

(The Book of Acts) Session 03

by George Verwer

George Verwer emphasizes the necessity of fervent faith and the transformative power of repentance and community in the Christian life.

Duration: 34:34

Scripture: Acts 2:38, Galatians 2:8

Topics: "Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of generosity and unselfishness. He refers to Acts 2:45, where the early believers sold their possessions to give to world missions. The speaker challenges the audience to consider if they have ever sold something for the sake of missions. He also highlights the need for repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit, as emphasized by Peter in his sermon in Acts 2. The sermon concludes with a powerful letter from a pastor in Africa, illustrating the reality of the book of Acts in today's world.

Transcript

That word to the Laodicean Church, I know thy works. Again, chapter 3, verse 15. That thou art neither cold nor hot, I would thou were cold or hot, so because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, have need of nothing, and knowest not, you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness does not appear, and anoint thine eyes with salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

Be zealous therefore, be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man, any person hear my voice and open the door, I will come in with him and sup with him, and he with me, to him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and sat down with my father in his throne.

Again, he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Powerful. Powerful.

It's God's will that every believer is on fire for Jesus. That is the normal Christian life. We've made a tremendous mistake by creating this and overemphasizing this category called carnal Christians.

This is supposedly a guy or a gal who's got saved, but really remains more or less living in the world. Or maybe went on for a while on fire for the Lord, and then sort of fell by the wayside, or got involved in the things of the world. And so people sometimes refer to them as a carnal Christian.

I've had people even tell me, some even boasting they were carnal Christians. It seems a little weird, a little bit of a contradiction. We know it is possible to be a believer and to be away from the Lord, but I will tell you generally you're fairly miserable when you're in that state.

I've had about a hundred thousand plus people come forward in my meetings or stand up in repentance and brokenness to come back to the Lord and to make Him Lord of their life and to follow Him. These were already believers, to follow Him as Master. And it's exciting, especially to see so many young people who have wandered in the wilderness, who got into lukewarmness, come back and experience that first love.

I wanted to read something that to me expresses the reality of the Book of Acts. It's a letter that came from a pastor in Africa. Some of you may have read this.

And it's quite amazing and you need to listen to it carefully. But it rings of the kind of reality that we're going to be looking at as we take on those last few verses in Acts chapter 2. And that is tomorrow and the rest of the week we try to make our way through the Book of Acts. Listen to this letter, this statement from a young pastor in Africa.

See if it represents at least something of the ring of your own heart. I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have stepped over the line.

The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, and smooth knees, and colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarf goals. I'm no longer, no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity.

I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by his patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power. My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear.

I cannot be bought, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adverse adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, and paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

I'm a disciple of Jesus. I must go till he comes, give till I drop, preach till I, till all know, and work till he stops me, and when he comes for his own, he will have no problem recognizing me. My banner will be clear.

Does that stir your heart? It stirs my heart, and I've known the power of God every single day for 43 years, but that still stirs my heart to somehow, by God's grace, through his word, to be on the cutting edge of what the Lord wants to do. Windows into the reality of the New Testament Church, and Acts 2, starting at Pentecost, going through that great sermon that Peter was preaching where he speaks about the reality of the crucified Lord and the resurrected Lord, and calls people to repentance. There's a lot of fighting today among God's people over vocabulary.

I dare you to study the New Testament carefully and try to see that there's only one vocabulary, one way of expressing what a person is to do to experience salvation by grace. I make it clear that for me, salvation is by grace alone. Galatians 2, 8, and 9 are my favorite verses, but it's interesting how in this particular message recorded in the book of Acts, we have this particular way of expressing that truth.

Pick the story up at verse 38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus, or in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, some denominations have taken that verse as their favorite verse and tried to teach baptismal regeneration, something I'm sure most of us don't believe in.

Others have tried to push various brands of what some people call lordship theology. I believe there's a tremendous difference between someone like Alan Redpath, the great pastor of Moody Church back in the 60s, one of my closest friends now in glory, who preached the lordship of Christ. A tremendous difference between that and someone who is basing salvation on your walk with Jesus.

I remember once in a meeting in Pennsylvania, one of my favorite states, at least in my top 40 group, and there was a group at the door giving out these extreme tracts that really gave the idea that everybody except those in their group were lost. And so there are extreme elements and sometimes they use certain cliches like, if Christ isn't Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. What does that mean? I've heard people preach that.

I have never heard anyone really explain what they mean by that. And I hope that you will be able to find some time during this great vacation we're all having to read some of these books. In fact, some people tell me when they go on vacation, that's the main thing they do, they just sit somewhere in a quiet place where they can't be disturbed and they read.

How many of you like to read on your vacation? That's a fun thing, you're a reader, good. Now I know some of you probably, you know, you don't want to read Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression is Causing Cure*, you know, you're probably reading something a little lighter. If you're looking for something light, by the way, this is a brand-new book, just easy to read stories.

Each one is only about two pages and they're stories of God intervening in the affairs of his people. Isn't that wonderful when God intervenes? I'm praying, looking forward to praying with some of you tomorrow morning that God will intervene in certain situations. Another book we have on our little book table is called *Touch the World Through Prayer* by Wesley Duell.

When I first went to India, he was one of the first missionaries I ever met. Amazing man. I followed him now for about 34 years.

17 years ago, he stepped down from administration in a mission society, OMS, and he's been involved in preaching and teaching and winning people to Christ ever since. He's linked with a businessman named

Stanley Pan. Have you ever read his interesting book, *The American Plastics Company*? You know, it's deadly when a businessman or a business person gets linked up with a missionary dynamo.

I will tell you, they have extra committee meetings in hell to figure out what they're supposed to do to handle it. Praise God. Touch the world through prayer.

We can touch the world from Muskegon. We can touch the world from Maranatha. So in this particular sermon, Peter puts an emphasis on the need to repent.

He puts the emphasis on the need to be baptized, and he puts an emphasis on the need to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. But if you take that verse with many other verses of the New Testament, you still come out with a basic message that salvation is by grace alone. But when people are really dynamically saved, they want to go on for God, they want to be baptized, they need to know the reality of the Holy Spirit, and surely somewhere in the process, repentance will be there, whether it's expressed or not.

We move on from this example of so many people coming to Christ. Verse 41, look at that. They that gladly received his word were baptized.

The same day they were added unto them about 3,000 souls. Those of us who minister interdenominationally, we have to be somewhat flexible. I minister with groups.

The moment somebody's converted, they want to take him down to the river and baptize him. That does not bother me at all. I minister with other groups that after someone professes the Lord, they want to wait some time and get him grounded in scriptures and put him through some kind of a class, and then they baptize.

You know, I'm just one of these mixed-up guys that, you know, if your group wants to do it this way and the other group wants to do it that way, to me the main thing is that the person has got saved, and he's now going on for Jesus. To me, getting saved is a big thing. In some churches today, you almost get the impression that getting saved, that really isn't much.

What really counts is all the other things you're supposed to do after you're saved, some of which, of course, is just legalistic baggage. Other items may be great biblical truths, and we need to go on in God. We need to grow in God.

That's one of the reasons we're gathered here tonight. This is not an evangelistic campaign. I have a very high esteem of evangelists, and I've noticed how very few, very few of our seminary graduates, very few, even in movement like OM, are actually evangelists.

We desperately, in our work, need more evangelists. Whether they're small E evangelists or big E evangelists, whether they're Billy Graham or Franklin Graham or Will Graham, that's a grandson of Billy Graham. Met him at Liberty University.

He loves Jesus as well. Isn't it great to see the third and fourth generation going on for God? That's tougher, by the way. I believe it's tougher than the first generation, and Franklin Graham was backslidden for quite a few years.

He, by the way, was just preaching one of the toughest places in Britain you could preach. Perth, Scotland, and thousands surrendered to Jesus Christ just a couple of weeks ago. So praise God for those

that feel called out into evangelism.

We have an evangelist in Great Britain. I've been listening to a lot of his tapes lately. He's the most humorous evangelist I've ever heard.

He's off the charts. I know it'd be very offensive to probably some of you here today. His name is J. John.

He was saved in an unusual, bizarre way. He's from the Middle East, and he says things a bit like Tony Capallo, a bit off the charts, and then sort of thinks about it later on. But people are getting saved.

Do you know what my Bible says? I don't know what translation you read, but my Bible says this treasure is in earthen vessels, and people, after they're saved, they're still earthen vessels, and they make mistakes, and sometimes they say stupid things. A lot of people I meet in Britain are very shy. You know, they never say anything stupid.

You know why? They never say anything, and if you're gonna do anything for God, if you're gonna evangelize anybody, if your church is ever gonna really get on the cutting edge and see people come to Christ, and we have no excuse for our church is not winning people to Christ in America. No excuse whatsoever. This is one of the easiest nations in the world to win people to Jesus Christ.

Hundreds of thousands of people are coming to Christ. Now I know some little grace killing pipsqueak will put his head up and say, well, I don't believe these are real conversions. Well, I fellowship among these people, and we've had a few thousand of them on Operation Mobilization, and I believe they are real conversions.

I was in a little place called Calvary Chapel in Fort Lauderdale. Now I know some of the old-timers in America who love to criticize everything and anything feel that Chuck Smith wasn't really quite on target, and the Calvary Chapel movement born out of the Jesus movement, which really wasn't quite fundamentalist enough, really didn't know the Bible that well. This kind of thing we need to all be very careful of, but I will tell you the Calvary Chapel movement, with six, seven hundred churches, has brought hundreds of thousands to Jesus Christ.

And their little church in Fort Lauderdale started with a couple of hundred about ten years ago, and now is ten thousand strong. Now when some people hear that, because their own church is in such a horrible state, they immediately have to say something negative. Probably not the true gospel, or the full gospel, or the full balanced gospel.

Probably a compromising pastor. He's probably picking his nose in the dark, or some other evil practice. I also have a lot of skepticism.

A.W. Tozer said we need to develop reverent skepticism. I worked on that for years. A lot of mine became irreverent, and skepticism is a hard thing to control.

But brothers and sisters, I think we make a mistake if we don't think God is working in the United States. Just because he's not working in your little church, doesn't mean he's not working in our country, and in our world. And I want to be very grace awakened, and very patient with churches where not much is happening right at the moment.

There's a lot to be learned during that period in which maybe there's difficulties, or division, or crisis. God isn't dead because your church is in trouble. In fact, there are lessons you can only learn when your church is going through a crisis.

We don't want that, but we don't want suffering at all, do we? How many of you know your big thing? You've come to Maranatha because you heard that Maranatha was big on suffering. You know, raise your hand. And yet, it's often through suffering we learn so much.

So 3,000 people, after this sermon by Peter, 3,000 people came to the Lord, and they were baptized, and then immediately we go into this picture, this window of how they lived. Now, I personally, and there's no problem disagreeing with me, do not believe that this scripture is to give us the exact way every one of us, since Pentecost, now must function. Some people tried that, and maybe they ended up many times in great difficulty.

But let's look and see what the scriptures say. Pick it up at verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

Let's read this modern translation. They spent their time learning the Apostles teaching. That's pretty good.

They continued to share, to break bread, and to pray together. When I first went to India around 1964, I met an amazing man named Bhakt Singh. Have you ever heard of that man? Bhakt Singh is moving toward 100 years of age.

He's still alive, but he has no proper function. His body is not functioning at all. He just sits behind a glass cage.

They keep him alive. It's a bit, it's a I remember seeing him 10 years ago. He was already so ill.

But somehow in God's providence, it's a mystery when people live so long and they have no, no quality of life. But his followers, and he helped plant hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of churches, and had hundreds of thousands of people came to Christ through his ministry. Probably the greatest apostle, if you like that word, evangelist, if you prefer that word, church planter, if you prefer that word, that India has ever known.

Even many, many great missiologists have paid tribute to Bhakt Singh. His movement, since his moving out of the leadership, has had difficulties. Some of the churches have split, but many of them are going on.

I had the privilege of ministering together with him during the heyday of that movement. And he and I became very, very close. And there would be gatherings of three or four thousand there in Madras or in Hyderabad.

And they were desperately wanting to practice New Testament Christianity. Bhakt Singh was an evangelist, but he saw many of the people he evangelized drift away. He became very concerned about that.

And so he started following up and he started church planting. And Bhakt Singh said, when I heard him preach on this text, I don't remember it very well, it was a long time ago, that verse 42 has the four pillars of a New Testament church. First of all, biblical doctrine.

Doctrine is important. It seems that so easily we get extremes. We have people where, the way they talk, the way they think, doctrine is everything.

Whether you have reality, whether you're winning people to Christ, evangelizing the unreached, expressing the reality of the fruit of the Spirit in your life, well that's really not so important. They sort of acknowledge that. The main thing is that you can sign their doctrinal statements.

Then you get the pendulum swinging way over, and that's very popular in America today. Doctrine, you know, that's not important at all. It's just Jesus.

And some don't even say that. I believe we see in the Bible a balance of truth in this regard. And I believe the Apostles' teaching, the Apostles' doctrine, being grounded in God's Word is important.

And that is a picture we have here. Then it says fellowship, the third principle. There's this emphasis on fellowship.

I'm sure Buck Sane would emphasize at this point church life. What happens when you're in a city with 1,000 churches? Do you only fellowship with your own church? Do you actually believe, any of you who are more denominationally minded, that the Bible teaches that you should only fellowship with your own little group in a planet where there are 27,000 denominations, a high percentage of which claim that they are the New Testament Church? You're trying to tell me that you're only to fellowship with one little group, and then you're going to tell me that you also have a brain? Hey, I find a problem with it. Forgive me, forgive me.

There is one body, there is one baptism, there is one Lord of all, and may every church and every denomination bow before the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge our folly. And when we do, I believe there will be a renewal and a revival that we will not be able to contain, at least in our own heart. Fellowship is important, and there's nothing wrong with making your own local church a priority.

We have to have priorities, and there's nothing wrong with that. Because to build a solid local fellowship that can reach people and serve people and love people, you have to put quite a lot of emphasis into that. But you can reach out to other believers in your community, leaders in communities who believe the Bible and love Christ, should be praying together.

I was in a town in Wyoming preaching a couple of years ago, and as I talked to the pastor, he made it clear that the pastors in that town never get together. They never. There is no contact, hardly at all, in that town among Christian leaders.

Just blows my mind. Let me tell you, in England, often our churches and our towns are light years ahead of many places, not everywhere, over here. Because we know what God has been doing through the prayer summit movement, we know what God has been doing through other fellowships of leaders and pastors, and I believe it's possible for pastors to fellowship together, leaders to pray together, without losing your distinctives, without losing that which is very important to you in terms of your own local fellowship and the church that you're attempting to plant and your viewpoint on certain scriptures.

And then the fourth pillar, the breaking of bread. Buck Singh was one of those persons that believed you should break bread each Sunday. They also had four-hour Sunday morning services, not this little one-hour fast lane services with a three-and-a-half-minute breaking of bread packed on the end as people are rushing out the door to grab their coat.

But breaking of bread speaks of remembering the Lord Jesus and all that he does. Breaking of bread, remember those men along the road to Emmaus? Only when they broke bread did they realize the man who was with them was the Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks of worship.

Tozer said more worship is the missing jewel of the evangelical church, and we need that reality in our churches. You know why there's so many new churches today that have a strong emphasis on worship and praise and worship with all kinds of new songs? And I know some of you probably wouldn't like those kind of churches. Do you know one of the reasons that has happened? That is the fastest growing part of the body of Christ in the United States.

Not one denomination. I'm not talking about that. Many, many different.

It's because people got tired of boring services. And the young people did not like our boring music. And boy did we react.

We reacted more about that in America than we ever did that 150,000 souls a day go to hell. That's no problem. Remember that story of Tony Campalo when he was with this real sleepy Presbyterian? Have you ever been among the Presbyterians? They lead the world in being able to sleep in church.

Praise God, there are some beautiful exceptions. And Tony Campalo was in this Presbyterian church. He was talking about people starving.

Nobody said anything. What's the difference? People are starving as long as I have my lunch. He was talking about people going to hell.

He was talking about misery in the world. Nobody was moving. And so he swore at them.

He said S-H-I-T. He didn't spell it. He said it.

Whoa, did the Presbyterians come alive at that particular moment. That's all they could talk about. That this preacher swore.

By the way, that word is not in the New Testament and I don't know where exactly to categorize it. You find a lot of it as a farmer. But somehow Tony Campalo got in such difficulty.

Oh, and I think he's actually retired from doing that. I got in difficulty once even just telling the story. And I hope I don't get in too much difficulty tonight because I'm not in the mood.

The Apostles Doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and what's the last one? Prayer, which we've spoken about this morning. There's not more time to speak about it tonight. And then we go into verse 43.

And fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles. Again, that has become a major controversy in the body of Christ. I don't know how aware you are of the phenomenal emphasis on this throughout the world, not just by one group or denomination, but by many.

It's interesting that this particular verse says that these wonders, these signs, were done by the Apostles. It wasn't just little Johnny New Convert, you know, who jumped up on his pew and performed a miracle. I've been wrestling with a whole subject of healing all of my life.

I've read so much. I've gone through so much agony as soul. But I believe it's impossible to read the Bible and the New Testament and not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ still heals people.

It's also not possible for me to believe that that is the main ministry of the Lord Jesus. I can't see that that is his main ministry as we look out across the world today. And I don't believe we can talk about healing without talking about the reality of what seems to be unanswered prayer.

And one of the greatest books, I think it's in the Skinner Room, that you could possibly pick up during this week is Ronald Dunn's book, *When Heaven is Silent*, or Philip Yancey's book, *Disappointment with God*. Because no matter how much we believe in answers to prayer and God healing and God doing wonderful things, we have to acknowledge that so often, humanly speaking, God seems to be silent. We talk of the one who was wonderfully healed of cancer, but what about the 15 who died of cancer? How do we handle that? I have friends right now who are dying of cancer, and I believe that at the end of the day, after studying the scripture and reading the books, we have to worship God in the midst of mystery.

There are things that we will never fully understand. But there in the New Testament, miracles were taking place. The Holy Spirit was working in an unusual way.

Though I've tried very hard, especially as a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, to somehow believe all these things were finished once we had the full New Testament, my mind, my intellect, my integrity has made that impossible. Forgive me. And I have no problem respecting people who disagree with me.

That's why I pushed this swindle book in my favorite chapter, agreeing to disagree. If that's what also kept my marriage together, I don't see why it shouldn't keep a few of us also in fellowship over at least the next seven days, because we'd hardly want any big bust-ups here at Maranatha. And fear came upon every soul.

Many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles, and some people, especially people in the charismatic movement, they're really keen on verse 43, but they abandon the ship when you get to verse 44, especially the prosperity guys out of Tulsa. What are you gonna do with verse 44? Today we have the more cafeteria approach to Bible study. Take the verses you like to bless you up, and leave the verses that seem to be a little bit of a pain.

And all that believe were together and had all things common. It's amazing when you have favorite verses and you get into commentaries, how all your favorite verses can be explained away. At the end of the day, there's no hard verses left.

That's why sometimes I love to just read the scriptures, and just leave the commentary. Just read the scripture and just see what God can say. I don't believe this passage was trying to set up communism.

I don't believe that this is the only way that Christians can function. That would be ridiculous in society even back then, but in the light of their situation, it was expedient to do what they did, and they did it. And there may be a time when in your life and my life, it will be expedient to give more than we're giving now, or to live more carefully than we're living now, and to share a little bit more than we're sharing now.

I'm convinced the challenge of this passage is a challenge to be generous. It's a challenge to be unselfish. It's a challenge to be big-hearted.

Verse 45 gets really unpleasant. They sold their possessions. How many of you have ever sold one single possession in order to give money for world missions? Raise your hand.

Nobody's gonna see your hand. Just give me an idea. You've sold at least something.

You know, an old shoe that you didn't want, or something for world missions. Raise your hand. You've done it once.

You know, you abandoned it. It frightened you, but you did it once. We have a couple of hands.

Not really the big thing. If we have a garage sale, we're a land of garage sales. How many of you have ever had a garage sale, right? Or yard sale.

Yard sale. Whoa, we've got a lot of hands. Well, what'd you do with that money? Well, you know, you had to buy some other things, right? They sold their possessions.

We find the same thing later in chapter 3 or 4. They parted them to all men as every man have need. I personally believe that the challenge that John DeVries is bringing to us to reach India for Christ and give people the gospel, some of them for the first time, is more important than this particular situation in the book of Acts. This is also important, but I believe that's more important.

Men continuing daily with one accord in the temple. Breaking of bread. Wow, they were putting into practice these things.

From house to house. So they did have houses. You see, they didn't all sell their houses, so relax.

Some of you are looking very tense tonight. To eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart. Praising God and having favor with all the people.

And what did the Lord do? Added to the church daily such as should be saved. Isn't that beautiful? And that's still happening all over the world. In fact, I know there may be a few of you that you don't like positive things.

You like negative things. You like to hear how bad the nation is, how bad the church is. It's the end days and we're all, you know, we'd better go get a machine gun, stay at home, and certainly don't pay any taxes.

By the way, there are a few hundred thousand Americans who believe in that. When I tried to warn people about the militia movement in America 20 years ago, people laughed at me. Nobody's laughing about the militia movement in America anymore.

Through the internet alone, they double their numbers. And many of them claim to be Christians. Brothers and sisters, doctrine is important.

Prayer is important. Fellowship is important. Living with a big heart generously is important.

Praising God is important. Being of one heart and one mind is important. And when we begin to live this way, when we begin to pray this way, the Lord will add to the church such as should be saved.

That's exciting for me. Let's pray. Our God and Father, we thank you for this opportunity to go into this great book, your Holy Word, and see this picture of the early church with all of their humanness, all of their

ragamuffin-ness, blazing away, and people being saved, and your church being born and multiplied.

And we must pray with all integrity, O God, O God, do it again in our town, in our church, in our heart. For we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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