are for all eternity. And don't forget it. The pleasures of sin are but for a season, but the wages of sin are for all eternity. Now that's the, that's the message, that's the message that Paul proclaimed. That's the preaching of Paul. And when Paul preached this dynamic message, he spoke of Christ – righteousness, judgment, temperance. And when he spoke of this, the Holy Spirit was there because this man trembled. Would to God that we would see more people tremble. He literally trembled under tremendous conviction. What a wonderful time it would have been to be saved, because Isaiah 55:6-7 says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." Oh, my dear friend, when there is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, please I beg you, please while God is near, call upon Him. Ask Him to save you.

## **II. The Pressures That Confronted Felix**

But I want you to see not only the proclamation that Paul gave, but I want you to see the pressures that confronted Felix. Why did he put off, why did he put off receiving the Lord Jesus Christ? What pressures were there on him? The same three pressures that are on you today, Mr. Procrastinator, Miss Put Off – the three. Number one: The world. Number two: The flesh. And number three: The devil. Here he was. The world was flattering him. And, he was living. He had a big job. He had position. He had possession. He had popularity. He had power. And what buttered his bread determined his conduct. He knew there'd have to be a change in his lifestyle. The world had him, and the flesh had him. The sins of the flesh were warring against him. Aha, but the greatest pressure came from the old devil himself. The devil whispered to this man under conviction, just like he does to some of you here today – "What that man may be saying is right, and you will be saved, but not today. When the invitation is given, remember someday, but not today."

Somebody in his imagination wrote a story of a convocation of demons. They held a council to see how they would damn the souls of men. And there in the caverns of the

netherworld they spoke of how they might doom and damn the souls of men. One demon said, "The best way to damn men is to make unbelievers out of them and tell them there is no God." Some imps and demons applauded. But others said, "That will only get a few because the evidences for God are too strong." Somebody else said, "Well, then tell them if there's a God, He's not the God of the Bible." Some said, "That will damn a few, but the Bible has such power and it is so self-authenticating." Another said, "Well, tell them that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God. Get them to misinterpret and twist the Bible with cults." They applauded and they said, "That will damn many." But others said, "Oh, but there's the power of the preaching of Jesus Christ, and Christ the Holy Spirit bears such witness of Jesus Christ." Then one feen, one demon, one imp who was known to be the most diabolical, the most cunning of all, stood and there was a horrible hush in the recesses of that dark world. And this demon stood and said, "My plan is this: Tell them there is a God. Tell them that He is the God of the Bible. Tell them that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Tell them they need to be saved. And then tell them to put it off." And cheers rang through the meeting hall because they knew that all of the demonic hosts knew that that, more than anything else, would drag souls into perdition. Here was a man who was pressured by the world, yes; by the flesh, yes; but by the devil, yes. And I'm telling you, my dear friend, wherever you are by television, by here, by tape, the devil himself will say, "That man may be right, but you need to be saved not today, but tomorrow." And the Bible says, "Today, if you'll hear God's voice, harden not your heart." God's Word says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."

### **III. The Presumption That Condemned Felix**

Now, my dear friend, I want you to see not only the preaching that convicted him and the pressure that confronted him, but, finally, would you see with me the presumption that condemned him. Look, if you will, in verse 25: "...Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Here he presumed upon the future. And this presumption condemned him. There's no record that Felix ever found Christ. As a matter of fact, secular historians tell us that he committed suicide in the beautiful lake in Italy. He made three terrible miscalculations. He presumed three things that he never should have presumed.

#### **A. He Presumed a More Convenient Time Would Come**

Number one: He presumed that a more convenient time would come. Now, my dear friend, you can't presume that anymore time is going to come, much less that it will be a convenient time. The Bible tells us clearly that you have no promise of tomorrow. Hebrews 3:15 says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." Proverbs 21:7 says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow...." God says, "Do it today. Don't brag about

tomorrow.” He is presuming about the future. My dear friend, you must come to Jesus Christ today. If you don’t come to Jesus today, you will lose today. Even if you could get saved tomorrow, you would lose today. Felix had a name. Do you know what the name Felix means? It means happy. That’s what his name meant. But, dear friend, he had a life that ended in misery of suicide. You see, being saved is not some penalty that you pay in order to go to heaven. I’d be a Christian if there were no heaven - to know Jesus Christ in this life. But not only may you lose today, you may be facing sudden death. I was thinking of the young basketball player, Mr. Gaithers. He went up for what every young basketball player dreams of – a slam dunk. And he did it. And the place erupted in cheers. Young, successful, at the epitome of success – a slam dunk. Seconds later he was lying on the basketball court dead. I was taking a trip through Arkansas. I stopped to get gasoline. I parked my car next to a service station between a, a little convenience store and a service station. I was going to go in the convenience store and, the man came out of the service station and said, “Hey, move that car.” I said, “Me?” He said, “Yeah, move that car. Trucks can’t get through there.” Well, the old Adrian started to tell him something, but the new Adrian said move the car. And the new Adrian and Christ in the new Adrian said not only move the car but be nice to that man. So I said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “As a matter of fact, I’ll let you just fill it up with gas.” And I drove over and let him fill it up with gas. When I went in, he said, “Do you hear about that basketball player?” I said, “Which one?” I hadn’t heard yet. He said, “Went up for a slam dunk; came down dead.” I said, “Oh,” I said, “When he, when he came down dead, did he go to heaven or hell?” He said, “How should I know?” I said, “Well, what do you think?” He said, “He’s a good basketball player.” I said, “Did that take him to heaven?” “Well,” he said, “I don’t know.” He said, “You know, there’s a little sin in all of us.” I said, “Well then, let me put it this way. If you were to go up for a slam dunk and come down dead, would you go to heaven or hell?” He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Would you like to know?” He said, “Yes.” And he received Christ as his personal Savior. And then I asked him after we prayed and I’d given him the plan of salvation, I said, “Now if you went up for a slam dunk and came down dead, where would you be?” He said, “I’d be in heaven because of the gift of God.” Now I want to ask you a question. If you died right now, where would you be? “Oh,” you say, “I’ve got plenty of time. I feel good.” Pete Maravitch came here, one of the greatest basketball players that ever lived. Gave his testimony. Told what Jesus Christ meant to him. A few weeks after that, he was out playing in California. Somebody said, “How do you feel, Pete?” He said, “I never felt better.” Forty years of age. In a few moments, he was dead. Well, you say, “I’m not a basketball player.” That’s right, but you might be a basket case here in just a few moments. And I want to ask you a question. Are you ready to meet the Lord? You say, “Well, I’ve got plenty of time.” You do? Down at Merritt Island where I used to preach, a young lady

named Dorothy, one of the prettiest women in our church, came out the door of that church on a spring morning about like this one. I was standing there. I can see her face right now in my....I can see like a photograph. She looked me in the face. She said, "Pastor, that was a good sermon. I will see you tonight." We shook hands. Dorothy, going over the Five-Twenty Causeway crossing over the Banana River Bridge, never saw the car on the wrong side of the road coming head on just like that. Thank God she knew Jesus. But she, like many of you, say, "Well, I'll go do something this afternoon and tonight I'll be back in church." You may never even get home for your lunch. "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." He says, "Go thy way, Paul. When I have a convenient season, I'll call for you."

### **B. He Presumed That Conviction Would Still Be There**

But not only did he presume that tomorrow would come. He presumed that conviction would still be there. You see, he was trembling like a leaf in a storm. But the Bible says, "My Spirit will not always strive with a man." Don't get the idea that you can just whistle and God will come running and save you. Oh, He'll save anybody who calls upon Him, but, dear friend, that desire to call may die in your heart. That's the reason the Bible says, "Today, if you'll hear God's voice, harden not your heart." Your heart can get so hard that you cannot hear the call of God, and God will stop calling. Hosea 4:17: "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone."

### **C. He Presumed Tomorrow Would Be Easier Than Today**

And then he also presumed that tomorrow is going to be easier than today, a more convenient time. Those of you in the balcony, listen to me for a moment. When I give the invitation this morning, the devil will say, "You're too far back. Wait till it's more convenient." The devil always says it will be easier, a more convenient time. It never gets easier. It always gets harder. The cuddly child we say, "Let him play his games." The tender teen, "He's got his, he's got his, his, dating, his date life. Don't bother him, Pastor." The tempestuous 20s – they're going to college. They are getting married. They are getting a career. The tired 30s – now they're having children and bills and mortgage payments. The feverish 40s – now they're seeing that their dreams are dissolving and things are not happening just right. No time for God now. The frantic 50s – "I'm over the hill, past middle age." You're getting bitter. You're getting cynical. The solemn 60s, the sinking 70s, the aching 80s, the nagging 90s - oh, if you live that long. I'll tell you, my dear friend, it never, never, never, never, never gets easier; always harder. Anything that a man does he gets good at. Play tennis long enough, you're a better tennis player. Play golf long enough, well. Dear friend, practice makes perfect, even in denying Jesus. Some are professional Christ rejecters without realizing it. They sit in a service like this and the message of Jesus rolls off their back like water off a

duck's back. And I'll tell you why. There was a time when they trembled and they said, "Holy Spirit, go Your way. I'm going to wait till it's more convenient."

## **Conclusion**

If you feel the slightest desire to come to Jesus, even if you don't tremble, even if there's just a spark, just a desire, please come, because He says, "Him that comes to Me, I'll in no wise cast out." Heads are bowed. Eyes are closed. Friend, God wants to speak to you today of righteousness. He demands righteousness, and only Jesus can provide it. Of temperance. Only He can bring your life into control. Of judgment to come. There is a day in which you'll face God in the judgment. And things may be going well now, but judgment is coming. Do you know Jesus? I wonder how many would say, "Pastor, if I died today, I know that I'd go to heaven." May I see your hand? Hold it up. "I know I'd go to heaven." Take it down. Now if you couldn't lift your hand, I'm going to ask you today to give your heart to Jesus Christ. Father, I pray today that many in this building will say an everlasting yes to Jesus Christ and be saved. In His dear name I pray, amen.

# The Marks of a Christian

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** January 7, 1996

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 11:19–26; 26:22–28

*“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”*

ACTS 11:26

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## Introduction

Praise the Lord—a wonderful, wonderful message in song and a wonderful message from the Word of God today. Turn to Acts chapter 26. In a moment, we’re going to begin reading in verse 22. The title of the message today: “The Marks of a Christian.”

Now, what is a Christian? We use the word *Christian* so carelessly that it’s almost lost its meaning. Today, a person is a Christian who is born in America who is not Jewish or Muslim. You say, “Well, if he’s not Jewish or Muslim, he must be Christian.” That’s how carelessly we use the word. I heard one time of a man who was asked this question: “Are you a Christian?” He said, “Yes, I am.” He said, “Why are you a Christian?” He said, “I was born in America, and America is a Christian country so I’m a Christian.” And, the friend, with a smile on his face, said, “I knew of some kittens who

were born in a breadbasket. That didn't make them biscuits." You can be born in America and not be a Christian. We've even started to qualify the word *Christian* today. We say, "Now, he is a converted Christian, a born-again Christian, a Bible Christian." We put adjectival descriptions in front of the word *Christian* to qualify it, but to say, "born-again Christian" is a little redundant. That's like saying, "tooth dentist." If you're a dentist, you deal with teeth. If you are a Christian, you are born again.

Now, what is a Christian? Well, let me ask you a question: Are you a Christian? Be careful before you answer. Did you know that the word *Christian* is only used three times in all of the Bible? Did you know that? We're going to look at those three times this morning, and then we're going to ask ourselves again this question: Are we Christians?

## I. A Christian Is Marked by Persuasion

Now, begin in verse 22: *"Having therefore obtained help [from] God, I continue...this day, witnessing both to small and [to] great, saying none [of the] things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come."* (Acts 26:22) Well, who's talking right now? The Apostle Paul. And, to whom is he speaking? Well, he's speaking to a civil magistrate, a king called Agrippa. Why is Paul there? Well, Paul has been arrested for preaching the gospel of Christ. They have falsely accused him of stirring up a riot. Now, he's standing before this pagan king, and the first thing he does—he gives his testimony. And, after he gives his testimony, he calls that testimony "the help of God," and he said, *"Having therefore obtained [the] help [from] God, I continue...this day, witnessing both to small and great"*—now, the great was the king himself. Paul witnessed to the up-and-out, the down-and-out, the out-and-out, the in-and-out, and anybody who was out; he just told them about Jesus—*"saying none [of the] things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice"*—now, Festus was there with King Agrippa. He was another high muckety-muck. And—*"Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad"*—that is, "Paul, you've been to school too long. You have lost your mind"—*"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness"*—"What I say is true, and what I say is very serious"—*"For the king"*—now, he's talking about Agrippa again—*"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner"*—the thing he's talking about is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, He showed himself alive with many infallible proofs. He's saying, "The king, now, knows

that I am telling the truth.” And then, he says—“*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?*”—that was a challenge straight to the king. And then, he said—“*I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*” (Acts 26:22–28) And, there’s the word *Christian*—the first time it’s used in our message. “*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*” (Acts 26:28) Now, I ask you this question: Are you a Christian? If you are, you have been persuaded and you have been converted to Christ. A Christian is somebody who is marked by a persuasion that leads to a conversion.

Now, Agrippa did not become a Christian. He was almost persuaded, but he was not altogether persuaded. Now he, first of all, was convinced about Christ. Paul said to Agrippa—he said, “I know that you believe. I know that you believe the prophets. I know that you’re convinced that this is true.” (Acts 26:27) And you, my friend, can be convinced and still not be a Christian. There are a lot of people who believe the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who are not Christians.

The Apostle Paul spoke to King Agrippa about the death of Jesus, about His voluntary death. In verse 22, he says that this was spoken of by Moses and the prophets. (Acts 26:22) It wasn’t accidental; it wasn’t incidental. Jesus didn’t die as a helpless victim, as a martyr. It was planned in the heart and mind of God, and Jesus voluntarily laid down His life. And, I want to tell you this: that He willingly died for you. He’s the only person that ever really volunteered to die, when you think about it. You say, “Other people may die. There are suicides, or other people may die as martyrs.” Well, all they do is volunteer to die a little sooner because they’re going to die sooner or later. Jesus need not have died. There was no sin in Him and no seed of death in Him. He died voluntarily; and then, He died vicariously. The next verse, verse 23, says that He suffered for our sins. (Acts 26:23) He took our place. He died for you. He took the hell that you deserved. He died voluntarily. He died victoriously. Also, He rose from the dead. That’s what the Apostle Paul preached to this man: the death of Christ—His voluntary death, His vicarious death, His victorious death. That’s what he preached to this man.

And, was King Agrippa saved? No, not yet. Though he was convinced about Christ, he had to be convicted by Christ. And, he was also convicted, it’s very clear in this passage of Scripture if you read in verse 27: “*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me.*” (Acts 26:27–28) That is, there was a deep conviction in his heart. His pulse began to quicken. His heart began to pound. His palms became moisten. Here is the greatest soul winner that ever lived facing that king, and that king is so close to being saved. When I was a younger preacher, we used to sing an invitation hymn called “Almost Persuaded,” and there’s a line in that invitation hymn:

*“Almost” cannot avail;  
“Almost” is but to fail!  
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—  
“Almost,” but lost!  
—PHILIP P. BLISS*

He was convinced. He was convicted, but he was not converted. It was so hard for this king to give up, and his pride in his heart brought up a barrier where the battering ram of the Holy Spirit could not get through. And, there he was, the king upon his throne. The Apostle Paul is telling him of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but he said, *“Almost.”* (Acts 26:28) And, he was at the very gate of heaven, but this morning, he was in the very pit of hell.

I’m convinced there are some who are listening to me this morning who are very much like King Agrippa. You’ve heard the gospel. You’ve heard of the voluntary, vicarious, victorious death of Jesus Christ for your sins. You have been convicted of your sin. You know the Bible is true. You’re so very close to being saved, but you’re going to spend eternity in hell because you’re almost persuaded. Are you a Christian? If you are, you have been converted to Christ. Are you converted? I didn’t ask you if you were a Baptist. I didn’t ask if you were a member of Bellevue Baptist Church. I didn’t ask if you come from a Christian family, if you’re a member of a Bible-believing church. Have you been truly converted?

## **II. A Christian Is Marked by Profession**

Now, there’s another time the word *Christian* is used in the Bible, and I want you to turn to Acts chapter 11 now. Just go back a few chapters, if you will.

### **A. A Consistent Walk**

And, in Acts chapter 11, let me tell you what has happened here. Some people in Jerusalem had followed the Lord Jesus Christ, and there’s a great persecution in Jerusalem, because Stephen was stoned for witnessing for Christ and it was open season on Christians. And, these Christians in Jerusalem decided they would take their wives, family, children, and they would move to a place called Antioch. And so, they moved to Antioch, and as they went to Antioch, as they were going and as they got there, they began to preach Christ—first of all, just to the Jews, and then they found some Greeks and they began to tell them about Christ. And, a little colony of heaven began to be built there, and people got saved. And then, revival broke out. The word of that revival got back to the church leaders in Jerusalem. They said, “We’d better go. We’d better send somebody up there to find out whether that thing is genuine, whether or not it is a real revival or whether they’ve got some wildfire up there. Maybe they’re starting a cult up there.” So, they found a good man whose name was Barnabas—and

the name *Barnabas* means “encourager”—and they sent old Barney up there to check it out.

And, I want you to begin to read with me, as we look here in Acts chapter 11, verse 22: *“Then tidings of these things came [into] the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem”—tidings of what things? Well, the good things happening in Antioch—“and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with [one] purpose of heart they [should] cleave unto the Lord. For he”—that is, Barnabas—“was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people [were] added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him [to] Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people”—now, notice this next line here—“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” (Acts 11:22–26) There’s the second use of the word *Christian*. “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26)*

Now, they didn’t have a vote and say, “Let’s name that church,” and people submitted names, and they gave a prize to the one who gave the best name—no. They were called Christians. Other people called them Christians. Why did they call them Christians? Because they were living like Christ. The word *Christian* means “somebody who is like the Lord Jesus.” A calling is a vocation. In ancient times, the people would be called by their vocation. If a man was a baker, the family name might be Baker. If he was a hunter, the family name might be Hunter. If he was a jeweler, the family name might be Goldsmith because that was the profession. That’s what the people did. These people in Antioch, their profession was Christ.

Somebody asked William Carey, who was the founder of modern missions, “What is your job?” He said, “My job is being a Christian.” “No, no,” he said, “I appreciate that, but what is your job?” Now, William Carey, who took the gospel to India, was a cobbler—a shoemaker, a shoe repairman. So, the man asked him again. He said, “What is your job?” He said, “My job is being a Christian.” He said, “No, no, no, no. What is your job?” He said, “Oh, I think I know what you mean.” He said, “I mend shoes to make a living, but my job is being a Christian,” and so it is with every one of us. That is our profession. Our profession—we are Christian by profession. And, profession means not only what we say; our profession means what we do. Are you a Christian by profession? I mean, is that your job? Can you say, “This one thing I do”? If not, you don’t have any right to call yourself a Christian. So, I would ask you, number one, are you converted to Christ? Number two: Are you committed to Christ?

Well, how can we tell whether or not you’re committed to Christ? Well, let’s see how these people were so living that they were called Christian. Go back up, if you will, to

verse 21. And, the Bible says, *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch”*—now, watch verse 23—*“Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad.”* (Acts 11:21–23) Question: How do you see the grace of God? *“When he...had seen the grace of God...”* (Acts 11:23) How did he see the grace of God? How big is it? What color is it? How do you see the grace of God? Do you know the only way you can see the grace of God? As it’s lived out in the life of a Christian. Isn’t that true? In my life and in your life, if I have been saved by grace and kept by grace, I’ll live by grace, and you will see the grace of God in my life. People are not to know, primarily, that we’re Christians because of a badge we bear or a bumper sticker but because they can see the grace of God in our lives. And, that’s something that concerns me, many times. I wonder if people can see the grace of God in my life.

¶ I was in a store when my children were little. And, Joyce was shopping, and I was minding Stephen and Gayle. And, they were of that age, you know, where they are prone to be...as children are prone to be. And, a lady came up to me and said, “Are you Pastor Rogers?” I said, “Yes, ma’am, I am.” She said, “I didn’t know whether that was you or not,” but she said, “but when I saw how sweet and kind you were being to your children, I knew that must have been you.” I said, “Thank you, Lord. Thank you that she caught me at the right time.”¶

¶ A friend of mine told me of one of his members out in California—a pastor. This man was a businessman who did everything just right. He was very punctual, always on time—a very organized businessman. Upon a time, when he got up to go to work, however, his car would not start. The battery was dead. He had to use his wife’s car. It made him late. He’s caught in the traffic, and he’s in a traffic jam. He can’t get to work. He’s very irritated. The car in front of him is not moving. The car behind him has pulled up to the bumpers. It’s bumper to bumper. He can’t turn right; he can’t turn left. He’s sitting there looking at his watch, very irritated he’s going to be late for work. And, the man behind him blows the horn. Well, that really infuriated him, but he sat there and tried to get it together again. After a few more minutes, the man tapped the horn again. There’s no way that he could move. Then, the third time the man blew the horn, it so infuriated this Christian businessman that he jumped out of the car and in a fit of rage went over and tapped on the window. The man rolled down the window, and he said, “Can’t you see I can’t move? Can’t you see there’s no way for me to move in this traffic? You sit back here and blow your horn at me?” He said, “If you do that one more time,” he said, “I’m going to drag you out of this car and spread your brains all over this pavement.” Now, this was a believer. “If you do that one more time...” The guy just lost

it. The fellow in the car behind him said, “Mister, what is wrong with you?” He said, “What do you mean ‘what’s wrong with me’? What’s wrong with you?” He said, “Look at your bumper sticker. Doesn’t it mean what it says—‘honk if you love Jesus’?” And, the man didn’t know that his wife had that bumper sticker. He said, “Oh, mister, forgive me.” He said, “I do love Jesus. Forgive me.”<sup>f</sup>

I wonder if people can see the grace of God in us. I wonder if the grace of God that has saved us... I mean, when people know by the way we behave in traffic that we’re Christian, can they see the grace of God? You see, it’s marked by a profession. There’s a consistent walk.

### **B. A Courageous Witness**

There’s a courageous witness. Look, if you will, in verses 19 and 20 of this same chapter here: *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus.”* (Acts 11:19–20) Now, not only was there a consistent walk, but there was a courageous witness. They were telling other people about Jesus—everywhere they went, telling people about Jesus.

Now again, are you a Christian? Well, do you witness? Do you? I mean, what right do you have to call yourself a follower of Jesus if His purpose is not your purpose? Jesus Christ *“[came] to seek and to save that which [is] lost.”* (Luke 19:10) Now, I hope I don’t hurt your feelings when I tell you this, but I’m going to tell you this anyway: I don’t think you have a right to call yourself a Christian if you don’t have a burden for lost souls. I mean, how can you believe that men without Christ are lost, that Jesus is the Savior of the world, and you have no concern to share the Lord Jesus Christ? Now, you may not do it from a pulpit. These people who preached Christ—this is not talking about their form of preaching. Actually, it’s the word—they went everywhere *gossiping* Jesus. Everywhere they went they were spreading the news about Jesus. You say, “Well, I’d get in trouble if I did that.” These people were in trouble. I mean, they were in trouble in Jerusalem; now they’re in trouble in Antioch. And, you’re going to get in trouble everywhere you go if you preach Jesus Christ because this world does not want to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, you don’t have to do it the way I do it. I don’t have to do it the way you do it. But somehow, some way, if you are saved, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, you’re going to be wanting to get the gospel out. Matthew Henry, one of the great old Puritans who wrote *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*—it’s still one of the best commentaries around—Matthew Henry said, “I consider him a Christian indeed that is neither

ashamed of the gospel or ashamed to the gospel.”

### C. A Common Worship

Are you a Christian? Consistent Walk. Are you a Christian? Courageous Witness. Are you a Christian? Here's the third thing: a common worship. Look in verses 25 and 26: *“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”* (Acts 11:25–26) Do you love the brethren? Do you love those whom Jesus loves? How can you call yourself a follower of Jesus if you don't love what Jesus loves? How can you be so foolish as to say, “I'm a Christian. I just don't like the Church. I don't go to the church. I'm not a part of the Church”? That's a contradiction in terms. Look again: *“[and] they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”* (Acts 11:26) If you love Jesus, you're going to love what Jesus loves, and Jesus loves the Church.

So, what were the marks of these people here, these people who were committed to Christ? Well, there was a consistent walk. There was a courageous witness. There was a common worship. They were called Christians.

### III. A Christian Is Marked by Persecution

Now, let me give you the third time the word *Christian* is used, and we'll be finished. Will you turn this time to 1 Peter chapter 4? Just turn right, if you're in the Bible, and keep on going through the book of Hebrews and James, and then you'll come to 1 Peter chapter 4. And look, if you will now, beginning in verse 16—1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 16: *“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.”* (1 Peter 4:16) *“If any man suffer as a Christian...”* (1 Peter 4:16) Here's the third thing. First of all, being a Christian is one that's marked by persuasion. Secondly, it's one that's marked by profession. And thirdly, it is one that is marked by a persecution. *“If any man suffer as a Christian...”* (1 Peter 4:16) Did you know that you can't be a true Christian without suffering for Jesus? Some of you might say, “Well, I don't want to be one then.” Well, maybe you won't be one, but the Bible says, *“All [who] will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* (2 Timothy 3:12)

Now, I'm asking you, are you a Christian? I'm going to help you answer the question. First of all, ask yourself this question: Have I been converted to Christ? Secondly, ask this question: Am I committed to Christ? And thirdly, ask this question: Am I crucified with Christ? If you are, you're a Christian. *“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.”* (1 Peter 4:16) There's no cheap way. There's no easy way. There's no lazy way that you can serve God and be a follower of Jesus Christ and not suffer for Christ.

### A. Common Trouble

You say, “Yes, pastor, I suffer. I have arthritis,” or, “I have a child that’s breaking my heart,” or, “I have just lost my job.” Well, that’s not necessarily suffering as a Christian. Those things happen to all kinds of people. There’s common suffering. The Bible says, “*Man [who] is born of [women] is...full of trouble.*” (Job 14:1) I mean, if you got here any other way, then maybe you’ll not have any trouble. But, if you were born, if you’ve got a mamma, you’ve got trouble. Not your mamma—you’ve just got trouble. “*Man that is born of...woman is...full of trouble.*” (Job 14:1) That’s common trouble.

### B. Carnal Trouble

And then, there’s carnal trouble. You know, we’re in verse 16; just back up to verse 15 and look at it for a moment. He says, “*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.*” (1 Peter 4:15) Sometimes we suffer because it’s our own fault. I mean, if you are a thief or a murderer or meddle in other people’s problems and you suffer because of it, well, you just got what you paid for. I mean, a lot of times the bitter fruit we eat is from trees we planted and the poisoned water we drink is from the well we dug. A lot of folks who call themselves Christians are just busybodies and meddlers. Stuart Briscoe says, “Verily, he who sticketh his nose in shall find a fist on the end of it.”

### C. Christian Trouble

We’re not talking about that kind of suffering; we’re talking about Christian suffering. Did you know that if you’re a true Christian, if you give your life to Jesus Christ, you’re going to suffer for it? You say, “Pastor, you’re trying to build a church. That’s no way to get folks.” Well, I don’t want you to come with any fine print in the contract. I think that’s the problem with a lot of people: they think if they waltz down the aisle and join somebody’s church that they’ve got a ticket to heaven and all they have to do is just going to be a life of ease, and all honey and no bees. That’s not true—that’s not true. “*Yea, and all [who] will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” (2 Timothy 3:12)

Are you converted to Christ? Are you committed to Christ? Are you crucified with Christ? If so, maybe you can call yourself a Christian. Has there been a persuasion? Is there a profession? And, is there a persecution? Three times the word *Christian* is used. Are you a Christian? I’m not saying that you get saved because you suffer; I’m saying you suffer because you’re saved. I’m not saying you can buy your salvation with anything that you do. Salvation is the gift of God. But, once you receive the Lord Jesus Christ, you are radically, dramatically, eternally changed. And, so many of us don’t want to suffer. We just think that somehow we can call ourselves Christians and live carnal, ungodly, lascivious lives.

Now, let me tell you what this suffering will do for you. Why does God allow this

suffering? Well, I want to give you four reasons, and then I'll be finished.

## 1. Purification

Reason number one is found in verse 12—chapter 4, verse 12. Look at it: *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”* (1 Peter 4:12) Now, what was this fiery trial that was to try them? In A.D. 64, Nero, who was the Roman emperor, set fire to Rome, according to historians. He wanted to renovate parts of the city of Rome, and they were slums. He knew he couldn't get the people out of the slums voluntarily so he sent his henchmen out there to burn the slums down. Well, of course, the thing backfired on him. People lost their homes, and many lost their lives. And, they were looking for someone to retaliate upon. And, Nero saw that it was getting dangerous; and so, one of his advisors said, “Nero, why don't you blame the Christians? They're always talking about setting the world on fire.” And so, they blamed the Christians, and it was open season on Christians. Many of the Christians were being put to death—and in all kinds of horrible ways. Christians died for their faith. I wonder, would you die for Jesus? I have to ask myself that question: “Adrian, would you die for Jesus?” I think I would. I don't want to boast too much. I believe I would. Maybe I will. Maybe you will. But, these people died for their faith.

Now, he says, *“[Don't] think it...strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.”* (1 Peter 4:12) Look at the word *try*. Do you see the word *try*? The word *try* actually is a word that means “to purify,” as gold is tried by fire. It means “as it is purified by fire,” where the dross and the filth and the scum are burned away from the gold ore so only the pure gold remains. Do you know what suffering will do for you? It will purify you like nothing else. It will purify you. When you go through the fire, the fire will burn out the dross. The fiery trial will purify you.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into a fiery furnace. When the king looked into the furnace, he saw those men fully clothed. All of the bonds were burned off them, the chains, but the smell of smoke wasn't even in their clothes. Point: The only thing that the fire burned off of them is what the world had put on them, and that's all the fire will burn off of you. When you go through that fiery furnace, when you get in the furnace—I mean, if you're in there for Jesus' sake—the first fruit of this suffering as a Christian will be purification.

## 2. Partnership

The second fruit of suffering as a Christian will be partnership. Look in verse 13. We're back in chapter 4 and verse 13: *“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.”* (1 Peter 4:13) If you suffer as a Christian, you ought to rejoice. That's what Peter says. Why? Because you are a partaker. The word *partaker* there is the word

*koinonia*. It means “fellowship”; it means “partnership.” You have become one with the Lord Jesus Christ in a remarkable way. I read there in the book of Acts where those earlier Christians rejoiced from the presence of the council, or “*departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*” (Acts 5:41) Jesus Christ will never be more real and more precious to you than when you’re suffering for Him.

I have suffered for Christ. Now, I have not suffered a lot, and I feel a little strange talking about suffering for Jesus because God has been so good to me and He’s blessed me so much. But yeah, I’ve had some people say some very bad things about me. I know you would never believe that, but I’ve had some people say some mean things about me and accuse me of my motives and other things, and maybe I take a stand for the Word of God and wouldn’t compromise about this or that, or preach against some particular sin or whatever. Some people can say some pretty hard things, and I don’t talk much about it. But, when that happens, do you know what it does to me? It gives me joy. You say, “Well, you’re some sort of a weirdo.” No, if I know that I’m not suffering as a busybody—not carnal suffering, but Christian suffering—if I say, “You know, Lord, I’m in trouble today, and Lord, it’s your fault. I’m in trouble because of you, because of your name, because of who I am, because of the stand that I’ve taken, because of what I’ve done, because of that, Lord, I’m in trouble because of you”—friend, you’ll never know just how sweet that is. And then, I say, “Lord, I take that, and I offer it to you as a praise offering,” and, therefore, the worse the criticism, the sweeter the offering. It’s an incredible thing—it’s an incredible thing. It is something that just changes and transforms everything and causes it to be a source of joy.

Now, you don’t need to go around and invite persecution. You don’t need to go around with a martyr complex. But, if it comes, remember, number one, it is a fiery trial—it’ll purify you; there’s purification—number two, there’s partnership. Jesus Christ will never be more real and never more sweet to you than when you’re going through the fire for Him. If you’ve never gone through the fire for Him, just try it sometime. Hey, by the way, you say, “Well, Pastor Rogers, how am I going to get any persecution?” I’ll guarantee you—you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will suffer persecution. You don’t have to go around, you know, daring people to say something bad about you. Don’t do that. Just live sweet, clean, reasonable, honest, godly, courageous lives for Christ, and it will come.

### **3. Power**

Now, here’s the third thing: not only will there be purification, not only will there be partnership; there will be incredible power when you begin to live this way. Look, if you will, in verse 14: “[*But*] if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.” (1 Peter 4:14) There will be incredible

power. When you get out there on a limb for the Lord Jesus Christ, God says, “There’s my servant. He’s suffering for me. She’s not ashamed of me. She’s standing up for me in this college classroom. He is standing up for me in this frat house. This man is standing up for me in that boardroom. That athlete is standing up for me on that football field.” God says, “I’m going to pour some glory on him. I’m going to put the Spirit of God upon him,” and you find that incredible power that comes when you suffer as a Christian. Do you want that power on your life? Most of us have about all the power that God can trust us with. The Church persecuted has always been the Church powerful.

#### 4. Persuasion

Now, here’s the last thing that this suffering as a Christian will do for you: not only will there be that purification, that partnership, and that power, but there will be an incredible persuasion. When you—when we—begin to live this way, we become authentic, and people begin to believe in our Christ. Look again in verse 14: “[*But*] if ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” (1 Peter 4:14) You become an incredible witness for the Lord Jesus Christ if you can suffer as a Christian without retaliating. We unleash a powerful source of persuasion. As a matter of fact, Peter, in the third chapter of this same book, says that’s the way that a wife can win her unsaved husband to Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:1–2)

### Conclusion

Now, question: Are you a Christian? Still want to say you’re a Christian? Have you been converted to Christ? Are you committed to Christ? Are you crucified with Christ? If that’s true about you, maybe you’re a Christian; maybe you can call yourself a Christian.

† Some time ago, I read a story that stayed with me. It was about a man who was a theological student—and a very brilliant one. He went to seminary. He studied Greek. He studied Hebrew. He studied philosophy, and he studied homiletics, the art of preaching, and he was good. He was an honors graduate. But, he went into the navy chaplaincy; he became a naval chaplain, and he found himself assigned to a naval prison, taking care of prisoners. Now remember, he was a very educated, erudite young man. And, in that prison, there was a big old rawboned prisoner who was a Christian, and he said to the chaplain, “Chaplain, could we have some Bible studies in the prison?” The truth of the matter was, the chaplain wasn’t really all that interested in Bible studies. He didn’t want to talk to those men who, he felt, were beneath him about the Bible. In order to get this man off his back, as it were, he said, “Well, if you want some Bible studies, you can teach them.” And so, that chaplain, later on, told how he would watch that big old man, who had just barely gotten through the sixth grade, open

his Bible and with tears streaming down his cheeks, a heart full of love, would preach Christ and tell about the change that Jesus Christ has made in his life. And, that chaplain watched as those prisoners, one by one, were being converted. After a while, the chaplain said to himself, "If that man is real, I am a phony. If what he has is true, what I have is false. I don't have with my Greek and Hebrew, my philosophy and my education, I don't have what that rawboned prisoner has." And, the testimony of that man, who was a true Christian, just kind of stabbed this young chaplain in the heart.

Later on, this chaplain was on the streets of San Francisco, and he was under conviction about sin. And, he saw a strange sight: he saw a man there; and both of his legs had been amputated, and he had just two stumps there. He had no wheelchair, but the man had made a little contrivance out of plywood and some little dolly wheels underneath the plywood. And, this man would sit on that plywood and push himself along the street with a couple of sticks in his hands. That's the way he traveled, and this chaplain was watching that. And, he saw that the man on the little board was going to try and catch a streetcar. Now, the chaplain thought, "Well, how will he get on that streetcar?" And, the streetcar in San Francisco stopped. And, there was the man, and he reached up both hands; and the conductor on that streetcar just reached down and took that man by his hands and lifted him onboard. And, that was the final thing the Holy Spirit did to bring that chaplain to Christ. The chaplain said, "O God, that's me. I'm like that man. I don't have a leg to stand on. There's nothing good about me. And, O God, if I'm saved, you're just going to have to reach down and bring me in." And, he said, "I lifted up my hands of faith, and God lifted up His hands of grace; and the Conductor of the universe took me onboard."<sup>f</sup>

Now folks, that's what it is. That's what salvation is. That's what being converted to Christ is. It's just simply saying, "Lord, here I am. I don't have a leg to stand on. Here, God, I reach up to you. Take me, Lord." And, when He does, you're converted to Christ. And, when you are, you're committed to Christ. And, when you are, you'll be crucified with Christ. And friend, it will be worth it all when we see Christ.

Let's pray. Father, I pray today that you will help us, that we might truly wear the name "Christian."

And now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, maybe you need to lift up those hands to the Conductor of the universe. Maybe you need to lay in the dust your pride and say, "Lord, my education, my money, my personality, my membership in the clubs, my good deeds can't save me. I need to be saved." Would you pray a prayer like this: "Lord Jesus, I need to be saved. I'm a sinner. I'm lost. I don't have a leg to stand on. My sin deserves judgment, but I need mercy. Thank you, Jesus, that you died for me. I believe you're the Son of God. I believe you paid my sin debt with your blood on the cross. I believe God raised you from the dead. And now, by faith, I receive you into

my heart right now as my Lord and Savior”? Would you ask Him, friend? Right now, do it. Don’t let anything keep you from doing it. “Right now, Lord Jesus, right now, this moment, I receive you as my Lord and Savior. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus.” Say that in your heart: “Save me, Lord Jesus. I reach up to you, Lord Jesus. Take me onboard, Lord Jesus.” Do it now.

Did you ask Him? Then, by faith, I want you to thank Him. Pray this way: “Thank you for saving me, Jesus. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You’re now my Lord and my Savior, my God and my Friend. And, if you’ll just give me the strength, Lord, I’ll make it public. I’ll not be ashamed of you. Amen.”

Now, look up here. If you prayed that prayer, the next thing you’re to do is to make it public. There’s something about making it public that helps settle it and seal it and shows you’re not ashamed of Jesus. Jesus said, “If you’re ashamed of me, I’ll be ashamed of you. If you’ll confess me, I’ll confess you.” (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 12:8; Matthew 10:32) Walking an aisle doesn’t save you, but what it indicates is what saves you—is that you’re not ashamed of Jesus, that you believe in Him, that you’re trusting Him. Now, I know that, by and large, most of us here today are already saved, but I just believe God has someone here today and God brought you here especially that you might be saved. So, when we stand and sing, if you prayed that prayer or you still need to pray that prayer, don’t let the devil intimidate you—as soon as we begin to sing, I want you to leave your seat and come forward. Standing at the head of this aisle and each of these aisles will be a minister.†

# How to Survive a Shipwreck

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached:** September 23, 1984

**Main Scripture Text:** Acts 27:9–31

*“Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them.”*

ACTS 27:9

## Outline

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## Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles today, if you will please, and open them to the 27th chapter of the book of Acts. And, if you did not bring a Bible with you, look in the pew rack there and you should find a Bible. And, if you'll turn to page 1094 in that Bible you'll come, I believe to the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts. I want everybody if possible to have an open Bible here in your hand. We're just delighted to have you. We have some dear guests who are coming in to visit us, and we're going to wait for just a few moments, and give them an opportunity to get seated and for you to find the Scripture here. We're just delighted to have these guests and these precious visitors. All right, let's find out just who we have coming in here, brother usher, all right, we've got some

folks from Crestwood Baptist Church where Larry Taylor is pastor and they are evidently on a sojourn, either to or from Oklahoma City. We're delighted to have these dear saints with us here and God bless the saints from Crestwood. And we welcome you in the name of Jesus.

Now, today as I've already said, we're going to be speaking on this subject, How to Survive a Shipwreck, How to Survive a Shipwreck. And, I want us to begin reading here in Acts chapter 27 and verse 9: *"Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives"*—That is, the ship's going to be in danger, the cargo is going to be in danger, and the lives of the people are going to be in danger—But notice in verse 11. *"Nevertheless the centurion..."*—And, the word "centurion" here means a Roman army officer over one hundred men—*"...the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul."* (Acts 27:9–11)

Now, I love this 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts because It is a story of the ocean and I love the ocean. It's a story of a storm at sea, and when you open the Bible to Acts 27, the salt air just comes up into your nostrils and it's an exciting story, a thrilling story. Don't you ever tell me that the Bible is not an exciting and a thrilling book. No more exciting story in all of the world will you find than the one right here in the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts.

Now, it is history, it tells what happened to the Apostle Paul. Paul was on a journey from Caesarea to Rome. He was a prisoner and he was put upon a ship and the ship got into a storm and the ship was destroyed upon the rocks. The ship was lost; the cargo was lost, but Paul's life was saved and Paul survived that storm. Now, God took an entire chapter not just to tell us the details of a shipwreck, but also to give us an illustration that is pertinent to every one of us. Because, you see, every one of us is on a voyage between two eternities. And, we're on the sea of time and every one of us from time to time will come into storms. And, every one of us from time to time will think our ship is going to sink and indeed sometimes it will and so God has given us a lesson. There is an analogy here, there's an illustration here that applies to every life.

Now, many times the storms we get into are storms that we've caused—like Jonah who fled from the Lord. You remember, Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord and a whale swallowed him after a storm and he spent the night on a foam blubber mattress. Now, what happened to Jonah was his own fault. Jonah got into trouble because he himself caused that trouble. But, now there are other people like Paul who get into storms and it's not their fault. Paul was a prisoner. Paul was being carried to Rome, guarded by a centurion. Paul didn't want to go and they went anyway. And many times

we're that way. Sometimes children find themselves in the midst of a storm because of their parents. For example, a mother and father will take a course of action that the child really wishes his parents would not take. Maybe they'll move to another city out of the will of God, and the child goes along, because he's a victim of circumstances. Perhaps sometimes our government will make it legal to kill and murder little babies in the womb. And we're against it. With every inch and ounce and nerve and fiber of our being we're against it. But it's still being done. And God judges this nation. And the nation is headed toward a storm and headed toward judgment. And we're against it, but we're caught up in it, and we're swept along in it. And there seems to be very little we can do about it.

Sometimes we are victims of circumstances. But you're going to see that even when we find ourselves in the midst of a storm, there is a way, that God knows the way for us, and as God delivered Paul, God will deliver you.

Now, there are three things that we're going to look at in this 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts. And the very first thing that I'm going to speak to you about is the cause of shipwreck: what causes some ships to sink, and what may cause your ship to sink—the cause of shipwreck. Then, secondly, we're going to look at the cost of shipwreck: what happens when the ship goes down. And then, thirdly, we're going to think a little bit about conquest in the shipwreck: how can we survive a shipwreck regardless of what caused it. Okay? You ready?

Now let's think for a little bit about the cause of shipwreck. Now I want to give you five things that will cause your ship to go down, and they're right here in the Word of God. Now look, if you will, in verse 9. The Bible says in verse 9, Now when much time was spent. I just want to pause right there and say that the ship had come into a harbor and there in the harbor it seemed to get waylaid and they weren't able to set sail. The conditions never did seem to be right, the weather was dangerous, the sea was choppy, the winds were contrary, and they're there tied to the wharf and time is wasting.

## **I. The Cause**

Now, they feel a compulsion to go, I mean, they feel like they're wasting time.

### **A. Compulsion**

Number one, you are going to sink your ship if you live by compulsion, by compulsion—when you feel compelled to do something. I'm not talking about divine compulsion. I'm not talking about when God leads you. There's a difference between the way that God leads and the devil deceives. God leads; the devil shoves. There are people who find themselves sometime in a situation and things don't seem to be working out for them, so they adopt a philosophy, a policy, whether they say it or not, it is this: "Let's do something, even if it's wrong." And so, you know, they're afraid that life's going to pass them by, and they're not married. And so they don't want to be an old maid, so they

marry a jerk. There are a lot of things worse than not being married. Number one on the list is being married to the wrong guy. Amen?

But, people do things out of compulsion, just in order to do something. They quit school, they change jobs, they do this, they do that. Because they are in a hurry, they do not wait on God. Time was passing, and that's what caused these people to make a mistake.

Now, listen. When somebody tells me, "Adrian, there's something I want you to do." I say, "Well, let me think about it. I want to find God's will." "No, you have to tell me right now. Are you going to do it or not?" I'll say, "No, no, I'm not going to make a decision on that kind of a basis, and neither should you." You never waste time when you wait on God. You never waste time when you wait on God.

### **B. Consultation**

Second thing that will sink your ship: not only compulsion, but consultation. Now, notice what happened. The centurion was in charge, and so he began to consult. He asked Paul, Paul said in verse 10, "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage not only of the lading and the ship but also of our lives." Now, put a big circle around the word "nevertheless." Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

That is, over here he has spiritual advice; over here he has secular advice. Over here he has a man of the Word; and over here he has a man of the world. Over here he has a man who's in touch with God; over here is a man who is out of touch with God. But, the man who is out of touch with God seems to be an expert because he is the master. He's the owner of the ship. He's a man of wealth. He's a man of the ocean. He knows the way of the wind and the waves and the sea. He's been on the sea. He knows it all. And over here is a dumb Baptist preacher.

Now, between those two, this man has to make a decision. And, so, what is the basis of his decision? Well, there is an expert over here and he's going to listen to the expert. And, by the way, you know what an expert is? It's a compounding of two words, "ex" meaning, "has been," and "spert" meaning "a drip under pressure." Now, what he did was to turn to this man who had worldly knowledge. He knew the ways of the world, and the ways of the waves, and the ways of the wind, but he did not know the ways of God. Now, it's all right to go to people for advice as long as that advice does not contradict the Word of God. If you need legal advice, go to a lawyer. If you need financial advice, go to a banker. If you need advice in building a house, go to a builder, an architect. But you'd better know the Word of God.

You see, God did not leave this centurion without a word from God. But, what he did, he depended upon consultation more than he depended upon revelation, and that was his mistake. I'm amazed at where people will get their advice. Sometimes when a

marriage is about to go on the rocks, and their ship is about to sink and be made shipwrecked, they will go to a marriage counselor. There's nothing wrong with a marriage counselor, but I would not trust any marriage counselor who does not understand the principles of God's Word. Not any! Not a one if he doesn't understand God's Word. He's got to tell you what God says. But, you say, "Well, Dr. so and so said do so and so." It doesn't matter if he's a Ph.D. It doesn't matter what kind of advice he gives you if it's contrary to the Word of God. I'm amazed at where people will get their advice. Sometimes they won't even go to that kind of a counselor.

A woman will be thinking about getting a divorce and she'll talk to the girl who types next to her there in the office, and clacking gum and typing and saying, "Well, I'll tell you what I'd do if I were you, honey." And, she does what she says rather than getting a message from God. Consultation rather than revelation will get you into difficulty and it will sink your ship.

### C. **Comfort**

Now, let me give you a third way to sink your ship. Not only there by compulsion, and consultation, but also look if you will in verse 12 and read: "*And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also...*" (Acts 27:12). Now, what does that mean: "Because the haven was not commodious to winter"? It just wasn't a good place to spend a winter. Folks, it was a dump. And they didn't want to stay there. It wasn't comfortable. It wasn't commodious.

They said, "We don't want to spend the winter here. What we've got to do, we've got to sail until we get on the lee side of an island where the wind is not blowing, where it will be comfortable in the winter time. We're going to spend a whole winter. Let's get out of this place."

Now, what caused them to make that decision? This was not compulsion. It wasn't consultation. It was comfort—just comfort. I mean, they did not want to stay in an uncomfortable place. All they were doing was making a move on the basis of one thing: self-gratification.

How many people make a decision like that? Most people I know. They live on an animal plane. Do you know what motivates an animal? Well, if an animal wants to eat, he eats, that is, if there's food there. If he wants to sleep, he sleeps, if he can—nobody to wake him up. If he wants to drink, he drinks. If he wants to mate and reproduce, he does, just simply because he wants to. He has no guidance, no leadership.

You see, these people were making a very animal decision, an animalistic decision. They were basing it not on the will of God, but just simply what made it easy, what gratified their flesh; they did not want to stay there. Now, God does not necessarily want you to be uncomfortable. And God has no fight with your being comfortable. We try to make the church air-conditioned, and give you a soft seat to sit on.

That's all right. But, dear friend, you'd better again not let comfort motivate you or decide what you are going to do. If you do, your flesh is going to mislead you. Many people make their great decisions of life, even their job, on what they think is going to be best for the physical welfare and their physical comfort.

#### D. **Consensus**

Now, let me give you the fourth way to sink a ship. And, boy, these are ways to do it. Not only comfort, but consensus. Look, if you will, in verse 12. And, the Bible says in the middle part, "And the more part advised to depart thence also." Now, what happened, the centurion had already gone to the owner of the ship, and he said, "Well, I don't think you ought to go." That's what we call consultation. But now they took a vote on it. They said, "How many on this ship think we ought to go?" Now, there were two hundred and seventy six people aboard that ship. That was a big ship, two hundred and seventy six people; I mean, that was a big one. "Say, how many of you think we ought to go?" And about two hundred and seventy hands went up. The more part, the majority, said, "Let's go." Are you listening? The majority is almost always wrong, even the majority of church membership. That's an amazing thing. That's the reason why we need strong spiritual leadership in our church.

You say, "You think the majority of our churches?" The majority are not even here on Wednesday night for prayer meeting. Isn't that right? The majority are not even here on Wednesday night when we meet to pray. You'd better be careful of following a crowd. The crowd is almost always going in the wrong direction. We are twice-born people in a world of once-born people, and we're going to be going against the tide most of the time. "*Broad is the way that leads to destruction; narrow is the way that leads to life...*" (Matthew 7:13–14) Joshua and Caleb and ten others went into the land to spy it out. Twelve people went in. Joshua and Caleb said, "Let's go in: we're able to possess it." Ten to two was the report. Ten of them said, "We shall not go in: we cannot possess it." The majority was wrong. The two were right. Fifty million Frenchman can be wrong. And you be afraid of following majority, a crowd, to do evil.

Now, you shouldn't do something because the majority is against it, or because the majority is for it. Sometimes the majority is right. Many times the majority is wrong. But the problem was that they were looking for a consensus rather than a word from God. And sometimes there's something you want to do, some sort of a decision; maybe it's about a job, maybe about a ministry, maybe about a marriage, maybe about something else, and rather than getting a word from God, you go around talking to enough people until you rack up enough votes to do what you wanted to do anyway. And you say, Well, everybody's for it: it must be all right. No, no, no! You do not live by consensus! It will sink your ship!

## E. Circumstances

And here is the last one and the climax of all of them—if you will look in verse 13. It's circumstance—circumstance! Look in verse 13 of this same chapter: “And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had attained their purpose, loosing from thence, they sailed close by Crete.” Now this is what really capped it off: circumstances. A soothing south wind came up. Now that's just exactly what they thought they needed. And, my goodness, look! Why, the experts say we ought to do it. It will be more comfortable if we do it. Most of the people think we ought to do it. We're wasting time here. And look! The wind is favorable. The circumstances are in our favor. There is a soothing south wind. We've got it made! That south wind was about to turn into a howling hurricane. It was about to turn into a cyclone. It was about to turn into a wind that would sink their ship. But they made the decision on the basis of circumstance. Do you know anybody who does that? I know a lot of people. “O Lord, if you want me to date this girl, cause her to sit next to me here in this classroom. There she is. Of course, you saw her before you prayed. There she is: circumstance! I know people who even do it different than this. They say, “Lord, if it's not your will, don't let it happen.” “Don't let it happen, Lord, if it's not your will.” Lots of things happen that are not God's will—rape and murder among them! A lot of things happen. Don't you take circumstances. Circumstances will fool you. You'll be deceived by circumstances. These people were deceived by circumstances. There's nothing wrong with letting circumstances be a part of your decision; but when God has spoken, as God had already spoken, you're going to sink your ship when you let circumstances keep you from obeying the Word of God.

Now, this is the formula for shipwreck. That's what they did. And that's what a lot of you are going to do. Some of you teenagers, you'd better listen to this Word of God. Now, God just didn't fill up a whole chapter just to tell you about a shipwreck. There's more to it. He wants you to learn something that you can apply to your own life. There's a deep lesson here. Now, that, dear friend, is a formula for sinking a ship. That is the cause of shipwreck.

## II. The Cost

Now, I want you to follow with me and see the cost of shipwreck. I want you to see what happens when a ship sinks. Now, begin in verse 14 and see: “*And not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon*” (Acts 27:14). There was a cyclone, a hurricane, that had it's own name: Euroclydon was the name of this storm.

Now, the word “tempestuous” means it was fierce. It was a terrible storm. If you want to see how bad it was, look down to verse 20: “*And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us...*” (Acts 27:20). And, you know what the phrase “no small tempest” means? It was a big one! It was a big one. They had

been in a storm night and day, many days. They couldn't see the sun, the moon, the stars. Every star had gone out of their sky.

Now, I want to remind you that they didn't have radar. They did not have radio. And they did not have the modern means of navigation that ships have today. They steered by the stars. They steered by the sun. They steered by the shore. And they couldn't see any of these.

Now, what do unsaved people do when the stars go out of their sky? Brother, you'd better have a relationship that can't be blotted out. Now Paul's spiritual radar kept on working. I mean, he wasn't guided by those things. He had an internal guidance system. He had the Holy Spirit of God to guide him. For the Bible says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." But these people only had external guidance. They had no internal guidance. They did not have the Spirit of God to lead them. The stars had gone out of the sky. And this storm with fists was beating upon the sea. And that little boat was being tossed like a bottle, like a cork, there upon the great Mediterranean. Listen. The Bible says that all hope was gone; I mean, all hope that they should be saved was taken away—in verse 20.

Can you use your imagination? Can you imagine being on a ship like that not just for an hour, but for day after day in the midst of a storm? No Dramamine. No radar. No radio. Just midnight. And finally they come to the place where they say, "We've had it. There is no hope. We are going down."

Now I want to talk to you now about the cost of shipwreck, okay? The cost of shipwreck: what happened? Well, let's see what these people did.

### **A. They Wander**

The very first thing I want you to notice that they did, if you look here in verse 15: "And when the ship was caught and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive." That's a very poignant phrase: "We let her drive." That is, they were no longer in control. There was a time when they were in control. They had the sails. They had the rudder. They were in control. But now, Mr. Ship's Master is out of control. Now Mr. Sailor is out of control. And what they do now is they are wandering off course. They are being driven. Their aims are not being fulfilled. Their dreams are dissolving. And their plans are coming apart like the ship at its seams. It's not up to man to direct his steps. Now you're going to find yourself when you leave God out of your life, you're going to find that the storms of life and the winds of circumstance that you thought were so good are going to drive you in directions in which you never dreamed that you would be going. The first thing they do: they wander.

### **B. They Work**

The second thing they do: they work. I want you to look, if you will, in this passage of

Scripture here and look if you will in verse 16—chapter 27 and verse 16. *“And running under a certain island called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat...”* (Acts 27:16). Now, what that means, “to come by the boat” literally means, “to secure the boat.” What they had done was to put great cables underneath the boat and wrap them around the boat just like you put your belt around you. And they took turnbuckles and tightened those things to hold the ship together. The ship was about to come apart. And listen, folks. This is in the midst of a storm, and they’re out there with the perspiration on their brow, and the Bible says that there was much work just to secure this thing.

Now, you know who was out there on the deck? I believe all hands were on deck. The sailors were out there. The ship’s owner was out there, some of the passengers. Madam Got-rocks was out there. Mr. Money-bags was out there. They were all out there. And they’re working—these people who had no time for God, these people who voted and said, “Let’s do it.” Now, what had been their motivation? They were looking for the easy way. Do you know what happened? When they looked for the easy way, it became the hard way: much work. Do you know, people will say it’s hard to be a Christian, hard to be a Christian, hard to be a Christian. Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says *“...the way of transgressor is hard”* (Proverbs 13:15). Isn’t that interesting? The way of the transgressor is hard.

Now, you finish this. Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me...For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28–30). Did you know that unsaved people take more difficulty to go to Hell than we do to go to Heaven? Here they are out there, I mean, saying, “We want the easy way.” But, *“...sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:15). And, there’s the labor, there’s the tediousness, the tiredness of those people who are working in the strength of their flesh rather than being moved by the winds of the Spirit of God.

### C. **They Waste**

They wander. They work. But wait a minute. They’re not over yet. They waste.

Look, if you will, in chapter 27 and verse 18: *“And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship”* (Acts 27:18). Do you know what that means? They started chunking everything overboard: all the precious cargo, all of the treasures, all of the things that were so important, over the side they go. And, not only that, but in verse 19, they threw the paraphernalia that they used to guide and run the ship with, the tackling of the ship, all of the hardware, it’s all going down, it’s going to the bottom. Boy, you have to pity the people of this world; you have to pity the people who don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ. They reject Jesus Christ for the world and then lose the world. I mean, they don’t have either one. You know, that’s why Jesus said, *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what*

*shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26).

Listen. How foolish a bargain if you could gain the whole world. You can't. But if you could. If you gained it, you couldn't keep it. And if you gained it and kept it, it couldn't satisfy you, because, you see, you were made for more. And here they are throwing all of this overboard. So many pitiful souls spend the first half of their lives spending their health to gain their wealth, and then they spend the last half of their lives spending their wealth to get their health back. And they're unhappy in both halves because they don't know God, and life is a waste, and their precious cargo is gone.

Sooner or later, it's going down: these toys, and these baubles, and these things that you think are so important. Sooner or later, your ship is going to sink, and you are going to leave these things. Don't you understand that? That's what he's showing: here they're throwing them all overboard. They cannot keep them—they cannot keep them. Neither shall you. What fools we are, what pitiful fools we are, when we waste our lives. A without Jesus life is a wasted life, ultimately a wasted life.

#### **D. They Wish**

And then, look, if you will, in verse 29. Not only do they waste; they wish. Verse 29, *"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern..."*—and here's a very poignant phrase—*"...and wished for the day"* (Acts 27:29). "Oh, if it would just get light. Oh, if we could only see. If only the sun would come up." What a night that must have been! I feel so sorry for people who don't know the Lord, who don't know how to pray. All they know how to do is hope. All they know how to do is to wish. "When I wish upon a star." Well, they didn't have a star to wish on. "Wishing will make it so." Wishing will not make it so. "Cheer up, things will get better." Isn't that good advice when your ship's about to sink? I mean, "Let's hope for a better day." I've been in the homes and hospitals of pagans who don't know God. That's the most pitiful thing to see a person who's in a terrible, horrible circumstance, and some well-meaning pagan will say a few scant words, then not knowing what else to say is "Good luck"—"Good luck." Well, I'm glad I don't have to depend upon good luck. I'm glad I just don't have to say to someone, "Well, I hope things get better."

Here they are: they are just hoping, wishing. "Oh, if the light would just come up, if we could just have the day." They waste; they wish. I feel so sorry for these people when their ship is going down. Then what do they do? Look in verse 30: *"And as the shipmen—that is, the sailors—were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."* (Acts 27:30–31).

Now, what happened there was this. There were some sailors, and these sailors had the idea that we'd better get off this tub: it's going down. Now, there was a lifeboat, but

there was only room for a few people. So these, the shipmen, these sailors, went up into the bow, the Bible says, “under color,” that is “under pretense” of casting some anchors out of the bow. But, they knew that the ship was up there, and they let that ship down into sea, that lifeboat, and they were going to get in it. Now, what were they trying to do? They said, “We want to get off.”

#### E. **They Withdraw**

Now, that’s the next thing that the unsaved man does when his ship is about to sink or while his ship is sinking: he withdraws—he withdraws. I mean, he tries to get away. Now, withdrawal is a common thing that people do. I mean, when it gets bad enough, do you know what they’re going to do? They’re going to withdraw to a bottle of pills, alcohol, divorce, suicide, sickness that is self-imposed as they just simply cannot face life; they cannot stay aboard that ship any longer; they say “I’ve got to get out of here; stop this world and let me off; give me something to kill my brain; I want away.” Paul says, “You can’t get away. There’s no escape.” The cost of shipwreck.

They didn’t think about that when they were back over there and said, “Oh boy, the south wind’s blowing: let’s go.” They didn’t listen to God. They didn’t want to listen to God. They didn’t want to listen to God’s man. They didn’t want to listen to God’s Word. Some of you may be the same way.

### III. **The Conquest**

Now, the third thing: We’ve talked about the cause and the cost; let’s talk about the conquest. What do you do when you find yourself on board a sinking ship? Maybe it’s not your fault. Maybe you didn’t plan it. Maybe you didn’t engineer it. Maybe you’re caught up in circumstances beyond your control. Well, let’s see. Look again in verse 20—chapter 27 and verse 20: “And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” Brother, I want to tell you, that’s just where God specializes: when there’s no hope. He’s the hope for the hopeless, the Lord Jesus. With God, nothing is impossible. Verse 21: “But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, Sirs, you should have hearkened unto me.” I guess Paul bit his tongue a thousand times; a thousand times he wanted to say, “I told you so.” Have you ever wanted to say, “I told you so”? Boy, that’s what I’m going to say at the Rapture: look down at some folks and say, “I told you”—when we’re going up. Listen—listen. Paul said, “I told you so. You should have listened to me and not suffered this loss. You should not have loosed from Crete to have gained this harm, and loss. And now I exhort you *to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve*”—*oh, praise God for that: whose I am, and whom I serve*—“saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must

*be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:22–25).*

Now, I want you to see what God did for the old apostle.

#### **A. God Guarded Paul from the Storm**

The very first thing I want you to see is that God guarded Paul from the storm. Now, Paul doubtless was tossed like everybody else. Paul was hungry like everybody else. Paul was wet and damp like everybody else. But God kept His man. And God said to Paul, “Paul, fear not.” That’s what He says right here in His Word: “Paul, don’t be afraid; fear not”—verse 24.

Now, listen. Sooner or later, what happened to this ship is going to happen to this world. This civilization as we know it, friend, is like a sinking ship, and arranging the deck chairs is not going to do any good. It’s going down. I mean, we ought to do all that we can do to keep her afloat. But it is going down. And God is saying to you what He said to Paul: “Don’t be afraid.” God has said, “Fear thou not” 365 times in the Bible, one time for every day of the year. “Don’t be afraid. I’m going to take care of you.” God will take care of you if you know Him, love Him, and trust Him; if you’re God’s man, God’s woman, God’s boy, God’s girl. God guarded Paul from the storm. Paul didn’t go down.

#### **B. God Gladdened Paul in the Storm**

Second thing: not only did God guard Paul from the storm, but God gladdened Paul in the storm. Look again, if you will, in verse 25. “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God.” Verse 22: “Now I exhort you to be of good cheer.” It’s one thing to be safe from the storm; it’s another thing to sing in the storm. I mean, here’s Paul praising God. They look at Paul, and when the storm was at its worst, Paul was at his best. Oh, Paul is walking around the decks of that ship saying, “He plants His footsteps on the sea. Praise God. Look at this. This is my Father’s world, this is my Father’s storm, and God is in control.” Paul, who helps you to smile at the storm? The same One who gave me songs at midnight when I was in prison back in the sixteenth chapter at Philippi. The Lord stood by me.

Where do you get your joy? Friend, listen. You had better get your joy from beyond the stars, and you’d better get your joy from the Lord. And in the midst of the storm—not in the absence of the storm, but in the midst of the storm—there was a man of God who could say, “Be of good cheer.”

#### **C. God Guided Paul Through the Storm**

Now, that, my friend, is biblical faith. God guarded Paul from the storm. God gladdened Paul in the storm. But here’s the most important thing: watch it. God guided Paul through the storm.

Now look: you're going to miss something if you don't look at it. And I want you to see it here. Verse 24: "Saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Caesar—thou must be brought before Caesar." Now, where was Paul going? He was going to Rome. Did he go to Rome? Look in chapter 28 and verse 14: "*Wherefore we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome*" (Acts 28:14)—going right on toward Rome. Why? Why is Rome so important? Well, go back to Acts 23 and look in verse 11: "*And the night following, the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so*"—what's that next word?—"must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11).

You see, God had a plan. Do you know what God's plan was? God's plan was that the Apostle Paul go and preach the gospel at Rome—and all Hell couldn't stop it. And I don't care what those people did, and I care not how much they disobeyed God, and how much they were motivated by circumstances, and compulsion, and all of these other things. Let me tell you that over it all was God, and where man rules, God overrules. Do you know what was on that ship? The Apostle Paul was on that ship. And do you know what was in Paul? Colossians was in Paul: it hadn't been written yet. Ephesians in Paul: it hadn't been written yet. Dr. Luke was with him: the Gospel of Luke hadn't been written yet. And God had a plan for Paul to go to Rome, and all hell couldn't stop it. That's exciting to me, folks.

## **Conclusion**

You see, listen. Don't you think that things have gotten out of control? God knew about that storm. And God said to Paul, "Paul, you are going to Rome"—and he went to Rome. You get in the stream of God's Spirit, you get in the will of God, I don't care if everybody else in the world won't obey God, you can still be right in the middle of God's will, and God will take care of you. God will take care of you. God will bring you through. God guarded Paul from the storm. God gladdened Paul in the storm. And God guided Paul through the storm.

When the Titanic set sail, she was called unsinkable. Captain Smith received a telegram, and that telegram warned Captain Smith of the Titanic that they were sailing through waters laden with icebergs. He smiled and took the telegram, crumpled it, put it in his pocket, and said, "She's unsinkable." The Titanic went down. Now when the Titanic set sail, there were many classes; many classes were on board. But after she sunk, there were only two classes: saved and lost. And, friend, one of these days, all the people of this world are going to be in one of two classes: saved or lost.

Let's pray. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. If you're not certain that you're saved, if you're not 100% certain that you're saved, I want you to know Christ as your personal Savior. And as the storms of life come, you can say:

*Jesus, Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea;  
Unknown waves before me roll,  
Hiding rocks and treacherous shoal.  
Chart and compass come from Thee.  
Jesus, Savior, Jesus, Savior, pilot me.*

Do you know Him? Do you want to know Him? Would you pray and say, "Lord Jesus, give me the courage today..."—pray it right now—"Lord Jesus, give me the courage today to confess you as my Lord and Savior."

And, Father, I pray that many today will come to Jesus. For we pray in His name.  
Amen.

# How to Weather the Storms of Life

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Date Preached: August 9, 1987**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 27:9–31**

*“Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them.”*

ACTS 27:9

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## Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and find Acts chapter 27. Acts chapter 27, in a moment we’ll begin reading in verse 9. I love the twenty-seventh chapter of the book of Acts. Several times since I’ve been your pastor I’ve studied with you this wonderful chapter. The reason I love the twenty-seventh chapter of the book of Acts is because it is the story of a shipwreck. Not that I’m all enamored with shipwrecks, it’s not so much. But, it’s the story of the sea. And, I love the ocean.

I was born in Florida, near the Atlantic Ocean, lived there most of my life. My blood is about ninety-five percent salt water. And, I love this wonderful story because it’s so

graphic. As you open the Bible to this chapter you just feel the salt spray in your face. It's a story that was written as an eyewitness account of a great shipwreck.

I want you to use your imagination. If you do, you'll taste the salt. You'll feel the swell of this ship as it rises and falls on the billows. You'll hear the winds as it moans, and groans, and screams, and whimpers. You'll hear the booming claps of thunder. And, you'll see the flashing fingers of lightning as they play across the sky. And, you'll look on the faces of these mariners and see stark terror that's on their face as they say to themselves, "Tonight, we die. We'll perish at sea." And, you'll see how God delivered them and you'll learn a lesson.

Have you ever wondered why did God use an entire chapter to tell about a shipwreck? Why did the Apostle Luke, who could write so much, why did he spend an entire chapter telling what happened. I'll tell you what I think, because while this is history, it is more than history. Luke who wrote his is using it as an illustration that we can apply to our lives in this twentieth century or at any other time.

Because you see life is like a voyage. And, the circumstances of life are like the weather. Sometimes there's smooth sailing, sometimes there's storms. And, we're caught up sometimes in these storms because we are sailing on the sea of time between two eternities.

Now, let me say that many times we are caught up in storms that are not our fault. Not because of anything we have done wrong. That's the way the Apostle Paul was. Paul did not want to sail. Now, he was a prisoner on this ship and he was going from Caesarea to Rome to be judged. And, they were in a particular place and they were trying to make up their mind whether or not they ought to set sail.

And, that's where we join the study in verse 9, chapter 27 and verse 9. *"Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them"*—That is he warned them and advised them—*"And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless"*—And, that nevertheless is a very important word there, *"Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon"* (Acts 27:9–14). That is, there was a howling hurricane that came down and began to pound the sea with its fist and swept that little boat to disaster.

Now, I want to say that Paul did not want to set sail. And, many times we find ourselves in the same situation. We're just caught of in circumstances. Sometimes there's a man who will move from this city to another city and take his family with him. Now, it's not God's plan that the man moves. The man moves for the wrong motive. His company says, "If you will go from here to there we will give you more money." He doesn't pray about it. He doesn't ask God about it. He just says, "More money, that's the answer." So, he takes his kids out of school. He withdraws from the church where he is working, and serving God, and having a ministry. He just goes. He's out of the will of God and he's about to get into a storm. He didn't pray. He didn't seek God's will. He's about to get in a storm and the little children, they're about to get into a storm too. They didn't get to vote. They're just prisoners on that ship and they go.

There are people who are in a marriage right now and one of the marriage partners says, "I want out of this marriage." And, he just steps out of the marriage and brings the storms of life into that home. That home is cast upon the winds, and the rains, and the rocks and the terrible things, the storms of life. And, here's a person who doesn't want to do it. But, he's caught up.

We find ourselves that way as citizens sometimes. Congress votes to do it. And, we as citizens sail on the ship of state. Wouldn't you like to get your rudder on your hand on the rudder of the ship of state sometime? Right here in our city, our people may vote, I pray God they will not, but they may vote to bring in Para-mutual wagering. They may vote to do that. We need to do everything we can do to keep it from happening. But, that may happen.

You say, "What's wrong with gambling?" Nobody can win at gambling without somebody else losing. It just violates the law of love. Trying to get into your possession what belongs to somebody else without giving them anything in exchange for it. It's very simple, it's morally wrong, but enough people by greed may vote it through and we live here. And, so we may be caught up in that. Saying, "Don't do it. There will be much harm. There will be much loss." And, everybody says, "We're going to do it anyway."

And, it's possible to get caught up in that. You'll find yourself in all kind of storms.

## **I. Five Ways to Sink Your Ship**

By the way, do you know why they decided to sail contrary to the will of God? There were five reasons right here in these verses I read to you. I want you to look at them. I'll call them five ways to sink your ship.

### **A. Compulsion**

All right, look if you will in verse 9. The very first of these ways is what I'm going to call the very first of these reasons is compulsion. Notice in verse 9, "Now, when much time was spent." That is, they said, "Well look, we've stayed around here long enough. Let's

do something even if it's wrong." There are a lot of people who just act out of compulsion. They quit school out of compulsion. They get divorced out of compulsion. They drop out of a job because of compulsion. They move from one church to another. They are just doing something. They don't have the peace of God, they don't have the will of God. They are just simply saying, "Well it seems to me like I'm wasting time where I am so therefore I'm going to do something else."

Friend, you stay where God put you until He tells you to move. You're not wasting time when you wait on God. Sometimes people will say to me, "Now, Adrian, I want you to do this or that." I say, "Well, let me pray about it." They say, "No, I need an answer right now." I say, "Okay, the answer is, 'No.'" No. The Holy Spirit of God leads you, but He never drives you. And, don't make your big decisions until you soak them in prayer. And, don't compulsively do this, compulsively do that.

### **B. Consultation**

Now, the second reason is just as bad and that's consultation. Notice if you will in verse 10. Paul said, "And sirs I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading, lading and ship, but also of our lives." Now, watch it.

"Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship more than those things which were spoken by Paul."

Now, the centurion, he was the Roman army officer in charge. So he's got two people over hear. On the one hand, is the Apostle Paul. He's God's man. He says, "Don't go." Over here is the master and the owner of the ship. And, he says, "Go." And, so this centurion has to make up his mind. "Am I going to listen to this preacher and his so-called revelation from God, or am I going to listen to this man who is an expert there's a man who owns the ship. He knows the ways of the wind, and the waves, and the sea. I mean, after all you don't get to be a shipmaster over night. This man is an expert. I don't need to know preachers are always so impractical. What does a Baptist preacher know about sailing anyway"?

And, so he goes over here contrary to the Word of God. And, in consultation with an expert he makes a decision. I want to say something right here. Thank God for the experts. Thank God for the lawyers. Thank God for the physicians. Thank God for the psychologists. Thank God for the psychiatrist. Thank God for the professor. But, friend, when they controvert the Word of God you're going to have enough spiritual sense to go with the Word of God. I don't care what they say.

One woman was counseling with a marriage counselor, a psychiatrist, and I love Christian psychiatrists. We have two very fine men in our church who are psychiatrists. But, she was counseling with a psychiatrist about her marriage. Her pastor found out the particular psychiatrist she was going to and he said, "I want to ask you a question, what is his authority and what is his criteria? What substantiates him to counsel with you

about this?” “Why,” she said, “He has a degree on his wall. He’s been to school. He is a graduate. He is a medical doctor and a psychiatrist. Those are his credentials.” Here pastor said to her, “How many times has he been married?” Three marriages he had had that failed. And, he is counseling her about marriage.

He may be an expert in some areas, but dear friend, you better learn to go to the Word of God and the will of God. And, so many times we go out here and consult with people and get advice from people and that advice is contrary to the Word of God. You’re about to sink your ship.

### **C. Comfort**

I’ll tell you the third thing they did. Not only consultation, but comfort. Notice comfort was something that caused them to want to sail. Notice verse 12, “And because the haven,”—That is the port—“was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised them to depart thence also.” That just wasn’t a good place to spend the winter. It wasn’t commodious. That is, you wouldn’t want to spend the winter there. And, so they said, “Look, we want to do what’s going to be best for us. We want to kind of pamper our flesh. We want to take the easy way.”

Now, folks, I want to tell you something, the easy way is almost always the wrong way. We, as Christians, are called on to endure hardness. The devil always just says, “Well, just come on, take the easy way. Don’t, if it’s going to cause you any rigor of the flesh, if it’s going to cause you any discipline, if it’s going to cause any restraint, if it’s going to cause any saying, ‘No,’ then don’t do it.”

So many people in America make their decisions on the animal plane. An animal eats when he wants to eat. He drinks when he wants to drink. He sleeps when he wants to sleep. He wakes up when he wants to wake up. He cohabitates when he wants to cohabitate. Reproduces when he wants to reproduce. That’s just animal living. Most people in America are making their decisions the same way.

And, Madison Avenue is just leading them along with a ring in their nose and they are acting, wanting to stay in the comfort zone. And, they make their decisions based on that. Folks I want to tell you, when you make your decisions based on comfort, before long you’re going to be very uncomfortable. That’s right, very uncomfortable when you take the easy way.

### **D. Consensus**

Now, let’s go on and look. Not only comfort, but here’s a big one, consensus. Look in verse 12 of this same chapter, “And because the haven was not commodious to winter in the more part advised to depart thence also.” Now, what happened is this, the centurion, he’s already had consultation with the shipmaster rather than the soul master, and now he says, “Well, evidently there was a big debate on the ship.” So,

finally he says, “All right, let’s put it to a vote. How many people on board this ship think we ought to sail?” And, two hundred and seventy-two hands went up. The more part said, “Let’s go.”

I want to tell you something else folks. Don’t make your decisions by majority vote. The majority is almost, not always, but almost always wrong. You boys and girls who were out there at the ground breaking, there were ten spies who said, “It can’t be done.” Two who said, “It could be done, should be done, and by God’s grace, it will be done.” Did you know even in the average church the majority is almost always wrong? The majority is almost always wrong even in a church like this one. The majority of our members don’t even come to prayer meeting. Think about it. The majority are not soul winners. It breaks my heart to say it, but that is true. Oh, the majority is going to be right sometimes, but dear friend you better learn not to simply say what most folks are doing because fifty million Frenchmen can be wrong. Listen, they can be wrong. And, the fact that the more part advised to sail did not mean that it was the will of God.

I’ve seen people trying to make a decision and in their heart and in their mind they almost know what they want to do before they do it, but they go around from person to person trying to wrap up a net vote. Getting enough people saying, “Hey, I think that will be all right. I think that will be all right.” And, still they are not consulting the mind, The Word, the will of God.

#### **E. Circumstances**

And, so, consensus, and then I want to mention another thing that so many people do and that is, this is the clincher of many people, they make their decisions on the basis of circumstances. Look if you will in verse 13, now in verse 13, “And, when the south winds blew softly, supposing they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence they sailed close by Crete.”

Now, what does that mean? They are up there, they are voting, they are saying, “All right by compulsion, and consolation, and consensus we’re trying to make up our mind.” But, then here comes the coup-de-gras. About that time somebody says, “Would you look at that. Well, now I know we ought to sail, the south wind is blowing softly. What a wonderful time to sail.” And, they said this is a time that we ought to go because circumstances are right.

Folks, this is the most deceiving of all. I’ve had so many people say, “Well, you know, I knew it was God’s will because there was an opportunity. God just gave me this opportunity.” They don’t check with God. They just check the wind. Whichever way the wind is blowing. But, that soothing south wind was about to turn into a horrible, howling, devastating cyclone.

Five ways to sink your ship. Now, they set sail. It was not Paul’s will, nor was it God’s will that they set sail. And, they sailed into the teeth of a storm.

## II. Three Lessons to Learn in the Midst of a Storm

And, I want you to learn three things if you find yourself in a storm like that.

### A. God Guarded Paul from the Storm

The very first thing is, as a child of God you can find out that this is true, that God guarded Paul from the storm. God guarded Paul from that storm. Look if you will here in God's Word in verse 20, *"And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us"*—that means it was a big one—*"all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me..."*—Now, it was all he could do not to say, "I told you so"—*"Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee"* (Acts 27:20–24).

Now, what God said to Paul is, "Paul, I know that you didn't want to sail. I know you wanted to do My will. I know Paul that you were caught up and swept up in circumstances beyond your control. And, Paul, I'm going to take care of you. And, by the way, not only, Paul, am I going to take care of you. I'm also going to give you the lives of these other people on board." Now, they didn't realize it, but Paul saved their lives. It was Paul on board that kept them from drowning.

And, folks, the people of this world don't realize it, but it's the Christians that keep God from sending judgment on this earth already. Did you know that? Did you know before the tribulation horrors can take place the Christians have to be taken out of this world? Before God destroyed Sodom with fire and brimstone He had to take Lot out of Sodom.

You know, people, they say, "Oh these Christians, they are the troublemakers." One of these days they'll be rid of us. And, then the ship is going to sink sure enough, folks. It was Paul on board that ship. When, when the saints are taken out at the rapture, the saints are the salt of the earth, when the saints are taken out you might as well try to dam up Niagara with a moonbeam as to try to keep back the power of evil that's going to sweep across this world.

It was those sinners that were saved because of this saint on board. And, God said to Paul, "Paul, I have given you these that sail with you." Now, here's the point. God guarded Paul from that storm. And, I know that when I get caught in storms beyond my control that God's going to take care of me.

You say, "Well, what about all of the Christians who die? What about the Christians

who are martyred? What about the Christians who are put in prison?” God take care of them too. You say, “Well, what about the ones that had their heads cut off?” God takes care of them too.

I want to show you a verse of Scripture. Luke chapter 21, turn to it for a moment. It is really worth turning to. Boy, this ought to put some steel in your backbone. Luke chapter 21, it’s an amazing passage of Scripture. Let’s look in verse 16. Our Lord is talking about what Christians will suffer and he says, *“And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends”*—sounds pretty dangerous doesn’t it?—*“and some of you shall they cause to be put to death”* (Luke 21:16). I mean, it’s getting really serious. And, I believe, I really believe, I could be wrong. But, I’m going to say something now. I really believe there’s some people listening to me today who are going to die for Jesus. I believe that’s the age we’re living in. You’re going to die for Jesus.

Some of you will be put to death for Jesus. We don’t realize how close we are to these days. Some of you will be put to death. More people are dying for Jesus today than any other time in history. I mean, today right now. But, now watch this. You say, “Well, Pastor, where’s all of this protection that you’re talking about.” Well, just continue to reading in 17, *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish”* (Luke 21:17).

Well, now, Lord, I wish you’d make up your mind. Am I going to be put to death or not a hair of my head perish? What he is saying is both. Hey folks, they may just stuff you in the ground for a little while, but they can’t hurt you. They can’t hurt you. Jesus said, *“...whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...”* (John 11:26). They are going to put you to death and not a hair will perish. Isn’t that beautiful?

Listen, death, death, that doesn’t kill you. Jesus said, “He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” I don’t care what happens, friend, God has given us an illustration here that as God took Paul through that literal storm, He’s going to bring us through every storm and God guarded Paul from the storm.

## **B. God Gladdened Paul in the Storm**

Now, there’s a second thing I want you to see. Not only did God guard Paul from the storm. But, praise God, God gladdened Paul in the storm. You see, Paul, he’s on the deck of that ship with a big smile on his face. I mean, everybody else thinks he’s popped his cork. Listen, listen, verse 21, “But after long abstinence,” Paul’s been down there praying, “Paul stood forth in the midst of them and said, sirs, ye should have harkened unto me and not have loosed from Crete to have gained this harm and loss. Now, I exhort you, be of good cheer.” When he said that I bet they felt like hitting him in the mouth. I mean, here the ship is about to sink and Paul is saying, “Hey, everybody, cheer up. For I believe God.”

Boy, thank God for a faith that can praise in the middle of a storm. I mean, when the storms of life are raging, Lord stand by me. He stood by Paul and said, “Paul, be of good cheer.” And, Paul was of good cheer. Paul had the joy of the Lord down in his heart in the midst of the storm. And, friend, I want to tell you, that is real Christianity. If I’d seen Paul walking on the decks of the ship might have said, “Paul, who gives you this smile? Who puts that smile on your face in the middle of that storm?” He’d say, “The same one that gave me songs in the night when I was in the dungeon in Philippi. When I praised my Lord.” Friend, there’s no storm that can take the joy out of your life. But, if you’re not saved, let me tell you what the storms will do to you. I want you to see what a storm will do to you if you’re not saved.

Look here in the Word of God and see what happens to these poor people. Oh friend, it’s such a sad story. Look in verse 20, “*And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away*” (Acts 27:20). Now, folks, what happened is this, the people of that day, they didn’t have radar, they didn’t have radio, they didn’t have all of the means of navigation that we have today. They sailed by the stars at night, they sailed by the sun at day, and they sailed by the shore, they took their chart, they took their measure meant from the shore, their surroundings and so forth. But, now what happened is this, they’re blown off course, and it gets so dark that the stars go out of their sky.

Now, I want to ask you friend, what do the unsaved do when the stars go out of their sky? You see, it’s easy when you can chart your course, some of you right now. You’re doing fine. I mean, the south winds been blowing, and you’re sailing along. You get out your chart and you say, “Well, now let me look at my finances, that’s fine. Now, let me look at my plans for retirement, well now that’s fine. Now, let me see what we’re going to do with the kids, how we’re going to educate the kids. Now, that’s fine. Now, let me see here I need to lose ten pounds. Well I’ll do that, you know.” And, you’re just sailing along you’re just charting your course. I mean, you’re able to measure, you’re able to plot, you’re able to plan, you’re able to guide your ship. And, the south wind is blowing. Hey, but what are you going to do when the storm hits and you can’t see the sky? You’d better learn to trust something friend, that the storms can’t blot out. I’ll show you what they do and it’s a tragic thing. Look right here in the Word of God.

### **1. In the Midst of the Storm, the Unsaved Wander**

The very first thing they do is to wander. Look in verse 15, “*And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive*” (Acts 27:15). Now, what does that mean? It means that the rudder didn’t mean anything now. It means that the set of the sail didn’t mean anything now. It means they were in circumstances beyond their control. And, their dreams dissolve and their control is gone and they are out of control. And, the man without God is going to get blown off course and all of these

dreams, and all of these plans, and all of these ideals, and all of these visions that he has in his manhood and his youth, they all dissolve. And, he just lets her drive.

## **2. In the Midst of the Storm, the Unsaved Work**

But, not only do they wander, I want you to see also they work. Look in verse 16, “*And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat*” (Acts 27:16). Now, what does that mean to come by the boat? That is to bring the boat around and get the boat heading into the wind so it won’t sink. They are laboring, they are pulling on the boat. They are pushing on the beams. They are bailing the water. They are under girding the ship. They are saying, “Oh, if we can just keep afloat.” And, they are working and they are working and they are straining.

You know people say, “Hey, it’s hard to be a Christian.” Friend, I want to tell you it’s hard not to be a Christian. The Bible says, “*...the way of transgressors is hard*” (Proverbs 13:15). People take more pains to go to Hell than the Christian does to go to Heaven, they really do. Folks, sin costs labor. People strive and they work. Perspiration is on their brow.

Don’t feel sorry for me because I’m a child of God. Don’t feel sorry for me because I am saved.

## **3. In the Midst of the Storm, the Unsaved Waste**

But, not only do they wander and not only do they work, they waste. Look if you will in verse 18 of this same chapter. “*And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship*” (Acts 27:18).

Now, one day they toss out all the cargo, when that’s not enough they toss out the furniture and the tools, the tackling, everything. Why? They are trying to lighten the ship. Now, dear friend, profit is not the motive. Survival is the motive. That’s what happens to folks when the winds of adversity and the storms of life come and they are just driven by the wind. They are laboring so hard. They are sinking deeper and deeper in the water. And, sin begins to cost them everything. They are just pouring it all over board. And, there are people now who would not listen to God who would give everything they have now to have their son sober again, to have their wife sane again, to have their marriage back again, to have their health back again. But, sin is a costly thing, it’s a wasteful thing.

We don’t nearly need a war on poverty so badly as need a war on sin. Folks, I want to tell you something. In just a few short years unless something happens our nation is going to be in severe economic difficulty over just one thing, the problem of aids. One patient can cost almost two hundred thousand dollars. And, if the prognostication is correct, there will be millions of cases. And, your insurance is going to skyrocket. And,

the drain on the economy is going to be so great it will be horrendous. Why? Why? Because we have a generation of people who are listening to the experts and they know more than God. They think. And, a lot of this problem could be solved overnight by just obeying what this book has to say about sex. Just obeying what that book has to say about sex.

But, no, we're so smart. But, before long, in our wisdom, we're going to be pouring the cargo into the sea. They waste.

#### **4. In the Midst of the Storm, the Unsaved Wish**

I'll tell you what else they do. This is the sad part, they wish. Look if you will in verse 29, *"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day"* (Acts 27:29). Don't you feel sorry for them? Here they are saying, "Oh, I wish the sun would come up. I wish I could see the stars. I wish that I could see the sun. I wish I had some light." They are just wishing.

Folks, Paul knew how to get alone and get with God. He knew how to pray. He knew how to intercede. We have a generation that has nothing friend, when the storms come, they have nothing. You go in to them, they are in the hospital room they are in agony and pain, they are in the middle of the divorce court, they are in criminal court, they are in the bankruptcy court, and somebody says, "Well, good luck. Hope things work out."

There's an old song says, "Wishing will make it so." Friend, it won't. They just wish. I mean, what substance is that, to wish? It's like walking on eggshells and Jell-O. We need something substantive. But, the stars have gone out of their sky, and they wander and they work, and they waste, and they wish, and then they withdraw.

Look if you will in verse 30, *"And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved"* (Acts 27:30–31).

#### **5. In the Midst of the Storm, the Unsaved Withdraw**

Now, here's what else they do. There were some sailors who said, "We know what to do. There's a little lifeboat over there, let's go to the back of the ship and make out like we're going to let out some sea anchors. What we'll do is we'll just let that little lifeboat down and we'll get in that lifeboat and we'll just get out of this mess. We'll just withdraw and if we can just withdraw somehow we'll be safe."

And, Paul says, "You won't be saved by withdrawing. You won't be saved by running. If you try to run you are going to perish." But, what do the unsaved do when the stars go out of their sky? They withdraw into alcohol. They withdraw into drugs. They withdraw into divorce. They withdraw by running away from home. They withdraw by dropping out of society. Some of them withdraw by suicide. That's all they know how to

do.

### C. God Guided Paul Through the Storm

But, I'm going to say dear friend, when all of that was happening to these people, there was a man of God who had a smile on his face and could say, "Be of good cheer for I believe God." God guarded Paul from this storm. God gladdened Paul in this storm. And, I want to show you one last thing and I don't have much time to say it, but God guided Paul through this storm. I want you to see something now, look with me if you will in verse 24. God said to Paul, "*Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar...*" (Acts 27:24).

Now, what, what did God say to Paul? He said, "Paul, you're in a storm, but I'm going to tell you something Paul, I have a will for you. My sovereign will, Paul, is this that you testify before Caesar. My sovereign will is I want Caesar to hear what Paul has to say." and God says, "Listen to me Paul, it must be done."

Now, friend if you don't mind marking in your Bible, you turn to Acts 23 verse 11 and mark that verse where God said to Paul, "*...so must thou bear witness also at Rome*" you must (Acts 23:11). And, then you mark Acts 28, verse 14 where it says, "*...so we went toward Rome*" (Acts 28:14). In between there was a storm. Before God says, "Paul, you're going to Rome." After the storm Luke says, "And, we went to Rome."

Now, folks, I can't understand it because that journey on that ship was not the will of God. They were out of the will of God, but it did not stop the will of God. Are you listening to me? They were out of the will of God, but it did not stop the will of God.

Where man rules, God overrules and there's a sovereign God and that sovereign God is going to have His will. And, now let me tell you how that applies to me and how that applies to you. As a Christian I may disobey God. As a Christian I may stumble, I may falter, I may fail. I may, but I'm going to tell you one thing, because I'm saved God has predestined me to be like Jesus and all Hell can't stop it. I'm going to be like Jesus. Amen? Because that's the sovereignty of God.

Yes, I have a free will. Sometimes I backslide, sometimes I disobey, sometimes I get in storms, but I tell you one day I'm going to stand faultless before the throne and all Hell can't stop it. God guided Paul through the storm. The church may falter, the church may flounder, the church may seem to fail, but I'll tell you one of these days our Lord Jesus will present it to Himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing for Jesus said, "*...I will build my church...*" (Matthew 16:18). And, all Hell can't stop it.

Now, the kings of this world, and the rulers of this world, and the political high muckety mucks can meet and they can plan. They can plan in the Pentagon and they can plan in the White House. And, they can plan in the Kremlin. And, they can plan in red China. But I'm going to tell you something friend, that's where man rules. But, I'm

going to tell you where God rules. “...*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ...*” (Revelation 11:15). And, all Hell can't stop it.

“Jesus shall reign where the sun doth his successive journeys run. And, his Kingdom spread from shore to shore till moon shall wax and wane no more.” And, planet earth will go through a storm, but my dear friend, the kingdoms of this world are going to become the Kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ. God guarded Paul from the storm. God gladdened Paul in the storm. And, God guided Paul through the storm. You must go to Rome.

## **Conclusion**

Hallelujah. Let's bow in prayer.

# Riding Out the Storm

*By Adrian Rogers*

**Sermon Date: February 25, 1996**

**Main Scripture Text: Acts 27:9–31**

## Outline

Introduction

- I. The Reason for the Storms of Life
  - II. The Reaction to the Storms of Life
  - III. The Result of the Storms of Life
- Conclusion

## Introduction

Today we have up in the balcony, and I hope that the television cameras can show this to you, we have a wonderful, wonderful group of young people. Five hundred and seventy-five participants met in thirty-eight homes Friday through today to study together the subject of—are you ready for this?—holiness. The theme: Lift High the Torch. Young people, would you stand, all of you there in the balconies. Cameras, just swing around and get a picture of these if you can. There they are. I want you to see them up there, folks. These are young people not ashamed of the Lord Jesus. God bless you. Amen and amen. Your pastor loves you; your parents love you; your workers here, your teachers led. This group was primarily led by Gregg Hauss, who is on our youth staff, and how we thank God for him, thank God for the parents, thank you for opening your homes. You can have them all repaired this coming year, it'll be fine; but we are so grateful for these young people, and for what they are doing, and the stand they are taking for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take God's Word, and turn with me, please, to Acts, the book of Acts, chapter 27. If you know anything about the book of Acts, you know that the book of Acts is a narrative. It tells how the early church began to spread, and it tells of the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. And in Acts chapter 27, it tells of the apostle Paul aboard a ship, and that ship rides into the teeth of a ferocious storm. And it tells how Paul went through that storm; if you will, how Paul rode out the storm. That's what I want to talk to you about today, is riding out the storm.

I love this 27th chapter of the book of Acts, and preach from it from time to time, because, when you open the Bible there, you can smell the salt air. There's just

something about this story. It's one of those gripping stories. If you listen, you can hear the booming thunder, you can see the lightning, as its fingers flash across the bosom of the sky, you can hear the old ship creak and groan, you can hear the moaning and the whistling of the wind. It is an incredible story, the story of a ship in the midst of a storm.

But that brings up a question, even before we begin to read. Why would God take almost an entire chapter in the Word of God, and tell us about a storm, and a ship in that storm? Because it is more than history. The Holy Spirit has taken this story and made an incredible illustration with a great spiritual application for all of us, because, you see, life is like a voyage. Sometimes the sea is calm, sometimes the wind blows softly, sometimes the sun is shining; and, thank God for those times. And maybe that's where you are right now, just sailing along. And, if you are, enjoy it. It's a gift of God. But sometimes the wind rises, sometimes the sky darkens, sometimes we find ourselves in the midst of a terrible storm. That's the way life is. This chapter is an illustration of every human being sailing between two eternities. Sometimes things are good, and sometimes things are bad.

Now, in this particular story, before we break in, I want to remind you that the apostle Paul is a prisoner. He's been taken prisoner for preaching the gospel of Christ, and they are taking him to Rome to be adjudicated. He started out, by the way, on this ship as a prisoner, but we're going to find out, before it was over, he was the captain. You know, Paul was different than most of us. Many of us see difficulties in every opportunity. The apostle Paul saw opportunity in every difficulty. You put him in prison; soon he becomes the jailer. He's singing songs in the night. You put him before King Agrippa, and he's the defendant. Before long, he's the prosecuting attorney. He takes every opportunity, and applies to it the Word of God, which says, "Thanks be unto God who causeth us always to triumph in Christ Jesus." And, if you're in a storm right now, we're going to look and see what Paul did, and then see what we can do, learn how to ride out the storm.

Now, look in verse 20, if you will. He describes the storm: "And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us..."—now, folks, that's just old English for saying it was a big one—"...no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away." Maybe that's where you are. I mean you're in the midst of a terrible storm and all hope seems to vanish from you. "But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, to have gained this army and loss. And now I exhort you be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul..."—by the way, somebody has said—I've not counted them—but somebody has said that at least 365 times in the Bible we find this phrase, fear not—one for every day of the year—"...Fear not, Paul, for thou

must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

Well, let’s back up a little bit, and, basically, three things I want you to see, as we look in this passage of Scripture today. First of all, the reason for these kind of storms; and, secondly, I want you to see the reaction of people when they get into storms—good people and bad people, godly and godless; and then, thirdly, I want you to see the result of the storm—what it does in the lives of those who are people of God, and in the lives of those who don’t know the Lord.

## **I. The Reason for the Storms of Life**

Now, we all get into storms, whether you’re saved or lost. Actually, basically, there are four basic kinds of storms in life. One, just the normal storms that come because we’re part of nature. The Bible says, God makes it to rain upon the just and the unjust. And, if you’re a human being, you will live in a world that has storms, just because we’re here. That’s one kind of storm we get into.

There’s another kind of storm we get into, and these are the ones that we ourselves engineer by our foolishness, and they are caused by disobedience. And that’s the kind of a storm that Jonah got into to when Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord. You remember that story. He spent the night on a foam-blubber mattress, you remember. He was swallowed by a whale. What was the problem with Jonah? He was out of the will of God, and he ran right into the teeth of a storm.

Now, there’s a third kind of storm. There are storms that God sends us into for development. Remember the story there in the gospels where Jesus commanded His disciples to get into the ship and go to the other side of the sea? And Jesus knew that a storm was brewing, but there He was trying to teach them a lesson for their development, for their discipleship. And sometimes we do get into storms, not because we’re out of the will of God like Jonah was, but because we’re in the will of God.

But now, here’s the fourth kind of storm we get into. We get into some storms, because we’re dragged into them by other people. That’s where the apostle Paul was. Now, he was a prisoner, but he was also a mariner. I mean, he’d been through shipwrecks before. He’d sailed before. He was a seasoned traveler, and he knew that this ship ought not to sail, and he tried to warn everybody, but they wouldn’t listen to him. He was guarded by a centurion. He had to go along. The higher power said, we’re going to sail, and he sailed with them.

Now, some of you can really identify with this. Many times we’re in storms, and they’re not of our own making. Sometimes children get into difficulty because of their parents. I mean, little children are born with ungodly parents, or unwise parents, and

these little children are just dragged along into a storm because of the parents. Sometimes, we get into difficulty because of authorities that are over us. Sometimes, folks, America goes into storms because of bad leadership—because of bad leadership—and sometimes Congress or the President or the judges make laws and rules, and we're aboard the ship of state, and we see ourselves sailing into judgment. We say I wish I could get my hand on the tiller. I wish somehow that I could do this, but we're just aboard the ship of state; we're prisoners, as it were. And that's very much like the apostle Paul was. Paul really didn't want to sail.

Look, if you will, in verses 9 and 10: "Now when much time was spent because, and when sailing was now dangerous..."—there's a certain time in the Mediterranean, especially in those days, you didn't sail—"...because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them. And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives."

Now, the apostle Paul had his spiritual radar. He was saying, don't sail, don't sail, don't sail; but, again, the matter was taken out of Paul's hands. There really wasn't much he could do about it. Look in verse 11: "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship more than those things which were spoken by Paul."

Now, you have a businessman. He owns the ship; he's a shipping tycoon; he's motivated by profit; he's led by worldly wisdom. And so, over here, you have the man of God, and, over here, you have the man of the world, and the centurion has to make a decision. So he just says, well, I'm not going to go with the religious fanatic; I'm not going to go with the prisoner; I'm going to go with the man who is obviously a successful man. He owns this ship. And so; he said; we are going to sail.

Now, let me just tell you right now the mistake the owner of the ship made, and it's the kind of a mistake that you can make. Let me give you five ways to sink a ship, okay? Now, I'm talking about your ship. Let me just tell you five ways to make a bad decision, and many of you today are in danger of making this kind of a bad decision, and you are going to sail into a storm, and it will not be a storm for your development. It will be a storm because of your disobedience, and because of your ignorance.

Number one, just make your decision in haste. Look, if you will, in verse 9 again: "Now when much time was spent, now when much time was spent..." They said hey, time is going fast. We'd better do something. Decide in haste; repent in leisure. There are a lot of folks who say, well, let's do something, even if it's wrong. Sometimes people get married that way; they marry in haste. Sometimes people make business decisions that way. Sometimes a man will just quit school, quit a job, leave a church, go some place, move out of the city, no real leadership from the Lord. Listen to me, my friends. You're in the middle of a decision—you wait on God. Bloom where you're planted, till God moves you. Don't just simply think that just because time is passing by that you've

got to do something. They said, well, much time is spent. Learn this. This compositivity—that's a word, I hope it is; whatever it is, every word's got to start somewhere anyway. So, the Holy Spirit of God does not push. If you feel something between your shoulder blades pushing you, that's not the Holy Spirit. He leads; He guides. He doesn't shove.

Number two: You're going to make a mistake if you depend upon worldly wisdom rather than upon godly wisdom. Look again in verse 11: "Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." You go to the people of this world. You say, tell me what to do. Some of you have marriage problems, and you're going to an ungodly counselor, and he's telling you what to do. You forsake any counsel that is not based on the Word of God. One woman went to a psychiatrist to try to get help about her marriage, and the psychiatrist had been married four times. There are people trying to tell you what to do, advice contrary to the will of God. One way to sink your ship is make your decision in haste. Number two: Another way to sink your ship is to depend upon worldly wisdom rather than godly wisdom.

Number three: Take the easy way out. Look, if you will, in verse 12. The Bible says they sailed, "because the haven—that is, the port—was not commodious to winter in..." They weren't comfortable, and so they made their decision on the basis of what would be easy. You're almost always going to get in trouble this way. We're called upon to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Do you know why an animal eats and drinks? Because it wants to eat and drink. Do you know why an animal copulates? Because it wants to. It is just simply led by its sensual desires, and there are so many people who make their decisions on the animal plane rather than on the spiritual plane. Rather than being led of the Spirit, they are driven by the flesh.

Here's the fourth way you can sink your ship, and I want to talk to you young people up in the balcony about this: just follow the crowd—just follow the crowd. Look in verse 12 again: "...the haven was not commodious to winter in, and the more part advised to depart thence also..." That is, they told the crowd, they said, what does everybody want to do? Now, there was a crowd on that boat, and, when they took a vote, 272 hands went up. Paul is outvoted. They said, let's sail. Learn this, and learn it well, everyone listening to me. The majority is almost always wrong; almost always the majority is wrong. Fifty thousand Frenchman can't be wrong. Don't get the idea that if everybody says it that it's right, that we have morality today in America by majority.

Twelve spies went out to spy out the land in Joshua's day. Ten said, it can't be done. Only two said it could be done. The ten were wrong, and the two were right. Isn't that right? When the people didn't have a king, and they wanted a king, the people of Israel,

they should have been a theocracy, but they wanted a monarchy. They said, how many of you want a king? And they all voted for a king. They got Saul. God gave them what they wanted, but after a while, they didn't want what they got. The majority was wrong.

When Jesus was there before Pilate, Pilate said, I'm going to release a prisoner to you. Do you want me to release Jesus or Barabbas? The Bible says that they shouted for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified. The majority said, release Barabbas and crucify Jesus. Never a more heinous crime has ever been committed on this earth. But it was done at the will of the majority. And there are many times when you young people want to do something, or adults, and you're trying to find out what you ought to do. You go from person to person to person to person, and you ask people trying to rake up enough votes to get permission to do what you already wanted to do anyway. You sink your ship that way by going with the majority. Do you know what the majority generally is? A lot of people pooling their ignorance—that's what it is.

Now, here's another way to sink your ship. Just depend upon circumstances—make your decision upon circumstances. Look in verse 13: "And when the south wind blew softly, supposing they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete." The wind just blows so soft. They said, look at this. The sun is shining; the sea is calm; the wind is blowing in our direction. It must be the will of God. Do you know there are a lot of people who are just led by circumstances, and they say, well, I've had them tell me this, brother Bob: well, I just told God if He didn't want me to do it, don't let it happen. You know people, they say, well, I asked God. Lord, it must be Your will. It looks good. Just circumstances. And that soothing south wind was soon to turn into a horrible, ferocious storm that would sink that ship.

## **II. The Reaction to the Storms of Life**

There are five ways to sink a ship. It's still happening today. These are the reasons for the storms of life. Let's talk a little bit about, the reaction to the storms of life. How do people react? Well, just begin now in verse 14, and read through verse 21: "But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive." What does that mean? They couldn't control it. I mean the wind now just picks up the ship and they said we can't turn this way, we can't turn that way, and it's just blown along by the storm.

What's the first thing happens to an ungodly man when he gets himself in a storm? Well, they just let her drive. What I mean by that is, there are broken dreams. The old ship's captain and owner and the centurion were not as strong as they thought they were. The Bible says they couldn't bear up. I've seen it happen many times. These people, these moguls, these tycoons, these know-it-alls—let the storm come and they find themselves now driven by winds that they cannot control. They are at the mercy of

forces that they cannot understand, dimly comprehend. They're aboard a floundering vessel—dreams dissolve.

Number two: They begin to labor with a desperate effort. Look, if you will, in verse 16: "And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat." That is, they got on the lee side of that island, and things lightened up a little bit, and they said, hey, we've got to get this thing straightened out, and so now, with beads of perspiration on their brow, and their backs aching, they're trying to get the tackle of the ship back together. They are trying to get it all back together, and they are working with much labor. You know what the devil will tell you? The devil will tell you it is hard to be a Christian. That is a lie. Jesus said, take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light. The Bible says, the way of the transgressor is hard. I don't mean there's no discipline in being a Christian; I don't mean that at all. I don't mean there's no hardness in being a Christian. Yes, we're to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. But as far as the labor, the grueling, gruesome toil—that comes with sin. There are so many people who are making this desperate effort to try to put things back together. The old devil has lied to you.

But not only do dreams dissolve, and not only does work increase; but resources are wasted. Look, if you will, in verse 18 and following: "And being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship." What does that mean? They started throwing stuff overboard. "And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship." Why, they're just dumping things into the ocean. And then, look in verse 20: "And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me..."—oh, he said, I told you, I told you—"...and not have loosed from Crete..."—now, look at this last sentence—"...and not to have gained this harm and loss." One of the most costly things around is sin—sin. These people—they work and they waste. They're throwing it overboard. Everything they thought was so precious is not precious now. The worldly man spends the first half of his life gaining his wealth; he spends the last half of his life spending his wealth to get his health back—and he's unhappy in both halves of his life. What a colossal waste it is.

And, you know, there are people sitting in this building who would give everything they possess right now to have their son sober again, to have their family back again, to have the emotional stability of a loved one restored again; but these people aboard the ship, they are driven by the wind. They wander; they labor; they work; they throw it overboard; they waste. People talk about a war on poverty. You know what we need in America? A war on sin. I mean, when people get right with God, the Bible says, God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servants. And so their resources are wasted.

And then, they lose hope. Look, if you will, in verse 29 of this same chapter: “And fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast out four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.” Oh, if I just had some light; if I just knew what to do. They rejected God’s light, and now they find themselves in darkness. You see—listen—the sailors of that day, they didn’t have the modern instrumentation that we have today. They sailed by the stars, the sun, the moon, the land, the shore. But the Bible tells us, in verse 20, all these things disappeared; they’re gone. All of the things that they said were so important, their business charts, their surveys, and their polls, all of these things, they’re gone. What do you do, dear friend, when the stars go out of your night and the sun disappears out of your day? These people in this stygian darkness, wishing for the day. Hopes vanish.

And then, you know what they do? They get very foolish. They began to make foolish plans because they don’t have stars to steer by, and so there is sort of an inner gyro that takes over. Look in verses 30 and following: “And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the flagship. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

Now, there were some sailors aboard. They said, let’s pretend we’re going to let an anchor out of the bow of the ship. There’s a little boat there, and there’s a little lifeboat there. We’ll get in that lifeboat. We’ll get off this big ship. We’ll escape. Paul says, you tell those guys they don’t stay on the ship, there’s no hope at all. What was this? It was a form of escapism that was built upon selfishness. I’ve seen it happen many times. A man who turns to alcohol takes a form of escapism that’s built on selfishness. You say, well, I’ll drown my problems. No, they can swim, dear friend. You’re the one who’s going to drown. The man who gets a divorce, the woman who gets a divorce, that’s escapism, built on selfishness. You made the storm, and now you’re trying to get a lifeboat to get out of it. The kid who runs away from home.

The ultimate act of selfishness and cowardice is suicide. If you’re thinking about suicide, let me tell you something, friend. Suicide is no way out of the storm. You listen to me. It never, never, never solves a problem. It is the ultimate selfishness and cowardice. But these people, here they are; the wind is driving them alone; they’re working, they’re throwing everything overboard; they can’t see which way to go. Do you know people like that? Folks, the world is full of them. And it was a storm that they’d been warned about to begin with not to get into it. Now, that’s how the godless sometimes go through storms.

But, what about the godly? Let’s see the old apostle Paul here. This is a blessing to you. Look, if you will, in verse 22. Here’s the apostle Paul. He calls everybody—all hands on deck—and the apostle Paul says, I’ve got an announcement to make: “And

now I exhort you to be of good cheer...” Can you imagine a man saying that, in the midst of these problems? Now, today there are some of us, they think we’re just Pollyanna. They think we don’t know what we’re talking about when we give a good message in the midst of the days that we’re in. There are three classes in America—those who are afraid, those who don’t know enough to be afraid, and those who know their Bibles.

Here’s the apostle Paul. He says—look at it: “...be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.” That is, the ship is going to be lost. For he said, “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” So, the angel of God here was the Lord Jesus, because he belonged to Jesus, and the Lord Jesus got on board that ship with the apostle Paul, and He says, don’t be afraid, Paul. And then again, in verse 25, he gives that message that he often gives when we’re in the midst of a storm: “...be of good cheer...”

Paul, “Who puts that smile on your face in the midst of the storm?” Paul says, “The same one that gave me songs in the night when I was in a dungeon at Philippi. His name is Jesus.” I see the apostle Paul walking on the deck of that ship, quoting the Word of God—Psalm 107:23 and following, “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet for he bringeth them unto their desired haven.” There’s a difference in the reaction of those who know the Lord and those who don’t know the Lord when they get in a storm. Maybe, if you’re in a storm right now, you might want to read this Psalm. It would be a great blessing to you—Psalm 107.

### **III. The Result of the Storms of Life**

Now, let’s go to the last thing very quickly. We’ve talked about the reasons, and the reactions to the storm. What was the result of the storm? Well, look again, in verse 23, if you will—in verse 23: “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul...”—now, folks, underscore this right now—“...for thou must be brought before Caesar...” Now, who was Caesar? He was the Roman Emperor. Where did he live? In Rome. Where was the ship headed? Toward Rome; toward Italy. And God says, Paul, that’s where you are going. Now, listen to me, folks: God had a plan, and God’s plan was to get Paul to Rome. In Acts 23, verse 11, God had said to Paul, “...thou must bear witness also at Rome.” No ifs, ands, or buts

about it. God had predetermined that. In Acts 28, verse 14, after this 27th chapter, it says, "...and so, we went toward Rome."

Now, listen to your pastor. I don't know a better illustration in the Word of God than this that shows divine sovereignty and human responsibility at the same time. Was it God's plan that that ship set sail? No! God had told Paul, with spiritual radar, don't sail. That was not the plan of a loving God, but did that stop God's ultimate plan? Absolutely not! What was on that ship? Well, Paul was on that ship. I'll tell you what else was on that ship. Ephesians, and Philippians and Colossians were on that ship. I'll tell you what else was on that ship. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts was on that ship. I'll tell you what else was on that ship. The sovereign will of Almighty God. And every bad decision they made could not overrule the will of God. Isn't that amazing?

Where God does not rule, God overrules. Do you ever get on one of these great big airplanes going overseas, say, a 747? You can sleep, or get a drink of water, eat or not eat, have a coke or a coffee, whatever you want; but, friend, while you're making all those little decisions, that old ship, that airplane, is just headed to a certain airport. I mean, there's a pilot that is carrying that ship. There is a predetermined plan that is taking that ship to that airport. And, on board, you say, well, I'm making this decision and that decision. But at the same time, there's another power that is just bringing it on. You listen. You listen. We serve a mighty God. We sang it: What a Mighty God we Serve. Christians may fail, they may flounder, they may sin; but if they belong to Jesus Christ, there's a sovereign power that says, one day my child will be just like my Son, the Lord Jesus, and all hell can't stop it. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

## **Conclusion**

The old church, the wonderful church, the church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes the church makes so many bad decisions; so many times we fail, so many times we do things we ought not to do as a church, and I'm talking about the church in general—but you know what Jesus said? Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. God is building for Himself a bride, and all hell can't stop it, and all of the rulers of this world and all of these people who are against our Lord and His Christ. Read Psalm 2. They make their rules, their laws against our Lord; they don't want Him, they don't want His commandments, they don't want His Word, they don't want His morality, and they say, let us break His bonds asunder and caste them from us; and yet, God says, in Psalm 2, "Yet have I set my Son upon my holy hill of Zion," and Jesus will reign where the sun doth his successive journeys run. His kingdom spread from shore to shore till moon shall wax and wane no more.

Folks, you listen to me. We are on the winning side. He cannot fail. He must prevail. There was a storm, but Paul said, so we went to Rome. Paul said, be of good cheer. I believe God. Verse 11 says the centurion believed the owner of the ship. You know what all life comes down to? Just who do you believe—just who do you believe. Paul said, I believe God. Don't make a mistake by believing the wrong person, because if you do, you may be engineering a storm that you'll not like at all. Let's bow our heads in prayer.