

The Major Ian Thomas Story-04 Biography

by Major Ian Thomas

The Christian life is a member of the body of the Lord Jesus, empowered by the divine indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and called to share the life of the Lord Jesus and recognize his headship.

Duration: 1:05:18

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Mark 6:34, Acts 8:25-26, Acts 8:35, Acts 8:39, Acts 9:1-8

Topics: "Biography"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the simplicity and power of the church in action. He uses the example of Philip, who obediently rode a donkey into the desert and encountered a man who was ready to hear about Jesus. The speaker highlights the importance of being sent by God and not going out of sheer enthusiasm, as it can lead to foolishness. He also mentions Peter's vision of a sheet with various animals, which symbolizes God's preparation and guidance in sharing the gospel. The sermon encourages Christians to trust in God's divine activity and to boldly speak about Jesus.

Transcript

Let me welcome you this evening to the last evening of our Spiritual Renewal Conference. Many of you have been with us for these three nights. Those of you who are new, and I've met some of you, we'd like to extend an especially warm welcome to you.

It is, again, my great privilege to be able to introduce Major Ian Thomas. As I said before, a man who's had tremendous influence on my own life. And I can't tell you how appreciative I've been over these days of seeing this man of God who has weathered many storms.

In Psalm 90 it says this, Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall be fresh and flourishing. They shall bear fruit in old age to declare that the Lord is righteous and there is no unrighteousness in him. And Major Thomas certainly has done that for me, for us, and we are so privileged to have him once again this evening.

Major Thomas. Well, it's so good to be with you again tonight, and I appreciate so much the very real privilege that has been mine to share the Lord Jesus with you. During the evening, as also with some of the cadets last night, and with the pastors and wives this afternoon.

We had a good time, and I had the joy of sharing again how gloriously, overwhelmingly adequate the Lord Jesus is in every circumstance, in everybody's life who is prepared to let him be as God, the God he is in them, in and through them. It's exciting to get up every morning and know that the one who died for us then is the one who is going to share his life with us today, right here and now. And accomplish in and through us what is his mind and will and purpose.

That's the Christian life, a member of the body of the Lord Jesus, through whom he continues to do and continues to teach the things that he began to do and began to teach. And he'll go on doing that through that which is now his body on earth, the church, until he returns vindicated in his deity, recognized for who he is, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord and bow in his presence. What a day that's going to be.

It could be tomorrow, or the day after. I'm looking forward to it. Because remember, I don't anticipate dying before he comes.

It's so near. I can't say that for sure, because he's God and I'm not. But I still cherish the ambition of being numbered amongst those who are alive and remain at his coming.

I believe the events all around the world are such that they're shouting at us, he's on the doorstep, he's knocking at the door. Hope you're ready for that moment, when if you're redeemed, numbered amongst those whose names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life, you see him as he is and you're like him, restored to image. As I was indicating to the folks this afternoon, when we see him as he is and we're like him, who will he see? When he looks at you, when he looks at me? Himself.

That's exactly what he had in mind when he first created Adam. Let us make man in our image, our likeness, in the image and likeness of God, made he, him. So when God looks at man and sees himself, that's normality.

That doesn't make you superman, it simply makes you normal. And that's why he came and died and rose again from the dead. And on the day of Pentecost, for the first time in all human history since Adam fell, by the gift of his indwelling Holy Spirit, took up residence within the humanity of every forgiven sinner, who was there at his command, waiting to receive that power that alone comes from on high.

Not just power, a person, somebody in whom all the power is vested. Tremendous. It wasn't until the early believers discovered the Lord Jesus alive and well that they got into action, were empowered by his divine indwelling for the purpose for which he had brought them in to be.

And it is still today, nearly 2,000 years later, only by virtue of his presence that you and I are enabled to be functional as a member of his body, sharing his life, recognizing his headship and gladly acknowledging. As the Lord Jesus said, the kingdom of God is within you. And if the kingdom of God is within us, then that's exactly where the king ought to be, exercising his sovereignty.

Calling the shots and expecting us to do as we're told. And when you're told what to do and you do as you're told, when you're sent and you went, you're put. And we talked about this yesterday.

But you can't be put until you've made the discovery that the early church had to discover before they could become effective. A risen living Lord, in whom you have a new joy, a new Bible, a new message, a new responsibility, and supremely by his divine indwelling a new enabling. Then you can say to me to live is Christ.

Because his strength is made perfect in our weakness. So all we can boast about is our weakness and his strength. And let God loosen the world in which we live.

Marvellous. And the message of the early church once said we discovered Jesus alive and well. They had nothing else to talk about.

But a risen living and indwelling saviour. Peter, who had said not so Lord to the cross, because he didn't want the cross. Didn't believe in the resurrection.

And full of enthusiasm and dedication and commitment and genuine love to the Lord Jesus was a dead loss. Until he too came to know the risen Lord. Convinced of the truth of it.

And the early church entered then into the good of it at Pentecost. And then demonstrated the fact of it. And preached in the power of it.

And lived in the joy of it. That was the real church. So long as they kept the Lord Jesus by faith in the place where he deserves to be.

In their hearts. Clothing his deity and divine activity with their redeemed humanity. The church in action.

Is Christ in action. We're going to talk about that a bit tonight. Peter and the other disciples and said we ought to obey God rather than men.

We'll just pick up the story from there. It's in the fifth chapter of the book of Acts. And said they were his witnesses.

This is our new responsibility. To be witnesses to the person of the Lord Jesus and to the uttermost ends of the earth. We're his witnesses of these things.

But not only we, so also is the Holy Spirit. Whom God has given to them that obey him. Obeying the gospel.

In other words, being honest enough to admit that you're a guilty sinner. Needing exactly what the Lord Jesus came to do. And undeservingly to become thereby the recipients of his indwelling life.

So that he can get on with what he once began to do and began to teach. And the story of the true early church is what the Lord Jesus continued to do and continued to teach. Peter and the other apostles in the 29th verse of the fifth chapter.

Said we ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you slew and you hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand.

Him hath God raised up with his right hand to be a prince and a savior. For to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. And we're his witnesses.

And so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey him. In other words, simply at his disposal. Available.

When the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin heard these things. Verse 33. They were cut to the heart.

And they took counsel to slay them. Foolishly imagining that if they could silence them they could silence God. But there stood up one of them in the council, a Pharisee.

But he was named Gamaliel, the doctor of the law. And in reputation among all the people because they recognized in Dr. Gamaliel genuine reality. So he commanded them to put the apostles forth a little while.

And said you men of Israel, take heed to yourselves. What you intend to do is touching these men. Before these days rose up Judas, boasting himself to be somebody.

To whom a number of men, about 400, joined themselves, who was slain. He died. And they were scattered and brought to nothing.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing. He drew away much people after him. He also perished.

And all even as many as obeyed him were dispersed. Judas is dead. Judas is dead.

Now I say unto you, verse 38, refrain from these men. Let them alone. For if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nothing.

But if it be of God, you cannot overthrow it unless happily you think you can fight against God. Judas is dead. Judas is dead.

And thought they, Jesus is dead. But if this is of God, Jesus is alive. And to him they agreed.

And when they had called the apostles and beaten them because they couldn't deny themselves that privilege. They commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus. And let them go.

And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame. For his name. And daily in the temple.

And in every house, house to house. They ceased not to teach and preach. Jesus.

The Christ. Convinced of the truth of it. Entering into the good of it.

On the day of Pentecost, becoming the recipients of his divine indwelling. By the gift of God the Holy Spirit. Demonstrating the fact of it.

Preaching the power of it. And living in the joy of it. The joy of suffering shame for his name.

That was the early church after they had made the life transforming discovery that Jesus was alive. Risen from the dead. Teaching.

And preaching. For they ceased not to teach and preach that Jesus is the Christ. You can't do any preaching until you are prepared to do some teaching.

You see teaching is an intelligent declaration of the fact. The truth as it is in Jesus. Preaching is then an exhortation to those who have been taught the fact.

To obey the truth and put their faith in Jesus. This is what the Lord Jesus did. When there was a great company of people who had been fed miraculously by the Lord Jesus.

He taught them many things. I like the way Luther translates that in his Bible. I mean the German Bible, it isn't his.

He just borrows it from the one who wrote it. Instead of he taught them many things. That means he preached a long sermon that's always been a great encouragement to me.

At least I'm following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. He preached a long sermon. What was he teaching them? The truth.

He looked at this great multitude, 5000 and he said they were like shepherds without a shepherd. They keep without a shepherd. He recognized their ignorance of what they needed to know.

So he didn't teach them what they wanted to hear. He did what Jesus always did, taught people what they needed to know. At least the disciples thought it was a long sermon.

Because finally they came along and said it's getting dark. These people are tired and hungry. It's time you quit.

And the Lord Jesus said if they're hungry, feed them. He said how can we feed them? 5000. Or we've got five loaves, two fishes.

Lord Jesus, it'll be a miracle and I'm going to teach you how to do a miracle. And live miraculously. And he took the five loaves and two fishes and broke them and gave them to distribute.

And everybody had as much as they could possibly eat and they were all filled. Because the genuine life of a genuine man is a miraculous life. Because it has no possible explanation but God.

That's why the Lord Jesus wasn't Superman when he came. He was simply man. As he is God created man to be.

He was never ever less than God. Co-equal in deity with the Father and the Holy Spirit and the triune Godhead. But he deliberately chose, and I have already alerted you to this in the second chapter of the book of the Philippians.

That of his own free choice and volition he deliberately chose to be born a human being. But he had to be born a human being by relinquishing all the attributes of deity. But still demonstrating the genuineness of his humanity.

He was never less than God. But always insisted upon living as though he were never more than man. Because he knew that he was going to send us, you and me, as the Father had sent him.

And he couldn't send us as God. He could only send us in our restored humanity as those reconciled, cleansed from our sin. By what he did upon the cross in the reconciling act.

Have been restored to function by the gift to us of his resurrection life. But as men, reconciled, redeemed and restored to life. Sharing his resurrection.

That's why the disciples had absolutely nothing to talk about but Jesus alive. A witness at all times to his resurrection. The Lord Jesus allowed to be clothing his deity with their humanity to be in action.

As he had allowed the Father clothed with his sinless humanity to be in action. He that has seen me has seen my Father. What I do he does.

What I say he says. What I am he is. Look at me and know God.

And that's the privilege that he's given now to you and to me. As he yielded his body then without reserve to the Father. So now he calls upon you and me, cleansed in his blood, reconciled to our Creator.

To place our humanity at his disposal without reservation. So that when others see us behave and hear us speak. This is the incredible privilege of being a Christian.

They'll see God behaving and hear God speaking. Incredible. How could you settle for less than be restored to your true function as an individual member of the body of Christ.

With whom today he clothes his divine activity. So what would you expect of the church in action? What would you then had you known the truth have expected of the Lord Jesus but the Father God in action. When the church, the true church, the real church is in action.

You would expect to see Christ behaving. Of course. And that was the early church.

Those who were sent. And went. And were put.

And let God take the consequences. In the blessing that is inevitable in the place where he's put you. Turn to the 8th chapter of the book of Acts.

Acts chapter 8. Saul. Saul of Tarsus. The arch enemy of the early church.

Consenting unto the death of Stephen. Seeing him stoned to death. Reveling in the fact that his blood was running in the gutter.

At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Except the disciples who remained in Jerusalem.

The apostles. Devout men carried Stephen to his burial. To whose death Saul of Tarsus had given his consent.

And took care of the clothes of those who stoned him to death. Devout men carried Stephen to his burial. Made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul. He made havoc of the church. Entering into every house.

Hailing men and women. Committed them to prison. Therefore they were scattered abroad.

Went everywhere. Bemoaning their faith. Uh uh.

Preaching the word. You see. God didn't want the church to settle down in Jerusalem and get comfy.

Air conditioning. Cushions to sit on. So he sent a cat among the pigeons.

Saul of Tarsus. And scattered them. In case they forgot to what end they had been redeemed.

To tell the world that Jesus is alive. They were scattered and went everywhere preaching the word. The living word.

Jesus. In whom all the promises and foreshadowings of God in the written word had their final consummation. Clothed with his sinless deity.

Scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the word. And then Philip. Went down to the city of Samaria.

And preached Christ. Don't jump to a wrong conclusion there. It wasn't that some disciples preached the word and Philip preached Christ.

You can't preach the word without preaching Christ. And you can't preach Christ without preaching the word. Teaching and preaching.

Explaining the facts from the revelation that God has given to us in his book. And then exhorting people to mix those facts with faith. So that he God by the Holy Spirit can turn the facts into reality.

The experience of some boy, girl, man or woman who has come to know Jesus for who he is. And is prepared to let him be God. So Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ.

Was he a preacher? No, he was a deacon. But he preached. Because any boy, girl, man or woman can be a preacher if you talk about Jesus.

He went down to the city of Samaria. And preached Christ. Go on to the verse 35, 25.

When they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem. And they preached the gospel in many villages. Villages of the Samaritans.

And the angel of the Lord spake to Philip saying, Then arise and go toward the south. The angel said go. And told him where to go.

Unto the way continuing in that 26th verse, Unto the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza. Which is desert. Now Philip by this time had become a well-known, applauded city evangelist.

He had become accustomed to countless people coming to hear him speak. And then God said go. Go south, down from Jerusalem to Gaza which is desert.

Can you imagine how Philip might have responded to that? Out into the desert. Don't you know? Haven't you been in my meetings when I've had thousands of people listening to what I had to say? Who do you think I'm going to preach to in the desert? A bunch of goats? But he didn't say that. Do you know why? Because he was a man being, continuous present tense, filled with the Holy Spirit.

He was available as a healthy member of the body of the Lord Jesus to be put where he was needed. And that's why he didn't argue. Instead, because he was being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Do you know what he did? Look at verse 27. He arose and went. That's pretty simple.

The Lord said go and he went. That's a man being filled with the Holy Spirit. That's what it means to be a Christian.

Be so available to the Lord Jesus 24 hours a day that whenever he says go, you arise and go and you win. And when you're told where to go and you win, where do you find yourself? Where was John when he was sent? A man sent from God. In the first chapter of John's Gospel.

Where God put him. If you're sent and went, you're put. That's what it means to be being filled with the Holy Spirit.

A healthy member of the body of Jesus, available for his every instruction, giving him the confidence to expect that when he says go, he'll be numbered amongst those who win. Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority, under Candacy, Queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure. He was the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

And the Queen, the Queen of Ethiopia, Candacy. And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet. Would you expect to go into the desert and find somebody reading their Bible? The prophecy of Isaiah.

And the Holy Spirit said then to Philip, go near, join yourself to this chariot. Because he's the object of Christ's quest. Philip ran thither to him.

He had to run, otherwise he would have missed this text. He ran thither to him, heard him read the prophet Isaiah and said, do you understand what you're reading? He said, how can I? Except some man should guide me. So he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

And the place of the scripture which he read was this. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, like a lamb done before his shearer so opened he not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away.

Who shall declare his generation for his life is taken from the earth. Fifty-third chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. The foreshadowing of the death of our Lord Jesus upon the cross.

Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the cost of our peace laid upon him. The eunuch answered in verse 34 and said, I pray thee of whom speaketh the prophet this? Is he talking about himself? Or of somebody other man? Somebody else, some other man. And then Philip did a very smart thing.

He opened his mouth. It's a good thing to do if you're going to say something. That's the first lesson in preaching.

Homiletics. Open your mouth. Now the Lord Jesus had spent a whole bunch of time telling the disciples to keep their mouths shut.

Don't tell anybody, because you don't know enough to talk sense. But here was a man in the desert, in the place where God had put him, who had the right to open his mouth. And began at the very same scripture and preached unto him, Jesus.

That's all he had to talk about. Because he knew exactly of whom the prophet Isaiah was speaking in the 53rd chapter of that prophecy. Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the cost of our peace with God laid on him by whose stripes we're healed.

So right beginning at that scripture he talked about Jesus. As they went on their way, they came under a certain water. So it's quite obvious that Philip had told him the significance of baptism.

Not just that Jesus died then, but that he rose again from the dead. And those who put their trust in this risen, living, indwelling Saviour testify to their faith in him by being baptized, going beneath the water, identifying themselves with his death and coming up out of the water, sharing his resurrection. Because that's what it means to be baptized.

Countless millions get baptized and haven't a clue what's happening, except they're becoming a church member. Identified with Christ in death, very. But identified with him in the power of his resurrection life, up out of the water, to begin your ministry as a member of his body.

Philip said, if you believe with all your heart what I've told you, you may. Which presupposes, of course, that if he didn't believe all that Philip had told him, he may not. He answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

So Philip commanded the chariot to stand still, and they went, both of them, down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they would come out of the water, the Holy Spirit caught away Philip. But the eunuch saw him no more.

He went by donkey, and went home by air. A donkey ride in the desert. You know, if Philip hadn't gone when God said go, and got on that donkey and set out, I think God would have sent the donkey.

And he would have been about as good, of course, as somebody who goes without being sent. It's wonderful when you're sent and you win, but it's pathetic when you go when you haven't been sent. And out of sheer enthusiasm, there are countless who've done that, and made fools of themselves.

Philip didn't. He was found finally at Azotus, and passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea. And I give you only one guess as to what he preached about.

Jesus. Well, this is the church in action, a donkey ride in the desert. Being told what to do, doing as you're told, and being in the place where God has put you, and finding a man reading his Bible, wanting to know what it really meant, and led him to Christ.

That doesn't sound very complicated, does it? Philip didn't have to have unusual skill or special training. All he had to do was get on a donkey when he was told to, and go for a ride in the desert. And God had already prepared the heart of a man who was waiting to hear, from the lips of one whose mouth had been placed at Christ's disposal, why he went to the cross.

That's the church in action. Donkey ride in the desert. Where you expect nothing.

Human is speaking. Except your heart is filled with a simple childlike faith in a God who knows what he's doing, and does what he knows. Chapter 9. Same book.

And remember, this is the continued activities of the Lord Jesus. Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, Saul of Tarsus, arch enemy of the early church. Relished the death of Stephen when he was stoned to death.

Threw others into jail. Ridiculed those who believed that Jesus was the Christ. And so Saul of Tarsus desired of the high priest letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem and throw them into jail.

But it was then that a light shined from heaven, brighter than the sun, and he heard the voice of God through the clouds. Saul arose from the earth, verse 8, and when he saw no man but they led him by the hand, he was brought to Damascus. And there he resided, in Damascus.

But there was a certain disciple at Damascus whose name was Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias, calling him by name. He said, behold, I'm here.

And the Lord said unto him, arise and... What's the word? Go. This is the church in action. Who's running the church? The Holy Spirit.

Who's giving the instructions? The Holy Spirit. That's the real church in action, the body of Christ. Indwelt by a risen, living Saviour.

I saw the vision, and God said, Ananias, go. Go into the street which is called straight, and enter into the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold he prayeth. So we see the church in action.

A donkey ride in the desert, now we see the church in action. A knock on the door down the road. Ananias answered, Lord, I've heard by many of this man, Saul of Tarsus, how much evil he hath done for thy saints at Jerusalem.

Did you say, Saul of Tarsus? Are you sure you've got the name right? God said, yeah, I've got the name right. But he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call him your name. I'd be sticking out my neck.

Well, I understand that, said God to him, but that's not your business, that's my business. Because now that you're a member of my body, your neck is my neck. The Lord said unto him, verse 15, Go thy way, do as you're told.

He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. This man whom you fear is going to become Paul the Apostle. My special emissary to the Gentiles.

So Ananias stopped arguing. Do you know why? He was a man being filled with the Holy Spirit. How do you know? Well, it's simple.

God said go, and Ananias, verse 17, went. And if you're told to go and you went, it means that you're a healthy member of the body of Christ. That's all it means, to be being filled with the Holy Spirit.

You don't have to make antics and draw attention to yourself. You just are told what to do, and do as you're told. Isn't that terribly complicated? A man full of the Holy Spirit.

He went his way, entered into the house, putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto me in the way as thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul of Tarsus, you're going to become an entirely new creature. Nobody will recognize you for who you were.

And immediately they fell from his eyes as it had been scales. For Saul of Tarsus had been led blinded into Damascus when he saw that light from heaven in the face of God. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

He received sight forthwith and arose, and he too was baptized. Identified himself, Saul of Tarsus, enemy of the early church, with the one who died and who spoke to him from heaven on the road to Damascus, came out of the water to share the life of his risen indwelling Savior. And straightway, verse 20, he preached Jesus, the Christ, in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

All that heard him were amazed and said, is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem? Came hither for that intent that he might bring them bound into the chief priest? Is this the same man? Of course. But recreated by the gift of that life from God that man lost in the day that Adam believed the devil's lie that he could be a man without God. Humanism.

And man becomes his own God. Saul increased the more in strength, verse 22, confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ. Just a knock on the door down the road, because a man was told to go and he went.

This is the church in action. Nothing spectacular. Donkey ride in the desert, knock on the door down the road.

Just ordinary people, doing ordinary things, but under divine compunction. This is the church in action. Chapter 10, verse 1. There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian Bands.

That regiment in the Roman army that were present and crucified the Lord Jesus and later was stationed at a city in England called Chester. And there's a museum there of this particular regiment. And this man was a centurion called Cornelius.

He was a major. And all majors are very, very fine people. He was a devout man.

He was one that feared God with all his house. In other words, his fear of God was so convincing that his kids couldn't help but be identified with him in his fear of God. His servants identified themselves with him.

He was a devout man. And his devotion to God they couldn't challenge. He gave much alms to the people.

He was generous. And he prayed to God always. He was a God-fearing man, a man of prayer.

So convincing that he didn't have to whip his kids to go to church. They loved him for the man of God he was. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day, verse 3, an angel of God coming into him saying to him, Cornelius.

And when he looked on him he was afraid. And he said, what is it Lord? He said to him, your prayers and your alms, your gifts have come up for a memorial before God. Never imagine that an unbeliever is despised by God if he's earnestly seeking to know the truth.

The Lord Jesus promised if a man seek, he will find. Only those fail to find who never sought. Only those to whom the door remains shut are those who never knock.

But to those who seek, they'll find. To those who knock, said the Lord Jesus, the door will open. Always.

And the lovely thing is that the Lord Jesus knows exactly where they are. He knew there was a man reading his Bible in the desert. He knew that there was a soul of Tarsus who had heard the voice of God on the road to Damascus.

Bear that in mind. When God says go, he knows where you've got to go. And he knows where you're going to be put.

And he's already prepared the hearts of those to whom he's going to minister through you for their eternal good. Send men now, verse 5, God said to the angel, to Cornelius. Send now men to Joppa, call for one Simon whose surname is Peter.

I'll tell you where he lives. He lives with one Simon Atanah whose house is by the seaside. And he shall tell you what you ought to do.

God has seen your prayers, heard them. God has seen the good gifts that you've given to your fellow countrymen in their need. God knows it all.

But I'm going to send you, or tell you to send for a man who's going to tell you what you ought to do. Because your prayers, Cornelius, aren't enough in themselves. Your good works, the alms, the gifts that you make available to the poor, they aren't enough in them.

They won't wash away your sins. But there's a man down in Joppa who'll tell you what you ought to do. Well, a well-meaning neighbor of Cornelius might, having heard this, say, If ever there was a man that deserves to go to heaven, Mr. Cornelius, or Major Cornelius, you're that man.

Don't listen to these people, they're scaring you, they're frightening you as though you weren't fit for heaven. Forget it. If ever a man deserved to go to heaven, on the basis of the kind of life that you live, you're that man.

Was Cornelius impressed? No. When the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, verse 7, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, two of them, that waited on him continually. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

He wasn't too proud to admit to two of his servants and a soldier escort that God had told him by an angel that he needed something more than his devotion and good works. And he's told me to send to Joppa that there's a man called Peter there who's going to tell me what I ought to do. Wasn't that kind of God? To find a man too ignorant to come to Jesus, because nobody ever told him about Jesus, but make sure that somebody who knew Jesus would come and tell him what he needed to know.

That's how good God is. That's his kindness. That's grace.

On the morrow as they went on their journey and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up unto the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. This is the man they'd gone to fetch. And he had climbed onto the roof and was praying there.

And while he was up there, he saw a vision. He became very hungry and would have eaten. And while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

Peter saw the heavens opened and a certain vessel descending unto him as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts to the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, fowls of the earth. And there came a voice to him, Peter, rise, Peter, come and eat. You're hungry, here it is.

I sent it down for you. And Peter said, not so long. Did he ever say that before? Sunday morning, wasn't it? 16th of Matthew.

And the Lord Jesus said, I'm going to the city of Jerusalem, there I'll be delivered into the hands of wicked men, religious men, and they'll do me to death, I'll be crucified, but don't panic. The third day I'll rise again from the dead. Peter then didn't believe it.

Now he did. Because he was living in the power of his resurrection. But he said, not so, Lord.

You know I'm a Jew, Jews don't eat that kind of stuff. Not so, Lord. I've never eaten anything, verse 14, that is common or unclean.

I can't do that. It would break my religious tradition. So the voice spoke again unto him the second time.

Peter, what God hath cleansed, that call thou not common. This was done three times. And then the vessel was received up again into heaven.

And while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who were sent from Cornelius, the major, had made inquiry for Simon's house and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, surnamed Peter, was lodged there. And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek you.

Two servants and a soldier escort. Sent by Cornelius. Verse 20.

Arise therefore. Get thee down. What's the word? Go.

That's all. Go. Go with them doubting nothing.

I sent them. Here was Peter just about to step into the timeless purpose of God. Because we are recreated in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained, that we should walk in them.

That's why you're only in the will of God when you were sent and you went and you're put. And God has already been telling the story and preparing for that part that he's allowing you to play in the story. So Peter went.

He was sent and went. He went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius and he said, Behold, I am he whom you seek. What is the cause wherefore you are come? And they said, Cornelius, the centurion, a just man, one that fears God and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send to thee into his house and to hear words of thee.

Then called he them in and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And Cornelius, when they arrived, was waiting for them.

And had called together his kinsmen, relations, and their near friends. And the house was filled with people. Peter took him up saying, as Cornelius fell at his feet and worshipped him, Stand up, I myself am just a man.

And as he talked with him he went in and found many that were come together. And said unto them, You know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come into one of another nation. But God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Therefore came I unto you without gain saying as soon as I was sent for. I ask therefore for what intent you sent for me. And Cornelius recounted the story of his own encounter with God when the angel came to him and told him to send and bring Peter.

Who would tell him what he needed to know and what he ought to do. Thy prayer is heard, the angel said to Cornelius as he recounted the story. Thine arms are come up before a memorial in remembrance in the sight of God.

Send therefore to Joppa, call hither Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodged in the house of one Simon of Tanna by the seaside. And he when he come shall speak unto thee.

Immediately therefore I sent to thee. And thou hast well done that thou hast come. Now therefore are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

We're not interested in listening to your opinions. We want as we've been promised through your lips to hear God speak. And Peter was as smart as Philip the deacon.

Verse 34. He opened his mouth. Isn't it great when you open your mouth you've got something to say that's worth saying.

This is the exciting adventure of being a Christian. A member of the body of Christ with whom he's clothing his divine activity. He knows exactly where the seeking souls are.

He's made all kinds of preparations in advance unknown to you. So that when you arrive all you've got to do is open your mouth and tell the truth about Jesus. Don't allow anybody to make for you the Christian ministry or call complicated.

All you've got to do is be told what to do. Do as you're told. Be sent and went and be put.

And when you see how marvelously God has opened this door of opportunity you open your mouth and talk about Jesus. He opened his mouth and said of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel preaching peace by Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all. That word I say you know which was published throughout all Judea.

And began from Galilee after the baptism which John the Baptist preached. How God anointed Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.

Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil. For God was with him. And we, verse 39, are witnesses.

Of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem whom they slew and hanged on a tree. But God raised him up the third day and showed him openly. And Jesus is alive.

Knock on the door down the road. Donkey ride in the desert. And a day in the dog house.

For Peter had to go to the house of a dirty Gentile dog. But if you're prepared by God's indwelling Holy Spirit to be a healthy member of the body of Jesus. You'll enter into all the adventure of being available to the one who alone knows where they are.

Who is seeking the truth and have never heard it. And you'll go for a ride on a donkey in the desert and find a man reading the Bible. You'll go down the road and knock on a door and throw your arms around the neck of a man.

Who is the arch enemy of the early church. And you'll be sent into the dog house of those whom men despise. Because they're unclean.

In other words we read as those who were members of the early church. Of those who were in the right place at the right time saying the right thing to the right person. But who organized it? The Lord Jesus himself.

He's the head of the body. Right man, right place, right time saying the right thing to the right person. When can you enter into the adventure of that quality of life? Very simple.

All you've got to do is die to yourself. And become available to Jesus. When Philip got on the donkey and went for a ride in the desert.

He died to himself. He had earned the reputation of being a city wide crusader. Thousands would come and listen to him preach.

And God said go into the desert. I've got somebody I need to talk to. And I need your lips.

And he went. And was put. Ananas had to die to his own physical preservation.

He got a knock on the door of a man who was the arch enemy of the early church. Who consented to the death of Stephen. And cast countless others into jail.

And you want me to knock on that door? Dead on said Jesus. He's my chosen vessel to go one day to the Gentiles. And Saul of Tarsus will become Paul the Apostle.

So Peter said to the Lord Jesus I want you to go with these men. But the Gentiles. I'm a Jew.

I can't go into their home. It's dirty. God said don't you dare to call common what I have cleansed.

Be told what to do and do as you're told. Go. And he went.

And Cornelius. The Roman officer became a Christian. All you've got to do is die to your own ambitions.

Die to your own success. Die to your own physical well being. And die to your religious prejudices.

And racial prejudices. And you'll be in the place where God. Who so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son.

That whosoever believeth on him should not perish. But have everlasting life. You'll be part of the action.

And for weeks and months and years afterwards. You'll be hearing the story of what happened to that boy. That girl.

That man. That woman. To whom you went because you were sent.

Isn't that exciting being a Christian? You don't need a PhD. Just a heart for Jesus and total availability. So that you become expendable.

For him. As he once was expendable. For us.

What an incredible privilege. What a joy. And this is your privilege.

This is your joy. Don't imagine that being a church member of this body. Is simply to sit in a seat.

Once a week or twice or three times. And put a dollar in the plate. That would be dull.

That's being religious. That's being churched. Open before you.

Is the glorious prospect of being a member of the body of Christ. In action allowing him to do his thing. His way.

His time. For his reason. And always to his praise.

Not now and again. When it's convenient. But with the hilarious expectation when you get up in the morning.

And say Lord Jesus. Thank you for what you did so many years ago. So that you could be right now who you are living in me.

I haven't a clue what your agenda is for today. But you do. And I want you to know that I'm available.

And just tell me the word to go. And I'll be one among those who have sinned. And I'll enjoy the miracle of seeing God in action.

Doing his thing. In his way. For his reason.

That's a glorious prospect. But that's yours right now. Because Jesus is not the one who was alive.

He's the one who is alive. Right now. Living in you.

And all you've got to say Lord. Here are your hands to work with. Here are your feet to walk with.

Here are your lips to speak with. Your eyes to see the need. Your ears to hear the cry.

And your heart to love with. Thank you. It's going to be fun to see what you have in mind.

I'm a Christian. Not just a church sitter. I'm a Christian.

I'm a member of the body of Christ. I'm alive. Because he's alive.

And I share his resurrection. And every tomorrow is the unfolding adventure of being part of God's story. Created in Christ Jesus unto good works that he has before ordained that I should walk in.

He knows the story and is waiting to tell it. But cannot, will not and does not. Unless I let him.

How do you let him? Just by making yourself as available now to him as he made himself available to the Father. And say thank you in advance for what he's going to accomplish. In spite of who you are but because of who he is.

Terrific. Storm or no storm. Because he's coming back again and you don't have to come back.

Your responsibility and privilege and joy now is to answer the call. And be found when Jesus comes in the place where he put you. Reveling in the blessing that is inevitable.

In the place of God's divine appointing. Great. I know it's true because I've tried being religious and found it so boring that finally in despair I quit.

Even though I was enthusiastic to the nth degree to do my best for Jesus. But I've missed the whole point. That he died for me only that he might live in me.

Every moment of every day on earth on the way to heaven and then forever. I'm not trading that for anything else. I can't settle for less.

I don't know how long I've got to live. But that's not my business. Because I'm ready to go.

But I'm ready to stay. So was Paul. He said I'd like to be out of the body and with Christ much better.

But so long as he still has something to do through me. For the furtherance of your faith and the furtherance of your joy. I'll hang around.

But when Jesus has nothing more to do with me and it's my body on earth I'm off. Bye. That's the Christian life.

Terrific. Right? Well live it up. Loving Jesus.

We thank you. We recognize you gladly now as the head of that body of which we have become members though we never deserved it. Because you've reconciled us to God with your death.

But you've quickened us to life. You've restored us to function. By coming in your resurrection power to clothe your deity with our redeemed humanity.

Thank you so much. Thank you for every new day that dawns in which we're prepared to allow you to do your thing. Your way.

In your time. For your reason. And to your praise.

Bless these men and women. Let them get excited about tomorrow. Because tomorrow is going to be as big as God.

So long as they let you be God. Thank you for boys, girls, men and women. You know where they are right now.

We don't but you do. But you'll need a hand to touch them. You'll need lips with which you can give utterance to your saving work on their behalf.

We don't know where they are. Anyone, Philip, knew who or where that eunuch was in the desert. We don't know where they are but you do, Lord Jesus.

Just as you knew where Cornelius was. Practicing religion sincerely, earnestly. Honoring, loving God but not knowing the truth about Jesus.

But you made sure he came to know the truth. Thank you for that little boy who was like I was when I was only 12. Never heard the gospel.

Taken to church but never heard the gospel. Never was introduced to Jesus. But thank you that that little boy sitting in that tent so many years ago was designed in your purpose to go all over the world and tell other people.

Tell them that you were waiting to be as much alive in them as you came to be then alive in me. Dear Lord, grant that these people may get excited about the incredible privilege of being active members of your body and part of the action and seeing God triumph again and again because he is the victory. Bless the pastor of this church.

Bless all the other pastors who have their role to play. Bless every individual member of your body as a member of this body corporate made up of individuals in particular who have been to the cross and said thank you Jesus for what you did. But a million times more I thank you now for who you are and for all that you've got in mind in days to come.

It's going to be exciting and I'm ready to go and be numbered amongst those who went and were put. Thank you. Dear Lord, you can't give us a greater privilege and we want every bit of it.

Not now and again, not in odds and ends, but a life that is no longer existence but the fulfillment of a divine plan. Thank you. In your own dear, purest, precious and all prevailing name, our Savior, our Lord and our God.

Amen. Mr. Thomas, we can't thank you enough for what you said. Could we give an adequate appreciation for him tonight? Thank you.

Thank you. I deeply appreciate it. Father, we just thank you so much for your choice servant, Major Ian Thomas.

Father, for the innumerable lives that you have touched through him over the years and over the last three days the way you've touched our lives and drawn us closer to your son, helped us to focus more clearly, more specifically on who he is and what he wants to be through us. Father, I pray that the words that you've spoken through Major Thomas would bear fruit in coming days and coming years. And Father, we look forward to seeing you face to face.

And Lord, in the meantime, we pray that in our lives, indeed, to live would be Christ, in Christ alone. It's in his name we pray. Amen.

Amen.

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