

Availability and Angels

By Paris Reidhead*

How very appropriate that this should be the song that has preceded our reading of Acts, Chapter 11. "He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."¹ I'll read beginning with the 1st verse. We read this morning, Chapter 10. I will not read the entire chapter. We read the report of what was done there as recorded in the 10th Chapter of Acts. So Acts 11, beginning with verse 1, through verse 18:

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.² And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,³ saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.⁴ But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,⁵ I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:⁶ upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.⁷ And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.⁸ But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.⁹ But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.¹⁰ And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.¹¹ And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.¹² And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:¹³ and he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;¹⁴ who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.¹⁶ Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.¹⁷ Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?¹⁸ When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

In dealing with this important theme of fellowship, it behooves us to understand that there are principles that God has always honored. And it is for these principles we seek. We discover, as we saw this morning those of you that were with us, that in the centurion, Cornelius, the principle of fear of God, prayer to such God as he knew, and in such manner as he knew, and sharing of what he possessed with those that were in need, had commended him to God; and that God, having seen this response to the light of conscience, and to such testimony as he heard, had caused Heaven to move in his behalf. And so it is always true. I am firmly convinced that God always respects the earnest heart, the seeking heart, the burdened heart, regardless of whether they are in the Christian context or not; if they are prepared to walk in the light that He has given by way of conscience and such revelation as they have, and would respond to the Gospel if they knew it, God will see to it that they hear the Gospel.

Now I know when we reached one tribe in Africa along the Sudan and Ethiopian border, we found a strange response to our coming. There was one who was very interested. He came about, he spent time listening, opened his mind to what we gave, and responded to what was said. We found out that he had had a dream that there would be people coming to his village, to his tribe, and speaking in his language, that would tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ. And when the missionaries came, there was this unusual response. He was prepared.

Now lest this should be thought exceptional, we found the same thing happening in a neighboring tribe some hundred and fifty miles distant. A missionary went out to this little village, saying it was to establish a little rest house, a little hut really, nothing more than a mud hut, and visit there once or twice a month; and there was one man who said, "Yes, that's fine and you can build your hut here, and I will bring the wood, and the grass, and make the bricks for you." And they asked, "Why?" And he said, "That he had seen in a vision that someone was going to come and tell him about God, the Above One, the Creator, and

1 "He Giveth More Grace" By Annie Johnson Flint

would ask to have a house built in his village, and that he was to give every possible assistance, because the words that this one would speak would be God's Word to their hearts."

So it is not unusual to find this. This could be duplicated many times in the experience of missionaries around the world. I think the most classic illustration of this is from an experience that I've related from the pulpit before, but I think it's appropriate and profitable that I should remind you of it now, lest you should feel that what happened with Cornelius is exceptional. If I can prove to you that this is happening, then possibly I will succeed in proving to you that there are other things that God is doing that are happening today.

You see, we have a tendency always when we approach the Scripture to say, Oh, this was for that day, and we halo that time, and we think that these were an unusual people, and these were exceptional circumstances. We talk about the good old days, and talk about oh how wonderful it would have been to have lived then. And this we must destroy. Whenever this comes up in your mind you must destroy it, because you must deal with it. You cannot tolerate it. It is a disavowal of that wonderful truth that this is the day that the Lord has made. And if you feel that you came into this service tonight, feeling that some other time was a better time to live, and some other day was a better day to live, if you are either looking ahead to a glorious tomorrow, or looking back to a halo of yesterday, then the present is more or less barren of meaning for you. And may God save us from this business of wishing our lives away, either backwards or forwards, and give to us a delight in the experience of the present, the joyous now. I think of the young boys that were seen in the soda fountain corner store, and one of them sitting there all dejected and disgusted with life and kicking their toes, the one into the heels, one said, "Boy, you should have been with us last week." He said, "Did we have fun. Oh, did we have fun." Looking at him, you would think that fun is a word out of an unknown dialect, the Egyptian. Did we have fun. That sort of an idea. And the other one said, "Oh, that's nothing. You ought to be with us next week. Are we ever going to have us a time." So they are talking about the wonderful yesterday, and the glorious tomorrow. But right there they are bored stiff. They just can hardly endure each other for another morning, another moment.

And I think that this sometimes characterizes Christian people. They have a grandiose idea of the past, and a glorified idea of the future, and they are living in a very barren now. May God save you from that. You didn't live that yesterday, and there is no prospect of that tomorrow. Your life is going to be pretty much as it has been, so "let us rejoice that this is the day that the Lord has made," and that He is doing today what He has done in all the yesterdays, and He hasn't any step children, and you are not deprived of blessing from God because you had the misfortune of being born in the 20th century. (Psa. 118:24) He is just the same, and His word is just the same, and His promises are just the same, and He is going to do with you, not what He did necessarily for this period, for Cornelius, but He is going to do with you something so wonderful if you will let Him, that your great grandchildren will talk about your life as the good old days. Wouldn't that be wonderful? This would be making history for them. And so if you could just bear with me to see that God is doing the same thing.

I have told you about it, and to some of you it will be familiar. Down on the northeast side of Lake Rudolf (now known as Lake Turkana), which is in that salient, that triangle area between the Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopian Somalia, is a virtually unmapped, un-traversed area. It is exceeding dangerous. It probably the most primitive part of Africa even yet. And maps are very sketchy; a few parties have gone through hunting. A few governments, military surveys have gone through. For all practical purposes it is the most primitive part of Africa.

Way down there in this trackless waste, not actually jungle, not mountain, a little bit of each, and not much of any, and very little profit in it, or it would have been exploited before this, some wandering herds people were following their tribes, little grass huts that they'd erect and where they would only stay a few weeks and then go on with their cattle. But seated down there one night, late at night, in front of a few coals, burning in the center of the hut was a young man, married, 2 children, and sitting there looking at his hands. His hands looked bloody. And he would rub them, and his heart which he seemed to see looked black, filled with blackness. He had gone to every witch doctor. He had gone to witch doctors of other tribes, always with the same question, "How do you get the blood off of your hands when you kill somebody? How do you get the black out of your heart?" And no, one had an answer. They prescribed this. Bring a cow, bring this, bring that, but nothing helped. And so late at night, he was seated there, looking into the dying embers of his fire, warming himself, and wondering how he could get

the blood off his hands; get the black out of his heart, when he noticed standing across the fire a figure in white, a man and in white, white clothing, and white face. He said, "I have heard you ask to have the blood taken off your hands, and black taken out of your heart." "Yes, that is what I've asked." He said, "Would you want to have that happen to you? badly enough to obey me?" "Yes." "Then all right. If you will follow me and go where I send you, I'll bring you to a man whose face is like mine, and he'll tell you." Now the angel did not tell him any more than the angel told Cornelius. The angel could have. But he didn't.

And so he woke his wife, said, I am leaving. He took some dried food that was there, some water, spears, staff, dog, and started off. And the figure stood outside of his house and said, "Take that path." Now remember where he was. On the northeast side of Lake Rudolf (now known as Lake Turkana), 360 degrees of the compass. I want to eliminate the possibility of change. He went for several weeks. He would follow a trail alone. Then he would come to a fork in the trail and he would say, "Which way should I go?" He would start down a trail. If it was the wrong one, the figure in white would say, "No, you take the other fork." The figure never came, never appeared except to correct him. As long as he was going properly in the right direction there was no visible message.

And he went on like this day after day, week after week, till finally he stumbled into the perimeter posts of the Sudan Army, Sudan Defense Force, way down in the southeast border of then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, now the Sudan. If you had asked the Government in Khartoum where Dick Lythe was, they would have said, "We don't know. He is somewhere here." No communication, no telegraph. Dick Lythe was the district commissioner for this whole area for the Pibor Post area, stationed at Akobo. He had been a missionary with the Church Missionary Society over in Equatorial Province, and studying the map, studying the location of missionaries he saw this vast area without a Gospel witness. So he had applied for government service to the Sudan Government. Under one condition, that they would allow him to be permanently stationed at Akobo and give him the privilege of learning the language and staying there long enough to use it. And he also stated, I am a missionary, and I go for the purpose not only of preaching — administering, but also of making known the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am expecting to have your recognition of this.

So he had gone in. He had translated the Gospel into the Sudanese that is colloquial Arabic, very colloquial, and he had learned the Murle language. Now he was the only white man in the world that knew the Murle language, and he was a born again Christian, well taught in the Scripture whose father-in-law incidentally was Mr. Smith who was one of the missionaries down in Kenya that was very much part of the Kenya-Uganda revival for many years.

Now this man who has been weeks on the way stumbles into a sentry on the perimeter outpost of this encampment of the Sudan Defense Force, probably half or three quarters of a mile away. And so he asks— they, of course, had taken him by bayonet thinking perhaps the army across in Ethiopia had sent him in, and he is a spy. But he doesn't know their language, they are speaking Arabic, and they take him into the sergeant who would be in charge, saying, "We have found him, he is here." He didn't apparently understand a word they said. Finally one of the soldiers spoke in Murle and he replied. He said, "I know that language. When I was a little boy these people came down and found us and I was taken as a slave and I escaped when I was about so many years." But he had learned the Murle language, which wasn't his language at all. And then he gave his story in Murle. He said, "I have blood on my hands, and black in my heart, and I knew not how to have it taken away. A figure in white, whose face is like the sun in the morning when it rises told me that if I would follow there would be someone whose face was like his that would tell me how the blood could be taken off my hands and the black out of my heart." Here were all of these Africans. He said, "Have you ever seen anyone whose face is like the sun in the morning?" They said, "Why yes, he is here in that tent." "Is that right? Could he tell me how to have the black taken out of my heart, and the blood off my hands?" And one of them said, "Yes, he told me. I was like you are, and he told me. We'll take you to him." And so they escorted this man that had been weeks on the path up to the tent, and Dick Lythe had the joyous and privilege of pointing him to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I saw the man he had been a Christian for about 8 years. He'd start out when the rains were over and the dry season began, and he would take a piece of cord about six feet in length, and every time he would witness to someone who opened their heart to receive the Lord Jesus, he would tie a knot in the cord. He wouldn't come back until the cord was so that he couldn't tie any more knots in it. He had knots. Then he had knots on knots. And then he had knots on knots. And when he

came back he would sit there in the presence of Mr. Lythe, and he'd tell about each knot, who this person was, and where he had met them, and what they did, and he would say, "Now these 5 right here close together were the sons of a man that received Christ when I was there last year, and now when I came his sons were waiting to receive the Lord." And he had been led all the way for nearly 400 miles, 300 miles and more, up and around, and across, to stumble into the camp of the only white man in the world who knew the language that he had learned as a slave boy, and who knew the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is my firm conviction that sovereign God who knows the hearts of all men is doing today what He did with Cornelius. And I would have you remember that.

But I would also have you remember, dear friends, that He will do with you what He did with a Dick Lythe. And just as He found Peter and Peter was prepared to go, if you are available, He will use you, because the angel could escort him, but the angel couldn't witness to him. And I am wondering if the angel of the Lord has often brought prepared people right by me and by you, because you were too busy to take time to tell someone how to have the black taken out of their hearts and the blood off their hands. Peter was busy. We saw last Sunday night, Philip was busy, but not too busy to be available to God.

Have you been that busy? Is there, as you approach this week, a sense of adventure and a sense of excitement, a sense of delight? Have you committed to Him all you are and have, and are available, and perhaps He is going to allow the Spirit of God or some angel of the Lord to escort to you that one to whom you can explain how to have the blood taken off his hands, and the black out of his heart. For there is the ministry of God in His sovereignty. There is the ministry of God by angels. Are there angels today? Oh, yes. Certainly. Unquestionably. "For angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him," and this is certainly not just a figment of imagination. (Psa. 34:7) This is a delight and truth to the tender heart that walks in fellowship with God.

You say, "I have never seen one." Very good. That is not important. The fact is as long as God can see him that is all I am worried about. When He loses sight of them, then they will be a matter of concern, but I am not necessarily... The thing I must see to is that I am living in fear of the Lord, and in constant trust and submission and obedience, because then He said He would care for His Own. I do recall, speaking to this point, for a moment, driving down one Saturday night, very late, through Georgia on one of those lonely, lonely, lonely roads where you can go 15 miles straight as a dye, and never see a town. The only thing you might see is a wandering deer or a loose cow, and head lights periodically. Well I had worked all day, driven most of the night before, had to be in Winter Haven, Florida, to speak at 11 o'clock, and I couldn't leave Chattanooga until 8 o'clock at night, and I had to drive every minute. I got to the church yard just about 5 minutes before I was to go into the pulpit.

And I was tired, so tired I could taste it, like acid in my mouth. And I was asleep, sound asleep, going down the wrong side of the road in Georgia at Georgia's limit of 60 miles an hour. And a car was coming directly at me, when I felt a hand on my shoulder, as definite as that. And I turned to see who it was, and saw the lights, and pulled the car in time to avoid a calamitous accident.

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

All I am concerned about is this, now. I have no question about the fact that angels can minister, that they are the ministering servants of God, to perform His will and purpose. This creates no problem with me. As I have said, and have said often, I only had problem with four words in the Bible and when I saw those four words then I have no trouble with the rest of it. And what were those words? "In the beginning God..." (Gen. 1:1) And as soon as I could adequately make my peace with these four words, I have had no problem since. And I think that anyone that will approach the Bible and read it from the beginning, and will actually consent that there is One who was before the beginning, and by whom the beginning began, then he won't have any trouble at all with the rest of the Bible. It is this preexistent One who is the cause of all that is, and the organizer of all that exists, that causes trouble, and as soon as you have made peace with the fact that God is, then you have no problem with the fact that God does.

But the problem isn't with God. I have no difficulty there or with an angelic ministry. The concern of my heart tonight Are you responsive? Are you prepared to overcome your prejudices? Are you prepared to overcome the natural lethargy of your heart? Are you prepared to overcome your preoccupation with tasks more interesting perhaps than those that you feel He'll give? Do you recognize that there is a glorious adventure of obedience to God that is your privilege to enjoy tomorrow? Oh, that somehow you could enter into tomorrow, realizing that every step is a step into adventure. Do not be like the man who looks at the gray sky and the rain and says, "My, isn't this a wonderful day to be only half alive." This I am afraid is too frequently the attitude.

People approach just half alive. They have got to go through the drudgery of succeeding with this task and the other, but oh that tomorrow you can say that God has some hungry Cornelius, God has some burdened man or woman, and I am here available to Him, willing and ready to be used where and when and how He chooses. This I see as tremendously important.

But the next matter that is of great concern to me from what we have read is this, that Peter had to learn that God was prepared to deal with others the same way that He had dealt with him. Perhaps this is one of the most difficult lessons that you are going to have to learn. There is always a sense in which we are inclined to think we are the people, God has found in us more than He found in others, and blessed us more than He has blessed others, and taught us more than He has taught others, done for us more than He has done for others. This smugness can grip us, this complacency can lay hold upon us and cripple us, and if I find it is a tendency into which my heart can fall, and in which it can fail and sin, I am confident that you share it. Peter was quite prepared to go, and I think he was quite prepared for God to save Cornelius from hell but the idea that Cornelius was going to have something happen to him similar to that which had happened to these that had been with Christ for the 3 years of His public ministry was just stretching his expectation. And so God had to settle the fact that He has no stepchildren. And there is nothing that He has ever done for anyone that He is not prepared to do for everyone. And in the house of Cornelius, he raises his voice, in sweet testimony to the Lord Jesus, we are witnesses of all that He did, and how that He was hanged upon the tree, how God raised Him up, and showed Him openly, commanded us to preach unto the people, to testify that Jesus Christ is the One whom God hath ordained to be the Judge, he is willing to say this.

But you know, when God just opened heaven, and poured out of His Spirit upon Cornelius, and his family, and his servants, and his friends, baptizing them in the Holy Ghost, and wonderfully signifying to Peter that it was, as it had been on Pentecost, then Peter was forced to say that God made no difference. He fell upon them as upon us at the beginning. And this is the truth that I want your heart to grip tonight, that God is meeting you to the degree to which you are prepared to be met by Him, as He has met people in the beginning.

We live in the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. This is the period of His ministry. G. Campbell Morgan², that great homiletician and British preacher, stated over and over again in his book, Acts of the Apostles, that Pentecost was not the day; it was dawn of the day. This is the day of Pentecost. That was the dawn. It dawned back there, and this is the day. Rather than speaking of that as the day, and this as something else. It had a dawning. But now Peter witnesses the Spirit of God fall upon Cornelius, and this company of Gentiles in identically the same way as he had in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost.

Now, incidentally, this is the only time that it happened just this way other than at Pentecost. This is the only occasion. And I think there is a real reason for it, for your heart as well as for Peter's. I think in Peter's case, he had to know that there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles. They were all on the same basis, and it was necessary for God to have witnesses. Six men went with Peter. It was necessary for Peter, who was in some sense, the leader of the apostles, to see and to participate in this visitation of the Lord in order that there might be no prejudice about the Gentile believers.

But I think it was necessary for you that this should have happened just this way, that God could encourage your heart to believe tonight that He is just the same today as when He went away. There is nothing changed. What has changed? You say, "Well, He is not doing as He did then, is He?" Of course, He is. Maybe not to me or to you, but He is. There is almost everything that He has ever done is doing. You say, "Well, are the dead being raised?" Well, our missionaries tell us of experiences. We

2 G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) British born Preacher and Teacher

think of that thing that took place in the Balim Valley, when that dear godly Kona that had gone down with them took the son of the chief that had been brought out of the house, taken away for burial, and he just held him in his arms and groaningly laid hold of God. He didn't know what he was even praying for, but he just was pleading the Name of Jesus, and the child was as far as everyone was concerned dead, and after a little while the child began to whisper and cry, and was brought back to his father. You say, "Well, you haven't any clinical proof, have you." No, we only have the fact that the tribe pretty well turned to Christ. That is all the proof we have, that God was working there.

You say, "Well, what about...?" All right, we can raise a hundred problems, and a hundred questions. You can cite a hundred distortions, and a thousand this and more of the other, but the point for your heart is that you are hungry for God, and you need to know Him, and you need to be able to come to His Word and say, All right, Lord. What about me? What about me? And so you have this wonderful testimony that the Spirit of God is prepared to meet the need of hungry hearts. If it is true, and I have sought to satisfy your minds, and certainly mine is, that God is leading by angels people to hear of Christ, and He is leading men out of their darkness and blindness into repentance and faith, that salvation is in every case supernatural, then I think we can just simply approach this Book as a living Book, and say, Lord, speak to my heart through it.

You say, "Won't this lead to fanaticism?" My dear, fanaticism does not come from truth. Fanaticism does not come from the Bible. Fanaticism comes from hearts that are unwilling to accept the balance whether of the Word of God, or whatever it may be. And you do not find that fanatics are confined to the religious interests at all. Do you know why we speak of baseball fans? Do you know what 'fan' is the short of? Well, it is just the short form of fanatics. And if you hear 10 thousand fans and really what you've said are 10 thousand fanatics. And it is from this source that it comes. And fanaticism, therefore, is not implicit in truth. You can become a fanatic on anything that you are desirous of committing yourself to. I believe in another sense, however, that every Christian is in one particular or another, a fanatic, and properly so. Sometime I would like to bring a whole message on what I call Balanced and Useful Fanaticism, because I believe that it is very, very important. The person that commits himself to Christ has so oriented his life around a Person, the Person of the Son of God, that from that time on he lives every breathe in the interests of that Person, and if this is not what you might call a fanatical orientation of one's life, then words would fails us to express it.

And so there is a disciplined, proper, and wholesome fanaticism, with the directing of our lives in accord with the will of a Person.

Now I recognize that one can become overbalanced on any doctrine, on any truth. This there is no debate, there is no argument, but I do not believe that anyone has ever become over-balanced in his love for the Lord Jesus. I do not believe that anyone has ever been pressed out of measure by his commitment to the will of the risen Christ. I believe that if you will accept the Word as the rule of your life, the whole of it in its full balance, that you can take everything in the Book, without hesitation, without fear, without question. I would like to disabuse your mind tonight, if it's possible, of the fact of fanaticism. I would like somehow to make this Word appear in its proper light so that you aren't going to be afraid. You are going to be afraid of this, however; you are going to be afraid of getting out of balance with the will of God. Oh, that somehow your heart can come to rest in this, that you do not need to be afraid of the Lord. You do not need to be afraid.

I have asked myself over and over again, "Why is it that there are some people who become — what shall I say — out of balance on a particular phase of truth?" I stand in the very unusual place with friends in so many quarters. For instance, I have some friends that believe in the sovereignty of God, and in supernatural salvation, and in the necessity of repentance. But you know what? That is all they believe in. That is all they believe in. And they know that I believe in this, and so when I get together with them as long as we talk about that, wonderful, that's fine. We are friends. Then I have other people that believe in victory. They believe in victory through the Cross. They believe in the possibility of victory in one's own personal experience through identification with Christ. They know I do. And so as long as we have fellowship there, wonderful. But if I ever talked about the sovereignty of God they would be disturbed. Then I find others that believe in the fullness of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but that's all they believe in. And they know I do. And so they say, "Well, that's fine." When I meet them on that level, splendid. But when I start talking to them about real repentance, they say, "Oh, that's not important." To these people that is all that is important. When I start talking to these people about victory, "Oh, that's not important". The

only thing that is is the fullness of the Spirit, and vice versa. With these people nothing is important but what they are interested in.

My friend, if it's in the Word of God, it's yours. If it's part of this Book, it's yours. And you don't need to abandon any of it because someone has abused it. If you are going to claim for yourself only that which has not been abused, there is going to be precious little that you'll have. For instance, you can't believe in the virgin birth because it is turned by some into Mariolatry. That's a big portion of the Word gone right there. That's right. If you are going to... because they have abused the doctrine, a wonderful doctrine. They have made it, pressed it, and turned it into Mariolatry. Well if your test of truth is going to be, it's abused, what have you left? You can't have that.

Well then you are going to have to do away with baptism, because they have turned it into baptismal regeneration. Multitudes of people are deceived into thinking that water saves. And so if you are going to say, "Well, anything that has been abused I reject," there goes baptism. And then the coming of the Lord, you are going to have to do away with that, because they have turned it into Millerism, and Jehovah's Witness, and a lot of other things, and twisted and abused, and if you reject anything that has been abused, that's gone.

And so it is with the gifts of the Spirit, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If you say, "Well, this has been abused, it is gone from my Bible." Precious little remains. No I think you can do this, that when you come to the place that what you want is to glorify God, and your concern is that your life be the vehicle for the revelation of the loveliness of Christ, and that you are an instrument to be available to Him, and you want both fruit and power for service, you can turn your life over to the Lord in absolute confidence that when you ask "hungrily for bread, He won't give you a stone. When you ask for an egg, He won't give you a serpent." (Luke 11:11) And when you ask for meat, He won't give you a cockatrice. He is going to give good and wonderful things in and of, and through His sovereign Son. And so with an open heart, a yielded heart...

You say, "Well, why do you talk like this?" Because I find that most Christian people are afraid of God. Did you know that? They are afraid of God, afraid of what He will do to them, afraid of what He will take from them. And this is the reason why the witch doctor business is so profitable in Africa, because people don't want to meet this invisible realm of personality. This is why the priesthood has trailled through the centuries, because people would like to have somebody else go into the mystery cavern of the unseen and come and tell them of what has happened. And this happens with Protestants also. That is why you have the deification of personality. There has been no movement in history that has so glorified personality as protestant Christianity, constantly looking for a personality that can be exploited, because of an inner fear of God, fear of what He is going to do, fear of what He is going to take.

But my friend, you do not need to be afraid of God. He'll never embarrass you. He'll never hurt you. You can come with the same openness and expectancy, and submission, and faith, and childlike anticipation as did Cornelius, knowing that anything that God does for you is good.

Now, many times people have their reactions to what they see. They say, "O I don't want that to happen to me, or I don't want this to happen to me," and they are proper and right. But you see, the place where we are to get our understanding of what God does for, and in, and to, and through people is not from what we see around us, but from the Word of God.

What I am pleading for tonight is this, that you should recognize that all the Peter's of all the ages are only the instruments to point you to the Lord Jesus. Philip went down to Samaria and preached and Peter and John came down and prayed for them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter went into the house of Cornelius, began to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ when the Spirit of God fell upon Cornelius. What has God told us here? He has told us that He does not have anyone pattern for meeting His children. Not one pattern.

It is so easy you know for people to get a little formula and say, "Now this is the way God meets His children." It is so easy. But I have such complete confidence in God that just as soon as I get Him fixed in my little pattern, He is going to break out of it, and I am so glad. I am so glad that I can't harness God to my formula, and fit Him to my pattern. My heart rejoices in this, that He is infinitely bigger, infinitely more glorious than any little conceptual pattern that I might fix for Him.

Now the reason that I dwell upon this is last Sunday night I dwelt upon what happened down at Samaria, when Peter and John came down and prayed for them and laid hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and we said it was a Church matter. It is a church matter. But lest we should make the mistake of saying, "This is how and only how, we hasten to come and say, God just wonderfully broke over, and through, and met Cornelius."

What is He going to do for you? How is God going to meet you? I do not know. I do not know. But this much I do know, that there is an interdependence that we all have one upon another. As Peter and John were important in Samaria, God chose this means of meeting and establishing that church; As Peter was likewise important even in standing by in the house of Cornelius, so everything that God does for you He is going to do (now note my words) He is going to do in conjunction with what He has done. He is going to do in accord with what He has done. And what He has done or does for you is going to be understood by the church.

But what I would love to see happen tonight is that you will go out of this service saying, "God wants to make me a complete, wholesome, happy, fulfilled, and filled full Christian, that I can be useful and available to the Lord Jesus Christ in exalting Him in my home, in my work, in my recreation." This is what I wanted you to see. Whatever means He chooses to use, that is up to Him; whatever plan He chooses, that is up to Him; but the fact is, whereas I cannot fit a pattern and say, "This is how God is going to meet you," whether He uses this pattern or that, this means or that, the one thing that is paramount is that you were intended to know Him in His fullness, in a life of union, in a life of indwelling, a life of fellowship, a life of joyous involvement with the living God. And you can, He is prepared to do the same for you today as He has done for all the people of the past. He is just waiting to find a hungry heart, and a dry prepared ground on which to pour the living water of Himself, the rivers of His love.

Well what about it? Are you afraid of God? Are you afraid of what He will do to you? Are you afraid of becoming too involved with Him? Is there a deep inner fear that God might embarrass you? Can't you just deal with this and recognize that every gift He gives is a good and a perfect gift. He never gives dirty gifts, nasty blessings. Everything God does is wonderful because He is wonderful, glorious because He is glorious, and you can just open your heart to Him, and open your life to Him, and ask Him to meet you and make you the vessel that He desires you to be, fill you with Himself and live through you His life, and believe that as you pray He accepts that prayer, He answers that prayer. And in His own time and way He'll lead you. It may be that in your case He is going to say, "You ought to go to the eldership." Maybe there is a heart of lack of submission, maybe the only way He can meet you is to bring you to the eldership. I know that is what He had to do with me, because I was so utterly sure that because I was me He was going to meet me alone, the way He did Cornelius.

Oh, I read this chapter over and over again. And I said, "Now, Lord, this is the way You have got to meet me, because I am me." I was not so bold as to say it that way, but that is just what I meant. You know what the Lord did, don't you? He made me go and see some brethren, a couple of Baptist brethren who knew the Lord. Now, I said, "Brethren, I don't know much. Would you help me? Will you teach me?" And they helped me, and they taught me. And I don't know quite how the Lord is going to meet you, but I do know this, that He is going to meet you. Perhaps He has, and if so, rejoice.

Someone says, "Well you know, I was filled with the fullness of God when I was saved." And you know what my answer to that is? Praise the Lord. If you know it, that is all I concerned about. Praise the Lord. Do you know why it could happen? Because it happened with Cornelius. And if it could happen with Cornelius, He could do that with you. And if you were filled with the Spirit of God when you were saved, good. Everyone is born of the Spirit, but not all are born full of the Spirit. AND He said, "Be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18b) So if you were born full of the Spirit, and God met you then, Praise the Lord. I'm satisfied, because this is here in the 11th chapter. But if you weren't, you ought to be, and you can be. And God wants you to be, and you ought to want to be, because then He gets the glory out of your life that He deserves, and you get the joy out of life that you deserve, and others get the witness out of your life that they deserve.

What we should see in this tonight is that God is prepared to meet you. He is prepared to forgive your sin. He is prepared to give you eternal life in His Son. He is prepared to make your life the vehicle for His presence, and He will give to you as much of

Himself as you are capable of receiving, and go on giving, and giving, and giving again. And your life is to be a life of ever increasing, ever widening, ever deepening fellowship with God.

Now, the only reason that Cornelius could have fellowship with the Church was because he had fellowship with God. And unfortunately too many people begin their life of fellowship with the church instead of with God. And so all they can have fellowship with is the church, because that is all they have known. You only can have fellowship with others in Christ, with others in the fullness of God, when you are in that relationship. Do you see? Otherwise they are talking about something you have never known about, talking about something you have never experienced, and you can listen, but you cannot share. And this is to be a life of sharing the normal state in the New Testament is filled with the fullness of Christ.

And this is the reason why Paul says, "That Christ may take up His lasting dwelling place in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and foundational in love may know what is the breath and length, and depth and height, and to experience the love of Christ which passes intelligence, in order that you might be filled unto all of the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:17-19)

And when this is the case, then you share in fellowship, and this is why He met Cornelius as He did, that he might share, in the life of the church. This is why He wants to meet you, that you might share Him in the life of the church. But that level of fellowship that is normal in the New Testament is filled unto all of the fullness of God. This is the beginning, not the ending. This is the place of fellowship, not the epitome of it. This is where we start, not where we finish. What of you?

Let us pray. Just to think, our Father, that we were forgiven, and sure that if we died we would go to Heaven is wonderful, to know that our past is under the Blood, to know that Thou wilt remember our sins against us no more forever. This is glorious, to know that we have peace with Thee, wonderful beyond words. But, our Father, to know Thee, to have fellowship with Thee, to know the fullness of Thyself, of Thy Spirit, and of Thy Son; this so transcends all the fellowship and the activities and fellowship in organization, and fellowship in the teachings, this is what John spoke about, our Father when he said, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto thee that you may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:3) We ask, our Father, that Thou wilt come us as a people. Thou didst come upon Cornelius, and by this Thou hast said that there was no particular time, no particular race, favored with Thee, no particular situation, not dependent upon any person. We believe, our Father, that from what we have considered these last two Sunday nights that every heart here can find some encouragement to believe that the hunger Thou hast given for Thyself, the yearning, the longing to be all that Thou dost want us to be, to be the instruments unto glory that Thou dost choose for us to be, is not a vain hope. We are not as those who beat against the sky. We are as children that come to a father, and say, father give me bread and egg and meat. And Thou wilt not give us the stone, and the serpent, and the cockatrice. If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more wilt Thou give of the fullness of Thyself, and of Thy Spirit to them that ask Thee. And so we can come with confidence, and can come with joy. We can let all of our fears and misconceptions, all of these inhibiting restricting things that we have gathered and picked up from the past just fall off of us, and we can open our hearts and minds, and spirits to Thee and say that we long for Thee, the Living God, to fill us with Thyself, and to fill us with the fruit of Thy Presence, the fruit of the Spirit, and to make us instruments to the glory of Christ. Grant, Lord, that this company gathered here tonight shall realize that this is Thy purpose, this is Thy message to our hearts, that this is the end Thou dost have in grace, not just to take us where Thou art when we die, but to come where we are and to share our homes and our hearts, share our lives and our work, our families and our needs, and just to fit Thyself into our lives that they might be lived with joy and meaning and blessing to ourselves and to others, and glory to Thee. Thou art concerned about us. Father, this overwhelms us. It just staggers us to think that Thou didst care enough to want to compress Thine Omnipotence, compress Thine Omnipresence into the poor limits of our hearts. But this is Thy plan, not ours. We are not telling Thee something that we think would be nice if Thou didst wish to do it, but Thou art telling us what Thy purpose was in grace, that the Lord Jesus died to take away the mountain of our guilt and the world of our uncleanness, and to wash us and take the legal barriers away, so that He could make our hearts His home, and live in us, and dwell in us, and walk in us, and we could know Heaven begun on earth, and we can have constant, conscious communion with Thee, and it would be not in working for Thee to see Thee at some distant day, but Thou living in us and working through us, and Heaven already begun in our hearts. And Father, this is what the world is waiting to see; this is what they are looking for. They have heard so much of the nice things we have said about Thee. They have heard so much about Theology. But they are waiting to see Him, the lovely One, they are waiting to see

the love, and joy, and peace, and gentleness, and long suffering, and goodness, the meekness, the faith, the self-control that His indwelling presence brings. They are waiting to see Christ living in us. They cannot believe what we say, Lord. They have got to see. And the only way they will ever see Him is to see Him living in us. And so we are asking, Father, that Thou wilt just be pleased to breathe upon us, and gather here by Thy sweet grace a people that Thou hast led, and drawn into Thyself. If Thou wouldst meet hungry, needy hearts by the discipline of the fellowship of the Church, the eldership as in the case of Peter and John. Teach, Lord, those whom Thou wouldst thus meet to make know their need in Thy guidance in their lives. Undoubtedly there are others that Thou wilt meet alone, just as Thou didst meet Cornelius. But our concern, Father, isn't how. We would not restrict Thee to a pattern, or fit Thee in a formula, but Oh that we should have a God intoxicated people, young men and women, students and fathers, and mothers, and all of us together sharing the risen life of the Lord Jesus, a Spirit filled people, a people Lord that are not only talking about how wonderful it was in some yesteryear, or how glorious it is going to be in some distant tomorrow, but are living in the joyous revelation of the risen Christ day by day. And Lord, we believe that Thou art preparing hearts, that of many here tonight. And O God that Thou shouldst teach us that Thou art just as near as the air we breathe. Thou dost not need to come from some distant place where Thou art more real than Thou art here. "In Thee we live and move and we have our being." (Acts 17:28) Thou art just as near as the air upon our face, as the light upon our cheeks, we are in the ocean of Thy presence, and like a bottle with the cork of unbelief, a cork that stops it, so Lord that we might take the cork of our fear and of our unbelief, and all of our misconceptions, and just allow Thee in whom we live to fill us with Thyself, and manifest Thyself, and make real Thy presence, until Lord a people that know Thee, not only with the hearing of the ear, but know Thee in the inner knowing that transcends all others. O God, to share Him thus in our lives and our homes, in our witness. This is that for which we long. And so we are praying now that as we see Thy grace manifest to this one and the working of Thy Spirit, Lord we would believe that there are some that have been led into this hall for this service tonight, and that perhaps some prejudice, some preconception, some restriction be removed, and that as we sing, and as we pray, "Fill me now, fill me now, Jesus come and fill me now. [Tape stops here] Fill me with Thy bless Presence. Come, O Come and fill me now."³ Thou didst not need to come from somewhere. The coming is not the problem. It is the matter our abandonment and yieldedness, and expectant faith that receives that which Thou art so willing and prepared to bring. So breathe upon us, Breath of God, and meet hungry hearts, and get to Thyself here a living fellowship of those that are sharing wondrous joy, walking in the Spirit, filled with the fullness of Christ. In His Name and for His sake.

Let us remain with heads bowed and eyes closed a moment. As we have prayed, have you prayed? I wonder if some of you tonight would just begin to change the climate of your heart from a vain asking to thanking the Lord that what you have read, what you have heard makes sense, that God wants to meet you, fill you, and just live in you His life, and thank Him that He is going to meet you, and He is going to, that He is going to satisfy every hunger. For it says, "the hunger for Him, He created it, and He will satisfy it." (Psa. 107:9)

Now let us stand for the Benediction. With heads bowed and eyes closed, we speak to you that are here and know not our Lord. Oh, dear friend, if you do not know Him, whom to know is life eternal, you have to carry a weight of sin and a burden of grief home with you, and there is a Savior with outstretched hands waiting to forgive and to pardon, waiting to save and to cleanse. Do not go. Stay. Make known your need. Ask for prayer. Perhaps there are other needs that can be met. The invitation continues. Wise people that see a need seek to have it met while they are still aware of it. You need not hurry. We won't. We will stay to share with you in every way we can.

"Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen." (Heb. 13:20,21)

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, November 25, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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³ "Fill Me Now" By Elwood H. Stokes 1879; Music by John R. Sweney