

Our Daily Homily - Acts

by F.B. Meyer

F.B. Meyer emphasizes the vital role of believers as witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit through prayer and community in the book of Acts.

Scripture: Acts 1:8, Acts 2:33, Acts 4:31, Acts 5:4, Acts 6:4, Acts 7:55, Acts 9:31, Acts 10:6, Acts 20:28, 2 Corinthians 3:18

Topics: "Empowerment by the Holy Spirit", "Witnessing"

Description

F.B. Meyer emphasizes the call for believers to be witnesses of Christ, contrasting this role with the priestly functions of the time. He highlights that true witness-bearing stems from a close relationship with Jesus, which transforms us and enables us to reflect His light. Meyer encourages believers to start witnessing in their immediate circles before expanding outward, asserting that the Holy Spirit empowers this mission. He also discusses the importance of prayer and the continuous filling of the Holy Spirit for effective ministry. Ultimately, Meyer calls for a life of obedience to God's will, urging believers to recognize their role in the ongoing story of the Church.

Transcript

Ye shall be witnesses unto me - Acts 1:8

How different this function, entrusted to the apostles, to that assumed by the self-styled priests of our time, who claim the power to repeat the sacrifice of Calvary, and to absolve the penitent from his sins! The Master did not say that His followers were to become sacrificing priests, but witnesses to what He had done and would do.

Looking to Jesus is the condition of witness bearing. - How else can we bear witness of Him? As we behold Him we shall reflect Him; and as we reflect Him we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit (2Co 3:18, R.V.). It will not involve strenuous effort to witness to Jesus, if we are living in fellowship with Him. Light is self-revealing. In infinitesimal touches and expressions the light we are catching from Him will gleam forth, and men will unconsciously be led to believe in Him who has made us what we are.

Witness-bearing must spread through successive circles of influence - like the circling wavelets from a stone flung into the midst of a calm mountain lake. Some think they could witness in the uttermost ends of the earth, but they neglect the Jerusalem of the home. Those who begin here will be led almost unconsciously forward to the Judaea of their relatives, and the Samaria of their near neighborhood, and so

to further boundary.

For witnessing we have supreme power. - If even your testimony is demanded, claim the power for the emergency. It is certainly at hand, and within reach. The hand of faith, the opened heart, may surely receive not a power, an attribute merely, but the Spirit, whose attribute of power certainly accompanies Him. Not It, but He.

He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear - Acts 2:33

What a sublime commencement! As Jacob's heart revived, and he was assured that Joseph lived when he saw the wagons that his sons had sent, so the heart of the Church revived when the Spirit came. It was the promised sign that the Master had reached the Father's throne, and was fulfilling the unforgotten promise that He would ask the Father for another Paraclete to fill his place, and abide until He should come again in glory.

It was as though, when the Son ascended on high, leading captivity captive, He passed through all heavens, till He came where no creature had ever come, or could come. There He prayed the Father, as He had said. It was as though He spoke thus: "Father, I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."

And the Father answered: "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Ask of Me, . . . and I will give Thee."

It was as if He said: "Father, I ask nothing for Myself; for all Thine are Mine, and Mine are Thine. But for others I ask that I may have the power of giving to My own the same anointing and power which Thou gavest Me when I stood on the threshold of My work. I was then filled with the Spirit; grant unto Me the power to fill the hearts of all who believe with that same Spirit. It was in the power of that Spirit that I wrought, died, and rose; let My Church be quickened and endued with the same sacred power."

And it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness of the Godhead should dwell, bodily. And the glorified body of Jesus became the reservoir of the Divine fullness, from which we all might receive.

Whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful - Acts 3:2

Is not this thyself? Thou art of the Israel of God. There is no doubt of thy name being enrolled in the pedigree of elect and regenerate souls; but thou art lame, needing to be carried by the strong support of minister and friend; never able to leap, and walk, and praise God; and at the best only able to reach the outer side of the Beautiful Gate that conducts to the richest, gladdest life. Through that gate of entire consecration there come snatches of holy melody; glimpses of white-vestured souls; visions of ideals of life which thou hast not attained: but thou art excluded, condemned to live on the alms of those that enter. How great the pity! Why shouldst thou not have the very best that God can give?

But look up! expect to receive something; open thine ears to hear and thine heart to receive immediately strength, just where thou lackest it most sorely. The feet and ankle-bones of this helpless cripple only needed strength; they were perfectly formed, but paralyzed. Similarly thine ideals of Christian living are true and accurate, but thou art deficient in power. Thou must receive strength.

But this strength can only be had by union with the risen Lord. His name (that is, His nature) alone can make thee strong, and give thee perfect soundness in the presence of those who have hitherto only pitied

thy weakness. Believe in Him! All that have ever risen up to obey His lead have had perfect health and strength. Open thine heart to receive them. Claim and appropriate the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Life which is in Christ Jesus shall make thee free from the law of sin and death, from weakness and failure.

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost - Acts 4:31

They had been filled on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter had been suddenly and mightily infilled for his encounter with the Sanhedrim (Acts 4:8); but here again they were all privileged, whilst in the attitude of prayer and praise, to be once more most blessedly infilled. From this we gather that we may claim repeated fillings of the Holy Spirit.

But let us remember that it is not necessary for the place to be shaken, or for the air to be filled with the outward phenomena of Pentecost as the necessary condition of this heavenly gift. Mr. Fletcher reminds us that the Lord may be pleased to come softly to our help. He may make an end of our corruption by helping us to sink gently to unknown depths of meekness. Like Naaman, we are full of prejudices. We expect that the Pentecostal gift will come to us with as much ado, pomp, and bustle, as the Syrian general looked for. But the blessed Paraclete often disconcerts all these preconceived notions. When we are looking for the hurricane, He comes as the zephyr. When we are expecting the torrent to pour into and fill the well, He fills it by single drops.

But the results will always be the same - great boldness in witness-bearing, much liberty in prayer and praise; great grace and beauty of character; self-denying love for those in need; great power through union with the risen Lord. If the second chapter of this book had been lost from the first MS. we must still have inferred something like the Pentecost. In no other way could we have accounted for the marvellous change which passed over the followers of Jesus, delivering them from the cowardice, wrangling, and prejudices of former days. Oh for a similar transforming experience for us all!

Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God - Acts 5:4

Achan, Belshazzar, and Ananias, met the same fate, because of their persistent use of devoted things. When once we have devoted aught to God, He counts it as His own, and strikes down the hand that would abase it to common and profane use. The Lord our God is a jealous God; He will brook no perversion of His rights. Beware that you take back nothing which you have laid on God's altar, least of all yourself.

Each gathering of believers is endowed with mystic and extraordinary importance, because the Lord, through the Eternal Spirit, is literally present. The true President is not the minister, however distinguished by His gift or grace, but the Divine Spirit Himself; and any sin against the Church is really against Him. It is this Divine presence that invests a gathering of the simplest, humblest believers with such unique importance. It is this which gives them the mysterious binding and loosing power, which is recognized and ratified in heaven. Behind Peter was the real Head of the Church; and so with every faithful minister. Honor the Personality, the Presidency, and Deity of the Holy Spirit, as set forth in this narrative.

Dr. Gordon told me on one occasion that he had in his church a man who, like a very crooked stick, obstructed all its work. He spoke to him alone, and before his brethren; but to no purpose. Then he bethought himself; and remembered that not himself, nor his church officials, was the true Head of the Church, but Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. He therefore handed the whole matter over to the Divine Spirit, as the Executive of the Godhead. In a fortnight this man had left the city, and necessarily

ceased the obstruction in which he had persisted.

We will give ourselves continually to prayer - Acts 6:4

If ever there was a sacred work, it was that of caring for these poor widows; and yet the apostles felt that even such duties might interfere with the continual ministry of intercession. No doubt they always lived in the atmosphere and spirit of prayer, but they rightly felt that this was not enough either for them or their work. So they sought a division of labor, that while some specially served tables and ministered the alms of the church, others might be set free for steadfast continuance in prayer. This would keep the communication with the King on the throne clear and fresh, would draw down the power and blessing of the heavenly world, and be the means of procuring wisdom and strength for their great responsibilities.

There are many courses of usefulness open to each of us in this world, and we must choose the one, not only most suited to our idiosyncrasies, but in which we can best serve our day and generation. It may be that in our incessant activities we are neglecting the one method by which we may contribute most largely to the coming of our Father's kingdom. Notice that word give. It is as though the Spirit of prayer were seeking natures so pure, so devoted, that without hindrance He might form Himself into them. Give yourself to Him for this!

"In that day," said our Lord, speaking of the Day of Pentecost, "ye shall ask in My name." It is only when we are full of the Holy Spirit that we can experience the true power to plead with God, and use the name of Christ so effectively as to receive the richest blessings for ourselves and others. Much prayer, much blessing; little prayer, little blessing; no prayer, no blessing. "The Word of God increased."

Being full of the Holy Ghost - Acts 7:55

The blessed characteristic of Stephen lay in his being perpetually full of the Holy Ghost. It is said of others, even Peter, that they were filled, as though they needed some special and overmastering inducement for special service. But Stephen is more than once described as full (Acts 7:6), as though he were always kept brimming, like a lake from the hills.

Those who are full of the Holy Spirit are always looking steadfastly upwards. - They look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen. Across the valleys, they catch sight of the Delectable Mountains, rising like the Himalaya above the plains of India. Whilst others look around for help, they lift up their eyes to the hills whence cometh their help; and to them heaven stands always open.

Those who are full of the Holy Spirit see and are transfigured by the glory of God. - What wonder that those who sat in the Council beheld Stephen's face, as it had been the face of an angel. The light that shone there was not as when Jesus was transfigured - in that case, the light of the Shechinah broke out from within - but here the glory of God shone from the open door of Heaven. So the sunrise smites the highest peaks.

Those who are full of the Holy Ghost see the Lord Jesus, in His glory, as their Priest. - It is the special work of the Holy Spirit to direct the gaze to Jesus. Those who are full of the Spirit may hardly be aware of His gracious presence, but they are keenly alive to their Lord's. The Spirit takes of the things of Jesus, and reveals them to the loving and obedient; specially those that concern His priestly work on the cross and in heaven.

...which is desert - Acts 8:26

Desert means uninhabited. It seemed a strange providence that took Philip thither. He had been chosen to the honorable office of deacon, and there was probably plenty of work to do in connection with the scattered Church. Moreover, he had just completed a most successful mission in Samaria, where the multitude had given heed with one accord to the things he had spoken; but now he was suddenly landed in these lonely solitudes, where only chance travellers could be encountered. Did he not count it strange, and wish to get home to his four little daughters (Acts 21:9)?

There are many deserts in life! The solitude of a new country, in which you do not know the language. The solitude of a sick-chamber, in which the earnest worker suddenly discovers the limitations of physical weakness. The solitude of suspicion and dislike, which contrast strangely with some large and devoted circle. Thither God brings us not infrequently. No flower can thrive in unbroken light.

But in every solitude, if we wait patiently on the Lord, there are opportunities of service. There is always some inquiring soul in need of the precise help we can give. There is an old story of some monks to whom the Book of Revelation was being read. At the end each was asked to choose the promise he loved best. One said I will take this, "God shall wipe away all tears." Another chose, "To him that overcometh I will give to sit on My throne." The third replied, "I would choose, 'His servants shall serve Him.'" This latter was Thomas a Kempis, who afterward wrote "The Imitation."

"Not caring how to serve Thee much,

But to please Thee perfectly."

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied - Acts 9:31

The church grew not simply by addition, but by multiplication. Three added to three make six; three multiplied by three, nine. That is the Pentecostal ratio of increase. These are the conditions of Church growth: -

First, there must be peace. - Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. As far as it lies in our power, let each of us live peaceably with all men. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away out of our hearts, with all malice, and let us be kind one to another, tender-hearted, and imitating God the great Peacemaker.

Next, the Church must be edified. - We must build ourselves up on our most holy faith. And, indeed, such growth in grace and the knowledge of God is almost inevitable where the Holy Ghost breaks up the reign of apathy and stagnation. When its foundations are deeply laid in righteousness and peace, the City of God arises into the pure air.

Moreover, the members of such a Christian community must walk in the fear of the Lord. To walk means the daily plodding, routine life-full of commonplaces, somewhat prosaic - but always ruled by the fear of grieving the heart that was pierced on Calvary. Lastly, we must walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, or, as the words might be rendered, in the paracletism of the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit is our Advocate, Teacher, Guide; and we should habitually dwell in His radiant and helpful environment. What a difference there is between sea weeds and sea flowers expanding in their rock-surrounded aquariums, and the same when taken into common air! Such is the contrast wrought by the Spirit.

He lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner - Acts 10:6

This lodging must have been somewhat distasteful to the apostle; not only because of its insalubrious odors, but because of the association with death that rendered him liable to the ceremonial pollution which a religious Jew, as Peter was, peculiarly dreaded. Probably he was only driven to it by the sternest necessity. But was it not remarkable that he who had been the chief apostle of the Church, and who had but recently come from a most successful tour, should suddenly be isolated from all his happy and holy associations, and be stranded for many days in the tanner's house (Acts 9:43)?

Yet such dealings on the part of the Lord with His servant are easy of explanation. We are all apt to substitute work for God instead of communion with Him. We become strong in our own strength; elated with success; puffed up by the adulation of our friends. It is needful, therefore, that we be withdrawn from the madding crowd and the career of unbroken prosperity; that the glare of the sun should be tempered, and confidence in ourselves be brought low. There is only one resort. To be hidden in the quiver; to become dependent on the widow-woman of Zarephath; to spend forty years in the desert, till the passionate impulses of our own life subside; to go apart into Arabia; to spend the slowly-moving weeks in the tanner's house.

Whilst Peter waited, he maintained his habits of prayer; left his heart open to the impressions and teachings of the Holy Spirit; awaited the next movements of the cloudy pillar; set himself to acquire lessons which, though subversive of his past experience, reacted on his whole after-life; and from his retirement went forth to unlock a new era.

He was a good man - Acts 11:24

This is the Holy Spirit's verdict on the character and life of Barnabas. Very different to the magniloquent inscriptions on the tombs of warriors and statesmen; but it were better to deserve this at the lips of the Master than to have the longest list of titles ever appended to a mortal's name. For a good man like this some would even dare to die. The characteristics of this good man were these:

He could see the good in movements outside his own church-order. - The Church at Antioch originated, as this paragraph proves, in the preaching of a number of unknown, unordained refugees, who were fleeing from the iron hand of persecution. All we know of them is that they were men of Cyprus and Cyrene. They had broken through the barrier of the ages by preaching to the Gentiles, great numbers of whom had been saved. The Church in Jerusalem was somewhat suspicious of this new departure, and sent Barnabas to report; but when he came he was forthwith convinced of its genuineness, saw the evidence of the hand of the Lord, and was glad. No jealousy, nor narrow bigotry, nor suspicion, warped his judgment.

He was willing that another should share with himself the joys of harvest. - He went off to Tarsus to seek his old acquaintance, and perhaps fellow-student, Paul, and for a whole year the two wrought side by side in loving fellowship, and taught much people.

He was eager that people should be added to the Lord. - Too often good men seek a following for themselves, and rejoice in those who are added to their church or organization. This is not the noblest style of work. It is better far to imitate the Baptist, who was content to be the Bridegroom's friend.

The iron gate - Acts 12:10

There are iron gates before most of us. We are not specially anxious about the first or second ward, but ah, that iron gate! The iron gate of supreme difficulty; of a parent's prohibition against entering the

mission-field; of some obstinate circumstance which seems to forbid the execution of our plans; of some barred and locked prohibition; of death at the end of all. It may be that in his strange bewilderment, between waking and sleeping, Peter anticipated this iron gate with a good deal of dread. That at least would bar his progress; but lo, it opened of its own accord! So shall it be with many of the evils that we anticipate.

Not before we come to them, but at the moment of reaching them; when heart and flesh threaten to fail - in the dim light we shall find them standing open, set back for us to pass. The tram-line is not cleared from end to end before the tram starts. Were the driver to wait for this, he would never start at all. But as he comes to each van, or drag, or carriage, it moves, and allows him a free course; or, if it seems dilatory, his whistle hastens it. Thus, when we arise to follow the angel of God's purpose, who has suddenly entered the dark cell of our life, we shall discover that apparently insuperable difficulties, which we have long dreaded, shall open to us, and allow us to pass, when we come to the object we have dreaded most, we shall find it gone.

Let there be plenty of prayer, "prayer without ceasing." Let there be prompt obedience to the angel's touch and summons; the willingness to gird the relaxed loins, and follow; and as you go through life, you will find yourself escorted by an invisible Companion, who holds the key to all doors.

Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them - Acts 13:2

The Holy Spirit, as the representative of the ascended Lord, is supreme in the Church. It is His sovereign voice that summons His chosen workers to undertake missionary or home enterprise. Dr. Ryland, who at first opposed Carey's idea of going to India, said afterward, "I believe God Himself infused into the mind of Carey that solicitude for the salvation of the heathen which cannot be fairly traced to any other source." And the same is true of all missionaries. The true call is always of the Divine Spirit. Whom He wills to call, He calls. Whom He calls, He separates. Whom He separates, He endows and sends forth.

But, Divine and absolute though the selection is, the Spirit seeks the concurrence of the Church. It was in answer to the Church's prayer for direction that the Spirit designated Barnabas and Saul for the great work of world-evangelization; and it was when the Church had fasted and prayed, and had offered these two to God as their wave offering, that they were sent forth by the Holy Ghost. Thus the Spirit and the Bride cooperate.

In determining whether you have been called by the Holy Spirit to be a missionary, you must certainly call in the advice of Christian friends, and specially of the church with which you worship. If the Spirit of God is in you and them, they will ratify the movements of your heart. It is right, too, to consider whether you have been specially gifted and qualified for the work. In this also, the advice of the Church is most valuable. Of course, the Church herself must fast, i.e., be separate from known evil and indulgence, that she may hear God's voice, and be able to advise her children.

Granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands - Acts 14:3

There is no source of encouragement more fruitful of help than the co-witness and co-working of the Holy Spirit. Those who are filled with the Spirit are called into communion, i.e., partnership, with Him in His work. Whilst they work from the outside, He works from within; whilst they sow the seed, He waters it abundantly. We must be very careful to be such in character and teaching that He may cooperate with us. Our hands must be very clean, if He, with an infinite condescension, is to grant signs and wonders to be

wrought by them. But when we work with Him, and He with us, the results are beyond measure astonishing, and His alone.

"We are now seven years in this land," wrote one of Gossner's missionaries from the land of the Kohls in India; "but through these long years it was but trial of our patience and endurance Everything seemed to be in vain, and many said the mission was useless. Then the Lord Himself kindled a fire before our eyes; and it seized not only single souls, but spread from village to village; and from every side the question was borne to us, What shall we do? How shall we be saved? And I thought it was no more a heathen land I was in, but a Christian, and at home."

Deus habet horas et moras, says the old proverb. God has His seasons and delays. We do not at once see the result of our sowings, toils, and tears; but we are conscious that our work is with our God - we know that we have our petitions, and we rejoice in hope. We must go on uttering "the word of His grace" - the grace that chooses such rebels to be His children; that cleanses them from sin; that restores and keeps and sanctifies.

They rehearsed - Acts 15:4-12

There is a difference between these two assertions. They are in exquisite harmony, but each contributes a different note. In the first we have the cooperation of the Holy Spirit with every faithful worker whom He sends forth; so that, while the servant speaks to the outward ear, the Lord simultaneously addresses the heart. In the second, we have the work of the Holy Spirit wrought through a yielded life which has become His pure channel and mouth-piece. This is His twofold ministry.

His witness with us. - As we speak of Jesus crucified, risen, ascended, the blessed Spirit convicts men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. To every faithful word of testimony there is a deep resonant affirmation from this hidden but mighty Cooperant. If we say, "Behold the Lamb of God!" He adds, "He takes away the sin of the world." If we say, "He died in weakness," the Spirit adds, "He was raised in power." If we say, "Repent and believe the Gospel," He adds, "Now is the accepted time. The Holy Ghost saith To-day." If the Bride says Come, the Spirit joins His voice to hers.

His witness through us. - "The word which ye hear," said our Lord, "is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." And that which was His glory may be ours also. We speak not of ourselves. This is the secret of a fruitful life - to be the yielded channel; the cleansed vessel; the bugle at the castle gate on which the King may sound His summons; the lute on whose strings the Divine hand may play. Oh, be sure that the most lasting work in this world is only possible when we can say with Paul that we will not boast of anything save what Christ has wrought through us to make men obedient to the Gospel.

A certain woman named Lydia The keeper of the prison - Acts 16:14-27

There are typical cases, put here in juxtaposition for the teaching and comfort of believers in every age. Each of them needed Christ, and each was brought into His true light; but each came in a different way. Lydia's heart opened as a flower beneath the touch of the sun, so gradually and imperceptibly that it was impossible to say the precise moment of her new life. The jailer came to Christ suddenly, startlingly, amid the crash of an earthquake. The one was drawn by love; the other driven by fear. A distinguished missionary says, "The Lord awakened me with a kiss" - it was so that Lydia's heart was won. Another tells us that the Lord sprang on him like a lion - it was thus with the jailer.

Lydia. - Do not always be looking out for signs and manifestations; for marked experiences. We do not notice the lines of longitude and latitude as we cross the ocean of life. Without knowing it, your character may be in the process of transfiguration. By insensible gradations the work of God may be proceeding in your heart. The tide is rising daily by tiny wavelets that appear to recede as fast as they advance. Do not measure progress by experience; only be yielded to God, and let Him do His will.

The Jailer. - Do not undervalue the influence of fear. There are some natures that never will be awakened unless they are startled by being brought face to face with the consequences of sin. If men will not come by the highest motives, be thankful that they come by any. Remember it is not belief about Christ, about His death or resurrection, but trust in Him as a living Person, that saves from the power and penalty of sin. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." He is a living Person. Trust Him now.

Christ must needs have suffered - Acts 17:3

This is what our Lord was constantly insisting upon during the closing days of His earthly ministry. "Behoved it not," He asked, "the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?" The Jewish nation rejected Him because His conception of Messianic power was so foreign to theirs; but in doing so, doomed themselves to rejection from the purposes of God, at least during the present dispensation.

It behoved Him, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. How could He have sympathized with the anguish of human hearts, if He had not drunk deeply of the cup of sorrow? How could He have led His flock through the thorny brake, if He had not gone to and fro with His bare feet? In that He hath suffered, He is able to succor.

It behoved Him, that He might be the sacrifice for sin. The conscience demands that forgiveness should be consistent with righteousness. It was necessary, therefore, if Jesus was to bring us forgiveness, that He should be prepared to make reparation and atonement for sin. He must shed His blood, that He may cleanse His people from their sins: He must be willing to be their scapegoat; He must offer Himself without spot to God, that He may cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.

It behoved Him, that He might reign forevermore. It is a fundamental principle in God's universe, that suffering, humbly and resignedly borne, leads to royalty and reigning. He who can stoop most profoundly can rise to reign most gloriously. As is the descent, so is the ascent. In proportion to the submission to take the form of a servant is the exaltation to the right hand of power.

A certain Jew named Aquila, With his wife Priscilla - Acts 18:2

It is a striking spectacle to see Paul, on his entrance to Corinth, with which his name was to be so remarkably associated, looking around, probably in the Jewish quarter, for manual employment, that he might be sure of his bread. Similarity of craft introduced him to Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who had been recently expelled from Rome by the imperial edict. At this time they were in unbelief, but were apparently converted by the words the apostle addressed to them as they sat together over their daily toil.

How eager Paul was, not only to preach the Gospel to the crowds that thronged the gay and sunny streets of Corinth, but to win individual souls for his Master's kingdom. Some are eager enough in this holy quest, when they occupy the pulpit, and are conscious of many eyes being fixed upon them; but they are careless of the individual souls cast in their way. Not so was it with the Master, who went out of His way to find one Samaritan woman, and stopped beneath the tree to call down one publican. Not so was it with

Philip, who spoke to the eunuch as eagerly as to Samaria. Not so was it with the apostle, who was as intense in his endeavors for a jailer, a Lydia, a Timothy, as for the crowds that were going to destruction.

Is not this God's secret test? If we are not careful about the ones and twos, He will not use us to the crowds. Indeed, it is the experience we obtain in dealing with individuals that equips us for multitudes. The way in which the kingdom of God comes ordinarily is, "One by one." How much might be done if each Christian workman would seek to win his neighbor!

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? - Acts 19:2

This was Paul's first question of these twelve disciples. He knew perfectly well that they could not have believed without the special grace of the Holy Spirit; but now he asked if at the moment of regeneration and conversion they received Him. Obviously, his question implied his belief that there was a special endowment of the Spirit of God for a consecrated and useful life over and above His initial work on the soul.

It is a question which is in these words addressed to every Christian reader. You have believed in Christ through the ministry of the Spirit; but did you at that or any subsequent moment receive the infilling and unction of the Pentecostal Spirit? You may not be able to point to some marked manifestation; but are you conscious of those fruits which are the invariable accompaniments of that supreme gift? If not, learn to receive, and receive now.

In how many instances might this inquiry be met by the reply which the apostle received: "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given." John the Baptist clearly foretold that Christ would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire; but in his days Pentecost was still more than three years away, and these, His disciples, had never heard that the last days foretold by God had already been inaugurated. Alas that it should be possible after these centuries for many Christian people to be in ignorance of the special glory and characteristic of this age, and be content to live without seeking for themselves all that Pentecost means! Ephesus was moved in every avenue of her corporate life, and the worship of Diana imperilled - and all because twelve men received the fullness of the Spirit.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock - Acts 20:28

There are many lessons in this verse.

(1) The Christian worker must not neglect his own soul. He must take heed to himself, as well as to the flock. Our temptation is to neglect our close walk with God in our eagerness to save others.

(2) The overseer, elder, or bishop, is not set over the flock, but is in it. Note the force of the Greek, as given in R. v.: the flock in the which they are made bishops. So to the end of life the most eminent of God's servants must remember that he is but a saved sinner, needing the blood and righteousness of Christ as much as the weakest of his flock; and he also must lie down in green pastures, and be led beside still waters.

(3) The office of the minister is given by the Holy Ghost. It is He who lays on him the burden of souls, and equips him for his work. He, too, is willing to direct and use. How awful and solemn the responsibility! Woe be to us if we exercise our ministry only for the eye and ear of our fellow-men!

(4) Notice that the Church is distinctly asserted to be God's. "Feed the Church of God." We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. His by choice, by purchase, by the drawing of the Holy Ghost. We must get a right understanding of this doctrine of the Church, that she had been taken out of the world to be God's peculiar possession and delight.

(5) The purchase money of the Church is here said to be God's own blood. It is a remarkable expression. It stands alone in the Word of God, but brings out very distinctly the thought that the entire Godhead achieved man's redemption in the offering of the Cross. We are dear to God, and must give Him the benefit of His great expenditure!

We kneeled down on the shore, and prayed - Acts 21:5

It is thus that Christians say farewell. On their knees, within sound of the breaking wavelets, men, women, and children, gathered in a weeping circle around the servant of God, who had been to so many of them the apostle of a new life. There is no attitude more befitting than this, at times when the heart-strings are strained to cracking, and it seems as though the sacrifice were too great for trembling hands to place on the altar of God.

But it is thus that Christians never say farewell. The relationship which is founded in the love of God cannot be broken. Of such friendship there is no past or future, but always a blessed present tense. What has been, is, and will be. And as severed hearts meet in prayer, though the bodies may be divided by hundreds of miles of sea and land, there is no separation. They are one in the Father's presence, eternally, indissolubly, and blessedly one.

When we are called to part from those whom we love better than ourselves, let us kneel down and pray; let us abide alike in the attitude and exercise of unceasing intercession; let us realize that space and time are mere accidents of being, and not essential; let us be sure that they who are near the King must be near to all who, in heaven or on earth, are nearest Him also. For such there is "no more sea."

It is easier, for the most part, to go on board ship, than to turn home again. There are the interest and excitement of new scenes and people to divert the traveller. But how grey is the common landscape from which the light of the dear presence is withdrawn! God alone can comfort the bereaved.

The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will - Acts 22:14

The will of God is general and particular. We may know it generally from the book of creation, the ten commandments, the beatitudes, and the conscience. But, in addition to this, God has a particular will for each of His children. The moon shines on the sea, but there is a special path of moonbeams to the spot where you stand, where you should be born, live, and die; what you should accomplish by your life; with what souls you should be brought into contact.

God comes still, as He did to Paul, with a great summons, calling His own from the midst of their fellows, and entrusting to them the sacred prerogative of knowing, seeing, and hearing. Happy are they who are prepared to arise at once, leave all, and follow. To them it will be given, as to Paul, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, so as to unfold them to others.

You have been appointed to know His will - be sure of this; and if as yet it is not clearly made known, adopt these precautions:

- (1) Carefully remove all your preconceptions and prejudices, so that your mind and heart can be a tablet for God to write on.
- (2) Set aside much time for waiting on God, in the study of His Holy Word.
- (3) Let the glory of Jesus be the supreme consideration with you.
- (4) Do not run to and fro, asking your friends and companions what they would recommend.
- (5) Wait the Lord's leisure, nor dare to Acts unless you are sure that you are in the line of His purpose.
- (6) Mark the trend of His providence, for it will certainly corroborate His inner voice.
- (7) When you have once made up your mind in faith and prayer, dare to act, and never look back. He will not let you be ashamed.

Men [and] brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day - Acts 23:1

Conscience is what one knows with oneself. That at least is an exActs translation of this Latin word. It is a man coming to himself, facing himself, looking deep into his own eyes as he stands before the mirror of God's truth. There are varieties of conscience - the weak conscience, which is ever questioning; the defiled conscience, which has a consciousness of neglected duty or unforgiven sin; the morbid conscience, which is perpetually discussing infinitesimal niceties, and splitting hairs. In contrast with these is the good conscience, of which the apostle speaks.

We have to live with our conscience, and if it is disquieted and restless, we find that it will make life almost unbearable. Like the restless sea, it frets and foams through the dark hours; and is always casting up the bitter memories and sad regrets of bygone days. As it was with King Ahab, so it is with all who have sinned against conscience, they get the vineyard of Naboth; but with it they get Elijah, standing like an incarnate conscience at the door, and taking pleasure and enjoyment from their possession.

Paul could not have made this statement unless he had been very accurate and careful in his daily walk and conversation; but he tells us that he perpetually exercised himself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man. Let us subject ourselves to a similar discipline, and often expose ourselves to the searching scrutiny of the Holy Spirit, so that we may say with the apostle, "My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost" (Acts 24:16; Rom 9:1).

It is a marvellous experience to stand before God; but how much more so to live before Him!

After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers - Acts 24:14

For want of a better term by which to set forth Christianity - whether by friend or foe is immaterial - the new principle which it represented was called the Way.

"Saul asked for letters to Damascus, that if he found any that were of the Way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2 (R. V.)). At Ephesus some were "disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude" (Acts 19:9). About that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way" (Acts 19:23).. "Felix had more exActs knowledge concerning the Way" (Acts 24:22). "I persecuted this Way unto the death" (Acts 22:4).

It is a beautiful and significant phrase. Christ is Himself the Way. He has opened the way to God. Through the heavens He passed in His ascension, leaving behind Him at every step a way by which we may travel till every one of us appears in Zion before God. In Christ we have found the way to the Father, and have learned a rule of life. The word Methodist is closely akin to this. The followers of Wesley have been obeying on a new method which their illustrious founder opened.

"Men of the Way"; such is the designation by which Christians should be known. They are pilgrims and strangers, wayfarers, having no abiding city, but always passing on. We may say of them as the psalmist did of the pilgrim hosts that went up yearly to worship at the feast, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways to Zion" (Psa 84:5, R.V.). And is not this the Way that Isaiah spoke of when he said, "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness" (Isa 35:8-10)?

One Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive - Acts 25:19

Festus talked lightly enough about Jesus. It was only a question in his mind of some Jewish superstition hardly worth debating. What did it matter to him or his imperial master whether Jesus were alive or dead? And was it not a fact that He was dead, crucified under Pontius Pilate? How little Festus realized the importance of that death, not to the Jews alone, but to himself! How little he understood that his own continued life was due to that death of which he spoke so lightly! Generations of luxury and years of self-indulgence had blunted his perception: as for all religious questions - they were mere superstition! And with respect to religious enthusiasm, as it appeared in Paul, he could find in his own history nothing that could account for or explain it.

Contrast with this sated worldling - a flatterer, an office-seeker, prepared to sell his soul for gold, the noble apostle whose character stands out in unsullied light. Though Christ had died, according to the Scriptures, he knew that He had risen, and was alive forevermore. His faith did not go back to the cross, but rose perpetually to the throne. He who was dead, was living forevermore; sharing His servant's sorrows, and supplying hourly grace for his every need.

He affirmed that He was alive. On the abundant testimony of those who had spoken with Him after His resurrection; on the strength of his own vision when Jesus had laid an arrest on him hard by Damascus; because of the mighty works that emanated from his hand; because of the daily fellowship which brought him into the presence of his Lord, in spite of clanking chain and iron bar - he affirmed that Jesus was alive.

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision - Acts 26:19

To us, also, the heavenly visions come. On our summer holidays, rising between us and some soaring Alp, or meeting us in our walk beside the gently-breaking sea; on beds of pain and in chambers of watching; visions of the risen Lord; visions of His infinite grief and pain which we have caused; visions of the possibilities of our life as a minister and witness of the things which we have seen; visions of results far down the vista wherein dark souls should become light, slaves emancipated, the defiled saintly. Ah, visions of God! ye leave an indelible impression that moulds and ennobles all after-years! Pitiably the soul to which visions of a holier, sweeter life never come, or, if they come, are never seen.

The one important matter is our treatment of them. We may indolently refuse to follow the beckoning hand and obey the voice that calls. We may return to our evil courses and follow the devices and desires of our own hearts. We may cling to the prison cell, instead of following the angel that strikes us on our side, and

bids us go forth into freedom. And if so, like Balaam, we shall become spiritually blind, and fail to see visions that the dumb creatures recognize, and that would fain arrest us in our perilous career.

On the other hand, if we will obey the vision, we shall not only retain the impression, and feel! its prolonged and enthralling power, but shall receive still further manifestations of the will of God. "A witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen Me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee." To those who love and obey Him, He is ever drawing near with fresh and deeper thoughts of the Father.

There stood by me this night an angel of god, saying, fear not, Paul! - Acts 27:23,24

Yes, the angels of God can find their way through the murkiest air, and alight on the most weather-beaten vessel that ever ploughed its difficult way through the stormy seas. Wheresoever thou art, O child of God, God's angels have their eyes fixed lovingly on thee; and in a moment, if it were God's will to give thee eyes, thou wouldest behold them.

"How oft do they their silver bowers leave,

To come to succor us that succor want!

How oft do they with golden pinions cleave

The flitting skyes, like flying pursuivant,

Against fowle feandes to ayd us militant!

They for us fight, they watch and dewly ward,

And their bright squadrons round about us plant!

And all for love, and nothing for reward:

Oh, why should Heavenly God to men have such regard?"

But if, like Paul, we would have the angel ministry, with their assurances against fear, like him we must be able to comply with two conditions - of being owned and being loyal.

Whose I am. - We are His by creation, by purchase, by consecration. That sentiment of being owned, which in the case of slaves is inimical to the highest development, is the elementary condition of our truest growth and well-being. We belong to One who is infinitely worthy. We cannot do as we would with ourselves. We may not take our own course.

Whom I serve. - The word rendered serve is the deepest and most expressive term that Paul could employ of the prostration of the soul at the feet of God. It is employed of the glorified, who serve Him day and night in His temple, and of whom it is said that His servants shall do Him service. The heavenly life begins here; and following its course, angels minister to us, and the stars in their courses fight for us.

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house - Acts 28:30

Thus, abruptly, does this fifth Gospel close. It has been well said that a close so abrupt suggests a continuance and a sequel. The curtain of silence falls when Paul's life is not brought to a close, and his work at Rome is still in process; and does not this indicate the design of the Holy Spirit that we should

believe that the book of the Acts of the Apostles is never complete, but is really conterminous with the present age? Thus, every generation of every life adds its own gold link to the chain, which reaches from the upper chamber in the earthly Jerusalem to the bridal chamber of the New Jerusalem, uniting in one glorious succession all in whom Jesus continues by the Spirit to speak and work.

When the late Bishop of Ripon read of the labors and sufferings of John Williams in the South Seas, he laid down the narrative, exclaiming, "This is the twenty-ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles." May we not rather say the five hundredth or five thousandth? Between the stories of Paul and of John Williams, you must insert thousands which have been recorded of God's remembrancing angels alone, as well as those which are filling our shelves with missionary romance and biography, more interesting than novels, more wonderful than dreams.

"The book is left incomplete, as it always will be while one believer is left to teach and preach those things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in His own flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church." And the question arises, Have you wrought or suffered for Jesus in such wise as to add some verses to those chapters, which are now being written by angel scribes?

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