

Cd Gv510 Unser Missionarischer Auftrag Eng - Germ 1.5.1986

by George Verwer

George Verwer emphasizes the necessity of a personal relationship with God and the reality of His presence in our lives through the example of Elijah.

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:37-39, 1 Kings 19:4, Acts 2:3, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Knowing God", "World Missions"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to share despite not speaking the audience's language. The main topic of the sermon is knowing God, which is essential for world missions and evangelism. The speaker recommends two books on the subject: 'Knowing God' by James Packer and a recently published book on the attributes of God by A.W. Tozer. The speaker shares personal experiences of encountering God's presence and witnessing answered prayers, which strengthened their faith. The sermon also touches on the story of Elijah, highlighting how even great men of God can experience discouragement and depression, but God provides comfort and sustenance. The sermon concludes with a story of a ship called Lagos, which has spread the word of God to millions of people but recently faced a dangerous fire incident that miraculously did not result in any casualties.

Transcript

It's a great privilege and challenge to be back in Germany again. I've been coming about once a year for the last 25 years. And I met some of you who were together in that great meeting in Berlin a few months ago.

Sometimes people ask me why I don't come more to Germany. It's mainly because I have felt that I should make my priority the Muslim world and the land of India. My wife and I have been living in India for a number of years.

When we could no longer get a visa, we lived in Nepal. Training leaders in the work in India. And we had the joy of sailing to India with the ship Logos when that ministry was first born.

So a number of years we lived on the ship around the various ports of India. Then God led us into Bangladesh and Pakistan. There's 1 billion or 1,000 million people in that subcontinent area.

God has given us now about 400 full-time workers out there. And one of my responsibilities in OM is to oversee that part of the world. I guess the other reason I don't come much is because I don't speak German.

It took all my linguistic energy to learn Spanish. Just the thought of another language, I get headaches. And then for a while, I tried to learn Russian.

I always remember the last time I was with you, 20-some years ago. It was a day just like today. Special friends came from all over Germany.

Though it was over 20 years ago, I remember well. Because the other speaker was Brother Andrew. And we met for the first time.

And have been very close associates ever since. Brother Andrew is known as God's smuggler. And Brother George known as God's bungler.

Bungler means the guy who made the big mistake. I also was smuggling Bibles into the Soviet Union in 1960. But right where they just had that nuclear reactor accident, Due to my own stupidity, I was arrested by the secret police and accused of being a spy.

I mean, isn't that ridiculous? I mean, do I look like a spy? After three days of questions, they decided I was a religious fanatic and sent me back to Austria. So I come with much sense of gratitude toward God for the privilege of sharing, even though I don't speak your beautiful language. This is why I always encourage people to read the books, because they have the language.

This morning we're thinking about the great subject of knowing God. World missions and evangelism comes out of a deep, practical knowledge of God. And we're featuring two absolutely brilliant books on the subject of knowing God.

One is called Knowing God by James Packer. The other is by my favorite author, A.W. Tozer. A book only recently published.

It's on the attributes of God. It's called, in German, you can read that for me, I read this book about 27 years ago. And the writings of this man are just so powerful.

I would really encourage you to read that book. There are two other books I would like to briefly mention. One is on being a disciple, a totally committed person for Jesus Christ.

The best book on discipleship I have ever read. Take My Life. And it's written by the man who is at the present principal of the London Bible College.

But he was the director of the China Inland Mission, or OMF, for many years. And has spoken at many of the big missions conferences, like Lausanne. I hope you will read that book.

And lastly, a book on the subject of sex. In England, in some of our churches, we don't speak about sex. 500 verses in the Bible on the subject of sex.

But God's people aren't speaking about it yet. And I thank God for this man of God who has written this bold book called Eros Defiled. Some people are very upset with this bold book.

A couple of things I don't agree with. But how are you going to agree with everything in a sex book? It is a brilliant book. And we need to read it.

I want you to turn with me now in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 18. We're thinking about knowing God. I was converted to Christ at 16 years of age.

Because an elderly lady had been praying for me for three years. I wasn't from a Christian home. I had never heard the gospel.

I had a little bit of religion, especially Sunday morning. But I had never been born again. I had never experienced a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

And our burden today isn't just to know about God. But it's to experience God. It's to know that God is real.

So you can experience Him. Early this morning, my friend and I, we went running to the top of one of your little hills here. And a deer ran in front of me as I was running, a deer went running in front of me.

We stopped on the top of the hill and we just had a time of prayer. And as it has been in most mornings of my life, we experienced the presence of God. You don't only experience Him on a mountaintop.

When I was arrested by the Soviets, and it looked like I was going on a free vacation to Siberia, we had times of prayer together. And we experienced the peace of God which passes all understanding. This summer again, I'm going back to Poland.

Some 3,000 young people will be gathered for this conference in Poland. I've been there many times. But I remember my first visit meeting a converted Jewish man who was my interpreter.

And even as we were together, I was just young. He was an older man. I knew that I was with a man that had a personal experience of God.

That man was a great influence on my life. I was converted because there was a woman who knew God. She knew how to pray.

She sent me the word of God through the post. And though I was in the midst of many worldly and wild activities, I kept reading this little gospel. And then when Billy Graham came to New York City, I went, heard the message, and I was born again in the Spirit of God.

Though I've had many failures since that day of conversion, I've experienced something of God. I've experienced God every single day ever since. And I just want to testify with all my heart, God is real.

We don't always feel that. But God is real. And as we read this passage here in 1 Kings, we see a fantastic picture of the reality of God.

We don't have time to read all of the verses. Let us look at verse 21 in 1 Kings 18. Just read the verses in German.

Elijah was there in Mount Carmel, surrounded by the enemy, surrounded by false prophets. And we find today there are many false prophets. We find today there are many people in our universities and many places who mock Christianity, and he even mocked Jesus Christ as far as being the Son of God.

The people were discouraged. The people were confused. And because they were confused and because they were discouraged, they were getting into sin, they were getting into idolatry, they were getting into compromise.

So God raised up a man. An ordinary man. His name was Elijah.

But he was a man filled with the knowledge of God. So Elijah faced those people. And he challenged them.

How long are you going to be between the two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him. And you know, many Christians today are like this. If many of us here were really honest with ourselves, which is so important in our Christian life, we might acknowledge that in fact we have one foot in the world and one foot in the church.

I've had about 14,000 letters as a result of that book, Jesus, in the practice of your labor. I never wanted to write that book. I'm not a writer.

But when two of my friends were killed in Poland in those early days of OM, I remembered that one of them had asked me to write a book. And so I let that material, it was originally on cassette tape, I let it go into print. And I dedicated that book to those two people.

And so I dedicated that book to those two people. And so I dedicated that book to those two people. Now half a million copies in 30, 40 languages have gone out all over the world, to my amazement.

In that book I speak about spiritual schizophrenia. The danger of developing a double life in which in one compartment we have our religious life and our Christian life and then there is the other compartment, the practical life. What we do with our time, what we do with our money, our relationships, all of that kind of thing.

And so we go back and forth between these two different mentalities. The book of James says a double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways. Elijah, he faced an unstable people and he called them to total commitment.

Of course he also challenged the false prophets. This is a very unusual event. Let's read verse 24.

These are very important words. It says, the God who answereth by fire. I'm reminded of that verse in the book of Hebrews.

It says, our God is a consuming fire. With that reactor still burning over by Keth, we're a little bit conscious in Europe of fire. Those of us who are involved with ships, as we are in OM, we are very conscious of fire.

Fire, when it's out of control, is dangerous. Fire, when it is within control, is one of man's most important tools. For 15 years, the ship Logos, fired by those diesel engines, has sailed around the world and given the word of God to 40 million people.

Just two weeks ago, in the engine room, a control mechanism on the generator broke. And the engine went out of control, the diesel engine, not the main engine. And it burst into fire.

One man was on duty in the engine room. Pieces of steel started shooting out of the engine. It was a miracle he was not killed.

I was just reading about this this morning, actually. He ran out of the engine room. And they got a special firefighting team who wear oxygen helmets.

And they went back into the engine room where the fire was. We've been practicing this for 15 years. But we never had the opportunity for a real fire on that ship.

And in God's mercy, they put the fire out immediately. I want to thank those of you who pray for the ship ministry. So we know a little bit about fire in Operation Mobilization.

We had a fire destroy our complete warehouse and offices in Bombay, India. Everything was destroyed. So it seems a little strange that the Bible speaks about God as a consuming fire.

You make a study of that in your Bible. Elijah challenged these men. Did you call upon your gods to bring fire down and consume the altar? And we read about the false prophets praying.

They even beat their bodies. Verse 27, they cried aloud. Nothing happened.

And then Elijah prayed to the living God. His prayer is found in verse 37. Hear me, O Lord, hear me.

Read that. And then what happened? Verse 38. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice.

Read the rest of that. And then the people responded. Verse 39.

I wonder when you last experienced God like that. It used to be said of A.W. Tozer that he would fall upon the earth and worship God, completely overwhelmed by the holiness and the power and the greatness of God. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said, Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was emblemized by those tongues of fire. Some people today claim to have those same experiences. But I've never heard, ever, anybody see tongues of fire as it was on the day of Pentecost.

The Word of God teaches that every believer, when he's born again, receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in his life. And if you are a believer, if you've experienced a new birth, the Holy Spirit, which is also the spirit of fire, spiritually speaking, is in your heart. And now what is needed is obedience, steps of faith, so that that fire may burn and influence and touch us and other people.

Have you had that kind of experience with God? If God had not met me again and again when I was a young teenager, with his fire, with his grace, I would never be here today. I had many struggles in my Christian life. When I went to university, I had many doubts.

I had many questions. I almost left the Christian faith. But as I went for days of prayer in the woods with my Bible, I experienced God.

I experienced his cleansing and his forgiveness, his grace and his love. I knew God was real. I then saw him answer prayer.

I saw close to 200 of my fellow students in that high school come and make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. When I was 19, I went to Mexico and I saw the power of God fall upon the meetings and bring men and women into true conversion to Jesus Christ. And so even when questions and doubts came, there

was strength because God was real.

That doesn't mean there will be no problems. And before we close, just a brief glimpse at chapter 19. Where we find this great man of God running out into the wilderness in verse 4 sitting down under a juniper tree and suddenly he requested for himself that he might die and said, it is enough.

Now, O Lord, take away my life for I am not better than my fathers. Often when we experience great blessings, Satan comes in with great ferocity and we become depressed. We become discouraged.

Something I have known far too much of in my own life. I have experienced far too much of this in my own life. And I was so helped by this picture of Elijah that a man of God could get so discouraged and so down we would think, well, God surely would send a great revival at that time.

What he needs is a good kick. But God didn't do that. God sent an angel and the angel gave him some sleep and then he arose, verse 5 and he ate.

What a picture! Look what it says in verse 6, just read that. And he lay down again. I call this the human factor.

And young person, no matter how much of the fire of God you have in your life, no matter how much of the power of God and the fullness of the Spirit you have in your life, and how much of the power of God or the Spirit of God you have experienced in your life, you are still a very weak human vessel. And you are going to make mistakes and you are going to sin and you are going to get discouraged and you are going to get hurt and you are going to be under a tree of discouragement. God is still alive.

God is still real. And as you trust him, he will send that help. It won't always be spiritual.

It may be physical. Because God doesn't separate the two. In one chapter we see the divine factor.

God coming down in power. We look across the page and find the human factor. And you know, it's been those two things kept in balance in my own life that's kept me running in the spiritual race these 30 years.

You read the rest of the chapter. Great earthquake comes. God's not in it.

Great wind comes. God's not in it. Great fire.

God's not in it. Later on it says that God spoke to Elijah with a still, small voice. Many times God has hit me with spiritual thunder and spiritual lightning.

Far more often as I've studied the word of God it's just been a still, small voice. Hallelujah, God is real. We thank you that you are reality.

And we thank you that you want to show yourself as reality in our life and through our life. And we ask you that we give you an answer today where we were discouraged, where we were left on the road, where we didn't feel anything of your power. We thank you that you are waiting for us to help us, to set us up, to give us a whole new direction.

Amen.

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