

Apostolic Conversion

By Art Katz



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Pretext or Reality?

This is the verbatim transcript of a message given in 1993 to an American congregation of a spiritually impressive kind. That is to say, that it had all the appearances of a committed body, serious in the Lord, and whose lively worship seemed to testify of its abounding health. Nevertheless, after two nights of meetings, I felt, as the speaker, an increasing sense of despair that not much had been transacted and that if the Lord did not radically intervene there would be little point in continuing.

This message was given on the third night, having spent the day in fasting and earnest intercessory prayer. With hardly a single exception, the entire congregation went down on their faces at its conclusion in a depth of groaning and intensive seeking of the Lord.

The word is like an arrow to the heart of the need of the church world-wide especially in its seeming 'success' and how much more in its static predictability. May it affect you as a reader as it did those who heard and received it as the Lord's word.

Tonight I believe that the Lord's heart is on the subject of conversion. I'm very fond of saying, "Many saved, few converted," and I've come to a realization after two nights, that to continue along the lines that we have been speaking would be vain unless there has in fact been a radical crossing to the other side. I can't think of a greater cruelty or delusion than to speak about apostolic things when we are spiritually incapacitated or incapable of walking them out, especially when something foundational to our relationship with God has not yet been effected. The apostolic things that pertain to His glory can only find fulfillment in a people who are utterly abandoned to God. If we embrace only the vocabulary of apostolicity, we engage the cruelest of all deceptions. Let's talk about anything else, and use any other kind of language, but let's not embrace this language unless we have an intent to fulfill it. Somehow we need to pause in the course of what is being unfolded in these days and raise the question of the authenticity of our own conversion. Can you understand that it is possible somehow to be saved and even born again of the Spirit – even

be filled with the Spirit – and yet not be converted in the sense of an utterness toward God that apostolic reality requires?

Seeing that we are focusing on Paul, I want to read an account of his conversion from Acts, Chapter 9. It is remarkable to note that in the book of Acts there are three expressions or recordings of that conversion. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to suggest that the apostolic life that followed was altogether proportionate to the kind of commencement or beginning that it had from the first. Or to put it in another way, maybe we can't exceed or go beyond what is the point of our beginning. Some of us may need a day of new beginnings or a beginning that has never in fact been made; which if it is in fact not made, would condemn us to being fixed at a certain level of Christian response beneath what the Lord himself intensely intends and desires.

I'm going to ask that we stand and ask the Lord's blessing before we read the Scriptures. I don't know where that thought came from, but somewhere in the course of the day I just had a sense of us standing to pray and I just want to invite you to call on the Lord even now. No lengthy prayer from one saint, but just a brief inviting of God to pull out the stops, to ask Him for something of an extraordinary kind. I'm always believing the Lord for something like that, an impetus like that in your spirit, so just sound out from where you are standing and then I'll conclude in prayer and then we'll get into the word for tonight.

So then, first reading from Acts 9...

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who are thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus who thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord what would thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul rose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."
[Acts 9:1-16]

Thank you precious God, for the light that shone upon an enemy and deeply converted him, my God, from the murderer to the chief apostle of the Church. What a work, my God, that

comes down from heaven in the moment that you appoint, even in all our opposition. We pray that tonight's speaking, my God, might be for us who have not yet fallen to the earth and who are still proceeding from our seeing, and not yet from yours – that we might be brought down in order that we may be brought up, and that we might learn what great things we must suffer for your name's sake, whom you will bring before Gentiles and kings – and especially in these last days, before the house of Israel. Come and speak to us out of this text, my God. We thank you and praise you for the privilege of a word about it that might be for us the event of it, in Jesus' holy Name, Amen.

So, as I've already said, the inception of the apostolic life greatly determines its end. Many of us are malfunctioning, not walking in fullness, because of inadequate beginnings. I can go off on a long dissertation about the inadequacy of our contemporary gospel, of it being more of a kind of formula for salvation than it is an induction into the most holy faith, and how the pagans in Thessalonica who heard an apostolic proclamation of that gospel were *saved "from their idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His son who comes from heaven and who will save them in the day of His wrath."* (1 Thess. 1:9). Evidently, they heard a much fuller and more powerful presentation of the gospel than most of us, and therefore, right from the instant of their conversion, a quality of things was released that made that church distinctive. Indeed, they reflect their beginning and we reflect ours.

But praise God that if our beginnings have been faulty and inadequate, if our poverty of beginning has affected our subsequent walk, then there are ways in which God can give us a new beginning.

I see in this a kind of parallel with Israel and the great 'crossing over' that they were required to make with Joshua. There is a Jordan, which means literally, "a descent into death." And this crossing leaves behind those who stumbled about in the religious wasteland for forty years where many cadavers had been left behind who did not have the fullness of heart of a Caleb or Joshua (Caleb means "Whole-hearted"). Only two out of an entire generation had the privilege of being welcomed into the land of promise and participating in the taking of the land. We stand at this kind of crossroad today. It is time to cross over, and this sense of crossing has been heavy on my heart in all the days I have been here and even the days that immediately preceded my coming to you.

But do you know that not all of the house of Israel crossed, but that a portion of the tribes of Gad, Manasseh and Reuben chose to remain on the other side? They remained because the ground there was lush, and the grasses were high and they were cattle breeders, who obviously recognized something of immediate value. They were unwilling for that risk of a faith in what might be found on the other side. They pleaded with Moses and got what they wanted, and they were allowed to remain on the wrong side of the Jordan and have been subsequently lost to the whole history of Israel. The only melancholy reminder we have of the tribe of Gad, who chose the wrong side, are the Gadarenes of the New Testament time who raised pigs and were unwilling, even at that later time, for a deliverer to come because it proved expensive for their flesh. They much preferred to sustain their herds, rather than welcome Him who casting those same herds into the sea delivers from demon spirits!

What a commentary on the consequences of an unwillingness to cross over, of a languishing on the wrong side. I think that the reason is always the same – because it is conducive to

the "flesh," because back there we have an assurance to things that pertain to "herds" (i.e., our immediate self-interest).

So there is now, as then, a real necessity for "crossing over," lest our own carcasses be found on the wrong side, or that we degenerate into the melancholy that became true for the tribes of Gad and Manasseh, who refused to go over but remained fixed for their "cattle's sake!" We just reviewed what the land of the Gadarenes had become by the time of Jesus, centuries later; they are lost even now to any kind of historical remembrance, let alone value.

Consequently, the conversion of Paul, and our conversion, is critical. It begins with the phrase, *"As he journeyed..."* I think there is more hope for an enemy of God journeying in full sincerity, even in his error, than for those who purport to be the friends of God and have long since ceased journeying and are just kind of "treading water" or occupying some kind of safe place. There is more hope to convert an enemy who is in motion, however grievous his error (and the error is a consequence, even, of an intensity for God, however misconceived), than there is for those of us who are safely ensconced in correct credos and doctrines but are not moving at all!

So, there is something in my spirit that rises up in the words we read, *"But as he journeyed..."* You wonder if there would have been a conversion if Saul would have been content to rest on his lees and to be satisfied with the conventional categories of orthodoxy that satisfied most of his contemporaries. *"But as he journeyed, suddenly there came a light from heaven,"* and I'm wondering if journeying is a condition of that light for us as well? Is it that when the Lord sees a questing there is more hope of our being arrested by the light of God than if we are merely treading water, satisfied with the spiritual status quo of our lives? But until that light shines, until something comes down to us from above, we are fixed in the place where we are.

Everything is from the great, sovereign hand of God. Whose eye *"roves to and fro over the face of the earth, seeking that one whose heart is perfect toward Him."* If that were not so, I would not be speaking to you now. I would not be in the faith but would have been a dead man a long time ago. But even as an atheist, and as an enemy of God, *"pouring out threats and murder"* against the Church thirty-seven years ago in the same kind of vehemence and opposition as Saul, I was arrested. (See Art's "Odyssey of a Modern Jew," the testimonial book of his own conversion). Probably for the same kinds of reasons that even in my error, even in my opposition to the Church and the faith, unable to mouth the name of Jesus, except as a blasphemy and a curse, God saw a heart that was desiring truth, that was willing to be on the way, "journeying." I think this is a disposition pleasing to God, even after one's initial encounter with God!

I love the way the Lord encountered Saul, who fell to the earth and heard a voice saying to him, *"Saul. Saul, why persecuteth thou Me?"* I think that if we are examining the anatomy of conversion, of what it is that must be radically turned, it is this fatal error, if it is allowed final expression, will ultimately result in the persecution of God and the Church. And what is this error? It is this – putting our "thou" before God's "Me." *"Why persecuteth thou Me?"* Why do you celebrate, and put your self-interest, however religious and sanctified you think it is, before Me? Here is where I have to trust the Holy Ghost to take that simple thing that lies too deep for words, and reveal the crux of the matter. We are not converted until His

"Me" is before our "thou." That is the fatal mishap, we go through an entire lifetime with our "thou" preceding His "Me," even religiously. Something needs to be wrenched about, radically altered and corrected; the one thing must be before the other – His "Me" before our "thou." If that does not take place, be assured that in one form or the other, we are persecuting God; we are opposing God even while we purport to be laboring and serving in His interest! Isn't that exactly the picture of Saul? Note that here is not some calculated atheist, indifferent to God, but here was a man zealous for God. The error that led to the persecution of God's own people, and God Himself in His people, was committed by a religious man in error whose "thou," however well meaning, was yet before God's "Me."

How does it stand with you tonight? If that basic and fatal error is possible for a man of religious zeal, who, with every right intention, sought to serve God and to seek out opportunities to round up heretics and bring them back to Jerusalem, how much more then are we capable of exactly the same fatal error? Why we put our "thou" before His "Me" is the nub of the matter, so long as we have made ourselves central and prior to Him. That, I think, is essentially characteristic of the Church today, even in its best "charismatic" form. It is still our "thou," it is still, "How are we affected?" That stubborn, spiritually egocentric attitude, however unconscious and expressed, can only be dislodged by profound conversion. For this in fact is what conversion is.

We can be saved; we can be filled with the Spirit; and yet, this central thing can remain unattended until a light shines down upon us from heaven and brings us down to the earth. Have we not, even in these two nights, integrated His word into the existing categories by which we affirm ourselves, misappropriating the very thing intended by God to unseat and even to devastate us?

I'll say it again. How many of us, in the hearing of the word on these very nights, have taken that word in through the prism of our own subjectivity and fitted it into the existing construct of our life, our categories, and found a way in which the Word would be amenable to our view of ourselves, of our spirituality, of our call? In a word, what are we doing, even unconsciously, is elevating ourselves above the Word, and ourselves determining how it is to be fitted comfortably into the categories that we approve. Instead of allowing the Word to devastate and demolish our categories, we stand or sit above it as arbiters, carefully molding it so that it can neatly be taken in and even acknowledged and celebrated as the Word of God, applauding the speaker for having brought it, thinking we have done God's service!

Can you see why we need to be converted? This egocentrism is unspeakably deep, and ironically, deepest in the religious and spiritual realm. What greater affront to God, what greater expression of putting our "thou" before His "Me" than the way in which we even hear and conditionally receive the Word? It is an entirely unconscious process, and we have been doing it for years, thereby missing the value and intent of the God who gave it!

I have to say that last night after the service I left depressed. I felt dejected. My spirit had sunk, I was slumping. I felt a tremendous exhaustion, a tiredness not only of body, but of soul. The word was good – the word was precious in God's intention, but somehow by the time it had been transmuted to the hearer, the way in which the hearer had received it and even responded or did not respond was already showing that our 'thou' was before His 'Me'. That is why the Lord is saying tonight, "Halt – I'll go no further! I'm not going to share the

holy things of the apostolic faith with a people who are going to take it, internalize it, and so construe it as to fit into their existing mindsets. By so doing, they somehow find a way to exalt what the word is intending to devastate."

In effect, we set ourselves above His Word, determining to what degree we allow it credence and acceptance. We determine to what degree we intend practically to internalize and implement it.

Do you realize that this is almost continually going on? Ours is a holy God. He's pouring His heart out to us and there we are, consciously or unconsciously calculating to what degree we are going to realistically receive such a word with the intent of doing it!

I think in this one thing I have described the essential malaise of the Church, why It is so stale, why It is not going from faith to faith and from glory to glory, why its services are replete with "sermons" rather than the word of God, which by its very nature demands response and change and is the purpose for which the Word is given. We are not hearing with the intent of doing. We are hearing with the intent of approving the Word as biblical and enjoying it.

Can you see that we bring a whole kind of mindset that stymies the very preciousness of the Word and intent of God?

FOR IF WE WILL NOT BE CHANGED BY THE WORD, BY WHAT ELSE SHALL WE BE CHANGED? But are we receiving it in an open and naked way and letting it have its full work? Are we willing to say, "*Lord, let be unto me according to Thy word?*" I don't know what the consequences will be – it may mean the eradication of my home and lifestyle, of my whole mode of being, or the loss of that for which I have labored so long that is not intrinsically wrong in itself. But until we come to the place where our heart says continually, in the hearing of the Word, "*Let it be unto me,*" we no longer hear the Word as God's; it can no longer perform the work of God. It becomes merely a "sermon" that we approve or dismiss.

What did it take for Mary to say, "*Let be unto me according to Thy word?*" It meant nothing less than receiving a pregnancy that could not be explained, and that to a pious, self-righteous generation totally prepared to stone to death on the doorstep of her father's house that woman who had an inexplicable pregnancy. To this day, the Talmud, the writing of the rabbis, makes shaded allusion to Mary's pregnancy as having come from a Roman soldier. How else shall inexplicable pregnancies be understood? And when Mary said, "*Let it be unto me according to Thy word,*" she meant, "I am willing to bear the full consequence of receiving this word, even if it shall mean my death in disgrace although I am in fact a virgin in Israel."

I'll tell you, when God shall find a heart like that, there is no limit to the extent of the divine work that can then have its inception. When I think of the potential in this room for the works of God in these last days, not only in this community but beyond it, in a world that is rocked and wracked by violence and filth and muck and perversion and corruption of every kind, waiting for those who will come to it, being sent by God, I sense the frustration of God, who cannot even perform it until a people will first receive His Word in that same virginal disposition of spirit, willing for its full consequence, whatever that consequence might be! "*Let it be unto me according to Thy Word.*"

You'll save yourself much unnecessary aggravation wondering what the outworking of that word will be in its particular application, if you have reconciled within yourself that it will inevitably lead to the place of death. And once you've made that reckoning, what difference by what form it comes – stoning at the doorstep of your father's house, disgrace, rejection of men, hostility, misunderstanding, catcalls, or shrieks or reproach – these kinds of things with moral and physical hazards of all kinds? God is yet waiting, and has never had any other inception for His works than one who will say, *"Let it be unto me according to Thy Word!"*

Let us note Saul's answer when he was confronted by the Jesus who said, "Saul, you celebrated and elevated your 'thou' before my 'Me?'" From it came that one great apostolic statement that underlines the whole of the great career that would follow, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"* I want to say that every invoking of the word "Lord" without also following it with the balance of Paul's statement is playing with a holy thing, even a taking of the name of the Lord in vain.

I want to ask you dear ones... When was the moment that you transacted with God something of the utterness with which Paul commenced his apostolic walk? That one question subsumes and includes every and all other questions, "Lord, what would You have for me to do?" No ifs, no ands, no buts. No stipulations, no conditions, no guarantees, no requests – even for illumination, understanding, or explanation. If the Lord is Lord, we have but one posture only, to be down on the earth before Him, with this one cry resonating throughout the balance of our natural lives, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"* We say it once, but we live forever in the resonance of that question or we do not live apostolically at all. And that is not one of the least of the reasons why we are hearing tonight what we are hearing. I came with a briefcase full of many choice messages, but I'm not at liberty to cite or to employ any one of them, however much I would delight in the promulgation of the precious, holy seed that God has given me. But my every speaking, my every service, like yours, needs again and again to be conducted in the resonance of that one question only, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"*

How many apostolic careers are in abeyance tonight? How many prophets are there in this room? How many evangelists and teachers and pastors? How many women of travail and intercession, how many callings of God hanging and waiting for the one question God yet waits to hear – a word that has never been sounded in His hearing with every stop removed and with all qualifications forsaken? It is the statement of utter, apostolic abandon. And until the Lord hears it, He is not going to tell you what to do.

That there are things to do is beyond question; but they can only be performed in the power given to those to whom they can be entrusted. "The Spirit is given without measure" to the sons who have no purpose in themselves and no life for themselves, but who live by one question only, which indeed is living! *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"* Anything less is deprivation. Anything less is conditional and inadequate. It is being seized with fears and doubts and vacillations and all those things that cripple and compromise and show us up. There is a release only when we have come finally to that place where with full integrity we say and put before God that thing for which He waits, that thing which He cannot command or compel, but must be utterly and freely and totally given. And no matter what we intone, He's not Lord until it has been given.

"Lord, what would You have for me to do?" I think that the answer is eternally the same, though the form of the fulfillment of it may vary – *"I will show him how great thing he must suffer for my name's sake."* No wonder we don't ask the question.

How wisely we intuit what the necessary answer must be. But I'll tell you dear saints, if you don't know it, that for every suffering that comes as the consequences of obedience to the Lord is a glory unspeakable, is reward eternal, is a joy even in the midst of the suffering and pain and distress and misunderstanding of men and the reproach that follows an obedience to a God who would have us do.

We need to ask ourselves, has there ever been a point, in the whole of our Christian life, where each of us has asked God, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"* – with full intention, not in just giving answer to something that would be spoken in that moment, but living continually in the light of that question ever after?

THERE WILL BE NO APOSTOLIC CHURCH UNTIL THAT QUESTION IS BOTH ASKED, AND CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED.

"Well Art, you don't understand, I'm a professional, I'm a doctor, I'm not some off-the-wall 'Jesus freak' like Saul. He didn't have much to lose. You have to realize that I have a family and professional responsibilities."

Saul was the prized student of the Rabbi Gamaliel, and if there is any man who committed religious suicide by the raising of that question and forfeiting an entire career that would have won him a celebration to this day in Jewish orthodoxy, it was Saul. But he forfeited all that, and counted it as dung, as we know, by raising the only question, the right question, that any creature can raise before its Creator, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"* Whatever the consequences, whatever the loss, You are Lord, and if You are not the Lord of that question, then anything I would presume to speak in that name is a mockery and a travesty and a religious exercise that even at best falls short of the glory of God!

The irony is, and mark my words, if you continue in such an exercise, in the last days you'll find yourself, not among the persecuted, but among the persecutors! Centrifugal force continues to work, ever bringing us into the one orbit or the other – into that which is apostolic or that which is finally apostate! *"For the love of many shall grow cold,"* and the last days shall be marked by the great apostasy and falling away of many who could not bring themselves to follow the Lord whithersoever He would lead them, but who found themselves in a vortex of a kind less than that which is apostolic and themselves offended by those who are apostolic and ironically opposing and persecuting them! This is the end of those whose *"thou"* is yet before His *"Me."*

We must not ask, with Saul, *"Who art thou, Lord?"* and receive the answer, *"I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."*

Do we really know Him until we do? Lord, give me grace, I don't know how to say this, I have been trying to say it for two nights, *"Who art thou Lord?"* Even the revelation of You as Lord so much waits on our *"pulling out the stops,"* that You are not going to squander and give us such treasure of the revelation of the knowledge of Yourself in truth until You see a people of truth willing to serve You in truth, but who are presently laboring with a truncated and inadequate understanding of God. If we really recognize it, we would see it crippling our spiritual life; we cannot rise above our inadequate vision of Jesus that we have

subjectively internalized for our own purpose. We need to ask, really and truly, "Lord who art Thou?"

I have myself been guilty of mouthing that word glibly in a facile way. Who hasn't? But I have to acknowledge in the light that is shining down on us from above tonight – I really don't know as I ought to know! 'Who art Thou?' The answer is, "I AM. I AM THAT I AM THAT I AM. I will be who I will be. I am Jesus. I'm not your 'buddy boy' and I am not the one to help you along the way and patch up your marriage, though I do all those things. I am above your need. I AM JESUS."

Unless that revelation comes, and comes when our faces are upon the ground, what kind of apostolic service can we perform? For it cannot exceed, but must necessarily reflect whatever our knowledge of God in truth is. Is that not why we ourselves are victims of inadequate ministries? Is not that why we have been invited to "accept the Lord" and repeat a prayer? Praise God for the measure in which He honors that, but look now how stultified our lives have been, banging around, divorced and remarried, doing the kinds of things that reflect not having a true beginning from the first. We never knew Him as we ought, and yet we are "singing His praises," or think we are! And the powers of darkness, brooding over us, relish the continuation of just this kind of thing that causes them no perturbation at all! There is nothing here that alarms them. Go ahead, continue your round of services; continue your programs. It in no way jeopardizes the kingdom of darkness, because you cannot rise above and exceed your inadequate knowledge of God. Even the use of His name is a kind of 'nomenclature,' a formula, a shallowness that does not invoke much.

Only that one who is deeply converted, that one who has gone down on his face and must be raised up from it as blind, who can see no man and must be led away as a child, is the one with the potential to threaten the kingdom of darkness! And how many of us want to be so led away by the hand? Here was Saul, the prize student of the Rabbi Gamaliel, he who could quote you yards of scripture with rabbinical interpretation, lying utterly blind, utterly devastated by the word that came to him in the voice that called him by name. And when he arose, he could not see because of that light and had to be led away, and he saw no man. And I don't think he ever saw men in the way we see, evoking in us fear and intimidation and compromise. The fear of man is so powerful, so repressive an element in our Christian living because we have never gone down and been brought up in blindness by that light that never again permits us to see man, even ourselves in our own humanity.

Now I want to tell you the last and cruelest of our deceptions – it is our concern to be understood and to be perceived in the way we would like men to acknowledge us spiritually. And until we are blind to men, even to the "spiritual man" that we think ourselves to be or who we desire to be known as, we cannot serve God apostolically. We must come to such a selflessness, such a mindlessness about this last man, this last cruel deceiver, who, after we have given up every other form, yet retains this kind of power by which we are traduced and compromised; the necessity to be understood by men in the way that we would wish ourselves to be seen and to be approved! We need to come to place where we see no man, even our own man, even our own seeing!

That is why Paul could say, "*Follow me as I follow Christ,*" without an iota of arrogance or audacity. Is it not we who think that he is arrogant because we project upon him the ego in which we still live, not having fallen on our face upon the ground upon which he had fallen,

and been blinded by the light of God, which blinded him? You project on him your own idea of "man" and assume that he must mean by that some kind of egotistic statement because you cannot understand a man who sees no man, and in which the element of self is therefore not a factor. He does not have to be recognized, he can be despised, he can be cast out, he can be the off-scouring of the world, without so much as blinking at it, for he sees no man. The light that has come down has blinded him once and for all to that last crippling seeing; even the seeing of ourselves that makes us spiritually self-conscious and therefore compromised.

"And he, trembling in astonishment asked, Lord, what would You have for me to do?" I'm a little suspicious, even to give an invitation tonight, and have you say now, "Lord, what would You have for me to do?" Of course you'll say it, but you will leave unchanged because it must be said "with astonishment and trembling." God forbid that we should make of this the last and worst and cruelest of deceptions in an altar call that we can glibly fulfill. Aren't we doing that already, with our so called 'repentance's and confessions' and other kinds of statement that are just a little too easy for us to pronounce? You'll know it is authentic when you die a thousand deaths in making it. Beware of anything that is fascicle, that is easy, that is glib, however correct. The cruelest delusion is to find ourselves in a lie about the very thing that is correct. It is with an utterness of astonishment and trembling that we need to say, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"

And you can know that if you will say that tonight, the God who inspired this word also will hear your word, and take you at that word. Your life will be changed, from this night and from that speaking. Things will be released that have been held in abeyance, waiting for the pronouncement that must come from you, but may rightly come only if it is true and not just a religious reflex, but made with astonishment and with trembling. This is the point of "crossing."

Many of us have said, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" but only in a particular moment of distress or need. But who of us asked it foundationally in a once and for all way, in utter abandonment of something never again to be taken back? Once you say this, the words are irretrievable. Something has been registered and recorded in the annals of heaven and has been heard in the hearing of witnesses and before the principalities and powers of the air. It is once and for all! It requires an utterness that nothing in this world has prepared us to perform.

This is the world of relativism; this is the world of "Easy come, easy go." This is the world of "maybe," "I guess," and "I suppose." This is the world that shuns and despises the absoluteness of God, and therefore cannot meet Him on that ground. To meet Him on this ground, with that absoluteness, with "all the stops pulled out," is once and for all to be brought out of that relativistic world of compromise into the "absoluteness" of the kingdom of heaven!

That is the reason I'm fasting today as well as praying. I know there is something of a transaction that can be performed tonight with astonishment and with trembling that will shake the earth, that will release in the earth such things that will take eternity of eternities to celebrate. This is the kind of thing that is beyond any man to perform. This thing itself must be given by God, but it must be spoken by men who are willing to "go down." Be

assured, you will never come up again in the same way. TO LIVE A WHOLE LIFE CONTINUALLY REITERATING THAT QUESTION IS CONVERSION.

What is your condition tonight? What is your status? Are you just 'saved' – or are you converted? The moment God, Who has waited so long, hears your response, He will answer, "Arise and go, and it will be told you what you must do." But before it is told you, before there is an explanation, before there is any assurance, arise and go. That rising is in the strength and power of the resurrection life itself! That coming up from that death into that which you have gone, like one struck dead from that light, is not you pulling yourself together, it is the force of the life of the Lord Himself. For the rising and the going is a call to things beyond any capacity in yourself to perform and to do. It is entirely a resurrection requirement! That is what makes apostolic doing a glory, and that is why Paul himself, the Chief of the apostles, was the one who most frequently punctuated his prayers with the cry, "Lord, who is sufficient for these things?" As I say this, I know that I am looking out on a congregation of very sufficient human beings, very skilled, very capable, very well ordered lives, who could make a very impressive show of things. But God is calling you, dear saints, to a dimension of service beyond any capacity in yourself to perform, and says, "Arise and go." And when He says, "Arise," it is not just an invitation, but an impartation of life, waiting for the one who has forfeited any hope in himself in any possibility of serving God on the basis of his own ability.

I've seen grown men tremble and weep when they heard this astonishing word. They were sailing along marvelously, serving God with adroitness and ability when they heard a word like this that cut like sword through their hearts and brought them down as dead men, trembling on the ground. Later, when they were physically lifted up and seated in a chair in astonishment, with hands clapped over their mouths, each one would say to me, "But Art, I have been encouraged in the Church to perform on the basis of my Ph.D. and my expertise, and I have been solicited to serve and do things on that level, and have until now succeeded marvelously."

But now something has come clear beyond any capacity in the individual; there is no rising, no walking away except in the power of that indestructible life that raised Jesus from the dead, and will raise us also who are willing to be struck dead, brought down into that earth and entirely blinded to the thing that we perceive as capable and celebrated as correct. Must we, like Saul, wait for someone to lay hands on us to confer to us our seeing and an understanding as it is only mediated through a lowly member of the body of Christ?

How classic this conversion is; its every element so formed in heaven, its wisdom so eternal that this great Saul, this giant in himself, was so reduced by the light that had fallen from heaven, greater than the noonday sun, that he was taken like a child by the hand in total helplessness and dependency lying as one dead. Blind for three days and nights, neither eating nor drinking, he reviewed his entire "charismatic" understanding. All of the principles of the faith, all of his "New Testament" understanding, the Lord totally put to death. For if he was to be God's gift to the Church, it had to be by an understanding conferred by God and is received by the laying on of hands by the simplest of the saints, Ananias. In the total dependency to which God brought him, Saul was grateful that there was an obedient servant, who, however great his personal fear, obeyed God and came, laying his hands on Saul that he might see. God had to teach this apostle, the Chief apostle to the Church, the

genius and mystery of the Body of Christ from the very inception of his whole apostolic walk, a lesson that many of us have never yet understood and have not yet seen, though employing its terminology! It must be conferred by revelation to those who would otherwise be blind to it.

However much we mouth the particulars of the "Body of Christ," (as if a new fad or a new vogue and a new vocabulary with which we can play and express ourselves), if it has not come to us by revelation, it has not come to us. Maybe that is why we are in our current condition. It is only "terminology," and awaits a receiving of something utterly humiliating that can only come to us through the operation of the lowly Body, or it will not come at all.

This "Arise and go," saints, that will come for some of us in this hour, need not mean that any factor of our life is in any way outwardly changed. You will still go to work tomorrow, you will still come home to your same house. In fact, nothing of our circumstances will in any way be externally altered, and yet, at the same time, profoundly, everything will be altered. This "Arise and go" sets in motion the whole heavenly dynamic by which in one day that to which we will return may not always be there.

So it is not for you to posture and for you to deliberate what you need to do once you have made this response. Having made it, the arising and going, having been set by God, will have its own logic, its own unfolding. "It shall be told thee what thou must do." Like Abraham, you will hear, "Get thee out into the land that I will show you." There is always a future dimension that requires this trembling and cleaving to the God who will show us what is required the next day, even the next moment. That is not the way we have been groomed by our society to live. We want to know; we want to have assurance; we want to have a firm grasp on what we are doing and why we are doing it and what will be the consequences of our doing. But God says, "I will show you what you must do."

And I'll tell you, for men who hear the kind of word that the Lord is pleased to give me, it is a "will show you" even for the very next sentence! It is the very next word. I don't know what follows this one. "Where do I go from hear Lord?" Your notes are not going to be your dependency. There is a necessary cleaving to what is given moment by moment by the God who has called us, and calls us into an utterness of dependency upon Him that violates every strength and confidence in which the world would have us to be established. It is a pilgrim way and you'll never get used to it.

Yesterday's success will not suffice today. Now, the consequences are even greater; life and death are at stake, eternity is in the balance, and who is sufficient for this kind of speaking? Once you arise and go, that is, begin to speak, it will be told thee. But you need to live with the tension of it, just as Abraham did, as every true saint who has ever responded to such a call, because there are things you must do. Thing that no one else can, that no one else is intended to do. It is explicit; it is appointed; there is a must that is for you. And God is bound up for the revelation, for the releasing of it, until He has heard your, "Lord, what would You have for me to do?"

"It shall be told thee," God says, "when you'll tell Me that you are willing to put your 'thou' beneath My 'Me' once and for all." Now your purpose and calling can be revealed; now it can be released. And it will not be what you thought it would be, but what the Lord has intended it to be and will now show you. It is here where God makes the apostolic appointment, the

eternally significant purpose for our being. This is the antidote to religious boredom and is the highly serious faith that persuades even our own children.

Do you know what the measure of having come to apostolic verity is? It is that we are able even to persuade our own children of the truth and seriousness of that which we are about. These children have the uncommon facility for sensing just how earnest their parents are together with other adults. They are asking themselves, "How much does this also make a requirement of me, though I am young? Is it something to which they (the adults) subscribe, because they like that kind of thing?"

We will know that we have arrived at apostolic verity and reality corporately, when we will have persuaded our own children! And the fact that we haven't, as yet, has had a toll beyond anything that we can conceive. Our present satisfaction and willingness to abide in something less than the sacrificial intention of God has come about because we have languished in and have loved the wrong side because its grasses are flourishing that feed our flesh. This has cost the kingdom of God incalculably in virtually every home.

Until we have come to this, have not our best religious efforts been a 'persecuting of the saints,' by means of lulling them into a lesser place, even ironically in the name of that which is apostolic and prophetic? Jesus said to Saul, "In that you have persecuted the Church, you have persecuted Me." Are we not guilty of persecuting the Church if we are measuring out to it something less than that which is heavenly? Is it not a depriving of the saints in encouraging them to equate doctrinal correctness and the verbalizing of truth as being truth itself? Is it not fancying that we ourselves are there, while all the while we have not yet entered the land of promise, let alone taken its cities? Are we still not on the wilderness side? Have we not persecuted the Church, short-changed it, and liberally gilded our acts with words "apostolic" and "prophetic," though we have condemned our hearers to languishing on the wrong side without even the awareness that that is their condition?

So Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. He never again saw men or feared men, but found that key to apostolic boldness and uncompromising audacity that regards God Himself only. From this time forward, everything is for the Lord's sake and not for one's own. You'll find that in Paul's writings. You never hear any reference to, "for my sake." There is no "my." It is for their sake and the Lord's sake. And what kind of Church would we have today if men of this kind were our ministers? Until we have such men, we are suffering a kind of deprivation that is tantamount to persecution, and those who have been its ministers need to recognize this and fall before the Lord.

So then, the one who persecuted the Body, failing to recognize its Head, receives sight, receives apostolic seeing, through the laying on of hands by its simplest member. From the very first, the Chief apostle was instructed about his dependency upon the Body and what the genius of that organism is – that alone is glory to God. And unless we ourselves lie blind, "neither eating nor drinking for three days," (i.e., putting aside even our traditional categories) we shall not see, but be condemned to employ the terminology of the Body of Christ while living effectually independent of it, yet all the while lauding it, thinking that we are doing God's service!

"And immediately he arose and there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." I trust this is happening now.

"And straight away he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the son of God." And straight away, equally, he opened himself to the opposition and persecution of men who have a particular vitriolic hatred for that which is apostolically authentic. Who cannot abide is challenging reality!

"Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live! And they cried out and cast off their clothes and through dust into the air." What is there about a converted man that makes the powers of darkness so fulminate and foam and rage that men are besides themselves with a fury, and filled by the spirit of it, and cannot abide that 'such a man' live?

What a man – what a heavenly man! What a servant to the Church, for the Church's sake and for the Lord's sake! It is this kind of selflessness that labors day and night and brings the whole counsel of God without fear that it will be understood, accepted, or rejected, or cause offence. Such a man does not anticipate the consequences for himself, because he lives in the resonance of one great statement, continually, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"*

Let's bow before Paul's God at this hour, who is the *I AM* and JESUS still. Many are called, but few are chosen, he tells us. Remember: Many saved, but few converted. Conversion is to the uttermost, or it is not conversion. It is an utterness to God by the Spirit, that the world cannot abide and will forever oppose, even unto death. But the works that such a man will do are eternal in their consequence.

So, in the name of Jesus, and as the minister of this word, I call upon you to respond with fear and trembling and astonishment to the God whose light has shone round about you. Bring down to earth every lesser thing, however correct, however applauded by men, however much it delights your own soul, that He might raise you up for the works that you must do when you arise and go in the power of the life given you once you have gone down into the death of everything less. Let Him hear you from that place one statement only, *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"*

I think the Lord is being literal; He means that explicit statement; He means a real coming down. Don't deceive yourself that you can make a private, silent, seated transaction saying, *"The Lord understands"* and is accepting. It is just that kind of thing that has kept us from apostolic truth, reality, authority, and power. No respectable, private, polite transaction on your terms. One transaction only, on His terms, with an utterness that requires even your bodily coming down, and these explicit words spoken – *"Lord, what would You have for me to do?"*

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