

The Spirit of the Lord 2 of 2

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the necessity of being led by the Holy Spirit, the challenges of faith, and the call to deeper commitment in a complacent generation.

Duration: 57:46

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 16:14-16, Acts 16:22-23

Topics: "Spirit Of The Lord"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of fulfilling God's messianic path in the unity of the spirit. He describes the believers as a small community of believers, standing strong amidst a sea of hostility and opposition. The preacher highlights the need for the modern generation to experience the full impact of life and to groan for the things of God. He also emphasizes the importance of perceiving the spiritual reality behind the outward appearances of people, recognizing the struggles and cries of those around us. The sermon references biblical stories, such as the magistrates beating Paul and Silas, to illustrate the challenges faced by believers in the world.

Transcript

So we're studying a day in the life of a couple of Jewish men who are men of the spirit, which is the only way to be Jewish, and we're seeing how they're being obedient to the heavenly vision. So it contradicts many of our conventional, even our evangelical understandings, and how that in the order of their steps by the Lord, by this direction they were brought out of the city where we would have thought that they should more likely have gone, and just went out to a riverside where a group of women were accustomed to making prayer. And there we read in the 14th verse, a certain woman named Lydia, a sower of purple, of the city of Phaethira, which worshipped God heard us, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Isn't that beautiful? I'll tell you, it should make us almost blush, because how many times have we attended to the things which were spoken by the Pauls which God had sent us? Has there ever been a generation more indulged spiritually speaking than we? Has any generation ever heard more speakers, more faiths, read more literature, been immersed in more knowledge of spiritual things than we? And yet where's the reflection of it? Where is the concomitant maturity and growth as a result of such speaking? It's almost as if we should call a moratorium, and there'll have to be no more speaking until we've caught up in our experience to what we have already heard. We think that meetings are the end all and be all of

our Christian endeavor, that the whole purpose of our existence is to be called together in meetings that we might hear more teaching. It was not so from the beginning.

What a woman is this, whose heart the Lord opened because she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. How do you know that? Where's the proof? Comes right next verse, and when she was baptized. I know she attended because her hearing eventuated in her acting.

Well, you say, big deal. What's baptism? Everything. Everything.

Maybe you need a Jewish guy to remind you of the enormous profundity of baptism. I told you, I'm beginning to get to be called archbaptist. I'm leaving a trail of wet bodies all across Europe, plunged into bathtubs if we can't find anything better.

Baptism is the ultimate act of separation and commitment. Now, Paul and Silas are going to leave town in a couple of days, but this woman is remaining with the stigma of public baptism upon her. That's a woman.

May God raise up the Lydia's for our generation, willing to receive that stigma. She heard the way of God, and she did it despite the cost, and her whole household. So I can only assume that the children were so kindred with her in spirit that they saw the light with her and received the same blessing, and she'd be sort of saying, if you've judged me to be faithful to God, come into my house and abide there, and she constrained them.

Isn't that a beautiful word? The very same word that God uses in speaking about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus made as if he would have gone on, and he would have, but they constrained him to come in, and he aboded them and broke bread, and their eyes were opened. I'm saying a lot of things about this modern generation.

What have I said so far? Insecure, glib, unctuous, full of vacillation, compromise, ifs, ands, and buts. And I suppose I should say another thing. They don't know how to constrain God.

Everything has been lived from the surface of our lives. There's never been a more plastic generation. Instant tea, fly now, pay later.

Never been a greater age of convenience and ease. We haven't known what it means to groan anything to come out of our gut, as we do say, out of the kishkas, but she constrained them to come in. How do we give them this? Well, if you're in the neighborhood, why don't you drop in, hoping against hope they won't drop in when the football game is on and keep us from our pleasure.

And I'll tell you, I know in that part of the world that when someone comes under your roof and enjoys your hospitality and breaks bread with you, you're one with them, and therefore where they are, you are, and what stigma they receive, you receive. She constrained them to come in. No wonder that God chose her as the first of his fruit in Philippi to begin the body of Christ.

Oh, isn't there always a woman at the inception of God's work? Because it says that the eye of God rose to and fro over the face of the earth, seeking that one whose heart is perfect toward him, that he might show himself strong in that life. And it wasn't too much for God to send two of his choicest servants, the great apostle himself from Asia, where he was successfully laboring, all the way to Greece, that he might bring the word of God to a woman, that she might be brought more perfectly into the way and be one of the founding stones of the body of Christ. And so it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel

possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her master as much gain as was sufficient.

The same followed Paul left and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God. Now, you have to hear this as she said it. Demoniactal voice, cracked, high-pitched, makes it chill when down in your spine.

These men are the servants of the most high God. This wasn't the woman speaking. These were the filthy spirits speaking out of her, who show unto us the way of salvation.

And this did she many days. And Paul, being grieved, turned and commanded the evil spirits to come out and came out in the same way. You know how I used to read that? Paul being bugged.

Paul being irritated. Oh, man, knock it off. Now you get out.

No. Paul being grieved is a lot different than Paul being bugged, Paul being irritated. And in that children lies an important principle of God.

How is it when we have said, Come out of her, they don't come out? How is it when we have prayed, Be healed, they're not healed? We have faith, we believe. We have faith, but do we have love? Because it's the faith which worketh by love. Paul being grieved, Paul being stricken, Paul being cut in his heart, Paul anguishing over the sight of a woman whose life was not her own, who was a cheap piece of merchandise exploited by vicious men for profit, commanded the evil spirits to come out, and they came out in that same way.

Jesus had compassion on the multitude, and they were all healed. We are children of faith, but are we also children of love? Are we grieved? You say, alright, when I'll hear a woman like that, you can be assured I'll be grieved also. Oh, boy, are you ever shallow.

They're everywhere about us, don't you see them? Do you have to wait for a high-pitched voice? Do you have to hear that craxy, maniacal shriek? I'll tell you, there are people who are wearing pinstripe suits, whose voices are never raised beyond monotone, who live perfectly ordered lives, ethical, moral, cultured, who are as much slaves to Satan as this woman, whose lives are not their own, who is marching by a beat that is ordered out of hell, and don't even know it. This woman knew she was possessed, but the pity is the greater for those who have no knowledge that they are securely in the hand of the evil one, and their lives are not their own, all children. The evil taskmaster is cracking an invisible whip over the backs of millions of men, fear, insecurity, keeping up with the Joneses, men on rat mills, mazes, the sweating, the grinding, the filthy lives, what goes on behind shut doors and pulled shades, the rent marriages of the broken homes, the shrieks.

I'll never forget walking in on my mother one day, married to a man who's now deceased, and they were going at it hammer and tongs. The veins were standing out on their necks, and her eyes were bulging out of her head, and she had a big Venetian ashtray in hand, ready to crack her husband on his skull. They were moved to such a pitch of vexation and anger and bitterness with each other, they couldn't be reconciled.

Neither one knew God. Vexatious Jews, coming at each other like tigers, and I'll tell you, that scene is enacted everywhere daily. Abortions, miscarriages, unhappy episodes, love affairs, disappointment, heartaches, there's a gloating mankind if you have ears to hear.

What are you seeing anyhow by the natural eye, by the eye of the spirit? When you see a man with a pinstripe suit, and he seems to have everything in order, and he has decorum and propriety, you assume that all is well? If we're children of the spirit, called in the age of the spirit, we need also to see by the eye of the spirit, that everywhere about us, there are people with demoniacal shrieks and cries, although they give every outward appearance of having everything in its place. They need to be set free in the power of the spirit by those who are grieved, in love, and have also authority and faith. You say, Art, what is the reward for such outstanding service? Will I receive a plaque from the Junior Chamber of Commerce Man of the Year? Or maybe the B'nai B'rith will single me out for meritorious service, because I've been obedient to the heavenly visions.

I'll tell you, if you've got a plaque from the B'nai B'rith, I would be very suspicious. Here's the reward for your obedient service. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrate, saying, These men being Jews do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe being Romans.

And the multitude rose up together against them, and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commended and beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, whoever received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the socks. If this is more than historical episode, if this is a definitive pattern of God, then we should have every reasonable expectation that the obedience to the Holy Spirit rendered by us shall eventuate and result in the same consequences that it did for them.

It was true for Jesus, it was true for that generation of disciples, and it shall be and must be true also for us. Didn't it behoove the Messiah to suffer and to die before he ascended to his glory, Jesus said, to those who were slow of heart? There's a certain behooving, there's a certain must-suffer, there's a certain ought that cannot be avoided. Obedience to the Holy Spirit will not result in being chaired around the marketplace with a wreath around your forehead, and being applauded by men, but it shall result always in reproach, persecution, suffering, and perhaps death.

And I'll tell you what, children, it may not only come from the world, you may get a bit of it from those who call themselves Christians also. And the multitude rose up together against them. What did I say last night, you have two Jews, you get three arguments? But there's one thing in which all three branches of Judaism agree, orthodox, conservative, and reformed.

They don't agree among themselves about almost anything, and look upon each other with jaundiced eyes, but on this one thing they're agreed, is there's a Jew who believes in Jesus, he's written out of the Jewish community, he's no longer a Jew. And the multitude rose up together against him. And I'll tell you that as God is moving to bring about the unity of his body, Satan is moving also to bring about the unity of his.

And two sons are going to battle it out at the end of the ages. And probably honest, I can't think of one issue that shall more coalesce the antagonistic forces to God, political, social, economic, and religious, than the opposition to God's people and the multitude rose up together against them. Those that live godly lives in Christ shall suffer persecution.

I get my first disappointment as a young believer coming back fresh from Jerusalem, stunned by the discovery of God, fully and naively expecting that when I took up my place in a Pentecostal congregation

in California, that I would see the continuation of the book of Acts to find out, a lack and a last, that it was no such thing. It was only a kind of country club, kind of sport, kind of idol Sunday service thing that had no impact on the community whatsoever. Neither was there therefore any persecution or any reproach.

It was altogether groovy. But I believe with all my heart that this age is going to end exactly as it began, in an apostolic manner, in the power of the Spirit, men directed by the Holy Spirit, not by programs, not by organizations, not by human devices nor ambitions, but the Heavenly Father, empowered and anointed by that Spirit to fulfill God's messianic task. In the unity of the Spirit, one people, the body of Christ, a besieged community of believers, small, I'm not expecting great numbers, an island of belief and spirit life in a sea of hostility and bitterness and opposition.

That's the way the age began, that's the way it shall also end. And the magistrates rent off their clothes and commanded to beat them, and when they had laid many stripes upon them. I was telling the boys in the TV room, I'm familiar with the TV technique, I've made many programs, and how not too long ago I made about 14 programs at Portsmouth, Virginia, at CBN, Christian Broadcasting Network, without any scripts, without preparation, arriving in the city in an exhausted condition, just trembling like a leaf, where do I come to follow men like Bob Mumford and other significant teachers of the day? I'm out of my element, I'm over my head, what am I going to say? And my only thought was to get to a hotel, get some rest, be prepared for the next day.

I never got there, God had me someplace that night, something happened, and the next morning I woke up, no time to pray, to prepare myself, and I woke up with one word in my heart, Joseph. And I tried to shake it, that's not an end time message, I couldn't get rid of Joseph. I came to the studio, it was all set up, I mean it was all set up, three or four cameras, expensive equipment, lights, set, these productions run thousands and thousands of dollars.

And I was trembling, I said, look at me, I'm not a pro, this is just Bobcat, Brooklyn boy, look, I don't know what to say, I don't have any script, I haven't had the time to prepare, I only have one word in my heart, Joseph, can we pray together? We went into a little football huddle in the middle of that room, and we just cried to the Lord, Lord direct us by your Spirit. And when that huddle broke, I still had one word in my heart, Joseph, and I was arguing with God, Lord that's not an end time message. And I thought if I blow this first program, if it becomes a mess, if I miss the leading of God, and I go off on some tangent that isn't good, we're going to lose the continuity, we're going to lose the whole flow, and the whole thing is going to sag and collapse and be a mess.

My reputation is ruined, let alone thousands of dollars of production time and equipment and all that stuff. But there was no other word in my heart but Joseph. I had a hunch.

And so when the red lights went on the camera, I took a deep breath and I began to speak about Joseph. And guess what happened? The anointing of God was upon me. He is not going to anoint those things which are not in his will and his good pleasure to do.

And as I heard myself speaking, and I heard it coming forth out of my mouth by the unction of the Holy Spirit, I began to see this is an end time message. This Hebrew, who was rejected of his brothers, they despised him for his dreams and all the more for the words which he spoke, is a picture of God's body in the end time, cast into pit and cast into dungeon, suffering reproach and persecution. But knowing the intimacy of God in the fellowship of his suffering, and in the moment of God's pleasing, just like Jesus himself, brought up out of obscurity and hiddenness, in the moment of maturity, at a time when famine has

swept all Egypt or is potentially ready to break, and all of the wise men of Egypt cannot give answer.

What an end time picture. And this Joseph, the true Hebrew says, Pharaoh said to him, I hear that you can give answer. And you know what most Jews would have said? Boy, here's my opportunity.

I'll let him believe it's me and he'll elevate me and I'll insinuate myself with him and then I'll be in a position to do my brother's good. Isn't that exactly what Joseph might have said about Potiphar's seductive attempts? Listen, if woman's got eyes for me, and God knows I haven't had an opportunity up until now, and I'm a red-blooded Jewish boy, and you know, and I'll be in good with her and good with her husband, I'll be in a position to do my brother's good. And she said, come lie with me.

End time temptation. When you got those end time glasses on, children, and pick up those old Hebrew texts, whammo! Searing temptation in the end times. But he refused.

That's the man that God uses. And he had another temptation, perhaps more seductive than Potiphar's. Pharaoh said, I hear that you can give answer.

And we would have said, yes, I can. But Joseph said, it is not in me the Lord shall give you answer. And God did give answer.

And Pharaoh had to turn to his wise men and say, can we find such a one as this, in whom the Spirit of God is? The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, for he had anointed him as an end time son to give answer in an age of extremity and crisis that all the wise men of Egypt could not. Not by might, not by power, not by cleverness, not by strategy, not by technique, but by my Spirit, sayeth the Lord. You know how those Hebrews were looked upon? Lowly, beggars, cheapers, the lowest scum of the earth.

The sophisticated Egyptians and all their occult practices looked upon the Hebrews as the lowest of the low. Simple. But God gave answer through such a mouth.

That was the first of those TV programs. And we went on that day making program after program without script, without preparation, and one was more glorious than the other. And then I went to bed that night.

I couldn't wait to hit that sack. Man, I was exhausted and wiped out. And tomorrow I had to conclude what I began.

And I didn't know what I was going to do the next day. And I just, I left the trail of clothing from the morning I walked into the hotel room, right to the bed. And with my last ounce of energy, I took that last leap and hit the switch of the light and fell asleep.

I hit, my head hit the pillow and nothing happened. So I punched the pillow and put my head down and nothing. And I turned it this way and nothing happened.

And I don't know how I was writhing and turning. And finally in the disgust, I put on a light. It was two o'clock and I hadn't yet closed my eyes.

So I said, well, that's what you get, Kat, for being a Jewish boy and going to bed without washing. Did your mother teach you better than that? So I got out of bed, fully repentant and took a hot bath. I mean a hot bath.

And I almost fainted in the tub. And I got out weak, you know, staggering to the bed, you know, one last lurch to make. I thought I'm going to fall on the floor.

And there, in whatever position I land, that's where I'm going to remain the rest of the night, dead, out. But I made it to the bed, hit the light, and I didn't fall asleep. So I punched the pillow.

I finally turned the light on. It was 6.20, 7.30. I had to be at the studio. I had no sleep whatsoever.

But the programs on the second day were more glorious than the first because his strength was made perfect in our weakness. He'll take the worst tactics of the enemy and turn it to the good. I think my best moments in prayer have come when Satan has worked me over in the middle of the night hours and roasted me on a spit and buffeted me.

And I can't sleep at night. I might as well get on my knees and call on the Lord. I've had great times with God that way.

He'll use the work of the enemy for the good. So I made a program on Acts 16. I said to these technicians, I said, have you got a whip and handcuffs in the place? Kat, you're too much.

Whip and handcuffs? What do you think this is, an armory? It happened to be there was a police station like a block away. So they went and they got a pair of handcuffs. And the studio guy made me as the prop man making a whip out of a broom handle and pieces of like leather from like a plastic.

And he tied ugly pieces of metal and glass on like a cat of nine tails. I mean, it was a vicious looking instrument. I said, now when the program begins, all of this without a script, without preparation, I'm just talking with my old pro carrying on.

I do this every day. I said, when the program begins, I said, I want that camera focusing on these instruments in my hand. And that's the way the program began.

I'm feeling the heft of this set of handcuffs and the whip. And then I began speaking in this manner to an audience that was to be invisible. I suppose you're wondering what these implements have to do with a gospel telecast.

And my answer to you is everything. They have ever and always had to do with the promulgation of the gospel. And so shall they have again to do at the end of the ages for those that shall be obedient to the heavenly spirit.

And then I went on to the message which I'm speaking to you today. Children, I'm not expecting to end this life of mine in a nice, safe, comfortable way in my bed. And many of us shall bear in our body as Paul himself experienced the marks of Jesus Christ before we pass this life.

These are the last hours. There's going to be a titanic collision between light and darkness, and there are going to be casualties. And no man shall be able to endure and be sustained in such extremity except by the same holy.

I tremble for every well-meaning Baptist. And by that, I mean every denominational person. And there are many wonderful, fine Christians of that description who know not the fullness of the Holy Spirit, who shall not be able to stand in that hour except they do.

Many stripes were laid upon them. You know what that means? I used to be a boxing fan. Every Wednesday and Friday night, this was before maybe you were born, it was fight night.

And I was always glued to the television set. I loved it. Man, when the guy tagged against the rope, my heart was pounding with excitement.

When the mouthpiece went flying around across the ring, I could hardly wait for the knockout. And when he was already tottering, ready to go down, this was living. I loved it, the comeback.

So one day I went to the gym to watch a fight in the flesh. And I've never been a boxing fan since. The first blow that landed, crack! And the guy pulled away his glove.

I saw a big red welt the size of the glove and the ribs of the other boxer. And I began to get like a sickly feeling in my stomach. And then there were more whacks and cracks and socks.

And when that mouthpiece did go flying across the ring, I was almost doubled up with nausea in my feet. I saw real blood, real ooze, real crunching blows, blood and spittle. And it was sickening.

I somehow never got that impact watching the TV set. And here's my point. Your whole generation has grown up in front of the boob tube.

I mean that not only literally, I mean it also symbolically. You've been insulated, sheltered. You've not gotten the full brunt and force and impact of life as it is, but it's been filtered down and through and refined that you have not understood it in its totality.

God needs to open our eyes. And I praise him for his discreetness. And many stripes were laid upon them.

You know what that means? 39 to be exact. According to the Jewish tradition, that lest they go over 40, the prescribed number, which is their judgment, they stop one short. But you know what 39 strokes means? With a vicious instrument like that? Can you picture Paul and Silas publicly humiliated and their clothes stripped from them in the marketplace? And I'll tell you children, wherever you shall touch this present world system by the power of the spirit, you're going to be brought before the rulers and the magistrates in the marketplace where the action is.

Cass, you sound so much like the Communist you once were. That's got not anything to do with that kind of kid stuff. I'm not talking about communism or socialism or capitalism.

I'm talking about this world system ruled over by the prince of darkness that plays upon the ambitions and lusts and gratifications of men. And if you rock it and thought to challenge it and set captive free by the power of the spirit, you're going to see yourself brought before the magistrates and rulers. There's a reason why tongues are being torn out of Christian heads behind the iron curtain, because they instinctively and intuitively know this people are a danger to the established order.

They're not a people who go along. They constitute a threat and something rises up vicious against them. Many strikes were laid upon them.

Can you hear that first crack? Can you imagine what it meant for a Jew like Paul? Perfect according to the law, the decorum, the propriety, impeccable in his conduct to be publicly stripped naked before a crowd. That alone is suffering. And then the first crack, crack! The sound of it will make you sick.

And then you see that, see the moth on the body as the throngs go right around the back and over the chest and over the legs and sides and a big ugly red welt and you get 38 more strokes to go. Crack! And what was the first red has been turning now somewhat blue. Crack! Some sickly green.

Crack! Purple. Crack! The skin is red. Crack! And the throngs cut right into the open flesh and right to the bone and we haven't yet counted 10.

I'll tell you that when these men were cast into the lower dungeon, bound, you never saw a more sickly and pathetic sight. That's the reward for the obedience to the Holy Spirit, in one form or another. I suppose if we can say that we're discussing the principles of God, we can almost make a mathematical formula that the consequences of our obedience is going to be in exact proportion to the degree rendered.

You want to know something, children? I've never before spoken that sentence. Never. It never before occurred to me.

God is doing something right in the present moment spontaneously. He's stating the principle. You shall suffer in exact proportion to the degree of your obedience rendered.

And if you shall be obedient to that suffering, guess what God shall order next. He'll call you from faith to faith or more properly from death to death. And that's why the love of many shall grow cold.

Not many have a stomach for that kind of service. Gee, it used to be groovy. You're a wet blanket, man.

I used to love the Jesus movement and we had great times witnessing and playing guitar and singing songs and going witnessing. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not altogether knocking that into some value, but many were having a great time and not going to be around in that last time.

The forces are going to be reduced because not everyone has a stomach for the crown of thorns. But those who are willing to wear that crown shall also wear another called the crown of glory. These men being Jews do exceedingly trouble out there.

Praise God. What do they say? You don't have to be Jewish to like Levi's rye bread? There's a famous advertising campaign in America for a Jewish rye bread company which is a Jewish delight. And they show you a Chinaman biting into a nice pastrami sandwich with rye bread or a black man.

You don't have to be Jewish to like Levi's rye bread. I'll take it one further, children. You don't have to be born Jewish to be this kind of Jew.

It's all an operation of the spirit and a circumcision of the heart and not the flesh and esteeming the praise of God greater than the praise of men to be this kind of Jew who shall exceedingly trouble our city. And don't they need it? I'll tell you my first night in Switzerland in Zurich, I sobbed like a child. Convulsive groanings and breakings.

I was stretched out like a dead man in the apartment of these German believers in Zurich after we had spent a couple of hours walking through the streets of Zurich. When is somebody going to shake Zurich? When is somebody going to shake Lausanne? When is somebody going to shake Geneva? When is somebody going to shake Berlin and Frankfurt and Paris, Moscow and all the great cities where men are moving to their doom without the slightest awareness that they are on such a course? God is looking for Jews who will exceedingly trouble cities. And I'll tell you, Satan has already employed many by the name

of A.B. Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and other unnamed Jews who make bombs, who start student rebellions, who belong to the weathermen, to the radical groups who deal in pornography.

They're shaking cities for Satan. But we're the Jews of God under the power of his spirit to shake cities for Christ. It's not a task for amateurs and it's not a task for children.

It's a task for mature men and women under the anointing of the Holy Spirit sent forth to the chief city by a heavenly vision. And the reward is not a wreath, not a plaque, suffering and humiliation and shame. We come to one of the most glorious scriptures in the entire Holy Book, the 25th verse of the 16th chapter of the book of Acts.

Picture Paul and Silas and their feet in socks. I'll tell you, I'm the kind of guy, as they say in Yiddish, I have no zitzreich. I can't even sit in charismatic meetings for more than a half hour.

I get all kinds of, I get itchy, I got to change my position, it hurts, I got to move, I got to stretch. I just can't sit. Imagine your feet bound in socks and you can't even alter your position and your back is hanging in shreds.

Imagine the stink of that cell. Maybe some of you have been to Rome and have visited the cell in which Paul had spent his last years. I had a stoop over because the ceiling is so low.

It glistens with sweat. It's a black hole. And the smell of human urine and feces exists, though it's not been used as a prison for centuries.

Imagine what it smelled like when it was used. The stench alone is asphyxiating. The scurrying of rats and vermin, the groans of men.

It is like going into a fairway in a hell, confined, congested and compressed. You can't move and alter your position. Your back hanging in shreds and unspeakable pain.

I know that every one of us would be tempted to say, Oh God, where did I go wrong? How did I miss it? I was obedient to the heavenly vision and look at me now. But you know what we read? Isn't that what we say for much lesser things? You get stood up on a date. You don't get the income tax return you think you ought.

You didn't get the grade in school that you think you deserve. You want to applaud and approve the way you think that you ought. It's not going the way you like it.

And you hear a man in a condition of unspeakable suffering that eclipses anything that any of us and all of us together have ever experienced in the world. And it says at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God our children. One minute's respectful silence before we go on.

Because we're at this moment circled about by an invisible crowd of witnesses of men throughout the ages who have prayed and sang praises to God in the midst of their adversity and suffering, looking upon us who are the concluding generation waiting for us to finish the race that is set before us. That we might rejoice together. Always made a big deal about praising the charismatic movement.

It's almost become a technique and a formula. Get them up out of their seats. Get them to lift their hands above their heads.

Get them to sing this chorus. And if you do it enough and get them excited enough, gee didn't we have a great meeting? It's almost become a methodology and a technique of manipulation. But I'll tell you it's holy, holy, holy.

The gifts of the Spirit are holy gifts, sacred, divine enablements for every contingency and every need at the end of the ages. And my Jewish soul wishes for every desecration and misuse. For men speaking about the Holy Spirit as if he's come to enhance their denominations and make them more groovy and spice up our meetings and make them interesting.

Oh did you hear that prophet? Did you hear that utterance? Holy gifts, holy enablements for holy tasks by the Holy Spirit at the end of the age. Oh children, have a reverence for the Holy Spirit of God. They prayed and sent praises unto God.

And as I said before, I don't care how conscientious a Christian you are, however well-meaning, in that kind of extremity and crisis there is not a way that you could praise God and worship Him except by the Holy Spirit. Many of us have a tough time even in situations like this. We don't feel so good today.

Our tongues are heavy in our mouths. They feel like sawdust. What did she mean by that statement yesterday? And we feel a little sullen.

I'm not too crazy for this speaker. I like the other guy better. I don't understand this guy.

I don't know the way he carries on. What are those strange words? Are they Yiddish? I don't feel like praising God. At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises.

One of the most glorious verses in all the Scriptures. I'll tell you what children, in my darkened fit of atheism, in my greatest rebellion and anger and bitterness against God, if this one page had floated into the street and I had picked it up, if the whole Scriptures had been burned and only this portion had been saved and it bronze fringes and I'd read this one verse, I would have fallen on my face before God and worshipped Him. Because I would have known that no man can worship God in such crisis and such adversity and such suffering except there be a Holy Spirit.

It says everything. No technique will do it. No methodology will do it.

Only the Spirit of God. Haven't we heard this through the ages about all the martyrs flung to the lions, roasted on coal, burned at the stake, and they sang praises until their voices were shut? There must be from God some special dispensation grace, some special enablement, some intimacy with God in the fellowship of His sufferings in that express moment that none of us can even imagine that enables men not only to endure but gloriously to testify to a world about the reality of the Messiah Jesus and the God of our Father in the hour of their cruelest suffering. To this hour we have been called.

And as my Yugoslavian brother said, oh Artie said, maybe God has reserved for me the honor that I might wear a martyr's crown. How are you doing as a candidate for suffering today? Such men as these were not fashioned in a moment. And that's why I wince also at indulgence, at pampering, at soft things.

And I think that as God is raising up an army, we ought to be prepared as soldiers. We ought to be disciplined people. We ought to know what it means to fast and to deny ourselves.

And to submit ourselves and to allow ourselves to be tested and to be tried. That if something should impinge upon our flesh, we don't go bananas. We don't go haywire.

We can take a bit of pain. We got to go to the dentist? We can do it very well. And I've seen believers absolutely freak out at the prospect of even going to a dentist.

They can't stand pain. They can't stand suffering. They're not habituated to it.

And they're trying to shrink from it. But I'll tell you that it was said of Moses that he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. And I'll tell you what, children, I'm a simple-minded man.

And I see everything in polarities, light and darkness, choice of kingdoms. And at the end of the ages, you know what? This is what it's going to be for us. We'll have one of two choices.

To suffer affliction with the people of God or to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season. There shall not be a third course. Are you preparing yourself now for the right choice? Are you screaming against your conditions and your circumstances? Why am I suffering this? Why is this wrong? God in his great wisdom and grace is preparing you for the service to which you're being called.

Maybe someday you're going to go to the office at lunchtime and ask for your money back and go home. This isn't what you signed up for. And indeed, I've heard many say they knew that this is what God had in mind.

They probably would never have accepted him. You know what the most beautiful part of that whole verse is? And the prisoners heard them. Oh, glory to God.

I'll tell you what. I don't have the slightest reservation, but that when I get to heaven, I'm going to see every prisoner who heard Paul and Silas that day. Saved lock, stock and barrel.

The prisoners heard them. How many times have we come home from our evangelistic campaign? Exhausted, spent, weary and depressed. Nothing happened.

I mean, not much. Our words were like water off the proverbial duck's back. No penetration.

And with my own Jewish mother, I poured out my soul. I was described. I've talked.

I've showed her scriptures. Nothing. And I've come and I've found myself on my bed in exhaustion and futility.

I cried, oh God, what does it take? It's going to take something more than correct words. Something more than glib and unctuous scripture quotations. I think what our final end time witness is going to be is our joy in God, our praise and worship, even in the midst of adversity and affliction.

And the prisoners. And I'll tell you, children, this is not the faith of what this is. I don't believe in a groovy rapture theory.

My own personal thing. I'm not the great theologian, but I have a sneaky suspicion that if I know anything about the way of a God who allowed his Hebrew children to go through a fiery furnace and came out without even the smell of smoke or a hair changed, that somehow he might do the same thing at the end

of the ages. We're not going to be conveniently lifted out.

We're going to pass through it, but there shall not be the smell of smoke. And our passing through shall be a revelation of the glory of God and his reality to those who are suffering everywhere about us. And the prisoners shall hear us.

And the prisoners heard us. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosened. Hallelujah.

Oh, what a wonderful coincidence. Isn't that strange? In that very moment when they're praising God, an earthquake came. Talk about coincidences.

And look, look, everyone's bands fell, and the doors burst open. Coincidence, my foot. God inhabits the praises of his people.

And where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty. Now I'll give you another mathematical equation. The Spirit of God is there in proportion to the authenticity of our praise and the depth of the crisis from which it is issued.

I can't make it any simpler than that. There's praise and praise, just like there's love and love, and there's faith and faith. There are different grades and qualities.

It's not one stock thing. Some praise is mechanical, some praise is feeble, some praise is well-meaning, some praise rings true, some praise is a glory and an effulgence and a fullness before God out of a holy redeemed life. There's praise and praise.

God inhabits the praises of his people in the same proportion as the quality and the authenticity of that praise and the depth of the crisis from which it is issued. It's one thing to praise God today. Gee, that was a great session.

I really enjoyed the Word of God. Sure you should enjoy it. Comfortable, closed, fed, every need provided.

But let me see you praise him when you're alone. Let me see you praise him in City College when the rabbis have torn you to pieces and your Christian colleagues have given you such stricken and hurt looks of disappointment. Let me see you praise him when things have gone wrong and you don't understand why, and he's not quick to explain.

That's the kind of praise that opens prison doors and shakes foundations. There was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and I'll tell you children, maybe some of us here this morning who can use such a shaking. A little bound, a little hung up, a little self-conscious, a little narrow, a little tight.

God's waiting for you to open your own mouth and praise him, not waiting for your circumstance to improve, but in your present circumstance, in your present affliction, in your present suffering, in your present denial. Praise him and love him and thank him for it and kiss the bars because he ordered that. It's not an accident.

They didn't stumble into prison. God knew it from the first that their obedience was going to result in that kind of suffering and that kind of shame. And they praised God that they were found worthy to suffer

reproach for Christ's sake.

Immediately, all the doors were opened and everyone's bands were loose. Where the spirit of God is, there is liberty. Nothing bound.

And now we come to a picture of real conversion. I told you Jews don't like the word conversion, but I personally kind of like it myself because I'm sick to the teeth of accepting Jesus. Cat, what is it with you? Well, I just don't like it.

Will you accept Jesus? Why don't you do him a favor already? Look, he's been standing so long with his hat in his hands. Why don't you accept him? It'll go well with you. He'll find you a boyfriend, a girlfriend, and he'll take care of your needs and your future.

Why don't you accept him to benefit the groovy? That's the theme with some exaggeration of modern evangelism. And that's why we see many saved, but few converted. But I'll tell you, when men like Sinni went on their heavenly tasks, men were not just saved.

They were soundly and thoroughly and utterly converted. And not men only, but entire communities had their jails emptied and their saloons closed. Cities were saved for God by the power of his Holy Spirit, and men clutched the pillars of the church when Sinni preached for fear that they would fall through the floor and into the pit of hell and felt the flames licking at the soles of their feet because he proclaimed the full counsel of God in the power of his Spirit.

He told them about the day of the soon coming wrath under the anointing of God. Men were converted. They fell out of their seats on the floor, their eyes rolled back in their skull and spittles were falling from the corners of their mouths, and Sinni was not quick to comfort them and pick them up and parse them off.

He allowed them to arise there, and they were carried out of meetings in that condition and remained in that condition for days until they broke through to God. What a different picture than from what we have. Some evangelical hotshot is invited into town, and he's put up at the motel, and he washes his face, and he's called to the platform, and at the five-minute introduction he's on, and he does his thing, and he gets paid and goes home.

And we hope some people may have accepted Jesus. You want to picture what real conversion is? Here it comes. And the keeper of the prison awakening out of his sleep, as ever and always got to be the first step.

What a picture the keeper of the prison is. He was holding the keys, right? Waiting for retirement, waiting for his pension, keeping his notes. A nice Christian.

He went every Sunday to his Methodist church or his Pentecostal church, whatever it was. Didn't want to have any trouble. Wanted to be a regular guy.

Respectable. All this in heaven too. Clutching the keys.

But I'll tell you what, children. He was more bound than Paul and Silas inside. More fearful, more intimidated, more threatened, more insecure.

Waiting for his pension, waiting for security. Fearful to endanger anything. Bound, though he held the keys.

And awakening out of his sleep. Hallelujah. What does it take to awaken the prison keepers of our own generation? Nothing less than an earthquake.

That's what it will take. Prompted by our praise in the moment of our greatest crisis. The keeper of the prison awakening out of his sleep, seeing the prison doors open, he drew his sword and would have killed himself supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

But Paul cried with a loud voice saying, do thyself no harm for we're over here. Cool it. We're good.

We're here. We're not going anywhere. Why should we? We weren't prisoners before and we're not prisoners now.

Because prison bars do not a prison make. To be free in Christ is to be free in deed. And I'll tell you if obedience to him has brought you to a place behind bars, it's heavenly.

Richard Wurmbrun, who spent 13 years in communist prison camps, says that when he left prison, it was like coming down from the mountaintop experience. Coming down. He would not have changed that experience for anything.

Are you a prisoner today for much less things? Circumstances? Things are not going right? Fear about the future? Insecurity? The steps of a righteous man are orders of the Lord. And wherever God has brought you in whatever circumstance, however unpleasant, however it may have contradicted your own intentions, you're free. To be free in Christ is free indeed.

And if he's with you in that cell and in you in that cell, it doesn't matter whether the doors are open or closed. We're still here. Do yourself no harm.

How did Paul see this guy ready to kill himself? When Paul was down in the lower dungeon, this man is on the street level seeing the doors burst open. He didn't see him by the natural eye. He saw him by the eye of the Spirit.

Gift of knowledge. And he shouted out to save the man's life. That's how precious the gifts of the Spirit are going to be in life and death situations at the end of the ages.

And we thought they were some kind of luxury to spice up our church meetings. Do yourself no harm. We're all here.

And then we read, then he called for a light. And sprang and he came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved? You know what I learned as a high school teacher, children? I was so well-meaning. I wanted to do such a smash-up job and do everything that teachers went up to me when I was an adolescent.

And I was giving my kids all kinds of information, the best of all that I had to offer. And it was going completely over their heads. I had to learn the hard way that it's absolutely stupid to give people answers for questions they've not yet answered.

Isn't that what we're doing? Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ. We're not exalting him, we're cheapening him. They're not ready yet to hear that precious name.

They have the faintest glimmer or concept of what salvation means. They have no need. Our function is not to give answers for questions that are not raised, but to be instruments to raise the proper questions in the hearts of men.

To bring them to divine discontent with their life in Zurich or Lausanne or Geneva, with their prosperity and their well-being and their civility and their culture and ethics, and show them that they will ascend and fall in short of the glory of God. And how the hell, they're not going to receive such a message just by verbal proclamation. They've got to see that glory in your face.

I know that God lives in this image, he said. Then he called for light and came trembling and fell down before them. Repent and believe ye the gospel.

And I'll tell you what, children, there's no bleeding without first repenting. There are a lot of people who have confessed the name of Jesus who have not yet repented and have great reservations about their salvation, let alone their conversion. Repent and believe ye the gospel.

Believing is a function of repenting. There's no believing without repenting. You know why? Because God has given us the most foolish things in which to believe.

Absolutely mind-boggling. It contradicts every kind of human wisdom and natural understanding. I mean, God himself lay aside his deity.

I'm going to tell that to some Jewish man. Some sophisticated, some established leader in business and commerce. That the God of our fathers lay aside his deity and his glory and took upon himself the form of flesh and became a Jew and was born in a stable.

Come on, cats, knock it off. What do you think I am, some kind of a fool, an idiot, to believe fables like that and live the life of obscurity and came forth in his 30th year and had a three-year ministry and suffered reproach and had not a place to lay his head. And the end of it was persecution, suffering, and death.

And that when he was strapped between heaven and hell, hung on nails, and poured out his blood, that if you believe that and see him as the Lamb of God and take that blood and apply it to the doorpost and lintel of your heart and life, death will pass over you. I never heard anything more foolish in my life. I never heard anything more beggarly.

And I'll tell you what, I'm not doing God a disservice. He himself said so. This gospel is foolishness to them that perish.

But it is the power of God unto salvation to those that believe, so they do first. But how can any man believe these things, except he first repents? There's no believing without repenting. I had to come to a place of brokenness, a place of repentance.

I didn't know the word, but I was virtually a dead man stuck in New York. I repented in the sense that I had turned from the world, its wisdom, and its way, and I was now, in my brokenness and my nothingness, a candidate for God and for the hearing of the full small voice. There is no believing without repenting.

And our function is to challenge men and bring them to such a place. Oh, you think you're a hot shot? Oh, you're a nice guy, are you? And you take cases and you don't receive fees and you help Negroes in distress and other underprivileged? I'll tell you what, God says that those acts are filthy rags in his sight.

There's not a man that's good.

No, not one. You've sinned and you've also fallen short of the glory of God because you've considered this the highest good and you're not willing to go higher. You think you're so righteous? What do you think of Jesus? Oh, you think that he's a prophet to you and a teacher? What a sport you are to acknowledge that.

Well, let me ask you, if you think that he's a teacher and a prophet and sent of God, why haven't you received all that he spoke of himself? Why haven't you fallen then at his feet as others have who forgave men their sins and exercised all the prerogatives of God and cried out, my Lord and my God? You're a failure to do so. You're a failure only to go so far with him and receive him as teacher and prophet shows you're a cop-out and a coward. You've been made naked and revealed by your response to Jesus.

Don't tell me you're a good man. Repent and believe ye the gospel of Yeshua HaMashiach. That's our ministry children.

Not to give good answers to a world that has not asked a question, but so to impress the hearts of men that they call for light and spring in trembling and say to us, what must I do in order to be saved? And so we read that they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved in thy house. Not just mentally agree to some mental concept. Cast your life upon him.

Make him the life of your life. Go from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and be planted into the tree of life and no more trembling and no more fears about security clutching keys. And they spoke up to him the word of the Lord into all that were in his house and he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes and was baptized he and all his straight away.

And when he had brought them into his house he said meet before them and rejoiced believing in God with all of us. That's it. Finished.

An episode in the life of a couple of men, obedient to the heavenly vision, a woman at the riverside, a demoniacal woman set free, some scroungy prisoners who heard them and the prison keeper. You know what that ragtail society became? The body of Christ in Philippi. Paul wrote them a letter and in that letter he spoke such things as I count all things as done that I might win Christ, that I might know him in the fellowship of his suffering and in the power of his resurrection.

I tell you if there's no other justification for the body of Christ in Philippi than that one letter for us to know and to love and to stand on today it was worth it. A body was born because men were willing to suffer and give their blood. It is death which worketh in me, Paul said, but life in you.

This is the way of God, children, the definitive pattern for the end times and there's no way to walk in it except by the Holy Spirit and there shall not be any anointing except we come as the first son did in the fullness of maturity in the 30th year, having it all together, one people in one spirit and one accord, the body of Christ made perfect and one to proclaim this end time message and the acceptable year of the Lord and his soon coming judgment. We need each other and we shall not have it alone. God is looking for a son mature in the fullness of years under the anointing of his spirit and there is no other way.

Let's bow our heads. Hallelujah, Lord. Precious God, we so appreciate the word of God, the record that these things were written, Lord, for our admonition upon whom the ends of the age have come.

Thank you, mighty God, that men like Paul and Silas were flesh and blood like as we. They had no greater natural attribute or endowment that made them candidates for suffering or gospel heroism. Men and women just like us, Lord, who attended to the word which was spoken and were baptized.

And mighty God, may we attend to the word which you've spoken this day. May it give us such an iron in our souls, such a mature sense of what our end time calling is. May we be saved by your speaking this day from frivolity, from childishness, from lesser things however good, from fun and games, evangelically speaking.

And may we day by day, Lord, receive at your hand the instruction, the preparation in the very circumstances of our life to be able, Lord, to wear whatever measure of the crown of suffering shall be required of us that the prisoners may hear us. May we give you praise, Lord, in every circumstance, that we might be a people of praise to your glory, that you might shake the foundations of these cities in the end times and save the prison keepers. Feel in the hearts of these children, Lord, all which you've spoken this day in the power of your spirit and by your word.

May it dwell richly in their hearts and may be recalled to their hearts and minds and spirits again and again when you shall bring them to suffering, to adversity, to trial, that they shall stand and live by this word. For we ask it in Jesus' holy name. And all the children of God said, Amen.

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