

Apostolic Vision - Part 2

by Art Katz

Art Katz explores the essence of apostolic vision, emphasizing the role of suffering, community, and divine revelation in shaping true apostolic character within the church.

Duration: 1:09:43

Scripture: Acts 17:16

Topics: "Apostolic"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Paul's encounter at Mars Hill in Acts 17. He emphasizes that Paul was taken by surprise and unprepared for the situation, yet God used him mightily. The speaker highlights the importance of being ready for unexpected moments of confrontation and crisis, as they reveal our true character and spirituality. He also warns against being deceived by surface-level expressions of worship and urges listeners to focus on their true condition under pressure.

Transcript

I'd like to continue from last night. Act 17. I intended tonight as a kind of a gleaning.

Going back and picking out certain things and underlining and stating again some of the things that were mentioned last night. We're entirely at the mercy of the Lord. Does everyone know that? I don't know how we sound and appear.

Or any preacher that gives an appearance of confident composure and having it all together. But as for me, well right now I can't even read my notes. Things just seem blurry.

So the Lord is going to have to turn on the light and assemble and put together his own statement. And Lord, we ask you now that you will. It's so much more choice to hear from you than from men.

And the remarkable thing is that you prefer to be heard through men. The great mystery of incarnation. And let us not be deceived, my God, from that because you're pleased to express yourself through a Brooklyn accent.

May we recognize the source and who is in fact speaking and whose heart we're hearing. And who is addressing us. And that we might give you, my God, the kind of attention that you deserve.

And Lord, we just confess that our ears are dull. We are all, so to speak, the victims of much hearing of much words, Lord. We swim in a sea of words and we ourselves, all of us are guilty, my God, of multiplying them.

And therefore there's a blurring and a dulling. And we're asking something virginal tonight and in these days. If you could so much as push the debris and the clutter away.

And just bring forth, my God, the things that come from you and need to be heard with a remarkable freshness. And taken into our hearts in an acute way with every intention, serious intention of walking them out. So spoil us, my God, and give us a fresh apprehension of your word.

A great and new deep respect for it. The phenomenon of the word. And what shall we say for the phenomenon of the anointing? Without which even your word, my God, will fail of its intent.

And we just acknowledge as we have before your people that we're utterly at your mercy. We're dead men. We're dead and hid with Christ and God until your life is revealed.

And if it's not, my God, we're just shabby nothing. But we ask the revelation of your life and that it might be unto glory. That serious things will be transacted in these days that will affect both time and eternity.

And so address us, my God, in that way we pray. And we thank you for the grace of it and the privilege of it. In Jesus' name.

Amen. We could almost select any apostolic episode at random. Because it's bound to include all of the constituent elements of apostolicity.

Whatever that is. But whatever it is, we have an obligation to find it out. That's one word that we dare not allow to be eclipsed or to become a kind of part of our mindless vocabulary.

My first true speaking on that subject was at YWEN, Youth with a Mission at Lausanne. And it took five days to speak on apostolic foundations. And if I can recall some of the titles, apostolic character, apostolic perception, eternity, the mystery of Israel, apostolic proclamation are among some of the titles.

And what we're examining is not just the life of Paul, however remarkable and rich that is. But that what Paul, what is summed up in that one man is a statement of what God is wanting in the church entire. That the foundation, that the superstructure is to be just like its foundation.

And so therefore, what we're hearing is a description of ourselves in the ultimate constitution of it that God intends. Which will never be obtained, by the way, unless we have a heart of intention for that. Your desire to become apostolic.

It's something more than other than charismatic. And the irony is that the lesser thing often stands in the way as a kind of an obstruction to the ultimate thing. We're just not too ultimately minded.

We're just kind of pragmatic and temporal and things like eternal, ultimate are words of a kind that don't somehow ring true for us. And they need to. These are the great words and they were true for Paul.

They need to become that for us. So, I said last night that we're moving toward the same kind of ultimate confrontation that is described in Paul's coming to Mars Hill. What a remarkable thing God has set before us, a little apostolic jewel of a man taken by surprise.

Without preparation, being brought by others to a place where he himself did not intend to be. And once there, something is set in motion that has a life of its own and is beyond himself. That began by his grieving or wincing in his spirit as he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

Therefore, the next verse, therefore, disputed he in the synagogues with the Jews and with the devout persons in the marketplace. And how these then brought him to Mars Hill. And then Paul, standing in the midst of Mars Hill, said, and how we began to examine that remarkable, unrehearsed, unplanned statement.

What do they say, or what do I say? Crisis reveals, an absolute crisis reveals absolutely. And we are moving toward a final and absolute crisis that will take us suddenly and reveal what in fact we are. Don't be deceived to think that what is expressed in euphoric worship and in the congregation of the saints, well fed and cared for, is the statement of our actual condition or spirituality.

It's what is revealed in stress. What is revealed under pressure. What surfaces when something hits us from the blind side for which we've had no forewarning is what in fact we really are.

The value of speaking now is to prepare us for that sudden and untoward moment that comes. As for example, Elijah being confronted by King Ahab, and boom, things being set in motion by which the false prophets are being challenged before the whole of an assembled apostate Israel. What was Elijah's preparation for that final and grand moment? An entire lifetime.

And so also ours. And I spoke last night about the grit of the everyday, the mundane, and the seemingly ordinary, that are the things that God employs in the making of apostolic character, prophetic character, if we can but see it. And but receive it.

And not resist nor resent the very elements that God employs in the things that make up our life and our experience. This itself is apostolic seeing. And we need to perceive our own situations with that kind of view.

Paul did that. Remember what he said in the text? The God who created all things and who has given all things. How come in his mouth that was not cliché? It was not just a piece of embroidery.

It wasn't a piece of ornate rhetoric. Because Paul was the man of all things. And the all things that was part of Paul's experience is what befell him in the previous chapter of Acts 16.

Namely, being beaten virtually to a pulp and being left with his back hanging in strips in a dungeon in Philippi in the stink and the suffocation of it. Lost to any discovery by his spiritual kinsmen and there to contract gangrene and die thinking that he was obedient to the heavenly vision. A man could become very depressed in circumstances like that.

Who thought to be serving God. Only to find that the full value of all that he did was to lead one woman to the Lord by the riverside. And set one woman free from demon spirits and immediately being jerked to the marketplace and being confronted and being stripped and beaten and thrown in the dungeon and fixed in hands and feet and left there to rot and to die.

But one of the greatest verses of all scripture is that at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto the Lord. I guess there ought to be another title called apostolic suffering. Because you can count on it.

This kind of life and character invites opposition and persecution. It's not some kind of melodramatic or masochistic longing for things that are adverse. They come inevitably of themselves.

That light that becomes more radiant as your walk becomes more true invites a darkness to suffocate it and to stamp it out. And that may be the reason why we even unconsciously shrink from apostolic invitation and much prefer something less. Because we intuit that to move and walk and have our being in this way is going to bring a consequence for ourselves that will be painful.

We mustn't think that martyrdom or persecution is only a phenomenon for people who lived on the other side of the once iron curtain. It's to our embarrassment. It's a discrediting of the church in the west that that has not been part of our experience.

It ought to be. It's intrinsic to true Christian living. But what we do in suffering and how we respond and react to it is really the ultimate statement and the test of what apostolicity is.

At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God. Those dumb saps thought that that suffering and humiliation and public beating and stripping was a statement to their credit. That it was the consequence of an obedience to the heavenly vision and that they were counted privileged to share in the sufferings of Christ.

What are you going to do with guys like that? I mean that's either insanity as the Soviet officials recognized it and took people who even began to approach that and put them in mental institutions and gave them shock treatments or it is utter and ultimate sanity. One or the other. The issue of suffering is going to be a great issue in the last days and will really separate the sheep from the goats.

So your attitude toward it, how you perceive it, whether you sullenly make the best of it and grit your teeth and silently or even vocally accuse and condemn God or count it privilege and see an intimation of a heavenly and eternal reward makes all the difference about the quality and the kind of life that you live. So we need to revive the centrality of the cross. Suffering is intrinsic to the faith.

And before that persecution will come to us from without, God has many ways by which to bring it from within. And we'll experience it within the congregation itself. We'll experience it in the body.

We'll experience it under our roofs. We'll experience it in the community. The church itself is a suffering before it's a glory.

And you're naive to perceive church in any way other than that. You're a romantic and you're a dreamer if you think that church is intended in its first expression as something that is going to be enjoyable and a blessing. Understand that? If it's that, I would be suspicious.

But when you start turning the chairs around and looking into each other's faces and working out the real issues of character and life, you'll know the kind of suffering that church is. It's an exquisite kind of suffering that even the world itself cannot inflict. But when it comes from a brother or sister, the accusations, the confrontations, the misunderstandings, the misapprehensions, the remarkable way in which every saint perceives something subjectively, you wonder where in fact objective truth is.

And each one utterly convinced that his seeing is the correct seeing and has a whole plethora of scripture to back it up. And you've got to wade through that and work your way through that. And finally, the log jam that you think will never be broken, and you feel like it's the end and the whole fellowship is coming apart

and the whole thing is going up with a puff, is saved in the last moment by some rickety, weak, newly-saved character who's knock-kneed and pimple-faced and pip-squeaked in his voice and will say, But Art, don't you remember that the Lord said da-da-da-da-da? And your head falls on your chest when you hear in that squeaky voice the voice of the Lord.

Oh, I tell you, church is something, saints. Aren't you looking forward to it? You know why we don't have apostles? Because we don't have apostolic sending bodies. Apostles don't grow on trees.

They are fashioned and formed like prophets out of the bosom of the body itself. And speaking from the prophetic perspective, there's nothing more ungainly and more of a drain and a test to the patience of a congregation than young prophets who are mixed bags and coming out at the seams and sweating at the pores and their statements are a little bit of this and that. And they have a wonderful and uncanny way of interrupting the services and coming out with their statements at the wrong time and you have to listen to them and sort out what's from God and what's from men.

But I'll tell you what, if you won't, how are such men to be visited upon the church or to come into the world and into the nations except that they have first tested their wings in a conducive, loving environment of people who will not shoot them down and cast them out. Who recognize the genius of the body and what office God gives into it and that these men don't come full blown. So I pray that you'll be that kind of an environment and then expect that out of your very midst, God is going to raise up evangelists, teachers, pastors, prophets and apostles.

And that they'll be ascending out of your midst as there was out of Antioch in chapter 13 of the book of Acts where when God found men worshiping the Lord together in such a priestly way that they were just as content to remain in the posture of worship as in the posture of serving. God said, okay, now separate unto me men who are already separated even from their own religious and ministerial ambition. I marvel at how discreet God is.

I wish that he had given us at least an extra chapter on the church of Antioch alone. But he only gives us a few Holy Ghost hints and not the least of which is its diversity. This one's a Hebrew, this one's from Cyrene, this one's of Roman descent, this one's Hebrew.

What a motley mishmash of Jews and Gentiles. One is even called Niger, who is evidently an African, a black man. And when they were found worshiping the Lord together, a Holy Ghost said.

Do you see what God is waiting for? A reality, a truth of relationship. Men who have not just swallowed down the abrasive themes that constitute historic, ethnic, cultural, racial differences, but have brought them to the light and worked their way through them so that their worship is unimpeded and is more than just singing the songs flashed on the screen by the overhead projector. That's a struggle, that's a suffering, but the end of every suffering is a glory.

And those of you who don't have a stomach for it and just want nice services will probably have to look elsewhere if this congregation has apostolic intention and will move in the directions of this reality to which even their ministers are not exempt. Don't think that we are God's men of faith and power who don't need the same sanctifying work as you. The body is God's provision for the sheep and for the shepherds.

And every blessed, benevolent thing I've ever received that has saved me from myself has come through the operation of the body in which I was just another brother and another member of that body when I was

not functioning in the gift and calling usually outside my own fellowship. I think the greatest compliment that we were ever paid is by a brother who came and stayed with us for two weeks who himself came from an ecumenical, catholic, charismatic community and he said, you know Art, everybody loves to use the word community. That's why we need to be jealous about words and their meaning.

He said, if I didn't know who the elders were in this community, I would be hard pressed to identify them. And I counted that a compliment. That's not to say that there was an absence of authority when it was required.

But until it was required, we elders were brothers in the body along with everyone else. There's a whole model of saints that needs to be struggled for that has been lost in our whole institutional parenthesis in these last two thousand years. And I'll tell you that to move toward it is to occasion such a screech and a howl from the religious world as you cannot imagine and believe.

They're threatened somehow by that. So we've lost anointing and we've lost the offices that God gives and we've moved from office to office. You know the difference? From men who are appointed rather than men who are anointed.

From bishops who are district supervisors rather than apostolic men of the kind that Paul himself was. And I believe there needs to be a restoration to that original model. Or we never will produce the kinds of men who can turn the world upside down.

These are they who turn the world upside down. And not the least reason for their power and their authority is their organic joining in the body which sends them. And by the laying on of hands of its members identifies to God and the principalities of powers the truth of that jointedness.

And that there's a supplication and intercession that goes forth out of that body for those who are sent. That those who remain receive the same share in the eternal reward as those who are sent. Because their struggle, their privation, their agonizing in spirit, in deep groanings that cannot be uttered is more critically the point of the work than the man on the firing line himself.

We are in this together. And everything I have said which I had not planned to say and is taking me off from the things that I thought to share comes with great price. And not the least of it is moving from spectator or passive observer safely ensconced in the pew in the kind of inconspicuity that we prefer to actual apostolic participation in the life of the body each member liberally supplying.

Are you going to move to that? Well, I'll take my toys and go home. You know what I have to say. You must be candidates for this or I wouldn't be here.

If I know anything, I know this. I'm not expended by God in any casual way for the merely curious. The fact that I'm here is a compliment to you.

And I'm just trying to be as unassuming as Paul was. You know, you can say things like that when you know who the author. So, Wayne was right.

You need to hear these last statements again and again. Hear them over again and again. But more than hear them, the Lord is waiting to hear from you.

Your willingness to be part of that kind of apostolic reality knowing that there's going to be a suffering before there's a glory. If we knew what is resident in this congregation tonight by way of rebellion, self-will, vanity, pride, ambition, my God, you would despair of anything, of any quality coming forth. But that's to be utterly realistic.

This is where God's people inevitably are before the deep, I almost was going to say cathartic, the deep, sanctifying work of God takes place by each other. We ourselves are the grit. We ourselves are the abrasive elements, one with another, in the shaping and the forming of a people for his name.

I pray that you agreed with the prayer that was prayed at the beginning of this night, that it's the Lord himself speaking, calling us to the kind of thing for which he has so long waited, has been so long lost in this whole institutional interim, and will again be restored in the last days. For such a church alone can confront the principalities and the powers of the air. Such a church alone can possess the gate of its enemies.

Such a church alone can move Israel to jealousy. And if I don't say anything more about that, you need to invite me back for another four days, for the subject of Israel for the church is central to its whole purpose and its reason for being in the last days. The church that does not recognize that, does not embrace that, forfeits being the church.

So let me just leave you with that, and search it out yourself in Romans 11, and let the Lord lead you into an excursion that's critical. So, back to Acts 17. We're moving to a final last days confrontation of the same kind of forces that were represented in what Paul faced.

The Stoics and the Epicureans, the devout persons in the marketplace, the idolatry that is to be found in the synagogue of the Jews, and any synagogue, Jewish or Gentile, any religious establishment that panders to men and gives them a modicum of religious satisfaction for very little expenditure. What is the idolatry that Paul saw that made him to grieve? What is idolatry? Don't let the word go forth and you have only a faint presentiment of what that means, because it is now, as always, the predominant characteristic of civilization and culture, however honorifically it is acknowledged. And that Paul disputed in the synagogues with the Jews is the first thing that follows the word, therefore, because it's in the religious establishment that idolatry has its most blatant, though most subtle, expression.

Nowhere more blatantly practiced than the synagogue of the Jews, and what is that? Predictable services, arranged for the convenience of men, sufficient to convey a modicum of religious moral satisfaction at minimal cost and without sacrifice. It does not require the acknowledgement of God as Lord, although in fact that word can be very liberally and frequently dispersed in the course of its services. We need to have apostolic seeing.

As I suggested last night, to see through the appearance of things and not to be impressed by something merely because it finds a verbal expression. In fact, our whole Christianity is threatened by becoming a kind of a phraseological Christianity. And I know it myself as a high school teacher in California, that if somehow a student can give back a verbal statement of the kind that he had received from the teacher, that constitutes obtaining a good mark.

As if merely to verbalize something constitutes the apprehending of it. So we need to be jealous for the reality to which those words point and not be satisfied with the mere words as recitation alone. That itself is deception.

Paul would never tolerate it. As we saw last night, he pierced right through their whole smokescreen, their whole mirage, their tablets and their monuments to the unknown God, which sounds so honorific, so lofty and ethereal and spiritually minded, when it's not only God who is unknown, but a God whom they choose to remain unknown, willfully choose. For the God who is known says, thou shalt not fornicate like rabbits, or even at all.

And who wants to know a God that explicitly? What we want is a certain aura of spirituality that allows us the freedom to indulge and to enjoy the things that we choose as the effectual and true lords of ourselves. That's idolatry. And Paul would not stand it for a moment.

He confronted Peter to his face that publicly in his jealousy for the purity of the gospel sake. So this is a no-God who they choose to honor as the unknown God in a willful ignorance, a pretense and a sham, a substitution for the true God that the apostle cannot abide nor leave uncontested. Why? Because for him that's not just an innocuous blurb of a seemingly spiritual kind.

It deflects men away from God. It's a substitute for God. And there will be an eternal tragic consequence if we allow that phony pretense to continue.

Not the least of the functions of the church is to blow the whistle on the things that are fraudulent. That its very life is a statement of the thing that is authentic. And that is why true apostolic bodies have historically been persecuted, hounded, burned at the stake, exiled.

How many people know about the Anabaptists? Not enough of you. What, you're bored? Then read church history. Because it's not over yet.

And I'll tell you what, are you ready for this? We are tonight surrounded by a cloud of invisible witnesses who are not yet complete without. Don't tell me this is just a service in a series of meetings. This is an historic and momentous event for which generations of those who have preceded us, of whom the world was not worthy, who hid in dens and caves and places in the rocks and were sawed in half and tortured, are waiting for the completion through us of the thing for which they gave themselves in sacrifice.

You need to live consciously in the awareness of the cloud of invisible witnesses. And that you are consciously and willfully in continuum with them. You're not some fly-by-night aberration that came together because you need services.

You're a piece of unbroken historic continuum from the first. And willfully and consciously identifying and recognizing that and seeing yourself as being mandated to complete and consummate the thing for which they gave themselves. That kind of seeing alone will condemn you in the world.

It will condemn you in the Christian world. It will mark you as freaky even among other Christians. And it will ruin your fun.

But it will open the door to glory. I get so amused when people will say to me or of me, he's so serious. He's so intense.

I'm not at all aware that I'm intense. What is that? Am I exhibiting some kind of temperamental disposition? Or is this the fervency and the zeal that becomes every saint that is occupied with the glory of God and his eternal purposes? Have you heard that little thing in Oakland High School when I came back from Jerusalem as saved man? And I left the school as the leading faculty radical and atheist and came back

14 months later saved with the Bible under my arm and Jesus as the answer. And blowing out of the saddle all of my Jewish intellectual colleagues who thought I had actually freaked out.

They themselves were on pills seeing psychiatrists and I'm sitting there in the perfect peace of God and they're telling me that I freaked out. This Jewish woman who was having an affair with another teacher, though married, taking pills to suffocate and to dull her grieving conscience. And I'm witnessing to her not even knowing that about her.

And this one time at the lunch table, I was just strangely silent, just eating quietly, minding my own business. And she was opposite me in the teacher's cafeteria and I could just sense her growing restlessness and irritation and vexation like a volcano, something, an eruption mounting and flying. Boom! Out it came.

And she said, even when you're silent, she said, you're a living accusation. And that's what we're called to be. To blow the whistle on the fraudulent.

The whole world is living in a lie. Its values stink. They have their origin in hell.

They have been blinded to the issue of eternity. They're completely caught up in the now. Their purposes for being are abysmal.

Their families are falling apart. Their kids are freaking out. And their whole lives are shot through with corruption.

Somewhere there needs to be a statement of another kind. And no statement more powerful than that which is corporate. It's not enough to have an individual virtuoso, a saint here and there, but that the whole quality to be found in the body, the whole corporate life, the evident health of it, and the truth of it, its face, its eyes, its speech, its unaffectedness, its heavenliness, is the kind of thing that should make the world pivot and turn around and catch the fragrance of Christ that is emitted.

And so we are the sum total of what we are saints. And what we think that we're living privately behind drawn curtains or shades shows up in the totality of the body. And you'll allow yourself and indulge yourself with things that you will not excise out of your life painfully except you recognize that it is adversely affecting the entire body though they be not conscious of the thing to which you give yourself in sinful indulgence.

There are things that we will do for others and for the church that we would not require of ourselves otherwise. And God has so established it that way. So be mindful of what you represent as a body.

So here's Paul not allowing that deception and fraud to go on to the unknown God. He whom you worship ignorantly, I declare unto you. Now that sounds like the boldest kind of... what would you call it? Arrogance, brashness, I declare unto you.

He had an obligation. But more than that, how many of us who would feel the obligation are able so to do? Can you declare God? Can you say to some ignorant person in a cult or sect or in atheism or in the alienation from God, him whom you ignorantly reject, I declare unto you. And we're not talking about four spiritual laws.

Paul didn't have that convenience worked out in a formula. In fact, what a price we have paid for taking the Holy Gospel and reducing it to formulas. It's much more than a nomenclature and a series of steps on how to get saved.

It's a holy thing. It's the sum up of what God himself is in his way. And who can set that forth and who can declare that in God as he in fact really is.

Not as you think him to be, you self-deceived, willfully ignorant person. But as he in fact is, I declare unto you. That's what apostolic is.

And where do you obtain it? That knowledge of God as he in fact is. It's not a cheap school. And that's how we will discern the true apostles from the false.

Not everyone who comes down the pike, who has some flair for church building and problem solving is in fact an apostle, though he can liberally quote apostolic texts and apply them. But let's look for the man who comes to us out of God's very presence and communicates the sense of God as he in fact is. You'll know when he comes, because when you hear him, you'll feel that you've never been saved.

Well, likely so. Him, declare I unto you. That exquisite knowledge that was the work of God tempered in the life of a man through trials and struggles and sufferings, seeing the faithfulness of God again and again, out of stonings and shipwrecks and all of the calamities and demands of the apostolic life.

Him, declare I to you. And I'll declare him to you in such a way that you will be eternally without excuse. You have but only to hear that proclamation once and you'll never be able to stand before God and say I never knew and I never heard.

So we need to make this our conscious, what shall I say, purpose. Lord, that we might know you as you in fact are. And in fact we're willing to confess we may have made you more in our image than you have made us in yours.

You may be more a projection of our wishful, fanciful, fantasizing thought life than the God you in fact are. Because one thing is clear, we have not the sense of you sufficient to fear you. The awe of God is not in your house.

Remember what Jacob said when he stumbled upon that place in the wilderness with his head upon a rock and in his distress and flight and had a vision of a gate, of a ladder raised up to heaven and the Lord above it. And he woke from his sleep and he said God is in this place, I knew it not. How dreadful is this place.

There's a sense of dread of the fear of God. But look how the word dreadful has changed its character. That's what we say when our stockings run or we put too much bleach in the laundry or the dinner went up in smoke, how dreadful.

But we're saints is the dread of God. We've made him a commonplace. A cheap, easy, glib busboy, someone to do our bidding.

I can't tell you the anguish that was mine in my earliest years as a Jewish convert at the frequency with which the word God or the name Jesus came off the lips of Christians as if he's their buddy boy. Even Jews in darkness who have some historic and ancestral sense of God won't even spell the word. It's G-D.

It wouldn't hurt us not just to put on an affectation of some kind of religious respect but to pray for and to seek and to come in to a sense of God that would communicate the lost fear that characterizes the house of God that is the gate to heaven. Only when that fear is there that Jacob found in his dream. Now we've taken the holiest thing of all and made of him an accessory.

We're not occupied with his purpose nor with his glory. We think that he's given the church in order to provide a program of services and other benefits to ourselves and our families. And we think that this is the normative intent.

In fact, if I can say this now. We need to break the false orbit of egocentrism that even occupies us as the church and is revealed by the kinds of things that we do. Our benefit, our enjoyment is what we are about tending toward the fulfillment of.

Are we jealous? Is the measure of our success not our numbers, our program, or our budget but to what degree we conceive is it even in our... Do we think like that? Are we even in a place where we believe that glory is attainable? That it's more than just some kind of spurious, esoteric word that has no real cognizance. The priest had to come out, glory of God. And they said, the Lord, he is God.

The Lord, he is God. And we have lived so long without that glory that we have taken the absence unto him be glory in the church. World without end through Christ Jesus throughout all ages.

Amen. For if you will not have glory in the church as long as ours is a religion of... Why are we unimpressive to the world? Because they sense what we proclaim. Paul could say to those philosophers who never heard of the resurrection of Jesus Christ this Jewish God whom the Jews themselves have rejected and crucified and he can say without batting an eyelash with an unsparing eye in total address of authority that God has appointed a day in which he will judge all men.

That means you too, philosopher. Why, that one whom he has raised from the dead. For God has winked in times past but he commands now all men everywhere to repent.

When a man speaks like that you're either going to cry out men and brethren what must we do to be saved? Or you're going to turn away from that dabbler or throw him off the brow of your hill. He could speak with certitude because he knew that there was a day in which God would judge all men. He knew God as judge.

And no New Testament writer speaks more prolifically about the day of judgment and God as judge that we will be judged in our bodies for all that we have done both good and bad than Paul himself. The judge is at the door. He was constantly aware and I'm not in some kind of a sick, demented way where you're fearful to breathe but in a healthy, life-giving way to know that there's a God before whom we stand and to whom we will one day bring an account and a reckoning.

I'm pleading with God's people to take eternity seriously and to know in that there'll be a day in which they'll be judged. When the books will be opened and to be without works in that day that have passed the fire of his examination because they are not made of hay, wood and stubble but of precious stones and gold and silver and will earn for us an eternal reward will be a day of lament and wailing and gnashing of teeth for people who have lived a slack Christian life content just to get in to heaven. Well, I don't know if it'll be my subject in these days but I'll just say for now we're not all going to the same place we're not all going to the same time and we're not all obtaining the same reward.

And whatever it is that we obtain will be in exact proportion to our labors in this life for his namesake. And when the judgment comes final, total, unyielding, irrevocable fix. I don't know that I believe it enough myself.

I know, but I don't know that I know enough. We have to contend for a faith like this once and for all, given the saints, earnestly. It's not enough merely to subscribe doctrinally to the truth that God has appointed a day in which he will judge.

That is not knowing sufficiently. To know sufficiently is to be able to persuade men knowing the terror of God. Are we contending for the faith? For there's a daily assault against it.

Do you realize that? I can't even bear that the TV set should be turned on for a few moments even so much as to quote hear the news. With it has got to come something of another kind. And even the news is not newsworthy.

And even the little insertion of some program later in the night or the commercial, whatever it is, is degrading, is dulling, is effacing something from our spirit by which we lose hold of this most precious faith. Contend, strive for that faith once and for all, given the saints, or you will assuredly lose it even while you continue to mouth and to support and subscribe correctly to its doctrines. I can't think of a more cruel loss than that.

That to think that because we have still the ability to verbalize the faith that we in fact are in the faith. The only thing that will save us from that erosion and that loss is a daily vigilance that I can commend to you earnestly. And here's the thing, you'll not do it by yourself.

You'll not maintain that quality of faith by yourself. You need brothers and sisters of like mind, heart and spirit who have equally that same intention and will speak to you in truth and love and tell you when they begin to sense an unreality coming into your life, your speech, your manner. When our preaching begins to sound different than our ordinary conversation, we're already in trouble.

There's already something professional that has set in, already a mannerism, a style, an affectation. I couldn't believe the numbers of men that were looking and sounding like Jack Hayford. Authenticity, saints, is the name of the game.

And that's what apostolicity is. To be apostolic is to be authentic, and to be authentic is to be apostolic. But that authenticity in a world that is devious, full of lies, shot through with counterfeits, that lies in the father of lies, who is a liar from the beginning, where words lose their meaning and everything is of a shabby and questionable kind.

To maintain an apostolic identity and authenticity in that is something that cannot be either obtained or maintained independent of other saints. So get together with those who are jealous for this, and encourage and exhort and rebuke, if you have to, to come in and to be established in such a reality. Our greatest error is our error concerning God.

And out of that flows every other evil. And we have reduced God to an idea or a concept, and I'm quoting one of my favorite theologians who says, All ideas of God are false. Even the best.

Because that makes Him the product of your thoughts. And I want to say, He is altogether above that. So contending for the faith is contending for the truth of God and the sense of God as He is.

And it may require ascending amounts of the kind to which God called Moses, Come up unto me and be there, and I will give you the tablets of the law that thou mayest teach them. And Moses neither ate nor drank forty days, and ascended the mount of God. And don't think it was some easy ascent.

Don't think that every step his legs were pierced by burrs and thickets and briars and thorny things, and his mind was being pounded by suggestions that he needed to get down there because there were so many needs in the body that need to be attended. Going up to seek God for his own sake is an extraordinary struggle of will. And only those who have sought God earnestly know what I'm talking about.

So seek God is the most strenuous, difficult and painful endeavor that a saint can make in this earth. And yet if we don't make it, what sense of God do we have? For not to know him as he is, is the gateway to every other presumption and error. And before God would let Moses take this people through the wilderness and fulfill his own apostolic mandate, come up unto me and be there.

We don't know how to be there. With men, let alone with God. And we'll never know how to be with men until we've been with God.

We're impatient and bored. And we need a distraction and a novelty and we've got to take off with them all and something to do. We can relate over a function.

But can we relate just in relation? Do we love the saints just by virtue of their being saints? And do we have to be compelling and witty and sharp in our small talk and engaging and entertaining? The greatest trial when you come to community is to live with the same saints every day without relief. And our boredom with them is the real statement of our patent and hidden boredom with God. Because we're not worshipping the true God and the one that we have created is boring.

We've got to find the God of the mount saints. And there's a God who is saying to us if we have apostolic intentions come up unto me and be there. Forty is the number of trial.

It's not going to be a picnic going up. But there's a God who is waiting for us in fire at the top of that mount and the last thing is six days in the smoke. And I'm not talking about the kind that you choke and gasp at.

I'm talking about the smoke of God's thick glory. The burning presence of God. And Moses was six days in the thick of that.

If there was anything left by the time he came up that high those six days in that smoke consumed it. And then on the seventh day the Lord said come up unto me and be there. You know what that suggests to me? Out of those last six days in the smoke six being the number of man that God has to dissipate away not just our carnality but our spirituality.

Particularly that which is faint, synthetic, contrived. So we are awfully impressed with it. Even our knowledge.

There's a knowing and a knowing. You know that there's a knowing of truth that is not yet the truth. There's a faith that is not yet the faith.

There's praying that's not yet praying. There's speaking that's not yet speaking. And I'm wondering that in those last six days God took from that extraordinary man not only his whole Egyptian princely heritage but his distinction as a Jew of the priestly class.

No one had greater advantage both spiritually and naturally than Moses. Yet God eradicated and effaced all that away and stripped him of everything even his correct knowledge which is not correct enough until we have obtained it out of the very presence of God. Then we can go and teach the law that he will give us.

Come up unto me and be there. How many of us are calling the God that is the God of our making Jesus? And just to employ that name does not sanctify what is not God. We can be as much in error with that as anything that sects and cults do with their own language and vocabulary.

Only a true worshipper can discern a city wholly given over to idolatry. So the apostle stands for what is actual as against what is merely verbal. He stands for what is authentic as against what is only a facsimile thereof.

He stands for life over against what is death. He knows the God who gives life and breath and all things because he suffers and receives all things from his hands and is completely convinced of God's sovereignty and that nothing is happenstance nor aimless. He knows the God of judgment who has fixed a day.

And what would society be if it had believed that? And what has been the consequence for the world that it hasn't? Men are capable and are performing today such atrocities that clearly is the evidence that they do not believe that there is a day in which they will stand before God in judgment. There is no civil system there is no system of law and justice that can put a lid on the bestiality which is in mankind if the fear of God is not there and there is no thought that one day men will have to stand before him. The belief that men will be called to account brings an urgency to all human deliberation and compels men to decide for or against God.

The absence of this knowledge of God as judge has robbed our gospel of a dimension of its power that in men hearing us they are compelled to decide for or against God. How would you like your whole life to be that? Not just in your proclamation but your very being. That when someone meets you who is in the world something is struck some issue has surfaced that requires that person to choose for or against God.

So vividly do we bring that issue before them not only in our speech but in our very being. Paul was that kind of a man. He was the thing in himself.

And my last question Do we mentally inhabit the world of the scriptures as being the real world? It's one thing to enjoy them as bible study but do we really believe that God has appointed a day that God is not slack concerning his promises that the day of the Lord will come that the earth will melt with a fervent heat that the heavens will be rolled up as a scroll seeing these things what manner of men ought we to be. Do we really believe that? Do we inhabit those scriptures or are they just subject matter for bible study? Are they the predicate of our reality? You really need to make a choice whether you're going to put your eyeballs in this book and the whole apostolic tenor of it or you're going to turn it away and look out into the world that contradicts it in every point and particular. If I go to New York and I see the new skyscrapers being raised up I see it as a statement of blasphemy against God that men are totally indifferent to what the word of God already states about an inevitable end and a judgment on this present world and in complete indifference to the stated word of God they're putting up their buildings as if this world is going to go on forever and as if God had not spoken.

They are not living as if they believe the word of God is true and they have been lulled into that deception by a church itself that does not live as if it believes it. Do you inhabit the scriptures as being the factual truth and foundation of your life? How then do you explain making arrangements for your children to go on to universities and successes and split-level houses and all the rest as if this world is not under judgment? We've got to make some kind of a reckoning. Either the scriptures are false and we can go on believing that progress is inevitable and the world will gradually improve will be ameliorated changes will take place or recognize that these are the last days the last of the last days of which God has spoken and that it will consummate in judgment and that our task is to bring out of burning as many as will be saved to bring in a final harvest to be to Israel a final testimony to fulfill the last purposes of God to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom that the end might come.

Are we inhabiting these scriptures as true? It's a choice as being the foundation of our real world the predicate of our being do we live as though these are the end times and as if the time was short and at hand? Are we like Paul, the thing in itself?

So these are little gleanings in Acts 17 the difference between the one and the other is this if we are not inhabiting the scriptures as true what we have to say to men is opinion and that opinion might be interesting but it can be ignored when we inhabit the apocalyptic scriptures as true and live as though we believe it and see an end as imminent we are no longer offering an opinion we are speaking a compelling conviction that requires those who hear us to decide for or against God so you need to search yourself and see whether you are in the faith that your word will not be a suggestion but a conviction that brings requirements lest men perish so let's pray for a body of that kind an apostolic reality of that kind here in this playground in all of this place of pleasure and recreation

and amusement where the beauty of nature itself has a deceiving quality where you need to fight away from the things visible and steep your eyeballs in the reality that is described in the scripture as being the thing that is authentic and true and that will stand when all these other visible things will pass away and I know that the measure with which you are hearing this from me and the degree of authority in that speaking is the measure to which I myself have appropriated that reality and are moving and living and having my being in him Paul said, you know what manner of man I was with you from the beginning I never withheld from you the whole counsel of God in tears day and night and from house to house and in public places and that the word that came to you you knew was not the word

of man but the word of God that performs a work in them that believe apostolic preaching requires apostolic men an apostolic character formed in apostolic bodies and sent by them to a world that would otherwise perish only to contend to leave God as unknown let's pray so Lord we know that you are earnestly contending with us we acknowledge that we have not earnestly enough contended with you and I pray my God that this speaking tonight can be understood as a call to come up unto me and be there this people my God representative of your people everywhere so spoiled by the church of convenience that does not require that kind of sacrifice and assent will be willing to break the power of the habit of casual believing and go up that there might be communion with God as God that they might be

able to stand before men conveying some sense of that God whom they have met and whose reality they retain and have pulled the plug out of every appliance and every worldly thing that would in any way dull that sense Lord grant us this jealousy grant us this divine desire grant us from heaven a jealousy for the glory of God that single uttermost central motive that makes the apostle apostolic let it be foremost over any and every other consideration that everything is measured in those terms how does this redound to

the glory of God what I'm about to preach what I'm about to do how I'm about to serve not whether it will find acceptance with men but will it redound to the glory of God why don't you just say something to the Lord in these last moments tonight not asking for any kind of

emotional altar call just out of your seat something about, oh, an intention to get right, an intention to go for it to be part of something of this kind that you should be spared the shame and the embarrassment of having been satisfied with something less called Christian tell him you're willing to sacrifice for this you're willing to suffer for this tell him you're willing to forsake for this things that have been too dear to you and have blunted and blurred your vision of the faith say something I think there's a Lord who's ear is near and will hear and give answer and help to break the power of things that has kept us in the lesser place tell him you're sorry for glib, facile and easy speaking of his name Lord, Lord, Lord and there's not been enough reverence and fear and

acknowledgement and that you wonder to what degree it's been a Lord of your own making which you've labeled Jesus and you want to forsake that and know him and worship him in spirit and in truth say something before we conclude this service tonight don't make it long don't make it eloquent but make it to the point

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