

(audio) Out of the Synagogue of Satan

by Art Katz

This sermon shares the powerful testimony of a man's journey from atheism to encountering the living God, Jesus Christ. It highlights the transformative power of hearing the still small voice of God, the impact of encountering believers who worship in spirit and truth, and the profound change that occurs when one surrenders to God's call. The message emphasizes the need for repentance, acknowledging Jesus as Lord, and experiencing the grace and mercy of God through a personal relationship with Him.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:12, John 10:27, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:13, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Transformation", "Surrender to God"

Description

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Transcript

Precious Lord God, in Yeshua's great name, we just ask mighty God that you possess us now for your glory. Lead us in every utterance. If it please you, Lord, to speak testimony, so do it.

Whatever, have your way, bless this people, speak to these hearts, show yourself real. Thank you and praise you for it, in Jesus name. Well, I got the answer.

Have you ever heard the phrase, still small voice of God? It's in the scriptures. Well, I had never heard that phrase because I wasn't the man conversant with the scriptures. Karl Marx, I knew to some degree, and Eric Fromm was one of my culture heroes, and Henry, what's his name, who's married now to a Japanese woman, Henry Miller was another one.

I was a prodigious reader, but I never once cracked the Bible. In fact, I used to look upon the Bible as a kind of an embarrassment, and the very suggestion that any one book could contain wisdom necessary to life, let alone be the answer, was the rankest kind of an offense to one who was schooled to understanding that truth was a quest to be served in a lifelong search, and no one even really supposed that you're going to come to the end of it. So, I didn't know that there was a phrase in the scriptures called the still small voice of God, let alone that I should ever hear that voice.

But would you believe right on this platform, at the conclusion of that prayer, that little voice spoke. One word, testimony. And so I'm kind of leading into that right now.

I guess you might say for want of a better introduction, that everything in the last analysis depends on the voice to which we give our hearing. And I suppose however young you are, you've come to the realization that there are a lot of voices seeking your attention in this hour. Strident voices, increasing in number and intensity.

And in all that clamor, it's going to be difficult to discern the still small voice of God. He doesn't shout. He's thundered once in times past from Sinai, but few men have heard that.

And so he's made the whole thing dependent upon the hearing of his voice. Jesus said, my sheep shall hear my voice. And there's never a time that I speak at places like this, when I don't remind people of that statement, and conclude by asking as many who have heard his voice to join me in prayer and respond to the thing which he's spoken.

Everything has got to do with hearing. And so I would say that the first condition for hearing the still small of God is to shut off the other voices. Even the Apostle Paul, as a believer, had to make the statement, I am determined, he said, to know nothing but Christ and him crucified.

It's only recently that that statement has taken on some meaning for me, because even as a believer, other things vie for my attention. And maybe this is a particular propensity of being Jewish, but our minds are so eager and so active to embrace a lot of things, that it takes an act of will to quiet the mind. Paul had to determine not to know anything but Christ and him crucified.

And again, the Scriptures say that in the end times, knowledge shall increase. So if you allow it, you're just going to become a kind of a grab bag, and a recipient of all kinds of information and statistics and clever statements and utterances and all kinds of things. Something is required from you, even today, to focus your attention on what is being spoken, and to try and discern behind this Brooklyn accent, the still small voice of God.

I first heard that voice audibly one day, ten years ago, in Jerusalem. It was about at the end of a 14-month spiritual hitchhiking odyssey, the journal of which is today a book called Ben Israel, and is available for anyone who wants it in this auditorium. I had been having a series of very unusual experiences in the course of those months of hitchhiking.

I was a disillusioned modern man, a deep cynic. My whole life from the age of 16 on as a high school dropout had been spent in search, seeking for some meaning to our fragmented existence as 20th century men, seeking for some kind of cause or ideology to which I could give my intense Jewish life, seeking to make some kind of sense out of a very broken world. And so in the course of those years, I had flitted from philosophy to philosophy and ideology to ideology.

I had attended for a time a Marxist Institute. I had belonged to left-wing youth organizations, and each time I had come to one of these places, I had shouted, Eureka, this is it. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling.

When I first found Karl Marx, it was a cry, Eureka, this is it. It seemed that everything fell into place, and in one fell swoop, I had the answer to all my perplexities. All we needed to do was to correct our class relationships and put the proletariat in its right place as rulers of the universe, that class of men who are

without spot and without blemish, victims of society, and we would have brotherhood and panacea, utopia.

Well, as I went on as a Marxist and as a adherent of left-wing causes, the fly in the ointment began to become pronounced. I saw it in myself. I was very capable of embracing distant causes.

My heart palpitated for the downtrodden and the oppressed. The only catch was that I could be very enthusiastic, zealous, and idealistic for the distant, but I didn't do quite well for those who were more immediately at hand, like my own brother or mother or even those in the same cause with me. There I could find myself capable of grinding my heel in their faces.

Have you ever had occasion to notice that paradox? Great palpitating and swelling hearts for distant causes, very capable of enunciating slogans that deal with brotherhood, but wholly unable to live them. And so it was a series of risings and fallings, coming to new eureka's and then falling to new disillusionments and despairs, until I came finally in my 34th year to my ultimate despair and crisis. And at that time the high school dropout was a high school teacher, by virtue of fact of having been in the service in a GI Bill, and I didn't come to the teaching profession as any lackey.

I wasn't the man intent upon just making a living. I was still an idealist and a visionary, and the classroom was going to become a social laboratory, and together with my innocence and unspoiled, uncorrupted youth, we were going to perfect a pattern by which all the world might obtain what we were going to find in the classroom. And it took four years to get the stuffings kicked out of me.

I found out that my students were not unspoiled and not uncorrupted. They were just as vain, just as loathsome as anyone in the world. In fact, you know what I came to see? That my classroom was in itself a microscopic universe, and all the great issues that were being compounded in the world took place also in that room.

It had nothing to do with power or politics or wealth or resources. It had only to do with such things as grades and human ambition, but it was exactly the same revelation. I came to such a place that by squinting my eyes, I could see that when a young middle-class girl came to my desk and sought to persuade me to upgrade her paper from C plus to B minus and used every feminine while, that what I was really being treated to was a demonstration of power politics.

I came to see that when my students wept tears over Biafra or Vietnam, they were only saccharine tears, and their real concern and their real palpitations had to do with much deeper issues, like the crisis of being, for example, flat-chested. If we could only see as God sees, far more of us would be flat on our faces before him, and our ears would be open to hear the still small voice. I'm just giving you a thumbnail sketch of my condition and the reasons that led to it.

I could just add to that the fact that I was married to a German girl, the great idealist who believed that although I was a Jew from Brooklyn, and that she had belonged to the Hitler Youth, that that didn't really matter, that love conquers all, etc., etc., only to find out that it did matter, and that human love was grossly inadequate to deal with a woman who lived on the other side of the moon, the dark side, suffering the great weight of unresolved guilt and falling into schizophrenia. And in her rage and fury, I was not able to turn the other cheek, but gave an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. I'm almost embarrassed to speak like this to you kids.

Am I over your heads? I mean, I'm divulging private things that maybe you're not ready to receive. But in a single year of my life, if you can take this telescope version, a proud, arrogant life died. The whole edifice came tumbling down.

I want you to know that Art Katz was not some weak specimen lacking in human endowment, and therefore he didn't have what it takes to live in the world, and therefore he had to reach for some straw that floated. Quite the contrary, people. I was a giant striding the world of pygmies.

I was superbly endowed, intellectually, physically, in talent, personality, to make it in the world. But my world came crashing down in my 34th year. I suppose if I'd been made of weaker stuff, it would have collapsed earlier, but praise God, it collapsed at last when it did.

And my prayer for you is, you should not have to wait till that age. Because you just don't spin your wheels till you're 34. You do things like get married, have children, and impose yourself upon other lives, and scar and mar and maim them.

And so there are quite a few people who paid the price for my atheistic career for the first 34 years. But as I said, in the 34th year, it all came tumbling down, and I couldn't go on being a teacher. I had nothing to give my students.

How was I going to give them an answer to save the world when I couldn't save my own marriage, save my own life, save them from their saccharine tears and their intense concern for lesser things? I realized in one fell swoop, education wasn't the answer, no more so than Marxism was the answer, or any other ism made of men. In a word, I would say that I'd come to this conclusion, that what we needed to save ourselves and our despairing universe was to become new creatures. It wasn't enough to be an idealist who gave all that he had until 320, and then retired again into his own privacy and self-indulgence.

Somehow we needed to be made of the same stuff of which martyrs are made, and to give unceasingly and untiringly, even unto death. But I myself was not made of such things. I was only a man, and I didn't know how to become a new creature.

I didn't even know that there was such a phrase in the scripture. And so I began that 14-month trip and a year's leave of absence from the teaching profession. My last statement at the last faculty meeting was when I arose with great indignation, which is a posture that modern men find easy to do, and I thumped the table and I cried out in indignation, We need a revolution! And I still believe that with all my heart.

It's just that God has given me to understand the nature of the revolution that's required. It has to begin with us hotshots who bang tables and make loud protestations. And so I began that trip, and I kept this journal of what I thought was going to be a search for philosophy, for what else shall an atheist seek.

I had already been a Marxist and a pragmatist and existentialist, and thought, well, what stone had I left unturned? And in the course of those 14 months of wandering, going back through the trail of Western civilization from California to New York, to Western European nations, to the Middle East, to Egypt, to Israel, I began to have a series of unanticipated encounters. You see, I had lived in so-called Christian America for 34 years and never saw anything, either from Jewish or Gentile lives, that made me to suspect that there's a living God. But one day, having already been accustomed to standing by the side of the road in drizzling rain for two and three hours at a time, soggy and limp, watching the cars whiz by with sullen masks for faces behind the wheels and slash lines for mouths, a man stopped for me with a brand

new car.

And he didn't just wait behind the wheel and give me a come on and say, hurry up, fella, I'm doing you a favor. He got out of the car and he greeted me by the side of the road, beaming from ear to ear, and immediately my deepest suspicions were aroused. I may have been a worthless bum and had a checkered career with the opposite sex, but for the deviants of my own sex, I had always found favor.

This man took my filthy rucksack and tossed it in the backseat of his car, and I winced when I saw the mess that it made of his new upholstery, and I looked cautiously at his face to see what horror would be registered there, and the man hadn't even noticed. And I thought to myself, what manner of man is this? Why every American I know that gets a scratch on the bumper, it gets panic-stricken. Our national idolatry and our real religion is in cars.

And evidently for this man, this car was just a mode of transportation. He had me sit down in the front seat and off we drove. And he turned and he looked at me.

It was well past the tourist season. I was not a high school kid out on the lock. And he said to me in German, why are you traveling this way? And so well as I could, I tried to explain.

I was a modern man whose life was broken at its foundation. I was seeking for the deepest answers to life. And before I could catch myself, I heard myself burning out that I was Jewish.

And I thought, cats, man, you've really blown it now. What did you volunteer that piece of information for? That's not something you share with any stranger. And I really turned to look to see what was going to come from this man, whether a sullen look or a painful silence or a grunt or worse.

And that man was just beaming with joy over the fact that I was a Jew. I had never seen such reaction. I mean, I hadn't thought that much about it myself.

I would fight at the drop of a hat. I was proudly Jewish, but I never could quite figure out what connection I had with those remote ancestors who tended sheep and all the rest of that. But for this man, evidently, being Jewish was something very special and significant, and he insisted that we stop for refreshments at his expense, for which I was grateful.

And so we had a meal that day. And isn't it remarkable how often in the Scriptures great spiritual transactions take place over the breaking of bread? I think we Americans are missing so much, because food now has become for us just a gastronomic activity in passing. We gulp it down and we run on to something else.

But breaking bread with someone can really be an intimate experience. I remember when I came back from Jerusalem as a believer and returned to the teaching profession, I was really a sore thumb with my colleagues, this former atheist radical now with a Bible under his arm saying that Jesus is the answer and witnessing to my students and colleagues alike. But one day I had lunch, and opposite me was a member of my department, a black man, and he was glowering at me as we were eating.

Man, was he shooting daggers. And I can see that that food was having such a tough time going down his gullet. He was masticating and masticating, but it wasn't going down any better than if it were lead.

I guess I must have looked to him like the archetypal Anglo-Saxon, can you believe it, the Jew from Brooklyn, and the enemy. And finally, he just couldn't contain himself longer. I could just hear those poisons circulating in his stomach and the gases and the acid.

And he finally blurted out, he said, one day, he said, my son is going to sit opposite your son and eat. I looked up and I said, oh, big deal. I said, is that all you want? I said, man, I thought you were a radical.

Boy, I'm far more radical than that. Is that all you want? Is the political or social freedom that your son can sit opposite my son and glower at each other while they masticate? I said, my intentions are far more radical. I want for your son and my son to break bread in love.

And I said, I'll tell you what, brother, there's not a piece of legislation made by men that can ever obtain that. Christ is the answer, guys. But not as a cheap slogan, as a bumper sticker.

Well, back to the story. And so I had a conversation with a Swiss man that day. He said, Art, how do you witness to an arrogant character like what you must have been? Cynical, atheistic, a bitter opponent of religion, and especially of Christianity, after all, for all that you Jews have suffered in the name of Christ.

How would you begin to speak to a man like you? Well, I'll tell you how he did it. He didn't say a word. But he listened to me that day in a way that I had never before been heard in all my life long.

Here was a man who was not just politely giving me his ear, waiting his opportunity to pounce upon me with John 3.16, or the four spiritual laws, or the five spiritual laws, depending on whether you're Gentile or Jewish. That man really was interested in my tsuris. Are you taking notes? Tsuris means troubles.

And I had them. Not just for myself, but for a woe-begone, stricken world. He was intently listening and hearing me.

And as I was beginning to share the content and the burden of my life, something was uncoiling around my heart, pain and constriction, and just going up out of my life and into him. He was like a living pincushion, receiving my anguish. And when I spit it all out, I came to a place where I was absolutely empty.

I'd come to the end of myself. And I looked at this man who wasn't anything to look at, conspicuous for anything, ordinary Gentile stranger. And I looked at that guy and I thought, now what is he going to tell me? Is he going to tell me about philosophy, ideologies, when I belong to half a dozen organizations on the Attorney General's list? There's nothing new under the sun.

He looked at me and he said, Adi said, do you know what it is that the world needs? What a question. Man, that was the question that was at the heart of my predicament. I wasn't dying for myself.

I was dying for a world teeter-tottering on the brink of atomic annihilation, ready to be steeped into a bloody racial holocaust, suffering already cultural decay, disintegration of value. That was the question that I wanted answered. Yes, I wanted to know what the world needed.

And I fixed such a cynical stare at that man that would have made men cower at 20 paces. And he looked up at me and he said, Adi said, what the world needs is for men to wash one another's feet. Something burst in my heart, people.

I began to choke and to sputter. Tears began to well up in the back of my eyes. A eureka tore out of my Jewish heart, deeper than any I had ever before exclaimed.

And I had a vision on the spot of every angry, contentious, self-righteous hotshot, ready to save the world, unable to control his own masturbation, humbling himself, washing the feet of the lowly and the despised. And there was odd cats doing it. I had a vision of Jews washing the feet of Germans, of blacks washing the feet of whites, of children washing the feet of their parents, students washing the feet of their teachers.

In a word, I saw that in one fell swoop, the world could be saved overnight, without legislation, without programs, without revolutions, without bloodshed, if only we would have this choice spirit of love and humility. I began to salivate, drool. And this man went on in German to tell me about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Oh, I was protesting loudly. Hey, just take it easy, fella. I'm Jewish.

That's for the goyim. That's for the Gentiles, you know. But evidently he didn't hear my or understand my complaint, and he went right on.

I'll tell you that when he finished with me that day, I must have been the most bewildered Jew on the face of this earth. On one hand, I knew that I'd heard the words of life and truth. They were unmistakable.

But on the other hand, I could not fathom how they could come in the name Jesus Christ. It was a name that I could not speak. It was a bone in my throat.

And all that I had ever associated with that name was persecution, oppression, forced conversion, exile, and all the rest. I left that man staggered. I'm sure he had no understanding of the impact that he had upon my life that day.

I have never seen him since. And it wasn't long after that, in that prepared condition, that I met a young girl, very much like many that I see before me this afternoon. It was a young girl with whom I could have had nothing to do.

She was a symbol of all that I despised in American life. A WASP, middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestant from the Midwest. The American wasteland, from the Brooklyn point of view.

And yet, you know, I was strangely drawn to this girl. There was something so compelling about her. She had that same kind of thing that Edwin had had, which I could not identify.

And her friends had left her for the day. She was on vacation in Europe, and we had this accidental meeting. And she was quite willing to spend time with me.

And like two innocent children, hand in hand, we walked the woods surrounding this European city. And all afternoon long, I'm probing this kid. How is it that you're willing to be kind to me? How is it you're not afraid of me? I'm a stranger.

And I asked her questions like that, and she answered every one simply, oh, she said, it's the love of God. It's the love of God. It's the love of God.

Well, I'll tell you something about us atheists. We can't stand God talk. There's nothing that moved me a fury more than innocuous talk about God.

And I thought to myself, as my impatience was growing, if this girl mentions God one more time, I'm going to lower the boom. And sure enough, she did it. So I dug my heels in the dirt, and I fixed my flinty face upon her.

I said, look, you're a sweet girl and all that, but I'm sick to the teeth with this God talk. You just answered me one question. You've been talking about God all afternoon long.

How do you know that he is? That was my famous \$64 question that no Christian had ever been able to answer for me. You know what my hobby was as an atheist? Find Christians, engage them in debate, and wipe them out. They gave me brittle theological answers.

So what about this little teenage kid? Man, my steamroller was going to roll right over and crush her. And I was waiting for that long, embarrassed silence. And she would think of something she had heard in Sunday school.

She didn't stand a chance. But to my amazement, there was no long, painful silence. She looked up immediately with that face flooded with the light of God, looked me straight in the eye, and said, Archie said, I know that God lives.

He lives in me. And pow, something happened to that heart all over again. The pieces were flying all over inside my chest, the fragments.

I was choking and sputtering. I was the one who was stopped dead in his tracks. And when I recovered myself, I thought, what is it that gave that girl's statement such power? It certainly wasn't theological.

It wasn't even intellectual. What was it? And it finally dawned upon me what it was. It was simply truth.

And she had a face to prove it. And you know what God did in that moment? He showed me that although I was twice this kid's age, twice as traveled, twice as sophisticated, twice as learned, she was in the light and I was in the darkness. And I knew that the light that she had was not to be obtained at universities.

I had been there. And I was moved to envy for that light. That's how God was preparing my heart for one more statement that was going to absolutely blow it to smithereens.

This time it was not to come from a Swiss man or an American girl. It came from the lips of the Messiah himself. Some weeks later, aboard the deck of a tramp steamer, the cheapest way for guys like me to travel with the homosexuals, the drifters, and the lost men aboard the deck of a ship, three days and nights from Italy to Greece, I found a Jewish fellow passenger who had a copy of the New Testament, a book I never before would have deigned to read, but my heart had been prepared.

And I borrowed that book and I found myself a place on the deck with a porthole over my shoulder and the light was coming from the inside out and inside the well-paying passengers were having a ball and we bums were huddled together for warmth on the deck. And in that inhospitable setting, I began the book designed for lost bums. And I'll tell you, it was a revelation right from the first page.

I knew immediately, omnivorous reader that I was, that this book was different from anything I'd ever laid my eyes on before. There's a certain compelling authority to this book that I could not put down. And the second revelation was the Jewishness of the book.

I was amazed to find that men like John and Peter, Barnabas, Paul, later on in my reading. In fact, all these men were Jewish, unmistakably Jewish. The whole character, tone of the book, the spirit of the book was Jewish and there was no character in the book more Jewish than Jesus himself.

Therefore, therefore, I was all the more staggered what came from his Jewish lips. Listen, I was a rank atheist. I was a man who wouldn't even begin to, to presume to know what the word holy means.

Yet I would never allow another mortal man to fall at my feet and cry, I don't know, my Lord and my God, and not rebuke him. But Jesus did it. I would never presume to say to another man, your sins be forgiven you, but Jesus did it.

I would never presume to say that I've come not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, but Jesus did it. I would never say of the Ten Commandments given by God on Sinai, it has been said to you of old, thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you, any man who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his own heart already. Talk aboutchutzpah, talk about arrogance.

I was staggered because I'll tell you what kids, however much an atheist I was, I was always a keen respecter of words, always. I was the kid in the junior high school class that when that snot-nosed jerk called the girl a whore, my face flushed with blood. I was angry to the root of my soul for any word indiscriminately spoken, and so from the dawn of my consciousness I recognized that words were sacred things not to be glibly spoken.

You can imagine my great joy when I came across that statement that Jesus spoke when he said, every idle word that a man shall speak he shall be held accountable. And I thought to myself, well that's the way he feels about words. He certainly is not going to speak idly himself.

What's the matter with us so-called intellectuals? Bunch of finks and cop-outs coming to snappy, sharp little sophistries and conclusions and not once ever having turned to the original source ourselves. Putting Jesus down and willing to be content with superstar images and t-shirt images and never once for ourselves consulted what he himself spoke nor did. Calling ourselves intellectual and flying in the very face of the fundamental axiom for intellect, turning to the source.

I'll tell you turning to that source is a radical encounter from which few men can squirm. God in his great genius has so stacked the cards that in your encounter with the Christ of the New Testament you have only but one of two alternatives. You either find him an unspeakable blasphemer and a lunatic of the greatest magnitude or the son of the living God, the Christ, the Mashiach, the Holy One of Israel.

I'll tell you I didn't know that there was a God the Father let alone that he had a son. But when Jesus kept saying that the words that I speak I receive of my father, the things which I do I've seen of my father. My father has sent me.

I and my father are one. There is a growing thing in my heart because he said it that after all there may be a father. And I'll tell you I came to a crisis.

Something was growing in my heart. A hero, one to whom I could indeed give my Jewish life and loyalty. Not a Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud and Eric Fromm or some lesser man who would in turn reveal his clay feet.

But my hero was in trouble because a woman had been taken in the act of adultery and this woman had been thrown at his feet and these religious hotshots had said to Jesus, you've said that you've come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Okay wise guy. The law says death by stoning.

What do you say? And I got so terrified for what he could say that I closed the book. I was afraid to read on. What could he say? And I didn't want to see my hero destroyed.

And I was going to bail him out. And I thought of this possible answer. I think every ingenious atom in my brain was put to work.

And finally, I don't know how long it took, I gave it up with complete exhaustion and came to this realization. And we've got to come to this realization. There's no human answer for the predicament that Jesus was in.

And I opened the book with trembling hands with the sweat pouring out of my palms and my heart was beating like a trip hammer. And I read on. It described Jesus bent over the earth poking his finger in the dirt with that woman weeping at his feet.

And you know what guys? It wasn't for me an academic episode. I saw myself as one with that woman taken in the act of adultery, deserving the stroke of God's judgment and wanting somehow in a desperate cry out of my heart for something more than the judgment of God and not knowing even how to name it. And I saw these men with a spittle from the corners of their mouths and their eyes ablaze with indignation and fury.

What is there about Jesus that turns men off so? I'm always suspicious of those who can pay him left-handed compliments. Oh yes, Jesus, yes, great teacher. And they're even so magnanimous, some of them, to consent to the fact that he might even be a great prophet.

Oh, I tremble for those, all the more for their embarrassment when they shall stand before him and hear the little sickly compliments paid back. Oh, you call him a great teacher, do you? And a great prophet? How then you did not fall at his feet and worship him? How could he be these things and make the statements that he did and exercise all of the prerogatives of deity? He's either mad or a fool, sick, or he's far more than a great teacher and even a great prophet. And there's no in between.

There's not a one of us that's going to stand before a holy God with excuse. Jesus looked up as I read on and I saw the face of him who had never sinned and he spoke that one line, let him who is without sin cast the first stone. And you know what happened guys? The line came right up off the page, penetrated into my eyes and my body began violently to tremble from head to toe.

And to my utter amazement, this thing didn't stop in my eyes, it went up into my brain. It felt like an electric current and it didn't even stop in my head, but it turned downward like a sharp two-edged sword cutting asunder the soul and the spirit and penetrated to the heart of my being. And when that shock wave stopped, I knew with complete certitude there's a living God.

I'm reading his word and therefore Jesus is who he claims to be. I received the revelation of God. If you thought that I shouted hallelujah, your estimation of me was as far greater than I deserved.

I didn't shout hallelujah, I was not happy for this unwelcome revelation. And the first thought that occurred to me was, what's your mother going to say about this? I knew what she was going to say. You've gone

and joined the enemy's camp.

She said that. You're mad. She said that and slammed the door in my face.

And I knew I would have to suffer reproach, misunderstanding, the loss of friends and other consequences to commit myself to this one who had been revealed to me, which I was not anxious to do. I'll tell you that if you're sitting here this afternoon and you've had intellectual difficulties in coming to the discovery of God, this is your problem. First of all, it's not an intellectual matter at all.

It's utterly spiritual from beginning to end. It has nothing to do with your mental striving and everything to do with the by the revelation of his spirit. There's only one thing wanting from you.

God says to us in Isaiah, to this man shall I look. He who is of a contrite and broken spirit, who trembles at my word. When you'll come before the God of all this world with such a disposition of heart trembling, knowing inwardly that this is going to be expensive.

This is going to cost that you're going to have to follow the same God who called Abraham from nation kindred and father's house in a fearful rupture and separation from everything dear and familiar to follow him to the land that he will show you with all of the anxiety and uncertainty and fearfulness and trembling that a walk by faith implies. You'll be ready in your heart to say yes to a God who shall make that call clear. You'll need not even have to leave this room this afternoon to find him.

I wrestled with God six months after that revelation and I tell you that if the Passover plot had been written then, I would have been the first one to eagerly have grabbed for it. I wanted an out. I wanted to be extricated from my embarrassing predicament.

I didn't want to become quote unquote a Christian and be one with those reactionaries and Ku Klux Klan and all the others that I thought Christians were. I could not for the life of me fathom how a God of Israel could ask me, a Jew, to become a quote unquote Christian. Of course he wasn't, but I didn't understand.

I didn't even know what the word Christ meant. I didn't know that it was the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word Mashiach or I would not have struggled so badly. If I had known that he wanted me to be a messianist, a follower of him who said if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, my anguish would have been very much relieved.

I didn't want to forsake being a Jew and I didn't understand that God was not asking me let alone to forsake it, but asking me authentically and existentially to find it. So six months later, in the experiences I could too long not have described, I found myself in Israel and I traveled the length and breadth of the land with that pack on my back. I went to the Kibbutzim.

I went to the towns, the cities. I spoke with people. I searched, still trying to find some other answer and in the streets of Jerusalem, I found a Jewish man, an American, studying at the Hebrew University to become ultimately a rabbi.

He is today. We're still friends. That man had had to confess to me recently.

Arie said, I'm a rabbi and I can't say with any assurance that I know that God lives, but you, he said, you're a Jew in the tradition of Elijah. Indeed, I've seen the fire fall from heaven and I've been fed by the ravens and I'll tell you if you'll receive it, it's the only kind of Jew that God really recognizes, but I'm going ahead of

myself. I met this man in the street and I told him that Jesus was breathing down my neck.

Oh, he was so alarmed that I would desert my ancestral faith and I agreed with him to stay at the Hebrew University, live in a dormitory, go to the library every day, read books, speak with professors. I lived not a stone unturned and I did it. And it's interesting, the more I read, the more encounters with professors, the more I realized that I was on the hook of God.

After two weeks, the last thing that this man wanted me to do was to visit the special Jewish community of Hasidic Jews. And he put me on a bus that day to the Hebrew University to go downtown Jerusalem and make changes, connections. I never got there.

By some fluky reason, I was put on the wrong bus and found myself in a section of Jerusalem lost. And I'll tell you, I was just too Jewish to go on riding in a bus, not going anywhere. And I got out of the bus and I walked into the first door that I could find and I asked for directions.

And the woman was so gracious, she made me a map. And I was just about to leave, I noticed that I was in a bookstore. And having been the kind of kid that read with a flashlight under the sheets, I wanted to see the titles of the books.

And it said Bibles and New Testaments and Assorted Christian Literature. I looked at the woman's Jewish face. I said, say, what is this place? Oh, she said, we're a congregation of Jewish believers in the Messiah, Jesus.

And this is our bookstore adjoining our chapel. Something snapped in my heart. Now we're getting to the place where we began at the beginning.

Thanks for your patience. In that moment, I want you to believe this with all your heart. I'm not putting you on.

I'm not taking any literary liberties. In that moment, I heard a still small voice. And the amazing thing is that it called me by name and spoke in a way to which I've since become familiar, very tersely and always in the form of command without explanation.

Art, you are not to leave. You know what I did? I started to get Jewish. I obeyed the voice of him with whom I have to do.

If two minutes before somebody had spoken to me about the hearing of voices, I would have directed them to a psychiatrist. But when I heard the voice myself, there was no question at all whose voice that is. The same one who had called my father Abraham, the same one who had spoken to my Jewish kinsmen 2,000 years ago and invited them to leave their boats and their nets in their father's houses and follow him.

To hear that still small voice, people, is all. My sheep, Jesus said, shall hear my voice. I stayed four days and nights with these Jewish believers.

I saw such a fantastic demonstration that I'd never before seen in synagogues and churches. I saw Jews pray with authority. You say, Art, you saw them? I saw them, yes, with their hands above their heads praising God and worshipping him in the spirit with tears rolling down their cheeks.

I'll tell you people, however stupid I was, I realized this. You can't teach a man to worship. There's no course that can induct them.

There's no book on technique and methodology. I don't care what we Americans think. Worship is the ultimate or authentic expression, the spontaneous overflow of hearts that know God.

These were Jews who had encountered the living God. And they prayed for me passionately and with me and for me and opened up to me the scriptures and showed me the relationship between the Old and New Testament scriptures of the hundreds of prophecies that pertain to a Messiah to come that could only have been fulfilled by one in point of time. And I went to sleep that fourth night so whacked out of my skull I couldn't think straight.

I was trying by the power of intellect to put all these things into place, and I couldn't. And my brain, which I had honed to a sharp edge, was failing me. I was not going to be saved by the exercise of my own intelligence, because all the rest of my life I'd be boasting about how sharp I was and looking with contempt upon those who were not quite as clever.

By faith are we saved, by the grace of God. In my sleep that night, in my ultimate confusion, ready to leave the next day perplexed, unable to save myself, God did something in my heart in my sleep. I could feel the pieces falling into place and I awoke the next morning with the most wonderful sense of peace and calm that I had never before enjoyed in all my adult life.

I came to the breakfast table and I said to this woman Rina, Rina I believe I understand. And the woman without a word fell out of a seat on the floor and had her arms above her head praising God, weeping, because her prayer that night had been, Lord, we've done everything for this stubborn man. You make him to understand.

God gave me understanding, people. Not that I understood all. In fact, I understood little, but I understood sufficiently.

I understood that there was a resurrected Christ. I didn't understand triune God, body, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. I didn't understand virgin birth.

I didn't understand doctrine and theology, but I understood that there was a living God, that there was a living Christ, a Messiah, a Holy One knocking at the door of my heart. And I just couldn't go on saying that I was a man who respected truth and a man of integrity and turned from him. And so in my pitiful condition, I prayed my first prayer in 35 years, quite an accomplishment for a blasphemer, a man who is sharp with his mouth to incite people to violence or to seduce women, speaking his first prayer.

It was the most awkward, choked performance you could ever imagine. But guess what? God received it and something immediately happened. I felt something leaving me, going out of me that was angry, bitter, dark, selfish, lustful, and something new was coming in to replace it.

A new spirit, a Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. You know what the first evidence was that I had become a new creature? My speech changed. I couldn't for the life of me curse.

And I just didn't even know how to speak without punctuating every certain sentence liberally with cursing. I've never cursed from that day. Only the first of many changes when God came in.

I returned some months later to California, resumed my teaching career. God was making of me a new teacher. I lost all my friends the first night back in California.

They thought that I'd gone off to the deep end. People turned with me with mild disdain, contempt, anger, some with real bitterness. God was beginning to work in my heart and shape me and conform me to his image.

One day, God led me to give this story at a local church. I didn't even know that I had anything special to tell. And when I finished it, some people came up to me afterwards, and among them was a roly-poly Gentile woman.

And she called me Brother Katz. Quite an experience. Brother Katz, she said, you don't know me, but you had my daughter as a student at the high school.

She knew that you were a radical and an atheist, and came home from school in the afternoons weeping over you. Since that day, she said, both my daughter and I have been praying for you. Something in my heart went crack.

One last time, there was that explosion, the fragments, the smithereens flying around in my chest. I went speechless, stupefied. When I found my voice, it was like a needle on the record.

Caught, you're again. So you're the one. So you're the one.

So there are several people who are sitting here this afternoon who are here because someone has been weeping for you, because someone has been supplicating and praying for you, and is a God who hears. Oh, precious children, there's not a thing that's taken place this afternoon. Your presence here, the things which are being spoken, the atmosphere which is in this room right now, which is in any way inadvertent or happenstance.

There's a living God. Only one. Here, oh Israel, for God's sake, here.

The Lord your God is one Lord. Who is he, Lord? A formerly blind man said to Jesus, who had received his sight at his hand. He who speaketh with thee.

The next verse says, and he worshipped him. Call yourself intellectual? Okay, here's an opportunity. Here's truth.

What are you going to do about it? Here's truth, inconvenient, challenging, radical. You have a heart to hear it. Have you heard a still small voice? Have you heard the great shepherd who seeks and finds those who are lost saying, come unto me? You who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

I am the way, the life and the truth. No man cometh to the father but by me. I'll tell you that if you call yourself Jewish and leave this room this afternoon, angry, irritated, amused, in any condition other than saved to the uttermost by your own repentant calling upon his name, then I challenge you as a Jew this day to shout from the rooftops that Jesus Christ is a lunatic, a blasphemer and to persuade countless numbers of Gentiles who have foolishly given him their lives to turn and save themselves from an eternal disappointment.

There's no other way. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads and I'm going to conclude the way I always conclude, calling on the name of the Lord and asking you, whatever your background, whatever your denominational affiliation, there's so many of you Gentile kids who are sitting here this afternoon who've had the same kind of Hebrew school experience we've had, indoctrination, Sunday school, catechisms,

the whole bit. Some of you are even paying lip service, but you've never allowed Jesus to be the Lord of your life.

There's no other way to know him. His terms are absolute. My sheep will hear my voice and I'm going to invite every soul who has heard the voice of the living God to follow me in a very simple prayer that will establish for time and eternity a relationship with that one who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the one who made the worlds and the earth and the heaven, who came into the world and the world knew him not, who came to his own and his own received him not, but to as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God.

There's an act of receiving required of you, which when you shall call upon his name, following me in this prayer, you shall receive. I'm going to thank God for this time and then I'm going to begin a prayer with the words, dear God, and I invite as many who have heard his voice who want him to follow me word for word in that prayer. Thank you precious God, Lord.

I tried, Lord, before this meeting to look into the scriptures to find some text or something you'd have me to speak and you closed it out. You would not let me. You wanted this people to hear about the mercy and grace and love of a living God who will not let us go, a hound of heaven who pursues us and breathes upon us and finds exquisite measures to pick us off the side of the road and to bring us to places of hearing, who will not wait for us to come to him, but comes to us even in rooms like this and pleads with us to believe.

Dear gracious God, in Jesus' holy name, I ask you to pour upon this people the spirit of supplication, the spirit of truth and revelation, the spirit of the love of God, the spirit of integrity. You know our hearts and you know our lives and you know our difficulties. I ask you to give us every assistance to be honest with you and to act out of our own freedom and volition and will to call upon your name.

I ask you to receive Lord with great joy and with a great attending of your spirit. Every soul who now follow me in this prayer in obedience to your scripture that says that the same Lord over Jew and Gentile is rich unto all who call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Lord save to the uttermost both Jew and Gentile who shall call upon you now in this prayer. Will you speak aloud with me these words? Dear God, I ask your forgiveness for my every offense against your holiness. I ask that you make me clean of every sin and transgression by the shed blood of the Lamb of God, the Messiah Jesus.

And now I open to you my heart and life. I'm finished with playing at games. I ask you to come in and to rule over my life and be my Lord and my God.

Take possession of my life from this afternoon on. Put your spirit within me. Give me the gift of eternal life.

Enter me into your kingdom and lead me in the way from this hour forth. Thank you for hearing me and saving me. In Jesus name I pray.

Amen.

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