

God Sent

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the significance of being a godsend and the role of a witness in reflecting God's light to the world.

Duration: 55:37

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 1:6-8, John 1:35, John 16:13, 2 Corinthians 3:18

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the character of John the Baptist as a man sent from God. He emphasizes that John's mission was to testify about the light, not to be the light himself. The preacher shares a story about a German boy who arrived unannounced at a mission station, seeking the meaning of life. He also recounts an encounter with a Vietnamese refugee at an airport, where John was able to comfort her in her own language. The main message of the sermon is that as believers, we should see ourselves as God-sent wherever we go, with the conviction that we are sent from God to be a source of encouragement to others.

Transcript

It begins to be told in the first chapter of John's Gospel, and the sixth verse, about a man in whose life we see some vital principles that can be a source of immense encouragement to you, as they have already been a source of immense encouragement to me. And I'd like to share with you this morning some of the encouragements that I have derived from the principles that are seen, made articulate, as it were, in the flesh and blood of his humanity. In the sixth verse, the first of John, there came a man, sent, sent from God, whose name was John.

In other words, in the strictest sense of the term, he was a godsend. Wherever he went, he was a godsend, because he was sent from God. I wonder if wherever you're found, you're a godsend.

No matter with whom you rub shoulders, no matter in what company you may find yourself, no matter in what circumstances, you're a godsend. There's the deep inner conviction in your own heart that you were sent from God, and there's no doubt whatever left in the minds of those with whom you have been in contact, that God sent you. There's nothing more delightful in the whole wide world than to know at any given moment, whoever it may be that is around, known or unknown, stranger or friend, you're a godsend.

Here was a man who was a godsend. He was a man sent from God, and his name was John. And we're told in the seventh verse that this man came to witness.

That was his mission. It was to that end he had been sent. He came that he might testify of the light that all men through him might believe.

And the eighth verse underlines very emphatically, he was not the light himself. He came simply that he might bear witness regarding that light. That's heavily emphasized.

He was not the light. He was simply a man sent from God that he might testify that light, that through him others might be deemed. In other words, as a man sent from God, he was not there to draw attention to himself.

And this is essentially the characteristic of a man sent from God. When you look at him, you see the one who sent him, God himself. He comes to bear witness of the light, though not the light itself.

Now that's the office, as all of you know, the lamp. That's what these lamps are doing. That lamp is not the light itself.

That lamp is bearing witness to the light, because the lamp itself is not the author of the light. It's simply the vehicle of that which alone can produce light, the power that flows through it. And because these lamps have been faithful witnesses, I don't suppose there's one of you at this moment, before I mention it, who took time to glance up and look at them.

You simply enjoyed the light to which they bore testimony. And it's a very good test of your own ministry to evaluate how far folks are attracted to you, and how much they are attracted to Christ. You can be absolutely certain that if they're preoccupied with you and not with him, you're a poor witness.

We've got to make it categorically clear at all times that we are not the light. It's simply our office, a magnificent, delightful office, to bear witness of the light. It's the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit in terms of his relationship to the Lord Jesus.

In the 16th of John, the Lord Jesus made it abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit would delight, it would be his peculiar joy, to bear witness of the Lord Jesus, lead us into all truth, and glorify him, taking the things that are Christ's and revealing them to us. And you notice something about this man. In the discharge of his responsibility as one who was sent to bear witness of the light, he was looking in the right direction.

If you turn on in the chapter, it says in the 35th verse, again the next day, after John stood and two of his disciples looking upon Jesus, as he walked, he made his solemn declaration, behold the Lamb of God. He was looking in the right direction, and he was saying the right thing. That's why the office of a witness, for which you and I were created in the very first instance, to bear testimony to the total likeness of the God who created us.

Let us make man in our likeness and in our image, so that when God, having made man in his own utter likeness, an absolute image, looked at man, he saw himself, and he said, good, I've got a witness. I've got in man a creature on this little planet, who's now spiritually qualified, magnificently equipped morally, to discharge that office for which I've made him, to bear witness, not to himself. For the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the triune Godhead, having created man, looking at man, saw themselves a witness.

That's why you have another very lovely illustration that is beautifully portrayed in the ministry of John the Baptist, of a witness, found in the second epistle to the Corinthians, which will be coming back to John in chapter 1, but if you turn to the second of Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians, and the third chapter, 2 Corinthians and chapter 3, and the last verse of that chapter, all of us is with unveiled face, because we continue to behold, and to reflect like mirrors, the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transformed into his very own image, in ever-increasing splendor, and from one degree of glory to another. For this, that is the image, the glory, comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. I read that from the Amplified New Testament, where uh, compared with the translation given the King James, it's much more lucid, because you clearly recognize the picture that the apostle here is using, of your responsibility, and mine, as one who is to bear witness, because we continue to behold, we reflect like mirrors, because we persistently and consistently look in the right direction, we reflect like mirror.

John, looking upon Jesus as he walked, he was gazing in the right direction, this of course is the office of a mirror, to reflect, not to bear witness to itself, but to bear witness to that whose image it reflects. Did you look in the mirror this morning? I'm sure you did, and you probably gazed with wonder, love, and praise. When you looked in the mirror this morning, what did you see? Whose fault was it? Don't blame the mirror.

When you looked in the mirror this morning, you got exactly what you deserved. It simply handed back to you what you gave it. It was discharging its office as a mirror.

The Bible describes this in a very specific way, it's called a derived image, not image by imitation, in which of course, alone the imitator, if achieving any success at all, alone can be congratulated. The office of a mirror is simply to receive what you give it and hand it back. It has nothing of itself to offer, and the picture that it provides is what is described as a derived image.

And the nature of a derived image is important to grasp, because it's at the very heart of the ministry of man in the discharge of that office which God created him to reflect his likeness. The nature of a derived image is that the object of the image is at one and the same time not only the object of that image, but the origin of the image of which it is the object. It has to be both the object of the image and the origin of the image of which it is the object.

Does that sound confusing? If it sounds confusing, here's a very, very simple experiment that you can engage in to prove the point. When you go back to your room sometime today, stand in front of the mirror and recognize what it is you're looking at. You probably won't have too much difficulty, you've seen it so often yourself, and what you're looking at is an image, and you're the object of that image.

But you're not only the object of that image as you look at it, you're the origin of the image of which you're the object. In other words, your presence there is imperative to the image. If you don't believe it, carry out a slight experiment.

Keep dead still, absolutely quiet, if there's anybody else in the room, tell them to keep quiet too, so as not to disturb the mirror, and then take in the mirror completely by surprise. A moment when it least expects it, jump quickly on one side and see what you can leave behind of the image at which you were looking. How much would you leave behind? Absolutely nothing, because you see, you were looking at an image of which you were the object, but you were not only looking at an image of which you were the object, you were looking at an image of which you were the origin, and your presence was absolutely imperative to the image.

Now this is what God is teaching us from the Bible from beginning to end, that if man is ever to reflect the likeness of his maker, the presence of his maker as creator within the creature is imperative to the operation, that you and I have no inherent capacity in ourselves to imitate God. It's beyond our reach, but he's so engineered us that the presence of God in the man gives to us the moral competence to discharge that responsibility. But the moment you detach man from God, he loses, in his loss of God, his moral competence to reproduce God's likeness.

God in the man must be not only the object of the image that the world sees when the world looks at that man, but God in the man must be the origin of that image of which God himself is equally the object. In other words, God is indispensable to your humanity and mine. And this is reflecting like a mirror, because we continue to behold.

Now if you're looking in the wrong direction, of course, you'll produce a wrong reflection. For instance, if you imagine that to be Christ-like is to imitate this person or that person, all you'll imitate is their imperfection. You won't really emit, you won't give a reflection of God, you'll simply give a reflection of that which may be a sincere attempt to be like God, but which inevitably will fall short of his likeness.

And we can very sincerely, but misguidedly, focus our attention like a mirror upon something less than Christ himself. The church, doctrine, the Bible, Christian activity, churchmanship, many things which are valid in themselves but can never in themselves become the origin of that likeness of our maker that we were created to present to the world in which we live. That must derive exclusively and only and consistently from the Lord Jesus himself, to whom we constantly look, that we might reflect like a mirror.

Now, if when looking at the mirror, instead of being preoccupied at once with the image of yourself, of which you're the object and the origin, supposing instead of being preoccupied with the image, you're immediately preoccupied with the mirror. Your attention is focused not upon what you can see of yourself, your attention is focused only upon what you can see of the mirror. What does it tell you about the mirror? One normally of two things, it's dirty or distorted.

If your attention is focused on the mirror and not on the image, it means that there's dirt on the mirror that's attracted your attention, because a good mirror, a perfect mirror, that's discharging its responsibility, will only reflect that which it receives. Of course, it may be distorted. You've been to those places where they have peculiar sort of mirrors, where when you look at it, you have an enormous stomach, or a very long chin, or a nose that's hooked, or ears that stick out.

Anything wrong with you? Well, not that much. What's happening? Well, you're looking into a distorted mirror, and everybody else looking over your shoulder into that distorted mirror will not only see a distorted image of you, but a distorted image of themselves. Now, a witness sent from God that is neither dirty nor distorted will give a valid expression of the one from whom that likeness derives.

He's a witness sent from God. The other thing about a mirror when it reflects is that it's totally unconscious of the operation. Have you ever seen a mirror sweating to produce your likeness? I could understand a mirror if it did sweat to produce some people's likeness, but I've never seen a mirror sweat in the attempt to produce somebody's likeness.

It's totally unconscious of the effort, and totally unconscious of what it's doing, and by and large, it's totally unconscious of what other people are seeing in it. And you see, the less conscious you and I are of the likeness of the Lord Jesus that we portray by what we do and say and are, the healthier is our relationship

to the Lord Jesus. The less, by and large, we know what he, through us, is doing in their lives, initially, the healthier the transaction.

In all probability, it'll surface as weeks and days and months and maybe years go by, but the initial impact is something that only God the Holy Spirit can do if it's going to be timelessly valid from God's point of view. And this is why I wanted really to share the good news with you, for your encouragement, because of the encouragement that I have received in seeing this principle operate in the measure in which I've sought to practice that principle. And I want to encourage you in the one or two days that we're together to understand the principle that governs the Christian life, and not then be satisfied with an academic grasp, a sort of mental nod, and say interesting, fascinating, valid, but then in a state of heart toward the Lord Jesus, allow him to demonstrate gloriously the truth of the principle that you practice.

And nothing, nothing has given me more encouragement in my Christian life than those occasions when what God has done has surfaced later, vindicating his integrity and demonstrating the validity of his claim that he, if he be lifted up, will draw all men unto him. I'm not particularly enamored of Norman Vincent Peale or his philosophy, but there's a little book called Guideposts that is published under his editorship together with his wife, and somebody gave me this in July because it contained the testimony of a young man called Tom Netherton. Now I'd never heard of Tom Netherton, quite a number of folk apparently have.

He sings in the Lawrence Welk Show, if you've ever heard of that, which is a sort of family program. Again, I've never seen the Lawrence Welk Show, but I passed his restaurant just yesterday on the way to the airport in San Diego, because it's between Falbrook and San Diego on the left-hand side, you go down the road, and that's apparently where it all began. But this was the testimony of this young man, as recorded in this book, it's part apparently of a book that he's written.

I grew up believing that nothing in life was permanent. My father was a career army officer, constantly being transferred, and we rarely lived on the same post for more than a year. When the Vietnam War intensified, I decided to join the army.

It was a decision that would change my life. Through basic training, and later in officer candidate school, I considered becoming a Greenberry or a paratrooper in Vietnam. But when my orders came, I was assigned to Panama, not Vietnam.

I had begun to smoke a little and to drink, after all that's what soldiers are expected to do. In Panama, I sang at night on off-duty hours at the piano bar of the officer's club. I went snorkeling and skin diving off Tobago Island.

During the day, I led my men on training maneuvers in the steaming Panamanian jungles. At night, I partied with Panamanian friends. But there was a longing, a deep longing inside me, going far beyond the tropical days and nights.

Nothing seemed to satisfy. One day, a friend asked if I'd like to hear a Major Ian Thomas speak at church. Up to this point in my life, church for me was more social than spiritual.

It was something nice people did on Sunday, but I didn't have anything else to do, so I went along with him. I recall now that it was some years ago, I was speaking in the Bilboa Heights Baptist Church there in Panama. I think it was about 10 years ago.

I think on that occasion, Ronnie Weller was with me from Florida. During the service, I sensed that something strange was beginning to happen to me. I sat among all those strangers and felt a sudden surge of expectation.

There was no voice from heaven, no bolt of lightning, no thunder, but as I sat there, I met my Savior. Take my life, I whispered, and use it any way you want to. Jesus, I give myself to you.

In that moment, I knew that by giving my life to Him, I would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the kind of man God had always intended me to be. Everything became clear to me. I had spent my life trying to be good and do good, just to get other people's approval, draw attention to himself, but now I felt free, free from fears and best of all, free from the haunting worry that my life wouldn't count for anything.

My life belonged to Jesus, and I trusted Him completely in everything. What fascinates me is that today, He revels in the knowledge of a personal relationship to a living Christ, but it happened so quietly, you see. Something began to happen to me.

The Holy Spirit was simply bearing witness to a seeking, hungry soul that there was a living Christ who still bore the wounds in His hands and feet of that redemptive transaction, who was on tiptoe to satisfy that deep, deep longing in His heart. If only He could be alerted to the fact that Jesus was alive, and that He was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. It was also gloriously anonymous, but the consequences, timeless, eternal, and tangible.

Now, that's what happened in John's ministry, you see. He was looking in the right direction, and he was saying the right thing. In that first chapter of John, it says in the 19th verse, this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? He confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

Now, he made that categorically clear, I am not the Christ. In other words, he came to bear witness of the light, but he himself was not the light of which he bore witness. They asked him again, verse 21, what then, art thou a liar, Elias, Elijah? He said, I am not.

So said they, are you that prophet, this prophet? He answered, no. Well, that was very frustrating. You see, they'd been sent to get copy.

They'd been sent to make a write-up. He was to hit banner headlines. He was a somewhat unusual gentleman, but whenever they asked him who he was, all he'd tell them was who he wasn't, and that didn't give them much to write about.

So they got a little bit irritated, and they said, who are you that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou thyself? Oh, he said, if you must know, tell him, I'm the voice. The one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, and as said the prophet Isaiah.

If you want to know my ministry, I'll tell you, I'm just a voice. Who I am, of course, is totally unimportant, so long as what I say is the right thing, and I'm looking in the right direction. That's all, just a voice.

It's not really my responsibility to take care of what happens, so long as I discharge my responsibility. I'm a voice, a man sent from God. That's a God-sent.

When at precisely the right moment, in precisely the right circumstances, in precisely that need, in precisely that opportunity, there's the right voice, because there's a man sent from God. He may be totally unaware of what's happening, as John constantly was unaware of what was happening. He was true to the person of the Lord Jesus, and he was true to the office of the Lord Jesus.

Behold, he said in verse 29, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. If you want to know who he is, I'll tell you, he's the Lamb, and I'll tell you why as the Lamb he's come. He's the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, before ever the world was.

And looking upon Jesus, verse 36, as he walked, he said, behold, the Lamb of God. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. That's it.

They heard him speak. He was the voice. But they followed Jesus, because you see, looking in the right direction, they followed his gaze.

And having followed the gaze, and their attention now being focused not upon John, but upon Jesus, they heard the right thing. The Lamb of God. He's the Savior.

He's the Redeemer. He's the Messiah. He's the one whom God sent, that in him all the families of the earth might be blessed.

Jesus turned and saw them following, and he said to them, what are you looking for? And they said unto him, Master, where do you live? And the Lord Jesus said, well, come and see. And they came and saw where he dwelt, and he abode with him that day. They just abode with him that day.

They lived with him. And when John looked round, he'd lost his congregation. And there's nothing more delightful than when a man sent from God loses his congregation, when they hear him speak, and they follow Jesus.

And he goes on his way, knowing that they're now living with him. That's exciting. And the wonderful thing is this, that in the measure of our availability to the Lord Jesus, you can be absolutely certain that constantly, known or unknown to you, as you keep looking in the right direction, prepared to say the right thing, some boy, some girl, some man or woman who needs it desperately is going to hear his voice.

When you look round, they may have gone, but you can have an unshatterable confidence in your heart that they're living with him. You may not know it for weeks and months and years, but one day, in God's goodness, for your encouragement, it'll surface. I was in Hombrechtikon in Switzerland in June.

It's a little village near Rapperswil, not too far from Zürich, just near the lake. It's where we have our Torchbearer Centre, called Hinterholt, and Uli Zürich is the director there. And I was there for a week of meetings, adult sort of Bible conference, the other side of the lake, near Mennendorf.

But on the Sunday morning, there was a Lutheran church service, and they have it once a year, it's out in the open air, it's held on the mountainside, in a beautiful pinewood, and then after the morning service, in which the local band, all dressed up, takes part, they fry sausages and have a sort of picnic. So the Lutheran pastor asked me to preach at that particular morning service, and it was a beautiful setting, it was a lovely day, the sun was shining, and after the service was over, I was chatting with one or two folks, and I suddenly saw a boy, he's probably about 13 years of age. I discovered later that his name was

Stefan, Stephen Rudloff.

Something in my heart said, watch out for that kid, and you know this experience, you've had it, many of you, many times, you can't explain to anybody else, but it's really fascinating. That's why I like before a service, always to be sitting on the platform, I hate sort of sitting with my back to the, I can't sort of visit with you, especially if I haven't been to the place before, I don't know what you look like, how peculiar you look, or how nice you look, how fat or thin, but quite apart from that, very often, you know, it's while visiting the congregation, sitting on the platform, that God alerts you to certain individuals in a way that you couldn't possibly explain to anybody else, and yet with fascinating regularity, without engineering the event, that person will right cross your path at precise moment, and it's really, it's really fascinating, and so I was alerted to the fact that probably I'd have some role to play in that kid's life, but when I'd finished talking to these folks, he'd gone, and I must confess, I was deeply disappointed, and I felt maybe I missed my cue, I should have broken off the conversation and grabbed him straight away, and an elderly gentleman and two elderly ladies then captured my attention and kept me talking for quite a long time, and I was a little impatient, I must confess, because I wanted to hunt for that kid, but finally, that conversation came to an end, and I suddenly turned around, and there, with his back to a tree, just six feet away, was the boy, Stefan Ratlaff, and he was looking in my direction, and I, in my heart, said, thank you, and I went across to him and said, what's your name? He says, Stefan. I said, Stefan, did you understand what I was saying this morning? He said, yes.

I said, do you know that the Lord Jesus is your saviour, that he's redeemed you, and your sins have been forgiven, you're God's child? He said, no. I said, wouldn't you like to? He said, yes, very much. That was encouraging, so I said, well, let's slip away out of the crowd, and we sat on a stump about 50 yards away in the woods, and there, in a very sweet, delightful way, that kid just opened his heart to Christ and said, thank you, Lord Jesus, I'm one of the sinners you died to redeem, thank you for being willing to come into my heart and share your life with me.

He was born again, and I've seldom seen a kid so young have so rich an appetite at once to know more. He insisted that every single night, by arrangement with his mum and dad, I picked him up and took him to the adult meetings where he sat all the way through, with the Bible I lent him, and followed the messages, and I sent him a Bible later on he wrote to me just a week or two ago, such a bright, cheery letter. He said, now I'm a Christian, what's next? That's great, I'm the ball for God, you see, once he knows what the ball is, and that excites me.

I was invited earlier this year to speak at the Wycliffe Biennial Conference for about 250 of their staff in Columbia, South America. I believe last year when I was here at this conference, I told you about a woman who got bored, I mean gored, gored by a bull. It was a woman who had come to the Wycliffe base, eight hours long journey of a rough country, because she had heard they'd got some quarter horses for sale, and I got the story from their missionary who was on furlough in Fresno, where I was for a week of meetings, the first batch just before coming to this conference, and he told me about this woman, who he thought was very hostile, and sort of atheistic in attitude, cynical.

Well, she was cynical, but she wasn't hostile. She was cynical and disillusioned, but she wasn't atheistic, as I discovered later. As a, as a girl, she had longed to know God, but all she found was dead sterility in a dead structured religion, and she threw the whole thing overboard, and said that's for the birds, and became cynical and disillusioned, and that's what made her sound hostile, because when he tried to witness to her the Lord Jesus, she just wouldn't listen.

But he said, one strange thing, I gave her some of your tapes, and I also lent her your books, and those were the only things she'd read or listen to. Now, I didn't know anything about that, that was in 1976, but then when her husband was away from the ranch, she was terribly, terribly mutilated by a bull, so seriously, that she really didn't expect to live. She maintained a presence of mind enough to get the cowboys, all Indians, she was an American citizen, although having lived with her husband for many years in a big ranch there, right on the edge of the jungle, on the central plains, the other side of the Andes mountains.

She maintained a presence of mind enough to tell the Indian cowboys what to do, to sort of patch her together, until help could come, which she knew couldn't possibly come for hours. But when the, you know, the effort of that was gone, she just collapsed, became deeply depressed, knew perfectly well she was going to die before any help could come, and then the books and the tapes all came back, just a voice, and alone in her despair, she put her trust in Christ. And it was at that time, in 1976, that the government was going to throw Wycliffe out of Columbia.

They've encountered a lot of hostility from some of the South American governments, because of the communist influence that has penetrated, especially in the universities, amongst the professors, especially in the area of anthropology. And this lady and her husband knew quite a lot of the members of the cabinet, because they lived in a social life, they were wealthy sort of folks, big ranches. And when she heard this, she was incensed, so she called the minister of the interior, who was a general in the army, and said, are you going to throw Wycliffe out of the country? And he said, yes.

And she said, have you been to see them? Have you interviewed them? Do you know anything about them? He said, no. Well, she said, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. To throw people out of a country, and you haven't even taken the trouble personally to go and investigate and find what they are.

She said, you've got to go and see them. Well, if you've seen the woman, you know how she can talk like that. She's about three times my size.

I mean, well balanced, because she's tall too. And I'm glad I wasn't the other end of that telephone conversation. Anyway, the man did exactly what she said, went with the deputation to the Wycliffe headquarters, was deeply impressed, the order was rescinded, and Wycliffe was still in Columbia.

Now, this lady asked special permission to attend the Wycliffe conference in January, that's why I met her. As a matter of fact, we flew back in the same little Cessna. I didn't think there'd be room.

About 13,000 feet high, over the Andes mountains, and that wasn't really fun, because it was all cloud with little bits of rock sticking out every now and again, and I was hoping we'd miss them. Have you ever been in a little single engine plane, 13,000 feet up over the Andes mountains, a stupid little plane that goes pop, pop, pop, and that's just one pop between you and the Andes mountains, and I believe it wasn't fun. I'd prefer to go by four-engine jet.

But you know, while I was at that conference in which I met this good lady, a German boy turned up, totally unannounced, uninvited. He was a high school kid, just graduated from school in Germany, and he wanted to tour the world and discover the meaning of life. He didn't know what life was all about, didn't add up, he didn't know where he'd come from, didn't know where he was going, but he stuck a testament, for some reason, in his bag, because he thought that might have a clue, and it might be worthwhile, he was spending months around, traveling around the world, to have a look at it.

He stayed for first four weeks with a German lady in Bogota, and then at the end of that time, he said, I'd like to visit a mission station. I'd like to see what missionaries do. Well, the only mission station she knew, because of the adverse publicity she'd seen in the newspapers, was Wickliffe, and so she dispatched him, long journey over the Andes mountains, and then across the central plains, and sure enough, all dusty and tired, he arrived one day.

His name was Michael Marr, a German boy from Oldenburg, and he just sat in. Well, it wasn't long before I discovered there was a German boy there, and it's the other language I use for preaching in, I'll be using it next week, and of all the people to meet, way in the central plains, the other side of the Andes mountains, somebody who could speak German, and he just heard a voice that told him that God's Son came into this world and died, shed his blood, that his sins might be forgiven, and we knelt together, and Michael ended into that relationship that allows the Lord Jesus, in reconciling a boy to God, to come and indwell his humanity. I'm hoping, God willing, to be in touch with him next week, but this to me makes life fantastically exciting, because you don't have to have any trumpets, you don't have to have any promotion, you just have to be wandering around the globe, prepared at any time to be a voice, either in English or in German, or Chinese, except that I don't know Chinese, but last night God knew that.

You see, we left at five o'clock yesterday morning to drive to San Diego, to catch the plane that would take us to Los Angeles at 7.30, 7.33 arriving, I was booked direct from San Diego to come here in the afternoon, but it wouldn't have got me in time for the evening meeting, so wisely or unwisely, I transferred the booking to a direct flight from Los Angeles, which would get me here in time. Well, we had three hours to wait, because it didn't go till 10.20, but it was the only way I could get to Los Angeles, in order to catch it, and when I went to check in at the desk, they said it's cancelled, because I indicated there was something wrong with the engine, they had to change it, I had no other equipment, every other flight was full, and so we had to spend the day in Los Angeles, which we sought to invest wisely, and then we finally came back to the airport, half past eleven last night, and when we got to the desk to check in, for a flight that left at a quarter to one in the morning, there was a Vietnamese girl from Hong Kong, who'd just arrived in America, under the sponsorship scheme as a refugee, she was crying her eyes out, there was an agent who was trying to pacify her, but he had to go and see somebody off on another plane, on American Airlines, another part of the terminal, and here was this poor girl, straight from Hong Kong, where she'd been a year after escaping from Vietnam, where she left her mum and her fiancé, in a big strange world, couldn't speak a word of English, not a word, just a slip of a kid, and being sent off to San Diego, San Antonio, to change planes, and get another plane to go to Corpus Christi, where she hoped somebody would meet her. Well, I couldn't comfort her, I didn't talk Cantonese, but John did, who was accompanying me.

Now, don't you think that's good planning? I mean, to transfer your flight, and a beastly engine goes out, and keeps you dumped in Los Angeles, of all places, for nearly 18 hours, and then to arrive, just as a girl arrives from Hong Kong, just an hour or two before, and knowing that I couldn't speak Chinese, God graciously provided me with somebody whom he introduced to me six years ago in Singapore, because he knew that there was going to be a Vietnamese girl there in Los Angeles, last night. I find life incredibly exciting. So I wasn't the voice last night, but John was, and we took care of her, and when we arrived at San Antonio, we checked her in on a new flight, and John made sure she got on board.

Just a voice, just a voice. Now, I haven't a clue what's going to happen to that girl, but I've got a very strong conviction in my heart that God does. Take the address, of course, follow it through, do the intelligent thing.

I scribbled on her ticket the address of a very fine Christian man who's pastored the First Presbyterian Church in Corpus Christi, had a week of meetings there earlier this year. We exchanged addresses so we can write to her, send her a Chinese Bible. You may not know for 5, 10, 15 years what happened to that girl, but it makes life incredibly exciting.

I wouldn't trade with anybody. I was flying from San Francisco, six years ago, to Colorado to go up to Ravencrest. It was a full plane, bang full, except for one seat, and it was next to me.

When I saw one seat empty next to me in a full plane, I thought that's ominous, really ominous. And sure enough, just before the plane took off, a stewardess came down with a small boy of about 12 years of age. His name was Paul Morella of Italian origin, Catholic, lived in Pueblo, Colorado.

He'd spent his vacation with his sister on the west coast, and she had arranged for a stewardess to take care of him until San Francisco, where he had a reservation on a later flight. But because he arrived in time for this flight, they thought rather than have him on their hands in the airport in San Francisco until his flight, they discovered there was just one seat left on this full plane, upon which he had no reservation. So the stewardess marched that kid along, plonked him down alongside, and we had a marvelous talk about the Lord Jesus.

I said, did anybody ever before in your life tell you that the Lord Jesus, God's son, came to this world, died for you because he loved you, paid the price of your redemption that your sins might be forgiven, he rose again from the dead, and knocking at the door of your heart, he's just waiting for your invitation to come in and be your savior. He said, yes. I said, that's interesting, who was it? And she told the truth, and I believe in the heart of that lady, she was looking in the right direction.

She had prepared the ground, that little kid was very open, and we became good friends, and I exchanged letters with him. Whenever I've been in Colorado Springs since, I've tried to contact him by phone, but for some strange reason, I've never, never been able to contact, and I didn't get a letter, and I somehow fancied they'd moved maybe. But every time I've opened my address book, under the M to get somebody else's address, there's Paul Morella, a little case history in red ink, the date I met him, how old he was, where he lived.

I thought to myself, what always happened to Paul? I'm sure God had some plan in mind. Thanks for the nun, thanks for the opportunity I had, I wonder who had the next opportunity to be a voice? Well, I had no idea, until about five weeks ago in Omaha, Nebraska, and you'd wonder what Omaha, Nebraska had to do with California or Colorado. But I was speaking there at the Grace Bible Church, at the Grace Bible College, but on the Sunday morning, before the week of meetings at the Grace Bible College, I spoke at the Christian Missionary Alliance Church, where Dr. R. R. Brown used to be the minister, years ago, one of the first radio, Christian radio broadcasts in the whole country.

And 15 years ago, I was there, having a week of meetings with him, he's now with Christ. But I was invited to speak on the Sunday morning, and after the service, one or two young people came to me, and one of them looked particularly sort of nervous and agitated, pleasantly agitated, but wanting to say something, and he was obviously of Italian origin, and immediately, in my mind, flashed back to Paul Morella, but I knew it wasn't he, because he was too old. But he said, do you ever remember people that you meet when you're traveling? I said, yes, I do, as a matter of fact, and I was just about to say Paul Morella, when he said, well, I became convinced, during the morning service, that you were the man that talked to my kid brother, on a plane from San Francisco to Denver.

It was his older brother. He'd got converted, last July, this year, and he had moved, only six weeks before, to Council Bluffs, which is a twin city to Omaha, in Iowa, it's on the state line, but the other side of the river. So here was a young fellow, who only got saved July, came six weeks ago, to link, whatever it is, Council Bluffs, other side of the river, and bumped into some young Christians, who said, and didn't belong to the church, would you like to go to the church in Omaha?

Well, I think that's good timing too, wouldn't you say? A kid from San Francisco to Colorado, lived in Pueblo, and I go to Nebraska, and find a kid that lives in Iowa, and it all ties together, and he was able to tell me that his young brother now lives in Lacey, in Washington, and the following Sunday, I was on the phone, talking to Paul, and that's not the end of the story, but you'll have to wait till next year, to tell you a bit more, but wouldn't you say that life is exciting?

It isn't big things, it isn't great mass rallies, it isn't big drums and placards, he came to speak, and to say, that which is lost, and he loves them, one at a time, just one at a time, just a fat little man, hidden in the leaves, balancing on that branch, doesn't say he was fat, it says he was little of stature, but I'm sure he made up sideways, what he lacked in height, he didn't expect Jesus Christ to address him personally, he was up the tree, because he didn't want anybody to know that he was there, he was a tax gatherer, he was despised by everybody, but the Lord Jesus suddenly stopped dead, looked straight into his face, and boys, was his face red, make haste, I'm going to abide with you, I'm coming home with you, you know how the crowd grumbled, going to be guest with a man that's a sinner, Lord Jesus was always keeping bad company, he was always getting into trouble for keeping bad company, I'm glad he keeps bad company, most of you wouldn't be here if he didn't, I wouldn't, he came to seek and to say that which is lost, it's a beautiful thing to be lost, because if you're lost, you're wanted, you don't throw lost things in the trash can, you look in the trash can for lost things, that's why Jesus Christ was so often at the trash can, go and get your husband, he said to the woman by the well in Samaria, she said, I don't have a husband, you're right, said the Lord Jesus, you've lived with five men, the man you're living with now isn't your husband, did he say that to hurt her?

No, but because he's the perfect friend who knows the worst about you, and loves you just the same, there's only one who loves like that, Jesus is his name, that woman leaving her water pot went back to the city and said, come see a man who told me everything I ever did, and loved me just the same, that's why he was up late that night when Nicodemus knocked on the door, he just needs a voice, God incarnate walked this earth clothed with the flesh and blood of his dear son, and wherever he went, men and women and little boys and girls heard the voice, blind Bartimaeus heard the voice, on the lips of his disciples, arise, be of good cheer, he calls, he calls me?

Interested in me? Yes, they say, that's why he came this way, a little boy with his five loaves and two fishes, the immediate object of Christ's quest, just one at a time, you ever been a godsend to a little boy, ever been a godsend to some broken-hearted woman, ever been a godsend to somebody so tired they're fit to quit, you don't even have to hang around, so long as your disposition is such that the Lord Jesus by his gracious Holy Spirit can motivate you, you can leave the consequences, I don't know what the consequences will be lots of times, but I know they're in safe hands, in April this year, I was in Cupertino, northern California, I'd just been to the travel bureau, wanted to pop in a store next door to make a purchase, and just before I went in the door, I saw a little kid looking very agitated, very nervous, and it was school time, I thought that kid's in trouble, he's out of school, what's he out of school for?

Anyway, I thought if he's in trouble, I'll at least smile at him and say hi, so I was just about to smile and say hi, when sort of rather timidly, he smiled and came in my direction, excuse me sir, sorry to bother you, but I've got a school assignment, I've got to interview somebody, can I interview you? I said great, fire away, and he said this, he said would you tell me please, what is the most important thing in your life? Man, talk about handed on a plate, for a preacher, well it took me 15 minutes, good sermon, I said the most important thing in my life is the knowledge that the Lord Jesus, my saviour, I was 12 when I received him into my heart, and he cleansed me from my sin and reconciled me to God, and became my greatest friend, so how old are you?

He said 13, I said great, I'd like to tell you about Jesus Christ, and I did, and then I suddenly noticed as I was talking that he got a tape recorder on his tummy, the moment I started talking he'd pressed the button, and his assignment was to play that in front of the school class next morning, well I don't know what little kid was sitting at school class, I reckon God had something in mind for that kid who was standing on the street, but won't it be fascinating one day when some young man or woman, maybe with their own kids, comes up and says, do you remember talking to a kid on the street, and he recorded what you had to say, while I was sitting in the school class next day, I'd like you to know that I heard a voice, that makes life miraculous, you can't organize it, only God, a man sent from God, looking in the right direction, saying the right thing, a mirror, ever been a God sent? Let's pray.

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