

YE ARE MY WITNESSES

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(Messages given in family prayers during the Holy Convocation held at Hyderabad in 1970) Scripture Reading: Acts 3.

We see in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Apostles preached Christ again and again. "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26). That was the main message, which they gave with power, authority and boldness. When they preached about the Lord Jesus Christ and His miracles nothing happened, but when they spoke about the power of resurrection, there was much opposition. Mohammedans believe in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, His miracles and crucifixion, but they do not believe in His resurrection. They say that Jesus came down from the cross alive and went to heaven. They do not believe in His death, burial and resurrection. That is why they remain blind spiritually. Make sure that you have a clear spiritual experience of the risen Lord Jesus. Then you will have authority to talk about Him and pray in His Name.

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee; ...In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"(v .6). With authority, Peter healed the lame man, because he had a personal experience of the power of resurrection. They were witnesses of His resurrection. No one will be offended if you emphasize the miracles and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, but many will be offended if you preach about His resurrection. The power of resurrection is the great secret of a triumphant life.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"(v .19). By having real faith that the Lord Jesus rose again to give us divine life, we will have liberty in prayer and boldness in witnessing.

Acts - 4

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all"(v.33). This power of resurrection is the highest power of God available to man. There is no other power greater than the power of resurrection. There was opposition because the apostles preached this message (vs.2, 3). The priests, leading people and Pharisees became very angry when they heard the apostles speak about the resurrection and they put them in prison. At the same time, many believed in the Lord Jesus because of the same message (v.4). On the one hand there was persecution and opposition. On the other hand, when the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ was preached many believed on Him. The Apostles went on giving the same message in spite of the opposition they had to face.

The apostles were threatened for speaking about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But they said, "...we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). You may use the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and talk about His miracles, but people will not be offended. Many people had seen the

miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ during His ministry upon the earth. But when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee", they were angry with Him (Matt.9: 2; Luke 7:48). The same people who had seen many miracles opposed Him (Luke4: 40; 7:21). When He performed miracles they did not question Him saying, "How are you doing these things?" Rather, they went after Him to see more miracles, but when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee", they said, "This is blasphemy". In the same way when the apostles spoke about the resurrection opposition came. If the Apostles had said that the lame man was healed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they would not have been angry; but because they said, "...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead..."(v.10), they faced opposition. Thus we find that the power of resurrection working in us will bring much opposition from the enemy. The Lord Jesus Christ performed many miracles but the miracles did not defeat the devil. He gave many sermons and He also spoke with authority. Even through that He did not defeat the devil. It was only when He died, was buried and rose again, that the devil was defeated. The devil made people to say to the Lord Jesus Christ, "Come down from the Cross and we will believe in Thee". The Mohammedans say that Jesus came down from the cross and went to heaven. The Lord Jesus died and was buried according to the Scriptures, and rose again according to the Scriptures. That is the only power that defeats the devil. That is why the Apostle Paul says in Phil.3: 10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection".

Many believers only think of signs, wonders and miracles. They are ignorant of the real power of the Lord Jesus Christ given to them. When we appropriate by faith the power of resurrection, we will be made more than conquerors over every sin. "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom.6: 2). That is why we find that the apostles kept on giving the same message with power. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). Without the power of resurrection our lives remain barren and our ministry unfruitful. That power is manifested only when we learn to appropriate it by faith. The cross means death, resurrection and power, and it is by identifying ourselves by faith with the Lord Jesus Christ in a threefold manner, that we receive God's power. By the power of His death we are able to die to our sinful thoughts, deeds and words. By the power of burial, all our sinful desires are buried and forgotten, and by the power of resurrection we go on conquering and receiving new life. All these three go together.

The believers at Corinth had many gifts. They had much knowledge and they saw many miracles. Paul said, "... ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 1: 7). But they knew very little about the Spirit of power. God's word was brought to them with great power, and yet they remained babes spiritually. They were full of strife and sin because they failed to understand the secret of the power of resurrection (1 Cor. 2:2). They were talking about miracles, numbers, knowledge and other things. But Paul was saying, "Tell me, what is your experience of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then I will know whether you are spiritually grown or not. " Thus we find that our spiritual growth depends upon the understanding and the experience of the power of resurrection. That power is the highest power. May the Lord teach you to enjoy that power.

Acts 5

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (v.30). We see how the same message of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was brought by the apostles in all their preaching and teaching. All messages were based on the fact that Christ rose again and is highly exalted. By the power of resurrection and by exalting the Lord Jesus Christ in our testimony, we will see God's power. The Holy Spirit is the witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His exaltation. So were the apostles and believers in those days.

By appropriating in us constantly by faith, the power of resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ in our testimony and preaching, we too will receive into us the power of resurrection. We should ask for it. This is possible only when we die to our thoughts, desires and feelings. We claim by faith the power of resurrection of the Lord Who died for our sins. Then we receive that power and we can glorify and magnify the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ again and again by our testimony, and ministry, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life"(v .20). These words were spoken by the angel who brought the apostles out from the prison. They had to preach fully what they themselves were taught.

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men! (v.29). There is a great secret in these words. By obeying God with all our hearts in spite of much opposition we will enjoy divine favor.

Acts 6

Our Christian life is warfare, individually and collectively. The more we try to live victoriously the more we are attacked by the enemy. The more we want to grow spiritually, the more we are opposed. As the work was increasing in the early church, the enemy brought this great weapon into the church. We saw in chapters 4 and 5 of the Acts of the Apostles that the apostles were opposed by those who did not believe in the Gospel. But now the trouble started among themselves..."there arose a murmuring of the Grecians" (v.1). They began to complain that their widows were not given the same attention as the Hebrew widows. Partiality is one of the weapons of the enemy. The spirit of partiality is in every man, in every state, and in every country. Man makes distinctions because of wealth, nationality, education etc. To be an overcomer, all these distinctions have to be put away by God's grace. This is a constant battle, not only for a few days but there will be the same trouble always. We have to search our hearts constantly so that we may be free from the spirit of partiality.

At the same time we see how God's servants were being hindered from giving the word of God with power and boldness. In verse two, there is a solemn warning given to God's servants. "... It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables" We, servants of God are called to be His mouthpieces. We have to devote sufficient time in prayer and then give God's word with authority, power and boldness. The enemy was trying to draw the apostles into a service, which was not meant for them. At that time they had the heavy responsibility of expounding the Word of God with power, instructing the believers, warning them, encouraging them, strengthening them and teaching them. Such ministry is necessary all the time. Then only we can see real growth in the believers in every place. But we find these days,

that many God's servants are slowly drawn away from real ministry and are occupied with other things. Gradually they cut short their time of prayer and God's Word. The enemy can enter in through many ways. One can be drawn away into many worldly affairs by fellow-believers. Others are drawn away through their children. All the time they are looking after their children. First of all, the wives demand it. Secondly, the husbands become slaves. We find many God's servants attending on their children all the time. Wherever they go, even in a prayer meeting they are occupied with them. Some say, they need more money for their large families. They say, if they have two or three children it does not matter, but now their number is increasing. So they want more money. They start keeping fowls to get more money. Then they spend all the time looking after their fowls. The time they should spend on God's people and the assembly is being spent in feeding the fowls. They say, "How can I manage with so many children?" If you believe in God and His Word, and if you fully trust and obey Him, He will never fail you. You will never find a single case in the history of mankind where God has failed His people and His servants.

God is faithful. See His promise in Phil.4: 19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus". Again our Lord said in John 16:24, "...ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full". If you believe God and His Word, and obey Him, you will find Him to be faithful. But in many cases, their eyes are upon man and not upon God. They depend upon wealthy believers to receive extra money every month. They visit frequently those who give them more money. If we do not trust God wholly and solely, He cannot supply our needs. If for a purpose God does not supply your needs for a few days or for a few months, then wait patiently and say to God. "O God, what is the lesson that you are teaching me, and my family by these trials?" In every trial, God has a purpose. We know fully well that when we are born again we are made free from every condemnation and judgment. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"(Rom.8: 1). Now all our trials are intended to give us stronger faith, to refine us. To strengthen us in our service and make us more useful and fruitful, but it is not a punishment. God never slumbers, never forgets, and never fails. For those who call upon Him, God wants to give the very best and in fullness. We have to make sure that we serve Him faithfully even in small matters and not doubt Him or question Him. We should not be drawn away to any earthly affairs, no matter how much we are tempted. When we give our lives for God's service, we have to be sure that we spend all our time and energy for Him.

I know many God's servants who never give their tithes. They say, "I have given my life for the Lord's service, now everything is mine". They preach to other people about giving tithes but they themselves do not give. That is how they disobey God. In some cases, they want to obey God, but they have become slaves to their wives. Even though God speaks to them on many occasions, when they go home only a few words from their wives change everything. It does not require much speaking. That is how some God's servants fail the Lord. We say solemnly that many have lost their rights and privileges. If you honor God and His Word as in 1 Sam.2: 30(b), He will honor you. If He keeps you in want for some time, it is for your spiritual edification and growth.

God's servant Apostle Paul was saying with experience that he had learnt to be content in whatsoever state God kept him, without murmuring or complaining. "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,

there with to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil.4: 11,12). He had learnt this by experience. He testified that God had kept him in time of want. The purpose of trial is not to punish us, but to bring about edification and growth. Paul found that in every need of every kind, God gave him extra grace, extra power and extra strength. What we gain spiritually by sufferings cannot be gained in any other way. This is God's way. We can thank God under all circumstances. Make sure that the ministry given to you is never hindered by any other occupation of the world, by friends or relations. God is speaking to. You Please obey Him and do not resist Him. Then God also will give you the answer.

The apostles asked the believers to find seven men full of the Holy Spirit to look after the widows (Acts 6:3). When we face any difficult situation in the church, we should pray. Then God will give the answer. The apostles could have said, "They are widows, so we must help them". Thus they could have been drawn away from their real ministry, but as they began to pray together, God gave the answer. They were to look for seven men, ...full of the Holy Ghost for that job. In answer to prayer God raised up seven men. We cannot take: for granted that without our prayer God would raise up such men. We have to pray as a church, "Lord, give us men full of the Holy Ghost to feed us and look after us". That is how through prayer and oneness divine order can be brought about in our midst. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). God did not allow the enemy to deceive the apostles, or hinder them from their ministry of giving the word of God and prayer. It was after much prayer and careful ministry of God's Word that God raised up those men.

Some servants of God expect God to work without giving God's word and praying for the people. Rather than giving God's Word, they give their own word. Because they have not prayed sufficiently, they do not have God's message. They cannot say, "Well, we don't have a message." So, without a message from God they stand before the people and go on saying whatever they like. They begin with a story and then they go on to say many things condemning and rebuking them. Is that a message? They think, rebuking and condemning people and telling stories is sufficient. They will not confess their own barrenness. They spend much time in looking after their children and other worldly activities. They do not wait upon God for a long time for their message and that is why they are dry spiritually. Please ask God to revive you. Do not be angry with God but humble yourself and cry to Him for your need.

When the disciples prayed, God gave the answer and raised up seven men filled with the Holy Ghost. The result was, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Because they obeyed God, the church was brought into divine order. By obeying God, and by coming into His order, they saw the result. That does not mean that there will not be any kind of opposition. Again and again the apostles had to face some opposition or the other from outside. "Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen" (Acts 6:9). All the worldly-wise people began to oppose the work of God. Throughout the ages we find worldly-wise people who take pride in knowledge, opposing God's servants. God gave Stephen heavenly wisdom. God takes

us through sufferings to give us His own wisdom, as we see in the case of Job. He had to pay a high price to receive true wisdom. If you also suffer joyfully, you will be given the same wisdom.

"And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:12-15). When they began to accuse Stephen falsely, his face began to shine. He never murmured. He never retaliated. He never used any bad words or said, "Why are you saying these things against me"? He bore everything patiently, he praised God for such a privilege and then his face began to shine. That is how we can defeat the enemy as God's servants. What do you do when you hear someone telling you that so and so was saying some thing against you? Some God's servants wait till Sunday morning, put all their energy into the sermon and speak against that particular person. They will not mention the name. They only look in that person's direction. That is their method. As a result, rather than having a shining face, their faces become dark. They feel so guilty that after the meeting, they are afraid of facing anyone. We are given heavenly weapons to defeat the enemy. We cannot defeat the devil by worldly weapons. We should only desire to honor God, that the Word may have its free course. May the Lord make us true witnesses and give us grace to obey and not become angry and offended. If God has spoken to you, then do not go with angry and sorrowful face; go into some corner and pray, "O God, help me, and forgive all my past failures and make me a faithful, loyal and a true witness".

Acts 7

Because Abraham saw God's glory he could leave everything behind and obey God fully (v.1). By seeing God's greatness and glory we can make any sacrifice to obey Him and follow Him. In seeing God's glory he was able to see the glory of the heavenly city, which has foundations. That is the heavenly church. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11: 10). That refers to the heavenly city.

When Moses wanted to be a leader himself, he failed (v.29). But when he humbled himself, God made him a ruler. Those who want authority, fail God. But when God distributes authority, you will be filled with the Spirit day by day. But you have to wait for God's time. Then He can help you and use you.

Acts 8

At that time there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem (v.1). The enemy thought that through persecution he could hinder the work of God, but we see how God's work spread far and wide because of persecution. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (v.4). Before our Lord Jesus Christ ascended, He told the disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. But they were not told where to begin or how to begin. It was for a purpose that the Lord Jesus ascended without giving them any plan. As the apostles kept themselves under the Headship of the Lord Jesus,

they were given the plan. Even though persecution came from the enemy, the Lord Jesus allowed it. Through that persecution the believers were scattered abroad to many places. We find God in His sovereign way, using the attacks of the enemy upon His people for the furtherance of the Gospel. In the same way, we see in Acts 16, that because Paul was put in prison the Gospel was taken to many parts (vs.23-26).

Many lives were transformed and they became the witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ through that one meeting held in the prison at Philippi. Within a short time the Gospel was preached in many parts of Europe and Asia. Those who have not gone through real persecution remain barren spiritually like a dry well. If water is not drawn from it, it gives a stinking smell but if the water is drawn regularly, it remains fresh. We see how in a wonderful way the Holy Spirit began to take the believers from place to place through persecution. If God has kept you in a lonely place believe that you are there as a witness of the Lord Jesus and do not try to get a transfer to any better place of comfort. If you believe God has kept you there, as His witness according to His plan be content.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:5,6). The Samaritans were despised and hated by the Jews as we see in John 4:9. The Jews would not even take water from their hands. Now the very same Samaritans had received the very same Gospel with great joy, and with one accord. That is how the Lord began to break the pride of the Jews. As a nation they were very proud. That is why they remained blind spiritually. Those who are proud of their country, position, family, community and wealth are very dry spiritually. That is the main cause of strife in many places.

It was for a purpose that God sent Philip to Samaria. He wanted to break the pride of the Jews and to show the spiritual oneness of all who believe. We shall see later on that when the Gospel was taken to these people, they began to grow spiritually. "Now they, which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord"(Acts11: 19-21). When Philip went to Samaria some unknown believers also went there at the same time. Before that they were giving the Gospel to the Jews only. They were still proud of their nationality. But some believers from Cyrene came to Antioch and spoke to the Grecians about the Lord Jesus Christ. From that time the center was shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch. That is how the believers in Jerusalem lost their privilege. From Antioch the Gospel began to go to many parts of the world. God in His own sovereign way brought this about.

Everyone is equally precious in God's sight. The believers in Samaria ought to have received the Holy Spirit when they believed. But in this case the Lord withheld the Holy Spirit from them even though a very large number believed and were baptized. The news had reached Jerusalem and the Apostles at Jerusalem were surprised that even the Samaritans whom they hated received the Gospel. So they sent Peter and John to verify it. They went over there and were filled with joy to see that the Samaritans had received the Gospel. When apostles Peter and John laid

hands on them they received the Holy Spirit (v .17). Thus they saw for themselves that the very same gift that the Lord had given to the Jews on the day of Pentecost was also given to the Samaritans. First of all they had to acknowledge their spiritual equality and oneness by the laying on of hands. Throughout the ages, they were taking pride in their Jewish nation. Today also we find in India and other countries believers taking pride in their position, education, community and wealth. But in the sight of God all are equal. We find that there are many names among Christians.

Some believers in the early Church began to call themselves after Paul, Cephas, and Apollos (1 Cor. 1: 10-13). That is how divisions came among the early believers at Corinth. The result was that all kinds of sin entered into them. It is unscriptural to be called by the name of any person. No one died for us, only the Lord Jesus Christ. How can we be called by any other name? There are hundreds of divisions among the Christians today. That is why there is so much strife and hatred. The same thing, we find in India at the time of marriages and other occasions; believers are much more concerned about their caste and community. Some believers call themselves Harijan Christians, to get scholarships and other benefits from colleges. Because the Government gives special concessions to such castes. Many Christians have the same temptation to call themselves Scheduled Caste to get a job or a seat in the college. Whatever one may gain materially in that way, they surely lose spiritually. They still take pride in their community like the Corinthians. Such believers are infants spiritually. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor.3: 1).

It is only by remaining as one family, that we can enjoy divine favor and God's blessings. Every believer is equally precious before God. That is why the testimony of baptism is very important. Only at that time can this truth be brought to us in reality. We as God's servants should take more time and diligently teach people about baptism and make sure that they are spiritually joined with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. When they are baptized into one body they are no more Jew or Gentile, high or low. This should be our daily experience and not for some time. But that is only possible when we give the Headship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship"(Acts 8:26,27). Here we see how Philip quickly and immediately obeyed God. God never told him why he had to go away from Samaria. He only said, "Arise and go towards the south". At that time he was very busy, because through him the Lord saved many souls in Samaria. He could have said, "How can I leave such a great work and go to an unknown place, a desert?" He never asked for one or two days leave for preparation but he went immediately. He did not wait for his wife's permission. Like Abraham, when God spoke to him, he obeyed straightway. Many God's servants lose their privileges in God's service, because they do not obey God immediately. Even though God speaks to them in a meeting or in some other way to go to a difficult place or if God asks them to go at nighttime, they listen to their wives or friends rather than God. This is very sad. How many God's servants are in that condition! They will not obey God at once. God has every right to send us anywhere any time. He can send us to a nearby place or a far off place without giving us any reason. Our duty is to obey Him. Philip went on

obeying God and the Lord showed him why he was called. Philip was not only fruitful but very fruitful in the ministry. "But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea"(Acts 8:40). He preached in all the cities. God does not make a mistake. By obeying God implicitly, we become fully fruitful.

Philip never demanded his traveling expenses. Many God's servants have many demands. They will obey provided they are given money for themselves and also for their children. But Philip never said, "What about my expenses?" First he walked. We do not know how long he walked. Then the Lord told him to join the chariot and so he ran (v.30). So he got a free lift in the chariot (v .31). He never asked for it. He never said, "Sir, I am tired, please give me a lift". Neither did he say, "I have walked many miles and have run a long distance. Please stop for a while". It was the eunuch who might have said. "Please help me. I want to understand this Scripture portion. Will you kindly come into the chariot?" There is no need for you to give any hint to anyone that you want something. It is for a purpose we find these details in the Word of God. It is not just a history book. It is for our spiritual instructions. If we obey God, and do what He tells us, we are fully blessed.

"And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (v.39). If we obey God He blesses us abundantly. First of all he walked, then he ran, then he got into the chariot for some time. He got the fastest vehicle. He went comfortably straightway. What a privilege to be in God's service. Sometimes we have to walk, sometimes we have to run, sometimes we have to go by bus, and sometimes by train. But God Himself will lead us in His own way. If you are called by God, there is no need to be worried or be anxious about your needs. Do not allow your wives to weaken your faith. In many cases the wives of God's servants weaken the faith of their husbands and go on worrying them. They say, "Think of your children. How about their education? How about their marriages? Do not be foolish". That is how many wives mislead their husbands. Thus by listening to their wives they lose their faith. Also some so-called servants beg for money. They do not ask for it. They put on a sad face, when they go for visiting. They look very miserable. Please take warning. Do not be offended. If God is calling you for service, serve Him faithfully. You cannot serve God and man. But whenever you obey Him, obey Him fully. Do not question Him. He is responsible for all your needs. You only have to see how He works.

"And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). What a joy Philip brought in his life! God had brought Philip at the right time, when the eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. Because Philip had obeyed God implicitly, he was able to give the message straightway to the eunuch. He knew from the very Scripture portion, what the Lord wanted him to speak. It is by obeying God's commands that God's servants will receive His message. There is no need to be worried about it. By obeying God fully, one can enjoy God's favor.

Acts 9

We have seen how God allowed persecution to spread far and wide. God is sovereign. He knows how to defeat the devices of the enemy, only if we give complete charge of ourselves to Him. At that time, Saul was the most bitter enemy of the Gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Saul became Paul, the most devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since his conversion, the Lord used his ministry and his testimony in a wonderful way. He suffered much for the Gospel's sake.

The Lord called Saul by his name. He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul's fellow travelers heard a voice and saw a light, but did not hear what Jesus said. We have to make sure that the Lord speaks to us saying, "My son, my daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee", and then we receive His peace and joy. But signs and dreams are not proofs of salvation.

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized"(v.18). The mystery of baptism is, whether they are apostles or others, they all had to be baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no exception. Our spiritual growth depends upon obeying God fully. When the Lord spoke to Saul on his way to Damascus, Saul said to Him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v.6). The Lord said to Saul, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". Then the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him to go to Damascus to meet Saul. If you want anyone to do any job for you, a very important job. You will say, "It is very, very important. You must do it". It has the same meaning here. "You go to Damascus and' will tell you what you must do". That was the first message given to Saul.

Paul obeyed in baptism immediately. That is how the early believers began to grow spiritually. After baptism, you find courage coming into you. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (v.22). So by obedience, we become stronger spiritually.

Acts 10

We have seen in chapter 9 that the Lord broke the plan of Peter to teach him a very important lesson. He went to Joppa to pray for Dorcas and he stayed there. Unless the Lord broke Peter's pride-, He could never show him His plan. Peter was still proud of his nationality as a Jew. He ministered only to the Jews even though the Lord commanded them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. In chapter 10 we find how God had to teach him that lesson. Peter became hungry while they were preparing food. So he went to the housetop to pray. Rather than grumbling, he began to pray. You also do not be angry when the food is late. There on the housetop the Lord spoke to him. He saw a sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of creatures in it. He heard the voice of God saying, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (vs. 13, 14). This happened thrice. God of holiness and grace cannot ask anyone to do anything that is wrong. God was speaking to Peter and he had to obey. But because of his self- righteousness he said, "No, Lord," as though God was making a mistake. God cannot make a mistake. We must obey though we cannot

fully understand what God tells us. That is how God taught an important lesson to Peter.

At first, God sent an angel to the house of Cornelius (v.3). Even though the angel was sent to him, the way of salvation had to be explained by Peter only. That privilege is given only to men and not to angels. The honor and privilege to be His witnesses is given to us. Again we see how the Apostle Peter preached about the power of resurrection. "Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly...whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (vs.40, 43). Now this message on resurrection is very, very important. It is through that message that God's power it manifested, and lives are changed. And this is the message; the One Who was crucified and buried, rose again.

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized... ?"(v.47). As soon as they were born again, they were baptized. We find that this is God's plan. Through baptism we grow spiritually and enjoy fully the power of resurrection and understand our spiritual equality with all believers.

Acts 11

The pride of nationality is so great, that even though God had done a great work through Peter in the house of Cornelius, the people of Jerusalem opposed him again and again. " And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (vs.2, 3). Later on, Peter had to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul. "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them, which were of the circumcision (Gal.2: 11-12). Because of the fear of the Jews Peter did not eat with the Gentiles.

Throughout the ages the enemy has used the same weapon to defeat God's people; take pride in nation, family, position and education. Even today it is the same. That is the cause of division everywhere -high caste, low caste, North Indian, South Indian, Andhras and Tamilians, all such differences are used by the enemy to defeat God's people. In the same way, there are different sections and denominations. That is why many believers are living in division and strife. But Paul the Apostle rebuked those believers who were carried away by such differences. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them, which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephass; and I of Christ" (1Cor.1: 10-12). These believers called themselves by the name of the apostles like Cephass and Paul. That brought division and also sin among them. Remember, if you want to be used by the Lord, do not go by these names. You are Christian. No man, no country died for you. Why do you call yourselves after the name of England or America or any other country? In all these subtle ways Satan brings defeat in the church. He makes people to think only of the name rather than the life of the Lord Jesus. That is why Paul says in 1 Cor.2: 2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you,

save Jesus Christ, and him crucified". That is the secret of knowing how much life is flowing from us. Do not go by their names or what they say, but go by the life of Christ. God's Word says, "...Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom.8: 9). In the same way, becoming a member of some denomination is also wrong. If you become a member of a denomination, it means, you are a part of all their teachings and practices. It is an unscriptural practice. You are a member of the Lord Jesus Christ. All other names bring division. Some are called by the name of a country or a person or a doctrine. That leads to division and strife. We see how in the early church these names brought much division.

"Now they, which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11: 19).

The believers were scattered through persecution and that is how the Gospel was taken to different places. Thus God overrules and uses many attacks of Satan for His own purpose.

One man of God went to a certain village and the people there did not receive him. Before leaving he prayed for them saying, "Lord, bless them and prosper them". Then he went to another village, where the people received him very gladly, and heard the word of God. Before leaving he prayed for them also saying, "Lord, scatter them". Then his co-worker asked him, "How is it that you asked the Lord to bless those who did not receive you and to scatter those who have received you?" He replied, "Those people who refused to receive me, will bring only evil if they go to other places. It is better that they remain in their own place. But if the good people are scattered, they will carry with them the good news".

Throughout the ages, the Lord has used persecution to spread the Gospel far and wide. For example, the Gospel spread through the believers at Thessalonica because they went through much affliction. We read about it in 1 Thess.1: 6-8; "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place...". Through sufferings and afflictions God's word went on spreading far and wide.

Again Paul says in Phil.1: 12, 13, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places". These words were written by Paul while he was in prison in Rome for the Gospel's sake. The believers in Philippi and Ephesus were feeling very sad. But Paul says, "Don't be sorry for my sufferings. God has allowed them for His own purpose". Through afflictions the Gospel was taken to the whole palace and to the emperor. When Paul was a prisoner living in his own hired house, the Roman soldiers had to keep watch over him by turns. While these soldiers were on duty Paul went on preaching and thus they could listen to the Gospel. One by one those soldiers must have been converted. Through those converted soldiers, the Gospel was taken to the whole of the Roman Empire, and even to Caesar's palace. So Paul saw for himself how God had honored him in putting him there to be a witness through sufferings. In the early Church the Gospel spread through persecution. Even so, today if the believers suffer joyfully, -they not only grow spiritually, but the

Gospel also will spread. Wherever there is no suffering or persecution, there is no growth. Instead there will be strife, division, parties and hatred.

Now though the early believers preached the Gospel, they preached to the Jews only. "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11: 19). That is why their spiritual growth was stunted. But there were some unknown believers from Cyprus and Cyrene who took the Gospel even to Greece. "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord"(v\$.20,21). God's word was thus preached through them to the Gentiles.

We have to give God's word to all people. But some people want to have special ministries. They want to work only among the students of universities. Others want to work among educated people or people in high positions. Others want to work among the poor. That is how they become limited. If you think only of a special class of people and spend more time on them you will be limited in God's sight. In God's work we cannot make distinctions or difference. We have to give God's word to all people, whether they are rich or poor, high or low, educated or uneducated. Then we will find uniform growth among the believers.

No doubt, the Gospel was preached by the apostles with power and wisdom, but they were giving it only to the Jews. That is why the center was shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch. From Antioch the Gospel was taken to Asia and other parts of Europe. "And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (Acts 13:49; 16:5). Apostles like Peter and Paul, and Barnabas, went from Antioch and other places. If you want your ministry to be effective, you have to serve all people equally with no distinction of caste, education or riches. We should not be governed by education or position. After all, they receive the same salvation. We have to be very careful and not show any partiality in the Lord's work.

In Acts 11: 23 we see that God brought His servant Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch. "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord". Barnabas then went to Tarsus in search of Paul. "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (v.26). They preached and the believers were strengthened. That was how God was showing that for spiritual growth we need His servants from different places. He Himself will send His own servants: from various countries. That is how the early believers began to grow and God's servants were sent to different places.

"And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch" (Acts 11: 27). Even though believers in Antioch were multiplied greatly and God's word was preached to them, they could not say that they could manage without the believers at Jerusalem. They depended upon others too. God in a sovereign way sent His servants to minister unto them. Then Agabus, the prophet, prophesied that there would be a famine in Jerusalem. The believers of Antioch felt sad for the believers of

Jerusalem. They sent help from Antioch to Jerusalem through Barnabas and Paul (vs.28- 30). That is how believers are supposed to help one another without any worldly organization, but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When these men came to Jerusalem they came just in time for the prayer meeting. "Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). See how in a sovereign way both the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, were brought to Jerusalem. When they returned to Antioch they came with the burden of prayer for Jerusalem. Though the believers at Antioch were taught mightily from God's Word now they were learning to pray for the suffering believers at Jerusalem. In Acts 13: 1-3, we see how they began to pray and as they prayed God separated Barnabas and Paul to take the Gospel to Asia and Europe. As they prayed, God's heavenly plan was shown to them by the Holy Spirit. Unless there is a burden for prayer God cannot show us His plan.

By prayer the early Church began to grow spiritually. That is the secret of the early Church. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness...But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 4:31; 6:4). By perseverance the early believers were able to defeat their enemies.

The enemy's attack on the believers is to make them cut short their prayer time. They are busy with other things and have no time for prayer. They pray but for a short while. That is why the enemy gains ground. The early Church overcame the enemy by prayer.

Acts 12

When Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem there was not only famine in Judea but also persecution. Peter was in prison and James was killed. Believers in Jerusalem began to pray earnestly for Peter. In answer to those prayers God delivered Peter from the prison.

Generally, we want to see God's power in great things. God works in small matters much more than in big matters to strengthen and encourage us. We do not think of small things as God does. No doubt, we see God's power in mighty things but we can also see His power in small things. God's ways are not our ways. Verse four tells us, four quaternions of soldiers kept watch over Peter turn by turn; he was in between two soldiers, bound to them with chains. Yet he was fast asleep. He was not sleeping on a downy pillow but on the stone floor of the prison, with two very strong chains on each hand. With all that he was able to sleep soundly, because he had no worries or anxiety. He could trust God for every situation. Most of us when we have small worries do not get sleep. We may drink Ovaltine or any hot drink; still we do not get sleep. Some take pills to get sleep in the nights. Even that fails and they cannot get sleep. But here we find this man of God sleeping soundly, in spite of all his disadvantages. When we put our trust in the Lord we will not be anxious about any matter, no matter what happens. Peter was having sound sleep. The angel smote him even then he could not get up. Then the angel raised him up, and he got up, and the chains fell off from his hands.

We can prove God's faithfulness, even in small things. There is no need to be anxious, troubled or worried when things go wrong. God may permit in our lives many painful situations to give us strong faith. He is our living God. He is all-powerful for every situation. He wants to prove that He is interested even in small things. Do not depend upon sleeping pills, but trust in God's Word. He will give you sound sleep. Most of you do not get proper sleep, because you are worried too much. Do not blame others for lack of sleep. It is your own worries and anxieties and unbelief, which keep you awake. Whenever someone says anything against you, you do not get sleep. If by chance you lose something, you cannot sleep. Perhaps you lose your umbrella in the bus; even though it is an old one you cannot sleep for two or three days. When you do not get sleep you should go upon your knees.

We read that the angel told Peter to bind on his sandals (Acts 12:8). They were not new shoes or English shoes. They must have been old or even torn ones. We do not know how old they were. Some people change their chappals every month, because they wear out soon. Some change for the sake of fashion. But this man of God did not follow the modern fashion. His were old-fashioned shoes. My father was an old fashioned man. He used to wear old-fashioned shoes and long shirts. One day he came to see me in the hostel and brought nice things for me. He was sitting beside me on the cot. One of my schoolmates saw my father, called me out and asked me who that man was, with old-fashioned shoes, and shirt. I was so ashamed and told him that he was from my village. I took his money, food and other things but was ashamed to say that he was my father. The man of God, Peter, was not ashamed.

We see here how the Lord takes interest even in small matters like old shoes. The Lord knew that in his excitement Peter would leave his shoes behind. This has happened many a time to many of us. One day a man came to see me. After a while, he wished everyone good bye and left. But he came again after a few minutes. I wondered why he had returned. He had forgotten his chappals. God knew that Peter was just an ordinary man, though he was filled with the Holy Spirit. We do not become supernatural when we are born again. We remain ordinary human beings. We all have common weaknesses and failures as human beings. Thank God for He is our sufficiency for all our needs.

See how God of grace is interested even in small things like Peter's shoes. You think of big things but God is interested in small things too. That is why God's Word says; our tears are numbered (Psa.56:8). Our hairs are also numbered (Matt. 10:30). Sometimes when we comb our hair, they fall. You do not know how many have fallen. Nor does your wife or husband, your children or parents know. But God knows. So also, He knows the number of our tears. Every tear we shed in sorrow, in trials and in difficulties, He knows, and He knows how to keep it. He puts our tears in a bottle. He does so to remind us and to show us that He knows what we go through and makes provision for every need.

He makes provision for our comfort, strength and sorrow. God will not allow anyone to take away even our old chappals. The Lord has looked after my old chappals all through the past years. Many lose their chappals in the train. Even though they put them under their head, clever thieves take them away. I have traveled for many years but never lost my chappals in the train. But strange to say, I

have lost them in the meetings. I have always prayed while traveling, asking the Lord to look after even my small things.

Once I got into a very crowded train. I wanted to have a shave badly. I could not go out lest I should lose my place. So I prayed saying, "Lord, will you please send me a barber?" I kept my head outside the window and a barber came. He shaved me, I paid the money, and the train started immediately. I knew if I had shouted for a barber, my voice would not reach him. But the Lord shouted for me. He brought the barber right on the spot. You may say, it was a chance, but to me it is God's provision. Learn to pray for every small thing. Scripture says in Phil.4: 6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". This should be our daily experience. Some children learn everything by heart and get very good marks. After three weeks all that they have learned by heart is forgotten. That is how many learn Scripture verses by heart and soon forget them.

God's Word should be read daily and its promises should be claimed. Phil.4: 6 say, "Be careful for nothing". So do not be worried about! Anything, but only pray for everything. One day I lost a bottle cork. It was so small that one could hardly see. I dropped it in the bathroom. First I thought, it is a small thing and why I should bother about it. I searched for it for three days but could not find it. Then I remembered that the Lord has told us to pray for everything. So I prayed saying, "Lord, I don't want to lose that cork. Please show me where it is". Then I looked down and found it. Even for small things learn to pray. In 2 Kings 6:1-7 we read about a man whose axe head fell into the water.

It was foolish to look for the axe head in the water. There was no hope of getting it back, because it had sunk deep into the water. But the man knew, if he went to the man of God he would get it back. The man of God cut down a stick and cast it in the water, and the iron did swim. Something, which was impossible, was made possible. Now we all know that iron cannot swim. Yet because of that man's faith in God's Word, God made the iron to float on the water. In the same way, every spiritual loss can be recovered if we pray.

That man was careless. Before cutting the wood he should have made sure that the axe was fixed properly. He lost the axe head because of his carelessness. But he went to the man of God for help and confessed his fault. God forgave him and he recovered that which he had lost. Most of us are like him. Through negligence we incur loss. We fail to find God's will and do things on our own, so we suffer loss. That man held the handle without the axe head. We would call him foolish. Some God's servants are foolish like him. They have lost their axe heads. There is no power in their ministry or prayer. They have no joy in their hearts. They only have their handles. The source of power is gone because of some negligence. Some defilement or some pride, or greed has entered into them. I Sometimes they lose their faith and peace also. They--become helpless and do not know how to face the situation. Perhaps that is your condition today. But there is hope for you. This man knew where to go (2 Kings 6:6). First of all, he had to go to the place where the axe head had fallen. Similarly, you have to go to the place where you have lost your axe head because of sin, defilement, and negligence etc. Then claim the power of the cross, because the tree speaks of the cross. Then he got back the axe head. You also can recover your spiritual loss, by humbling yourself at the Cross-of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many times we do not confess our failures. We blame others for our loss as

Adam blamed the woman God had given him. Do not blame anyone. Humble yourself before the Lord, acknowledge your faults and failures, negligence or whatever it may be; then recover the loss.

Many parents are very negligent and careless. They do not spend sufficient time with their children. They do not have family prayers both morning and evening. They say in their hearts, "We are far too busy with our jobs. How can we spare time for prayer and Bible study in the morning?" They do not fulfill their first responsibility towards their children. After some time they find some sin in their children. Parents are responsible for their sin. Their axe head was lost due to their negligence and carelessness. Do not blame your children. Do your duty faithfully with love and concern when they are small. Read Heb.12: 6-12. Many parents have lost their axe heads. Their children are disobedient because of their own negligence. When children needed to be chastened and corrected, they did not do it. Now that they are grown up, it is too late. They are rebellious now, and no amount of teaching will help them. Only by confessing their sin and going to the place where the axe head had fallen they can recover. Go to the same place and say, "Lord, it is due to my failure and negligence, that my children are disobedient. Help me to be careful in the future and fulfill my duty faithfully towards my children. Help me to recover all". Thus go on asking the Lord for every small thing. Seek God's face in all things and recover every loss. In Prov.3: 5,6 we read, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths". Learn to depend upon God for spiritual things. Do not depend upon your cleverness, wisdom or experience of any kind. We have to claim God's strength, grace, and wisdom for every small thing. It must be a daily practice. Then you will see God's hand upon you, and recover every loss.

Now Peter was not only told to bind on his sandals but also take his garments (Acts 12:8). Thus we see how God is interested in everything, in old chappals as well as garments. Then the angel said to Peter, "Follow me". Do not go by your own experience. You may be a strong man but you do not know the way. For some distance, Peter followed the angel. Learn to seek God's guidance. Do not think that you know the way. It is safe to say, "Lord, I do not know the way". Let Him guide you. He knows the way. He knows what is the best way. He knows the end from the beginning. Our safety is to follow Him as long as He leads us.

Then we are told in Acts 12: 10, when they were past the first and the second ward they came to the iron gate, which opened to them by itself. The Lord knew how to bring Peter safely through the gates. You also may be facing many iron gates. As you follow His guidance, He will bring/you out safely. When He shows the way, then we are safe.

In the beginning the Lord's angel had to open the prison door. But in verse 13 we find Peter himself knocking the door many times. If God wanted, He could have opened that door also and brought Peter into the house. But for a purpose, the angel departed from half the way. Then Peter himself found the way and went on knocking the door. God gives us divine strength when needed. At other times we have to use our own strength to open the door, nevertheless, God is always with us.

The same Herod who persecuted Peter was dealt with by God Himself without any interference on the part of Peter. Peter was an ordinary man. He could have cursed Herod and said, "Lord, punish Herod". But he had no hatred for him. He never said one word of revenge against him. He kept sleeping and left Herod in the hands of God. That is why God Himself punished Herod. If there are people like Herod in your neighborhood or office, do not worry. God Himself will judge them. The Lord Himself will solve all your problems. He will take up your case and judge other people.

Acts 13

"But God raised him from the dead" (v.30). "But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption" (v.37). We see in the Acts of the Apostles, that emphasis is laid on the power of resurrection. The Apostles tried to prove from all the Scripture portions and references how the Lord Jesus Christ suffered, died, and were buried and rose again. Without the power of resurrection we cannot live a victorious and triumphant life. We need to depend upon this very same experience. In the early days the apostles and disciples made it a point to make this fact very clear.

"...I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will" (v.22). As David was a man after God's own heart, God wants us also to be men and women after His own heart. It is not because of human qualifications or outward humility or simple dress that we can be called men or women after God's own heart. It is the greatest privilege to be a man after God's own heart. Such a person wants to do God's will in whatever he does or wherever he goes. We have the privilege to be in the will of God.

Our whole life, preaching and teaching should please God. But many times we fail. Generally speaking, we look at great men and are carried away by their appearance. Even a great man like Samuel the prophet was about to make a mistake in choosing the king of Israel. Eliab was the eldest son of Jesse: going by his height, countenance and appearance Samuel thought he was fit to be the king. But the Lord said unto him, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

Generally, we look on the outward appearance. Some take pride in their family, some in their nationality, some in their knowledge, some in their education, and some in their appearance and their talents. That is how many make mistakes in marriages, business and other matters. Many marriages are a failure and they suffer very great loss afterwards. In some cases, they are in misery life-long. They look at the outward appearance rather than knowing God's will. That is why Samuel made Jesse to bring all his sons before him. Samuel was a prophet, Jesse was a God-fearing man, but none of them knew God's mind. Samuel was about to make a mistake and anoint Eliab. He looked on Eliab, and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him", but the Lord said unto Samuel, "I have refused him". That means, howsoever clever, gifted, or educated we may be, we cannot trust ourselves. We make many mistakes in our lives. Many great men made great mistakes in their lives. They were carried away by fame and name. People may talk about God's will like a parrot, but they do not know what is God's will. Going by God's Word we have to wait on Him and persevere to know His will. Jesse made Abinadab, Shammah and

seven of his sons to pass before Samuel but the Lord had not chosen them. If God wanted He could have 'told Samuel to go to Bethlehem and ask Jesse for David and anoint him. But that is not God's method. God knows our nature. He knows how easily we are misled by the outward appearance. To avoid that, we need much patience to wait upon God to hear His voice. After David came, God said, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he". We have to wait till we have every evidence to prove that we are in God's will and God's plan. When God speaks there must be clear inward registration. We have to hear God's voice. We should not be carried away by only one test. We need to have every evidence to know God's will. The first great proof is the inward voice of God, which means to have a consciousness of God's presence. "And the work of righteousness shall be peace" (Isa.32: 17). To feel God's presence in a greater, growing way, we must be in God's presence for a long time. We should not be governed by the first registration but we should have the registration many times. We must enjoy the inward peace, great peace, multiplying peace and heavenly peace.

According to Psa. 119: 165, it is great peace which creates in us a growing love and consciousness of God's own presence in our lives. The peace of God and the presence of God go together (Psa.16: 11). If you desire to know God's will do not go by one evidence only, but have all other evidences. Even though you may have peace for some time, you may be led in a wrong way and you may be deceived. There will be growing consciousness of God as you pray.

Acts 13

There will be growing consciousness of God's presence as we pray in the morning, pray in the evening and pray in the night. Ask the Lord, "Lord, is this Thy will for me?" We have no right to command God but we have the privilege of calling upon Him as we read in Jer.33: 3. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not". Go on calling upon Him till He speaks in a very clear way and shows His perfect will. We can trust God's Word. Do not open the Bible at random to find God's will. Learn to read God's Word in a systematic way. Try to find God's will in a clear way from your daily portion of God's Word.

For finding God's will it is necessary for us to die to our own will. In many cases our desire for something is so strong, that we ask the Lord saying, "Give me this, or that". We have to pray honestly, truthfully and sincerely with these words, "Not my will, but Thy will be done". Even though our desires and affections are very strong, we should not be governed by them. God's will can be different. For that purpose we have to claim the power of resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and die to our own will, as Paul says in Gal.2: 20, "...nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Please note the fragment, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me". Unless the Lord Jesus Christ takes full charge of our lives we cannot say that He is jiving in us. That should become our daily practice. You should pray saying, "Lord, not my choice, but Thy choice; not my desires but Thy desires; not my thoughts but Thy thoughts; not my plan but Thy plan; not my ideas but Thy ideas". We should pray like that because the Lord can see everything. He knows the end from the beginning. We should die to our own will.

When Saul was chosen to be king, he came upon the throne immediately. But David had to go through many painful sufferings and afflictions for eight years.

Rather than appreciating his victory over Goliath, Saul became jealous of David, and tried to kill him three times. He went on pursuing him. The Lord permitted these sufferings in David's life so that he might learn to find God's will. To teach David these lessons, God took him through many painful experiences. He learned to call upon God. In the Old Testament period there were Urim and Thummim to find God's will. They were two stones behind the breastplate of the high priest. Even today we do not know how these stones worked, but one thing we know that they used these two stones to find God's will. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Urim and Thummim. He is the life; He is the truth and grace. By going to Him constantly and waiting upon Him we can hear His voice. We see how David went to the Lord so many times to enquire of Him. "Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah" (1 Sam.23: 2). In verse 4 we read, "Then David inquired of the Lord yet again. " Thus he went on enquiring for every matter. Abiathar the high priest came to David with an ephod, which had the two stones with which they enquired from the Lord. Now in the New Testament period we can go to the Lord Jesus at any time for any matter. That requires patience and perseverance. We have to wait, till we hear the voice of His Word confirms God and it.

When sufferings increased David failed to enquire of the Lord. He thought God had forgotten him. Without enquiring from God he joined the Philistines. David knew that Saul could not touch him as God anointed him. Also he knew that God would not allow him to kill Saul and that in His own plan, and in His own time, God would judge Saul. That is why God did not allow David to kill Saul even though he came very near to him. But without enquiring from God and without knowing His will he joined the Philistines against Saul.

The lords of the Philistines became suspicious of David. They feared that David might leave them, join Saul and war against them as their enemy. So they insisted that David should be sent back. David knew that it was not God's will for him to join the Philistines, yet he decided to join them. Eventually he had to go back. David knew how to enquire from God, but he did not. That is why all their wives and children were taken away and they lost everything. Their loss was so great that they wept till they had no more strength to weep. If you know God's will and do not do it, you will suffer great loss. David repented and enquired of the Lord and the Lord in His mercy forgave him. Scripture says, "...his compassions fail not" (Lam.3: 22). If we humble ourselves, confess our sins and call upon God and pray, He will have compassion upon us and forgive us. Now even though David had no hope of recovering anything, because he repented, confessed his failure and prayed, God helped him. He went to God and enquired what God's plan was. " And David inquired at the Lord, saying, Shall' pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all" (1 Sam.30:8). He ought to have done that earlier: now after he lost everything he went to the Lord. God is showing us how foolish we are. Now God forgave David when he obeyed Him and gave all the men into his hands.

Going by the number of the army of the Amalekites, it was not possible to pursue or smite them. Because David enquired of God, God told him to pursue the Amalekites. God in His own way helped them to pursue the enemy. On the way, they found an Egyptian who was about to die. God uses simple means to deliver us and help us. They had pity on that Egyptian. They gave him food and drink (vs.11, 12). Through him, they recovered not only what they had lost but also much more than that.

By believing God's Word and by obeying His Word they recovered all. Even though their loss was great, by humility and obedience they recovered. The spoil was so great, that David sent presents to all his friends who had helped him in the past. When he was pursued by Saul, David had to provide food for all his men. David being a man of God kept clear record of all that he received from his friends. Some gave shelter and some gave food. In some places he stayed for two days and in some places for four days or more. He knew the quantity of food they brought. Now he sent them all gifts and presents from the spoil. He was so thankful for their help in time of need. By enquiring from God, by obeying, Him and by believing in Him David recovered everything. He paid all the past debts, which he had to pay to his friends. Thus we also can recover all our past losses. But we have to ask God's forgiveness for not doing His will in some cases and make it a principle to find God's will and plan for all matters.

Many believers buy property without finding God's will and do many other things without knowing God's will. Some people get their children married without finding God's will. Now they are weeping and their children are also weeping. Now if they humble themselves, repent and confess their sin and obey God and His Word, they can recover all and even more. May God make us all men and women after His own heart?