

# Through the Bible - Acts - Part 2

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen's sermon explores the early church's outreach to Gentiles, emphasizing God's impartiality and the importance of personal experience in sharing the Gospel.*

**Duration:** 54:08

**Scripture:** Acts 11:27, Acts 16:17, Acts 17:10-11, Acts 18:9-10, Acts 20:18-19, Acts 20:21, Acts 20:28

**Topics:** "Humility In Service", "Spiritual Leadership"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of serving God with humility and setting a good example through one's life, not just through preaching. He warns that when strict gatekeepers like Paul are absent, wolves can enter the church and cause harm. The speaker also highlights the need to serve one's generation and fulfill God's will before passing on. The sermon concludes with a discussion on the importance of fasting and worshiping God, as well as the guidance of a God-given leader in one's spiritual journey.

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## Transcript

Turn to Acts of the Apostles and chapter 10. Here we read of the word of God going to the Gentiles. You know, Jesus said that you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the outermost parts of the earth.

And we saw how it started in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 2 and then the regions of Judea. Acts chapter 8, it went to Samaria and it's gradually now going to the outermost parts of the earth to people who are non-Jews. And Peter was the one who was given the privilege to open the door to the Jews in Acts chapter 2 and also given the privilege to open the door to the non-Jews in Acts chapter 10.

I want you to notice something here, that when Cornelius was praying, he was a man who knew nothing of the Bible, nothing of God, he did not worship idols, but we could say he was praying to the God in heaven who he did not know who he was. Like a lot of people today, they are not necessarily idol worshippers, they are not Christians, but there are some people seeking after God, like Cornelius. And the amazing thing is, it says here in verse 4, that while he was praying, in the ninth hour of the day, while he was praying, he was a very devout man, verse 2, one who feared God, gave a lot of money to poor people, prayed to God continually, knowing nothing of the Bible, nothing of Jesus Christ.

And in the three o'clock in the afternoon when he was praying, he saw a vision. An angel of God appeared to him and said, the last part of verse 4, your prayers and your alms, money given to the poor, have ascended as a memorial before God. Now some of us may think that God does not listen to the prayers of such sincere people who are praying not knowing anything about the Bible or about Jesus.

If that were the case, you would have to say that verse 4 is not true. But God sent an angel from heaven to this Cornelius who did not know anything about the Bible, anything about Jesus. He was praying, God said, I've heard your prayers, I've seen the money that you were giving to the poor.

You know, God, with God there is no partiality. And wherever people are sincerely seeking Him, He meets with them. Sometimes beyond our understanding.

Now we can have a prejudice like Peter had. No, no, no, no, no. God cannot meet with them.

That is impossible. God only meets with us. Peter was like that.

God can only meet with us. And God had to change Peter's opinion to enlarge his heart. See, Peter had this opinion, we are clean, those fellows are unclean.

And so God gave him a vision when Peter was praying one day. It says he had a vision of a great sheet coming down from heaven, verse 11, with all kinds of animals inside, clean animals and unclean animals. And the voice said, arise Peter, kill and eat.

There are pigs there, kill and eat it. And Peter said, no means Lord, I will never touch anything unclean or unholy, verse 14. And the voice came and said, what God has cleansed, don't call unholy.

And this had to happen three times before Peter got convinced, verse 16. And while he was perplexing, what does this vision mean? What is God trying to, he knew it was a vision, it was not an actual pig or a lizard over there. But it was a vision of unclean animals, which he knew that the law of Moses forbade him from eating.

And God was saying, eat it. What does this vision mean? And then as soon as he was thinking like that, these people from Cornelius' house reached Peter's house. Because God had told Cornelius through the angel, go and ask Peter to come and give you a message.

Now, I want to ask you a question. When the angel came to Cornelius' house, did the angel know the gospel that Jesus had died for the sins of the world and Jesus rose up from the dead? What do you think? Did he know the gospel or not? He certainly did. Why couldn't he preach the gospel himself instead of waiting for three days for Peter to come? That's a very important question.

You need to know the answer for that. What was it that Peter had that the angel did not have? I'm sure the angel could have explained the gospel ten times better than Peter. Definitely.

But there was something that Peter had which the angel did not have. And that was the experience of salvation. Only Peter had the experience of salvation and only one who has had an experience of salvation can speak about salvation.

That is the principle in the Acts of the Apostles. What did we see in Acts 1.1? He did and taught. We have the experience, then we teach it.

The angel did not have an experience and so even though he knew the gospel very clearly, he is not permitted to speak it. What is the message for you and me? If you don't have an experience, don't speak about it. Learn a lesson from the angels.

Even though they know it better than anybody else, they keep quiet about it because they're sorry we can't speak it. We don't have the experience. Please send for that brother.

He can't explain it half as well as I can, but he's got the experience. So he can teach you better. Remember this with all your Bible study and knowledge.

If you don't have the experience, you cannot speak about it. You're wasting your time. Peter had to come.

He may be a humble brother who knows less than you, but he's got the experience and he's the one who's going to speak about it. And when Peter was thinking like that, the Lord told him, see, three men are looking for you. Go and don't have any misgivings.

Then he understood what this vision meant, that these are unclean people, Gentiles. I must not go and eat with them. And when he came to Cornelius house, we read that Cornelius fell down and worshiped Peter.

Verse 25, Peter said, get up. I'm just a man. And then he said about this vision that God gave him and said, now I have understood what this vision means.

Now I understand. Verse 35. Now I know that in every nation, in every nation and every denomination, the man who fears God and does what is right is welcome to him.

Is that right? I believe it is. God will lead such a man onwards to Christ. I'm not saying such a man is saved.

Cornelius was not saved. Definitely not. But God leads such people on.

He welcomes them. He hears that person who doesn't know the truth crying out to him. And he welcomes him.

He receives him. And he longs to send you to tell that man about salvation. What if Peter had said, Lord, I'm not going to go.

Like today, God calls somebody and the man says, I'm not willing to go. What would happen? Will Cornelius get lost because of Peter's disobedience? That would be very unrighteous of God to make Cornelius suffer for Peter's disobedience. No.

If Peter had not gone, God would have sent James or John or somebody else. If you don't go, well, you miss the opportunity. God will give that privilege to somebody else.

God will give your ministry to somebody else. So that's all there is to it. Acts chapter 10, verse 38.

When Jesus' ministry is being described by Peter, Peter expresses it like this. Beautiful word. You know Jesus of Nazareth.

God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. Power. That's the mark of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus never spoke in tongues throughout his life. He did not need to speak in tongues. You know the reason why Jesus never spoke in tongues? It's very important to know the reason for that.

He never had the gift of tongues. He had the gift of healing, miracles, discernment, prophecy, everything, but he never had tongues. What is the reason for that? See, tongues is because our fellowship with God is so imperfect that he gives us another language to be able to communicate with him more perfectly.

When we get to heaven and our communication is perfect, tongues, there will be no more tongues. When Jesus lived on earth, his communication with the Father was so perfect that he never needed the gift of tongues. That's the reason Jesus never spoke in tongues.

And it says Jesus was anointed with power and he went about doing good. When you are anointed with power, what is the first thing you'll do? Good to other people. If you do not know how to go around doing good to other people, brother, seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power so that you can go around doing good to people, number one. Secondly, you will go around delivering people who are oppressed by the devil. We are surrounded by people who are oppressed by the devil.

People committing suicide, people who are discouraged, people who are sick, people who are demon-possessed, people who are harassed, wives who are being harassed by their husbands and husbands who are being harassed by their wives. All types of things are going on in the world around us. And God has placed us in the midst of such a world to go and deliver these people from the oppression of the devil.

You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit for that. Even Jesus needed to be anointed to do that ministry. How much more you and I? And he did it.

Why? Because God was with him. And when you are anointed with the Holy Spirit in your ministry, it will be written about you, God was with you. When you went to deliver that person, God was with you.

When you stood in the pulpit, God was with you. This is how God is with us, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Okay, we move on to chapter 11.

Number of things there about the spread of the gospel. I just want to go down to verse 27. At this time some prophets came.

I want to speak to you a word about prophets. There was a man named Agabus who stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there will be a famine all over the world. He didn't say when, because the times and epochs are not for us to know.

Acts 1.7. But he said, God has shown me there is going to be a famine. Pretty soon perhaps, I don't know when. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

And what did the disciples do? When they heard there is going to be a famine, then we must collect money, because these people in Antioch were rich. So they heard that the people in Jerusalem were poor, so they collected money and sent a contribution, verse 29, for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. All collection of money that you read of in the New Testament, whether it is here, or 1 Corinthians 16, verse 2, or 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, always the collection of money was for poor people.

You never see Paul telling people, take a collection for me. Never. He always said, there are poor people there, please give it to them.

And he wouldn't touch it himself. So there is an exhortation in the New Testament, telling believers to give money, but if you read carefully, it was always asking them to give money to somebody else, not to me. Not saying, give it to my ministry, because I need to buy a house or rent a house and I want you to support me, I am the Lord's servant.

No, Paul trusted the Lord to provide his need. But he did urge believers to give money, because there were poor believers who needed help. So they took a collection and sent it, and this they sent through Barnabas and Saul.

So, God used the famine to bring these Gentiles in Antioch closer to the Jews in Jerusalem. You know there was a big division between the Jews and Gentiles. And here in Antioch, we read number of Gentiles were getting converted, as we read in Acts 11.21. How to bring these Jews and Gentiles together? The Lord says, let's send a famine.

And when the famine comes, these rich Gentiles will send money to the poor Jews and they learn to love one another. What do we learn from that? Some of the troubles and trials God sends into our life and into our churches is in order to bring believers together, who are far apart from each other. Yeah, some believer is in hospital, sick, and all the other believers rally around and provide food for his family and provide money for his hospital expenses.

What is the result of that? Not just his sickness, he comes out of the hospital after three weeks, but he comes out much more closely linked to the body of Christ. Through what? Through some message? No, through sickness. So God uses sickness, famine, all types of things to bring believers together, to make them one.

Give thanks for everything God permits. And the other thing we see here is that Barnabas and Saul were the ones who went from here to Jerusalem. Okay, keep that in mind.

And in the next chapter, we read about James being killed by the sword, verse 2, and Peter being delivered from prison, because it says here, when Peter was in prison, verse 5 of chapter 12, fervent prayer was made by the church to God. And who were the people watching this fervent prayer? Barnabas and Saul, who had just come. Chapter 11, verse 30, with the money.

And they had never seen a prayer meeting like this. Terrific prayer meeting, morning, night, prayer meeting, and they see one day Peter is at the door, he has come out of the prison. And that really shook them up.

In Antioch, they were doing a lot of teaching. But now when they came to Jerusalem and they blessed the people in Jerusalem with money, they got a blessing in return. What was that blessing they got in return? They got a vision of what prayer can do.

And they came back to Antioch in chapter 13, and they began to pray over there. Where did they learn how to pray? In Jerusalem. What did they go to Jerusalem for? To give money.

And they got a blessing in return, learned how to pray, and came back in chapter 13 and started praying with the others. And God spoke to them in the middle of that prayer meeting and said, separate me Saul

and Barnabas for the ministry. See, God is using all these means to teach one another.

Whenever you bless somebody else, that person blesses you in another way. You may bless him materially, he may bless you spiritually. You may bless him spiritually, he may bless you materially.

But God makes the body of Christ linked with each other. You see that again and again. One more thing I want to say to you from this prophecy of Agabus, Acts 11.28. It's very important to know that in the Old Testament, people went to the prophets and said, what shall I do? And the prophets said, do this, go here, go there.

Why did the prophets have to say that in the Old Testament? Because none of these other people had the Holy Spirit. Only the prophet had the Holy Spirit. But in the New Covenant, the Lord said, they shall not teach every man his neighbor, saying, know the Lord.

In the New Covenant, Hebrews chapter 8. But all shall know Me. So there's no need for the prophet to tell that person now, you can go here or you shouldn't go there. No.

Then the prophet is taking the place of the Holy Spirit. In my lifetime, many, many, many, many people in many, many places have come to me to find the will of God for their lives. And I have never tried to do it.

I said, I will not find the will of God for your life, because that will be taking the place of the Holy Spirit in your life. And I dare not take the place of the Holy Spirit in your life, because I am a man who fears God. Some other fellow who doesn't fear God may take the place of the Holy Spirit in your life, but I will not do it.

I want the Holy Spirit to have the rightful place in your life, so I will not find God's will for you. I can give you advice. When you ask me, should I do this or should I do that, I can tell you, with the certain amount of wisdom I've had, walking with the Lord for so many years, these are the advantages, these are the disadvantages, consider this, consider this.

So what should I do, brother? Think of all the things I told you, go and pray to God, and God will tell you whether you should take this job or travel here or not. Should I marry this girl? I say, I don't know. I can tell you what I know about this girl or what I know about this boy.

I can give you, but you got to find God's will yourself. Don't ever try to find God's will for somebody else. Don't ever try to take the place of God in somebody else's life.

Oh, there are multitudes of people who call themselves prophets today, who are taking the place of God. Like it says in 2 Thessalonians 2, the Antichrist sits in the temple, takes the place of God. There are these prophets today who are sitting in the church, taking the place of God, telling people what to do.

Taking the place of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will guide you. He's a jealous spirit.

He does not want to give his place in your life to some wretched prophet, false prophet. No, he wants to tell you himself. So what should a true man of God do? A man of God should give you advice, show you the advantages, disadvantages, and point you to the Holy Spirit.

What did Agabus do here? Read carefully. Did Agabus say, there's going to be a famine, so take a collection? No. He knew where to stop.

Today's prophets don't know where to stop. He said, there's going to be a famine, full stop. That's all.

I'm not going to say anything more. What should you do about it? I'm not going to tell you. You've got the Holy Spirit.

Seek God. They sought God, and God told them to send a contribution. They did that.

Agabus did not tell them what to do. Directive prophecy is never found in the New Testament. Directive prophecy is an Old Testament feature because people didn't have the Holy Spirit.

Very, very important to understand that if you want to be saved from the deception that goes by the name of prophecy, there's plenty of it here in Kerala, plenty of it in Northeast India, in the states over there, in different places particularly, like this. People who sit with them, they take their fees, prophets' fees. It's just like a doctor's consulting room.

You go there and you pay your fees and get your prophecy and go. It's all a deception. And you find people who go there never grow in the Lord because they have no contact with the Holy Spirit.

Next time they want to find something, they've got to contact the prophet again. This is all deception. Don't be deceived by it.

Agabus was a true prophet who said something and left it for people to decide what to do. Later on you read in Acts 21, Agabus said, thus says the Lord, the man who owns this girdle, that is Paul, he will be bound in Jerusalem. He didn't tell Paul whether to go or not to go.

There were other self-appointed prophets over there who said, no, the Lord says don't go. Paul said, rubbish, I'm going. Agabus knew where to stop.

Those self-appointed false prophets there in Acts 21 did not know where to stop. We find both categories of people today. A prophet in the Old Testament never, never, never told other people what to do in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament they did. Okay, God's sovereignty we see in Acts chapter 12 in delivering Peter but allowing James to die. I don't know why James died.

God could have delivered James just as he delivered Peter. He could have sent an angel three days earlier and delivered James from prison. But when a man's time is up in God's diary, God does not send an angel.

He just takes him to heaven. When God's time is not up, then he will deliver him. Jeremiah and Uriah both prophesied.

We saw Uriah died, Jeremiah lived, James died, Peter was alive. And Peter comes to the meeting and testifies, God delivered me. And sitting in the meeting is Mrs. James, perhaps thinking, why didn't God deliver my husband? Do you wonder why God did not do something for you, which he did for another brother? Humble yourself and say, Lord, that's your sovereign plan.

I'm so happy that you did it for that brother. That's what Mrs. James should say. My husband died a few days ago.

He was killed. Lord, you could have delivered him like you delivered Peter. He's standing here now.

Mrs. Peter is so happy. And I want to rejoice with Mrs. Peter for the work you have done for her husband, even though you allowed my husband to die. That is a godly woman who recognizes the sovereignty of God in delivering one and allowing another person to die.

So often sicknesses, one person is healed, another person is not. Learn to rejoice when God deals like that with that person, if he's not dealt like that with you. So there are many lessons like this we learn.

Acts chapter 13, we read about the first great missionary movement out of Antioch. They come back and they've learned how to pray. And the Lord says in verse 2, it's a very important principle of missionary work here.

You read in Acts 13, verse 1 and 2. There were a number of prophets and teachers there. And they fasted and worshipped the Lord. They were not only fasting and praying, they were fasting and worshipping, asking for nothing.

Lord, we worship you. Thou alone art worthy. Fasting and worshipping.

It's a wonderful thing to fast and worship. And while they were fasting and worshipping, the Holy Spirit spoke. In a way that all those five people there got a deep conviction.

This is what God is saying. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul. Didn't stop there.

Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have already called them. I'm not calling them now. Some people think this is the call of Saul and Barnabas.

No. I have already called them. The call of God is always personal and private.

It may be confirmed in public. Like this is a public meeting where the call was confirmed. But this was not the call.

Don't ever get a call when somebody says, Blessed is the Lord. You are called to go here or you are called to marry so and so. Garbage.

Throw it in the garbage bin. If God wants you to do something, He will speak to you privately. He may confirm it through other elders publicly.

But always to the work to which I have already called them. Saul and Barnabas already heard the call. They were thinking about it, thinking about it.

And suddenly in the meeting, the other elders say, Hey, we get a confirmation you should be like this. It's wonderful. I remember when the day when God called me.

I mentioned it the other day. It's the 6th of May 1964. And I remember nobody knew.

I was sitting reading the scriptures. I was in the midst of traveling. I was on leave that time.

I was traveling around in an evangelistic team having meetings. And I was reading the scriptures and God called me very clearly. It was personal, private.

It was very clear. And while I was seriously considering and just thinking of quitting my job, a man of God who was the greatest man of God I've respected in this country in my life. He's dead now.

Came to me and said, Are you thinking of leaving your job? When are you leaving your job? It was prophetic. That man was a prophet. And that was an external confirmation to what God had already called me.

If God calls you, he'll call you personally. The confirmation may come from other godly men. But you must get the call yourself.

That's what we see here. And they went out sent out by the and the power of God was with them. And you see a number of things there.

Let me show you one thing in one of the sermons that Paul preached in verse 36. Says about David that he served his generation in the will of God and then fell asleep. Do you know, my brothers and sisters, that you can only serve your generation.

In another generation, God has to raise up another man, another woman. But in your generation, make sure you serve God's purpose and fulfill all of God's will in your generation before you pass on. And if you want to do that, you must be like it says here, I have found David, a man after my own heart.

That's the type of person you are to be. And he served in his own generation and he died. If you also like David are a man after God's own heart, then like it says here in verse 36, you can serve your generation in the will of God and move on.

So verse 22, where it says, I found David after my own heart is linked with verse 36. OK, we move on to chapter 14. And we read of the signs and wonders that the Lord did there.

And it's very interesting that we see that in one place where in one at one moment they were almost worshipping them. Verse 13, they brought garlands and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds to Paul and Barnabas because they saw them doing a miracle. A few moments later in verse 19, they were stoning them to death, going to stone them to death.

See how fickle minded the crowd is. One moment they are praising you, next moment they want to stone you. We read of Jesus in Nazareth in Luke chapter four.

He started preaching. People said, what gracious words he's speaking. And then he said something to hurt them.

And they stopped him in the middle of the sermon, pulled him out and took him outside to kill him. But they didn't succeed in killing Jesus and they didn't succeed in killing Paul. They stoned Paul, verse 19, dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

Does God allow his greatest servants to be treated like this? He does. I remember once hearing a story of a man who was an unbeliever. Somebody was witnessing to him and that man's son had died in some bad way.

Some others had killed him or something like that. And so this unbeliever said to this believer who was witnessing to him, where was your God when my son died? And the believer told him that God was in the same place where he was when his own son died on the cross. He didn't stop evil people from killing his son.

He didn't stop evil people from killing Peter, Paul, James, all the apostles except John as far as we know were killed. The greatest servants of Jesus Christ in history were killed. And God did not stop them from killing his greatest servants.

This is not like the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God did not allow anybody to kill Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or David or Elijah or Joshua. They all died natural deaths.

But we are in the New Covenant now. And in the New Covenant almost all of God's greatest servants, the apostles, were all killed. But only in God's time.

It was not time for Paul to die so he allowed the people to think that Paul was dead. They dragged him out. And you know, if you look at the time factor, when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 12 he said, I knew a man 14 years ago who went up to heaven and came back.

He was talking about himself. The time factor relates it to this particular time. This is probably the time when Paul went up to heaven and came back.

When he was dragged, thrown outside, stoned to death, but God rewarded him with a trip up to heaven and came back. And he has never told us what he saw there in heaven. Now you can be sure that if God allows you to face intense suffering, he will give you some intense rewards also.

Great suffering comes with great rewards. Verse 22, and after that it says Paul went somewhere and verse 21, returned to Lystra, to the same place where he was stoned. He was not afraid.

He came back and strengthened the souls of the disciples and said, don't get discouraged, they stoned me. And through much tribulation, verse 22, we must enter the kingdom of God. And when a man like Paul stood up and said that, with all the scars on his face and the wounds which are still healing, and such a man says through much tribulation, you got to enter the kingdom of God is much more impressive than me standing here and saying it.

So those who are called to be, God gives them the honor of being persecuted for the kingdom's sake. They are extremely valuable in God's eyes. The second thing Paul did there was verse 23.

He appointed elders in every church. You never find in the New Testament pastors being appointed in any church. Never.

No church in the New Testament was run by one pastor. Pastor is not an office. It is a gift.

It's a shepherd. It's a gift of shepherding people like apostle is a gift. Evangelist is a gift, Ephesians 4. It's not an office.

The office is the office of elder. And always there was more than one elder in every church. They appointed elders in every church and prayed with fasting because in New Testament ministry, it's not like one Elijah, one Abraham, one Elisha, one Moses.

No. In New Testament ministry, you need a minimum of two people to express the body of Christ. Because Jesus said where two are gathered together, there I am in the midst.

So you have to have two elders for the Lord to be present there to manifest his power when they bind Satan and lead the church on. And also the balance. Separate me not Saul alone, but Saul and Barnabas.

Not Peter alone going to pray. Peter and John we read in Acts 3 going to pray. Saul and Barnabas.

Two elders. Always in the New Testament, you find this principle of two. Jesus sent out his disciples two by two.

This one man pastor is never found anywhere in the New Testament. It's I know it's practiced in Christendom like a hundred and one other unscriptural practices are practiced. But all I'm trying to show you is if you have the courage to believe it, it is not found in the New Testament.

They appointed elders. Acts chapter 15. We read of a controversy concerning circumcision and the apostles did a wise thing.

They came together were six to look into this matter because they wanted, didn't want any controversy. Remember, this is a time when scripture was not written. We don't have such controversies today because we got the New Testament.

But they were living in a time when the New Testament was not written. They were in that transition period. And the apostles spoke the word of God.

There was no written New Testament those days. So they needed to come together to clarify these things. And after some days were 36 acts 1536 Paul said to Barnabas.

Let's go back and visit some of these brothers. Let's go back and establish them. Now we learn something from this.

I don't think the world has ever seen a greater evangelist than the apostle Paul, a greater man who had a greater burden for reaching the lost and reaching lost souls. Many times he used to say, I want to preach Christ where he's never been named. I don't want to build on another man's foundation.

I want to go away. Nobody says the people have never heard of Jesus Christ. What a passion he had.

And this man who had such a passion for evangelism. Here what does he say? He's not talking about evangelism. He's talking about building the church.

Why doesn't he tell Barnabas, let us go to some other places where the gospel has never been preached. That's not what he says. What weren't there other places where the gospel was not preached? Hundreds and thousands of places.

But he says, let us go back to the cities where we have already preached the word of God. And let's see how they are, because he knew the value of building the fellowship of the local church and making them disciples, not just evangelism. The greatest evangelist is speaking.

You can't be better than this man. So Barnabas said, listen, we should take along Mark. Mark was the person who came with them the first time and dropped out halfway because he found it was tough, this missionary work.

And Paul said, you cannot take him. Barnabas, Mark was his nephew. Barnabas said, we must take him.

And it says the disagreement with them, between them, verse 39, was so sharp that they separated. Paul said, okay, you take Mark, I can't take him. The Holy Spirit had brought Saul and Barnabas together.

Saul was a very hard man, speaking of truth. Barnabas was a soft man, speaking of grace. Between them, the glory of God was seen, full of grace and truth.

When they separated, how sad. Was that separation the will of God? Definitely not. God does not desire those whom he has called together to separate, particularly when they perfectly balance out each other.

You see the balance right here. Paul was hard. Don't take Mark.

Barnabas says, Paul, you also got a second chance. Let's give him a second chance. If they had learned to work together, how different it would have been.

Much later in life, Paul says, yeah, Mark is profitable for the ministry. Remember, these apostles also made mistakes. Acts of the Apostles is full of a number of mistakes the apostles made.

And they learned from those mistakes. I'm sure if this had happened when Paul was 60 years old, he would not have reacted like that. And Barnabas also would not have reacted like that.

They would have found a way to solve that problem. But they were in their 30s, maybe 39, 40, full of zeal, not that much wisdom. They made mistakes.

And that's a great encouragement for us to know that apostles made mistakes and we'll make mistakes. But God used it for the furtherance of the gospel because now instead of one team going, two teams went. Both had one experienced person in it.

Barnabas took Mark and went. And Paul chose Silas and went. So the gospel spread even more.

So God uses the things that the devil does for the furtherance of the gospel. So praise the Lord. And when he went to Derby, he met a disciple called Timothy, chapter 16, verse 1. It was Paul who chose Silas, but God had planned some other co-worker for Paul, and that was Timothy.

And so immediately after Barnabas is taken away, God says, okay, Paul, you need another gentle type of person, you're too hard. And he gives him a very gentle co-worker, Timothy, who was another Barnabas. How did this affect John Mark? I think John Mark was blessed by Paul's attitude and Barnabas's attitude.

He was blessed by Paul's attitude because Paul, Mark must have realized, yeah, that's serious what I did last time, just drop out half the way what Paul says is right. I better take my Christian life more seriously in future. Paul helped him to think like that.

At the same time, he didn't get discouraged and give up because Barnabas gave him a second chance. So grace and truth, when both ministries operate together, they bless people. And so we read here that Paul saw this young man, Timothy, outstanding and took him.

And another mistake Paul made here, verse 3, he circumcised him to please the Jews. Paul made a lot of mistakes. Don't follow him in everything.

And we read in verse 9, he saw a vision. Here we get an understanding of Christian leadership. Paul had a vision.

Everybody in the team didn't get a vision. One man, the leader, got the vision. He said, come to Macedonia and help us.

And now listen to this verse 10, it's a beautiful verse. They had such confidence in the leadership of Paul. They said, Paul, you've seen the vision, that's enough.

God doesn't have to give a vision to all of us. We are absolutely convinced, verse 10, that God has called us to go to Macedonia. It's wonderful when teams can work like this with absolute confidence in their leader.

The leader sees a vision and the team says, fine, we're going that way. I want to say to all of you, don't be a loner. There are many loners in India.

Loners means people who work all by themselves, alone, with no leadership, no fellowship, a lot of freedom. I can do what I like, I arrange my own program, I do this, I do that, and I do the other thing. I tell you, ultimately you'll destroy yourself.

It's just a matter of time. You need a God-given leader to guide you. And you're on very dangerous ground.

You may not believe it today, you think you're alright, just wait another five years and see what happens. And you'll believe the truth of what I say. And it says here, one more thing I want to point out to you is that in verse 6, they passed through the Galatian region and were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.

How did the Holy Spirit forbid them? Do you know? You read in Galatians chapter 4 that Paul says, I preached the gospel to you because I was sick. That means it was Paul got sick. He didn't want to stop in Galatia.

He was going to another place called Asia Minor. But on the way, when he was in Galatia, he fell sick. And because he was sick, he could not go where he wanted to go and he had to stay there and people came and he preached the gospel and people got converted and the church was formed in Galatia.

See God's will in stopping Paul by a sickness in order to establish a church in the place where Paul got sick. So don't think when you get sick, you miss the will of God. Not necessarily a church got established in Galatia because Paul was sick.

But here it is said he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit, but we are not told how. Sometimes the Holy Spirit stops us through sickness. There are many wonderful things like this in the whole Acts of the Apostles where you can learn the principles of serving God and learn from the mistakes of the Apostles too.

We see one thing here about a demon possessed girl saying, verse 17, following after Paul and saying, these are the servants of the Most High God. And Paul virtually told him, shut up. I command you to get out in the name of Jesus.

I don't want a testimony from demons. Paul did not want any testimony from demons, just like Jesus did not want demons to say he is the son of God. Don't ever receive a testimony from demons.

Chapter 17, it says here in verse 10 and 11, Paul and Silas went to Berea and the people in Berea were more noble because they received the word of God with great eagerness and studied the scriptures. What is the result of that? The result is there is no epistle of Paul to the Bereans. Why? Because they already had the habit of checking up what every preacher said with the word of God.

And those who keep checking up everything that anything they hear with the word of God will not go astray, like some of those other people in the other places in Galatia and others all needed correction in their teaching. Okay, we move on to chapter 18 where we read of the apostle Paul, the Lord telling the apostle Paul when he was in Corinth, don't be afraid of all the opposition, verse 9 and 10, keep on speaking boldly because I've got many people in this city. Just because there's opposition does not mean we should run away.

Seek the Lord and if the Lord says go, go. But the Lord may tell you stay on because nobody can harm you here. It's always good to develop the habit of listening to God, not to go only by outside circumstances.

We must never move on the basis of fear, we must move on the basis of God leading us. A wonderful example in verse 24 and 28 of a godly sister who could help a brother get more light. Priscilla was the wife of Aquila and it seems as though she was more spiritual and perhaps had a better understanding of scripture because verse 26, it's written Priscilla and Aquila, giving us a little indication that perhaps she was more spiritual.

They took Apollos who did not know the scriptures properly aside, took him home, explained the word of God to him, the way of God to him more accurately. Here was a sister who knew her place. She did not try to teach without her husband, she called her husband, called Apollos home, called him for a meal and shared the word of God with him along with her husband and led this man to a better understanding and ultimately he became a mighty servant of God.

Sisters have a unique ministry in the New Testament. In Acts chapter 19 we read about certain people to whom Paul asked this question, verse 2, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? He said we never heard about the Holy Spirit. Then he says, into what were you baptized? Now this verse by the way proves that they did not baptize in the name of Jesus in those days.

How do you get that from this verse? Because when they said we haven't heard about the Holy Spirit, he said then what were you baptized? In what name were you baptized? Because they were supposed to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. That's the point. That's how they were baptized in those days.

So he said you have to have heard about the Holy Spirit because that would have been there in your baptism and then they said we were not baptized that way. Then he discovered they were baptized only with John's baptism. And so he preached the gospel to them, they accepted the Lord and they were baptized.

Verse 5, in the name of the Father, the Son, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. After they were born again and after they were baptized, Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began speaking in unknown tongues and prophesying. Just like in Cornelius' house, as Paul, Peter was praying, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius' house and they spoke in unknown tongues.

Notice the different ways the Holy Spirit came on people. In Acts chapter 2, there was no preaching, they were just waiting, the Holy Spirit came. In Acts chapter 10, before Cornelius was baptized, without anybody laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came.

Here, after they were baptized, through the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came. It teaches us that the Holy Spirit can come with laying on of hands, without laying on of hands, before baptism, after water baptism, all by yourself when you are praying. Paul was alone praying and God sent Ananias.

So it's different ways. The important thing is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 20, we read about Paul giving a testimony to the elders in Ephesus.

After having been there for three years, it's a wonderful passage and I would encourage you to read from verse 17 to verse 35. It's a beautiful passage demonstrating how a true servant of God should serve the Lord. He says, I preach repentance and faith, verse 21.

I've spent three years here and he says, in all these three years, you've seen, not listen to my sermons only, but verse 18 and 19, you've seen how I have lived here and served you with all humility. He points to his life. He's not ashamed to say, look at my life, come and see, look at my example.

Don't be ashamed to show other people the example of your life and talk about it, not just your sermons. And he says, now I'm going, be on guard for yourself, verse 28, because I know what will happen after I go, verse 29, wolves will come in. Why couldn't the wolves come in when Paul was there? Because Paul was a very strict gatekeeper.

Every church needs a very strict gatekeeper if you want to keep the wolves outside. When that gatekeeper goes away and all the diplomatic elders take over, all the wolves come right in. That's what happened.

Paul was there for three years. So, every church needs a strong leader who makes sure that the wolves get the whip. Otherwise, the church will be destroyed.

And Paul's example in verse 33 to 34 and 35, he said, you see how I worked with my own hands, earned my living, supported myself so that I did not take any money from you, I did not take any clothes from you. And I supported not only myself, but these people with me to give you an example how we should serve the Lord. In Acts chapter 21, we read about this time when I told you these false prophets, false prophets means not false in the sense of evil, but they went beyond what the Holy Spirit said.

They said to Paul, verse 4, you should not set foot in Jerusalem. Paul was in a meeting and they were in Tyre and Paul was attending a meeting and there, Acts 21, verse 4, somebody got up and said, thus says the Lord, Apostle Paul, you should not go to Jerusalem. Agabus also came a little later and prophesied in verse 11 in another town.

And what does he tell Paul? He only says, Paul, you'll be bound in Jerusalem, but I cannot tell you whether you should go or not to go. You see the difference. One are immature people who don't know how to prophesy.

Agabus was a mature prophet. He knew I cannot tell this man what to do or what not to do. Paul said, I'm going.

And he went. Now let us find out whether Paul went in the will of God or outside the will of God. Acts 23, 11.

The Lord appeared to Paul at night and said, take courage, Paul, as you have witnessed in Jerusalem, you will witness in Rome also. Some people say because Paul was jailed, he missed the will of God. He

didn't.

The Lord said, you are in the will of God. If he had listened to those prophets who said, don't go to Jerusalem, he would not have gone to Jerusalem. He would not have gone to Rome.

It was in Rome that he sat down and wrote Philippians and Colossians when he was locked up there. We would not have got the letters to the Philippians and the Colossians and all if he had listened to those people who were giving him directive prophecy. When you listen to people who give you directive prophecy, you can miss the will of God too.

Acts 24, 16, a lovely verse that tells us one secret of Paul's life. I always maintain a conscience blameless before God and before men. Whenever his conscience troubled him, he set it right immediately.

Acts 26, 19, another secret of Paul's life. I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision God gave me. You can read the rest of those stories, that beautiful story in Acts 27 where the ship got wrecked and nobody in that ship was lost.

Reason? Because there was one man of God on that ship. Do you know the blessing a ship gets if one man of God is on that ship? Do you know the blessing a town gets if one man of God is in that town? Be a man of God like that. In conclusion, chapter 28, verse 31.

Paul stayed two full years, verse 30 and 31, in his own rented quarters. He paid the rent for his own house. He did not ask the church in Rome to pay his rent.

He was a man who was free. He paid his own rent for two years and preached the kingdom of God with all openness, unhindered. This is the place where he wrote Philippians and Colossians and Ephesians.

Sitting there for two years, imprisoned as a soldier of Rome, he fulfilled God's purpose. Paul comes through in the Acts of the Apostles as a unique example of a servant of God. He supported himself and served the Lord.

Not all did that. Peter, James, John, they were fishermen. They could not carry their boat with them.

But Peter, but Paul was a tent maker. All he had to carry was a needle with him and he could support himself. Some people are called to support themselves and serve the Lord like Paul.

Some people are called to be supported by others like Jesus, Peter, James, John. It's not a question of how you are supported. It's a question of being faithful with the money you receive, seeking the glory of God, ultimately trusting God to provide your need.

In many, many areas we can see Paul's unique example. Let's follow his example and serve the Lord in our day and age. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the example of this wonderful godly man who lived 20 centuries ago, whose example challenges us even today. Help us to follow his example as he followed Christ, we ask in Jesus' name.

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