

Fishers of men

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Ministério Seara Ágape

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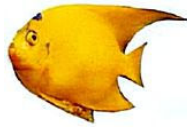


Ministério Seara Ágape
Ensino Bíblico Evangélico

Tânia Cristina Giachetti
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This book is dedicated to those who love Jesus, who do not give up His promises and are not afraid of the unconditional surrender to Him, not seeing the difficulties or the barriers for His will to prevail; To the lovers of His work that put themselves as true instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit, overcoming oppositions, rejections and humiliations, for they know His creative force in their interior, helping them to surpass their own limits and to find out the new of God for their lives.

I thank Him, who is able to do abundantly,
above all that we can ask or think,
according to the power that works in us
and that has made me know His creative force
and His love, encouraging me to do His will,
helping me to overcome my own limits
and giving me the knowledge of His good and
acceptable and perfect will; To the One who has
been faithful to His promises and His covenant,
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!



Introduction

What makes someone leave everything he has to follow Jesus? What makes someone be able to surpass anything to accomplish His purpose? What motivates a person's heart to think less about his life in order to think of others as his own kindred or friends? These and other questions are of great interest to us when we begin to examine the acts of the Early Church. What did they have that seems to have been extinguished today? We talk a lot about the return of Christ and the Church's current revival, but despite the move of the Spirit in our midst we need to strive to keep alive the flame of true love and the unconditional surrender to Jesus. The Agape Love (Greek = God's love) existing in those days in a newly-created work that started a true transformation in humanity needs to be revived so that we may experience this strength in our own lives once again and prepare firmly the way for the Lord's return.

The book of Acts shows us how the powerful action of the Spirit in the newborn believers can direct our steps as *warriors of Light and Love* nowadays to influence our brothers to keep their intimacy with God and resist all the temptations that surround them. This book also makes us reflect on the steps that guided a work that was created by the mind and the heart of God, a sowing made by His own Son in order to generate a large offspring, which, however, was starting and could not be done in a reckless way and governed by human anxiety that wants to see immediate fruit, but in the prudent, wise and steady way of God.

Here, I will not speak about the apostle Paul, except his conversion; however, I'll give focus to the other apostles who walked with Jesus and were the *firstfruits* of His great sowing among men. They were the pioneers of the first revival given to mankind as a gift of love from the Father.

This book is a novel, which gives us the freedom to *travel* along with our first brothers, to feel their emotions, their expectations and questions when they were called to establish a different work in the midst of a stubborn and rebellious generation, accustomed to the traditionalism and the use of the brute force of the flesh to keep the power and to stifle this new movement that was emerging there to remove it from the spiritual stagnation it was in. Like the previous novel ("*Come!*"), the biblical text is written as it is exactly written in the bible, differentiating it from the informal dialogues, resulting from my imagination.

The chapters teach us a few steps and attitudes that we must follow when we start a new project in our lives, guiding us through the Spirit of God, instead of giving heed to the opinions of men and the wisdom we are used to. We're talking about

Revival

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- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995); Sometimes it's also used NIV (New International Version).

Time to prepare and learn



Peter

I no longer felt the same person as before. Indeed, since from that day on the beach, when the Lord had given me a new heart and a job as pastor of His flock, I, Simon Peter, was no longer the impulsive man of the past. It seemed that my inner silence led me to know and understand something that for long had been hidden inside me, waiting for the right moment to be heard. The Master continued to eat with us, appeared before us when we were together thinking about the things that had recently occurred and that changed our lives completely. We were all different now. Though we continued rude and simple in our way to speak, something was mature within us. It seemed that we were crossing a bridge between two places of dry land, but we still weren't sure where that path would lead us. For three years we walked with Jesus and only now we could realize how much His companionship had influenced our soul. Only today His teachings made sense, but not completely yet. We needed understanding, as parts of a machine to be fitted. I was realizing that all these years were a time of preparation in my life, as well as that of the brothers. We felt more united in those days; selfishness seemed to have no more place in our hearts. Our families were there with us when we were gathered together in the same room where we had spent the last supper with the Lord. Our children seemed to be children of all. Even our brothers who had not yet his own family acted as careful parents of our children. My wife was silent; she didn't understand what was happening inside me. Soon lunch would be served. My mother-in-law remained the same, an excellent cook. I think I found something inside of me that remained intact: my appetite; it had not changed, thanks to our good God. After all, I should keep myself physically fit for what was to come.

"Peace be with you!"

"Master, what a pleasant surprise!"

"Sit down with us, lunch will be served."

"Thanks, children!"

"I'm not hungry."

"What's wrong with you, Matthew? Don't you remember the pleasure of eating anymore?"

"I don't know! I am no longer the same man."

"Thanks to the Lord, the food will be left to us!"

"Jesus!"

"Speak, John."

"A few days ago you resurrected and you have visited us, told us some things, but I still don't understand what you mean. You know, Lord! I feel strange. I miss our boat trips."

"Soon you'll know what I have prepared for you."

"I can imagine! Now I understand many things of the Scriptures that I didn't know before."

"After lunch we will talk more about them."

“Please make room for me to put the fish and the honey. Put the bread to the side just a bit. Peter! Stop eating before the others; the curd is almost over and the dates were gone; only the cores remained.”

“Okay, my beloved mother-in-law! The Master is eager to taste the fish.”

“How are you, Sarah?”

“Lord! It is a special moment to be in your presence. I always feel renewed.”

“Children! Let us pray and give thanks for this precious food. ‘Abba Father, we thank you for what we’ll eat and for your gracious presence in our midst. We consecrate this food to you, because you have supplied us and cared for us. Amen.’”

“Attack!”

“Have we changed so much, after all?”

“Hah, hah, hah! Back to the old times.”

“I’m happy with the gladness in your hearts, my children. I promise to multiply it so that you can continue the journey.”

“Eat, Jesus. The food will grow cold.”

“Thanks, Sarah! Sit here with us.”

“Yes, Yes. This side of the table where the women are is more ‘civilized.’”

Jesus took part in our meetings, and in these forty days He spoke of the things concerning to the kingdom of God.

“These are the words that I told you, being yet with you, that must be fulfilled all that from me was written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then the Lord opened our mind to understand the Scriptures and said,

“Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

He took us to Bethany, and lifting His hands, He blessed us. We asked Him,

“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

At our sight, He was elevated to the heights. We looked at the sky and saw Him moving away from us, until a cloud covered Him from our eyes. In our souls there was a mixture of joy and longing. We knew that the Father’s will was being fulfilled, and we would not be alone, but how would we feel now without His physical presence with us? He had given us the promise that we would receive His Spirit. What would this be? Two men dressed in white robes appeared beside us, as if from nowhere, and told us, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Those words seemed to get us out of the torpor that had taken hold of us. It was true, He was not there anymore. Suddenly, we realized that we had something to talk about. We needed to exchange some ideas. We also needed to pray. It seemed that prayer got us closer to Him and made us feel safe. His words still echoed in my ears, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”

We withdrew from the Mount of Olives and came back to Jerusalem, going up to the upper room: all the eleven disciples, the women with Mary, Mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

“Brothers, I don’t know what goes on in your hearts, but I, Simon Peter, would like to talk and exchange ideas to be able to put my mind in order.”

“Peter, you were chosen by Him to be our leader. Please tell us what you feel.”

“I don’t know, John. It seems that something big will happen, but I still am not sure what it is. I think we should pray and wait for the fulfillment of the promise.”

“And you, Thomas, what do you think?”

“I believe!”

“Do you believe in what?”

“That a good thing will come.”

“Great help!”

“I guess it’s not only good, but it will also bring us more responsibility.”

“Nathanael is right; it was not without purpose that we spend this time of three years learning from Him and more these forty days. I confess that at first I didn’t understand anything, but after His revelation, I feel that His will is that we continue His work. There is only one problem: I don’t feel able to do it.”

“Do not despair Matthew; this comes later. The important thing is that we have discovered the main idea.”

“What?”

“James! Jesus is giving us something completely different from anything that these people have ever seen. There is no more oppression or yoke upon us, we no longer have to obey the rituals of before, our soul feels free from the rules.”

“Yes, some heat comes to my heart when I remember Him; and courage too. Do you remember what He said when washed our feet? He said, *‘I know whom I have chosen ... In truth I say to you, whoever receives whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives Him who sent me.’*”

“So, there is no problem; we’ll be His messengers and He Himself will tell us what to do. He Himself will bring people to us and when we have to go somewhere, we will also know.”

“Okay, Simon the Zealot. Judas Thaddaeus! Sing a song for us. Afterwards, we’ll go to our houses; the important is to continue to pray for His guidance in all things.”

For me, that conversation was very important. It was clear that we would continue the work of the Master and He would empower us in some way. It was time to wait, not to hurry. More things needed to be clarified yet.

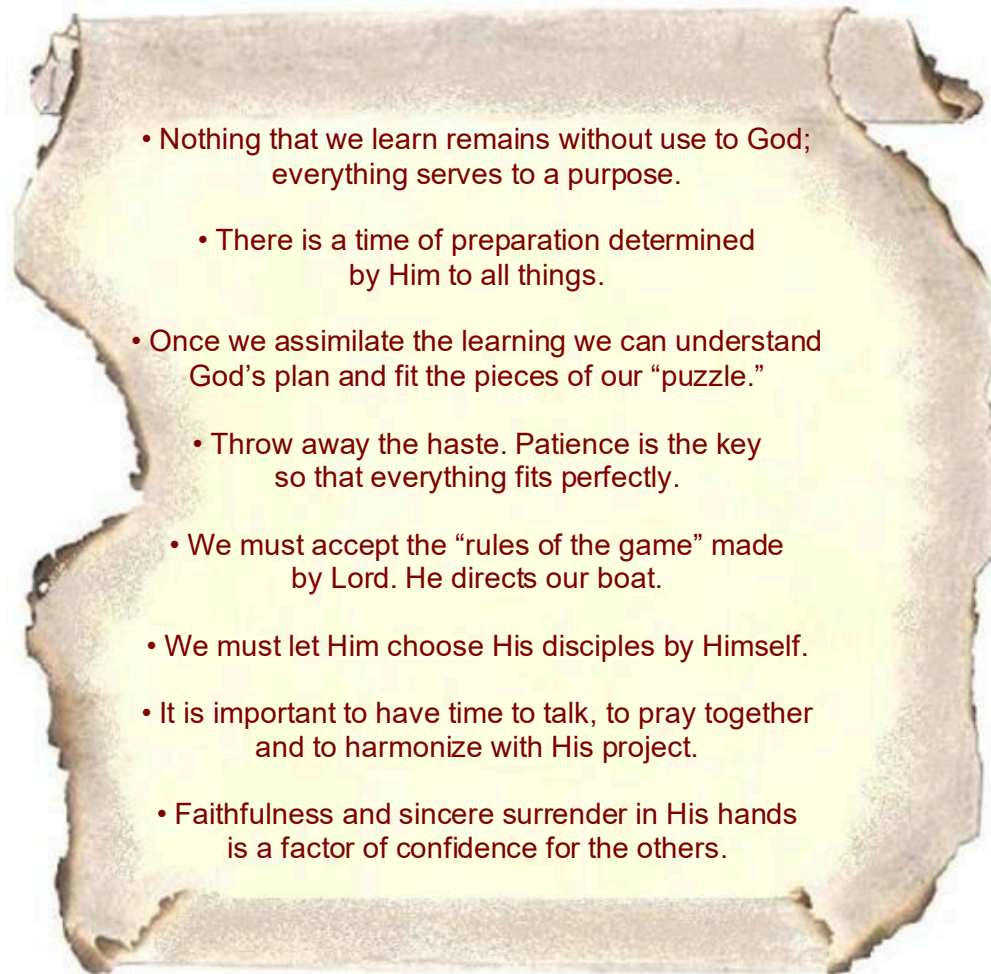
Those days we started to notice other people with us in the upper room; not only us, the apostles of the Lord and His family, but the other disciples who walked with Him. One day in prayer, something I had almost forgotten came to my mind: we were eleven now, not twelve; Judas Iscariot was dead. And I felt in my heart that it was necessary to choose someone among those one hundred and twenty people to replace him. So I said to them,

“Brothers, one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.”

So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then we prayed and said,

“Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

We cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. Until now we were walking under the guidance of the Spirit. I decided to write down some important learning in my notebook,



Spiritual training and fulfillment of the promise



Peter

It was Saturday and we gathered together, as usual, in the upper room around nine o'clock in the morning. We talked about everything that Jesus had promised us while we waited for the women to arrive. Some brothers were a little quiet, like Andrew and John, as if they knew something. Actually, the two have always been quiet and shy, so it was not strange that they were turned inward. Thomas, on the contrary, walked from one side to another, showing some anxiety. What was he thinking about?

“Thomas, be still! You’re making me nervous.”

“Are you not feeling something strange here today?”

“No, why?”

“We are talking about Jesus, aren’t we? Whenever we speak of Him, a surprise seems to happen.”

“What is it, folks! It seems we are all very impressed.”

“Philip, aren’t you feeling too? Thomas is right.”

“I’m not feeling anything, Matthew, but I’m hearing a strange noise like a wind.”

“How can there be wind if the leaves of the trees and people’s clothes on the street are motionless?”

“Hey, guys! Philip is right, listen...”

“What’s going on, Peter?”

“He is coming, the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus.”

We were now feeling and listening to the wind as it approached us, but it was not a wind like the others; it seemed that only we perceived it. People out there behaved as if nothing was happening. The noise was getting louder and stronger like that of a great storm at sea. Suddenly, He came in. The Spirit of God took hold of us and we could see over our heads something like tongues of fire. He filled us and consumed us with His presence. I could experience His warmth in my body, my soul and my spirit like a whirlwind around me and that was growing up till I opened my mouth and started talking in a language that I had never known. The same happened with the other disciples. We were not afraid; on the contrary, the sense of security and boldness that came on us was unlike anything we had ever seen before. Our voices became clearer and we started talking in a louder tone, which drew the attention of people outside. They started looking at the house and walk towards us as if recognizing the words they were hearing. They were pious Jews who had come from all nations around us: Parthians, Medes and Elamites and the natives of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya, near Cyrene, and Romans who lived here, and Cretans and Arabs. They had come to celebrate Pentecost. As soon as they began to hear through us the greatness of God spoken in their own languages they were astonished and asked to each other what it meant. They thought we were drunk. So I got up and said,

“Brothers, do not be scared by what you are seeing, because today the prophecy made by Joel is being fulfilled, *‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.’* Gentlemen, heed these words now, because Jesus of Nazareth, whom you killed, resurrected and broke the shackles of death. David prophesied of Him that He was who should sit on the throne of Israel as his descendant. This risen Jesus is pouring out today His Spirit that was promised, because God has made Him Lord and Christ.”

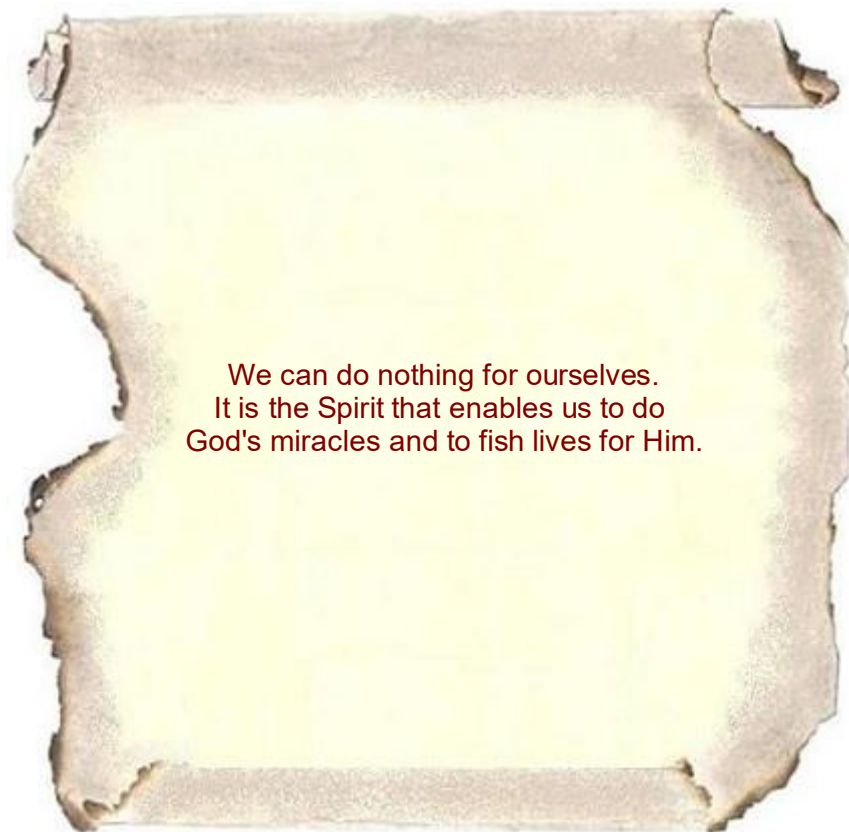
The crowd was touched by those words and began to ask us, in their language of origin:

“What shall we do, brothers?”

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. You now have the chance to save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

I saw the other disciples telling them the same words, each one in a different language. Men and women accepted Jesus into their hearts and we baptized them in water, with the baptism of John; so, the Holy Spirit was poured over them.

I said to myself, *“Peter, Peter! You are no longer the same; your brothers are not the same too. Look at Andrew and John; they look like Jesus, by the bold way of speaking and acting. James the less seems no longer a helpless child. Simon the Zealot is no longer the ‘threatening and rude lion’, but a gentle and meek man like the Master. Lord, I fear a little with all this, but I feel another person, totally free in the hands of Your Spirit! Peter, Peter! You don’t belong to yourself anymore. Now the Lord took the entire course of your life. Things will be different henceforth. It seems that something new is starting and will not stop anymore. Even the women are different; they show a new glow on their faces. Now you have almost three thousand sheep to lead, my dear. You better put this important learning in your notes,”*



Experience of sharing



Peter

It was late when we left the upper room. The people had returned happy to their homes. I remembered the words of Jesus, *“Simon, Simon! You, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”* What would I do henceforth? Many lives had been witnesses of God’s power today. What did the Lord would direct from now? *“Tomorrow we’ll need to have a meeting and decide what to do. Peter, Peter! Don’t think too much, don’t think of anything, let the Spirit think for you.”*

I confess I was astonished with everything that was happening, but from Jesus I could expect everything. He was always very creative. Nothing was repeated with Him near by; every experience was completely different.

Yes, we met the next day, but in fact we didn’t know how to plan anything. All we could do was to pray and ask for the Spirit to direct us. His answer came through those who had converted the previous day. That same morning, we decided to walk through Jerusalem after our prayer to see how things were. A long time had passed since we met the Pharisees for the last time; since the resurrection of Jesus. The forty days He was with us were days of private teaching, to enjoy His loving presence in our midst. It seems we had forgotten the heated discussions with that loyalist group. The resurrection of the Master left them traumatized and thoughtful for a while. They didn’t understand the meaning of miracle. Soon we went out into the street, we noticed the brightness and peace of the Holy Spirit in those new converts. They came to us thirsty for the *Word of Life* that they had drunk; they wanted more. The Lord continued to exercise His power through us, and when we realized many sick people had been healed by Jesus through our hands. Pentecost was still acting. In every soul we saw, there was the fear of God and this gladdened us. The Spirit led us to the temple and we started talking about Jesus to those who were there. Thus, we found out that the Lord was giving us the direction: three times a day we would meet there to teach. We also began the visits from house to house, where we prayed and took the Word to those who still had not heard it, Jews from other nations who came to Jerusalem. After preaching, the bread was shared with joy and simplicity, for I started to notice a transformation in the heart of each one. It had not been generated by any of us, but by the action of the Spirit Himself. Just as we were now different, they also didn’t behave as before, in a so selfish and individualistic way, but they thought of each other, divided among them what they had so that nobody missed anything. We were like a big family, really, and it touched my heart. *“Peter, Peter! You will not cry again. Are you getting silly now?”* However, I knew that it was not an emotional imbalance, but a deep joy generated by the work of God in a so graceful manner in His new chosen ones. The disciples also felt the transformation and were very happy with that. It was decided that they would bring to us the money from the properties that were sold; so, it was up to us to distribute the necessities to the needy. We were counting on the sympathy of all the people and this was an incentive for the Church that began. I could see in everyone the joy of sharing what they had; they gave voluntarily and spontaneously, without we needed to ask. They gave their best and

that was God's miracle. Thus, love and friendship reached those who didn't believe yet, and then they started to believe. The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. The power of the Spirit continued to act in us and, as the days passed, we bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with great boldness, even under the antagonistic looks of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The abundant grace of God was in us. Love was a force that united us and opened the floodgates of heaven in our behalf. I was learning too much from all this.

"Brothers, are you seeing the miracles?"

"We're not only seeing, but living them."

"And we need not worry about them as we were thinking at first. The Holy Spirit Himself did the work in their hearts."

"Yes, they are spontaneous in what they say and do."

"They look like children. They are happy and feel safe."

"May the Lord help us all and keep us so, devoted and strong."

"They have persevered in the Word and in prayer. They will not give up, I'm sure of this."

"Peter, Peter! Another important learning to put in your notebook,"



Exercise of power and authority. Overcoming oppositions.



John

We were going to the temple for the prayer of three o'clock in the afternoon, as usual. Peter looked straight ahead, determined, surely looking for the right words to preach to the people. He should not worry too much, for Jesus Himself had said that the Spirit of the Father would speak for us. I looked ahead and saw again that lame from birth that men were placing, as always, at the temple gate called *Beautiful* to ask alms from those who were entering. He had more than forty years old. As we passed, he looked at us with pleading eyes, asking us something. I confess that this kind of thing moved me and bothered me at the same time. I waited to see what would be the reaction of Peter. I felt bolder lately, especially when the Holy Spirit took me to do something important, but I stayed quiet just watching. Peter looked at him and said, "Look at us."

The lame man looked at us with attention. He expected to receive something.

However, Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."

And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. The man promptly obeyed the orders of Peter as those who in other times were healed by Jesus. He got up quickly and I could see the glow of faith in his eyes. His song of praise drew the curious ears and soon the people recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. The amazement and admiration seized the spirit of everyone. The man feared and came to Peter, who quickly opened his mouth and spoke with a voice of authority, "You, the people of Israel, why do you look at us as if we were the authors of the miracle? It was not by our own power or godliness that we did him walk. You killed Jesus, the author of life, and that rose from the dead. We are witnesses of this. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. Even having killed Jesus because of ignorance, and so needed to be fulfilled the prophecies about Him, repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out and you may receive the Holy Spirit."

Did Peter not realize what was happening? When the Spirit took hold of him, he no longer saw anything around him; he seemed to pass to another level of understanding, making him unconscious of the people around him, binding him to Jesus so strongly that nothing made him stop talking or acting until he had completed the work of the Lord through him. I, however, continued to observe things around us and the movement of people in the temple. There they came: the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees. They were certainly resented with us for teaching the people and preaching the resurrection from the dead. They grabbed the man who had been cured and cast him away from us. We didn't have time to react; soon they arrested us and took us to prison. We would be there until the next day because it was evening. We had not realized that

we spent the whole afternoon preaching about Jesus to those people, at least for four or five hours. I had no idea what time it was, but it was dark, and probably the priests and the Sadducees would have an answer for us on the next day. I could say one thing: it had been a great work. Many people accepted Jesus as happened at Pentecost. The number of believers had now risen to almost five thousand families (perhaps fifteen thousand people, including women and children). However, we were still a minority compared to almost two hundred thousand inhabitants of Jerusalem. Anyway, the addition of lives to the Lord made me happy. Not only Peter was used; I also talked to people there, while he was concerned to convince them of the true author of the miracle they had witnessed. The Holy Spirit used me to touch many of them and I know they have been cured of many diseases, which contributed to our testimony and our 'big fishing.' The difference between us is that I didn't feel enraptured like him, when the Spirit acted in me; on the contrary, it seemed that I became more aware of His presence and of what He did through my body.

"Peter, are you sleeping?"

"Not yet, John."

"What are you thinking?"

"I was praying and thanking the Lord for the 'fishing' and asking for strength little brother, in order to know how to answer to these vipers tomorrow."

"I was meditating on what happened today too. Would the others be worried about us?"

"Surely they already know what happened and I know that we can count on their prayers in our behalf."

"It's cold here."

"Yeah! At least they didn't beat us, just threw us in this place. Try to sleep, John. Lord will take care of us."

"Good night, Peter."

"Good night."

The night passed quickly and soon dawned. The guards came and put us before the religious authorities who were assembled.

"By what power or by what name did you do this?"

"Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead... There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and this left them perplexed and without answer. I didn't say anything, but I could feel the authority of the Lord flowing through me. What most left them so confused is that they knew we were unlearned and ignorant men, but had to acknowledge that we had been with Jesus. They looked at the man who was healed and couldn't say or do anything to prove something contrary to the evidence. They threatened us and ordered us not to speak or teach in Jesus' name.

"Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

I could hear their growing threats and uncontrolled voices screaming against us, but my inner self was at peace because we had obeyed the Lord and we could feel His approval. They couldn't do anything against us or punish us because of the people, for everyone glorified God for what happened to the lame.

"Go away, get out now."

“Come on, Peter, the brothers should be worried.”

“Let us go.”

We ran away of their presence and sought the apostles. They heard everything. We prayed aloud crying to the Lord to look at their threats and to grant us to announce His word with all boldness, using us for healing, signs and wonders in Jesus’ name. When we finished our prayer, the place shook and we were filled with the Holy Spirit. His strength in us gave us the courage that we have asked for in order to announce His word.

Peter

We sat chatting merrily on the development that we could see in the new converts. We rejoiced also by the presence of Barnabas there with us. He was a Greek Jew, born in Cyprus, a Levite. His name of origin was Joseph, but the apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which means, *son of encouragement*. His voice was strong and determined and he was God-fearing and filled with the Holy Spirit. When he sang praises, our heart was invigorated and the fire descended upon us like the first time. He had sold a field and brought to us the sale price. He also wanted to contribute to the Church. We were, as usual, in Solomon’s Portico.

I looked up and saw Ananias. Then a voice inside me spoke strongly, warning me, *“He made an agreement with Sapphira his wife, to sell their property, but retained part of the price for him. He thought to deceive God; however, nothing is hidden from my eyes.”* It was the Holy Spirit coming upon me once more; at that time His voice sounded with authority in my ears and His word was ready to be exercised. I shut my mouth and let Ananias approach.

“Good morning, brother Peter!”

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!”

When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it. The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

I, Simon Peter, was thoughtful before the drastic action of God, but meditating on the case, I realized that the newborn Church was very vulnerable. Hypocrisy and deceit without punishment, always destructive in any community, could have undermined this newborn work. The fast and severe judgment of God helped all believers to maintain a healthy respect for truth and for His love among His people. *“Peter, Peter! Be alert and vigilant; you have a great responsibility on your hands. Lord! I need more of your wisdom to lead this flock. Give me the ability to use authority the correct way to keep your work standing and the flame does not extinguish in these sincere hearts.”*

Nearly three hours later, Ananias’ wife came, not knowing what had happened.

“Sapphira, tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price.”

“Yes, that was the price.”

“How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”

Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

Many signs and wonders were done through the apostles' hands, which made to increase the crowd of believers added to the Lord. They carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats. Their faith was the major factor in miracles. They believed that by going through there, my shadow would heal them. It was no use to explain that it was not me who did all those things, but the Spirit through me. Anyway, God honored the faith of His people. These things even seemed the healings that Jesus did while He was with us. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured, because the action of the Holy Spirit was great in our midst.

Envy was clear in the Pharisees and Sadducees because of us, and again we were led to the public prison, however, something new happened to us that night. We could see a great light before our eyes, illuminating that dark and fetid place; it was an angel of the Lord who appeared before us at that moment. What did he do with the guards? They seemed frozen in the position they were, they did not move. I don't know if they were aware of what happened. The angel opened the doors and led us out. Wherever we went by, the eyes of the sentinels were the same: fixed and distant. In reaching the street, he told us,

“Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life.”

It was the moment of our prayers with the people at daybreak. When the elders did not find us in the prison, the high priest and the Sanhedrin sent soldiers to bring us to them. They threatened us again, but I told them:

“We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

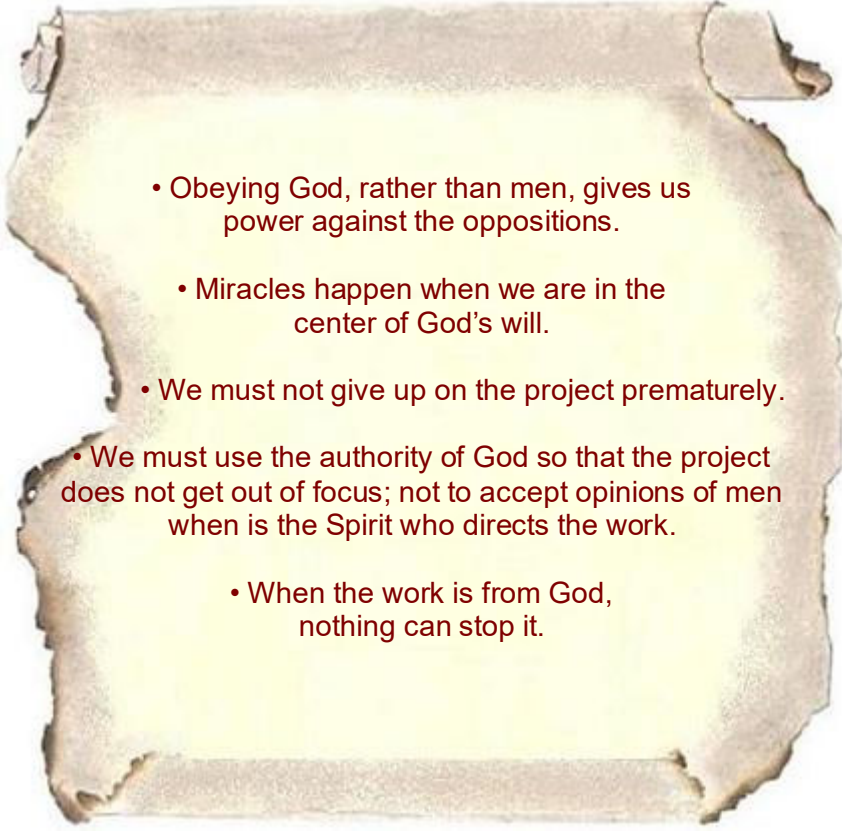
We heard their furious screams until stood up a Pharisee named Gamaliel. We were taken out. Then, some brothers in Christ told us what he said,

“So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!”

They agreed with him. They called us and, after having flogged us, they released us, ordering us not to talk in the name of Jesus anymore.

The Lord, while He was among us, warned us about the persecutions. We were suffering them; however, we were also experiencing His faithfulness and His deliverance.

“Peter! We have already learned many other things, don't you agree? It is not easy to start something, especially when it is contrary to all existing standards. Until now, you've seen great miracles of the Spirit, but to every action there is a reaction. The most important thing is that our balance has been positive. Put this in your notebook,”

- 
- Obeying God, rather than men, gives us power against the oppositions.
 - Miracles happen when we are in the center of God's will.
 - We must not give up on the project prematurely.
 - We must use the authority of God so that the project does not get out of focus; not to accept opinions of men when is the Spirit who directs the work.
 - When the work is from God, nothing can stop it.

Discipline and division of functions. Responsibility to take on our place.



John

The number of disciples had grown in recent days, both Hellenist and Hebrews. However, there began to be complaint of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were being forgotten in the daily distribution of food. I realized that the conflict between these two groups was fed by primary issues. The Hellenistic Jews spoke another language and had different cultural customs from the Hebrews. The Jews of Greek culture were not interested in the Jewish customs. Perhaps, they might have lived for long in Macedonia and Greece, being influenced by those cultures. Some, perhaps, were Greek, converts to Judaism. The Church was led by us, Jews; so, we needed to undo this embarrassment wisely.

“Peter, what commotion is this now?”

“I don’t know, Andrew, but we’ll clear up everything.”

“I don’t understand why these people have such a great desire to create problems.”

“They don’t know how to manage or organize, just that.”

“I only know that if we do not intervene in the matter, they will pull up a fight.”

“John, why are you so quiet?”

“I am thinking here of a more diplomatic solution.”

“Then speak.”

“They speak another language, right?”

“Right!”

“Their customs are different, right?”

“Right!”

“If we insist on our position as Jews, they can give up everything and abandon the “*Way*”, right?”

“Right!”

“And that would be a great defeat for the Church, besides weakening our movement against the Romans and Pharisees, right?”

“Right!”

“And Jesus would be very disappointed with us, right?”

“Right!”

“John, speak up soon! I’m getting nervous.”

“Calm down, ‘Captain!’ I’m just leading the brothers to the reasoning the Holy Spirit gave me.”

“All right! Go on, then!”

“It’s simple, why don’t we appoint Greek-speaking leaders to minister to believers in their own language?”

“Well thought! Where was our head?”

“What about us, the apostles? I’ve noticed that things are different and now there many who follow the “*Way*.” Our position must be well defined among them so that there is no mix of functions.”

“James is right. John, do you have an answer for this too?”

“I do not, but the Holy Spirit thought of everything.”

“This John! He was the quietest in the class and now is starting to show he is a leader. Okay, beloved of the Lord! What did He suggest?”

“Call the disciples, and I tell you the project.”

“Thomas!”

“I’m going.”

After a while...

“Okay, they’re all here!”

“Speak, John.”

“I was thinking, brothers, according to Peter, and we find that it is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task; and, as for us, we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

“Very well thought! Congratulations, brothers! We will do that.”

“Who do you choose?”

“Give us ten minutes.”

Time passed...

“Ready! We already chosen: Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a disciple from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. Peter! These are the men.”

“Come here. We, the apostles of the Lord appoint you deacons. Come closer and we’ll pray and lay hands on you.”

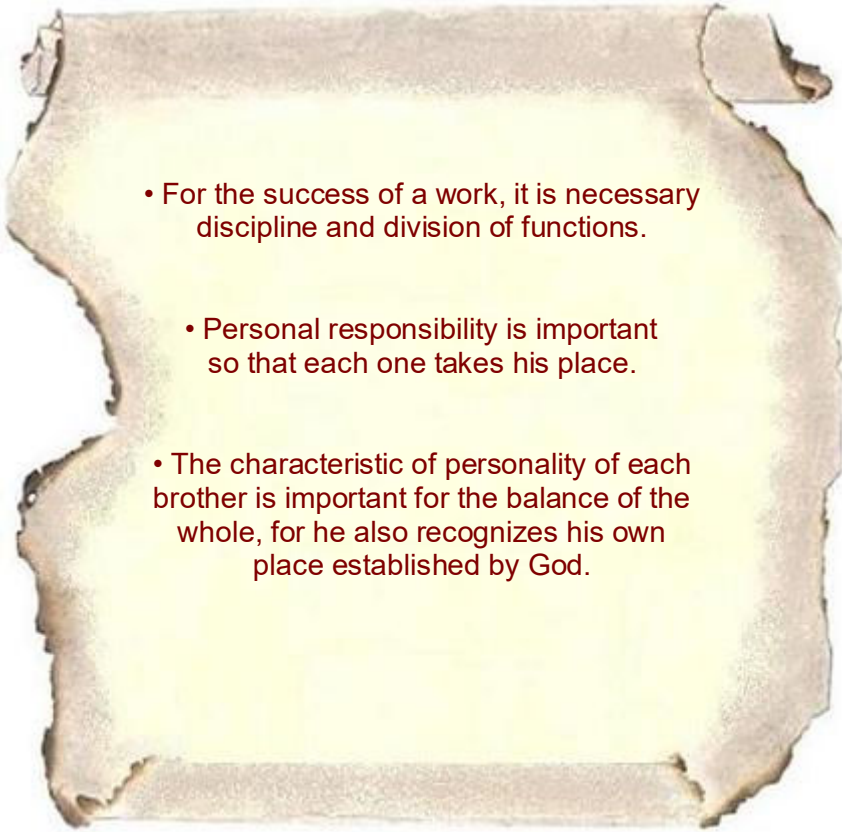
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I, John, was being once again an instrument of the Holy Spirit to mediate many matters and it made me very happy because I seemed to balance the fire of the authority and the boldness of Peter.

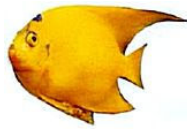
Peter

Is it not true that John is surprising me? I remember him when we were mere disciples of the Lord. He hardly spoke, was shy, insecure, like a child wanting to cry all the time, wanting for lap; but now, after that the Holy Spirit came upon him, who could imagine? He is a meek man, centered and able to make wise decisions at the right time. I feel calm with him by my side. He counterbalances the stronger flame of the Spirit in my sanguine temperament. The flame in him is powerful, yet gentle and peaceful, as if giving him time to meditate on all things.

The most important thing is that between us there is agreement and peace of the Lord, and the word of the Master has spread here in Jerusalem. The number of disciples has also multiplied. Strange! Even some priests began to obey the faith! They realized the futility of those dead religious sacrifices. *“Peter, Peter, Jesus is great! He transforms all religiosity and all ritual into a living and pleasing sacrifice in His sight. But this only happens to those who allow themselves to be truly touched by Him. The hypocrites and critics cannot experience His power, unless they change their attitude. Lord! I praise you for the humble and thirsty sheep that you have placed in our way. With them, we can accomplish great deeds. Peter, Peter, how about to note this in your little notebook?”*

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- For the success of a work, it is necessary discipline and division of functions.
 - Personal responsibility is important so that each one takes his place.
 - The characteristic of personality of each brother is important for the balance of the whole, for he also recognizes his own place established by God.

Example of fidelity and surrender



James

My brother John and I walked down the streets of Jerusalem now. We were talking about our victories, about the growing number of disciples, and especially on the effect of the Holy Spirit in the life of each of them; they acted with excitement, they healed and preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. Who most drew the attention of everybody was Stephen. Full of grace and power, he did great wonders and signs among the people. His faithfulness to Jesus, whom he did not know personally, and his dedication to the work that started were captivating and surely he was already being honored by the Lord. There he was, a few feet away, surrounded by people. Many wanted to hear him and be touched by his hands. Often, his face seemed to light up and resembled that of an angel. It was the wisdom God gave him to minister His word that did this. However, some of the synagogue of the Freedmen, composed by Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as those from Cilicia and Asia began to argue with Stephen. It was a congregation composed of former slaves. They had talked several times with him and disagreed about the worship in the temple. Our deacon told them that the true worship no longer required the previous rituals. They were slaves in other nations for many years and were not accustomed to the new rules, which seemed to nullify the traditional Judaism. With envy and jealousy of him, because they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke, they distorted his words to sound like a direct attack on the law and God. We were some distance from them and we noted the result of that discussion in what happened next: the people, the elders and the scribes got there quickly and snatched him, taking him to the Sanhedrin.

“John! Call Peter and the brothers. I’ll go with Stephen to see what happens.”

“James! Try to get as close as you can from him; don’t let them touch him.”

“I’ll do my best, but I fear that things have happened too fast. The poor guy is not even having a chance to defend himself.”

“Hurry, run!”

I ran after that rebellious mob and thirsty for blood. The high priest asked him about the accusations being made against him.

Stephen’s countenance was calm and it seemed illuminated. The Holy Spirit was upon him. He began speaking in a clear voice and full of wisdom and authority of the Lord and reviewed the story of Israel making it clear that the people have always rebelled against God. He also talked about the Jewish religion that had become static and failed, because it did not proceed to the new temple, the Body of Christ. Stephen was telling the truth. From the moment he started talking about Abraham and the patriarchs, passing through Moses and the prophets, every word coming out of his lips was a sharp sword against the hypocrisy and religiosity of that small and selfish people. His voice had risen in tone and was faster now, as if he wanted to finish his speech soon, knowing what would follow. The passion for the truth of Christ inflamed him and it was clear that he was not seeking in any way, to be diplomatic, but he put himself as a powerful instrument of exhortation in the hands of the Spirit of God. He looked like

Jesus when He discussed with the Pharisees in the temple. Stephen's speech was breaking with the old principles of worship in God's House. The believers saw through the practice that they were the new people of God, as the true temple, the altar and the sacrifice, living an authentic life of pilgrimage, and rejected, just as the prophets and Jesus were by the Jews.

Jesus had died some years ago, but His presence was still alive in us through His Spirit. Where were the apostles who did not come? I was getting apprehensive, because the conversation was becoming fierce.

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."

"Stephen, what are you saying? Jesus! Take your son in your hands. Peter! Where are you?"

I already knew what was coming. Wasn't it the same with the Master?

"Peter, good to see you! And the others?"

"They are on the other side with John. They are doing everything possible to stop this discussion."

"Look, Peter, what he is saying! He is looking at the sky. He seems to have seen the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand, as once the Lord has revealed to us. Yes! He himself is confirming,"

"I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

"Peter, do something! They are dragging him out of the city. They'll stone him."

"What can I do? My God!"

The people stoned Stephen, who was invoking and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

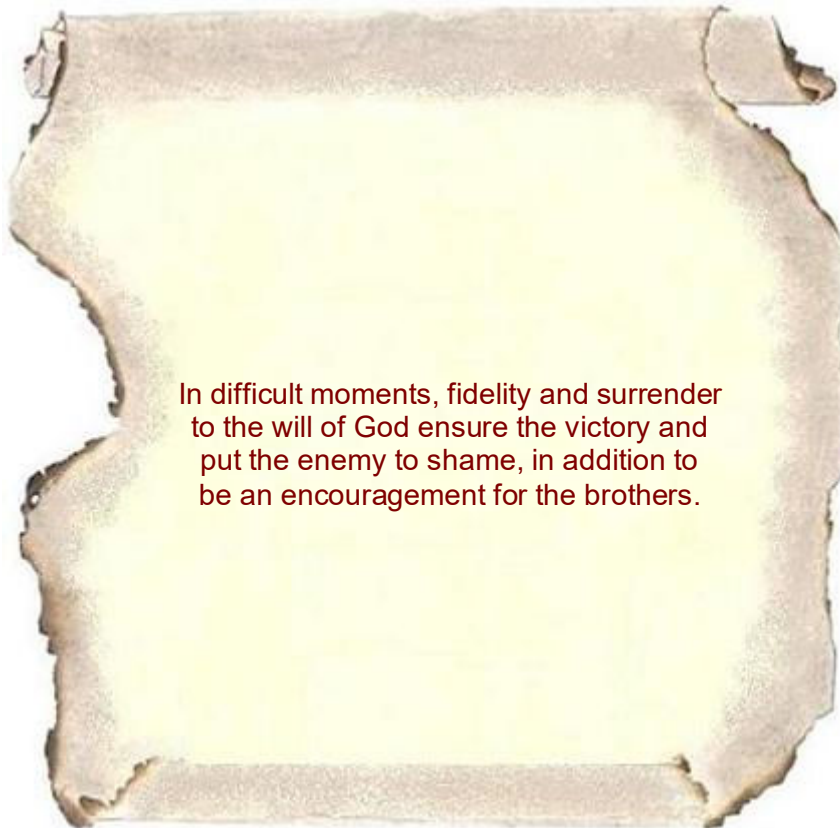
Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

When he had said this, he died. The witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Peter

I was shocked by what was happening. What did they do with Stephen? Would jealousy and intrigue never leave man's heart? Something told me that we were at risk at this time. The mood was very hot, especially in the middle of the crowd that had been influenced by the priests. The disciples began to withdraw. We the apostles were all together now wondering what to do henceforth. The young man named Saul, who consented in the death of Stephen, was very concerned about giving orders to persecute and exterminate the followers of Jesus. I saw all the people rushing to their homes and many showed a desire to flee Jerusalem. The disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Some pious men buried Stephen and mourned his death. The panic broke out among the people when Saul began to enter the houses and drag people to prison. We ran away and hid in one of the places where we held our meetings, but still unknown to the authorities. If we fled like the other disciples, the Christian movement would weaken, and the Lord's work would delay; we would lose the fruit of what we had sown until now. Together and united in prayer we would have more

chance to rebuild the work and revive the believers. The Holy Spirit comforted us and kept our hearts in peace despite the persecution. God was in control of all things. We were sad because of Stephen, but at the same time, happy for his attitude in the face of so many oppositions. He remained firm in his convictions and this was an example for all of us, apostles and disciples and believers. *“Peter, take note of this,”*



In difficult moments, fidelity and surrender to the will of God ensure the victory and put the enemy to shame, in addition to be an encouragement for the brothers.

The miracles continue



John

Although we were hidden at that moment, we were not at all devoid of information. We knew that our deacon Philip the evangelist, who had been dispersed along with the others, was in Samaria doing the work. There, he was preaching the word of God and the crowds listened to what he said, because they saw the miracles that he did. The unclean spirits were driven out, paralyzed or lame were healed and the news of the new life in Christ brought joy to the hearts. Men and women were baptized in the name of Jesus. We heard that certain magician, named Simon, had also joined the faith, being baptized in the waters and was now following Philip because of the miracles he did.

The persecution had decreased here in Jerusalem and we met to decide what to do. By common consent, the brothers decided to send me and Peter to Samaria.

We left Jerusalem and went down there.

“John, do you remember how many times we journeyed by this road with the Master?”

“Why did you think about this now?”

“Whenever the Holy Spirit sends me somewhere, I remember Jesus. It seems that He continues to live here with me and I don’t feel alone. I want to do whatever He did. The whole crowd followed Him and He didn’t get disturbed. We are here on the road, but I know that when we get there, many will run to us asking for help.”

“I’m longing to see the fruit of Philip. After Stephen, he seems to be the most dedicated, and the Holy Spirit uses him so wonderfully, don’t you think?”

“This Simon of whom they are now speaking, for example; is he truly on our side?”

“I don’t know, just seeing personally!”

“We are arriving. Look! Some brothers came to greet us.”

“The peace of the Lord! You are Peter and John, aren’t you?”

“Yes, brothers. How is Philip?”

“You will see for yourselves. Great things are happening here in the name of Jesus. Come to refresh for a while and soon the whole city will be aware of your arrival. By the way, my name is Isaiah and this brother here is Daniel.”

“God bless you.”

As we left the house of Isaiah we find Philip, preaching in the street. We got to know the new converts and we prayed for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit too. We laid hands on them and they were filled with the power of God. The man named Simon was watching us, attentive, with great curiosity. Something in him began to bother me. It didn’t take so long before I found out what it was about. Actually he had not been converted, but wanted the same power that worked in us through the Spirit. He came straight to Peter with a bag full of money and the mouth ready with a request,

“Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness.”

“Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me.”

Poor Simon! The Holy Spirit is a gift from God. The Church and its leaders, like Peter, do not forgive sins, though they may declare God’s forgiveness for that. It is up to Him and not to us to grant forgiveness. Peter made it clear that the fact of Simon be forgiven depended on his own attitude. If he truly repented, he could receive forgiveness as a gift from God. I hoped that he really understood what he was seeing there.


We stayed several days with those people testifying and speaking the word of the Lord. We decided to leave Philip there for a while and we returned to Jerusalem. As we passed through the villages of the Samaritans we preached the gospel to many of them.

Peter

I went out of Samaria very happy because I saw the powerful action of God where before there was so much idolatry. The Samaritans were our brothers and the old conflict about the place of worship, whether in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim, was now falling to the ground by discovering that they no longer had to discuss for this. Jesus had brought a new understanding of the true temple and place of worship. They could see themselves as temples of the living God and this was gratifying. Men and women, elderly and youngsters had found the *Way* for their lives.

I was also discovering some things about me. Jesus had raised me as a spokesman before the Jewish authorities, in view of my reaction in all previous arrests because of faith. What was happening now (to go to Samaria) started to give me a new insight of the mission reserved by God for my life. I thought I’d be only in Jerusalem as the leader of the Church, along with the other apostles, but I began to have an inward impression of being called by the Lord as the first apostle associated with the mission among the Gentiles. This was confirmed later. I will return to comment this when I talk about my travel to Joppa, Caesarea and the Plain of Sharon. I know that after a few years the Lord chose another servant to assume this mission more fully, making me return to the Jews; however these experiences with the Gentiles heated my heart with a new possibility for my work, for during the travel from Samaria to Jerusalem I could see the conversion of some of them. Years had passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus, but my heart was burning more and more with love for Him and for my call. The fire of the Spirit did not extinguish; on the contrary, it was renewed every victory of Jesus through my life and I truly felt a helpful vessel in His hands. Later, when I took over the evangelization out of Jerusalem, James the brother of the Master took my place.

“Peter, Peter! You’re learning a lot of things, aren’t you? Jesus doesn’t interrupt His work; on the contrary, He expands it when finds vessels available to Him; and the barriers fall to the ground. The miracles continue in the lives of those who persevere like Stephen and Philip. What a pity that others let the flame goes out in their hearts! Stay firm, Peter. There is still much work to be done. How about some notes in your little notebook?”

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- God does not give up on His project or stops His work.
 - The constant renewal of the Spirit is the factor that keeps the door open to the miracle.
 - Hearts opened to the Word are a great incentive for the sowers of the Lord.
 - The Lord surprises us with new revelations and with what He can do with those who He brings to us.

Obedience to the Lord helps to overcome the limits



Philip

I, Philip, deacon and evangelist of the Lord, was in Samaria. It was nine o'clock in the morning when I put myself in prayer. In vision, I saw an angel who told me, *“Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza (This is a wilderness road).”*

The same way as he appeared, the angel was gone, but I had understood the message of God. I didn't think to ask anything else or question him. I just got up and went south, as it was pointed to me, in the direction of Gaza.

The road from Jerusalem to Gaza had a detour to the north and then turned south, where this city was located. I was looking for the best way through those rocks. Although it was not totally an arid place, the little vegetation didn't offer great protection against the scorching sun that shone over my head. I wondered that David had hidden very often in those rocks, seeking refuge in God from the uncontrolled persecution of Saul. I was not running away, despite the persecutions which had arisen recently against the Church in the person of certain Jew, Saul of Tarsus, but I felt a bit uncomfortable with the possibility of being found alone there in that place so devoid of life. When my soul was beginning to give these signs of humanity, I thought of Jesus and the power of His Spirit came to meet it, reviving the love in my heart for Him and giving me the perseverance to accomplish the mission that He had entrusted to me.

I had come to a flatter ground, a short distance from the main road, but that gave me the full view of it. The Holy Spirit suddenly told me, *“Go over to this chariot and join it.”*

In fact I had already seen a chariot with horses coming from Jerusalem toward Gaza, but I couldn't see clearly who was driving. Who would be?

It didn't run unbridled; it also didn't seem to be there only to admire the landscape. I would have to make some effort if I wanted to reach it. I started running towards it and when I was getting closer, I saw a man reading aloud the scroll of prophet Isaiah. I raised my voice above the noise of the horses' hooves to draw his attention, *“Sir, do you understand what you are reading?”*

He stopped the chariot because he saw me breathless and invited me to climb. He didn't move it immediately, but he introduced himself with formality, trying to speak Aramaic with difficulty, because I soon realized that he was a foreigner. He was an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and important official in charge of all her treasure; he had come to worship in Jerusalem. That was not unusual as it seemed at first sight. Gentiles God-fearing sometimes traveled to Jerusalem to worship, even if they could only enter the places outside the temple, the courtyard of the Gentiles. Rich rulers of other lands sometimes sent gifts to the temple, hoping to gain the favor of the God of Israel. Some even asked to offer sacrifices in their benefit. Although I did not know how that Ethiopian eunuch had a scroll of Isaiah, something rare and expensive on these days, I knew he was curious about the religion of

our people. But he was excluded for two reasons: he was not only a foreigner, but also a eunuch. He could only stay in the courtyard of the Gentiles, hoping to get a quick glimpse of the interior. However, the prophecy of Isaiah gave him, even without knowing it, a means of entry. Jesus certainly had prepared his heart.

“My name is Philip; do you understand what you are reading?”

“How can I, unless someone explains it to me? Sit down here beside me, Philip. Tell me about this roll.”

“What passage are you trying to understand?”

“This one, *‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’* Please explain to me whom the prophet talking about. Does he speak of himself or someone else?”

“Our prophet Isaiah wrote seven hundred years ago about the Messiah, who would be given to Israel by God to redeem us from our sins. He has already come, the Son of God, Jesus, whom our people handed over to be crucified some years ago. He brought a spiritual realm, not material, as imagined. As you can read in the prophecy, it was written that He would suffer for our sins and rise again on the third day. We are witnesses of His resurrection, and now He sits at the right hand of God offering His salvation to all who believe in Him. Those who repent of their sins receive His forgiveness and acquire eternal life. I don’t know if you have heard of John the Baptist. He was His cousin and came preaching the baptism of repentance, preparing hearts to hear the words of the Messiah and be completely save, knowing the secrets of eternal life. John told us, *‘I baptize you with water; but what comes after me, which am not worthy to untie the thong of sandals, this will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’* The Spirit is a promise for all who are saved by Jesus. We, His apostles and disciples, received Him at Pentecost and it is through Him that we perform the miracles that you’ve probably heard of.”

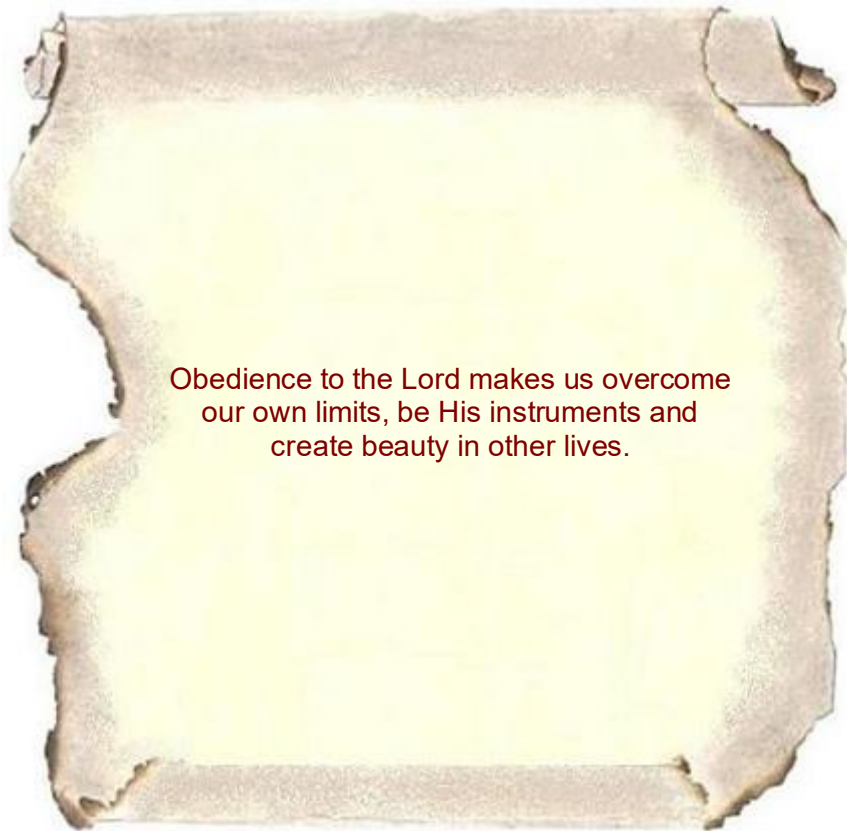
The chariot continued down the road. Coming to a place where there was water, the eunuch asked me,

“Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

“You can, if you believe with all your heart.”

“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

He commanded the chariot to stop, we went down into the water, and I baptized him in the name of Jesus for repentance of his sins and eternal salvation. I have not seen him anymore, for the Spirit has sent me to Azotus. *“I need to tell this to Peter so that he puts this note in his little notebook,”*



Obedience to the Lord makes us overcome
our own limits, be His instruments and
create beauty in other lives.

The will of God is sovereign and changes the hearts



Saul

The so-called Jesus the Nazarene had been died some years ago, but I couldn't fail to execute the law. How that sect was growing up in these days, the *Way*, as they called it! Wherever I went I heard speak of Him. His followers were a proud and arrogant people, too joyful for my taste, emanating a power that I didn't understand and doing miracles that made me angry and confused. What I should do was to arrest them and kill them before it was too late; they were a threat to Judaism. Who could believe that the Son of God came in person to earth to save men and rose from the dead, leaving His Spirit in His followers, giving them the same authority to perform miracles in His name? I, Saul, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, born in Tarsus of Cilicia as a Roman citizen, zealous of the Law of Moses, a Pharisee educated by Rabbi Gamaliel and always obedient to the precepts of God, I didn't understand how anyone could believe in a lie like this they were hearing. I knew what to do; I would go to the high priest in Jerusalem and would ask him letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if I found anyone who belonged to the *Way*, both men and women, I would bring them back as prisoners. The high priest gave me the letters and, with some soldiers I put myself on the way to Damascus.

I was almost coming to the town. I was a little tired from the trip, which took a few days and was exhaustive, because we could not take our eyes off the road, watching, in the case of having to face enemies (the followers of the sect). They could be dangerous. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground, hearing a voice saying,

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.”

“Who are you, Lord?”

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

What a weird thing was happening to me! I couldn't withstand the light around me. It was intense and took my whole being, enveloping me with love and protection, at the same time with an authority that could not be disobeyed. And the voice was undeniably royal, a voice of thunder, a powerful voice and full of majesty, voice that breaks the cedars of Lebanon. I couldn't see His face physically, but at the same time I could describe Him through my spirit. The soldiers who were traveling with me heard the voice, however, they didn't see the light, and were speechless. They saw when I fell and heard what I said, but did not understand what had happened. Only I, Saul, had seen the Lord. I opened my eyes and noticed that I was completely blind. My companions took me by the hand and led me to Damascus. I've been three days without seeing anything. I was not hungry or thirsty. I was taken to a house on a street called Straight. The name of the host was Judas. I had never seen him before. I prayed incessantly, as if something inside me compelled me to this, seeking the direction and revelation from God for everything that was happening to me. I lost the track of time and couldn't even realize

the basic needs like food and water. The owner of the house seemed to know this, for he didn't come there to visit me during this time I spent alone. Often some situations in my life came to mind. Then, I cried and asked God for forgiveness by the reckless and foolish acts I had committed. The cry relieved me and the voice of the Lord began to be clearer and familiar to my soul. In truth, I was beginning to know in my innermost He who I chased so much, having a true revelation of His character. I saw the legalism and the religiosity falling to the ground and a new learning entering my mind and that often frightened me, sometimes left me bewildered, because I didn't understand it fully yet, and I needed more comprehension to know what all that had to do with me and with the divine plan for me. In these three days, Jesus led me to a true travel through my interior, reformulating my entire structure, healing my wounds, forgiving my sins and changing my character. The hours and days passed and I could no longer remember who the former Saul of Tarsus was. I began to feel different, but still was not sure of what He had done with me. At a time of deep prayer, seeking understanding of what would happen from that moment on, I had a vision of a man coming into my room and laying hands on my eyes so that I might regain my sight. Jesus told me his name, Ananias. Then I fell asleep. Ananias was a disciple whom God had visited, telling about me. He had already heard of Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted fiercely Christ's followers and he questioned the Lord. However, He said to him, *"Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."* Ananias came and, entering the house of Judas, he said,

"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately, something like scales fell from my eyes and my sight was restored. I got up and was baptized in the name of Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord filled me and I could understand what it meant to be filled with His power. Now I could understand the existing strength in His followers and that enabled them to perform miracles. Judas asked me to come down and eat something, because there was three days that I neither ate nor drank. After eating, I regained my strength and stayed a few days in Damascus with the disciples. They took me to synagogues where I had the opportunity to preach, claiming to be Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. They didn't believe in the sincerity of my heart; they didn't believe in my words. They still remembered of my well-known attitudes towards the followers of the Master. I strengthened myself with these speeches in which the Holy Spirit spoke through me, and some Jews began to be convinced of my testimony, confusing the others. Some time passed and then I knew that the Jews were planning against my life; day and night they guarded the city gates to kill me. Judas and the other disciples advised me,

"Brother, we need to get you out of this town, do you understand?"

"Yes, but how?"

"Wait, we have a plan."

"Yes, tonight we'll put you in a basket and descend it by the city walls. By reaching the ground run toward Jerusalem. Look for the apostles, especially Peter. You remember him when he was present at the death of Stephen."

"Ananias!"

"Speak, Theophilus!"

"It is very risky to descend Paul by the walls. You know the city is built on a hill and Paul may fall against the cliffs and get hurt badly. How will we know if he will arrive unharmed to the ground? How to know exactly the height of the wall and the length of the rope? No, no, no! I think it's a scary thing. It's too dangerous!"

“Brothers, fear not. If the Lord rescued me to Him He will not let me perish now. I accept the strategy.”

“Saul, it will be very dark. When you feel the basket touching the ground, go down carefully and seek to make sure it is not hanging in a crevice of the cliffs. Hide in caves during the day and walk at night to avoid being discovered. You became a fugitive, *enemy number one* of the Jews.”

“Don’t worry, Theophilus. I’ll be fine.”

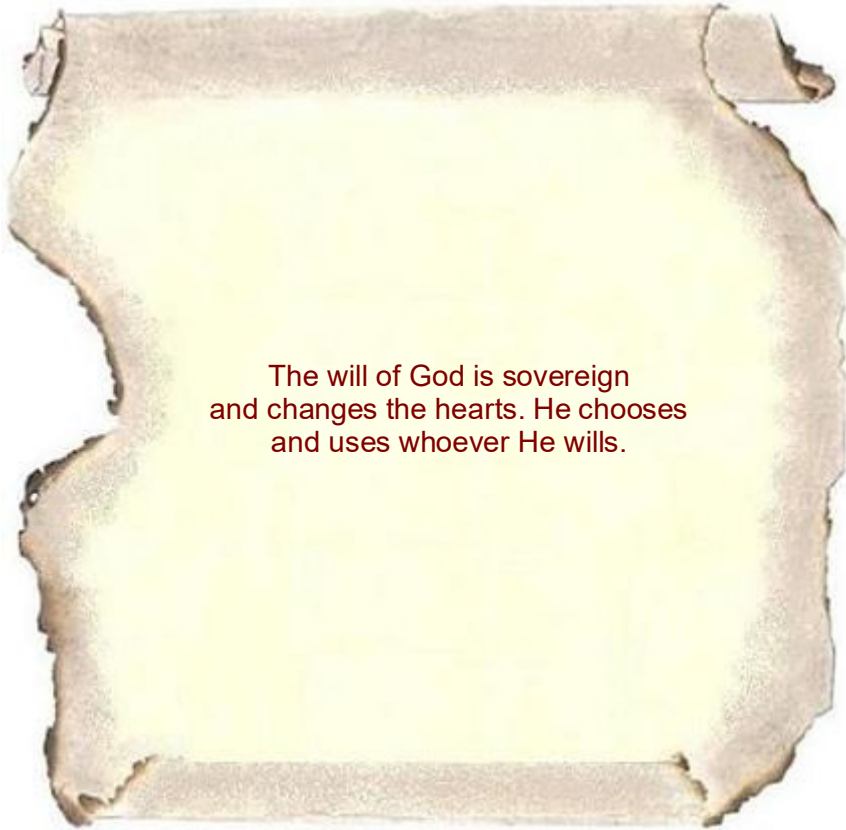
“Well, brothers, prepare everything!”

The plan worked and I came to Jerusalem. I tried to join the disciples that, however, feared me. I met Barnabas, who led me to the apostles. I told them about my meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road. Barnabas took me with him to the synagogues, where I preached in the name of Jesus. I discussed the word with the Hellenists who still had difficulty in accepting faith as a vehicle for salvation and insisted on the ancient rituals. They tried to take my life, as they did with Stephen. This fact was known to all brothers, who led me to Caesarea and sent me away to Tarsus. There I would spend a longer period of preparation of the Lord in my life, I can say, until I really take on my post as an apostle to the Gentiles. I stayed about ten years in Tarsus until Barnabas called me again for God’s work.

Peter

I was really surprised when I saw Barnabas entering with a guy of medium height, with scarce hair, but a full beard and a vibrant voice as those who were ready to discuss at any time for anything. There was nothing very impressive about his aspect despite his fame throughout Israel. That one was Saul of Tarsus, whom Jesus had recently touched and converted. However, the presence of the Holy Spirit in him was evident. He used him and would use, certainly with much power. In those days he spent with us in Jerusalem we had the chance to talk a lot. I began to like him, though sometimes we tended to disagree about the doctrine to apply to Jews and Gentiles. Who could imagine that God could make of a persecutor of His work, a disciple?

“Peter, Peter! Jesus surprised you once again. Look at this man. Does he look like an enemy of your people? I like him. I just think that our temperaments would not permit us to live side by side for so long. With me and John is different. Even so, I will pray for you, my ‘Brother of Fire’ because I can see that your mission will not be one of the easiest. Write this down, Peter.”



The will of God is sovereign
and changes the hearts. He chooses
and uses whoever He wills.

Breaking prejudice and religiosity. Spreading the wings.



Peter

It was time to try something new out of Jerusalem, as I had previously thought. James the brother of Jesus replaced me in the leadership of the people in the capital, while I headed for Lydda by order of the Holy Spirit. I needed to learn to spread the wings. The Lord had commissioned me to bring the Word to the Gentiles, as well as to the saints of that city.

I stayed at the home of one of the brothers. That afternoon I walked down the streets of Lydda because I needed to stay alone a little to meditate and hear the voice of the Spirit. Passing by certain street toward the synagogue, I noticed a man sitting by the roadside. The fire of God's Spirit took hold of me at that very moment and I looked at that paralytic; his name was Aeneas and he was bedridden for eight years. I told him,

“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!”

He immediately stood up. The inhabitants of Lydda and all the Plain of Sharon who knew him for a long time were amazed and turned to the Lord.

I didn't stay long in Lydda, but I went to Joppa with two disciples because they ran after me in order to solve a serious case there. Joppa was a seaside town, very pleasant, and that lived up to its name (*beautiful place*). The smell of the sea air began to pervade my nostrils, and tears almost came to my eyes when I saw the waves and the clear waters that bathed my feet on that deserted beach. Oh! If only I had a boat! But I had no time to enjoy the landscape. The brothers who walked with me seemed to be in a hurry and I needed to run a bit to follow their footsteps. Along the way, they explained to me what was happening: there was in Joppa a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas (*“gazelle”*); she was devoted to good works and acts of charity. It happened in those days that she fell sick and died; she was in the upper room and was to that place where we were going to. Having arrived there, all the widows surrounded me, weeping and showing me the tunics and other clothing that Dorcas made while she was with them. That situation reminded me of another that I had lived a long time ago with Jesus: the resurrection of Jairus' daughter. Those women cried and caused a great commotion in all who came to that place. With them there by my side, I could not concentrate on the prayer to understand the true desire of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus did in the house of Jairus I made everybody to get out of the room and knelt beside the disciple. It took me a few seconds to quiet my soul until I could lift my spirit to the Lord. He said He wanted to give me a new experience through that situation. I heard His clear voice, His order to be obeyed. I turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!”

She opened her eyes and, seeing me, she sat up.

“What happened?”

“Tabitha, Jesus Christ raised you from the dead.”

I took her hand and lifted her. I called all the saints, especially the widows, and presented her alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

I tried to get out as soon as I could. I looked back and saw a man coming toward me, calling me by name. I stopped and learned that his name was Simon; he was a tanner and was inviting me to spend a few days at his house.

“Peter! Wait! Don’t go away now. Come to my house.”

“Thanks, Simon. What is your job? I didn’t pay attention, I’m sorry!”

“I am a tanner, that is, I transform animal skins into leather. But don’t worry; my workplace is separate from my house. You will not suffer any inconvenience, I promise.”

“Would you mind going ahead? I’d like to walk by the beach; I miss the sound of the waves, do you understand?”

“Of course, my friend. My house is right there, on the right, behind those trees.”

“I’ve seen it, thanks, I’ll soon be there.”

I walked toward the sea. I seemed to need urgently that vision to balance my emotions. It was very good to hear the roar of the waves; they calmed my nerves. How exciting was the smell of sea air! If I had a boat at the time, I would go fishing. *“What did Simon say? I heard: tanner. Lord, he turns animal skins into leather! By the Law, the contact with dead animals is considered unclean. Jesus! Nothing is by chance. What do you have for me? Are you preparing me for some experience? Peter, Peter, don’t think of anything else now; just enjoy the beauty that presents itself to you. Yes, Lord, you have done great things in my life lately! How many “fish” you have brought to my nets! I could not believe that this kind of thing would happen to me, when you called me for the first time: ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men!’”* I continued my walk looking at the seagulls in the sky and meditating on the lessons that the Holy Spirit was giving me on the last few days, amazing things, fascinating. I was sure that nothing happened by my own will or my power, but by God. Were the other apostles living many miracles too? I noticed that my mind had expanded the way of seeing things; it seems that many barriers and prejudices were falling down. *“Who knew? Simon Peter in the house of Simon the tanner, evangelizing the Gentiles in the Plain of Sharon! Peter, only look ahead and do not be afraid of the new; spread your wings and fly high.”*

I headed for the house of Simon, because the sun was setting and I needed to rest and take a bath. Simon was waiting for me with clean clothes, water and soap, as if he knew my thoughts. We dined, talked about many things and went to bed.

I stayed a few days there with him and walked along the sea, besides to preach to all who came to me in search of the Word. Simon himself had been prepared by the Lord. He was now a brother in Christ, living freely in the grace of the Holy Spirit and the Lord blessed his work. I began to realize the lifestyle of those gentiles and this contributed to my inner growth; the old structure of Jewish life within me was being shaken. Jesus, as it seems, had many ‘fish’ besides the Jews to be fished. While I was waiting for the meal, for about noon, I went up on the roof of Simon’s house in order to pray. Suddenly, I fell into a trance, very real, almost palpable to be frank. I saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners, containing all sorts of four-footed animals and reptiles and birds. A voice told me, *“Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”* I replied, *“By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.”* The voice spoke to me again and said, *“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”* This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. I was perplexed. What would this

mean? The Holy Spirit told me, *“Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.”* In fact, I could hear the voice of Simon talking with two men and I was able to distinguish my name clearly on the lips of one of them. I went down and introduced myself to them,

“I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?”

“Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.”

“Welcome, come in. I’m Simon, the host. Come in and stay with us until tomorrow. Then, you’ll leave.”

By the next morning some of the brothers who lived in Joppa accompanied me to the house of Cornelius. The trip took one day.

When we got there, Cornelius was already waiting for us, having gathered their relatives and close friends. When I entered, the man fell at my feet and worshiped me. I felt astonished; what did he think he was doing?

“Stand up; I am only a man.”

“Come, Peter!”

“You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”

“Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, *“Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.”* Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”

“I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

I still spoke when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. The circumcised believers who had come with me from Joppa were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. Those who were baptized in the Spirit prayed in other tongues and glorified God. I said,

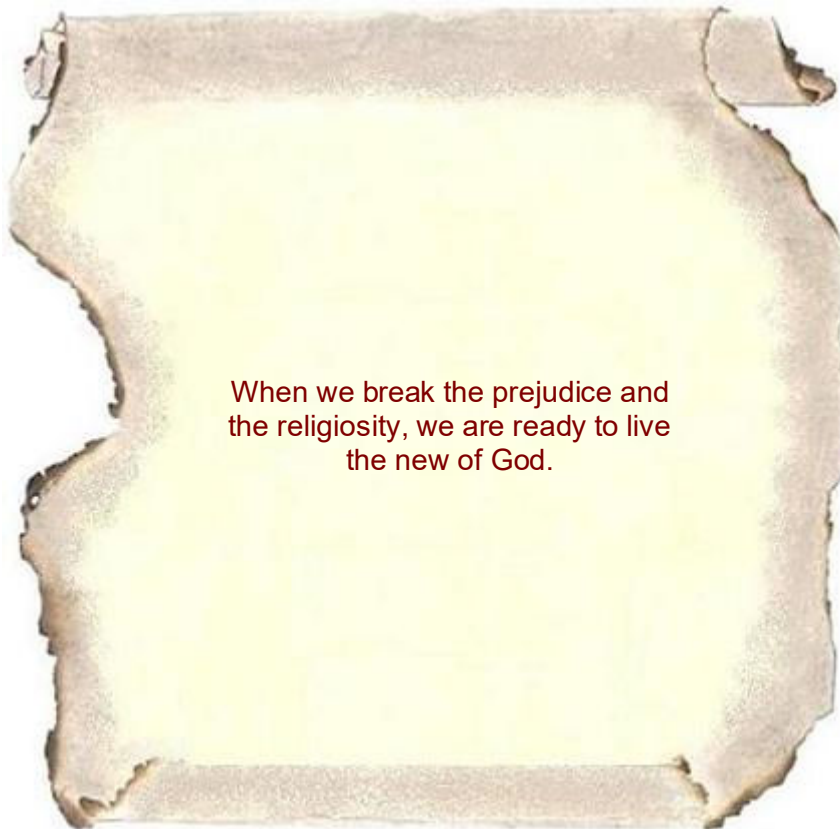
“Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? Be baptized now in the name of Jesus Christ.”

“Peter, stay with us a few days; we need to hear more and be strengthened.”

How good was to feel the fire of the first love in those thirsty hearts! I stayed with them for a few days, while others that have not heard the first preaching, received Jesus and were baptized. The number of converts to the Lord also grew among the Gentiles; I

was being proof of this. Although some remembrances of the tradition have remained with me, I could see a drastic change in my attitudes and my thoughts about the grace of God to all men. He, Jesus, had come for many, to all who accepted Him as Messiah and Savior of their souls.

“Peter, Peter! Put this in your little notebook,”



Overcoming new oppositions



Peter

I and the six brothers who had come from Joppa to Caesarea with me knew that our work here with Cornelius was already known to the apostles in Jerusalem. So we decided to go back. When we arrived, we were welcomed by the brothers, who were glad by the fact of the first Gentile family in the Plain of Sharon has accepted Jesus. They wanted to know all the details. We spent happy and relaxed times until came to us some of those of circumcision for arguing us. They didn't understand how a Jew could have entered the house of uncircumcised; little did they know the call of Holy Spirit for us to have taken that attitude! Carnal people wanting to impose religious rules to spiritual ones! But the Spirit came over me and I reported them with power what had occurred there, which was confirmed by the brothers who came with me. Yes, the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit like us at Pentecost. Hearing this, the moods were appeased, and they glorified God for the blessing of the Lord on them too.

It had been almost fourteen years since the death of Stephen, and the disciples who were scattered at that time still continued to preach the word in Cyprus, Phoenicia and Antioch, but only to Jews. Some, however, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene and that went to Antioch, also spoke to the Greeks, who were converted to the Lord. We heard about them here in Jerusalem; we sent Barnabas who also did a great work of evangelization in that region. With the help of Saul who had come again from Tarsus, Barnabas stayed for a year there, teaching the disciples, who were called Christians for the first time.

Around 46 AD came a time of famine in Judea, by a succession of poor harvests; there was also hard famine in several regions of the Roman Empire, but we here in Jerusalem seemed to be suffering a bit more with it. Thank God, we overcame this test with the help of brothers from other lands, who sent money through Barnabas and Saul.

But before this, King Herod Agrippa, nephew of Herod Antipas, who had executed John the Baptist, and father of Agrippa (who later came to interrogate Saul, now called Paul), Berenice and Drusilla (who married Festus, also known for interrogate Paul) around 44 AD decided to arrest some of the Church to mistreat them. James, the brother of John, was beheaded. This was pleasing to the Jews who were in opposition to us. We no longer had how to hide, and soon I was taken to prison too. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, namely, Passover. This time, it was not a simple public prison as I experienced previously, but the Fortress Antonia, a place of custody, called by the Greeks *phylake or oikema (house)*, where prisoners were carefully and constantly guarded by four soldiers, two of them chained to the prisoner and two outside the door. In addition, there were some general guards before reaching the iron gate that opened outwards. There was incessant prayer of the Church in my favor and this comforted me. I was sleeping chained between two soldiers when, once again, I had a supernatural experience with God. An angel in the form of a great light broke into that place and touched me, waking me. He told me, "*Get up quickly!*" Then the chains fell off my wrists. He went on, "*Fasten your belt and put on your sandals. Wrap your cloak around*

you and follow me.” I did what he commanded me. To me it seemed like a vision, not a real situation, but I followed him until we passed through all the guards and reached the iron gate that led into the street and that opened suddenly. I followed him for a few streets until he disappeared. Only then, I was sure that what I was experiencing was real. I thought, *“Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”* I decided to go to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, where many brothers were gathered together praying. I knocked at the door and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. I know she recognized my voice and was very happy with this but did not let me come in; she ran to warn the others.

“Rhoda, where are you going? It’s me, Peter, let me enter.” I thought, *“My God, what is going on with her, why so much delay?”*

“Open up! It is me, Peter. Please answer me. Brothers, do not leave me here.”

“Peter, is it you?”

“John, open the door, who do you think it is knocking?”

“We thought it was your angel.”

“And do you think that my angel would make so much fuss? He would not have to knock at the door; he would enter without permission through the walls. Come on, let me come in!”

“Good to see you, my brother! Is everything okay? Are you hurt? Do you feel pain?”

“It doesn’t matter now, John, I want to see the others. Shhh! Hush, you guys! Do you want to attract all the guards of Herod here?”

“Peter, what happened?”

“I was in prison and the angel of the Lord came to me while I was chained and he saved me. Brothers, what an amazing thing! The light seemed more a vision than a real thing. The chains fell off miraculously and the doors opened when he started walking ahead of me. The guards continued to sleep as if nothing had happened. They seemed to have been asleep by a supernatural force. I just realized that it was real when I saw myself on the street. I don’t have more time to talk. I need to hide somewhere else lest to put you at greater risk. Keep praying. Warn James, please. I promise to send you news. See you soon.”

“Peter, be careful!”

I ran away quickly and hid temporarily in a place that they couldn’t find me not to endanger the brothers. I heard that in the morning there was a real panic among the soldiers of the prison when they realized my absence. They could not explain what had happened. Herod executed them, with fury, and went to Caesarea, on the Plain of Sharon. Probably, the rheumatic pains were troubling him very much in those days. I praised the Lord for this period of respite for us. The inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were bickered with Herod due to trade problems, so he would have something to worry about, while we reorganized and asked for strength to the Lord. With each prayer, the Spirit came with extraordinary power over us and renewed our soul. The unity among the apostles and the disciples was the major factor that facilitated this outpouring. I heard that Herod died a few days later and his son Agrippa stood in his place. However, the word of God grew and multiplied.

“Peter, Peter! The Lord has given you great deliverances! And how many victories continue to be bestowed upon the Church, despite the oppositions! Yeah! The major factor is the Lord’s love among us and the fire of the Spirit that is not quenched; on the contrary, it continues to burn in more and more hearts. Jesus should be happy with our achievements, knowing that His work was not in vain. Jesus, Jesus! Give us strength,

faith and perseverance to accomplish what you have asked of us. My friend! I miss our relaxed conversations at seaside. Who could imagine that Peter, once an immature man, would be now doing so risky work and of so much responsibility! Jesus, you're awesome! Peter! Take note of this,"



Respect for the mission of others



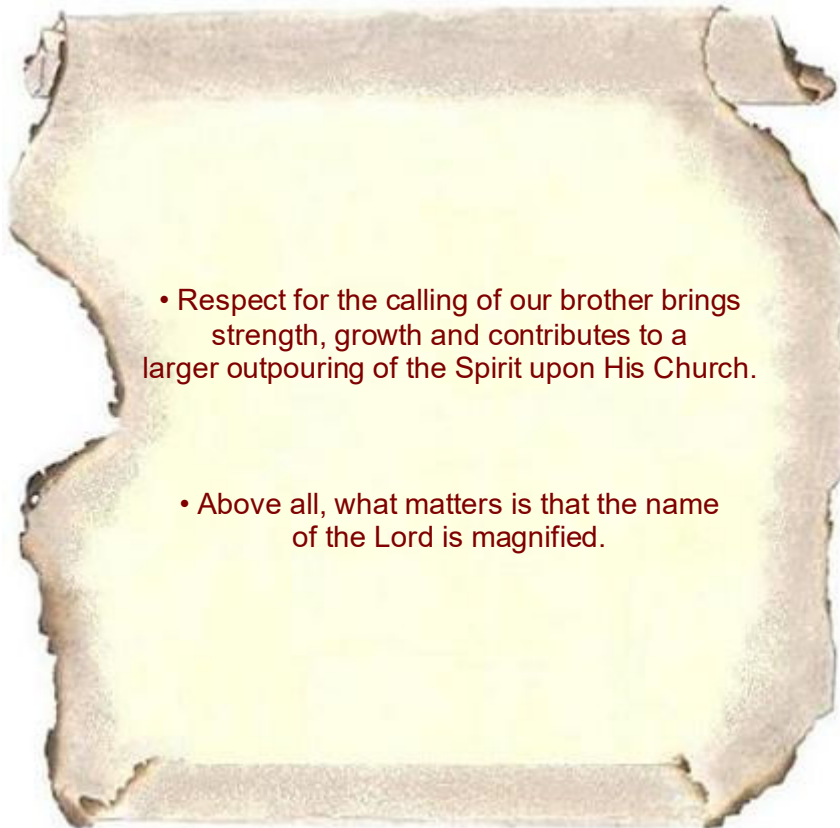
Peter

Some years passed and now it seemed that my position among the apostles was more clearly defined. Saul, now Paul, was doing a great missionary work among the Gentiles. Though I have been commissioned in the first place to bring the Word to them and continued to tell them about Jesus in their own homes, I had to recognize that Paul was clothed with a higher authority and a new power of God for this mission. We met again fourteen years after our first meeting and the great point of our quarrels revolved around the circumcision and the attitudes to be tolerated in relation to the uncircumcised. I had to recognize that since that experience with the sheet falling from heaven and that took me to gain the centurion Cornelius to Jesus, I had changed a lot my way to think about them, but Paul seemed to have received a greater empowerment and a greater freedom to understand them and deal with them on the basis of faith, besides having a greater power and wisdom of God in his words. When he spoke, it was as if a flame of fire came from within him, consuming all the false teachings that tried to penetrate the Church, especially those that the Gentiles insisted on keeping; yet, Paul was not intimidated about it any way. He had suffered even more than I the persecution for the sake of the gospel; however, he remained persistent and steadfast in his walk, which also strengthened us.

After so many years since its beginning, the Church continued to grow and our ministries were practically defined. Each of us had found out exactly what the Lord would like us to do and we put ourselves at His disposal to cooperate with the brothers, with respect for what each one was performing. I had understood that the respect for the call of each one was the factor that kept us together and put us in a position of honor before those who did not know Jesus, so that His name was glorified. We had understood that despite our carnal differences, the work of God and the action of the Holy Spirit were more important than everything and gave us doubled strength not to give up on our mission. Each of us was assigned to a place and the prophetic word of Jesus was being fulfilled, *“The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.”* He could only act in Israel, but we were covering the world. Each of us, with a specific gift and with his own way of being, was finding his way to perform what the Master had given to our lives; there was room for everyone. We discovered that we were cooperators in God’s harvest and we felt great joy when we met to share the victories that were conquered. Over the years, we separated physically of each other, but we remained united in only one spirit, as it was in the beginning. How many lives the Lord would still have separated to Him! He said He would return to fetch His Church, but before this happened, we would have to evangelize the whole earth. He said, *“And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”*

I felt now a mature and experienced man in this generation, but at the same time, a baby, starting something that I would not see here during my lifetime. I simply had

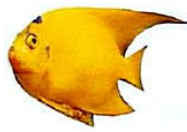
enjoyed a part of this great work; perhaps my little work was a seed for the future generations. *“Peter, Peter, remain firm, the Lord needs you. Write this down,”*



- Respect for the calling of our brother brings strength, growth and contributes to a larger outpouring of the Spirit upon His Church.

- Above all, what matters is that the name of the Lord is magnified.

Epilogue



Pentecost was the beginning of the work that for three years was sown by Jesus. The newborn Church was clothed with a spiritual strength that made it overcome the persecutions, difficulties and barriers. This strength bestowed by the Holy Spirit was the true love that found in hearts the innocence and purity as a fertile ground to sprout. The fidelity to the Lord was the incentive that kept intact the original flame of faith and love, generating a growing outpouring of the spiritual gifts, and consequently, leading to the growth of the work that was started. However, over the centuries, the difficulties of life and the numbness of human hearts by the wickedness went extinguishing the fire, causing stagnation and cooling of that work. That's what the Spirit is trying to raise again on these days, moving sincere and God-fearing hearts, which do not conform to the disappearance of pure and true love that breaks barriers. It was Jesus Himself who said that in the last times love would grow cold in the heart of almost everyone. It's sad to think that many believers are conforming themselves of being part of these "*almost everyone*." It seems that they don't want to fight with all their strength against what is apparently stronger, like money, knowledge, power struggle and all false gods. These factors cause coldness in relationships, under the guise of professionalism or anything else with any other name that transform the basic human needs such as healthy emotional relationship among his fellowmen in an article of third category. Modern technology has exercised an overwhelming power over man and this power can only be mastered when we, beings made in the image and likeness of God, take our position of authority delegated to us by Jesus, taking from the darkness what rightfully belongs to us. None of us can change the Word of God about the Apocalypse, nor change the course of human history, but we can fight to be out of this sad group of *the almost everyone* where the Lord's love has no more place. A cold or lukewarm position regarding this would be hypocrisy when we talk about revival. The Holy Spirit needs and wants to bestow gifts upon His children, as long as such children make room in their hearts for Him to act. There is still time to reconsider our position with the Lord and our ministerial calling, understanding that there are steps to be followed to 'strengthen the stakes of our tent' (*Isa. 54: 2*), as it was in the Early Church, but that also depends on our willingness to be filled with His power and to impact this generation. Jesus Himself said, "*I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.*" There are still many needing to know Him and it is up to us to be willing to be His instruments, 'The children of the Cross' in the middle of our fellow men.

I hope you have been ministered by the Spirit of God and may the flame of *the first love* be revived in your spirit to no longer go out.

Come, Spirit, and enliven our hearts!