

(Through the Bible) Acts 9

by Chuck Smith

God's apprehension of Paul and his subsequent conversion and ministry serve as a model for effective ministry preparation and foundation laying.

Duration: 59:11

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6, Acts 9:21-22, Acts 9:26-27

Topics: "Biblical Ministry", "Spiritual Preparation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praying for God to use the listeners as instruments to display His glory in the world. He emphasizes the importance of preparation in ministry, cautioning against hastily laying hands on people without a solid foundation in the Word. The speaker also criticizes the practice of immediately inviting Hollywood celebrities who profess faith to become conference speakers, as they often lack a deep understanding of the Bible. Finally, the speaker mentions the concept of visualization and goal-setting, comparing it to metaphysics and highlighting the power of the subconscious mind.

Transcript

Now let's turn to Acts chapter 9. When Alexander the Great conquered the world, he left pockets of Greek culture throughout the world. And so, these pockets of Greek culture became very influential. And even though the Roman Empire conquered the Grecian Empire, yet the Grecian culture remained as a dominant characteristic throughout the world.

So, the world was under the Roman Empire, but it was dominated by Grecian culture. Now, the Grecian culture was more towards the arts. And in contrast, the Hebrew culture was very legalistic.

The Pharisees were representatives of the Hebrew culture. Very strict. Very legalistic.

And they tended towards the legal side. Whereas, the Grecian was more cultural, more interested in the various forms of art and all. And thus, there was a real conflict in these cultures.

Now, during this time, Israel was divided. The Jews were divided into the Hellenist and into the Hebrews. All Jews, but the Sadducees were of the Hellenist culture.

They were the materialists. Whereas, the Pharisees were followers of the Hebrew culture. Thus, for a man to effectively reach the Jewish people, he had to have an understanding of the Grecian culture but he also needed a keen understanding of the Hebrew culture.

So, God chose Paul as that instrument. Paul was born in the city of Tarsus, which was one of the centers of the Grecian culture. And up until the age of 14, though he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, that is, his parents were of the Hebrew culture, very strong Pharisees, Paul's earliest acquaintances, friends, playmates, were all of the Hellenist culture.

So, he became acquainted with the Hellenist culture. But his parents, in order to shield him from the Hellenist culture, when he was 14, rather than send him to university there in Asia Minor, chose rather to send him to the Hebrew university in Jerusalem where he might sit at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of that day and a Pharisee. And so, Paul became deeply imbued with the Pharisaiic culture, but yet he never did get totally free of that Grecian cultural background that he had as a child.

Perfect instrument that God needed to go out into that world and to reach those of the Hellenist culture with the straight truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, beginning in chapter 9, we have God's apprehension of Paul. And Saul, still breathing out threatenings and murders against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and desired of him letters that he might go to Damascus, the synagogues there, and if he found any that were of this way, an interesting description of the Christians, whether they were men or women, that he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goats.

Paul's apprehension. He said, I have not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended. Here is Paul's apprehension by God in a very dramatic way.

Here is a man that God turns around 180 degrees. Yet there are indications in the text that God's Spirit was already dealing with this man. As the Lord said unto him, it is hard for thee to kick against the goats.

Now the goats were those instruments that they put on the back of the plow or on the front of the plow, so that if the ox began to kick, it would kick the goats and it would determine that kicking wasn't so wise. And of course, it would help protect the fellow guiding the plow. Hard for you to kick against the goats.

I believe that the death of Stephen had a very remarkable effect upon Paul. I think that as he watched Stephen die and Paul said, I consented unto his death, which means that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and he voted for the death of Stephen as a member of the Sanhedrin, which brings up some interesting sidelights. He had to be married to be a member of the Sanhedrin.

And whatever happened to his wife, the Scripture is silent. There are stories that abound from the early church that she left him when he embraced Christianity and that they had two sons. One went with Paul.

One went with her. But that's all tradition. We don't know.

But I believe that watching Stephen die, by hearing the message of Stephen, for Paul was there, heard his message, saw the face, saw the anointing of God's Spirit, and yet, he was determined as a Pharisee to stamp out this new sect that was arising within Judaism. And so, he went to the high priest. Later on, writing of his testimony to the Philippian church, he said concerning Zeal persecuting the church.

And he came to Damascus when suddenly God apprehended him there on the road. Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you persecuted. It is hard for thee to kick against the goats.

Now, here's an interesting thing. Paul was actually persecuting the church, wasn't he? But notice how Jesus so completely identifies himself with the church. Any persecution that you may receive is directed against him.

He is totally identified with his church. He didn't say, you know, why do you persecute my church? Jesus said, why are you persecuting me? Or it is, I am the one that you are persecuting. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what will you have me to do? Instant conversion.

180 degrees. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city and it will be told you what you must do. Now, the command of the Lord to Paul was very simple, wasn't it? Remember last week we told you how God gives us one step at a time? So, rather than spelling out to Paul at this time the whole future, he just said, just get up and go on into the city.

And it will be told you what you are to do. And so the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. Now, there are those who imagine a contradiction in the Scripture here, because as Paul is recounting this story in this 22nd chapter of Acts, he declares that those that were with him did not hear the voice.

But he uses a different Greek word there. They did not hear the articulation of the words. They heard sounds, but they didn't understand the sounds.

Though the Lord was speaking to Saul, they heard a voice speaking, but they could not understand the words. And that's what Paul is referring to in the 22nd chapter. They did not hear the phonetics.

And so, no contradiction. They stood speechless because they heard a voice, but they didn't see anybody. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man.

So he was blinded momentarily by this experience. And so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. Now, his entry into Damascus was surely far different than when Paul was imagining his entry to be into Damascus.

He was going to come in, charging in with the papers from the high priest and start throwing people in prison who called upon the name of the Lord. But rather than coming in in this manner, he is being led in, blinded, and being led by his friends into the city. And for three days, he was without sight, and neither did he eat nor drink.

I believe that in these three days, there must have been an awful lot going on in Paul's mind. God sort of cut him off from other distractions, sensory distractions, that he might really help him into trying to filter out exactly what was going on. And so he was without sight.

He did not eat or drink for three days as he was just sifting through these happenings that were taking place in his life. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus. Notice, not an apostle, just a disciple.

And his name was Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, I'm here, Lord.

And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called Straight, which is the main street through Damascus, and inquire in the house of Judas, for one who is called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he

is praying. And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered and said, Lord, I've heard by many of this man how much evil he has done to Your saints at Jerusalem.

And here he has the authority from the chief priests to bind all of those that are calling on Your name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. So, God needed a man with the background of Paul.

A man who could address the Hebrews. A man who could address the Grecian culture. A man who could address kings.

And so he is a chosen vessel of God. So, Paul, later on, recognized that God's hand was upon his life from his mother's womb. That even in the early experiences, God's hand was upon him, training him, developing him for that work that God ultimately had in mind for him to accomplish.

And so, with every servant of God, we can look back in our lives and watch the processes by which God was developing us for the work that God had in mind for us to accomplish for Him. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, said, For you are His workmanship created together in Christ Jesus unto the good works that God has before ordained that you should walk in them. God knows what He has in mind for your life.

God knows that ministry or that work that He has in mind for you to fulfill for the kingdom's sake. Now, God, in the meantime, is working in your life as He is preparing you for that work. And one day you'll discover that all of this background that I have is all a part of God's plan as He was preparing that instrument to do His work.

And it's exciting then to realize that even at times when I wasn't aware of God, wasn't conscious of God, yet God was there working in my life, preparing my life for the work that God had in mind for me to accomplish. A chosen vessel. And He is to bear my name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel.

And here to me is an interesting statement. For the Lord said, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake. I wonder if I had been in his shoes and the Lord would call me to the ministry and show me in advance all of the things that I would have to suffer if I would have continued or would have bowed out and said, Lord, why don't you send someone else? Why don't you call someone else? I admire Paul.

The Lord showed him all of the things he was going to suffer, and yet Paul was ready. In yielding his life when he said, Who art Thou, Lord, that I may serve Thee? What will You have me to do, Lord? There wasn't any changing from that. He made a contract with the Lord.

A binding contract. One that he wasn't going to go back on. Because he realized that God's hand was upon his life to develop him to this point.

And no matter what, Lord, I'm going to go through. So, Ananias went his way. When God first said go talk to Saul, he was sure that God had made a terrible mistake.

Lord, I've heard about this fellow. You can't be serious. So, Ananias went his way and entered into the house and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul... I like that.

He immediately acknowledges him as a brother. Receives him immediately into that fellowship of the brotherhood in Christ. Brother Saul.

The Lord, even Jesus. Now, you remember, he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. And so, here Ananias is saying, The Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto you in the way as you were coming, has sent me that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Remember, Ananias is not an apostle. He's only a disciple. There in the church in Damascus of which we hear nothing more about him after this time.

Just an ordinary disciple, and yet God is using him as the instrument to lay his hands upon Paul that he might be healed, receive his sight, and that he might receive the empowering of the Holy Spirit. And so, immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received his sight immediately and he arose and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.

And then was Saul certain days with the disciples that were at Damascus. And immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God. Now, Paul had enough background in the Scriptures that as soon as he realized that Jesus was Lord, he was able to take his understanding of the Scriptures and realize that God had promised to send His Son.

He realized, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God with us. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. And all of these Scriptures began to click in Paul's mind.

And he was able to see now that Jesus was the Son of God. And so he began to go in the synagogues and began to preach unto the Jews that Jesus was the Son of God. And all that heard Him were amazed and they said, is not this the One that destroyed those which called on this name in Jerusalem? And did He not come here for that same intent that He might bring them bound to the chief priests? And they were amazed at Paul's preaching.

Now, between verse 21 and verse 22, there is a gap of time. It isn't indicated in our text. But at this point, according to the Galatian Epistle, Paul left Damascus not conferring with flesh, but to really just wait upon God and to really get His full instructions, he went down to the wilderness area of the Sinai and there for two to three years, he was just waiting upon the Lord, being instructed by the Lord concerning the way of truth in Jesus Christ.

So Paul, writing to the Galatians, said that after his conversion, immediately, I did not confer with any man, but I went to Arabia and there was taught directly by Jesus the Gospel, the doctrine that He proclaimed. And then later he said, I returned to Damascus and then to Jerusalem where I stayed with Peter for 15 days, but not to be instructed by Him, but just to share the things that had happened. So, the three years in Arabia down near the Sinai are not spoken of in the Acts, but just passed over.

And if you want to put them in the text, it's between verse 21 and 22 is Paul's journey to the desert for three years. Now, in verse 22, Saul by this time increased all the more in strength. That three years was a time of strengthening in his life as he was just waiting upon the Lord.

I get a little concerned about those who come up and say, Chuck, I want to go into the ministry. And I say, well, that's fine. How long have you been a Christian? Oh, two months now.

You know, and they're looking for a pulpit and somewhere to begin their pastoring. Paul had a very rich background in the Scriptures. Yet he did not enter immediately in the ministry, but took time to prepare himself as he was there in Arabia for three years being taught of the Lord.

God uses instruments that He has prepared. But preparation is a necessary part to any effective ministry. I believe there is a great mistake that takes place in the church by laying hands on people too suddenly.

I think that a tragedy has existed for years within the church. Whenever some Hollywood celebrity makes a profession of faith, immediately they are bombarded by every church and every conference to come and to be a conference speaker. And they're going around constantly giving their testimony week after week after week, here and there, giving their testimony to excited crowds around the United States.

Well, unfortunately, they're spending so much time traveling around the country to give their testimony to the crowds, the only thing they ever hear is their own testimony. And thus, they are never rooted and grounded in the Word. They never get a foundation.

And so many of these great celebrities who have gone around with their sparkling testimonies, after a period of time, you say, well, what happened to... Oh well, he's back into the old life, you know. Well, it didn't last or it didn't take or something. It's because the church has made a tragic mistake of assuming that because a person is a brilliant person in one field, that he can immediately be a great theologian or a teacher of the Word.

And that is a wrong assumption to make. There have been some very brilliant scientists who have accepted the Lord. And of course, immediately, everyone wants to come and testify of their conversion experience.

Well, you might be a genius in biology, but that doesn't mean that you know anything about the Word of God. And so, Paul needed to get a foundation established and thus he went to Arabia. And that is just a wise move for anybody.

Don't be in a hurry. Make sure that you've dug deep and laid a foundation. Jesus talked about the two men building their houses.

The wise man dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. The foolish man just began to build immediately on the sand. And unfortunately, that's what a lot of people do.

They want to get things going. Let's get the building up. Let's start the framing, you know.

And they haven't taken time to lay a solid foundation. And when the storm comes, the house is destroyed. So, take time.

Lay a foundation. If God is calling you, God is not in a hurry. We are the ones that are in a hurry.

And God wants to prepare those instruments that he will use for his work. And so, while he was there in the wilderness, he increased the more in strength. As he came back to Damascus, after this three years, he was now a real dynamo for God and he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Messiah.

Again, he had his rich background in their Scriptures and he could take their Scriptures and by them prove that Jesus is the Messiah. And that's not a difficult task. It's very simple to take the Old Testament Scriptures and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.

But there are none so blind as those who will not see. And after that, many days were fulfilled. The Jews took counsel to kill him.

You see, though he proved that Jesus was the Messiah, it only angered them. And so they began to lay in wait for him, but it was told to Saul that they were ready to ambush him, going to kill him. And they were watching the gates of the city of Damascus day and night ready to kill him.

And so the disciples took him by night and they led him down by the wall in a basket. And so he didn't have a very triumphant exodus out of Damascus, a rather ignominious way to leave over the wall in a basket, escaping from those Jews that were plotting his death. And so it was at this point he came to Jerusalem and first met the apostles.

So when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. And they believed not that he was a disciple. And this is a tragic thing.

How that he was rejected by the church when he first returned to Jerusalem. But Barnabas. Now, you remember this man Barnabas who it said he had a different name, but they called him Barnabas, which means son of consolation.

And here you see why he got his name. Barnabas is a fellow to bring men together. And Barnabas took him and he brought him to the apostles.

And he declared unto them how that he had seen the Lord in the way and that he had spoken to Him and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And so he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists.

But they went about to kill him. Paul's ministry seemed to have that effect upon people. Everywhere he preached, it ended in either a revival or a riot.

And people were moved by what he said one way or the other. Some adversely and some in a favorable way. But Paul had a way of stirring people.

Now when the brethren knew that they were planning to kill Paul in Jerusalem, what a way to start your ministry. The first two places you have to leave town on the quiet because there are those who are plotting against your life. So when the brethren knew the plot, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him forth to Tarsus or go back home, Paul.

And so they sent him back to Tarsus. And then had the churches rest throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria. I don't know that that rest was too healthy.

Then had the churches rest. They got rid of Paul. Well, it meant that their witness wasn't as bold as it was.

They began to live more peaceably with those. And I don't know that is a sign of a healthy church or not. Now, Paul stayed at Tarsus for up to 10 years.

Just how long, we are not certain. But most scholars believe that his going back to Tarsus, he remained in obscurity for 10 years more. No doubt, they were times in which God was continually pouring into Paul the knowledge of the grace and the goodness of God.

But they were silent years as far as Paul's ministry is concerned. The churches had rest throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria and they were edified as they walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. They were multiplied.

Now, we leave Paul at this point. And the record goes back now to Peter. It came to pass as Peter passed throughout all of the quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lyta.

So at this point, Peter decided to go around and to visit the various pockets of believers that had sprung out throughout Judea. And over towards the coast, the area of Lyta which is the present city of Lod, where the Ben-Gurion airport is, is the area where Peter went to visit the Christians there. And he found a certain man named Aeneas which had been in his bed, had been confined to the bed for eight years.

And he was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ makes you whole. Arise, make your bed.

And he arose immediately. And all of those that dwelt at Lyta and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. Peter spoke to him the Word of Faith.

And there is power in the spoken Word of Faith. It's important that we find the balance. There are those who take this teaching and they carry it to extremes as they would elevate man to the position of sovereignty.

You can have anything you want. All you have to do is to speak it. And they speak of the rhema, the spoken Word, and the creative power of the spoken Word.

And so you speak by faith whatever you want. I want to be a millionaire, you know. I want to drive a Mercedes.

I want to have a home on Lytto Island. I want... And they tell you to speak the words of faith. Visualize what you desire.

Visualize yourself driving that little Porsche. See yourself scooting in and out of traffic. Visualize it.

And then, you know, you're putting these creative forces to work. And you can have whatever you want. Did not God say, command ye me the works of my hands? And they talk about speaking the Word of Faith and the visualizing of the things that you want.

This is metaphysics. You'll find the same things in Napoleon Hill's book Think and Grow Rich. Or the 13 Richest Men in Babylon.

It's a part of metaphysics. And it is something that is... There is creative power in the subconscious. And so by visualizing and by putting up your goals and by declaring your goals over and over, you're planning these things in the area of the subconscious.

And the subconscious begins then to develop schemes and devise methods whereby these things might become a reality. And you're using the vast power of the subconscious. Of course, the spiritual writers say

you're using the vast power of the spirit, the fourth dimension, and you're putting that power to work.

But it works without the spirit. It works for men of the world who want to follow these principles. And you'll find many, many men who will testify that their tremendous success in business and all is attributable to Napoleon Hill's concepts in metaphysics in Think and Grow Rich.

Same principles exactly. Now, because of that, there is a tendency for us to have a backlash against that. Because it is such dangerous heresy, we are prone to back away.

And that's wrong. But we're prone to back away from what God is wanting to do. And from stepping out in faith.

And from declaring a word of faith. Now, I am certain that before Peter said this to Aeneas, that the Lord spoke to Peter's heart to say it. You remember when Paul was at Lystra, he perceived that this lame man over here had the faith to be healed.

And he said, brother, Jesus Christ makes you whole. Stand up and walk. And the man who was lame for 40 years stood up and walked, because Paul spoke the word of faith to him.

But before Paul spoke the word of faith, the Spirit had already revealed to Paul what the Spirit was wanting to do. I do not direct the works of God, nor should I ever seek to be in that position of directing God's works. They are God's works.

They always begin with Him. It is important that I recognize what God is doing. It is important that I recognize the work of God.

And herein is the real key. And so, yes, there may be times when the Lord would have us to speak a word of faith to someone. And have them act upon that word of faith.

Jesus often did that. Be strong. And I'd like to speak that word of faith to you tonight.

Be delivered. Be set free. Live a life of victory in Jesus.

Now you can take those as words of faith and you say, yes, Lord, I will be strong. Yes, Lord, I will have victory. Yes, Lord, I will stop it.

And they can be a word of faith that you will act upon and you will find victory. You'll find strength. You'll find God working in a dynamic way within your life.

The work of God will be done. And the word of faith is important. It's wrong though to carry it to the extremes that these men carry it to today.

So that's the balance. And so often, because we are striking for the balance, when we speak out against some of the fanaticism that oftentimes accompanies these things, people will then say, oh, well, Chuck said that's wrong and we shouldn't do that. But yet there is the balance there.

And it is important that we maintain the balance. Yes, God does work today. Yes, God will work today.

Yes, there is power through faith. Yes, we can see the work of God accomplished in the lives of people. And yes, we can speak the word of faith to them.

And it's important that we do. But it's also important that we don't become extremists and just go around and try to run the universe like suddenly I've found a new dimension of power and now I'm in control and now this is the way I want things done. God, over there.

Quick. And I take away from that sovereignty and that sovereign work of God by I am in command now and I am going to demand what's going on. It's so easy to get on power trips.

And you've got to be careful about that because there is something within us that likes power. And I like to feel that sense of power and all. And it's so easy to get exalted on a power trip.

I was reading where the god Thor, that Norse god, when he first discovered his power, was so excited, he just jumped on his horse and he began to ride across the skies on his horse, pointing down at the earth because as he pointed, he could cause the lightning to come off the end of his finger and flash across the earth. And he had discovered this great power he had of casting these thunderbolts and these flashes of lightning. And so he was just riding all over the earth, throwing down the thunderbolts, causing the flashes of lightning.

And he spent the whole day riding his horse through the skies, throwing the thunderbolts all over the world. And as he got back to the north country with this sense of power, he cried, I'm Thor! And his horse turned around and said, well, why didn't you use a fiddle, filly? So be careful of the power trips. Peter did speak the Word of Faith and we can speak the Word of Faith and we can see the power of speaking the Word of Faith.

There is a legitimate concept here that we can use. We just shouldn't take it to extremes. So, as a result of the healing of Aeneas, people all over the area, the Sharon Valley there, in seeing this man who had been infirm for eight years healed, they believed and turned to the Lord.

Now, in Joppa, about eight miles away from Lydda, there was a certain disciple named Tabetha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas. The name means a gazelle. Graceful, beautiful.

This woman was full of good works and alms deeds, which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and she died. Whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

And inasmuch as Lydda was near to Joppa, only eight miles, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. And then Peter arose and went with them. And when he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber and all of the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and the garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.

And so here she was making things for the poor, a very marvelous, beautiful woman. But Peter put them all forth. Now he probably took a page out of the life of Jesus.

For he was there when Jairus had come to Jesus concerning his daughter. And as Jesus was on his way to Jairus' house, the servants came and said, don't trouble the Master any further. Your daughter is dead.

And so, Jesus said to him, don't be afraid. Don't panic. She's only sleeping.

And so when they came to the house, all of the mourners were already gathered. And they were wailing and mourning over the death of this little 12-year-old girl, the daughter of Jairus. And Jesus said, she's not

dead, she's only asleep.

And they laughed him to scorn. They mocked him. And so he put them all forth.

He said, get up. And he brought in Peter and John, the inner circle. And then he said unto her, Talitha, little girl, arise.

And she sat up and looked around. And Jesus took her by the hand and led her out to the parents and said, might give her something to eat. But Peter had seen the Lord put away those of unbelief and doubt.

And so Peter, because these people were all just, though they were perhaps Christians, they were yet just all into the mourning over her death. Look at the beautiful thing she made. Oh, she was such a wonderful person.

Peter just put them forth. Probably also what he was going to do was so bizarre that he, in case nothing happened, he didn't want to be embarrassed. I would have done that.

So Peter put them all forth and he kneeled down and he prayed. And turning to the body, he said, Tabetha Kumi. Now, he called her by her name, Tabetha.

And notice how close it is to what Jesus called the little girl Talitha, little girl Tabetha, Gazeal, Kumi, arise. Now, he's talking to a dead person, a corpse that is there. And that is rather bizarre, talking to a corpse.

But he knelt down and prayed and then he turned and said, Tabetha, arise. And she opened her eyes and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and he lifted her up and when he had called the saints and the widows, he presented her alive.

And it was known throughout all of Joppa and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass that he tarried there for many days in Joppa with one Simon, a tanner. Now, we are reminded of the words in Jesus in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John when he said to his disciples, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also.

And even greater works than these shall he do because I go unto the Father. And if you shall ask the Father anything in my name, I will do it that the Father will be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

So here's Peter doing the same kind of works that Jesus did. And here is a notable, remarkable miracle of the raising from the dead of this blessed saint there in the church in Joppa, Dorcas, who God brought back from death. So, we see the power still existing there in the early church.

And that is, of course, one of the marks of the early church. That dynamic power of the Holy Spirit working in and through the church. Should we assume that God no longer works in such dynamic ways? I think that it is wrong to make that assumption.

I think that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I do not believe that we should fault God for the lack of power in the church. I think that we should fault the church.

Fault ourselves. I believe that this power is still available today. I believe in the power of God to change lives, to transform lives, to turn people around 180 degrees.

I believe in the power of God to raise people out of beds of infirmity, to deliver people from the bondage of things that are destroying them, setting people free. I believe in the power of God to raise the dead. I do not believe that there is any lack with God or with God's ability or even with God's desire to manifest Himself.

I do feel that the lack is on our side. And I think that as much as anything else, it is the lack of being able to handle all of the notoriety and attention that would be drawn to the person who had this kind of power. I am certain that I could not personally deal with that kind of power and notoriety that would arise from it.

I do not trust myself. I'm afraid that I would be lifted up with pride. I'm afraid that I would go out advertising great miracle campaigns and would, you know, just not be able to really handle all that would result from having that kind of a ministry.

Now, there were years when I fasted and prayed for this kind of power. And I desired to experience this kind of power. And the Lord finally spoke to my heart and said, I have given you the more excellent way, the path of love.

And I ceased praying for the power for miracles. Now, I have seen miracles. And who can doubt but what the power of God in changing a person's life, turning him around, is not really the most desirable and greatest miracle that we can see.

It would be much better that a person's life be transformed by the power of the Spirit of God from the bondage of sin into a new life in Christ. That is a more important miracle than, say, raising the dead. If that person, when he was raised from the dead, would live a wicked life and die in sin.

Or if through that miracle, you know, you'd be lifted up with so much pride that you would become useless to God. So, God's hand is not short. But we just see today more sham than reality in the miracle services.

And those who are professing to have the power are men that I wouldn't trust many times behind my back. I know them. Now, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't seek or desire it still.

I don't desire it for myself anymore because God spoke to me about it. But that doesn't mean that maybe God has so worked in your life that He could use you in this way. And if so, I would praise God for it.

And I would rejoice in the work that God would do through your life. I don't want to be in the position of limiting God. And I don't think that that should ever be our position.

God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Now, I'm not going to try and get into chapter 10 because there's so much here that we want to cover. It's quite a long chapter.

And it is an important chapter as it deals with the beginning of the gospel among the Gentiles. And so, we'll begin this a week from Sunday night. Chapters 10 and 11.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank You tonight for the power of Your Holy Spirit. And Lord, we pray for true demonstrations of that power. Touch lives.

Anoint lives. And use them, Father, to display Your glory through the world. Lord, we offer ourselves to You such as we are tonight.

As Paul, we would ask, what would You have us to do, Lord? And we make ourselves available unto You for whatever You might have in mind. Whatever purpose You would have us to fulfill. Lord, You've apprehended us.

And when You did, You had in mind a purpose for apprehending us. Help us, Lord, that we might seek to accomplish and to apprehend that for which we were apprehended. So, guide us.

Use us. And through us, Lord, bring glory to Thy name. And we thank You.

Amen.

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