

(The Book of Acts) Session 09

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the call to mission, highlighting the need for believers to trust in God's sovereignty and share the gospel through various means.

Scripture: Matthew 9:38, Acts 2:2, Acts 13:3, Acts 13:5, Romans 10:15

Topics: "Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sending missionaries to spread the word of God. He encourages every church, regardless of size, to send at least one missionary or missionary couple. The speaker highlights the difficulty of finding senders rather than goers and expresses gratitude for the generous response to a recent fundraising effort for world missions. The sermon also emphasizes the significance of prayer and worship in the missionary work, and the power of these practices in hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. The speaker shares powerful testimonies of individuals whose lives were transformed through encounters with the Gospel.

Transcript

Just there in chapter 12, gearing up for some important thoughts from chapter 13. Chapter 12, again, we find Peter arrested. We find this tremendous challenge there in verse 5. Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him.

Right across the world today, millions, hundreds of millions are in the prison house of sin and only prayer, it's a mystery, but only prayer is going to set them free. It's interesting that while he was in prison, the church was praying strenuously. I wanted to see what that said in this paraphrase called the message, and it talks about Peter being in prison, but the church praying.

All the time that Peter was under heavy guard in the jailhouse, the church prayed for him most strenuously. I remember reading a great book by a Norwegian theologian named Halesby, and one of the chapters in this book on prayer was prayer is work. No wonder we don't find so many gathering at the prayer meeting.

I felt that was so precious tonight when we had those little prayer groups. That is the main way that we pray all over the world in Operation Mobilization. We sometimes pray together, but when we have two or three hours of prayer, we break up in small groups.

When we have a meeting like we have a big conference coming up in the Netherlands, a thousand people will be there. We break up into groups, and we find a lot of people who are shy to pray in a big meeting. Maybe they don't feel they're loud enough, or they're just daunting for them.

They will pray in the small groups, and I surely hope your own church has that concept. It's now over 30 years old. I was one of the persons to birth that small group praying as a student at Moody back in 1959, and yet still some people think that that's a new concept.

So that was precious tonight, especially in the light of this passage that we're preaching from. In answer to prayer, Peter was set free, and we read in verse 12, when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. If any of you see any kind of breakthrough in terms of a prayer meeting in your church, in your home, wherever, I would love to hear about it.

I've also written a leaflet called Whatever Happened to the Prayer Meeting, initially published in Moody Monthly many, many years ago, and two or three follow-up leaflets, and I'd be happy to send those to you. Thanks for the little index cards you've been passing back to me. I was praying especially over this little card and some of the other cards this afternoon, and I will continue to do that, and if you didn't get in on that feedback this morning, any piece of paper, your name and address if you want, and a couple of prayer requests, I would love to be able to specifically pray for you.

So Peter goes to the house where many are gathered together praying. It is not just personal prayer which is biblical. The prayer meeting is biblical.

It's a powerful testimony. A lot of things happen because of that prayer meeting. Some heads actually roll.

Verse 19, when Herod, who was by the way leading this persecution, sought for him and found him naughty, examined the keepers, commanded that they should be put to death, and went down from Judea to Caesarea, and there abode. Sometimes when we do God's will, there are phenomenal consequences for the enemy. We may not particularly want that.

No, we need to be willing for that kind of reality. In fact, I find it's difficult to do anything great for the kingdom of God and not have some negative repercussions. And then the enemy, or someone opposed to the gospel, or maybe opposed to you and your vision, will try to use that situation to oppose you or to bring confusion.

This situation led Herod to blaspheme, and immediately, verse 23, after the blasphemy of Herod, immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not the glory. He was eaten of worms, and he died. The word of God grew and multiplied, and Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

So they returned to Antioch. We then see a tremendous shift. Up to now, all of the outreach and all the witness has been to Judea and to Samaria.

And as we get into chapter 13, there is the tremendous shift. Remember Acts 1a, he shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. Up to now, as fascinating and challenging and as exciting as it's been, that outreach has been to the Samaritans, to the Judeans.

Now from this Antioch church, which was planted because of the dispersion and the persecution, we have this fascinating bit of great, motivating history. Now to be honest, at this point I'm getting to a chapter that I speak from all the time. When I am invited to Sweden, where I've just come from, and I get one message, they may ask me in advance, what are you going to speak on? I say I'm speaking on Acts 13.

I've spoken over 100 times on Acts 13. Partly because this is tied with a vision that God gave me when I was on an airplane in South America a couple years ago, as part of a network tied into a movement called the 82,000 Movement, which especially emphasizes the 1040 window, 10 degrees north of the equator to 40 degrees north of the equator, right through the Middle East, right through places like India, on out to China, through Burma, Tibet, all those places. The 82,000 Movement, in their research, networking with thousands of churches and organizations across the world, have pointed out that over 80% over 80% of the more unreached people in the world are in the 1040 window.

In God's providence, I became the chairperson of the Mission Mobilization Network. I'm still with that responsibility, nothing to do with OM, but with the body of Christ in general. I also ended up as the co-director of a conference in South Africa of missionary executives.

Over 500 missionary CEOs came together. It was one of the most scary experiences of my life to speak to all these people, together with 4,000 others who were in other different tracks, nine different sections of this conference, all went on at the same time there in Pretoria two summers ago, right about this time of the year. It was exciting, but I was on that airplane in Argentina a couple of years ago, when I was wrestling for the need for new missionaries, and we had been praying about the thought of having at least 200,000 new workers, that's the whole church to the whole world, no one organization.

It all seemed so impossible, it all seemed ridiculous, when on that airplane, God spoke to my heart and said, it's possible, it's possible, it's doable. And God said, I want you to just start writing out names of countries that can possibly send out missionaries, and total up all of these countries, and every other part of the world, and I took some paper out, and I just began to write. I'm not saying God was literally speaking to me, but thoughts were coming, some of them were there from other things, some of them were there because God was putting them on my heart, the human factors mixed into this, so I don't claim these numbers are inspired.

They eventually got on video, got on audio cassette, got into English, got into Spanish, and all over the world, the challenge of Acts 13 has gone out to hundreds of thousands of people, who are now praying for 200,000 new workers, and it's happening. That's not happening enough. We didn't put a time limit on this, because it takes time to train up workers.

We estimate 40 or 50,000 or more are in the pipeline, just from the last couple of years, trying to get to the mission field, Americans and Canadians, Brazilians and Koreans. Some would estimate it's closer to a hundred thousand. Many, many who volunteer go to the mission field, never get past first base, because of the complexities, because of the minefields.

This great vision to see 200,000 workers is a vision based on Acts 13. It's a vision that puts the ownership of world missions in the hands of the local church, and we're asking for 100,000 churches. That's not really that many in a world where there are a couple million churches.

There are a couple million evangelical churches in the world today. The Dawn movement, that multiplies churches so fastly, so quickly, they are hoping for seven million churches by the end of the year 2000. I

don't know what the score is, but it's incredible what God is doing in many parts of the world.

The idea is that every church, even if it's a small church, could send at least one missionary or one missionary couple. On this leaflet, and there'll be copies of it on the table, there's more on the table tomorrow morning, there may be a time of question and answers coming up when you can ask more about these things, there's a leaflet called Acts 13, and we'd love you to pick that up and catch something of the heartbeat of this vision, which is also tied into Matthew chapter 9, which we looked at a couple of days ago. Pray the Lord of the harvest that he'll send forth workers into the harvest.

Tonight I'd like to share seven words. This is similar to what I do all over the world. Seven words from this chapter, seven words that are tied into this vision, and just to give you a little extra motivation, I do this all over the world all the time, so why should I miss out tonight? Simply because I have the privilege of being here all week.

If one year from now you send me those seven words on an email or snail mail, I send you seven dynamic books free of charge. Almost every day now my secretaries receive those requests and the books go out from our warehouse in Waynesboro or Great Britain or India around the globe, and I think you've got a taste during these days of how much we love the ministry of the printed page. God uses the printed page.

I actually wrote a book on how God uses literature. There's a few copies still left. It has been the slowest distributing book on the book table, even though it's combined with another book on effective evangelism.

There are many stories in that book, like a man who sat down to go to the toilet and someone had left a tract in the toilet, and he got saved before he even flushed the toilet and got out of there. Another man in Argentina was going to commit suicide, and someone had been given a gospel of John in Spanish, of course, didn't want it, threw it, and it landed in a tree. The man who was going to commit suicide saw this gospel, he didn't know it was a gospel, a book and a tree.

Curiosity got the best of him. He took it out of the tree, sat down on the bench. Instead of committing suicide, he read this gospel and gave his life to Jesus Christ.

A man in South or North Carolina was going door-to-door with tracts. He knocked on the door, nobody came, rang the bell, finally somebody came. The man was a bit disgruntled, took the tract and closed the door.

The man, weeks later, went to follow up. The man with the big smile said, come in, I've got a story to tell you. He took the tract-distributing evangelist up to his attic, and he said, when you rang my doorbell weeks ago, I was about to stand on this box, there was a noose, and put my head in this noose and hang myself.

And as I heard the doorbell again, curiosity got me, I went to the door, you gave me this tract. And he showed him the tract, and he said, instead of hanging myself, I knelt by this box and surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. Something has happened to me, maybe you could tell me more about it.

The power of the printed page. No wonder our movement in the early days became extreme in using almost all of our money for the printed page, and we're almost unwilling to spend any money on anything else. This could have blown my marriage apart, because I wouldn't give my wife any money.

And before we were married, I spent no money all during the time of dating. Everything was a freebie, because I told her the money is for world missions. And I did actually everything I could to scare her away.

The first date, because I was a bit scared of marrying the wrong woman. So on the first date, it wasn't really a date, it was sort of a spiritual encounter. I said, look, probably nothing's gonna happen between you and me, but you know, we don't want to waste a lot of time.

I'm gonna be a missionary, and if you marry me, you'll probably end up being eaten by cannibals in New Guinea. I told her that on the first date. The second thing I did was give her a bag of dirty laundry.

I said, look, would you wash this as unto the Lord? The third thing was a study in the book of Acts. And the fourth thing is, I made her go door-to-door to Spanish speaking people when she didn't know any Spanish, and I was selling books door-to-door to Spanish speaking people. Well, we ended up getting engaged, and we had a lot of different struggles.

Went to Mexico together, that was a disaster. She had three psychosomatic illnesses. I thought I'll never have enough love for this chick, and I was gonna break the engagement, and we talked about that.

That was really difficult, and in the quiet of her own room, she realized something of the all-sufficiency of Jesus, because before that, it was Jesus plus George, Jesus plus marriage, Jesus plus this, plus that. But through what God was doing in her heart, through His Word, and the great Chicago Keswick Convention, she saw Jesus was all-sufficient. She fell asleep at night and woke up completely healed of all three of those illnesses.

And I tell you, I've had the privilege of 39 years being married to a soldier of Jesus Christ, who often is tired, who often has pain. She's gone through many number of major surgeries. She had hepatitis in India, giving birth to three children, lots of other things.

But we've seen an all-sufficient Savior. Some of you may have read the story in some book about how even after we were married, I didn't want to spend any money, and so I was selling the wedding gifts. I even sold a wedding cake.

Fortunately, there were two cakes. Somehow we ended up with one of these cakes, and our first night, I'm married in Milwaukee, first night was in Wheaton. I went to a gas station in Wheaton.

I said, hey, you know, would you like this cake? I'll give it to you for a tank of gas. The guy blew his mind. He'd never had anybody try that before.

He said, hey man, I don't want your cake. Here's some gas. It's a true story.

The next morning, we went through the night, didn't spend any money on a motel. Miracle we didn't freeze to death. I did backslide and spent one dollar for hot chocolate and prayed the Lord would give that back in two days.

And this window, it was January. I didn't want to spend any money to repair the window. There were no seats in this 1949 Dodge van.

She was piled on top of cereal that Wheaton College students had forsaken from their breakfast to sell for world missions. I mean, it was bizarre. The next morning, in Illinois somewhere, I went to another gas station with a cake.

Again, it was a believer. He said, hey, you can have free gas, oil change that works, and he left me the cake. 500 miles down the road, another gas station.

By this time, this cake was looking a bit shaky. I offered the man a cake. He was not a Christian.

He wasn't very keen on giving me anything, but he liked cake. And we got another tank of gas and got all the way to the Mexican border. This was supposedly our honeymoon by trading possessions, mainly my wife's and other things, for gasoline.

God's mercy to a very needy character. By the way, I got my dollar back because the next night we had to stay in somebody's house. Went to the phone book, called the minister, called Terker, got his address from the phone book, knocked on his door and said, hey, we're missionaries going to Mexico.

Can we have a free bed? It blew his mind. He gave us his bridal suite and a dollar in the morning to get us on our way. That covered the hot chocolate money that I had spent under pressure the night before.

I'm just telling you the truth. In fact, this will really blow your mind. Once we were sitting along Lake Michigan, the other side, and since we had food back at the Bible Institute, and I don't know where she got her food from, and I didn't think we should buy any lunch, but we couldn't get back to the Institute for lunch, so just committed to the Lord.

Missing meals, no big deal. But I could sense maybe she was a little uneasy about that. I shot up a prayer for lunch.

You ever eat prayer for lunch? I tell you, you lose weight. But a couple of people came, this is absolute truth, a couple of people came and sat right behind us. They had their lunch.

You could almost smell it. When they left, I was still praying. They threw their bag, little brown bag, into the garbage bin, and I went over there and got out that brown bag, searched through it, and there was a sandwich that had not been unwrapped, and I presented it to my fiancée.

But I got into balance shortly after the wedding. Praise God, I gave my wife one day a dollar and told her she could be free to spend that however she wanted. What this has to do with the book of Acts, I'm not sure, except that I believe with all my heart that we are still functioning under the same power and the same reality and the same Holy Spirit.

For Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forevermore. And if you think bizarre, wild things ended at the finish of the book of Acts, then you have not read much of church history. And today, even in 1999, even as we sit here, the Holy Spirit is doing great things around the world, sending out missionaries, raising up workers, birthing new churches.

Now let me give you these seven words. The first word is the word church. We've looked a lot, not enough, but a lot, at the church here in the book of Acts.

And as we get more toward the end of the book of Acts, we see the church is even more active. People were first called Christians at Antioch, we saw this morning. And we notice in verse 1 it says, the church that was at Antioch.

The church that was at Antioch. A high percentage of all of our workers, though the uninformed people would often call Operation Mobilization a parachurch agency, but in fact a high percentage of all of our long-term workers, which is somewhere 500, 700, 800 of our 2,800 are longer-term people. Dale Roton just came back to the United States, he's been out there 39 years.

That's what happens as a result of short-term. We have seen most of these people have been sent out by their own local church in the same style as Acts chapter 13. Isn't that exciting? Do you have those kind of meetings in your church? I hope so.

Bring up a missionary, even a summer missionary, two years short-term or longer-term and pray for them. The second word that jumps right out of this chapter is the word Holy Spirit. More than a word, it's the third person in the Trinity.

And we know that the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 40 times in the first 20 chapters of the book of Acts. Verse 2, as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, what? The Holy Spirit said. Now, some people, in wanting to stand against extremism or the danger of people adding to the Word of God, make very extreme statements that the Holy Spirit is no longer speaking to anybody.

This is nonsense. The Holy Spirit is not adding to the Word of God anymore, but the Holy Spirit speaks to people. How are you supposed to know as you volunteer to be a missionary which country you're supposed to go to? How do you know what mission society you're supposed to go with? The Holy Spirit directs us in practical ways.

After I was arrested by the Soviets and had this horrendous failure and came back for that day of prayer, God's Spirit spoke to me and gave me those names, Operation Mobilization. That wasn't just my idea. That was from God.

And some years later, when I was praying in a converted pub, God gave me a vision to get an ocean-going ship. Five years later, this ship was sailing with my wife and I around Africa. The Holy Spirit has spoken to me thousands of times.

It is no big deal if it's kept in balance. I know that I can easily make a mistake. And it's not the Holy Spirit, it's me drinking too much tea again.

By the way, in America, we're not too good at making tea. You know, that's a separate message that my wife generally gives. But we have to confess, we're poor missionaries.

And when we come to the United States, we bring our own teapot and our own tea bags. And about six in the morning, you can see me creeping down the stairs in the lodge with my teapot and my own tea bags, which you have to heat the pot first. You know, there's some water down there that's hot.

Not hot enough, it's hot. You heat the pot and then throw the water away. Then you put the bag in.

Then you put the hot water. Must impact. Try to make it impact the bag directly.

You just get better, you know, just a better teonic explosion. And then I take that up and serve my wife her morning cup of tea. Now again, I'm not quite sure what that has to do here with the Book of Acts.

But one thing we know, no matter how filled we are with the Holy Spirit, we're incredibly human. And we would like to see the American people learn how to make proper tea. In a restaurant, when they serve you hot water with a bag laying next to the water, that is an abomination.

Anyway, let's get back to the text. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said. Notice also down in verse 4. So they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

By the way, they were into ships a long time ago, long before we got our ships. The Holy Spirit is the chief executive officer of all missionary work. And if there's anything we've seen during these days in the Book of Acts, is that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That is God's plan for all believers. Some people it may happen in a very crisis, noisy way. Other people it may happen in a very quiet way.

But as we already quoted from Billy Graham, I don't care how you get it, just get it. The reality, the power, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit spoke and said, separate me Barnabas and Saul, two of the most important people in the New Testament as far as we can see.

Though on the other side of the coin, everybody's important. And this church is just being born, and these two men are on their way. How many of our churches in America are choosing two of the best, the most mature, the most godly people in the church, and sending them out overseas? Doesn't happen so much anymore.

The third word I leave with you is the word sent. We find that also a number of times. First of all, in verse 3, when they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them, and they what? Sent them away.

Verse 4, so they being sent forth by the Holy Spirit departed unto Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. You remember those amazing powerful words of Romans chapter 10, verse 15? How will they go? How will they preach unless they are sent? And after 43 years of mission work, I want to tell you, it's harder to find the senders than it is the goers. And I was just amazed when I discovered this morning the tremendous response that, thanks to that man who matched all the money, some \$37,000 was released for world missions here during these days.

And I'm sure some of you have made a considerable sacrifice. How will they go? How will they preach unless they are sent? Now we of course have focused on one particular nation and one particular kind of mission work this week, and that's beautiful and that's important. But I hope we will understand that we, this week, have been engaging in helping an already existing work in a huge land of India where there are already millions of believers, still not many, a land of one billion.

That we must not forget that in other parts of the world there are hardly any believers at all. Therefore we need to make it clear, especially as we study the book of Acts and passages like Matthew 9, that American missionaries are also still needed, especially in the Muslim world. In fact the Indian Christian Church has acknowledged failure to reach the Muslims of India.

130 million Muslims in India, almost no work, most of the work in India is all in South India. That's why the Friends Missionary Prayer Band that John referred to is so strategic because they're moving out. We've been involved with them for 30 years into the north of India.

If you didn't get a copy of that book, maybe you could get it tonight, *Serving as Senders*, because that will be such a help to you in your sending ministry. It isn't firstly just the amount of money you can give, though it's wonderful when you can give money. It's where your heart is.

It's a matter of having a vision. Discipleship without vision can become drudgery. One of the reasons that so many churches are locked into legalism is because they don't have a vision.

They don't know why they're doing this or not doing that, and when we have a vision, that often breaks us out of legalism because we have higher goals and we have higher aims and we live for a higher cause and we stop shooting mice and get more involved in elephant hunting for the kingdom of God. The fourth word is the word prayer. The word prayer.

Notice it in verse 3, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them. We've already mentioned that so strongly that we'll move on to the fifth word, which is the word worship. As they minister to the Lord, in other translations it says, as they worship the Lord, the Holy Spirit spoke.

A.W. Tozer said that worship was the missing jewel of the Evangelical Church. My heart is so grieved that the body of Christ is so divided over the subject of worship. How can it be that something so important, so beautiful, has brought so much division? And many of your churches know the division in America are mainly connected with the music.

I'd love to send you a phenomenal book on the subject of worship and contemporary Christian music. A balanced, well-researched book that I believe will help you understand that there's a wide range of kinds of music that can be used in worship. And I just last summer preached in Scotland in the We Free Churches where they have no music and no music instruments whatsoever and they still worship.

I'm afraid they've lost quite a few of their young people because of that. But I mention it because it just shows the range, the range of what we're dealing with. How sad it is when people get so excited about something they have no objective argument really so they just simply blurt out and say that's from the devil.

That is something I like to be very slow to say. I might say, well that's of inferior quality. I might say, you know, I don't agree with that.

I hope you've got to that chapter in Swindell's book. How to Agree to Disagree. It's a great chapter for marriage as well.

How to Agree to Disagree. And later on in the book, Oiling Your Marriage. Oiling Your Marriage by Grace.

Being confined to the Book of Acts, though I've gone on a few of my little tangents and I see my time is gone, has meant that I've not been able to get into some of my favorite subjects. So if you'd like to hear what I have to say about sex, write to me. I'll send you a book on it.

If you'd like to hear what I have to say about rearing children, write me. I'll send you a book on that. If you'd like to hear what I want to say about marriage, write to me and I'll send a book on that.

In fact, if there's any subject you'd like me to say something about, you write to me and I will send you a book on it because we've got tens of thousands of different titles and we'd love to get them out around the world. My sixth word is the word preach. We find as they went they preached.

My seventh word is the word helper. Verse 5, after it says they preach the word, they had John as their helper. Isn't that beautiful? We don't have so many Pauls and Barnabases, but we have many helpers and I believe with the way the church is today, needing computer people, secretarial people, mechanics, engineers, all kinds of people are needed in God's work today.

For every Paul and Barnabas that's roaring out to plant churches in the middle of the Muslim world, we need many helpers behind the scenes. That's true in the local church as well and I want to pay a tribute to everybody here at Maranatha. I've watched them in their different jobs.

I prayed for them as I've walked by them, cleaning the rooms and doing this and doing that and making repairs. It takes a lot of people to keep Maranatha going and I want to pay a tribute to all those at Maranatha who are exercising the ministry of helps that we can have a bonanza vacation and be here enjoying this great atmosphere and this great fellowship. Praise be to the living God.

The book of Acts goes on and on and on. Don't miss it. Don't miss it because if you do, at the judgment seat, you're going to look like a real jerk and that's bad news.

Let's pray. Father, we thank and praise you for the word of God. We thank and praise you for all the helpers around Maranatha that are keeping this place going.

From Ronald Bush and the board of directors right down to the newest person who just stumbled here looking for a way to help out. We thank you Lord for these six or seven dynamic words from Acts 13 that can impact our lives, that can impact our churches and that can enable us to reach everybody in the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grant us a mighty renewal in these things for we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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