

Interview With John Ridely

by John Ridley

John Ridley's interview reflects on his 50 years of Christian faith, military experiences, and the importance of evangelism and prayer in ministry.

Duration: 29:47

Scripture: Isaiah 64:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 3:10, 1 Corinthians 2:2, 2 Corinthians 5:21, James 4:8, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Evangelism Ministry", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker shares their personal experiences as an evangelist and the challenges they faced in their ministry. They express their doubts and feelings of inadequacy, but find comfort in the message from Dr. Alexander Smelly's book, emphasizing that it is God who brings inquiries and conversions. The speaker also talks about a powerful transformation they experienced, shifting their career ambitions from the military to evangelism, which they attribute to the power of God and the Holy Spirit. They highlight the importance of prayer, visions, and personal spiritual growth in their evangelistic ministry. The speaker concludes by stating that despite the changes in the world and the approach of preachers, they have remained steadfast in their ministry and have not deviated from their calling.

Transcript

Mr. Ridley, welcome to the microphone. How did you become a Christian? I was born again under the ministry of the Reverend William Lamb in 1915. Unexpectedly, I went there to hear him speak about the war.

And having a keen soldier background, I went to answer and to gather all I could about the war position from William Lamb. Instead of that, I was arrested by scam preaching on the second coming of Christ and led to a definite decision and acceptance of the Saviour and the confession of the same dear Redeemer. This was in the Burton Street Baptist Church or the Burton Street Tabernacle, as most people know it by.

And Mr. Lamb, of course, was a great prophetic preacher, wasn't he? Wonderful preacher, Mr. Turnham, a wonderful preacher. He held a congregation in the grip of God for well over an hour often in his preaching. And he opened to me and to many others the word of God from its prophetic angle as well as its evangelistic angle.

Now, Mr. Ridley, after your conversion to Christ of the Burton Street Baptist Church, you went to France, didn't you? Yes, within a few months, sir, I went off to France. And after some months in Egypt, rather, first

of all to Egypt, after some months in Egypt, waiting to go to Gallipoli, when they had the evacuation from Anzac, we were taken into the Arabian Desert to meet the Turks. And the Turks didn't turn up.

And then we were swept across the Mediterranean to enter into the war in France, which I saw a great deal of. Now, I notice you have a military decoration. That is simply the military cross that many others may have won if they'd just been seen at the time.

But it was graciously granted to me at the storming of the Hindenburg Line in 1918. Tell us the circumstances of that. I'm hesitant to tell of the circumstances about it because, after all, I feel so many of my comrades deserved the decoration as much as I did.

But I've been long in the battalion and have fought in every battle save one in our long history, the 53rd Battalion. And perhaps they gave it to me at the last battle because I had consideration of my surviving of so many earlier battles. But it was really by bringing in wounded from the Hindenburg Line system and going out under difficult conditions to rescue some of our men.

So I think I really got what some of the other men won for me in some way. Mr. Ridley, have you found in 50 years as a Christian of being, Mr. Ridley, have you found that being a Christian for 50 years, it has helped being a member of the Army or not? A great help to me, sir, in having the background of an Army experience both in the First and Second Wars, World Wars, because I had an idea of the rough and tumble of life in the services. Now tell us about your evangelistic work.

Have you ever had a pastorate? Only for 19 months. After my return from World War I, I was at Maroubra for about 19 months as a student pastor and then collapsed at the close of that time in a wartime reactionary breakdown from my battle wound and long years under fire. And then you took up a new kind of ministry in full-time evangelism.

Tell us how you started out on that. Well, I really went out jackarooing for a start on a Western keep and cattle station to try and recover my health. And then failing to do that, I went from pitter to post for some three years in very bad health.

And finally, after about three and a half years, I was anointed with oil and prayed over by some of the brethren. Soon after that, I had a call to go out just as a bush missionary in the back country, the Word of God and with Bibles and Christian literature and to speak more than to preach to lonely wanderers of the outback. Mr. Ridley, you've been very well known in churches of all denominations, although you are a Baptist minister.

Have you found real fellowship with people of other denominations? Generally speaking, yes. I think I can say I have found fellowship with all the denominations that I've served with and I have with most of them, sometime or other. But I expect, I must say I have had a little more fellowship with the Baptists because they are my own kith and kin in the theological sense.

But I've enjoyed the time when I've got over the fence and labored with other denominations as well as with my own people. Mr. Ridley, after 50 years as a Christian, could you answer this question? When you first became a Christian, did you find everything became easy and all your problems were solved or not? Not exactly, Mr. Turner, but I did find this, a new power had come into my life, an amazing power that changed my ambitions and ideals from the army in which I was set upon for my career and to my own amazement swung me around during the war years the desire to advocate the Savior's cause rather than

go ahead with my army career. And I think it was an inward power, I'm sure it was an inward power, the power of God and the Holy Spirit that changed me from a military career to a ministry in evangelism.

Looking back over 50 years, you can see certain people who've come to Christ. Could you tell us about some of these people? Well, sir, I could tell you of some of the cases that have been most striking. One known to some of my heroes of one of the worst criminals of the city, in a provincial city in New South Wales, who was not only a criminal but an alcoholic and a very bad character, who was apprehended by a voice that seemed to advise him that he had a better life ahead if only he would turn.

And he went and sought help from a Salvation Army officer who said there was no meeting that night but that I was holding a mission there and he came to my meeting. He was then, you might say, a catadormalian, a poor broken-down sinner. And he said he heard the gospel for the first time that night and he came to the Lord Jesus under the message, the Master has come and calleth for thee.

And that thee got him and he came out for Christ that night. And though we had grave fears how he would progress, he went on faithfully for many years and has now passed to be with the Lord a living witness in his own city right up to the end. That's one of the cases.

And there are many others that I don't think I could possibly give in this brief interview but I remember another who was a railway porter whose swearing was so great that the girls of the home where he was staying, a farm home, said that the father had decided that the porter would be told to go unless his swearing decreased and his conduct improved. Well, during our little mission in the very wild and lonely country church, he came out for Christ and was graciously saved and has become a minister of Christ in his own order and is an excellent preacher and so one of this day. Mr. Ridley, would you have any idea how many people have been won to Christ over these 50 years of ministry? None at all, sir.

I don't like to count numbers even because I believe that many that I have been privileged to welcome to Jesus Christ have been prayed in by others in the background, behind the scenes, and perhaps in the long run when our work is measured up at the judgment seat of Christ, the prayers will have more to their credit from the Lord than the preacher. I could not tell you how many but I thank God for a number in the ministry and in the mission field today and others, yes, ordinary Christians who the Lord privileged me to welcome the Lord Jesus Christ. Mr. Ridley, we've been speaking about the highlights of your ministry.

How about the bad times? Can you remember any times when you were really down low and things weren't happening and you may have thought your ministry was a failure? Indeed I can, sir. Very early in my evangelistic ministry I had two very hard meetings along the western country line, going out west. First one was in Lithgow and I had very little response.

Second one was in Millthorpe where I'd only two came out in answer to the appeal after 10 days of fighting for decisions and I began to think I was not really fitted to be an evangelist. But I received a sweet message from Dr. Alexander Smelly's book, *In the Hour of Silence*, where he said when it comes to soul winning we must recognize that the Lord is the one that gives the inquest. We can pray, we can preach, we can plead, but only God can give the inquest.

That comforted me, strengthened me, and I went on to Dubbo, and as we drove into Dubbo I said, Oh Lord, do grant me some seal of thy power and presence, and we came across a little revival there, revived my own heart as well. Mr. Ridley, over a period of 50 years the world has changed almost beyond recognition, particularly in the technologies. Have you noticed any change in spiritual life of people and

also in the change, have you noticed any changes in, I'm going to take it again, keep going.

Mr. Ridley, in the 50 years that you've been a Christian the world has changed almost beyond recognition, particularly in the technologies. Do you think people have changed in this 50 years? I rather think there has been a certain change in that attitude to the standards of the gospel. I don't think people have changed, basically I think they're still in desperate need individually of the redeeming blood of Christ and the mighty changing power of the Spirit, but I do feel there's been a hardening because the standards in the church appear to me to have fallen to some extent from the early days when I was a young convert and a young Christian.

In those days there seemed to be a more instant passion to go out and rescue others when one was saved and there was more joy in seeing real conversions than I generally notice today when people make a decision there doesn't seem to be the leaping forward into the life of love for others as in those days that was so distinctly imprinted upon my mind. Though the same need I think is still there basically people need Christ and his transforming power. And over these 50 years have you noticed any change in the approach of the preacher to the unconverted? Any new method you've discovered along the way? I'm old now sir and I haven't dared to change horses in my long ministry of evangelism and I don't dare to do it now.

I don't for a moment think my method is perfect and often I feel disappointed with the way it's put over in the appeal and the invitation whatever you like to call it, but I have found the Lord so often sealing it, often unknown to myself sealing it, that I think it's better to stick by the method that has been blessed than to chant some new method. Though I don't deny to others their right to a new approach in the matter of making an appeal or an advance to the sinner, for myself I must stand by the old landmarks that the fathers have set and which I followed in such a case as following the way my father in God William Lamb used to plead with us intensely and earnestly and beseech us to come to Christ before his advent while we had time to come. What do you think then of modern evangelists like Billy Graham? I have heard Billy Graham and I've met him personally of the highest esteem for him.

I thank God for his ministry and personally I feel that he is a prophet to the nations and we all ought to be grateful for his great ministry. I feel that he's warning as well as wooing in the wonderful way in these last days and I feel they are the last days of this dispensation of righteousness. I thank God for the great evangelists from America.

One last question Mr. Whitley, what is your view of the church union movement that's coming up now? Well I'm always or I try to be very reserved in passing judgments but you've asked me for my view many many years ago the Reverend William Lamb in his ministry where I was molded for my own work by the grace of God warned us that a day would come when Christendom would be united but on a wrong basis not united on the great fundamentals of the faith but coming together in a kind of uncertain union trying to bridge the differences but not going down deeply to get a union of the spirit and in the spirit for the great work of God. I do not feel happy myself personally in the ecumenical movement though on the other hand I'm in love and fellowship with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth though I don't favor an organic union. Finally Mr. Whitley, would you like to take say five or ten minutes and give a straight evangelistic message for your listeners? Well sir I'm not prepared for it but I'll do my best.

Go right ahead. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and there is no doubt about it that he came to save all men because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none

righteous no not one.

I remember a dear woman whom I was with in England an aristocratic woman who had her own little chapel and a number of well-to-do people would gather in that chapel when they came to stay with her but she was essentially true to the gospel and she told me on one occasion she got these people to read a passage from the prophecy of Isaiah in which they had to repeat after her these very words all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags and she said I told them now think of it all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

So in God's sight there is none righteous no not one and it is essential that we should preach the righteousness of Christ that is that the Lord God Almighty hath made him Jesus Christ who knew no sin to be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him that is that on his on the basis of his righteousness I am accepted as righteous though I know in my own heart that I am not in myself a righteous man yet the imputed righteousness of Christ is placed on my account this is very wonderful this covers all my sin with the cleansing blood of Jesus and then gives me a robe of righteousness and a garment of salvation when David Sanderman a missionary to China was dying after only a few years service he was asked what was his hope in those dying hours grandly he replied

head to foot righteousness he was covered with the righteousness of Christ and of course we have that sweet word that if any man sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world so that anyone coming to Christ and receiving him as their personal savior while they may not become perfectly righteous in their early days or even till their last days they have constantly an advocate with the father who is presenting to the father his perfect righteousness on their behalf what a wonderful gospel it is not of works but all of grace we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast I remember on one occasion

being in a train when I was a chaplain in the second war with an air force officer and we came round to the subject of personal religion and he said padre surely I am a decent good man I belong to a church I've done the best I can all my days he said now listen I'll prove to you that I am a good person because the lady that I married she changed her religion changed her denomination because of my life now isn't that enough to get me to heaven ah my friend I said not at all you've given me a great opportunity to tell you that you are boasting in righteousness and the salvation of God is intended to blast away boasting and pride and self-confidence why I said the simple gospel is we are saved by grace not of ourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast and that's

just what you're doing but Jesus Christ did it all when on the cross he said it is finished why not kneel down here tonight and receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart and cease boasting in your own works and begin to glory in him I thank God that he suddenly said padre you have won me you have caught me on the very spot when I'm weak and I realize now that I really need the savior he bent down with me and knelt down that night in the train and opened his heart to Christ and later made an open stand in one of our meetings in the north he was trusting to his own righteousness may I close by saying that I was converted under that simple and beautiful hymn Jesus and shall it ever be a mortal man ashamed of thee ashamed of thee whom angels praise whose glory shine to endless days some

of you will remember how that wonderful hymn closes ashamed of Jesus yes I may when I've no guilt to wash away no fears to quell no good to crave no tears to wipe no soul to say till then till then nor is my

boasting vain till then I boast a savior slain and oh may this my glory be that Christ is not ashamed of me and again remember that sweet and wondrous word when I survive the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died my richest gain I count but loss and poor contempt on all my pride forbid it lord that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God all the vain things that charm me most I sacrifice them to his blood were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all as it demands that may God give

us grace friends to present to him our souls our lives out all as love answers to love divine amen Mr Ridley you have been a Christian for 50 years on the 20th of June 1965 what is your earthly age I am 68 almost on the point of 69 would you like to give a word of advice to young preachers who are following in your footsteps yes I could give an advice a word of advice I I don't know that it will count but I just speak from the experience of the years I first of all thought I wanted to be a great soldier when I was converted then I wanted to be a great Christian when I set my face to the ministry then I wanted to be a great preacher and slowly because of great suffering that came to me tremendous suffering and humbling in that suffering I realized that the Lord Jesus Christ wanted a great

lover and it wasn't great preaching that counted or even great Christianity in the eyes of the world but great love for the Lord himself so that I coined from Samuel Rutherford that beautiful statement where he said to love the Lord Jesus Christ is the last end of a true believer's love and I think the making of a preacher is that by the grace of God through suffering or through some other experience he falls in love with Jesus Christ and can say with the apostle I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him the crucified that is one point that I would stress to young preachers another one I would stress it's essential that we develop in some measure an inward life of prayer I was wonderfully blessed by being brought into a circle or concert of prayer early in my

Christian life with two other valiant prayers that knew how to pray and in those prayer meetings I discovered uh what I could never have discovered at the feet of a professor or in the theological college or the bible college I discovered when we draw nigh to God he draws nigh to us and it was in prayer that I began to see visions and dream dreams that became to me afterwards the background and the backbone of my evangelistic ministry when the Lord was pleased to bring me back out of the wilderness of suffering into the forefront of service for some years another point I would stress to young preachers would be to uh endeavor as much as in them is to discover what the Lord blesses to their own soul in a special way he blessed my soul the word of confession confession of Christ and I had

to prove it in the very hard and difficult sphere of army camps and battle trenches and very grim places on the fields of Flanders and elsewhere and I realized that I had to unfurl my flag or fall from my Christian profession I heard a message given by a valiant young heart in Egypt in the days of the first world war from those words in the psalms thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be a displayed or unfurled because of the truth and the Lord laid on my heart from the very time I was challenged to make a confession for Christ right down the years increasingly that the Lord Jesus Christ needs valiant witnesses fearless confessors of his name in a world that has rejected him and does still reject him in many ways but other men have laid to their hearts perhaps the

love of God in a deeper way some have laid to their hearts the message of judgment some have laid to their heart the message of revival in a general way but it's a good thing as Duncan Matheson the great evangelist said find out what God blesses through you and then stick to it this recording was made in Studio B on the 9th of June 1965 with the Reverend John Ridley commemorating his 50 years as a

Christian on the 20th of June 1965

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