

Availability and Angels

by Paris Reidhead

God is still active in the world today, and he is doing the same things he has always done, including guiding us through angels and human beings.

Scripture: Acts 11:1-2, Acts 11:4, Acts 11:15, Acts 11:17-18, Acts 11:23

Topics: "Angels"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a man who had blood on his hands and darkness in his heart. He was told by a figure in white that someone with a face like his would help him remove the blood and darkness. The man searched for a solution but nothing worked until one night, he saw the figure in white standing across the fire. The figure asked if he was willing to obey in order to have the blood and darkness removed. The speaker then emphasizes the importance of living in the present and not wishing our lives away.

Transcript

I'll read beginning with the first verse. We read this morning chapter 10. We'll not read the entire chapter, we'll read the report of what was done there as recorded in the 10th chapter of Acts.

So Acts 11 beginning with verse 1, And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, How wentest into men uncircumcised, and did eat with them? But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend as it had been a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners, and it came even to me. Upon the which, when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered and saw four-footed beasts of the earth and wild beasts, creeping things and fowls of the air.

And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

And this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. And behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting.

Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning.

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. For as much then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. In dealing with this important theme of fellowship, it behooves us to understand that there are principles that God has always honored.

And it is for these principles we seek. We discover, as we saw this morning, those of you that were with us, that in the centurion Cornelius, the principle of fear of God, prayer to such God as he knew and in such manner as he knew, and sharing of what he possessed with those that were in need, had commended him to God, and that God having seen this response to the light of conscience and to such testimony as he heard, had caused heaven to move in his behalf. And so it is always true.

I am firmly convinced that God always respects the earnest heart, the seeking heart, the burdened heart. Regardless of whether they are in the Christian context or not, if they're prepared to walk in the light that he has given by way of conscience and such revelation as they have, and would respond to the gospel if they knew it, God will see to it that they hear the gospel. Now, I know when we reached one tribe in Africa, along the Sudan-Ethiopian border, we found a strange response to our coming.

There was one who was very interested. He came about, he spent time listening, opened his mind to what we gave, and responded to what was said. We found out that he had had a dream that there would be people coming to his village, to his tribe, and speaking in his language that would tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when the missionaries came, there was this unusual response. He was prepared. Now, lest this should be thought exceptional, we found the same thing happening in a neighboring tribe some 150 miles distance.

A missionary went out to this little village saying that it was to establish a little rest house, a little hut really, nothing more than a mud hut, and visit there once or twice a month. And there was one man who said, yes, that's fine, and you can build your hut here, and I will bring the wood and the grass and make the bricks for you. They asked why, and he said that he had seen in a vision that someone was going to come, tell him about God, the above one, the creator, and would ask to have a house built in his village, and that he was to give every possible assistance, because the word that this one would speak would be God's word to their heart.

So it's not unusual to find this. This could be duplicated many times in the experience of missionaries around the world. I think the most classic illustration of this is from an experience that I've related from the pulpit before, but I think it's appropriate and profitable that I should remind you of it now, lest you should feel that what happened with Cornelius is exceptional.

If I can prove to you that this is happening, then possibly I will succeed in proving to you that there are other things that God is doing that are happening today. See, we have a tendency always, when we

approach the scripture, to say, oh this was for that day, and we halo that time, and we think that these were an unusual people, and these were exceptional circumstances. And we talk about the good old days, and oh how wonderful it would have been to have lived then.

And this we must destroy. Whenever this comes up in your mind, you must destroy it, because you must deal with it. You can't tolerate it.

It is a disavowal of that wonderful truth that this is the day the Lord has made. And if you feel, if you came into this service some, tonight feeling that some other time was a better time to live, and some other day was a better day to live, if you're either looking ahead to a glorious tomorrow, or looking back to a haloed yesterday, then the present is more or less barren of meaning for you. And may God save us from this business of wishing our lives away, either backwards or forwards, and give to us a delight in the experience of the present, the joyous now.

I think of the, and this is also, by the way, I think of the young boys that were seen in the soda fountain corner store. And one of them, they're sitting there all dejected and disgusted with life, and kicking their toes, one into their heels, and one of them says, boy you should have been with us last week. Did we have fun? Oh did we have fun? The way looking at them, you'd think that fun was a word out of an unknown dialect of the Egyptians.

You know, did we have fun? That sort of an idea. And the other one says, ah that's nothing. You ought to be with us next week.

Are we going to ever have us a time? So they're talking about the wonderful yesterday, and the glorious tomorrow, but right there they're bored stiff. They just can hardly endure each other for another morning, another moment. And I think that this sometimes characterizes Christian people.

They have a grandiose idea of the past, and a glorified idea of the future, and they're living in a very barren now. May God save you from that. You didn't live yes that yesterday, and there's no prospect of that tomorrow.

Your life is going to be pretty much as it's been. So let's rejoice that this is the day the Lord has made, and that he's doing today what he's done in all the yesterdays, and he hasn't any stepchildren, and you're not deprived of blessing from God because you had the misfortune of being in the born in the 20th century. He's just the same, and his word is just the same, and his promises are just the same, and he's going to do with you not what he did for necessarily for this period, for Cornelius, but he's going to do with you something so wonderful, if you will let him, that your great-grandchildren will talk about your life as the good old days.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? This would be making history for them. And so if you could just bear with me to see that God is doing the same thing. I've told you about it, and some to some of you it'll be familiar.

But down on the northeast side of Lake Rudolph, which is in that salient, that area, that triangle area between the Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopians, Somali, is a virtually unmapped, untraversed area. It's exceedingly dangerous. It's probably the most primitive part of Africa even yet.

Maps are very sketchy. Few parties have gone through hunting. A few government military surveys have gone through, but for all practical purposes, it is the most primitive part of Africa.

Way down there in this trackless waste, not actually jungle, not mountains, a little bit of each and not much of any, and very little profit in it or would have been exploited before this. Some wandering herdspeople were following their tribes, little grass huts they'd wrecked before they'd only stay a few weeks and then go on with their cattle. But seated down there one night, late at night, in front of a few coals burning in the center of the hut, was a young man, married, two children, and sitting there looking at his hands.

His hands looked bloody, and he'd rubbed them, and his heart, which he seemed to see, looked black, filled with blackness. He'd gone to every witch doctor, he'd gone to witch doctors of other tribes, always with the same question, how do you get the blood off of your hands when you kill someone? How do you get the black out of your heart? And no one had an answer. They prescribed this, bring a cow, bring this, bring that, but nothing helped.

And so late at night he was seated there, looking into the dying embers of his fire, warming himself, and wondering how he could get the blood off his hands, get the black out of his heart. When he noticed standing across the fire a figure in white, a man, and in white, white clothing and white face, he said, I've heard you ask to have the blood taken off your hands and black taken out of your heart? Yes, that's what I've asked. He said, would you want to have that happen to you, badly enough to obey me? Yes.

He said, all right, if you'll follow me and go where I send you, I'll bring you to a man whose face is like mine, and he'll tell you. Now the angel didn't tell him any more than the angel told Cornelius. The angel could have, but he didn't.

And so he woke his wife, said I'm leaving. He took some dried food that was there, and some water, his spears, staff, dog, and started off. And the figure stood outside of his house and said, take that path.

Now remember where he was in the northeast side of Lake Rudolph, 360 degrees of the compass. I want to eliminate the possibility of chance. He went for several weeks.

He would follow a trail alone. Then he'd come to a fork in the trail, and he'd say, which way should I go? He'd start down the trail. If it was the wrong one, the figure in white would say, no, you take the other fork.

The figure never came, never appeared, except to correct him. As long as he was going properly in the right direction, there was no visible message. And he went on like this day after day and week after week, till finally he stumbled into the perimeter posts of the Sudan Army, Sudan Defense Force, way down on the southeast border of then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, now the Sudan.

If you'd have asked the government in Khartoum where Dick Lyde was, they'd have said, we don't know. He's somewhere here. No communications, no telegraph.

Dick Lyde was the district commissioner for this whole area called the Peaborer Post area, stationed at Okobo. He had been a missionary with the Church Missionary Society over in Equatorial Province. And studying the map, studying the location of missionaries, he saw this vast area without a gospel witness.

So he had applied for government service to the Sudan government under one condition, that they would allow him to be permanently stationed at Okobo and give him privilege of learning the language and staying there long enough to use it. And he also stated, I'm a missionary and I go for the purpose not only of preaching, of administering, but also of making known the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am expecting to have your recognition of this. So he'd gone in, he'd translated the gospel into the Sudanese, the colloquial Arabic, very colloquial, and he had learned the Murale language.

Now, he was the only white man in the world that knew the Murale language, and he was a born-again Christian, well taught in the scripture, whose father-in-law incidentally was Mr. Smith, who was one of the missionaries down in Kenya that was very much part of the Kenya-Uganda revival for many years. Now, this man has been weeks on the way, stumbles into a sentry on the perimeter outpost of this encampment of the Sudan Defense Force, probably a half or three quarters of a mile away. And so he asks, they of course take him by bayonet, thinking perhaps the army across in Ethiopia had sent him in and he's a spy, but he doesn't know their language, they're speaking Arabic.

And they take him in to the sergeant who would be in charge, saying, we found him, he's here. He didn't apparently understand a word they said. Finally, one of the soldiers spoke in Murale, and he replied.

He said, I know that language. When I was a little boy, these people came down and found us, and I was taken as a slave, and I escaped when I was about so many years. But he had learned the Murale language, which wasn't his language at all.

And then he gave his story in Murale. He said, I had blood on my hands and black in my heart, and I knew not how to have it taken. A figure in white whose face is like the sun in the morning when it rises, told me that if I would follow, there would be someone whose face was like his that would tell me how the blood could be taken off my hands and the black out of my heart.

Here were all of these Africans. He said, have you ever seen anyone whose face is like the sun in the morning? I said, why yes, he's here in that tent. Is that right? Could he tell me how to have the black taken out of my heart and the blood off my hands? And one of them said, yes, he told me I was like you are, and he told me we'll take you to him.

And so they escorted this man that had been weeks on the path up to the tent, and Dick Lyde had the joyous privilege of pointing him to the Lord Jesus Christ. When I saw the man, he'd been a Christian for about eight years. He'd start out when the rains were over and the dry season began, and he'd take a piece of cord about six feet in length.

And he would, every time he witnessed to someone who opened their heart to receive the Lord Jesus, he'd tie a knot in the cord. He wouldn't come back until the cord was so that he couldn't tie any more knots in it. He had knots, then he had knots on knots, and then he had knots on knots.

And when he came back, he'd sit there in the presence of Mr. Lyde, and he'd tell about each knot, who this person was, and where he'd met them, and what they did. And he'd say, now these five right here, close together, were the sons of a man that received Christ when I was there last year, and now when I came, the sons were waiting to receive the Lord. And he'd been led all the way for nearly 400 miles, 300 miles and more, up and around and across, to stumble into the camp of the only white man in the world who knew the language that he had learned as a slave boy, and who knew the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's my firm conviction that a sovereign God who knows the hearts of all men is doing today what he did with Cornelius. And I would have you remember that. But I would also have you remember, dear friends, that he's doing, will do with you, what he did with Adiklai.

And just as he found Peter, and Peter was prepared to go, if you're available, he'll use you. Because the angel could escort him, but the angel couldn't witness to him. And I am wondering if the angel of the Lord has often brought prepared people right by me, and by you, because you were too busy to take time to tell

someone how to have the black taken off their hands, and off their heart, and the blood off their hands.

Peter was busy. We saw last Sunday night, Philip was busy, but not too busy to be available to God. Have you been that busy? Is there, as you approach this week, a sense of adventure, and a sense of excitement, a sense of delight, that you've committed to him all you are, and have, and are available, and perhaps he's going to allow the Spirit of God, or some angel of the Lord, to escort to you, that one to whom you can explain how to have the blood taken off their hands, and the black out of their heart.

For there is the ministry of God and his sovereignty. There's the ministry of God by angels. You say, angels today? Oh yes, certainly, unquestionably.

For the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him. And this is certainly not just a figment of imagination. This is a delightful truth to the tender heart that walks in fellowship with God.

Say, I've never seen one. Very good, that's not important. The fact is, as long as God keeps seeing them, that's all I'm worried about.

When he loses sight of them, then there'll be a matter of concern, but I'm not necessarily. The thing I must see to it is that I'm living in fear of the Lord, and in constant trust, and submission, and obedience, because then he said that he would care for his own. I do recall speaking to this point for a moment, driving down one Saturday night, very late, through Georgia, on one of those lonely, lonely, lonely roads, where you can go 15 miles straight as a die, and never see a town.

The only thing you might see is a wandering deer or a loose cow, and the headlights periodically. Well, I'd worked all day, driven most of the night before, had to be in Winter Haven, Florida, to speak at 11 o'clock, and I couldn't leave Chattanooga until 8 o'clock at night, and I had to drive every minute. I got to the church yard just about five minutes before I was to go into the pulpit, and I was tired, so tired I could taste it like acid in my mouth, and I was asleep, sound asleep, going down the wrong side of the road at Georgia's limit of 60 miles an hour, and a car was coming directly at me, and I felt a hand on my shoulder, as definite as that, and I turned to see who it was, and saw the lights pull the car in time to avoid a calamitous accident.

Now, you can say, who? I don't know, but I only know that I awakened because a hand on my shoulder drew my attention and brought me out of my drowsiness, and I turned to see whose hand had awakened me. They couldn't have happened. Well, it did.

It did. All I'm concerned about is this. Now, no question about the fact that angels can minister, that they are the ministering servants of God to perform his will and purpose.

This creates no problem with me. As I say, I've said often, I only had problem with four words in the Bible, and when I solve those four words, then I haven't struggled with the rest of it. You know what words those were? In the beginning, God.

And as soon as I could adequately make my peace with these four words, I've had no problem since. And I think that anyone that will approach the Bible and read it from the beginning and will actually consent that there is one who was before the beginning and by whom the beginning began, then he won't have any trouble at all with the rest of the Bible. It's this pre-existent one who is the cause of all that is and the organizer of all that exists that causes trouble.

And as soon as you've made peace with the fact that God is, then you have no problem with the fact that God does. But the problem isn't with God. I have no difficulty there with an angelic ministry.

The concern in my heart tonight is, are you responsive? Are you prepared to overcome your prejudices? Are you prepared to overcome the natural lethargy of your heart? Are you prepared to overcome your preoccupation with tasks more interesting, perhaps, than those that you feel he'll give? Do you recognize that there is a glorious adventure of obedience to God that's your privilege to enjoy tomorrow? Oh, that somehow you could enter into tomorrow realizing that every step is a step into adventure. Don't be like the man who looked at the gray sky and the rain and says, my, isn't this a wonderful day to be only half alive? This, I'm afraid, is too frequently the attitude. People approach just half alive.

They've got to go through the drudgery of succeeding with this task and the other. But oh, that tomorrow you can say that God has some hungry Cornelius, God has some burdened man or woman, and I am here available to him, willing and ready to be used where and when and how he chooses. This, I see, is tremendously important.

But the next matter that is of great concern to me from what we've read is this, that Peter had to learn that God was prepared to deal with others the same way that he dealt with him. Perhaps this is one of the most difficult lessons that you're going to have to learn. There's always a sense in which we are inclined to think we are the people.

God has found in us more than he's found in others, and blessed us more than he's blessed others, and taught us more than he's taught others, and done for us more than he's done for others. This smugness can grip us, this complacency can lay hold upon us and cripple us. And if I find it is a tendency into which my heart can fall, and in it which it can fail and sin, I'm confident that you share it.

Peter was quite prepared to go, and I think he was quite prepared for God to save Cornelius from hell. But the idea that Cornelius was going to have something happen to him similar to that which had happened to these that had been with Christ for the three years of his public ministry, was just stretching his expectation. And so God had to settle the fact that he has no stepchildren.

And there's nothing that he's ever done for anyone that he's not prepared to do for everyone. And in the house of Cornelius, he raises his voice in sweet testimony to the Lord Jesus. We are witnesses of all that he did, and how that he was hanged upon a tree, and how God raised him up and showed him openly, and commanded us to preach unto the people to testify that Jesus Christ is the one whom God had ordained to be the judge.

He was willing to say this. But you know, when God just opened heaven and poured out of his Spirit upon Cornelius and his family, and his servants, and his friends, baptizing them in the Holy Ghost, and wonderfully signifying to Peter that it was as it had been on Pentecost, then Peter was forced to say that God made no difference. He fell upon them as upon us at the beginning.

And this is the truth that I want your heart to grip tonight, that God is meeting you to the degree to which you're prepared to be met by him, as he has met people in the beginning. We live in the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. This is the period of his ministry.

G. Campbell Morgan, that great homiletician and British preacher, stated over and over again in his book Acts of the Apostles, that Pentecost was not the day, it was the dawn of the day. This is the day of

Pentecost, that was the dawn. It dawned back there, and this is the day.

Rather than speaking of that as the day, and this is something else. It had a dawning, but now Peter witnesses the Spirit of God fall upon Cornelius and this company of Gentiles in identically the same way as he had in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Now incidentally, this is the only time that it happened just this way, other than at Pentecost.

This is the only occasion, and I think there's a real reason for it, for your heart as well as for Peter's. I think in Peter's case he had to know that there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles. They were all on the same basis, and it was necessary for God to have witnesses.

Six men went with Peter. It was necessary for Peter, who was in some sense the leader of the Apostles, to see and to participate in this visitation of the Lord, in order that there might be no prejudice about the Gentile believers. But I think it was necessary for you that this should have happened just this way, that God could encourage your heart to believe tonight that he's just the same today as when he went away, and there's nothing changed.

What has changed? You say, well he is not doing as he did then, is he? Of course he is. Maybe not to me or to you, but he is. There's almost everything that he's ever done that he's doing.

You say, well are the dead being raised? Well, our missionaries tell us of experiences. We think of that thing that took place in the Baleen Valley, when that dear godly Kupaka that had gone down with them took the son of the chief that had been brought out of the house but taken away for burial, and he just held him in his arms and groaningly laid hold of God. He didn't know what he was even praying for, but he just was pleading the name of Jesus.

And the child was, as far as everyone was concerned, was dead. And after a little while, the child began to whimper and cry, was brought back to his father. You say, well you haven't any clinical proof, have you? No, we only have the fact that the tribe pretty well turned to Christ, that's all the proof we have, that God was working there.

You say, well what about, all right, we can raise a hundred problems and a hundred questions and you can cite a hundred distortions and a thousand this and more of the other, but the point for your heart is that you're hungry for God, and you need to know him, and you need to be able to come to his word and say, all right Lord, what about me? What about me? And so you have this wonderful testimony that the Spirit of God is prepared to meet the need of hungry hearts. If it is true, and I've sought to satisfy your minds, and certainly mine is, that God is leading by angels people to hear of Christ, and he's leading men out of their darkness and blindness into repentance and faith, that salvation is in every case supernatural, then I think we can just simply approach this book as a living book, so Lord speak to my heart through it. You say, won't this lead to fanaticism? My dear, fanaticism doesn't come from truth.

Fanaticism doesn't come from the Bible. Fanaticism comes from hearts that are unwilling to accept the balance, whether of the word of God or whatever it may be. You don't find that fanatics are confined to the religious interests at all.

Do you know why we speak of baseball fans? Do you know what fan is the short of? Well, it's just the short form of fanatics, and you hear 10,000 fans and really what you've said is 10,000 fanatics, and it's from this source that it comes. And fanaticism therefore is not implicit in truth. You can become a fanatic on

anything that you're desirous of committing yourself to.

I believe in another sense, however, that every Christian is in one particular or another a fanatic, and properly so. Sometime I'd like to bring a whole message on what I call balanced and useful fanaticism, because I believe that it is very, very important. The person that commits himself to Christ is so oriented his life around a person, the person of the Son of God, that from that time on he lives every breath in the interest of that person.

And if this isn't what you might call a fanatical orientation of one's life, then words would fail us to express it. And so there is a disciplined, proper, and wholesome fanaticism, directing of our lives in accord with the will of a person. Now I recognize that one can become overbalanced on any doctrine, on any truth.

There's no debate, there's no argument. But I do not believe that anyone has ever become overbalanced in his love for the Lord Jesus. I do not believe that anyone has ever been oppressed out of measure by his commitment to the will of the risen Christ.

I believe that if you will accept the word as the rule of your life, the whole of it in its full balance, that you can take everything in the book without hesitation, without fear, without question. I would like to disabuse your mind tonight, if it's possible, of the fact that of fanaticism. I would like somehow to make this word appear in its proper light so that you aren't going to be afraid.

You're going to be afraid of this, however. You're going to be afraid of getting out of balance with the will of God. Oh, that if somehow your heart can come to rest in this, that you do not need to be afraid of the Lord.

You don't need to be afraid. I have asked myself over and over again, why is it that there are some people who become, what shall I say, out of balance on a particular phase of truth? I stand in a very unusual place with friends in so many quarters. For instance, I have some friends that believe in the sovereignty of God, and in supernatural salvation, and in the necessity of repentance.

But you know what? That's all they believe in. That's all they believe in. And they know that I believe in this.

And so when I get together, as long as we talk about that, wonderful. That's fine. We're friends.

Then I have other people that believe in victory. They believe in victory through the cross. They believe in a possibility of victory in one's own personal experience through identification with Christ.

They know I do. And so as long as we have a fellowship there, wonderful. But if I ever talked about the sovereignty of God, they'd be disturbed.

Then I find others that believe in the fullness of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But that's all they believe in. They know I do.

And so they say, well, that's fine. When I meet them on that level, we're just splendid. But when I start talking to them about real repentance and real, oh, that's not important.

To these people, that's all that is important. When I start talking to these people about victory, well, that's not important. The only thing is the fullness of the Spirit.

And vice versa. With these people, nothing's important but what they, their interests. My friend, if it's in the Word of God, it's yours.

If it's part of this book, it's yours. And you don't need to abandon any of it because someone has abused it. If you're going to claim for yourself only that which hasn't been abused, there's going to be precious little that you'll have.

For instance, you can't believe in the virgin birth because it's turned by some into mariolatry. That's a big portion of the Word gone right there. That's right, if you're going, because they've abused the doctrine, a wonderful doctrine.

They've made it, pressed it, and turned it into mariolatry. Well, if your test of truth is going to be it's abused, what have you left? You can't have that. Well, then you're going to have to do away with baptism because they've turned it into baptismal regeneration.

Multitudes of people are deceived into thinking that water saves. And so if you're And then the coming of the Lord, you're going to have to do away with that because they've turned it into Millerism and Jehovah's Witness and a lot of other things, been twisted and abused. And if you reject anything that's been abused, that's gone.

And so it is with the gifts of the Spirit and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If you say, well this has been abused, it's gone from my Bible. Precious little remains.

No, I think you can do this. That when you come to the place that what you want is to glorify God, and your concern is that your life be the vehicle for the revelation of the loveliness of Christ, and that you're an instrument to be available to And you want both fruit and power for service. You can turn your life over to the Lord in absolute confidence that when you ask hungrily for bread, he won't give you a stone.

And when you ask for an egg, he won't give you a serpent. And when you ask for meat, he won't give you a cockatrice. He's going to give good and wonderful things, him in and of, and through himself his son.

And so with an open heart and a yielded heart, you say, well why do you talk like this? Because I find that most Christian people are afraid of God. Did you know that? They're afraid of God. They're afraid of what he'll do to them.

They're afraid of what he'll take from them. And they, this is the reason why the witch doctor business is so profitable in Africa, because people don't want to meet this invisible realm of personality. This is why the priesthood has prevailed through the centuries, because people would like to have somebody else go into the mysterious caverns of the unseen and come and tell them what happened.

And this happens with Protestants also. That's why you have the deification of personality. There's been no movement in history that's so glorified personality as Protestant Christianity.

Constantly looking for a personality that can be exploited because of an inner fear of God, fear of what he's going to do, fear of what he's going to take. But my friend, you do not need to be afraid of God. He'll never embarrass you.

He'll never hurt you. You can come with the same openness and expectancy and submission and faith and childlike anticipation as did Cornelius, knowing that anything that God does for you is good. Now,

many times people have their reactions to what they see.

They say, oh, I don't want that to happen to me, or I don't want this to happen to me, and they're proper, right. But you see, the place where we're to get our understanding of what God does for and in and to and through his people is not from what we see around us, but from the word of God. What I am pleading for tonight is this, that you should recognize that all of Peter's of all the ages are only the instruments to point you to the Lord Jesus.

Philip went down to Samaria and preached and Peter and John came down and prayed for them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter went into the house of Cornelius, began to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of God fell upon Cornelius.

What has God told us here? He's told us that he doesn't have any one pattern for meeting his children. Not one pattern. It's so easy, you know, for people to get a little formula and say, now this is the way God meets his children.

So easy. But I have such complete confidence in God that just as soon as I get him fixed in my little pattern, he's going to break out of it. And I'm so glad.

I'm so glad that I can't harness God to my formula and fit him to my pattern. My heart rejoices in this, that he's infinitely bigger, infinitely more glorious than any little conceptual pattern that I might fix for him. Now the reason that I dwell upon this is last Sunday night I dwelt upon what happened down at Samaria.

When Peter and John came down and prayed for them and laid hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Ghost and we said it was a church matter, it is a church matter, but lest we should make the mistake of saying this is how and only how. We hasten to come and say God just wonderfully broke over and through and met Cornelius. What is he going to do for you? How is God going to meet you? I don't know.

I don't know. But this much I do know, that there's an interdependence that we all have one upon another. As Peter and John were important in Samaria, and God chose this means, meeting and establishing that church, as Peter was likewise important even in standing by in the house of Cornelius, so everything that God does for you he's going to do, now note my words, he's going to do in conjunction with what he has done.

He's going to do in accord with what he's done, and what he's done, does for you, is going to be understood by the church. I, but what I would love to see happen tonight, is that you go out of this service saying, God wants to make me a complete, wholesome, happy, fulfilled, and filled full Christian. That I can be useful and available to the Lord Jesus Christ, in exalting him in my home, in my work, in my recreation.

This is what I want you to see. Whatever means he chooses to use, that's up to him. Whatever plan he uses, that's up to him.

But the fact is, whereas I can't fit a pattern and say this is how God's going to meet you, whether he uses this pattern or that, this means or that, the one thing that is paramount is that you were intended to know him in his fullness, in a life of union, a life of indwelling, a life of fellowship, a life of joyous involvement with the living God. And you can. And he's prepared to do the same for you today, as he's done for all the people of the past.

He's just waiting to find the hungry heart and the dry prepared ground on which to pour the living water of himself, the rivers of his love. Well, what about it? Are you afraid of God? Are you afraid of what he'll do to you? Are you afraid of becoming too involved with him? Is there a deep inner fear that God might embarrass you? Can't you just deal with this and recognize that every gift he gives is a good and a perfect gift? He never gives dirty gifts, nasty blessings. Everything God does is wonderful because he is wonderful, glorious because he is glorious.

And you can just open your heart to him and open your life to him and ask him to meet you and make you the vessel that he desires you to be, fill you with himself and live through you his life, and believe that as you pray he accepts that prayer, he answers that prayer. And in his own time and way he'll lead you. It may be in your case he's going to say you ought to go to the eldership.

Maybe there's a heart of lack of submission. Maybe the only way he can meet you is to bring you to the eldership. I know that's what he had to do with me because I was so utterly sure that because I was me he was going to meet me alone the way he did Cornelius.

Oh I read this chapter over and over again. I said now Lord this is the way you've got to meet me because I'm me. Well I wasn't so bold as to say it that way but that's just what I meant.

You know what the Lord did didn't you? He made me go and see some brethren, a couple of Baptist brethren who knew the Lord. Now I said brethren I don't know much will you help me? Will you teach me? And they helped me and they taught me. And I don't know quite how the Lord is going to meet you but I do know this that he's going to meet you.

Perhaps he has and if so rejoice. Someone says well you know I was filled with the fullness of God when I was saved. And you know what my answer to that is? Praise the Lord.

If you know it that's all I'm concerned about. Praise the Lord. You know why it could happen? Because it happened with Cornelius and if it could happen with Cornelius he could do that with you.

And if you were filled with the Spirit of God when you were saved, good. Most everyone's born of the Spirit but not all are born full of the Spirit. And he said be filled with the Spirit.

So if you were born full of the Spirit and if God met you then praise the Lord. I'm satisfied because this is here in the 11th chapter. But if you weren't you ought to be.

And you can be. And God wants you to be. And you ought to want to be.

Because then he gets the glory out of your life that he deserves. And you get the joy out of life that you deserve. And others get the witness out of your life that they deserve.

What we should see in this tonight is that God is prepared to meet you. He's prepared to forgive your sin. He's prepared to give you eternal life in his Son.

He's prepared to make your life the vehicle for his presence. And he will give to you as much of himself as you're capable of receiving. And go on giving and giving and giving again.

And your life is to be a life of ever increasing, ever widening, ever deepening fellowship with God. Now the only reason that Philip, that Cornelius, could have fellowship with the Church was because he had fellowship with God. And unfortunately too many people begin their life of fellowship with the Church

instead of with God.

And so all they can have fellowship with is the Church. Because that's all they've known. You only can have fellowship with others in Christ, with others in the fullness of God, when you are in that relationship.

Do you see? Otherwise they're talking about something you've never known about. Talking about something that you've never experienced. And you can listen, but you can't share.

And this is to be a life of sharing. And the normal state in the New Testament is filled with the fullness of Christ. And this is the reason Paul, why Paul says, that Christ may take up your lasting dwelling place in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and foundationed in love may know what is the breadth and length and depth and and to experience the love of Christ which passes intelligence in order that you might be filled unto all of the fullness of God.

And when this is the case, then you share in fellowship. And this is why he met Philip, Cornelius, as he did. That he might share in the life of the Church.

This is why he wants to meet you, that you might share him in the life of the Church. But that level of fellowship that is normal in the New Testament is filled unto all of the fullness of God. This is the beginning, not the ending.

This is the place of fellowship, not the epitome of it. This is where we start, not where we finish. What have you? Let us pray.

Just to think our Father that we were forgiven, and sure that if we died we'd go to heaven is wonderful. To know that our past is under the blood, to know that thou will remember our sins against us no more forever, this is glorious. To know that we have peace with thee, wonderful beyond words.

But our Father to know thee, to have fellowship with thee, know the fullness of thyself, of thy spirit, and of thy son. This so transcends all the fellowship in the activities, and fellowship in the organization, and fellowship in the teachings. This is what John spoke about our Father when he said, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto thee, that you may have fellowship with us.

And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We ask our Father that thou will come upon us as a people. Thou didst come upon Cornelius, and by this thou said that there was no particular time, no particular race favored with thee, no particular situation, not dependent upon any person.

We believe our Father that from what we've considered these last two Sunday nights, that every heart here can find some encouragement to believe that the hunger thou has given for thyself, the yearning, the longing to be all that thou dost want us to be, to be the instruments unto glory thou dost choose for us to be, is not a vain hope. We're not as those who beat against the sky. We're as children that come to a father and say, Father give me bread, and egg, and meat.

And thou wilt not give us the stone, and the serpent, and the cockatrice. If we being evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will thou give of the fullness of thyself, of thy spirit, to them that ask thee. And so we can come with confidence, we can come with joy, we can let all of our fears and misconceptions, all of these inhibiting, restricting things that we've gathered and picked up in the past, just fall off of us.

And we can open our hearts, and minds, and spirits to thee, and say that we long for thee, the living God, to fill us with thyself, and to fill us with the fruit of thy presence, the fruit of the spirit, and to make us instruments to the glory of Christ. Grant, Lord, that this company gathered here tonight shall realize that this is thy purpose, this is thy message to our hearts, that this is the end thou hast had in grace, not just to take us where thou art when we die, but to come where we are, and share our homes, and our hearts, share our lives, and our work, our families, and our needs, and just to fit thyself into our lives, that they might be lived with joy, and meaning, and blessing to ourselves, and to others, and glory to thee. Thou art concerned about us.

Father, this overwhelms us, it just staggers us to think that thou didst care enough to want to compress thine omnipotence, compress thine omnipresence into the poor limits of our hearts. But this is thy plan, not ours. We're not telling thee something that we think would be nice if thou didst wish to do it, but thou art telling us what thy purpose was in grace, that the Lord Jesus died to take away the mountain of our guilt, and the world of our uncleanness, and to wash us, and take the legal barriers away, so that he could make our hearts his home, and live in us, and dwell in us, and walk in us, and we could know heaven begun on earth.

We could have constant conscious communion with thee, and it would be not working for thee to see thee at some distant day, but thou were living in us, and working through us, and heaven already begun in our hearts. And Father, this is what the world is waiting to see, this is what they're looking for. They've heard so much of the nice things we've said about thee, they've heard so much of our theology, but they're waiting to see him, the lovely one.

They're waiting to see the love, and joy, and peace, and gentleness, and long-suffering, and goodness, the meekness, the faith, the self-control that his indwelling presence brings. They're waiting to see Christ living in us. They can't believe what we say, Lord, they've got to see.

And the only thing they'll ever, way they'll ever see him, is to see him living in us. And so we're asking, Father, that thou will just be pleased to breathe upon us, and gather here by thy sweet grace a people that thou hast led and drawn into thyself. If thou wouldst meet hungry, needy hearts by the discipline of the fellowship of the church, as the eldership is in the case of Peter and John, teach, Lord, those whom thou wouldst thus meet to make known their need in thy guidance in their lives.

Undoubtedly there are others that thou meet alone, just as thou didst meet Cornelius. But our concern, Father, isn't how. We wouldn't restrict thee to a pattern, or fit thee in a formula, but oh that we should have a God-intoxicated people, young men and women, students and fathers and mothers, and all of us together sharing the risen life of the Lord Jesus.

A spirit-filled people. A people, Lord, that aren't only talking about how wonderful it was in some yesteryear, or how glorious it's going to be in some distant tomorrow, but are living in the joyous revelation of the risen Christ day by day. And Lord, we believe that thou art preparing hearts.

There are many here tonight. Know, God, that thou should teach us that thou are just as near as the air we breathe. Thou dost not need to come from some distant place where thou art more real than thou art here.

That thou, in thee we live, and we move, and we have our being. Thou art just as near as the air upon our face, as the light upon our cheek, and that if we're in the ocean of thy presence, and like a bottle with a cork of unbelief, the cork that stops it. So, Lord, that we might take the cork of our fear, and of our unbelief,

and all of our misconceptions, and just allow thee in whom we live to fill us with thyself, and manifest thyself, and make real thy presence, until, Lord, a people that know thee not only with the hearing of the ear, but know thee in that inner knowing that transcends all other.

O God, to share him thus in our lives, in our homes, in our witness. This is that for which we long, and so we're praying now that as we see thy grace manifest to this one, the working of thy spirit, Lord, we would believe that there are some that have been led into this hall for this service tonight, and that perhaps some prejudice, some preconception, some restriction be removed, and that as we sing, and as we pray, fill me now, fill me now, Jesus come.

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