

Service abroad (Acts 9)

Part 1

Speaker	N. Packer
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[00:00:00] This is a recording of the afternoon address given by Mr Norman Packer at Wildfellow Hall Catford on the 2nd of June 1962, his subject Service Abroad. Now can we turn to God's Word. The ninth chapter of the book of the Acts, Acts chapter 9. And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, [00:01:04] Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man. But they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. [00:02:01] And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus called Ananias. And to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias.

And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street, which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. For behold, he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on [00:03:01] thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him, he said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeareth unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. [00:04:03] Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus, and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. May God add his blessing to that reading of his word. I would just like to read to you three verses of scripture, one from the first chapter of Mark, and the other, two from the first chapter of Mark, and

one from the last. The 16th verse of Mark 1, now as Jesus walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. [00:05:02] And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.

And in the last chapter, verse 15, right at the end, and Jesus said unto them, Not come this time.

Not come this time. He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

I'm really fascinated by the way in which Catford [00:06:03] seizes some innocent provincial type like myself and flings him onto a platform like this and says, speak on that.

In the nicest possible way, too, and I think at this moment the hardest possible job, those of you who were here last evening will not envy me speaking on this platform after a dear brother who has not only spoken for 50 years, but preached and filled this room for 50 years.

If there were a trapdoor, and I think there is somewhere, I could wish that it would open and release me, and at the same time replace me by somebody who knows more about what I'm going to say. [00:07:03] Of course we should have, and by the way, whenever you put your foot on a platform, and a very old brother once said to me, never put your foot on a platform unless you must. I think it was said again last night in other words, never do it unless you must. But if ever you do, you will find all kinds of things said to you and about you. And I couldn't agree more with what our dear senior brother said last night. If the Lord has sent you, you must take it. Somebody said to me halfway through last week, well I would have thought with very great respect to all concerned, that somebody with 20 years experience overseas at least, should be doing the job which you are built to do on Saturday. Well I agree, but you see brethren, they're all doing the job and they're over there. [00:08:02] And there's another thing too. I was going to say that our dear brother, and I must pause a bit here because I'm delighted and honoured to be here to join you in thanksgiving for a period of service of half a century in this room. It's service I really want to speak about. There doesn't seem to me to be a great deal of difference today, and you're going to forgive me Cecil aren't you for anything I say, a great deal of difference today between, there's a great difference in the kind of service, but it's service to our master that matters wherever it may be. And the subject of this week has been thanksgiving for service and looking forward. And our dear brother is looking forward. He's done 50 years here and very shortly he sails to rejoice with some who celebrate 100 years [00:09:08] of service in the Barbados. I think perhaps he's just inquiring even now as to how to go on to the full century. Well anyhow, may the Lord be with him and as he provides us with the opportunity for speaking from the scripture about service, just let us get on. May I say I'm making quite abundantly clear that I have never been called overseas to serve the Lord. I'm firmly convinced of this, that there are just one or two things that need saying about service overseas amongst us that perhaps I can say this afternoon. I just happen to be, and I say it because these things are not known quite so clearly as perhaps [00:10:01] they might be. I'm one of the minor members of a group of backroom boys whose task year in and year out is to try and relate your interest, my dear brother and sister, in the Lord's work worldwide to relate your interest with the need overseas. I claim no more than that, a little more of that later. Service abroad. I would like to call this talk perhaps, Come and Go. The blessed Lord Jesus has commissioned every single believer in him, commissioned him for service, commissioned her for service. Every true believer on the Lord Jesus Christ has been saved to serve.

[00:11:08] And that's why I read a verse which said, Come. Oh I love him for this.

In John's gospel he says in the beginning, Come and see. You've heard his lovely voice, haven't you, saying, Come. You come. Come and see, he said. In Matthew he said, Come unto me.

But in Mark, and in Mark's gospel, you do know this don't you, but I'm going to say it, because there are boys and girls here and it's quite safe to speak to adults as though they were boys and girls, quite safe. I love it myself. And the four gospels, and how gracious of the [00:12:04] Holy Spirit of God to give us four separate accounts of the wonderful life of our Savior. They all speak of him in different ways. In Matthew as the king, Luke as the man, wonderful man, perfect man, John as the son of God, and Mark, as you know, as the servant of God. And it's wonderful that in the first chapter when Jesus says, Come, the invitation to himself that reaches us when we are still sinners, by the way, if you are still not sure that you belong to Jesus, and it's quite possible to have been brought up in an exceedingly religious home, [00:13:04] and not belong to the Lord Jesus at all, just listen to that first word, Come. It's an open invitation to you to come to Jesus. But of course in Mark, he says, Come after me, come ye after me, and I will do something for you. I will make you to become fishers of men. It speaks to me of the Lord's invitation for me to turn to him, in order that I might be trained by him in useful service. He was the most useful of servants, the perfect servant, we always say. And so, of course, he gives this lean to his invitation in this gospel [00:14:09] of Mark. Well, we could talk quite a lot about Mark, perhaps, but let's go to the end. The Lord Jesus says, Go. This is a word which the teenager is fairly familiar with, I believe. It's rather a time since I was a teenager, but I listen to their language from time to time, because I'm anxious that young people should so hear the voice of the Son of God, which has the power to give life to even the dead, anxious that they should hear it in a way that is unmistakably clear that, of course, I need to know a little of the kind of language they use. Go, man, go, they say today. And whatever they mean by it, it does express energy. [00:15:08] When I was a youngster, my father used to accuse me of lacking go. That is initiative and drive and energy. But of course, as usual, you find this very word in the scripture, written long before any of us were born or thought of at all. And so, the blessed Savior, at the end of this gospel, which speaks of him as the servant, he turned to his own, as he was about to leave them, and he said more clearly, I think, than elsewhere. He says, said, go, not now come. You've come unto me. You've heard me. You've listened to me. Now, go. Go ye unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And that is a general commission.

[00:16:14] Last night, we were hearing of the individual being commissioned. Let us, none of us, shrink into our shells and say, yes, but I haven't heard the call. Not for me. The blessed Lord Jesus addressed this word to all that believed on him in that room. They were not all evangelists. But he said, go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

Just one little thought on that. I have been told, and I very thoroughly agree with it, that only those that the Lord places on the preaching platform should stand there. But I believe that when the Lord Jesus uttered [00:17:06] these words, he gave us all a place of some kind in the preaching of the gospel. It's very well known, is it not, and it was confessed last night, that there were more people engaged in the preaching of the gospel here than the one servant whom the Lord has been pleased to use so very much in this place. He said the words. He was empowered to do so. He was gifted to do so. But behind him there needed to be, as in the army they tell me, seven men in the army behind the lines for everyone that's in the front. And I think it's 70 times seven in spiritual matters. You, my dear brother, my dear sister, my young brother, my young sister, [00:18:01] have a living part in the preaching of the gospel to all the world. You may not be able to put two words together in the gospel

fashion, but the preacher needs all kinds of services behind the scenes. There is the general commission. What a wonderful thing it is. What a marvelous privilege it is. I just want to say that the service of the Lord is not an axon duty. It's the kind of privilege which rocks you back on your heels, if you think of it twice, to imagine that the God of heaven should choose to work at all through a man like me, even ever so small a way, [00:19:01] is something very marvelous. He has all the power. He doesn't need me, you would think, but the blessed Savior offers you a share in the company, to use modern phraseology. You may be the office boy, you may be the person who cleans the step, but some of the greatest combines of our day are seeking to do themselves a bit of good by offering the most menial worker shares in the company. That's not new either. The Lord Jesus, the greatest servant of all, the Son of God in his own right. We were reading this morning after breakfast, that first chapter of Colossians, where you learn, if you didn't know it before, and every time you read it you learn it again, if you read it carefully, that the one [00:20:03] whose blood was shed on Calvary's cross is the same one who made the world and is supporting and was supporting the world in which he was crucified. I can't understand it.

I rejoice in the belief of it, and it's that person, that master, who says, you go, don't sit there, but go, in some way or other, into all the world and preach the gospel. Oh yes, but is it as simple as that? Well, if you've taken that to heart, you'll be saying, like Saul of Tarsus, who was the chief of sinners, and God just picked hold of him and made him into the chiefest of the apostles. [00:21:02] That's a masterstroke that God made, if that's not an irreverent thing to say. He took the chief of sinners and had him converted. But when Saul had heard the voice from heaven, he said, of course, those famous words, Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? What wouldst thou have me to do? And now we become, there this becomes more particular. We've been speaking of a general commission, which nevertheless applies to us all. But now the call is personal.

You'll get the call all right, if you ask the question in your heart of hearts, ever so simply, [00:22:03] ever so directly, Lord. That, of course, bows you at his feet to start with. Jesus, my Savior, is now my Lord. Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? Two-letter word, two-letter word, like the word go. You'll be told what to do. Another man comes into that chapter that we had read to us so sweetly, and a nurse. He was a backroom boy. He was on his knees. He wasn't preaching on the platform, but the Lord spoke to him, and what did he say? He said, go into the street, call straight. Ananias argued a little, but he went. He wanted to know why.

[00:23:06] The Lord answered his questions. You know the story. And he said, his message was, this man, Saul, will be told what he must do.

Not what I would like him to do, but what he must do. And it's what he must do, not think about, and it's what he must do, not think about, not talk about, not ask about.

But the Lord requires a sort of servant, the sort of service from each one of us, which can be called doing, not guessing, not wishing, not plotting, not planning, but doing. Yes, but how does it happen? May I just say, quite humbly, you need to do just two things.

[00:24:10] You listen in, first to God, like Samuel. So you see, you can't be too young.

As soon as you've got a pair of ears, you can hear the voice of Jesus. I borrowed that phrase from a dear brother who was converted from the very depths of depravity in Newcastle a few years ago. After he'd been converted, somebody said, Tom, when ought we to start teaching our little baby

about Jesus? And he rapped out, as soon as he's got a pair of ears, Jesus, the name that means so much in heaven and earth. And [00:25:09] you've got to listen with those ears, in prayer, of course, in your heart of heart. Little Samuel, he listened, and he said, after the advice, speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. I'm listening, Lord, if only you'll speak to me. And he did, we know the story. But then we get Philip, we were hearing of last night. The Lord said to Philip, go to Gaza. Go, he said, to Gaza.

I don't believe that Philip knew why he was going to Gaza. He simply went. I'm a little worried about servants who say they've heard the instruction, but they haven't gone. [00:26:06] Philip went to Gaza, and then he saw the chariot, and he got another directive, go near. And join thyself to this chariot. What a specific instruction. I don't want to be dramatic about this, but the servant, he was a servant of the Lord. He was a servant of the Lord. He was a servant of the Lord, and he was a servant of the Lord. I don't want to be dramatic about this, but the scripture is dramatic in these things, so I can't help myself. You and I, oh, my me, my very small way, very small, not noticed by the world at all, does that matter?

I hear, go, and I go, if I'm wise. If I really mean it, if I've heard the Lord's first commission, [00:27:11] then I listen to him for the call. But there's some other kind of listening I must do. And that, too, I was going to talk about Peter. Peter got to go, too. Go with them.

Nothing doubting. Do you remember when that was said? When Peter was about to draw his cats around him and say, and did do so, said, Lord, I can't go there. It would be spiritually defiling to me to mix up with them. They're Gentiles. They're Gentiles, Lord, and I'm a strict Jew. I can't do that, Lord. Until he heard the Lord say, go. [00:28:01] Go. Nothing doubting. So you see, the Lord does speak directly to his servants, and sometimes he says things which are really surprising.

And then I must not only listen in to God, I must listen in to man, to man's need, alert, as one who wants to serve the Master. And if I do that, I must serve my fellow man.

And we get two instances I've made a note of here, where the dear Apostle Paul, waiting for the message, saw the man from Macedonia saying, not go, but come. On this time, from a fellow creature in need.

[00:29:04] Come over the border, foreign service, and help us. He heard the call from over the border.

Over the border. I'm trying not to say from overseas. Our brother has said we're insular. Yes, we're in an island. Other foreign missionaries merely have to cross borders at times. However, that by the way. Well, I love too, the invitation from the eunuch in the chariot to Philip. The Lord had said, go and join, go near. Don't stand this side for safety's sake. Don't have a gun in your pocket, and because he may not want you, the Lord said, go near and join. Not your letters, or your words, or your voice, but join thyself to this chariot. [00:30:03] When he got near, the man said, come up and sit with me. Come up and sit with me. Have you ever heard that? I have, but not in a chariot. But there's soul after soul after soul aching in their heart of hearts for some Christian like you to come up and sit with them to talk about Jesus.

So I listen into God, and I listen into man, and because the Lord has commissioned me in the first place, if I do that, I shall hear the call, the individual call, to the service that he has planned for me. You say we know all this. I'm glad you do, but I love to think of it again. Well, it's a shrinking world. I

want to speak about other countries now. It's a shrinking world. [00:31:07] We can speak around it. We can see around it. We can travel around it in 80 minutes.

It's getting less, and I believe, I'm one of those who believe that frontiers are dissolving. I'm going to say something else about that in a moment, what I do want to impress you with, just to draw your attention to, that if frontiers are dissolving, they're being replaced by something more difficult to cross at times, that's gates. As Jeffrey Bull, I could write when iron gates yield.

As those who went to the Ouka Indians could think of gates of splendor. They went through them to [00:32:06] heaven, of course, but they found almost impossible barriers, you see. You can't always guard a frontier, but you can lock a gate, and then we've got, as our brother has just reminded us, and I had it on my mind, there's curtains of iron, bamboo, purple, and the world has a pretty tight lock on these things. It astonishes me that in a day when communications are so much greater than they were, infinitely greater than even when I was a youngster 50 years ago, that the access from one to the other can be even more difficult. And let me ask you, brethren, if you don't hear all you would like about your missionary friend, your foreign laborer, will you make a note of this, that sometimes things can't be written out in that foreign country like they could, [00:33:05] they could be spoken over the radio today, but they can't even be written now, because they go so easily back, so that the brother who is laboring under a hostile government dare not say what his trouble is, in order that we might pray, because in the next to no time it's reported to that foreign government, you can see he would be in trouble. Now this is a very real difficulty, it's a sideline to what I'm saying, but let me ask you two things. To remember that some of them are more cut off than they've ever been before, by man's satan's artificial barriers, and then let me ask you to keep on praying for them, whether you know their details or not, that's a bit difficult, there's nothing that helps my prayers like information, [00:34:04] but let me take my place today in this field of labor overseas, by determining to pray by name for every foreign serving brother and sister whose name I know, they're bound to be in trouble sooner or later, they need further help if they're not in trouble. The keys to the gates and the locked curtains are in the hands though, and this is encouraging, of those whom the Lord calls to overseas service, that is certain. I think often of Moses in the Old Testament, when he was, when the Lord chose him for service, he trembled, as every servant, every true servant does, to start with, he trembles to think that he's been chosen for service, [00:35:04] and the Lord said, what is that in thine hand? What was it? He was a shepherd, it was a rod, you know that the Lord turned that shepherd's rod into a key, it led him into the palace of Pharaoh, with that rod Moses brought down the plagues upon Pharaoh, judgment, but more wonderful still, when he came to the seemingly impassable barrier of the Red Sea, it was Moses' rod, the thing he had in his hand, that provided the key, he held it over the waters and they divided. When the Lord calls you, he'll put the key into your hand, to the kind of service you've got to do. And today, I've heard some of those who really do work on the foreign field, make this plea, [00:36:09] go into the country that the Lord sent you to, go into it with the thing that the country needs, a medical degree, there are a lot of lepers, a nursing degree, there are a lot of sick, there are a lot of sick, a teaching diploma, a fittest spanner, a watchmaker's tool, but how far these are from preaching the gospel.

The finest men I know overseas, and I have watched some of them from the start, went out prepared to work, with something in their hands that was a key into the country [00:37:05] of their entry. The Lord sometimes led them after that, to put the key in their pocket and serve him whole time, but they were in. Saul of Tarsus used his tent maker's needle, but I needn't go on, I haven't time anyhow. But it does bring me to this point, that I begin to think, with great respect, that we should drop the word missionary today. There are one or two good reasons for that. Be a labourer, a worker. There are

some countries in this world, and some of my brethren here will know this, gate-crashing into other countries, to set up political and military [00:38:08] bases under the name of missionary. Well, because it's not a new trick, Satan's been doing that for years. But let us get out of our heads that we are a very superior race, going to help some other benighted race. I can foresee the day, when some countries may well consider it worthwhile, sending missionaries to this country. But brethren, we're heading for it, you know, aren't we? We're asking for it. Please come and preach the gospel here, we who knew it so well once. Well, if, and I know that there are those, who are feeling that perhaps the Lord won't send them overseas, if you get the chance to have a key in your pocket, in your hand, [00:39:10] take it. Be prepared to use it for him. He may well take that course in the next few days.

Years of enabling you to get in and work. And when you go, you're a laborer, a laborer, a worker. Not a representative of a great white government, but a worker.

Together with those of us who must perforce, because of our inability maybe, sit behind and pray like mad, and pay all we can, and help you all we can, to go forward. And that brings me to this final thing of cost. What about the cost? [00:40:02] Well, you never go into the Lord's service at your own charges. Never. Never. I could think of a brother, I do think of a brother, who told me, he's now on the foreign field, he said as a young lad, he was obviously chosen by the Lord from a very early age, for a foreign service, preaching the gospel. But he said it was a wonderful experience to him, when he found a way in a country that was not his own country, trying to learn how to prepare himself for the Lord's work. He ran short of money. He ran desperately short. He needed sixty pounds. He prayed about it.

And the next day, an old Christian lady came to him and said, I had a curious experience yesterday. I was praying, and I thought I heard the Lord say, you keep telling me that all you've got is [00:41:05] mine. Yes, Lord. Well, God gave sixty pounds to young Stanso.

That's an absolute fact. These things are not new. And that they're happening every day, and they can happen to you, and they will happen to all of us, if we look up and simply acknowledge his leadership, and we look around to see what is needed. Deep, caller unto deep, Psalm 42 says, at the noise of thy water spouts. A water spout joins the great mass of water up above, with the great mass of water below. It seems like a miracle when you see it. The deep love of God has made contact with the deep need of man. You'll find that if you've got a real deep concern to serve the Lord, there'll be a deeper need right on your doorstep, [00:42:09] or the Lord will bring it to you. But on this matter of cost, money? Yes, please. There's ample room for the expenditure, brethren, of more money in the fields of foreign service that are known even to a small company like this. Prayer? There's an insatiable need for us to pray for those who are in the forefront of the battle against the powers of darkness. And there's something else. Can there be something more? Yes. I think it springs from an attitude of mind before the Lord. But I think of what the Apostle Paul was able to say [00:43:05] to the Macedonians, of the Macedonians. They first gave their own selves unto the Lord.

They gave their own selves unto the Lord. There's a crying need for that. Maybe you feel that need.

Nobody can thrust you, my young brother or young sister, into the harvest but the Lord.

But if you feel the call, if you feel the stirring, take some of us into your confidence, would you? I want to say it like this. Somebody says, and this is rather bold, somebody says, try it but there's no opportunity among brethren. There's no missionary society. Don't be too sure.

[00:44:11] I know a servant who is now happily working in a field supported by you, who very, very nearly went to serve with a missionary society. And what was it that stopped him? I'm not speaking against missionary societies. But the thing that stopped him was this. Oh, true service always springs from devotion. I like my base, the base of my operations to be worship, devotion. That brings me back to the assembly. I jump off from the assembly, if I'm wise, [00:45:12] not linked merely with a preaching organization, but I go out from a position of being established by the Lord. I'd only like to say that that's still possible today, still possible today. And we've failed in our duties, some of us, if we haven't perhaps spoken to you a little about it. In Egypt, there are brethren there, there's a work there, which I'm just old enough to remember, started by some sisters who had it laid on their hearts to go and speak to women and girls in a land where it was [00:46:07] terribly difficult, if not impossible, for men to reach them at all. They went. In 25 years or a little more, 25,000 pounds or more have been expended on buildings alone.

And as you know, children have come, girls have come through a school, and in God's goodness, those conflated in that school are now in charge of it. Just one example. Our brother, Mr. Weston, is going to Barbados, where a work was started 100 years ago, and is thriving today. And so we could go on. There's something starting from our point of view in Colombia, where the Lord has converted, [00:47:13] as you know, perhaps, one of the rebels who had been persecuting to death the saints of God. He has converted him, and that work is going ahead. And there's Peru, there's British Guiana, there's the Caribbean islands, St. Kitts and St. Vincent's, there's Jamaica, and there's Africa, Spanish Guinea, Togoland, the Cameroons, there's the Congo, there's China. China, where the bamboo curtain has been brought down with a smash and locked at the bottom. But the devil has outstepped [00:48:07] himself because, while you can't get easily through the bamboo curtain, there are Christians behind it, working for the Lord. So let me ask you this afternoon, first of all, to hear the commission and take it to heart, then to listen for the call for your place in the Lord's work, and then to turn your eyes to other lands where the need is.

And there's something you can do. You can give your money. If you haven't any money, you can pray. You can, perhaps, encourage those, like the assembly did, who heard the voice of the Master in Heaven saying, [00:49:09] Saul and Barnabas separate them for the work to which I have called them. Only he can call Only he can call, but he expects us to help with all our powers those whom he has called. When the prize day comes, he will know how to reward.