

passage. This made him extremely irritated; he became angrier and angrier and even red in the face as he discussed the matter with the airline agent. What really happened was the following: He had bought a ticket for economy class and they had given him a ticket in first class. (As you know, that would mean he would have to pay the difference between the less expensive economy class and first class.) It was because of this difference in price that he became so upset. Finally, when he was seated in the plane, he bowed his head and began to pray. In a little while someone sat down at his side. He turned to see a soldier. Then a steward approached and asked what he would like to drink. He said, "I don't want anything"; while the soldier answered, "Bring two whiskeys and put them here." They then began conversing and he asked the soldier where he was going. "I'm going to Vietnam to die!" He then began to witness to the soldier and asked him, "Are you a Christian?" He said, "No." "Do you know Christ?" "No." "May I speak about Jesus?" "I am dying to hear!" And the soldier continued: "This morning I went to church to find an answer for my hungry heart. I participated in all of the worship service, I listened to all of the message, but there was nothing to help me." Never be guilty of not preaching to souls in your sermons. Think about the guilt of that pastor who preached on that morning in such a manner that the young man went away as hungry as he had entered.

Then that pastor picked up his New Testament and began presenting the plan of salvation to the soldier. And right there the soldier lowered his head and prayed and gave his heart to Jesus. Then he did what every Christian should do. His eyes filled with tears and he returned the whiskey to the steward. Shortly thereafter, they opened the curtain that separates economy from first class and the pastor saw that the economy class was full of other pastors bound for the convention. And they shouted: "Hey, what are you doing there?" He understood that he had been sent by the Holy Spirit. Only a man full of the Holy Spirit could be a powerful evangelist.

## GOD AT WORK THROUGH MEN: ANANIAS AND PAUL

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In the passage of Scripture for this morning, we have two people whom God used in carrying out his plan — Paul and Ananias. These two persons form a sharp contrast. Ananias was hardly known to Christians, yet God chose to use him. In fact Paul, who was going to be a famous and great Christian leader, needed his prayer and counseling. In these two persons we find a most significant combination in evangelism. Ananias represents Christians who are nobodies, engaged in personal evangelism. They are not known to the Christian public but known of God and greatly valued by God. They are absolutely indispensable. Personal evangelism is still the foundation of all types of evangelism. Paul represents the other type — the great leaders in evangelism whom God raises up for the need of the times and to whom God gives special talents and vision. They are also indispensable in the hand of God.

Our meditation this morning will concentrate on Paul — a man raised and used by God in evangelism. God used him to turn the world upside down because he himself was first turned upside down by God. Or, to use a modern word, God used Paul to revolutionize the world because he himself was first revolutionized by God. Here we have a basic principle in evangelism: God revolutionizes the world through people who are revolutionized by God first.

How was Paul revolutionized? We find the answer in the third chapter of Philipians.

In the first place, Paul was revolutionized in his concept of salvation. In the past, he tried hard to attain to righteousness by keeping the Law of God, but now he rejoices in receiving the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He has great joy in passing on to others this great news of salvation through Jesus Christ. In reading through Paul's epistles, we often find him suddenly bursting into a song or a shout in great excitement and exultation about God's unfathomable grace and wisdom in Jesus Christ. There is glorious salvation in Christ! There is freedom, and peace, and joy, and hope in Christ! May we, too, have the same joy and assurance in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Christ.

In the second place, Paul was revolutionized in his sense of value. In the past, he was bent on gain for himself, but now, he counts all gain as loss and all loss as gain for Christ. Not only that, but also he had joy in sacrificing everything for Christ. He says in Phil. 2:17, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Paul indeed followed the steps of his Lord of whom it was said, "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich." It is certainly true to speak of Paul as "poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things."

When he came to the end of his earthly journey, he could only speak of his overcoat and his books (II Tim. 4:13), yet he was so rich in Christ, and he made many people rich in Christ. This reminds us of John Wesley whose autographed will was discovered in 1768 in which only his clerical gowns, his watch, and his books were mentioned. That was all that he had in material things but many people were enriched through his ministry. Gandhi of India said to a missionary, "Sing me the deepest hymn of Christianity." "Which one?" the missionary asked. Gandhi said, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." All of us are familiar with the lines of this hymn: "My richest gain I count but loss. . . . All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice to his blood. . . . Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

In the third place, Paul was revolutionized in his concept of life. There are two things that stand out in Paul's new understanding of life:

First, abundant life through death. Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (II Cor. 4:10). One phase of the rich meaning of these words is that when Paul died to his self-life, others were brought to have life in Christ. Probably Paul also had something else in mind when he said these words which could be illustrated by his experience in the city of Lystra. Paul was stoned by the angry Jews and he was thought to be dead, and it was possible that he was dead, and they pulled him out of the city. But God healed him. Shortly afterwards, Paul again went to Lystra to preach the Gospel — what dedication and bravery! This time, we read of Christians in Lystra who evidently had been brought to life in Christ through Paul's reported death.

Second, Paul had only one goal in his life which is the "one thing" in his life — "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). This is the center of all Paul's efforts. This concentration creates a focus which generates dynamic power in Paul's life. A life without a focus can never achieve anything. A Christian or a Christian worker without a focus in his life or service cannot accomplish things for Christ. Dedication brings concentration, and concentration brings fruitfulness. When Paul was warned by the Holy Spirit of dangers that were waiting for him at Jerusalem (Acts 21:11), he would not listen to those who tried to persuade him not to go to that city. He understood the real intention of the Holy Spirit in revealing dangers to him, and he took them as challenge and went ahead. And he said, "And now I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem; not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24).

When Mary Slessor passed into higher service, her mission had to send twenty men to take over her work. That shows the power that is generated by full dedication.

We pray that God will raise up more fully dedicated Christians and Christian workers all over the world who will have Paul's "one thing" in their lives.

## GOD AT WORK THROUGH MEN: PETER AND THE ROMAN OFFICER (ACTS 10:9-48)

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The historical occurrence recounted in this passage is of great significance to the church and Christianity, because the account of God's opening the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles is repeated three times.

Who was Cornelius? A Roman officer serving in Israel, he accepted faith in the living God and submitted to the religious laws and practices of the Jews. This was, however, inadequate for his salvation. But God still heard this devout man's prayer and wanted to bring him into the fellowship of Christians, and perfectly arranged a meeting with Peter who had to open the door of Christianity to him.

What can we learn from this account and apply to ourselves? The contemporary world is religiously inclined and exerts every effort in an attempt to achieve salvation. However, despite its religiosity, the world does not know Jesus and consequently cannot find that only way to God.

But to return to the text. Here God prepares Peter for a specific mission. He is charged with announcing the saving message of Jesus Christ, the Good News of Salvation, without works. As a devout Jew who had received the commandment from Jesus not to go among the pagans (Matt. 10:5), he could not comprehend the opportunity arising for Gentiles to be saved as well. Therefore, God prepared him in a graphic way and in a manner which he could understand. God uses various means to assert his will in history, and in this instance he resorted to a special vision to give Peter his commandment about the necessity of going to a pagan's house.

Peter's faithfulness in prayer was a prerequisite to this special revelation from God. We cannot, however, conclude that just because Peter prayed at a special time, God used him as an agent to deliver the Gospel to a pagan. God had him in his plan, so that Peter really opened the door to Christianity for the Gentiles with the keys which Christ, in a figurative way, had given him. It is interesting to note that through the prayers of Cornelius and Peter, God was able to adapt perfectly the time and place to complete the work of salvation in a pagan.

Peter was astonished by this divine proclamation and summons, so that initially he rejected God's command. In his prejudicial devotion he answered God: "Not so, Lord!" and in so doing uttered a paradox, for while he called God his Lord he could not reject him simultaneously. Still, God did not withdraw his command but repeated it three times so that Peter would be radically changed.

God's timing and placing of events are perfect, but we are more concerned about particulars and childish details than in unquestioningly obeying God's commands and acting on them. It is God's problem how to bring people to hear the truth which he has revealed to me. I must be