

Acts 21_pt1

by Bill Gallatin

God works in our lives before we meet Him, and He uses our experiences to prepare us for His call, and we can overcome bitterness and resentment by focusing on the love and forgiveness of Christ.

Duration: 1:13:13

Scripture: John 3:3, Acts 9:3-6, Acts 9:16

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living a life that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ. He challenges the audience to examine their own lives and question whether others can see a difference in them. The preacher uses the example of the apostle Paul, who faced persecution and suffering but remained focused on his faith in Christ. He encourages the audience to forget past grievances and press forward in their spiritual journey, running the race for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. The sermon also highlights the transformative power of encountering the presence of Jesus, as seen in Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

Transcript

Acts 22. I'm convinced, as you study the Bible, and you look at the lives of the people that God uses, that before they even realize that there's a call on their life, or before they even know the Lord personally, God begins to work in their lives in childhood, and uses the events and the circumstances and the experiences of our lives to prepare us for when He does reveal Himself and call us, to put within us those things that are necessary that God may use us when He begins to work in our lives. The wonderful thing about that, and the providence of God, and the sovereignty of God, is that I don't have to wear black and mourn and call myself a victim my whole life after I meet Jesus Christ, because of what happened to me as a child, what I might have gone through as a human being because of some depraved relative, or some crisis or some catastrophe in my life that's even maybe affected me physically.

But I don't have to spend the rest of my life now, oh, poor me, I'm a victim, this horrible thing. God, in His providence and sovereignty, controls everything to work in our lives, that when we meet Him, He's had a purpose in it. And nothing declares it more clearly than the life of the Apostle Paul.

Now you remember, he's in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. Jews from all the known world are required to be there, at least all male Jews, at least once in their lifetime, according to the Law of Moses. Josephus records that at this time the population of Jerusalem swells to over 2 million people, from the

known world, every culture, every language, drawn there to worship God and be obedient to the Law of Moses.

Now here's the Apostle Paul, a man who has been raised experiencing the extreme and the best of both cultures that rule the world, the Grecian culture, the Hellenist culture, and the Jewish culture. Born of Jewish parents in Tarsus, which was a free city under the Greek culture, but ruled by Rome. And being a free city, it means that Rome, certain cities, because they would aid Rome whenever there was a war, they would allow them to rule themselves with their own laws and religion, but just answer to Rome, maintain the peace, and answer to the Roman Empire.

So they were allowed to rule themselves because of that allegiance to Rome. But it was a Greek culture, Greek education, that Paul was raised in. So here's the common language of the world, the philosophy, the art of the world.

Raised in that, having godly parents, Orthodox Jews who want him to be a rabbi, and so they send him to Bible school, send him to Jerusalem. Now, he's raised in the Jewish religion, the Jewish culture, but also the Greek, the Grecian culture. So he's educated to be able to adapt to both levels of society in the known world.

So they send him to Jerusalem as a young child, and he is taught by the greatest rabbi of the known day, Gamaliel. He sits at his feet. He's trained to be a Pharisee.

He reaches the elitism of his religion, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. You remember that when he was born again, personal revelation for three years in the Arabian desert and wilderness from none other than Jesus Christ himself, face to face, mouth to mouth. He did not receive his revelation from man, Jesus Christ himself.

So being steeped in Grecian thought, Grecian education to mix with the elite of the known world, and also the Jewish religion, knowing it better than anybody else, the Pharisee of the Pharisees, and then being taken by Jesus Christ himself into the Arabian desert for at least three years, personal revelation face to face, to see the transition in the purpose of law for the Jewish mind, and then make that transition from God's revelation from law to grace, and see how it's been set aside. Just as Jesus Christ was buried, fulfilling the law, the law buried in the earth, rising with grace, Paul sees the reality of that and comes back to bring the message of grace and make the transition and to teach the Jews also the purpose of the law, that it was temporary, it's been disannulled by the Messiah, Jesus Christ himself, and at the same time offer salvation to the greatest minds of the Gentile world because of his Greek background, salvation is for the Gentile also through Jesus Christ. Now stop and think of this man.

Before his life is over, the preparation of his life being raised in Greece, or this Grecian colony under Rome, Tarsus, which is today Turkey and Cilicia, not only did he meet Caesar, the greatest Gentile on earth, he met the greatest, most influential Jews of the world before he died. So he had the opportunity to share his faith and the truth concerning Jesus Christ to the greatest people in the known world, Jew and Gentile alike, God having planned it all, he not knowing it. Now, you know, probably wondering why has God allowed Rome, Gentile Rome, to rule my people? Why was I born in, you know, Cilicia rather than Jerusalem? Why are my parents, you know, willing to send me down and sit at the feet of Gamaliel? You know, he probably had questions like that as a child.

Now it's interesting, he did not suffer before Christ, but God designed that he suffered after Christ to bring him glory, to identify with Christ. Some people suffer before they meet Christ and never suffer again. Again, God in his sovereignty knows exactly what our personalities are.

He's formed our personalities, our IQs, everything that we're going to be used for in his kingdom, and he knows what we have to experience before we meet him and after we meet him. So you see, I don't have to say, oh Lord, why did this happen to me? I have met Jesus Christ and that's all that matters. It doesn't matter anymore what happened in the past, or I don't have to worry about what's going to happen in the future.

God's designed it for his glory. And that's why Paul could say in Philippians chapter 3, his only purpose for living then, at that time when he wrote the Philippian letter, is that he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection. What's the power of the resurrection? Now, some churches think they get into this power thing, and all they can, you know, power, and they've got to see things and feel things without.

The power of the resurrection is the love that no natural human being, and even a Christian many times, will never apprehend until they get to that point where they know Christ and the power of his resurrection. The resurrection love, to love and forgive the very people that crucified him after he came back from the dead and he could have wiped them out. To forgive.

To love and to forgive the very people that slandered him, betrayed him, tried to destroy him. And, and it's interesting, unless you have the power of the resurrection or apprehend that agape love of Jesus Christ, you can't go to the next stage, as Paul said, and the fellowship of his suffering. If you don't have love, you see, you don't want to identify with Christ.

I'm going to preserve my flesh. I'm never going to allow my feelings to be hurt again. I'm not going to associate with anybody.

I'm not going to expose myself to anybody. I'm not going to serve Christ. I've been hurt enough.

Never again. You see, when you have the power of the resurrection, you have a love of Christ that overcomes everything. So then you're not afraid to enter into the fellowship of his suffering.

You can identify with that and you begin to be rejected by the very people you can love because they misapprehend it. You remember in, I think it's in the Song of Solomon, it says that, or no, it's Paul that says that, the more I love, the less I am loved because people don't understand it. They don't trust it.

They think that you've got some kind of an agenda. And so then there's that fellowship of suffering. And then it's interesting, he said, being made conformable unto his death.

Not his life. That's all Paul lived for. You begin to experience the love of Jesus Christ.

You go, Lord, there's nothing else. This is the most burning thing in my heart. I want to identify with you.

I want to know you. The power of your resurrection, that kind of love. The fellowship of your suffering.

Being made conformable unto your death. And so then Paul finishes it by running there. He talks about running the race.

He says, this one thing I do, I don't care what Grandpa did to me or my uncle did to me or that God allowed me to get arrested unjustly or why I got in a car wreck and lost an eye or why I'm crippled. This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, if I'm going to agonize, Paul says, I don't agonize of why this happened to me. I agonize or I press toward the mark.

I'm running to the race now for the prize, the high calling in Christ Jesus. That's all I live for. So you forget the past.

And see, then Satan's defeated. If you forget the past, Satan's defeated. You can't get wiped out and get trapped in bitterness and resentment.

Oh, there they are again. I see them. Five years later, there she is.

I'll never forgive her. There he is. They're going to this church now.

I'm leaving this church. They start coming here. I'm going somewhere else.

I can't stand this. Satan's defeated. Love and forgiveness of Christ.

So here's Paul. And remember, he's created a variety. Remember, this is his sixth riot in this ministry.

If he isn't in jail, he's creating riots. But here it's all God's design to bring him, eventually bring him to the elite of the religious leaders of Jerusalem, the high priest, the Roman governor, Felix, and before it's all over, Caesar. It all started in his childhood.

Preparation as a child that he had no control over. Decisions that his parents made. And now who's arrested? Remember, as they thought he was a Greek.

And remember, he spoke Greek. And the Roman soldier, the head of the garrison, are thou that Egyptian that started that resurrection? He wasn't quite sure who he was because he spoke such perfect Greek. So there he relates to the Gentile.

Before it's over, he speaks Hebrew. And he's got the attention of the Jews. Now the sad thing about Jerusalem at this time, remember Paul is bringing a love offering for the poor church in Jerusalem, the Jewish church in Jerusalem, from Gentiles of the known world.

The love gifts because they knew that their brothers in Jerusalem were hurting, so they took up offerings and they sent the money with Paul. Now the tragedy is that the Jewish church compromised to try and maintain the Jewish traditions. They allowed Jews to come in and they still maintained things that were absolutely unnecessary.

And so it weakened the church. They wanted to maintain their Jewishness. When the Bible clearly states that once you meet Christ, there's neither Jew nor Gentile anymore.

Those things aren't necessary for righteousness. And so they compromised to swell the range with more Jewish converts, but they allowed them to continue to press forward in these Jewish ideas that had been set aside and disavowed. And it weakened the church to such a degree that when Paul showed up, instead of welcoming with open arms, they were afraid Paul was going to stir up trouble with the Jewish converts because they'd compromised.

And Paul wouldn't compromise. In fact, he did try to become all things and take their advice and it backfired. It still created a riot.

You remember there was this idea. Someone said, Oh, I saw him in the court of the Gentiles with some guy from Ephesus, a Gentile. And it created the riot.

And the church was so weak that they couldn't even come to the aid or protect Paul. God had to use the heathen to protect him, a Roman centurion, from the Antonia fortress. And so he carries him and frees him from the mob trying to rip him apart.

And what's so amazing, he's standing in the very spot some 20 years earlier where Jesus Christ himself stood on trial. The very same spot. And you're going to hear some of the same words away with him as he enters into the fellowship of suffering with his Lord.

And so he says, Because men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you. And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence. Boy, when they heard that.

Remember, the mob's going crazy. Some people are saying this and one faction's saying that. Just out of control.

Just yelling and screaming and trying to get at him. Because, you know, at that time they didn't even know he was this Hebrew, this Jewish man. He said, I am verily a man which am a Jew born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, or Turkey, just up by the Syrian border, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel.

And taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers. And was zealous toward God. Now, notice the wisdom here of Paul.

As ye all are this day. Now, you remember in Romans chapter 10, Paul pours out his heart, his desire to see his brethren or the Jews saved. He says, I say this, my heart's desire and my prayer is that all of Israel would come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and be saved.

But, you remember he said, but they go about trying to achieve righteousness with a zeal, but not according to knowledge. Trying to earn their salvation. And we know that's one of the most difficult things.

Trying to make my own righteousness by rules and regulations and my own little code of ethics. Rather than just simply trusting in the Lord and allowing the Holy Spirit of God to lead me and to do that work in my life. A person that puts himself under his own little code of ethics and tries in his own right, even though he's born again, whether they admit it or not, you'll see that they immediately begin to lose their joy and they become rigid.

And reactionary. And very judgmental of others around them. That what it is, you see, is modern day Phariseeism.

I've established my own little code of ethics and I'm going to keep these things and I'm going to be holy, I'm going to be righteous. And so they begin to perform in that area whatever it is they've set for themselves. Rather than just knowing and yielding to the Spirit of God and allowing the righteousness of Christ to free them and then the Spirit of God to lead them and give them victory and mortify the deeds of the flesh.

And they become very rigid and lose their joy. And then when they see others that they think that are not living that righteous life, they become very judgmental. And they form attitudes toward them.

Usually it's an attitude of superiority. It's tough to be around a Christian with a bad attitude. God wants us to be free from those things.

You know, we learned, you remember, Jesus taught about the moat, trying to remove the moat, the little sliver in someone's eye, not knowing that we have a beam or a house timber in our own. And in the Greek, the little speck, the little sliver is from the very beam. It's from the same material.

It's from the beam that's in my eye. And I notice that little flaw in you, and I'm not aware of this gigantic thing in my own life. So Paul says, I know how you were.

I was there. I know how that was. I was there.

I'm so thankful that we destroyed all the tapes of the first 15 years that I was a pastor. We destroyed them. I said, destroy them all.

I mean, my gosh, my Marine Corps drill instructor was nicer than me. And I was supposed to be a Christian? I mean, it was unbelievable. I'd never listen to myself, but every once in a while I'd hear something, and I'd shudder.

Oh, Jesus is so gracious. So loving. It's so long-suffering.

And these are terms from the Old Testament. The God of judgment and righteousness, loving-kindnesses. Remember last Sunday, we touched on the Lord, that He said, this is what I'd like you to glory in, that you know me, my judgment and my righteousness and my loving-kindnesses.

The loving-kindness of the Lord. I'd persecute it this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. He could have cared less.

If it was a Christian, whether it was a woman or a man, He would have them put to death. How could God use a man like that? Now, again, it shows you how dangerous a devout religious person can be and how dangerous it is around someone who begins to defend their religion. And you have to be very sensitive to the Spirit, not to attack somebody's religion.

You don't accomplish anything attacking a religion to try and get them to acknowledge Jesus Christ. You can really get into a firestorm and it can get very hostile. Paul was a deeply religious, devout man.

And you remember, he had this Bible that you were all holding. I hope everyone here has a Bible tonight. If you don't, please, we'll give you one.

That's the most important thing in this church, is your Bible. But he put people to death thinking he was doing God a service. As also the high priest of Bear Me Witness.

The high priest, even 20 years later, some of the Pharisees still knew of the Apostle Paul and his change, his transition to this Jesus sect. The man that once they'd send off with orders to kill Christians, to destroy churches, as far as Damascus. See, we can't conceive that kind of a hatred.

Someone that would travel on foot 160 miles just to find Christians to put them to death. Now that's hatred. That is religious hatred.

And yet Paul did that. And so, the high priest bears witness that I was like that. And all the estate of the elders, from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring them, which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished.

They would drag them behind their horses. Drag them through the streets. Many times they'd die on the way to the jail.

These people that made a profession for Jesus Christ in those days. Now, isn't it interesting? If one of them got into a scriptural confrontation with Paul, they both had their Bibles. And the Christian would open up the Old Testament and start pointing out Isaiah 53.

He'd point out Psalm 22. He'd point out things in Genesis. He'd point out all these Scriptures that all point.

Zechariah. And then begin to show. And Paul would look at the very same Scriptures and say, I don't see it that way.

So it just shows you, you see, unless you're born again, that without the Spirit of God it's impossible to see it. That's why you don't have to strain or strive and try and squeeze somebody into submission verbally. It's the work of the Spirit.

So you can always be gentle. You can always be patient. They are spiritually discerned.

And without the Spirit of God, nobody can comprehend these things. So many times I think we as Christians, we go away angry and frustrated, ready to curse somebody because it's right before your eyes. Can't you see that? Here, let me read this out.

Don't you understand the Hebrew? It's right there in your very own Bible. And they can't see it at all. You see, they're spiritually discerned, spiritually understood.

And it's impossible for a person without the Spirit of God to apprehend it. That's why it's so important to understand what Jesus is teaching. Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus, art thou a father of Israel, and thou knowest not these things? You must be born again.

Even Paul himself sometimes got so frustrated, so angry, because he wanted to see Israel saved. He wanted his nation to see who the Messiah was as He did. And it came to pass that as I made my journey and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me, and an angel hit me across the head with a two-by-four and said, Paul, we're tired of this persecution.

God loves you, but He's going to deal with you. No grace for you. You've been too mean.

I mean the grace of God, the love of God, the forgiveness of God. No matter how evil and vile and filthy and bitter we've been, God's love is so great. And it's the most important thing to begin to apprehend.

And again you can see why Paul in Ephesians said, I bow my knee to the Lord Jesus Christ and His prayer for the church was that we might come to know the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, which is that pass of all knowledge. And when you know this love, it is the fullness of God. The fullness of God.

There's the power of the resurrection, the love of God, the love of Christ, the agape love of Jesus. It defeats Satan. It destroys the resentment, the bitterness, the attitude.

Now, this light is so bright. It surpasses the noon sun. You go to the Mideast and at noon it is bright.

But see, the light is the creator of the sun. The very sun that's in the heavens. And this shows you that we are going to need glorified bodies to be in the presence of the risen Lord in heaven because with our natural bodies, our natural eyes can't even look at the sun without destroying our retinas.

Now, stop and think of the glory of Jesus Christ, the creator of the sun, who outshined the sun at high noon and it was so bright that it blotted out the physical sun of the universe. And Paul remembers clearly, and I fell into the ground, just overwhelmed, the presence of Jesus Christ. And heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? Every time I see this, Oh, Lord, your love, your forgiveness.

This text, this conversion, Paul's testimony is the clincher that, you know, you can't judge, oh, they're getting close. I think they're getting close to their redemption. Or ever say, God will never save that person.

You know, God is so glorified that the uglier, the nastier we are. God says, I'm just going to turn things around here. I'm just going to overwhelm them with my love.

And he's going to go to Damascus, but he's not going to be the same person. I mean, we start off one way and Jesus steps into our life and oh, how he changed this thing. The love of Christ changes everything, doesn't it? Who art thou, Lord? You don't know who I am? Another six months before you can get saved.

You can't even say the sinner's prayer today. Just, I'll see you later. No.

Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. Now, you see, there is the totality and the reality of the body of Christ even then. When Paul writes in Ephesians that when you accept Jesus Christ, you are totally baptized or immersed supernaturally into the body of Christ.

You become part of the body of Christ. And when someone persecutes you, they're persecuting Jesus Christ. So all these Christians that Paul was persecuting and wreaking havoc with the church, having them put to death, he was actually persecuting and striking out at the body of Jesus Christ.

And he's taking all that abuse, all that pain, and yet he's still willing to forgive because Paul's doing it in such ignorance. Remember that when someone lashes out at you and tells you to take your Jesus and get out of here. Take your fanaticism and I hate you and resentment comes at you.

Don't take it personal. Don't give up. Don't harden your heart.

You see, Jesus loves that person. You remember when they wanted to stone Moses to death for his faithfulness and they resented Moses and they just got tired. They wanted to form a congregational church.

It shows you how weak a congregational church is where the people make the decisions and tell the shepherd what to do. And so they kept telling Moses, you know, we ought to do this, we ought to do that, and Moses wouldn't listen to them because he was listening to God. God was directing them.

And the failure of the congregation and they wanted to stone Moses and get rid of him, pick somebody else for their pastor because he wasn't doing what they wanted. And so Moses got to the point and said, Lord, I don't know. You know, these people.

He said, Moses, don't be discouraged. They're not angry with you. They're angry with me because I'm working through you and they don't like the way I'm doing things.

They're not angry at you. They're angry with me. And so when you attack a Christian, you're attacking Jesus Christ and yet he's willing to forgive you.

Remember, the only thing, you can say all manner of evil, you can curse, you can blaspheme the name of Jesus, God. Jesus said there's only one sin. You blaspheme the Holy Spirit, that's the unpardonable sin, no forgiveness.

You get to the point so hardened that you reject Jesus Christ as your Savior. That's the only sin he can't forgive. But all the things that we can say and our attitude toward Christ, our secret dispositions toward Jesus before we meet him.

And the Lord knows all about him and the Lord says, I'm willing to forgive you. I want to forgive you. Now, Paul didn't know he was persecuting Jesus Christ.

He just hated the people that represented him. And see, it's the same today. Now you may get the brunt of it.

It may be personal to you with a family member or a friend. Don't be discouraged. Sure, it hurts.

Sure, it hurts. But that's the fellowship of Christ's suffering. And Jesus said, when this takes place, rejoice for so persecuted the prophets before you.

Great is your reward in heaven if you're persecuted for righteousness' sake. Really, all Satan is doing is trying to get you to the point where you won't share your faith anymore. To get you to the point where you're so afraid that you don't share your faith.

And they that were with me saw indeed the light and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. Look, salvation is personal. Isn't that wonderful? It's personal.

Even though there were other people there, God revealed himself in such a way to Paul that his salvation was personal. Now, he's already spoken personally to somebody here tonight in some way. You've been spoken to somehow in the Word.

There's something that God has flashed on you that maybe you're the only one here tonight, but you're going to walk away tonight and you're going to remember something you heard already tonight that may have gone right over someone else. The Holy Spirit has taken to you personally something that God wants to encourage you with or convict or answer a question in your heart. How often people have gone to church.

I can recall going to church, and even to this day many times, having a question about something in the Bible and I have planned, you know, after the service I'm going to go out and I'm going to ask Pastor Chuck. I've got to know this thing. There's something that I've been reading and I'm going to ask him.

And I'll be sitting in the Bible study and don't you know it that the very teaching the Holy Spirit answers it. That's the very thing I was going to ask the pastor tonight. Just for you.

Because you see, God knows you personally. There's a song. Remember the song we sang the last night at the arena? He knows your name.

He knows my name. He knows my name. I hope we learn that.

Where's Pastor John? John, he knows my name or he knows your name. That thing is awesome. He knows your name.

And he's concerned. He's interested in your life. He's got a plan for your life.

He's got forgiveness for you that you can't comprehend. You don't have to be afraid of Jesus. No matter what you've done.

How nasty or ugly or cantankerous or mean you've been. He loves you. And he has a plan for your life.

And he wants to forgive you. Now, notice how quickly he is converted. I said, now notice this.

What shall I do, Lord? Now, it tells us in 1 Corinthians 12-3 that no man can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit. So he's converted. Here are the Holy Spirit's in him now.

He's saved. He's been converted. Notice.

And what's the very first thing he says? Lord, I'm a king's kid. I'm claiming a new car. By faith.

I want a bigger house. I demand it as your child. Notice what true conversion is.

How? When you really meet Jesus in a real way. Notice what it does. He says, as soon as he's converted, What shall I do, Lord? Not telling the Lord to do something for him.

That's true conversion. Lord, what shall I do? Lord, that you would love me, that you would forgive me. Lord, what do you want me to do? The Lord said unto me, Arise and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

Notice Jesus didn't rail on him. Didn't humiliate him. Didn't frighten him.

Didn't berate him for the way he treated Christians in his ignorance. Because you see, as Paul wrote later in Romans chapter 8 verse 1, There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, which walk after the Spirit, not after the flesh. Jesus doesn't condemn.

He forgives. And he doesn't dig up the past and drag everything up and throw it in my face. He forgives.

He says, Now, I've got something for you to do. A wonderful life for you. The past is over.

It's forgotten. Let's go ahead now. I've got something for you in the future.

You're not even there yet. You're on the way though. I've got something for you in Damascus.

Now, you had one thing planned in Damascus, but I've got something better for you. And notice he would say, Well, Lord, I don't know if I want to do it that way. I don't know.

How about this, Lord? No. All he said was, Lord, what shall I do? You see, that's real servanthood. I've met a lot of people that say they want to help and get involved, and then they try to tell you how to do everything.

They don't want to really be a servant. They want to take over. They want to serve by taking over and doing it their way.

And then if they can't get it done that way, they quit serving. And yet they say they're a servant. Or if you do ask them to do something, they say, well, I don't see why you're asking me to do this.

And then they grumble about what you ask them to do. That's not being a servant. A slave doesn't question.

A slave just responds to the Master and says, I'm a slave. I'm a servant. What will you have me to do? Lord.

He's converted. And you see, that's freedom. When I really make Jesus my Lord, that frees me from worrying and having to take care of everything and how to work it out.

He'll work it out. I just need to respond to Him. Lord, I'll respond to You.

Tell me what to do. And then you see, the truth of the matter is when He tells you what to do, He enables you to do it by the power of His Holy Spirit. It's a horrible thing to see someone try to accomplish something in the name of Jesus, calling themselves a servant, when God's not enabling them to do it.

It is so frustrating to try and be something and accomplish something in the name of the Lord when God hasn't asked you to do it. But when God does ask you to do it and you do know, oh man, God begins to work by His Spirit, and then there's accomplishment. There's success.

God's doing it. It's not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then it's enjoyable.

Then it is the easy yoke. My yoke is easy. My burden is light because our Lord's doing it.

He's accomplishing it. I'm just serving. Okay, Lord, tell me what to do.

I'm not going to ask You why You want me to do it. Just tell me I'll do it. You're smarter than I am.

The problem is, you see, I don't think God is smarter than me, so I'm always questioning, why are You asking me to do it this way? Why should I do it that way? Why do it today? Why can't I do it tomorrow? Why do I have to paint it that color? Why do I have to go here? That's not a servant. And a person that's always constantly in that mode never has any joy. They're just always serving the Lord, working for Jesus.

I've been around them. Arise, go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

Oh, how humbling. It is tough. If you've been a leader all the time and God said, no, I want to use you, but you let yourself be led.

Well, there's the pride issue right there, man. Notice now, here's this mighty Paul. He's always going along with orders and papers to arrest people.

Do this. Do that. Taking an entourage with him, and he meets Jesus Christ, and all of a sudden now, he's being led.

God says, I'm going to use you, but I'm going to have someone else lead you. And the amazing thing is, they're unsaved. Paul was the only one saved in that experience.

So sometimes God begins to work in our lives to see if we're willing to yield and be prepared for greater things. If we don't take care of these small things the way Christ designs it, He watches our attitudes, we never get to the greater things. And sometimes it says in the Bible, before honor, there must be humility.

And I think too many times that myself, when I look back in my life, I try to skip some of the lessons. Jump right in and do greater, more, bigger. Now, you don't know, I've got so much zeal, you don't know what I can do, Jesus.

He says, no, you need to be led a little bit. Wait a minute. No, I'll lead.

If you don't allow yourself to be led, you'll never lead. I don't need leaders. I need people who will allow me to lead, who will be led in humility.

One Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which stood out there, came unto me and stood and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. In the same hour, I looked up upon him. Now, this is what I find very interesting about Paul.

Now, remember, 20 years earlier. And again, as you look at the church today, I see things and sometimes the over-emphasis of things that really aren't as important as they think they should be. Now, you remember what really took place here.

Paul's giving his testimony. Now, remember, he's before the Jews. He's got Gentiles in the crowd.

He's got thousands of people captured. Now, remember, he's chained, but he's got the crowd in the palm of his hand speaking Greek, speaking Hebrew now, so he's got both camps listening. And what a time for testimony.

He's giving his testimony. And I like what he says. As he thinks back and he flashes 20 years earlier.

He didn't make one mention of being baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit or talk about the power of God. All he spoke of is a man named Ananias prayed for him and he received his sight. He could see again because a believer prayed for him.

He didn't make a big deal out of the healing. Didn't go off. Didn't say one thing about being baptized and filled with the Spirit of God even though he was.

Clearly it says, you see, he was, in the Acts account in chapter 9, baptized, filled with the Spirit. Then, it's interesting, he got saved on the way. Salvation was first.

His conversion on the way to Damascus. Then in Damascus, baptized with the Holy Spirit. He didn't speak in tongues.

He didn't fall in the ground. He received his sight. And then Ananias says, now Paul, get water baptized.

Another interesting thing about the way God does things, he does it the way he wants to and then they form movement and say this is the only way God can do it. You've got to accept Christ first and then you've got to be water baptized. Some people, you can't be baptized in the Spirit separately.

God does it differently with everybody. And I think he loves to upset the plans of certain groups and say this is the way it's done. Now, we've got God in a box.

And if it doesn't happen to you this way, it hasn't happened to you. No, Paul was converted without saying a sinner's prayer, without walking down an aisle, without bowing his head and slipping up his hand, without filling out a card or kneeling in a bench and he was baptized and filled with the Spirit and didn't speak in tongues and wasn't knocked to the ground. And yet here, he doesn't even talk about it.

One of the most exciting dynamic things, you see, there again is the sensitivity of the Spirit. There are some people that's almost like they're in a rut. As soon as they get an opportunity to speak, you can tell exactly what their 45 minute spiel is going to be.

The same old thing. This church, that church, they get on the trail, the testimony trail, and it's the same thing. And they think that's being led by the Spirit.

What's interesting is each time Paul shared in different groups at different times, he shared differently his experience, but the one thing was always the same. I met Jesus Christ. I was forgiven.

I was given new life. What's more important? Meeting Jesus Christ or being filled with the Spirit? Having a healing. And then having the ability to be so transformed that when you're before the crowd, some of the people, that they see the difference.

The greatest testimony is that He isn't what He used to be. It's not putting on a big show to draw attention to myself. In fact, being so led of the Spirit that He didn't think it was important.

He didn't even have to mention it. Ananias prayed for Him and he could see. And what they could see, this isn't the same man that we knew 20 years ago.

Let me ask you this. We should ask all of ourselves. Now that we are converted, if someone from the past saw you, would they think you are changed? If they were invisible and watching you as you watch television or what you listen to on the radio or the way you talk to your wife or your husband or where you go, what you drink, what you do in your personal life, someone who knew you a few years ago, since you say you've been converted, would they think you've changed? You see, that's the greatest witness for Christ.

There can be, this man is not the same. This person isn't the same. I knew them and this isn't the same person.

And he says, I met Jesus. And Ananias said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldst know his will and see that just one and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. Oh, to fellowship with Jesus, to hear his voice.

Here's your 12th apostle, handpicked by Jesus. You remember in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul said, Am I not an apostle? Have not I seen the Lord Jesus Christ? You remember the apostles drew straws and cast lots to

replace Judas. But God, you know, could have cared less.

God says, I've got the 12th one picked. His name is Paul. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

And now, why tarryest thou? Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Now, identify with God. Openly declare that you're not ashamed.

Just bury the old man. Submit to the rite of water baptism. Now, isn't it interesting? He's converted.

The Spirit of God dwells within him. Ephesians 1.13. Then he's baptized in the Holy Spirit as he receives the healing. He doesn't speak in tongues at his baptism.

It's interesting, later on in his ministry, he does receive the gift of tongues. We don't know when, but later on when he's writing to the Corinthian church because of all their imbalance and being more enamored with the gifts and the outer sign things than the indwelling person, the Spirit Himself. He says, you know, I thank God I speak more than all of you in tongues.

But I'd rather speak five words in the congregation with my understanding than ten thousand words in tongues that the body of Christ would be magnified and edified. So he got tongues, but not when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. And then the water baptism came later.

All through the book of Acts there's different orders. Sometimes people were baptized in the Holy Spirit when they were in the water. Sometimes people were baptized in the Holy Spirit and they didn't even know it was coming.

The house of Cornelius. Heaven opened on a whole group. Kind of like the day of Pentecost.

But now Ananias says, now go get water baptized. And it came to pass that when I was come again to... Now, here's another thing. These people in the churches say that you can't be saved except you're water baptized.

There are certain factions of the Christian church that say there's no conversion without water baptism. Hey, he was already converted on the way to Damascus. He was already saved without water baptism.

So again, don't put God in a box. If he asks you to do something, just do it and get blessed. Enjoy it.

And everybody doesn't have to have your experience to be a legitimate Christian. Doesn't have to have my experience to be a legitimate Christian. Don't get into arguments over semantics.

Baptized in the Spirit. Filled with the Spirit. Overwhelmed with the Spirit.

Just make sure you have it. Because you can tell if you have it or not. No matter how... You can try to explain it all the way you want to and you can try to convince me.

But I've been around people and they're trying to tell me they're baptized in the Holy Spirit. It's like talking to a tree trunk. I mean, they have no life, no joy whatsoever.

And you know they haven't been baptized in the Holy Spirit. They may be saved, but they have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. So it came to pass that when I was coming into Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance.

Now this isn't recorded anywhere in the letters of Paul. He brings something out that is never written in any of the letters. Now this is after the three years that he's personally with Jesus Christ in the Arabian desert getting revelation.

I could suggest something and I'll tell you. One of the most beneficial, wonderful things in your Christian experience is being alone with Jesus. Make time to be alone with Jesus a lot.

If you really want to enjoy life, if you want revelation, if you want blessings, make time to be alone with Jesus. It is glorious. There's nothing more exciting than being alone with Jesus.

So when he gets back and he's in Jerusalem that short time before he leaves for several years, and while he's in Jerusalem, he prayed, and the Lord put him in a trance. And I saw him saying unto me, Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. Now isn't it wonderful to know that in times, the Lord Himself appeared to Paul to encourage him and strengthen him, but didn't let him escape.

Now here, and again, here's the wonderful mystery and the excitement of following Jesus Christ, being led of the Spirit, knowing that Jesus is with me all the time. Now remember when he was in the storm on the Mediterranean later in his life, he didn't escape the shipwreck. He didn't escape being bitten by a poisonous snake, but Jesus was with him.

Jesus appeared to him on the boat. Sometimes he didn't escape, but Jesus was there if he needed him. It's not always the guarantee you're going to escape your trouble, but here's the guarantee.

Jesus will be with you no matter what. Whether you escape or not, the Lord will be there, and He'll manifest Himself if you need it. And so in this particular case, he's not going to do it supernaturally.

He just says, you know, you're going to have to think clearly, make some arrangements to leave the area. There's danger. Other times it was supernatural, you remember.

So he said, make haste, get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the clothing of them that slew him.

Paul was, you know, just so into it that when they stoned Stephen, he stood there holding the garment so they could get their arms free to stone him to death. Now notice, there's absolute sense. He's got the whole crowd arrested.

Remember, he just waved his hand and spoke in Hebrew. Absolute silence here. They think they've got him arrested.

He's standing in the same place that Jesus stood when he was arrested at the Antonia Fortress 20 years earlier. Now notice what takes place. And he said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

Now remember, absolute silence. They're listening. He's got their attention.

And he says the word Gentiles. That's all you had to say to a Jew. Gentile.

Boy, you talk about bigots and hatred. Now notice what happens when he says the word, the Messiah. The very one he's trying to convince them is the Savior of mankind.

Their Messiah, the Savior of the Jews, would send someone to save Gentiles. See, the Jew couldn't think that. They couldn't conceive that.

That they were personally, privately, you know, they had the Messiah to themselves and God wouldn't save Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word and then lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow. They went berserk.

It was absolute quiet and they were going along with it until he said, Gentiles, that Jesus Christ loves Gentiles. And then they lifted up their voices and said exactly what they said 20 years earlier to the Messiah himself. Here is the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ.

Away with such a fellow. You'll never come back here at Thanksgiving again. The whole family is done with you, this fanaticism.

Eat your turkey in your own home. Away with you. You've disrupted this family every Christmas with this Jesus stuff.

Open your presents and enjoy the tree and shut up. Away with you. Isn't it amazing? And they can say that.

You say, Away with you. Away with such a fellow from the earth. It is not fit that he should live.

And as they cried out, they cast off their clothes and threw dust into the air. They really, you know, Jewish people are very emotional. Ripping their clothes off, throwing stuff in the air all because he said, Jesus loves Gentiles.

Now, see, we laugh, but I've been around people and all you have to do is mention another race and you can feel them tighten up inside. And you know they've got a problem. Or you watch them when you say, Oh, greet one another.

And it's amazing. They might be sitting next to somebody of another race and they'll walk 50 feet the opposite direction. You see, there's no room for that in the body of Christ.

It's painful to see, to feel it. All you have to do is, and you can feel the reaction of someone, all you do is say the right thing and you can feel them react. They are bigoted.

And they couldn't control what happened in their heart. These people couldn't control it. You see, there again, the love of Jesus.

You see, God is no respecter of persons. God in his perfect wisdom designed Adam and Eve in such a way that a little bit of himself, remember, before he even created Adam, the Trinity discussed in Genesis 1, 26 and 27, let us make man in our image. Male and female made he them.

And God designed and put his own being, his own color codes. Codes, not one color, but the codes in the DNA and the genetic of our first parents that the glory and the beauty of God would be spread out through the centuries and every race, wherever they got packeted, pocketed or landlocked because of history, and then there's the beauty of God. No matter what continent they are, there's the beauty of God.

He doesn't have a problem, you see. And these people that say they have the love of the Lord and they love Jesus and you feel them tighten up inside. Oh, they've fallen far short of the true love of Jesus Christ.

The agape love of Jesus is the most wonderful thing there is, especially when you allow it to flow through you directed towards somebody else. The agape love of Jesus. The power of the resurrection.

It's the most wonderful thing there is, the love of Christ. It's the love he has for you and wants us to have for each other, no matter who. While they're ripping their clothes off and going crazy, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle and bade that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

Or it really tested, literally, an intensive, repetitive scourging and beating. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion and said, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned? Now Roman law said if you scourge a Roman citizen before he's even found guilty, you're put to death. You receive the scourging until you're dead.

And usually scourging killed a man anyhow before the 40 lashes or 39 lashes. And what they would do is strip a man naked and they'd have a little stake in the pavement and they'd bend him over, tie his hands, that it would arch the back and they'd be bent over facing the ground with their wrists about 18 inches off the pavement. They'd have to stand like that.

And they would train guards to use the whip with pieces of bone and glass embedded in leather thongs, long leather strips. And they'd hit the person in such a way that it would dig into the flesh and then they'd pull on it and rip the flesh out. That's why the Bible in Isaiah speaks Jesus was so disfigured he wasn't recognized as a human being.

It would disembowel people, tear their eyes out, mutilate their faces and their bodies. The ligaments would come loose and exposed through the skin. And normally a human being would never live through the scourging.

And Rome perfected it. And so they would get a confession and if someone began to tell the truth they would lighten up the scourge. If the person continued to deny and lie they would hit them harder and it would dig in deeper and they'd rip some more.

And if they continued to lie they'd either die or they'd go through the whole thing and be totally mutilated, so just disfigured that you could never be the same again. The amazing thing is about the Apostle Paul. He couldn't lie.

He had nothing to lie about. He received those kind of beatings five times for the love of Christ rather than deny Christ. And so they're ready to scourge him to bring out a confession.

Now stop and think. What could Jesus do? When they scourged Jesus he had nothing to confess but the truth. And he went through that scourging as Isaiah said, by his stripes we are healed.

Upon him the Lord laid the iniquity of us all. He took the condemnation that you and I deserve, was beaten for my sin, for your sin. You see, he could not escape.

You see, there was nothing to lie about and he had to tell the truth. So he received it all for us. He sent his lamb to the slaughter because of his love for us, for you.

So here's Paul standing in the same area, being treated the same way. Now the question is, are you close enough to Jesus? Are you identifying with Jesus enough that people are beginning to resent? Or like the Jewish Christians, have you compromised? Do we compromise to get by because I don't want to be rejected or entered into the fellowship of suffering? You see, you don't have to act like a fool to be rejected. Just be like Jesus and we can begin to experience the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ.

Or do they see no relation? Do they look at my life and say, I don't see anything different about you? Or you go to that place there, that old skating rink there in 332, don't you? I don't see anything different about you though. Your refrigerator looks just like mine. You've got a six-pack in there.

I see the videos you watch. I hear what's on your car radio. You just go to that building and I don't.

We're the same. When you begin to really be conformed to that image, then the fellowship of the suffering can begin. This is what happened to Paul.

He didn't go out and make a fool out of himself, drawing attention to himself. He just became like Jesus. So he asked the question, because if they make a mistake and they didn't know he was a Roman citizen because he's speaking perfect Hebrew and he's a Jew.

When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman. They would all be put to death. Then the chief captain came and said unto him, tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, yeah.

And the chief captain answered, with a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, but I was free born. In other words, I was born in a Roman city, a naturalized citizen.

Now, the Roman centurion, usually the Roman soldiers were non-Romans. They were slaves. They were put in the army or bought their freedom or served faithfully in Rome, freed them from their slavery and made them an honorary citizen.

So this soldier said, I experienced, I went through a lot to get my Roman citizenship. What did you do? Paul said, I was born a Roman. So here again, the providence of God having Paul brought into the world to be a naturalized Roman citizen, but a Hebrew of the Hebrews, to reach the elite of both races.

To be steeped in the Greek culture, the Greek education. At the same time, the Jewish religion. Paul said, I'm going to use you everywhere.

Now again, you may be going through something right now. Do not be discouraged. Do not doubt God's love for you.

If it's difficult right now, because God may be preparing you for something so wonderful. To reach somebody that no one else could reach by the very character and depth he's allowing to be put into your soul. Just as he said, remember Joseph, iron was put in his soul because God was preparing him for the future.

And it's the way you're handling the situation you're in right now that's going to determine how God can use you in the future. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him. And the chief captain also was afraid after he heard that he was a Roman and because he had done it.

Notice, they're all afraid of him now. Usually the guy says, you know, you've got hundreds of people. You're chained to two guards.

You're being unjustly accused. People are going to rip your body apart. Now they're all afraid of him.

How God can reverse the tables. Here's Romans 8.28 that Paul wrote. Know this, that God works all things to the good to those that love them and are called according to his purposes.

On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty whereof he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands and commanded the chief priests and all their counsel to appear and brought Paul down and set him before the men. You know, God's saying, here's a church for you, Paul. I've got a captive audience.

They're going to hear it. All are going to hear it. Now they probably would have nothing to do with Paul.

But now the Roman centurion said, all you Jews, you Pharisees, get down here. We're going to have a meeting. And they're all going to listen to Paul.

Only God could orchestrate that. You see, Paul, if he came into town, I want to have a meeting with the most important Jewish rabbis and I want to have a meeting with the most important Roman leaders. Meet with me tomorrow afternoon.

Who are you? My name is Paul. Get out of here. God orchestrates it with his providence and they're all going to be there.

It's amazing. And again, it shows you. Would Paul say, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? If you really say that, you'd be amazed at the doors that God will open for you.

I know people have been beaten on doors trying to get them open to serve God so long their knuckles are bleeding. They're angry because no one recognizes their anointing or their ministry or their calling or it's the devil stopping their ministry when they haven't stopped and said, Lord, what do you want me to do? And then Satan can't keep any door closed. And the crowds might get bigger and the people might be more important than you meet and influential.

If he'll just say, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? You're a lot smarter than me. Shall we stand? Father, it is wonderful to understand your sovereign control of all events past and future. And we thank You, dear Lord, that we can forget the past, that we need not burden ourselves any longer with why this happened or why You allowed this or that.

But, Lord, we can just like Paul. We've met You now, Lord Jesus. We've opened our heart to You, experienced Your love to forgive us of all the bitterness and the anger and the resentment that we've carried about in our hearts.

You've given us a new lease on life. And so now, Lord, we stand before You and say, what would You have us to do, Lord? Oh, we love You, Jesus. We thank You for Your love and Your forgiveness for us.

May we portray it faithfully in our own lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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