

My Missionary Roots in Africa

by Stephen Olford

The speaker, Stephen Olford, shares his missionary roots and the significance of the bread of life, which is Jesus Christ, and the process of becoming the bread of life.

Duration: 30:49

Scripture: Exodus 16:4, Matthew 6:33, John 6:32-35, John 6:41, John 6:47-48, John 6:51, John 6:58

Topics: "Testimony"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares personal experiences that highlight the power of God and the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ. He recounts a story where a man who threatened him with a gun died suddenly after the speaker prayed to God for protection. This incident led to the conversion of many people in the community. The speaker also shares a childhood experience where he narrowly escaped death and realized the need to accept Jesus as his Savior. He emphasizes the importance of having a personal encounter with Jesus and invites others to do the same.

Transcript

I want to say what a tremendous joy it is to be in this chapel once again. I preached here some years ago before the church at Mount Vernon there was dedicated, and of course I was preaching there this morning, but what a thrill to come back here and to meet with you in this chapel representing the assembly in this location. When I met with Brother Duncan and his brother just now for a word of prayer, he asked if I might give just a word of testimony concerning my background and my roots.

Some of you may not know it, but I do come from the genuine Plymouth brethren. Amen. There are my roots, and my father was actually a Plymouthian.

He was born in Plymouth, England, so he is a Plymouth brother. He's now in glory. No question about it, no question about it.

He was saved as a result of an American evangelist by the name of Dr. Torrey. Thank you, beloved brother. When Dr. Torrey followed on the heels of D.L. Moody and conducted crusades across Britain, he had a huge crusade away there in Plymouth in what was known as Soldier's Hall.

And one night, the soloist, Alexander, got up and sang so powerfully that Dr. Torrey, before even opening the Bible, even before expounding the word, challenged the congregation there and said, Is there a young

man here who will stand to his feet publicly and confess Jesus Christ as Lord? And a young man in that congregation by the name of Frederick Ernest Samuel Oldford stood to his feet. He'd been attending the meetings. God had convicted him and brought him to a sense of need, and he stood up before that huge crowd and said, Jesus Christ is my Lord.

And God saved him there and then. Shortly after that, Fred Oldford brought eleven of his pals. It was a naval city, as you know, Devonport, leveled during World War II, now a beautiful brand new city.

He brought eleven of his pals with whom he used to go out rowing, and every one of them was saved in that crusade. So they called my father Peter and the others the Eleven. Peter and the Eleven.

And they started a tremendous work of preaching in the villages of Devon. They used to cycle out, preach in the open air, give out tracts, and in the heat of all the enthusiasm and devotion to Jesus Christ, young Oldford heard a missionary from Africa by the name of Fred Arnett tell of the needs in Africa. And he went forward in a missionary meeting and said, I want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in the heart of Central Africa.

And shortly after that, he went into training with a beautiful man that my father used to talk about, just a godly man called Danny, intensive angelism. And God-to-know-how-to-preach-the-gospel, he did some medical training, and then went out with Fred Arnett to become a missionary in what you know today as Angola. It was then Portuguese West Africa.

So that was my father, all the way from Plymouth, England, through the assemblies, out to Africa. My mother came from Bladesville, New York. Like Churchill, I have a great tradition, British father and American mother.

She was saved as a young lady, and many of you have possibly heard the little book, or heard of the little book called, Little Is Much When God Is In It. Well, if you've read that little book, the bestie in that little book is my mother. She was saved, brought up in the assemblies in Bladesville, then went to Buffalo in New York State in order to mature in Christian things under the elders there, and caught the vision to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in Africa, and she went to the Toronto Bible College, and then went to London for midwifery, and then out to Africa, and landed in God's providence on the very station where Young Oldford was.

And they came together in a very unusual way, young people. In those cultures, you don't date, and you're not to be seen with single ladies or single gentlemen. That's just not the done thing.

But my mother had an accident. A big, big dog that was on that station for protection jumped on her, and she was a little lady, frail, frail, little lady, knocked her over, and her knee was put out of joint. There was only one person on the station with any medical knowledge to put that right, and that was my father.

Young Fred Oldford was out to come put that knee back into place, and he manipulated it, snapped it, went back into place, but he maintained that the only way in which that knee could be healed was that every day it had to come and see Messiah. God works in mysterious ways, wonders to perform. And the match, match began right there, and as the love deepened and devotion deepened, God made it clear that they were meant for one another, and they were married three times.

Once in English, second time in Portuguese, and the third time in the Ashoka language. So my people were well and truly married. And you youngsters here will be interested to know this, that when I was

coming along, there was no doctor on the station.

The nearest doctor anywhere was a thousand miles away. My father had enough medical knowledge to predict some possible difficulties in my arrival, so they had to go to a doctor. And instead of picking up a telephone like you would here, or take your car and go down the road, father worked out an itinerary of a thousand miles, predicted the number of days it was going to take, and my mother was carried in a hammock with an awning over by two Africans.

Father walked every single inch of the way, one thousand miles, to a place in northern Rhodesia then called Kalani Hill. And you brethren will know in your prayer list of Kalani Hill, because that was a great brethren stronghold right there. And in that little school called Sakeji, a little bundle arrived one day and they called it Stephen.

If it hadn't been Stephen, it would be called Ruth. By this time, all the bridges had been washed away with the rainy season. It had taken that long.

But they decided to come back and came back a thousand miles again, father walking every inch of the way. And because the bridges were now swept away in what was just a little dirt road, my father had to go ahead and fire shots in every river to frighten away the crocodiles in case Stephen, who was now being carried in a little caddy cart on the head of a big African, should somehow or other trip and fall into the rivers as a little hors d'oeuvre before they started on the stage. One night, my parents tell me, a lion prowled around the tent and pawed almost the whole wing of the tent that had to be sewed up just inches away from where my little cart was.

There was some problem about feeding me. And there was no such thing as baby bottles in those days. And there was a real, real emergency.

Guess what happened? My father took his fountain pen, and those were the days of fountain pens, and my father could really write. I mean, he wrote like a script. He took the rubber from his fountain pen, washed it, cleaned it, sterilized it, and drips of milk were put in there and a little hole at the end, and that's how I was fed.

That's probably why I've got the tongue of a ready writer. But boys and girls here, I want to tell you something. As a young lad, I came to know Jesus Christ as my Savior.

I was being carried in a hammock one memorable day over another very, very frail little bridge, and the man in front slipped, which was very, very unusual. And in slipping, he turned the hammock, and I came hurtling through the air, crashed through a tree, and if I had fallen, I would have fallen to my death in one of the softest flowing streams of big rocks down below. But I was caught in the fork of a tree, and I was hanging there.

And I knew that I wasn't ready to meet my Lord. I knew I wasn't ready to meet my Lord. I was extricated from that tree, and trembling on the grass there with these two Africans who begged me not to tell my dad, not to tell my dad.

I decided that as soon as I could, I was going to get saved. A few weeks later was my birthday, seventh birthday, and we had a wonderful little tradition. Mother always took prayers at a birthday time, and the presents were given after the birthday time.

Mom took prayers that night, and she read John 14. Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me, in my Father's house and many mansions. Were it not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.

And she stopped there. And she said, you know, Jesus is coming again, as we were singing just now. He's coming again.

Isn't that wonderful? And when he comes again, Pedro, that's one of our boys, he will go. Manuel, that was another boy, he will go. João, that's John, he will go.

Daddy will go. Mommy will go. Stephen, will you go? Do you know how boys do? You know? I put my head down, started to play with my fingers, but I was feeling very uncomfortable.

Then my mother quietly said, let's pray. And she prayed, we had the gift, and I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I couldn't sleep.

The pillow seemed to be stuffed with bricks. And I twisted and turned, suddenly thought, I wonder if he's come. How do I know? Perhaps he's come.

Well, there's only one way to make sure. Find out if mother is still around. So I started to call, Mother! No answer.

And then I yelled, Mother! Then I screamed. And mother came tumbling into the bedroom. What's the matter, Stephen? Is it a hyena at the window again? Have you messed up your mosquito net? Are the mosquitoes in there? Is it that lion again roaring out there? No, I said, Mom, I thought Jesus had come and I'd been left behind.

And a godly mother knelt down with me and led me to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. And I asked the Lord Jesus who died for me at Calvary, shed his precious blood, rose again to come into my heart. And he came in, and he's never, never left me since.

And that's how I came to know my Savior. My brother asked me if I would just repeat a very remarkable incident that occurred in my teenage years. And apparently, John DeBriant had it on radio right here in Pennsylvania just the other day.

And it so moved my brother here. He said, Would you tell about it? We went through many experiences on the field. I was 17 years of age when I went back to England to go to university, do my degrees, and then God called me into God's service.

But that's a long story. But I would say around about 15 years of age when this particular incident happened, the devil doesn't like the gospel being preached. And a fierce witch doctor threatened my father's life and said, If you don't stop preaching the gospel, I'm going to kill you.

And then he made a threat. He said, On such and such a day, I'm going to come up the drive of your house, and I'm going to shoot you and Mrs. Alford and the three boys, those three of us, Stephen, Paul, and John. But my father was a man of prayer, a man who knew the power of the Holy Spirit.

And I've seen him preach and seen an entire village turn to God. He was a great evangelist, tremendous preacher. And this particular day, sure enough, here was the man coming, and the Africans stood back all very frightened, and this witch doctor all painted with all manner of colors, white and green and yellow and

white, came up that pathway with his gun cocked, ready to shoot.

And there was Father on the veranda. We'd already had prayer because we didn't take fresh blighting, and we'd been on our knees asking God for protection. But my father went right out and stood at the door, and the man came right up, right up, with a gun at his shoulder, and he said, I'm shooting you first, and then I'm going to shoot your wife and your three sons.

And my father waited until he was in good earshot, and he said, I am God's servant. I've been sent here in the name of the mighty Son of God, and in that name, which is above every name, on the ground of Calvary, in the power of the Holy Spirit, I rebuke you. And the man dropped.

The gun fell to the ground, harmless. The man got up again and rushed to the village. But in about ten minutes or fifteen minutes after his arrival, a courier came back to the house and said, he's dead.

He's dead. My father rushed to the village. The man was taken.

There was a doctor on the station. They opened him up, conducted a post-mortem. No cause of natural death.

God had answered from heaven. And fear came upon the entire, the entire community. And people turned to Christ by the thousands that He's a man who knows how to touch God.

And you can't play with a holy God. Can't play with a holy God. Well, that's the story you heard.

And those are the kind of experiences behind my boyhood day. Makes you shiver, doesn't it? But God is God. And we're living in a day when we're being far, far too flippant about Almighty God and His holiness.

God is a God of judgment as well as a God of love. And I thought I'd give you a little background as to my TB roots. Plymouth Brethren Roots.

And I thank God and still have wonderful fellowship with them wherever I go. And it's a joy to be here tonight and to bring you greetings from my beloved wife here and our family and to say what a privilege it is to be in this chapel. I think it would be a tremendous thing if we just stand once more and stood, because you asked me to give our little introduction and I just want to make a break fist before we go to the word of God.

So I don't know where the ladies are or where they were. Ah, all the way back there. Would you turn to 216.

216. And I think we'll rise just to change our positions and then we'll go right into the message of the night. 216.

Pray thou the bread of life. Let us rise. Pray thou.

The spirit of that hymn. Chapter six. The sixth chapter of John.

I've been asked to speak this particular passage because you are a gospel and you've reached this point. And having prayed over the matter ourselves what better can I do than to take on just where you've left off and to bring my contribution as you follow your way through the gospel of John. John chapter six.

And we'll begin if we may at verse 32 for connection and context. Then Jesus said unto them Verily, verily, I say unto you Moses gave you not that bread from heaven but thy father giveth you the true bread from heaven. The true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him Lord evermore give us this bread. Jesus said unto them I am the bread of life he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

We're going to pause there and drop down to verse 47 for the sake of interpretation. 47 Verily, verily, I say unto you he that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life.

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread that cometh down from heaven that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever. The bread that I give is my flesh which I'll give for the life of the world. Lord, as we prayed in that hymn break thou the bread of life to our hungry hearts here tonight for Jesus' sake.

Amen. My theme, quite obviously, beloved is the bread of life. As I stand here tonight literally tens of thousands of people have died this very day especially in certain parts of Africa and they've died because they have no bread.

All through Scripture and all through life bread is a symbol of life. It's the staff of life. In the East whenever an Arab or a Jew picked up a crust of bread in the streets as we would call it in the dirty park he would never trample it underfoot.

He would pick it up and put it into the niche of a wall for some beggar or some dog. Bread was never despised. When Jesus said I am the bread of life they knew what he was talking about.

That was life. That was life. Supremely life.

Needless to say that passage speaks to it in no uncertain way. And I want to be very simple but I want to be extremely pointed. And I want to ask from the very beginning do you know that life? Do you know that life in Jesus Christ? I want you to notice three very simple things tonight that as the bread Jesus supplied spiritual life.

As the bread he supplied spiritual life. He said I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man if any woman if any boy or girl eat this bread he shall live forever.

He shall live forever. The question arises why did Jesus use this wonderful picture of the bread for himself? And how did he become that bread of life which brings life into our very being supplies that life? I want you to think for just a moment. How is bread made? And how do we see it in the word of God? Well bread is made from corn or wheat it may even be made by from barley but whatever the bread is first of all first of all that corn that wheat that barley has to be brewed has to be ground.

Have you ever read Isaiah 28, 28? Bread, corn, brewed. Before he could be that bread of life he had to be ground under the upper and the nether grindstone of God's wrath against sin. He was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the castration of our teeth was upon him and with his stripes we are healed.

He was the bruised the bruised corn of wheat. Before he could be bread he had to be bruised. But not only that he had to be baked for us.

The Bible speaks of it in the picture of those Levitical offerings he was the meal offering and went into the oven of God's wrath that speaks of those dark hours of Calvary when he was shut in as it were when he who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And in that darkest moment midday darkness he cried in dereliction My God! My God! Why has not forsaken me? He was baked in the oven of God's wrath. The scriptures speak for that.

That's why he's the meal offering. But to me the greatest picture in the scriptures is not only the bruised and the baked but the broken bread. When he instituted what you celebrated here this morning in this chapel what we call the Lord's Supper he took bread and he broke it and he said This is my body which is broken for you.

I was chatting with folks this morning at Mount Vernon the tremendous impact that a book is made on my life just recently called The Cross of Christ The Cross of Christ by John R. Starke. He deals in the most exquisite way with what happened at Calvary. Beloved as those who preach the gospel we must preach that when God when God in Christ reconciled the world unto himself the Lord Jesus on that cross took our place and died in our stead as a substitute answering to all the righteous demands of the Holy God.

Holy love and holy justice led to Calvary and when Jesus died he died he died that I might live. He was broken he was broken and that's what we celebrated every communion feast the broken bread the bruised the dead the broken bread that you might live that I might live.

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