

Convention Sermons

1935 - 2010

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of the
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Introduction

The National Association of Free Will Baptists is celebrating 75 years of ministry. To help commemorate this historic occasion, we set out to publish a book of convention sermons. This ambitious undertaking has been a challenging but rewarding experience.

Free Will Baptists have long been known for their preachers. We take a back seat to no one when it comes to the proclamation of God's Word. Through the years, some of our most capable speakers have addressed convention assemblies.

Four hundred forty-two ministers have spoken in the last 75 years at the National Association. Seventy-two have spoken multiple times—47 spoke twice, 16 spoke three times, six spoke four times, and one addressed the convention six times.

Obviously, this is *not* an exhaustive volume. In spite of our best efforts, we were unable to obtain a copy of every message that has been preached over the years. We are in debt to many who assisted us by providing outlines and manuscripts of those who have since gone to be with the Lord.

You hold in your hand a piece of Free Will Baptist history! Be blessed as you read these sermons. As you thank God for this great heritage, ask Him to raise up others from our ranks who will carry on this legacy as they preach the Word.

Keith Burden, CMP, Executive Secretary

National Association of Free Will Baptists, Inc.

Endorsement Page

The Executive Office is to be complimented for such a monumental task in preserving the history of our convention speakers and their messages. I commend you for leading your staff in this tremendous project, and them for the work they have done. History is a great teacher, and this work will share with us much of the times represented. The present and future will be blessed for this undertaking.

Dr. Alton E. Loveless, former director, Randall House Publications

A book of sermons preached at the annual convention of Free Will Baptists! What better way to celebrate our 75th anniversary year than to focus on the preaching? Biblical preaching is at the heart of Free Will Baptist worship, and so it is the highlight of our annual meetings. The sermons preached there are among the best we have to offer.

Dr. Robert E. Picirilli, former academic dean, Free Will Baptist Bible College, Nashville, Tennessee

This book serves as significant historical document for it succinctly captures the spirit, style, and substance of the sermons preached at Free Will Baptist national conventions through the years. In a denomination that prides itself on strong, scriptural, spiritual, and substantive preaching, this book gives a historical perspective on Free Will Baptist preachers and their preaching at the national convention.

Dr. Melvin Leroy Worthington Th.D, Ed.D., CMP, Executive Secretary Emeritus

1947 – Ralph Lightsey

What Think Ye of Christ?

Text: Matthew 22:42

Jesus Himself asked this question: *Whose son is He?* The Bible portrays God as eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three Persons. The Genesis account has God creating in the beginning, before anything else existed. The Gospel account says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

The eternal God took upon Himself human flesh. He was fully God and fully man in every respect.

I. What Think Ye of Christ as Creator?

- A. The Physical Universe
- B. The Animal Kingdom
- C. Man

II. What Think Ye of Christ as Sustainer?

- A. The heavens declare His glory.
- B. The sun, moon and stars praise Him.
- C. Man goes his own way. All have sinned. There is none good. Once sin is committed, someone, somewhere must pay.

III. What Think Ye of Christ as Redeemer?

- A. As God (the just one), He demanded full payment for all our sin (Romans 3:26). He laid them on Jesus (Isaiah 53:6).
- B. As Man (the justifier), He bore our sin. He satisfied the justice of God for all our sins (1 John 1 :7).
- C. As our Savior, He pleads our case. One day He will present us to the Father—holy, unblameable, and unreprieveable (Colossians 1:22, 23).

1961 – Ralph Lightsey

The Lord's Way

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:5

They gave themselves first to the Lord. Paul had knowledge of the economic conditions in the area of his missionary journeys. That being the case, he decided to help some of those who were suffering the most. It appears that he leaned toward a system of giving consistent with the ability to give.

I. The Conditions in Macedonia

- A. Persecution
- B. Poverty
- C. Need

II. The Response of the Macedonians

- A. They gave themselves first to the Lord.
- B. They sought the will of the Lord.
- C. They gave generously (above expectations).

III. The Results of their Commitment

- A. There was joy.
- B. There was surprise.
- C. There was victory.

For those who surrender completely, there is the Pentecostal example.

1. The hundred and twenty waited in the Upper Room.
2. No one was uninterested.
3. No one was indifferent.
4. No one was absent.
5. All were present in one accord, in one place, for one thing.

1961 – William Hill

Commitment to Christ

Text: Matthew 16:24-26

We are looking at the strife between the disciples in their struggle for positions of authority and prestige. The 10 disciples were angry with James and John for requesting special seats on either side of Jesus in His Kingdom.

Then Jesus asked them if they were ready and able to drink the bitter cup and be baptized into suffering and death with Him. They replied, "We are able."

In this passage Jesus tells them that He is now ready to drink and be baptized by facing the Cross.

Peter is appalled and rebukes Jesus. Jesus rebukes Peter and tells him that with that kind of attitude he is not on God's side but aligning himself with Satan.

Jesus was not an armchair general who sat in an ivory tower and gave orders to men on the front lines. He did not play with the lives of men as a chess player does with expendable pawns. What He demands of His disciples, He is willing to face before them.

Here in verse 34 is one of the greatest declarations of Jesus concerning discipleship. In this declaration are two of the most difficult words a person can ever face—deny and cross. We almost choke when we read them.

There is no such thing as discipleship or following Jesus on any less terms. We need to differentiate between denial of self and self-denial.

We usually think of self-denial as abstaining from certain pleasures or luxuries during the Lenten season, which is 40 days of abstinence, alms giving and acts of devotion beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding Easter Eve.

One of the traps of self-denial is pride, applauding ourselves for our control or generosity, making ourselves a "spiritual Little Jack Horner" and whispering, "What a good boy am I."

The denial of self is much deeper and much more difficult. Rather than eliciting pride, it elicits humiliation.

Self-denial relates to denying something. Denial of self relates to denying someone, namely the self. To deny self is to dethrone self and to enthrone God. It is to subordinate the clamoring ego and its pre-occupation with I—me—mine. It is to say, no to its whimpering insistence of having its own way.

I anticipate many people's negative response to this statement who say, "Many Christians agonizingly struggle with a low self-esteem, and you come along and say they are to deny the very self they so desperately need to build up." They go on to say, "Are you advocating Christian masochism? Self-hate? Does a miserable, unhappy existence as a Christian authenticate piety and commitment?"

No! that is not what I am advocating. Miserable Christians make poor witnesses. Denial of self is not self-hate.

Self-love or self-hate? Which does God want? What does He require? Are you and I as Christians to practice a self-denial so severe that life becomes a sort of living death? How does dying enable us to live—and to live productively?

God is not in the business of breaking Christians down, reducing them to zeros. God is in the business of building Christians up, maximizing their talents and fulfilling their potential. He is not out to diminish selfhood. Selfhood is what you and I are as human beings created in God's image.

A healthy love of self is not self-centeredness. If you don't love yourself, you cannot possibly love others. If you try to love others without a proper love for self, they sap the very life out of you and you end up in disaster for then you hate them as well.

God is in the business of making us as His children the happiest, the best, the most productive persons we can be. But in order to maximize our selfhood, God has to help us get rid of our self-centeredness, our self-concern, our sinful selfishness.

What I am saying is that when the self dominates and controls, it pushes God and others out of the picture. The self-centered ego manipulates and uses and abuses others for its own selfish gratification and then discards them when it is finished.

When we lose God, we become God. Did you ever see a happy, contented self-centered person? Every self-centered person becomes a self-disrupted person.

Jesus has every right to demand of His disciples the denial of self because He willingly denied Himself (Philippians 2:5-11).

When we refuse to deny the self, we deny Jesus.

An example of this is Peter who denied Jesus out of fear and shame (Matthew 26:69-75).

Let's not be too eager to condemn Peter. How often have we been guilty of denying our Lord by the way we live and by refusing to be a witness?

Peter wept bitterly over His sin of denying Jesus. May we be as repentant.

We also may deny Jesus by having a weak, watered-down doctrine of Christology. One of the concerns among evangelical leaders is the biblical illiteracy among our people. Many of us are mentally lazy which leads us down the road to gullibility where we are swayed back and forth by winds of false doctrine. Many of us are not interested in deep thinking.

We do not want to wrestle with the theology of the existence of God, creation vs. evolution, the incarnation, the Trinity, sin, salvation, Heaven, Hell. We leave this to the theologians, philosophers, and pastors. After all, that's what we pay them to do.

I realize that laymen have not given their lives to the study of doctrine that theologians and pastors have, and they are not expected to know as much. But could you give an intellectual defense for your faith if challenged?

There must be a balance of head knowledge and heart experience. Head knowledge alone breeds cold, dead orthodoxy. Heart experience alone breeds weak, shallow faith.

We also may deny Christ when we fail to love our neighbor as our self.

Too many contemporary Christians are looking for what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called, "cheap grace," A grace that does not cost us anything.

After denial of self, the disciple is to take up his cross and follow his Lord to death.

Punishment by the cross was the Roman way of exacting extreme torment and disgrace upon criminals. The disciples had seen condemned

men carrying their own crosses to some nearby Golgotha.

They understood the symbolism. Jesus invites His followers to death—death to self.

The cross Jesus talks about is not some mere inconvenience. It is not some boring routine of duty. It is not our shortcomings of temperament and disposition or uncontrolled emotion. It is more than calamity or tragedy. It is more than some burden we bear. It is the choice of taking upon ourselves someone else's burden—or the suffering we choose to endure for Jesus' sake.

The cross is Calcutta for Mother Teresa, Lambarene for Albert Schweitzer, Africa for David Livingstone, Philippines for Gary and Janet Friezen, Europe for Ben and Marty Mosher.

God's grace is seen in His people. The way we wear our thorns and survive. But God wants to share His glory with us, His triumph, His throne. It comes when we pick up our cross and follow Him.

1963 – Ben Scott

Victorious Christian Living

(Sermon Excerpts)

It is said that a passenger on a large airliner became disturbed one night while in flight. She walked to the cockpit and asked the pilot, "Where are we now?" To which the pilot replied, "Well, right now we're lost." Then, taking note of the passenger's concerned look, he added, "But we're making good time!"

I believe this presents a true picture of this present generation. We don't know exactly where we are, but I think we all know we're making pretty good time!

The decade in which we live has been described as "The Soaring Sixties." And I think it is! Man has soared higher into space than ever before. Our national debt is higher than it ever was. Our national crime rate is soaring year after year. Our juvenile problems are soaring; the consumption of alcoholic beverages is increasing year after year. These are truly the Soaring Sixties.

This is an age that has traded God for gadgets. We, like the men of Jeremiah's day, have forsaken the Fountain of living waters and hewed us out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. We have tried to defy the Word of the Lord Jesus Who said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

So far, we have failed to prove Christ wrong. We take more aspirins for our headaches than any generation. In fact, this might well be called the age of the pill. The tranquilizer takes its place on many a medicine cabinet shelf. We take a pill to pep us up; we take a pill to calm us down; we take a pill to put us to sleep; and we take a pill to keep us awake.

But there is something wrong with the world tonight that a pill cannot cure! Morally, we are sick. Spiritually, we are sick. Socially, we are sick. To a great extent, even the church itself is sick. We need a spiritual transfusion of the life that only comes from the Son of God.

Jesus said to His followers, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of

good cheer; I have overcome the world."The question that perplexes a lot of people is: How, in a world like this, can we have victory? How can we live above the clouds? How can we stay on the right road in a world that's lost its way?

In answer to these questions, I offer three imperatives for victorious Christian living. First, our attitude toward Christ. Second, our relationship with the Holy Spirit. And third, a proper attachment to this present world.

We're living in a day when many religionists are beckoning with open arms and saying, "Come on, fellows, let's all get in the same boat and ride together." And about the only stipulation they make is that we look toward the starry skies and acknowledge that somewhere there is a God Who is the Father of us all. I tell you, it is not enough that we merely believe there is a God. It makes a great deal of difference what we believe about God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! There's a man in our town who has told me different times, "The world has twelve saviors." I don't know who they are; I'm not interested. The Bible says there is one Savior.

You'll never know real victory in your soul until you settle it once and for all what you believe about Jesus Christ! Jesus Himself declared, "For if ye believe not that I am He ye shall die in your sins!" And in the same chapter He said, "Where I am ye cannot come." The greatest question facing us today is, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" To that question, I hope we'll affirm with all the conviction of our souls. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

1964 – Ken Walker

The Call to Christian Maturity

Text: Acts 20:32

May I begin by using some of Paul's words to relate my feelings about my subject? Philippians 3:13, 14.

I consider this my opportunity to share some things with you that if preached and taught in the Spirit, and received in the Spirit, will build a mature church. Whether I learned this by success or failure, by the easy road or the road of hard-knocks, is of no concern. That they will work and are needful to get a job done for God is our concern.

Our text speaks of the Ephesian church. Paul had a brief visit (Acts 18:19, 20) at Ephesus on his second missionary journey. He later returned (Acts 19) on his third journey and spent three years with them.

The Ephesian Christians were saved out of great idolatry. There was the worship of Diana (Acts 19:35) that not only affected the local people but many from afar came to worship her. The making of idols was a big business, a business that nearly collapsed when people began to accept Christ. It was during this time that Paul was confronted with a labor union riot and mob violence. Still we are told that the "Word of God grew and prevailed" (Acts 19:20). It is my firm conviction that when a man gets saved he can say with Ephraim of old, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

Having departed then to travel throughout Macedonia, it seemed that Paul could not get the Ephesians off his mind (Acts 20:16). Though he did not return to Ephesus, he was to pass through Miletus, not far away, on his way home. Arriving there, he was so concerned with the churches at Ephesus that he sent for the elders to come to him that he might review his ministry among them.

He wanted the Ephesian Christians to grow up in the faith into maturity. It is evident that he considered the elder as the key man in this program.

My message to you is taken from Paul's to them, a message designed to lead us to Christian maturity. He knew they had been saved out of sensual and idolatrous backgrounds and he knew what it would take to lead them

on to maturity. The same things are needed by us today.

His message was to the elders, and mine will be pointed in that direction.

I. Things Spoken by Paul to Help One Grow Up in the Faith

A. Humility (verses 19, 24)

1. Humble in spite of failure or discouragement; "tears."
2. Humble in spite of hard trials or "temptations."

Learn: It is easier to stay humble when things are going well. But we succumb to that awful tendency to get a critical attitude when adversity comes along. Some preachers' hearts get so hardened toward people. The ability to love the unlovely is lost. And with it go the tears, the compassion, and the zeal. Lord, give me a soft heart, a heart that can feel another's woe, the sinner's plight, and the Christian's hurt.

Fellow preacher-pastor, we cannot labor effectively without hearts of love and humility of mind. We will act as children, immature to the task before us, unburdened for the task.

Some college students were being taken on a tour of the city's slum area when a young lady in the group saw a child playing in the gutter. The child was very dirty and her condition irritated the student. She commented, "Why doesn't the mother of this child clean it up?" The guide heard her and gave the following answer to the student: "You hate dirt, but you do not love the child enough to clean it up. The mother loves the child but does not hate dirt. Until love for the child and hatred for the dirt is found in the same person, the child will remain dirty."

It can also be said that until love for souls and hatred for sin are found in the same heart, there will be no motivation to reach them with the Gospel which can cleanse their souls.

Did this church succeed? Evidently for a while (Revelation 2:1-7). Then it slipped into the barrenness of professionalism. The work of the church became a business affair rather than a love affair for Jesus and lost souls. They lost their humility and love. "Beware of the barrenness of busyness!"

Digress: Maturity is not synonymous with versatility. One may have many strings to his bow, but there is greater value in having one bow, a string, a

hand, and an eye that will every time send the arrow into the bull's eye of the target. Notice: the machinist who "works in" anywhere is not the one who is put on the nicest work. On the other hand, "A strong, definite purpose is many-handed, and lays hold of whatever is near that can serve it."

Ministers, pin down your ministry! Just what has God called you to do? Beware, lest we become Jacks of all trades and masters of none. A minister who knows his calling and ministers with a soft heart and humility of mind will make his mark for God.

B. A Recognition of the Whole Counsel of God (verses 20, 27)

1. How did he go about doing this? (verse 20)

a. By example... "shewed you." This example spoke of a dedication that said, "Neither count I my life dear to myself" (verse 24). This dedication manifested itself in a life of selflessness; that is real maturity. It is a mistake to speak of dedication as sacrifice. We obey a duty, not choose a sacrifice. This maturity will cause one to:

(1) Live under a purpose rather than under an impulse. The need is not for educated men but trained men with purpose.

(2) Set aside the thought of enjoyment and get to thinking of attainment. Ministers, look out when all you hear around your house is, "When are we going to take some time for ourselves?" How do we reconcile that with 1 Corinthians 7:29?

(3) Conceive life as a race instead of a drift. Munger said, "Better to be born blind than not to see the glory of life." The abundant life is known by few churches.

b. By public discourse... "publicly." We cannot discharge all our responsibility here. We need the swift currents of public discourse, but we also need the trickling brooks of private witnessing.

c. By private witnessing... "house to house." Someone has called this Acts 20:20 Vision. Well put.

Uncle John Vassar was a great preacher and soul winner. He would preach revival meetings and during the daytime hours go up and down the streets witnessing. One day someone slammed the door right in his face.

His reaction was noteworthy. He walked to the edge of the porch, sat down and began to sing, "But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe; Here Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do..." singing four stanzas of the hymn "At the Cross." He did his best and went to the next house.

A solemn thought. Can you and I say the words of verse 26 with Paul?

Preachers are to preach the Word. You say, Amen. But this is not, to my knowledge, one of our problems, theologically speaking.

Preachers are to preach, and this is one of our problems. Brothers, how many preachers does God call to pastor one church? It is very difficult to build a mature Christian church when you have so many "pastor's assistants" and each with his own ideas. It is confusing to the pastor, the church, and to God's work.

If you are called to preach, get out and preach! Find a stump, a street corner, build a church, do Home Mission work; but get out and go to work. Now!

2. What did he teach? (verse 21)

- a. He taught genuine repentance (verse 21). Have we let down the standard to get numbers? Illustration: Rise of membership and rise of crime. When a man gets saved, he quits his meanness. Have we let down the standard? Is Christ's blood too weak to prevail?

Much of today's church squabbling can be laid to unsaved church members. Some people are ignorant to the church's real program and purpose and need to be taught and want to be taught; others are either cold or reluctant to the church's program and need to be revived; still others are opposed to any progressive move in the church, and these simply need to get saved. A dose of genuine repentance will do the work!

- b. He taught them to take heed unto themselves and to the flock (verse 28).

- (1) By submitting yourselves to the Holy Spirit (verses 22, 23, 28). Be a bond slave for Jesus. Give yourself over to the Spirit in reckless abandonment, holy desperation. Consider the Declaration of Independence. Most Americans are aware that July 4, 1776, is a great date in our nation's history. It was then that we stated our Declaration of Independence. There

needs to be a time in each Christian's life when he/she states a Declaration of Dependence upon the Holy Spirit's work in one's life. Oh, how we need the Spirit's guidance in the ministry.

- (2) By feeding Christ's purchased possession. (Matthew 4:4, an inseparable trio, God's will, way and Word.)
- (3) By guarding the flock (verses 29-31). A senator once said something like this, "There are sparrows roosting and tweeting in pulpits today where eagles once stood." We need the zeal and burden of Richard Baxter who said, "I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."
- (4) By teaching the stewardship of giving (verses 33-35). "What I do with my money reveals my spiritual me." May I add, it reveals also my maturity. Christian maturity will recognize God's ownership of our material possessions. "He is a wise steward of life who relinquishes the temporal to lay hold on the eternal promises of God."

The pastor was exhorting his people as to what books were needed in a worship service. He said, "We need the Good Book, The Bible, for our message and food for the soul. We will need a hymn book so we can sing and worship God from our hearts. And we need our pocketbooks so we can worship God with our tithes and offerings."

II. What Are the Tools Designed for Our Use to Bring About This Maturity?

A. Commitment to God. This involves:

1. Loyalty—to Christ first, then the church. If the church has been faithful to us, we should be loyal to her. Still, monies that should have been given to the church are used for vacation funds. Convention funds? No wonder the summer slump. This loyalty doesn't mean I will never move my letter from back home!
2. Steadfastness—consistent, dependable. A lover writes: "Dearest Annabelle, I could swim the mighty ocean for one glance from your lovely eyes; I could walk through a wall of flame for one touch of your little hand; I could leap the widest stream for one

word from your warm lips. As always, your own, Oscar. P.S. I'll be over to see you Sunday night if it doesn't rain." Or as another similar conversation went, "Your fiance is a charming man. He has a certain something." "Yes," came the reply, "but I would rather he had something certain."

3. Involvement. Where do these "trunk Baptists" fit in? Consider the rape victim in New York. Thirty-odd persons watched, none helped. Why? The words of one, "I didn't want to get involved."
 4. The second look—at Calvary, at Hell, at the great commission, at Christian responsibility.
- B. Convinceableness of the Word. The "word of His grace" spoken here refers to the Gospel. Paul said it was "the power of God unto salvation." A man wanted his pocket New Testament re-bound and imprinted with "The New Testament." When he received his book, he was told the printer did not have small enough type to do so, so he abbreviated: TNT. Dear hearts, the Word will:
1. Build you up (Read It Through in 62). I was convinced anew of this in the N.A.E. A revival spirit appeared as a result.
 2. Give you an inheritance.
 3. Tie the sanctified ones closer together.

Learn: Ephesians 6:17. The Word will not cut, reprove, do its work, unless it is yielded by the Spirit. It is the sword of the Spirit. A yielded heart with Bible in hand is the greatest authority on earth. Are we convinced of its power?

Acts 20:32 (*Amplified New Testament*): "And, now, brethren, I commit you to God—that is, I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care. And I commend you to the word of His grace—to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor. It is able to build you up and to give you (your rightful) inheritance among all God's set-apart ones—those consecrated, purified and transformed of the soul."

Conclusion

The elder is in a most important position. He is an important key to building a mature church. He is the leader, a leader that must lead his people:

1. Into a faith program.
2. Into a deeper life.
3. Into a state of holy desperation.
4. Into an effectual prayer life.
5. Into a deep evangelistic fervor, to be reproducers.
6. Into a worldwide missions program.
7. Into a recognition of the hand as well as the cup.
8. Into a deep respect for the Bible.
9. Into a brigade of contenders for the faith.
10. Into a mature Christian Church, the last of which will be the result of the aforementioned.

We must not fail—we will not fail—if we keep our commitment to God, our convinceableness of the Word.

A mature Christian will face the challenge where he is. He will not live on “has beens” or “past blessings.” He will not always have to refer to “How it was back home” in order to say something about his service for the Lord. He will consider the following: separation as opposed to isolation; meat as opposed to milk; witnessing as opposed to silence; selflessness as opposed to selfishness; burden as opposed to apathy; and cross-bearing as opposed to a drifting, convictionless life.

We have spent millions, yea, perhaps billions, in our conquest of outer space, but if we leave our mark for God in this present world we must begin devoting much time to the “Conquest of Inner Space.”

Let us state our Declaration of Dependence upon Almighty God; live separated, consecrated lives for His glory; and let every Christian become a showcase example of effective Christianity.

1965 – LaVerne Miley

Even So, Send I You

Text: John 20:19-22

Introduction

I count it a privilege to speak to you in behalf of Christ concerning His claim upon your life and mine. You have heard a message on the death of Jesus Christ and another on His resurrection. This message is based on the commission that He gave to His disciples that first resurrection day. [Read John 20:19-22.]

I. The Commission Given

- A. Christ's mission as He came forth from the Father and took upon Him the form of flesh was to give Himself a ransom for a sin-cursed humanity, and to pay in full the penalty for sin on the Cross of Calvary (2 Corinthians 5:21; Mark 10:45; 1 John 2:2). This mission was fully and completely accomplished in the substitutionary offering of Christ on Calvary.
- B. Christ's commission was to make known to the world the purpose of this mission through works of mercy and grace and through the preaching of His Gospel, and to call men to repentance toward God and to faith in Himself (Luke 5:30-32). The commission had been shared by the followers of Christ during His earthly ministry. Examples:
 - 1. The sending forth of the twelve (Matthews 10:5-8).
 - 2. The sending forth of the seventy (Luke 10:1-3, 8, 9, 16, 17).

Now, after the death and resurrection of Christ, this commission is transmitted wholly to His followers. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

II. Why This Commission?

- A. Why did God send His only begotten Son to die on Calvary? There is only one answer: John 3:16.

B. The Great Commission stems from the love of God for a sin-cursed world and from His desire to bring men to Himself and to save them (2 Peter 3:9). The human mind cannot comprehend the marvelous love of God.

C. God has given to us this commission because in His infinite wisdom He has chosen to use human instrumentality. We are to be personal representatives of the crucified, buried, risen and exalted Christ. We are to preach Christ crucified for the sins of the world and risen for the justification of all believers.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Brethren, it's a serious business.

III. The Enduement of Power

A. The Scripture tells us that when Jesus had given the Great Commission, He breathed on them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." I believe that then and there on that first Easter Sunday evening was given to the disciples an earnest, a down-payment, of the effusion of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Church 50 days later on the day of Pentecost.

B. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, man is wholly incapable of executing the Great Commission; that is why Christ imparted to His followers the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

1. It is the Holy Spirit who unfolds unto us the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection—the two fundamental facts in human redemption. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to bear witness to these facts.

2. It is the Holy Spirit who will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment and will perform the task of regeneration in the hearts of those who believe if we are faithful in executing this Great Commission. Thank God for the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. The Challenge

"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." This solemn charge was

given to the assembled believers on the evening of Christ's resurrection, and it is binding upon the Church until Jesus comes. It does not belong exclusively to a special group of Christ's followers called missionaries; it rests upon every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the preeminent responsibility in your life and mine. It is the claim of Christ upon your life.

I remember the time when to me the Great Commission of our Lord meant giving that others might go with the Gospel of Christ. Illustration: giving of \$10 bill.

I remember when to me the Great Commission meant not only giving that others might go but also praying for those who had gone. Illustration: after dinner prayer band, calling missionaries by name.

I remember the time when to me the execution of the Great Commission meant that I had to go myself as a personal representative of Jesus Christ our Lord. It wasn't an easy step to take, especially with a wife and three children. After several years of struggle, I finally yielded and said "Yes" to the Lord. You see, I had no alternative. It was as though the Lord Jesus Christ Himself were saying, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Could I say "No" to Him Who had bought me with His own precious blood?

There was no alternative.

Five years ago, I stood before the National Association assembled in Fresno, California, and told that group assembled there why we were going to the regions beyond as medical missionaries. I will not repeat that testimony here. It will suffice to say that He had miraculously led and provided for us that we might go.

We did go—in November 1960—13 months in France to study the language and a course in tropical medicine.

In January 1962, we arrived in Ivory Coast. Brother Dan Merkh was building our house; the clinic had not yet been begun. We felt we were not ready to begin the medical work. But an epidemic of meningitis struck. The patient load mounted: 50, 100, 150, 200. In January 1963, the clinic was officially opened, and treating of patients was begun on an organized basis. Patients had to pay: four cents for the first visit, and two cents for subsequent visits; penicillin 10 cents.

The Word of God was given forth in two different languages at first, by means of tape-recorded messages—later in four languages. People listened;

the Word of God is powerful. I suppose that nearly 10,000 different people have heard the Word of God by this means during the past two-and-one-half years.

Day in and day out people came for treatment: malaria, pneumonia, filarial, snail fever, yaws, venereal disease, hepatitis, hook worm, guinea worm, dysenteries, and a host of other illnesses. And I must admit that some days after treating 150 or 200 patients, one begins to tire and the load seems heavy, especially if one is called out in the middle of the night to minister to someone who is in need.

But, you may ask, is it really worthwhile? Is the medical ministry being used to win people to the Lord Jesus Christ, which, after all, is our primary purpose for being there? Let me say something to you here that I want you to remember: God does not call His servant to perform a task that is not worthwhile. Never. But you have a right to ask the question: Is it really worthwhile? Let me reply by giving a couple of illustrations:

1. The little old lady from Tiarbiella; the turning of many to Jesus Christ.
2. The injury of Filtite Kambire; the conversion of Bempate.

I believe with all my heart that we are just beginning to see the fruits of our labors and that we would be welcomed into scores of villages round about us and people would hear and believe, just as they have at Tiarbiella, if we had the time and laborers to go. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth more laborers into His harvest.

Conclusion: [Read letter from Joseph.] I wish you could know Joseph (Rumplestiltskin, tall, thin, spindly legs, undernourished, but nearly always smiling or laughing). Sunday mornings he goes with me to Tiarbiella. Thank God for Joseph. There are other Josephs—many of them—still diamonds in the rough. Someone has to go seek them out and bring them to the Lord.

Tonight, in this vast congregation, surely there are those to whom the Lord is speaking, and saying, "As my Father has sent me, even so send I you." Would you not reply: "Here am I, Lord; send me."

1965 – Robert Picirilli

Because I Live: The Miracle and Meaning of Easter

Text: Matthew 28:1-8; John 14:19

Introduction

My purpose is not to rehearse the story—though it never grows old with the telling.

My purpose is also not to reaffirm our faith in the truth that Jesus arose from the dead, though that is always worthwhile. He did not simply swoon on the cross and revive in the cool shade of the tomb. It was not a tale prevaricated by the disciples. And it is not enough to experience the influence of Christ in our hearts. All these are tragic lies invented by people who are too sophisticated to believe in the miracle-working power of Almighty God, who have therefore invented a pathetic deity of their own.

No: Jesus arose bodily from the tomb, and our faith is founded on that historical fact, and as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain.”

But, as I said, that is not my purpose today. Instead, I want us to focus, for a few minutes, on the miracle and meaning of Easter.

Where, then, is the real miracle of that first Easter morning? Do we dare look for the miracle among so many?

Is it the frightening earthquake of verse 2, which must have shook not just the land under their feet but the confidence of the very souls of the disciples? Yet another portent of the faith-shattering events of Friday, did they think?

Or is it the visible appearance of an angel from Heaven, standing there with his countenance like lightning and his clothing brilliant white? No wonder the women at the tomb trembled at such an awesome spectacle!

Or is it the rolled-back stone? Heavy, back-breaking stone. The women knew they couldn’t roll it away from the entry into the tomb; perhaps they hoped to get the soldiers standing guard to help them. But when they arrived they found it already moved aside, miraculously.

Is it the neatly-collapsed grave-clothes, lying there almost undisturbed, the head-wrapping to itself, as though removed before one left his bedroom to present himself in public?

Is it Jesus' fleeting appearances: at first unrecognized by the Magdalene and by the two on the road to Emmaus? Or to the disciples in the upper room behind closed doors? Miraculous things, all of these, but not the miracle.

Indeed, if you'll pardon me for saying so, the miracle is not even to be found in a dead body's return to the world of the living. There were others—Lazarus, for example—who came back to life from the dead. Some of them were spectacular, indeed, as when they were burying a man whose corpse touched the bones of a long-dead man of God, and the man came alive! So there were other empty tombs—for awhile, anyway. Sure, those were all miracles, as was Jesus' resurrection.

But His was more than the resurrection of someone from the dead, as miraculous as that is. There are deeper meanings in Jesus' resurrection, and in those meanings is found the real miracle of Easter.

I. There is the miracle of conquered Hell.

All His life, and especially during the last, critical days, Jesus was doing battle with the forces of Hell. As early as Eden, it had been promised that the old serpent would strike and poison the heel of the seed of the woman, and that was occurring on the cross. Picture Satan, if you will, standing on the front row of the mob at Calvary, howling with fiendish glee, whispering his mockery into the ears of the humans there and delighting as they parroted the ridicule.

They did not understand what was really transpiring, but Jesus and Satan did. And while Jesus bided His time, Satan exulted in triumph. Or so he thought.

I wonder if a shudder crept down Satan's spine when Jesus said "It is finished!"—and it sounded like a victor's cry. I don't know, but I'm confident that on a cool April morning three days later he learned the meaning of those words. Yes, he beat the women there, he watched when the angel rolled back the stone, he had already crept in and seen the empty tomb. His prey had escaped alive! He must have felt the chains tightening around his neck. Indeed, it was finished, the battle was done and won. Jesus had

conquered the forces of Hell.

A famous French infidel named Renan once wrote a life of Jesus. After describing the crucifixion, he ended his story with the word *Finis*. To which his publisher attached a wood-cut of the crucifixion: Jesus hanging on a cross with drooping head and matted hair and pale, blood-streaked face, deserted by all, storm-clouds looming overhead, black-pinioned birds circling.

But only fools think that is the finish. Jesus is not defeated, Hell is. The resurrection sounds the death-knell for Satan and all his henchmen.

The apostle Paul paints the results of this battle in an interesting word-picture in Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 4:8:

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men.

In New Testament times, it was customary for a victorious Roman general to be welcomed home in triumphant celebration. An archway was erected at the entrance to the city. A parade was arranged to enter there and march through the city. Vanquished captives to be executed or enslaved led the parade, followed by the conquering general in a splendid chariot loaded with the spoils taken in battle. As he rode by the cheering crowds, he would toss out this item or that to fortunate bystanders along the way. Incense pots lined the streets on the route.

That's the picture in Colossians and Ephesians. See them as they pass. A long row of defeated captives, stripped half naked, hands bound behind their backs, their necks linked with ropes one after the other. They are the principalities and powers Paul mentions, the forces of spiritual wickedness, and Satan heads the column. And see there the conquering King driving them. It is our Savior, making a public show of his defeated enemies, mounting up to Heaven in triumph!

Sure, only those with spiritual eyesight view the scene, and Satan himself only half realizes what happened, fighting on futilely with his eternal enemy. But this is what happened when Jesus ascended up on high, and the final culmination waits only for His timing. Until then, Satan and Hell are already defeated.

It is as if Jesus went from the cross into Hell and placed His foot on the neck of the conquered enemy and proclaimed the victory. And on Sunday morning He rode forth in triumph proclaiming to one and all that He has conquered Hell.

II. There is also the miracle of conquered sin.

Go back with me to the trial of Jesus and remember what happened there, and how it expressed mankind's rejection of Him. See Him standing in Pilate's courtyard, head bowed, as Pilate feebly tries to get the crowd to ask for Jesus' release. "What then shall I do with Jesus?" he asks in exasperation when they request, instead, that a criminal be released. "Crucify Him," they cry. First one and then the whole crowd calls out: "Release Barabbas, let Jesus be crucified." What did Jesus feel when they preferred a murderer to Him, when they jeered at Him and expressed against Him sinful humanity's rejection of God? Did tears fill His eyes?

So they led Him away to execution hill, as the crowd lined the Via Dolorosa and mocked every step. When He stumbled and fell under the weight of the cross, they laughed.

Can we even imagine the suffering of His soul as He felt the terrible weight of rejection? People He loved, people He came to save, demand His crucifixion, beat Him, nail Him to a cross, and mock Him.

And, you see, we were part of that mob! As Charles Wesley used to say, "My name is written in His hands." Every time they sing it, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" my heart beats the answer, "I was there. I did those things to Him.

But, you see, our rejection, our sins did not conquer Him. We nailed Him to a tree, and He died and was entombed, and you would think that He was defeated. But on the third day, yes on the third day He strode forth in victory and peace. He conquered our sins, our rejection of Him and God the Father, our wicked and rebellious hearts, our will to have it our way.

I trust you understand what this means. It means that He has forgiven us for our sins, including what we did to Him on Calvary. Remember that He prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them." And Paul says in Romans 4:25 that He was raised for our justification, our forgiveness. He accepted the hurt of our rejection and the separating wrath of His Father for our sins, and came forth having satisfied God's holy demands. It means He

has triumphed over all our sins, that He has taken them on Himself and borne them—and they were a far heavier burden than a Roman cross. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, God the Father has, on our behalf, made Him to be sin for us, Him who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

See Him on the cross. Written there are all my sins and yours and the sins of the whole world. That is the crime for which He dies. Now see Him on Sunday morning: the resurrection is God's declaration that our sins have been forgiven!

Now add to this, if you will. It also means that sin no longer has dominion over us. Because He lives, we too are alive. When He came forth alive from the tomb, we too were born again, made alive, raised from the dead! Our sins had slain us: read again Ephesians 2:1-10 if you don't believe me. As Jesus did for Lazarus, so He stood outside the cemetery of our souls and gently called, "Come forth!" and the rushing wind of the Spirit filled the tomb and we walked out alive.

We are therefore freed from the enslavement of sin. When Lazarus came forth, he was still bound by the grave-wrappings. We, too, were dead, bound by the wrappings of our spiritual death, in bondage to sin. "Loose him And let him go," then, is for us too. We've been freed from the dominion and power of sin.

This means, then, that we won't have to pay the penalty for our sins. That's one form of the bondage, isn't it! But they were nailed to His cross with Him; He took the curse on Himself, and He came forth alive. We too are alive, and eternal death has no more dominion over us.

And it means that we can have victory even now. Maybe not sinless perfection: that's a matter for another discussion. But Jesus didn't arise in triumph for us to remain defeated. As Romans 6 puts it, when He died and arose we died and arose with Him and the old man—the person you used to be—was buried and you came forth a new person. In verse 7, there, Paul says: He who has died has been freed from sin!

Let the historical fact of Jesus' death and resurrection never be doubted. But it's more than historical fact; it's also existential experience. The power of the resurrected Christ is yours and mine for a new life in triumph over sin. Lay claim to that.

III. Finally, there is the miracle of conquered death.

Here I'm not thinking primarily of spiritual death, though that's involved. But that's what the conquest of Hell and sin address. I'm thinking now of the conquering of physical death. That, too, is the meaning and miracle of Easter.

Mankind was not created to die. Death is, as Paul calls him in 1 Corinthians 15, an enemy, a fraternal twin of Hell who stole his way into our lives. He is an interloper; his fearful countenance has no rightful place in human history. Through sin he obtained a fixed grip on us, and he clings tenaciously, a hideous monster ever choking just a little more life from our bodies.

It was that way on that first Good Friday. Death waited in the wings, chortling with glee when the mob cried out, "Crucify him!" He stalked his prey all the way up Calvary and finally leapt on our Savior's pierced body and claimed another victim. Death had defeated even the Son of God!

It was a black hour indeed. The disciples grieved and scattered. The women watched where they entombed Him and planned to return after the Sabbath was done, for the sad task of anointing His body. On the way there, that Sunday morning before light they wondered about the stone. They were somber and downcast, disheartened, defeated. He had raised others, but He was dead. He had spoken of hope, but everything was hopeless.

I think the clouds hung low that morning in dismal prospect, the darkness delaying its departure. The trees bowed low in grief, and the sheep grazing nearby were still. Satan and death stood watch, loathe to leave the scene of so great a victory, their glee unseen and unshared by the human and physical world.

But it was not long on that April morning before the sun broke clear in the skies and drove all the little shadows into hiding. The trees straightened and lifted their branches in silent praise to their maker. The birds sang sweet melodies. The fog dispersed and the dew glistened in the sunlight.

I wonder if the women thought bitterly how the world could be so bright when all was so dark within. But it wasn't long before their hearts were just as bright and joyful. An angel gave them the glad news: "He is not here. He is risen. No need to seek the living among the dead!"

Death's victory was only apparent, for just a moment. The Son of God breaks its grip and walks out alive. Death cannot keep his prey, He tore the bars away. The grave has been robbed, death is defeated. No wonder Paul can exult, mocking death: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

Yes, death is still an enemy, but for the believer there is assurance that in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, though it be the last enemy, it will be destroyed. We face death, though with a measure of dread, with confidence and hope, in stark contrast to those who do not know Him.

They say that Tom Paine, notorious infidel, on his death bed alternated between begging Jesus for mercy and cursing Him, that one of his nurses was so upset over his blasphemy that she left the room and declared she would never attend the deathbed of another infidel. Dwight L. Moody, on the other hand, when told that the time of his death was upon him, responded: "Earth recedes, heaven opens. This is my coronation day. I am going home. If this is death, there is no dark valley here."

Death has been defeated. What a delightful trick our Lord has played on this ancient enemy, that his dreaded work is but a vehicle to convey into the presence and blessedness of our dear Savior, our true home. His worst attack is our finest hour. Spurgeon said, "Death...is the waiting room where we robe ourselves for immortality, the place where the body bathes...that it may be fit for the embrace of its Lord."

We face ugly death, then, with confidence. And that's not all: in the power of Christ's resurrection our vile bodies, which are subjected for a time to death's stranglehold, will be lifted, like His, into newness of life from the grave.

By the first Adam, and his sin, came death. By the second Adam, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 again, comes the resurrection of the dead. Christ the first-fruits, he says, then they that are Christ's at His coming. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout of command to the dead, and the dead in Christ shall arise.

Death has been conquered by the resurrection of Jesus Christ out from among the dead.

Conclusion

What is the miracle and meaning of Easter, then? Among so many miracles, this is it: the miracle of conquered Hell, defeated as our enemy and destination; the miracle of conquered sin, so that we are delivered from its curse, its bondage, and its penalty; the miracle of conquered death, enabling us to face its horrifying visage in confidence and hope.

See Jesus on that first Lord's day, then, as He walks forth in triumph from the empty tomb. Look there, like Samson of old, He has a gate under one arm; it is the gate of Hell. In the other hand are open shackles, the very cuffs that bound us in sin as doomed slaves. And hanging on His belt is a key: it is the master key to the realm of the underworld, the key to death and the grave. See Him mount the skies in victory, and prepare to follow Him.

1965 – Henry Van Kluyve

I Will Come Again

Text: John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Introduction

We find ourselves in the Age of Space—of achievement, progress, and invention. In many ways, it is a fascinating age. But the world responsible for this age is a troubled one.

There is fear and uncertainty, dread and distress, disease and infirmity, death and sorrow. “Men’s hearts are failing them.” While we still enjoy the sunshine of blessing, dark clouds loom on the horizon.

The Bible, in Matthew 24:3-12, sheds more light on this age of ours. There will be:

- a. False messiahs and christs (verse 5)
- b. Wars and rumors of wars (verses 6, 7a)
- c. Famines and pestilences (verse 7b)
- d. Earthquakes in divers places (verse 7b)
- e. Anti-Semitism and Jew haters (verses 9, 10)
- f. False prophets and deceivers (verse 11)
- g. Increase of iniquity (verse 12)
- h. Apostasy and love growing cold (verse 12)
- i. The universal preaching of the Gospel (verse 14)

(Race hatred—large scale sin)

The devil and his demon host will all go out in a last-minute effort to destroy that which is pure, holy, of good report, honest, heavenly, etc. But, amid all of this, John 14:3 (along with numerous other Scriptures) shines forth and writes across the darkening sky in letters mixed with all the colors of a glorious sunset, “I will come again!”

Therefore, these blessed words from the Savior’s lips offer much to the Christian, the born-again child of God, as he treads earth’s pathways.

I. A Call to Holiness

A. Of heart and life

1. Because of our standing in Christ (regenerated, redeemed, sanctified, justified).
2. Because of Christ's exclusive ownership. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20: "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."
3. Because the way of the Cross is the way of holiness:
 - a. Supernatural regeneration (repentance and the lordship of Christ)
 - b. Transforming sanctification (resulting in Christlikeness—the infillings of God's Spirit) We are to dwell in the light—as Christ is in the light – Splendid, beautiful, pure, uncontaminated.
4. Because the devil's road runs parallel to the Calvary Road.
 - a. Many on this road are:
 - 1) taken up with spiritual things
 - 2) talk about spiritual things
 - 3) sing spiritual songs
 - 4) praying spiritual prayers
 - 5) preaching, prophesying, etc.
5. Because God sees inside.
 - a. "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). "Doth not he see all my ways and count all my steps?" (Job 31:4).
 - b. What of your heart in its present condition? Right now! Would your church be shocked to know it? Would your wife? Your husband? Your children? Your friends?

- c. What if no social pressures to restrain your action?
- 6. Because the task before us is a heart task.
 - a. Broken hearts needed. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18).
 - b. Burning hearts (Luke 24:25-27).
 - c. Believing hearts.
 - d. Blameless hearts. "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Not sinless perfection but maturity, completeness.

One Thing I of the Lord Desire

One thing I of the Lord desire,
For all my way hath miry been:
Be it by water or by fire,
O make me clean!

If clear vision Thou impart,
Grateful and glad my soul shall be;
But yet to have a purer heart
Is more to me.

Yea, only as the heart is clean
May larger vision yet be mine,
For mirrored in its depths are seen
The things divine.
I watch to shun the miry way,
And stanch the spring of guilty thought:

But, watch and wrestle as I may,
Pure I am not.

So, wash Thou me without, within;
Or purge with fire, if that must be;
No matter how, if only sin
Die out in me.

—Walter Chalmers Smith

I Love My God

I love my God, but with no love of mine,
For I have none to give;
I love Thee, Lord; but all the love is Thine,
For by Thy love I live.
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
Emptied, and lost, and swallowed up in Thee.

Thou, Lord, alone, art all Thy children need
And there is none beside;
From Thee the streams of blessedness proceed,
In Thee the blessed abide.
Fountain of life, and all-abounding grace,
Our source, our center, and our dwelling place.

—Madame Guyon

B. Of ministry and method (1 Timothy 4:1-6)

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Verse 13: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Verse 15: “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly

to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." Verse 16: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

1. There is a constant strain and stretch to devise new methods, plans, organizations to advance the Kingdom of Christ.
2. The trend today has caused us to lose sight of the *man* in the work of the Gospel.
3. The Old Testament shows us:
 - a. Noah – a man
 - b. Moses – a man
 - c. Joshua – a man
 - d. Elijah – a man
 - e. Daniel – a man
 - f. Isaiah – a man
4. The New Testament shows us:
 - a. John the Baptist – a man
 - b. Jesus – the Son of Man
 - c. The Twelve – men
 - d. Paul – a man
5. God and His Word make much of the man.
6. The Holy Spirit blesses and flows through men, not methods.
7. The Christian ministry of today needs more holiness!
 - a. Listen to Robert Murray McCheyne: "Study universal holiness of life. Your whole usefulness depends on this, for your sermons last but an hour or two; your life preaches all the week. If Satan can only make a covetous minister a lover of praise, of pleasure, of good eating, he has ruined your ministry. Give yourself to prayer, and get your texts, your thoughts, your words from God. Luther spent his best three hours each day in prayer.
 - b. Paul called it "My Gospel."
 - 1) It was put into the heart and lifeblood of the man Paul.

- 2) His soul was on fire!
 - 3) What of his sermons? How great? How homiletical? How eloquent? How illustrative?
 - 4) What of the *Man*! He lives on! Greater than any of his sermons. Johnathan Edwards said: "I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness and conformity to Christ. The Heaven I desired was a Heaven of holiness."
- c. Much of today's ministry and methods is far removed from the pattern of Scripture.
- 1) Contests and give away drives have taken the limelight.
 - 2) Competition has replaced consecration.
 - 3) Fleshly energy has ruled out heavenly power. Leonard Ravenhill has aptly put it:
 - Easy-going preachers = easy-going believers.
 - More star preachers than scarred preachers.
 - More expositors than exposers.
 - More concerned to get it over than to pray it through.

To many, the width of the head matters more than the depth of the heart.
- d. E.M. Bounds has said: "Preaching is not the performance of an hour; it is the outflow of a life."
- Oh, God, more holiness give me!

II. A Challenge to Become Mighty in the Scriptures

A. The Scriptures come from God Himself.

1. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).
2. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 2:21).

B. The power of God lies in His Word.

1. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).
2. In Jeremiah 23:29, God compares it to a fire and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.

C. The power in preaching comes through the Word.

1. Much of today's sermon is sadly lacking in Scripture.
2. If revival comes to your church, the Word of God will have first been sown by His Holy Spirit in your heart.
3. If sin's shackles are broken, they will be snapped by God's Word.
4. If wisdom and understanding are to be had, they must come via the precious Word of God.
5. If pastors are to receive strength for the journey and food for the soul, it will come through the Scriptures.
6. Fancy illustrations and sad stories have too often been used to bring conviction when God's Word alone can break the sinful, rebellious heart. Lehman Strauss has said: "Most preaching today is bright, breezy, brief, and brotherly."

D. Power for holy living is found in God's Word.

1. It keeps us from sin (Psalm 119:11-16).
2. It brings blessing on life. "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart" (Psalm 119:2).
3. It has been well said that:

"This book tells the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here paradise is restored, Heaven opened, and Hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully.

Let it fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened in the judgment, and remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the highest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents.”

4. The Bible needs not to be rewritten, but re-read!
5. Martin Luther said: “Without the Word I would not live in paradise, if I might; but with the Word, I could live in Hell itself.”
6. The altars are full, but lives remain untransformed!
 - Centuries come and go. The Word, it stands.
 - Kingdoms rise and fall. The Word, it stands.
 - Atheists and agnostics rail against it. There it stands.
 - Critics deny it. There it stands.
 - Modernism ignores it. Yet it abideth forever.Let’s read it, meditate therein, preach it, live by it, die by it.

John Wesley to John Trembath (August 17, 1760)

“What has exceedingly hurt you in time past, nay and I fear to this day, is want of reading. I scarce ever knew a preacher read so little. And perhaps by neglecting it you have lost the taste for it. Hence your talent in preaching does not increase. It is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep; there is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this. You can never be a deep preacher without it any more than a thorough Christian. O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher.”

III. An Invitation to the Closet of Prayer

A. Prayer-less preachers (a modern peril)

1. Jesus said, “I will come again.” This being true, we shall fellowship and

commune with Him throughout all eternity. Then let's begin now by fellowshiping and communing with Him in the indispensable prayer closet. A recent survey of 500 theological students in two of the leading seminaries of this country revealed the following:

-7% had a daily devotional life.

-93% then were destined to become prayer-less preachers.

Spurgeon said: "Of course, the preacher is above all others distinguished as a man of prayer. He prays as an ordinary Christian, else he were a hypocrite. He prays more than ordinary Christians, else he were disqualified for the office he has undertaken. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared to our closets."

2. Prayer is a ministry within itself.

a. Samuel said, "As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

b. The Apostles realized the importance of prayer by appointing laymen to serve tables so they could give themselves "continually to prayer."

c. James 5:17 says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly."

d. The Early Church prayed. Acts 4:31 says, "When they prayed, the place was shaken...and they spake the word with boldness."

3. Preaching without prayer cannot save.

a. "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

b. While one person may be saved because the Word of God is preached, a dozen may be lost because it is handled with unholy hands.

c. Natural ability, published oratory, perfected preparation, memorized sermons are as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals" without prayer!

4. Any work for God is easier than praying.

a. Praying is the highest activity of the human soul.

b. Praying is the ultimate test of a man's spiritual condition.

- c. Preaching is very much easier than praying.
- d. A man talks to his congregation and to others with far greater ease than he talks to God.
- e. Much of our public praying is addressed to the congregation anyway.
- f. But a man alone with God discovers his true spiritual state.

Listen to these quotes by E.M. Bounds:

“A praying pulpit will beget praying pews.”

“The greatest will be of reformers and apostles, who can set the church to praying.”

“It takes a good time for the full flow of God into the spirit. Short devotions cut the pipe of God’s full flow.”

“Natural ability and educational advantages do not figure as factors in this matter; but capacity for faith, the ability to pray, the power of thorough consecration, the ability of self-littleness, an absolute losing of one’s self in God’s glory and an ever present and insatiable yearning and seeking after all the fullness of God—men who can set the Church ablaze for God; not in a noisy, showy way, but with an intense and quiet heat that melts and moves everything for God.”

(My desire for our moderator, executive secretary, department heads, headquarters staff, Bible College administrative faculty and staff is that they excel in prayer.)

B. Prayer-less pews (the curse of modern day Christianity)

1. Preaching never reaches nor does anything to a prayer-less soul.
2. God’s Word and its truth will never reach the heart of that church officer until he begins to pray and prays long!
3. Churches will continue to split where prayer is a mere form and not a force for God. Where is the pulpit committee who, when examining a preacher who has just preached his best sermon, asks: “How about your prayer life, your ministry of prayer?”
4. The above is rare indeed because for the most part, our pews are prayer-less!

Oh, Lord, give us laymen who will hold up the hands of their pastor;

men who will pray for God's Spirit and power to fall on the pulpit;
men who will tarry long at intercessory prayer.

Oh, Lord, give us homes where mothers and dads will pray long and
thereby instill within their children's hearts that same desire and
practice.

Oh, Lord, in this age of self-indulgence, keep us from being flabby
saints and playboy preachers void of prayer!

(Comment on Fellowship here.)

IV. A Blessed Hope

A. For this life:

1. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; and where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).
2. "Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).
3. It has been the strength for the people of God in every age.
4. The sorrowing, afflicted heart can find comfort in the Savior's promise.
5. Those who are battling for Jesus find courage and sustainment in the "blessed hope."
6. Though we groan under the pressures of Hell and the Evil One, we carry on, looking for our Lord from Heaven.

In this life...

- with all its perplexities and complexities,
- with all its temptations and snares,
- with all its heartaches and sorrows,
- with its Christ rejectors and Bible deniers,

–with its religious form and godless, powerless, prayer-less churchianity,

We see the ray of light and on its beam the words of Jesus, “Let not your heart....”

The words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” The blessed hope.

B. For eternity:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:1-5).

1. The presence of Jesus.
2. A changed, glorified body.
3. An everlasting fellowship.
4. A never-ending love.
5. A lasting peace and joy.
6. A city “four square.”

Conclusion

May God burn within your heart the message just offered that we may

not only be hearers, but doers.

May our blessed Lord give courage to the hearts and lives of our denominational leaders, our pastors, our laity, to stay true.

- a. True to Him – A life of holiness
- b. True to Him – Mighty in the Scriptures
- c. True to Him – In the closet of Prayer
- d. True to Him – By looking, watching, waiting, trusting, serving, striving, praying, etc.

Until that blessed hope becomes a reality when we see the One Who is responsible for the hope appear personally and visibly in power and majesty on the clouds to receive us unto Himself.

Christian Service

“Our work is solemn;
Therefore we dare not trifle,
Our task is difficult;
Therefore we dare not relax.
Our opportunities are brief;
Therefore we dare not delay.
Our path is narrow;
Therefore we dare not wander.
Our prize will be glorious;
Therefore we dare not faint.”

–Selected.

“Until Then” (Sung by Malcolm Fry)

My heart can sing when I pause to remember,
A heartache here is but a stepping stone
Along a trail that’s winding always upwards,

This troubled world is not my final home.

The things of earth will dim and lose their value
If we recall they're borrowed for a while,
And things of earth that cause the heart to tremble,
Remembered there will only bring a smile.

This weary world with all its toils and struggles
May take its toll of misery and strife.
The soul of man is like a waiting falcon,
When it's released it's destined for the skies.

But until then, my heart will go on singing
Until then, with joy I'll carry on,
Until the day, my eyes behold the city,
Until the day, God calls me home!

"I will come again and receive you...unto myself" (John 14:3).

1966 – Russell Spurgeon

God's Good News

Text: Romans 5:8

That we live in a time of anxiety, ferment, crisis, danger, fear, war, and death, is evident. There is the constant expectancy that something is about to happen. We awaken each morning wondering what new crisis has come upon us during the night. Voices call to us from every side to believe this or that, to accept certain opinions. Millions wait, with pathetic eagerness, for some voice of authority to which they may anchor themselves.

At the time of perhaps her greatest opportunity, the church has faltered and failed because she, too, is seemingly drifting around in confusion, unsure of what her message is, uncertain as to her mission in the twentieth century.

Look magazine, in a recent article, had this to report after talking with various religious and community leaders: "What the experts are saying about almost every aspect of American morality is—in a rapidly changing world we have lost our traditional guidelines, we are groping painfully and blindly for new standards that will enable us to live morally and decently; we cannot turn back to earlier rigid behavior patterns, we must find a new moral code that will fit the needs of the society we live in."

Whom shall we follow? What can we believe? Shall we follow Altizer and Christianity without belief in God, who has said, "Ours is a time in which God is dead. We must not simply accept the death of God with fortitude, but rather will the death of God with the passion of faith." This is no new heresy. Three thousand years ago God, through the Psalmist, said, "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."

Or perhaps we can find the answer in Robinson's Christianity without religious experience, who declares, "God is no longer a person...he is the ground of our being."

But the most devastating and appealing of all the new theologies is the cry of Christianity without transformation. Simply announce to people they are saved. Saved social structure, not individuals.

Dr. Marikawa, Secretary of Evangelism of the American Baptist Convention, in 1964, said, "The redemption of the world is not dependent unto the souls we win for Jesus Christ. There cannot be individual salvation...salvation has more to do with the whole society than with the individual soul."

Last Sunday night, I stood by the bedside of a young woman dying of cancer of the brain. The doctor diagnosed her case as a sinus condition and treated her for such. He was sincere in his diagnosis and treatment, but he was wrong, and by the time malignancy was discovered it was too late.

The social Gospel deals only with the effects of sin, and fails to touch the cause. What good does it do for the doctor to rush to the aid of the victim if he has nothing to minister to the dying patient? What good for the fireman to speed to the burning building if he has no water with which to put out the flame?

There are those in the church who use the language of orthodoxy with the old thought patterns of the social Gospel. This is why many churches have inadequate programs—poorly conceived, ineffectively articulated, and divisive and unproductive in results.

We have allowed Protestant professors of exegesis to make interpretations of the Holy Scriptures that even the church of Rome would not allow the Pope to make—that of taking the miracles of the Virgin Birth and Christ's bodily resurrection, and interpreting them as myths and legends.

The theology of presumption is a substitution of human reasoning for divine revelation. Man is not a lost creature—he is saved and needs to be told of his salvation. Man's perilous position as a sinner is questioned: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" is rebuked with Satan's words, "Ye shall not surely die."

Let us be clear that this theology is not a "statement of old truths in a new and different way." It is a denial of the validity of the Holy Scriptures and substitutes human philosophy for divine revelation.

Does this mean that we are to wring our hands in despair and throw in the towel? Does this mean we have no message left to proclaim? Paul, too, lived in a time of crisis; war, poverty, disease, and unnatural vice were rampant. He had his Robinsons of the first century.

The philosophies of Socrates and Diogenes on physical conduct failed to satisfy and the lofty plain of intellectual analysis of Plato and Aristotle was unable to bring an inward change. Man felt helplessly trapped by his own

feelings, drives, and desires.

Through mystical religions, they thought salvation was by social and physical cleansing rather than inward spiritual regeneration. Asceticism and Gnosticism were prevailing schools of thought. Then, as now, there was a cry for moral guidance.

Today the corrosive forces of time, joined with human frailty, have eaten away the heart of the Christian message until a social, secular, almost pagan substitute has appeared instead.

The greatest stumbling block to the acceptance of Jesus Christ by today's mass of society is not the "scandal" of denominational divisions, but is the ineffective witness of those churches who have lost the message and spirit of a dedicated evangelistic outreach.

The basic problem facing our world is not social inequality, poverty, or lack of education. Thousands of good, kindhearted well-meaning people are concerned and anxious about a better world. But they are idealistic, ignoring the basic cause of man's problems and the deep-seated disease that plagues the human race. Greeds, hates, passions, and lust are not eliminated by food and education. The root of sin in man is deep. This is the basic cause of the world's problems, and only Jesus Christ can solve it.

Christianity is being equated with demand for social action, pacifism, eradication of poverty, new social concept—these are important, but not the *first* concern of the church.

To be effective, the church must have a sure message; authority more than the finite mind of the latest theologian. The primary purpose for our existence is to mediate the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ to the dying millions. God's good news is to be through men who have found a perfect Lord and worship a holy God.

The 20th-century church stands at a crossroads as she ponders the meaning of the cross. The integrity and identity of her heritage are at stake. The cross is still crucial and the focal point of our message. As we form our judgments about it, God, through the cross, is judging us.

The church's message is primarily for the spiritual needs of mankind. When she keeps to her divinely appointed mission, the Holy Spirit leads men to perform the will of God in all other areas of life.

The church must adhere strictly to the infallibility of the Scriptures. As

long as the church cleaves to her scriptural responsibility of evangelism, she will be kept from error, but when she becomes involved in secular controversial matters, those who oppose the church's position on these issues will question the ability of the church to speak authoritatively on spiritual subjects.

The message of evangelism is the message of the Scriptures—that message is Christ as the Savior of mankind by His death on the cross, and the only hope of the world by His resurrection.

God's good news will bring profound personal conviction of salvation, of the personal experience of justification by faith, of the priesthood of all believers, and of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. If we relinquish these truths we have no ground upon which to stand.

The Word of God is as up-to-date as newsprint wet from the presses, and as sturdy as grandfather's hickory cane. No wonder Luther looked to the Bible and said, "Go lay hold upon the Word, and you shall never be alone."

The Bible is the only book that has been written in blood, carried on by foot, and read by torch smoke in caverns and catacombs. There is a hidden, unseen power in the Word of God.

Our forefathers believed in it emphatically, and their vigor is attested by the tremendous growth of Protestantism in the nineteenth century. The church was vocal, boldly proclaiming the faith—now she is often confused and controversial. God's good news will make the church again vigorous, vocal, and visual in her Christian proclamation.

In our text Paul said, "according to the scripture." The Word of God has been ridiculed, cursed, torn apart, burned, banned, and ignored; but it stands high against the waves of time and men like the Rock of Gibraltar.

May we, with John Wesley, say, "According to the light we have, we cannot but believe the Scripture is of God, and thus we dare not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left."

As John Fisher, 16th-century bishop, was being led from the Tower of London to his martyrdom, he saw the high scaffold on which he was to die, and his courage wavered. He took his Greek Testament from his pocket and prayed, "Oh God, send me some special word to help me in this awful hour." He opened it and read from John 17, "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "Blessed

be God," he cried, "this Word will suffice for all eternity"—and he went, singing, to his death.

The Gospel is designed to be simple enough for its message of God's intercession on behalf of a lost world to be understood by all.

The message by God's bearer of good news is authoritative because it is the Word of God. And the Word of God declares in the text of the message tonight, through the ringing affirmation of Paul, that the message of evangelism is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that reads, "One cannot carve rotten wood." Yet we find continued efforts to carve the rotten wood of unredeemed men into pillars of righteousness by the process of reformation without the transforming power that comes only through the blood atonement of Jesus Christ. Fellow Free Will Baptists, this is one of the great relevant issues of the hour. The Word declares in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "(Him) who knew no sin He (God) made to be sin on our behalf."

We hear the voice of the liberal theologian (Bultmann) declare the irrelevance of the saving events of the Gospel for the message of "redemptive history." Liberalism continues, "The death of Christ is not to be understood as the expiatory death of a substitute. That an incarnate divine being should cancel out the sins of men through his blood is primitive mythology." But Romans 5:8 says, "God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Man may shrink from the thought that his sins require the death of God's Son. He may insist that blood shed 2,000 years ago has no power today; blood-bought redemption may be distasteful to him. He may refuse to accept by faith the forgiveness of sins on God's terms, but the fact will remain—that is God's way and God's offer, and there is no other. God's Word says, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." There is no general amnesty in the cross—it is the basis of redemption to those who believe.

The sentimentalist who cries out what a cruel, barbaric, and unjust being God is, to demand Christ's death on the cross, has no understanding of the atonement. The atonement is not an impersonal event to the Father, nor a sole concern of the Son; both Father and Son are active; not an affair where Christ takes firm initiative while the Father adopts a passive role.

At the cross God is bearing the penalty of sin Himself in Christ. Christ didn't happen to get mixed up with sin; God made Him sin. Christ did not redeem men from the cross of law by becoming man, but by the death of the cross. And, as we must not overlook the activity of God in what happened at Calvary, we must not fail to see that it is only as men actively identify themselves with the cross that reconciliation to God is possible.

One of the corrosive forces of our time is Bultmann's position that the death of Christ is merely revelational. By this he doesn't mean that the atonement consists of historical fact; all that is needed in this view is the "story" of the cross. The real cross, the cross of history with the real God-man hanging upon it, is superfluous for the revelation view. In this view, the cross is only an event in communication, and not the reality that the good news tells.

But regardless of the theories of men about the atonement, the Bible testifies to a change in God's relations to sinners as a result of Calvary; and this is attested by the very order of the books of the Bible. It is unthinkable that the account of Pentecost could be placed ahead of the crucifixion story.

The cross is a transactional event affirming that something happened at Calvary; a change affecting and involving God. It happened objectively and not merely in the minds of men. It is not simply a timeless truth but an event by which God is saying things to men about Himself and His revelation to them that He could not say before.

The death of the cross was judicial in relation to the penalty of sin and vicarious in its relation to its regenerating power in our lives. The cross is love doing perfect work in the judgment death of sin that Christ the Savior died. The cross deals with the judgment of sins where Christ bears them away in His own body.

The Word in 2 Peter 2:24 says, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins should live unto righteousness."

The central theological truth of the New Testament is that there is an immediate and direct connection between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Any doctrines that bypass the atonement are heresy, and let there be no wavering nor compromise of our denomination upon this truth.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. But the atonement

is only half of the message. He rose again from the dead according to the Scripture.

Paul further declares in 1 Corinthians 15:4 that God's acceptance of the work of Christ's death was guaranteed when He raised Him from the dead. In Romans 10:9, 10 man's salvation is linked to the resurrection of Christ. Phillips translates it, "If you openly admit by your own mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord and if you believe in your own heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved."

In death, no less than in life, Christ was Lord. He was not a pacifist, not a martyr, not a good man caught in circumstances. His death was self-chosen. He said, "I lay down my life; no man taketh it from me." Even in the jaws of death He remained Lord. He was not a passive but an active sacrifice. Death did not come to Him—He went to death. He was not a victim, but a victor.

The resurrection is being discredited by many liberal theologians today. Their view is expressed by Bultmann, a leading proponent of the visionary resurrection. "This is not an actual event, inasmuch as the return of one dead into life simply does not occur."

But Paul declares the very deity of Christ depends upon His resurrection. Romans 1:4, "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

How different from the liberal is the apostolic proclamation on the day of Pentecost when Peter declared, speaking of Christ, "whom God hath raised up having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." And again in Acts 2:32, "This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we are all witnesses."

Hear Paul as he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20: "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ; whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But

now is Christ risen from the dead.”

The victory is meant to be realized in the dust and heart of everyday living. Paul leaves no doubt that the truth of the believer’s identification has its earthly application as well as its heavenly assurance of personal resurrection. There is not one note of pessimism in the New Testament after the resurrection.

“They nailed him to a cross and thought that they had won; that love was lost and goodness dead, and truth forever done.” But they forgot it was God’s world! God spoke, and Christ rose from the dead!

The day will come when the bruised and broken body of Christ becomes the church victorious. Her stigmata shall be her glory, the scandal of the cross her own crown, and her shredded garment shall become the seamless robe, clothing the redeemed of all ages.

The incarnation of Christ, His cross, His resurrection, and His coming again, are not mythological conceptions but acts of saving history, brought to completion by God. It has been shown and confirmed that only this “mythological” Gospel has power to win men to Christ; to redeem them and make known the saving grace of God through the acts of the Holy Spirit.

This is not time for despairing retreat; it is a time for belief, for confidence, and for involvement. A redeemed social structure will never come into being without redeemed men. We need changed hearts, not changed environments; conversion, not conversation; dedication, not dialogue. Not a new message we need, but new messengers with an old message for some age-old sins. Not help from government, but help from God we need.

The church will pulsate with life and power when she ceases trying to prove the existence of God and simply declares His mighty acts.

God’s good news will be proclaimed. He has raised up prophetic voices in the past and will raise them up again. Voices that will bring with them God’s good news, the message of and for the Church.

The good news of the truth of God in Christ is ours. Not to alter, supplement, or annotate, but to declare clearly and forcefully. When it is announced with maximum clarity, it will satisfy not only the mind of the scholar, but also the heart of the saint.

It’s action time! Ring out the news—Christ died for our sins, rose for our justification, and is coming again for His own.

1967 – Milton Worthington

Evangelism/Edification (That Other Responsibility)

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

The context of the text: The sublime claim, the sovereign commission, and the sweet companionship.

We live in a day of crisis, confusion, conflict, and compromise. The church of Jesus Christ faces a grave hour on the one hand and glorious opportunity on the other. It is evident, however, that we need to reevaluate some things.

Membership is at an all-time high but the attendance, concern, conviction, and consistency is at an all-time low. Some churches take in many members each year, but the overall attendance remains basically the same. I think this indicates a need for proper emphasis on follow-up evangelism and the developing of Christian maturity. (Of course, we allow for the fact that some members move out of town.)

We are confronted with the curse of "easy believism." This is the emphasis which says "believe" but does not demand "doing." It is the way that lacks repentance, denying of self, and a failure to count the cost. As Jesus said to a group of very religious people, "Ye say, but do not." Thus, our churches are filled with people who say they believe, but it has made no real difference in their lives. They are not as Paul declares, "new creatures."

In the light of these prevailing thoughts and emphases, we, as ministers of the Gospel, need to reevaluate our methods and teachings concerning evangelism and Christian maturity. We need effective evangelism in our local churches and not just decisions that do not produce fruits unto salvation.

The Reevaluation of the Nature of Evangelism

"Evangelism is not only an act but a process." I mean by this in most cases no one man wins a soul. First Corinthians 3 declares that one sows, and another waters, but "God giveth the increase." The reaper is not mentioned. He that sows and he that waters are one...that is, they are both doing the

job that God has called them to do. One is not to take a more important attitude concerning his or her ministry, for they are but the instruments through which the Lord gives the increase. This attitude keeps the unity of the body and not the glorifying of the personalities, which is a sign of carnality. All eyes need to be turned to the Lord!

If one's main interest is in getting decisions, there will be the danger of false motivation as suggested by 1 Corinthians 2:1-6. This deals with the excitement of the flesh. It brings to mind some of the contests sponsored by churches that try to grow by little temporary spurts of interest, when there should be consecrated involvement of the members all through the year.

"But preacher," you say, "we will not get a crowd! Our number will go down." Maybe we should take lessons from Gideon who got more done with the dedicated 300 than with the 32,000. My prayer is that God will give us in this day in our church "the winning 300." Quantity was replaced by quality and the victory was won. We are trying to do with the majority what God has always done with the minority. How we need this emphasis today!

The well-known evangelist Vance Havner gives a good word on this: "John the Baptist did not offer a free camel ride to whoever brought the most people to hear him preach, nor did he give an autographed copy of Isaiah to the oldest grandmother present. He was his own publicity and needed no press agent." May we not make our church a place of carnival episodes for the excitement and enjoyment of the flesh, but rather, a place of conviction and conversion of the soul.

The Realization of the Need of Edification

"Salvation is not only a decision but an experience." I am convinced we should teach our people the whole meaning of what it is to be saved. Many times we leave the impression in our preaching that all one has to do or is expected to do is to make one decision and all their problems will be over.

Three areas of teaching are needed in the life of every born-again believer. First is the area of assurance. First Peter 1:18, 19 declares that we are saved from sin by nothing less than the shed blood of Jesus Christ. First John 5:12, 13 states without reservation the fact that we are to know that we are saved. Paul again echoes this truth in 1 Timothy 1:12, "for I know whom I have believed...." We should teach each child of God the glorious truth of

the blessed assurance that can be theirs.

Second, we should teach them in the area of advancement. First Peter 2:2 declares, "as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby." Second Peter 3:18 exhorts us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. This growth process is not an excuse for graceless living, but enrichment for gracious living. First Corinthians 3:1-4 tells us about the problems of envy, strife, and divisions in the church at Corinth due to the lack of Christian growth. These conditions are evident in many churches today. With blessed advancement in the lives of Christians, our churches would be different.

Third, we should teach them in the area of advertisement. First Peter 2:9 declares that we are to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness to light (cf. Philippians 1:27, Matthew 5:13). Many of our church people are not good advertisements for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is due, in great measure, to the fact that we have failed to properly teach them concerning their responsibility as being blessed advertisement...samples on display for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Griffith Thomas points out that the Christian life, its provisions and possibilities, its secrets and methods, its duties and responsibilities, will be found emphasized almost everywhere in the Bible. When the Christian life is what it should be, the duty of evangelization at home and abroad will be the natural and necessary outcome, as effect to cause, as the clear flowing stream is the result of the springs that feed it.

First Thessalonians 1 bears this out. "Having received the Word...ye became followers of us...and of the Lord...so that ye were ensamples...for from you sounded out the Word of the Lord...in every place...your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing" (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10).

May the Lord give us grace to reevaluate the nature of our task and to realize the need for teaching in these days of ignorance concerning spiritual truths. Lord, teach us the joy of the truth that You have called us to play the game, not to keep the score.

Thought: "Salvation is the miracle of a moment, sanctification is the miracle of a lifetime."

1968 – Eustace Riggs

Possessing Our Possessions

Text: Joshua 1:9

Introduction: The book of Joshua deals with: a promise, a people, a possessing of the land.

It is the Ephesians of the Old Testament—a type of the Christian in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:3). God is leading His people out of the world (Egypt), through the wilderness (of defeat), to Canaan (victory). A two-fold application to the church and to the individual.

There are steps we must take if we would possess the heavenly possessions God has for us:

1. Plead the promises (Psalm 25:14).

A. God's call to Abram.

B. Blessed us with all spiritual blessings.

1. Redemption.

2. Heir of God and Christ.

3. The riches of His glory.

2. Pay the price.

Conditions:

A. Faithful Obedience

1. Unbelief kept Israel out the first time.

2. This faith...

a. Reckons on God.

b. Risks something for God.

c. Rewarded by God.

B. Fullness of Spirit

3. Prove the provisions.

Jericho was right in the pathway of victory.

A. Satan's Methods

1. With Individuals...

- a. Depresses spirit
- b. Deludes mind
- c. Destroys body
- d. Dooms soul

2. With Church...

- a. Indifference
- b. Materialism
- c. Disloyal members
- d. Worldly pleasure
- e. Division

B. God's Methods of Victory

- 1. The church in unity is an army terrible with banners.
- 2. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

4. Protect the privileges.

A. The privilege of prayer

- 1. Flush with victory, Joshua forgot to pray.
- 2. In prayer, God reveals His plan.

B. The privilege of the power of His presence

- 1. If we have the power of His presence, sin must be dealt with.
- 2. If Christ is absent, sin is present.

5. Possess the prize (Joshua 24).

A. Joshua reminds them...

- 1. They had revelation; so do we (Ephesians 2:4-6).
- 2. They had an experience; so do we (Ephesians 2:7-9).
- 3. They had service of good works; so do we (Ephesians 2:10).

B. Joshua asked them to...

1. Fear the Lord.
2. Put away strange gods.
3. Serve the Lord.

1970 – J. D. O'Donnell

The Power of the Truth

Text: John 8:31-33

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If you continue in my Word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31).

I don't want us to forget the background of this verse. I'm not going to preach a textual message as such and expound thoroughly on this verse. But I do want us to think a little bit about the situation.

Jesus had been preaching in Galilee the land of the Jews, and He tells us as He spoke many believed on Him. And of those who believed, some were Jews. Now there's some disagreement among Greek scholars as to the meaning of the word *belief* here. I doubt if this is speaking of the ultimate belief as we usually term it—as we talk about pure faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, they believed. They recognized Him to be a leader, so they believed Him. Now Jesus said to these Jews, “If you continue in my word”—you've got the beginning now, and if you continue in it “then are you my disciples indeed.” You will actually become disciples. And then He continues to stress this, “You shall know the truth”—you will come to know the actual truth, and this truth that you shall come to know “shall set you free.”

I think this is the great truth of the Gospel, that men who come to know the truth are set free from sin in so many ways. Tonight, as we speak, I would like to talk to you about the need for appropriating the truth in God's Word. Last night, our speaker spoke about the provision of the Word. I believe that he believes in the literal Word of God. I really enjoyed that. He believes it like I believe it. God has spoken to us; He has provided us His truth, His Word, and we should accept the fact that He has provided it to us, but now tonight we want to talk about appropriating that Word.

We've got it, now let's appropriate it in our lives. We need to experience the Word of God in a manner that gives meaning and purpose to our lives. Now, we've loved the old Book and held it so dear. Sometimes we reference the black book that's in the living room too much just as a book, but we

need to take the words that are therein and appropriate them for our lives.

My topic tonight is the power of truth. I've really wrestled with this. When we think of power, we usually think of military might or organizational power, political power—all these things. I was thinking tonight about black power. Let me show you something. All of you who have your Bibles tonight, lift your Bibles up. If you've got those red Bibles put them down, we're talking about black power tonight. That's black power. No, those are nice red Bibles. I never have owned one, but they're nice.

We're talking about the power of the Word of God—spiritual power's involved in this. And then we are talking about truth. There are two great systems of truth vying for power in the world today. Oh, there are many different classifications maybe, but actually there are two.

There is the scientific worldview. This view dreams of a universe that has no creator. It gives us a natural explanation for everything we see, and everything we hear. This scientific worldview tells us there is no personal relationship to a deity. There is no possible relationship to a supernatural being. This view tells us that human existence has no purpose—it just happened. It evolved slowly from a mass of nothing into something. The scientific view tries to tell us how things come into existence, but you know it never tries to tell us why it came into existence. There is no "why" in this view.

Now the view that opposes this is the Christian view. Of course, the basis of this is the Christian Gospel. There are many emphases that it gives. One thing is that God created the universe and the world with purpose. He had a meaning behind it. Now man was a part of this creation, but man failed to realize the purpose for his creation. He's lost. He's out of favor with his maker. Judgment is going to come upon him; and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is going to ultimately be his judge. Now another truth is this, Christ can save from that judgment. He has made provision for salvation from that judgment. Then another great emphasis is the fact that the Gospel priest will accomplish his purpose and will produce effective results in the life of men.

Now involved in this Christian view is what we term the Gospel. There are three main elements in that Gospel. One element has to do with the doctrine of a person. That person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And when I say the Son of God, I mean literally, the Son of God—a divine being. The second great element in this Gospel has to do with the unprecedented

event of His death. Now we have those who tried to do away with the relative nature of the death of Jesus Christ to the Gospel. But one of the chief elements of the Gospel must be the death of the Son of God. And then the third main element, of course, is His resurrection and ascension. His resurrection and ascension wrought saving and keeping power for man, and it must be emphasized.

This doctrine of the Christian faith remains today. Sometimes, I think, we've let it grow old to us. But there are three things that cause the power of the truth of the Gospel to remain, and one of them is the continuing contemporaneous nature of Jesus Christ. Because of that resurrection and ascension, Jesus is just as contemporaneous today as He was when He walked the shores of Galilee. That's important. The second thing is this—the un-altering nature of the Gospel that has been committed to us.

You know we're all the time getting new ideas. Men are trying to develop new truths. I had a boy in seminary tell me that to him the words of Paul Tillich were just as important as the words of Paul of Tarsus. But we need to recognize that men's teaching today is not of the same nature of the Gospel, and the nature of the Gospel has not altered. It is still the same as it was in the days of Jesus Christ Who walked on earth.

And then the third thing that keeps this power among us, the power of truth, has to do with the never relinquishing ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst. I heard a voice speak here the other day—a young man—he stood up. He had been raised in a Christian background. And he told how he had gone out into the world to flee the Gospel. And he said this thing got hold of him. He would come in at night and couldn't go to bed and would go back out—because the Holy Spirit kept pressing it in upon his heart. And he was afraid to go to sleep...he was afraid to go to bed without yielding to that ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. So that work of the Holy Spirit among us, keeps ever alive the power of the truth.

We're living in the age of rebellion. It's been said so many times, I hesitate to say it. But we're living in what might be characterized, "the hippy culture." I don't know if Paul lived in something like this. You remember in writing Timothy, he said the men are turned away from the truth. And he said also, the way of truth they know not. Now we think our age is unique. But there have been men in all ages who have gone away from the truth of the Gospel. But today there are so many things that bind men—rationalism, materialism, secularism, humanism—all these need the liberating power of

the truth in their lives.

Now let's think about the power of truth. We need first to recognize the power of truth. We need to recognize what it is. When I spoke of the power of truth, there are so many ways it's mentioned in the Bible. I think that in the Bible it's mentioned as the power of God, because His character is the standard for truth. We're living in the age of relativism, where men are saying there is no standard by which we can give people standards for character and for their morals.

But to the believer in the power of truth, the very character of God is the standard for truth. The power of God is mentioned in many ways, even the preaching of the Gospel is called the power of God. The power of the Son is related to the power of truth. When we think of His power, Paul talked in Ephesians 6:10 about the "power of his might." And in Ephesians 3:7, he spoke of the "effectual working of his power." The one that said, "I am the truth," is spoken of in Colossians 2:10 as the "head of all principalities and powers."

And this power of the Son is related to the power of truth. I think the power of the Spirit is related to the power of truth. Paul spoke of the power that worketh in us. That's the power of the Spirit. God has given us the Spirit of His power. That's in us. The power of truth lies in us. Jesus, you know, came in the power of the Spirit.

But I think maybe the power of truth to us is more greatly described as the Word of God—the power of the Word of God. We are told the Word of God is quick and powerful. Now that word *quick*, doesn't mean the word "fast." It's fast—it works fast sometimes, but it means alive. You know you've got a quick in your finger; well it means it's alive. The Word of God is alive; it's powerful.

Have you ever thought of the effects of the Word of God as it began to circulate in the early days of Christianity? Various men began to push out with it, it refused to relinquish the ancestral worship of the Hebrews. The formalism that characterized their worship was actually made to look silly. The same thing happened to Greek mythology. Have you ever compared Greek mythology to the Word of God? Greek mythology that was being circulated in those days was silly compared to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And also look over into Rome—the paganism that was centered there in Rome was given a death blow by the Gospel as Paul and others began to carry the Gospel there into the capital of the Roman Empire.

We need to recognize that the power of truth is involved in all these things, and it's in the power of the believer as well. The power that works in us. We have the power of an endless life. It's been given to us. And as we go, we represent the truth wherever we stand. This power needs to be demonstrated. We read in the Bible of the power it had in the lives of the apostles. I think of Peter—we use him so often—but look at him. There during the nights of crisis—cringing, cursing, weak, cowardly—but just a few days later endued with the power of truth, that cowardly, cringing man stood up and became the preacher of Pentecost. Change—the power of truth in his life was demonstrated.

I think of Paul. There was a man transformed by the same force of Gospel truth. It renewed his life. As it changed him, he thought of how it could change the world. And you and I ought to proclaim that truth to the world. That power of truth put a new light in his eyes. It set joy throbbing in his heart. He was passionate. He had an emotional nature that was destroying his life. Those forces that at one time disintegrated his life and would have destroyed it became the very forces that built it up. And when he was mastered with the power of truth in the Lord Jesus Christ, he gathered all those wandering lustful desires away from evil, and he was drawn in pure gladness into a noble, commanding allegiance to Jesus Christ and it changed his life.

We could come to Martin Luther, who stands to me as someone who had the real raw stuff of manhood. This great man had an unbending will. One day he found personal contact with the truth, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that truth dominated his life, and it transformed him. This man became the hinge on the door of which modern religion was swung open. The power of truth came in and was demonstrated in his life. We could talk about the power of truth in the lives of men today.

We could call our evangelists up here—Jack Paramore, Bobby Jackson, Van Dale Hudson, Ken Riggs. They could tell you about how they go across the country; how lives of men are transformed. We could ask these pastors here, and they could tell you of man after man whose lives have been transformed by the power of truth in their lives. We could call Sunday School teachers, and I hope there are many here, that could give testimony of how God reached into lives through their telling the power of truth and lives were changed.

But let's think thirdly about the realization of that power. That power

needs to be fully realized in every one of our lives. We admit the decay of this age. Politicians admit it. Our national leaders of every walk of life admit they're in a day of decay. Our churches admit it. Let's admit that we are living in a day where men resist the truth. I went to a conference on religion at the University of Oklahoma. I went to hear a man that's a theological professor at the University of Chicago. And that man stood there, a theological professor, and told us that science and religion had been in a warfare for many years. But he said the warfare is over now, because one of them is dead. But he said science is not dead.

But you know, I read just a few days later in a book that I got...I want to read you some quotes I read. A professor at that same university in Chicago said, "Youth are returning to the sacred. Young people are angry at science for their failures." A young lady at that very university said, "Science has not ended war. It has not ended injustices, and it doesn't respond to most of man's needs. Why should we take it seriously?" A young man at that university said, "When we see the other incapacities of the rationalist to engage in rational discourse with us, we begin to rediscover the legitimacy of emotions. From these it is just a short step to the legitimacy of the sacred."

Let me ask you this question, "Is revival of the power of truth possible in this age of decay?" It is possible. Listen—Jesus Christ and the apostles lived in a day of decay. They lived in a day when religion was dead. But they began to preach the Gospel of truth, and revival came and souls were saved. The Roman Empire almost toppled to the Gospel.

Come to the days of Martin Luther. Oh, how I would have hated to live in the days of Martin Luther. Religion was dead. It had been in the dark ages for centuries. But men began to proclaim the truth of the Gospel, and modern religion was born. Our colonies in the early days were very anti-God. But men like Jonathan Edwards and others began preaching the Gospel, and revival swept our colonies and states. After Civil War, with the West opening up, things ran rampant for sin and evil. But you know those ole frontier preachers began preaching the Gospel and evangelism came into view and soon revival swept our nation and saved us. And it's possible today.

Let me go just a little farther. I don't think it's just possible, I think it's probable. We've gone through days where revival would sweep our world, our nation. And then we would sink down into the decay like we are in

today, but revival would come. We would sink again, and then revival would come. Let me say this. We're either facing revival or the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. If our age continues, we must say that revival and the power of the demonstration of truth is imperative. It must come. And we can be involved in it.

Now let's recognize there are dangers. Oh, there are those who would proclaim a Gospel without a biblical basis. They're taking the cross out of the Gospel, and preaching this. Listen. The church is thriving. It is going forward in so many areas. But there is that danger of no cross in the Gospel.

There is another danger. There is this Gospel that is rich in biblical quotation, but it presents salvation as something easy, something empty. That's not going to help anything. We're living in a day of spiritual indifference—nominalism among Christians. I might use the word *infantilism*. Christians are infants. They're weak. They're not growing. They're not being fed. And there is an insufficient knowledge of the Word of God among them—among people that call themselves Christians. All this together has created a lack of evangelism and missionary zeal, and because of it we have a big mammoth church, but its power is gone. Listen, let's admit it. We're living in the days of a cold church. Let's admit it. Let's recognize the need that exists.

But you know there are many things that would enhance the power of truth today. Let me list a few. We need a revival of authoritative Gospel preaching. Fellows, begin preaching with authority, thus saith the Lord. We're giving our young people every answer to their problem except the Word of God. We're telling them how it ought to be done in our way. We're telling them how others would do it. But we need to give them—thus saith the Word of God. And if we want the power of truth to be enhanced, we must have that.

We need a revival of preaching that pleads for a verdict. That asks people to make a decision, and in that decision an instantaneous salvation that comes forth. This is the type preaching that we need. I think we need a revival of experiential salvation. Salvation that is an experience that dominates our lives, drives us forward. It dominates our lives in every aspect.

Do you know why people don't want to be a Christian? Because we're not one. If we don't have anything, why do they want what we have? We need an experience that they can look at our lives and believe that something has happened to us, and it can happen to them. And involved in all of this, we

need a revival of compassion and concern for lost souls. We do not have the compassion and concern that we need. Neighbors lost, and we go to church and never invite them...never witness to them. We work with people and see them every day, and we never think about their lost souls.

And then involved in all of this, to enhance the power of truth today, we need a revival of optimism, expectancy, and excitement. We need to recognize that Jesus might come again. We've lost it. We're not excited. Many of you have heard me say it before—we love the sweet now and now so much that we can't get excited about the sweet by and by. But we need that exciting zeal that drove Paul forth, and Peter forth, and all the other apostles—pressing constantly that the Gospel might have its effect among men.

Let's think about the experience of that truth in our lives. You know we don't have to understand the power of the working of salvation to really enjoy it. Sometimes we think we have to study and study and study. But you know, you don't understand television, yet you watch it. You don't understand the radio, but you use it. We don't understand all about how the Gospel can come into our lives and change us, but we need to use the force of that change to go forth as witnesses. Browning had one of his characters say, "I intend to get to God." And I think this is what we need. Everything to the believer is built on experiencing the unchanging truth of God. You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. We need to constantly be coming into a greater knowledge of truth, and we will be freer to work for God. That freedom is not the license that is wanted by men today. It is freedom with responsibility.

And I think in this changing, permissive age, we need to recognize that permanence and finality is in God. The process of death in our age—the death of a society, the death of a culture can be checked as we go forth and re-experience the truth and bring others into an experience of truth.

I think the realization of the power of truth is based on two things: one is to sense our human failure. In America, we've been taught to depend on ourselves, be independent. And this has gotten into our religion, and we have come to depend on self so much. God may have to bring some catastrophe on our nation to make us once again sense our human failure. And then this will drive us to the second thing, a sense of divine aid. We're living in an age where exquisite and exotic growth surrounds us. These things are like alluring, persuasive perfumes that tempt us to follow the

world constantly and give ourselves to it. These things, as we view them and as they see us, seem to make God and God's truth impertinent in our age. And they're haunting us. They're drawing us away.

Truth, on the other hand, is more like a lonely mountain crag. It's windblown, weather-beaten—a godly man trying to achieve the things of truth has to work for it in our civilization. He has to stand against the tide. But you know the power of truth makes a man want to do more than just keep the Ten Commandments. When the truth possesses a man, it gives a glowing fervor of gladness and devotion in his life. It lights little candles in his life and keeps them burning therein.

Peter, facing the cross in his own power, denied the Lord. But possessed of the Spirit of power, he spoke boldly and openly to the same men that he had cringed before. That power of truth in our lives, does not cause us to evade life and get away from it. It doesn't make us flee to a cabin of illusion, but it gives us power to proclaim the truth.

Kipling tells of a man to whom deity granted the fulfillment of several desires. He said the deity gave this man the one request or several desires that he wanted. The first request of this man was, "Open mine eyes that I may see." As the man's eyes were opened, he saw stark, hideous, naked reality. And as he saw the world as it really is he cried out, "O God, make me blind again."

But men and women, who have received the gift of God's truth in their lives, seek no refuge or evasions. They do not cry out and say make me blind again. They face the world and keep light in their heart; they keep a song in their heart and they go forth. It is their desire to bring other men to a realization of what they have in their hearts.

John Wesley said, "What a dreadful thing it would be for me if I should be ignorant of the power of truth that I am preparing to proclaim."

Tonight, I am speaking to men, women, boys and girls, teachers and preachers. Tonight, I feel like I am speaking to the leaders of one of the leading fundamental denominations of the world. Do you realize the tremendous responsibility upon us? So many denominations have lost their message. We are small. But listen—we have criticized the Methodists. We've criticized the Episcopalians. By criticizing them, we're saying we've got it. Do we have it? If we have it, the responsibility is upon us just as it was upon that handful of men to whom Jesus said "to go unto all the world

and preach the Gospel to every creature."If we are the men and women in the world that have the power of truth in our life, the responsibility is so great to share it with other men.

I heard a story once that thrilled me—the story of a colored man in South Carolina by the name of John Jasper. One night at the revival meeting, John Jasper was saved. On the job the next day, he felt like he just had to tell his salvation to some men at work. The boss came by and told him to get back to work. John tried to work but that fire began to kindle in his heart, and he began talking again. The boss came by and told him to get back to work. He went back to work but pretty soon it drove him and he had to burst forth with what had happened to him. The boss came by and got angry again and sent him to the foreman.

The foreman asked him what was wrong. John said, "Boss, last night Jesus came into my heart. I've just got to tell it, and the boss won't let me."

The foreman said, "John, I'm a Christian. I know what it is to experience salvation. You go back on the floor, and you tell everyone on the floor about it. Then go and tell the second floor. And when you are finished, take the rest of the day off and tell everyone else."

Is that what we have? Do we have the power of truth in our lives? Listen, Free Will Baptists, we have a great task. And that task is to share the power of the Gospel of truth in our hearts and lives to men around the world. God bless us in that task.

1970 – Archie Mayhew

Proclamation of the Truth

Text: 1 Timothy 2:4

It is certainly a privilege to look into the Word of God, the precious Word of God, because it has the power and the ability to change people's lives. Tonight the topic that's been given to me is "The Proclamation of the Truth." As I thought about this, I thought, well, a person must proclaim Jesus because He is the truth.

And, of course, as we have given to people in every area of the world that we have visited the Word of God, we've seen lives changed...some of them changed more than others. We found that responsibility for changing people's lives is not really our responsibility. The Word and the power of God change lives, but the Word of God must be proclaimed. Truth must be proclaimed.

In 1 Timothy 2:4, it is speaking of God when it says, "Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." It is God's will that all be saved. Those who believe in the idea of a limited atonement, whether it's doctrinal or whether it's by not taking the Word of God to others, they are wrong, and the Word of God plainly declares that it's to all men; that God would have all men to be saved. It is His will. And since it is His will that the Word of God be proclaimed to all men, it is our job to proclaim it.

Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus tasted death for every man. First John 2:2 says that He died for the sins of the whole world. Second Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." I'd like for us to get that emphasis—*then were all dead*. All are dead in sins and trespasses, and they have need of the Word of God.

The Word of God tells us that God is not willing that any should perish. And while man has written off some—on the one hand, we've written off one church maybe; on the other hand, we've written off the Moslems; on another hand, we've written off another group. God is not willing that any should perish, and He has not written off anyone. He would like for us to

take the Word of God to them.

In Philippians 2, there are a number of verses we would like to look into. I realize that time is supposed to be limited, but, I thought that if we could cut our argumentation down to 35 minutes, and have about four hours of preaching, it would fit the mission field life.

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit...”

Consolation in Christ

There is comfort in Christ. And on the mission field, seeing people converted and coming out of the depths of darkness into light, and having joy and liberty by Jesus Christ, I’ve experienced some of the comfort through them, some of the consolation of Jesus Christ.

My mind went back when I thought of this to the day I was driving from Laoudi-Ba to Bondoukou to get our mail. It had been several days since we had received mail, and as I was driving, I left our mission station at Laoudi-Ba and the presence of God came over me and flooded my soul with a strange, special comfort.

And I thought, “This is strange.” I hadn’t been praying. I was thinking about the work, supplies we needed to purchase, and yet the comfort of God just settled over me, and I felt the wonderful peace and comfort of the Lord in a special way.

That day when I went to the post office, I opened the post office box and found a letter from my wife’s mother. I looked at the postmark and it was about 13 days before that it was postmarked. And that letter told me that my mother had gone on to be with the Lord. It took 13 days for the news to get there, and I was active in the work of the Lord.

That day whenever I needed the comfort, 13 days later, as I was going to the post office to get the mail, the comforting consolation power of the Holy Spirit of God descended upon me. And I experienced anew and afresh that Mother was in the hands of the Lord.

The Lord had given me the promise that if I wasn’t in the United States when she went on to be with the Lord, He showed me in the Word of God how that in Lazarus’ case the angels of God (and that’s angels, plural), came to take Lazarus on to glory. The Lord had given me the promise that if I

didn't get to be home when my mother was ready to go on to be with the Lord, He would have the angels there to take care of it. I decided I'd rather have them at my mother's funeral than anybody.

The Word of God says in verse 1 that "if any fellowship of the Spirit," and oh, the fellowship of the Spirit of God! I couldn't really appreciate that until the devil got after me over there, and the witch doctors, and you seek fellowship, and your closest brethren are 50 miles away. I thought about it, 50 miles away... they're far enough away that whenever you get to see them you are not ready to argue with them whenever you get there.

The fellowship of the Spirit of God is so rich that I suggest if anybody is having any difficulties, you ought to go to the mission field, have fellowship with the Spirit of God, because the brethren are quite a ways away. He said in verse 2, "Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Then he said in verse 3, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory."

I want to give you my definition of strife: it's the interaction of those on their way to the top. There is no strife between those who are on their way to a lower position. You want to get rid of strife? Just seek the lower position. He said then, "But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

Now, this is what we're getting to—Jesus is the best example of this. Jesus esteemed others of more value than Himself. He valued our souls highly. He values the souls of others highly. Now the question is, how highly do we value the souls of others?

Verse 4 says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Now this verse is one of the deepest verses I've found because it gives us, I think, the key to why people have not gone. You know, if we just tell people to go for God, but we don't tell them how, we have failed. If we don't tell them why, we fail. And this passage opens up the idea of the why and the how that it can be done.

It says, "Look not every man on his own things." There's much wisdom in this. Jesus did not look upon His own things. But you see, if we do not see clearly in the Word of God in this thing, we will look on our own things, and this will stop us from doing the will of God. It will keep us from going where God wants us to go.

If we look at our homes, we want to stay there. If we look at the homes

of others, we find they have none. And I'm thinking about an eternal home for others. As Jesus looked at His situation, and He looked at His heavenly home, He was willing to leave it.

When we look at our wealth, we want to keep it. If we look at our poverty, we want to get more. If we look at other people's wealth, we see how poor they are and we see their need. Now the reason we need to look on the needs of others and not on our own things is because we can see their need instead of our own difficulties. We see the poverty that others have in the world, and it's extreme. The world is only looking on the physical poverty and that is only an insight into the spiritual poverty. Jesus looked at His riches and He made the comparison of the riches that He had in Heaven and compared that to the poverty He had to come to on the earth. And Jesus did not look on His own things and His own riches, He looked on the poverty of the world, and He came.

If we look upon our own corruptions, the corruption around us, we have fear to do anything for God. If we look on the corruption of the world, we see that it's full of corruption, and they need the liberty and power of God to lift them out of the corruption. Jesus looked at His perfection in Heaven—the opposite of corruption. He looked at His perfection and then He looked at the corruption He was going to have to come to in the world. He did not look on His own things, but He looked at the depths of the corruption, and He decided to set aside His perfection and come to the corrupted, and even be in and a partaker of the corruption in order to deliver us from it. The disaster that's around us...people are afraid when they look at the disaster. But you haven't seen the disaster until you've seen it on the mission field. How great the disaster is when people are involved in devil worship. Somebody said the heathen are saved if they don't hear. If they are devil-possessed, how are they going to get saved?

Jesus looked on His joy and He compared this with the disaster, and He had to leave the joys of Heaven to come to this disastrous territory of the earth. But He did not look on His own things. He looked on the things of others and He came to this disastrous territory.

If we look on the praise that others have for us, we would like to just stay here and enjoy the praise. If we look at the praise that others are going to have when they face their Lord, they're going to have no praise, and they have need of help. Jesus looked at the praise that was being given to Him by the angels, as they would fall down and say, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and He

compared that praise to the blasphemy He would have to stand when He came to face men on this earth. And He was willing to set aside His praise and accept the blasphemy in order to get us delivered into the praise that we will be eternally in. And we have just tasted a little bit of the praise here. You ought to wait and see it there.

The desires. If we look on our own desires, we see that we would like to have a great gathering at home. And yet we look out on the mission fields of the world and see that they have no home to gather to in the future. And Jesus desires a gathering of home. We need to put aside our own looks and our own desires and go out to others so that there will be a great gathering of home.

We look on our own power, and we just want to show the power. There are different colors and classes of power that people want to show. If we look at our own things, we just want to show our power. If we look on the things of the people and world that is lost, we see that the only power they know is the power of the devil, and he's got them captivated and they can't know the power of God through the Word of God.

Mercy. If we want people to be merciful to us, we're searching to do man's will, and we'll be trapped into doing man's will so they will be merciful to us. If we look at the mercy that's extended to other people, we find that they have none. There is no mercy among the heathen. You know, one of the strangest things I experienced in the Koulongo Tribe in Africa was that they didn't have mercy and didn't have love for one another. Then I recognized that these things come from God. And in the United States, there would never have been any mercy or love shown had it not come from God originally. Jesus looked at the mercy covering Heaven and the condemnation that He would experience when He came to the earth, but He put it aside. He did not look on His own things, but He came, willing to be condemned.

Love. Oh, this word is so misused. But most of the time, people want to be loved. And they look upon their own things and they just see self, love of self. And it makes us selfish. And if we look at the others' love, they have no love. And as Jesus looked on His things, He saw God in Heaven, which was complete, wonderful; He saw the hate that He would have to come to; He didn't look on His own things, but He came.

Confusion is in the world. Don't be worried whenever you see confusion. It's in the world. It's going to be in the world until we're caught up out of

it. And the less part we as Christians have in the confusion, the better off we'll be. Because the Word of God tells us that God is not the author of confusion. Very simple.

Vain glory. The Word of God says for us to do nothing through vain glory. Oh, if we look at the glory, all our glorying is vain. If we look at all the glory the heathen have, they have none. And we look at the glory that Jesus had in Heaven, true glory, but then He stepped down and aside so that we could get rid of the vain glory.

People look on their own troubles. This is why a person does not go for God when God calls. They look on their own things. If a man looks on his own troubles, he sees he can't do it. If he looks on the troubles of others, he sees their needs. The reason why people are not burdened for other people is because they are not looking on the things of the other person. They are always looking on their own things. Jesus took the hurts of others upon Himself. That's what we can do with the troubles. When we see other people's troubles, we can have compassion upon them. When we see the trouble that Jesus went through, when we look to His trouble, we have sympathy with Jesus. And you know, the world doesn't seem to have much sympathy, but then again, that comes from God also.

Discouragements. When we look on our own discouragements, I'll tell you, it's a dismal picture. But when we look on the discouragements of others, we see that they need a lifting out of their discouragements. I'll tell you that it's a precious thing I found. When people are discouraged, I can find a passage of Scripture that will lift them right out of their discouragement. I get so thrilled in the Word of God sometime that I just get ready to whoop. I've seen times when I've been walking down the street and get happy and my wife kind of gets embarrassed about it, 'cause I get to whooping a little bit. And you know, I've found that sometimes that I get to whooping when someone else is preaching, and I don't hear their message and I have to muffle myself. Sometimes when I'm preaching, I have to muffle myself so I can get the message across. Because it's the truth of the message that's going to do the work of God and not how loud I can holler. And later on, if people's lives are moved by the truth, then I can get off with the Lord and I can holler all I want to.

If we look on our things, we would like to increase our fame. I've found that fame is a difficult, terrible thing. I've wanted to deal with people and I knew I had the answer to their problem. They'd hear that it was the

missionary going to come and they'd run. And I thought, "Well, why did anybody tell them the missionary was going to deal with them?" Our fame is only a hindrance to us. There is One Who is famous and Who ought to be exalted, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. But the fame of those in the heathen lands, they are unknown to Jesus, and Jesus left His things so that the heathen could become famous to God. When we look on our needs, it makes us selfish. Jesus had such selflessness, that He completely gave Himself. Sometimes in an introduction, people say that this person has completely dedicated or he has given himself completely. Oh, how I wish that were true of me. There was One that did, and that was Jesus.

When we look at our thorns, it distracts us. When we look at the thorns of others, we see how that they have need. When we look at the thorns Jesus wore on His head, we see that Jesus, by doing this, was purchasing for us a crown of life. Instead of looking on His own things, He looked upon the things of others. The people looked on Jesus and saw Him as just man. But Jesus was making man just. Whenever they judged Him, He was justifying us. Whenever they said, "Away with Jesus!" to crucify Him, Jesus was bringing us to God. They said, "We have no king." Jesus was making us kings and priests of God. Whenever they looked upon Jesus as they crucified Him between two thieves, they looked upon Him as a thief. But really, He was taking my place and yours in between those thieves. We were the ones that belonged there. And yet He took our place. Oh, they took His clothing, and while they were taking His clothing, from Him, He was giving us a robe of righteousness. While they gave Jesus vinegar to drink, glory to God, He was opening up a well of living water for me! When they gave Him death, He gave us life. He didn't look on His own things, but He looked upon our needs.

Equality. The Word of God says in verse 5, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Now, all the statements in chapter two refer to this "mind" which was in Christ Jesus. It said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." And here is equality.

I've learned a little about equality from a young African preacher by the name of Abo Kwajou, at Goumere. Abo Kwajou had been taught that their tribe was much lower than most other tribes. As a matter of fact, I think he told me that the only tribe lower than his was the Lobi tribe. (That's the tribe the Mileys are ministering to.) He had been taught that all other tribes

down toward the better educated region of the capital city were higher than they were. And he had been taught this by his parents. He had been taught also that the white man was really higher than he was. And then Abo Kwajou found out that when a person comes to Jesus, all of us as children of God are servants of God, therefore, we become equal. Oh, Abo Kwajou was thrilled with this thought of equality—that we're all equal.

One day he said to me, "Did you know what? That makes me equal even with you, Pastor Mayhew." And I said, "Well, Abo Kwajou, I told you that!" And he said, "Yes, but I just realized it." Then one evening Abo Kwajou stood up to preach a message in the church at Goumere, and I'll tell you I never heard a message like it in my life. As Abo Kwajou preached that message, he got into Romans 8 and he came to the place where the Word of God said we are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, and Abo couldn't even imagine it! He was so thrilled with the fact that God had made him and us equal to God's Son, Jesus Christ. I'll tell you what, I learned a little bit about equality.

The world is seeking equality. People are striving for equality, and man's station is so low, they want to be equal with man. Did you know that? Man's station is so low and they want to be equal with man, and Jesus has made it available for man to be equal with Him, the very Son of God! What a message we've got to take! I love to take it.

Verse 7 says, "But made himself of no reputation..." Jesus did not seek His own reputation, and you can see that, all through the New Testament. But He sought to give us a reputation. We were the ones in need. I don't like going into my past life. It's discouraging to even think about it. I had just about ruined any reputation anybody had ever given me or I had.

The day I got right with the Lord, I gained a reputation. It wasn't because of what I had done. But it was because One was willing to put aside His reputation and come and be spoken against. And, so to speak, in the eyes of the world (this is the way the world looks at it), they look at it like He lost His reputation there that day. They don't know that when Jesus lost His reputation, we found it! I couldn't have seen His reputation had He not come for me. But He made himself of no reputation. And the best way we can see this is by comparing Him to one of the kings in the Scripture.

Comparison of Herod and Jesus

King Herod, when he was born—now, I'm not going into the exactness

of this, but I would like for you to think with me about how a king lived. I didn't realize how a king lived until I saw Koulango kings and what authority and power he had over the people's lives. He could just take a person, make him a servant.

Whenever people would have a fight with one another, the women and the men would have arguments and fusses, and finally their fusses would get up as high as the king. The king would look at this woman and her family and the man and his family, and if the woman looked good, he'd take that woman for himself and send the rest of them home and end their argument.

Whenever I saw the authority a king had and what a king could do, it opened my eyes to the kingship of which the Bible speaks.

Herod was born in possibly one of the best beds that money could buy, in one of the nicest places, and Jesus was born in a stable. But, Jesus was willing to be born in a stable because I needed a new birth. The clothes for Herod—they would have sought the best clothes that could be found for this king that was going to be born. But Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes. You see, Jesus knew I was going to need a white robe.

The value of Herod was very high. He was protected. The value of Jesus was 30 pieces of silver, and He was hunted; He was hunted like a common criminal with sticks and staves. But Jesus knew He had to get about so that God would be hunting us.

The praise and honor that came to Herod because He was the high king—of Jesus, they said He had the devil. But they said that so we could be cleansed. You know what I've found since returning to the United States? I learned that in Africa people could be devil-possessed and influenced by demons. When I came to the United States, I found that a lot of people didn't believe that here. But they were possessed, just the same.

Herod had a wonderful home; he had a palace. Jesus had no place to lay His head. But you see, Jesus knew we were going to need a mansion in glory. And He was willing to come and make the first preparation for it.

The transportation Herod had was beautiful white horses and a nice carriage. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. But you see, He knew I was going to need transportation to Glory. And He was just taking care of that for me.

The crown Herod wore was a beautiful, jeweled crown. Jesus' crown was

thorns. Paul was talking about his converts and he said, "You're my crown of rejoicing." And it is my desire, if possible at all, to reach a million Koulangos, a million people in our tribe. And I'd like to see them installed as a crown for Jesus in Heaven, a crown of rejoicing. I'll need your prayers if we reach a million there. And we don't want to be selfish about it, we'd like for there to be a million Lobis there. You know, the Bible says there's going to be some from every tribe, every nation, and every tongue.

And all we have is just a little part in helping some of those that speak those other tongues get in. And you can have a part. I tell you, my heart has been moved as I listened to Dan Merkh speak about France. I had to examine this myself, and I had to say, "Now Lord, do you want me to go to France?" I had to face it.

And, brothers and sisters, every one of us ought to face this thing. Lord, do you want me to go to France? I covenanted with Dan Merkh that God would call six couples to France tonight and I tell you, I want Him to get hold of your heart, and He wants to get hold of your heart! Transportation to Heaven—and there's transportation for them. The Lord has made transportation available for the people.

King Herod's death—did you know that the death of the king was usually secret, so that it was honorable? One time several years ago a church leader died, and his doctor said that he screamed, and said that the flames were engulfing him. And you know, they really persecuted this doctor because he came out and told the truth about it. The death of a king would be secret, and it would be honorable and would be among the wealthy people. It would be kept quiet so he could have an honorable death.

The death of Jesus was public, between two thieves. It was so open. And it was such a terrible death. But you know, it was so that we could die out to ourselves, so we could pass through death and be among the angels. Jesus was between two thieves so that we could be among the angels. Jesus was thirsty. No doubt, the king drank out of golden cups. Whenever Jesus was thirsty, they brought Him a sponge of vinegar. He didn't look on His own things. He was opening up the well of water for us.

The burial would be in fine clothing for the king, in a kingly grave. Jesus' clothes had been sold or had been given to the soldiers. He was in a borrowed tomb. He was buried to bury our shame. He was buried in that tomb so that our bodies do not have to stay on earth.

I learned more about the resurrection while I was in Africa. Kofi David and I were out digging sand one day; we were getting ready to make concrete blocks for our place on the mission station in Goumere. And as we dug down into the sand, we saw the shape of a bone in the sand, and the bone had disintegrated and had gone back to sand.

As we dug, we threw it up into the truck and Kofi stopped and said to me, "Pastor Mayhew. Wait a minute. Wasn't that a bone that was buried here that turned to sand?"

And I said, "It sure looks like it, didn't it Kofi?" And he said, "It sure did. Pastor Mayhew, all these buildings that they build out of cement—we've heard about these big buildings. Suppose a Christian died and suppose his bones went back into the sand like that, and then they make concrete blocks out of it, and then they build those big buildings out of it. What would happen in the resurrection?"

I said, "Brother, those buildings are gonna come down!"

Now, I don't know a lot about future things. I have some comments on Scripture later if you really want to know about what I believe is going to happen in the future. But, I'll tell you, these great big dams that are up here in the hills in California, if any Christians fell into those things when they were pouring the concrete, I'll tell you what's going to happen, it's going to have to let them go when Jesus comes.

The procession they would have for the burial of the king...and then Jesus was carried in the arms of Joseph, so that the arms of angels could carry us on to glory. Oh, they proclaimed that Herod was king, while people denied that Jesus was king. But in the book of Hebrews there's a verse that tells us that Jesus, "Whither the forerunner for us is entered." And it tells us that Jesus was the forerunner for us.

You know how that John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus? As the king in the Koulongo tribe is going into a village, they'll send a forerunner in there and they'll beat the drum almost all day before the king comes into that village, because they want the people to know that the king is coming. John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus. The Word of God says that Jesus is the forerunner, and He has entered for us.

And I see this, that whenever Jesus entered Heaven at the ascension, He said, "Father, the kings and priests are coming."

He has made us to be priests and kings of God, and I'll tell you it's good.

You know, we have a message to proclaim. Now, we can look at the likeness of men. Jesus came as a servant, and you know there are so many people that want to be masters. But Jesus is calling servants. And if anybody comes tonight to present yourself to Jesus Christ, to make yourself available, as that precious sister said the other day, make yourself available to Jesus, you'll come as a servant, not as a master.

I think the arguments take place between the masters and the work takes place among the servants. If we're going to do something for God, we need to recognize, that He is calling servants. When Jesus came He humbled Himself and He was exalted and He received a name that is above every name. Folks, sometimes they mix up our names, they don't spell them right. Well, they're not supposed to. You see, there's one name that's supposed to be exalted above every name. "And at the name of Jesus every knee," (Now listen, *every* knee, did you get that?), "shall bow, of things in the earth, things in heaven, things in earth and things under the earth." I guess that would include the whole mission field, the whole world. "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Now verse 14 says, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." Verse 16 says, "Holding forth the word of life." When Paul sent Timothy, (verse 20), he said something about Timothy, in verse 19 he said he was going to send them shortly to them. Then he said in verse 20, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." In verse 21, a verse that replies back to verse 4, he said, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

If we looked at the law, it would condemn us. But as we look at the grace of God, we see that when the Lord opens our eyes to this truth, and we stop seeking our own things and look on the things of others and the things of Jesus, it will make a difference!

There's going to be a mission offering taken at the end of the service. Somebody will look at his wallet and think, "Well, my transmission is broken in my car, and I need money for that." You know, he's looking on his own things and Jesus needs some transmission money also. Transmitting the Gospel costs money. Taking it somewhere else costs money. We can think of our own things, and then we'll decide maybe we ought not to give much. Everybody will probably do that. But we cannot think on our own things but the things of Jesus. We must think on the things of others.

He said (and this is a pitiful verse), "For all seek their own..." I tell you, it

broke my heart as I thought of the many years that I sought my own things. And brothers and sisters, contrary to what some people would have you believe about us, we still catch ourselves thinking on our own things, and we have to stop it.

Are we going to think on our own things? Let me ask you this very simply, "Isn't it about time we stop thinking about our own things and start thinking on the things of others?" As we saw people's lives transformed, and I've seen a number of people's lives transformed in various places in the world, but as we've seen their lives transformed, it thrilled me every time. I saw the different people—the Spanish people in Spain whose lives had been transformed by the Gospel.

I saw a woman come out of Czechoslovakia. She heard we were ordering tape recorders for missionaries when we were in Switzerland. She asked us to order her a tape recorder. I asked her what she wanted to do with it and she said, "Well, it's against the law to preach the Gospel in their country, in the country of Czechoslovakia, but if she bought a tape recorder and they recorded the message on tape, they could carry that tape recorder into homes in the communist country and they could listen to Gospel messages off the tape." And that's why she wanted it. I said, "Yes, I'll get you one."

As I saw the lives of others, I remember one day a man's life was transformed. We went into the country of Ghana, next door to Ivory Coast. We went to buy some supplies. My wife met a Hindu from India. This man had a store where he sold cloth, and we needed to make some clothes because our clothes had worn out. So she was going to buy some cloth.

We were talking to this man about it, and he said, "Sit down." And he sent somebody out to get us a Coca-Cola. When he came back, he gave my wife a Coca-Cola, and she said, "Oh, I so appreciate that. I have something to give you too." And she gave him the plan of salvation.

Jimmy Aldridge and I had visited with that man at other times, and we had already given him the plan of salvation. But he didn't seem to touch it when we gave it to him. When my wife thanked him for the Coca-Cola, and she gave him the plan of salvation, I went by and brought back to him a New Testament because she had promised him one, and she didn't have one with her. That happens when girls make promises.

So I brought the New Testament to that man and gave it to him. We received a letter later from Ivory Coast, and he said he'd been reading that

New Testament and his eyes were opened, and he could see now what he had never before seen in his life. And I thought, "How easy it was to win that Hindu to Jesus Christ."

If you will get your eyes off your own things and seek the things of others, the Lord can speak to you. Are we going to do it? Today I thought about the pastors. I think, after having seen the mission fields, that what we need now, as well as young people, is to start in preparation, to start early. But what we need as well as the young people, are some pastors who are really successful. And I have started praying that God will call successful pastors to the mission field.

Pastors, I've been in some of your churches, and I've seen that you are a soul winner and I've seen that you've been teaching your deacons and your people to win souls and you've been teaching them to build other people up in the faith. You are the ones I want on the mission field, on our mission fields. And would we listen to God? Would we listen to Him? I am persuaded that if we'll listen to the Lord, if we will pray now for the Lord to send forth laborers into the harvest, there will be some laborers sent here tonight. Do you believe that?

Let us pray.

1971 – Larry Powell

The Power of Revival

Text: Acts 1:8

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Introduction

God’s call to us to be His witness in St. Croix, Virgin Island. (Give a brief description of the island location, people and culture.)

I. The Price of Revival

Verse 8: “But ye shall receive power.” Note: at what price do we receive power?

2 Chronicles 7:13, 14: Humble ourselves; seek God’s face with broken hearts. Repent of our wickedness, and God will forgive and bring revival.

Illustration: Winning many people to Christ in St. Croix in the early days. As people were saved and baptized in the ocean at Solitude Bay, the church grew and revival came.

II. The Power of Revival

Verse 8: “After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”

Psalms 85:6-9: “Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

Note: Recite words of that great hymn, “Revive Us Again.”

1. Revive us again, fill each heart with thy love.
2. May each soul be rekindled with fire from above (Commentary).

Illustrations: Winning professional men and women to Christ (several medical doctors, bankers, attorneys). In a meeting with the governor of the island. Speaking on radio and island television. Teaching Bible in local schools.

Illustration: The bishop and headmaster of the Anglican school offers their school facility rent free.

III. The Place of Revival

Verse 8 (both and at the same time) my words, "In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria—into all the world."

From the heart of the local church, to our state, to our nation and to our perishing world.

Illustrations:

- Winning the president of an earth moving company. Prepared the land to build, free.
- Winning a banker to Christ, who provided funds to build.
- Winning a contractor to Christ, who built our first church facility.

In spite of our weakness and lack of experience, God is building the work in St. Croix, Virgin Islands. To God be the Glory!

Invitation

"Set our souls afire, Lord" for a perishing world. Is God speaking to your heart this evening? Please respond now to His call upon your life.

1971 –Van Dale Hudson

The Possibility of Revival

Text: Ezekiel 37:3

“Can these bones live again?”

Though revival is the last thing most want, revival is what is needed most in America. A genuine spiritual awakening would do the nation more good than all other endeavors combined. A return to biblical Christianity would solve more of our problems than anything that could be experienced.

The Bible contains several word pictures of revival, portraits of renewal. The wind is picturesque of revival—seen when God breathed life into the body of Adam; seen when the Scriptures are described as God-breathed. How desperately we need the stirring wind of God’s Spirit to clear the moral atmosphere; to drive away the smog that envelopes the land.

The rain describes revival as it refreshes the parched earth, settles the dust, and puts new life into the withering and dying. We need this heavenly rain in the latter days.

Farming illustrates revival. Before the harvest comes the briars, weeds, brush, and trees must be cut and burned. The stumps must be removed. The hard “fallow” ground must be broken up for the seed to be sown. We need the plow of revival on our barren fields.

Construction exemplifies revival. Isaiah compared it to the building of a road. The valleys must be filled, the mountains lowered, the crooked turns straightened, and the rough spots smoothed. Nehemiah compared it to the building of a wall. His enemies scoffed at him while he revived the stones out of the rubbish with sword in one hand and trowel in the other. We need the hammer and shovel of revival as we engage in the building and battling process simultaneously.

Fire demonstrates revival. Such was the case when Elijah saw the consuming fire fall on Mt. Carmel. Such was the experience of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Revival fires purge, warm, and illuminate. How we need the flame of revival.

Is it possible for us to see revival in our present situation? Can we actually see the skeleton of the church come to life once more as God’s Spirit raises

the body of Christ to a renewed vitality to engage the forces of darkness in these last days? How possible is revival?

I. It is as possible as the promises of God are unchanging.

Rightfully we rejoice in the multiple promises of God. He has promised:

Conversion for the lost sinner (John 6:37)

Cleansing for the erring saint (1 John 1:9)

Comfort through His indwelling Spirit (John 14:16)

Companionship in evangelism (Matthew 28:19, 20)

Commission to bear witness worldwide (Acts 1:8)

Clothing for our spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6)

Coming again for the redeemed (John 14:3)

Crown of righteousness for the faithful (2 Timothy 4:8)

Accompanying these declared and dependable promises are promises concerning the possibility of revival. However, there are two things that are true about these revival promises: they are clear and conditional.

Note 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." The "if" precedes the "then." Without the "if" becoming a reality, the "then" cannot be experienced.

Think of Isaiah 40:29-31 where the promise of power for the faint and strength for the weak is given; but the renewal is preceded by a willingness to "wait upon the Lord."

The promises given by Jesus Himself concerning "whatsoever we desire" have the prerequisite of "believing that we shall receive them" (Mark 11:24).

The classic Galatians 6:7-9 passage regarding the law of sowing and reaping closes with the condition, "For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Only if we fail to faint can the reaping take place.

If men who are right with God

Have motives that honor God

Use methods endorsed by God

Preach the message given by God...

Revival can come!

Without these conditions, all attempts will fail regardless of personality, program, or promotions that are involved.

Not only is revival as possible as the promises of God are unchanging, but...

II. It is as possible as the power of God is unlimited.

Conditions, on whatever scale, do not limit God. The only limitation placed on God's power being manifested in revival is the sin and unbelief of His people. Did not David say about the Jews: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Psalm 78:41)?

It is indeed a dirty world in which we live, but we don't live in such a dark, dirty, difficult, and dangerous day but what God can manifest His power.

It is dark on the international scene as the nuclear threat grows with enough warheads now stockpiled to destroy 50 planets the size of earth. The tension mounting between world powers mounts has been compared to scorpions being jostled inside a glass jar.

It is dark on the domestic scene as we see the home crumbling under the impact of the termites of liquor, infidelity, cohabitation, and divorce.

It is dark on the political scene as we are fast slipping away from the success of private enterprise into the evils of socialism with an ever-growing threat of economic collapse.

It is dark on the educational scene as we reap the crop from years of sowing Deweyism, evolution, behaviorism, and other humanist concepts.

It is dark on the religious scene as pulpits are being occupied by preachers of Karl Marx rather than Saint Mark, and ecumenism strives to build the one-world church of Antichrist.

And on we could go painting the picture darker and darker. We are moving toward the midnight hour while evil intensifies daily. Can we have revival in such an hour? Is God able to cope with the situation? Can we expect a spiritual awakening? Has God lost His omnipotence and stepped

down from His throne?

To answer these questions we need to scan history to see instances of revival in the darkest hours. In doing so it will be seen that circumstances are always contrary; that Satan will always put forth his best effort to stop it; that the lost world is not interested; that the church in general is apathetic; and that the atmosphere of the age will always be anti-revival.

But all this proves the desperate need of a spiritual awakening, and it gives God the space in which He can manifest His power in a more clear and dramatic manner.

One biblical example of God breaking through is what happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Revival came amid intense opposition and adversity. Fearful and frustrated, the small band of disciples met in the upper room to pray. They waited, fasted, and prayed. Their hearts were greatly distressed. They were flooded with doubts and uncertainties.

They knew Jesus was alive. They had seen Him in His resurrected body. They had watched Him ascend to Heaven. They had His promise of power. But outside was the milling multitude that had cried "Crucify Him." The Jewish leaders who had plotted His death were still in power and ready to deal with any who claimed loyalty to Jesus as Messiah. They feared what the Roman authorities might do to them if captured.

They faced an impossible situation from the human standpoint. Before them was a wicked immoral society, heartless hypocritical Judaism, and the power of a Caesar-worshipping Roman government. But they had revival anyway! Why? Because there were no barriers? Because there was no opposition? Because the devil had gone out of business? Because the outward circumstances were favorable?

No! A thousand times no! They had revival because they met God's conditions and He responded with a demonstration of His power.

Another example of the unlimited power of God is seen in what took place in England and America in the 18th century. The English churches, government, educational systems, and society in general were corrupt. Liberal churchmen added to the deterioration. Those conservatives who were trying to maintain some degree of steadfastness were discouraged and labeled "Dissenters." It looked as though England was doomed to die from the cancer of intemperance, immorality, crime, and cruelty.

Then God raised up Wesley and Whitefield, men of purity, prayer, passion

and preaching who saw an awakening in England that saved the nation from ruin, and spread for over 50 years; and even though less than three percent of the population was converted, the spiritual climate of the entire nation changed for the better:

Slave trade stopped.

Four out of five taverns closed.

Prison and penal reforms were instituted.

Dangerous conditions of child labor improved.

Corruption in government declined.

Samuel Green said of that time: "The temper of the English people seemed to be transformed overnight."

Lecky said: "Wesley saved Britain from a revolution of blood."

Lloyd George, writing as prime minister, said: "Wesley changed the history of the British Isles."

France, Germany, Italy, and Spain rejected revival and paved the way for continual revolution, dictatorships, and anarchy.

The revival then spread to America. The impact was so great that Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President said, "America was born in a revival of religion. Back of that revival were John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Francis Asbury." This revival laid the foundation for the freedom we enjoy today.

These men preached the truth under the anointing of God's Spirit. They denounced sin, demanded repentance, and demonstrated holy living. People both in the church and outside the church were converted. Every strata of society was affected. When Whitefield preached in Boston, some 22 preachers were saved. Even Harvard University was affected. As a result of the revival, many great preachers and leaders came out of that school which was in moral decline.

Our American Constitution was born in revival. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia amid the ongoing failure to unify as a group of leaders, Benjamin Franklin declared: "I have lived a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall without His notice, is it probable that a nation can rise without His aid? 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it.' Without His concurring aid we shall proceed no

better than the builders of Babel.”

A prayer meeting followed out of which was born the Constitution with laws and policies based largely on the Word of God.

When the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville sought to find the secret of America’s greatness, he could not find it in the natural resources, schools, Congress, and businesses but in the churches of America where he heard the pulpits “afire with righteousness.” He went home to France and wrote: “America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”

The truth is, we are living off the fringe benefits of the past revivals of not only Wesley and Whitefield, but those of Finney, Moody, and Sunday and many lesser-known instruments God has used. We now desperately need a revival of our own.

Can America be saved? The question is, Will the church be revived? We can survive only if God’s people can be revived. If not, the blood will run in our streets; treachery will reign; and our society will die for lack of spiritual breath.

No hour is so dark, day so chaotic, era so confused, or age so bemuddled but what a measure of revival can be experienced.

How possible is revival? It is as possible as the promises of God are unchanging; as possible as the power of God is unlimited and....

III. It is as possible as the people of God are unwilling.

What is being stressed is the absolute willingness to meet God’s conditions while at the same time a determined unwillingness to do at least three things:

First, we must be unwilling to accustom ourselves to deadness. This is what the church in Sardis did (Revelation 3:1-6), and they apparently didn’t even realize the life was gone from the church. They continued to function as a lifeless, but active, corpse, if such an oddity can be envisioned. And what few members had a degree of life left were in terminal condition ready to expire at any moment.

May we not get used to having church without having a truly vibrant personal relationship with our Lord. If we aren’t careful, we will become accustomed to:

A spasmodic prayer life,
A seldom read Bible,
A shying away from witnessing,
The sealing of wrong attitudes,
And the sorrow of unconfessed sins in our hearts.

Even we as preachers can be satisfied with barren altars, dry baptistries, tearless eyes, compassionate hearts, and mundane routine without real meaning. Can we not all agree that a church needs revival when...

Lukewarm dispositions prevail,
Lowered standards plague,
Limited vision permeates,
And lifeless programs paralyze?

It has been uniquely said that revival can come to the church if all the...

Sleeping will wake up,
Lazy will get up,
Lukewarm will fire up,
Unfaithful will show up,
Drinkers will dry up,
Disgruntled will sweeten up,
Delinquent will pay up,
Dishonest will confess up,
Silent will sing up,
Estranged will make up,
Gossipers will shut up,
Loose-living will tighten up,
Tight-pursed will loosen up,
Downhearted will look up,

Timid will speak up,
Soldiers will stand up,
Dirty will wash up,
Dozing will sit up,
Idle will harness up,
Immobile will gear up,
Immature will grow up,
Hard hearts will soften up...
Revival will certainly come!

Compared to the Christian body as a whole, we as Free Will Baptists are not many in number. We are a minority compared to other groups, but God often chooses to work through the small rather than the large. What would happen if just half of our churches had real revival this next year? What if just 100 of our churches really experienced a visitation from Heaven?

May we not just talk about it and think about it, let's see it happen!

But we must not only be unwilling to accustom ourselves to the deadness, but we must also be unwilling to align ourselves with the decoys.

There is such a thing as a counterfeit revival where there will be crowds, responses, and apparent success, and yet no lasting spiritual results take place. It is only a surface showing.

Satan is the master of disguise and the counterfeit. Since his expulsion from Heaven, he has tried to imitate God. He is worshipped as a god. He is part of an evil trinity. He has a false gospel. He is building a false church. And he can produce a fake revival. Here is how he works. He says you can have revival without following God's pattern. He says you can have revival without paying the price in confession of sin, earnest prayer, and disciplined fasting.

But no true revival with lasting fruit has ever come when built on compromise. The moral tone of the community will remain unchanged. The church will continue to be barren.

We, more or less, know this is true. The challenge is putting into practice what we know. The problem in our churches is not the sin of cooperating with liberals. Our problem is our failure to cooperate with one another in

an effort to see revival. If our churches could get together in a cooperative effort to see revival in their local area, we would be amazed at the lasting results. God has put us here for a reason. Let's get busy as a team to see accomplished what He has called us to do.

But not only must we be unwilling to accustom ourselves to deadness and align ourselves with decoys, but we must be unwilling to accept defeat.

Some who have not failed in the first two areas have succumbed to defeat for one reason or the other. Many a good preacher has settled in to live with the status quo; to not try anymore to have a ministry of spiritual impact.

Indeed, the road to revival is undeniably difficult and demanding and requires constant discipline and renewed dedication to the challenge; but this journey is well worth the trip once you see what a difference it makes in so many lives. The row of revival plowing is a hard one with many rough spots in the field, but the crop to be gathered will make every exertion of effort worthwhile and rewarding.

There are a lot of things the devil has attempted to do... he tried to take God's throne; he attracted angels to follow him in rebellion; he attacked the first couple with temptation; he deceived all the humans except eight in the days of the great flood; he snared the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; he led kings down paths of sin; and he has lured believers into unconcern and unfaithfulness.

But there is one thing he cannot do. He can't stop revival if God's people really want it to come. A measure of it is coming in some places. The mercy drops are falling. God has set some of our men and churches on fire and others are attracted to the flame. Growth is evident in some areas; but how meager is our accomplishment compared to the potential.

As an evangelist laboring in our ranks, it is my constant desire to minister in the midst of a true revival. For Jesus' sake; for my soul's sake; for my family's sake; for our churches' sake; and for the sake of all eternity that rises up to meet us.

May it be truly said that we all are desperate for revival in our day!

How possible is revival?

It is as possible as the promises of God are unchanging.

It is as possible as the power of God is unlimited.

It is as possible as the people of God are unwilling.

Closing note: This message was prepared on short notice when I was asked on Saturday if I would preach on the upcoming Monday evening in the place of Brother Fred Warner who was ill. Much thanks is given to the Lord for the grace He provided to do so.

1972 – Milton Worthington

Discipleship

Text: Luke 14:25-35

Introduction

Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 14:25-35. You will notice that this section is introduced by the little word “for.” In other words, this section gives us the underlying reason for the two verses that come before, and for the verse that comes afterward. And although this section comes second in position, it comes first in argument, and therefore should come first in our consideration.

I. The Costliness of Discipleship (verses 28-33)

- A. The Building to be Framed (verses 28-30)
- B. The Battle to be Fought (verses 31-33)
- C. The Beloved to be Followed (verses 26, 27, 33)
 - 1. Christ’s Person
 - 2. Christ’s Passion
 - 3. Christ’s Power

II. The Claim of Discipleship (First Place; verses 26, 27, 33)

- A. Before the People we Love (verse 26)
- B. Before the Painlessness we Love (verse 27)
- C. Before the Possession we Love (verse 33)

III. The Contribution of Discipleship (verses 34, 35)

- A. Useful to the Savior
- B. Useful in the Society

Conclusion

We have examined the costliness, claim, and contribution of discipleship. Christ claims to be placed first in our life. Are you prepared to put Him first tonight? Are you prepared to put Him first every day until you see Him on the throne, the fairest among 10,000, and the altogether lovely One?

God has given Him first place in creation and redemption, but you must give Him first place (the preminent) in personal dedication.

Thought

"I want my life to be a challenge not a compromise."

1971 – Herman Hersey

The Product of Revival

Text: Psalm 85:4-6

“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us forever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?” (Psalm 85:4-6).

A very sincere man prayed almost every week in church, “Lord, clean out the cobwebs.” By this he was asking God to forgive him for his sins and straighten out his life. After hearing this prayer for almost a year, a brother spoke up and said, “Lord, don’t do it! Kill the spider instead.”

Many of our revival efforts have been just cleaning out the cobwebs. Some good is done, but in a revival that is Heaven-sent, God-inspired, Holy Spirit-energized, Christ-honoring, we will kill the spider. We need to pray the prayer in our text, Psalm 85:6, “Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

We have problems today in determining a genuine revival. I am afraid if we were to see such a revival, we would not recognize it. We have substituted evangelism for revival. Now, there is a difference. Evangelism is for winning the lost to Jesus, to bring the sinner to salvation. A sinner is a dead man, and a dead man cannot be revived. A dead man needs a resurrection.

A revival is for God’s people. It produces a hatred for sin, draws Christians closer to the Lord, and allows God to work within the church. Yes, we have substituted evangelism for revival. It is not a question of having either-or. We need both.

There are some reasons why our evangelistic efforts have not produced revival. First, we are not nearly as evangelistic as we like to believe. We are content with easy decisions, with little or no emphasis on repentance. Very little emphasis is given to discipleship. To become a disciple means putting your life under the discipline of another. You will follow another’s rules and regulations for your life. Furthermore, evangelism seldom disturbs the saints and the church.

In this day and time, we have a lot of counterfeit revivals. For example, some church members live all week in sin and iniquity. Others follow

those who sing in the worldly nightclubs and such sinful places. Some members, and even some entertainers, stand up on Sunday morning and sing "Amazing Grace," and God's people say, "Oh, how wonderful, they are singing a hymn. That really touched my heart, and I feel revived." But, that is a counterfeit revival. For those who sing ought to live right. A person cannot live for the devil six days out of the week then sing for the glory of the Lord. It is a mockery in the sight of God.

Then, the church has been conditioned by the spirit of this age, which makes it difficult to have revival. This generation is marked by humanism, a philosophy which attempts to make a god out of man and a man out of God. It attempts to pull God down to man's level. Anytime we attempt this, we are in for problems.

This age is also marked with sensualism and materialism. Many live today for the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes. Folks today live for the almighty dollar. Many families, even in the church, will sacrifice anything, even their children, on an altar of gold so they may have just a little bit more of this world's goods.

We have made some costly substitutions in the church. We have substituted promotion for prayer. You hear a lot now about the need to promote the church, to promote the services. But we hear very little about all-night prayer meetings, and very little about fasting and praying. We hear very little about earnestly seeking the face of God until He does something unusual for us. And, we have substituted popularity for a peculiar people.

As I pointed out before, I believe our experience is too limited for us to know whether we really have revival. I've heard folks say, "We had a good revival," and I always think, "Compared to what?" Let me illustrate it this way. I am the world's greatest singer, compared to some people. You see, if I look hard enough I can find somebody who sings worse than I do. So, if I'm going to compare myself with that one person, I am then the very best singer there is.

In the church, you can always find somebody who lives a worse life than you do. You can always find somebody who lives farther away from God than you do, who prays less than you do, or, who gives less than you. When you compare yourself with them, you come out looking pretty good.

I have carefully studied the Book of Acts, and found that not one revival took place. It was evangelism, winning souls to Jesus. In the epistles of the

New Testament, we find the need for revival, especially in Corinthians and in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation.

It is in Old Testament history we find the principles of revival, and these principles are eternal. In 2 Chronicles, chapters 29, 30, and 31, we read about a young king named Hezekiah. In 2 Chronicles 29:1 we learn that Hezekiah began to reign when he was 25 years old and reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. This young king came to the throne facing some real problems.

First, his father had set up idols to Baal and offered children as sacrifices, one of the most despicable sins of Baal worship. When Elijah met with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, he challenged the Baal worshipers to build an altar. He would do the same. He told them his people would ask their God and you will ask your god to answer by fire. The one who answers by fire is the true God. Elijah told them to offer a "bullock" upon the altar. Now, do you know why? Elijah knew that if they were not to offer the bullock, they would want to offer one of their children. You know the outcome. Almighty God answered by fire.

Second, King Hezekiah had to face the fact that the doors of the house of the Lord were shut, closed tight. There was no sacrifice offered, and there was no worship. The people had made political and military alliances with the ungodly and heathen in opposition to what God commanded.

Now, we want to summarize what King Hezekiah did, and then look at the result or product of this revival. Remember that he had just been appointed king at age 25. Now, what would be the most important thing he would want to do? Why, you would think he would want to travel around the kingdom, visit a little, get the palace in order, appoint some of his friends to political offices, strengthen the army, or do one thing or another.

No, the first thing he did was to open the doors of God's house. In 2 Chronicles 29:3 we read, "He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them." Just think that the house of the Lord was closed for so long, the doors needed to be repaired.

King Hezekiah then challenged the priests and the Levites to get God's house in order. In verses 4 and 5 we read, "And he brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them together into the east street, and said to them, 'Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the Holy

Place.” In other words, God’s house needed to be cleaned up.

In verses 20 through 28, we learn that he restored the sacrifices and worship in the Temple. The Levites started a teaching ministry. Then in chapter 30, King Hezekiah sent word throughout all Israel and all Judea for the people to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover.

It is interesting to note that some people did not respond. In 2 Chronicles 30:10, we read, “So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: But they laughed them to scorn and mocked them.” Note that the posts passed from city to city. This was the word for messenger. We get the word post office and postman from that word. In those days, they had postmen, or messengers who went from place to place to deliver messages and invitations as this one from the King.

Yes, some people laughed them to scorn. Some mocked them. But in verse 11, we read that some people humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. Not only did they go, they brought offerings in abundance (chapter 31). The priests and Levites were provided for according to the commandment of the Lord.

That is a summary of what young King Hezekiah did. He opened the doors of God’s house, and repaired them; he told God’s people to sanctify themselves; he had the priests and Levites sanctify themselves and clean up the filthiness out of the Holy Place and sanctify it; he restored worship in the Temple, and invited all to come.

The first result of this revival was repentance on the part of God’s children. “And they gathered their brethren and sanctified themselves and came according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the Lord to cleanse the house of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 29:15).

Today’s church will never have revival until there is awareness and brokenness over sin. We read over and over in Psalms how David prayed for God to forgive him. He prayed that he wanted God to give him a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). Some people today laugh about sin. Oftentimes they joke about sin. In the sight of God, sin is indeed very serious, and I would to God we would get a brokenness over sin. I would to God that it would concern us. It always bothers me when someone gets up to preach or to testify and they brag about what a great sinner they were. You mark it down. There is something wrong with that. If a person has lived

in sin all his life and is saved, his life is changed. He no longer lives in the past. He is not going to glory in the details of the sinful things he used to do. He is going to get right with God and talk of a new life in Christ.

The second result of this revival was the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Those of us who are saved see Jesus as our Savior. But it is not enough to say, "He is my Savior." We must go beyond that. We must say, "He is my Lord." We find this principle in 2 Chronicles 30:8. God says to His people, "Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were." *Stiff-necked* simply means they refused to bow down. They refused to yield themselves to the authority of someone else. God said, "Yield yourselves unto the Lord." In other words, recognize the Lord as Master. That is the meaning of the term "Lord." It means master, and therefore, we, as His children, need to yield ourselves to Him. Paul made this clear in Romans 6:16-18. Truly the Lord is our master.

When there is genuine revival, we will have a renewed love for God's Word. In 2 Chronicles 29:15b we read they "came, according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the LORD." In 2 Chronicles 30:12, we read, "Also in Judea the hand of the Lord was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king, and of the princes, by the word of the LORD." God's Word was important to them. The Word of God made the difference. When we have a true revival, we will return to God's Word. God's Word will produce a renewed love for God and for Jesus.

My wife and I courted long distance. Now, that is better than not courting at all. Almost every day, I wrote a letter to her, and she wrote to me. I looked forward to getting those letters. When I got back from a preaching trip, I would head for the post office, I would open up the letter dated last to see how the letter ended. I was interested to find out whether I was still in or out and how things were going. Then, I would go back and read every word again with a smile in my heart. I would want to diagram every sentence and write an exposition on every thought. Why? I was anxious to find out what she had to say to me. I was concerned about her, and I was interested in her. I loved her.

The Word of God is a love letter to us. And, oh, how we need to read it. How we need to hide it away in our heart! How we need to be concerned that we live according to how God would have us to live.

We spend our time trying to stop worldliness in the church, but we need

to stop the love for the things of this world. You see, the love of the world must be killed. Remember the illustration at the beginning of the message? We don't need to clean out the cobwebs; we need to kill the spider. We need to get down to the very cause of our problems. When we have the right kind of love for the Word of God, we will stop loving this world.

The third result of the revival was restoration of the church's true ministry. In 2 Chronicles 29: 35, we read, "and also the burnt offerings were in abundance with the fat of the peace offering and the drink offerings for every burnt offering." So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order. Everybody was in his or her place. Today God has a place for you, and He has a place for me.

The Apostle Paul uses the illustration of the body. Our body has many parts. He says you have hands, feet, eyes and a nose. He says the hand cannot say to the foot, "I don't need you anymore." The eye cannot say to the ear, "I don't need you." No, we need every part of the body for us to function correctly. So it is with the church. God gives people gifts according to their abilities. Every one of us needs to be in our place, doing the job God has for us. This is restoring the true ministry of the church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what is the result of revival? There must be repentance on the part of God's children. There will be recognition of the Lordship of Christ. There will be a renewed love for the Bible. There will be a restoration of the true ministry of the church, and there will be rejoicing among God's people.

We read in 2 Chronicles 29:25-30, 36 that King Hezekiah:

"Set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David the king of Israel. "All the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

And when they had made an end of the offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshiped. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads and worshiped...and Hezekiah rejoiced and all the people, that God had prepared....”

Notice 2 Chronicles 29:36, “...and Hezekiah rejoiced and all the people that God had prepared.” God had prepared the people. They rejoiced in doing God’s work. Their stewardship was restored. They started to bring in their offerings as they should. They were obedient to the Lord in what they did. Not only was stewardship restored, there was salvation of the lost, and their song was restored.

Do you have a song in your heart? Is your song gone? Do you still have that joy you once had as a child of God? Once an Israelite in captivity asked, “How can I sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” You know, it is hard for us to have a song of rejoicing and gladness in our hearts when we are not living for the Lord.

I want us to turn again to our text where we began. In Psalm 85:6 the Psalmist prays, “that thy people may rejoice in thee.” He could have given many reasons why he wanted God to revive His people again, but he said, “that Thy people may rejoice in Thee.” Oh, may God revive our hearts that we may rejoice in Him.

1973 – Claudie Hames

Discipleship

Text: Matthew 16:21-28

I. What Is a Disciple?

Some questions are asked often of a preacher.

- A. What is a Christian? What does it mean? What does it involve? What does it cost to be a Christian? What do I have to give up? Sin.
- B. What is an apostle? Do we have apostles today?
- C. A disciple is a “follower of Jesus.”
- D. One whose life is a “disciplined Life.”
- E. Illustration: The disciples of Gandhi in India adopted his “philosophy of life” and adhered to his teachings.

II. The Conditions of Discipleship Given by Jesus (Are Never Watered Down).

- A. If any man will come after me (verse 24). Follower...Freedom of the will.
- B. Examples: Peter, James, and John (Luke 5:10, 11)
 - 1. Levi or Matthew the Publican (Matthew 9:9)
 - 2. Zacchaeus: (Luke 19:1-10)
- C. Let him deny himself: Oh, a dirty word.
- D. Take up his cross: (gas chamber, lethal injection, hanging, firing squad). It is God’s plus sign.
- E. Crucifixion: Egyptians, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans (Describe crucifixion; describe the cross.) This cruel punishment was a deterrent to insurrections.
- F. Whosoever will save his life: Will lose it; withdraw it from Christian service.
- G. Whosoever will lose his life: Laid on the altar for the Lord. “Here am I.”

H. Jesus taught, "Count the cost" (Luke 14:25-33).

III. Serious Consideration (Evaluate, Inventory, Consider) of the End Results:

- A. Jesus proposes two questions (verse 26):
- B. What would it profit a man? Illustration: J. Paul Getty was one of the richest men on earth—gains \$60,000 every hour—There are some things I have not achieved.
- C. What shall a man give in exchange?
- D. Who knows the worth of a soul? Estimated appraisal of auto, home, property. Who has a *Blue Book* for your soul?
- E. Ashamed of Jesus? (Matthew 10:32-33). Four things you need to know:
 - 1. You are a sinner.
 - 2. There is a penalty (spiritual, physical, eternal).
 - 3. Jesus paid it.
 - 4. Receive Him, repent, and live for Him.

1973 – Galen Dunbar

Call to Discipleship

Text: John 1:35-51; Luke 14:25-33; Luke 9:57-62; Mark 8:34-38

The theme last year was, “Soul Winning: the Church in Action”

After salvation, we have discipleship. Matthew 28:19, 20 tells us, “Go ye therefore and teach (disciple) all nations.”

The word disciple does not mean salvation automatically. Definition:

1. To learn, to be apprised of, to increase one’s knowledge.
2. A learner, a pupil, one who follows the teachings of someone else.

Disciples of communism: Marx, Mao, Lenin.

Disciples of Judge Rutherford: Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Bible—Disciples of:

1. John (Matthew 9:14)
2. Pharisees (Matthew 22:16) unsaved
3. Moses (John 9:28)
4. Jesus
 - a. Jews who accepted His teaching
 - b. Twelve apostles in Matthew 10:1
 - c. Acts: all who believe and confessed Him
 - d. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).

The curse of modern-day disciples is that they divorce doctrine and practice. “What one believes in his heart is the control of his actions.”

(The Bible must support experience.)

Book of James

I. The Call to Salvation

- A. New Birth: soul being saved. Majority of church members show no evidence of being born again.
- B. Mission field on church rolls. "Level of average Christian is so low, you'd have to backslide to be in fellowship" (Harner).
- C. Looseness of requirements of church membership. Illustration: Lady and feet washing.
- D. Accepting Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9).
 - The Contradiction: Take Him as Savior; reject Him as Lord.
 - He made Heaven (John 14:1-3).
 - He is the Door (John 10:9).
 - He determines who goes there (John 14:6).
 - Thomas called him, "My Lord."

II. Call to Separation

- A. You cannot love the Lord and the world at same time. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not..." (James 4:4).
- B. 1 John 2:15-17
 - Eve: Jesus
 - Flesh: food, bread
 - Eye: pleasant to eyes, kingdoms of world
 - Pride: wise, cast Himself down...angels
- C. Sin binds us. Illustration: Man who could break any chain but his own. Fungus infects the tree; worldliness, the heart.

III. Call to Sanctification ("Dedication")

- A. 1 Corinthians 1:30: "Christ...sanctification"
- B. Give God the leftovers. The evidence?
 - 10%—Cannot be found.
 - 20%—Never pray
 - 40%—Never read the Bible.

70%—Have no church responsibility.

90%—Build no family altar.

95%—Never win a soul.

C. Putting on Christ in:

1. Being filled with the Spirit (Acts 8:18, 19). Simon rebuked for wanting to buy it.
2. Taking Christ at His word (Luke 5:5). Peter, "at thy command." The message of Malachi is talking back to God. (Wherein?) First sign of backsliding.

IV. Call to Service

A. Luke 6:46-49 Wise man and foolish man. "Doeth them..." James 1:22

B. Dedication of body: Romans 12:1, 2.

Peter: "Not so Lord..." Acts 10:14

Contradiction

C. Crucifixion of self. Illustration: The young lad said, "Mommy, I give you me!"

"Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things..."

1973 – Jack Williams

What It Means to Be a Free Will Baptist

Introduction: There are two texts for this sermon—Proverbs 22:28 and Numbers 32:6. The first is a warning, the second an indictment.

On June 10, 1973, a fiery-eyed Free Will Baptist preacher named Wade Thomas Jernigan, scarred by the miles and years, stood to dedicate the earth in a ground-breaking ceremony for a new church sanctuary in California's San Joaquin Valley. He made two statements that I am ready to endorse:

1. "I won't sell my father's inheritance."
2. "I won't remove the ancient landmark."

Brethren, too many have given too much for us to cut the moorings which anchor the present to the past. We possess a legacy, a heritage so great that if the bits and pieces are ever fitted together in one book, somebody will have a best-seller on his hands. The Free Will Baptist story embodies the truth behind that sports announcer's byline: "The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat."

I will present the facts as I see them in four categories.

The "Believe It or Not" Section

"Old Bill Williams"

Two weeks ago, a newspaper clipping titled "Old Bill" was seen hanging on the wall of the Kimo Cafe in Kingman, Arizona. It told of "Old Bill Williams" who founded Williams, Arizona. Bill's father had come over from Wales and settled in the Welsh Tract in North Carolina. He was a Free Will Baptist preacher. The family moved west to St. Louis where they leased land from the Spanish land barons.

Bill began preaching and following his father's footsteps. The newspaper said: "Old Bill came out of the Missouri swamps preaching Hell-fire and brimstone....when he couldn't find any Free Willers, he joined the

Methodists.”

So, there was a hidden piece of our history hanging on a cafe wall 200 miles from the nearest Free Will Baptist church.

Union Square—San Francisco

Across the street from the opera house in downtown San Francisco is a place called Union Square. It’s now a big underground garage and park.

But at one time a 190-member Free Will Baptist church flourished there. We owned one square block in the heart of San Francisco. The church had been organized on October 31, 1876, and was one of six Bay area churches.

In the mid-1950s, a Mr. Ruth, the San Francisco city/county attorney, talked with local Free Will Baptist pastors about the work. His grandfather had served as the church’s pastor. But the 1906 earthquake destroyed the church building and scattered the members.

A remnant of this group merged with a Free Will Baptist church in Oakland that in turn merged in 1911 with the Northern Baptist Convention. The Northern Baptists tried unsuccessfully to claim the property, since they couldn’t prove that this church would have gone in the denomination-wide merger if it had existed in 1911. After years of claims and counter-claims, the city obtained title to the land in 1946 and built Union Square.

End of story—but I’ll always wonder what might have happened during the 1960s-1970s if the Hippie and LSD generation had encountered a vibrant Free Will Baptist church in downtown San Francisco instead of a park that overflowed with drug dealers.

The Broken Berkeley Connection

When Jerry Dudley pastored in Tulare, California, he discovered that the Professor of Religion at the College of the Sequoias (Visalia) was saved in 1931 in a Free Will Baptist mission in Berkeley—an area which was later famous for its Hippies, LSD, and Flower Children. The odd part of the story is that we didn’t have a church or a mission work there at the time. Or so the historians thought.

Be that a historical gap or not, the fact is that Dr. Tom Murray and his wife both claimed to have been saved at the altar of a Free Will Baptist

mission in Berkeley, California. Dr. Murray went on to Harvard and did post-graduate work, and returned to find the mission gone. He knew of no other Free Will Baptists until Pastor Jerry Dudley sniffed him out of the woodwork 20 years later and 200 miles south.

The point being—there was a time when California Free Will Baptists were positioned to make an impact for Christ in San Francisco when the Hippie movement swept the area. Somewhere along the way, we missed the opportunity.

Norman Baxter

Dr. Norman Allen Baxter, who once aspired to be a history professor, is president of the 16,000 student Fresno State University in Fresno, California. In 1957, he wrote a thesis which he published as a book titled *History of the Freewill Baptists*. The book is about the same size as the better-known volume by Damon Dodd, *The Free Will Baptist Story* (approximately 200 pages). So, you see, Free Will Baptists are known and researched by the academic community—we're just not publicly acknowledged by many.

By the way, I invited Norman Baxter to attend the 1970 Free Will Baptist national convention which met in Fresno.

Fisk University

Have you heard of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee? The Civil War general named Clinton B. Fisk who started Fisk University in 1865 ran for President of the United States on the Prohibition Party ticket in 1888. General Fisk was one of five in the first graduating class at Hillsdale College, originally a Free Will Baptist institution. This "Hillsdale College" still exists today—not in Oklahoma but in Michigan. The college started out as Michigan Central College but changed its name when it relocated to Hillsdale, Michigan. Fisk worked on and supported the Underground Railroad to free escaped slaves before he saddled his horse and rode off to join the Union army.

Abraham Lincoln and Others

According to the April 1973 issue of *Contact* magazine (page 17), Abraham Lincoln's parents were Kentucky Free Will Baptists. It appears that Honest Abe was at least rocked in a Free Will Baptist cradle.

There's a sad story floating around that seems to be substantiated by Robert G. Torbet on page 277 of his book, *A History of the Baptists*, that William Miller who fathered the Seventh Day Adventists was a backslidden Free Will Baptist preacher. If it's true, may the Lord forgive him, for I'm sure the denomination never will.

I was told recently that the song, "The Church in the Wildwood," was based on a Free Will Baptist church.

What's more, a Disciples of Christ missionary to South America admitted that their movement originated in the Redstone Association of Free Will Baptists in Virginia after the Campbellite invasion of 1839.

Voices From the Past

(Excerpts from the General Conference Minutes)

Free Will Baptists have always enjoyed yearly meetings. The following excerpts come from a time when the movement was 100 years old (1727-1827). In 1798 at a New Durham (New Hampshire) meeting, some 2,000 people were present, and 100 were saved.

Prayer: 1829, 1830 General Conference

"That in our opinion, kneeling is the proper and scriptural position for Christians in time of prayer."

A circular letter on prayer contains: "It is the duty of every Christian to maintain daily and constant intercourse with God. We have foes to conquer, a tempting adversary to resist, the world to overcome, and self to be denied."

Written Sermons: 1828 General Conference

"That we do not approve of written sermons or sketches of sermons for delivery in public."

Also said: "That we do not desire instrumental music in our meetings of worship."

Racism: 1827 General Conference

“Resolved, that the color of a candidate for the ministry should have no influence on his ordination provided he be otherwise qualified.”

Preachers (several years)

“It is barely possible to restore a preacher who has been guilty of drunkenness, theft, licentiousness.”

“If any ministers deny the divinity of Christ, their names shall be erased from our records.”

“That we publish the names of preachers excluded.”

“That January 1, 1838, be declared a day of prayer and fasting for God to call preachers who are...intelligent, holy, humble, devoted.”

Practical Resolutions (1837-1844)

“That the denomination condemn both the harlot and the men who frequent the harlot.”

“Resolved that we view the cause of missions as the cause of Christ.”

“If we possess a better faith than our neighbor, let us exhibit it by the infallible criterion of better works.”

Resolutions against the continued use of fermented wine at the communion table...and against tobacco...and tea...and coffee. Wow, they were a nosey bunch, weren't they?

Men from the Past

What kind of men filled our past? This kind—the kind that Sam W. Foss wrote of when he penned:

Bring me men to match my mountains;

Bring me men to match my plains,

Men with empires in their purpose,

And new eras in their brains.

Paul Palmer

Here's a name you already know—Paul Palmer organized the first Free Will Baptist church in America in 1727 in Chowan County, North Carolina. It had 32 members. Palmer was an evangelist and a church planter. He died in 1750.

Benjamin Randall

This name you also know—Benjamin Randall was born in 1749 and was greatly influenced by George Whitefield. He organized the northern Free Will Baptist work in 1780. In his last written address to his Free Will Baptist brethren before he died in 1808, Randall wrote: "Cheer up ye poor, yet rich; ye weak, yet strong; ye trembling, yet valiant ministers of Jesus. Wear out in the cause and rejoice in the privilege."

Joseph Parker

Did you know that Joseph Parker was the first pastor of the church that Paul Palmer organized in 1727? He probably did as much as Paul Palmer for the southern movement of Free Will Baptists.

Hosea Quimby

Dr. Hosea Quimby has been named by historians as "the father of Free Will Baptist education." When the Smithville Seminary in Rhode Island encountered financial woes, he bought it himself and operated the seminary for 30 years. He later served as chaplain of the New Hampshire State Prison.

Others

Consider the Free Will Baptist historian I.D. Stewart, and Ransom Dunn, a theologian for 35 years. Then there was John Colby, probably the greatest preacher of them all, whose company governors sought. And Evangelist Clement Phinney who said he was "born a Free Will Baptist." Let's not forget Rufus Cheney who organized the first Free Will Baptist church in Wisconsin, of whom it is written: "For more than half a century he freely preached a free Gospel and practiced what he preached."

Reuben Kendrick

Let me tell you of Reuben Kendrick, a black man, called the “Benjamin Randall of the South.” Kendrick was born in 1841 on the Davidson Plantation in Livingston Parish, Louisiana. He fathered the first Free Will Baptist work in Mississippi.

Charles Ready

Remember the name Elder Charles Ready, another black man. He took Free Will Baptist doctrine to the Creoles and Cajuns in South Louisiana. Elder Ready died in 1877, but before his death, this godly man had given birth to 34 Free Will Baptist churches from Baton Rouge to New Orleans.

Lessons From the Past

Elihu Root said it: “Men do not fail; they give up trying.”

Perhaps from the backdrop of our own history, we can stop sending our lessons back to ourselves to be learned again. Someone warned, and we would do well to listen: “He who does not remember the past is condemned to repeat it.”

We have been plagued by well organized outside forces for more than 200 years.

Palmer Movement Attacked

In 1750 the Particular Baptists led by John Gano came in preaching, “Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you Free Will Baptists.” He swept ministers and members from our churches.

There was another raid in 1802 by glib, smooth-talking Calvinists. According to one source, the Palmer group in that area was reduced to “three preachers, five churches, 800 members, and not a scholar among us.” Little did they know that in another 100 years it would happen again.

Then in 1839, a Campbellite massacre hit the Bethel Conference. It cost 10 preachers and 600 members.

Randall Movement Falls Prey

Shakerism lashed out in the 1780s. Led by high priestess Ann Lee, this

18th century Charismatic forerunner caused untold woes until the Free Will Baptists called a prayer meeting and asked God to intervene for the sake of His work. Ann Lee died shortly thereafter.

But the day of infamy came in 1911. Five years after the San Francisco earthquake that shook the Free Will Baptist work in California to rubble, another earth swell arose and swallowed the Randall movement.

The Jehovah's Witnesses said the Second Coming would occur in 1914. They were wrong. The noise they heard that year was the sound of Free Will Baptists dismantling their souls for the Northern Baptist Convention. From 1910-1917, more than 600 churches, 11 colleges and institutes, some 60,000 members, and millions of dollars in property and funds poured from Free Will Baptist altars to fatten Northern Baptist coffers. It took seven years to dismantle the work of two centuries.

Now we know how the Egyptians felt when the "seven years of famine" was upon the land.

National Association of Free Will Baptists

But on the day that Billy Sunday died in November 1935, at Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, the National Association of Free Will Baptists was born again!

As the great evangelist lay dying, a telegram was wired to Mrs. Billy Sunday as the first official action by the national body. The evangelistic mantle slipped from the shoulders of Billy Sunday and was picked up by the revitalized Free Will Baptist movement.

They walked out of the Carolina swamps, climbed down off the Kentucky hills, and rolled west...west into the Oklahoma oil fields. Every place they stopped, they planted churches. Dog-eared old Bibles were piled in wagons, buckboards, on horseback, in pickup trucks, and pushed west. Some of the older preachers arrived in Indian Territory with the Gospel in one hand and a .45 revolver in the other. But they pushed west until they splashed in the Pacific coast waters.

Conclusion

The entire movement was characterized by the efforts of two preachers that Paul Ketteman told about in 1968 at the Arkansas State Association. It

seems that after the 1911 merger some 15 or so Free Will Baptist churches in Southern Illinois escaped the Northern Baptists. Two preachers tried to pastor all 15 churches.

One of the preachers had to cross the Big Muddy River every Sunday to begin his long circuit. He would arrive on his horse wringing wet from the river, and back up to the church stove to preach while his clothes steamed dry. Then he got back on his horse and rode to his next appointment.

One week the river flooded, and folks met for prayer, feeling sure that the preacher could not cross the swollen waters. One man who had stepped outside with a child during prayer meeting thought he heard a voice on the river. He called the men over to the bluff where they looked into the torrent below. Far out on the swift water, they saw two horses pulling a buckboard, and that Free Will Baptist preacher standing up on the seat singing at the top of his lungs, "I'll never turn back anymore!"

This is what it means to be a Free Will Baptist.

There seems to have been a demonic plot to destroy this great movement of ours. And when that failed, there has been a conspiracy of silence to hide the glorious past with its history and towering men. But slowly, from musty libraries, the truth is rising.

As for me, I plan to die with my hand on The Book and my soul in the pulpit. Please, dear God, when I'm dead, let it be said of me: "He was a Free Will Baptist preacher."

1973 – Bob Ketchum

The Characteristics of Discipleship

Text: John 13:12-17 (verses 13, 16)

Introduction: Webster says that the word *characteristic* means “a trait, quality, or property distinguishing an individual, group, or type.” We must not gauge our discipleship by comparing ourselves with ourselves, but the criteria must be Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary.

The text says that the servant is not greater than his Lord. Calvary demands nothing less than total surrender of our lives and property as disciples of His.

“The Saviour is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him—or their weekends—or their years of retirement. Rather He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives” (H.A. Evan Hopkins).

As we approach this subject of our discipleship, may we with the songwriter look hard and fast at Calvary again to test our degree of discipleship:

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

I. Obedience

“Obedience is better than sacrifice.”

“Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?”

A. Obedience to the Bible

1. Great Commission
2. Standard of Living (separated living)
3. Standard for the church

II. Love to One Another (John 13:35)

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (1 Corinthians 13).

- A. Love is not weak in discipline but strong.
- B. Love never lacks convictions.
- C. Love always has a judgment.

III. Fruit Bearing (to glorify the Father)

- A. Soul-winning is not for a selective few in the church (Acts 8).
- B. Soul-winning churches and preachers are not shallow (individuals).
- C. Judgment is pronounced upon those that bear no fruit. “Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground.”

IV. Prayer (Luke 11:1-10)

A. Elementary prayer (verses 1-4). Parable of friend:

1. Our situation (verses 5, 6)
2. Importunity in prayer (verses 7, 8)
3. The promise of answered prayer (verses 9, 10)
4. The result of the right kind of praying (verse 13)

Hudson Taylor said, “We can learn to move man through God.”

V. Work Is a Characteristic

“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

- A. The example of Paul: “He is a man without the care of making friends, without the hope or desire of worldly good, without the apprehension of worldly loss, without the care of life, without the fear of death. He is a man of no rank, country or condition. A man of one thought—the Gospel of Christ. A man of one purpose—the glory of God. A fool, and content to be reckoned a fool for Christ. Let him be called enthusiast, fanatic, babbler or any other outlandish

nondescript the world may choose to denominate him. But still let him be nondescript. As soon as they call him trader, householder, citizen, man of wealth, man of the world, man of learning, or even man of common sense, it is all over with his character. He must speak or he must die, and though he should die, he will speak. He has no rest but hastens over land and sea, over rocks and trackless deserts. He cries aloud and spares not, and will not be hindered. In the prisons, he lifts up his voice, and in the tempests of the ocean, he is not silent. Before awful councils and throned kings, he witnesses in behalf of the truth. Nothing can quench his voice but death, and even in the article of death, before the knife has severed his head from his body, he speaks, he prays, he testifies, he confesses, he beseeches, he wars, and at length he blessed the cruel people."

C.T. Studd once wrote: "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of Hell."

B. The zeal of the Communist and cult put the Church to shame.

VI. Stewardship (Matthew 7:21)

"Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

A. The location of our "treasures" will determine the place of our heart's devotion.

B. We pay tithes to show that Jesus is alive (our high priest, Hebrews 7:8), "And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them of who it is witnessed that he liveth."

C. But what about time? Talent?

VII. Warfare

(William MacDonald in booklet, *True Discipleship*)

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice

was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).

A. War demands obedience.

B. War demands skill in use of weapons.

C. War demands a knowledge of the enemy.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

“Wherefore take upon you the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

1974 – Calvin Evans

Love

Love is a little four-letter word, but my what a meaning it carries in the Christian life. Many four-letter words we hear today carry the wrong meaning, and they're invading our language from every side.

Most four-letter words receiving attention are words of vulgarity, profanity, blasphemy, or "off color" to say the least. But it seems this four-letter word has been almost forgotten by the masses of America today.

Even the language coming from Washington is filled with four-letter "expletives." I think this shows us the moral and spiritual sickness in America which is reaching every level of our society. This should concern and challenge every Christian.

Jesus said, when talking about the last days, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). It's important that we know what the word *love* really means from the Christian point of view. There are four letters in this word and these letters will form the outline of my message:

I. The Law of Love

I think we can say the "L" stands for the law of love. I believe the law of love defines it. Someone has said that it's impossible to define love, that it cannot be explained. It can only be experienced, and perhaps this is true.

Love means many things to different people. A young boy who had just fallen in love with his first girlfriend said, "Love is a tickle under the fifth rib."

This is one kind of love, but not what I'm talking about today.

I know a young couple who were married and six weeks later separated and divorced. When asked what happened, they replied, "We just don't love each other anymore." I'm glad God's love for us lasts longer than six weeks. God says in Jeremiah 31:3, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Someone has pointed out that if it were possible for us to travel back into the distant past, beyond the time when the first wave had ever beat

against the beach, or the first leaf had ever fluttered in the breeze, beyond the time the first star had ever penciled its ray of light across the blackness of this universe, or the first angel had ever worshipped before the throne of God, we would be no nearer the beginning of God's love than we are this present hour.

If we could board the chariot of time and travel into the future beyond time when the moon turns black, the sun grows cold, and the stars fall from Heaven, beyond that time when the works of men vanish, and the leaves of God's judgment book shall fall, we would be no nearer the end of God's love than we are at this very moment. Aren't you glad God's love never changes?

We also hear much today about "free love." Love is never free! Genuine love always costs something! "God so loved...He gave" (John 3:16).

God made man in His own image and placed him in Eden. When He did this, He gave man a law to live by. God warned man, that if this law was broken, he would surely die. Man soon broke this law and started down the wide road of destruction, despair, and death. From that moment on, God has always given man a law.

God through Moses, gave man a law to live by. This law said "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" do thus and so. In our age, God no longer says, "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," but He simply says, "If a man love me he will keep my words." Romans 13:10 tells us, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

The law of love is the strongest law in this universe. Love is that motivating force which will cause us to walk uprightly before God. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

The law of love is the balance-wheel of Christianity. Jeb Magruder, a young businessman from California, left his position several months ago to become a special assistant to the President of the United States. May 21, 1974, Jeb Magruder was sentenced to prison for his part in the Watergate affair. During an interview he was asked, "Why did you do it?" He replied, "Somewhere between my ambitions and my ideals, I lost my compass. "The law of love is a compass which will give us a sense of direction in the way we should travel.

Robert Oppenheimer, one of the most brilliant minds of this century and the father of the hydrogen bomb, died a middle-aged man. He lived the last 15 years of his life in seclusion. Before he died, he said to a friend, "I have no purpose in life, I have no scale of values." Thank God, the law of love gives us a scale of values upon which we can build our lives.

II. The Object of Love

I believe the "O" could stand for the object of love. If the law of love defines it, then we could say the object of love confines it. Love must have an object. If God gave man the law of love to direct his path, then God must also give him an object of love to show him where that path will lead.

Many think of God as an unidentified object of educated vagueness. The Pantheist, for example, teaches that everything is God and God is everything.

They say that God is the air, the trees, the rivers, and the flowers. If this were true, then we could love everything. But it is not true! God is a personal God and He is to be the object of our love.

The Bible teaches that we are to love God and hate the devil. We are to love good and hate evil; love sinners, but hate sin. Jesus says, "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). A little girl once came to her mother and asked, "Mother, where is God?" The mother replied, "God is everywhere." But the little girl responded, "I don't want God to be everywhere. I want Him to be somewhere, and I want Him to be someone."

How sad is it that many think of God as some vague object whom we can never personally know and love.

Dr. Hyman Appleman tells the story of a wealthy couple who had only one child, a seven-year old daughter. Death took the child from them suddenly. The parents were grief stricken. As soon as the mother had recovered from her initial shock, her friends suggested that she adopt a child. She finally agreed and arrangements were made for her to interview an orphan girl about the same age as her own daughter.

The mother asked to be alone with the little girl. She began to tell the frightened child that she and her husband would like for her to come and live with them. She said, "If you come and live with us, we are rich, and can

give you everything you want. You will have a nursery, a pony, many dolls, along with many other things." The little girl stood there not saying a word. The appeal went on. Finally, the mother was ready to give up in defeat. Then, the little girl looked up in bewilderment and asked, "If I come and be your little girl, and you give me all these things, what do you want me to do?" The mother grabbed that little girl in her arms and said, "All we want you to do is just to love us."

If I know anything about Christianity, the thing God wants most from us, is for us to love Him. God sees man on the road of life with his sins, his frustration, his problems, and says, "If you'll come to Me, I'll forgive your sins, cleanse your conscience, fight your battles, be your friend, and finally, give you a home in Heaven." Man looks up and says, "God, if you're going to do all this for me, what do I have to do?" God replies, "I just want you to love Me." God did not make us as a puppet on a string. He gave us a mind with which we can know; a heart with which we can feel; and a will with which we can choose. God wants to be that number one object of our love.

We're not only to love God, but also love the brethren. The Bible tells us that one of the evidences of the new birth will be our love for one another. By the way, I believe in the new birth. We must be born again. If we are born again, we'll love the brethren. First John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

The theme of this convention has been Christian growth. However, there can be no Christian growth without a Christian birth. The reason some people never grow as Christians is because they have never been born again. The baby grows after birth. The sincerity of our love for God will always be reflected in our love for the brethren. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen" (1 John 4:20)?

Not only are we to love God, and the brethren, but we are also to love the lost. Jesus teaches us that we are to love one another as He loved us. The world is hungry for a little bit of love. We need to tell the world that Jesus loves them. Jesus had a love and compassion for the lost.

My ministry through radio and television brings me into contact with thousands of people. This makes me keenly aware that there must be millions in America who have no one to love them. Many have grown old. They are shut-in. Their families are gone. If relatives are living, they no

longer care. How I pray God will give us the vision and concern we need to try to reach these people and tell them somebody loves them.

III. The Virtue of Love

If the law of love defines it, and the object of love confines it, I think we could say the virtue of love refines it.

I don't know much about refining. I do know, however, it is a process where you take out the impurities. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul listed many virtues of Christianity, but said the greatest is charity or love. Love is that virtue which lifts Christianity to its highest level of spiritual and moral excellence. Love will meet and conquer every test of life and lift us to a higher level of Christian maturity.

I shall never forget the time when I was saved. I knew I was in sin. I knew I was lost. I didn't know John 3:16 or anything else about the Bible. I didn't have anyone to tell me about the Romans Road, but I knew I was lost and my life was a wreck. I came down an aisle and for three days and nights I wrestled with God. (I didn't have to—at least they tell me I didn't have to—but I didn't know that then.) I was sick of my life and hungering for something. Finally, when I ceased my struggling and reached up with my little hand of faith and took hold of the nail-pierced hand of my Savior, something happened. When I arose from the altar and looked at that choir, they looked like a convoy of angels God had sent from another world.

The next morning I took a walk up behind the plant where I worked at the time. The sun had never shone as it did that morning! The grass was never as green as it was that morning! The birds had never sung as they did that day! It was the same old world, just a different man.

Somebody said, "He'll never make it over the first weekend." But that has been over 21 years ago. And if I know my own heart, I'm closer to Heaven now than I've ever been in my life.

In this 13th chapter, Paul reminds us that it is possible to be a great preacher, a great theologian, a great humanitarian, or even a martyr, but without love, it will profit nothing.

IV. The Effect of Love

If the law of love defines it, the object of love confines it, the virtue of

love refines it, then the effect of love outshines it.

D. L. Moody once said, "If I can only convince a man I love him, I can win him." Jesus did not say the world will know you are my disciples because of your greatness, your faith, your works, your name, your fame, or your social status. But Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

Dr. Herschel Ford tells of a Baptist missionary by the name of Paul Bell, who was a missionary to the Mexicans. One day Paul Bell won an old Mexican woodcutter to Christ. He could not read or write, but he seemed to be gloriously saved. He said, "Brother Bell, I can't read or write. Will you teach me a verse of Scripture and a stanza of a song so I can witness to my people?" Brother Bell taught him John 3:16 and a stanza of that song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

The man promised to come back to church to be baptized. Three weeks passed, and he didn't show up. But on the fourth Sunday he came and brought five others with him whom he had led to Christ. The old Mexican woodcutter only lived two years after his conversion, but, during those two years, with only one verse of Scripture and one stanza of a song, he won about 50 others to the Lord. Why? Because he loved his people and wanted to see them saved. Please understand me clearly. I'm not placing a premium on ignorance. What I am saying is, that if we really love God, we can use the capacity and potential we have and be effective in winning others to Christ. Let's not use our inadequacies and our lack of training as an excuse for not being a soul-winner. One day knowledge will vanish away. One day prophecies shall cease. One day faith will turn into sight and hope will merge into reality, but love will shine on and on.

1974 – Leroy Forlines

Conformity of the Personality to Christ: The Extent

Text: Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18

In Romans 8:29, Paul spoke about being “conformed to the image of Christ.” God has before determined that those who place their trust in Jesus Christ will be made like Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 he said that as we behold the glory of the Lord we are “changed into the same image.”

Man was created in the image of God. According to these verses, it is the design of redemption to restore the fullness of the image of God in man. Time will permit only a brief statement of what is involved in the image of God in man. God is a rational, moral being. Man is a rational, moral being. Another way of putting it that sums the matter up is: God is a personal being. Man is a personal being.

A person is a thinking, acting, feeling being. We think with our mind, feel with our heart, and act with our will.

Personality, as distinguished from person, refers to the way a person thinks, the way he feels, and the way he acts.

When man came from the hands of the Creator, he was a person whose personality was pleasing and acceptable to God. When man fell into sin, he remained a person. He remained a thinking, feeling, and acting being. However, his personality was no longer acceptable with God. The way he thought, the way he felt, the way he acted no longer reflected the likeness of God. It is the purpose of redemption to restore the personality of the believer to the likeness of God as it is found in Jesus Christ. The believer again becomes a person who thinks, feels, and acts in a manner that is pleasing to God.

Our concept of the Christian life must take into account the fact that man is a person. Man is not a puppet to be manipulated by pulling the right strings. Man is not just an instrument to be used. Man at his highest is not controlled in the sense that a driver controls a car. Man at his highest makes decisions that are his own. He may be influenced, but in a very real sense his decisions are his own. This is what is involved in free will. This is at the bottom of what is involved in responsibility.

It must be kept in mind that God has made man a thinking, feeling, acting being. He will not transgress this fact in dealing with man. He will not reduce man to a puppet to be controlled like a machine.

The view of redemption that makes man in his highest dedication a surrendered instrument or machine to be controlled by God to the point that a Christian's decisions are in no real sense his own fails to understand what is meant about being changed into the image of Christ. Such a view fails to reckon fully with the fact that man is a personal being.

The church has always been plagued with the idea that there is no real redemption of the human personality in this life. Man is pictured as being so totally wrecked by sin that he is beyond repair, at least in this life. Salvation becomes a divine towing service for the wrecked human being. Nothing can really be done to restore him in this life. Everything will be made all right when we are finally towed into the heavenly garage, but that will be in the next life.

The best thing, according to this view, is for a person to dwell on the idea of his own nothingness and worthlessness. He is to believe that he is doing nothing and can do nothing worthwhile. God is doing everything. The best he can do is to keep from being a hindrance while God is towing his wrecked humanity on to the heavenly garage. To despise himself is about his highest virtue. To respect himself or to have anything like self-confidence is a sin.

If you think what I am saying is an exaggerated fabrication of my own mind, let me read to you from one of the most famous devotional books in the history of the church. I will refrain from giving the name of the book and the author because there are many good statements in the book and I do not want to hurt the good that the book may accomplish.

"A true view of one's self, and consequently a low opinion of one's self, is the best and most valuable lesson to be acquired. To think nothing of one's self, and always to think well and highly of others is great wisdom and perfectness.

"Blessed is the man who knows what it is to love Jesus, and to despise himself for Jesus' sake.

"This certainly I may truly think and say, O Lord, I am nothing, I can do nothing, I have nothing good of myself, but am deficient in everything and I ever tend to nothing. And unless I am upheld by Thee, and inwardly

instructed, I become altogether lukewarm and lax.”

The basic idea of this viewpoint is held by Christians in varying degrees—some to the extent described above, others to a lesser extent. But wherever it is found it is always chiseling away at the person’s self-respect on the one hand while on the other hand demanding that he live a life worthy of respect.

I am persuaded that such a viewpoint is not taught in the Word of God. From the verses above and other passages to which I will refer, I want to support the position that in this life our personalities are being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

I. The language of the New Testament teaches that there is a basic inward change that is taking place in the believer that manifests itself in an outwardly changed life.

Romans 8:29. In speaking of the goal of our sanctification, Paul described it as being “conformed to the image of God’s Son.” The Greek word for conformed is the word *summorphos*. According to the *International Critical Commentary*, this “denotes inward and thorough and not merely superficial likeness.”

Second Corinthians 3:18. In this verse when Paul speaks of the process of change into the likeness of the glory of the Lord, he uses a very interesting word. He uses a verb that is kin to the word used in Romans 8:29. It is the word *metamorphos*. The word is made up of two words, “after” and “form.” In this word the Greek word for “form” is a verb. It means “to form.” The noun which comes from the same root is the word *morphe*. There is another word with which this word is interestingly contrasted. It is the word *schema*. This word refers to the fashion or outward form or appearance, according to R. C. Trench, in his book, *Synonyms of the New Testament*. Concerning *morphe*, he says it “signifies the form as it is the utterance of the inner life.” It is possible for the outward form to be superficial only. The *morphe*, which speaks of the inner life, must be real.

When Paul speaks about our being “changed into the same image from glory to glory,” he is referring to a deep, basic change in the inner nature of the Christian.

Romans 12:2. In Romans 12:2, Paul said, “And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

The Greek words which are translated “conformed” and “transformed” prove to be very interesting here. We looked at the word *schema* which refers to the fashion or outward form. The word that is here translated conformed is a verb form of this word. It refers to a fashioning of the outward appearance. It is something shallow.

The word which is translated “transformed” is the same word that was translated “changed” in 2 Corinthians 3:18. It refers to a real, basic, inner change.

Concerning this verse and the words under study, Trench explains: “Do not fall in with the fleeting fashions of this world, nor be yourselves fashioned to them, but undergo a deep abiding change by the renewing of your mind, such as the Spirit of God alone can work in you” (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Conversion itself is a basic inward change. This is evident from 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Romans 12:2 are referring to the work of sanctification. Romans 8:29 tells us that the goal of sanctification is conformity to the image of Christ. The life is to be brought into the likeness of the life of Christ. This life is to be a manifestation of an inner reality.

Second Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:1, 2 speak of the process of sanctification. It is what follows the new birth. The tense of the words that are used in the Greek tells us that it is a reference to a continuous process. It is a continuous process of changing the basic, inner nature of the believer into the likeness of Christ. As the Christian matures, his actions reflect the way he thinks and feels. His actions are in a very real sense the product of his own desires and choices.

The control of a machine, the use of an instrument, the filling of a vessel, the molding of clay, and the control of a puppet may all be used to illustrate our dependence upon God. However, we should recognize the limitations of these illustrations. There is one drastic difference. A person is one who thinks, feels, and makes choices. If this observation is not taken into account, the practical error can be serious. A puppet cannot refuse to obey the directions of his master. A person can. The actions of a person must reflect his own basic nature before they are his in the truest sense of what it means to be a person.

In the divine work of sanctification, God takes these factors into account.

He works with us in the full recognition of the fact that we are thinking, feeling, acting beings. To refer to Galatians 5:22, 23, God is making us the kind of persons to whom it is natural to experience “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (or self-control).”

II. The New Testament teaches that conformity to the image of Christ extends to each area of the person.

As has already been pointed out, there are three basic areas of the person or personality: the mind with which we think, the heart or emotions with which we feel, and the will with which we make choices or act.

Romans 12:2 proves to be very interesting at this point. Paul spoke about being “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Remember that the word “transformed” refers to the basic, inner change taking place in the believer. As I understand it, the renewing of the mind is not a process that stands outside the transformation that brings it about. Rather, it is involved in the transformation. This transformation includes the mind. In it the mind is renewed.

In the English language, the word “mind” is used in two ways: (1) It refers to the mind as that with which we think and reason. (2) It embraces the mind in this limited sense, plus the heart, and the will. It is this use of the word “mind” that is reflected in the statement: “I have made up my mind to serve the Lord.” We mean by this that our whole being—mind, heart, and will—are involved in the decision.

After having studied the Greek word for mind in Romans 12:2, I am of the opinion that it is used in much the same way the English word is used. In this instance, I believe it refers to the renewing of the mind, heart, and will. If this be the case, when Paul spoke of the process of the transformation of the sinner, he spoke of the process of transforming the personality in the mind, heart, and will of the believer.

If there be any doubt concerning Paul’s meaning in Romans 12:2, there can be no mistake about the fact that the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Christianity places upon us the responsibility of thinking, feeling, and acting in accord with God’s nature and will.

A. The Mind

The mind is referred to in the following verses: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). "I will put my laws into their mind" (Hebrews 8:10).

The words "think," "reason," and "understanding" are used too much to require a list of proof texts here today.

The Book of Proverbs makes it unquestionably clear that God places a high premium on knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. All these are products of the human mind.

A problem exists with reference to the mind. The Bible speaks about limitations of reason. Also, a wrong use can be made of reason. In 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul said, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." This verse tells us that men have not discovered God by philosophical reasonings.

First Corinthians 2:9 speaks along the same line when it says: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." This verse tells us that the things of God are not learned through science and philosophy.

First Corinthians 2:10 tells us the source of spiritual truth. It reads, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit."

God is not an object to be found. He is a personal being who speaks. He has revealed Himself and His plan to us through the Bible and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Our minds do not create the truth of God. They receive it by revelation. To say that reason is not the author of our view of God is not to say that our faith in revealed truth is not reasonable. There is nothing that makes more sense than believing in God, but our conviction of God's existence and our view of God are not the product of a set of proofs. Man is never more rational than when he believes in God.

Another problem is seen in Proverbs 3:5, 6, which reads: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

The statement "lean not unto thine own understanding" cannot be taken

to mean that the Christian is to set his mind aside. To understand it to mean this would be to miss the basic thrust of the Book of Proverbs which gives a strong emphasis to the importance of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

A proper interpretation of "thine own understanding" would be understanding that leaves God out or that does not take into account the truth of the Bible. We are to avoid any dependence upon such an understanding. But we are to place a high value on an understanding that acknowledges God and takes into account the moral and spiritual truth revealed in the Bible.

To the person who either does not believe in God or who does not take God and the Bible seriously, it seems foolish for a person to leave a good position with financial security to enter school to prepare for the ministry. However, for the person who believes in God and the Bible, nothing could make more sense than to follow the will of God regardless of the cost. What makes sense is determined by what you permit as data.

Another problem about the use of the mind is related to our dependence upon the Holy Spirit in the matter of understanding spiritual truth. First Corinthians 2:12 reads: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

Those things that come to us by revelation from God are understood by the help of the Holy Spirit. However, to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit to set aside the need of mental effort in understanding the Bible is to grossly misunderstand the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

True, there must be a dependence upon the Holy Spirit. But dependence upon the Holy Spirit does not make study unnecessary. Rather, the Holy Spirit aids in the study of Scripture. Second Timothy 2:15 makes it clear that we are to put our minds to work in understanding the Bible. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

When one human being works with another human being in the study of the Bible, it is a person working with a person. To have a human teacher is not to set aside the use of the mind on the part of the student. The Holy Spirit as a person works with the believer as a person. The Holy Spirit is our teacher, but He does not do our homework for us. We are dependent upon

Him, but our own minds are active.

It is true that the Bible does place limitations upon our minds. We are dependent upon revelation. We must take the proper information or the proper data into account. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit as our teacher. These things guide the use of our minds as Christians, but they do not set aside the use of our minds. A person is never more rational than when, as a Christian, his mind is renewed and put to work.

B. The Heart

The heart is the seat of the emotions. It is with the heart that we feel sorrow and sadness. It is with the heart that we feel joy, happiness, satisfaction, peace, love, mercy, compassion, and conviction against sin.

In the conforming of our basic nature to the image of Christ, it is very evident from Scripture that our heart or our emotions are involved in this change. In Matthew 22:37, we are told to love God with our heart, soul, and mind.

Romans 10:9 reads: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Hebrews 8:10 with reference to the work of God in the New Covenant reads, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." This verse makes it clear that there is a basic change that takes place in the heart.

The experiences of Paul show that he experienced a basic change in his heart. His heart functioned in a way that was pleasing to God. He said in Romans 9:2, 3, when expressing his love for lost Jews, "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Again he said in Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

I do not think it necessary to add additional verses for proof. The point is irrefutably clear. Our hearts are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Heart involvement is essential in the Christian life.

We need a correct understanding and a new appreciation for emotions. Emotions can certainly be abused, but they can also be wrongly criticized. It is with our hearts that what we know with our minds becomes real. Cold

facts do not change lives. Convictions are not just ideas of the mind. These ideas become convictions only when they are felt in the heart. We will take a stand against sin only when we have deep feelings about it. Love for God is felt in the heart. Love for others is felt in the heart.

I know that a lot of people get confused when we talk about feeling, but we cannot take feeling out of the Christian experience any more than we can take feeling out of courtship. We may not feel like somebody else says he feels, but if we love God it is real to us.

There is no part of our personality that needs to be conformed to the image of Christ any more than our heart. Our will can commit us no farther than the attitude of our heart will let it. Any action that is not based on the proper attitude of heart is mechanical and fruitless.

C. The Will

The appeals to the will of the Christian are too numerous to require any reference to verses for proof. Every command, every prohibition, every exhortation, and every entreaty made in the Bible to Christians presupposes that they are capable of making choices.

The important question is: Are the choices we make our own when they are in keeping with God's desire for us? We read in Philippians 2:13: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Are these choices in any real sense our own, or are they altogether God's? If we picture ourselves as being transformed in our inner basic nature, there is no reason why we cannot consider our decisions to in some real sense be our own. The influence of one person upon another does not destroy the fact that a person's choices are his own. The Holy Spirit does not intend to take away our ability to exercise our wills. Rather, He helps us so that we may make choices in keeping with the higher purposes for which man was created. He works with us as a person works with a person.

Once I understand that God is transforming my inner nature, I realize that I can and do use my will. If I make the wrong choices, I must accept the blame. I have no excuse for making wrong choices and for doing the wrong thing. I cannot blame my problem on my "nothingness." By God's grace I can do what I should if I want to. If I don't, I have no defense for my failure.

The work of God in conforming us to the image of Christ touches every area of our personality—the mind, the heart, and the will. It is the design of redemption to make us in our inner nature be the kind of person who

thinks, feels, and acts in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to God. We are becoming the kind of person to whom moral and spiritual functions are natural.

I am not suggesting that our inner being is completely transformed in this life. I am not suggesting that there are no inner conflicts. I am, however, suggesting that though there be inner conflicts there are also inner realities.

It is my firm conviction that when these truths are seen in their proper light they form the basis on the one hand for praising and giving glory to God, while on the other hand they form the basis of a healthy self-respect or self-esteem.

By creation we are made in the image of God. By redemption we are being remade into the image of God in our personality. We are members of the family of God. This gives us a real value. To fail to recognize this is to fail to give God the credit that belongs to Him. There is no merit in constantly running ourselves down. To do so discredits the redeeming grace of God.

I am not talking about being blind to our faults. I am talking about seeing what God has done in us. Also, in view of the fact that we can choose God or refuse God, and when we do right it is in a real sense our own choice, I believe that we have a personal right to have a sense of personal satisfaction in knowing that we have properly responded to God's grace. I believe this is what Paul did when near the end of his life he reflected back over his life.

He said in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

We are not mere instruments being used of God. We are persons being transformed in our basic, inner nature into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As we grow in grace, in our personality we think, feel, and act in a way that pleases God.

1974 - Melvin Worthington

Growing in Grace

Text: 2 Peter 3:17, 18

Introduction

The Epistle of 2 Peter has a two-fold theme: Guarding/Discernment and Growing/Development. The Christian must be on guard against the master deceiver and grow into a mature disciple. This two-fold process requires discernment, dedication, diligence, and discipline.

I. The Expectation of Spiritual Growth: The Foundational Truth— The Call for Steadfastness (2 Peter 1)

- A. The Provision for Spiritual Growth: The Trust (verses 1-4)
 - 1. God's almighty power enables Spiritual Growth (verses 1, 2)
 - 2. God's abundant promises encourage Spiritual Growth (verses 3, 4)
- B. The Pathway/Progress in Spiritual Growth: The Traits (verses 5-7)
- C. The Perseverance in Spiritual Growth: The Truth (verses 8-11)
 - 1. Spiritual growth prevents spiritual barrenness (verse 8).
 - 2. Spiritual growth prevents spiritual blindness (verse 9).
 - 3. Spiritual growth prevents spiritual bankruptcy (verse 9).
 - 4. Spiritual growth prevents spiritual backsliding (verses 10, 11).
- D. The Pledge Regarding Spiritual Growth: The Testimony (verses 12-21)
 - 1. The servant's/Simon's testimony (verses 12-18)
 - a. The apostle's duty (verse 12)
 - b. The apostle's design (verse 13)
 - c. The apostle's death (verse 14)

- d. The apostle's disclosure (verses 15-18)
- 2. The Sovereign's/scriptural testimony (verses 19-21)
 - a. The value of prophecy (verse 19)
 - b. The voice of prophecy (verse 20)
 - c. The validity of prophecy (verse 21)

II. The Enemies of Spiritual Growth: The False Teachers—The Corrupting Seducers (2 Peter 2)

- A. The Doctrine of False Teachers (verses 1-3a)
- B. The Doom of False Teachers (verses 3b-6)
- C. The Denunciation of False Teachers
- D. The Doings of False Teachers (verses 7-18)
- E. The Danger of False Teachers (verses 19-22)

III. The Evidence of Spiritual Growth: The Future Things—The Coming of the Savior (2 Peter 3)

- A. The Advent Truth Attacked (verses 1-7)
- B. The Advent Truth Affirmed (verses 8-10)
- C. The Advent Truth Applied (verses 11-18)

Conclusion

God has made all the provisions necessary for Christians to be on guard against the devil and his darts. His provisions include the power for Christians to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians need to respond to the mandate for growth, the menace to growth, and the manifestation of growth as set forth in Peter's second epistle.

1975 – Robert Piricilli

Equipping the Saints: The Missing Dimension

Text: Ephesians 4:11-16

The theme of our convention is “Equipping the Saints.” I have been asked to speak to you on this subject, “The Missing Dimension.” Those who made our program have shown by this title that they believe some dimension is missing. That was their assumption, not mine, but I entirely agree.

Introduction

This passage shows us that Paul also recognized a missing dimension, and he was specially enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God.

Look at verse 13: see how he longed for a time when his readers would attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Evidently there was division and strife in Paul’s time. That situation hasn’t changed. We still have division, strife, tension. God’s people are all too easily set against each other.

Now look at verse 14: see how he anticipated a time when his readers would grow up, be no longer babes. Then there must have been immaturity and childishness in his time, too. There is still immaturity. Too many of God’s children are petulant and playful.

Look at verse 14 again: see that he knew his readers were too easily tossed to and fro, carried about with every changing doctrinal wind. Clearly there was instability in Paul’s church at Ephesus. And we are still plagued with unstable believers, running hither and yon to every voice that calls, confused and changeable.

Once more, look at verse 14: see how this instability involved also tricky, cunning, crafty, deceptive, false teaching. Already in Paul’s day, some he had won to Christ broke his heart by hearkening to false doctrine. The situation is even worse in our day. Our hearts still bleed because our people are naïve and gullible, untaught and undiscerning, easy prey for the vultures that would devour them with heresy.

Disunity, immaturity, instability, gullibility: are you sure Paul wrote this

letter to some church 1,900 years ago? Surely this must have been one of our 20th-century Free Will Baptist churches?

I think we will agree there is a missing dimension. We see it in the critical shortage of workers in the churches, whether the lack of enough qualified Sunday School teachers or the meager handful the pastor can shame into going on visitation. We see it when you can't tell the Christians from the unsaved, not in appearance or actions, and often not even at the national convention.

We see this missing dimension when typical church members are inconsistent and vacillating, indifferent to holiness, unconcerned about the lost, neurotic and spoiled, self-seeking, agitated, defeated, indulgent, short-fused, sacrilegious, and unspiritual.

And we are most profoundly aware of the missing dimension when many in the church feel left out and useless, that there is nothing for them to do, no contribution to make to the work; worse still, when others want nothing to do, and expect the preacher and deacons to do it all.

In all these ways, and in many more, we have no doubt: something is wrong, something is missing. What is it? Can we find it here? Doesn't Paul, penning words breathed in him by God Himself, put his finger on the problem? He certainly does. Here is the biblical solution, in verse 12. The whole passage turns on this phrase, "for the perfecting—the equipping—of the saints."

That is my task this evening:

- to present to you the equipping of the saints as the missing dimension.
- to convince you that our failure, at least in part, lies in our failure to equip fully all the saints.
- to expound and explain that equipping.
- to open up the dimensions of that word and the task it represents.
- to arouse in us all a new determination to work at the equipping of the saints.

There are, in fact, three emphases about the equipping of the saints that I have found in this passage, and these are the three parts of my message to you.

I. I find in this passage that equipping the saints is equipping them to *be*.

The Greek word translated “perfecting” or equipping in verse 12 often means that something is formed or fashioned to be what it really is or ought to be. Equipping the saints includes forming or fashioning them into what they ought to be.

My friends, we must first be concerned with what the believer is. How often we are justly heartbroken because our people do not do, and we fret and fuss. But in such cases maybe we ought to back up a step and ask what these Christians are, because what they are must come before what they do. Study this passage closely and you’ll see that Paul was very concerned about what these Ephesian believers were and could become.

A. To start with, he was concerned about their sainthood. Verse 12 speaks of the equipping of the saints. I don’t think we do any injustice to that phrase to observe that the very first thing involved is equipping them to be saints. To equip a believer is to form and fashion him into a saint.

Now I know that a person becomes a saint, in one sense, the moment he is converted. Positionally, he is instantaneously sanctified, set apart to God, made holy by the presence of the Holy Spirit that indwells him. But in practice he is a weak and stumbling saint at best. A saint, you know, is one who is holy: holy in thought and mind, as well as in word and deed. Holy because God is holy. Holy because both God and the believer have a passion for holiness.

Someone has said that “saints are people who have cultivated habits of holiness.” That is the truth, and habits of holiness in thought and word and deed are not developed overnight. Sainthood has to be taught and trained, preached and practiced, exemplified and emulated. Some of the weakness of our people is the inevitable product of their meager sainthood. We have to equip them to be saints.

B. Next, Paul was concerned about the Ephesians’ stature. In verse 13, you can see how Paul longed for them to attain “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Now the word “perfect,” here, is not the same Greek word as perfecting in verse 12. This one means complete and mature. Notice how Paul links this with the word “stature” here, and how he contrasts this, in verse 14, with children. What Paul means by perfect, is, you see, full grown.

I realize that Paul's "perfect man," here in verse 13, refers in a very real sense to the body of Christ as a whole. He wants to see the whole body of Christ, the Church, full grown, perfectly developed into adult manhood. But here's the point: that fully-developed manhood of the Church cannot come without the fully-developed manhood of every believer. So if we're going to equip the saints, we have to bring each one to adult manhood. Did you notice that verse 13 says we must all attain this? That is what we ought to be working tirelessly to produce: every saint a spiritually full-grown adult.

And I hope you noticed also just what sort of fully-developed stature Paul measures this adulthood by: "the stature of the fullness of Christ." The fully-grown saint will possess the fullness that Christ has to give him. In each member of the true church is to be embodied the measure of the graces and qualities of the character and personality of the man Jesus.

Far too long we have thought of this as a goal that is not possible to achieve. Or we have oiled the troubled waters of our consciences by telling ourselves that we will achieve this, anyway, in our glorified state when Jesus comes back. But, my dear fellow Free Will Baptists, there is no excuse for such miserable attitudes. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—full-grown, spiritual, adult manhood—is a target we ought to be shooting at for now, with the determination and expectation of reaching it in our earthly lifetimes. And I am fully persuaded that it will make a difference in glory just how closely we have come to attaining that stature down here.

It is an innocent game we play with our children when we ask them, at various times, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" And they are always changing, never sure, as long as they remain children. How sad it would be, though, if we met such uncertainty in a man of 30. Worse than that is the condition of Christians who remain spiritual babes all their lives, always talking about what they are going to be when they grow up! God help us: we need to go ahead and grow up. And equipping the saints means helping them reach the stature of fully-grown adults, in the image of the perfect humanity of our Lord Himself.

C. Now one more thing Paul was concerned about, in the matter of equipping the saints to be. Examine verse 14, and you'll see that he was concerned about their stability. He expresses this concern in an interesting way, with three negatives. See, he didn't want them to remain children; he didn't want them tossed and carried about by the shifting winds of doctrine;

and he didn't want them taken in by the sleight and cunning deception of false doctrine.

I won't say much more about the matter of being children, except that the Greek word literally means infants, babies. And far too many of our Christians are thumb-sucking, peevish babies. Consequently, they are unstable, wishy-washy, and vacillating. And our pastors have to spend their time changing diapers and warming bottles.

The most interesting picture of instability that Paul paints here is in these words: "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." This is the picture of a small boat caught in a storm at sea, at the mercy of waves and wind. When the wind blows this way, the boat goes this way. When the wind changes, so does the direction of the boat. You've heard of "small craft warnings"? This small, unstable craft is at the mercy of the fickle seas.

And I ask you, sadly: Doesn't that describe exactly what far too many of our people are? Agitated and tossed, following first this voice and then that one, changing every time the wind changes, at the mercy of the shifting winds of teaching. Oh, how our hearts long to see not small, unstable craft but solid, sound ships that can chart their course in any storm, knowing their destination and never veering from it!

The last part of verse 14 makes the picture even more tragic, because this instability leaves the people open not merely for fickle vacillation but for fatal deception. Paul strings together, here, a handful of words that describe this error of false teaching that unstable believers are susceptible to. *Sleight* originally meant the tricky tossing of the dice, and so came to refer to cheating and fraud. *Cunning craftiness* means skillful deceit, treacherous manipulation. *Lying in wait* refers to wily methods, deceitful devices. And to deceive means to lead astray. All these put together depict the methods and objectives of false teachers who craftily, schemingly, skillfully, deceitfully manipulate unstable believers toward a fatal straying from the truth.

I am not going to pretend to you that all our people have grown out of this, that they are too well trained to be taken in. No, I fear the truth is that many are still gullible, subject to the fierce winds of false teaching. It is all too easy for far too many to follow the multiple pied pipers of deceit that play first one tune and then another and lead God's people off into this cult or that heresy or some other fatal fad. Equipping the saints means equipping them to be spiritually stable, knowing the truth and discerning

and resisting what is false.

You see, then, that Paul was concerned to equip the Ephesians to be: to be saints, to be of the stature of full-grown adulthood, to be stable. We too must be concerned with what our people are: their holiness in heart and life, their spiritual maturity and stability.

Did you ever notice the interesting wording of Mark 3:14: Jesus “ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.” Jesus wanted His disciples to become something by their association with Him, as well as to go out and preach to others. We too must be concerned about the persons as well as their proclamation, what they practice as well as what they preach. We have to equip them to be a testimony as well as to give one, to obey His commandments as well as His commission.

In truth, what we are is as important as what we say, in influencing others for Christ. Isn't that what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16? “That they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven.”

II. In the second place, I find in this passage that equipping the saints is equipping them to *grow*.

A. Now I realize that this idea was included in what I have already said about equipping the saints to be. But the emphasis on growth in this passage is so strong as to demand our special attention. Paul was deeply concerned about the perfecting of the saints, about their spiritual development and growth. You don't have any trouble spotting that concern in the passage.

I already explained that the “perfect man” in verse 13 refers to a full-grown man, a well-developed adult. And I already called attention, in referring to verse 14, to the fact that Paul wanted the Ephesians to be children no longer. But now notice something I have not yet pointed out. In verse 15, Paul expresses his desire that his readers may “grow up into him in all things.” The word translated grow up is the usual one for the process of growth in Greek, as in the growth of a plant, for example. Now look at verse 16, where Paul refers, near the end of the verse, to the increase of the body. This is the very same word in Greek as grow up in verse 15.

Do you see it? Every verse says something about spiritual growth. This passage is about spiritual growth. Paul is concerned about spiritual growth.

Equipping the saints includes the nurture of their spiritual growth.

B. May I take a few moments and share from my heart? During the past year or two I have become increasingly concerned about this matter of spiritual growth. Because I care about our students and about our people, I have given some serious Bible study and meditation to the subject, and I want to share some conclusions with you.

First, I have become convinced that the biblical way to present spiritual growth is in terms of the New Testament concept of the fruit of the Spirit. Furthermore, I believe that the unhindered production of the Spirit's fruit in our lives is one of the most important things the Bible means by being "filled" with the Spirit.

Right here in Ephesians we have the famous verse, 5:18, that urges us to "be filled with the Spirit." That exhortation has spawned many a curious teaching about what it means. The truth is that being filled with the Spirit is not a single, crisis experience but a continuing process. "Be being filled with the Spirit"—that's what it means. Go on being filled. Make continuing progress in the process of being filled.

How do you do that? Well, I don't think it's any accident that Ephesians 5:18 is preceded, a few verses earlier, by Ephesians 5:9, which refers to the "fruit of the Spirit," to be found in all manner of goodness, righteousness, and truth produced in our lives. And that reminds us of Galatians 5:22, 23, where the list is longer and better known: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Here are nine marvelous fruits to be produced in the lives of growing Christians, fruits that flourish and mature under the influence of God's Spirit working through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is at work to produce in the lives of believers graces and qualities of character modeled after the character of the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This is true spiritual growth.

Let me expand on this a bit. Such lists are not intended to be complete. I submit that every good quality of Christian character and personality taught in the New Testament ought to be seen by us as part of the fruit of the Spirit. I took the time, earlier this year, to go through all the New Testament epistles and make a list of every such quality I could find, Christian graces that as the fruit of the Spirit provide the very terms in which Christian growth is to be measured.

I won't burden you by reading the list I made, for some 40 or 50 New Testament words would be required. But I do want to read to you, slowly, a score or so of such words. As I do, I want you to think about the kind of Christian that is pictured in them: Kind, gentle, loving, merciful, forgiving, holy, godly, righteous, pure, fearful, cheerful, thankful, joyful, patient, persevering, contented, courteous, submissive, virtuous, humble, meek, impartial, peaceful, sharing, honest, self-disciplined.

We could go on at length. In these very Christian graces—and many others—the Spirit of God wants to shape and mold our lives, developing in us the stature of the fullness of Christ. God has purposed for us to be conformed to the image of His Son. These are the fruits of the Spirit, and—hear me, now—only in the flourishing and maturing of such fruits can the fullness of the Spirit be experienced and seen.

Oh, so much confusion reigns these days about being filled with the Spirit. Someone says, “The hair stood up on the back of my neck!” I don't doubt it, but show me the fullness of the Spirit in honesty and humility and holiness. Another person tells how she jumped and shouted when she was filled with the Spirit. I guess that's all right, as far as it goes. But the fullness of the Spirit can much better be demonstrated in showing mercy and love and forgiveness, in purity and godliness. The evidence of the fullness of the Spirit is far more to be found in the fruits of the Spirit than anywhere else; and this includes telling the truth and disciplining the tongue more than speaking in tongues, I dare say.

Beloved, this matter of spiritual growth, this gracious striving of the Spirit of God to produce His fruit in us, involves changing the very kinds of persons we are. And I say to you sadly, we just aren't bringing much of our energies to bear on changing the kinds of persons we and our people are. All too often, those who have been afraid remain afraid. Those who are timid remain timid. Those who are insecure, or are spoiled and self-centered, remain insecure, or spoiled and self-centered. Those who seek attention continue to do so. Those who are harsh and critical remain so. Those who are self-conscious and defensive keep on thinking it's all about them. Those who are unserious remain unserious, and those who are too serious continue that way. Our churches are fairly filled with childish saints, and all our countless little tensions and conflicts and hurt feelings and strivings—in short, all our powerlessness—is the result.

I know that all our personalities are different, and I thank God they are.

We are unique, individuals. But with all our wonderful differences, God wants to make every one of us honest, happy, reasonable, loving, self-sacrificing, reliable, self-disciplined, and virtuous. Every one!

This spiritual growth is, of course, a process. There is no short cut. The apple does not suddenly pop out, full grown, on the tree. There is first the bud, then the bloom, then the green fruit slowly reaching full size and finally ripening. (Oh, how agonizingly slow is the process when you're a kid waiting for the apples to be ripe. Sometimes you don't wait, and then you get a bellyache!)

Just so, the fruit of the Spirit is produced slowly, gradually, in our lives. And the process requires nurture and cultivation. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God, and we have to open and devour the Word. We have to read and meditate on the Scriptures, learn them, let our minds be molded by them, apply them. You've noticed 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, to be sure, where we're told that the Scriptures are intended to help make every believer "perfect," "thoroughly furnished" to all good works. Did you know that the words *perfect* and *thoroughly furnished*, there, are the very same words in Greek as here in Ephesians 4? The Scriptures are used to equip the saints with the mature fruits of the Spirit, from which all good works come.

Christian, take heed! Minister of the Word, take heed! Every one of us ought to study and learn the process of spiritual growth. We ought to be spiritual "horticulturalists," mastering the process of nurturing our own spiritual growth. And then we ought to apply all the principles of spiritual growth in our ministry to others, those who depend on our leadership. We need to have the satisfaction of seeing them grow, of recognizing first one and then another of the fruits of the Spirit forming and flourishing in their lives, changing them.

Vance Havner, in his unique way, said that for church membership to grow statistically without the church members growing spiritually in proportion is like putting a new baby in a refrigerator or live chicks under a dead hen!

My brothers, it is not enough that we go, we must also grow. One of our problems is that we have a utilitarian philosophy of the Christian life. But the value and worth of everything cannot be measured in terms of its usefulness alone. The flourishing, flowering, fruitful Christian life is a thing of joy and beauty in itself and worthwhile for that reason if for no other. Christian growth aims at developing in the believer's life the gracious

blooms of love and joy, the brilliant gems of peace and gentleness, the sweet ripe fruits of longsuffering and self-control. Such a trophy of grace, mature and complete, is the goal of God's work in salvation, falling short only of the final goal of His glory. And although such a life may be a means to yet another end, it is still an end in itself. In such a life God exults. He is glad and glorified.

In all our busy-ness, then, in all our hustle and doing, let's not forget being. God is pleased to sniff the perfume of the flowering Christian life. The church needs, reflected in its eyes, the sparkling beams of polished gems of Christian maturity. The world needs to taste the ripened fruits of the flourishing Christian life.

III. Now third, and finally, I find in this passage that equipping the saints is equipping them to *serve*.

Once again an observation about the meaning of the Greek word *perfecting* or *equipping*. It often refers, specifically, to being fitted for a given use. Paul certainly wants to see saints fitted, furnished, prepared, equipped for useful service.

It is not enough, then, for the believer to become the saint of stature and stability he ought to be. Nor is it enough for him to grow spiritually so that the fullness of the Spirit is demonstrated in the flourishing of beautiful graces in his life. No, the believer must also serve.

That is exactly what Paul means, here, when he says, "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry." Make no mistake about it, the phrase "for the work of the ministry" modifies the saints. Not the apostles, not the prophets, not the evangelists, not the pastor-teachers—although they also minister. No, the saints are to be equipped for the work of ministry.

Here's another mistake to avoid: ministry is spelled not with a capital letter but a small "m." Ministry means service. The saints are to be equipped to serve, and that service, in turn, according to verse 12, is aimed at the building up of the body of Christ.

Now I'm going to touch on this third point only briefly, not because I am less interested in it—that is not the case—but because I must not transgress on the sermon for tomorrow night. The service of the saints, in this passage, will be the emphasis tomorrow night—and, in a way, on Wednesday night also. Not knowing, however, what our good Brother Williams will say, I

cannot resist making a few observations on the subject of the saints' service toward the building up of the body of Christ. (At least, I'm glad I get to go first!)

First, let me stress the point that every single believer has a part to play, a place to fill in the work. Notice verse 7: "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Then notice verse 16: "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Every one. Every joint. Every part. No Christian is left out. Every believer is to be meaningfully involved in the work of service.

There is no excuse for us to leave some members feeling useless and unwanted, and I fear that too many feel that way. Brethren, teach one that he or she has a place in the work of service. Teach him or her what that place is—and everyone's place is not the same. Equip them all to perform that service. That's the job of the gifted leaders. Give meaning and significance, and thus joy and happiness, to their lives. Equipping the saints is getting every one busy in the service of building up the body of Christ.

I called your attention to verse 16 a moment ago. Look at it again, and take delight in this work of art in words, describing the growth of the whole body of Christ. The church is likened to a human body. Christ is the Head from whom all the directions and energies flow. That body is in the process of growth, of being fitly framed and knit together by means of every joint and part. And, by the way, a local church is in a real sense, though in microcosm, the body of Christ.

Spiritually, you see, these joints and parts are the various members of the church, the individual believers. Everyone is to be in his proper place, functioning according to the measure of responsibility assigned by the Head. Every one, in turn, is supplied the energy for performing his service by that same Head. Then, with all parts functioning as intended, the whole body makes the kind of increase—growing and being built up, in other words—that pleases God.

So we see, beloved, that the beautiful Christian life I have tried to picture in the two previous parts of this message, has a utilitarian purpose after all. The flowering Christian life does not make one a wall-flower, but one that is put to use. All of us have seen many things we regarded as lovely but not practical. The Christian life is both: beautiful and practical, not just pretty

but useful. Equipping the saints includes preparing and sending them forth to serve, in the building up of the body of Christ.

And may I take a minute or two more of your time? Please let me offer a word about the building up of the body of Christ, which is the work of service every believer is to be equipped for and engaged in. Please hear me: the building of the body of Christ includes both evangelism and edification, both winning people and nurturing them. We have to hew out new blocks of stone from the quarry. We also have to shape and fit those new stones for their place in the building.

Have you ever noticed Colossians 1:27, 28? There Paul presents his own concept of his ministry. His ultimate objective, he says, is to present perfect—full grown—persons to Christ. He will not be satisfied with anything less. And so, to strive for that goal, he warns and teaches, evangelizing and edifying. He will have none to offer to Christ if he wins none. He will have only babes to offer Him if he does not nurture them. So he does both.

Likewise we must do both and equip the saints to do both, and we need not keep on in this petty bickering about which is more important. Each one produces the other in a well-formed circle, and each is to be loved for its own worth as part of the whole. A love for evangelism that neglects Christian nurture is a perverted love. A love for edification that neglects evangelism is a perverted love.

Well, I have probably already made Brother Williams and Brother Jones cringe, so I will not go on with this emphasis, except to say that all this work of evangelizing and edifying is the service of all the saints, a service for which we must equip them. It is not the professionals alone who are to evangelize. All the saints are to fill their places in the service of evangelism, the extension of the body. Nor is it the professionals alone who are to do the work of edifying those who are won. All the saints are to be equipped to fill their places in this service too. As verse 16 says, the body edifies itself.

Someone has said that Christianity began as a company of lay witnesses but has now become a professional “pulpitism” financed by the spectators. That ought not to be. Vance Havner says, “Nowadays we ‘hire’ a church staff to do ‘full-time Christian work,’ and then we sit back in church on Sunday and watch them do it.” I’m afraid he’s telling the truth. But every believer is intended by the Lord to be in full-time Christian service. I, for one, would be willing to give up the concept we have of a professional ministry if we could get all the saints, as they should, to do the work of the ministry. That

is why we are to equip them to be and grow, so they can serve.

Let me give you a final illustration, one that I think ties it all together, one some of you have heard me use in a message on fruit-bearing from John 15. After all, what is the purpose, the effect, of a good fruit tree that produces as it should?

My favorite fruit is peaches. I come from a peach-growing state, and it's not Georgia. I hate to tell you this but we have one county in South Carolina that produces more peaches for market than the whole state of Georgia. (Please, Georgians, don't be mad with me.)

Go with me to the peach orchard. Here's a tree we're approaching, and it's loaded down with peaches. The branches are so heavy with the red and yellow, ripe fruit that they are bending over, touching the ground, about to break. As we get closer, we can see that they're big and plump and juicy. Some of them have already burst open at the seams and the juice is oozing out. We get a little closer and the sweet smell of ripe peaches fills our nostrils. See them in your mind. Smell them in your mind. Reach out and pull one off the tree in your mind.

What does that make you want to do? Why, eat peaches, of course! That's what ripe fruit is for. Everybody who comes around will want to taste some of those peaches.

What if the people in the world about us could see the people in our churches being what Christians ought to be, and growing spiritually like Christians ought to grow, and filling our places in service like Christians ought to? What if they could see in all our lives the ripe, mature fruit of the Spirit produced in our character and practice? I think they would want to sample the fruit. Isn't that the point?

1977 – Fred Warner

The Church Triumphant in the World

Text: Matthew 28:18-20

The theme for this service is “The Church Triumphant in the World.” We are not apt to be triumphant in our personal lives, our homes, or even in our churches if we are not first triumphant in the world. More than any where else, it is in the world that Christianity is put to the acid test, but thanks be to God Who enables us to triumph even in a hostile world (1 Corinthians 15:57).

The message of our text constitutes more than a missionary mandate; it gives us the basis for believing that the church not only can, but will execute an effective program of worldwide evangelism. This truth is conveyed by three things.

I. The Power Which Christ Claims

A. Christ has authoritative power.

I call attention to verse 18 and the term “power.” The meaning of power is two-fold. Christ not only has “all power” in the sense of “the ability to act,” but “all power” in the sense of “authority to warrant acting.” He did not assume or usurp this “authority;” it was given to Him upon His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

B. Christ has absolute power.

Note the extent of His power—that it embraces both heaven and earth. Someone has said He is not only Lord of Heaven and earth but everywhere in between. No creature is exempt from His power (Philippians 2:10, 11). Scripture abounds with examples of His absolute authority. Disease was no match for His power, demons bowed to His authority, nature submitted to His commands, His preaching had a ring of authority which captured the hearts of those who heard Him, and even death itself could not hold Him.

C. Christ has authenticated power.

As the text indicates, it is on the basis of this power that He said, “Go ye, therefore....” Armed with His power, the first-century Christians turned

the world upside down for Christ. Evangelism became the whole work of the whole church for the whole age. Within 30 to 35 years after Pentecost, the early church had taken the Gospel to all the then known world. When questioned about the source of their power, the answer of the disciples was always the same (Act 4:5-10). And the church saw physical miracles give way to spiritual miracles—the miracle of regeneration through the new birth (John 14:12). Leonard Ravenhill said it best: “The greatest miracle God ever performed is to take an unholy man out of an unholy world and make him holy, and put him back in an unholy world and keep him holy.”

II. The Program Which Christ Outlines

In verses 19 and 20 Christ unveils His three-fold plan for world evangelism:

A. The Church is to evangelize.

Note the command, “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations...” The command to go suggests that the church is to be aggressive rather than passive. We must not retreat or merely try to hold the fort; we must make Christ known in the regions beyond. “Teach all nations” means to make “disciples of all people groups.” As the songwriter has said, “We’ve a story to tell to the nations....”

B. The Church is to enroll.

Converts are to “baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...” To baptize suggests the need to enroll followers of Christ as members of a visible, local church (Acts 2:41). This point needs to be labored because so many in our day are trying to discredit the importance of the local, visible, organized church. Many in the professing church are now labeling themselves as a “fellowship” rather than a “church,” and in many cases it is an attempt to escape the discipline and authority of a Bible-preaching, Bible-practicing church.

Although fellowship is vital in the life of believers, the term “church” should never be sacrificed to make her more appealing or less offensive. Such terminology weakens the emphasis of being an aggressive soul-winning church. Today, dress is not only casual but often immodest and beneath the dignity of worship. Preaching is no longer appreciated and applauded but frowned upon by those who are fearful of being disturbed in their sins. They want dialogue, not preaching; they had rather have a

glorified bull session than straight-down-the-gun-barrel-preaching. The end result is a lack of commitment to Christ and a lack of loyalty to the church. While these observations may sound cruel and harsh, time will tell (if it hasn't already) whether or not such concern is justified.

I have no sympathy for those who minimize the importance of the local church or Bible preaching. There is power in the preached Word (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21)! We must not only be set for the defense of the Gospel, but for the defense of the local, visible church. After all, the church at her worst, with all her failings, is still the best thing this side of Heaven! She is God's creation (Ephesians 2:10).

C. The Church is to edify.

Getting the lost saved is only the first step in our responsibility to those we win. We have not fully obeyed the Gospel until we edify and educate those we reach (Matthew 28:20). The ultimate goal is not only to win souls to Christ, but to present every man perfect (mature) in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28). This means we need strong doctrinal preaching that will ground converts in the faith; that will enable them to be an asset rather than a liability to the cause of Christ.

III. The Promise Which Christ Extends

Great and precious promises are attached to the Great Commission and Matthew 28:20 is no exception. Note the three-fold promise related to Christ's presence.

A. The promise of His personal presence

Jesus said, "And, lo, I am with you..." We not only have the inspired Word to encourage us, we have the abiding presence of the Living Word in the Person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18). It should be noted that His work can only be accomplished in His power (Zechariah 4:6; John 15:5; Acts 1:8; and 2 Corinthians 3:5).

B. The promise of His perpetual presence

Jesus also said, "I am with you always..." In season and out of season, regardless of the circumstances, He is a very present help in the time of trouble (Psalm 46:1; Hebrews 13:5). It is the Lord's presence that sustains in the heat of battle (2 Timothy 4:16, 17).

C. The promise of His prevailing presence

Note that Christ also said, "...And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (or the end of the age). This is the promise of His prevailing presence! This assures us of victory as long as the church is on earth. In fact, Christ Himself said that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Closing Remarks

If you are challenged and encouraged by what Christ is going to accomplish through His church, I invite you to surrender your life to Him in this service. There is no better time to renew our commitment to the Lord and the task of world evangelism.

1978 – Jack Stallings

The Worship of God

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Chronicles 16:29

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”(1 Chronicles 16:29).

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LoRD our maker”(Psalm 95:6).

Introduction

The worship of the true God is the highest activity to which one may aspire or of which he is capable. Worship is the central purpose for which God created men. Therefore, the worship of God is the central, unifying characteristic of the Christian life.

In the strictest sense, worship is pure adoration, the lifting up of the heart unto God in contemplation of His holy perfection. In the broader sense, actions which grow out of this heart attitude may also be considered worship.

The worship of God then, may mean more than just the action of worshiping per se. It may also include the numerous acts of service to God which, because of the heart attitude in which they are performed, are actually acts of worship in and of themselves.

This morning, we are going to focus primarily on worship in its strictest sense—pure heart adoration of God. This is because the pure worship of God is so greatly neglected in our age and because such pure worship is essential if our actions are going to constitute worship rather than mere legalism.

We shall note, first, that:

I. Worshipping God is man's highest calling.

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:35-38).

A. The worship of God is man's highest duty here on earth. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalms 29:1, 2).

"Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy" (Psalms 99:5).

B. The worship of God will continue to be man's central activity in Heaven. "And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him" (Revelation 19:5-7a).

II. Worshipping God is more important than anything else the Christian does, even his service.

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha; thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

Martha was the leader who took the action of inviting Jesus into their home. Martha was careful, troubled, and cumbered with much service. Martha was upset that Mary was spending time in so impractical an activity as worship. Martha was missing the single most important thing, the only abiding and real thing: the true worship and contemplation of Jesus.

- A. The modern age may well be characterized as the age of Marthaism. Men are careful, troubled, and cumbered with much service, but leaving out the most pressing and fundamental duty: the worship of God with the whole heart.
- B. It seems that Christians are convinced that, since worship is pleasant rather than tedious and difficult, it must not be worthy or important. They have been conditioned to feel guilty if they take time away from their “duties” to worship God.
- C. Nothing could be more wrong! It is only as “service” is an aspect and outgrowth of worship, that it is either valuable or pleasing to God.

III. Worshipping God is the key to maintaining proper motives in Christian Service.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

- A. Everything one does must be done as unto God rather than men.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:1-4).

- B. Service that is rendered for any reason other than worship to God is meaningless.
- C. Much “service” is meaningless, even sinful, because of wrong motivation.
- D. Christians desperately need, at this time, to return to the worship of God as their primary duty in life.

It should be noted that this line of reasoning is in no way intended to be an excuse for laziness or inactivity. It is, rather, a call for Christians to rethink all their actions and direct them all to the glory of God.

IV. Worshipping God is the key to holy living.

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:1-5).

A. When one comes into the presence of the God of Heaven, he becomes immediately and painfully aware of his sinfulness.

B. The reason why Christians today are ever more worldly in their habits and ever less separated in their attitudes is that they have no direct personal contact with God through real worship.

V. Worshipping God will keep the Christian straight in his theology.

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

A. When men who know God refuse to worship him in the fullness of that knowledge, that knowledge is corrupted and lost.

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:21, 25, 28).

B. False doctrine and apostasy will not prevail where men actively worship and love the God of the Bible with all their heart, soul and mind.

C. It is only in the vacuum of a worship-less heart that error and apostasy flourish. It is only after men have forsaken the fountain of living waters that they feel the need to hew themselves out a cistern.

Conclusion

Evangelical Christians cannot afford to leave the worship of God out of their churches, out of their services, out of their lives. They cannot just leave worship to the liberals. They cannot leave it to the Charismatics. They cannot dismiss it as impractical and non-productive.

There are two reasons why this is so:

1. Because worship is God's primary objective for mankind.
2. Because all other objectives are meaningless and/or sinful apart from it.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23).

What does God most want from you? The sincere worship of your heart.
Christian: Do you truly worship God? Or do you merely go through the outward forms and motions of serving Him?

Non-Christian: Your most basic and wicked sin is your refusal to worship God. You refuse to acknowledge Him as God in your own life. You disregard and disobey Him.

1978 – Dennis Wiggs

Sunday School Lesson

Text: 2 Corinthians 2:11-16

The theme of the 41st annual session of the National Association of Free Will Baptists is “Triumphant in Christ” in the individual believer, in the home, in the church, in the world, and in the prayer life. Our theme verse is 2 Corinthians 2:14. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is defending his ministry, declaring his testimony, and denouncing the Corinthians’ accusations.

Paul had come to Troas and waited for Titus, but he did not come. Instead of going to Corinth, he went to the open door of Macedonia. The Corinthian church accused him of fickleness.

The Apostle wrote these words in this letter in defense of what God was doing in his life. Yes, it may look like fickleness. The Corinthians may not have understood or even wanted to understand. But, in Paul’s soul, he was convinced he was right, led by the Lord, and not fickle.

First, Paul declares that he is rejoicing in God, the One who led him from Troas to Macedonia. He says: “Thanks be unto God.” Thanks be unto the Corinthians who judged his motives? No, sir. Thanks be unto the church at Corinth for their critical spirit? No, sir. But, thanks be unto God. The One who understands. The One who judges the heart and not the outward appearance.

The believer who is accomplishing anything for the Lord will suffer criticism, misunderstanding, and judging. And, remember that Paul’s critics were not unsaved. They were believers. Some of our most difficult opposition comes from the household of God.

If we develop some biblical standards, they will criticize us for being narrow-minded and legalistic. If we seek to win souls to Christ, the accusers declare us to be too shallow. If we expound the Word of God to edify the saints, we are judged as being too deep and dry. If we try to rear our kids in the ways of the Lord and lay down some family rules, they criticize us for being too old-timey and sheltering our children from the true world. But if we let them do what they want to do, accusers say we are too lenient and don’t love our kids. It does not matter what we do, there will be criticism.

Our responsibility is to be convinced that we are right in the sight of God. Paul was convinced that he was right (verse 12).

Even though the Corinthians judged Paul, he was rejoicing in the Lord who saved him out of sin, called him to preach the Gospel, and led him to Macedonia rather than Corinth. It didn't matter what the Corinthians said. God understood. He was doing the Lord's business and that was what counted.

Therefore, Paul declares, "God always causes or leads me to triumph in Christ." In the midst of opposition, criticism, discouragement, and hard work, there is still victory.

Paul declares that he is led to triumph in Christ. He shares in the victories in Christ. The picture is of a Roman general who had been to a distant land, won the battle, and returned home. The senate voted him a triumph and when he and his army returned to Rome, a public holiday was declared, and all of the people thronged down the main street to see this general enter in triumph with his captives chained. Sweet smelling censers were the odor of life to the captives who were set free and the odor of death to the captives who were condemned and killed.

Paul identified with this triumph. Christ is the victor. He has won the battle and Paul was sharing in the celebration. He says, "Praise God, we won." The football team comes home. "We won." The basketball team wins the championship. "We won." What did you do? Nothing. But you share in the victory because that is your team.

Paul says we're on God's team. God allows us—or leads us—to victory with Christ. It's not our battle. It's not our world. It's not our Great Commission. It's not our church. It's not our Christian school. It belongs to God and Christ. They are the creators. They are the conquerors. We're just on their team.

We are triumphant in Christ. But, wait a minute. Are we? Does every Christian live in victory, realizing that this is God's battle, and we are just sharing in His triumph? No, we don't. There are some discouraged, disappointed, disgusted believers. Why?

There are three very strong influences that affect the Christian's victory. self, Satan, sin.

Self, the flesh, the natural man robs the believer of spiritual victory. The home, the church, the world will never rise any higher than the individual

believer. Selfishness robs the believer of being triumphant in Christ.

So does Satan. He uses tools such as weaknesses in the flesh or worry to restrain us from sharing in the triumph of Christ. The evil one knows how weak we are. He got to Solomon through Egyptian horses and women. He got to Demas through the world's pleasures. He got to Judas through his greed. He'll get to you and me through our weak spot. Or, he causes us to worry. Philippians 4:6 states that worry is a sin.

Illustration: Man with flat tire on car. No Jack. Sees house off in distance. Walks to house but worries: what if the man says no, he doesn't trust me, he wants a deposit and I'm broke, he doesn't believe me. Knocks at the door. Door opens. He's worried himself so much: "Keep your old jack. I didn't want it anyway!" Worry defeats our spiritual victory.

Sin is another challenge to our being triumphant in Christ. Hidden sin. Unconfessed sin. Achan: Israel was victorious at Jericho but Achan took a Babylonish garment, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of 50 shekels weight. With that hidden sin hanging over Israel, they went up to Ai, and 36 men were killed (Joshua 7). Sin robs us of spiritual victory.

But God leads us to triumph in Christ. He doesn't drive us, nor force us. He leads. Illustration: Shepherd leads sheep, pastor told congregation, but on tour to Israel he saw a man driving sheep. Went to him. He was a butcher, not a shepherd. God leads us. We follow. To follow Him demands at least three responses from us:

Our submission. Submission to God: to recognize His power in our lives. The all-wise, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God. Our reverence, respect, submitting to the One worthy of leading us.

Our surrender. Submission allows God to be Master and Lord. Surrender is yielding to His will, to give up oneself (Galatians 2:20).

Our service. God leads. We follow in submission, surrender, and then in service. The believer in service is a sweet aroma or fragrance (verses 14b-16). First, an aroma to God's nostrils. The triumphant believer is a Christian who communes with God, who fellowships with the Lord, who adores the Master. Adoration comes before activity. Worship is first, works second. We must smell good to God first, and then we will smell good to others.

Our lives manifest an aroma. This Gospel smell is a savor unto life for those who trust our Savior but a savor unto death for those who refuse.

And that's our ministry in life. To smell good. That's why our churches exist. That's why we live. That's why we are in Detroit—to manifest a “good smell.”

But can we be triumphant in Christ in our own ability? No (verse 16). But the answer is given in 2 Corinthians 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

1979 – LaVerne Miley

Evangelizing in the Spirit

Text: Acts 13:1-4

Introduction

If you have been present for all the convention services, you have heard messages concerning being filled with the Spirit; walking in the Spirit; ministering in the Spirit. Tonight, my subject is evangelizing in the Spirit—preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Spirit in order to convert sinners.

The subject of the Holy Spirit is much in the news today in the religious world, and opinions range from one extreme to the other:

1. Cold orthodoxy, where the Holy Spirit seems to have no place of significance, if any place at all.
2. Religious fanaticism, where the major emphasis is upon an outward display of phenomena attributed to the Holy Spirit.

If we are to evangelize in the Spirit, we must understand the place the Holy Spirit occupies in our lives, yea, the place He wants to fill in order that God may use us.

I. The Rightful Place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's Life

- A. What is the rightful place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life, according to the Scriptures?
 1. The child of God is born of the Spirit (John 3:5). Without this experience, no man enters God's kingdom.
 2. The child of God is baptized by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) into the one body of Christ.
 3. The child of God is indwelt by the Spirit (1 John 3:24) who gives him assurance (Romans 8:16).
 4. The child of God is sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). The transaction is finished; we belong to Him.

All these events occur the moment one accepts Christ as Savior and Lord by faith.

- B. But there is something more that I believe is necessary if we are to evangelize in the Spirit: we must be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This is my daily prayer: to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Only as we are filled with the Holy Spirit can we be used to the fullest to glorify our Lord. (It isn't how much of the Holy Spirit we have that counts; it's how much of us the Holy Spirit has. When He infills us, He has all of us—our mind, our body, our will—to use for His glory.)
- C. The only way we can ever preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost and win them to Him is in the power of the Spirit of God.

II. Evangelizing in the Spirit

- A. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, we find the meaning of "evangelizing in the Spirit." Humanly speaking, in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, Paul's speech was devoid of wisdom and appeal. But in reality, in demonstration of the Spirit and of the power of God—and God blessed Paul's message and ministry, and the Corinthian church was born. If this was the experience of a man like Paul whom God used so mightily, surely we should seek a like experience—not relying upon human ability, upon oratorical eloquence, upon a degree from Bible college, university, or seminary, but relying upon the Spirit of God and His ability to demonstrate His power through us. We are just channels.

Personal Testimony

Asked to preach in a youth revival at 17 years of age; realization of my inadequacy, my inability. God revealed unto me 1 Corinthians 2; I used a portion as a text. Seventeen young people came to the Lord. I knew of a certainty that it was "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6b). We live in a day in which God is belittled and man is exalted; but God hasn't changed.

- B. In Ivory Coast tonight is a man named Paul—Kontin Paul—who, from the human standpoint has few things in common with Paul of the New Testament except the name.

The Apostle Paul was

white

a Hebrew of the Hebrews

of the tribe of Benjamin

a brilliant scholar

brought up at the feet of Gamaliel

a Pharisee

Kontin Paul is

black

a Lobi

a member of a despised race

an unlearned peasant

farmer

a former fetish-priest

But one thing they have in common: when they stand to preach, it is not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. This is what it means to evangelize in the Spirit. This is what we need today.

III. Christ Foretold the Place of the Holy Spirit in Our Witnessing for Him.

- A. On the night of the betrayal (John 15:26, 27). Linked with the statement that the Holy Spirit shall testify of Christ is the assertion that "ye also shall bear witness."
- B. Six weeks later on the mount called Olivet (Acts 1:8), Jesus commissioned them to evangelize the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.

You see, the fulfillment of the Great Commission presupposes His witnesses going forth in the power of the indwelling, infilling Holy Spirit. His presence and power in our lives is an absolute necessity if our witness is to be effective. There is no other way to accomplish the task.

IV. The Manner of Evangelizing Is Described in the Book of Acts.

- A. The task of evangelizing the world is accomplished as we heed the calling and leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our individual lives and then go forth in-filled and empowered by Him to bear witness to Christ.
- B. Then the apostolic church sought out seven men to serve as deacons in that early church. It was required that they be "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

Deacons (“servants”) must be filled with the Holy Spirit to render service that will glorify the Lord.

1. Stephen: he was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost and of power.
 - a. His adversaries could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke (Acts 6:10).
 - b. His fervent witness in the power of the Spirit of God cost him his life; he sealed his testimony with his blood.
 - c. But his Savior stood to usher him through the portals of glory (Acts 7:56).
2. Philip: he, too, went forth preaching Christ in the power of the Spirit.
 - a. The city of Samaria received the Word of God.
 - b. “There was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8) where he performed signs and miracles, and multitudes were believing and being baptized.
 - c. And the Lord said (Acts 8:26).
 - d. The Lord knew there was a man on that lonely road—a black man—whose heart He had prepared to receive Christ.
 - e. Philip witnessed to him; he believed, was baptized and went on his way rejoicing.
 - f. The black man returned to his own country—back to Africa—a new creature in Christ.

Whether performing miracles before the multitudes of Samaria or witnessing to a stranger on a forsaken country road, the important thing was being where the Spirit led. This is evangelizing in the Spirit. And that is what is important for you and for me tonight.

Over the years I have wondered if that African’s testimony centuries ago reached Lobi-land. First baptismal service, Lobi initiation ceremony; baptism represents an event of great importance to the Lobi. Just as the Lord prepared the heart of the Ethiopian for the witness of Philip, so He prepares hearts today. Illustration: Prophet going among the villages around Konzie. But we must go as the Spirit leads to minister to hearts He is even now preparing.

V. The Holy Spirit Takes the Initiative in Sending Us Forth to Evangelize

A. One thing is certain: every child of God is to be a witness for Him wherever he is.

B. But equally certain is the fact that He calls certain ones of us to serve Him in a particular capacity in a specific place.

God still calls preachers; He still calls and sends forth missionaries; He still sends to the regions beyond—some to serve in one capacity, some in another.

C. What is a call of God? An abiding God-given conviction (L. R. Ennis). It may not be what we would choose. That conviction may be initiated as God speaks to us through His Word, as His servant preaches the Word, by that still small voice in the middle of the night.

1. When God saved Saul of Tarsus, immediately He commissioned him to carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles. Paul before Agrippa (Acts 26:16-19). In God's timing, when the hour arrived, He sent him forth (Acts 13:2-4). This is God's plan; it's up to Him to call; it's up to us to go (if He calls us) and to send (if He calls our brother or sister).
2. God doesn't always show us when He saves us what He has for us to do out in the future. I'm glad He doesn't.
3. If He calls us for a special service, He will not let us rest until we yield to Him.

And tragically, there are those who go through life saying "No" to God, unwilling to yield, afraid of what it will cost, never thinking of what it will cost not to yield to His will for their lives.

Testimony of the old man in Oklahoma who refused the call to preach when he was a young man.

I understand: I rebelled against God's call to preach; I rebelled when He called to the mission field; and it cost us dearly: our own baby. But I know, too, the peace that passeth understanding and the joy unspeakable and full of glory that come with saying "Not my will, but Thine be done"; with realizing that His grace is sufficient for me, His strength is made perfect in my weakness.

My friend, He will never call you to perform a task but what He will supply the grace that you may accomplish it.

Conclusion

Nineteen years ago I stood before this body in Fresno, California. I gave you our testimony; and I said, "We're ready to go if you are ready to send us. You sent us. You have stood by us, and we shall be eternally grateful.

Two-and-one-half years ago we went through another experience with the Lord on a freighter carrying us back to Africa for our fourth term of service. After a day of prayer and fasting, we felt the Lord was showing us this would be our last term. It was not an easy decision; two of our children were there. But many times I had said I never wanted to become so attached to a place that I couldn't move at His command.

In January of this year we returned to the States. God in His goodness has opened fields of service for us, and moment by moment we seek to follow where He leads. We are just strangers and pilgrims here looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Our citizenship is in heaven.

But I know, too, that until Jesus comes, our standing orders remain (Mark 16:15).

Our responsibility today is no less than it was 19 years ago: to be witnesses for Him, infilled and empowered by the Spirit of God, wherever He puts us. But these are your standing orders, too; this is your responsibility.

If the Lord Jesus sees fit at this time to use us here, He will call forth others to continue to proclaim Jesus Christ among the Lobis—our people, people dear to our hearts. Thank God for calling two of our children to continue to lift up Christ our Savior among the Lobis.

But the harvest fields out there are so vast, the laborers so few. I speak in terms of Ivory Coast and the Lobis because my heart is still there; but in reality that is just a small corner in the world's vast harvest fields that need to be reaped for Jesus. And no one area is more important than another.

It's up to God to say where He would have us labor as individuals, but it's up to us to yield ourselves to Him.

You don't have to have a Damascus Road experience before you say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" You don't have to have a vision of

the Lord in the Temple, surrounded by angels, before you say, "Here am I; send me."

If God, by His still small voice is speaking to your heart tonight, won't you just say to Him, "I yield; my life I give to Thee; not my will, but Thine, be done."

1979 – Eugene Hales

Approved Unto God and Man

Text: Romans 14:17, 18

Introduction

- A. Obviously, this chapter is about the law of love concerning doubtful things and our judgment of the weak in the faith.
- B. We propose to speak about the life we now live as presented in Galatians 2:20: Crucified, yet alive, by faith, Christ in me.
- C. We wish to clarify the what, the why, and the how of living a life acceptable to God (2 Corinthians 5:9).

Theme: Five elements to consider in pleasing God.

I. The Miracle We Show

- A. We have experienced the miracle of Salvation (Romans 1:16).
- B. We have experienced the miracle of a New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- C. We have experienced the miracle of the New Birth. (John 3:3, 5).
- D. We have experienced the miracle of the Kingdom of God.
 - 1. The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink nor diet and special days (Romans 4:17).
 - 2. The Kingdom of God is much more (Romans 4:17):
 - a. It is the righteousness of God.
 - b. It is peace with God.
 - c. It is joy in the Holy Ghost.
 - 3. The Kingdom of God also includes:
 - a. Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ...."
 - b. Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God...."

- c. Ecclesiastes 12:1: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth...."
- d. Ephesians 6:1, 2: "Children obey your parents..." "Honour thy father and thy mother."

II. The Master We Serve (Romans 14:4-19)

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ is our Master (verse 4): "By him we stand or fall."
- B. God is able to make us stand firm (verse 4).
- C. Be fully persuaded by Jesus Christ (verses 5, 14).
- D. We are the Lord's (verses 8, 9).
- E. We are to serve Christ (verse 18).

III. The Motive We Share (Romans 14:1-23)

- A. To give God thanks (Romans 14: 6).
- B. To give God glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- C. To give God a life approved unto Him (2 Corinthians 5:9). The Apostle Paul offers help for such motive (Romans 13:11-14):
 - 1. Let us cast off the works of darkness (Romans 13:12).
 - 2. Let us put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12).
 - 3. Let us walk honestly as in the day (Romans 13:13).
 - 4. Let us put on the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14).

IV. The Message We Secure (Romans 14:10-23)

- A. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (verse 10).
- B. We all will bow, confess and give account of ourselves to God (verses 11, 12).
- C. We must become a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block (verse 13).
- D. We must devote ourselves to living totally for Christ and not ourselves.

1. In love (verse 15).
2. In purity (verse 20).
3. In peace (verses 17, 19).
4. In faith (verse 23).
5. In edification (verse 19).

V. The Morals We Sanction: Who and what we are is revealed by...

- A. Our attitude: "Let not then your good be evil spoken of" (Romans 14:16).
- B. By our conversation: "Keep thyself pure" (body, mind, heart, motives, and actions).
- C. By our faithfulness. To Christ our Savior, to the Holy Scriptures, to Christian obligation and accountability.

Conclusion

By God's grace and God's help through these five elements, we can be acceptable unto God and approved unto men.

1980 – Jack Richey

A Good Minister of Jesus Christ

Text: 1 Timothy 4:6

Introduction

Theme of Convention: “Year of the Sunday School”

Emphasis will be placed on instruction in the teaching and ministry.

The Apostle Paul gave some good instruction about the preaching ministry. Unless it is adhered to, the teaching ministry will be ineffective or at least hindered.

Background of 1 Timothy

“A Good Minister of Jesus Christ”

1 Timothy 4:6

Conditional—Some principles must be applied.

A good minister will place a:

I. Preeminence on Preaching (1 Timothy 4:6, 7)

A. Persuades the Perishing (1 Corinthians 1:17, 18, 21-23; 2:1, 2)

Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men. How? Preaching the Word!

B. Pledge to the Prisoners (Romans 1:14, 15, 16)

(1 Timothy 4:7) “Refuse.” We preach not ourselves.

Leave out of the pulpit:

- Counselors: Belong in the office
- Lecturers: Belong in the classroom
- Seminars: Belong in the classroom
- Workshops: Belong in the conventions

Preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2).

Put preaching back in the pulpits. A good minister is concerned about:

II. Purity in the Profession (1 Timothy 4:12)

Purity is not gone from the ministry but certainly lost its prominence.

Example: Pattern to follow. Many do not want the responsibility of being an example.

A. Pattern of the Prophet

- High and holy calling
- 2 Corinthians 6:3, 4, 6
- "Be ye followers of me."
- "Look on us..."
- We are examples (Philippians 3:13-17).
- Preachers need to be standard bearers.

Dress

Conduct

Marriage and divorce. There is no difference between preachers and congregations. Immorality is running rampant in our ranks.

B. Propriety in Personal Life (1 Corinthians 9:23-27; 1 Peter 5:2-7). A good minister of Jesus Christ will put purity in the profession. A good minister will experience:

III. Peace in the Pulpit (Pastorate) (1 Timothy 4:9-16)

A. Pride in the Position

- Called of God: Meditate on this.
- 2 Timothy 1:9-12
- God has placed you in the ministry.
- Stop desiring the position, power, possessions, popularity, prestige, professions of the world and take pride in being a preacher of the Word. It will bring peace and cut down on the ministerial dropouts.

B. Promise to the Parting

- 2 Timothy 4:6-8: A minister at peace
- At the time of my departure, I want peace.

Conclusion

Our denomination needs some good ministers of Jesus Christ.

Men who will put:

- Preeminence on preaching
- Purity in the profession
- Peace in the pulpit

Pray that God will find them among us.

1980 – Roger Reeds

The Heritage of the Sunday School

Text: Deuteronomy 31:9-13

The verse that I want to call your attention to is verse 12, a verse that I discovered a long time ago and have since called my Sunday School verse. "Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law."

My subject this evening is, "The Heritage of the Sunday School." I guess almost everyone gets excited about an inheritance. I have never received one yet; I don't know that I ever will. But most people have some rich relative they hope might leave them a portion of their fortune. I don't know if that is going to happen to you or not, I couldn't forecast for you, and I don't think it will happen in my instance.

I heard about a young lad, though, who had a rich old aunt who was extremely wealthy and was extremely fond of dogs. He thought the best way he could get in with her was to make friends with her dogs. And so he worked at this for years. Every time he would go to the house, he would pat the dogs on the head and be very friendly with them in every possible way.

Sure enough, when the old aunt finally died, the lawyer called all the family together to read the will. It reads something like this: "To my beloved nephew who has been so kind and affectionate to my lovely dogs, I bequeath all of my..." and then the lawyer paused and took a deep breath.

The nephew cried out anxiously, "Go on, go on." So the lawyer went on reading, "to my beloved nephew who has been so kind and affectionate to my lovely dogs, I bequeath all of my dogs." So maybe that's what is going to happen to you or me with our inheritance.

Another man was wearing a ring with a very sizable diamond stone. Somebody said "Where in the world did you get a ring like that?" He said, "Well, my uncle left me \$5,000 to buy a memorial stone, and so I bought this stone in memory of him."

I guess everyone has heard the story of the man with the weak heart who inherited a sizable fortune. His family was perplexed as to how to break the news to him, so they decided to call in the pastor. The pastor thought for a while asking himself, "What can be my best approach?"

He finally decided to be subtle about it. He went to the man's bedside and said, "Jim, what would you do if you inherited a sizable sum of money?"

Jim replied, "Why preacher I'd give it all to you!" and the preacher died of a heart attack!

But our concern this evening has to do with a spiritual inheritance—not a financial inheritance. In the Scripture I read this evening, we discover that Moses was concerned about a spiritual inheritance. Back in Deuteronomy 31:2, he announced that he was 120 years old, and he was concerned about Israel's spiritual inheritance. He was not going to be permitted to cross Jordan with the Israelites, and he was going to leave them something, the best that he had. He gathered the Israelites together, and he gave them a charge of encouragement in verse 6.

In verses 7 and 8, he gave a similar charge to Joshua. Then he handed the law that he had written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Levitical priests. He gave those Levitical priests instructions as to how they were to read the law of God, and it was to be done every seven years at the feast of the tabernacles. The law was to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant. I don't know really why but I've had in my mind for some time, probably for preservation. It has always made sense to me that the God who would inspire His Word and reveal His Word would also preserve His Word. I think He has done exactly that.

The important thing here is that Moses presented the law to the Levites for the purpose of reading it, and then also for the purpose of teaching it. We are not to think that the law was only read once every seven years, however, for on into the days of Ezra we'll discover that the Word of God was read every day and taught every day as Ezra read the Word of God and gave the sense of it.

The idea here is that men and women and children were to be gathered together for the express purpose of hearing the Word of God, of learning the Word of God, and then going forth to obey the Word of God. That's why I'm sold on the Sunday School ministry. I believe this is what we do during the Sunday School hour. We gather together to teach God's Word, to learn

God's Word, and then go forth to obey God's Word.

Later, others added to God's Word following Moses' writings—the historical writings, the poetical books, the writing of the prophets, and then also the writings of the apostles of the New Testament. These early Bible teachers only had five books to teach. We have 66, so our job is even more magnified. But the original idea or intent has not changed. God still wants us to gather the men and the women and the children together and teach them His Word. He wants us to learn His Word and to obey His Word.

Down through the centuries, man has devised various ideas and methods as to how he might accomplish this task of teaching the Word of God, and I believe the Sunday School has been one of the better ideas. We gather for the purpose of teaching the Word of God. My responsibility in this message is to deal with the heritage of the Sunday School. I want to do so from a three-fold standpoint. There are always three aspects involved in any inheritance. There is the legator, the one who leaves the inheritance. There is the legacy, that which is bequeathed. Then there is the legatee, the one to whom the legacy is bequeathed.

We shall explore the legators of the Sunday School heritage, the legacy of the Sunday School heritage and the legatees of the Sunday School heritage.

Look first tonight to the legators of the Sunday School heritage, starting with the biblical legators. On the occasion of the centennial of the Sunday School in the year 1880, Dr. H. Clay Trumbull, editor of the *Sunday School Times*, delivered a series of lectures on the Sunday School at Yale Divinity School. In his first lecture, titled "The Sunday School: Its Jewish Origin and Its Christian Adoption," Trumbull claimed the origin of the Sunday School could be traced to the beginning of biblical history. I am inclined to agree with Dr. Trumbull. The Bible is not only the textbook of the Sunday School; it is also the sourcebook of a teaching history.

Consider the prominence of the teacher and teaching in the Old Testament. As we look at biblical legators, the first teacher was God himself. In Exodus 4:12, we read that God would teach Moses what to say: "Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."

He was going to tell Moses what he should do or teach him what he should do. Exodus 4:15 says, "And I will be with thy mouth, and will teach

you what ye shall do.”

In Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, we find the explicit command to teach: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

And, in the text today, we find what I call the Great Commission of the Old Testament, “Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 31:12).

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra the scribe read and taught the Word of God. So, they read in the book of the law and God gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.

The teacher and teaching is also prominent in New Testament history. We find the Lord Jesus was a teacher. Sixty of the 90 times Jesus was addressed, He was called rabbi. The Sermon on the Mount opens with “And he opened his mouth and taught them saying...” and closes with the words, “For he taught them as one having authority.” The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 emphasizes the idea of teaching and the idea of teacher.

Note also the Apostle Paul as a teacher. We find a strong teaching emphasis in all of Paul’s epistles. He taught at Corinth for a year and a half. He taught at Ephesus for three years. He taught at Rome during the time of his imprisonment. In his writings in 1 Corinthians, he listed the position of teacher as being very important in rank. He said, “And God hath set some in the church first apostles, secondly prophets and thirdly teachers.”

Notice something else here. The office of apostle was done away with when the last one died. The office of prophet ceased with inspiration. So that moves the teacher’s position up to a very prominent one, for we still have this responsibility of teaching the Word of God, a legacy passed down from our biblical legators.

Let’s think for a moment about our bimillennial legators. This takes us back 2,000 years ago to Jewish history, and again a return to the writings of Trumbull. His writings tell us there were various forms of Bible schools in Old Testament times. He quoted extensively from the writings of Jewish rabbis to support his arguments, and I believe he was correct. There were

Bible schools 2,000 years ago. Josephus, the Jewish historian, said it was a custom of the Jews to assemble in their synagogues every Sabbath—not only to hear the law but to learn it accurately.

Alfred Edersheim, in his massive volume on the life and times of Jesus the Messiah, describes the children gathered in synagogues and school houses where they learned the Word of God. Edersheim said these synagogues or schools even had age level groupings. There were classes in the Bible for boys ages 5-10, in the Mishna for boys ages 10-15, in theology for boys ages 15 and above. Incidentally, the girls were not there because they were taught at home.

We come to the Church Age, and it certainly makes sense to me that if the synagogues were centers of instruction, it is only natural to assume that the early churches followed this pattern. They became teaching centers. But then something happened. During the papal years, the only type of teaching was catechetical in nature. The church was ushered in to the stagnation of the Dark Ages, and I believe it was because they failed to teach. Any time the church fails to teach, it will become stagnant.

The church began to look with suspicion upon anyone who would dare to attempt to extend learning beyond the monks or the clergy. Consequently, teaching passed off the scene.

Then we come to the bicentennial legators, 200 years ago. However, I would also like to mention Martin Luther, though he lived prior to this date. Though Luther predates this time, he is worthy of notice. He fanned the flickering flames of reformation by his firm stand that said, “The just shall live by faith.” But Luther had some other things to say. He said for the church’s sake Christian schools should be established and maintained.

He went on to ask if it was not reasonable that every Christian should know the Gospels by age nine or 10? In answer to Luther’s plea, some schools were formed to teach the Bible. And that leads us to Robert Raikes. You heard much about him last evening, so I’ll not say a whole lot about him this evening—just a word about his background.

The Industrial Revolution was underway in England during the mid-1770s. Factories sprang up all over the country, and many businessmen hired children. Many of the children were under 10 years of age. Some of them were literally chained to their machines and made to work 16 hours a day, six days a week.

The only day they had off was the Sabbath day. Consequently, they got involved in all sorts of vices and crimes on that day. Education of most of England's lower classes was almost totally void. Yet it was among these uneducated, crime-ridden children that Raikes began his Sunday School movement.

Raikes was born in Gloucester, England, 1736, son of a Gloucester printer and editor. He inherited his father's occupation and position. He became a crusading editor, first on behalf of prison reform and later on behalf of the Sunday School movement. In July 1780, Raikes gathered a handful of poor children from the manufacturing quarter of Gloucester, into the kitchen of a Mrs. Meredith who served as that first Sunday School teacher.

The children stayed in school from 10:00 a.m. - noon with an hour off for lunch. They returned for further study from 1:00-5:00 p.m. Raikes did not design his schools to teach the Bible but to teach reading, writing, and religion. However, the Bible was used as a text in his schools.

As we think of bicentennial legators, I don't think we should bypass Benjamin Randall. Someone said last evening we had the presentation of the twins Randall and Raikes, and perhaps we should have called it a trio: Randall, Raikes, and Reeds. I don't know; I don't want my name involved with these two men; they were too great!

Benjamin Randall was the founder of the Free Will Baptist movement. As far as we know, he never attended Sunday School. I believe it was for a reason. He had fought in the Revolutionary War and was anti-British and anti-England. He didn't want anything to do with anything that smacked of England. And too, the first Sunday School did not begin until eight or nine years after he died, after he had passed off the scene.

But he has a place in my heart for several other reasons: He started the Free Will Baptist denomination almost simultaneously with the beginning of the Sunday School movement by Raikes, and I believe that perhaps God had in mind that our denomination and the Sunday School movement be blended together as one and used of Him for His honor and His glory. I think we've done that in our day. Randall also believed the Bible was written by holy men inspired by God, and that the Bible contains everything necessary for us to believe and practice. He also believed that the Scriptures were in harmony and formed the basis for sound doctrine. And he was exactly right.

Now let's consider some bi-contemporary legators. There is no such word; I've coined it. The word "bi" because I have two more men I wish to mention, and "contemporary" because they were more or less contemporary.

One was a man named Arthur Flake. Perhaps you've never heard of him, but he was a layman who began working for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in 1909. In 1922, he published a book titled *Building a Standard Sunday School*, and this book remains the standard of Southern Baptist Sunday Schools today.

In 1927, he presented the Southern Baptist Convention with a 25-year challenge for his denomination. He selected a motto that went something like this: "From 52 to 1 by 52." In the year 1927, his denomination ranked 52nd numerically among denominations. He wanted to see his denomination begin a Sunday School thrust that would move them into first place numerically among the denominations.

Ironically, Flake died in 1952 at age 90, and he did not live long enough to see his denomination move into first place. He did live long enough to see it move into second place, and later it took over first place. A Southern Baptist gentleman told me recently that if Southern Baptists continue to grow at their present rate, there will soon be more Southern Baptists than people. Maybe they're right, because they continue to grow.

Another contemporary legator is Clarence Benson. This man stands out as a great giant of God. A Christian teacher and preacher in Japan, he became director of Christian Education at Moody Bible Institute, editor of the *Sunday School Promoter*; founder of the Evangelical Teacher Training Association, and wrote many textbooks for this teacher training organization. He was the organizer of the National Sunday School Association, founder of Scripture Press Publications, and the writer of many other fine Christian education books.

These are the men who left us a heritage. These are the legators. A careful survey might discover others, but these are a few I wanted to name this evening.

What about the legacy they left us? First, they left us a Bible to teach. The Bible is the basic textbook of the Sunday School today. And that is as it should be. I said this in one of our churches, and some dear old brother came up to me and said, "Brother Reeds, I agree with you. We ought to throw away those Sunday School quarterlies and just study our Bibles." And

I said, "Please don't do that, you'll put us out of business!" But keep in mind that the Bible *is* the textbook and the Sunday School quarterly simply a commentary on "thus saith the Word of God."

Raikes' plan was to teach reading, writing, and religion with the Bible as the basis of study. The American plan was to take the Bible and place it in the hands of trained Christian laymen and women and let them teach the Word of God. That plan has worked effectively down through the years. It's still working today, and I predict it will continue to work until the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

Something happened in the year 1872, just before the Sunday School celebrated its first centennial. The international lesson outlines were born. The idea was for various denominations to come together in a systematic, interdenominational study of the Scriptures with the goal of giving full coverage of the Scriptures every seven years. This meant all denominations would study the same passage of Scripture every week. It was a good idea. The plan, though greatly weakened—and we'll come back to it in just a moment—is still being carried out today.

In addition to the international lesson outlines, curriculum plans were begun, and curriculum houses established. You have the birth of the independent publisher, and I hope I've listed them in their correct order: David C. Cook, Union Gospel Press, Scripture Press, and Gospel Light. The birth of these independent publishers coincided with the time when the Sunday School movement had begun catching on in Free Will Baptist ranks, and we began publishing: *The Sunday School Repository* 1844, the *Myrtle* 1845, the *Myrtle Buds* 1889, and then the *Star* quarterly 1881. And many of these periodicals carried on until the merger of 1911.

These legators left us a Bible to teach. The legators also left us an organizational structure in which to work as various societies, associations, and conventions were formed.

Consequently, Sunday School began to take on its present shape of classes and grades and departments. Some of the earliest Sunday Schools had four grades. They had one for infants, two-seven years of age; the ignorant, seven years upward for those who could not read; the instructed seven-15 years of age for those who could read; and adults for those over 15 years of age.

Today, Sunday Schools have classes and departments for all ages, and that

is as it should be. The Sunday School took upon itself a pioneer missionary flavor. The American Sunday School Union formed in 1824, and perhaps you heard the story of Stephen Paxson last evening. He traveled 100,000 miles on horseback on a horse named Robert Raikes and established 1,314 Sunday Schools in our country.

By the way, many of these Sunday Schools went on to become denominational churches, and many of them became Methodist churches. Consequently, denominations were born. There are some 250 different denominations in these United States now, with a new one born almost every day. The smallest is the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptist with 201 members. With a name like that, I can understand why they are so small.

The largest is the Southern Baptist convention with over 13 million members. In Elmer Towns' book, *Is the Day of Denominations Dead?*, he defines a denomination as "a group of churches with similar doctrinal beliefs who have similar traditions and backgrounds, who share the same goals in ministry, who desire fellowship to encourage one another and have organically bound themselves together to establish corporately what they feel cannot be wrought separately." That's a pretty good definition.

Now I'd like to give you my own. I believe a denomination is a group of churches of like faith that band together to accomplish things together that they could never possibly accomplish individually. For instance: our literature program, missions programs—both home and foreign, the Bible college, etc. We do all these things together as a denomination that we could never do separately.

Quite frankly, if there are 250 denominations, I believe only one is doctrinally correct, and that is ours. Pardon me if I'm biased. I believe our denomination is doctrinally correct. I believe that, as Randall stated, the Scriptures are in harmony and are the basis for sound doctrine. I believe our doctrine. In fact, I thank God for our denomination and for the fact that it was responsible for winning me to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many years ago in the city of St. Louis, they established a small storefront Free Will Baptist church. It was in that church that I found the Lord Jesus as my own personal Savior. A few months later, I announced my call to preach, went off to our Bible college for training, and every opportunity and challenge I have had in my life since that time has come through this denomination. I love it. I want you to know that I love and appreciate it.

But the legators left us something else. They left us a formula for growth. One of the fellows I mentioned a moment ago was Arthur Flake. Let me share with you Flake's formula for growth that is still working today. Southern Baptists tell me that as long as they apply this formula, they grow. When they cease to follow it, they cease to grow. Flake said to know your possibilities. Enlarge your organization. Provide the space. Enlist and train workers. Go after the people.

Let me give you Reeds' revision that I published in a booklet called, "Building a Sunday School with Es." The first step is employment, which means to enlist the workers. The second, enlightenment, means to train the workers. The third, enactment, challenges you to enlarge your organization. The fourth is environment or provide the space. And the fifth, enlistment—go after the people.

While I don't think we can really improve on Flakes' formula, I've rearranged it, and I think it will work. I believe these are ways we can grow in our day. So this is the legacy we have been left.

Now let's think about the legatees of our Sunday School heritage. In reality, that's us. Let's take a look and see how we are faring with our inheritance. What are we doing with that which we have inherited? I think you'll discover—and I think you are aware of the fact—that we are engaged in a battle for the Bible, the basic textbook of the Sunday School. The Book that gave rise to the international Sunday School lesson outlines. The Book that gave rise to the many publishing houses.

It's now being denied by many. For some reason—I've never understood how or why—the international Sunday School outlines came under the International Council of Churches. The committee who prepares the outlines is made up of many who reject the Bible as a revealed and inspired book. The committee is very selective in the passages chosen for study. For instance, the lesson outlines have lost their evangelistic flavor.

These aren't just my own ideas; these are quotes from some other books I've read about them. The lessons have taken on the flavor of the social gospel advocated by the National Council of Churches. The Bible is spoon-fed to champion certain causes.

Well, I'm glad to report that we began moving away from the international lesson outlines in 1964, and now all of our curriculum is our own. We have a two-year cycle for the nursery and preschool levels. We have developed

a three-year cycle for primaries and juniors. We have developed a seven-year cycle for teens through the adults. We have a good system of electives available to you that provide an in-depth study of the Scriptures.

Let me pause to say I believe Free Will Baptist churches ought to use Free Will Baptist literature. I realize some are not, and I am not going to fall out with you about it, but that's my opinion. Let me share what Elmer Towns said about this: "The rebels in a denomination [and that's what he calls them—the rebels] not using its literature are slowly educating themselves out of the denominational orbit." I believe we ought to use our own literature.

How are we faring in our day? We are participants in a see-saw attendance of the Sunday School. Consequently, the Sunday School has gone through a decline, a resurgence, and is now going through another decline. You see, after the first hundred years, the Sunday School was geared up to go. It had everything going for it. It should have gone, but it didn't. It suffered a decline. Dr. Clarence Benson wrote, "Government figures indicate that despite the increase in population Sunday School enrollment has decreased 12.6% between the years 1926 and 1936."

In 1950, a spokesman for the National Council of Churches wrote, "Sunday School enrollment showed a healthy and continuous growth during the first third of the century," and then during the '30s something happened. Momentum slowed down, and some of the religious bodies actually registered a loss. Then we came into the '50s and '60s which were rather tranquil years as far as Sunday School is concerned.

And then we came to those years of resurgence during the last part of the '60s into the '70s, when we saw an unparalleled revival of interest in the Sunday School. Some things began to happen. Busing gained a top priority. You'll remember we did everything from giving away bubble gum to swallowing gold fish to gain attendance. We gave away McDonald's hamburgers, hot dogs, bicycles, sponsored lucky buck seats on the bus in order to gain attendance. We did everything from baptizing Santa Claus to wearing clown suits in order to gain attendance. As a result, big churches with big classes occupied big buildings and had big pastors.

Now I ask you the question, how big is big? You have to define what you are talking about when you talk about "bigness," and which denomination you are talking about. In the Mennonite church, if you have 60 in attendance, you have a big church. In Free Will Baptists if you have 200 or 300 in Sunday

School you have a big church. You really have to qualify whom you are talking about when you talk about size. Everybody wanted to be another Hyles or Falwell. Pastors of small churches were led to believe they were failures because numbers were the only measure of success. Many big churches came into what I call the era of the Dead Sea syndrome. When a church gets big and gets enamored with its size, money flows in, everything flows in, nothing flows out, and it becomes like the Dead Sea spiritually.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not anti-big church. I'm just issuing a note of warning. Dr. Truman Dollar said recently if numbers are the only measure of success then the Kansas City Chiefs are having better success than the Kansas City Baptist Temple. By the way, the best church in our denomination—and I don't know who it is or where it is—may not be the biggest church. Just because we're big does not make us the best.

You see, Sunday School was never designed to be an attendance getter. I hope I've somehow, and in some way, proven that to you in our survey. It was never designed to be an attendance getter. It was designed to be a Bible study center.

I know we enter the old argument of evangelization versus edification, and I'm for both. Someone recently stated that the age of the '70s was the age of evangelization, and that the '80s settled down to a more tranquil time of edification. I don't know why we can't strike a happy balance and have both evangelization and edification.

Then there's the argument of quantity versus quality. Somehow we've gotten the idea that we cannot have quality when we grow large, but I contend we can. We can have quality Sunday Schools. Attendance is important, but I believe it is secondary. It takes a back seat to Bible study which ought to have top priority among us as we study the Word of God.

Today, we are plagued with a decline of denominational interest. What made Randall stand so separate from the other Baptists was his distinctives in contrast to their distinctives. You see, theirs went something like this: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, preservation of the saints. His went something like this: unlimited atonement, conditional election, salvation for all, resistible grace, and the possibility of apostasy. As far as I can ascertain, we have not changed those basic tenets through the years. We still stand on those distinctives.

Other Baptist groups, however, have vacillated. They have changed to

adopt a position more like ours, so the basic distinguishing features between us and other Baptists today is our acceptance of baptism by others in the name of the triune God, open communion rather than closed communion (and they're even changing that), the washing of the saints' feet, and the possibility of apostasy. You see, we have not changed; they have become more like us. I hope we never change.

But we have had our discouragements as well as our distinctives. Our denomination has been plagued with mergers and splits. We have been invaded by Campbellites, Calvinists, and charismatics. You've seen it happen in our day, it happened in days gone by, and it could happen to us again through the independent church movement. I'm sorry to see them wield such a vital influence over so many of our people, and it ought not to be. We are a denomination. If they want to be separate and independent, that's their business.

Our denomination has also become apathetic. I think this is evidenced by declining attendance. Some time ago, we began a 300 club in our department, whereby we would recognize any church that averaged 300 or more in attendance. Over the years we have gained 45 churches in that 300 club. I recently took a survey to discover only 23 of the original 45 still run 300 or more. We organized a 600 club. We had eight churches join that 600 club. Out of the eight, only three continue to average 600 or above. We have a problem of declining attendance.

Our apathy is further evidenced by attendance at associational meetings. As I have attended state associations, I have discovered the attendance is down. That bothers me. It bothers me that it's down at our national convention. I believe people ought to have a burden for denominational work and should attend these meetings. They are vital and important.

Our denomination also faces the problem of sectionalism. You know in Christ there is no east or west, and there ought not be in our ranks either. I have never accepted the mythical dividing line of the Mississippi River and the idea that Free Will Baptists on one side of the river are better than Free Will Baptists on the other side of the river. I don't buy that.

Neither will our denomination tolerate leadership. We must learn to cultivate leadership and not destroy it. We must pray for and follow our leaders.

So you see, it appears the legatees have not fared too well with the legacy

left to them by the legators. It seems evident that some of us have been like Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Others have been like the prodigal son who demanded his inheritance and went forth and wasted it in riotous living. We must learn from our history. That's one of the reasons we study history so that we might learn from it. And I hope we will.

What can we do? I believe we need to launch three ships. The first one I recommend is friendship. Nothing can take the place of that. You see, we are brethren. We are of like faith, and we need to be together. Incidentally, and I say this kindly, anyone who does not agree with our distinctives ought to gracefully withdraw from us. However, we have far more to unite us and bring us together than to divide us.

We need stronger pulpits. If our people are fed properly from the Word of God, we will not have problems with charismatics, Campbellites, or Calvinists. We must create better preachers of the Word. We must have better teachers of the Word.

Another ship we need to launch is stewardship. It is tragic that so many church members do not support our churches, and that our churches in return do not support our denomination. We have too many poorly paid pastors and my heart goes out to them. Many would qualify for food stamps, and I'm honest when I say that. A denomination our size should have given \$2 million to the cooperative program instead of \$200,000. We should have given \$16 million to foreign missions instead of \$1.6 million. We should have given \$5 million to Christian education instead of \$500,000. We should have given \$5 million to home missions instead of \$1 million. You see, we've got to train our people to give.

The real key, though, lies in the third ship—discipleship. The thrust of our Sunday Schools in the future must be better curriculum. I pledge to do my best to improve our curriculum over these next several years. We must have better training and better teaching. We must expand the thrust of Christian education. I see no reason why a denomination our size could not have at least four colleges and two seminaries. Many denominations smaller than ours support more colleges.

We should heed the call of Brother Harrold Harrison to establish at least 100 Bible institutes across our denomination. We must rescue the fading Sunday evening training hour. I am sorry that we ever gave that hour over to the devil. We've given it over to television. We don't have time for Sunday evening training.

Not too long ago, in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, they decided to destroy the old Andrew Jackson Hotel. Rather than have a bulldozer plow it down, they brought in experts with dynamite. They took out all the windows, anything that might break, etc. The experts set the dynamite, and the result was something to behold. In the space of only a few seconds, the building was totally demolished and lay in a pile of dust on the ground. I thought how it had taken years to design and build that building but only seconds to destroy.

It takes years to build a great Sunday School. You'll never build one overnight. It takes a lot of hard work, and it takes years to build. It also takes years to build a great denomination. It will not be done overnight. But let me issue a note of warning. I believe we could almost be destroyed as quickly as the Andrew Jackson Hotel. We could destroy ourselves.

Let me close with this admonition from Nehemiah, when he said arise and build. Let me ask you the question. Are you a builder or a destroyer? Arise and build. May God bless you.

1980 – Hobert Ashby

The Hope of the Sunday School

Text: Colossians 1:25-29

I feel deeply honored to address this great association. It's not something I aspired to. In fact, I have no aspirations other than to serve the Lord and go to Heaven. However, I do appreciate the invitation. I never expected that. But I do appreciate it. I feel deeply indebted to the association.

Over 31 years ago, a Free Will Baptist preacher preached the Gospel to me, and I turned to the Lord Jesus Christ with my whole heart. When I did that, I meant to go to Heaven. And I've meant it ever since.

Some of you good folks out there taught my children at the Bible college, and I appreciate that. Others of you came by and encouraged me when I felt low. I've appreciated that. I don't know if Paul Kettelman is here tonight, but he told me he was going to Disneyland. Well, that's the kind of fellow I'm here to preach to. He's probably out there. I just don't see him.

The first office I held, after being saved one year, was Sunday School superintendent. In Kentucky, in those days, we only had Sunday School and night church. Sunday morning church met once a month. Not long thereafter, the church I was saved in started having church every Sunday morning. It may have been one of the only ones in Kentucky to have church every Sunday morning. Ted Green was preaching when I was saved; he probably knows. It was in a Free Will Baptist church where I was saved and where I have served. The church I was in ordained me as a deacon, and one of the associations ordained me as a preacher of the Gospel. I just may go to Heaven from this association. Now, I don't mean that I don't know if I'm going to Heaven, just that I may go from this association. Indeed I will, unless it deviates from the Book. That's the only reason I wouldn't be part of this group when I go.

Well, on with the business at hand. I want to read from Colossians 1. There are some long sentences in that chapter. I'm not going to do an exegesis of the chapter. Rather, I'll just break in, if you don't mind, at verse 25. We'll read verses 25-29.

As I went through this chapter I saw many great truths—and any one

of them you could preach on. I saw the preexistence of Christ. I saw the preeminence of Christ. I saw His presence, i.e. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." I saw the prospect of those being preached to, and those being taught. I saw the presentation and the perfection at the conclusion of the chapter. And I think that's probably what's implied in the hope of the Sunday School.

First, I think the thing that would make the Sunday School progressive and effective is the same thing that would cause individual Christians to be "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

As Lonnie Sparks was preaching this morning, he just about took that point from me. I almost shouted. I don't know how Carl Vallance was able to stay still. Christ in you is the hope of glory. Christ in the Sunday School is the hope of its success. That's the hope of carrying out the commission that has been given to it. I'm thinking of three areas in which we can describe what the hope of the Sunday School is. What's going to cause it to survive?

Let me drop in a side note here. Brother Roger Reeds told us Dr. Elmer Towns said denominations are dying. I tell you, this one is not dead! It may be sick in a few areas, but it's not dead. My brethren have been praying for me today and I know that. A lot of tension and anxiety I felt is gone. My wife said, "You shouldn't be nervous; you've preached a thousand funerals." I said, "Well, if Elmer Towns is right, I may be preaching this one." But I don't believe that for a minute. This thing is alive and going. And it's going to continue to go.

I'd like to abbreviate John 4:35, and we'll go from there. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Lift up your eyes. Look unto the fields. They are ready...." What's involved in this matter of looking? The word *look* implies more and means more than a mere look or a glance. It means: "to gaze, to look at it until we see it." The Lord looked on the multitudes and was moved with compassion. I think we need to look until we see, and it affects us.

It means: "to behold, to gaze upon, to be affected by." We need to look meditatively. When we look out on this old world, we need to look meditatively. In March 1979, *U.S. News & World Report*, said that 1,800 years passed from the time of Christ until there were a billion people in the world. Now there are better than 4.5 billion. They expect that by the turn of the century there will be 6.3 billion people on the face of the earth. If we are going to look like we need to look, we had better look meditatively. It is my

hope that we as Free Will Baptists can get on the cutting edge. Too often we have grabbed the caboose of programs that others have worn out. And we hope to do something with those things. We need to be on the cutting edge in the days to come, in the 80s, and up to the turn of the century. I believe we can. And I believe we will. Because I believe there are people looking meditatively at the scene that's before us.

Further, we need to look contemplatively. We need to look with such a concern that we will begin to see what we need to do. That means looking for where we can work and what areas we can cover. Where does the Lord want to use you? I tell you, my heart has been moved as I've heard this preaching and been in these seminars this week. I'm just sorry I couldn't get to them all. But there have been things I've heard this week that encouraged me, strengthened me, made me know that God is working in His people.

We need to look meditatively, we need to look contemplatively, and we need to look compassionately on the world scene. We read over and over again, that Jesus looked around Him and had compassion. He looked on the multitudes, and He had compassion. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. The eyes that watched are the eyes that wept. He wept over Jerusalem. I'm sure He looked up every street and down every avenue. He looked into every secret place as He looked in the heart of man. And what He saw caused Him to weep. We need to look meditatively, contemplatively, and compassionately. And we need to look until it affects us as it affected the Lord.

We're confronted with North America's third of a billion people, Europe with a half-billion, and Asia with 1.5 billion. You might say, "You're preaching a missionary message." Every message is a missionary message to God's people. What if the doors to China were to open to the Gospel? I don't know about that. I can't speculate. There's so much I don't know.

I can't tell you where the stock market will be. I'll leave that to Howard Ruff and those fellows. I can't tell you what the results of the election will be in November—probably more of the same. But there is something I can tell you. God is going to judge this world. He has appointed a day in which He will judge this liquor-soaked, God-defying world. God's going to judge it.

We need to look at this world through the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, it's Christ, in you, the hope of glory. And that's the hope of that lost person out there: Christ in you, doing what God wants done. I fear, too often, we plan for success with no passion for souls. A. W. Tozer said, "There

is a sad and anemic Christianity in the world today that doesn't stand for much of anything."

Just about anybody, regardless of standards, can say that they are born again and it's simply accepted. Tozer said we need to get back to New Testament sainthood. God's people must get on their face before Him, if we're going to see anything like that. We need to have a passion for souls. Not just plan for success but have a passion for souls.

When the Lord said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields," He was saying that we must get our eyes off the mud and see the multitudes. By doing that, our horizon will be lifted. We'll be able to face the facts and face our failures. We've had failures in the past; there's no question about that. We should acknowledge them and repent of them. Face our failures, but also face the fact that our opportunities are here and the Lord has said they are ready. They are ready. Are *we* ready? Let us face the fields and forge ahead as pioneers setting out to conquer a great frontier.

What is needed to accomplish such a task? First of all, I think we need a proper evaluation. We must face the fields and properly evaluate the situation: Our failures, our future, our frontiers. There needs to be prompt evangelization. That's what the Lord said in this Scripture passage: "Look on the fields for they are ready." That implies prompt evangelization. Someone might say, "Evangelism isn't in the Bible." But the principle is throughout the Bible.

Oh, I know evangelism is controversial. If I stood up here and said it wasn't controversial, it would be hypocritical. Among our folks, it's controversial. Now, I don't know what other people think about it; I just know the burning burden on my own heart. So, it's controversial. But can we not live with some differences? Even with some controversy? In 1904, the great theologian Augustus Strong said while addressing the Baptist Assembly, "When you cease to evangelize, you'll cease to be evangelical. And when you cease to be evangelical, you'll cease to be."

Listen, that very group he was addressing has "Ichabod" written over it. Gone by the wayside. Evangelism is very important if we're going to see the Sunday School move as God wants it to move. God has said launch an invasion, but we've lapsed into evasion. *Evasion* means: "to avoid, to put off."

The best illustration is the proverbial ostrich. When a danger or some

excitement comes, he sticks his head in the sand and hopes it will go away. He pretends it isn't there. Let me tell you, church people are masters at that. Evasion is an art, and church people are masters at it. God says invade, and we evade.

The Lord said in Acts 1:8, "You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the world." If we only see a geographical scene there, we've missed something. When He talks about being witnesses in Jerusalem, He's talking about the dear folk, the near folk, the folks who are right at hand. How many times have we heard someone say, "Pray for my children," or "Pray for my friend," or "Pray for my neighbor." The near folk, the dear ones. It's not hard to find someone to be concerned about, the near and dear folks. Most of us, if we are ever concerned, will be concerned about those.

But then He said Judea. The Jerusalem group, the near group, the dear group...but also Judea, the district folk. These are the disbelieving folk who are a little outside our immediate realm. You are going to be my witness to those district folks, those disbelieving folks out there. You are to be witnesses to them.

Then He said Samaria, the despised group. Be my witness to the despised group. Sometimes I hear, "Preacher, we ought to go to this person or that person. They'd be an asset to our church." I'll tell you, I'll take a bum off skid row who really gets it. What we need is those who truly get saved; God's transformed their life. I'll welcome that one into the church a lot quicker than I would a banker who goes to wild parties. I don't have any concern about that fellow being a member of my church unless he gets right.

God sends us to the despised folk. After all, think where the Lord was in John 4:35 when He said, "Look unto the fields. They are white with harvest." He was in Samaria. He had just gone past the frontier, as far as they were concerned. He'd been conversing with a woman most folks wouldn't have anything to do with. He was amidst a people that they had no contact with. He was in Samaria. These were the despised folks.

He said, "Look at the fields." They're ready. Lift up your eyes and look at the fields. He was talking about a despised people as far as those fellows were concerned. And then there are the uttermost parts. These are the distant folks. Now, there are probably folks on your block who are as distant to you as someone in China would be. There are folks where you work, in the factory or the mill or the school, who are as distant to you as someone

in Timbuktu. We know He saves to the uttermost. Brother, that's quite a range. The distant folks. We talk about the generation gap. There's some distance there. Where there's a gap, there's some distance. The Lord said, "Ye shall be my witnesses." From the dear folks, to the district folk, to the despised folk, to the distant folks. You'll be my witnesses.

I was recalling earlier today an incident some years ago just after I went to the First Dayton church. A dear lady called me and said, "My brother just got out of the hospital. Would you go visit him? He's still very ill."

The song leader and I went down to his house on a Saturday morning. When I knocked on the door, one of the adult children came to the door and said, "Yes, Dad's in there on the couch."

We told her who we were and that we'd been asked to come and see him. I started talking to him and I asked him about his condition. He told me that he had a tube in his side. He said, "I'm not doing too well. They let me come home, but I'm not doing too well."

I talked to him about the Lord. I said, "The Lord let you out of the hospital. Folks are concerned about you. I wanted to come by and have prayer with you, and talk for a little while."

He said, "I appreciate that. You know, when I was a little boy, I used to go to Sunday School."

I said, "You ought to be a Christian." So, I talked to him along that line. I believe in aggressive evangelism. Pray tell, is there any other kind? He said, "If I had some way of getting to Sunday School tomorrow, I'd come."

My song leader was sitting there with tears in his eyes. He said, "I'll come by and get you." He went by and picked him up for Sunday School, and they sat on the front pew. When the Sunday School lesson was over, I preached and gave the invitation. That dear fellow got up, with tears running down his face. He came and sat on the altar. He couldn't bend down, but he said, "Oh, I wish I could get down there to pray."

I looked, and a puddle of tears had gathered on the altar. I said, "Sir, you don't have to get down there." I heard something from back of the congregation. His little old mother who was 87 years old was standing in the aisle. Someone had told her he was there and that he was at the altar.

Her daughter had brought her to church, and she didn't even know that he was there. When I looked back there, I saw her waving her little hand,

saying, "I used to carry him to Sunday School when he was a little boy. I've prayed for him for 62 years." He trusted the Lord as his Savior, there, that morning.

He never was able to come back to the church. We buried him two weeks later. About five years later, when his dear old mom was 92 or 93 years old, they called me and said that she was ill at home, but she wouldn't go to the hospital.

I went over to visit her; she was now living with her daughter. I went to that upstairs bedroom, and I talked with her a little while and had prayer with her. After a while, I went back home. Before long, they called me back and said she was going in and out, in a kind of a semi-coma. When I went in, she opened her eyes, and said: "Brother Ashby, I prayed for my boy for 62 years, but I saw him saved."

I replied, "Praise God, Granny, you did see him saved. Yes."

In a few minutes, she opened her eyes again. She said, "I saw Hubert saved."

I said, "Yes Mother, you did."

She said, "I'm going to be with Hubert."

I didn't mention this before. But when she walked by the casket at his funeral, she said, "Honey, Mama's going to see you soon. Mama prayed for you for 62 years. And, oh my dear baby." She patted his face. "I'm gonna see you soon."

That day, in that upstairs bedroom, after she said, "I'm going to see Hubert," she gave a big sigh, and she and Hubert were together.

Now, I think the Sunday School has a great ministry to reach people *before* they get to be 62. His mom had carried him to Sunday School. He hadn't been in Sunday School since he was a child. But she kept praying. For 62 years she prayed for him. Now, it's our responsibility to get them before they get to be 62 years old. That is, after all, "The hope for the Sunday School."

1981– Jerry Dudley

God's Man in Today's World: His Conflicts

Text: Ephesians 6:11

God's man in today's world—his conflicts. War. Fighting. Struggle. Adversaries. Mental frustrations. Confrontations. Combat. We use these and many other words and phrases in our vocabularies to describe the physical, mental, spiritual antagonism present in our everyday lives. Now then, the message didn't suggest that if we have conflict. It simply begins with the postulate "His Conflicts."

So I'm not going to try to prove to you that you do. I'll simply begin. And whether the stage of your struggle is only a skirmish or whether it has reached the proportions of a real blitzkrieg, the thing you probably are keenly aware of is that you are involved in your own personal struggles. If all the troubles of everybody here tonight were written down, our libraries probably wouldn't contain the books.

The conflict you are in may involve you and those about you, or it may be that your greatest conflict is something taking place down inside your own life. The scope of our involvement in the conflicts of this world are so broad that it would be impossible to cover it all in one, in fact for that matter, even several sermons.

For example, I read that mental conflict, our emotional conflicts, put more people in the hospital than all the diseases and accidents and physical maladies that afflict us. We find ourselves increasingly less capable of coping with our problems.

Now on the other extreme is this constantly mounting danger of global conflict which could possibly become an atomic holocaust that would leave our earth a cinder heap. Choruses of despair sound on every side. In a pamphlet issued a few years ago by the Atomic Energy Commission, which was amazingly frank, it said, "We have now made it possible to destroy the human race, to reduce to the time of Cain and Abel man's position on earth; to scatter to the four winds in a matter of seconds the civilization it has taken centuries to build."

Bertrand Russell, a rather noted skeptic, has written, "An unrelieved

gloom awaits us. It is likely that during this present generation all our large cities in every part of the world may be destroyed.”

Scientist William Vogt, sometimes called the Father of the Atomic Bomb, has said the handwriting on the wall of five continents now tells us the day of judgment is at hand.

So, where does the man of God stand in the midst of all of this? Jesus said in Luke 21:25, 26, 28, “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; and the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

I want to consider some of the plagues, the problems, and the persecutions of the man of God in today’s world. I like the song we sang, Brother Whaley, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus,” because, if we have any hope, that’s it. If we have any dependence that’s going to be stable enough to sustain us in these hours of trial, it’s going to have to be more permanent than anything we have found in the world.

Turn with me now, and let’s read our text together. Ephesians 6:11.

Listen to the Apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 5:8 he says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that the man of God is in a conflict. I want us to look, number one, at the problem of conflict for the man of God, then at the position of the man of God in the conflict, then the purpose of the conflict for the man of God, and finally, the promises made to the man of God in the conflict.

First, there’s a firm certainty that we, as children of God, are involved in conflict. That’s a problem. For those of us who are peace-loving people, we would just rather not fight. You know the popular saying, “I’m a lover, not a fighter.” But with the people of God, you find that you probably have to be both.

You’re going to have to love with all your heart and fight with all your might. For conflict is just as certain as death. Whether the battleground is within your own breast or an international holocaust, it is sure and certain that you’re going to be involved. The very nature of our universe produces

and involve us in pressures, hostilities, and at times, just plain old open violent combat.

We can and we must be sure to know that conflict is part of our earthly lives and being saved does not exempt us from it. In fact, I would think it just about guarantees you will be involved. Let's look at the nature.

You see, because of the nature of this fight we're in, God's man in today's world needs to be instructed in the nature of the enemy. Look at the text again, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The day we were born of the flesh, we began the conflict of mortal life. Calamities, disease, and danger have surrounded us every moment of our lives, since the hour we drew our first breath. Since the day we cast our lot with God, His church, and His people, we have been thrust into a spiritual battle. Before we were saved, we were pawns in the battle, but the day we received Jesus Christ we became soldiers in the fight.

Satan is real; he is powerful; he is wily. The Word of God describes him as more subtle than all the creatures. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:3, "But I fear, lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Paul worried about the Christians that he ministered to. He worried about his people, pastor, just like you worry about your people.

You worry about the problems they have, the spiritual battles that are theirs. You pray for them. You help them. You counsel them. You do everything in your power to equip them to be effective soldiers for Jesus Christ. You see, beloved, this is no small fight we're in. The battle is on, the stakes are high, and the souls of mankind are hanging in the balance.

God's man must stand strong in the face of the onslaught. The enemy will invade every area of your life. Paul instructed the Ephesians to put on the whole armor of God, and it would be redundant and meaningless if they were not needed. Surely, God intended that we use the armor He provided for us. He emphasized this by saying, "And having done all, to stand."

Beloved, there is no compromise in the battle we're in. You're not going to make any deals with the devil and beat him. There are some who are polishing their armor for the big parade, jousting among themselves, and

have never gotten into the battle that is raging outside. Beloved, your Christian life is on the line and there's no room and there's no time for playing around with sin.

Sin is real. Sin is dangerous. Sin is on every hand. It's going to afflict and tempt every one of us. This is a real battle. We're not shadow boxing. The punches are landing hard, and we're suffering some painful casualties.

Pastors, let me ask you something. How many people in your church are missing today that were active a year ago? How many casualties have you had in your church in the last 12 months? How many of your friends have fallen by the wayside? How many of them have become entangled again in the affairs of this world and have been overcome?

These are dangerous days. I think it's time that we, God's people, decide who the enemy really is. One of our great concerns is that some brethren at times turn their artillery on their own troops. By that I mean, sometimes we take our frustrations, problems, and fears to the pulpit and lay them on our people. The result is they go home discouraged, in despair, and defeated.

Jesus instructed us to feed the sheep, not fight them; we're to feed the flock of God, provide for them, and care for them. We're to be the under shepherd to the Great Shepherd and lead them carefully.

It appears to me that sometimes in our inward struggles, whether your church, association, state, or even the national convention, that sometimes a few people feel they are Gideon's successor, that it's their responsibility to thin out the troops. The problem is, their directions did not come from the Lord, and they are not Gideon!

We don't all have the same office. We have not all the same gifts. So urgently and of absolute necessity in our present position, we, the people of God, had best come to recognize that those of us who are born again, regenerated, serving in the army of God, must focus on this truth—we are brethren! Pray for your brethren. Support the brethren. Work with those God has given us to work with.

This is no time; this is no place. The battle we're in has no room for needless casualties among ourselves. We can't all be chiefs. There's got to be a few of us be Indians. We can't all be the pilots, you know. There's got to be some navigators and some bombardiers. In fact, there's got to be some cooks in the line for the others to be there. What I'm simply saying is that we're not all in the limelight. There's no room for that. And sometimes

these self-appointed watchdogs turn out to be just that...dogs.

The position of the man of God as the Lord aligns the forces and the entrenchments, is fairly well designated. See, it all began, if I understand properly, when Lucifer rebelled against God. Listen to it, "And there was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. And the dragon fought and his angels prevailed not, neither was their place found anymore in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out. That old serpent called the devil and Satan which deceiveth the whole world, he was cast out into the earth and his angels were cast out with him."

Now then, I don't know exactly where in the chronological order this all happened. All I know is that when God made Adam and Eve and set them in Eden, Satan was there. And the conflict began immediately. For Satan was determined, and he is still determined, and he will continue to be determined to thwart the purposes of God. God made man a little lower than the angels, and he left us to be tempted by the devil.

Those who obey the Lord, those who choose him of their own free will, they will be the ones who repopulate Heaven. The great open war is on. Man can choose God and live, or he can choose not to serve God and die. Our only hope of life is to be born again, born of God—a new creature in Christ Jesus. God, the whole of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, with all the angels of Heaven, are set in array to help us in our predicament.

Mankind—earthy, weak, and frail in comparison with these titan forces with which we struggle—can do nothing to save itself. So, in due time, God sent His Son to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He overcame the tempter and all the forces of evil. He overcame death, Hell, and the grave. And He set you at liberty to choose life or death.

We are either controlled by Satan and sin or by Christ and righteousness. There is no lingering between the two. There are no shades of gray. You're not half-saved.

Some years ago, I got carried away preaching and I used the following illustration. I said, "Boy, you can't get half-way in the door and half-way out."

After the service, a lady walked up to me and said, "Pastor, I can get half-way in the door and half-way out."

I replied, "Okay. But be careful, because I'm fixing to close the door."

You see, either you are serving the Lord or you are not. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me. He that gathereth not, is scattering."

If we are committed to Christ, we are automatically pitted against Satan and all the forces he has at his command. Now then, let me make one point clear. Satan is *not*, Satan is *not* God's equal. While Satan is far more powerful than we are, he is *not* omnipotent as is God. He is *not* omnipresent as is God.

But his host of fallen angels (or his evil spirits) are legion. They are everywhere. He is not omniscient, but he is a whispering, lying, malignant evil spirit, and he will suggest to our minds and our spirit that he is there. Brethren, we face a formidable enemy!

So, the position of the man of God in this conflict is of absolute necessity, in utter dependence upon our God to keep us. And He's promised us He would. But He didn't say He'd keep you out of the fight.

Now let me enlarge just a moment on a statement I made earlier. Satan's attacks can be brutal, violent, open, frontal attacks. Or, they may be very devious, whispering campaigns, subtly attacking our faith and our minds. Paul said, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity of the law of sin which is in my members."

We are warned repeatedly of our vulnerability to Satan's attacks on our minds. Listen to a few of them:

– Romans 8:7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

– 2 Thessalonians 2:2, "Be not soon shaken in your minds."

And then concerning those false teachers who are "doting about questions and strifes of words whereof come envy, strife, railings, evil surmising, perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds" (1 Timothy 6:4).

He'll use everything in the world to keep you from centering your heart and your mind upon Jesus Christ.

Now then, let's make it real simple. For example, you housewives and mothers at home, when you strive to have a time of prayer, as sure as shootin', the telephone will ring, the baby will squall, or somebody will come to the door. He'll interrupt your prayer life.

You fellows, when you try to pray a certain time of the day, he'll interrupt

it some way or another. If he can't do that, he'll get your mind on something else before you ever get to your real praying. I'm talking about praying that's the kind of praying that's getting down with real agony with God. I'm not talking about "Now I lay me down to sleep" kind of praying. I'm talking about the kind that's work! Your heart and your life are involved in it, and the souls of men are involved in your praying. He'll interrupt it every time if he can. It's going to take some real concentration to be able to do it.

There's a purpose, I think, in all this. There is a conflict. There is the tempter. There is the helper and the sustainer, our Lord and God the Holy Spirit. And this conflict may be within our hearts, or it may involve those about us, but as the case always is with our Lord, He has a purpose in it. Without trial, you'll never know if your faith is genuine or imagined. And your faith will be tested.

Faith is the whole substance of our relationship with God, for we are saved by grace through faith. Without faith, it's impossible to please Him. God, for our sakes, tries our faith. Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ, said in 1 Peter 1 (relating the hopes and trials of the man of God), "We are to greatly rejoice, though now for a season if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Over the years, I've stood behind the casket or beside a grave and conducted more than 700 funeral services. Again and again, I'm asked the same question: "Why? How come? Why did God take mine? Why wasn't it somebody else's?"

And about the best answer I've ever come up with is, "I just don't know any other way to get to Heaven except to die."

None of us wants to die. Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die. Everybody wants victory in their life, but nobody wants to fight.

Beloved, there is victory, and there is a way into Heaven, but it's going to take some effort on our part. It's going to take some standing and fighting in our own lives. In Jesus' teaching about building our lives on the sand or on the rock, He said, "He [the man of God] is like a man which built a house and digged deep and laid a foundation on a rock, and when the flood arose and the stream beat vehemently on that house and could not shake

it, for it was founded on the rock.”

The conflict is our assurance that we are standing firm in Christ, that Satan and his crowd are the enemies, that Christ is our captain, and even in the storm there is the stability God will give you in life.

The promises that are made to the man of God in conflict. You see, I’ve been taught from the beginning of my studies that any time we find a paradox in Scripture, look at it closely, for it is going to contain some great truth. So it is, in this seemingly contradictory tenet of Scripture. You see, one of the major tenets of the Gospel is peace.

Peace is a promise to every believer. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Paul wrote in Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep you heart and mind through Jesus Christ.”

Yet, we hear Jesus say now in Matthew 10:34-36, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

Why, that looks like a complete, open contradiction, doesn’t it? He promised peace, and then he said He didn’t come to bring peace. Obviously, Jesus was saying His disciples are changed. They’ve been made new; they’ve become new creatures. They are separated from the world, even from the worldly family members. They’re still your family, and you still love them. But you belong to a different crowd now.

Satan would use our earthly families to defeat us if it’s possible. He’s done it many times. Even though they love us, our families may not understand the calling of God, and they may seek to prevent us from doing His will. Brothers, these areas are the most difficult ones we have to battle. You still love your families. You parents, love your children, even though they are in sin. If there is one thing in the world to bring a Christian to compromise, I suppose it is our kids. We love them so much. Or one of the most difficult things for a young person to do is to serve the Lord in spite of their parents.

You see, Jesus is simply saying, that when you get saved, this puts you in conflict with the world. But even though that’s going on, you can have

peace in the midst of trouble. When He told us to not be troubled or afraid, and when Paul taught us that the peace of God would keep our hearts and minds, they were speaking the truth.

What does your heart long for most? Most of us could answer honestly, "Peace." We'd like peace. We desire at least a measure of tranquility in our lives. And even in the white heat of conflict, if we will let Him, our Lord will speak peace to our hearts.

The same time that He's giving us grace and courage and strength and power with Him, enabling us to stand to fight mightily against the enemy of our hearts and souls, He'll speak peace and comfort to your heart. Jesus, when preparing His own disciples for His death and departure in John 16, warned them of their own suffering to come. He promised the Holy Spirit to them and said in verse 33, "These things I have spoken unto you that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

God wants to give us the desires of our heart. He wants to give us peace. The birth of Jesus was announced by an angel and a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men."

The fruits of the spirit are listed in Galatians 5 as love, joy, and peace. The Holy Spirit will bring peace. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

Hey, Brother, has the battle been hard? Has the enemy borne down heavily on you? Has he afflicted you from behind and before? Has he attacked you when you were least expecting it? Has he come at you through children or parents? Has your best friend let you down?

Discouragement is one of those things Satan uses. I'm telling you, that is a big club. He'll beat you with it if you let him. In the midst of this horrid, terrible, soul-wrenching conflict which is ours, as long as we inhabit the flesh, as long as our souls are longing for their eternal home, and Satan is vying for them, by every craft and subtle means, we can find the peace of God by casting all our care upon Him, for He still cares for us.

He still loves you. He still wants to sustain you. In fact, He wants to forgive you, to comfort you, and love you, and strengthen you and make

you strong, and take you by the hand and lead you home. You've got to let Him. Your part of the job is just letting Him!

When we begin the struggle by ourselves, in ourselves, and of ourselves, we are doomed to failure. It is only as we let Him, Who has already won the fight—say, I wish I had that song that the brother sang last night. You know, when we're fighting our own battles, we didn't know the Lord had already won it for us. He already has! He's overcome death, Hell, the grave, and the tempter. All we have to do is let Him be our grace and strength.

Prayer

Father, in these terrible times of conflict, combat, fighting, struggling, pressing, when our hearts grow weary, we remember You taught us in Your word to be not weary in well doing, for in due season we would reap if we fainted not. So tonight we pray for these precious souls that are weary of the struggle, tired of the fight, bruised, beaten, hurt. And we pray that tonight by Your very nearness, by Your Holy Spirit, You'd simply draw them to You, bind up their broken hearts, speak peace to their souls, and give them what they need.

1981 – Keith Burden

Beyond the Burning Bush

Text: Exodus 17:1-16

Our text this morning is Exodus 17. Although it's a bit lengthy, we want to read all 16 verses and speak on the subject, "Beyond the Burning Bush."

A lot of things happened during the exodus that are left unsaid. God's Word is rather explicit in some areas, but there are other areas where we really don't know a great deal. They did live in tents and I'd like for us to use our imaginations and see Moses as he stands one morning in the door of his tent, just before the sun began to come up over the horizon. There was just enough light to see the camp sprawled out beneath him and the massive nation of Israel that he had been appointed and called to lead.

As he stood in the door of his tent, he looked toward Heaven and saw the pillar of cloud glowing like an ember. As Moses stood there and looked at the cloud, his mind went back to the evening he was out in the desert with the sheep of his father-in-law. That night God got hold of his heart as the bush began to burn, but was not consumed.

God said, "Take off your shoes, because you're on holy ground, and come near." Moses said, "I'll turn aside and see this great sight."

God said, "Moses, I want you to go to Pharaoh. I want you to tell him God says, 'let my people go.'"

Moses said, "Lord, I can't." He began to give God excuses that we use whenever we try to find a reason for not serving God.

God said, "Moses, surely I will be with thee. You go, and you tell Pharaoh—I'll do the rest."

Moses left that scene determined to do what God had asked him to do. As the sun began to peek over the horizon that morning, he snapped out of his daydreaming and realized he wasn't at the burning bush any longer. He was no longer in Egypt seeing all the signs and wonders of God. He was there in the valley with the people of God. He had to go forward and lead God's people.

Sometimes we like to go back and dwell at the burning bush. And I'll be

honest with you, there have been times in my ministry when I've had to go back to the burning bush. I don't find a time when the experience was ever repeated in Moses' life. The bush in the desert never burned again; but it never stopped burning in his heart.

Moses remembered the time when God spoke to him out of the burning bush. Now he was living in the present reality of difficulties and hard decisions. He knew God had something for him to do. Like Moses, we have to go beyond the burning bush. We can't stay there.

Moses would have a hard time getting ordained in some of our churches and associations. He didn't attend a Bible college—he went to a secular university. He wasn't an eloquent man. Some say he had a speech impediment. He was a murderer. We wouldn't ordain someone like that.

He'd spent his time in preparation at the University of Egypt. He had done some graduate work out there in the wilderness. When the time was just right, God said, "I want you to go and lead my people." He obeyed God.

Moses had a pastor's heart. I want to speak to the pastors this morning primarily. I realize there are lay people here, but my heart is in the pastorate. I believe for the most part our denomination is comprised of men whose hearts are there, leading the people of God. There are some things about a pastor I want us to consider.

Moses understood a pastor's problems. We all have problems. Moses encountered his with the people of God. He was leading over a million people! I have a hard time leading 150.

I believe Moses had a problem with his faith from time to time. The first verse of our text today says Israel journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim. There was no water for the people to drink.

There's a conflict. God gave the commandment for them to go into Rephidim. But there was no water in Rephidim. Sometimes God instructs us to do things that don't make sense. Moses knew this area. At times Rephidim did bubble and gush with refreshing waters. But there were other times when the brook dried up. Moses knew the season and he probably was well aware that the brook was dry.

God said, "Go to Rephidim!" Moses said, "God, there's no water down there." God said, "Go to Rephidim!" There are times when God calls on

us as pastors to lead our people in directions where we really cannot see provision.

Moses couldn't explain how it was going to be done, but God said, "Go." There are times when God is going to give you a vision. God will, through the eye of faith, let you see things that can and need to be done.

How many times have we stepped out on faith? How many times has God provided in a miraculous way? Listen, folks—people are more concerned that you believe it *can* be done than that you know *how* it can be done. If you believe God will do it, they will follow you.

We also have a problem in an area I call flexibility. Early on, in the Exodus 15, they came upon this problem of water. They found some water, but it was bitter and they couldn't drink it. God said, "Moses, I want you to cut that tree down and put it in the water." Do you know what happened? God made the water fit for consumption.

Then here in chapter 17 they came to a place where there was no water. God said, "Moses, take the rod in thine hand and smite the rock and I'll send water out." And God did.

We find a depletion in the water supply again in Numbers 20. God said, "Moses, go and speak to the rock and water will come out." He disobeyed God, but God still honored His word.

What I'm saying is this: The need in each case was essentially the same. There was a lack of water. In every place God's plan for provision was different. In one place he cast in a tree. In another place he smote the rock. In yet another he spoke to it. Each was different, but the outcome was the same.

I like tradition. I feel comfortable in it, and we have some good traditions in our denomination. I appreciate the traditions that have given us distinction and made us a unique people with a rich heritage. But at the same time, if we're not careful, we can become locked in, comfortable, and think we have to do it the same way every time.

And so it is when it comes to choosing methods. The outcome will be essentially the same and God will get the glory. But the way it's done will be different sometimes. The key here is being open and in tune with God so you'll know how He wants you to do it.

Another problem pastors have is with their foes or their enemies. The

Amalekites were a formidable foe. They were the first real threat Israel faced in their journey. Of course, Egypt had followed after them, but God took care of that. They never had to lift a finger.

They were on their way now, and the Amalekites saw this mass of people coming through their grasslands. They were going to consume the grass, litter the land, and deplete their water supplies. So Amalek came out in an ambush and attacked the people of God.

In Deuteronomy 25:17, God said, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when you were come forth out of Egypt. How he met thee by the way and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou was faint and weary and he feared not God."

God never forgot that. Amalek smote the back portion, the hindermost part of the nation of Israel. Moses put the elderly and the feeble and the fainthearted at the back to bring up the rear, hoping that it would afford greater protection. Amalek came out and attacked them at their most vulnerable and weakest point.

The devil is going to hit us where we are weakest and most vulnerable. Sometimes we are deceived into believing the devil fights fair. As far as he is concerned, there are no rules in this fight. Anything he can get by with, he is going to do.

Indirectly, down the line, the Amalekites were kinfolk to Israel. They were descendants of Esau. The first foe was not that which was without, but that which was within. That may be part of our biggest problem today. We have our defenses up and we are prepared against the onslaught of things like liberalism. But we haven't fortified the defenses from within. We become gullible and vulnerable. The road along the way today is scattered and strewn with casualties in our denomination.

Amalek didn't want them to come through the land. Similarly, the devil wants to keep us from going to the water. He doesn't care if we meet and have services, fellowship groups, bazaars, rummage sales, and everything else. But start preaching and teaching and living the Word of God and you're going to have a fight on your hands.

I like Moses' attitude here. Up to this time God had done all the fighting. Moses said, "It's time to fight, folks." We're to live at peace with all men. But there comes a time when the devil stands up and tries to bully God's people and we have to put on the gloves. We've taken the path of least resistance,

side-stepped issues and tried to avoid confrontations. By so doing, we've caused ourselves more problems.

Israel didn't go looking for a fight. They wanted to go to the Promised Land. Amalek wasn't going to let them go—that way. It came time to fight. There are times when the devil will call your bluff, try to find out what you're made of. Amalek found that Moses didn't run.

Those are some of the problems pastors face, and Moses understood them. But I also see in the life of Moses the pastor's priorities. The arrangement of his values, the things he treasured most in life.

First, we see priorities in Moses' life through his emphasis upon prayer. Of all the things I studied in preparation for this message, the thing that impressed me most is the fact that Moses was a man of prayer. Time doesn't permit me to mention every occasion that Moses prayed. I'll share just a couple with you.

He came from the burning bush to the people of Israel and said, "God has called me to lead you out of bondage in Egypt." So he went to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go." Pharaoh said, "No." In fact, he increased their task of labor and made it hard on them. No straw was provided for the bricks and he increased the tally.

When he went to the people and told them Pharaoh's reaction, they became angry. What did Moses do? The Bible says he cried out to God.

In Numbers, we find another challenge for Moses. There was an eloquent, arrogant fellow named Korah. He was trying to undermine the authority of the man of God. Moses could have called for the heads of the tribes to resolve this matter. Instead, the first thing he did (according to the Bible) was cry out to God. He fell on his face.

God has a way of taking care of problems. What happened to Korah and his crowd? God took care of them in the snap of a finger and Moses' position was strengthened.

In Exodus 32, Moses was up on the mountain many days and God was talking to him. Later he heard noise down in the valley and he came off the mountain to investigate. What he saw broke his heart. The people were worshipping a golden calf. The anger of Moses waxed hot.

God was prepared to destroy the people and raise up a new nation through Moses. Here is where we see that Moses had a pastor's heart. He

begged God to spare the people. And if God didn't, he was prepared to be blotted out with them. He was a man of prayer.

Another priority a pastor must have is personnel or people. Some of us get so caught up in building buildings and programs that we neglect the most important part of our ministry, and that is, building people. We have beautiful edifices, impressive structures, elaborate plans, but our people are still on first base spiritually, because we have not given ourselves to developing and building people.

Personnel—I'm convinced in my mind that when Moses sent Joshua down that day with the troops, he had utmost confidence in that young fellow. Joshua bursts on the scene. There's no introduction—you don't know where he came from. But God used that young fellow to lead the people of God.

Moses spent time with Joshua. He poured himself into the young man. Consequently, Joshua became both competent and confident. He became a great leader in part because Moses had confidence in him.

Another priority in his pastor's heart was the protection for the people of God. I touched on this earlier.

This wasn't one of these military maneuvers like we had over in Vietnam. This was a full-fledged conflict. This was where the blood met the metal. Hand-to-hand; loss of life and loss of limb. Those soldiers were laying it all on the line. Moses had a compassion for the people of God, and he wanted to afford protection for them.

But in spite of all he could do in the flesh to prepare for the conflict, Moses realized that if God did not intervene, they could not win. So Moses said, "While you are fighting down there, I'll be fighting up here. I'm going to wait before God and I'm going to pray."

The greatest way we can protect our people today is through prayer and preaching the Word of God. A lot of our people are ill-prepared to face the onslaught of the enemy, simply because they have not been grounded in the Word of God.

Let's move to the final point, and that's the pastor's provisions. I'm glad that God doesn't expect us to do it all by ourselves! He gave some provisions to this man of God called Moses. You can almost hear the clashing of swords, the moans and cries of men who had their lives taken from them as their blood spilled out that day.

They were engaged in real warfare...not war games. There were real casualties. I'm sure that caused Moses to hold his hands a little higher. But if you've ever tried to hold your hands up very long, you know it's difficult to do.

The battle continued all day. I've never seen anyone who could hold his hands up all day. As he stood there, his arms began to tremble with weakness. Perspiration popped out on his forehead, and his knees began to shake. His legs began to tremble, and his body began to become faint and weary and fatigued. As he agonized with God in prayer the arms began to slowly sink down. He'd hear the cries of his people and he'd hold his hands up again, but they would begin to come down.

Thank God there's a provision made for him and his weakness. Aaron and Hur were up there with him. They saw what was happening. They found a stone and pulled it over for Moses to sit on. They gave him a solid foundation. The knees quit trembling. It gave stability to a man who had found it difficult to stand on his own.

There's also a steadfast friend down in the valley. Exodus 17:10 just thrills my soul. "So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek."

Joshua never gave a second thought to retreating or going back. There were times when the enemy began to prevail. But he knew up there on the hillside was a man of God interceding for him.

Moses was over 80 years old. He couldn't fight. Joshua was 40 years old. He wasn't really prepared to pray. They had their respective positions. They knew their spiritual gifts. Moses was right where he should have been and so was Joshua.

One final thing that I think was a provision was a supportive family. Everyone knows that Moses and Aaron were kinfolk. Secular historians suggest that Hur was either the husband of Miriam or perhaps even the son of Moses himself. I can't substantiate that with Scripture, but I have an idea that Hur and Aaron were both in the family.

When the hands began to sink down and he couldn't hold them up anymore, that brother and that brother-in-law came over and said, "Moses, let us help you." They began to lift the man of God's hands upward.

There have been times in my ministry when my hands have gotten so heavy. The responsibility of the church was so great that I didn't think I

could hold my hands up. About the time I was ready to collapse and give up, I had a father or a mother or a brother or a sister or a wife or a son or a daughter or someone who'd come and raise those hands back up.

I'll embarrass my wife to death, but there have been times that I couldn't have held my hands up without her. There have been times I would have quit if there hadn't been someone in my family holding me up.

God told Moses, in Exodus 17:14, "I want you to write this down in the book of remembrance." Why? "I want you to rehearse it before Joshua." The battle was recorded to encourage Joshua. There was going to come a time (Moses knew full-well) when Joshua and the people were going to face some formidable foes, some giants. He would need to be reminded of what God had done in the past.

Moses erected an altar there and gave it an unusual name: Jehovah-Nissi—The Lord is my banner. The Lord is my banner. He ascribed the victory to God—not Israel.

And so it is every time we go forth, the banner of God should go ahead of us. The Lord is my banner. Is He the banner in your life today?

1981 – Bobby Aycock

God's Man in Today's World: His Commission

Text: Matthew 28: 18-20; Luke 24:45-47

Introduction: Our Calling

1. Heaven bound

A. Moving toward the person. "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:23, 24).

B. Moving toward the place. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1, 2).

1) We are pilgrims passing through.

2) Illustration: Abraham was looking for a city. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9, 10).

2. A useful journey

– Psalm 137:2-4

– verse 2 "Hanged our harps on the willows..."

– verse 3 "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

– verse 4 "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord had done great things for them" (Psalm 126: 1, 2).

A. Partners with Him in His work.

- 1) Christ has the heathen for His inheritance. "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalm 2:7, 8).
- 2) We are joint heirs. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17).

B. Christ is calling out a people for His name.

- He has enlisted us in this work. "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father has sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).
- "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18).
- This is our commission!
- "The fact is, belief in missions and belief in Christ stand and fall together." —Dr. James S. Stewart

The commission suggests four things:

- I. The Unique Message
- II. The Ultimate Mandate
- III. The Unreached Multitudes
- IV. The Usable Method

I. The Unique Message

- A. God is the only God: sets aside all other gods.
- B. Christianity is the only true religion: sets aside all other religions.
 1. Sets aside non-Christian religions:
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Hinduism
 - c. Islam

- d. Confucianism
- e. Spiritism, etc.

Illustration: The Spiritist woman said to Maria das Dores, "Our religions are alike, we are both interested in the spiritual."

- 2. Sets aside cults and corrupted Christian religions.
 - a. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists
 - b. Roman Catholicism
 - 1) The Mass
 - a) The bread becomes the body of Christ.
(transubstantiation)
 - b) Every time mass is said, Christ is offered in sacrifice anew.
 - c) Receiving Christ is merely eating the bread (the host).
 - 2) The Mediators: The saints, priests, the Pope

Illustration: Lelis Fachini was a city councilman and a practicing Catholic. When he asked me, "What is the difference between your religion and ours?" I told him to bring his Catholic Bible and had him read 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

When I asked him how many mediators there are in the Catholic Church, he named about six saints before I could stop him. I asked him to look at the verse again. He immediately recognized that the Bible says there is one Mediator, which is Christ. The Holy Spirit used this truth to convict him and he eventually came to trust Christ as his personal Savior with great joy and jubilation. He became a great witness for the Lord.

C. The Gospel is the only means of salvation: Sets aside all other supposed means of salvation (Romans 1:16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 2:1, 2).

—"Christ alone can save the world, but Christ cannot save the world alone."

II. The Ultimate Mandate

A. The objective mandate stated by our Lord

1. Resurrection day (Luke 24:46, 47; John 20, 21)
 2. During the 40 days (Matthew 28:19, 20)
 3. Previous to His ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:8)
- B. The subjective mandate in the Bible as a whole and in the New Testament in particular
1. Old Testament: Israel was a mediator through whom God chose to work to reach the world.
 - a. Israel was a witness.
 - b. Some of the prophets spoke to and about other nations of the world. (Jonah was sent to a Gentile city.)
 - c. The Temple had the Court of the Gentiles.
 2. New Testament

–“The Great Commission does not make Christianity a missionary religion. The latter is such because of its source, nature and total design. The apostles became missionaries not because of the commission but because Christianity is what it is and because of the indwelling Holy Spirit who is an outgoing and witnessing Spirit. Christ Himself speaks of the mission of the Holy Spirit as a witnessing mission” (John 15:26; 16:8-15; from *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, page 173, by George W. Peters).

–“The last command of Christ is often set forth as alike the primary and conclusive argument for missions. ...Even if Jesus had not embodied the missionary duty of the Church in the ‘great commission,’ we should be under obligation to evangelize the world by reason of the essential character of Christianity and its mission to the world” (Robert Speer. *Ibid.* Page 347).

Illustration: The Amazon River in Brazil begins with an Andes glacier. Hundreds of tributaries pour their waters into this moving inland sea that drains half of South America making its way to the Atlantic. The river’s power is so great that it floods the ocean with fresh muddy water for up to 100 miles offshore.

–“We are moving within the center stream of the New Testament when I assert that the principle task of the Church is to communicate intelligibly and effectively a divine message to the

world in order to bring man to a living relationship with Christ by faith" (From *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, page 229, by George W. Peters).

– Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

III. The Unreached Multitudes

A. Great Commission is world-wide in focus.

1. Terms

a. The world

b. All nations

c. To the uttermost part of the earth (Beyond our city, county, state, country)

2. Numbers

a. Sea of faces in Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte

b. Two billion souls who have no witness

– "It concerns the myriads of the human family who, if they passed in procession in single file before our eyes, it would take the lifetime of the oldest living person to complete the progression and hear just once the message of salvation which has been given to us in trust for them" (From *Missionary Messages*, A.B. Simpson, page 11).

– "A great missionary of the past generation wrote: A great 'without' is written over heathenism. Men and women are without a Bible, without a Sunday, and without righteousness. They have homes without peace, marriage without sanctity. Their young men and women are without ideals, the children without purity, the mothers without wisdom or self-control. There is poverty without relief, sickness without skill or care, sorrow without sympathy, sin without remedy, death without hope, without Christ.

"All this wrapped up in the words, 'without Christ.' This is why Christ has told us to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel. This is why we urge you to give and pray without stint, for the only answer to the world without is to have Christ within" (From

World Missions Total War, L.E. Maxwell, page 166).

B. Great commission is individual in function (Preach the Gospel to every creature).

Illustration: Rogério's conversion. Rogério, a neighbor in Barbacena, Brazil, was an affirmed atheist. He made fun of and criticized us for believing in God and going to church. We witnessed to him every opportunity we had. He had an accident in the cement factory where he worked as an electronic technician. His 20-foot fall to a concrete floor severely damaged his back and landed him in the hospital for several days. I visited him almost every day. Only after he was out of the hospital and many months of God interacting with him did he believe and trust Christ as his personal Savior.

Poem:

A hundred thousand souls a day,
Are passing one by one away,
In Christless guilt and gloom;
Without one ray of hope or light
With future dark as endless night,
They're passing to their doom.

(From A. B. Simpson, *The Cry of the World*, Oswald J. Smith, page 81.)

Illustration: Funeral procession on main street in Barbacena. Once from the balcony of the radio station from where my daily broadcast was aired, I looked down upon the scene of a funeral procession on the main street of Barbacena. During those days the casket was pushed along the street as the family and friends followed walking to the cemetery. Heartrending thoughts flooded my mind of all those souls living in spiritual darkness that were also making their way to a Christ-less doom.

Poem:

"Oh, I seem to hear them crying,
As they sink into the grave,
We are dying, we are dying,
Is there none to help and save."

(From *Missionary Messages*, by A.B. Simpson, page 70.)

“When He (Jesus) saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

Compassion responds to the need. This brings us now to consider the response which is the usable method.

IV. The Usable Method

Introduction

1. The Mission Board

- a. Sending agency
- b. Serves as informant.
- c. The task of world evangelization does not rest primarily with the board.

2. The Bible Colleges

- a. It is good and right to have a world missions emphasis.
 - 1) Conducive to receive the call
 - 2) Those not called can be challenged to support and promote missions.
 - 3) The task of world evangelism does not rest primarily with the Bible colleges.

3. The task of world evangelism lies at the door of the local church. The pastor is the key to world evangelization!

A. Fervent Prayer: Paul's example (experience)

1. Initial prayer for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2). They prayed for Paul and Silas when they went out (Acts 15:40).
2. Continual Prayer (Acts 13:27, 28). Without doubt, the church continued to pray and received Paul well when he returned.
3. Requested prayer of the churches (Ephesians 6:18-20; Romans 15:30-32; Colossians 4:2-4).

B. Faithful Giving

1. Need for prayerful, liberal, and consistent sacrificial giving

2. Faith Promise giving: one efficient way to give. Consider *Faith Promise for World Witness*, by Norm Lewis, statistician. A request for information was sent to churches who used the plan. Two hundred responded, and 179 filled out questionnaires.

Questions asked:

- Question 3: Has it resulted in increased missionary giving through your own church? Yes – 167 (93%) of churches; No – 8 (4%); No Answer – 4 (2%)
- Question 5: Have your local expenses suffered as a result of this plan? Yes – 2 (1%); No – 165 (92%); No Answer – 12 (7%)
- Question 6: Has giving for local expenses merely been maintained, or has it increased with the use of the Faith Promise Plan? Yes – 148 (83%); No – 16 (9%); No Answer – 15 (8%)

Illustration: Robert Arthington never married. He lived in a single room and cooked his own meals. During his lifetime he gave over \$500,000 for missionary work. Said Arthington, “Gladly would I make the floor my bed, a box my chair, and another box my table rather than that men should die for want of the knowledge of Christ” (From *Faith Promise for World Witness*, Norm Lewis, page 11).

Illustration: One Christmastide in the Sudan the missionary asked the native girls to bring an offering for Jesus. They each brought some little thing. With some, it was a little flower or some toy that had been given them by the passing traders.

One dark-skinned girl, with deep-set eyes, and a face transfigured, handed the missionary a little bundle. When he opened it, he found it to contain 85 cents. For a poor girl in the Sudan that was as much as for you to give \$85,000. It was a fortune for the heathen girl to give. He called her to him and said, “My child, how could you do this?”

“Jesus gave Himself for me and I thought I would give myself for Him. I went and sold myself for the rest of my life to a planter. I gave him the right to use me in his field at the hardest toil, and he gave me 85 cents and let me have this one day so I could bring the money to you.”

The missionary was overwhelmed with what this sacrifice might mean: 60 years of drudgery, unrequited toil in the burning fields of Africa, with no freedom. She might never love anybody for herself, or have anything of her

own, her whole life mortgaged to a man that she might have 85 cents to give to Jesus Christ. (From *Missionary Messages*, A.B. Simpson, page 111.)

“If God wills the evangelization of the world, and you refuse to support missions, then you are opposed to the will of God.”—Oswald J. Smith

- Question 1: Has the Faith Promise Plan encouraged missionary candidates to go from your church? Yes – 91 (51%); No – 59 (33%); No Answer – 29 (16%)

C. Flaming Laborers

- Laborers sent forth (Romans 10:13-15).
- Make disciples, “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 19, 20).

Illustration: Jesus feeding the 5,000

Information: 90% of the preachers and full-time Christian workers minister to 10% of the world’s population, while 10% minister to 90% of the world’s population.

1. The need to pray for laborers (Matthew 9:36, 37)
 - a. Pastors pray for and with their congregations.
 - b. Sunday School teachers pray for and with their students.
 - c. Parents pray for and with their children.

Illustration: When I was a junior in high school, a girl in our youth group felt strongly that God had called her to the mission field. Upon graduating from high school, she wanted to go to Bible college to prepare for serving the Lord overseas. Her father said to her, “You are not going to the mission field, nor are you going to the Bible college!” She was heartbroken and wept regretfully.

The next year I graduated and went to the Bible college. When I came home from spring break, I learned that she had died from a brain tumor the size of an orange and was buried the day before I arrived. The next Sunday in the church service her father stood up weeping and said he believed the Lord had taken his daughter because he did not allow her to do the will of God for her life. He wanted to keep his daughter for himself instead of giving her to the Lord.

We need to pray for God to call forth laborers for the harvest field, and

parents should not stand in the way of their children.

2. The need for volunteers

a. A man to stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30).

b. Volunteers (Isaiah 6:8; Acts 13:2).

Illustration: Rogério, our neighbor, now born-again, wanted to be used by the Lord. He became an ardent soul winner. He talked with anyone anywhere at any time. He was one of the most effective soul winners that I have ever known.

Poem:

Could a mariner sit idle

If he heard the drowning cry?

Could a doctor sit in comfort

And just let his patients die?

Could a fireman sit idle

Let men burn and give no hand?

Can you sit at ease in Zion,

With the world around you damned?

—Leonard Ravenhill

Illustration: One Sunday morning before others had arrived for Sunday School, Lelis told me about his father's death that occurred some years earlier. His father, like himself, was in the Catholic religion, and had never heard the Gospel. Reflecting on the situation, Lelis became very emotional. With tears running down his face, he said, "I know my father is in Hell!" Then looking through his tears, in agony, he said to me, "Why didn't you come sooner so my father could have been saved?" It crushed me!

1982 – Bill Fulcher

The Fundamentals of Stewardship

Text: Matthew 25:14-24

Have you ever heard anything like what we read in the text? Is it not amazing? It's amazing because of what continues, "Reaping where thou hast not sown, gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." His lord answered and said unto him, "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with interest."

Stewardship. Now, for fear that some of us might think that is a new naval vessel, I want to go into a few definitions here. I understand that the Hebrew word for *steward* means the head person, head man, the one in charge. And I assume the Greek words have the same connotation. In the Greek, the word *steward* means manager, overseer—basically the idea of managing another's household. I suppose as you look through the Old Testament, at least to me one of the most fitting verses or passages is in 1 Chronicles 28:1, "...a steward over all the substance and possession of the king."

I've got some sad news for you. Brace yourself. I don't suppose any of us knew this. But God said the silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. In other words, brethren, tonight what we're saying is, we do not own anything; we are simply in possession for a while of that which God gives us. He has called us His own servants to Himself, and He has delivered unto us His goods, and He has said to us I want you to take this and multiply it and when I come again I want to see the interest on my investment. And somehow, somehow, we have missed the point and we believe that what we have is our own and God ought to be honored to let us use it for the saints. I want to deal with this thing from a positive standpoint, not a negative one. I don't want to talk about your sins all the time, and our failures, and what we should have done or could have done. Somehow when you deal with this thing of stewardship, you see what God wants us to do and what we have done. Sometimes it just automatically goes into the negative. I want to say this from the beginning—I want to

thank God for what we have done and for what we do have. I thank God for the foreign missionaries who came across this platform tonight. I thank God for our home missionaries. I thank God for the pastors who are here tonight. I thank God for those here who are involved in our institutions of learning, and involved in our women's auxiliary, and our youth work, and all of that which we have in our Free Will Baptist denomination. I thank God tonight for what we have. Thank God for where we've come, and for where we are. Let that be understood. Oh brethren, we've just scratched the surface. I hope that in some way tonight, a positive way, that I can help you see, help myself to see what God can do and wants to do and will do for me and through me if I'll allow Him to do it.

Dr. L.C. Johnson always told me, "Do not try to make a parable say more than it says." That's hard to do. I found so many things I would like to make this parable say. Usually a parable tries to teach one thing, and if you limit it to that one thing maybe you begin to understand the Word of God better. My understanding of this parable is that the one who called his own servants to him and went on a journey represents our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Then those, of course, being His own servants, those receiving the talents, are His servants. Perhaps it dealt with, at that particular time, a certain group of people—maybe the Israelites—but surely today it applies to every blood-washed Christian who knows the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior. We're included. We are His servants, and He has delivered unto us His goods. I think there's something vitally important to see.

Every servant did not receive the same number of talents. But he received a just number of talents, because God knew what he needed. And I'm using God here. You see one individual received five talents and he went out and made other five. And one received two and worked and made other two. I just said that tonight to say this—don't be concerned if you can't do everything the other fellow does. Does it bother you sometimes that you see these people that are so brilliant and in a moment calculate and take Rubik's cubes and work them all out and you sit there and—you wouldn't do that, would you? Listen, does it bother you sometimes that you're not a genius? Don't let that bother you. There are only a few of us around.

I'm saying tonight that God has not given us the same number of talents, perhaps. But He, I guarantee you, has given us exactly what we need because the Bible says He gave to every man according to his several ability, or God gave to everyone exactly what He knew that individual could

use and could trade with and would be effective with.

I need to determine, "Lord, what have You done for me? What have You placed in my hand? What is my job? And regardless of what other people do, God help me to faithfully do what You want me to do."

That's really the picture. The one who received five talents was faithful. The Lord said, "Well done." The one who received two was faithful, and the Lord said, "Well done." And the problem with the individual who received only one talent was not that he had such a meager amount, but the fact that he was not faithful with what God gave him.

Many have said, don't take this parable to teach that most of the people who have more are faithful, and the folks that have few talents are unfaithful. Some commentator said that it's probably just the reverse. The folks who have the one talent may be more faithful than the ones who have many, but that's neither here nor there.

I want you to listen to a couple of verses that deal with stewardship and stewards. The Bible is full of them, but I want to read two. I mention them because it seems to me these two will probably deal with all of us tonight. First, to those of us who preach the Word of God, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, "Let a man so account of us, as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required as stewards, that a man be found faithful."

That's exactly what this parable teaches. Now, I'm not against tent making. I know many times our men who preach have to work on the side, and tonight I personally thank God for faithful pastors who perhaps did not have the privilege of a good Bible education or do not have sufficient income to pastor a church full-time. Many such men have brought to us years of tremendous faithfulness, and I thank God for that.

I thank God, and I believe when it's the Lord's will for a man to work and preach, then that's the way it ought to be. God will honor it. God will bless that. Some men, in years gone by, have been more faithful and done things we younger men would not want to do. They've stayed faithful, and they've brought it on to us.

But I also want to say this. Thank God that Paul says we are stewards of the mysteries of God—men who preach the Word of God. If it is possible for you to preach the Word of God full-time, and you know a church that will support you and you can get involved in the work of God full-time as a

steward of the mysteries of God, do not stoop to sell insurance and work on the side just because that will give you a little more money. I know inflation has hit us all, but how much more blessed it is to preach the mysteries of God than to work in secular work if you don't have to do so. Having said that, I will move on.

The second verse is 1 Peter 4:10: "As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The Lord's done so much for us. He's been so good to us. Let's use what we have received to minister to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

A man was once in charge of building a cathedral—a big church. He walked up to one of the workers and said, "Whatcha doing?"

He replied, "I'm mixing mortar."

The man walked on and saw another fellow working with bricks, getting them ready for the bricklayers, and he said, "What are you doing?"

The worker replied, "I'm stacking bricks."

He walked a little further and found another worker and he said to him, "Sir, what are you doing?"

The man looked up from his task and smiled. "I'm building a cathedral. I'm not mixing mortar or stacking bricks. I'm building a cathedral."

I say to you tonight, that real stewardship is understanding what we are doing and getting on with the job. And I just want to quickly give you three things as it relates to stewardship.

Number one, God has given us a stewardship of substance. I mean by that, God has placed in our hands material things. He has given us these things to use, to trade, to multiply. Somebody has said, "God's gifts and God's money are not prizes. They are tools."

John Wesley had a good theory on money. He said, "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."

But you don't gain it by ruining your body, harming your body, or doing harm to the physical body or the mind that God has given you. You gain it in a sensible and reasonable way. I'm afraid that some people—in an effort to gain more and more—get out of the will of God and harm their minds

and bodies in an effort to make ends meet. John Wesley meant not to waste. Don't buy things you don't need when you could use that money for God.

Good stewardship means some of you men would go back home after this convention and sell a boat. Now, there's nothing wrong with having a boat. I wish I had one. But if your boat keeps you from giving to Free Will Baptist Bible College, Foreign Missions, Home Missions, or anywhere else—if that money should have gone for the glory of God—then that boat looms. Every time you put it in the water, it looms as something detrimental to your Christian life.

If we save all we can by not buying junk we don't really need, we'll be able to give all we can. I believe we could give a tremendous amount more if we would just follow those simple rules.

Now of course Paul was just as clear or much clearer with this. First Corinthians 16:2 says, "Upon the first day of the week. . . lay by in store."

Planned giving. In other words, when I think about giving to God, I ought to give that as much consideration as I give anything else in my life. I ought to plan what I am going to give to God. I ought to calculate. I ought to pray and say, "Lord, how much can I give you? Not, "How much can I keep from giving?" But, "Lord, how much can I give you?" I ought to give as much thought and attention to that as I give to other things.

Second, it is also to be a personal thing. He also says, "Every one of you." If all our people did what some of our people did, we would have no problem with that truth.

I'm probably speaking to those tonight who do give sacrificially if anyone in our denomination does. I'm speaking to those tonight and probably a multitude who could not or would not come tonight, but Paul said *every one* of you. Young people or middle-aged, every one of us ought to consider and plan what we will give to God. We shouldn't have given haphazardly in the offering tonight—we should have planned what we were going to give, and I hope you did.

Third, as the parable has taught, giving is a proportionate thing. The Bible says to give as God has prospered you. God does not expect everyone to give the same amount. God, of course, does not expect as much from an individual who does not have as much in his possession as another fellow.

I need not say that; you understand that. Paul said, "As God has prospered you." If we as God's people immediately took a portion of the money we

receive and set it aside for God to be used for God, how we could really give to our denominational enterprises!

The church covenant says, "We agree to accept Christian admonition and reproof with meekness."

This is not what I am talking about, but if Free Will Baptists are weak anywhere, it is in receiving admonition and letting people help us as they admonish us.

"We agree to accept Christian admonition and reproof with meekness and to watch over one another with love and endeavoring to keep unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, to be careful of one another's happiness and reputation and seek to strengthen the weak and encourage the afflicted, admonish the erring, and as far as we are able, promote the success of the church and of the Gospel."

The last paragraph is where I meant to go anyway.

"To this end we agree to labor for the promotion of educational and denominational enterprises."

Brethren, I know I shouldn't say this. And I suppose if I understood more of the ins and outs of the financial situation of our denomination and our local churches, I might not say it. I know you must have a system to have everything done decently and in order. But somehow at a past convention when we've debated whether a church should give \$10 a year, I've thought to myself that I'll buy more than that in my next bag of groceries. I cannot understand why anyone would discuss why we should give \$10 a year to anything.

We are stewards of what God has given us, and as it relates to stewardship, we are stewards to the Free Will Baptist denomination and its enterprises. If we don't support them, no one else will. If we don't do it, I believe it's sin. We need to give sacrificially so that the Word of God might be spread at home and abroad.

We are stewards of the saints. I simply mean that God has given me to you to take care of, to see to it that I'm a success. But God has given you to me also. And God has given us a ministry to the saints, a ministry to one another. He told us that we are to do all we can to make sure our brothers and sisters are taken care of, are successful, and have a good life in God, and find the will of God for their lives.

Paul said in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."

We could use more of that in the Free Will Baptist denomination.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul said, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us. Ye also helping together by prayer for us."

Paul told the Corinthians that he and his coworkers were in dire straits. The situation was difficult. They were almost ready to die, almost ready to throw in the towel. But Paul quickly told them they knew that God would come to the rescue. In verse 11, they knew what He was going to do, but it was helped by prayer. Second Thessalonians 3:1, 2 says, "Finally brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men."

We have a stewardship to sinners. Stewardship is war. Getting the job done for God is a battlefield. In Acts 13, you read of a ministry church, a church that knew what stewardship was. Two of the five named served on the foreign mission field. I'm not so sure the ratio should be all that different today. Sometimes we, as missionaries or agencies, are to blame, because we place so much emphasis on a "call." In Matthew 28, we learn that he who has a command doesn't need a call. I think we have lost the missions mentality and a heart for missions.

I don't hear talk about people wanting to go to foreign fields anymore. I don't see people talking about going to the foreign fields anymore. I don't hear people saying, "I want to go to some of these hard places where perhaps people have not heard." I don't hear it being taught, and I don't see young people getting involved in this thing of "God, send me out to the world."

We're organizing and learning how to work computers and learning how to do this and how to do that, and if that's what God wants you to do, then, bless God, you ought to do that.

But somebody's missing the boat. And young people, some of you here ought to come out tonight and say, "Dear God, I want to dedicate my life

to go to this world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Wherever You say go, I'll go. Here am I, send me. God, You pick the place. God, You pick the time. But Lord, I want You to know, I want my denomination to know, dear God, here am I, send me."

I hope you'll come tonight. A missionary to the sinners. Stewards, that is, of sinners.

I don't want to conclude, but I've got to. Now brothers, let me tell you something, if you think there's not a difference living in Japan and living in the United States of America or living on the border of Uruguay and Brazil and living here in this country, you've got another thought coming. And my boss doesn't mind me saying that. While I'm saying that, I'll say a few other things. There's a difference in living up where James O'Dell is and some of these other fellows. You don't think there's a difference, bless your heart, you try it one time. I think you know there's a difference, and that's why you haven't tried it yet.

But we have a stewardship not only to Texas and North Carolina and Tennessee and Oklahoma and California—we have a stewardship to those states in our own country where we have not a single one—Free Will Baptist witness. How I love and appreciate Paul Thompson and his fine wife. Paul is not a young man, but he left his church in Ohio last week on his way to Phoenix, Arizona. Arizona, like many of our other states, is weak as far as Free Will Baptist witness is concerned (and any other kind of witness, unless it's Jehovah's Witness). As Paul told me, it's been on my heart a long time. And do you know why some of the rest of you don't go? It hasn't been on your heart. In fact, if it's on our heart and what really grips us by the Holy Spirit of God, that's what we'll do if we really mean business with God.

Now quickly, folks, it's all worth it, the stewardship to the saints. You see what God has really done. I know all the world won't come to Jesus. I know the Bible doesn't teach that. I know the Bible teaches that many, many people will go down the pathway to destruction. That does not alleviate my responsibility or eliminate from my life the need to say to God, "Lord, you know who will and who won't, but I'm still called to go to all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

Let God take care of the rest.

1982 – Nate Ange

To Do His Will

Text: Hebrews 13:20, 21

I prayed for months about this message and the theme of “Triumph in Christ.” I believe there are no greater verses in all the Bible that say it as clearly as these two verses. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

I want you to notice one phrase in verse 21. That phrase, four simple words, if practiced in our lives will mean we can stand before God having lived a life that is well pleasing in His sight.

Those four words are “to do his will.”

That’s the subject which I preach tonight, and I pray the Holy Spirit will minister to your hearts.

Let’s bow our heads together in prayer. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I invite you to pray and ask the Holy Spirit right now to speak to your heart in this service. The crowd I preach to on this night, the crowd I preach to are those who are standing right now. I hope that God will speak to every heart.

Prayer

Now, Lord, we come to you this hour, and we are totally dependent upon You; for all power comes from Thee. And I pray, Lord, right now that You might fill us with the Holy Spirit of God. Give us a special unction of thy precious Holy Spirit. Oh, God, You know it is our desire to be used of God. I pray, Lord, in these next few moments that You might meet with us and speak to our hearts. God, I pray that we will determine all over again tonight to do Your will. Lord, that we will stand regardless of the obstacles, regardless of the fight, regardless of the sin, regardless of the worldliness. Oh, God, help us tonight to have that determination kindled deep in our

soul to do your will. Oh, Holy Spirit, minister to every heart both young and old in this building tonight. For we will give Jesus the honor and glory; for it's in His name we pray, Amen.

I speak to you on the simple subject of doing the will of God tonight because, first of all, there is a will of God for everyone in this building. From the back row to the front, from the side corridors all the way around this building, God has a perfect will for every individual here. I read in Acts 12:36 that David fell asleep. The Bible says and writes an epitaph on his tombstone.

The Scripture said, "He served his generation by the will of God." In other words, when he had finished his life, God wrote over David's life and said he served his generation by God's will.

I believe there is a will of God for everyone, especially tonight these precious young people. Not only does God have a perfect will for every individual, but every individual can do the will of God. The will of God can be proven and can be done by every individual.

We read in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

We read of Paul as he came down the home-stretch of life. When writing to young Timothy, he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day. And not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing."

The Apostle Paul said he had finished the course of God's will for his life. And I believe everyone in this building can live in the will of God so when we come down to the end of life, we can say, "I've done the will of God."

I preach now on the will of God because there is a will for every individual in the building. Not only because we can do the will of God, but third, if we fail to do the will of God, our lives will be one of drifting. Our lives will be one of waste. And our lives will eventually be one of wreck and ruin.

Listen, to step out of the will of God is dangerous. I share with you a simple poem that I ran across the other day:

Live for Something

Live for something, have a purpose,
And that purpose keep in view,
Drifting like a helpless vessel,
You can never to life be true.
Half the wrecks that strew life's oceans,
If some star had been their guide,
Might have still been sailing safely,
But they drifted with the tide.

I remember, as a young man—just a boy in Royal Oak church—I heard a little orphanage choir come to sing one Sunday night. I remember that group of boys from the orphan home sang in the service. I don't remember a lot about them, but I remember the song they sang. My heart burned inside of me as they sang, "Oh, Lord, use me. And please, Lord, don't refuse me. For surely there's a work that I can do. And even though it's humble, help my will to crumble. Though the cost be great, I'll work for you."

God knows that's my desire tonight, and I believe God can use every individual. But if we miss the will of God, our lives will be one of drifting with the current of this world, eventually wasting our lives and wrecking our lives.

I was in revival not long ago in the church where I had been twice before. I met a beautiful young lady who had given her heart to Jesus and answered the call of God to serve Him. She had gone to Bible college. She had planned to really give her life to God. Then, on one occasion, on Christmas break, she came home. She asked her pastor, "Preacher, one of my old boyfriends wants to take me out. Should I go out with him?"

The pastor said, "Oh, honey, you don't need to. You know what that means. That's your old life. You don't need to go out with him."

She said, "It's just a friendship; that's all. I just want to go and reacquaint myself."

He pleaded with her not to go.

She went on that date, and when it came time to go back to Bible college, she did not go. The pastor was brokenhearted and couldn't understand.

Not only did she not go to Bible college, she would not come to church. Two or three months went by in that young lady's life. The revival meeting came around, and the pastor and I went to her home and pleaded with her to come to the revival. She refused to come; she would not hear it.

After the girl had gone to her room, her mother began to weep and sob. She said, "Pastor, I can't hold it any longer." She told a sordid story about that beautiful young lady who had all the prospects of serving God. She told how that young lady had ruined and wrecked her life on that date. She sought out an abortion on her own, had her young baby aborted.

The tragedy of a ruined and wasted life! The stories I could stand here and tell you tonight, but I don't need to tell you to know that the only way to miss a wasted life is to stay in the will of God.

Anything else leads to a wrecked life and a ruined life. We are held accountable to God for keeping and doing His will. You say, "Preacher, can you do the will of God? Can you know that you are doing the will of God?"

Yes, I believe everyone in this building can know he is in the will of God. And I believe we can do the will of God. I find several places in the Word of God that God reveals His will to His people. Not only in generalities but in specifics. God reveals His will.

I want you to notice in Isaiah tonight. How does God speak to me? How do I know that God is leading me in a certain direction? Can I know it deep in my soul? Can I know the will of God for my life? In Isaiah 30:21, we read, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left." Here God gives us a promise that He will speak a word in our ears which way to go, and we can hear the voice of the Holy Spirit saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

I believe the Holy Spirit of God reveals the will of God to His children. I believe He'll make it clear. I believe He'll leave no questions in our mind. I remember reading in the book of Acts concerning Philip preaching a great revival campaign. Then the Scripture says, "The angel of the Lord told Phillip to go to the desert."

He left his revival meeting, but once he was in the desert, it says in Acts 8:29, "The Spirit of the Lord said unto Philip, Join thyself to this chariot."

The Spirit of God made the will of God clear, even the specifics. The

Spirit of God spoke, and Phillip obeyed. I think the Ethiopian eunuch was saved as a result of the Spirit's leading.

I think of Peter when, prejudiced as he was against the Gentiles, he had a vision. You might call it a nightmare because in that dream, God commanded him to eat food he didn't like. God told Peter to eat it. Peter didn't want to eat it because it was unclean. After God had taught Peter a lesson there on the housetop, it says, "The Spirit of the Lord said, There are three men at the door. Go down there to them, for they seek thee." God gave Peter explicit instruction of His will through the person of the Holy Spirit.

I believe the Holy Spirit of God reveals His will to us. Too many times, however, when the Spirit of God speaks to our hearts and speaks to our lives, we are so caught up in the rat race world of our society that we do not hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit of God.

Notice the truth in this simple poem:

Among the things that this day brings will come to you a call,
The which unless you're listening, you may not hear at all.
Lest it be very soft and low, what e'er you do, where e'er you go,
Be listening,
When God shall come and say to you,
'Here is the thing that you must do,'
Be listening.

So many times when the Holy Spirit is trying to speak to our hearts, we do not hear Him speak. He speaks in a still, quiet voice.

Not only does God reveal His will through the Holy Spirit, God reveals His will through prayer. I believe God will reveal His will to any individual in this room who wants to know the will of God. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let Him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

I believe if we are seeking to know the will of God, that if we get on our knees before God and we pray, we can know the will of God. God will give us leadership on our knees. The problem is, so many times, we just don't pray like we ought to. So many times when we're talking to others, and when we're sharing our hearts with others, we could be in the prayer closet with God getting direction for our lives.

Oh, yes, God reveals His will through prayer. I think of Genesis 24. Abraham's servant was given a difficult task. He had to go find a wife for another man. He was sent to find a wife for Isaac, a pretty difficult task.

Next to your salvation experience, young people, there is no greater responsibility to know the will of God than in whom you marry and the person with whom you will spend the rest of your life. You ought to spend more time praying about that than you do fretting and worrying about the next stage.

The servant prayed about who he should find for Isaac's wife. I think he was praying for a couple reasons. Number one, he wanted to please his master. Number two, he wanted to get the right woman because he had to face his master Isaac when he returned home.

Well, he was praying. And Genesis 24:14 says that he got down on his knees. He said, "Now, Lord, you've sent me on this mission, and I ask Thee that when I ask the maiden at the well to give me water that she will say, 'Can I give your camels water also?' And if you want me to take the woman back, you have her ask to water my camels, and then I'll know that's the will of God. I won't have any doubts about it. I won't have any questions about it. I'll know that's God's will."

His prayer was answered. I believe through prayer, we can *know* the will of God. I believe we can have direct leading.

Not only can we know the will of God through the Holy Spirit, and through prayer, but we can know it through peace. Isaiah 26:3 tells us, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because He trusteth in thee."

It says God will keep His children in *perfect peace*. Now there are two kinds of peace. If you're saved, you have peace with God. But there's also the peace of God, and every individual can have the peace of God. Every one of us can know what it is to have quietness upon our soul when we pillow our head at night knowing we have done the will of God for that day.

Colossians 3:15, a familiar passage of Scripture, says, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts by the which you are called in one body and be ye thankful."

The world *rule* is the word "referee." Let the peace of God *referee* in your heart. That is, God will call you "out of bounds" in your heart when you

begin to go against His will. The peace of God will evaporate, and God will withdraw His sweet presence from your life. A referee will be standing there with a whistle to blow to say, "You've stepped out of the will of God."

I tell you it's precious to have the peace of God within your heart, knowing you're in the will of God. That's precious beyond measure.

Not only does God reveal His will through the Holy Spirit, through prayer, and through peace, but God reveals His will through others. On the Damascus Road, when stricken with blindness, Paul converted in his soul, seeking help, and God sent Ananias to the Apostle Paul.

Ananias said, "God has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). In that passage of Scripture, we see how God uses other individuals in our lives to direct us in His will. I see in the lives of every individual here that God has planted a very important person in your life to direct you in the will of God. That is the God-anointed preacher that preaches to you week after week and ministers to you.

God uses His preachers to communicate His will. God speaks through preachers, and preachers are the mouthpiece of God. When we sit in a service and daydream on Sunday morning or make our plans for next week during a preaching service, we're sinning against a holy God. We may miss the will of God when the man of God preaches because God speaks through His preachers.

Young people, don't ever yawn your way through a Sunday night service or a Wednesday night prayer meeting, for it may be in that service that God is trying to communicate His will to your life. It would be a tragedy to miss the will of God through the voice of the preacher. But not only that, God uses others. Many a person in this building has been influenced by a godly mother, a godly father, a godly grandmother who prayed for you. I have no doubt I stand where I stand tonight—not only because of a precious mother and father but also because of a grandmother who is now with Jesus who prayed every night, "God, call my grandson to preach."

I'm thinking of a young man. God moved in his life. He had set out on a course of sin and rebellion against God. He was about to go off into sin beyond return. One night, laying awake on his bed, he could hear the sobs of his father. Just past a thin-boarded wall on the other side was his father on his face praying in the middle of the night, "God save my boy. God save my boy. Don't let my boy go to Hell. Don't let him wreck his life."

And there, laying on his bed with his rock posters around the room trying to blot out the voice of God, God spoke to that young man through the prayers of a godly father. He cried out from his bed that night and said, "God help me!"

His father came, and he was saved that night and is now preaching the Word of God. God speaks through others in our lives. But let's be honest, folks, when God speaks to us, many times we are not listening. Many times when God speaks through the peace of God, we are not listening. Many times when God would reveal His will through prayer, we don't pray. Many times when God sends others our way, we don't listen.

So God has another way to reveal His will to us. I'm convinced tonight that God uses circumstances to reveal His will to us. Sometimes God has to take the stick of correction, the rod, to get our attention, to show us His will for our lives. God uses circumstances. Over and over again in the Word of God, God used circumstances to bring men, to show them His will. Jonah was brought to know the will of God through circumstances. God uses circumstances to direct our paths in the right direction.

Revelation 3:7 says, "Unto the church of Philadelphia write. He that is holy and He that is true and He that hath the key of David and He that openeth and no man shutteth and shutteth and no man openeth."

I believe if you're seeking to do the will of God, and you're seeking to the will of God with all your heart, God will open and close the doors. But if there is any reservation in your heart concerning the will of God, then God, many times, will let us walk through a door that is not His will simply because we are not wholly surrendered. Sometimes, our question is, "Lord, what is your will, so I can decide whether I want to do it or not?"

You'll never know the will of God asking that question. Never! God will not reveal His will to those who are hesitant about doing it.

God often uses circumstances to direct us in the course of His will. A precious young lady in our church is now married to a preacher, but it was not so three years ago. She came from a Catholic family who never darkened the door of a Catholic mass, much less a Bible-preaching church. Her neighbors came to our church and invited them to church time and time again, pleading with them to come. Two young men on teenage soul winning were getting ready to leave the parking lot and go to the house and witness to those teenagers in that home.

On that same night, the telephone rang at the church. Before the young men could leave the parking lot of the church, we stopped the car because it was too late.

The 16-year-old boy in that home got up from the supper table as he had a thousand times before, walked down the corridor to his bedroom, and shut the door. A few seconds later, they heard an awful blast. The mother jumped up from the table and ran down the hall, swung open the door, and found her 16-year-old son lying in a pool of blood in the floor. He had gone out into eternity without Christ.

One week to the day of his death, that entire family—mother, father, teenage daughter, and ten-year-old sister got down on their knees around the kitchen table in that home, gave their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, and were gloriously saved.

They would not listen to the voice of God through the preacher. They would not listen to the voice of God through the Holy Spirit. So God used circumstances to get their attention. And today they are faithful to God. God will get our attention through circumstances. He will direct us in His will.

Now, I want to say tonight that the will of God is already revealed in the Word of God. Anything that contradicts His Book is against God's will. We can stand against it and know it's against God's will. The will of God is known through the Word of God. Many things are already laid out clearly in the Word of God by which every one of us can know the will of God. It is useless to say, "God, show me Your will" if you're not already doing what God has revealed to you to be His will.

The first thing I see clearly in the Word of God is found in 2 Peter 3:9. You are familiar with the verse: "The Lord is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

It is the will of God that every individual be—first of all—saved. It is God's will for you to be saved. You say, "Well, preacher, I'm not too sure. I've been going to church 15 years, and God hasn't dealt with me in five years. And I'm really wondering."

I'm telling you tonight, it's God's will for you to be saved. God wants you to be saved! I know you can go through the motions. I know you can quote Scripture. I know you can sing beautifully in a choir and still not be genuinely saved. It is the will of God that every young person and every mom and dad and every Christian worker have a know-so salvation and

believe in your heart and know in your heart that you're saved. Have no doubt about it. There are too many *head* commitments to this Book and to Jesus today and not enough *heart* commitments. Apart from a heart commitment, there is no conversion. A person is not saved until they make a heart commitment to Jesus Christ.

It's not enough to believe about Jesus; you must believe in Him. It's not enough to know about Jesus; you must know Him. Ponder that question tonight: Do you really know Jesus? It is the will of God that you be saved.

During a revival in Panama City, Florida, a young people's choir from an Independent Baptist church came to the Free Will Baptist church to sing. It was a fine looking group of young people. They sang beautifully and struck every note correctly. When the invitation to receive Christ was given, a beautiful 16-year-old girl made her way from the second row. With tears streaming down her face, she parted the way and got to the altar. She stayed on the altar alone some time and then she stood up and said, "I've been in this choir four years. I've been on youth visitation. I've traveled with this choir everywhere we've gone, but I'm sorry tonight to tell you I've been a put-on. Until tonight, I've never really been saved." She continued, "I want you to know that tonight I got saved."

It is God's will that every person be saved.

It is also God's will clearly in the Word of God that every person be separated. There is no doubt about it, not a question about it in the Word of God. First Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God even your sanctification that ye should abstain from fornication." Verse seven goes on to say, "For God hath not called us to uncleanness but unto holiness."

It is the will of God that every person live a clean, dedicated, separated life for Jesus. God's will for your life is to be separated from the world and dedicated to God. Listen to Colossians 1:18, "That in all things he might have the preeminence." The reason for that verse in the Scriptures is because a lot of folks want to put Jesus in a prominent spot, but they don't want Him in the preeminent spot. They want Him in an important place in their life, but they don't want Him in the one and only place in their life.

The first area we need to separate ourselves to is in our priorities. Revelation 2:4 says, "I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love." You say, "When I first got saved, I really loved Jesus, but I don't love Him like I used to." That's not what the passage means. It may mean

that partially, but the passage means this. Jesus said, "I have somewhat against you because I am no longer in first place in your life. You've left Me as your first love. You've relegated Me to second or third or fourth place." It's possible that in this service tonight are some Christians who are not living separated lives.

It's not a sin to involve yourself in sports, but it is a sin if Jesus comes in second place. It is not a sin to have a job, but it is a sin if Jesus is put in second or third place. If He is not in the preeminent spot in your life, everything that comes between you and Jesus Christ can become a sin. Thus, anything in our lives that is good can become sin if Jesus is not first, if He is not in the preeminent spot.

Popularity is driving young people today to all sorts of antics and sins. There is nothing sinful about money, but if money-making comes between you and God, it is sin. There is nothing wrong with being accepted, but if it comes between you and Jesus, it is sin. Many idols in our lives need to be put out. The Bible says in Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The key is the last two words, "before me." Anything that comes before Jesus in your life is an idol. It could be a boyfriend. It could be a girlfriend before God. It might be a house that comes between you and Jesus—anything that becomes an idol.

We must be separated in dealing with the idols in our lives. We must also be separated in the particular evils in our lives. God spoke to Jacob and said, "Put away the strange gods from among you."

Second, He said, "Be clean." That word there is the word *pure*. It is talking about purity of the heart. There is no sense in you praying about the will of God if there is sin in your heart. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." God made you a promise, and the will of God is hidden to those who harbor sins in their lives.

Let's talk about a few for a moment. The sins of the tongue. You stand a sentinel at the door of your mouth every day to guard you from living a life of particular sins: gossip, profanity, lying, murmuring, and complaining. These sins brought judgment down upon the children of Israel. Are they not sickening in the sight of God? Sins of the tongue, particular sins.

Not only that, but sins of the eyes, looking upon that which God in His Word has forbidden a Christian to look upon. Some things in the Word of God are taboo for a Christian to look at. Ninety-nine percent of what's

coming over the television air waves today is filth and garbage and has no place in the thoughts and minds of a believer if he wants to do the will of God. It entertains our minds in the things of this world. It fashions us according to the thinking of this world rather than that of the world to come. We must not look on that which is forbidden.

Not only that but the sins of the ears. Listening to things God has forbidden a Christian to listen to. We are to be separate in that which we listen to. We are supposed to be different and distinct from the world in the kind of music we listen to. The airwaves of America today are filled with the most perverted music that has ever been perpetrated on the human race. There is filthy, vile, vulgar music today. Rock 'n roll culture—the Rock 'n Devil culture, as I call it—is filthy and vile. Many a young person is saying, “Oh, preacher, I want to do the will of God” while they are filling their mind with the music of the world.

Young person, I’m going to tell you tonight, you will not find God’s will down that road. You’ll miss it. The tragedy is that some moms and dads are screaming, “Son, turn that loud noise off. I can’t stand it...so I can listen to Dolly Parton.” They know the music and words of those songs are sorry, filthy, and vile.

What about the sins of the heart. “Oh, Preacher, let’s not get in that area because nobody knows what goes on in my heart.” I realize we are talking to some tonight that live clean lives. We are talking to some of the finest people. We try to live separated, clean lives, but what about our hearts tonight? God sees the heart. He can see the dark recesses of our heart when nobody else sees.

To do the will of God, we must be separated from particular sins in our hearts. Hatred has no place in the heart of a Christian. Jealousy has no place in the heart of God’s people. The love of money, bitterness, gnawing like a cancer at the heart of so many of God’s people must be put aside along with lust and rebellion. These sins of the heart must be put out. We must deal with the particular sins in our lives.

We must be separated not only in our priorities according to the Word of God, not only in our particular sins, but also in our personal testimony. The Bible says in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

It is the will of God for every Christian to be separated and clean in your

personal testimony to a godless and sinful world. The unsaved world will be watching us, and our personal testimony ought to be above shame, above reproach. We ought to live in such a way as to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ.

The same verse that says God looks upon the heart also says that man "looketh on the outward appearance." If we are going to be a witness to a lost and dying world, we must give to them the light of the world in our personal testimony which includes our dress, our public demeanor, the places we go, and the people we hang around. We are to be separated people, a peculiar people in the areas of our personal testimony.

It's not only God's will for you to be saved and to be separated, but it's God's will for every person that's saved to be Spirit-filled. "Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

What is the will of the Lord, Paul? "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Can every person in this building live a Spirit-filled life? If you are saved, and you are separated, then you can be Spirit-filled. What does it mean to be Spirit-filled? First, the Holy Spirit occupies the body of every Christian. Second, He owns your body. "What, know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God and ye are not your own?" He occupies you; He owns you. Third, He wants to operate you. You allow the Holy Spirit to operate your life.

Paul mentions a drunk man in this verse of Scripture. Why did God put the drunk man in the same verse as the Spirit-filled man? Because the drunk man is under the influence of a "higher power." Alcohol has infiltrated his bloodstream to the point where he staggers and falls and can't talk plain. He can't see right. He is under the control of alcohol.

But the Apostle Paul says, "Don't be under the control of alcohol; be under the control of the Holy Spirit." Submit yourself to the Holy Spirit, and every day say, "Oh, blessed Holy Spirit, fill me. Oh, Holy Spirit, use these eyes today. Use these hands today. Use these feet today. Oh, Holy Spirit, control me." You can live a Spirit-filled life.

That verse says, "Be not drunk with wine." The same God that gave us a command not to be drunk with wine, gave us another command in that verse without even a period. He said, "But be filled with the Spirit." If it's a sin to get drunk, it is a sin for a Christian not to be filled with the Holy

Spirit of God.

Not only that, but it's God's will that every Christian be a soul winner. God left you here for the one purpose of propagating the Gospel to the ends of this world. It is the will of God that every Christian be a soul winner.

Daniel 12:3 says, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament. They that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

One day Jesus went walking down by the seashore and there were some men out there fishing. Jesus called out to those men and said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

They said, "Oh, but Lord, you don't understand, we are already fisherman."

He replied, "No, from henceforth, ye shall catch men" (Luke 5:10). Jesus said, "Follow me, and ye shall catch men." He didn't say, "You might." He didn't say, "Maybe." The same word used there that says you shall be saved says you shall catch men. I believe every person under the Spirit's leading and control in this building can be a soul winner for Jesus and can catch men from the fires of Hell whether they be young or old. Every young person can give his life to the greatest task on the face of the earth and that is winning souls for Jesus Christ. Whether it is here on American soil or in a foreign land somewhere, it is God's will for you to be a soul winner!

L. R. Scarborough said, "To refuse to witness the saving Gospel to the lost world day by day is nothing short of treason, spiritual rebellion, and inexcusable disobedience to His holy command." R. A. Torrey said, "I would like to ask you what right any man has to call himself a follower of Jesus Christ if he is not a soul winner. There is absolutely no such thing as following Christ unless you can make the purpose of Christ's life the purpose of your life."

Every one of us ought to give ourselves to the task of soul winning. Be a soul winner now, and God will lead you in His will. There are hungry souls, and it is our business to be winning souls.

According to the Scriptures, it is God's will for every Christian to be totally surrendered. Romans 12:1, 2 says, "I beseech ye, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God that ye may present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your

mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

What is God’s will? To present your body a living sacrifice, totally dedicated to do the will of God. Moses set out to do the will of God. In an attempt to deliver God’s people, he killed an Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Moses was dedicated to do the will of God, but he was not dedicated to the God of that will.

It is very possible for you to be dedicated to do God’s will and not be dedicated first to God—totally sold out and surrendered to do what God wants you to do. God’s will for us may not be visions of grandeur, but God’s will for your life and mine may be martyrdom. Stephen preached his first recorded sermon, and after his first sermon, he was killed. Stephen had surrendered to be anything the Lord wanted Him to be. And Stephen, as a young man, died preaching his first sermon.

Are you surrendered to be a nothing? The secret to doing the will of God is losing ourselves. “Whosoever saveth his life shall lose it, but whosoever loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). God wants us to be totally surrendered tonight.

God will not reveal the other specifics of His will until, first, we are doing what He said in His Word for us to do.

In Calcutta, India, there is a beautiful church with a beautiful pipe organ and a beautiful auditorium.

A few scattered people sit in the pews. But the beautiful thing about that building is not the organ or the pews but a large bronze plaque engraved on the wall. On that plaque are eight names of young men who left England and Scotland as teenagers to go do the will of God. Before their 20th birthdays, they left to build a church for Jesus in a land of Hinduism, leprosy, and malaria. The names inscribed on the plaque are the men who founded the church. Five of them died before they were 25 years old. Two died before they reached 30.

That moved my heart because here were some men who said, “God I will do your will because I am surrendered to be a nothing.” Is that type of surrender evident in your life?

Finally, it is God’s will for everyone in the building to be spiritually sighted. “Set your affections on things above, not on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

It is God's will for you to see things that you don't see with these eyes. Young people, you will never do the will of God until you see some things with your spiritual eyes. Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields."

The first thing we ought to see are the fields of a lost and dying world. Until we see that with our spiritual eyes, we will never do the will of God. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest."

Hebrews 11:10 says Abraham looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker was God. Abraham saw a city. "Abraham, why are you leaving home? Why are you leaving your family? Why are you separating yourself from your hometown?"

If we could talk to Abraham today, I think he would say, "Because I see a city God is building."

They said, "You are crazy, Abraham"

He said, "No, I see a city."

He saw a city whose builder and maker was God. In Titus 2:13, Paul wrote, "Looking unto that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

He saw Jesus coming back, and this hope kept him going. You can live with an ever-consciousness that Jesus may come at any moment. Jesus is coming. You are going to see Him one day. He will stretch out His nail-pierced hands before you, and then it will be known whether you have done that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

In Revelation 21, we read that John saw a new Heaven and a new earth. Stephen, while being stoned, "looked steadfastly up into Heaven." Can you see that young preacher as they gnashed upon him with their teeth and stoned him to death? The Scripture declares that as he looked up steadfastly into Heaven, he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. He saw Heaven open, and he saw Jesus.

Nothing will motivate you to do the will of God if you can not see Jesus tonight. The only way we can triumph over sin and triumph over worldliness and triumph over compromise and triumph over the flesh and the devil is to see Jesus with spiritual eyes. Stephen saw Jesus—not sitting down but standing up with hand extended to Stephen. While the blood ran down his

back and with his dying breaths, this young man said, "I've done the will of God. Jesus is standing up to greet me." He left this earth with triumph in his soul.

So often we've sung, "Jesus paid it all."

What's the next phrase? "All to him I owe."

Yes, Jesus did pay it all. But because He paid it all, I now owe Him everything.

We sing, "My Jesus, I love thee. I know Thou art mine."

But what does the next line say? "For Thee all the follies of sin I resign."

We sing, "The vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to Thy blood."

We sing, "Love so amazing, so divine."

But what does the next line say? "Demands my soul, my life, my all."

There is no way to find the will of God when you live contrary to this Book. This is the revealed will of God to do His will.

"God, I want to do your will."

1982 – Don Pegram

The God-Breathed Book

Text: 2 Timothy 3:16

Introduction

People who would never dream of taking God's name in vain think nothing of questioning the authority of the Bible, and yet this is the one thing that is more important to God than even His name.

For 26 years, I have read, loved, studied, and preached this precious Book, and it grows sweeter and dearer to me with every passing day.

In a moving tribute to the Bible, Billy Sunday takes a word picture journey through the Scriptures. He described it this way.

"I entered through the portico of Genesis and walked down through the Old Testament art gallery where the pictures of Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Isaiah, David, and Solomon hung on the walls.

"I passed into the music room of the Psalms, and every reed of God's great organ responded to the tuneful harp of David.

"I entered the chamber of Ecclesiastes where the voice of the preacher was heard, and into the conservatory of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley's spices filled and perfumed my life.

"I entered the business office of the Proverbs, then into the observation room of the prophets where I saw telescopes of various sizes, some pointing to far-off events; but all concentrated unto the bright Star which was to rise above the moonlit hills of Judea for our salvation.

"I entered the audience room of the King of kings and passed into the correspondence rooms where sat Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and James penning their epistles.

"I stepped then into the throne room of Revelation and caught a vision of the King sitting on His throne in all His glory, and I cried:

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angel's prostrate fall;

Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.”

I believe with all the conviction of my soul that I hold in my hand tonight the very Word of God. Though God used human authors with their own personalities, styles, backgrounds, the words they wrote were taught not by human wisdom, but by the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration

Inspiration is the moving of the Holy Spirit upon the Bible writers in such a way that they were directed in the very thoughts and words they employed, and were therefore kept free from all error. The Word of God was given over a period of 1,600 years by about 40 human authors and is without contradiction or error. It is fully and completely inspired even to the very words (plenary-verbal). Over 2,000 times we find, “Thus saith the Lord” or “The Word of the Lord came to me.”

Second Timothy 3:16 says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

God used men from every walk of life:

- Moses was a political leader.
- Peter was a fisherman.
- Amos was a herdsman.
- Daniel was a prime minister.
- Paul was a rabbi.
- Matthew was an IRS representative.
- Luke was a physician.
- Nehemiah was a cup bearer.
- Solomon was a king.

They wrote in different places: Dungeons, hillsides, tents, the Temple, and synagogues. They wrote in Africa, Asia, and Europe, but when it was all brought together there was absolute harmony from beginning to end. Man want to believe what he likes and ignore the rest. But we either have a whole Bible or a Bible full of holes.

The skeptic asks, “How do we know all these writers reported correctly?”

They may have forgotten some things.”

That’s true, but we are not dependent on their recollection, but on the Holy Spirit’s and He never forgets (2 Peter 1:21).

Jesus testified to the inspiration of the Scriptures in Matthew 5:18. The jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. A tittle is a minute ornament over a Hebrew consonant—less than the crossing on a “t” (Psalm 119:73, 169).

“But fixed for everlasting years,
Unmoved amid the wreck of spheres,
Thy Word shall shine in cloudless day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away.”

Jesus testified to the divine authority of the Old Testament in Luke 24:27, 44. I’m preaching from the same Old Testament Jesus preached from. Not one book has been added, and none have been taken out. It was completed during the lifetime of Ezra.

This is the book quoted by Jesus, the apostles, and the early church.

Jesus endorsed the New Testament in John 14:26. “The Holy Spirit will bring all things to your remembrance.”

The New Testament books were either written by the apostles or one with a close relationship to an apostle and were universally accepted by the Church.

Since the end of the fourth century, there has never been any question concerning the 27 New Testament books except on the part of heretics and unbelievers in general. “Forever, oh Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven.”

Uniqueness

The uniqueness of the Bible testifies to its divine inspiration.

It is unique in its circulation. The first book printed on movable type was the Bible (around 1450 A.D.). According to *Cambridge History*, no book in history even approaches the circulation of the Bible. In a recent year, 218,429,595 Bibles and portions of Bibles were distributed by 55 Bible societies, not counting all the publishing houses.

It is unique in its influence. (No other book has influenced the world for

good like the Bible.) The greatest art, literature, music, and all the laws of civilized countries were influenced by the Bible. The lives of great men were changed by the Bible. Consider George Mueller's faith. He read the Bible through more than 100 times (65 on his knees). He said it was fresher each time. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

All the great social reforms were influenced by the Bible. Freedom of women, anti-slavery, etc.

You cannot find a great truth on moral and spiritual matters in the history of literature by any author that you cannot find reference to in the Word of God. There are jewels of thought in the writings of skeptics and agnostics, but they are stolen from the pages of the very book they ridicule.

"We search the world for truth;
We call the good, the pure, and the beautiful.
From craven stone and written scroll,
From all old flower fields of the soul;
And weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest,
To find that all the sages said,
Is in the Book our mothers read."
—John Greenleaf Whittier

It is unique in its indestructibility. For 19 centuries every weapon of destruction that human science, philosophy, wit, reasoning, or brutality could bring to bear has been leveled against the Bible.

Until 1450 A.D., it had to be copied by hand. If it were man's book, it would have been annihilated and forgotten hundreds of years ago. (Many great works have been lost through time and were it not for them being quoted, we would know nothing of them.)

There are over 14,000 manuscripts of the Bible still in existence, many dating to the first, second, and third centuries. (Closest to that in history is the *Illiad* by Homer with only 643 known manuscripts. Five percent of the texts of the *Illiad* are corrupt). The Bible has only one-twelfth of one percent

where there are any questions of difference in a word in all 14,000 biblical manuscripts.

Rome issued edicts banning the Bible, making it a capital crime to have even a portion of it in your possession. In A.D. 303, Diocletian ordered every Bible burned and even built a monument to mark the date Christianity was wiped out.

Only 25 years later, the next emperor ordered Eusebious to have 50 perfect copies of the Bible printed at the expense of the government, and Christians by the thousands came out of the catacombs and spread the Word over all the Roman Empire.

Before his death in 1728, Voltaire said that within 100 years of his death, Christianity would be extinct. He became extinct, but 50 years later, the Geneva Bible Society bought his house and used his presses to print thousands of Bibles.

Be careful how you regard portions of the Scripture to be spurious. (Parts that were so regarded have been found to be reliable by new archeological discoveries.) Every time they stick a shovel in the ground in Palestine, a liberal dies.

I'm not going to explain away passages I don't understand by saying, "It was not in the original text." I don't know anyone who has seen an original text. Consider Mark 16:9-20.

I'm going to believe Mark 16:16-19. I'm not going to play with snakes, but if I get bit reaching for my Bible in a brush arbor revival, I'm going to claim it. If some frustrated deacon laces my coffee with arsenic, I'm going to claim verse 18. I would rather go to Heaven in childish faith and find that I was wrong than discredit the Book of God and face it at the judgment bar.

The Hammer and the Anvil

Last eve I passed a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
When looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers worn with beating years of time.

How many anvils have you had, said I
To wear and batter all these hammers so?
Just one, said he, then said with twinkling eye,
The anvil wears the hammers out you know.

And so, I thought, the anvil of God's word
For ages skeptics blows have beat upon;
Yet though the noise of falling blows were heard,
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone!
—John Clifford

The Holy Spirit testifies to Scripture. My first point had to do with the testimony of the Lord Jesus. I'll end with the testimony of the Third Person. The Holy Spirit sets His seal in the soul of every true believer as to the divine inspiration of Scripture.

I don't have to argue with someone to prove to me the Bible is the Word of God. "My sheep know my voice." I know the voice that speaks to me from the pages of this Book is the voice of my Father. I don't have to read dusty lectures in systematic theology to believe the Book.

Sometimes, some pious elderly saint will tell you she knows the Bible is God's Word. If you ask for a reason, she has none. Is that mere superstition? No, she's just one of God's sheep, and she can distinguish the voice of her Shepherd from every other voice.

Not only does the Holy Spirit identify the Bible as God's Word, but He enables you to understand it. It is so simple a child with a spiritual heart can understand it, and so profound a genius can never fathom its depths.

The answer is found in John 7:17. The problem is not the head, it is the heart.

Conclusion

More than anything else, we need a return to the simple, old time, red-hot preaching of the Word of God. No film series, quiet vesper service, or

dialogue program will ever take the place of preaching. Every denomination, every church was built upon it in its infancy. It always has, and always will have infinite power. No higher critic ever had a revival. No skeptic ever built a church. The reason they steal churches, schools, and denominations is that it's the only way they can get them. I never saw a dog house a Liberal could build.

A revival of love for and preaching of this Book will set our churches and preachers on fire, but if we don't do it, God will raise up someone who will. He has always had a voice, and I'm not pessimistic. I'm optimistic because I have the promise of God, the power of God, and the past performance of God backing His Word. Let Hell boil over, let the enemies of the Bible mock, God is still on the throne, and He still backs the Word!

At a freethinkers' convention, Robert Ingersoll argued that progress was on the side of agnosticism, and Christianity was being left behind: "The churches are dying out all over the land; they are struck with death."

McCabe read a report of this speech in a newspaper as he was riding on a train as part of his busy schedule raising support for the rapid growth of the Methodist church. At the next station, McCabe sent Ingersoll a telegram at the free thinkers' convention saying: "All hail the power of Jesus' name. We are building two Methodist churches every day in the year."

On his own lecture circuit, McCabe told about the telegram, and the churches rejoiced. Reverend Alfred J. Hough worked the story up into a hymn which, against all odds, became an overnight sensation with the Methodists and Baptists:

The infidels, a motley band, in council met and said:

"The Churches die all through the land, the last will soon be dead."

When suddenly a message came, it filled them with dismay:

"All hail the power of Jesus' name! We're building two a day.

We're building two a day, dear Bob, we're building two a day.

All hail the power of Jesus' name! We're building two a day."

1982 – Richard Kennedy

Knocked Down, But Not Knocked Out

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Paul lets us in on a secret of survival in ministry. The Christian life (and that includes pastors) will not be without a battle! He presents four powerful statements that are present passive participles or “being” words.

1. “Being troubled or pressed” (verse 8). It means to squeeze. Been there?
 - “Yet not distressed.” This phrase means a narrow space, or a tight place.
 - In wrestling terms: pressed, but not pinned!
2. “Being perplexed” (verse 8). To be *without* means to despair.
 - But not in despair;
 - Losing, but not lost!
3. “Being persecuted” (verse 9). To pursue with intent to destroy.
 - “But not forsaken.” Deserted, abandoned, and chased.
 - Chased, but not alone!
4. “Being cast down” (verse 9). Knocked down.
 - “But not destroyed.”
 - Knocked down, but not knocked out!
 - Note: We may lose altitude, but we must not lose *hope*!

Paul, what advice do you have for a guy who is “against the ropes?” Four things:

1. A strong sense of belonging to Christ (verse 10).
 - I belong to Him; whatever happens is something He sends or something He allows.
2. A complete surrender to Christ: an abandonment of self (verse 11).
 - It means to allow Jesus to live His life out in us.

- It means to live for His glory. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).
3. Keys to not fainting or losing heart (verses 1, 16). The inward man is renewed day-by-day. Yes, but How?
- a. Renewal of our spirit: Worship
 - Confessing our weakness
 - Confessing His greatness
 - Confessing our dependency upon Him
 - b. Renewal of our mind: God’s Word
 - Read Isaiah 55:8-11 (see from God’s perspective).
 - Romans 12:2. Understand the transforming power of the Word. Metamorphosis: a gradual change
 - We saturate our minds with Scripture through study, Bible memorization, and interaction with others.
 - c. Renewal of our heart: Prayer
 - Read Isaiah 40:29-31. “He giveth power to the faint...When they wait upon the Lord.”
 - The key word is d-a-i-l-y; not weekly, and not when trouble comes knocking at your door.
4. Develop an eternal perspective (verses 17, 18).
- “But our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight in glory” (verse 17).
 - Paul, you call your afflictions light?
 - What did he see that others did not see? “An eternal weight of glory ...for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Conclusion

Let me close with a story about a young minister who was having a significant ministry in a small English village many years ago. People were coming from miles around to hear him teach the Scriptures. In his mid-

20s, he had a voracious appetite for not only teaching the Scriptures but knowing them as well. He was making an impact in the village and the surrounding area...until the charges were made.

A young woman came forward and claimed he had tried to force himself upon her sexually. The word spread like wildfire across the countryside. He was finished. The sentiments of the people were with the young girl. His reputation was in shambles. And it was all a lie. It simply never happened.

The young man struggled deeply with the betrayal of the young woman whom he had legitimately tried to help. She had turned on him and was in the process of ruining his ministry for life. He thought he would never recover. How could he ever minister again anywhere with such charges against him?

Bitterness nearly overwhelmed him. The betrayal was too much. He couldn't bear it, and he couldn't undo it. But with God's help, he refused to allow bitterness to take root in his heart. God enabled him to conquer the bitterness just as Joseph had done centuries before. The falsely accused young man thought that he would never again be used by God. But there are millions of people who can vouch for the fact that Oswald Chambers was greatly used of God before it was all over.

Look beyond your betrayal, bitterness, and disappointment. God isn't finished with you yet.

1982 – Ben Scott

The Doctrine of Salvation

Text: Luke 2:25-32

Fundamentals of the Faith: My subject is “Salvation” from the Scripture found in Luke 2:25-32. Simeon, an old servant of the Lord, said these words, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

The Apostle Paul wrote: “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.”

In dealing with this subject, there are three points I’d like to present. First, the *design*; second, the *discipline*; and third, the *destiny* of salvation. The seriousness of this subject grips my soul. Peter said concerning salvation: “The prophets have desired to look into it.” Isaiah spoke often of it. Jeremiah wept over it. Furthermore, Peter indicated that even the angels desire to look into it.

The Design of Salvation

I’m glad that it wasn’t left to a committee of men to formulate a plan of salvation. I’m especially glad it wasn’t committed to a committee in Washington. If it had come from a bureau in Washington, none of us could understand it, and it would probably take 15 library shelves to hold all the books required to contain it. It was designed, not by man, but by deity!

It is so simple, so plain, that many an eight-year-old child can understand it and be saved. It is also so simple that many a Ph.D. will stumble over it and die and go to Hell.

Remembering that salvation means deliverance, I think of some Old Testament examples. There was the ark in Noah’s day. It was a matter of life and death. Those on the inside were saved; those on the outside perished. On the night of the first Passover in Egypt, it took the form of the slain lamb, the sprinkled blood on the posts of the door. As Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea, it took the form of an east wind as God provided through His power and grace that the waters should stand back. Moses had

said, "Stand still and see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord."

To Rahab the harlot in Jericho, it took the form of a crimson cord; and when Jericho was taken, this woman was spared along with her household.

To us who are saved, the design of salvation has been revealed for all time in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God, who became Son of Man. He was the person of promise in prophecy, of whom it was written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer."

The Deliverer *did* come! He is the Ark of safety from the flood of God's wrath in judgment. He is the Passover Lamb, the One who stood as a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It is His blood that is symbolized by the crimson cord that runs through every book and every chapter from Genesis through to Revelation. We speak of the "plan" of salvation, when in actuality it is more than a plan; it is really a man.

"There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The greatest mystery of the ages is that the Creator would become the creature; that God Himself could become one of us. That's exactly what happened.

"Thou shalt call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is God with us." At His birth it was declared: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord."

The Scripture reading from Luke gives the account of an old man, a saint of God named Simeon. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Christ child.

There came the blessed day—the day when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus into the Temple as an eight-day-old baby. I don't know how Simeon must have felt. But as he embraced the Christ child to his bosom, I think he saw more than a little baby that day. I think he looked at those little hands; and looking through the years to come, I believe he saw that these were the hands that would bless the multitudes. These were the hands that would reach out, beckoning to a weary world. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

And I believe, looking a bit further, he saw the shadow of a cross upon a lonely hill. He saw these little hands that would be stretched out as full-grown Man, nailed to a rugged, cruel cross to complete the plan of God's redemption.

I believe he looked at those little baby feet, and he saw the day when they would walk the by-ways, streets, and lanes of the cities. But he also saw by the grace of God—the day those feet would walk up a rugged hill called Calvary and He would stumble under the weight of the cross as He went to complete the will of the Father.

Simeon looked at that little baby's head, and I think he saw the day when that head would be beaten; and upon that head would be placed a crown of thorns. I think he looked into those eyes and saw the day when they would be filled with tears because of a Christ-rejecting world.

Jesus said to Zacchaeus after he had come down from the tree: "Today is salvation come to your house."

After Pentecost, Peter, the converted fisherman, said to a group of religious elitists, concerning Christ, "This is the Stone that was set at naught of you builders; which is become the head of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name given under Heaven among men whereby we must be saved."

And I'll tell you friend, that culls out an awful lot of folks! "None other Name!" It is the *only name* by which a sinner is saved and leaves this world to go to the Paradise of God.

The design of salvation is deity. It is not man-made. Consequently, it is a perfect plan of salvation. It is broad enough to include "whosoever will."

The Discipline of Salvation

Somebody said not long ago, "This is the most undisciplined generation that ever lived."

Maybe that is true. We need to be reminded that Jesus said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

Paul wrote in Titus 2, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, in this present world."

Now, that is discipline! But where is the discipline in our day? Where is the dedication? Where is the cross-bearing? The lives of the first-century Christians were characterized by discipline and dedication. We desperately need the same in our day!

I grew up under old-fashioned, country hill preaching that just scared the daylights out of me; and I really believe the right kind of preaching ought to scare a fellow a little bit. They made me believe that if I didn't shape up and live right—if I died in my sins—I stood in great danger of going to Hell. And I'm glad they preached it that way. One of the things they emphasized was that when a fellow got saved he was supposed to act and live like it.

We're living in the generation that says, "I've gotta be me. I did it my way, and don't fence me in." As a result of this philosophy, we've got churches filled with "wandering stars," "trees with no fruit," and "clouds with no water."

We've got too many births with no labor pains of repentance and conviction. We see sports figures and so-called "celebrities" get religion. They give a testimony and figuratively, if not literally, they hold the Bible in one hand and the bottle in the other.

Entertainment personalities get religion, but they go on entertaining in the night club, or wherever they want to. I read the account of one entertainer not long ago. She said she really had a problem. She had made a profession of faith in Christ. She had a commitment in Las Vegas.

She said, "I wrestled with the decision, didn't really know what to do; I felt like I ought to get out of it." But she continued, "I finally came to this conclusion: I'll go ahead and perform, and I'll conclude my program with a religious hymn."

She went on to say that the singing of the hymn was the most popular thing. But where is the cross? Where is the discipline of the cross? It doesn't make a bit of difference whether it's a sports figure making a million dollars a year, (which is about \$990,000 more than they are worth) or whether it's somebody like you and me who has been called upon to leave the things of the world and follow Christ.

There's a cross to bear. Thank God we still have the blood and the cross in our hymn books. But we better have it in more than the lyrics we sing; we better have it in the lives we live!

I've lived in the greatest days of our denomination. I remember in 1952, a young couple, Carlisle and Marie Hanna, took their newborn daughter, Sheila Marie, and went to India. I was pastor of the church in St. Louis where Marie and her parents were members. I'll never forget a few months after

they left, a telegram came. Sheila Marie had taken dysentery and suddenly died. Every time I see Carlisle and Marie, I cannot help thinking how much they and other foreign missionaries have been called upon to bear.

Are the demands and discipline of salvation any greater for missionaries than for a church member here in the homeland? I'm speaking to us tonight about things that really matter; I don't have any right to dictate to God where I'll go, or under what conditions I'll serve. But while we send our missionaries to a foreign land for four years at a time, their children can die, their parents can die, conditions can get terrible; and we say to them, "You stay on the mission field for four years."

Yet here in the homeland, we've got multitudes of church members who haven't been in church in four Sundays straight.

There's the discipline of faithfulness. Do you remember that Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through suffering? Are we, His servants, greater than our Lord? I admonish you, beloved, hang in there! The Captain of our salvation died at His post. I want to die where the Lord wants me to die, and I want to be doing what the Lord wants me to be doing when that moment comes.

John 6 is an interesting chapter. It begins with meat, miracles, and a multitude. (If you deal in meat and miracles, you can get a multitude!) But when the chapter ends, the meat's played out, the miracles have ceased, the multitude has dispersed, and the Lord Jesus is saying to a handful of disciples, "Will ye also go away?"

The other day, I read the story of Elisha when he was called to follow Elijah. He was ploughing with 12 yoke of oxen. Elisha was a big farmer. Elijah came by and cast the mantle of the prophet upon him. Elisha said, "Let me go and kiss my father and my mother. And then I'll follow you." And he did.

Can you imagine Elisha coming home, and he embraced his father and his mother and said, "Mother, I won't be seeing you now for awhile. Dad, I'm going and I won't be seeing you any time soon."

"Where are you going, son?"

"I'm just going wherever the Lord wants me to go. The Lord has called, and I must go!"

He killed a pair of oxen; he built an altar. He left his profession. He left

his possessions. He kissed his dad and mom good-by, and multitudes of people tonight have never kissed anything good-bye.

“Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?” No!

There is the discipline of diligence. Free Will Baptist doctrine emphasizes diligence. Peter did too. He wrote: “Besides this, giving all diligence.”

He then admonished that we add the following Christian graces: Virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. “For if these things be in you and abound they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.”

What’s the opposite of diligence? I think it’s neglect. The writer of Hebrews asked this question, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”

Sinners reject. Christians neglect. Be diligent! How are we going to escape if we neglect?

There’s the discipline of separation. I don’t know how separated we can get. I’m sure none of us are as separated from this world as we ought to be. I’m not like they used to say about the Puritans. When ice cream came along, the Puritans wouldn’t eat it. They said nothing could taste that good without being sinful.

The Bible does say, “Be not conformed to this world.” Again, it is written, “Having these promises dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The church and the world walked far apart
On the changing shores of time;
The world was singing a giddy song;
The church a hymn sublime.
Come, give me your hand, cried the merry world
And walk with me this way.
But the good church hid her snowy hand
And solemnly answered ‘Nay.’

The following verses describe the compromise of the church as she gives in to the allurements and temptations of the world, and the final sad conclusion can be stated like this:

The sons of the world and the sons of the church
Walked closely, hand and heart
And only the Master Who knoweth all,
Could tell the two apart.

The Destiny of Salvation

I'd like to say last of all, a few things about the destiny of salvation. God gets kicked around down here. His name is blasphemed. Jesus Christ is still the rejected Redeemer. He's ruled out of the classroom. He gets a raw deal in the courtroom by the judge and the jury. Entertainers would be hard pressed to come up with a line if it were not for "Hell," "God," or some vulgarity.

Some of you have heard Dr. R.G. Lee's message, *Payday Someday*. I listen to it every once in a while. Ahab is going on in his sin. The blood of Naboth has not been avenged, and Jezebel is going her merry way. Justice seems to have been aborted. I can hear the old preacher cry out, "Where is God? Where is God? Is He deaf that He cannot hear? Is He blind that He cannot see? Is He paralyzed that He cannot move?"

No, God's not blind, deaf, or paralyzed. We know where God is. He is where He's always been. One of these days, it is going to all be over down here, and God's going to have His way. The last chapter is the most interesting and exciting. Because when you read the last chapter you know how it's all going to turn out.

A few years ago during one of our Arkansas state ministers' retreats, I was staying in a motel room with some of our state's younger preachers. During this time, the Arkansas Razorbacks were playing the Aggies of Texas A&M in an important conference basketball game. The game was shown on a delayed telecast. That means the game was already over when the telecast started, and the score had already been determined.

I knew what the score was. I already knew who the winner was. The

game had been won by one point, and I knew which team had the victory. So, I went to bed and went to sleep.

If I didn't know how this thing was going to turn out, I'd have a nervous breakdown. I know! I've read the last chapter. I'm not alarmed about how it's going to turn out. I know who is on the victory side.

I'd like to talk to Daniel for a moment. He seemed to have special insight. Daniel said, "There'll be a time of trouble like there never has been." But he doesn't stop there. How about it, Daniel? "The saints...the saints of the most High shall take the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom...forever, even forever and ever." I like that.

Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

John, the Isle-of-Patmos John? "After this I beheld and lo, a great multitude which no man could number of kindreds and people and tongues stood before the throne and before the Lamb clothed with robes and palms in their hands and cried with a loud voice, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

What's it like, John? "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Another look, John. "And I saw Heaven opened, and behold a white horse and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True. And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a Name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

The last chapter of this whole thing turns out well. The saints take the Kingdom. Christ reigns as King. God is still the Almighty. The prophets have learned about the salvation of which they enquired. The Master's minority has become a mighty multitude. We lay down the cross and take up the crown. We quit our sighing and start singing. And we proclaim, "Worthy is the Lamb."

I close with this benediction: "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood; and hath made us Kings and Priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

1983 – David Boggs

Sifted Saints

Text: Luke 22:31-34

In Christ's time, there were several steps in the preparation of wheat before it could be ground and made ready for cooking and baking. The first was obviously harvesting. This was the gathering of the wheat from the fields.

Threshing: In this process the outer covering, called chaff, is broken. The wheat was then thrown up into the wind allowing the chaff, which was lighter, to blow aside and the good grain to fall to the ground.

Winnowing: A part of the process of winnowing grain consisted in the use of a sieve by which means the particles of earth and other impurities, which clung to the wheat during the process of threshing, were separated from the grain.

It is in this third step that the word *sift* (sin-ee-ad'-zo) in Luke 22:31 is found. Jesus was telling Peter that Satan wanted to have Peter so he might *sift*, literally *shake* him like grain.¹ Job tells us that our enemy is busy "going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it" (Job 1:7).

Exactly what is Satan doing while walking up and down on the earth? Peter himself answered that question for us in 1 Peter 5:8, where we are warned, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

Yes, teenager, Satan wishes to sift, shake, and separate you! However, unlike the farmers of Christ's day, who wished to separate the good from the bad so they might discard the bad, Satan wishes to separate the good from the bad in order to discard the good, leaving you with nothing but the bad.

Simply put, there are many good things in this life, from which Satan wishes to separate you. We will have time to mention only a few today. First, Satan wishes to separate young people from...

1. Their Family.

It is estimated that between 1.6 and 2.8 million youth run away in a year

in the U.S. Forty-seven percent of runaway/homeless youth indicated that conflict between them and their parent or guardian was a major problem. Over 50% of youth in shelters and on the streets reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving but did not care.²

Yes, Satan wishes to separate young people from their parents. Just how does he accomplish this? Satan wants to separate young people from the authority of their parents. Do you need to be reminded of those familiar words from the pen of the Apostle Paul?

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 3:20).

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

Young and old alike need to understand that to disobey your parents is to disobey God. We need to see our parents’ authority as a giant umbrella of protection. To be out from under their authority is to be out from under their protection and to be out from under God’s authority is to be out from under God’s protection.

Listen to Hebrews 13:17. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

Satan wants to separate young people from the affection of their parents. Satan wants to drive a wedge of bitterness and hatred between you and your parents. Again, the question is, “How does he do this?”

Disobedience: I am not implying that if you disobey your parents they will stop loving you. I am saying that the proper kind of love cannot grow amid the soil of bitterness and strife.

Arguing: As a teenager, I swore I would never answer my children with, “Because I said so!” However, as a parent it did not take me long to recognize when my children said why or why not, they were usually arguing with me,

instead of really wanting to know the reason for my decision.

Naturally then, I followed the footsteps of generations of parents who often replied to children's arguments, "Because I said so!"

Pouting: When I think of pouting, I think of the prodigal son's older brother from Christ's parable in Luke 15:11-32. Instead of joining the party that was being given in honor of his younger brother's return home from the far country, he was angry and would not go in. What was he doing? He was pouting at his father. Sound familiar? Pouting is another tool used by Satan in his war against the family.

Disrespect: Despite the frequent injunctions in the Scriptures to honor parents, teens often show disrespect to the parents and other authorities in the words they say and the tone of voice they use. Slamming doors and squealing tires and cranking up the stereo until the walls shake are just a few of the ways young people express their disrespect.

Young people, I know a good way to get rid of your parents. No one will ever know you are responsible, and your parents will be out of your hair forever. When they least expect it, just tell them that you love them (with no ulterior motive). They will die of a cardiac arrest right on the spot. Their heart will not be able to take the shock.

Without a doubt, Satan wants to sift, shake, and separate young people from their family. He also wants to separate them from...

2. Their Friends.

What is Satan's strategy in this particular battle? Well, he separates us from our friends when we have a critical spirit. Turn your Bible to the Book of Proverbs to see what the Lord has to say about our attitude.

- (Proverbs 15:1) "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger."
- (Proverbs 16:28) "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."
- (Proverbs 18:14) "The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?"
- (Proverbs 17:13) "Whoever rewards evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house."

– (Proverbs 18:19) “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.”

It is easy for us to develop a “holier than thou” attitude, if we are not careful. But Paul instructs us, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3). This is not always easy but it is important and possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen teens, if you cannot say something good about someone, say nothing at all. Do not let the devil use your critical spirit to drive a wedge between you and your friends.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says, “These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.”

Satan’s strategy is also to separate young people from their friends by an unforgiving spirit. Listen to Christ’s stern declaration in Matthew 6:14, 15: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Jesus exemplified the proper attitude toward those who hurt Him. From the Cross, He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Typically, we keep the memories of the things and people that have hurt us in one of two files. Sometimes we keep them in the “grudge” file. We hold a grudge against them, and each time they hurt us, we add to the ever growing file of things we have not forgiven. Now, we are not angry about one event but about any number of events. Each time we think of the offender or the offense, we bring out all the things in “the grudge file” and get angry all over again.

At other times, we keep our hurts and mistreatment in “the forgiven file.” Each time we think of the offender or the offense, we remember that we placed that event in “the forgiven file” and having forgiven them, are no longer angry. Whatever way in which you have been wronged must be put, forever, in “the forgiven file.”

Keep in mind that no matter how others have sinned against you, it

does not compare to how you have sinned against God. If God, in Christ Jesus, forgave you, should you not also forgive others?

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

There can be no question that Satan wants to sift, shake, and separate young people from their family and friends. He also wants to separate them from...

3. Their Fruitful Life.

When Jesus told Simon Peter that Satan wanted to “sift” him like wheat, it should have been obvious to Peter that his enemy was trying to destroy any hope Peter had for a fruitful life.

So, how does Satan separate us from a fruitful life? How does he prevent us from bearing fruit for Christ? He does so by separating us from a surrendered life.

I know a man from whom the devil stole a surrendered life.

- He walked and talked with Jesus.
- He heard Him preach.
- He sat in on His class in Bible theology.
- He saw Him heal the sick and raise the dead.
- He heard Him weep over lost souls.

Nevertheless, to him the surrendered life was worth only \$52.80 or 30 pieces of silver. Judas just never surrendered 100%.

If you want your life to be fruitful and worthwhile, you must yield your life entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ without reservation. In Luke 14:33, we have Christ’s own words: “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

Satan also wants to separate teenagers from an obedient life. A surrendered life will naturally lead to an obedient life.

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

King Solomon is a glaring example of someone who was unsundered and disobedient by allowing idolatry to run rampant in Israel. He evaluated his own sinful behavior like this: "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11).

Conclusion

Please listen to this warning. Satan wants to separate you from...

–Your Family

–Your Friends

–Your Fruitful Life

To close, I want us to observe one final and beautiful statement made by the Lord Jesus Christ to Peter. "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32).

I am so glad that Jesus is praying for you and for me today. He is praying that you will not allow Satan to separate you from your family, your friends, or your fruitful life.

The words of this anonymous writer challenge us to put into practice what Jesus was trying to teach Simon Peter and attempting to teach you and me.

Could I Be Called a Christian?

Could I be called a Christian if everybody knew

My secret thoughts and failings, and everything I do?

Oh, could they see the likeness of Christ in me each day,

Or could they hear Him speaking in every word I say?

Could I be called a Christian if other folk could know

That I am found in places where Jesus would not go?

Oh, could they hear His echo in every song I sing?

In eating, drinking, dressing—is Christ in everything?
Could I be called a Christian if judged by what I read,
By all my recreation and every thought and deed?
Could I be counted Christ-like as I now work and play?
Unselfish, kind, forgiving to others every day?

¹ *Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary*

² *NRS Statistics on Runaways from Peer-reviewed Journals and Federal Studies*

1983 – Lynn Wood

God's Call to the Pastor

Text: Acts 20:28-31

The call of God to the ministry is definite and distinct. It is direct and distinguishable. The call of God when accepted by an individual is followed by commitment to a task and a person.

I. Take heed.

A. Unto yourselves. The number one area of our responsibility is number one (ourselves).

1. Personal behavior, relationships, purity, loyalty.
2. Your home, family, leadership. Your activities, your time.
3. Your name—in the community and neighborhood. You are being watched.

B. And to all the flock. Your people. Your church. Your congregation. It is God's people, but He has chosen you and appointed you to take care of His flock.

1. The up-and-out as well as the down-and-out. The sick and also the well. Rich as well as poor. The lovable as well as the unlovable. The easy to care for and the difficult. The young, the old, the in-betweens. You are to pastor every age, every gender, in every way, and every day.
2. We are not to fleece the flock but to feed it. God knows their hunger, and we should seek His direction and help in providing for their needs.
3. Consider the tremendous price paid for this flock. God made the supreme sacrifice by the gift of His own Son to purchase His flock.
4. The flock suggests the owner of the flock—both caretaker and servant.

II. Why do we need to take heed?

- A. Grievous wolves will enter.
- B. Perilous times will come.
- C. Time is short and critical.

III. Your ministry, your manner, and your message will be under attack.

- A. It's the enemy's plan to destroy the works of God.
- B. He has no regard for you or your person. He will do anything to get at God.
- C. The Lord said, "they will hate you," but remember, they first hated Him.

Conclusion

It truly is late. We are in the 11th hour. Shortly, it will be midnight, the time when we can work no more. God, the flock, and the cause need dedicated personnel. They are critical to the hour.

1983 – Lester Horton

Considering the Covenant: Our Sacrificial Promotion of God's Program

Text: Numbers 32:6, 7, 16-25

You ought to be familiar with the Church Covenant. As Free Will Baptists, we ought to know who we are, what we believe, and what our church stands for. I personally think—and it's already been stated by others—we have one of the greatest Church Covenants I have ever read. It's biblical, it's scriptural, based on scriptural principles in the Word of God. I'm convinced if we would allow the Word of God to control our lives, it'll solve every problem we have. It is God's prescription for mankind .

The last two paragraphs of the Church Covenant state: "We will everywhere hold Christian principle sacred and Christian obligations and enterprises supreme; counting it our chief business in life to extend the influence of Christ in society, constantly praying and toiling that the Kingdom of God may come, and His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

"To this end we agree to labor for the promotion of educational and denominational enterprises, the support of missions, the success of Sunday Schools. And may the God of peace sanctify us wholly, and preserve us blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I want to comment just briefly on these two paragraphs and how we are bound together. It's hard to talk about the last two without being reminded of those things that have already been said to us.

When we read the first paragraph, "Having given ourselves to God, by faith in Jesus Christ, and adopted the Word of God as our rule of faith and practice," I think we cover the rest of it. When we adopt the Word of God, all the other principles are covered.

Because this is missions' night, I will emphasize that in regard to the Covenant and in the message. It was so good to see the missionaries parade across the stage tonight. My heart went out to those who would like to be here. And when you pray, pray for our missionaries at home and abroad.

Please note in the first paragraph that it really has to do with our Christian conduct. By the way, we can memorize all the Scripture—and I think it would be a blessing if we could—but we need to be concerned about our Christian conduct. Christianity is not just Sunday morning religion; we need to live for God seven days a week. I believe this world's looking for that. I think it's what Paul had in mind when he gave us Romans 12. He said, "I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

I believe the world is sick of Sunday morning religion. They are sick of bumper sticker religion. They want to see you and me practice what we preach. Live for God daily. Our conduct involves a lot of things. (And I will not attempt to think of all of them.) It involves our manners. I believe we ought to behave as a Christian in church, out of church, on the job, and in the community. How we conduct our lives communicates far more than what we say.

It also involves our morals. I believe we ought to heed to the passage where the covenant says, "We will everywhere hold Christian principle sacred."

This is vacation time—a time when we're blessed to live in a great nation where God has given us the liberty to enjoy a vacation. If you were in a communist country tonight, you would not be able to enjoy what we are enjoying this week. But the fact is, when you are away from home, Christian principles still apply to our lives. Nowhere are we allowed to take a vacation from the Word of God and the principles of Christianity.

The Covenant says *everywhere*—whether it be in California, North Carolina, Canada, or on the coast, it is still, beloved, the same Word of God we need to adhere to. Christian principles need to be followed wherever we are. In some areas of our society, you go one place and one thing is a sin, and you go someplace else and something else is a sin. But the Word of God does not have one brand for a part of our country and one for the other. It applies to all of us wherever we are. Brother, it is our road map to live by. It brings faith for our salvation and instructs us on how to live.

The Covenant goes on to say we "hold Christian principle sacred, and Christian obligations and enterprises supreme." It refers to priorities we

ought to have in our lives. Every time I read that passage in Romans 1 where Paul says, "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians," I began thinking about our debts and obligations.

I have an obligation to tell the world about Jesus Christ our Savior. I have an obligation to the weak brother by the wayside. I have an obligation to my church. You have an obligation to your pastor. I feel an obligation to my denomination that has provided me a pulpit to preach from for more than a quarter of a century. And the list could go on.

Sure, we are saved by grace and salvation is a gift. We're not buying our salvation. It was bought on the Cross when, thank God, Jesus bowed His head and said it was finished. The Bible says we're to be the Church He bought with His own blood. The fact is we are created unto Christ for good works.

Let me just call your attention to a thing or two here, then we shall review the text for the message. It does say that we will consider it "our chief business to extend the influence of Christ in society." But I say to you that living for God should not be a sideline or byproduct. It should be first priority in our life—to make Jesus Christ preeminent in our lives. Living for God isn't something we do on the weekend. We are blessed on the weekend because we've been living for Him during the week. He doesn't pay us in advance. He blesses you because you've been faithful.

Therefore, we have the challenge to make it our chief business to extend the influence of Christ in society. You know and I know and God knows they need it. We live in a dark age. Folks, the only thing that will help our nation, our world, our denomination, our church, and our spiritual lives is for God to somehow stir our souls with an old-fashioned revival that brings us back to the old landmark laid in Zion—that foundation stone that tumbled down out of Zion that Daniel writes about. That's when Jesus Christ is exalted in our lives daily. To this end, we agree to labor for the promotion of denominational enterprises, the support of missions, and the success of Sunday School.

This passage, beloved, involves our commitment. When we become a part of the local church, we have a commitment to support that local church. I believe it goes beyond our stained glass windows. I believe it needs to become about an outreach. It says in Galatians 6:10, "As you therefore have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

I am a Free Will Baptist by choice tonight. I told a brother in one of the lobbies earlier that I was preaching Free Will Baptist doctrine before I became a Free Will Baptist.

I had gotten saved in Baltimore, Maryland, moved back to where I grew up, and joined another denomination. I was preaching basically my first sermon—what I am preaching today. I've been at home in this denomination. As long as there is one missionary who has paraded across this stage tonight or those who are not here, we have an obligation to our own denomination tonight.

I'm not interested in building a condominium in Charlotte, a tower in Tulsa, a cathedral in California, or even a miracle on the mountain. I'm concerned about our denomination, that we will raise up an institution and prepare that which is needed on the field.

You know and I know that the field is ready for harvest tonight. I am committed. My friends and my own people—God bless all of those who are fundamental and getting people saved. But my first commitment is to my own church family tonight. I speak of a family. I do not speak of the fact that we have a pope farther up there. I speak of the fact that Ephesians 2:19 describes us as Gentiles who were long-time aliens among the commonwealth of Israel, lost with no hope in the world and without God. He said, "You are no more pilgrims or strangers, but citizens with me and the household of God." That's what I'm talking about tonight.

Now let me preach awhile, will you? I trust you'll read your Covenant when you get home.

Turn in your Bibles to Numbers 32, and we'll read a passage or two here then look at some others for the message.

"Thank you, Lord, for being in this service tonight."

I'll not take the time to read all of the verses but we will be in Numbers 32. I'll read verses 6, 7, then drop down to verses 16-25, then we'll go back and analyze these verses. I am aware that I'm in the Old Testament, but there are some principles in the Word of God that were not crucified at Calvary.

The principle of being obedient to God and God's Word was not crucified on the cross and there are some principles back here that the Lord Jesus referred to. Paul taught about them when he wrote 1 Corinthians 10. He said they all drank from that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that

Rock was Christ.

But he went on to say some of the things were written as examples: we should not lust after evil things. Romans 11 reminds us, "If you spare not the natural branch, take heed that he spare not thee." Those principles were not crucified on Calvary when Jesus died. I think we can go back, and we need to go back. The Word of God says all Scripture was given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, that the Word of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Solomon thought so much of it that he said in Proverbs 30:5, every word of God is pure to those who put their trust in him. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 3 that the Word of God was precious in those days, and there was no division. It's still precious tonight. The Bible says in Romans 10:17, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Paul says "Timothy, I'm going to have to leave now. I've had something on layaway for a long time that I couldn't afford down here. But when I leave, I want you to know how to preach the Word. Be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

Let me refer back briefly to the situation in Numbers 32.

I want to talk to you about this chapter. I trust you read with us the passages. It's not that I can't read. These bifocals steam up sometimes, and it's kind of hard to see through them. Maybe someone ought to invent windshield wipers for preacher's glasses. That might help some.

Anyway, I want us to look tonight at some serious Scripture in the Word of God. I said earlier tonight that we need something in our souls from God in this convention. Our problems cannot be solved in three and a half days, or whatever time we attend our convention. But I do think we need to go back and look at some principles in the Word of God.

First, Moses said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, "Have you considered the people tonight?" When you go back to Genesis 49 and read the Shiloh prophecy, when Jacob called his sons together and began to talk about Gad and Reuben, he said to Gad (that's the offspring of the man we are talking about), "A troop shall overcome thee but thou shall overcome at last."

Gad represented a folk that never really had the victory. They were defeated for most of their lives until the end of the way. I submit to you today that many of us live beneath our privilege as a child of God. First

Corinthians 15:57 says, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Then look there at Gad and their children who picked up the practice of their fathers. By the way, you and I cannot live a defeated life all the time and expect our children to be on fire when we are gone. Somehow, it passes from one generation to another. We have seen that in this meeting where men of God have had their children follow in their footsteps as well.

And then he talks about Reuben in Genesis 49:3, "You're my firstborn." He was the one to legally inherit the birthright. He said, "You're my might. You are the first of my prosperity, the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." You see, he had all the natural abilities to really do something for God.

And then, the sad statement when he looks at his son and says, "You're as unstable as water." May I say to you today, if there is anything that is hurting us as a denomination, it is the sin of instability among our own folks that we love. Jesus still means what He said when He inspired Paul to write, "Be ye therefore steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. For as much as you know, your labor is not in vain."

Heaven will never go bankrupt. God is not out of town tonight. He says to Gad, you've been defeated; to Reuben, you've been unstable. Brethren, these are the offspring Moses speaks to in this chapter. And he continues by saying, in regard to their procrastination, "Shall your brethren go to war?" Isn't it true today that in most of our religious circles, about 10% of the people do 90% of the work? It is sad when you think about it.

But Moses said to them, why would you sit here and let your brethren cross the river? That's where the battle is, in the land that I have given you. There are some Canaanites to conquer, some giants to drive out. How can you sit down here and see your brethren go to war?

I want you to see their procrastination. They were sitting there by the wayside. They were discouraging those that would get involved. It's sad when a loving God reaches down from Heaven and brings a soul into the family of God; they raise from the altar all fired up to serve God; then somebody sitting on the wayside tells them God only desires a reasonable service.

You need to read the rest of that passage in Romans 12. So many get discouraged from being involved in the Lord's work. They are told, "You

don't have to go out to church every time the door is open. You don't have to go to every revival or evangelistic meeting. We don't have to worry about reading your Bible or getting a Christian education."

For some reason, they're sitting on the wayside and discouraging others who would go. Notice the problem in verses 9-11.

You get the whole picture of that in Numbers 13,14:9-11. You remember when God sent out the 12 men to spy out the land of Canaan. Ten of them came back backslidden. "There are giants over there and we can't take the land."

Oh, there were two men that God had His hand on. Caleb had "another spirit" (Deuteronomy 34), and Moses laid his hand on Joshua the son of Nun. There's only one Joshua in the Bible. I'm talking about the one God had there for the mantle of responsibility to fall on, when he buried Moses in the valley of Moab.

These men had some faith in God. They could be depended upon. The problem is seen. They came back with those grapes from Canaan, and said, "We can't do it."

I read the first verse of Numbers 14, "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night." They had an all night crying meeting. They hadn't done anything; they just had to cry. You folks get the picture. About the time when we decide to do something, the opposition rises up.

They haven't moved a hoot. They haven't moved a tent. They were just talking about doing, claiming what God would give to them. He said to Joshua later, "I was with Moses, so will I be with thee; be not afraid." It's mentioned 144 times in the Word of God. It's the equivalent of *fear not*.

It's the first thing God said to His people after 400 years of darkness when he spoke to Zacharias and said, "Fear not." He says to Moses come to us and we'll do thee good. God said to Joshua, "I've been with Moses, I'll be with you." I believe God loves every child of God tonight just as much as He did Joshua and Moses. You see, the problem was doubting God. But it goes on to say in the chapter, "Because they have not wholly followed me."

The only way I know how to say it is: The fact that we can't halfway do this thing, the fact of this cheap-easy believism, shallow religion, and this worldly living will not bring the power of God upon your life to conquer the giants in the land that God has already given to us. The problem was a

divided heart, lack of consecration, lack of separation, lack of clean living for God. Their heart was not in it.

We get to the place our hearts are no longer in our ministry. We need to somehow go back to Bethel. He said, "They haven't wholly followed me." Hosea 10:2 said Israel's heart was divided.

You remember what Elisha said to Joash? "I want you to smite the ground and every time you smite it, you will be able to defeat the enemy."

He haphazardly hit about three licks and quit. That's about where we are today, but the Lord said that if he compel you to go one mile, go ye two. This idea, beloved, of only serving God on the surface won't get the job done. Somewhere there's going to have to be some time in the closet. Somewhere, there's going to have to be some time in this Book. Somewhere along the line, we're going to have to get our priorities right. Paul said his heart's desire and cry to Israel is that they would get saved. We can go through life, altars barren, baptismal waters never stirred, and somewhere down the line we blame it on the worldly environment.

God's still God tonight. His Word is still sharper than any two-edged sword. One man and God is victory anywhere you go. We ought to claim the victory on our own soul. Go back home and keep this in mind. I'm talking about God's people tonight. God promised, "I'll make your seed as the sand of the sea."

So many times we take Scripture out of context, and there are those who doubted God here in the passage in regard to their relationship. They resisted God's man and God's word. Did you know the Bible says that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft? None of you would set up a fortune-teller shop in your church on Sunday morning, but when we rebel against this Book and the God of this Book, we are in the same business. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.

I said again these folks were rebellious. They were against God's man, God's word, and God's program. Notice the pattern quickly. In verse 12: "Lord, have mercy," I hear him say as he gives a pattern. Then he mentions Joshua. He speaks of these men who had faith in God. Now, God had His hand on them. Thank God for those who will blaze the trail. Psalm 61:5 says, "For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name."

I stand here tonight and preach to a denomination of men who have

blazed the trail without air conditioners, without nice automobiles, and many of them without a salary to hand down to us the heritage of a Church Covenant that binds us to our Savior and to the service of our God and to one another. Thank God for those who have already received their promotion. You say, "Preacher, they're dead." But that's a promotion for the saved! "Precious in the sight of God is the death of His saints." His name is precious unto death. There is nothing to weep about.

He said to Joshua, "They have wholly followed the Lord." It won't work for me and, it won't work for any of you to live ungodly 'til midnight on Saturday night and then grab our Sunday School quarterly, go in late, and leave before preaching. I wonder why the church is dead!

I'm talking about a day when we recognize it's God who raises that big sun ball in the morning. It's God who hangs the stars out there on nothing. It's God who created the universe out of nothing and hung it on nothing and made you and me out of the dust of the earth. And breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils, and he became a living soul. In Adam we all died, but the second Man of Heaven came with the cavalry and died on an old rugged Cross on a skull-face rock called Calvary. It's only mentioned one time in the Word of God. God only needed one. He only had one Son to give, hallelujah! Amen! You and I, tonight, are covenant people, God's people, and He's counting on us to get the job done.

Note the pledge in Numbers 32:16. "And they came."

That's the children of Gad and the children of Reuben. It's one thing to know it. It's one thing to know it's going on. I never did anything until I really nailed it down with a commitment, a pledge, or a promise before God and neither will any of us. There's got to come a time when we nail some things down. I'm talking to saved folks now about when they nailed it down. They made their pledge, they came near unto Him and said, "When we build sheepfolds here for our cattle, cities for our little ones. We ourselves will go armed and ready before the children of Israel until all have received their inheritance."

Note their pledge in this passage? First, we'll provide a ministry at home. We're going to take care of our families and children, build a fence, make sure they're safe.

I tell you what, folks, when we forsake our family—our God-given responsibility—we can't expect to be effective in the ministry of the service

of God. I know the Lord said He must be first, but that doesn't mean we are to dump our families in the gutter somewhere. I say it kind and lovingly.

We say we are faithful to the cause. We are covenant people. You can count on us. You know that's what you pastors count on—your membership, and those who have received the covenant and become a part of your church. That's what you count on.

Our church—we're in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C.—has a campground just below us. Folks come in from Canada, California, and Florida, but they are just passing through. The folks that I'm looking for to help carry the load are those that I refer to as the covenant folks of our church and our denomination.

They said, "You can count on us."

I consider the Covenant a vow tonight, a pledge made before God. Did you know there are some things Christians really don't have to pray about? If God said do it, you can do it, and you don't have to vote on it. If the Lord said do it, just do it, and it will be all right. You don't even have to pray about it. You may have to pray where. I believe the Holy Spirit not only calls a servant, but I believe He selects the field of service. And we need to be so close to God, we can hear His voice.

But for these folks who made that promise, made that pledge and said he could count on them, Moses said in verse 21, "If you will go all of you armed over Jordan." Did you know this thing involves all of us? Some folks say, "Preacher, I would serve the Lord but I just don't think I can do anything."

Did you know that the three people God used to open the doors of the Gentiles and the house of Cornelius were two janitors and a soldier? It wasn't the mayor or the governor, just two household servants and a soldier. I don't mean to degrade those professions, but they are not what you would consider the upper, professional group. They were just people who made themselves available. They went to get Simon, and I'd like to hold a revival where people did their homework like Cornelius did. He told Peter, "We're all here to hear what God told you to tell us." You talk about a time we would have to preach three weeks to get things going. But in the passage he says, if you will do this, if you'll go armed, if you'll go prepared, if all of you get involved.

Then the proclamation—if you will *not* do so, behold ye have sinned. For years I thought that was written to the alcoholic, that if he continued

drinking, his liver would turn to jelly. I thought it was written to those on drugs, that they would wreck their bodies and their nervous systems. I could go on down the line and list the sins of the flesh and say they will find you out one day.

You can't commit fornication without God knowing it, and somewhere it will find you out. You can't even get out of town, because God even knows the hair on our head, the thoughts on our tongue before we speak. There's not a sparrow that falls that Heaven doesn't notice. And, glory to God, there's not a soul saved when Heaven doesn't have a shouting celebration.

And He told those covenant people that if they would not do what they had said—that they would go into battle, accept the covenant. We have said we would accept the covenant of giving ourselves to God, by faith in Christ, and adopted the Word of God as our rule of faith and practice. By saying that, we became covenant folks. If we don't, it will find us out in our prayer life.

David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." It's not how thick the ceiling is. The problem is down here beneath the fifth rib. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, it will find us out in our prayer life.

Let me ask you something. If your child calls down the hall tonight, and says, "Mommy or Daddy, I want to get saved. Would you pray for me?"

Would you be in shape to pray? Or would you have to say, "I'll call the pastor. Did you know one minute too late could be an eternity too late?"

The same thing is true in all times of our lives. It will find us out in our public worship. I'm talking about the sin, now, of covenant breaking. The sin of covenant breaking will find us out in our public worship. This idea of considering it sacred wherever we go, and the fact that we are concerned about one another's happiness—by the way, there's no room on my shoulder or yours for a chip and a cross at the same time. It'll find us out. You can't come to church—fighting at home, fighting in the car—and expect God to open the windows of Heaven. It won't happen. It will find us out, folks, in our worship service. We can blame it on the air conditioning, blame it on the preacher, blame it on the choir, blame it on the usher, blame it on the deacon board, but it comes right down to us. The Lord said, "If any man will open the door, I will come in and sup with him." It's an individual thing between you and serving God tonight. If we don't, it will find us out. It affects our power with God.

When Felix trembled before Paul, he wasn't afraid of his muscles, He was afraid of his master. He spoke to him about righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come. You cannot legislate righteousness, brethren. It's got to be lived from a right relationship with God. I appreciate our concern for the laws of our land, but until somehow we get back to this Book and the God of this Book, we can't expect things to be much better.

It'll find us out when it comes to persuading sinners to accept God. I know some church members too. I've got as much as they've got. If they go to Heaven, I'm going too. You have to leave defeated, fellows, because the fact is, unless we have the anointing of God on our lives and we've been faithful to the Word of God—and by the way, any of us would agree that our Covenant is based on the Word of God. Moses said if you won't do what you've said, it will find you out. It will find us out in persuading others to get saved. It will find us out in our partnership at home. It will find us out in our posterity.

Oh, the thought of our wayward youth today! It's not Madeline Murray O'Hair. I'm not defending her in the least, but it may be the fact that they are seeing through the "cotton candy religion" that is sweeping our country, and know we are breaking our vows to God. We have departed from the old landmark of the Book, the blessed Book.

It could very easily find us out in our physical state. God chastens those He loves. Psalm 116:12-14, 18 says, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

John said, "We love him because he first loved us." All of us enjoy the benefits—providing saving grace, sustaining grace.

If I had known that, I'd have gotten saved a lot sooner. Sin claimed my life for a number of years—not knowing that God provided daily, sustaining grace, and He provides saving grace when the time comes.

He said, "What shall I render to God for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now."

Now! He didn't say, "I will wait until I get back to my room." The devil will talk you out of it. He didn't say, "I'll wait until I get back home." Something will distract your attention. The devil knows the power of the Word of God, and he steals the seed away from the heart God has spoken to.

The psalmist knew that and he said, "I will pay my vows now in the

presence." He was saying, "I am not ashamed of my God or His Word in the presence of all his people." He said it again in verse 18, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. In the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord."

God wants to do something for us tonight. This chapter has spoken to my heart over and over again—the vows, the covenants I've made, the blessings God has bestowed upon my life. We all have trouble with Satan. We will until we leave here. There have been too many blessings back down the road. I think we ought to be like Elisha and just burn the bridges behind us!

Set our affections on things above. Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He was ready to make that commitment and that vow in his life. Some of you here perhaps have been reminded of some vows you made to God, and you are discouraged. Cast all your cares on Him for He cares for you. Come forward and pray tonight.

1983 – Harold Pitts

Considering the Covenant: Our Sincere Pledge to God's People

A covenant is an agreement or a commitment. God's people are all who have been born again. All who have personal faith in Christ Jesus. Paul tells us in Galatians 3:26, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

As a believer, a member of the Body of Christ, the true Church, I must make a sincere pledge to the members of my own spiritual family. The assignment given me concerns paragraphs three, four, and five of the Church Covenant. This is a great responsibility, and I sincerely request the prayers of each one of you.

As your messenger, "I stand before you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling." My prayer to God is "that my speech and my preaching will not be with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2: 3, 4).

In earnest prayer and careful study, my conclusion is that three important facts are clearly set forth for this message. I will use the following outline for the message.

1. Personal Preparation
2. Public Participation
3. Prayerful Consideration

I must prepare to make a sincere pledge to God's people. The words of Paul make this fact clear. "Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his, And, let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

I. Personal Preparation (Paragraph 3)

Paragraph three of our Covenant tells us how to make personal preparation.

A. We must study the Scriptures.

Many of our personal problems and blunders are the result of ignorance of the Scriptures. Hosea 4:6 tells us, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou has rejected knowledge, I will reject thee." Jesus said to a group of Sadducees, who along with the Pharisees, sought to entangle Him in His talk, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). He was saying you are not saved, and you cannot understand the Scriptures for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Scriptures were written by divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16), and the Lord reveals unto His children the truth of the Scriptures. Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." Jesus said also, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). In 2 Timothy 3:15, it was said of Timothy, "That from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Three things we must know to profitably study the Scriptures. First, we must read them (Revelation 1:3). Next, we must meditate upon them (Psalm 1:2), and third, we must obey them (John 7:17). "If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

I have spent weeks in homes of preachers, and in some of these homes, the preacher did not read his Bible during the entire week. Some preachers did not even take their Bible with them to the services.

B. We must pray in secret in order to personally prepare our own hearts for the service of God.

Matthew 6:6 says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Secret prayers are much more likely to be honest and sincere than public prayers. In public prayers, one is tempted to say that which pleases the hearers. Not so with secret prayers. This is strictly a matter between the dear Lord and the person

who is praying. Secret prayers are a must for the true believer.

Jesus prayed in secret. "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). The song "Did You Think to Pray?" challenges us. The writer asked, "Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?"

Mr. Cadle, founder of Cadle Tabernacle in Indianapolis, Indiana, often said, "When you pray in the morning, it makes it much easier to do right and much harder to do wrong." Men and women whose lives have really counted for God have been those who have spent much time in secret prayer.

C. We must practice family devotions.

This is a must if one is to be personally prepared to render service to others. This is the responsibility of the husband and father in the home. God intended for the husband to be the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23). It is therefore the duty of the husband and the father to provide a family altar in his home. Genesis 18:19 tells us of the faithfulness of Abraham in regard to his family. In Joshua 24:15, Joshua expressed his confidence in his family. He had taught them properly and set the right example before them, and now could say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In a day when so many people are turning from the Lord and going back into sin—preachers and church members included—it is time, and high time to return to family devotions, the old-time family altar where the Word of God is read, and the family kneels in prayer together. The family that prays together stays together.

For many years, we have had Bible reading and prayer in our home twice each day. We begin the day with Bible reading and prayer at the breakfast table and end the day with Bible reading and prayer before retiring for the night. Our three daughters and five grandchildren have enjoyed this blessing of the family devotions all their lives, and I am happy to tell you that every one of them is a true Christian and serving the Lord on their way to Heaven.

D. We must participate in social worship.

Worship is a must in the life of a child of God. Psalms 95:6 says, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Jesus said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Men who refuse to worship God will turn

to idols and worship them or will worship things. Our world today is filled with idolatrous worshippers. I sincerely trust this will be a time of sincere worship for every believer present, that in your heart you, too, will kneel before the Lord your Maker. If we really worship God during the stated times for worship during this convention, everything else we do will be well pleasing unto our dear Heavenly Father.

E. Growth in grace of the true believer in Jesus Christ.

Three conditions are mentioned. First, self-denial. This presents a serious problem for most of us. We are human and expect to have our own way. We need to go with Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane and sincerely pray, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). The first principle of true discipleship is self-denial. He said to them all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

The second condition for growth in grace is faith. We are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We live by faith (Galatians 2:20). We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). If we grow in grace, our faith must be fed by the meat and the milk of the Word of God. Our faith must be put to work for God for "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).

Last, the final condition for growth in grace is good works. We were saved by faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8, 9) and (Titus 3:5), however, the Word immediately informs us that saving faith must manifest itself in works of righteousness. "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6).

II. Public Participation (Paragraph 4)

Second, in making our sincere pledge to God's people, we consider paragraph four of the Church Covenant. "We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together for Church Conferences, Public Worship, and the observance of the Ordinances of the Gospel, nor fail to pay according to our ability for the support of the Church, of its poor, and all its benevolent work."

There are no so-called "secret" disciples. God wants no cowards in His army. He expects believers who will boldly and publicly pledge their

allegiance unto Him.

“We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.” Many professed believers willfully and habitually absent themselves from the church services.

Nehemiah asked, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” (Nehemiah 13:11). The context reveals a partial answer to the question. The Sabbath day was being used for secular labor. Treading the wine presses and bringing in their commodities for sale.

Sexual sins were also prominent, along with ungodly marriages. Paul tells us some of the greatest reasons as to why the house of God is forsaken. Second Timothy 3:4 mentions “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” Hebrews 10:25 gives us a clear command: “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

So, God’s people are to exhort each other to be faithful in attending the services of the church. Note three reasons mentioned for attending.

A. Church conferences or business meetings

Sadly, church conferences are usually poorly attended. Romans 12:11 tells us that we are not to be “slothful in business, but fervent in spirit serving the Lord.” Business should not be monotonous and boring. It should be informative, inspiring, and exciting to the child of God. It should take priority over all other matters at the appointed time for this important meeting.

B. Public worship

This important experience in the life of a believer can never be overemphasized. God’s Word teaches it so emphatically. Our blessed Savior set the example for us, and we are left without excuse if we fail in this God-given responsibility. We enter the house of God to worship. We depart from God’s house to serve Him by serving those about us, and both experiences are necessary in our Christian lives.

C. Financial Support

Next in making our sincere pledge to God’s people by means of public participation, we agree to pay according to our ability for the support of the church, of its poor, and all of its benevolent work. This means we will pay tithes and offerings to support the work of the Lord.

If you pay less than the tithe, you are a robber (Malachi 3:8). If you pay only the tithe, you are a Pharisee. If you pay both tithes and offerings, you are paying according to the plain teaching of the Word of God. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone."

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian believers, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye, Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

1. We pay to support the church.

Meaning both the local and worldwide ministry. It is a sad day, when because of the failure of many of its members to pay according to their ability, the local church has overdue and unpaid bills. This is a blight on any church and seriously hinders the testimony and the influence of such a congregation. The local church staff is to be paid sufficiently for their services and all other local bills are to be paid promptly. The church should pay regularly to support our educational and missionary programs. To fail to do so is a sin against our God, for which we will be held accountable.

2. We pay to support the poor.

Here we must use good common judgment. We live in a day with many public parasites. These people refuse to work and are constantly begging God's people for material help. Now, the Bible tells us, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

I, personally, have been a victim of many of these public parasites. Lest I be considered hard-hearted and inconsiderate, let me hasten to add that I firmly believe in paying to support the poor, who because of no fault of their own, but due to circumstances beyond their control, are reduced to poverty and are in dire need. We must not overlook or fail to pay to support these needy souls. My heart reaches out to many of these poor neglected souls who are pining away in poorly kept rest homes.

3. And all of its benevolent work.

Meaning wherever and whenever there is a material need that is

scripturally worthy of material support, I am responsible to respond with whatever material support that I am capable of giving.

III. Prayerful Consideration (Paragraph 5)

The paragraph reads as follows: "We agree to accept Christian admonition and reproof with meekness, and to watch over one another in love, endeavoring to 'keep the unity of the Spirit' in bonds of peace, to be careful of one another's happiness and reputation and seek to strengthen the weak, encourage the afflicted, admonish the erring, and so far as we are able to promote the success of the church and of the Gospel."

Paragraph five of our Church Covenant is so important that I was led of the Lord to interpret this to mean prayerful consideration. We should study this important paragraph with a prayer on our lips, with concern in our hearts and with a willingness to fulfill our promise in making this solemn agreement.

1. We agree to accept Christian admonition and reproof with meekness.

Now, this may never be easy, but it is always scripturally right. A very important part of the Christian ministry is reproof. This was one of the reasons for the inspiration of the Scriptures. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

In giving the ministerial charge to Timothy, Paul spoke the following words: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom: Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1, 2). We are human, and as such, we often fail in our responsibility to God and to our fellow man, and in such times it is necessary that we be reproved for our failure. When a fellow believer reproves us for wrongdoing, we should never become angry, but should submit meekly. David is a great example of one who accepted Christian admonition and reproof with meekness. His testimony is recorded in Psalm 55:12-14. "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it, neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him; But it was thou, a man of mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took

sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.”

What a victory! What a blessing! For a man who has been reprov'd for wrong to repent and join his friend in going to the house of God.

2. To watch over one another in love.

Love for our brethren is proof that we have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14), it is proof to others that we are disciples of the Lord Jesus (John 13:35) and is to be continued until the end of our lives (Hebrews 13:1). In Romans 13:10 Paul said, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

I promised to watch over my brother in love when I became a member of a Free Will Baptist church, and by the help of God, I must keep my promise.

3. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.

Unity in peace is a must if God's people are to enjoy their Christian experience and win souls to the Savior. Psalm 133:1 tells us, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” The Lord Jesus, in His prayer recorded in John 17:21 prayed for the unity of the believers. “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” On the day of Pentecost, the church was in unity. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). Little wonder that the hand of the Lord was so bountiful and that 3,000 souls were saved and baptized at the end of the preaching of the Gospel. Division brings grief and failure. In Ephesians 4:3, we are told that we must “endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.”

Isaiah tells us that, “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21). But we are not wicked. We have been justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Since we are Christians and have peace with God, we are to “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). Paul adds, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

I am a lover of peace. I do not want to have an ill will toward any person. Jesus said, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift

before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24). This is God's plan for bringing about peace between those who may not be at peace with one another.

4. To be careful of one another's happiness and reputation.

There seems to be very little happiness in the lives even of professed followers of Jesus today. We sing "O happy day when Jesus washed my sins away," but in reality are we really happy? Could this be the result of our failure to be careful of one another's happiness? Have I intentionally done something to antagonize another or mar his/her happiness? This is a debt that I owe to my fellow believer.

Reputation: We want to be held in high esteem by all who know us, and especially by the Lord's people. At times it may take many years for a person to build a reputation that is unquestioned by others. Our present and future success will depend largely upon what others think of us. It would be helpful, at this point, to remember to live by the golden rule, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).

5. Seek to strengthen the weak.

We can strengthen the weak by encouraging them and assuring them of our prayers. By giving them the assurance of our willingness to lend a helping hand with any problem or difficulty that they are confronted with. We must not condemn and criticize them when they fail to live up to our expectations.

6. Encourage the afflicted.

This is a very important ministry for the child of God. There are so many afflicted people, some who have little or no sanity, who are pining away in public institutions who need some concerned person to visit them, read the Word of God and pray with them. Many have relatives who never visit them and who seem to have no consideration for their welfare. James 2:27 tells us, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Brethren, this is an important ministry. May God help us not to neglect it!

7. Admonish the erring.

We must remind the erring of their errors, not to embarrass them or to

try to convince them that we are stronger and more holy than they are, but with the intent to restore them to a place of fellowship and usefulness in the service of the Lord. Paul tells us how to deal with them in Galatians 6:1. May God help us to play by the rules.

8. To Promote the success of the Church and the Gospel.

The last thing mentioned in paragraph five of our Covenant is our agreement, as far as we are able, to promote the success of the Church and the Gospel. Many church congregations are failing in their God-given responsibility to win souls to Jesus Christ and get them established in the faith.

Several years ago one of the major denominations in their annual report revealed the fact that there were 600 established churches in the state of Tennessee that did not win a single soul to Jesus in an entire year. Dear brethren, we must get busy evangelizing the lost, winning souls to Jesus, or we will eventually die.

The Gospel is the Good News that lost souls need to hear, and it is the only means by which a lost person can be saved from sin. In Proverbs 25:25 the writer tells us, "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

Read the daily newspaper, turn on your radio or TV and almost everything that you read or hear is bad news—both at home and from every far country. But, thank God, I come with "good news, glad tidings of great joy. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:8-11). "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

It is important that I, a believer in Christ Jesus, and a member of the Body of Christ, the Church of the living God, give a sincere pledge to give my full cooperation to God's dear people in the all important work of the Church.

1983 – David Sutton

Considering the Covenant: Our Sacred Promise to God Personally

Text: Romans 12:1, 2

I appreciate the privilege given to me to speak at this 47th annual session of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Thank you to those on the committee. I consider it an honor indeed.

I commend the committee for the theme, "Considering the Covenant." I feel it is most fitting for this time in the history of our denomination. I pray that God will work through the theme and through the preaching for His glory and our benefit. I am confident that He wants to, and will indeed do so, if we, His people, will only cooperate.

I have been assigned paragraphs one and two of the Church Covenant, focusing on the subject, "Our Sacred Promise to God Personally." No particular text was assigned to me, but I have chosen Romans 12:1, 2, as my supporting Scripture. Would you please stand for the reading of paragraphs one and two of the *Church Covenant* followed by the reading of God's Word.

In this day of unholy conformity, when many have turned to unstable compromise, it is of great importance that we Free Will Baptists review, perhaps on a regular basis, our unique commitment to Christ and His cause. What about our personal promise to God? Have we considered it as sacred? Have we been faithful to it? Have we been guilty of unholy conformity?

In the message tonight we will ponder these questions and more. I have arranged my message under three major points:

I. The Glorious Foundation Resting Beneath Our Sacred Promise

The foundation of the covenant is the first five words of the first paragraph: "Having given ourselves to God." It is a glorious foundation because of its character. It calls us to a higher plane, and is the only one of its kind. It is this foundation, and this foundation alone, that makes our promise to God

a sacred one. There are two things about this glorious foundation that I wish to point out.

A. The necessity of it.

The covenant is empty and meaningless without this foundation. Before you and I can subscribe to any other statement in the covenant, we must first, of necessity, “give ourselves to God.” For example, we cannot “give ourselves to one another” until we first “give ourselves to God.” We cannot love Him and obey Him without first turning to Him and trusting Him. We cannot live a holy, separated life without first denying ourselves and giving Him first place.

“Having given ourselves to God” is the essential foundation on which our relationship with God must rest. It is vital if we are to become the people that God wants us to be.

The gift of ourselves is a continual thing. It must be. The Apostle Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). Notice, Paul was writing to Christians. He was addressing the “brethren.” He was calling on those who had already given themselves to God to “keep on doing it.” In essence he was saying, “Give yourselves to God again; give yourselves to God daily.” He was saying “Brethren, whatever you do, keep the foundation strong!”

Quite often, when we have a problem in the church, we deal with the symptom instead of the cause. Is that not true? In the first church I pastored back in 1969, I had a medical doctor in the church who taught me this truth.

Let me illustrate what I mean. When a person has strep throat, one of the symptoms is a high fever. Now, it is true that aspirin may very well help the temperature to go down, but aspirin is not sufficient to take care of the problem of strep throat. Actually, aspirin only treats the symptom. One may feel better temporarily, but the real problem is still there. A good doctor will do more than treat the symptom; he will deal with the cause.

This is especially important when it comes to serving God. Many of the problems we encounter in the church spring from a relationship that is “out of harmony” with Christ Jesus. Rather than treating the symptom, we ought to go straight to the source of the problem.

I have a story that will illustrate this truth very well. During my first

pastorate, I received a phone call early one Sunday morning around 2:30 a.m. The voice on the other end of the line seemed desperate. A couple needed to see me right away if at all possible. I quickly got out of bed and prepared for a 3:00 a.m. meeting at the church. The problem was quite serious. They had been married for several years but were now on the brink of separation and possibly divorce.

He didn't think he could ever forgive her for what she had done. While counseling the couple, the Holy Spirit reminded me that the real problem was not what had happened the past few days concerning their marriage relationship. The real problem was that they were away from the Lord and out of church.

I silently thanked Him for His help and immediately began talking to them about their relationship with Christ. They both confessed to me that they were indeed backslidden and needed to renew their vows to God.

Somewhere around 3:30 a.m., while kneeling at the altar in the sanctuary of the church, they both cried out to God and begged His forgiveness. You know what I am about to say, don't you? You are right! As soon as they finished praying, they looked at one another, fell into each other's arms, and the marriage problem was solved.

Here's my point: The problem in their marriage was only a symptom of a greater problem. When they went to the source of the problem and settled that issue, everything else fell into place.

I repeat. It is of utmost importance that we "give ourselves to God." If we would give ourselves to Him on a daily basis, and each day live a life that is holy and acceptable to Him, we would have far fewer problems, because many of our problems are only symptoms springing forth from the fact that we are not given to God as we ought to be. "Having given ourselves to God" is the glorious foundation that must rest beneath our commitment to Him.

B. The nature of it.

We give ourselves to God "by faith in Christ." The Apostle Paul said "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1, 2).

In verses six through 10 of this same chapter, we see that Christ gave Himself as a dying sacrifice. The One who died sacrificially for us is asking

that we live sacrificially for Him. The sacrificial life that He is asking for is no less than the life of faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul said it this way in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

When one gives himself to God by faith in Christ, it will be a holy sacrifice. When one gives himself to God by faith in Christ, it will be acceptable unto God. And yes, when one gives himself to God by faith in Christ, it will be only a reasonable service.

Many in our generation are confused about the subject of faith. They feel that faith is something to be sought and used during a time of extreme emergency. If they can just pray hard enough and long enough, and muster up enough faith, they think God will then be obligated to do something great for them. And nothing less than a visible miracle is acceptable. If it doesn't happen, they think it is because of a lack of faith on somebody's part.

Real faith is so different from that. Faith is giving the problem to God and trusting Him to do with it as He so wills. Faith is giving ourselves to God and trusting Him to do with our lives as He so pleases. Really, faith is composed of these three ingredients: 1) Knowledge of God and His Word; 2) Belief in God and His Word; and 3) Obedience to God and His Word. It is not enough just to talk about faith and claim its companionship. One must believe and embrace the teachings of God's Word.

Real, genuine, biblical faith is a faith in Christ that brings a person from a world of sin to the very heart and will of God. As far as I am concerned, there is no better way to begin a church covenant than this: "Having given ourselves to God by faith in Christ."

Evidently, the Free Will Baptist church fathers who put this Covenant together felt the same way.

II. The Gospel Formula Revolving Around Our Sacred Promise

After giving ourselves to God by faith in Christ, we now "adopt the Word of God as our rule of faith and practice." God gave us His Word that we might know Him, believe in Him, and obey Him. Paul puts it this way in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

If you want a greater faith, don't just pray and ask God for it. Pick up your Bible, read it, study it, and meditate on it. As you attain a greater knowledge of God's Word, and apply that knowledge to your life by believing it and obeying it, your faith will grow. God's Word is our guide for successful living. I will not know how to live right—how to present my body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God—except through the teachings of God's Word. I call it a "Gospel Formula" because there are a number of Gospel principles that must blend together to mold and guide my life if I indeed please God.

Let me illustrate: This past spring I decided to spray my yard to get rid of the weeds. The solution that I used last year did not seem to work very well, so I sought the advice of my youth minister, Dean Stone. Dean is a graduate of Oklahoma State University with a major in Agronomy.

At the present time he teaches Biology at Hillsdale and is also a part-time student taking some Bible courses there. Dean said, "I have something that will get rid of those weeds." He brought me a jug of full-strength 2-4-D.

Of course, the 2-4-D must be mixed with water to weaken the mixture. Well, guess what? I used the wrong formula. I misunderstand the directions on the sprayer. Instead of using the #2 setting, I used the #8 setting. Now, one would think that if a little bit would do some good, a whole lot would do a lot of good. Not so! I killed the dallis grass, the nut grass, and the dandelions, but I also killed the tulips, the marigolds, and the periwinkles.

I did exactly as my wife had told me. I chose a good still day when there was no wind whatsoever, and I was very careful around the flowers and shrubs, but it was a disaster. The problem was the formula. It was so strong that the fumes of the 2-4-D rose up and choked the flowers to death. At least I am guessing that is what happened.

That day I learned the importance of following the instructions and using the proper formula. The Christian life is much like this. The Apostle Peter said, "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Peter did not mean that we add one to another, and then another to the two, etc., until we eventually had acquired all the virtues. He was speaking, rather, of a complete and well-balanced life. He was saying that faith is

vital, but that it is only one characteristic of God's divine formula for a righteous life. He was saying that there are other Christian graces that one needs in addition to faith.

The gospel formula is well balanced. In our text, we see this "complete" kind of life. Paul said, live a surrendered life: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice." Live a separated life: "Be not conformed to this world." And live a spiritual life: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds."

The Church Covenant says it with different words, but the meaning is the same.

1. Paragraph 2 begins by saying "We are to love and obey Him in all things." Of course, this can only be done by His grace. In his booklet, *Living the Free Will Baptist Church Covenant*, Dr. Robert Picirilli says, "You can't separate loving God from obeying Him. Loving is choosing. To love God is to choose Him and His ways." How true! A surrendered life is all about loving and obeying God.

2. Another part of this Gospel formula is "avoiding all appearance of evil." This phrase speaks of a separated life. We get ourselves into a lot of trouble by hanging around that which is not godly. Like Joseph in Egypt, we should flee when evil appears on the scene. We can't flirt with evil and expect to come out a champion. It doesn't work that way. King David tarried at Jerusalem when he should have been out with his men in battle. When he accidentally saw Bathsheba and her nakedness, he should have immediately left that upper deck and gone back downstairs, but he didn't. Instead of separating himself from the clear view of the temptation, he lingered on, no doubt looking again and again. The Scripture warns each of us, saying, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

3. The Covenant continues, "We promise to abstain from all sinful amusements and unholy conformity to the world," Again, this phrase calls for a separated life, and shouts aloud, "Be not conformed to this world." We talk about how "worldly" the world is, but we shouldn't be surprised by that. The world is supposed to be worldly. That's its nature. Christians, however, are not supposed to be worldly. They are supposed to be holy. God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." He says, "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

Now, not all pleasure is sinful. There is a "lustful" pleasure and a "lawful" pleasure. The lustful pleasure is but for a season, but the lawful pleasure is

everlasting. God didn't intend that we have no enjoyment in life. There are many pleasures that are fun and enjoyable. The men and boys' fishing trip was a blast. The women and girls' day at the outlet mall is still being talked about. These are lawful pleasures.

But, as we all know, there are many pleasures that are lustful in nature. Call me old-fashioned if you wish, but no Christian has any business whatsoever going to the club or hanging out at the dance. These are the very places that one can expect to find worldly people. You can't hang out at such places and be a good witness for Christ. My, how times are changing!

It used to be shocking to see immodest dress on the streets of our towns and cities. It's not anymore. When I was a young man back in the '50s, a woman on the streets in a pair of shorts was considered by most as a woman of the world. She was suspected of being a prostitute. In our day, however, nothing much is thought of it. Today, a church member in about anybody's church can get by with it without a big ado.

When I was a freshman in high school, I went to the state fair in Oklahoma City with a group from my school. That day I paid 50 cents to go to a sideshow. On the stage before us they had a skimpy-dressed woman in a box. One by one, they stuck knives through the box from every direction. It appeared that this woman couldn't possibly have survived the knives. And, along through the process, one piece at a time, they pulled every single article of her clothing out of the box and tossed it on the stage. For another quarter, anyone wanting to could come to the stage and take a peak down into the box.

Practically everybody, it seemed, headed for the stage to take a look. I just happened to have another quarter, so I followed along. As I looked down into the box it seemed as if my heart skipped a beat. There, curled up in that box, in and around those knife blades, was the woman. She had practically nothing on. For a country boy who had seen nothing like this before, I was overwhelmed. I saw her in her nakedness. I was ashamed. I left wishing I had not done what I did. I told no one that I knew about this sinful thing I had done. It wasn't long after that that I was converted, and that ordeal was one of the things for which I repented.

I guess someone in that carnival crowd got the idea that day for a bikini bathing suit, because it wasn't too terribly long after that bikinis became popular, and practically everybody—even some church members—began wearing them. Lord help us!

4. A final aspect of separation is “abstinence from all sanction of the use and sale of intoxicating beverages.” We all know that alcoholic beverages have resulted in much damage and hurt through the years. I well remember the drunk who ran into the bridge near the Garr Corner Free Will Baptist Church where I attended as a young adult.

We heard the crash during a church service one night and ran to the bridge to see what we could do to help. There was nothing we could do. The car was on fire. The drunk man had crawled out, but it was too late to get his wife and two children out. They died in the flames.

This story has been repeated over a thousand times and more. Why would any Christian want to mess around with something that has caused so much pain and hurt? Habakkuk 2:15 clearly speaks to its harm, and so does Proverbs 23:31. Christians should not use it or sell it. Neither should a Christian sanction its use or sale. It may put millions of tax dollars into the economy to help education, but tax dollars are not what separation and holiness are all about.

Here’s the bottom line: It is important that Free Will Baptists live a surrendered life and a separated life. When that happens, the two added together result in a spiritual life.

The last phrase of paragraph two commits us to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.” An honest relationship with God and with our fellow man will certainly be the result of a Spirit-filled life. Church is a spiritual family of believers living together with God. May God give us transformed churches in our Free Will Baptist denomination!

III. The Grand Finale Resulting From Our Sacred Promise

A finale is the conclusion or last part of something. In this case, we mean the end result of a life totally given to God—and even more so, the end result of a fellowship of believers totally given to God. According to the covenant, we are only now ready to give ourselves to one another. Again I say, this can’t happen until we have first given ourselves to God. Brother Harold Pitts will deal with that aspect of the covenant tomorrow night.

Paul’s words in verse 2 of our text say it so beautifully, “That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” Here’s the grand finale. Here’s the end result of a denomination given to God.

The world must be confused. There are so many religions in this world

that it is just unbelievable. I read recently that there is an average of one new religion beginning each day here in the United States. One can believe just about anything he wishes and find a religion that will agree. The world must see Christianity in a different way.

Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt hath lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men." Again He said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

If we are not very careful, we will lose our savor. We must beware lest our light get dim and go out. Souls are at stake. We cannot afford to lose our testimony. We must live in a way as to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

Our creed is what we believe. Our character is what we are. Our conduct is what we do. The world must see these three in agreement one with the other. It is of utmost importance that we believe the truth of God's Word. Praise God for our Free Will Baptist doctrine! If our creed is not right, our character and conduct will not be right either. But even if our creed is right, that doesn't automatically mean that our character and conduct are right as well. Have you noticed that in this day of unholy compromise, many are changing their creed to match their conduct rather than getting their conduct in line with the Word. Their conduct is ungodly because their character is ungodly, and it's easier to change their creed than it is their character.

Conclusion

Brethren, let's agree together tonight that we will not settle for anything less than a creed, character, and conduct becoming to and consistent with the Word of God. I am convinced that we must have revival. We must experience it in our hearts and lives. How wonderful it would be if we could experience it this week and carry it back to our churches. We need a greater faith in Christ—the kind of faith that will bring us to the foot of the cross; the kind that will result in separated, holy living. We need a greater love for

one another—the kind of love that will be quick to forgive; the kind that will go beyond the normal to the extreme.

Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have lone one for another.” We need a greater passion for lost souls - the kind that will reach out to the uttermost; the kind that will hold out a helping hand to people regardless of who they are or what they have done; the kind that will say, “Here am I, send me!”

I am praying that the messages this week will speak to our hearts and show us our need for real revival. I am praying that each of us will re-examine our hearts and re-commit our lives to this great and worthy cause. Nothing else is as important as our relationship to God and our relationship to one another. Let us pray.

1984 – Ken Walker

Reaching for Revival by Facing the Sin Problem

Text: Proverbs 14:9

The theme for this convention is “Reaching for Revival.” God knows we need revival! I know we need revival. The concerned Christian knows this. The burdened pastor is aware of this. The discerning layman realizes that the level of dedication to God in the average church is low. Why? Perhaps Matthew 24:12 sheds some light. Sin cools the heart and suppresses dedication to God. We have lost a sin consciousness in our churches.

Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

Illustration: A woman walks into the psychiatrist’s office with a strip of bacon over each ear and a fried egg on top of her head. The doctor asks, “What may I do for you?” She replies, “I’ve come to talk with you about my brother’s problems.”

We must face the sin problem if we would have revival. We cannot survive by just doctoring the effects of sin.

Illustration: A violent storm had ripped some of the roof off of a barracks building. Soldiers watched the rain cascade into the building. The sagging floor finally became a lake of water. “Call the carpenter shop,” someone said.

They did, and after a while someone came in, surveyed the water, took a drill from his tool box and proceeded to drill a hole through the floor in the middle of that lake. Then, dried himself off, picked up his tools and left. The soldiers were left staring at the hole in the roof! All he did was doctor the effects.

The problem is sin. Truth is man is punished by his sins as well as for his sins. We will reap what we sow!

My message seeks to create a vital sin consciousness by raising three questions:

1. What is sin?

2. Why do people sin?

3. Why do people continue sinning when they know it is wrong?

Remember, God is not against us for our sins, but is for us and against our sins!

I. What is Sin?

A. The Bible teaches that sin is found in: vain talk (Proverbs 10:19); contempt for others (Proverbs 14:21); foolish thoughts (Proverbs 24:9); unbelief (Romans 14:23); neglect of opportunity (James 4:17); transgression of the law (1 John 3:4); all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17).

B. Bruden's definition: "Sin is every thought, word, action, omission, or desire contrary to the law of God."

Learn: Here is a summary of sin's power to ruin. Four words:

1. Sin (Romans 3:23). Sin here means failing to be and to do what we have been so commanded, missing the mark, falling short of God's intended purpose for our lives.
2. Trespass (2 Corinthians 5:19). Trespass means insisting on doing what we are forbidden to do. (Every deliberate violation of a clear commandment of God is rebellion and lawlessness.)
3. Iniquity (Psalm 51:25). Iniquity perverts that which is good to be twisted, crooked. (Such became David's life in his adultery with Bathsheba, and he knew it!)
4. Guile (Psalm 32:2). Guile is projecting what is false, i.e. the liar, the perjurer, the teller of half-truths to mislead.

Sin has the power to ruin a person's life. Still, people sin!

II. Why Do People Sin?

A. Man has a free will. Consider 1 John 2:15, 16 (i.e., freedom of choice).

B. Men have unholy desires: Genesis 3:6 (true of both Eve and Adam).

1. Eve had an unholy desire.
2. Expressed an unlawful act.

3. Was bent on an ungodly purpose.

C. People yield to the lower nature. (According to James 1:13-16, temptation is not sin, but yielding to it is).

D. People do not realize the power of the adversary of the soul. (Illustration: Comedian Flip Wilson said often, "The devil made me do it." Our society is rampant with flippant remarks about sin.)

Learn: While we recognize the devil's roar (1 Peter 5:8) in open and vile sin, we fail to hear the flutter of his wings (2 Corinthians 11:14) when he transforms himself into an angel of light.

III. Why Do People Continue Sinning (even when they know it is wrong)?

A. They are set in their own ways: The lost (Isaiah 53:6); the backslider (Proverbs 14:14).

B. They mistake God's longsuffering and justice: Ecclesiastes 8:10, 11. (This is one of the saddest pictures in the Bible.)

C. They think there is no joy in serving the Lord: Hebrews 11:25. (They choose the pleasures of sin for a season. God offers abundant life with eternity in Heaven.)

D. They do not believe the Bible when it teaches all must give an account of our lives: Romans 14:12; Hebrews 9:27. (If I lived like some people do, I wouldn't want to believe that either. But it is still true.)

E. They confuse the meaning of Calvary and say that God loves too much to send people to Hell. (Calvary expresses two things about God: His love and His wrath. At Calvary, Jesus paid a debt He did not owe to cover a debt I could not pay.)

Oh, dear soul, have you faced the sin problem?

Each of us determines his own destiny, his own eternal destiny. It's a matter of choice. Accept Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. Ask for forgiveness for your sins.

One more verse of Scripture: Ecclesiastes 8:5. Listen carefully. Be wise! Make the right choice! What 'time' is it in your life? If your life were to end today, how would you fare in judgment?

1984 – Lonnie DaVoult

Reaching for Revival

- Folks needed
- Formula for revival
- Fruits of revival

Formula for Revival:

Revival is not...

- Soul saving
- Evangelistic campaign
- Protracted sessions of meetings

Revival is...

- Reviving something that has some life in it.

Revival will come...

- Individually
- When the Holy Ghost comes
- When saints get sanctified, cleansed, and yielded

Revival time...

- Is not a set time each year
- Is not a certain evangelist
- Should be all the time

Illustration: Guitar—Chet Atkins

Illustration: Grand Canyon—Is anybody else up there?

The formula for revival is...

- Humble, selflessness (Philippians 2:5) “Let this mind be in you.”
- Pray (Sister Mabel Willey) “Lord, teach us to pray.”
- Seek my face...eye-to-eye. Illustration: Fork-eyed boxer
- Turn from wicked ways to God.
- Then will I hear, forgive, heal.

1984 – Keith Burden

Something You Can Take Home With You

Text: Acts 8:26-39

Was Paul being unrealistic or just downright funny when he said in 1 Thessalonians 5 to “Rejoice evermore,” or in Philippians 4 where he said, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice”? Most of us respond to such scriptural statements by thinking, “Sure, Paul! It sounds great, but it’s just not possible!” Or is it?

I. Things That Had Not Caused This Man to Rejoice

- A. A religious experience. He had come to Jerusalem to worship (verse 27).
- B. A responsible position. He was a man of great authority: “had the charge of all her treasure” (verse 27).
- C. A restricted lifestyle. He was a eunuch (verse 27 and cf. Mark 10:20, 21).

II. Things That Had Caused This Man to Rejoice

- A. Becoming fully acquainted with the Savior. Phillip preached unto him Jesus (verse 35 and cf. Philippians 3:10).
- B. Becoming fully assured of his salvation: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (verse 37 and cf. 2 Peter 1:10).
- C. Becoming fully aligned with the Scriptures: “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” (verse 36).

His rejoicing was not dependent on:

- (1) His circumstances—he was in the desert (verse 26).
- (2) His companions—the eunuch saw him no more (verse 39).

His rejoicing was based on:

His conversion (cf. Luke 10:19, 20).

1984 – Terry Forrest

The Fruits of Revival Received

Text: 2 Chronicles 7:14

The Lord describes the people and the process involved in reaching for revival in the first part of this verse; in the last part He describes the provisions which are available to those who are willing to meet the conditions.

The word *then* is the pivotal word in this passage. It reminds us of the conditions placed upon God's blessings on His people. "If my people... then" these things will happen. It implies the idea "only then." This explains why many revival meetings are just meetings, not revivals. What will happen when God's people meet the conditions for revival?

First, the fruits of revival will be received in that God will hear our prayers. There are times when the heavens seem to be shut up like brass. Solomon recognized this when dedicating the Temple. Second Chronicles 6:19-21: in three verses, "hearken" is mentioned three times and "hear" two times.

There are reasons God refuses to hear. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Let's consider the results when we meet His conditions. When God hears, great things happen. Let us be reminded tonight, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not by the space of three years and six months." We have no clear record of how Elijah went about it when he prayed. He just appeared one day and announced to Ahab, "No rain."

No doubt Ahab didn't believe it. I can see the prophets as Ahab called them in after a few weeks of drought. They said, "Don't worry about it Ahab, we've had dry spells before. This won't last long."

Beloved, he did worry about it. When God withholds the rain, everything suffers. How true that is in a spiritual sense also. There are, no doubt, people here tonight who have been experiencing a dry spell—pastors whose ministry seems to be dried up. Parents who have lost touch with children. Seemingly unbreakable barriers developed. Families, perhaps husbands and wives came to this convention with bitterness and anger, on the brink

of separation. There may be individual Christians here with the springs of your soul dried up, and you have no joy. Church leaders can't seem to cope with the situations your church is in. How we need the dew of Heaven to fall upon us to quench our thirsty souls.

Hear God's promise: "Then will I hear."

James said, "He prayed again." We do have a record. It was after his victory at Mt. Carmel. He went to the top of the mountain. He cast himself down with his head between his knees and prayed. He sent the servant to "look toward the sea." He said, "There is nothing."

What a picture of our prayer experience so often. But Elijah prayed seven times. We need to learn persistence in prayer. The seventh time, a cloud the size of a man's hand appeared. Elijah said, "That's enough, Ahab. You better get on your horse. It's fixin' to rain."

Sometimes we will be satisfied with nothing but a thunderstorm when we need to fasten our faith on a few sprinkles until God's time is right. Lo and behold, as rain came, Ahab raced toward Jezreel in his chariot. The Lord empowered Elijah to run and beat Ahab there, standing in the gate when he passed.

We need revival, for we need to reach the ear of God. Remind Ahab how these things came about. When God hears, things happen.

Then, fruits of revival will be received when God handles our problems; that is, forgives our sin. I grew up in the foothills of Missouri. One old preacher taught me, "Got to get folks lost before you can get them saved." Men must be convicted of sin. The fires of holiness are burning low in this once-strong denomination.

I'm afraid too often we are in the business of calling the righteous to repentance, or that is how we approach it. We are unwilling to face the seriousness of our situation. God will never forgive our sin until we are able and willing to recognize and confess and forsake it. God won't bless just anything no matter how often we ask Him.

It may be we are guilty of trying to treat the patient while pretending he is not really sick. I do not point an accusing finger at others while ignoring our situation. In too many of our churches immodesty is common. And we wonder why there is no revival.

Many passages deal with the sin problem. Let's put God's magnifying

glass on our hearts. In Proverbs 6:16-19, sins are listed: pride, lying, injustice, evil thinking, the inclination to get involved in mischief, rumor spreading, and sowing discord among brethren.

The devil is in the counterfeiting business. It is possible to dress these sins up. Disguise them until they become virtually unrecognizable. They appear respectable, even commendable.

Pride can fit into the garb called spirituality. It is possible for us to put on our best fundamental shirt and our newest pair of strict standards and convictions and put our spirituality on display. Don't get me wrong. We need strict standards and convictions. There is some movement in the right direction among people I know. I want to remind you in truth, the closer any man draws to God the more evident his sinfulness becomes. True spirituality gives birth to humility not pride. God at our best, shows us how sinful we are and how dependent on His grace.

Lying can often wear the mask of the casual remark. Loose words, like the arrow, are impossible to stop once we let them go. We shall give account for every idle word.

Injustice, shedding innocent blood is most often hidden under the cloak of religion. The history of the Church bears out that its greatest enemies have been religious men. Who crucified Jesus? Who killed Stephen? Who stoned Paul? Who fills the pages of *Fox's Christian Martyrs*? Who gives you your greatest problems in your work for God?

Evil thinking often dons the wardrobe of caution. It is possible for us to always expect the worst from people, even our brethren. A black cloud of suspicion can overshadow all our relationships. Paul writes, "Love thinketh no evil." Love doesn't ignore evil, it just doesn't expect it. It is surprised and shocked when it encounters it.

Then, there is an inclination to participate in mischief. Those feet that are swift in running to mischief often wear shoes with the label called involvement. We tend to want to do what others are doing. It won't do to not be involved. Sometimes we get involved trying to tell others how.

Rumor spreading can wear the respectable clothing of Christian fellowship. It is possible for more damage to be done in a day than can be repaired in a decade. How many reputations have been needlessly damaged? A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. Conventions like this are breeding grounds for gossip. Before you say anything, be sure you have

the facts. Of course some facts are better left unsaid. We don't have to tell everything we know. The Bible does say, "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is wise." There may be a chance for us.

The sin of sowing discord can wear the costume of the defender of the faith. I have great respect for the independent movements in fundamental circles but the great independent movements have put on the gloves so often they seem to have difficulty at times distinguishing friend from foe. Strike out at whoever gets close enough. I don't believe we can afford the price of that spirit.

Paul says in Galatians 5:15, "But if ye bite and devour one another take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

Vance Havner tells of two war vessels that met in the fog and after firing at each other for hours discovered when the fog lifted that they both flew the same flag. I pray that soon the fog will lift for us.

Seems to me there should be among us men of reason and the possibility of unity without absolute uniformity. We have a biblical responsibility to do everything that is in our power to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Yes, we should exhort one another and so much the more.

Yes, we should admonish or warn one another. I appreciate those who, through the years, have admonished me and helped me develop my convictions.

In some cases we should reprove and rebuke one another, but we must learn to strike a proper balance in our relationships to each other. A balance that allows us to be uncompromising and yet to have a proper spirit. A spirit that prizes unity and fortifies love.

It is wrong to whisper and scheme and politic no matter who is guilty. God stands ready to forgive our sins when we acknowledge them and forsake them.

Finally, the fruits of revival are revealed in the healing of our people. Jesus Christ is the great physician. None will deny that our world is sick. The Church is the only hope of this generation. I want to underscore that I am talking about the local church. On every hand today, we hear the taunting cry of the world speaking to the church: "Physician heal thyself."

Isn't that what you hear every week of this world on visitation? Now

listen, some of that is justified. The church, God's instrument of healing, is itself sick. In many of the congregations the symptoms are evident. Everyone is saying, "She really is sick!" In others, the symptoms are hidden, like a fearful, deadly cancer eating away. What appears to be healthy may burst open at any moment with running sores. You say, "My church is not like that. Praise God we are on fire."

Then, Brother, pray for the rest and take heed lest ye fall. I'm not painting an unduly dark picture, I'm saying the devil isn't dead yet. He is opposed to every effort of the people of God whether it be the work of an individual or a church or denomination. He is, I believe, launching a great offensive against every church and every denomination that stands true.

Not only is the church sick, many of our homes are sick. How many preachers and their wives came to last year's national that will never go anywhere else together again? In all of our statistics, in some of which we properly rejoice, we do not report how many divorces we had in our church last year. Our homes need healing.

Beyond that, for those homes that cannot be salvaged, we must come to grips with developing a biblical, compassionate approach to promoting healing in those lives. Divorce is a terrible thing. We must make its tragedy clear to help our people avoid it. Nobody knows how terrible divorce is any better than those who have experienced it. What those people need is not a more clear diagnosis of the disease; they need healing.

Then, it seems to me, our denomination needs the healing hand of God. What a glorious thing if in this national convention, healing of the body of Christ might take place. Then it wouldn't matter whether we decide this convention is worth the money, time, and trouble it takes to meet every year or every other year, if healing can take place. One thing we all could agree on is that the national convention of 1984 was worth any price.

The fruits of revival are received when God hears our prayers, handles our problem of sin, and heals our people. These things speak of what God will do when revival comes.

1984 – Jimmy Alridge

When Thou Art Converted...

Introduction

Peter

1. Saved (John 1:40-42)
2. Called to service (Matthew 4:18-20)
3. Named an apostle (Matthew 10:1, 2; 7, 8)
4. Walked on water (Matthew 14:28-31)
5. Thou art Christ (Matthew 16:13-16)
6. Had faith in Christ (John 6:66-69)
7. Witnessed the transfiguration (Matthew 17)

But...“When thou art converted, strengthen the brothers.”

Conversion

- A. John 21:15-17: from a sentimental, affectionate fondness for Jesus the Jewish Messiah to a willing devotion to Jesus the Savior of the world, the Lamb for sinners slain.
 - Mark 12:30: “Heart, soul, mind, body, strength.”
 - John 14:15: “If you love me, keep my commandments.”
 - 1 John 3:18: “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”
- B. Converted from a nasty, hidebound, religious bigotry that bordered on racism, to an acceptance of the worth of other races for whom the Lord Jesus died.
 - Vision of Cornelius (Acts 10:28; 11:2-18)
 - Backslidden: Galatians 2:11-14

C. Converted from a reckless, uncontrolled use of words, to articulate, forceful, Spirit-directed, scriptural preaching.

1. Rebuked Jesus (Matthew 16:22, 23)

2. Told Jesus he shouldn't put him in the boat with the others (Matthew 26:31-33).

3. Talked without knowing what he said (Luke 9:33)

– I don't remember Peter ever quoting the Scriptures until after his "conversion of love" encounter with Jesus.

– He never shared his faith until after he realized that all men without Christ are lost.

– Great biblical sermons: Acts 2:14-37; Acts 3:12-26. He quoted Joel, David, Jesus.

D. Converted from a wrong use of leadership abilities to a right use.

1. Matthew 26:35: Led the disciples to make false declarations

2. Matthew 26:40-43: Asleep on the job

3. Matthew 26:58: Followed Jesus afar off

4. Matthew 26:69-74: Denied knowing Jesus

5. Mark 8:33: "Savored things of men"

6. John 13:6: Refused feet washing at first

7. John 21:3; Luke 24: Went fishing after death of Christ

– Acts 1-12. Fearless leadership

Conclusion

1. Remembered Jesus' word (Luke 22:61; Matthew 26:75).

2. He wept (Matthew 26:75).

1984 – Billy Jackson

Sowing Seeds, Reaping Joy

Text: Psalm 126:6

Illustrations of what our local church does to further the cause of Christ:

1. Bus ministry
2. Junior church (or children's church) ministry
3. Street services (witnessing on the street for Christ)
4. Tract ministry
5. Services at the old folks' home
6. Radio ministry

[Sermon excerpts as recalled by the family.]

1984 – Jacob Creech

Anchors in the Midst of the Storms

Text: Acts 27:9-29

Introduction

The Apostle Paul had finally been captured by the Jews in Jerusalem and turned over to the Roman authorities for proper trial and punishment. Chief Captain Claudius Lysias sent Paul to Felix, the “more convenient time” governor, and the governor wanted Agrippa, the “almost thou persuadest me” king, to hear Paul’s case. Since Paul had done nothing worthy of death, and since he was a Roman citizen, he appealed to Caesar.

In Acts 27, we find that Paul was delivered into the hands of one named Julius, a Roman centurion, to see to it that Paul got to Rome. They boarded the ship and began their long, tedious Journey.

As we examine this passage today, I want us to notice, first of all:

I. The Storm: The Adversity They Faced (27:14)

“Euroclydon.” Notice that they named storms back then too. This word means “An east wind, causing boisterous waves.”

In verses 9, 10, Paul perceived that danger lay ahead, and advised that they winter in Fair Havens. But Paul’s advice was not heeded, and they decided to push on to Phenice on the western end of the island, since it was a more pleasant place to spend the winter.

But it was during this time they were trying to reach this port of greater comfort, that the storm arose, and for 14 days and nights the ship was driven with the wind. There seemed little hope that they would be saved (verse 20). All 276 persons on board the ship faced great physical adversity.

This goes to remind us that we all will face storms in our lives. Please be reminded that Paul was not taking a luxury cruise on the Mediterranean. He had not taken a few days off to go on a deep-sea fishing trip with some of his Christian friends. He was a prisoner headed for Rome to stand trial for his life, simply for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we say we want to be like Paul. But are we really sure of that? Oh, we want to be able to lead the Philippian jailer to Christ, but not too many of us are excited about being put in jail and beaten in order to get the opportunity. We would like to share the excitement of a new church being born on one of Paul's missionary journeys, but we may shy away from being stoned and cast on the trash pile for dead, like Paul was at Derbe.

We might enjoy being caught up into the third heaven and seeing the glorious sights, yet we may not think too well of those who vow that they will not eat or drink until we are dead, just because we told them of our experience. Paul said on one occasion that "a great door and effectual is opened unto me, but there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9).

There are so many things in our lives that can cause the storm winds to blow upon us, and we may feel at any moment that our ship will sink. But just before it does, may the next truth in this passage grip our hearts, for not only are there the storms and the adversities that they faced, but second, we find:

II. The Solution: The Admonition They Found (27:21-26)

Paul let the people on the ship know there was Someone on board other than the 276 registered passengers (verse 23). There was a word from God in the midst of the storm.

Paul said to them that he belonged to God, who made the seas, and he believed in the God who formed the winds, and he served the God who controls the waves, and his God was right there in the ship with them, that all on the ship would be spared (verse 24).

May all of us be reminded that God has never promised to deliver us from the storms, but He has promised to be with us through the storms. Third, we find in this passage:

III. The Stays: The Anchors They Fixed (27:29)

This verse says that they put out four anchors. Someone might ask, "Now if God is in the boat with you, and He is going to carry you through the storm, why the anchors? Why do you not just 'trust in God'?"

Folks, trusting in God involves common sense. Those on the ship were not rebuked for setting some anchors. That would be like asking God to

meet a financial need and then not being willing to work for the money. I believe we must have some anchors if we are to remain firm in the storms we face. There must be those stays that stabilize the vessel of our soul.

The song writer says, "In times like these, you need a Savior. In times like these, you need an anchor. Be very sure. Be very sure. Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock."

So they cast four anchors out of the stern and waited for the day. I will basically deal with one anchor that we find in the text that is absolutely essential, and will suggest three more that are important.

The first anchor they cast was:

The Anchor of Faith in the Savior (verses 23-25).

Paul said, "I believe God, and I belong to God, and I serve God." So many sink in the storms of life because they are not firmly anchored in their faith in Jesus Christ. We must know that we believe God and that we belong to God and that we serve God.

Jude spoke of being "sound in faith," so there is such a thing as unsound faith, which is not real faith at all. James spoke of saving faith and a faith that does not save. So let's talk about:

1. The Fallacies of faith. These include:
 - a. The power of positive thinking idea.
 - b. The believe-and-receive or confession philosophy.
 - c. Step out on faith. Instead, we must step out on the promises of God.
 - d. Name-it-and-claim-it theology.
2. The Facts of faith: Paul said "I believe God. I belong to God."
 - a. There must be saving faith. Saving faith is resting our all on God and His Word, and what Jesus did on the cross to purchase our salvation.
 - b. There must be serving faith. Paul said, "I serve God." Over and over the Bible says that we must live by faith, or we must walk by faith. Faith has continuous action. We must believe and keep on believing. It's like riding a bicycle. You have to peddle and

keep on peddling.

3. The formation of faith (Romans 10:17).
4. The followers of faith. Consider a couple of examples of those who lived the life of faith:

a. Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-19).

- The prepared city for which he looked (Hebrews 11:8-10).
- The promised son for which he longed (Hebrews 11:11, 12). God had not only promised Abraham a home, but he also promised him a heritage.
- The particular sacrifice which proved his love (Hebrews 11:17-19). Someone has said that “We can only enjoy that which we have fully given to God.”

Abraham did not know the *where* of the city. He did not know the *how* of the son. He did not know the *why* of the sacrifice. But he knew the *One* who was directing his life, and that was all that mattered, because Abraham was a follower of faith.

b. Moses (Hebrews 11:12-29). Moses shows his great faith by four choices that he made.

- Moses rejected worldly prestige (verse 24).
- Moses rejected worldly pleasure (verse 25).
- Moses rejected worldly plenty (verse 26).
- Moses rejected worldly pressure (verse 27) .

5. The Fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Paul said, “Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life.” He also said, “I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith.”

The supreme desire of Satan is to attack our faith in God and to totally shatter it. Job is the prime biblical example. Fighting the good fight of faith involved:

- a. Contending for the faith (Jude 3).
- b. Continuing in the faith (1 Timothy 6:12, 20, 21).
- c. Caring for our faith (Jude 17-22, 2 Peter 1:5-10).

Finally there is:

6. The finish of faith (1 Peter 1: 8, 9). But there are three more anchor that we must cast:
 - a. The anchor of fullness of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
 - b. The anchor of fervency of supplication and prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16)
 - c. The anchor of fellowship among the saints (Proverbs 18:24, John 15:9-21, Philippians 1:2-6).

Conclusion

The mammoth warship *U.S.S. North Carolina* is docked at Wilmington, North Carolina. But the thing that caught my attention the most about this ship were the anchors. They were so very huge. Yet, in order to stabilize a ship that size, they needed anchors that large.

I believe that the anchors we have looked at today are huge enough to stabilize us in any storm that we may face, regardless of how big the storm may be.

1985 – Jonathan N. Thigpen

Let Us Run!

Text: Hebrews 12:1-3

Are you in the race or on the sidelines of life? If you are in the race, then run:

I. Courageously, not cowardly.

A. Follow the example of those who have gone before (Hebrews 12:1), men like:

1. Henry "Pop" Melvin
2. John West
3. John L Welch
4. Ray Lee
5. John and Kay Metcalf
6. Chris and Linda Hummel
7. Floyd Wolfenbarger

B. Be encouraged by their cheers; we have the home court advantage.

II. Cautiously, not carelessly.

A. Lay aside every weight; we must travel light (Philippians 3:13), e.g. missionary who had little furniture "because I am a traveler; more at heavenly home."

B. Lay aside every entangling sin, e.g. compare the eagle and the weasel.

III. Consistently, not inconsistently.

A. Run patiently; run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). Consider the start of a marathon compared with the finish.

- B. Don't quit. Illustration: Joan Hansen fell but still finished in the 1984 3,000-meter Olympic race.
- C. It's the finish that counts.

IV. Confidently, not pessimistically.

- A. Jesus is our focal point, our ultimate example (Hebrews 12:1-2).
- B. Jesus is our confidence.
- C. Prayer of Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee: "Dear God, your will; nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

1985 – Herman Hersey

Denominational Stewardship

Text: 1 Chronicles 29

Open your Bible, please, to 1 Chronicles 29 and keep it open for we will be referring to the verses from this chapter throughout the message.

The prayer and desire of King David's heart was to build a Temple for God. God told him he could not do it. We read in 1 Chronicles 28:3 the reason God gave David. He said, "Your hands have shed blood. However, I will let you do the next best thing. I will let your son Solomon build the temple. I will let you make the plans for it, and I will let you gather the materials and raise the money before you die."

In this passage, we find some great stewardship principles. We usually think of stewardship as giving money, and giving is an expression of stewardship. Giving is often the proof of a good steward, but stewardship goes far beyond mere giving. These principles also apply to the stewardship of life, talent, time, and other areas of life. In this message, I will speak only on the stewardship of money.

Notice four stewardship principles in 1 Chronicles 29. First, stewardship recognizes all wealth comes from God. In verse 14, David says, "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

Notice in verse 16, David says, "Oh Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own."

I don't need to take time with this congregation to prove from the Bible that God owns everything. You are aware of this. I find several things the Bible specifically teaches that God owns the world, the heavens, the seas, the land, the fruits of the land, the cattle, money, clothes, our children, our bodies, our souls. God owns everything we possess.

First, God owns everything by right of creation. He created all things for His honor and glory. God owns all things—not only because He created them—but also because all things are upheld by the might of His power. God holds this universe together.

For the Christian, there is a more important reason. God owns us by right of redemption. Because He redeemed us, we are not our own. We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to Him. In fact, the Bible teaches even our bodies are not our own but the temple, the dwelling place of God.

Therefore, since God owns all things, I realize that nothing I possess is mine. It is His. It is not a question of deciding I am going to give what I have to God for He owns it already. That is a part of stewardship we may never have faced or realized.

I have heard the stewardship of money expressed in different ways. Some say God not only is concerned about the tithe we give, He is also concerned about how we spend the 90% we keep for ourselves. I have heard it expressed that God does not see what we give; He sees what we have left. I'm sure these are truths. Yet in a real sense, everything we have belongs to Him. It is not ours, and therefore we are accountable to Him. You will recall that Paul writes, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). As stewards, we must be ready to give an account of our stewardship.

As a pastor, I think I have asked the wrong questions. I'm sure some of you pastors are guilty too. I asked, "How can I get people to give more? How can I get them to be more generous? How can I get them to start tithing?"

I think a more scriptural question would be, "How will I get people to free themselves from selfishness, stinginess, and greed? How can I get them to realize everything belongs to God?"

We don't need to argue that today we are living in an age when materialism is the motivating force for so many people. The great Henry Ford, who in his 90s went to the office every day, was asked, "Why are you going every day? When will you be satisfied?"

He answered, "I just want one dollar more." Just one dollar more...just one dollar more. That was his driving force.

Oh, if only we as a people could say, instead of just one dollar more, we want just one *soul* more. We want one more church, one more answered prayer, one more victory. For you see, if that becomes the motivating force in our lives, and we realize all things belong to the Lord, the stewardship of material possessions takes on an entirely different meaning.

God has given to us so we can have bread and butter on the table. It's

just that simple. He has given to us so we can sustain life, so we can have food, clothing, shelter, and the other needs of this life.

The second principle of stewardship not only recognizes all things come from the Lord but requires absolute love unto the Lord. In 1 Chronicles 29:3, David says, "I have set my affection to the house of my God."

Notice the verb construction here. David says, "I have set...." I think it implies that he had made up his mind at some time in the past. I have set my affection; you're not going to change me. My affection is set to the house of my God.

Can we honestly say without hypocrisy, without hesitation, and without holding back, "We have set our affection to the house of our God"? Can we say we have no love that competes with our love for God? No love that competes with our love for God's house? For God's Book? For God's work? For God's people? Until we get our love life straightened out and have set our affection to the house of our God for all time, we will never have the right kind of stewardship. Stewardship demands this.

I don't know how old I was when I first started noticing girls. I remember back when I went through that delirious age. When I wasn't near the girl I was in love with, I was in love with the girl I was near. One time, I went down to South Carolina for a revival meeting in a little church. They had asked me to lead the singing of all things. I can't lead singing and I can't sing, but I was hungry. So I led singing, and there was a pretty little dark-haired gal playing the piano. I'll tell you, it didn't take but a couple of looks at her before I flipped over her.

Listen, I settled it there. I knew there were other pretty gals in the world but *none* as pretty as Vernie. (I know you understand how that goes.) I set my affection right then. That's what marriage is all about. You make up your mind.

And we need to set our affection to the house of the Lord and to God's Word the same way. Stewardship requires this and results in willing service. Notice verse five of this chapter. David asks, "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" There are two truths here. First, God is looking for your service. Second, you have a service to perform. Think about that for a moment. If you did not have a service to perform for God, He would not be looking for your service.

Some folks say, "I have no talent. There is nothing I can do." No,

stewardship recognizes that all people have talents, and there is a service you can perform for the Lord.

I'm a little concerned, and I'm sure you are, about the shortage of preachers in our denomination. I tell you, we need more preachers. Our young men need to be willing to answer God's call, to forsake all and say, "Yes, I'm going to preach the Gospel." We have a lot of fellows becoming ministers of music, and I have no particular problem with that. But we need preachers. God did not say it was through the foolishness of music that man is saved but by the foolishness of preaching (I Corinthians 1:21).

I think one reason we do not have more young men answer the call to the ministry lies at the basis of our stewardship problem. Many of our churches have been stingy in taking care of their pastor. These young men have seen how pastors and their families have to get along with half enough. Instead of answering the call to the ministry, they say, "No, I'm going to do something else. I'm not going to let them treat my family like they treated my dad or my pastor."

I'm afraid we are going to reap what we sow for not taking adequate care of our pastors. On the emblem of the American Baptist Missionary Society is an image of an ox standing between an altar and a plow with these words inscribed on a scroll, "Ready for either or both."

Ready for service; ready for sacrifice. A good steward realizes he is to be ready to give or to give up, ready to serve God or to put his life on the altar to do whatever God has for him to do. He realizes his life is not his own. God is his master and there is no question about it.

Let me remind you of the first three points of this message. Stewardship recognizes all wealth comes from God, requires absolute love, and results in willing service.

I want to emphasize the fourth and last principle. Stewardship recognizes that I do not give to my church. I do not give to a board, I do not give to a missionary, I do not give to an institution, I do not give to a pastor, and I do not give to a program. I give to the Lord. I think we have lost sight of this fact. Giving is not to men, but giving is to the Lord.

This principle is taught over and over in the Bible, particularly in this chapter. Notice the last part of verse 1. David said, "The work is great, for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." David is saying everything he is doing is not for man but for the Lord. Notice verse 14 where he said,

“Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort, for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

In the last part of verse 17, David said, “Now I have seen with joy thy people, which are present here, offer willingly unto thee.”

When we give to people, it will divide us. When we give with partiality, it will hinder us. Giving must be done in faith. Everything we do is a matter of faith: This is the essence of our Christian walk. David did not know for sure what Solomon was going to do with all the gifts and billions of dollars. He did not know for sure that Solomon would obey God. As a matter of fact, David gave toward a Temple that in the providence of God would be destroyed. Think of that. The Temple would be destroyed, yet David gave the offering, trusting God to take care of that gift.

I wonder what you and I would have told the widow who at the Temple cast in two mites, all she had, into the Temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44). We probably would have said, “Don’t give your offering there. That is a corrupt temple. They are rejecting the Messiah, and they are preaching false doctrine.”

We would say the priests might spend the money wrong. They might use it to pay one of the Temple prostitutes, to bribe some Roman official, or squander it in any number of ways. However, our Lord commended her. Why? She wasn’t giving to those corrupt priests who were accountable unto God for their stewardship. The widow’s gift was not in vain. It was not wasted. Why? She gave it to the Lord.

I suspect Jesus gave to that same Temple. I cannot prove that, but you can’t disprove it. Jesus went to the Temple regularly, and He was expected to speak. He obeyed their law and kept their traditions. When the question came up about paying tribute money, He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). I think it is a reasonable inference to suppose that Jesus gave to this Temple.

The disciples came to Jesus all shook up. They told Him there was a fellow outside casting out devils in His name. He didn’t have the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, and he was not one of them. Jesus answered, “Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:50).

Some people think they have been appointed as God’s watchdogs

to watch over how folks give. I tell you, no one can take the place of the Holy Spirit's leading, guiding, and directing. God has not given that over to anybody—whether he calls himself deacon, promotional secretary, executive secretary, director or whoever he is.

We need to respect our pastors and keep a balance in this thing, but the bottom line is every believer is a priest before God. Each one has a responsibility to give to the Lord, as he feels directed in his heart. Yes, we need to learn to give in faith trusting the sovereign God to take care of it.

Then, we need to give willingly. We learn in verse 5 about willing service. I want you to notice what David said in verse 9. "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with a perfect heart they offered willingly unto the Lord." Notice verse 14 where David prayed, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort."

In verse 17, David said he and the people had willingly offered their offerings. What did they offer? We find the summary in verses 7 and 8. Some say if you work that out, you will find it was approximately \$1.624 billion plus 500 tons of brass, 5,000 tons of iron and precious stones with no estimation of the value.

David and the people gave with humility. Jesus warned us to have a right attitude in giving. He said that some go out with a brass band and fanfare and give to be seen of men. He said they have received their reward already (Matthew 6:4). We must not give to be seen of men. That's why when we give to the Lord, we don't worry about who gets the credit as long as the work gets done. We don't worry if no one knows what we have done as long as the job gets done for the glory of the Lord.

We give with humility; then we give worshipfully. There is a tremendous prayer here in verses 10-20. When we give to the Lord with a worshipful attitude, we will give with joy. This is just a little preview of what it's going to be like when we get to Heaven. Did you notice the similarity in the language David used in his prayer and the language we find in Revelation 5? I won't take time this morning to make the comparison.

As I conclude, turn please to Revelation 4. We see here what folks are doing in Heaven. I speak here about the 24 elders in verse 10. I'm not sure what all this means, so I'll let you explain it sometime. One thing I *do* know is whatever they have, they cast at the feet of Jesus.

You see, our possessions here are not our own, nor are those we have in Heaven. Those mentioned in this verse had crowns they cast at Jesus' feet. In the light of the matchless Son of God Who is ruler of Heaven, they were not worthy to keep the crowns.

Remember David's attitude in giving an offering was that he and his people didn't have anything but what belonged to God, and they generously gave it back to Him. That's the attitude we see find in Revelation 4:10. As the 24 cast their crowns at Jesus' feet they worshiped Him saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created." In Revelation 5:9, 10 they sing a new song.

"Thou art worthy...for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on earth."

Yes, stewardship recognizes that all things belong to God. Stewardship requires absolute love for the Lord. Stewardship results in willing service to the Lord. We give in faith, willingly, with humility, worshipfully, and with joy. Stewardship realizes we do not give to a program, to men, to people, to a church, to a denomination, to an institution. We give to the Lord.

We need to help one another. You need to help me, I need to help you, and we need to help those we contact to see the truth that when we give, we give to the Lord. Whatever we build as a stewardship program and whatever methods we use (and I'm not particularly concerned about that), I'm concerned we build on the right foundation. The foundation is that we give to the Lord.

Will you pray for me, and I will pray for you that the Lord will help us to realize that as we give, we give to the Lord. Will you say with me, "Yes, the next time I give, I will make a conscious effort to give as unto the Lord"?

1985 – Bobby Jackson

Realizing Our Potential

The morning that David Joslin called me, when Floyd Wolfenbarger died, I turned to my wife with a lump in my throat and a tear in my eye and said, “Floyd is dead.”

And she said, “You just lost one of the best friends that you had in the world.”

She was right. He had just driven all the way to Conway, Arkansas, to sit on an uncomfortable bench and listen to me preach for three nights—the same old sermons he’d heard me preach before. So when Melvin Worthington stuck me with this job, I sort of said to Floyd, “If you were such a good friend, what are you doing in Heaven and leaving me with your place on Wednesday night?” I expect he’s smiling about it.

The burden I carry tonight is for three things. First, that God would enlarge our generosity, loose us from our stingy purse strings, and create in us the kind of stewardship that would give to God sacrificially—not out of our abundance, but out of that which costs us something. That somehow God could do something in our hearts that would increase our devotion to Him and therefore enlarge our giving to Him.

The second thing I desire is that this service will encourage those who’ve grown weary in the work of God and need to reenlist wholeheartedly in the service of the Lord.

My third concern is that among our young people we may have those who will enlist in the service of the Lord Jesus. If we are to realize any potential in this denomination, there must be somebody to follow those of us who are growing old.

It troubled me a little bit to see a number of our young people checking out and going home today, knowing that they would not even be in this service tonight. We have thousands of young people who attend the youth conference. But there are not a thousand students in all of our colleges added together. What has become of the thousands that come to youth conferences that dwindle to hundreds that go to all of our colleges combined, and out of those hundreds, just tens who give themselves to

God? We are losing thousands. Unless something happens in our midst to stir the hearts and souls of young people to enlist themselves in the service of Jesus Christ, we will have no potential for the future.

To that end I want us to pray that God will speak to us tonight about our concern and generosity, encourage those that are discouraged, and that the Spirit of God will move in our midst upon the hearts of those that need to give themselves to the Lord.

The subject assigned for tonight is “Realize the Potential.” I noted that the word *realize* has two closely related definitions. In one sense, it means to think vividly, clearly, and with such imagination that the thought becomes reality in the mind. That’s the sense in which, when you get out and start back to the hotel tonight, and climb that third hill, you suddenly realize it’s a long way from here to the Hyatt. Another closely related definition is to accomplish, to put thinking into practice and bring it into a reality outside of the mind.

First, we should try to evaluate the potential of our movement and our denomination. Let me illustrate. If the Dallas Cowboys are considering drafting a football player, they will take all of his physical, mental, and emotional attributes—positive and negative—and feed them into a computer. The physical attributes include his weight, height, size, speed, and movement. The mental is whether he’s able to understand and remember 200 offensive plays or not—his ability to understand that particular team and the game of football. The emotional attributes include his aggressiveness, even his anger. The computer organizes all of these facts to analyze the potential of that player.

Jesus suggested that it is wise, before you go to war or start to build a house, to sit down and evaluate your potential. One businessman in our city was quoted saying that “the difference between a successful organization and one that’s unsuccessful is that people in a successful organization determine who they are, where they are, where they’re going, and how to get there.”

So then, let’s evaluate our assets and try to offset them with our liabilities. That’s the way you would do it if you were evaluating the potential of a company or organization, and that’s the way I want us to do it tonight.

We can start with physical, or tangible, assets. Thirty-five years ago, when I started in the Free Will Baptist ministry, we did not have much. I’m talking about buildings, starting with local church buildings. Today, there

are more of them. They are larger, more comfortable, better located, and air-conditioned where you used to preach with the gnats and the sweat. We also have state offices, national offices, colleges, and other properties. We have many physical assets we did not have 35 years ago.

Even so, there are some things on the liability side of our physical assets. For one thing, many churches have overbuilt. It may be a testimony to some pastor's ego that a building can seat 1,500 people yet has 300 rattling around in it, therefore increasing the overhead and expense, using money that could have been used to build a church in Brazil.

For another thing, we have built churches unnecessarily simply because people couldn't get along with each other. One faction leaves a church that costs \$600,000 and can take care of 800 people.

They build another church down the street for \$600,000 that can take care of 500 more people. If you put the two congregations together, you'd have 300 people. How completely unnecessary! In my town, I think some of that has gone on. We've got five to seven churches in my town. I mean that's how many we had when I left; I don't know how many there'll be when I get back. When you find 15 churches in a little town, it does not necessarily mean they are spiritual; it may mean they can't get along with each other.

Another liability occurs when people misunderstand and identify the church with the building. We begin to think that because you have a building, you have a church. Nothing can be farther from the truth. You can go to a new city. You can float a bond program. You can build a church for \$200,000, and you can leave and say, "We've got a church in that city." Not necessarily. You've got a building. The building and the church are two different things. Don't confuse the building with the church.

As part of our tangible assets and liabilities, we can include personnel. Dr. Johnson mentioned last night we probably have more and better trained preachers and missionaries than we have ever had in the history of the National Association. I agree. We do have more personnel than we had at one time, and that certainly is an asset.

But we need to be aware of liabilities in this matter, too. For example, we must not think that training necessarily guarantees effectiveness and fruitfulness. Sometimes a fellow goes to the Bible college, gets his degree, gets out, and nothing happens. So he says, "Something went wrong. I didn't

get enough training.”

He goes back and spends two more years, gets out, and still nothing happens; he says, “I still didn’t get enough training.”

So he goes off to a conference on evangelism and soul winning, gets excited, comes home, and nothing happens, and he says, “I still don’t have it.” Even with our training, we may not necessarily be effective and fruitful in the task God has given us.

Furthermore, even with the personnel we have, we still do not have enough personnel. The field is still white, the laborers are still few, and there are still spots we have nobody trained to fill.

Christian schools have desperate problems getting qualified teachers and leaders. If you are trying to add someone to your staff in a church, you have difficulty getting someone. There are not enough preachers to fill the places where the needs are, so while we have more we still have to pray, “Dear Lord, the field is white, and the laborers are few.” We need more personnel.

Now, while we’re evaluating tangible things, we can talk about pay. I use that word in order to have alliteration. It’s true our budgets are larger. Our income is greater, we receive more money, we spend more money, and there’s more money available to be spent in the work of God. And that is a definite asset—money and its proper use to get the Gospel out.

But there’s a liability here, too. Even with the increase of the money, we still have not developed an effective stewardship program that will meet the financial needs of the work of God.

On the local level, many churches have yet to accept the responsibility for a full-time paid ministry. I would venture to say most of our pastors are subsidized by a working wife or a second job. It would be interesting to know how many pastors in our denomination meet their material needs solely by what the church pays them, with no subsidy to that income. We have yet to accept the responsibility of a full-time, educated, paid pastor.

Much less, evangelists. People wonder why we have no more evangelists. I can relieve you of wondering. Ask me about the miles, the expenses, and the offerings. (If you’re wondering why there’s not a line applying for my job!) We have not accepted the responsibility of full-time evangelists because we have not accepted the responsibility of full-time pastors. And this is a liability. Southern Baptists got a hundred years’ jump on us by

taking responsibility for a full-time, educated, paid ministry.

Now, let's talk about mental assets. First, what we believe about the Bible is a positive asset for us. While the Southern Baptists may be discussing and debating and arguing about the infallibility of the Scriptures, it's interesting that—as far as I know—no one among us rejects the idea of an infallible, inerrant Bible.

Several years ago, when the national convention adopted that strong statement on inspiration about the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures—even in matters of history and science—there was not a single negative vote, not a single negative voice in the debate.

Now, we may argue about what the Bible means. We may argue about the application. We may argue about its principles. We may argue and divide over issues like modesty or separation or a dozen others, but we are not arguing about whether or not the Bible is true. And I think it is an asset that we still believe in an infallible, inerrant Bible, inspired of God, that charts for us the direction and the program we should follow in this world.

But even here, we find a liability. Our favorite verse on inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16, says, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction unto righteousness."

I fear it is possible to believe in an infallible, inerrant Scripture without permitting that Scripture to do for us what God intended: to correct us when we do wrong and turn us from sin and bring us to practice righteousness. Believing in an infallible Bible without permitting that Bible to reprove you when you sin, correct you when you're wrong, and bring you to practice righteousness, leaves the Bible powerless and fruitless in our lives. It's not enough that you believe what it says; you must put it into practice and live by it.

I was reading that verse in 2 Timothy while getting ready for this, and decided to read the entire third chapter. I stumbled over an interesting paradox. You may remember that Brother Ralph Hampton read this earlier today. The first few verses of that third chapter, just before the verses about the inspiration of the Scripture, say: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers

of pleasure more than lovers of God." Verse 5 is what sort of stopped me, stunned me for a moment.

I remember, when I read this, my first thought was that those were the characteristics of the unregenerate, heathen world we would live in, in these last days. Oh, and those are characteristics of the unregenerate, heathen world. That's the kind of people the world is filled with.

But then I noticed Paul said this particular group would be "holding [or having] a form of godliness." The word translated *form* is used one other time in the New Testament, in Romans 2, where Paul described Jews who teach the law and don't live by the law. In verse 20 he said that "they have a form of knowledge and of the truth." And so I realized that those weren't irreligious heathen; those were religious people.

That's true here in 2 Timothy, too; they have "a form of godliness." They aren't heathen at all. Then, I thought, it is the liberals. They're the ones Paul is talking about, because they have ritual without reality. But then I read G. Campbell Morgan, and he said that Paul is describing conservative, religious people.

So, I asked myself, "Is it possible to have an ungodly fundamentalist?" You say, "Well, it all depends on the context." So I looked at the context. Paul says they were "lovers of themselves," and I said, "Have I ever known a fundamentalist who loved himself—whose favorite note in the musical scale is me, me, me?"

"Lovers of money?" Have I ever known a fundamentalist who got sidetracked by money? Fell in love with and sought to pursue money?

Now, don't go misquoting me: I didn't say all fundamentalists are ungodly. The most godly people in this country, in my opinion, are fundamentalists. I think the most godly people you will ever meet will probably be fundamentalists. But what shocked me was realizing that not all fundamentalists would necessarily be godly, that there could be those holding to the form and the truth and the knowledge but not having the power of God in their lives to produce godliness.

By the way, there is really nothing wrong with money. If it falls into a man's hands while he's on the road to the will of God in service and sacrifice, the money will be legitimate and he will use it right. It's when he turns aside to pursue the money because he loves it that it gets to be a problem.

Paul said, "Boasters." Did you ever know a fundamentalist who boasted and bragged? There are some, and it's usually about two things. He'll either boast about what he has done because his church is the biggest in the world, or he'll boast about what he knows because of his theological training and education.

While I'm at it, let me throw this in: I honestly don't know any group of people that run any faster than fundamental people pursuing easy, spurious, honorary doctor's degrees. Evidently, some fundamentalists think that if you don't have a doctor's degree, you're up a creek, like a gospel singer with no bus.

Or, have you ever seen one that was "proud"? That's the next word. Then comes the word "blasphemers."

You say, "A fundamentalist couldn't be those he described as blasphemers." That's interesting. Both here and in Romans 2, Paul accused those he described as blasphemers. I wonder which is the greatest blasphemer against God—the atheist who steps out in a storm and looks up at the clouds and curses God and the lightning? Or the man who says he believes there is a God, but in his works denies that God? Who through ritual and testimony in the church speaks the name of God insincerely without the knowledge of God? I wonder—if there are degrees in blasphemy—which would be the greatest blasphemer.

Now, did you ever know one that wasn't very loving? That's in verse 3: "without natural affection." It means unloving; not having a loving spirit or attitude.

"Trucebreakers." The New American Standard translates that word "irreconcilable." The reason they're called trucebreakers is they're at war, and you'll never get a truce with them because they won't be reconciled. Did you ever know any fundamentalists who fight all the time and are irreconcilable?

"False accusers." I wonder if there's ever been a fundamentalist that accused another fundamentalist falsely.

"Incontinent." That word simply means without self control; flying off the handle; can't control their temper.

"Fierce." That's brutal and cruel. Did you ever know any cruel, brutal fundamentalists?

“Traitors.” That word could be translated treacherous.

You see, the liability in all this is we may believe that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God, having an orthodox head but a heterodox heart, being ungodly although we believe the Bible to be true. That’s a liability.

Another one of the things we believe that is an asset, is what we believe about God and man and the relationship between the two. If any group of people should have as an asset their doctrinal position concerning the relationship between man and God, it certainly should be Free Will Baptists. I could understand if the Calvinists had no missionary program or Sunday Schools. If you believe that some are unconditionally elected and the unconditionally elected will be saved by the Lord whether they want to be saved or not, then what’s the purpose of having a missionary program? What’s the purpose of having Sunday School?

But Free Will Baptists do not believe that. We believe that the relationship between man and God depends upon a condition, and man must meet the condition of repentance and faith to come into right relationship with God. So, if any group of people ever had a doctrine that should encourage them in evangelism, missions, and soul winning, it should be Free Will Baptists, who believe that one’s relationship with God depends upon meeting the condition.

Oh, and if anybody believed in edification, follow-up, teaching, and training, it should be Free Will Baptists, because we not only believe that salvation begins conditionally, we believe that it continues conditionally. That makes edification necessary. We agree with the Apostle Paul who said to the Galatians, “I am laboring as travailing with labor pains, like a woman who would give birth to a child. But the labor pains that I now have is that Christ may be formed in you.”

You see, Paul carried the same kind of burden and passion and labor pains for those who professed to know Christ—that He would be formed in them—as he did that they would be born to begin with. He must not have thought, just because you take a man down the Romans Road, that he’s just as sure of Heaven as if he were already there.

We don’t either. You are not as sure of Heaven as if you were already there. And neither is anybody else. If a man’s relationship to God is conditional, as we believe, then of all the denominations on this earth that should have

a program of edification and teaching and training, it ought to be the Free Will Baptists. That is one of our assets.

The liability part of that is sometimes we don't really believe the freedom that we express in our theology. We practice the same kind of evangelism as the Calvinists, who give everybody instant Heaven—like instant grits and instant tea and instant coffee. That's the easy way.

If we're not careful, we'll work with people as though we also have the concept that once we've led them to the Lord they are sure of Heaven. And if we do, we don't really believe any more what we say we believe, that the conditional relationship between a man and God continues as long as he lives upon this earth.

Another asset, in this realm of the things which we believe, is what we believe about the church. We believe that the church is an organization, an organism of people who have responsibilities to God as individuals, and that this responsibility cannot be overridden by any other organization whether it be a church or a pastor. We have a special amount of freedom and democracy involved in our concept of the individual, his relationship to a local church, and their relationship to one another.

Dr. Johnson mentioned last night that we're living in a day when the emphasis is on individual freedom and independence. If any group of people do not believe in a totalitarian religion, whether it is in this country or some other country, certainly it should be Free Will Baptists.

That kind of freedom should flourish in a society that also believes in freedom. I think one of the reasons Baptists have done well in this country from the beginning is because they have the most, open, free, religious organization of any religious system. I think that makes it difficult for a totalitarian system to grow and flourish in this country as much as the religious systems that are free.

I think it's an asset that we believe in individual responsibility, in individual freedom, and that ours is not a totalitarian system. We do not have a bureaucracy at the top that orders people down at the bottom, and we also don't have individuals at the bottom that order others around. I suppose that Augustus Strong was probably right when he said that every Baptist preacher has within him an undeveloped pope. Some of us have difficulty keeping that pope from developing, but the truth is that not one of us—preacher or layman—lords it over any other one of us.

Now the liability in this is that as long as you have that kind of freedom, you're going to have disagreements. You're going to have arguments. You're going to have dissension and divisions. Personally, I'd rather have the dissension and divisions and have the freedom to go with it, than to have totalitarianism and not have the dissension and the division. We have to learn how to live with our differences.

Quickly, now, let's evaluate our spiritual assets and liabilities. The number one spiritual asset we have is the power of the precious, personal Holy Spirit who moves in the midst of men and has a ministry in our minds and hearts. The charismatics do not have the Holy Spirit cornered on this earth. In fact, He is present, active, powerful, and working to do two or three things in our lives.

First, if you permit Him, He will make you an effective, courageous, powerful witness. The Bible says, "You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

We have as an asset the fact that the Holy Spirit can take your life and turn it into an effective, powerful witness for God upon the earth.

The liability side is this: you also have the power as a free person to resist Him, to refuse to submit and yield to Him; and therefore you may not be a witness. It's simply a matter of allowing Him to perform His ministry in your heart.

Second, he is present in our lives to empower us to overcome sin. As you read Romans 8, you will recognize that those who possess the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit of God. And, by the way, these are the only ones in Romans 8 that Paul said are the sons of God. Now, if you are a son of God, you do possess the Spirit of God, and you are led by the Spirit of God; then according to Romans 8, you will not follow the flesh, but you will walk after the Spirit. And those who walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh have the power of the Spirit in their lives to overcome sin.

The liability, here, is that we may excuse sin, make alibis for sin. We live like the Calvinists, who justify sinning by separating the believers' two natures, and say, "Well, nobody's perfect." Why do you smile when you say that? Why are you so happy because nobody's perfect? Does it make you feel better about your own imperfections? You say, "Well, you aren't perfect either." I know it, and it aggravates me to death.

We have a tendency to say, "Well, every man sins." That's true, but you can't justify or excuse your sin by blaming it on everybody else or Adam or human nature or the old nature or your circumstances or environment. God has provided the power to overcome sin in your life, and there's no excuse for you to continue in sin.

Third, the work of the Holy Spirit is also to produce "the fruit of the Spirit" in our lives. Read Galatians 5 and look around you; better yet, look inside you and see how much of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, patience, goodness, faith, temperance—you can find. Then look again and see how much strife, dissension, sectarianism, or division you find, as the works of the flesh.

What amazes me is the number of us that can make the fruit of the Spirit sound bad and the works of the flesh sound good. Have you ever noticed that if a man preaches on love he may be a liberal because loving people is supposed to be bad? Somehow, love is supposed to be bad if you love everybody. Now, hating things and people is supposed to be good because you're standing for what's right when you hate certain things and people. Hatred suddenly becomes good and love becomes bad.

Or consider what we do with "meekness," thinking it means having no backbone, being yellow, or without courage. Strife and dissension and fighting are good, because that shows you've got courage. Even peace is bad because you've got to sacrifice purity if you have peace. But war must be good because war proves you're standing up for purity.

Isn't it interesting how easy it is to make the fruit of the Spirit sound bad and the works of the flesh sound good? Some night, when you can sit down long enough to meditate and read it, just go back and read Galatians 5 and see how much of the fruit of the Spirit you find in your life and in the lives of our denomination, and how much of the works of the flesh.

But I must leave the evaluation of our potential, with its assets and liabilities, and hurry on to the last part of this message, and that is how to get where we are going, how to realize our potential. In the evaluation I've given, I think there are more pluses than minuses. I think we have more things going for us than we do against us. I'm happy for us to be where we are, and I think as you weigh it, we do have potential among us. Now, the next question is "How do we put it to best use? How do we accomplish that?"

I remember hearing Millard Sasser, two or three years ago at a Leadership

Conference, tell about this preacher fellow. He was reading through Genesis 22, and his comprehension wasn't too clear when he came to the verse about Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife Milcah.

The verse says "These eight (meaning eight sons) did Milcah bare for Nahor." Only he understood it to say, "These eight did milk a bear for Nahor." He said, "I don't know much about milking bears, but I think I could get a sermon on that."

So, he just analyzed the text and he said, "Now the first thing it would take to milk a bear is conviction, cause you'd have to really believe that bear needed milking, since there ain't no market for bear's milk, and bears don't give much milk, and there's going to be a lot of obstacles."

"The second thing," he said, "It would take consecration, 'cause you've got to face the jaws and the paws and the claws. You'd have to be dedicated to the job because if you weren't, you wouldn't face the obstacles."

"Finally," he said, "the third thing that you're going to have to have to milk a bear is cooperation." He said, "It would take at least eight men to milk a bear. There ain't no one man can milk a bear by himself."

Now, when I was trying to think of how we're going to accomplish the task God has put before us, I don't know of anything better than what that fellow said it would take to milk a bear.

We're certainly going to have to have some deep settled convictions in our hearts about certain things. We need to be absolutely convinced in the first place that men need saving, and I mean all men—rich, poor, educated, ignorant, black, yellow, white—all men on this earth.

And then we have to be convinced that they are worth saving. If they are poor, shabby, dirty, bus kids they are worth saving. If they are ignorant Amazons in Brazil, they are worth saving. If they are blacks, they are worth saving.

Next, we've got to be convinced that God is willing that they be saved, that, from God's standpoint, He is not willing that any should perish, but that all men should come to repentance. It is the will of God that every man on the earth be saved.

Then we must be convinced that God will save every man who meets the condition. And if we can get this settled in our hearts, then we will spend our lives confronting men with the Gospel of the grace of God—that

they need saving, that salvation is possible, and that they must meet the condition; then God will save them.

It will also take cooperation. There's a job to do for God. When Jesus sent out the 70, he sent them two by two. Some things one person can't do, two people can do. Furthermore, when the man sick of palsy was brought to Jesus, four friends brought him and took him up to the roof. Evidently there are some things two people can't do that four people can do. When Gideon set out to accomplish that for which God had called him, he finally narrowed it down to 300. There are some things 300 can do that four can't do.

Every pastor loves to see cooperation in his local church. If he would just practice the same cooperation with the pastor in the neighboring local church, that would be wonderful. But he doesn't do that. He wants them to cooperate with him on a one-way trip.

All the way from that local pastor and the neighboring church to the national association, one note we keep hearing over and over, from the laity on the field, is: Why don't the departments in Nashville stop fussing and fighting and learn to cooperate with one another? Why is the Home Mission Board in competition with the Foreign? Why is the Bible College in competition with both boards?

Aren't we all in the same business? I mean, isn't the Bible College a part of the missions program, not only because they train missionaries but also because many of them are called while they're still in school at the Bible College? And isn't the missions program a part of the Bible College's arm of extension? That's where the students go to minister for God when they leave and send more back to the school. I find it extremely difficult to explain to the layman out there who looks around and says, "I just don't understand why people can't get along when they're leaders in the denomination." God has a job for us that, if we ever do it, we're going to have to have better cooperation than we have now.

This brings me to the climax of the message. The greatest requirement is going to be consecration, dedication. Now I'm talking about the kind of dedication that the Apostle Paul had, that Dr. Picirilli told us about yesterday morning. The kind of dedication seen in Acts 20, when Agabus, said to Paul, "You're going to Jerusalem and they're going to bind your hands and put you in prison and we won't ever see you anymore," and Paul simply looked at him and the others and he said, "I'm ready to go to Jerusalem to be bound or to die. I have only one life's ambition—to finish the task of the ministry

of the Gospel of the grace of God that's laid upon me. I count not my life dear to myself." They followed him to the boat. They fell on his neck and kissed him. He left with all of them weeping. The reason they wept was the last thing he said: "You will never see my face anymore." Sure enough, they put him in prison, which ended with his martyrdom and execution.

That's what he had said to Timothy, "I fought the fight and my race is run, but somebody needs to take up the race and find his place in the ministry and get in."

Yesterday morning, as Brother Connie Cariker was closing his message, he alluded to one of the outstanding incidents in the history of the state of Texas. It provides a clear illustration of the kind of dedication that is necessary if we are to reach the potential that God has for us. It was the winter of 1835 and '36. The citizens of Texas grew weary under the government of Mexico and decided to wage a war of independence. The Texans took the city of San Antonio. They left 140-150 men, all volunteers, under the leadership of Lt. Col. William Travis, the officer in charge, to guard the city of San Antonio. On February 23, with 4-6,000 Mexicans in his army, Antonio Lopez, under Santa Anna, attacked the city and surprised the Texans. They had not expected the attack. They retreated to a Spanish colonial mission, called the Alamo, and turned it into a fort.

Colonel Travis sent out a call for relief, and some 25 or 30 more men from Gonzales made it through the Mexican lines and came to their relief. A few days before the siege started, David Crockett with some riflemen from Tennessee, had joined them. The number in the Alamo reached 182 men. The Mexican troops assaulted them for nine days, one assault after another. Three times the waves of that assault were turned back.

On the night of March 3, Colonel Travis called together all the men except those who had to stand sentry duty. He explained to them the situation. No relief was coming. It was impossible to withstand the continuing assaults of the masses of that Mexican army. Their ammunition was running out. He explained why they should hold that fort as long as possible: so as to give Sam Houston time to recruit and organize an army of Texans, and also to weaken the army of Santa Anna so that it would have to be reorganized. Then he said, "I'll need to know who I can count on when the end finally comes."

They understood what the end was, because with every assault of that Mexican army, the bugler had blown the Spanish charge, "The Assassin,"

which means: Take no prisoners, leave nobody alive, kill all those in the fort. He took the sword and in the dirt he drew a line. He stepped across the line and said, "I want everyone who can be counted on in the end to follow me across the line."

David Crockett was one of the first. Immediately, his men from Tennessee followed him and stepped across the line. Some hesitated, thoughtfully waiting; some stepped across quickly. Jim Bowie had been brought to the meeting because of his influence with men he had led. He had been wounded and was on a stretcher. He looked across the line at the other men and said, "Boys, I can't make it by myself, but I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a hand." When they lifted the stretcher and moved him across the line, the remainder of the men followed him and stepped across the line—all except one. Julius Rose, a mercenary from Napoleon's army in Europe, slipped quickly to the wall and disappeared over the outside in the dark. He was the one person who lived to tell the story of the challenge of that night.

Three days later, early in the morning of March 9, the Mexicans overran the camp. They killed all the men but six. Santa Anna commanded that these six be shot. There was left an officer's wife, named Mrs. Dickinson, and her baby and a nurse and a black boy. Then he commanded that the bodies of all 182 be piled in a stack in the street and burned and that all their bones be buried in a common grave.

But that wasn't the end. On April 21, after Sam Houston had had time to recruit an army of Texans in the city of San Jacinto, they caught the Mexicans in afternoon siesta, routed the army, captured Santa Anna, and the next morning forced him to sign a treaty for the independence of the state of Texas.

Most historians who tell of the death of those 182 men will tell you that they did not die because they loved the state of Texas. They didn't die for freedom. They didn't die for the independence of the state of Texas. Those men died for one reason: they were dedicated to three leaders. Some of those men died for Col. William Travis. Some of them died out of dedication to David Crockett. Others died with Jim Bowie.

The truth is men don't usually die for causes or principles. And tonight I am not here to ask you to dedicate your life to foreign missions. Or to the Free Will Baptist denomination. Or to home missions. There is, in this building tonight, a Person, a wonderful loving, sacrificing, caring Leader who is our precious Lord. He's the one that draws the line and looks back

over His shoulder with a tear in His eye and a nail print in His hand and says, "Follow me." Don't enlist your life for missions or the Free Will Baptists, but for the dear Lord Jesus.

Thirty-five years ago, as a 17-year-old boy, one Saturday night about midnight, I didn't know then what I know now. And I didn't understand then what I understand now. I heard the voice of the Lord calling and saying, "Come, follow me." I didn't know the Romans Road. I didn't even know there was a Book of Romans. I stood at the foot of my bed, looked out the window at the dark, and I said, "Lord, I want to be on your side. That's all I know to say. That as long as I live, I just want to be on your side."

There have been a lot of times in these 35 years that I've repeated that and reminded myself. But those of us who are in the work now won't last forever. Who's gonna fill the place when I no longer hold 46 meetings a year and some young man's got to kiss his wife and babies goodbye and he's got to go and stay gone for two months? Who's going to India to take Carlisle Hanna's place? Paul Kettelman lived on the road all these years and now with cancer, how long? Who's gonna go on the road? Connie Cariker has heart problems; how long will he continue? Who's gonna fill his place when Connie dies? Floyd Wolfenbarger's already gone. And the same dear Lord whispers through this auditorium, and tonight He's drawn a line and He says, "Will you commit yourself, will you step across that line and say, 'I give my life to the Lord Jesus.'"

Some of you who committed yourself years ago have grown weary. There have been times you wanted out and you sort of asked for a discharge. You need to reenlist. You don't need out. You need to say to the Lord tonight, "It's me and I've come to reenlist. I'll step across the line. Until the last battle's fought and the war is over, the victory's won and I can stand on the banks of the river of life and hear Him say, 'Well done, good, and faithful servant.'"

Tonight, will you honestly, simply, and sincerely commit yourself to the Lord Jesus, to live or die? Will you just look up at Him and say, "Lord, it's me. I just want to be on your side."

Oh, God, when the tears are dried and we leave this place, we pray that there will be commitments and decisions made that will be permanent and lasting, decisions that will change the lives of people so that they will follow the precious Lord Jesus.

1985 – L .C. Johnson

Remembering the Past

I'm delighted to speak to you this evening. I've been sitting here looking out over the audience and spotting students of former days in chapel, and I've been trying to imagine myself speaking in chapel. That's just a little hard, with this size audience.

I was speaking to Brother I.L. Stanley awhile ago, and he reminded me that this would be his last year conducting a song service in this convention. I think he was suggesting that this might be my last time to speak. I don't know, but I assume that it is. And what are you going to say in your swan song?

In trying to figure out why they chose me to speak on this topic, I have come to the conclusion that one reason could be that when children want someone to tell them about "when I was a boy" or "in my day" or "in the good ole days," they call on Grandpa.

Well, I will try to tell you a story this evening. In telling the story of Free Will Baptists, primarily of the past 50 years, I will not have the bad man always getting killed and the good men always winning. Rather, I will attempt to weave enough reality into the story that it may cause us at times to lift our faces heavenward and be thankful, or at other times to blush and look the other way. But I suppose that would be true in telling the story of any group of people.

There are just a few still living that have been in the midst of and as close to the history of the past 50 years as I have. My ministry began in 1933, two years before the National Association was organized. I have attended all National Associational meetings, except two, since its founding. My relationship with Free Will Baptist Bible College gave me a front row seat in the drama of the National Association. I have known all of its leaders. I have seen its programs come into being. I have watched it grow and enlarge its ministries. I have not only watched its development, but have had some part in it. This association is a part of me. My life has been spent here. I have been jealous for its success, and hurt with any degree of failure. As with anything left to humankind, the graph of progress has not always been

upward. There have been interruptions and downslides that have been costly. But in spite of the downward turns of the graph, the general trend has been upward.

My task now is to help us see what is important to know about our past and to learn from it. Teaching history for a number of years showed me that it is difficult for some to see the relevance of the past for the present, or for the future. However, it is the responsibility of any teacher to enable his students to see the importance of the subject at hand.

I also learned, in teaching history a number of years, that some people go to sleep on you when you talk about history and get F's as a result. But if you get tired tonight and want to take a little nap, we're not in a history class, so go ahead and take one and when you wake up, catch in wherever we happen to be.

Seriously, there are many good reasons to remember our history. We are all the product of history. History is a composite of all the experiences we've had in the past and our responses to those experiences. Thus, history has determined who we are and what we are. All our roots are in the past, and from those roots will grow the fruits of the future.

History is a platform, built of past events, where we stand on tiptoe to peek into the future, as we stand in the present we can look in two directions. Historically, we look backwards. Those past events don't need to be recited and left there; they need to be evaluated. History needs to be put under the microscope to see if there are faults and corrections that need to be made. That stream of history that flows from the past has brought to us those events; but as we evaluate them, we look forward prophetically.

Now I know I'm talking to many theologians, and you want to argue with me about prophets not being in this day, but you're wrong. God gives to men gifts, prophetic gifts, to evaluate the past and in some way put that together with the future because we're going to have to live in the future if Jesus does not come. We are creating something here to hand on to our sons and daughters. And what we are doing here can be wings or shackles. We can give to them wings to soar to greater heights and do greater things than we have done. Or we can pass on to them shackles, because of our littleness and mediocrity, and they will be hindered in doing what God would have them do.

Let me make just a few broad statements about our early years. The

relationship between the northern and southern arms of our denomination has never been fully established. Even though history does not fill us in to our satisfaction, my feeling is that there was more fellowship between the two than our records reveal. And to read of the progress of those days, especially in the North, brings a flush of excitement to our eyes. They had a message of truth; and they were capable of expressing it both intelligently and with an emotional appeal that demanded a hearing and response. We look upon those days with fond memories as days of grandeur. Had that momentum been sustained, we would have become one of the major forces in the religious life of America.

Some way God gave to those men something that I wish maybe we could recapture, but for some reason or other—we'd just as well be honest—we lost that momentum. It slipped through our fingers. Our denominational enterprise became fragments. In the South—especially in the Carolinas—we were invaded by Calvinism. The loss was heavy. We were also invaded by the followers of the Campbells, as well as by Pentecostalism. In the North the merger with the Northern Baptists was devastating to our momentum.

Let me speculate a bit as to why we were so vulnerable to these invasions. In the South the training level of the ministers was not sufficient to withstand the attacks that were made against them. The Calvinistic invasion was led by capable, well-qualified men. The apologetic resistance to these attacks was no match for the persuasion and ability of the invaders. The Free Will Baptist constituency had not been doctrinally prepared for the attack. I believe that doctrinal indoctrination is the fundamental essential that gives self-identification. It is the one basic that helps you know who you are and why you are. Too many Free Will Baptists have underemphasized the importance of doctrinal preaching. Some have boasted that they never preach on doctrine because it makes preaching too didactic and dry. Shame on you!

You have to have a base of sound doctrinal teaching to undergird whatever you're going to do, to keep your truths. Then those doctrinal truths must be infused with the Spirit of the living God, to make them alive and meaningful in the hearts of people.

In the North, the Randall movement did have articulate, well-trained leadership. Because of Randall's split with extreme Calvinism, it was necessary for him and his movement to define their beliefs. They created for their movement definite distinctives. Along with the articulation of their

beliefs, they had not only a cause, but a tremendous emotional spirit that was contagious. And oh, how we need that. Not an emotionalism that's born of a worked up fleshly sort, but an emotionalism that's born of the Holy Spirit. Oh, how we need to beg God for that. I think if we could have that, we might not need so many seminars on how to do things. Anyway, that movement had momentum and attracted people of great abilities that resulted in a missionary ministry, and in the establishment of great educational institutions.

Then what went wrong? My reasoning leads me to these conclusions. After the initial leadership passed away, the wholesome fervency and emotional appeal continued while doctrinal emphases declined. The undergirding platform of doctrinal teaching was weakened and the emotionalism that had been begotten by the Holy Spirit was gradually replaced with emotional involvement in social issues, such as the anti-slavery movement. Whenever strong doctrinal preaching ceases to be the base you build on, you lose your biblical convictions and forget who you are.

Another possible explanation for the happenings in the Northern movement is that the Age of Reason (rationalism) was very rife in the North. As biblical, doctrinal preaching weakened and they became more involved in social issues, they lost sight of their distinctive. They also became more exposed to the prevailing rationalism through higher education.

When education gets too sophisticated, it becomes damnable. Education should bring us into a closer knowledge of God and what God would have. That kind of education God can use. But sophisticated education leads to latitudinarianism. I'll tell you what that is because I looked it up. It is a broad-mindedness that accepts almost anything, a relativism that nothing is sure for sure and your ideal is as good as mine. As a result they were conditioned to merge with a liberal movement, the Northern Baptist Convention.

The question we should ask is, could these invasions have been prevented or repelled? In my opinion, yes. If the conviction that their existence was by divine will had been kept in sharp focus, it would have been a fortification to take-over. If leadership and laymen alike had been indoctrinated—and that is not a bad word—in their beliefs, there would not have been a take-over.

As a result of the merger with the Northern Baptists and the invasion of other religious bodies in the South, our denominational structure was almost a shambles. The missionary and educational enterprises were lost. In the Northern movement, only isolated pockets of Free Will Baptist churches

did not go into the merger. In the South, the losses had been mostly on a local church-by-church basis.

There were some who fought bravely to salvage what was left. I mention two examples. Dr. Thomas Peden who headed the Ayden Seminary in North Carolina was from Ohio. Afterward, this became Eureka College. Dr. John Wolfe, of Nebraska, was involved in starting Tecumseh College in Oklahoma. For one reason or another, both of these educational efforts failed. Nor was there any organized denominational missionary program from the time of the merger until 1935.

During this quarter of century (1910-35), there was the loss of a missionary vision. There was also a waning interest in education. With no training center for the leadership of the churches, the denomination was not able to cope with a growing, changing society. With the industrialization of America came the urbanization of America. With untrained leadership, we were unprepared to compete in the urban marketplace and stayed in the less competitive rural areas.

Also during this period, there was a great loss of manpower for leadership. When a young man was called to the ministry and sought training for his calling, he had to seek it in some other denominational institution. More often than not, he chose his ministry with the denomination that had trained him. The Free Will Baptist denomination was losing its trained manpower.

The strength of the denomination resided in local churches and local associations. The resources of the denomination were bottled up without a channel to express them. Any movement must have an effective means of utilizing its potential. Our unused denominational resources lay latent.

In 1935, a new day dawned. An organization was created that would make intelligent, effective use of denominational resources. The National Association was born. Here in this city some men of vision got together and gave us this organization. Now we had a channel, an outlet, a way to use our resources. All we needed—all we still need—is the wisdom of God, and we can harness all the resources that are scattered abroad among our churches, and we can pool those resources and do greater things for God than we can do singlehandedly.

But we are in a day of independence, politically. Mr. Reagan wants to dismantle the bureaucracy of Washington. I say amen to that. But that same attitude of independency is in the churches. And we look upon anything

that's denominational with suspicion. Brethren, as a denomination we must be wise enough, we must be led of God enough, that we do not give that suspicion validity. It's up to us to convince our people that we do not have a heavy bureaucracy that's sapping our strength and our resources.

Anyway a new day was here. But the task would not be easy or quickly accomplished. There were many diversities that had developed that would have to be overcome. These diversities had caused a degree of suspicion. Perhaps one of the greatest problems to overcome was a lack of world vision. Staying "local" was both comfortable and non-costly.

The fires of evangelism and Christian maturity had to be built if the resources of the denomination were to be activated. Loyalty to a cause would only be a quick fix. Loyalty to a cause without understanding the biblical principles of the cause always breeds self-righteousness, pride, and arrogance. The denomination had to be educated to its biblical responsibilities.

The denomination was by no means totally lacking in men of wisdom and competence. Until now there had been no channel through which to express the abilities of the denomination. The National Association provided this.

Two of the first movements inaugurated by the newly formed National Association were an educational enterprise and a missionary program. There could have been no better beginning point. Missions is a means to express the spirit and heart of Scripture. Education is essential for understanding the Scriptures and to give intelligent and effective expression to its truths.

Miss Laura Belle Barnard had just gone to India as the first missionary from Free Will Baptist ranks in more than a quarter of a century. The Eastern General Conference had committed to her support as a Free Will Baptist missionary. This was in June 1935 before the National Association was organized in November. After the National Association came into being, it soon assumed the responsibility for Miss Barnard's support. Then Brother and Mrs. Thomas Willey joined the missionary staff. It is interesting that both Miss Barnard and the Willeys had gotten their burden and call to missions outside the Free Will Baptist denomination. It seems that God was providing the denomination with a missions stimulus that could be used to awaken the denomination's conscience to its obligation to "the other lost sheep."

One of the first actions of the National Association was to appoint a

committee on education to promote the idea of the need for an educational institution. The response to this idea was small. For a period of seven years this committee made its report at each session of the association. The fires of interest were only gradually growing. One thing that hastened the growing interest was a series of two-week Bible institutes conducted at strategic places throughout the denomination. Brother L.R. Ennis had this idea and headed up the movement. These institutes generated great interest among the ministers and the laity alike. After seven years of promoting interest in a better trained ministry, the Board of Christian Education recommended to the National Association that a Bible School be opened in Nashville, Tennessee. This action was taken in July 1942, at the convening of the National Association in Columbus, Mississippi.

Shortly thereafter, I was asked to be president of the new school, scheduled to open in September. I had prepared for ministry, not for school work. So in accepting the responsibility, I had to rely on the judgment of men I highly respected. I can honestly say that I had no ambition for the job; my experience or training had not qualified me for it. And thus, in September 1942, Free Will Baptist Bible College became a reality.

It was not called Free Will Baptist Bible College at the beginning, just Free Will Baptist Bible School. It was not clear whether it should be an institute or upgraded to college level. An institute would permit a less expanded curriculum and be less demanding financially and administratively. In the process of development, it became my conviction that it should be a Bible college. A Bible college curriculum, in my opinion, should be made up of approximately 40% liberal arts courses and 60% biblical courses. It was my feeling that studies in the field of liberal arts would help students understand and appreciate the world and culture in which we live, while biblical studies would be the message we bear to the world.

Has this program of education worked for the denomination? The record will have to give the answer. Beginning with an initial enrollment of 10 students and a two-year program, there is now a four-year program with a top enrollment having passed the 600 mark. Add to this a graduate school.

The earliest missionaries of the National Association got their training outside the denomination. That is no longer true. Both the Home and Foreign Missions programs have been built on the product of Free Will Baptist Bible College, and more recently the product of other colleges that have come into existence.

Before 1942, any man called to the ministry had to seek training outside the denomination. This is no longer true. As a result of providing training for our ministers, there is no longer the loss of the denomination's manpower.

We do not boast in this; surely it is what was expected from our investment in education. I will inject, here, that there is another loss we are still suffering, by not having a sufficient number of churches in larger cities. When rural members move to the city, too many end up turning to other denominations for their church home. This will not cease until we have strong churches in metropolitan areas. The price is high for not having kept pace with a changing America.

Let us take a look at conditions in 1935. My estimation is that the denomination was 85-95% rural. There is nothing wrong with being rural. Rural churches have been the backbone of our financial growth since 1935. However, rural churches cannot provide numerical growth. People are in cities. Not only were the churches of the denomination rural, the majority had one-Sunday-a-month preaching. The typical building was a one-room building with no educational facilities. The pastor probably did not live in the community, but came only on preaching weekends. The pastors of these churches usually served four churches. The pastors were poorly paid and farmed or had other jobs for livelihood. This arrangement was acceptable to rural America at that period, but not for urban America; and not even for rural America today.

I can use the Free Will Baptist church in my home town—Alma, Georgia—as an illustration of what was happening in the denomination. The Free Will Baptist church in Alma was the largest church in town. The Baptist church was small and weak. The Methodist church was a circuit church, also weak. But Alma has no Free Will Baptist church today. The Baptist and Methodist churches are strong with beautiful facilities and full-time programs.

What happened? The Free Will Baptist ministers of the area were getting old and few in number. There were no young men entering the ministry, and if they did, they went to the denomination that provided for their training. Free Will Baptists had no schools to train them. The Baptists and Methodists had invested in education to train their leaders. Free Will Baptists had not. They seized the opportunities that Free Will Baptists lost. There came a time when there was no pastor for the Alma Free will Baptist Church, and it

closed its doors. Free Will Baptist members from rural churches surrounding Alma have populated the Baptist and Methodist churches in Alma with some of their best workers.

I am telling this, not to make us feel bad and be depressed, but to enable us to understand the problems we are having to overcome. There has been a turnaround. Today the churches that were quarter-time with one room and no resident pastor are full-time with nice facilities and resident pastors.

Alma Free Will Baptist Church would not have to close its doors today for lack of a pastor. The progress has been great. The small investment made in training leadership has yielded tremendous dividends. One of the most exciting experiences I have known has been to watch it happen and have a small part in it. Education of the right kind activates the latent powers of the human personality and gives it direction to useful purposes.

In recent years many churches have been planted in larger cities. It will take time for these churches to become strong. We are on the way, but must not expect too much too soon. We have a better trained ministry. We are no longer intimidated by the city. If the Apostle Paul went to Athens, Corinth, and Rome, we must also go to our Athens, with its sophistication, to Corinth with its wickedness, and to Rome with its political power. To invade these bastions of sophistication, wickedness, and power, it will take men of burning dedication and zeal, harnessed with a high degree of competence. Would it be selfish or vain to ask the Lord of the harvest for such men? I think not.

We do not boast in the things that have changed. But God has blessed us with these things and we certainly have a right tonight to rejoice in them at this 50th anniversary.

I want to conclude by saying to you that I believe it is God's will for there to be a Free Will Baptist denomination. That is the basis for our right to be. If not, let's pack up and go home! It is not an accident that we exist.

I cannot accept the idea that somewhere in the distant past, a group of peevish people got together who couldn't get along with anybody else and started a Free Will Baptist denomination. Nor do I believe a group of men got together some time who held an off-brand theological position and started a Free Will Baptist denomination. I think there must have been, in God's mind, and in God's program of things, a place for the Free Will Baptist denomination. Maybe the theological scales, tilted too heavily

toward Calvinism, needed to be balanced.

Anyway, it is for us to discover what God's place for us is and to put it in to operation. It is humbling for us to believe that we have a God-ordained mission to fill. It will rob us of all pride and arrogance and boasting if God has called us out to render a ministry. But it will also be motivating for us to believe that we are a tributary to God's great ocean flow of purpose to get the Gospel out to the ends of the earth. What could be a greater motivating force than that?

So then, we do have a divine mission to fulfill, and it is our work to find out what it is and do it, regardless how hard or long the task may be.

I leave this challenge. Let us be convinced that we have a divine purpose to fill. Let us discover what it is and ask God for wisdom and for unction to fulfill it. Great preaching sanctified by the Holy Spirit to produce a compassionate heart will still find a market among the hungry hearts of men. May God bless you.

1985 – Alton Loveless

Reviewing the Present

Tonight I feel awesome being placed between a President Emeritus and a Preacher A-merited, since I was always a Pupil de-merited!

I feel much like the puffed up student selected by a group of professors to be taught all they knew about the flood. After weeks of intense teaching and training they were ready to send him to lecture others. Noticing his conceitedness and haughty spirit, the professors felt they needed to humble him before he left. They decided to tell him the following: "We have taught you all we know. You have the combined knowledge of those of us who have been your mentors. You know more than anyone we know about the flood. However, we feel you should know that where you will be speaking tomorrow at your first lecture you will have a very special guest we haven't even met. Noah will be there!"

I feel much the same way as I view the countless mentors, teachers, and leaders who grace this 50th Golden Anniversary Convention of over 8,000 delegates and peers.

My subject "Reviewing the Present" is greatly influenced by a survey mailed to pastors in every conference of our National Association. Seventy-seven responses were received from this mailing representing 25 states and Canada. It represented large and small churches, city and rural, north and south, east and west. All responses were from pastors with a combined ministry of 1,681 years of service. The average age was 45 with the youngest being 27 and the oldest 67. They averaged beginning to preach at age 24 and oddly enough, while all pastors were selected at random from the national directory, the academic background averaged four years of college with 61 having attended college and 16 not having that privilege. The least educated had completed the sixth grade and the highest attained was seven years of college. (Perhaps the reason for their greater response is that college men are more accustomed to surveys). Sixty were full-time with 17 others supplementing their income. Of the respondents 57 said their church was growing, and 20 said no. The average membership of their churches was 179 with the largest having 1,350 members and the smallest 20. They averaged 133 in attendance. Forty-six said the attitude of their

people toward church growth was average to good but 12 classified their churches attitude as excellent. Nineteen were poor to average.

Probably the most referred to item centered around leadership as our key problem from pastor, membership, and routing itself to our national. Most pastors felt deficient themselves and were seeking help from a national leadership they felt weak and divided without common goals.

Raymond C. Ortlund in his book, *Let the Church Be the Church*, tells of a pilot who announced over his intercom system, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we have a tailwind and are making excellent time. The bad news is that our compass is broken and we have no idea where we are going."

There is a story in *The Last Hurrah* that illustrates my concern. The mayor of Boston is watching a parade. He says, "There go the people. I am their leader. I must follow them."

Since no one rises higher than leadership takes us, I feel it helpful that we look at the men the Master chose and how He developed leadership. How could Christ take 12 of the most changeable men and move the world? Could Jesus, who knows all things, make a mistake in choosing such men of diversity?

May I suggest from the beginning that these were His best friends. And while we are concerned about being His friend, we forget these were His whom He had called to train. They, like us, broke His heart many times as He sought to make them leaders.

Most of you probably cannot name all 12 of these men, but they appear in the Bible in four different places as an entire group (Matthew 10:2, 3; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; and Acts 1:13).

Please note that in all four lists, Simon Peter is always listed first. Judas always appears last except in Acts where he has already betrayed the Lord. Note the disciples appear in all four lists in three groups of four. It is interesting that the same person appears first in each of the three groups. Peter in group one; Philip in group two; James the Less in group three.

They also must have had a partner as well. This is indicated from Mark 6:7 as they were sent out two by two. Sometime in your study, observe who ran around with whom.

I believe I can fairly classify these three groups:

Group one: The Presenters (The Vocal Ones, Authoritarian Leaders)

Group two: The Contenders (The Varied Ones, Automatic Leaders)

Group three: The Pretenders (The Vacillating Ones, Appointed Leaders)

I. The Presenters (The Vocal Ones, Authoritarian Leaders)

The first disciple I will refer to is Simon Peter. He was the upfront one. Simon Peter is what students of leadership would call a task-oriented leader. The text called him the first Simon. He was not first by order of calling, but rather because he was always the up-front, out-front man.

The Greek word *protos* is used for the first time in this verse. The same word is used in 1 Timothy 4:15 for chief, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

Simon Peter, we know more about him than most all the other disciples. Next to the name of Jesus, Peter appears more than any other disciple in the Gospels. No disciple speaks as often as Peter, and nobody is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. He is reproved by the Lord. No one acknowledges the Lordship of Christ as boldly as Peter, yet no one so boldly denied it as Peter.

First, he has three unusual characteristics:

1. Inquisitive. Peter asks more questions in the Gospels than all the other disciples combined.
 - How often should I forgive? (Matthew 18:21)
 - What reward will we get if we follow? (Matthew 19:27)
 - What about the fig tree that has withered? (Mark 11:21)
 - What about the meaning of the end? (Mark 13:3-5)
2. Initiative. Peter not only asked questions but he was always the one who answered.
 - When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" (Luke 8:45), Peter answered.
 - When Jesus asked, "Who say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15,16), Peter answered.
 - When Jesus asked, "Will you also go away..." (John 6:67) Peter said,

“To whom shall we go...thou hast the words of eternal life.”

3. Involved. Leaders are always in the middle of everything.

- Matthew 14:29. Peter jumped out of the boat and walked on the water. We criticize him for lack of faith, but six others didn't have enough to even jump in.
- Peter denied Christ three times, but none of the others were there. Earlier the men “left all and followed Him,” but now they “forsook Him and fled.”
- After the resurrection, John stood at the entrance of the tomb, but Peter rushed right in.

Second, he was tainted by secular identification:

In John 1:42, at His first meeting of Simon, Jesus said, “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone.” Simon was the name used when he was referred to by secular identification.

- The house of Simon (Mark 1:29).
- Simon's wife's mother (Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38).
- Simon's boat (Luke 5:3).
- Simon's fishing partners (Luke 5:10).
- Simon's house (Luke 4:38, Acts 10:17).

When Jesus reprimanded him for sin, he was also called Simon. Luke 5:4, 5 says, “He said unto Simon, launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught, and Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing. Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”

He was saying, “This is ridiculous! We are the professionals. He is just a carpenter. Oh well.”

Luke 5:8 says, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

- Three times Jesus asked him, “Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me?”
- However, when Jesus builds him up, He calls him Peter.

Third, he is taught by spiritual insistence.

Vocal leaders often pay dearly. Simon Peter did. You cannot know the impetuous, changeable Simon until you read his two epistles in the back of the New Testament. Then you will see "The stone." Vocal leaders would do well to study Simon Peter's inconsistency.

The second disciple I want to consider is Andrew who I call the manly one. First, note he was a testifier because of spritual increase.

Andrew, whose name means "manly," never broke into the inner circle. Only once is he ever listed with the other three in a group and that is in Mark 13:3 when they sat upon the Mount of Olives and asked Jesus, "Tell us when shall these things be: and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"

Andrew was never as out front or forward as his brother. (By the way, how would you always like to be referred to as someone's brother?) All but one time, Andrew is referred to as Simon Peter's brother. In fact, he is not mentioned in any detail in the first three Gospels (his calling, etc.), but in the Gospel of John he is mentioned in three distinct instances, and in each he is doing the same thing! Bringing people to Jesus.

– John 1:40-42: He brought Peter to Christ.

– John 6:8, 9: He brought the little boy with fish and loaves.

– John 12:20-22: He brought the Greeks to Christ.

Thank God there dwells among our denomination men still interested in bringing men to Christ. Soul winners who remain unsung and whose churches are growing. However, we need to be careful that our pride of success does not lead us to a temptation due to satanic intervention.

C.S. Lewis said, "The source of pride is comparison."

History reveals few great churches exist from times past and they are only a shadow of that greatness. Time is our greatest enemy. You may have a great church today and you should preach for its very soul for growth. But wait a little while. Give Satan time, your people time, your pride time. But be aware that men die, movements fade, monuments fall, and only the message falters not. The flood of Hell cannot prevail upon the Church of Jesus Christ.

Our greatest failure is to see things as physical, not spiritual; earthly, not heavenly; as time, not eternal. We are nearsighted, out of focus; blind to

our own conceits; boastful in our own capabilities; and burdened by our own carelessness. We have a tendency to: view with human eyes and dim the eye of faith; to weigh things on the world's scales, not on eternity's balances; and to obscure present realities with pipedreams, or fantasies, instead of giving ourselves with courage and faith to changing this world for Christ.

Remember, "History is His story and we have little regard for it."

The third disciple in this group is James who I call the hot head for obvious reasons.

James was temperamental by implication. Note that James' name always appears before his brother John in the Gospels. Perhaps he was the elder or the one of stronger influence. James was a fiery fellow evidenced by Luke 9:51-56, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village."

"Let us pray that fire come from Heaven." I do not believe they would make good missionaries. Do you? Note Jesus rebuked them. In Mark 3:17, Jesus called them *Boanerges*, or "sons of thunder."

James had a temporary message due to imprisonment. The only place James appears without John is in Acts 12:1-4 when Herod subdues this zealous, aggressive, passionate, fervent man by taking his head. This occurs only 14 years after he wanted to know on which side of the Lord he would sit in the kingdom.

Now let me consider John, the beloved disciple. John is also charged with a tantrum of indictment. The only time we find John alone in the Gospels is in Mark 9:38, and he was upset. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followed not us: and we forbade him, because he followeth not us."

At this time he was still sectarian, narrow-minded, unbending, intolerant. My, how we need to work on this. We are a diverse denomination. Born out of it. Still in it! Can't we be diverse without being divisive?

One respondent stated, "Our problem is that the vocal minority is unwilling to accept the diversity of our many." More than half of the replies from my poll made mention of our lack of togetherness, division, intolerance of each other, lack of brotherly love, suspicion and jealousy, and lack of doctrinal purity.

The other half expressed love and confidence in our leadership and denomination as a whole.

Dr. H. Stephen Shoemake of Louisville, relates a story he picked up. A Texas rancher bought ten ranches and put them together into one big spread. His friend asked the name of the new ranch. The Texan replied, "It's called the Circle Q, Rambling Brook, Double Bar, Broken Circle, Crooked Creek, Golden Horseshoe, Lazy B, Bent Arrow, Sleepy T, Triple O Ranch."

"Wow!" the friend replied, "I bet you have a lot of cattle."

"No. Not many survive the branding."

There is a temptation for us to "brand" each other negatively. But too much branding—as the Texan admitted—can reduce the herd.

Dear friend, if we are to exist, an honest effort of cooperation must prevail at all levels and must be made by every preacher and layperson. Defiance and rebellion have no place in the ranks of godly men. An attitude and spirit of animosity, suspicion, and pride will finally destroy a preacher, person, and place.

Cooperation enhances unity, to which I am committed. In Matthew 20:20-24, please note the self interest of James and John in desiring to sit one on each side of the Lord. Note also they sent their mother to do the job of asking Christ but further find in verse 24 the other 10 disciples "were moved with indignation against the two brethren."

We are at a crossroads, and we need to take a lesson from John as we find him becoming the truth presenter from spiritual improvement. There are two words that characterize John's later life and teaching. One is love and the other is witness. He uses the word *love* more than 80 times and the word *witness* in some form almost 70 times.

He becomes a real truth seeker. He was also borne out of the same zeal,

passion, and strength as was his brother James. He, like us, had to work on loving his brothers. One phrase stands out from the mature John. "My little children, love one another."

It is not what you are that is important, but what you are willing to become. May we learn to: respect the person, resist pride, restore piety, re-examine our priority, refine by prayer, and reform by practice

We come now to the second group I call:

II. The Contenders (The Varied Ones, Automatic Leaders)

This type of leader is approachable. One should learn credibility is earned, not demanded.

Just as Simon is always first in the four listings, Philip is the first in this second four. His name means "lover of horses." He was skeptical, pessimistic, and analytical. But the Lord uses men like this as well. Our churches and conferences are full of this type person. Men of caution, often visionless, but sometimes it is simply that they want to count the cost.

Philip, like many, was seeking to find his potential. The first three Gospels don't tell us anything about Philip. But John's Gospel mentions him four times:

- John 1:43-46: Where he is called to follow the Lord and where he leads Nathanael to Christ.
- John 6:5-7: Where he was singled out by Christ relative to buying food for the 5,000. His response to Christ was, "We couldn't get 200 pennyworth from the whole crowd." What a shame to respond thusly when Jesus in verse 6 states why, "And this He said to test him; for He knew himself what He would do."

Philip was a materialist, methodical, and mechanical—the type who would take out his pocket calculator and say, "We can't afford it!" He appears in the same three chapters as does Andrew but lacks the faith. He represents in part our stewardship program. We need to be unified in our denominational giving. We have never taught our people to give biblically.

A host of pastors don't tithe, and multitudes of our members have never received the blessings or joy of giving. Our churches have been selfish. Therefore, the lack of outside giving has resulted in the withholding of God's blessing in every area of our denomination.

We need a Stewardship Commission to educate us or a stronger emphasis in our publications and colleges toward giving beyond our own local church to a total ministry.

Nearly every strong, virile denomination growing today has taught their people the value and blessing of unified giving.

Out of the top 10 giving states, six give through the unified co-op plan. An analysis revealed the fastest-growing giving states were in this program. While it does not pay all the bills, those states involved were also the fastest growing toward quotas set by the departments and in establishing strong state and local agencies.

In the spirit of fairness, however, it should be mentioned that other strong giving states exist that have not adopted this program.

Have we been against this program because of its author? The argument remains, but those who oppose enjoy spending the benefits none the less.

Also note the other two instances:

- John 12:20-22. Here Philip brings the Greeks that come to him to Andrew who takes them to Christ.
- John 14:8 “Lord show us the Father.” Many men like Philip have walked, led, sat where Christ is, but have yet to fully see the Father or Son. He followed Christ for over three years, but it is conceivable he represents so many yet today. However, he did have a seeking heart in the midst of his insecurity.

Now I come to Bartholomew (Nathanael) the second in this grouping.

Only one place tells us anything about him aside from the four lists and that is in John 1:46-51 where he is called Nathanael. Let us note his flaw because of prejudice.

He and Philip were students of the Scripture as noted in verse 45. But we see his sin when Nathanael was told about Jesus. He said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

In the recent survey it appeared many were saying, “Can anything good come out of Nashville?”

On a national level many sense a lack of evangelistic thrust, narrow scope for growth, unwillingness to face the issues, power struggles among departments, leadership out of touch with the pastorate.

They see a need for new faces in old places. Place the heavenly degree above the Nashville degree. Growth department catering just to large churches.

The more complimentary suggestions were: Need unity without uniformity. Return to Christian love.

Rekindle the old paths. Gear toward the small church to help them. Speak to our needs. Prepare correspondence courses for leaders and preachers. Improve literature. Prepare literature for churches for growth. Establish a national ministers retreat.

Prejudice is an uncalled-for generalization based on feelings of superiority. Prejudice is ugly in any form. It was prejudice that kept the Pharisees from responding because He wasn't from Jerusalem. They said of the apostles in Acts 2:7, 4:13, that they were ignorant, unlearned, Galilean hayseeds. Prejudice is used by Satan to blind people. However, I'm glad Nathanael's prejudice was not deep. Let's look at his faith seen by the phenomenal One

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (verse 47). Thank God that while prejudice exists among us, the tribe is dying. Like Nathanael, our knowledge of the Word is causing us to be less judgmental. May we be seekers of truth, not bound by prejudice, but honest, open, people of prayer.

Every child of God must one day stand before Christ to have his lifetime of service investigated.

Second Corinthians 5:10 states, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

This judgment of believers is exclusively the responsibility of the Lord Jesus Christ. No mere mortal is capable of assuming the place of an omniscient, omnipotent God when it comes to judging men and movements. Finite human beings, regardless of their fundamental pedigree or position, are incapable of looking into another man's heart.

Only God can judge righteously. He said in Jeremiah 17:10, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

This is why the Holy Spirit emphatically declares in Romans 14:4, 10-13:

“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand...But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”

We need to be careful about proclaiming and publishing the latest faults of brethren. Remarks made against anyone are not worthy to be classified under the heading of “defending the faith,” but rather as “sowing discord among brothers,” a sin God adamantly hates (Proverbs 6:16-19). Until the Lord is allowed to correct this terrible sin through a Holy Spirit-empowered revival of genuine love, our movement will decline and eventually die. A healthy body cannot exist without love.

We come now to Matthew, also known as Levi. It appears by his record that he sees himself as the worst one of the disciple group.

The only picture we see of Matthew is found in three places (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:14-17; Luke 5:27-32). All three passages describe the same incident—sitting at the seat of custom. Look at the fame from which he propels.

Matthew was a tax collector. However, he was willing to leave it entirely. Being a publican was not easy. It was even worse when you know the Scriptures of your fathers but were not permitted in the Temple because you were a publican. Publicans were outcast. Remember the publican who sat afar off and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

The Jewish Talmud said, “It is righteous to lie and steal from tax collectors.” Matthew must have felt he was the worst one of the lot, because he alone in his listing of the Twelve gives his occupation as a publican. The publicans were hated and despised by the Jewish society. Matthew, in recording his profession, demonstrates genuine humility and expresses his sinful unworthiness.

While Matthew never speaks, never asks a question, never appears in another incident, his book is loaded with an appreciation for Christ.

Think about the forgiveness he proposes. Matthew 9:9-13 says, “And as

Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The theme of Matthew's message can be summed up in this same chapter when he asks which is greater, "to be saved from your sins or healed."

This book, called the Book of the King of Kings to the Jews, perhaps is so noted due to his including more Old Testament quotes of the Law and History than all the other Gospels combined.

May I draw your attention to the distance he comes in order to follow Christ. There were two classes of Tax collectors: The Gabbai and Mokhes. The Gabbai were the general collectors that collected property tax, income, poll tax, etc. The Mokhes collected duty and tolls on everything. They were divided into two groups. The Great Mokhes hired others to do the collecting as he faded from sight, and the little Mokhes were too greedy to hire anyone else.

Matthew was saying, "I was a little Mokhes. I came from the table. I was saved from the undermost to the uttermost."

He—like another publican, Zacheaus—did something no one else did after their conversion. They gave a banquet for their Savior.

The last in group two is Thomas. What do you think of when you think of Thomas? Doubter? If you do, you may believe wrong. Perhaps he got bad press.

Look at his faith we desire to reprove. In John 10:39, we find that Jesus and the disciples had left Jerusalem because of the plot to take his life. But in John 11:14-16, the news of Lazarus's death was received and Jesus decides to return to Bethany near Jerusalem. This caused a panic by the disciples except Thomas.

"Let us also go, that we may die with him" (verse 16b). This is not characteristic of doubters, but rather because he totally believed in Christ. John 14:1-5 says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe

also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

He is saying, "Lord don't you go somewhere we can't come."

Thomas had a problem with separation. "I don't like what I hear. You are going somewhere and we can't get there. We'll never find the place."

When Jesus was crucified in John 19, Thomas was destroyed. In John 20:24-29, we find the account of the disciples being gathered in the upper room after the crucifixion but Thomas was not there.

"I knew it! He died and I didn't. I wanted to go with Him and be where He is but He is gone."

He was depressed and had left the others—who, by the way, were in the upper room "for fear."

Thomas was probably kicking every can in Jerusalem. He believed Jesus was gone. Before you label Thomas "the doubter," remember that none of the other disciples believed Jesus had risen until they saw him.

We should see Thomas in the light of John 20:29, "Thou hast believed." Here we see his fidelity we should duplicate. Our faith and trust falters and our denomination needs to return to a stronger and deeper commitment to the Christ of our salvation. We must take a look at our faith in what He wants to do in and through us. We need to:

Define our purpose. That's motive.

Discover our potential. That's measure.

Determine our priorities. That's manner.

Direct our program. That's message.

Remember the Lord builds His Church with:

- A Sanctified Preacher
- A Separated People
- A Salvaging Passion
- A Saturating Program

I am a denominational person owing my conversion to this movement, but frankly I'm not sure God is as thrilled that there is a Free Will Baptist denomination as I am. But I *am* sure He is concerned about my indifference to the lost or my lack of reaching the lost here and around the world.

He is more concerned that people are saved than that we continue as a denomination. The reason any organization exists is to fulfill its preamble. If it wavers, it has lost its reason to be. The responsibility is ours. We may:

- Shirk it, because we are afraid to undertake it.
- Shelve it, because we are anxious to defer it.
- Shed it, because we are tired of hearing it. Or...
- Shoulder it, because we are ready to fulfill it.
- Share it, and be wise in distributing it.

Men on every level who are known as leaders, but whose pride robs of true repentance, can create a dike holding back the needful revival for themselves and those they influence. The streams of revival are held back when cold hearts continue to hold ill feelings. We will never experience revival and restitution:

- Until pastors and parishioners forgive each other.
- Until churches and conferences forgive each other.
- Until states and leaders forgive each other.
- Until every organization can say, "I forgive!"

When all our people: from president to pastor, leader to layman can practice Matthew 18:15.

Then and only then will we move forward. Until we do, one must surely be fearful in saying, "let us go that we may die with him."

How can He forgive us our trespasses when we don't? May the fountains of the Water of life, the washing of regeneration once again flow and flood every member of our denomination.

III. The Pretenders (The Vacillating Ones, Appointed Leaders)

This third group represents a segment of our movement and they are many. In many ways our people are suffering from a lack of good leadership. A vast number of our membership have a mistrust of denominational

affiliation due to misinformation. Communication falls rapidly from the national to the local church. Only about 8,000 receive *Contact*, and maybe four times that number receive *Mission Grams* and *Heartbeat*. But this is far short of reaching the more than 200,000 members. We have 22 states publishing 22 different publications that reach only about 42,000 people. Each defines or carries the denominational message with their own bias.

A great transition exists today with a stronger emphasis being given to the local and state ministries. In fact, 22 states now have their own state executive or promotional secretaries where the state and national programs are being promoted. With time, a stronger program from the local conference to national convention will exist. Until then, national organizations would better their own programs by coordinating with these state leaders.

We now have 28 regular state conventions, 17 Free Will Baptist Bible institutes in 10 states, 75 Christian schools in 22 states, 13 full-time evangelists, four colleges geographically centered across the United States, nine national boards and commissions made up of 68 men and women, with 110 foreign missionaries in nine countries and 122 home missionaries in 28 states and Canada, Mexico, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. We also have eight chaplains serving in the armed services. In addition, the national Sunday School Department dedicated a new Spanish curriculum this year adding to its 1.4 million yearly units of printed curriculum.

Our 1984 statistics reveal we had 210 district associations, 2,598 churches and 213,025 members. With plenty of prayer, preparation, and a positive approach, we can reach into every area of our denomination like never before. Now, let us look at these four disciples who always appear in this group. Just like our mass of people of whom we know so little, these disciples are the ones of whom we know little.

The first in group three is James, the son of Alphaeus. His name is first in group three in all four biblical accounts.

The only thing the Bible tells us about this disciple is his name. He never says a word nor is spoken to, but he is still one of the Twelve. Because of this, let me address the designation his name presents.

In Mark 15:40, he is called "James the less." The Greek word used in this title is *mikros* which means little. However, while it basically means "small in stature," could it also mean "young in age" or "one of little influence"?

We may never know, but the Bible does tell us some details of his

pedigree. Could Matthew have been his brother? According to Mark 2:14, Levi (Matthew) was also a son of Alphasus.

Could Jesus be his cousin? In John 19:25, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas." Can we assume that no mother would name two daughters Mary, and that she was actually a sister-in-law of Mary? Also, Clopas is another form of the name Alphasus. Is it possible that Alphasus was Joseph's brother, making Christ and James cousins? To further substantiate this, Mark 15:40 refers to a Mary as "the mother of James the less."

James represents a vast multitude of our movement. There are thousands of people in leadership roles in local churches and conferences who are totally unknown outside their areas. Such a person is none the less a leader, and his influence, while little known nationally or statewide, is followed locally. He is the overlooked person and is the person to be reached before the grassroots will ever be touched.

While not recognized outside his region he, like James, will be recognized in Heaven. The Lord does use obscure, little known, unsung men.

Second, we find Lebbaeus, also known as Judas Thaddaeus. His name is the definition of his personality. His name was Judas (Jehovah leads). The names Lebbaeus and Thaddaeus may have been added at a later time to reflect his character. *Thadaeus* comes from the Hebrew root *Thad*. It carries with it the meaning of being a "breast-child." He may have been the youngest child, the baby of the family. *Lebbaeus* comes from the Hebrew root *Leb*, which means heart. A man of courage—a heart-child.

What about the declaration of his priorities? This man was also lost in obscurity, but we find him one time in the Scripture. John 14:21-24, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

Jesus' answer simply put would be, "I can tell who loves Me by the way they obey Me. Only to those who truly love and obey Me will I manifest

myself. The only people who will be able to perceive me are those who love Me." In other words, manifestation is limited to reception.

I believe one's dedication is determined by:

- The Master you serve.
- The message you share.
- The morals you sanction.
- The manners you show.

Bob Jones, Sr., said, "The level of responsibility is determined by the level of opportunity." A leadership with integrity does not wait to see what the trends are, or what is popular. The true leader sets the trends and rallies the people, even when the cause is unpopular.

How can the church remain silent when millions of unborn infants are being slaughtered?

How can the church remain silent when we are having an epidemic of divorce and witnessing the breakdown of the family?

How can the church remain silent when racism has become sophisticated and hidden in political philosophy?

How can the church remain silent when there are those demanding that homosexuality be recognized as a valid Christian life style?

How can the church remain silent when our culture is drowning in a sea of alcohol? Where are the Carry Nations of our time?

What we know about Simon. He was the *zealot*, which means "jealous for the Law." In Matthew and Mark, Simon is identified as "Simon the Canaanite." Luke and Acts record him as "Simon, called Zelotes." The Greek word for Zelotes has the same meaning as the Hebrew root *quana* where the transliteration *Kananaios* is used. The meaning of the words is "to be jealous."

Simon may have been identified with a party of Judaism known as the Zealots. His was one of the four dominant groups within Judaism. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the Zealots.

Think about the doctrine he presented. The zealots were the most fervent, passionate, patriots of Judaism. Probably born out of the Maccabean period where Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt against Greek influences on the Jewish

nation and religion.

The intensity of the Zealot philosophy is reflected in 1 Maccabees 2:50, which reads, "Be ye zealous for the law and give your lives for the covenant."

In New Testament times, the Zealots fled to Massada after the destruction of Jerusalem led by a man named Eleazar. Here, 960 zealots committed suicide rather than be taken by the hated Roman enemy according to Josephus, the Jewish historian (*Wars of the Jews*, book seven, chapters 8, 9).

Do you see his determination above his partner? I believe that Simon's partner was Judas Iscariot as Jesus sent out the disciples two by two (Mark 6:7). But Simon continued to believe and was transformed. Judas, however, fell short of the mark.

I believe as Free Will Baptists, we have failed to indoctrinate our people. We give up more people to denominations with a foreign biblical doctrine than we receive from others. I have observed many people join our churches across the denomination. Many were made members without having knowledge of our beliefs. Most didn't have the opportunity to even reject our Church Covenant because it wasn't read to them. Many will never be taught our doctrine. That which made us what we are was a common belief and an abiding conviction about apostasy, feet washing, open communion, and local church autonomy. This separates us from other denominations and their beliefs. These beliefs have been the chains that bind us together.

Many movements growing today are not sidestepping doctrinal emphasis, but make it the center of their preaching, along with salvation. The emphasis is on conversion, baptism, joining the local church, and living separated lives. Until we do this, our losses will continue.

The last is Judas Iscariot. He always appears last in the group listings. The name Judas was a common one. It was simply the Greek form of *Judah*—the land of God's people. Some say its root meaning is "Jehovah praised" but others "one who is the object of praise."

In any case, it is sad that it was given to the one who rejected his Lord. *Iscariot* basically comes from a combination of the Hebrew term *ish*, which means "man," and *Kerioth*, the name of a town. He was the "Man of Kerioth." He was Judas of Kerioth. In fact, he was the only disciple not from Galilee, since Kerioth was in Judea near Hebron south of Jerusalem. Since he was not one of the acquaintances or brothers, could it be he was never accepted

as one of the group?

Remember Jesus demanded total commitment, as early as John 6:66, "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Many left, but the Twelve stayed. Could Judas have been motivated by selfish purposes? What type of relationship did he have with Christ? Note what the Scriptures say.

- Psalm 41:9: "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."
- Psalm 55:12-14, 20b-21: "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have born it. Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company...he hath broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords."
- Zechariah 11:12, 13: "And I said unto them, if ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord."
- John 17:12: "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and one of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."
- Luke 22:21, 22: "But behold, the hand of him that betrayed me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!"

Was it his desires during the pretense? Judas never has a word to say until he complains about the money Mary wasted in anointing Jesus' feet. This is the first time he speaks in the entire biblical record. John 12:3-6 says, "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag,

and bare what was put therein.”

Remember the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. Was he the hypocrite of hypocrites? No one even suspected him. Outwardly, Judas appeared not to have a defective character. In fact, he was not even considered a betrayer right up to the last supper by his peers. When he left the upper room the other disciples thought he had only gone out to buy more food.

Judas heard the same lessons as the other disciples.

- The unjust steward (Luke 16:11-13)
- The wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-14)
- Lessons about money (Matthew 23:1-12)

Jesus even forewarned by saying in John 6:70b, “One of you is a devil,” and in John 13:21, “Verily, verily, I say unto you that one of you shall betray me.”

Was there a departure he planned? (John 13:10b, 11, 18, 19, 21-29). “He that is washed need not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, ye are not all clean...I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, he that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he...When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, that thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.”

- Matthew 26:16: “And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.”

- Mark 14:11: “And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.”
- Luke 22:6: “And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.”
- John 18:2-4: “And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?”
- Matthew 27:3, 5: “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and sent and hanged himself.”
- Acts 1:18: “Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”
- Matthew 27:6, 7: “And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, it is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.”
- Acts 1:15-26: “And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men

which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

- Psalm 69:25-28: "Let their habitation be desolate; and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute him who thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."

Judas represents those of our movement falling short of God's purpose for his life. Today, we have a faltering family unit. Pastors and laymen alike are falling speedily into the separation of the family. Many of our great and good men, preachers of the Gospel, have become victims of divorce. Others are open prey for Satan's attack. It is advisable to remember Philip Brooks saying, "If God called you to preach, never stoop to be a king."

We need like never before a Family Life Commission and a strong emphasis on the Christian family in every area of our movement. It cannot be left to the clergy for they are hurting too, and the church needs the message.

Teaching our people is one of our failings. Another is legalism. We seem to have the idea no better way exists than our own. With this type of attitude, our churches will cease to meet the needs of a changing society. I think most of our churches have reached the height of their growth.

I don't think it's impossible for them to grow; I think it's improbable that they will. Therefore, if our denomination is to grow, it will take new churches. It will take men dedicated to the cause of growing a church for the cause of Christ.

Since there is a constant upward mobility in society as a whole, we need to strengthen, maintain, nourish, and develop our existing churches. We must open new churches for our children who are leaving rural areas and going to cities, graduating from universities, and becoming involved in industry. We cannot forget to serve every area of our changing society.

On a national level, we need to capitalize on what God has allowed us to have as denominational resources—our Bible college, Sunday School department, executive office, and missions departments. These departments are not mini-denominations with only their desire in mind. But we are one denomination with many organizations that need to remember we are one.

Our colleges need to produce men who are dedicated to our cause, who believe we are a total denomination without prejudice to the uneducated or non-Bible college trained minister. Our missions departments should gear up in fulfilling the design of their organization with a cooperating spirit as the body advances. Our publications should foster unity in the body, and our curriculum press prepare material designed for edification.

All working together will provide the impetus we need for a unity which will produce growth.

The first Austrian to ever win a gold medal did so in the 1968 Olympics with a hand gun. He hit the bull's eye 100 times for a perfect score. Upon his return to Austria, he was highly honored by his countrymen and sent out to inspire the youth. After the fanfare died, he returned to his job.

Only a short time later, he lost his left hand in a machine at the plant in which he worked. Remembering the past, he became quite discouraged. In fact, he was hard to live with. One evening he came in pushing aside his wife and entered the bedroom where in the chest he found a pistol. His wife, knowing his deep despair, fell to her knees, paralyzed as she cried, "Oh, no."

He left his home to cross over the hillside. She suddenly heard a bang. Jumping to her feet, she hastened to the sound. Just as she peered over the hillside, she heard another bang—bang, bang, bang.

In 1972, he won his second gold medal by hitting the bull's eye 99 out of 100 times. He, while discouraged, despaired and crippled, faltered, still never lost his dream. May we as Free Will Baptists not lose sight of our goal, our dream.

1986 – Richard Cordell

The Program for Growth

Text: John 14:12; 17:18

My theme for the evening is “The Program for Growth.” We need a program for growth. We have programs for a lot of things. And I need not spend any time really telling you that I’m not here to berate or belittle any of our programs. But I declare we need a program for growth. I mean, we need one from the Pacific to the Atlantic, from the Gulf up through Canada, down into Mexico, to every foreign field and to every opportunity that will be ours in the years to come. We need a program for growth. We’ve got to have it. We absolutely have to have it.

So I want to tell you at the outset that I believe with all my heart what I’m going to preach tonight. I sure would like to preach about Heaven. That’s a wonderful theme. There are a lot of things I’d like to preach about. But tonight, I can at least preach a burden of my heart, and I want you to listen.

Turn in your Bibles to John 14. I would like to read briefly from John 14, 17, and 20. It is astounding to me that Jesus would say in John 14:12 that the works He did, we would do also. And greater works than these shall we do, because He goes to His Father. Greater works than opening blind eyes? Yes. Greater works than strengthening ankle bones—bones that had never sustained a man? Yes. Greater works than opening deaf ears? Yes. Greater works than loosening the tongue of the mute who had never spoken? Yes.

Jesus said, “Greater works shall ye do than these, because I go unto my Father.” In chapter 17, Jesus said in verse 18, in the Lord’s prayer, “As thou has sent me into the world, even so, have I also sent them into the world.”

He’s talking about us. Over 1,900 years ago, He was talking to the Father about us. He included every man, woman, girl and boy in this building who is saved. A companion verse to that verse is found in chapter 20. Some relate it to the Great Commission, and I’m sure it is. Jesus said, “As my Father has sent me, even so send I you.”

I’m not here tonight to get you involved in some spectacular program that will cause your membership to soar to new heights. I wouldn’t be opposed to that, but that is not my purpose. I am not here tonight to convince you

that I alone have the answer to the problem that affects every one of us.

I am here to state some facts about God's program for growth in the New Testament church—particularly, Free Will Baptist churches. This is the group that has my heart. I do not know anything but this group. I do not have a dual love affair with any other group.

I love all God's people. I'm concerned with all those who are doing a work for God, and I want us to all be faithful to His dear cause. But honestly folks, I am concerned more about us than I am about anyone else. Just as a father and a grandfather, I am concerned more about my family—my children, my wife, my grandchildren—more than I am about other families.

Nearly 15 years ago, in the Woodbine Church while I was pastoring there, we had a church growth seminar sponsored by our national Sunday School Department. It was a wonderful seminar. Dr. Elmer Towns was the guest speaker. Dr. Towns said something in his remarks that has stayed with me through the years. I don't suppose that I was as stricken by it then as I have been in years since. He said, "Free Will Baptists are either immune to growth, or they are infatuated with littleness."

Now, please don't jump on Dr. Towns or me for a few minutes. That was not a criticism. He was among friends, and he was simply giving an evaluation on the basis of what he believed to be an accurate assessment of our movement. Dr. Towns was a friend in those days who tried to sound a note of personal concern for his friends, the Free Will Baptists.

I personally, believe what he said was accurate. I believe what he said 15 years ago was an accurate statement. I'm not proud of that. I'm not grateful for that. I simply believe that the 15 years that have followed that statement have accentuated that statement. I don't believe it was something organized on our part. I do not believe it was something we wanted. I do not believe it was something we planned. I believe it was something we allowed. I believe it was something we permitted. I believe it was a side track that we got on, and we haven't gotten off of it yet.

Now, I do not believe we are immune to growth. But I do believe, because I have attended about as many meetings as most of you. I haven't missed a National Association in 25 years. I attend my state associations faithfully; I attend my district associations faithfully when I'm at home. It is a fact folks—like it or not, believe it or not, accept it or not—that our Free Will Baptist churches are not growing.

We really have not grown much, if any, in the last 15 years since Dr. Elmer Towns made that statement. That was not an indictment; it was not meant to be an indictment. It was simply meant to be an assessment. And I share it as he was sharing it then. We are not growing.

Now for some of our folks, that doesn't shock them. Truth is, it doesn't disturb them. Matter of fact, it doesn't even concern them. I mean, they are absolutely unmoved by the fact that we are not growing. Now folks, if we are not growing, we've stagnated. We've stopped growing. We are content to grow in areas that really are not real growth.

Brother Bobby Jackson could not have been more on target this morning when he gave the moderator's message. What he said was absolutely the truth, and if I reiterate it in the message, I want to say it here.

Growth is not dividing a church and taking 50 over here and 50 over there and continuing with the 50 here and the 50 there. That is not growth. Growth is not losing 20 and gaining 20 more. That's not growth.

I'll tell you what growth is, and I'll say it in several ways. Growth is what Sister Cordell and I experienced in 1955, when our first daughter was born. There were two of us in '54 and in '55 there were three of us. In 1957, the three from '55 grew to four. There were four of us. We went to the hospital and got us a little boy.

In 1960, we went back to the hospital and got us another daughter and that made five of us. We started with just two. I mean there was just the two of us when we slipped away from that little Free Will Baptist church on that hot, April night. When they rang those wedding bells and away we went—just two of us. By 1960 there were five of us.

By 1962, there were six of us. Now folks, that's growth. And some of you have a better testimony than I have. Now that's growth. I do not want to devote this message to the negative side of the problem, because if I do that, when we finish we will not have a solution. We'll have nothing to respond to. We will have nothing upon which to agree. But I want to commit the time we have together tonight to what I believe under God, and I know many of you believe, is the solution for church growth among Free Will Baptists. And we can grow. I'm saying we can grow. We are not immune to growth. We need not be infatuated with littleness. We can grow.

Martin Luther King hasn't got anything on us. We can holler around and get things stirred up, can't we? Our solution for growth must be born out

of our willingness to admit the problem exists, and commit ourselves to the only lasting solution.

Now folks, I am not interested in putting band-aids on cancers. I'm not interested in shallow, cheap commitments that do not last until you get out of the city limits. I want for us to grow for the glory of God, for the cause of Christ, for the salvation of souls here and around the world. I want us to be electrified with the power of God that will send us from this place as flaming evangelists of truth to carry the unsearchable riches to the regions beyond.

Call it church growth, call it evangelism, call it missions, call it what you will, but there is only one way to reverse our trend. There is only one way to solve our problem. There is only one way to see our churches at home and on our mission fields grow to the glory of God—as our moderator said.

We grow by addition. You know the philosophy of Sunday School? I've been taught that you multiply by dividing. You see, the problem is that some of our folks think that's how you grow a church—you divide one and grow two. The problem with that is, that when you divide one the way we divide them, the rest of it doesn't work. There's usually so much contention after the division, that we've lost our zeal to do anything but complain about the problem that divided us.

Someone comes to the church that's new, a visitor comes, and someone gets him over in a corner and tells him all the problems—the reasons you don't have as many as you used to have, or the reason you are meeting here instead of over there in the building.

Real church growth is converts walking the aisles trusting Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior, following Him in believer's baptism and becoming involved in the work of the local church to get others to do the same things. Now folks, I believe in counting converts. I'm not opposed to that. But I learned something this summer.

We went on a fishing trip with our men and boys. One of my men dragged me out before daylight, loaded me in the boat, and carried me across the lake. And when we got to the other side of the lake, the sun was about to come up on the horizon. And I saw something I've never seen before in my life. I saw fish coming out of the water bigger than I had ever seen before.

Now, it might have been because I wasn't good and awake—reason they were so big. But I'm telling you, that was a sight to behold. And he said

we'll get them here. I wanted to get a net, but we had to catch 'em. And we started casting out and, man alive, we'd cast out and start bringing them in. Now, I've never caught big fish or that many fish in my life. I never had. I'm not a fisherman. I was catching them. I was so excited! And about the time I got him in the air, he jerked a little and was gone. I said to him, "I had him. I had him. I caught that fish." But I didn't get him. I didn't string him, and we didn't eat him.

If you want to grow a church—and please, if I want you to misunderstand me on some things, I'll give them to you after a while—we're not only going to have to catch these fish, we're going to have to get them down the aisles, and get them baptized, and get them on our rolls, and get them involved in what we were doing when we caught them.

Now, when you get that going, you're going to have church growth. Many years ago on a Chicago street, a man stepped up to a young man and said, "Are you a Christian?"

"Mind your own business," was the reply.

"This is my business—my main business," said Mr. Moody. Never let a day pass without speaking to someone about Jesus.

My dear Free Will Baptist brothers and sisters, soul winning is our business too. We must make it our main business. Soul winning is the main business of the church whether we make it so or not. Whether we believe it or not. Whether we practice it or not. Whether you like it or not.

Andrew Murray said, "There are two kinds of Christians in the world—soul winners and backsliders." Amen, or oh me? I sit where you sit. I haven't arrived. No one in this room has arrived at what we're talking about tonight. We need it. We must admit it. We need to make soul winning our main business.

I want to challenge you tonight to make what I call the theme of the life of Christ your theme. He was only 12 years old, but when they found Him, when they inquired of Him where He was and what He had been doing, He said, "Wist you not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Now, I believe He clarified that business later on in His ministry when He said in Matthew 9:13, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

In Luke 19:10, Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to

save that which was lost.”

What if He had gotten sidetracked? What if He had failed in His mission? R. A. Torrey said, “The main business of every Christian is daily to witness for Christ and to bring perishing souls to him.”

Daily to witness for Christ. “Daily,” said Mr. Moody. Daily to witness for Christ. We call ourselves full-time Christian workers. I say we need to daily witness for Christ and bring perishing souls to Him.

Free Will Baptists are not the only ones failing to make the main business the main business. It is said that 95% of all church members never bring a single, solitary person to Christ. Now, it may comfort you to know that you are in the majority. But neighbor, I don’t get any consolation out of that. In the first place, thanks be to God I don’t fit in that 95% category, but in the second place, I don’t get any consolation out of that for us, for any of us.

You see, even if in this building tonight, we could rise up as a mass crowd and say that the majority of this number here tonight had won someone to Christ in your Christian experience. That would still be a sad commentary on what we should have done. You know, I’m not nearly as concerned about what I have done as I am concerned about what I have not done. I face that every night. Five percent of all church members are the only ones doing the soul winning.

George Truett said, “The bringing of one soul to Jesus is the highest achievement possible to the human life.”

He’s right. That’s right tonight. It is the highest possible achievement to any human being, to bring one soul to Christ. George C. Stevens penned these words in the chorus, “Must I go in empty-handed? Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet him—must I empty-handed go.”

We cannot all be preachers, but we can all be soul winners. We cannot all be missionaries, but we can all be soul winners. We cannot all be college professors, but we can all be soul winners. We cannot all be denominational workers, but we can all be soul winners. We cannot all be full-time Christian workers, but we can all be full-time soul winners.

I say to our leaders, and I love and respect our leaders. We will not attract what we want. We will attract what we are. If we are not soul winners, we won’t attract soul winners. We’ll attract folks who will be just like us. Like begets like. Dr. Johnson used to, about once a year, get on this thing when

he was trying to straighten out some students and get them away from the bad crowd. Birds of a feather do flock together. He had a string of them. I got it, thank God. We attract what we are.

One of the charges made against John Bunyan was that the tinker tries to mend souls as well as pots and pans. What a charge. What a charge. They tried to say this was not his business, but it *was* his business. Proverbs 11:30 declares that “the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.”

Do you want to get on God’s honor roll? I mean His A+, 100% honor roll. Be a soul winner. Daniel 12:3 says, “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Do you want to shine for God? Be a soul winner. R. G. Lee said, “Soul winning is the heartbeat, the alpha, the omega of Christianity.”

I’m afraid, my friends, we’ve allowed some other things to become the heartbeat. We’ve allowed some other things to become the alpha. We’ve allowed some other things to become the omega. And we’ve allowed some other things to become all of the alphabet in between.

We need a return to the old-time Bible plan for church growth. And it’s soul winning—the main business of the New Testament Church. Dr. Lee also said, “Soul winning is the greatest business in the whole universe.” Man I think he’d been all over it, too.

I’m saying we ought to make the main business the main business. And soul winning *is* the main business. It is. It is. It is the main business. John Wesley did not pray to become a great preacher, but he did pray to become a great soul winner. He became both. It was said of Wesley that he was out of breath pursuing souls. Would that be said to include even one of our number? He’s out of breath pursuing souls. No wonder Wesley is the man we read about today. No wonder Wesley is one of the great heroes of the work of God.

If we build buildings, if we build schools, if we build programs, if we build budgets, if we build organization, if we build reputations, if we build a thousand other things and fail to win souls, my friend, we will fail. We will fail God, we will fail the church, we will fail future Free Will Baptists. We will have missed our main business for following Jesus.

Jesus said, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” None of us

have an excuse for not being soul winners. God gave His Son for perishing souls. He did not give His Son for organizations, building programs, or budgets. He gave His only begotten Son because souls would perish in Hell where the worm dieth not, and Jesus died for those perishing souls.

Now, someone has to tell them so they know. It is not enough to tell them simply so they can hear. We must tell them so they can know. Where are they? They're everywhere. There are some in our homes. Some of you left precious people at home, in your house, who if they die tonight will go into a Christless eternity and a devil's Hell forever and ever. I'm not indicting you.

I passed through Ozark on my way up here and stopped. My mother died last year in Ozark without Christ. She went to a Free Will Baptist church, and I don't blame the Free Will Baptist preacher. She had a son who is a Free Will Baptist preacher. I knelt at her knees and begged her—prayed with her, cried and wept and pleaded with her—to give her heart to Jesus. And she said she did. I hope she did, but she didn't leave much of a testimony. I lost a brother last year, six years older than me. Lost.

I'm telling you that the main business has got to be soul winning. They're in our homes. They're in our churches. They're in our communities. They're in our areas. They're in—lost, sin-laden individuals—in our sin-soaked nation by the millions.

Don't you be overcome by this business of 60 million Christians in America. Don't you get carried away by the so called 40 million born-again Christians in America. If there were 40 million born-again Christians in America, we could turn this country upside down for Christ!

We can't even stop the murder of the unborn. They're out there—4.5 billion souls populating our world tonight, and most of them are perishing without Christ, and most of them have never heard one time, not one time.

Oswald J. Smith said, "No man should have the right to hear the Gospel twice, until everyone has heard the Gospel at least one time." "I do not know if he is right, but I know this: everyone ought to have the opportunity to hear at least one time so that he can understand it. If he rejects it, that's his business, but he ought to have the opportunity.

We have a responsibility. We must rise to the responsibility. We must be about the task that's been given us to reach our generation. I have a responsibility to my generation and so do you, and we must be about the

main business of winning souls or we are going to fail our generation; but more important, we are going to fail the Lord who saved us.

Jesus said, "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." If following Jesus is His prerequisite for winning souls, then I would say many are not following Jesus. I'm not saying they are not saved. I'm saying they are not following Jesus. For Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." If you follow Jesus, you will be a soul winner.

You see, it's when we do not follow Him that we get preoccupied. We get sidetracked. We get involved in all of these other things, and some of them are good. But He said, "If you follow Me, I'll lead you into the best thing." Not the good but the best. Soul winning.

Every child of God is responsible to be a soul winner. Now if you do not agree with that, you are trying to justify yourself and excuse yourself. Why don't you just 'fess up? Why don't you just get right with God? And I'm not being hard. I'm not being harsh, but it's time we pulled the folk to one side. It's time someone exposed our naked excuses for what they are. We have no excuse. We have every reason. We have every opportunity. Souls are crying. Men are dying. Is it anything to you? Do you care?

I say it's our business. Preachers ought to be soul winners. Listen to me, there is not a pastor in this building tonight that could not be responsible for his church to grow measurably if he alone won one soul to Christ a month. But the truth is, there are men in this building tonight who are called preachers and pastor churches and make their living by the Gospel who have not won a soul to Christ in 12 months.

I'm sorry for you. But I beg you in Jesus' name to determine, to purpose in your heart tonight, that you are not going to be wounded by what has been said, but you are going to respond to what has been said. You are going to say, "Enough about this barrenness. Enough of this business of not winning souls. I'm going to be about my Father's business."

Missionaries. I don't have time to get around to everybody. Missionaries, there may be some folks here who love you more than I do and that care about what you're trying to do more than I, but I don't know who they are. I'm sure they're here. I'm talking about all of you. I'm talking about our whole work. I'm talking about every field, every work. Missionaries ought to be soul winners—consistent, faithful soul winners. And if there's anyone on the face of God's earth that ought to get a hold of this thing

and make soul winning the main business of their ministry, it ought to be missionaries.

I know that some say that you can't do it on the mission field like you can do it here. Language barrier, cultural barrier, all kinds of barriers—whatever happened to what Jesus said in Acts 1:8?

Let me tell you something, the greatest communicator we have going for us is not our ability, it is not what we know, it is not what we've learned, it is not the lessons we've learned. Our greatest communicator is He who dwells within us, who can communicate our message. He can go through the language barrier. He can penetrate the cultural barriers. I'm saying we have more in us than we have against us. Just do it. Just purpose in your heart, "I can." And you will. The more you tell yourself you can't, the more you won't. You won't have to worry about coming home and apologizing for not seeing anyone saved. You'll have them saved.

But you say they don't understand everything. But friend, they don't understand everything here either. They don't understand everything when they first get saved. I didn't understand everything. In fact, if I had understood everything that was going to happen to me, I would have run.

It's our business to win souls. Herein lies our church growth. Herein lies our program for growth. We need to prime our people. Prime them for what? Swapping fish? We have more keepers of the aquarium right now than we have fishers of men. It's the truth. Herein lies our program for growth. Herein lies the answer to the malignancy that threatens our existence. I am not simply interested in Target 90, I'm interested in Target 2000. I want a vibrant, soul winning Free Will Baptist church in every community across this country. And I believe most of us do.

But folks, wishing won't get it. Sitting around hoping, dreaming, and fabricating won't get it. But soul winning will. We must win souls not to increase our numbers, not to increase our budgets, not to ensure our success, but we must win souls because we have a divine command/mandate to win souls. That's what Matthew 28:19, 20 is all about.

The sad truth is we are not growing. And we are not growing because we are not going. I'm interested in America. But I'm interested in Ivory Coast, Japan, Panama, Spain, France, India, the islands of the sea, Mexico and Canada. I'm interested in every mission field we have. And I'm interested in the rest of the world. I'm interested because my God is interested. For

God so loved the world...How can they believe in Him in whom they have not heard? And how are they going to believe if we do not tell them?

One of the reasons we have the problem today is because we have permitted it. You teach what you tolerate. That's not just true in school. It's true in Sunday School, just like it's true in Monday school. We have a mandate: Psalm 126:5, 6.

Let me tell you something—the Bible's behind you, soul winner. Heaven's behind you. Souls, precious souls are perishing. Some 100,000 souls a day go out into a Christless eternity. Is it nothing to you? Is it nothing to you because it is not personal, because you don't know them? Is it nothing to you that they are perishing when we hold the bread of life?

[The recording concludes at this point in the sermon.]

1986 – J.D. Norris

The Forgotten Son

Text: John 3:16

Introduction

I have heard it said that Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., made a statement about Free Will Baptists, that God had saved us for the last days. If that is a true statement, then my friends, we must get busy. The very last days are upon us.

Oh, how we need a great moving of God's Spirit in our beloved denomination today. I pray for an old-fashioned, Holy Ghost revival to break out and spread throughout our churches, homes, and our fields of service.

The begotten Son has become the forgotten Son, and it is showing throughout the land in our ranks. If we hope to be used of God in these last days, we must move quickly from the place of barrenness to the place of surrender and service, that we might bring forth fruit for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Have we forgotten the Begotten?

I. His Word – Jeremiah 23:29

- A. The inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God
- B. His love letter to us (courage, strength, warning), Jeremiah 3:22
- C. Our road map. Many of our people know so little about the Bible.
- D. Have you read it with a broken spirit and a sob in your soul, the beauty and magnitude and splendor of His divine Word?

Have we forgotten the Begotten?

II. His Love – Jeremiah 31:3

- A. No one has ever loved you like Jesus.
- B. No one has ever cared for you like Jesus.
- C. No one ever died for you like Jesus.

- D. His love helps us to keep going, even when Satan and all the imps of Hell try to destroy us. His love comes shining through the dark clouds of despair and woe.

Have we forgotten the Begotten?

III. His Promises

- A. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.
- B. How many times has our dear Lord stood by our side when it looked like it was all over for us? He has never let us down. Whatever it takes to help His man in an hour of need, He will come through.
1. The rod of Moses
 2. The rock of David
 3. The mantle of Elisha
 4. The trumpet of Gideon
 5. The fire on Mt. Carmel

I even thank God for the Shimei's Dust that is cast at me from time to time, for it helps to make me stronger.

- C. Jesus will see us through. His Word is truth. He cannot lie. (If it is written in the Bible, I will believe it until I die, though the mountains be removed and cast into the sea. If Jesus said it, I believe it. It's good enough for me.)
- D. He will save those who call upon Him (whosoever will, Romans 10:13).
1. Whatever part of the world you come from (low or high grade)
 2. Race or color, He will save you
 3. He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

I was not saved at an early age like my children, but thank God He saved me when I called, and praise His dear name, He is the begotten Son in my life.

- E. We must take His promise to a lost and dying world (worldwide missions). I didn't know anyone in Tallahassee, Florida, when we moved there to start a Free Will Baptist church.

1. Sometimes I am afraid we have forgotten what our ministry and mission in life is all about. We are left here for a reason (Titus 1:5).
2. We get sidetracked by so many seemingly good and important things. One example is Christian schools. Dr. Bob Jones once said, "If you have an enemy, get them to start a Christian school."
3. Pet peeves and projects of a faltering and failing denomination. Because of fussing and fighting among ourselves, choosing sides and pulling against the truth that has made Free Will Baptists great. Love the brethren. Regardless of what side of the river you are on, regardless of what flag of eschatology you fly under, love the brethren.
4. Christ is dishonored and the work of God cheapened when those chosen of God as His messengers do not forgive and forget our differences and move forward in reaching souls for whom Jesus died.

Have we forgotten the Begotten?

IV. His Message

- A. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
 1. As young Christians we couldn't do enough to reach this old world.
- B. The message and cause of Christ must be proclaimed by young and old alike.
 1. Saved and sure
 2. Saved and serving
 3. Saved and surrendering
- C. Free Will Baptists have the right message. We must move forward and take our place as a soul-winning denomination. If not, we will go under in shame and defeat.
- D. Unashamed and apologetic for our stand on perseverance and the practice of feet washing. We are of the Arminian persuasion.
- E. His message needs to be delivered to an awaiting body of seekers by a broken-hearted, compassionate servant of God.

1. The pastor mounting his pulpit, like a king mounting his throne
 2. Glowing with a message of God on his soul, that came through prayer, study, and yes, even fasting
- F. This meeting should make a difference not only in the lives of our pastors, our families, our churches, and our denomination, but also to the city we are visiting.
1. Be a witness (Jeremiah 20:9).
 2. Be a soldier.
 3. Be a soul winner.

Jesus is the begotten Son. Don't make Him the forgotten Son in your life!

V. His Power – Acts 1:8

- A. Our denomination needs a fresh breath of the power of God on *all* of us.
1. I am tired of taking a back seat on the bus of spiritual power.
 2. The charismatics do not have a corner on the Holy Spirit.
 3. Neither do the Independent Baptists have a monopoly on soul winning.
- B. His power can make you what you ought to be. His power can cleanse your soul and set you free.
- C. I am tired of seeing a "powerless ministry" going nowhere and doing nothing for the cause of Christ.
1. Why? Jeremiah 18:15: "Because my people have forgotten me."
- D. Friends, are you tired of a powerless ministry and just going through the motions and drawing a check?
1. I want my life to count for my Lord: fruit for my labor.
 2. I want to be used of God. The first revival I was ever in I went to the altar once for assurance, and two other times begging God to use me. I am still begging.
 3. I was told we Free Will Baptists had to get this bigness out of our heads, that we were just average. I don't want to be just average.

I don't want Jesus to become the forgotten Son in my life. I want Him to be real, radiant, and reigning.

VI. His Death

A. We must be a denomination that will remain and be remembered.

B. He came to die that we might live.

C. It is finished (John 19:30). Remember the words of the old hymn, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

1. The price was paid...

– He did it all for us.

– He left Heaven and went to a manger that we might have a mansion.

– He was beaten black and blue so that by His stripes we could be healed.

– He shed His precious blood so we could belong.

– He carried a cross so we might have a crown.

– He took our sins so we might have salvation.

– He took our Hell so we might have Heaven.

Have we forgotten the Begotten?

VII. His Coming

A. We, as Free Will Baptists, believe in the Book, the blood, and the blessed hope.

B. Regardless of your stand on eschatology and denominational issues, we all believe He is coming soon.

C. Our prayer should be, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

If Dr. Bob's statement were true, in any sense of the word, about God saving Free Will Baptists for the last days then my friends, I have got news for you... We must get busy now! I want to do my part. I want God to take over my life completely. "Breathe on me."

We need some "fresh oil." We need a renewed vision of holiness, standards,

and soul winning. We need a revival. Oh, Holy Spirit, breathe on us.

I don't want this to be just another national convention. I want it to be something special. I want to see the power of God fall on all of us.

I want to see us quit worrying so much about business (although it has its place) and allow God to move us to a position of brokenness and a sense of need that can only come from Him.

Do it again. Remember the 1972 National Association in Texas—preaching, praying, shouting, souls saved? People called into the ministry and mission fields? I stood and watched folks walk the aisles with tears streaming down their cheeks. “Oh God, do it again!”

Please allow Jesus to be the begotten Son of God in your life and not the forgotten Son.

Guidelines for Growth: Get back to the Old-Fashioned Ways.

Preachers, did you come expecting God to do something special for you? One more time: God, you must help me! This meeting could very well be the one for which we have prayed for years!

“I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of Egypt: open thy mouth wide and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:10).

1987 – Fred Hall

The Church and the Dangers We Face

Text: 1 Peter 5:8, 9

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to First Peter. I'm going to be addressing what Free Will Baptists face, and I notice a long list of them. I'm going to try and keep them to a list of three because I think these three are the three the Bible has more to say about than any others. As a result, I am trying to pay attention to what the Bible pays attention to.

First, there is a verse of warning in 1 Peter 5:8, 9. You are familiar with this warning. Sometimes we need to be reminded of it. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith." Let me call your attention to a couple of things about those two verses. First, these verses identify the fact that we do have an adversary. We have an opponent; we have someone that opposes us—who is in the business of defeating us; who is in the business of dividing us; who is in the business of robbing us of the power of God; who is in the business of putting us out of business. So, he is our adversary.

That verse properly identifies the adversary. But it also properly identifies our attitude toward the adversary. It would be foolish for man to have an enemy that didn't watch him. And here he calls upon us to be two things: to be sober, to be serious about the threat and not to take it lightly; second, to be vigilant—to be wide awake, not dull or sleepy but wide awake and looking around and alert for the enemy that is approaching.

It also gives us the resource we have to resist the enemy in verse 9: "Resist steadfast in the faith." We are to resist him how? In the faith. You can't fight the devil with fists or a pistol or a rifle or a bomb. You can fight him only in the faith. And we are to resist the devil in the faith.

In the context, Peter was saying to these Jewish Christians, "Don't compromise just because you want to avoid a martyr's death, but keep on believing what you've always been believing." James had a clear explanation in chapter 4 when he said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Just resist him. Now one more text, and we will get into the message. That text

is 1 Corinthians 10:12. This is a warning to all of us. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

I'm glad I'm a Free Will Baptist; I really am. I can't think of anything I'd rather be than a member of the Free Will Baptist church. And one of the things that pleases me is that we don't meet in our National Association to discuss compromises of theology and doctrine. I just celebrated my 30th year in the ministry. I was ordained July 17, 1957, in the old western conference of North Carolina before the split. And we've never met to decide that we were no longer going to believe in the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ, or the deity of Jesus. We've never met together to talk about things like that. And I'm glad. We hold to conservative doctrinal and theological views. And we are not bothered by that kind of thing.

And quite frankly, I don't think there is an immediate threat to Free Will Baptists theologically or doctrinally. Now, that may be down the road, but not right now. I'm talking about immediate threats to our existence and to our ministry, but that isn't to say that we don't have dangers facing us. I believe those dangers are on a practical level. And as a result, this morning, in the time I have—I hope I have time to do this—I want to address your attention to three basic dangers.

I. We face the danger of becoming jaded by the materialistic emphasis of the world in which we live.

First, I address your attention to what I think is a very real threat—Jesus had a lot to say about it—that we face the danger of becoming jaded by the materialistic emphasis in this world. We do live in the world. And by the world, I am not talking about the created world. I am not talking about the beautiful world that God gave us to live in. I'm talking about the world's system of doing things—a corrupt system that is based on greed, jealousy, and envy. It's a money world. You're not successful in the world's system unless you've made a lot of money.

You're not successful in the world's system unless you have accumulated a lot of things, have a good bank account, stocks and bonds, houses and lands. If you have none of those things, as far as the world is concerned, you're a failure. And according to their standards, Jesus was a failure. Jesus never owned a piece of property. He never had much money. He said the birds of the air have their nests and the foxes have their holes, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. So as far as the world's system is

concerned, He was a failure. But we do live in this world, and sometimes it is very tempting for us to become affected by the world's system.

The biblical warnings are clear. For instance, look what Jesus said in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. He talked about the various kinds of soil that receive the seed. In His explanation of the parable of the sower, He said the seed was the Word of God. Then He went on to describe how certain people receive the Word. And He said in verse 22, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becometh unfruitful."

Notice that he did receive the Word. And it's implied that at some point after hearing the Word, he was fruitful. You can't become unfruitful unless you were fruitful to start with. And so at some point, he was fruitful. But two things made him become unfruitful. One of those was the care of this world, and the second was the deceitfulness of riches. Deceit means lying. It deceives you. Part of the deceitfulness of riches is that it can make you think prosperity is a blessing when it is really a curse.

The worst thing that has ever happened to Christian people is when we became prosperous. Because then we lost our dependency on the Lord. Listen, when the checks aren't coming in, the bills aren't paid, and there's no food in the pantry, you pray an awful lot. Boy, you're really beseeching the throne of God for God to help you. But when things are prosperous, somehow you forget to pray.

I've been around long enough to remember our National Association being held in local churches and we stayed in people's homes. Now we meet in the best place in town and stay in the best hotels. I heard a story about a Free Will Baptist preacher who had a committee meeting in his local conference and all the preachers came over to his house for the meeting. So many of them drove up in Lincoln Continentals and Cadillacs and parked them in his yard that the local police dropped by—just wanted to check... they thought it was a mafia meeting in town.

We've become sort of that way. In fact the secular world makes fun of us. Have you heard Ray Stevens' song, "Would Jesus Wear a Rolex on His Television Show?" I mean, you can't see Jesus doing that, and yet we see the television ministers dripping with their diamond rings and their Rolex watches and their Hart Shaffner Marx suits.

Prosperity has caused a tremendous problem because it has become something that is ruling us instead of us ruling it. Jesus said again in Matthew 6, "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Now mammon is not the devil. Mammon is materialism. He said you cannot serve me and at the same time be a servant to materialism. I am afraid that oftentimes we are affected by that.

I suppose John said it a bit clearer in 1 John 2. Now before I read this, I need to tell you that I don't think worldliness is always the things that were defined to me when I was growing up. When I was growing up, worldliness was going mixed bathing, movies, and dancing. That was worldliness. I'm going to tell you, you can avoid all those things and still be worldly. To be worldly means that you have a mentality, desire, and affection for this world's system. Whether you do all those things or not, you kind of like it, and worldliness begins in your heart before it ever makes its appearance outwardly.

John said in 1 John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, then the love of the Father is not in him." Now that doesn't mean God doesn't love you. Listen carefully, "If any man love the world, then the love of the Father is not in him." It means that because you are involved in this world's system, you can't love God like you ought to. In the same proportion that one is in love with the world, in the same proportion one's love for God diminishes. The more you're involved with the world, the less you are involved with God. And that's what John was trying to say.

He goes on, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." See the contrast? He even defined what was in the world. He said there was the lust of the flesh. Now the lust of the flesh is sinful desire that seeks gratification. In the world's language, "If it feels good, do it."

If you want to do it, don't withhold yourself from it. That's the lust of the flesh. The lust of the eye is a lust, an unreasonable desire that reaches out beyond what one can actually reach. That's covetousness. That's desiring things that you don't have and you don't need, but you want them because

your next door neighbor's got them or because your friend's got them. Or because someone you know has them and you don't have them—that's the lust of the eyes.

And then he said the pride of life. The pride of life is an arrogance which says I can live in this life without God's help. I can direct the course of my life apart from God. He said that's what characterizes the world's system. And if you fall in love with the world system, then you can't love God like you ought to love Him. That's a serious indictment.

Brother, that's serious! If you get so involved in the materialistic world and become jaded by it to the point that your love for God diminishes, you cease to be able to serve God. The dangers that can cause:

1. It can make us exchange purity for popularity.

I suppose some of the early fathers in the Assemblies of God would turn over in their graves if they could see what was happening in the Assemblies of God churches today. The fastest growing Protestant denomination in this country is the Assemblies of God. But I want to tell you something. Not all of them, but some of them long ago, abandoned purity for popularity.

2. The second danger is that we could become slaves to money and materialism and what money can buy rather than being servants of Christ.

I read the story of Alexander the Great who was in his great campaign against the Persian Empire. Eventually, he gained the victory over that great empire, but as they marched through the empire, his soldiers were looting and spoiling. It got to the point that they had captured so much gold and silver and precious jewels that they were simply loaded down with it. It became a burden for them. And Alexander the Great recognized that they weren't going to win any major battles so long as they were confronted with the terrible problem of having to carry around all of this junk. So he had them all bring it into one great pile, set fire to it, and burned it up.

The soldiers were furious. But after they burned up all that stuff, it seemed as if they had wings. They began to overcome the Persian Empire, and as you know they eventually overran it. They didn't do it until they got rid of the stuff. They didn't do it until they got rid of the things that had limited them.

3. The last danger is that we can become selective in our presentation of the Gospel.

In other words, we can become a respecter of persons. There's an old guy in our town who's got a lot of money. We need to go over there and win him to the Lord. Not because he's lost. Not because Jesus told us to go win him. Not because we're compassionate over the fact that he is going to Hell. But win him because he's got some money. And we need some money in our building fund. And we need some money in our church. And I need a raise in salary. And maybe that old boy will give me a new set of golf clubs.

When I was a young man, I almost quit the ministry, when I heard some old preachers in North Carolina talking about preaching a ham out of people. I used to hear preachers promise, "If you call me for revival, I'll make sure your church buys you a new set of tires or a new suit." That's wrong motivation. That's mammon talking. That's materialism talking. And I want to tell you that it can become a problem, and we can become selective of our presentation of the Gospel.

What are we going to do about it? We must listen to God's warnings. And this is radical, Brother. This is 2,000 years old, but this is radical stuff. This is Luke 12, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Now I don't mean to ridicule anybody, please forgive me if this sounds unloving. I suppose more of us spend more time in seminars about how to save money and provide for retirement, than we spend in the study of God's Word or studying how to be better, effective preachers, and how to win folks to the Lord, because sometimes we are more concerned about retirement than we are concerned about getting folks into Heaven.

Jesus said your life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things you possess. There's a whole lot better treasure than that. He also said to leave to Him the supply that you need in this world. Listen to Him again in the same chapter in Luke. He said, "Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on." Skip down lower in the chapter, verse 31, "But rather, seek ye the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you." What He's saying was, it isn't wrong to have things, but to seek to glorify God more than you seek things. Don't spend all your time looking for materialism.

Now, here I really do get radical. I'm not radical... Jesus is radical. Luke 12:33, 34. That's a radical chapter. Get in trouble just reading it. Jesus said make doing the will of God the greatest treasure of your life. He said, "Sell all that you have (You mean my Rolex watch? You mean my color TV and

my VCR? Oh, Lord, not my Honda. I worked for years to get that Lincoln. Surely, Lord, not the Lincoln.) and give alms.”

Give it away. Jesus wouldn't be popular today, would He? He wasn't popular then either. “Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If your treasure is in the bank, that's where your heart is. If your treasure is in possessions, that's where your heart is. But if your treasure is in Heaven, that's where your heart is.

II. We face the danger of becoming divided over issues that force us to take sides.

Now I go further. There is a danger that we sometimes don't like to talk about. The issues that have caused division of our beloved denomination have not been theological or doctrinal, but we face this danger of becoming divided if we are not already. We become divided over issues that force us to take sides against one another. I want to tell you, I don't want to take sides against anybody. I've been around long enough to remember some of the issues that we've had. I remember some years ago out in Oklahoma, we had some issues about NAE—whether you agree with what we did or not.

I remember a good friend of mine meeting me on the street. I was walking back to the hotel, and he came up to me and asked me how I voted. I'm not going to tell you how I voted, but I told him. He said, “What?” and he didn't speak to me for three or four years, and I couldn't understand it. We still love the Lord, I hope. And I'll still love him. But somehow we've got to get on somebody's side.

Not because we believe in liberal theology. Not because we believe in bad doctrine. But because we were forced to take a side over an issue that's really inconsequential when it comes to thinking about the lost of this world and doing the work that God has called us to do.

I want to make a statement to you. If you don't remember anything else I say, I hope you remember this—the importance of our task, which is winning the world for Christ, and the purity of our testimony depends on Free Will Baptists remaining unified in our faith, unified in our love for each other, and unified in our commitment to bring glory to God. A verse of Scripture that all of us know, yet we forget—John 13:35—Jesus said,

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. If you have love one to another.” If you read that often enough, it will break your heart. Jesus said the only way the world is going to know that you follow Me, that you learned from Me, that you are My followers is the way you love one another. And I’m sorry to say that sometimes the world couldn’t tell that we were followers of the Lord because a lot of times our relationships are not based on love but on something else.

In fact, as I read further in the Bible I find out that I’m supposed to love like Jesus loved, and the way Jesus loved is beyond me. Because here they falsely accused Jesus of sedition and heresy, and He said, “I love you.” They arrested Him and took Him to Pilate, and Pilate said, “Answer for yourself.” He didn’t say anything. In effect He was saying, “I love you.”

They took him over to Pilate’s hall of judgment and plucked out His beard, and He said, “I love you.” They put a false robe on Him, and He said, “I love you.” They put a crown of thorns on His brow, and He said, “I love you.” They hung Him on a cross and lifted Him up between Heaven and earth; and while they walked around the cross and shook their fingers at Him and ridiculed Him, he said, “Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do.”

He loved them. But you know what? The way He loved them, that one Roman soldier that day was impressed, and as he looked up into the face of Jesus he said, “Oh, this must have been the Son of God.”

That’s the way we’re supposed to love—like Jesus. If you want to know how you’re supposed to love your brother in Christ, love like Jesus did. They brought to Him one time a woman accused of adultery, caught in the very act. He looked at her with love and compassion, then He sat down and wrote something in the sand. I don’t know what He wrote, it doesn’t say. I think He wrote some names. Jesus knew the list. He said, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”

This was a very loose woman. What He was saying was, “Let the fellow here who has never sinned with this woman cast the first stone.” They all started leaving. See, it was all right in those days for a man to do stuff, but a woman couldn’t. And they all started leaving. They all left. He said, “Woman, where are your accusers?” She said, “Lord, they’re all gone.” He said, “Neither do I accuse thee. Go and sin no more.” That’s the way we’re supposed to do it, isn’t it? Aren’t we supposed to be like Jesus? It’s kind of hard to be like Jesus.

Do you know that when Jesus prayed in John 17—and by the way John 17 is the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is not, "Our Father who art in Heaven." That's what He used to teach men how to pray. When Jesus prayed, He prayed in John 17. And do you know what He prayed for? He prayed for those people who followed Him. And a part of that prayer in verses 20, 21 is unique.

It said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me."

The world has a hard time believing sometimes by the way we behave. Do you know how our oneness is supposed to be? It's the same kind of oneness that the Father and the Son have. Can you imagine the Father and the Son getting into an argument? Can you imagine Jesus saying to the Father, "I'm not going to do it."

Jesus prayed in the Garden before He was crucified, and great drops of blood fell from His forehead as He said, "O Father, please let this cup pass from me; not my will but thine be done." He didn't want to die for the sins of men. It wasn't just dying but becoming sin, that's what He didn't want to do. But He said, "I'll do it because that's what You sent me here to do."

It isn't always easy to love each other. Some folks are easier to love than others. I don't have any trouble loving my wife because she loves me. I don't know why she loves me, but she does. We've been together 29 years; it's getting better all the time.

I have a hard time loving some folks. I have to make an effort at it. A guy talks about you, criticizes you, stabs you in the back, accuses you—you look at him and smirk, not smile, "I love you, brother."

You know, that's hard. You really have to deal with yourself to get where you can love him. But Jesus said we're supposed to. We're just supposed to love him.

Satan wants to destroy Free Will Baptists. I don't think he can destroy us right now theologically. If someone stood up today and said, "I don't believe the virgin birth of Christ," we would carry him out on a stretcher. I don't believe the devil has a chance, right now, theologically. But I'll tell you what he can do. He can place a thought in a preacher's mind sitting over there in his study, criticizing somebody or finding something wrong with

something some denominational executive has done or some other pastor has done, and he says, "I'll get him."

I never will forget some of the things Dr. L. C. Johnson told us in chapel. I've forgotten a lot of things he said. Sometimes I was half asleep. But every once and a while, he said something that I remembered. And I thank God for it. But I remember one of those particular days he was talking to us preacher boys, and what he said was very accurate. He said, "Now boys, when you are contemplating an action in your ministry, and it seems so right that you can hear the flutter of angels' wings. Just remember, Satan's angels have wings too."

And that's exactly right. If you are contemplating some divisive action, don't do it. Paul's admonition to the Ephesian church in Ephesians 4:1-3, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy." To *walk worthy* means that you don't bring shame upon your calling. "Of the vocation." The *vocation* is the task to which God has called you, to win folks to the Lord. "Wherewith you are called." How are you to walk? "With all lowliness and meekness, and longsuffering."

I never will forget hearing somebody define the biblical word *meekness*. I had always wondered. Did you know it comes from a man who handles horses? The word *meekness* means power under control. It doesn't mean being like a nerd. That's not what it means. It doesn't mean going around, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm just so sorry I did that. Please excuse me. Excuse me. Pardon me." That's not meekness.

Meekness is power under control. It means that you have the power, the capacity, the potential to hurt somebody, but even though you have it, you don't do it. You could hurt him, but you won't do it. You know something about that brother that would make them jerk his credentials, but you're not going to do it. You'll pray for him. Try to restore him. But you're not going to do it. That's meekness.

And then he says, "forbearing one another in love." That doesn't mean putting up with one another. The word *forebear* actually means to support one another. To uphold one another. To endure the faults of others for the sake of Christian love. That's what forbearing means. And that's how we're to do it in the Christian family.

And then he says we are to "endeavor to keep the unity." To *endeavor* means that you try real hard. That you're really zealous and that you're

diligent. That you work at this thing of maintaining the unity.

A divided Corinthian church received this admonition, "That there should be no schism (that's dissension) in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."

You see, when a part of the human body is out of kilter, you've got a sick body. I've had a lot of back trouble lately. I used to not be sympathetic to people with back trouble. I am now. But boy, when your back's out of whack, you're out of whack. Your whole body is sick. And when you have a part of the body of Christ that is out of whack, out of agreement, out of unity, you've got a sick body.

It's time for us to have a healing service. We call it revival. It's time for us to come together, brethren, and hug each other's neck, shake each other's hand, say, "I love you; I pray for you." You know what? Brother Roy Thomas sent me a letter saying that he was praying for me as I was preaching this week, and I wrote him back. I appreciate it; I really do. And I told him, I've been going to these meetings for years and years, and I've never heard of us coming to a city and having an impact on that city in terms of folks being won to the Lord. Got all of these preachers, all these folks. Wouldn't it be great if we could come together for a meeting, we would leave a nucleus of new believers and start a new church. We could if we were together. We could if we loved the Lord and the souls of men.

That reminds me of a story that I heard. The members of a congregation were divided over an issue between predestination and the freedom of the will. Sound familiar? In fact, the squabble got so hot that the two divisions of the congregation—one went on one side of the church and one went on the other.

One fellow who had friends on both sides didn't know what to do. So finally he just went over to the predestination crowd. They looked at him and said, "What are you doing over here?"

He said, "Well, I just came over here of my own free will."

They said, "Look here. You can't talk like that and be with us. You get out of here. You go on over to that other crowd."

So he went across the auditorium to the other crowd and they said, "What are you doing over here?"

He said, "I was forced over here."

And they kicked him out. What's a guy to do? Nobody will take you because they're all taking sides. And brother, that destroys the unity of a church.

III. We face the danger of losing our concern and replacing it with a concern for less important things.

We face the danger of losing our concern for the lost and replacing it with a concern for less important things. We hear that we need to strengthen the brethren. And we do. But in many areas of our work, evangelism has been relegated to the backburner in favor of several things: (1) Fellowship with the brethren is great, but it must never replace our concern for the lost world. (2) Sometimes it's been replaced with foolishness among the backslidden, sporting events, games and activities, silly stuff. We seek to entertain instead of trying to do a work. I heard it said years ago and you did too, "Church isn't supposed to be a clubhouse for saints; it's supposed to be a hospital for sinners."

And somehow we get to the point where we make it just that. Our programs, projects, and propositions have less to do with winning the world than feeding the saints. We need to do both, but we must never lose our concern for the world.

A few years before the death of Charles Spurgeon, an American lecture bureau tried to hire him to come over to America to deliver 50 lectures in 50 nights in 50 cities. They promised him that they would pay his expenses and his wife's expenses and the salary of a secretary and give him \$1,000 a night. He could make \$50,000 in 50 nights.

"I want to find the name of that American bureau." That's what most of us would say. Do you know what Charles Spurgeon's answer to them was? He said, "I can do better. I'll stay in London and try to save 50 souls." I like that. He understood what God had called him to do. He wasn't there to lecture, he was there to win folks to the Lord and that's what he did.

The primary activity of the church must be in reaching the lost for Christ and every activity should contribute to that. That's why Jesus gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28, when He said to us, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." He promised us that if we did that, all power would be ours because all power was His. The source of our power for

doing that work is found in Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

We can become distracted to this purpose in several ways—the wiles of Satan. I read that Scripture verse in the very beginning of this message. Satan is trying to defeat us. And the wiles of Satan will oppose anyone who is interested in winning the lost to Christ. Other distractions to this purpose are: the weakness of this flesh evidenced by the fear of people and of ridicule, just plain ol' laziness, and a lack of concern.

You know the rich man in Luke in the story of Lazarus wasn't concerned until he got to Hell. And in Hell he cried to Father Abraham, "Send somebody to talk to my brothers, and tell them that there's a Hell. Tell them they better prepare for dying." His concern only got real when he died and went to Hell. If we really believed that people were going to Hell—if we really believed that—we'd be doing more than what we're doing about trying to keep people out of Hell. God help us to realize that Hell is real.

In the New Testament, in Acts 5, when the apostles were threatened by the powers that be who said, "Listen, you guys, you can't go and preach in this city. You can't keep proclaiming the Gospel. You can't keep trying to win people to the Lord."

You know what their answer was? Acts 5:42, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." The threat didn't affect them at all. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to say, "The test of a man's character is what it takes to stop him." That's exactly right.

Well, I conclude today by reminding you that we are faced with dangers. We're faced with dangers that will compromise our testimony—that will rob us of God's power. The more we are divided, the less of God's power can be felt among us. It is a real danger that one day they may write "Ichabod" over the doorways of our churches. "The glory of the Lord hath departed." We must deal with them. If that's the danger, let's do something about it. The best way to deal with sin is to confess it. You don't get anywhere hiding it. You don't get anywhere talking yourself into thinking that it isn't there, that you haven't done anything. The best way to deal with it is to confess it. Confess our sins if we have already succumbed to the dangers, or confess our need for God's help if we want to avoid the dangers that are before us. We must determine to keep ourselves deserving of God's blessing.

Remember others have fallen.

John Wesley would turn over in his grave today over the Methodist denomination. But there was a time when the Methodist denomination was one of the most powerful voices for God in this country. They're the ones who won the frontier in this country. Powerful preachers preached the words and got people saved.

I've got an uncle who's a liberal Methodist preacher. He doesn't think sin is sin. He thinks it's just an error in judgment, just a mistake...don't have to worry about it. And I want to tell you something—I don't ever want us to get that way, but we better take careful heed to the dangers that we have or confess that we've got to have God's help.

I have mentioned the three dangers: materialism, dissension, and unfeeling attitude toward the lost. Those are our immediate dangers. Let's do something about them. Let's trust God to really help us do something about them, and let's submit ourselves to Him.

1987 – Delbert Akin

The Elements of a Joyous Experience in Christ

Text: 1 Peter 1: 1-9

Introduction

It is amazing that these first century Christians demonstrated the joy of their experience in Christ. They were suffering from persecution on every side. Yet Peter tells us that they were able to “greatly rejoice” even though they suffered great temptations. My question is how were they able to have this great joy in their lives? I believe Peter gives us the elements of that joy in this passage of Scripture. Note with me the following outline of this experience.

I. A Born Again Experience (verse 3)

“God hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” There is no joy without the new birth.

II. The Keeping Power of God (verse 5)

There is no joy if we doubt that God can keep us through His power.

III. An Abiding Love for Christ and His Kingdom (verse 8)

Even though we have not seen the Lord face to face, we love Him with all our hearts. This is a love that brings joy to our souls every day.

IV. An Assurance That Christ Is Coming Again (verse 7)

“That the trial of your faith...might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” The hope of the second coming of Christ and assurance of that coming is a great and necessary element in our joyous experience.

1987 – Milton Worthington

The Servant God Sends

Text: Isaiah 6:1-13

Introduction

Reviewing the theme of the convention. There are three truths that our text brings before us for our consideration.

I. The Vision of Glory That Enthralled Isaiah (verses 1-4)

- A. The Glory of His Person
- B. The Glory of His Power
- C. The Glory of His Purpose

II. The Verdict of Guilt That Appalled Isaiah (verses 5-7)

- A. The Conviction That Crushed Isaiah
 - 1. His Sinfulness in the Sight of God
 - 2. His Helplessness in the Service of God
- B. The Provision That Cleansed Isaiah
 - 1. Sanctifying of the Holy Spirit for His Sinfulness
 - 2. Strengthening of the Holy Spirit for His Helplessness

III. The Venture of Gratitude That Recalled Isaiah (verse 8)

- A. The Concern in the Heart of God
- B. The Consent to the Will of God

Conclusion

Illustration: Can you say, “Here am I, send me” tonight? “Only one life will soon be passed, only what’s done for Christ will last—anywhere, at any time, at any cost, for Jesus’ sake.”

Thought: “Having seen the Lord....go share Him.”

1987 – Larry Condit

Victory for God

Text: Joshua 1:1-8

It is God who gets the victory when God's people obey Him (as the book of Joshua shouts out to all). It truly is a joy to be a Free Will Baptist today! Our denomination still preaches all the Bible from cover to cover with no compromise of the truth.

1. Free Will Baptists are God's people standing strong today.
2. Free Will Baptists have the message of truth today.
3. Free Will Baptists must take the message about Jesus to lost people today.
4. Free Will Baptists must remember we will see Jesus someday and give an account to Him.
5. Free Will Baptists must finish the course given to us by our Lord and Savior today!

Let us stay united as a denomination.

Let us love one another and work together for the cause is great and our Lord is worthy.

1987 – Kenneth Riggs

The Centrality of Christ

Text: Colossians 1:18b

Introduction

The centrality of Christ is certainly obvious in the Bible. Paul's letter to the Colossian Christians makes that clear:

- In natural creation (1:16, 17)
- In the church (1:18)
- In new creation (1:20-22)
- Our past life: alienation
- Our present life: reconciliation

Paul makes it very clear that Christ is to have the preeminence, not just being prominent:

- Preeminence: *proteuo*; *protos*; to be first; a similar thing is said of Diotrephes but the difference was Diotrephes wanted to be first; *philoproteuz* (3 John 9).
- *Prominent* carries the idea that something may be important but not necessarily first place

Three things should be noted:

1. Christ's Preeminence Defended
2. Colossian Problem Described
3. Christian Practice Demanded

I. Christ's Preeminence Defended (1:15-23)

A. By the centrality of Christ:

1. In deity
2. In creation
3. In the Church

B. By the completeness of Christians (2:10)

II. Colossian Problem Described

- A. False persuasion (2:4)
- B. False philosophy (2:8)
- C. False practices (2:16)
- D. False piety (2:18)

III. Christian Practice Demanded

- A. Exercise the spiritual (3:1-4)
- B. Execute the sensual (3:5-11)
- C. Exemplify the Spirit (3:12-14)

1988 – Roger Duncan

And the Hand of the Lord Was on Elijah

Text: 1 Kings 18:46

Introduction

Some time ago I was studying the life of Elijah, came across this verse of Scripture, and it literally leaped from the pages of God's Word to my heart. I promptly wrote in the margin of my Bible, "Oh God, may your hand be upon me also." I believe that every God-called preacher has to have God's hand upon his life if he is going to be effective.

Lately, I have come across a word that is found only one place in the Bible. First John 2:20 says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One." I looked up the word *unction*, and it means, "A smearing, an enduement, an anointing of the Holy Spirit." How I need the unction. Illustration: Young preacher, old deacon praying for the unction.

A. Two questions came to my mind as I studied this verse of Scripture:

1. What does it mean when it says, "The hand of the Lord was on him"?
2. How can I have the Lord's hand upon my life?

What does it mean when the Bible says the hand of the Lord was on Elijah?

I. It means God had called him to be a prophet.

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah literally bursts on the scene during a time of great wickedness. Under wicked King Ahab and his sinful wife Jezebel, Israel had gone deeply into idolatry again and was sinking deeper into sin. In the rocky hills of Gilead, God began to deal with a young man's heart.

We see Elijah:

A. The Man

His name was Elijah which means "Jehovah is my God" or "Jehovah is my strength." We have very little information on Elijah, and we do not know

who his parents were and very little about him.

1. We do know that God called him to be a prophet. In 1 Kings 17:2, 8 and 1 Kings 18:1, it says the same thing, "And the word of the Lord came to Elijah." God put his word in Elijah's heart and in his mouth, and I believe that God puts His word in every God-called man's mouth. In Jeremiah 20:9, Jeremiah is somewhat discouraged, and he said, "I will not make mention of him or speak anymore in his name. But His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay."
2. It is still God and God alone that calls a man to preach today.
 - (a) In Acts 9:6, Paul asked, "What would you have me do?" And the Lord said, "You are my chosen vessel to the Gentiles." (God called Paul.)
 - (b) In Acts 13:2, "The Holy Ghost said separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to do." Acts 20:28 says, "Feed the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers."
 - (c) I have had some times of disappointments as a preacher. I have been discouraged, and I have spent some time under the juniper tree like Elijah, but I have never, never doubted that God placed His hand upon me and called me to preach! Like Gypsy Smith once said, "I have not been to your colleges and seminaries...but I have been to the feet of Jesus where the only true scholarship is learned."

B. And his message

In 1 Kings 17:1, Elijah said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be rain nor dew these years but according to my word."

Elijah told Ahab that God's judgment was coming in the form of a drought. The altars of God had been torn down; the prophets of God had been slain; altars had been erected to worship Baal; God sends his man to cry aloud against their wickedness.

1. We need some Elijahs today to stand and cry out against the sins of our nation: 4,500 abortions per day; 75,000 homosexuals marching in San Francisco; 1,000 new cases of AIDS every day; one out of two

- marriages ending in divorce; and drugs threaten to destroy us.
2. America has heard for too long that “something good is going to happen to you.” We need a few Michaiah the prophets who will say, “Whatsoever the Lord saith unto me that will I speak.”
 3. We need a few Billy Sundays: revival temporary, rub cat’s fur, etc.
 4. We need a few Sam Jones, “We brought you here to preach.”

II. It means that God had supplied His provisions.

- King David said, “I have been young.”
- God fed Elijah miraculously three times in the Bible.
- 1 Kings 17:4: “I have commanded the ravens.”
- 1 Kings 17:8-16: Zarephath
- 1 Kings 19: Angels
- Illustration: God has fed me with ravens; Kissimmee, money. “I will be God’s ravens.”

III. It means that God had answered his prayers.

James 5:17, 18 says, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are.”

When Elijah saw the wickedness and sin of his day, he did what every real man of God would do—he prayed. He poured his heart out to God in prayer. The secret of Elijah’s success was prayer.

- A. Years ago, a group of ministerial students went to hear the great Spurgeon preach.
- B. M.R. DeHaan said, “I’d much rather be a great pray-er than a great preacher.”
- C. Billy Sunday said, “There has never been a spiritual awakening in America that did not root itself in prayer.”
- D. Leonard Ravenhill said, “The preacher who is not praying is playing. The church member who is not praying is straying. There are many organizers but few agonizers, many pastors but few wrestlers, much fashion but little passion.”

IV. It means that God had given him His power.

After Elijah's translation, it says in 2 Kings 2:15, "The Spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."

- A. Because Elijah was a man of prayer, he was also a man of power.
- B. God's power enabled Elijah to:
 - 1. Shut up Heaven for 3.5 years.
 - 2. Bring rain and fruit (Power still brings fruit in our lives).
 - 3. Raise the dead. In 1 Kings 17, he raised the widow's son from the dead. If we today are going to raise the spiritually dead to life today, we need God's power.
 - 4. Call fire from Heaven. In 1 Kings 18, God sent fire to Mt. Carmel. If we are going to have the holy fire in our lives and in our churches, we have to have the power of the Holy Spirit.
- C. In the Bible, power always follows prayer (Elijah).
 - 1. In Acts 1:14, "These all continued with one accord in prayer." Acts 2:4 tells us the Holy Spirit came "as a rushing, mighty wind and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."
 - 2. Acts 4:31 says, "When they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled." Power follows prayer!
- D. I have mentioned before that when I was a boy, most preachers were uneducated and untrained. Many had poor vocabularies, yet they had something many of us have lost—the "unction from the Holy One." The "smearing, the anointing of God's Holy Spirit."

Illustration: Ed Pallew, "Writing prayer."

E. Acts 1:8 says, "Ye shall receive power."

F. Vance Havner said, "One may be as straight as a gun barrel theologically and as empty as a gun barrel spiritually." We need power.

G. How can I have the Lord's hand upon my life? First Corinthians 10:11 says, "These things happened unto them for ensamples and are written for our admonition." We can learn from Elijah's life. If I want the Lord's hand upon my life I will have to be:

- 1. A man of prayer. Elijah prayed, and I will have to pray as well.

2. A man of passion. Elijah had a burden for revival, and I must have one, too. Remember the words of Psalm 126:6: "He that goeth forth in tears...."

Illustration: General Booth said, "Have you tried tears?"

3. A man of power. We will have to have the power of God.

4. A man who pleases. Our desire must be to "please Him who has called us to be a soldier."

Illustration: "Mother, how deep shall I drink?"

Illustration: George Whitefield "preached until the candle burned out."

Illustration: Oil spills, pelicans, spot. I have lived for God 35 years, but if I fall, if I become spotted, they will forget the 35 years and remember the spot. God, keep me pure! God, give me power!

1988 – Fred Warner

A Divine Welcome: Finishing Well

Text: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

The Apostle Paul not only set the standard for Timothy to be a “man of God,” he raised the bar to the level of excellence in terms of perseverance. He left Timothy with an untarnished example of what it means to be faithful to the Lord in proclaiming the Word. I call your attention to three things regarding Paul’s final words to this young preacher.

I. His Composure in Death

At least three things tell us that Paul was comfortable with the thought of dying:

A. The Revelation He Acquired

Note the words, “My time is at hand...” Paul knew his days were numbered. Perhaps he was like the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1:14: “Knowing that shortly I must put off this tabernacle, even as the Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.” The psalmist (Psalm 31:15) spoke of God’s divine providence in such matters: “My times are in Thy hand...”

B. The Readiness He Avowed

He says, “For I am now ready to be offered...” Paul had lived his life as a “living sacrifice” to God (Romans 12:1). Now he was about to pour out his life’s blood on the altar of martyrdom to complete the sacrifice of himself to God. He did not see himself as a helpless victim of Roman injustice but rather a willing sacrifice. In other words, Rome was not taking his life, he was giving it. There is no hint of anxiety—no pacing the floor, no wringing of the hands, and no cold sweat on his brow. In fact, he was not even preoccupied with dying. He was too busy giving Timothy last minute instructions regarding preaching.

C. The Release He Awaited

Note the words, “The time of my departure is at hand...” He does not say that the time of his death is at hand, but the time of his “departure” or “release” is at hand.

He is simply getting ready to move from this world to the world to come! In the original language, the term *departure* is used in a variety of ways, all of which apply to departing saints.

1. It was used as a judicial term.

It suggests releasing a prisoner, and Paul was about to be set free. Physically, he was about to be set free from the foul, damp, varmint infested Roman dungeon which held him captive. Spiritually, he was about to be set free from his wretched mortal body (Romans 7:24, 25) with all its depraved tendencies and limitations.

2. It was used as an agricultural term.

It also signified the “unyoking” of an ox after a hard days work in order to rest. For a man who boasted of “labors more abundant” (2 Corinthians 11:23) more than any of his contemporaries, Paul was more than ready for a much deserved rest, but his words in 1 Corinthians 15:58 still challenge us to be faithful.

3. It was used as a military term.

It carries the idea of breaking camp—loosing the cords and stakes, and taking down the tent to move to another location. Paul spoke of “journeys often” in 2 Corinthians 11:26. He was a veteran of three major missionary journeys but was about to break camp for the last time. He was on the last leg of the journey to his eternal home.

4. It was used as a philosopher’s term.

In this sense, it suggests “the unraveling of some knotty problem” regarding things we do not understand this side of Heaven. It was Paul who said, “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

5. It was used as a naval term.

It was used to describe the unmooring of a ship, taking up anchor, casting off the lines, and putting out to sea. Paul was about to make his final voyage—a trip that would take him into the very presence of God. So for Paul, death was like:

- A slave being set free.
- A servant finding rest.
- A soldier breaking camp.

- A soul attaining perfection.
- A sailor setting sail.

II. His Constancy in Life

In order for one to die well, one must live well, and Paul did both! In 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul looks back over his life and tells us three things regarding his faithfulness to the Lord:

A. There Is a War to Be Won

He said, "I have fought a good fight!" He had been a good soldier of Jesus Christ. In fact, he often spoke of the Christian life in terms of spiritual warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:10; and 2 Timothy 2:3, 4). He was a veteran of many conflicts and had endured great suffering. His biography reads like that of a common criminal. He had been beaten, stoned and left for dead, but "he had fought the good fight of faith."

B. There Is a Race to Be Run

Paul goes on to say, "I have finished my course." He saw the Christian life as a race. He said as much to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

He had not only started the race, he had finished it, but many others, like Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), forsake the high calling of God for worldly pursuits. Blessed is the man who can say with the Lord Jesus, "I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4).

C. There Is a Faith to Be Followed

He also said, "I have kept the faith." That is, he had been a good steward of the sacred trust committed to him. He had not only kept the faith, he had contended for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. And he had also "fleshed out" the faith in the life he lived. He had championed the doctrine of "justification by faith" without the deeds of the law. He had faithfully shared the faith that saves and sustains.

III. His Confidence in Judgment

As we have already noted, one must live well in order to die well, but

living well not only gives courage in the face of death, it also gives one confidence at the judgment. Second Timothy 4:8 reflects the fact that Paul had a good conscience toward God, even in giving an account of himself to the Lord. He not only had no regrets, he actually looked forward to judgment—an attitude to be coveted by all. He lived and died in the light of Romans 8:1 and his confidence in judgment is seen in three things.

A. The Crown He Expected

Note that he says, “Hence forth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” He speaks of a crown reserved for him. Whether it is literal or figurative is not important. The important thing is that God is going to recognize and reward those who have been faithful (Hebrews 6:10). And note that it is a “crown of righteousness”—perfect righteousness!

B. The Christ He Envisions

Then he says, “Which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me in that day.” Paul was about to become another victim of so-called Roman justice, but he knew neither Nero nor Rome would have the last word. In fact, he was preoccupied with something far greater—a heavenly judgment and a Judge Who will judge righteously. He sees a day when he will not be judged as a common criminal but as a child of God, an ambassador of the Kings of kings and Lord of lords.

C. The Comfort He Extends

Finally, he says: “And not to me only, but to all who love his appearing.” Not just him, but all who love his appearing will be recipients of divine recognition. God help us to live so as not to be ashamed at His coming as stated in 1 John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in Him, that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed at His coming.”

Summary

Paul is every preacher’s role model. Here is a man who truly finished well. I can’t help but believe that when Paul entered the presence of the Lord, he heard the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

1989 – Milburn Wilson

Stewardship of Our Territory (Our Harvest Field)

Text: Mark 16:14-20; Matthew 28:19, 20

In Matthew 28:19, 20, the Great Commission was given to the church.

Definition: To proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Savior, to persuade people to become His disciples and responsible members of His church.

– Presence

– Proclamation

– Persuasion

– Disciple: Won to Christ and the church

A. The local church where we serve (our territory).

B. America, the mission field (our territory, Home Missions).

C. The world, now reaching 4 billion people (our territory, Foreign Missions).

1. Three of four families in America are unchurched.

2. America has a population of 256 million:

– 96 million (40%) no religious affiliation.

– 73 million (31%) Christians in name only.

– 169 million (71%) of total population.

3. America: The Mission Field. There are only five other countries in the world with a population larger than 169 million: China, the Soviet Union, India, Indonesia, and Brazil.

4. Between 80% and 85% of all churches in America have either plateaued or are declining.

5. Cults are responding to the void. In November 1985, *Time* magazine reported that “by any statistical standard, Spencer W. Kimball’s reign as president, prophet, seer and revelator of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was a triumph. During his 12-year ministry, the Mormon Church doubled...to 5.8 million members...

- and doubled its force of short-term missionaries to 30,000.”
6. In 1900, there were 27 churches for every 10,000 Americans.
 - In 1950 there were 17 churches for every 10,000 Americans.
 - In 1985 there were 12 churches for every 10,000 Americans.
 7. America is a pluralistic society with sub-cultures as isolated from the Gospel spoken in English, as they would be in their native countries. One-hundred million persons have been identified in 200 language/culture groups other than Anglo-American.
 8. Edward Dayton reported in *Unreached People* that the church is losing 2,765,000 members per year to nominalism or unbelief.
 9. Between 3,500 and 4,000 churches die each year.
 10. Ninety to 95% of all churches peak in attendance prior to their 15th birthday. There is a need to build growth principles into the life of the new churches if they are to avoid the problem. This pattern can also be broken with appropriate intervention.

The local church at best is on maintenance ministry. Eighty-seven percent of our resources are burned up within the walls of the church. We have failed to teach the church to minister. As we look at Free Will Baptists, our denomination has reached a plateau and now just tries to maintain.

Everyone places the blame somewhere, but nothing is happening for growth. We just wear a mask that needs to be removed by our Lord, as we all commit our lives anew to His work. (Every Christian is a minister.)

I believe it is God’s will that all His children be saved, and He has chosen us as His messengers to communicate the Gospel to them. John 4:35 says, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields they are white already to harvest.”

Is there an answer? Is there hope? Into this stormy scene Jesus brings the everlasting promise of hope. First John 4:4 says it this way, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”

– “Take courage, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

– “If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37).

– “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John

3:16).

More than anything else, mankind needs a place to stand in a troubled world. The great need today is to mobilize the resources of the church of Jesus Christ in a spirit-led strategy which has as its purpose to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

“But when he (Jesus) saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them. Because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:36-38).

Three-Hour Christians’ Syndrome: Three times each week produces

- 6,000 hours (age 40)
- 12,000 hours (if they live to 80 years)
- 18,000 hours—the Lord will be proud!

I. The Missing Cutting Blades for the Harvest

Illustration: Story of First Church of Rollingwood. It had a 33% increase in attendance the last year. However, after one Sunday morning service, the pastor’s wife said, “But what do you think they really mean when they say, ‘I enjoyed your sermon.’ We hear that week after week, and it sounds like a stuck record to me.”

A smothering sensation of doubt rose in the pastor’s heart as he listened to his wife. He knew that most of the compliments on his sermon were sincere. He could preach with the confidence that God had called and gifted him to speak. Yet the church seemed to be pretty much the same as it was when he came—larger, but about the same. Was this the kind of Christianity the first-century church experienced?

Monday was his day off. Golf course.

At 7:30 a.m., the chairman of the deacon board called to tell him the year’s survey was back. “I have some concerns.”

The pastor’s day turned to dread. He couldn’t help but wonder what was wrong. He didn’t feel like praising the Lord because he knew what was coming. For the first time, he was faced with inescapable evidence that the First Church had dropped to that low common denominator of being a

functioning organization, outwardly successful, but inwardly devoid of the sense of the miraculous. Somehow, the expectancy, born of the conviction that a living God is in the world today transforming lives, was missing.

Today, we are at the crossroads. We face either the greatest opportunity we have ever had, or we can continue as we are, grinding along in a rut.

The good news about First Church in Rollingwood:

- 650 members
- 480 average attendance
- Up 100 from one year ago
- 61 new members
- 18 lost or moved away
- 40% of our people tithe
- Exceeded our budget
- Gave 33% to missions and denominational causes

The bad news about First Church in Rollingwood:

- Most who joined the church were transfers from other churches, or our own church family children.
- Only five were new Christians.
- Only 20% shared their faith in the last month.
- Didn't someone say that sharing is the natural overflow of a spirit-filled life? Not much overflow.
- Only 30% read their Bibles three times a week.
- Only 21% have devotions and prayer as a family.
- Seventy percent have no fellowship with other members except on Sunday mornings.
- Only 10% know their spiritual gifts.
- Only 5% really care about our community.
- Fifty percent stated they were not spiritually fed.

Has something gone wrong with the harvest?

II. What's going wrong with the harvest?

“And they went out preaching everywhere while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the Word by the signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).

This, in a nutshell, is the work of the church—a united body going out, reaching people, with the Lord confirming His presence. It is our responsibility to release that divine power into the world today.

A.W. Tozer once said, “The church must have power; she must become formidable, a moral force to be reckoned with, if she would regain her lost position of spiritual ascendancy and make her message the revolutionizing, conquering thing it once was.”

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example. That ye should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Jesus warned that all are stewards of God's resources and that each of us will be held accountable for our performance (Luke 12:25-49).

Now go and take the message of salvation from Jerusalem to all nations: Our territory (Acts 1:8).

“Where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Where the young men and women in Free Will Baptists are called, committed, and trained to serve our Lord. That is the key to the future.

Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20).

“Now your hopes have all been fulfilled so go, with the very power of God Himself.” These were the last words of Jesus to His Church and they represent the marching orders that are to be followed until His return.

Consider three mandates:

1. To proclaim the message.
2. To persuade the unbeliever.
3. To cultivate the believer (assimilation).

What is the state of evangelism today?

- A. Reaching the lost: low priority of the church.
- B. Reaching the lost: low priority for most Christians.
- C. Biblical concept of “lostness” has disappeared.

D. Most evangelism methods are relatively ineffective in making disciples.

E. Evangelism focuses on decision-making rather than disciple-making.

F. Evangelism is much discussed, but little practiced.

III. The Master of the Harvest

“For I have given you an example. That you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Agape love always follows the servant model. Jesus earned this. Jesus had accountability. He began at age 12 to do the work the Father had sent him to do. He completely understood the nature of all men.

“Those who are sick need a physician” (Luke 5:30-32). Jesus called sinners to repentance. He was keenly aware that change will not occur without the presence of felt need. Jesus adapted His message to the circumstances. Ethnic and cultural barriers were crossed.

Jesus lived, walked and talked with people and displayed a genuine interest and concern for their welfare. Today, 70-90% of people who come to Christ and the church are friends and relatives of people already in the church.

Where was His territory? Jesus met people on the streets, hillsides, fields, at meals, on fishing boats, at weddings, on roads, and today the Holy Spirit will give insight.

“As the Father has sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

“He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” (1 John 2:6).

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Consider the Emmaus road experience and those discouraged disciples: (Luke 24:13-35)

– Motivation: Word of God alive

– Enthusiasm: Church on fire

– Repetition: Tell it again and again—overflow. Illustration: Be a living example.

– Work. “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day, the

night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4).

IV. Where Are the Harvesters?

"Be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). The harvesters are not our buildings, organizations, programs, etc. The church is viewed as the body of Christ, true laity or followers of Jesus. Those who work in our fields, or territory. The church has many gifts to give. "God wants His lost children found."

Consider the first century Church. "They were scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:1). It worked.

Acts 1:8 – witness

Acts 1:15 – 120

Acts 2:41 – 3,120

Acts 4:4 – 5,000 men

Acts 4:32 – multitudes

Acts 5:14 – multitudes (men and women)

Acts 6:1 – multiplied (there arose a murmuring)

Acts 6:7 – multiplied greatly

Acts 5:28 – filled Jerusalem (with the doctrine of Christ)

Acts 4:20 – (attitude) "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:12 – salvation

Consider the Church:

1. Organized under one head, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19-21, 1:22, 23). The church, in its biblical essence is a live, functioning organism.
2. Equipped by God to perform His functions. Empowered and spiritually gifted (Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:12, 13).
3. Ministering to each other. In Acts 2, the first century church was described by the words "Lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

4. Ministering to the world

The Church should be characterized by:

5. A lifestyle of obedience. Everyone is on the harvest field. "By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).
6. Reproduction. "The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:36-38). Lord, count me in the harvest!
 - "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I send me" (Isaiah 6:8).
 - "There is nothing left to show that we are your people" (Psalm 74:9). The prophets are gone, and who can say when it will end?
 - "The priest, the ministers of God, will stand between the people and the altar, weeping and they will pray, spare your people, O our God: don't let the heathen rule them, for they belong to you" (Joel 2:17). Are we standing there?
 - "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe! Get you down: For the press is full, the vats overflow: for their wickedness is great" (Joel 3:13, 14).

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. (The multitudes waiting for their verdict of their doom in the valley of judgment. The harvest is ripe and waiting.)

- "A basket of summer (ripe) fruit" (Amos 8:2).
- "I will not again pass by them anymore" (Judgment).
- "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Hunger for the Lord our God.

You can be that newly called Christian worker, preacher, missionary. You can be that new pastor, home missionary. We lack nothing that is necessary to finish God's work. Let's get those cutting blades back in place and expect miracles!

1989 – Delmar Sparks

Stewards of the Text

Text: Genesis 1:1; Revelation 22:21

The Bible says that “In the beginning, God created...” Thus starts the greatest story that has ever been told. The creation of man, how God took from the dust of the earth—a handful of dirt, really—and molded man in His own image and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And the Bible said that he became a living soul, and God placed him in the garden. But man sinned and was separated from God. But God loved us and began to work a redemption plan whereby we could be redeemed by His love—not what we are but by His love. Thus the 66 books and the 40 writers—the greatest book that has ever been written.

This book closes with “Even so come, Lord Jesus.”

May the grace of God be with you all. From the first five words to the last phrase in the book of Revelation; we are the stewards of the text. That’s my assignment tonight, and I appreciate it.

We are charged with this stewardship. God is immutable. God’s Word does not change. We need the assurance of this not only as John told us in his writing, “These things have I written to you who believe, that you may know that ye have eternal life.”

We need the assurance we get from the Word of God and the promises. Someone suggested at the Bible Conference taking all of his best points from his messages and preaching them. I’ve considered taking all the best points I’ve heard since I’ve come here and preaching them, because there have been some beautiful things said—some beautiful teachings from the Word of God. But the old hymn writer said, “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent word. What more can he say than to you he hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.”

We read the story of a farmer who had been saved but really lacked assurance. So, he asked God for a sign. He said “Lord, if I have really been saved, then over in this corner of the field place 10 sheep when I go over there this afternoon.”

And sure enough, there were 10 sheep over there. Boy, he was happy...for a little while. Then it dawned on him that perhaps it was just a coincidence. So, he said, "Now Lord, have 10 other sheep in a different place for my assurance." He anxiously went later and sure enough there were 10 sheep there.

Someone asked him, "Did this give you assurance?"

He replied, "No. Nothing gave me certainty until I got the sure Word of God." And that's what we need to base it on, folks. It doesn't make any difference if we have formal training or not, I want us to look at this.

Jeremiah—God spoke to him and said that He was going to destroy Jerusalem, and the king was perturbed about what Jeremiah had said. The king did not want to hear that. He sent a little later for Jeremiah and asked, "Is there any word from the Lord?"

Jeremiah said, "There is, but it's the same word. The word from God has not changed any."

Formal training or not, we can be faithful. Most scholars agree that the teachings of Jesus are expressed at the third through fifth grade level—profound truth expressed simply. Five things that I want to look at tonight: the product, the progress, the purity, the power, and the preaching of the Word.

I. The Product

What we are is the product of the faithfulness of others. I remember in my childhood the preachers that I so respected—and I won't get off on a tangent to try to express the respect we should have for them. How they lived was as important an influence to me as what they said.

Young Christians often don't know what to do, so they do what they see others doing. And we need to set the example for them. After a while, they learn to give and forgive, and they learn to do it for the right reasons and with the right attitude. On a local level, we must give our attention to producing Sunday School teachers, youth workers, CTS—building strong and not necessarily big—local churches. The package is not what gets the job done, it's the product in the package. What we see tonight represents progress in numbers. We have come a long way.

II. The Progress

I remember as a pre-teen at the mouth of Cam Creek sat Elizabeth tabernacle with sawdust floors, coal oil lamps, and great revivals. And God is still the same today. His Word is still the same today. We have made progress, and praise God for that. We have made progress in numbers, education, Sunday School, CTS, methods and presentation. And have progress in our spiritual development. Regeneration changes our nature.

The day I got saved, there was something that changed in my life. I used to take my wife to church and then sit in the church yard and read the Sunday morning paper—didn't bother to go inside. But the day God changed my life, I could not wait to get back to church that night.

Regeneration changes our nature. Justification changes our standing. Sanctification changes our character. And that's what we are. That's what we must develop in our lives. If we're going to make progress, we must study and apply the Word of God to our lives. The foundation has been laid. I'm convinced of that. We have a solid foundation, and Jesus Christ is that foundation. The potential is there, in the Sunday School, pews, and homes. The personnel is there. The power is available. The progress is up to us. For the stewardship to progress, we must know and apply the Word of God. It's not enough just to know. We must apply it to our lives.

Let me show you what John says in 1 John 3:2, 3. And I believe that's moving forward, and growing in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some grains of wheat were found, thousands of years old, but they hadn't produced anything. They had not been planted. They had not been watered. But the Scripture teaches that one sows, another waters, but God gives the increase. I never saved a soul in my life! God gives the increase if we know and apply the Word of God. He's promised. The stewardship of the text can only be fulfilled by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

In Acts 19, we read the story of some apostate Jews who had heard the message, had seen Paul cast out demons, and thought they would do it also. They tried to cast out this evil spirit, and the evil spirit said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?"

The power of the Holy Spirit is the difference. It says the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. The apostle Paul, when writing to the church of Ephesus, told them to put on the whole

armor of God. He said to take the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. We have it in our hands, we must have it in our hearts. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are mighty through God for pulling down the strongholds of the devil.

The Word of God—quick and powerful, able to do exceeding abundantly more than we think it can do. We must not handle it deceitfully. We must live it.

III. The Purity

I remember as a young Christian, seeing a local church sign that said, “Don’t do as I do; do as I say.”

That always stuck with me. I know that God, in one sense, requires the same of us He requires of everyone else. But there is something different about a preacher. God has laid His hand on us.

Paul instructs us in Timothy to live to a higher standard (1 Timothy 4). Be an example unto the believer. He didn’t just leave it in generalities. He put some specifics in there. In words—we need to be careful of the words that we use. In word, in conversation, in our everyday conduct. I believe that people ought to see that there is something different about us. I believe the preacher ought to set the example.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4, we learn that charity is long suffering and kind, and we are instructed to be an example in purity. Where is your mind?

You don’t have to water, plow, and harvest those thoughts. Get them out. That’s what he was talking about—purity. Paul said, “Give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all.”

IV. The Preaching

In 2 Timothy, we find the preaching of the Word. If we are to have power in our preaching and stewardship, we must spend time in prayer and study. That’s one of the things I’ve wrestled with. I was raised on a farm, and all I knew was hard work. It was difficult to reprogram my brain that it was okay to sit in an air conditioned office and meditate, study, pray, and agonize with God for my people.

I believe that’s a part of our responsibility. We must live holy lives allowing God to speak to us. If we are charged with the stewardship of the Word, we

are charged with the purity of the Word. Preach the Word. We must not change the Word to fit 1989. We must change 1989 to fit the Word. If our text becomes tainted, our progress is impeded, and our product is flawed. The Word sanctifies, sets us apart, and cleans us up. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through your truth, thy word is truth." The word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee. I want to have that word in there.

The stewardship of the Word is not just confined to preachers but deacons, Sunday School teachers, CTS volunteers, the youth, and the home. We are *all* charged with the responsibility of the stewardship of the Word. And so Paul instructs Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy to preach the Word. That's what we need to do. Nothing else will get the job done. There are other things that will help and assist, but the Word is the only thing that will get the job done.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul gives us an outline for the preaching of our text, for the preaching of the Word of God. The three points are: the message, the method, and the motive for preaching the Word of God.

Paul did not only preach a Jesus of Galilee, he preached one of Calvary. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17, "Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel. Not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of non-effect."

The preaching of the Cross. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul defined what the Gospel is—the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now Paul tells us in verse 14 what five things will be the result if Jesus did not raise from the dead. If Christ be not risen, there is no resurrection; if there is no resurrection, our preaching is in vain. He said your faith is also vain. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, our faith is in vain. We have nothing to cling to. The third thing, we are false witnesses because we testified that God raised him from the dead. But if there be no resurrection of the dead then Christ be not risen.

And then he goes on to say ye are yet in your sins. That's the fourth thing. People say Free Will Baptists have no security. I've never considered going back on the Lord. But I'll tell you one of the most sobering thoughts I've ever had—to stand in the presence of the Almighty God and give an account of my stewardship. If Jesus has not risen from the dead, we are yet in our sins; and those who are asleep in Him are perished, if there be no resurrection of the dead. If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. It is great to live for the Lord, and He does bless

us. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, we have no hope past death's door. Terrible, terrible thought!

This, then is the message: the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The method in verse 4 says, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit."

Paul was not concerned with impressing men that he might take an ego trip. Paul was concerned with preaching the Word, that there would be power when he preached. And power comes from holy living. Power comes from head and heart preparation. If we are going to preach and teach, then we need to prepare our head by study and research and we need to prepare our heart by being in prayer to God. We need to have close fellowship with God.

The most powerful charge I've ever heard given to a young man being ordained. They thrust the Bible at him and tell him, "Here is a gold mine... dig it out." In this day of instant everything, that's tough. A lot goes into preparation.

Verse 5 says, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Why do you preach? Why do you teach? For the name? For the job? Paul desired that the people would stand in the right thing, that was his goal and ambition. People must stand in the power of God not in the preacher, not in the local church, not in other people. Floods will come you cannot control. There will be rivers you can't cross, mountains you can't climb, and valleys you can't cross. But God can. God said "I'll never leave you and I'll never forsake you." Hang your hat on that promise. And God will never leave you.

Two motives for preaching: that people might be saved. Paul desired to see people saved. The second thing was spiritual maturing. Hebrews 6 puts it this way, "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ let us go on to perfection." Let us go on to completion.

Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus in 4:8 (quoted). In verses 11-13 (quoted). If there's to be power, progress, and preaching and it's going to produce, this is what it is going to produce. Verses 14-16 (quoted), the product. We are the product of a bygone generation, and I'm hoping others will come along and build on the foundation so we can go forward to the glory of God.

1989 – Garnett Reid

Cravings and Qoheleth: A Primer on Stewardship

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Cravings—everyone has them. Whether it's a sudden appetite for pizza at 2:00 a.m. or a deep longing to talk to an old friend, we often long for things we think we need desperately. Barney Fife called them "compulsions."

Yet many important cravings lie much deeper in our personalities. We have intellectual, emotional, and spiritual longings that must find satisfaction. Two of the loudest, most demanding needs in our experience are for reality and meaning. "Be real. Relate to me. Get down where I really live," people insist. In that demand for reality, we are looking for purpose, something to live for, a reason to get up in the morning.

So along comes Ecclesiastes. Qoheleth (his Hebrew name) slaps us in the face with a blunt, no nonsense reality and turns an unwelcome spotlight on the dark corners of our pursuit of satisfaction. But in the end, that light leads us to the One who makes all of our dreams come true.

To come to that understanding, though, we must read the book honestly. At first glance, Ecclesiastes seems like a pessimist's paradise.

"There is nothing new under the sun."

"So I hated life."

"The fate of the sons of men and the fate of the beasts is the same."

"This is chasing after the wind."

"Vanity of vanities. All is vanity."

Many who have read these words reach the wrong conclusion about the message of Qoheleth the preacher. "This is just man reasoning under the sun."

"It reflects nothing more than the ramblings of sinful man about life without God."

"Ecclesiastes is the best man can do apart from God's true revelation. The book is inspired only in that it quotes accurately what Solomon thought about life. But it does not present truth to live by."

These are wrongheaded approaches, however. Solomon “uprightly wrote words of truth,” he says. They are given “by one Shepherd” (Ecclesiastes 12:10, 11). Actually Qoheleth explores and answers some of the great questions at the heart of life: our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to the world. These are issues of stewardship, which we may define as faithful maintenance of trust in God and faithful management of what He has placed in our hands. Qoheleth challenges us to enjoy and use the gifts God gives us, but to love the Giver more than His gifts.

In the book of Ecclesiastes we see three conditions essential to a biblical understanding of stewardship.

I. If we are to be faithful stewards, we must understand that pursuing satisfaction only in this life is like “chasing after wind” (1:12-14, 16, 17).

Such a pursuit brings only “vanity,” which speaks of: (1) that which is temporary and fleeting; and (2) inability to produce all that is expected or desired.

A. Part one of Ecclesiastes (chapters 1-6) centers around gaining experience in life, trying to “do” something to find satisfaction—namely, pleasure, learning, and labor. Ultimate satisfaction does not come through these three experiences in life because:

1. The fruit of our labor will be left to another (2:18, 19).
2. The results of our labor are not in our hands anyway (3:1-9).
3. Death is coming regardless (3:19, 20; 6:6).
4. If we work hard to be a success, we’ll stir up hard feelings and envy (4:1-4).
5. Some toil alone with no friends or family (4:8).
6. Even advancement doesn’t always satisfy (4:12-16).
7. As we climb the ladder to success, pursuing and overtaking us is the desire for more (5:1-11; 6:7).
8. We could lose all that we have worked for (5:13-16).

B. Part two of Ecclesiastes (chapters 7-12) centers around gaining knowledge in life, trying to “know” something to find satisfaction. But “man cannot know,” a refrain echoing through these final six chapters.

1. We do not always know what is good, better, or best (7:2, 14).
2. Sometimes it appears that wickedness is as good as righteousness (7:15; 8:11, 17).

While we cannot find ultimate satisfaction in this life, a second condition essential to understanding stewardship becomes apparent.

II. If we are to be faithful stewards, we must admit that this life does bring a measure of fulfillment as we pursue satisfaction.

God gives good gifts in this life, and we should enjoy them and use them for His glory.

- A. We can enjoy earthly provisions (2:24a; 3:13a; 5:18a; 8:15a; 9:9a).
- B. We can enjoy the accomplishments of our labors in this life (2:24; 3:12, 13, 22; 5:18, 19; 9:9)
- C. All these provisions and accomplishments are God's gifts He allots to us in this life (2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18, 19; 8:15; 9:7).

Despite a measure of enjoying God's good gifts in this life, though, our ultimate longings are only fulfilled in God as we long for the eternal dimension of our relationship with Him. The third condition essential to understanding stewardship holds the key to Ecclesiastes.

3. If we are to be faithful stewards, we must believe that pursuing satisfaction finds its fulfillment only in a proper relationship to God and to His purposes.

Qoheleth knows that a relationship with God is the most important thing in life. "I know that it will go well with those who fear God," he assures us (8:12).

- A. We must trust who God is—His person.
 1. He is wise (3:11).
 2. He is good (3:13).
 3. He is just (3:17; 8:12, 13).
 4. He is sovereign (3:1-9).
- B. We must trust what God does—His purposes.

1. He gives good things (2:27).
2. He sends hard things (7:14).
3. He provides appropriate things (3:11).

Solomon the preacher challenges us to recognize that, as faithful stewards, we are to enjoy and use the good gifts He gives us. But we must always love Him above His gifts. From this premise we can draw several important conclusions.

First, delight in the good things the Lord provides in His grace to us. Yet, second, do not live for things in this life because they will not ultimately satisfy; we were designed with an awareness of eternity in our hearts (3:11). A third lesson we can take from Qoheleth is that the “whole” of life for us is to “fear” God—that is, to trust and obey Him (12:13). Next, fourth, recognize and admit that this life will bring problems, that there will not always be easy answers in this life. Living for “stuff,” our out-of-control materialism and consumer desire, is the source of many of our difficulties. We live as though this life will satisfy. This fifth implication points, then, to the sixth: we need a higher level of commitment in order to be faithful stewards.

So Ecclesiastes awakens us to the craving, the hunger in our hearts and spirits. C. S. Lewis explains:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Several years ago while serving at Camp Caleb, near Flat Gap, Kentucky, I was reading in my room one afternoon around 3:00 p.m. A sudden craving for fried chicken overtook me! I just let it pass. Not many minutes later Estill Williams, one of the volunteer staffers from Ohio, knocked on my door. “Brother Reid,” he told me, “the staff eats early and I thought you might like to join us.” So I walked with him to the mess hall where I found my place at the table adorned with fresh half-runner green beans, new potatoes, garden tomatoes, onions and cucumbers in vinegar, fresh corn, cornbread, and—you guessed it—fried chicken! As the hymn writer asks, “Hast thou not seen how thy desires e’re have been granted in what He ordaineth?” Enjoying God’s gifts is good. Enjoying God is better.

1990 – Larry Powell

Salty Christians

Text: Matthew 5:13

“Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.”

Introduction

Our Lord Jesus took common things and gave them a divine touch. Salt. Sometimes when you pick up the salt shaker on your table, I hope you will remember that Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth.”

Our Lord is saying, if you are a kingdom man or woman. If you are one of Mine, My disciple, then here is what you are to be: the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

I. A Compliment

The Master Teacher has given us compliments as Salty Christians.

Note several things about salt:

- Salt was precious and valuable.
- Salt was used in the great Temple on offerings to Jehovah God.
- Salt was used to form covenants.

Illustration: The mayor of Jerusalem will break bread and sprinkle salt on it and give to a visiting guest from another nation as a “key to the city” forming a bond or covenant.

Expressions about salt:

- “There is salt between us!” (Commentary)
- “He isn’t worth his salt” meaning he isn’t worth his salary.
- Our word *salary* comes from two ancient words for “salt money.”
- Roman soldiers were paid with bags of salt.

- “Take that with a grain of salt.” Be cautious
- “She is just the salt of the earth” meaning good, dependable, honest.

What a compliment to us, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Salt was used as a purifier, a preserver. Your life will have an effect on those around you for Christ. You are the preserving and purifying element in your community or wherever you go. What a strong analogy. You must be salt. Salt gives flavor, vitality, zest. You cannot hide salt. You cannot pass over it or overlook its “tangy” presence. It will come out. It saturates. It penetrates. It flavors; it influences all.

Illustration: getting salt in the ice cream churn. My wife said, “Don’t eat it, Larry. I got salt in it. Why didn’t she say, “This is not as good as some we’ve had?” Because you can’t hide salt.

Jesus said, You are to be a salty Christian for Me—in the hospital where you work; in the office where you spend eight hours; at the service station; in the grocery store; at the post office; in the business deal; at the Christmas party—wherever you are. Be salty for Jesus!

The idea that you can separate your Christianity from your business life, your social life, your academic life, or your professional life is totally contrary to everything the Bible teaches.

Illustration: Angels came to visit Abraham on their way to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham pled with them to spare the cities if righteous people were found. You remember he began with 50 and finally asked if 10 righteous could be found, would God spare the cities. Because 10 “salty people” could not be found, a great judgment of fire fell on those wicked in Genesis 18, 19.

It is because of the “salt of the earth” that God is extending mercy to America and our dark world.

When I think of salt—salty peanuts, salty popcorn—I get thirsty for something cold to drink. I wonder, when people touch my life, when they touch your life, do they get thirsty? Do they get thirsty for the real, for the meaningful, for the wonderful peace and assurance? Do they get thirsty for our Savior? What a wonderful compliment, “You are the salt of the earth.”

II. A Caution

Here is a clear caution to us! Did you see that in this verse? Is there a warning to us? "But if the salt has lost his savor, how will it be salty?"

In Jesus' day, they got their salt from the seeps along the sea shores. And in time, it would lose its flavor. It lost its saltiness. I remember once when I was growing up in our home, we got a box of salt that wasn't salty. We threw it in the trash! Have you lost your savor? Don't lose your flavor for Jesus.

Morton's salt claims, "When it rains, it pours." What does that mean? It means that during rainy weather, the salt won't lump or stick together. Why? They mix sodium chloride (salt) with sodium carbonate. The sodium carbonate coats each grain so that it won't stick to the others. It just keeps on flowing, just as we must keep on pouring out the love of Christ to the perishing world around us.

Illustration: the ancients put salt between the bricks in their ovens. It made the fire hotter, but when it lost its effectiveness, they would remove it, put it out in the road, and replace it with new salt.

What did Jesus say about salt that had lost its savor? He said it is good for nothing. Throw it out in the road. Would it make any difference if you were taken out of this world? Are you a salty Christian in your influence in your family, in your community, and in your city?

What a caution. Uselessness invites disaster and destruction. Don't lose your savor.

There is a compliment and there is a caution.

Invitation

Is our Savior calling you to be the salt of the earth here in North America or somewhere in our waiting world? Would you respond this evening to the call to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

1990 – Ken Walker

Outdoing the World

Text: Matthew 5:43-48

Notice the “ye have heard” in Matthew 5: 21, 27, 33, 38, and 43. Christians can and should outdo the world.

Why be a believer? Why get saved? May I suggest that as such Jesus says we can outdo the world. I want to encourage us in this worship hour. I want us to remember something special from God’s Word.

Man felt he had made quite an achievement when he learned how to express the third dimension in pictures. He had reached beyond what he had previously thought were his limits.

We hear of a sixth sense. The five normal senses are: hearing, taste, touch, sight, smell. I don’t understand all of that, but it appears that some people have an uncanny ability to reach beyond the normal senses. As a youth, we thought the fictitious characters of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon were fantastic, but now the space shuttle, the moon landing, etc., finds man reaching beyond anything those characters imagined.

This reaching beyond is not a new concept. Jesus said that all believers have that ability. How? Look at the text. “What do ye more than others?” (verse 47) And you can conclude that Christians, born-again believers, can outdo the average performance of the world, can reach beyond the status quo of life, can enlarge life, and can outperform the world.

Someone has said, “The risen life is the best testimony to a risen Christ.” A great truth then is if we Christians will live that truth, the world will know that salvation is real.

Now, let us explore this premise of outdoing the world.

I. Let Us Outdo the World in Our Loving.

A. Three comments in general on love in the believer’s life.

1. Love is indeed the first evidence, followed by eight others, of the Spirit-filled life (Galatians 5:22).

2. Love is the top priority in the believer's conduct (John 14:15, 21, 23). In 1 Corinthians 13, we find the love chapter. Love is defined here: There abideth faith, hope, and charity, but the greatest is charity. (verse 13)

3. Love is the hallmark of Christianity. "By this shall all men know..." (John 13:35).

Illustration regarding attitude of Christians: A woman told Billy Sunday that she had a bad temper, but that it was all over in a minute. He replied, "So is a shotgun blast, but it blows everything to pieces!"

B. Interpreting the text (Matthew 5:43-48).

1. Jesus reminded them of what had been previously taught (verse 43). How often we hear this said today: "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth."
2. Jesus introduces a new dimension (verse 44). This is not a lifestyle that can be lived apart from the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Zechariah 4:6), power to level mountains.
3. Jesus reveals that we are children of God, who act and react differently from the unsaved world (verse 45). As God shows kindness to both, so should we.
4. Jesus shows us the scope of this love (verses 46, 47). Herein lies the challenge by our Lord.
5. Jesus states why this should be so (verse 48). Perfect (complete in your love as is your Heavenly Father's love to you). Because this is the manner in which we were and are loved by the Father: (Romans 5:6, 8). Implied here (verse 8) is that we can and should love as He loved us!

Learn: This kind of love will motivate us to fulfill our task.

Illustration: Dr. L.C. Johnson taught many of us years ago that, "Either you see people as problems and view them with contempt, or you see people with problems and view them with compassion," (love).

Joseph Stowell, in his book *Eternity*, said, "Christ constantly elevated the value of people, and with good reason. People are the only things that will last for eternity. Everything else stops at the border."

Have you ever thought that the only possessions we can take to Heaven

with us are our children?

II. Let Us Outdo the World in Our Living.

The context of Matthew 5 leading up to my text speaks of six areas of our living where we should strive for perfection and areas where He implies we should have victory: anger (verses 21, 22), sexual purity (verses 27-30), marital fidelity (verses 31, 32), honesty in speech (verses 33-37), nonretaliation (verses 38-42), treatment of enemies (verses 43-48).

Note about living the abundant life: It is like someone has said, "We talk about deep sea diving and wind up snorkeling in the bath tub!"

A. Let us outlive the world in our thinking. Consider Philippians 2:5, then remember the words of Proverbs: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In Philippians 2:6-8, we see Jesus in condescension (verse 6), in self-denial (verse 7), as a servant in humility (verse 8), as a sacrifice (verse 8). Put all that together and let that mind, those traits, dictate our conduct to the glory of God. We can have the mind of Christ for life and conduct. Meekness is not weakness!

B. Let us outlive the world in our values.

1. Laying up real treasures, the treasures of prayer, visiting the sick, witnessing, good stewardship, benevolence (Matthew 6:19-21).

Illustration: A rich woman had a dream she had gone to Heaven. Someone met her there and asked if she would like to stroll down Golden Avenue. She said, "Yes." As they walked, there were mansions on both sides of the street. Her guide paused at a beautiful mansion and told her how great it was. She asked, "Who lives there?"

When told, she said, "If I remember him, he was always doing good deeds for people, giving them money or helping them in one way or another." Then she said, "Poor soul, he had so little in life."

"Well," said her guide, "that's why he lives up here."

They continue the walk and stop in front of a very modest cottage. "Who lives here?" she asked.

"That's your home." "My home? Why? I always had the very best. I don't understand."

"Well," said her guide, "we can only build with the materials you sent up!"

2. Exercising true greatness (Matthew 20:26b-28; 23:11).
3. Manifesting true faithfulness.
 - a. To God (1 Corinthians 1:9; 4:2).
 - b. To the church (Hebrews 10:25). It appears that the only time you see some of the members is either on Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, or a Christmas special service.
 - c. To one another (1 Corinthians 1:9, 10). As we seek a unity in belief (speak the same thing), practice (no division), purpose (perfectly joined).

Learn: Faithfulness is not the absence of the negative but the presence of the positive.

C. Let us outlive the world in our priorities

Let's start in Matthew 5:23, 24 with the word "first." Sometimes these actions are referred to as "going the second mile." But according to Jesus, this is normal Christianity.

1. First your brother, then your gift (Matthew 5:23, 24). This concerns forgiveness. I must learn how to forgive and to forget. The unforgiving spirit can devastate lives and churches and create a lot of empty pews.
2. First the spiritual, then the temporal (Matthew 6:33). This concerns spirituality and needs of life in our age of materialism.
3. First judge yourself, then if necessary, judge another (Matthew 7:3-5; John 7:24).
4. First what Christ wants, then what I want (Matthew 8:21, 22). This concerns Lordship of Christ. Oh, the tragedy of the me-first life. Why would a child of God insist on bad habits, wrong company, worldly apparel, worldly places, disobedience to the known Word of God?
5. First the inside then the outside (Matthew 23:25, 26) This concerns spiritual cleansing and conduct of life. We are so taken with appearances.

Illustration: Lady found it easier to change churches than her wardrobe.

III. Let Us Outdo the World in Our Longing (1 Corinthians 15:19).

A. Listen to the Apostle Paul (2 Timothy 4:6-8). The Christian heart should long to see and be with Jesus. Such was the hope of martyrs.

Illustration: Thank God for streets of gold and gates of pearl, but being with Jesus will be more precious. Life's precious now but will be even more precious there.

B. When we think of our life's end here on earth and with eternity in view, let us outdo the world:

1. When dying (saved as opposed to lost).
2. In judgment (accepted instead of rejected).
3. In our eternal abode (Heaven instead of Hell).

Conclusion

We can and should outdo the world. Praise God, the born-again believer can outdo the world in his loving, living, and longing, and in the process experience the abundant life. Do you want to be a winner? Want the fullness of life that God offers? Then, repent of sin, know Jesus Christ by faith through God's grace, and enter in. The basis of the victorious life is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

The society in which you and I live is sick and hurting. It needs the Christian heart, life, and hope.

This message should bolster the faith of a child of God. By the grace of God we can be all that God wants us to be and we can do all that God wants us to do.

And, this message should help that dear soul who wants to be a Christian but as yet has not made a commitment to Jesus Christ because of the fear that he/she will not be able to "hold out." I understand their feelings, but with Christ in you and you in Christ, we are more than conquerors over sin and Satan.

1990 – David Joslin

The Problem of Discipleship

Text: 1 Kings 19:19-21

“Then he (Elisha) arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him” (1 Kings 19:21). New Testament twin truth (Mark 10:29, 30).

Introduction

Many are puzzled and perplexed by the meaning of discipleship. True believers are scarce. Others wonder what is really involved in being a disciple. Discipleship is pictured only in a negative sense, giving a false picture of the demands, standards, and nature of true discipleship.

Four words adequately picture discipleship: call, cost, commitment, and compensation. All of these words combined give a proper and adequate understanding of discipleship.

I. The Call of Discipleship

Discipleship does involve a call. It even takes for granted and assumes that there is a call. As Elijah marches across the field, he removes his mantle in one swift action, and casts it over the shoulders of Elisha. This signified the appropriate way to designate Elisha as a prophet. The mantle was the sign that Elisha was to follow Elijah to be his disciple. Elisha understood this action and made up his mind at once.

A. A Call to Be Identified With a Person

From that moment, Elisha identified with the man of God. We are not called to be identified with a movement, or a campaign. The end and aim of all discipleship is personal devotion to Christ.

“He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach (Mark 3:14). There is fellowship, then ministry—association with Him, then activity for Him.

B. A Call to Become Inspired by a Plan

Elisha did not realize it at this time, but God was in the process of summoning him to be a prophet. “Go...return to thy way to the wilderness of Damascus, Elisha shall thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.”

There is nothing more inspiring in the believer’s walk, work, and witness, than to know that as he follows the Lord in obedience, he is carrying out God’s plan and blueprint for his life. God’s plan for Elisha’s life is generally recorded, gradually revealed, and then finally gloriously realized.

C. A Call to Become Involved in a Program

Christianity requires that the participants come out of the stands, and on to the playing field. While some are standing on the promises, others sit on the premises. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

II. The Cost of Discipleship

To respond to the call may involve suffering, pain, and hardship, but these are the things which accompany discipleship and are not the essence of discipleship. The cost must be paid if the believer steps out in true discipleship.

- A. Cost Recognized. There should be no hesitation upon entering the service of God. Elisha did not go home to ask permission, but to inform his family of his new ministry.
- B. Cost Reviewed. He left behind house, lands, possessions, as he responded to becoming identified with the man of God.
- C. Cost Represented. The completeness of his renunciation of the world was expressed in his sacrifice of the oxen with the wooden plow.
 - 1. The oxen and the plow—symbols of the old way of life—were completely consumed with fire.
 - 2. Christ’s disciples must be free from the entanglements of this life.
 - 3. The cost was represented joyfully, remembered by a feast and not a fast.
 - 4. “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”(Matthew 10:37).

III. The Commitment of Discipleship

A. To Follow Fully. Elisha completely committed himself to the man of God, and prepared himself to follow fully.

B. To Serve Faithfully. "Then he arose, and went after Elijah and ministered unto him" (1 Kings 19:21).

1. God requires and rewards faithfulness.
2. A religion that won't take you to church will likely not take you to Heaven.
3. "Not everyone that saith 'Lord, Lord,' but he that doeth."
4. If a church member expects to answer the roll when it is called up yonder, he had better be present when the roll is called down here.

IV. The Compensation of Discipleship

A. The compensation of the presence of the Master

B. The compensation of the power of the Spirit

C. The compensation of the performance of good deeds

V. Conclusion

"There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospels...but he shall receive an hundred fold...now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29, 30).

1991 – Billy Hanna

The Will of God

Text: Matthew 6:10

I am excited about being here tonight. I feel like the new groom who got so excited after he and his bride were pronounced husband and wife that he kissed the minister and gave his bride \$50.

It has been a great concern of mine and others in our denomination that we have so many pastors, missionaries, and laymen dropping out of the work of God. It is also a grave concern that we do not have more young men and women responding to the call of God upon their lives.

I am sure part of it can be attributed to the fact that we live in perilous times and men are lovers of themselves more than lovers of God. But there is another reason and I want to deal with that tonight.

I am absolutely convinced that one primary reason we do not have more young men and women responding to the call of God upon their lives and entering His service is that the will of God is not a major consideration in our lives.

In a recent survey I did among my congregation, I discovered something that confirmed this. I asked them the following questions regarding Reservists and National Guardsmen being called up for the Gulf War:

1. Should women with small children be forced to go on active duty even if they have newborn babies?
2. Should doctors and other professionals be forced to leave their practices to go on active duty?
3. Should fathers be forced to go on active duty who have children graduating from high school and college, thus missing their graduation?
4. Should both husband and wife be activated and thus be forced to leave their children?

The answer to all of these was a resounding Yes! They said: "They enlisted even though they understood the possibilities, and besides, they enjoyed

the benefits.”

Then I asked:

1. Should a missionary couple leave their child in a missionary school and go hundreds of miles to their field of service?
2. Should an evangelist leave his ministry to be with his wife when she has a baby? What do you think of one who does this and does not see his new baby for months?
3. Should missionaries be required to go back to their fields even though they do not see their children graduate?

The answers to these were, absolutely not! God expects us to look after our family. Ironic isn't it. We say the government has greater rights to our lives than God!

The will of God is something that ought to concern us. People used to say: I will do such and such, if the Lord wills. Have you noticed today about the only time we talk about the will of God is when someone has a terminal illness?

This is so sad but I have had parents ask me to pray for their child that: They would be accepted in a particular school, get a job, buy a house, etc. But rarely have I had a parent ask me to pray for their child to find the will of God.

It ought to concern us because it concerned Jesus. He said in John 5:30, “I seek not to do my own will but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” He also said in John 6:38, “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

I would like to remind you of some things regarding the will of God.

I. What is the will of God?

Note my text: Matthew 6:10, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Stated by our Lord in the purest and simplest manner, the will of God is God's will being done in our lives as it is in Heaven.

How is it done in Heaven? Everything God desires and commands is fulfilled. He is reigning supremely. The will of God is God reigning, ruling in my life.

Can you imagine the heavenly host discussing, debating, questioning, and refusing to do the will of God?

Illustration: Picture one of the angels, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation, saying to the Lord, "I don't want to go to Melvin Worthington. I don't like him, and besides all he does is play golf and fellowship, and there are too many demons to contend with on those golf courses."

Listen, the last, first and only time the will of God was ever debated in Heaven Lucifer and one-third of the heavenly host were forever banished from Heaven with irreversible doom and destiny. Their apostasy was without remedy!

God's will means that God rules in my life. This involves three things:

1. What I am (being).
2. What I do (doing).
3. Where (place).

This is clearly seen in our Lord's parable of the faithful and wise servant (Matthew 24:45-51). Note from our parable that we see these three things.

1. He was faithful and wise. That had to do with his being.
2. He was a ruler. That had to do with doing.
3. He was over the master's household. That had to do with the place.

The story of Jonah illustrates this truth. Jonah was to:

1. Obey the Law.
2. He was to prophesy.
3. He was to prophesy in Nineveh.

We all know the story, but suppose Jonah had made it to Tarshish. We probably would have said that must be the "permissive will" of God because God did not kill him. Let's suppose that at Tarshish he was still a good Jew and obeyed the law. Let's further suppose that being a prophet, he preached to those at Tarshish.

Regardless of all that he may have done, in God's eyes he would have still been a first-class rebel and a disobedient prophet. Why? Because he did not do the will of God. It does matter to God what church you attend, what class you teach, where you go to college, the denomination you serve and your field of service.

We need to understand that God's will is not generic. The will of God can be understood as:

A. The general will of God

This is expressed in:

1. Salvation. Peter clearly tells in 2 Peter 3:9 that God, "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This means that God's will is that you:
 - a. Be saved.
 - b. That others be saved.

This is the reason that we are taught Matthew 9:37, 38, "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

Some time ago, we began praying this in our church. Guess what? God called two of our most outstanding young people. One was my son. Don't pray it unless you are willing to go or see your children respond.

Many years ago I heard Dr. Robert Picirilli preach on this text and God tugged on my heart and whispered in my ear to go into my harvest field.

Why must we be concerned about the will of God? For three reasons:

- Because of the lostness of man.
 - Because of the love of God.
 - Because of our liability, we are debtors to preach the Gospel.
2. Sanctification. First Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." God's will is for us to be holy and separated from sin and unto Him. I heard about a young couple caught in the act of adultery in the chapel on a Christian campus. When they were confronted by the dean, their answer was that they had prayed about it. You can pray all you wish, but God will not consent for you to sin.
 3. Joyful, praising, thankful. First Thessalonians 5:18 states, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
 4. Suffer. First Peter 3:17: "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye

suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." First Peter 4:19: "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

The will of God is not always pleasant. You do not always want to do it. Consider Jesus in the garden. He prays, "Remove this cup." As we have already mentioned, Jonah was repulsed at the thought of going to Nineveh.

Some think that they have got to have a burden in order to do something for God. I hear people say I gave up my class because I lost the burden. What has a burden got to do with the will of God? What has a burden got to do with it? God never said to Jonah do it if you have a burden. It was evident that he did not. I doubt he preached like he had a burden. He did it because it was the will of God.

I love the story of Ananias in Acts 9. God told him to go to Saul. Ananias tries to explain to God what kind of man Saul was. It was evident that Ananias did not have a burden. But God said to him in verse 15, "go"; and verse 17 says, "and Ananias went." Why did he go? It was the will of God.

B. The specific will of God

Acts 9:6 says, "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." As with Paul there is a specific will for each of us.

C. The continuous will of God

First Peter 4:2: "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

My text in Matthew 6:10 reminds us that the will of God is to be done as it is in "Heaven." That means for one thing that it is "eternal."

Can you imagine the Apostle John at age 62 saying, "I have a little stuck back from my dad's business and the church at Ephesus has given me a little place, so I think I'll take it easy."

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul at 55 saying, "I've got a group of people at Corinth who are going to look after me. You know how much I like the Greek culture. So this will give me the opportunity to do some personal development."

The truth of the matter is that at 57, Paul may have gone on his fourth missionary journey to Spain. I wonder what Paul would have thought of

those who reach 55-60: retire, travel, give up church, Sunday School class and their work for God?

We have been indoctrinated with the philosophy of this age.

II. Why is the will of God so important?

A. It is the Father's will (Matthew 6:10).

The very fact that we have a relationship with God as Father makes it important. If Isaac would submit himself to his earthly father to be sacrificed at his will, can we do less?

Because He is our heavenly Father it reminds us that He is sovereign. He is the Ruler of all. If love and a relationship is not enough then fear ought to be. Paul said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

B. What it does.

The will of God promotes everything good, especially salvation.

C. What it means.

According to:

- 1 John 2:17: "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."
- Mark 3:35: "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."
- Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Not to do the will of God is rebellion. Someone may say, "Now that is pretty narrow." You are right. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13, 14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Don't get mad with me, if you don't like it. I did not write the Book. Anyone who has a complaint regarding this matter should take it up with

the Author, not me. In fact, the complaint is with the Author. But I can tell you this: If you not do the will of God, you can be assured that He will take it up with you.

Listen my brothers and sisters, you can dissect it, dilute it, deny it, and dispensationalize it, and it still comes out the same.

D. Because someone has their eye on you

My son Brad told me once, "Dad don't mess up, because I am watching you." Listen, you can be assured that someone is watching you. Don't mess up!

E. Because of God's attitude

We must remember that King Saul in dealing with the Amalekites did almost all that God told him to do but not everything, and to him God said "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."

Consider Demas. Paul gives this report in 2 Timothy 4:10, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." Have you ever thought about what may have happened to Demas when he left Paul? Let me give you my sanctified version.

He went to Thessalonica and got a job as a sales rep. He then enrolled at U.T. (the University of Thessalonica). Then he joined the First Free Will Baptist Church. When the pastor presented him for church membership, he said "I am honored and humbled to present to this congregation a tremendous servant of the Lord. He is a missionary who for many years was an associate of the Apostle Paul. Together with Paul established churches and spread the Gospel all over the world. For some reason God has seen fit to send him to us. What is the pleasure of this congregation?" Of course there was a standing vote with applause.

He is immediately made teacher of the adult Sunday School class.

Two months later he becomes the chairman of the deacon board.

When they discuss why he left Paul, they give a litany of reasons, such as health, a man must look after his family, he was stressed out or burned out, or perhaps some would have said he has paid his dues. Leave him alone.

I did a historical study on Demas. Every author referred to the same ancient writer, who wrote a good bit about him. So I decided to read what he wrote. I thought one thing was worth quoting. He was not English, so I did a rough translation of his words. I am not very good at foreign

languages but this is roughly what he said: "Demas for me forsook loving the now present age and went to Thessalonica."

In 1611, the beloved King James Version translated: "Demas hath forsaken me. Having loved this present world and is departed to Thessalonica."

It was translated In 1769, 1901, 1946, 1954, 1960, 1973, 1979, and 1991, and it said the same thing. Beloved, when the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat and the earth and the works that are in it are burned up and everything is dissolved; when this Old Infallible Book that has been tried in Heaven and inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by holy men of God with an inerrant pen, in indestructible ink; when it is encased in Heaven in diamonds and gold, as an eternal reminder of the mind and will of God, it will still say: "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world."

God wants us to understand His attitude toward His will.

III. What to do about the will of God.

A. Find it.

1. You must be willing to do it. John 7:17: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."
2. You may find it through the Scriptures (Psalms 37:23; 32:8).
3. You may find it through prayer (Joshua 9:14; James 1:5).
4. You may find it through counsel (Proverbs 24:6; 11:14; 25:19).
5. You may find it through circumstances.

B. Do it.

Years ago, after I had answered the call to preach, I was working to pay off some bills and save some money to go to the Bible college. Guy Owens had a family from the First Free Will Baptist Church in Florence, South Carolina, who moved to a town about 40 miles away and wanted to start a church. Guy asked me to go preach for them and get it started. I did not know what to do. I did not know much about the Bible. I was not even licensed to preach.

I sought some counsel from my wise and godly pastor, Norwood Gibson. I found Brother Norwood in the sanctuary putting hymnals in their holders.

I told him my problem. As I recall, my counseling session lasted from the time he went from one end of a pew to the other. He said to me, "Boy! If God has called you to preach, then you need to get off your seat and preach, even if you have to do it on a box at the street corner." Well, I went unlearned, unlettered, and unlicensed and there is a church there today.

After all these years the wisdom of my pastor's words still ring in my soul. If God has called you to preach, get off your seat and preach! There are some things I do not understand. We have 2,500 churches and 5,000 ordained preachers and at any given time 10% of our churches cannot find pastors. Something is wrong. My opinion is that those who won't preach ought to turn in their credentials or we ought to have a recall.

IV. What you will find about the will of God.

- A. Satisfaction. Romans 12:1, 2, tells us it is good, acceptable, and perfect (Psalm 40:8).
- B. Challenges both in it and to it.
- C. Rewards.

V. What it will take.

- A. Get your eyes on Jesus. For some it will mean taking your eyes off yourself, your family, and future (2 Timothy 4:10).
- B. Learn who your Master is. My family loves dogs. We have had dogs since my children were small. We are especially partial to Cocker Spaniels. Our first Cocker, Duke, was everything you would want in a dog. He was pretty, gentle, smart (for a Cocker) and obedient. He was a great family dog. We had him about 15 years. He died a quiet death. We wept and gave him a loving burial. I said a prayer of thanks when we put him in the grave.

Our next dog was also a Cocker. We named him Beau. Now, Beau was just the opposite of Duke. He was aggressive, retarded, and not very obedient. You could hand Duke something to eat and he would never bite your finger. Beau, on the other hand, would try to take your finger off with any food you might give him. Tell Duke to sit and he would do so immediately and stay until you gave him permission to get up. Tell Beau to sit and he would look at you as if he was thinking, "Get a life, I'll sit when I take a mind to." Some

of us thought his elevator was stuck between floors. But things were about to change very abruptly for Beau.

One night we were all in the den: family, and of course man's best friend. Beau had just come home from the coiffeurs. In Georgia that is a dog hair dresser. I thought that perhaps Beau and I needed a little bonding time since our relationship was somewhat strained. I felt that psychologically Beau's self-esteem would be greatly enhanced if I played with him on the floor.

Beau did not grasp the significance of my endeavor to enhance his self-esteem. He snapped at my right hand. Understand that he tried to bite me. I know you think that this is terrible, but when he snapped at my right hand, I hit him with a good strong slap to the side of his face with my left hand. He naturally snapped at that hand, to which I responded with a quick and solid slap to the other cheek.

This exchange happened three or four times. Beau came up the loser each time. You know, on that last slap to his head, something happened to Beau. As we say, his elevator came unstuck. Ever since that exchange, Beau's relationship with me has changed. When I walk by him, his eyes follow me with deep reverence. When I speak, he obeys immediately. Surprisingly when I hand him a food treat, he will never let his teeth touch my finger. Our relationship is dramatically different.

What do you think happened to Beau? I think there is a simple answer. He finally learned who his master was. There is sense in this nonsense. It is simply that many of God's people need to learn, like Beau, who their Master is. When one discovers his master, the relationship will change tremendously.

Some here tonight need to learn this great lesson.

It is imperative that we find, follow, and finish the will of God for our lives. We need to dedicate ourselves anew to it. May I speak a word to:

1. Pastors, are you concerned about the will of God in your life and that of your family?
2. Parents, are you seeking the will of God for your children?
3. Young people, is God speaking to you about surrendering to the will of God for your life?

I made reference to this earlier. Many years ago when I was a young

man in the army, my wife and I went to a different church one Sunday. Dr. Picirilli was there; he preached on the harvest is great but the laborers are few. Dr. Picirilli did not know me, but when he gave the invitation, he said, "I believe there is a young man here who is dedicated to the Lord but He is calling for you to surrender further to His will and go into the harvest field."

That day as a 21 year-old young man, I closed my Bible and said "Lord, I heard You. Dr. Picirilli does not need to call my name. I will go and do whatever you want me to do."

I say tonight as Dr. Picirilli said many years ago in that service that I believe there are young people here who God is calling to His service. Will you listen to His voice and obey?

Maybe there are some here who have gotten out of the will of God and you would like to come back. Why don't you come. Maybe there are parents here who will pray for the first time for the will of God in the lives of your children. Will you listen and respond to His call tonight?

Who will say, "The will of God; nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else"?

1991 – Robert Piricilli

Shine the Light

Text: Philippians 2:12-16

Fifty years ago, when the founding fathers of Free Will Baptist Bible College chose a theme verse for the new college, they picked Psalm 43:3: “O send out thy light and thy truth.” Consequently, the college’s symbol has always included a torch. Tonight, the choral group has sung what has become one of our new president’s favorites: “We will carry the torch.”

I want to pick up on that theme, and read from Philippians 2:12-16.

There isn’t time, now, for a thorough exposition of this text. Even so, there are some truths here that are appropriate for tonight’s program, all centering around our responsibility as Christians to be light bearers in our world.

First, you’ll note the need of the world for light, both stated and implied. That we shine as lights implies that the world is in darkness. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, we read that the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, for the very purpose of keeping the light of the Gospel from them. Jesus said that men love darkness, that they choose it in preference to the light. That we hold forth the Word of life implies that the world is dead. In Ephesians 4, Paul describes the condition of lost mankind: they are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

In no uncertain terms Paul says the world is “a crooked and perverse nation.” *Crooked* means bent, not straight. *Perverse* means twisted, perverted. And *nation*, here, can mean a race or an age. Can anyone doubt that we live—as the Philippian Christians did—in the midst of a generation that is morally bent and has twisted the truth to suit its own taste?

As Christians, we are surrounded by a world of spiritually dead men, blind and lost, groping in darkness, having turned away from God and suffered His awful judgment of giving them over to walk in their own bent and twisted ways, devoid of truth.

We say that with compassion, not condemnation. Only yesterday we

were there with them. And today we are alive and walk in the light. Only we know we did not deliver ourselves. We have been rescued by nothing less than the miraculous, gracious, redemptive work of a merciful God.

Even so, for our lives to mean what God intends them to mean, we have to keep this context in mind. And that leads us to our second point: our basic purpose, in life, is to serve as light for our world.

The Greek word translated *lights* here is not the simple word for light itself, but a compound that refers to anything that gives or bears light. We are luminaries, light bearers.

Yes, we know that this is possible only because Jesus is the light. But the same One who said "I am the light of the world" also said "You are the light of the world." We bear the light, reflect the light. We carry the torch. We show men light when we show them Jesus.

Dear friends, there's a truth here I just wish I could somehow get over to you and burn it into your souls. Young people, I yearn over you as you struggle with the urges and the conflicting philosophies that tug at you.

The truth is simply this: the meaning of our lives, as Christians, is found in this simple fact that we have been placed here to shine as lights in the world.

There is no meaning in fleshly pleasures. There is no meaning in achieving prominence or position in the world's eyes. There is no meaning in wielding power in this age. There is no meaning in accumulating possessions for security and comfort, for the good life.

Let me put it plainly: making money is not where it's at! Where it's at is this: the world around us is on fire and people are hurting and perishing; and we have light and life to offer them. That is the context we live in. We have been placed here to shine as lights in the world.

There's a third truth, or complex of truths here, too, and there isn't time to do it justice. But for all that, let's not overlook it. The fact is, the Spirit of God has described for us, through Paul, just how we can shine as lights in the world. There are, indeed, several suggestions along this line.

In verse 12, we are urged, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." There's more than one way to interpret this. I'm inclined to think Paul means that, as Christians, we must work out in our lives all that our salvation means, the practical effects God intended our salvation to

have. One commentator says, "The believer ... must 'work out' what God in His grace has 'worked in'."

In verse 14, the command is, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings."

You can't read this without being reminded of ancient Israel's sorry example of rebellious complainings in the wilderness. And sometimes the church, yes sometimes the Free will Baptist denomination, reminds us all too frighteningly of Israel. These "murmurings and disputings" are rebellious complainings and argumentative reasonings. They speak of tension and discord. Christians have no light to offer people when they are characterized that way.

In verse 15, we read that we are to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke."

Blameless people offer others no valid reason to find fault with them. *Harmless* literally means unmixed, therefore pure, innocent. *Sons* is children here; God's children manifest His character in their relationships with others. *Without rebuke* translates the very word that was used to describe the sacrificial lamb as unblemished. Christians must be free of moral blemish.

Finally, verse 16 adds that we are to be "holding forth the word of life." True, the Greek verb might just as accurately be translated "holding fast." Either way, however, the underlying truth is that we are in possession of the word that gives life out of spiritual death. And in order to shine as lights in a world with no light, we must hold forth to those about us the word that gives them light and life.

And don't overlook verse 13: the resources for all this are not in ourselves, but in the working of God within us—the energizing if you will—to produce both the desiring or willing and the working or performing.

Good friends in Christ, that's a powerful and attractive picture. A picture of Christians being and doing what God intended them to be and do: to shine as lights in the world by working out the full implications of their salvation in their lives, by manifesting harmony and joy in one another in their walk together, by a lifestyle that brings no reproach and manifests the family likeness as children of God, by holding fast and holding forth the Gospel of life. And all this by the effective working of God within and among them!

I'm back where I started, then. Free Will Baptist Bible College was founded

with this in mind. And so she continues to this day. For 50 years she has labored to train young people to shine as lights in the world, to send forth God's light and God's truth. And she is just as committed as ever, more than ever needing the steadfast support—financial and otherwise—of the people who have brought her into existence for that purpose.

I tell you the truth: the need for workers is greater than ever. Our work force for Christian ministry is graying and retiring. Our churches need pastors and music directors and youth ministers. The foreign fields where we minister need more missionaries—to say nothing of the unreached millions in scores of places around the world. In city after city in our own land there is spiritual famine. Our Christian schools need teachers—not to mention the public schools' need for teachers with character. Apart from the full-time ministry, our churches need laity who are equipped to serve the Lord Christ.

That's what Free Will Baptist Bible College is all about: to train workers for the church and the world. Oh, Free Will Baptist people, send us your youth who will respond to God's challenge to live for Him, and let us equip them for service.

Indeed, as this passage has shown us, this is finally what being a Christian is all about. I repeat the main point: we are here to shine as lights in the world.

Christian parents, give your young people to live for God. You can't keep them for yourself without destroying them. Let them serve God and you will have them forever.

Pastors, challenge your young people for Christian service: I am very afraid that isn't happening much these days. Why aren't the youth in our churches answering the call of God?

Christian young people, I call on you in the words of one of our trailblazers, dear Laura Belle Barnard: "Lay aside your small, vain ambitions and take up the cross and follow Jesus."

As we meet tonight, she is making final preparations to stand before her Lord. When your time comes to do that, what do you want to be able to say you lived for?

1991 – James Earl Raper

Going Forward in Faith

Text: Exodus 14:15

The theme for the National Association this year is “Found Faithful.” My subject is “Going Forward in Faith.” God said go forward (Red Sea). People said let’s go back (Egypt). Moses had a problem: What to do? Like the old expression, “Between the devil and the deep blue sea.”

The problem was settled in Hebrews 11:25, “Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

The result: We are going forward in faith. “Moses lifted up his rod, stretched out his hand” (Exodus 14:16), and the world has never been the same.

A difficult and rugged path lay ahead:

1. Exodus 4:24: One time, God wanted to kill Moses.
2. Exodus 17:4: One time, the people wanted to kill Moses.
3. Exodus 32:7-14 and 32:32: One time God wanted to kill the people, and Moses talked God out of it.

If God, Moses, or the people could have ever gotten together, only God would have been left.

Six things to consider about the trial of Israel’s faith. You will never know the strength of your faith until it is tried.

I. The Dangers They Faced

- A. Walking by sight and not by faith (Exodus 14:10).
- B. Living in the past; Egypt was good enough (Exodus 14:11, 12).
- C. Expecting the easy way.

II. The Dilemma They Were In (Exodus 14:10)

A *dilemma* is a situation involving choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives. A good synonym is predicament.

- A. They didn't know which way to go.
- B. They were afraid.
- C. They cried out.

III. The Deliverer That Came to Their Rescue (Exodus 14:13)

- A. "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord, which he will shew to you today."
- B. "The Lord shall fight for you" (Exodus 14:14).
- C. Moses wanted to pray. God said, "Go forward" (Exodus 14:15).
- D. Man's extremity is God's opportunity (Exodus 14:16).

IV. The Determination of the People (Exodus 14:22)

- A. They obeyed and went "forward in faith."
- B. They learned four things:
 - 1. A rebuke for murmuring
 - 2. A reverential fear of God
 - 3. A respectful trust of God
 - 4. A right opinion of God's man

V. The Destruction of Their Enemies (Exodus 14:28-31)

- A. Judgment: sudden, terrible, deserved
- B. Lesson to all hindering the command of God
- C. These verses convince me Pharaoh drowned (Exodus 14:5, 6, 8, 10, 17, 18, 23, 28; 15:19).
- D. What was deliverance for one was destruction for the other.
- E. What was a blessing to one was a curse to the other.

VI. The Delight of a Delivered People (Exodus 15:1)

- A. They sang on the other side of the Red Sea.
- B. A song of victory and praise to God.
- C. How different for them now—faith.
- D. This “Song of Moses” is the first mention of singing in the Bible.
- E. It is also the last mention of singing in the Bible, which is in Heaven.
 “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Revelation 15:3).

Conclusion

What of Israel’s faith? We say: weak, imperfect, stammering. The New Testament speaks of four kinds of faith: great, much, little, none. Faith is like a muscle that grows stronger as you use it.

Hebrews 11:1-40 has a victorious faith! Inclusive of the entire Old Testament, in Hebrews 11:1-40 Abel through the prophets, were found faithful. Hebrews 11:36: others had trial of their faith. Hebrews 11:39: all of these obtained a good report through faith. What would be recorded of your faith?

- 1 Thessalonians 3:3: “But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.”
- Matthew 9:29: “According to your faith be it unto you.”
- Hebrews 10:23: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”
- Revelation 2:10: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

1991 – Howard Munsey

Stewardship in Worship

Text: 2 Chronicles 5:10

It is a tremendous job to preach the Gospel of Christ. When you stand between the living and the dead, and you open the Word of God, it is serious business. My heart rejoices for the wonderful privilege I have to be here with you. I am so thankful for Free Will Baptists. I can say we are a great people—and we are. But we are great because we have a great Savior! He has transformed us, and made us what we are. Like Paul, we can say that we are what we are by the grace of God.

I am thankful for the wonderful privilege to be associated with the premier people on the face of the earth. Every year when I go to the National Association, I start looking. I see people that I just know are Free Will Baptists. You are different. Your demeanor is different. Your manner of dress and actions are different.

Thank God, we are a “peculiar people.” Now that word *peculiar* doesn’t mean odd or weird; it means we are peculiarly His. We are trying to be like Him. We have a heritage to protect, a heritage to carry on. Our forefathers were great worshipping people. If we are going to survive, we are going to have to continue that tradition. We must hold up the high standards of worship and let God speak to our hearts.

In the interest of brevity, I am going to read only one verse for my text: “There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt” (2 Chronicles 5:10). My subject this morning will be “Stewardship in Worship” or “Found Faithful in Worship.”

The Ark of the Covenant was the centerpiece of Old Testament worship. It was conceived and brought forth from the mind of God. Its construction details were given to Moses as the children of Israel camped in the wilderness. It was the most important piece of furniture in the Temple. Everything about these worship centers, both the Temple and the Tabernacle, was highly significant and figurative, typifying Christ in some aspect of His nature or work.

The Ark was a rectangular box, some 4.5 feet long by 2.5 feet wide and high. It was made from acacia wood, which was found growing in the desert. The Ark was overlaid in pure gold. The wood symbolized the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gold His divinity. This signified that the person who would be the Savior of the world was to have two perfect and whole natures—both a human nature and a divine.

Paul expressed it Philippians 2: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (verses 6-10).

I’m glad it’s like that. He was human because we are human. He expressed it again in the Book of Hebrews: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (2:14, 15). Isn’t that a wonderful passage that identifies us with the Lord Jesus Christ and His humanity? Thus He became our Kinsman-Redeemer.

Over the Ark was the Mercy Seat. It was a covering made of acacia wood just like the Ark, and it too was overlaid with gold. On each end of this Mercy Seat stood a gold cherub, each facing the other, which symbolizes the august presence of a thrice-holy God.

Now inside the Ark were the tables of stone, upon which God had engraved the writing of the Ten Commandments. There was something else in that Ark also; it was Aaron’s rod that budded and blossomed and brought forth almonds. In addition, they were commanded to put a golden pot of manna, and lay it up as a memorial of God’s provision for the children of Israel in the wilderness wanderings.

This Ark was appropriately placed in the extremity of the Temple behind the second veil, where only one man from one family from one tribe of the children of Israel could go and approach it only once every year. On this occasion, the High Priest of the Jews would stand before that Ark, typical

of the Lord Jesus Christ in His mediatorial ministry. He was clothed in his sacerdotal vestments of blue, purple, and vermillion linen. And these vestments symbolized the righteousness of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only did he stand there in this way, but upon him hung a breastplate with 12 precious stones, each engraved with one of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. This typified the abiding interest of Jesus in every child of God, even us in New Testament times. All of this bespeaks to us of the wonderful nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how that we are imperishably engraved upon His memory as He intercedes for us at the right hand of God the Father.

In his hand was a golden censer of burning coals on which he sprinkled incense, typical of the satisfaction of the Father in the mediatorial ministry of His Son, the Lord Jesus, in behalf of us as guilty sinners. God Himself is satisfied with what Jesus did on our behalf.

Upon this Mercy Seat he sprinkles blood, the instrument of propitiation. Beneath it lay the broken Law, the medium to be propitiated. While between the cherubim, and above, dwelt the presence of this wonderful God, who conceived the plan of salvation. He lodged it in types and shadows in the days of the Old Testament, and at the fullness of time, brought it forth so that you and I could be recipients of His matchless grace, love, and forgiveness.

And while God, in symbolic form, speaks to the High Priest from the cloud that gathers above that Mercy Seat, I'm glad, thank God, that He cannot see the sins of the sinner through the shed blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now these ceremonies constituted worship under the ceremonial law. They served as patterns of things in the heavenlies, until the fullness of time was come when God sent forth His Son to bear the guilt of all mankind's sin upon that cruel tree of Calvary. Now we don't have to have it lodged in symbols and types; we have the real thing! We have experienced it here this morning. We experienced it last night. Free Will Baptists have been experiencing it ever since God brought us into existence. And we want to continue to experience it until the Lord Jesus takes us home with Him to eternal glory.

I am glad that we don't have to have ceremonial props to worship God. You'll not get very far in life without worship. And much that passes off

as worship is not worship at all. I am thinking particularly of the Gospel singing cult. Now, I love Gospel singing and like to sing myself. But much that passes as Gospel singing is no more than tear-jerking lyrics set to a syncopated beat. It's religious drivel. And that's not really worship.

I believe people worship God in the house of God. We're told in the book of Hebrews: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (10:24, 25). If we believe that passage, we must believe that God wants us to assemble together to worship Him as a people.

But worship is not confined to the house of the Lord. Christians ought to worship God every day that we live. Worship means to adore, to pray, to honor, to love, and to respect and appreciate God. And I ought to do that every day of the week, just like I do at the house of the Lord. In fact, my worship on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday evening is not very meaningful if I have ignored Him throughout the week. That's why God wants us to be a worshipping people. So I say that, thank God, we don't have to have the props now, we can talk to Jesus no matter what the circumstances are.

I remember leading a fellow to Christ one time in the jailhouse. I remember when he got off his knees, after we had prayed, he was weeping and praising the Lord. He looked around and said, "It doesn't look so bad in the jailhouse with Jesus in here."

I'm going to tell you that no matter where you are Jesus is wonderful. He is real and He is precious. And He wants us to be a worshipping people.

The principles and the basic elements of worship, however, remain the same. We find in the Ark of the Covenant three symbols, which I want to share with you.

Now the dedication of Solomon's Temple is one of the notable events of Old Testament history. The Temple was one of the most magnificent structures of all times. As you know, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was one of the magnificent buildings, not only of antiquity, but of all time. And it would be wonderful if we had some picture of it, so we could see it. This building was richly ornamented with gold and silver, and precious stones. It was finished with the finest cedars of Lebanon. Its

interior was hung with curtains ornately embroidered with threads of gold and bright colors like purple, vermillion, and blue. The exterior porticoes and fluted columns were the highest expression of the craftsman's art. You could see that building as you approached Jerusalem for many miles away.

Now on the occasion of the dedication of this Temple, from which our Scripture is taken, multitudes of people from all over Israel had come in for this service. Elaborate plans had been made for bringing in the Ark of the Covenant from the City of David, which is Zion. But something was missing from that Ark. It says, "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb." There was supposed to be something else in there. There was supposed to be something else that symbolized the worship that I've been talking about.

One, Aaron's rod that had budded, blossomed, and brought forth almonds. Symbolic of the high-priestly authority of the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, there are a lot of people who do not care what Jesus had to say about things. You can preach to them until you're blue in the face. You can do your best to teach them from the Word of God, but they have made up their mind that it doesn't make any difference what they do with their lives, they're going to Heaven anyway. They've got that fixed in their minds. But I'm going to say that you're not going to worship God and ignore the authority of the matchless person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, this rod was cut off from its source of life. It was made from an almond sapling, and shepherds used this in shepherding their sheep. Sometimes it was called a shepherd's rod or staff. It was cut off from its source of life, but when the people grumbled and complained in the days of old about Moses and Aaron taking all the authority, Moses had the different tribes to come in and bring one of their rods. There were 12 rods laid up in the Tabernacle. And the next morning, when Moses went in to get those rods, all the others were the same. They were still dead; but Aaron's rod had budded and blossomed and brought forth its fruit.

That's symbolic of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we're talking about resurrection power, we're talking about spiritual power. You remember that Paul said in the Book of Romans: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (8:11). So we're talking about resurrection power.

Two, there was also a pot of manna. This pot of manna represents Jesus as

the bread of God which came down from Heaven as the vital nourishment of the soul, without which none of us can make it through to God and immortal glory. I am going to tell you folks, you can't make it without Jesus! You can make it without me. You can make it without Mom and Dad. And as much as we need and appreciate each other, we can make it without each other. But we cannot make it without Christ. Jesus must be the One, without which there can be no complete worship of God.

Third, there were the tables of stone, which represented the Word of the living God. You're not going to worship very much without the Word of God. I say to you that the Word of God is important. It's important in convicting sinners. It's important in the nourishment and encouragement of the Christian in his journey along life's way. It has great value as a source of light.

I read in Psalm 19 where it says: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward" (verses 7-11).

Thank God for the Word of the Lord. It provides everything.

But there is more to worship than reading, studying, and preaching the Bible. It has to be anointed with the Spirit and the power of God. And if there's one thing we need to maintain as Free Will Baptist people—as servants of the living God—it's the power of the Spirit of God in our services and in our ministries. There is no true worship of God without this.

Jesus Himself said in John 5: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (verse 39). And again Paul tells us: "But our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:5b, 6). There is no life in our services without the power and ministry of the Holy Ghost. This is what Aaron's rod that budded represented in that Ark.

If we read the journals of Benjamin Randall, David Marks, and others of our forefathers, we would be put to shame by the devotion that they had

and the things that they suffered to go forth and tell the sweet story of the Savior. Thank God for our heritage; it's a wonderful heritage! It's a heritage that God wants us to continue on. And although we live in a modern world, which frowns upon these things, we must hold that up and be true in our stewardship of worshipping God in these days in which we live.

Thank God we not only have the ministry of the Word, but we need to hold up the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what that pot of manna represented. It typified Jesus as the Bread of Life. And we need Him for the vital nourishment of the soul if we're going to survive in this world. Listen folks, Jesus is everything. He is all in all. The Bible teaches us that He is "the express image" of the Godhead bodily (Hebrews 1:3). In the book of Colossians we're told that He is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15). Again in Philippians we're told that "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation ... And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (2:6-8).

Listen! The Bible tells us that He is not only this, but also the great Creator. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

We look at these beautiful mountains. We see the delightful streams. We look at the earth that God has created and realize that it was Jesus who formed it all. He piled up these mountains, scooped out these river valleys. He holds the seas in the palm of His hand. He hung the stars out on nothing, and told them when to shine. He put them in orbit about each other, so that they are working in absolute mathematical precision. And we need to lift up God and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ in our day.

And I hope the time will never come when the presence of the Holy Ghost and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is missing in our worship services before God. You cannot have sinners converted without it. You cannot have the encouragement you need without it. It is just absolutely not possible. And I wonder as I am speaking to this group of folks this morning, how many churches in the Free Will Baptist denomination have not baptized a convert in the past year. Do you know why? It's because of our lack of devotion like our forefathers had and lack of surrender.

Let me say briefly that God does fill His people with the Spirit. The

reason He does is because He wants us to serve. Sometimes we get the idea that God fills us with the Spirit just so that we can be happy. Now I'm happy when it happens. Sometimes it's hard for me to stay on my seat when God is pouring out His power upon us and exalting His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to get up and holler "Glory!"

But He doesn't give us His Spirit just to make us feel good. He doesn't give us His Spirit to make us feel exalted over other Christians or superior to anybody else. He gives us the Spirit to give us the power to serve God and carry the message of salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth. And if we're going to get back to that, we're going to have to have that personal devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to mention to you the threefold prayer of David Livingstone that I came across recently. I thought it was appropriate and fitting. His prayer was,

"Lord, send me anywhere, only go with me.

Lay any burden on me, only sustain me.

Sever any ties but the tie that binds me to Thy service."

I believe if we'll do that, God will honor His Word. He's got a ministry for Free Will Baptists in these last days, and who knows but what we are standing on the threshold of one of the mightiest movements of modern history. God wants to bless us if time goes on. I'm looking for Jesus to come, but if He doesn't, I want to be found in my place worshipping God and obedient to Him in all things.

1991 – David Reece

Faithful to the Preaching of the Gospel

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:3

In his book *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer wrote that “it is a solemn thing and no small scandal in the kingdom of God, to see God’s children starving while actually seated at the Father’s table.” He went on to say, “the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”

It would be a sad thing for the pulpits of the Free Will Baptist churches to be occupied with message-less preachers or pastors who allow the sheep to go unfed. Today we will look at being faithful to the preaching of the Gospel.

I. Faithful to the Call

Not long ago, I was asked to write down some information for young preachers about the call of God upon their lives to the ministry. Some of the examples in Scripture were:

- Abraham and his covenant (Genesis 12:1-5)
- Moses and his bush (Exodus 3:10-12)
- Isaiah and his temple (Isaiah 6:8, 9)
- Amos and his sheep (Amos 7:14, 15)
- Apostle Paul (Acts 9:6)

1. The call is dynamic.

As dynamic as:

- A. Calling forth Adam from the dust (Genesis 3:26-28).
- B. Calling forth Lazarus from the grave (John 11:43, 44).
- C. A personal call from God Himself

J. H. Jowett once said, “Before a man selects the ministry as a profession, he must have the assurance that the selection has been imperatively constrained by the eternal God...and the call of the eternal must ring

through the rooms of his soul.”

D. A call forth unto separation:

- A man from his will to the will of God
- From sitting among the sheep to the shepherd

2. The call is definite.

(As definite as:)

A. The call of Elijah and Elisha

(No one doubted the call of Elijah and Elisha.)

- Had power with God before the people
- Defiant before sin
- Became implements in God’s hand
- Influenced and moved the world around them

Note: We are great only when we are God-possessed.

3. The call is distinctive.

(As distinctive as:)

A. Moses and Aaron were from Korah (Numbers 16)

B. Jeremiah was from the false prophets (Jeremiah 28)

Preachers are different:

- They belong to Christ and His ministry.
- They serve among His sheep.
- They are separated by a holy life.
- They are motivated by the Word of God.

II. Faithful to Surrender to His Will.

1. Concerning our ministry:

A. Where to go or when

B. What to preach and how

C. Who to win and where

D. What direction and means to use to accomplish the task.

Note: Our work when we are doing it under the power of the Holy Spirit is God's work.

2. Concerning our personal life:

A. The surrender of ambitions (in every area of life)

B. The surrender of finances

C. The surrender of family

D. The surrender of the future

3. Concerning our destiny:

A. Being confident that God will finish the work He has begun in our lives

B. Pleased to serve Him anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances

III. Faithful to the Proclamation of God's Word

1. Preaching the Word as God's Word

A. It is powerful.

B. It is holy.

C. It is sharper than a two-edged sword.

D. It convicts and saves.

E. It is the final witness.

2. Preach the Word from a heart of commitment.

A. Rooted deep in your soul

B. With passion and personal conviction

C. With urgency

D. With compassion

3. Preach the Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A. As a revelation and inspiration of God

B. As a reprover and rebuker of sin

- C. As a guide to the Church
- 4. Preach the Word under the fear of failure (2 Corinthians 6:3).
 - A. Seek His pleasure only.
 - B. Glorify His presence in the message.
 - C. Seek an encounter with His will in the message. Conviction leads to salvation.
 - D. Seek His favor diligently.

1992 – Randy Sawyer

Reflecting the Glory of the Lord

Text: Exodus 33:18; 34:6, 7, 29, 30

Perhaps the greatest prayer ever offered by mortal man to God was the prayer of Moses, "Show me Thy glory."

The Scripture records for us many mighty and wonderful prayers. Great was the prayer offered by Abraham for the wicked city of Sodom. Great was the prayer of Jacob, when he grasped the angel and would not let go until the blessing was granted. Great were the prayers of Elijah which first closed the windows of Heaven and then opened them again. Great was the prayer of that same mighty prophet which fetched fire down upon the sacrifice on Carmel's rocky heights. Great was the prayer of Elisha which brought life again to a lifeless child. Great were the prayers of Hannah, as in barrenness she petitioned God for a son, which was answered in the birth of Samuel. Great was the prayer of King Hezekiah, whose intercession for the nation resulted in the death angel smiting the camp of the Assyrians. Great was Habakkuk's prayer for revival, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years." Great was the prayer of the early church for the imprisoned Apostle Peter. Great were the recorded prayers of Paul and the others apostles.

But perhaps the greatest prayer ever laid before the throne by mortal man was this prayer of Moses, "I beseech thee, show me Thy glory."

Had he requested a fiery chariot in which to be taken to Heaven, had he requested that the sun stand still in order that the enemies of God might be obliterated, had he requested more years in which to serve God and live before men, a precedent to his prayer might be found. But with this prayer, "Show me Thy glory," he stands alone. Among the lofty peaks and summits of man's prayer, this is the highest, the culminating point. Great, bold, unprecedented was this prayer of Moses, "Show me Thy glory."

But what was this request? What did Moses mean when he prayed "Show me Thy glory"?

The glory of God is a significant theme in Scripture. The Hebrew word for *glory* means weight, substance, or essence. The glory of God is the weight, substance, or essence of God. The glory of God is what He is in His

essential nature. The glory of the Lord is what He is, and because of what He is, He deserves glory.

David encouraged the people of the Lord to “Declare His glory among all nations” (1 Chronicles 16:24). While in the Temple, Isaiah heard the seraphim singing that the “whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). In the prologue to his Gospel, John explains that the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory” (John 1:14). As Stephen was about to be stoned to death, Scripture declares that he was “full of the Holy Spirit,” and as he gazed into Heaven he “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). And in Revelation, we learn that the New Jerusalem will be “illuminated by the glory of the Lord” (Revelation 21:22).

Moses and the children of Israel had viewed something of the glory of God on several earlier occasions. According to Exodus 16:10, Moses and Israel were privileged to behold God’s glory, though that glory was shrouded by a cloud. In Exodus 24:16, 17, the glory of the Lord was again viewed by the people, though on that occasion it appeared like a devouring fire. The idea is that Moses and the people saw God’s glory but never directly.

In Exodus 33:11, Moses entered the “tent of meeting” and communed with God, “face to face” as a man speaks to a friend; yet once more he experienced the “shekinah” behind some mist or veil. But he was not satisfied with any vision of God he had seen nor with any communion he had enjoyed; he wanted more. He desired to see the substance or essence of God without figure, shroud, or veil. It’s as if he prayed, “Dear Lord, let me see You as I have never seen You. Let me know You as I have never known You. Lord, take away the shroud and let me behold Your glory! Remove any obstacle and let me see You as You are, and know You as You are, and experience You as You are.”

What a prayer, what a bold, unprecedented petition. Though God could not, because of Moses’ human weakness, answer the prayer completely, He did grant Moses a partial vision. And what a profound effect it had on him, and what great significance it had for Israel.

Now the case is the same with us. We shall never in this life be privileged to behold God literally, for man is incapable of receiving such a vision. But we can and should be challenged by Moses’ request to offer that bold petition. Each of us should be moved by Moses’ experience to long for the Lord more deeply, to search for Him more relentlessly, to hunger for Him

until we join to pray with David, "As a deer pants for the flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1). Is that what you want? Do you long for a greater vision of Him? Do you search for a deeper knowledge of Him? Are you willing to pray with Moses, "Please, show me Thy glory"?

With this as a backdrop on which to hang our thoughts, let us prayerfully consider three questions.

First, what reasons should prompt this bold request? Second, what reply can we expect? Third, what results can we realize?

1. What reasons should prompt this bold request?

As we examine the historical record of Moses' prayer, we can discern at least three reasons.

When prayers are answered, we are encouraged to offer larger requests. In order to understand the reasoning behind the requests, we need to set the stage historically. We begin with Exodus 32. The long stay of Moses on the mountain, Mount Sinai, left the people of Israel so impatient that they asked Aaron, to whom Moses had directed the people to go in case of trouble, to make them a god, a visible representation of Yahweh; the protecting, helping presence of the Lord they thought had vanished with Moses, whom they supposed to be dead. They were unwilling to continue any longer without an image of God to go before them. It is interesting that without a true man of God in their midst, they quickly turned to idolatry. The absence of God's man often leads to people confused and wandering.

Instead of courageously and decidedly opposing their request, Aaron hoped to divert them from their proposal by human ingenuity. He commanded them to give up their jewelry, perhaps hoping they would object and the issue would be dropped. His cleverness, however, was put to shame. For immediately the people tore off their golden ornaments and brought them to Aaron. Thus, the weak-minded Aaron had no choice but to make an image of God for the people. He fashioned for them a golden calf. The calf was copied from the Egyptians but was not meant to represent an Egyptian deity. The image was to symbolize the great strength of God. But making the idol was not an honor but an insult. It didn't display the glory of God, it defrauded His glory.

In Stephen's address, recited in Acts 7:38-40, we find the key to the whole incident. Though they fashioned a golden bull to represent Yahweh

and made pretense of worshipping Him, they had actually cast off their allegiance to God, their hearts had departed from Him.

Before Moses left the mountain, God told him of the apostasy of the people, and in His holy anger, the Lord said to Moses, "Now therefore leave me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make of a great nation of you" (Exodus 32:9, 10).

When God said to Moses "leave me alone, that my wrath may burn hot," God was essentially putting the fate of the nation into the hands of Moses. Moses had become the divinely ordained mediator between the offending nation and the offended God. The nation's future rested in Moses' reaction.

True to his calling, Moses entered the breach and interceded for the sinful nation. He literally pleaded with God for mercy. With that, he left the presence of God on the mountain, without any assurance that God would hear his request.

When Moses came near the camp he saw the calf and heard the music of their celebration and his anger burned hot. He threw the tablets of the covenant and broke them as a sign that Israel had broken the covenant. Then he proceeded to destroy the idol with fire. The wooden center of the statue was reduced to ashes and mixed with the molten gold. Then he cast the mixture into the water and made the people drink it so that their bellies might be filled with their own sin and that they might know what it is to turn from God.

Then Moses cried, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me" (Exodus 32:26). With that the sons of Levi gathered to his side. To them he instructed, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor" (Exodus 32:27).

When they returned to Moses, 3,000 of their kinsmen had been slain. See Moses now—he loved them, but he did not keep back the stern blow of justice; meekest man in all the earth, yet an unbending executor of divine wrath—meek, but not indifferent to truth and righteousness.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "God does not use spineless jellyfish. He does not use men without backbone. We have plenty of men made of sugar these days that melt into the stream of popular opinion, but these shall never ascend into the holy hill of God, and they shall never wear God's

glory as Moses did.”

Unaware of the turning of God’s wrath, Moses then returned to the Lord to attempt to intercede for the people. His prayer here is so audacious that it almost takes our breath away to read it. He prayed, “Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written” (Exodus 32:31).

As a true mediator, Moses was ready to stake his own life and eternity for the deliverance of the nation. These words of Moses were a strong expression of self-sacrificing love. They are similar to those of Paul in his prayer for the Jews of his generation (Romans 9:3).

God did not refuse the pleadings of His faithful servant. He turned from His wrath and remembered mercy. However, God sent further punishment against the offending nation in the form of a plague (Exodus 32:35). Even more disturbingly, the Lord withdrew His guiding presence. In Exodus 33:3, God instructed Israel to “go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

When Moses informed the people of this sad state of affairs they mourned, overwhelmed with sorrow that God would not go before them Himself. In response to their obvious contrition of heart, Moses for a third time entered the presence of the Lord to intercede for the people. He took a tent and pitched it outside the camp, some distance off. When he entered the tent, the pillar of cloud came down upon the tent. Out of this mist Yahweh talked with Moses (Exodus 33:9): “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).

The dialogue between Moses and the Lord is recorded for us in detail in Exodus 33:12-34:28. These words indicate a familiar conversation of one intimate companion to another. Moses boldly sought the presence of God as a fellow-guide to lead the people forward (Exodus 33:12, 13). Because Moses had found favor with the Lord, God relented and promised to go with them (Exodus 33:14). It’s as if he prayed, “These people have sinned—they are a wicked lot—but if I have found grace in Your sight, and if You recognize me as Your servant, do not leave me in uncertainty, do not leave me with merely an angel as my guide. Go with me Lord; and if You’re not going—please don’t carry us from here.” To that petition the Lord replied, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in

my sight, and I know you by name.”

What a wonderful affirmation; and with the success of that prayer, Moses was made bolder still. It is here that he exclaimed, “Show me Thy glory.” Moses had been with God; he had enjoyed as intimate a communion with God as any man ever had—40 days on the mountain on three occasions—interceding for the sinful nation—speaking with God face to face—as friend to friend. As his prayers one by one were answered, he was encouraged to offer larger prayers.

Moses had received the answer to several smaller prayers, comparatively speaking, and with those prayers having been answered he was made bold for more. We should never be content with past answers but should go again and again to the throne with a double request. Nothing so pleases God as when a sinner comes again very soon with a larger petition, saying “Lord, you heard me last time, here I am again.”

Spurgeon once said, “Make your petitions larger and larger. Ask for 10. If God gives you 10, ask for 100. If God gives you 100, ask for 1,000. If God gives you 1,000 ask for 10,000.” Prayers that are answered leave us with the faith to ask for more.

A second reason that should prompt God’s children to seek a vision of His face for a view of His glory is that when communion with God has been granted, we are encouraged to seek a broader view of Him. Communion with God enlarges a man’s capacity for Him and leaves him with a desire for still more. Moses had been with God, speaking with Him literally “mouth to mouth” (Exodus 33:11), “face to face,” “friend to friend.” Spending time with God enlarged his capacity, and so with an enlarged heart he prayed, “Lord, more of You.”

Augustine once wrote of the Lord, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

It is for His pleasure that we were created; and our chief end is to know Him and glorify Him. In this boasted age of science and enlightenment, very few are seeking Him; very few long for Him. The fiery urge that drove men like Brainerd and McCheyne is missing today. But the man who will ascend the mountain with great desire to know God will find Him. A.W. Tozer said, “He waits to be wanted.”

And when a man finds God he will desire more and more and more of Him. F. B. Meyer said, “The holiest of God’s saints are those who are

pressed nearer and ever nearer into His sacred fellowship, in order that they may be satisfied with the vision of His face.”

Consider the holy men of the past, and you will soon feel the heart of their desire after God. They mourned for Him, they prayed and wrestled and sought for Him day and night. In season and out of season they panted for Him and when they found Him the finding was the sweetest thing in the world to them.

Again Tozer prayed, “O God, I have tasted Thy goodness and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, I want to want Thee. I long to be filled with longing. I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory that I may know Thee indeed.”

That man who has known God and communed with Him will desire more of the same—until his life is consumed with longing to know Him.

The third reason we should pray this prayer with Moses is because when responsibilities have been increased, we are encouraged to long for a deeper knowledge of Him.

Moses knew by this time how important his intercession was between offended God and the sinful nation. He has been ordained, commissioned to mediate for the nation. He seems to have understood that Israel’s only hope of survival was that their leader be successful in his work. So he sought more knowledge of God that he might more effectively fulfill his mission. He prayed in essence, “Lord, for the sake of this people whom You have sent me to lead—for the sake of this idolatrous people—show me Thy glory.”

We too live in an idolatrous nation. Man must have an object to worship, and when he turns from the true God he at once craves a false one. This has been proven without exception. When man’s faith is not strong enough to worship the invisible, he worships the works of his own hands.

In Romans 1:18-24, Paul traces for the Roman believers the pathway to uncleanness. The first step away from God was revelation (verse 18). The end of verse 18 says that men know the truth. How? Because “God has manifested it to them” (verse 19). And how has He done this? Verse 20 says, “From the creation of the world.” In other words, God reveals Himself to mankind. That’s where it all begins. Men know God, at first.

The second step away from God is rejection. Verse 21 declares, “When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful but

became empty in their reasoning and their foolish heart was darkened.” The first point says they have the truth of God, and this one says they reject that truth. They glorify Him not as God and they are not thankful to Him as the source of everything.

The third step away from God is rationalization. In verse 22, the Apostle explains, “They profess themselves to be wise and become the most supreme fools.” Man has revelation; he then moves to rejection; and then rationalization.

Fourth, man steps away from God to religion. “He then exchanges the glory of the true God, the incorruptible God, for an idol made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things” (verse 23). Men have the truth; they refuse the truth; they think they know the truth anyway, and then out of their own supposed wisdom they create gods of their own making.

Finally, in their descent from God, men experience reprobation. Having forsaken the Lord who has revealed Himself to man, they are then forsaken by God. The Scripture says, “Wherefore, God gave them up” (verse 24). God literally gives up on men. He abandons them.

This process toward reprobation describes every culture and society since the creation of the world, and this is where we are today in the western world. Men worship idols, and the worship of idols always leaves men as it left them in Romans 1, turned over to immorality, homosexuality, and uncleanness.

If we, God’s Church, are to effectively minister to this broken, bruised, and bleeding society, the world that has turned to idols, we must know God; we must pray with Moses, “Show me Thy glory.” We will only be as effective in His service as our relationship with God will allow. For the sake of those to whom we minister, we must pray “Show me Thy glory.” For the sake of lost souls, under the condemnation of the Lord, we must pray “Show me Thy glory.” To be effective in preaching, teaching, soul-winning, service, and mercy, we must pray “Show me Thy glory.”

But do we want to know Him that much? Tozer wrote, “The lack of true longing after God has brought us to where we are today.” We do not know God these days because we have not made the effort to seek Him, and now we are reduced to human ingenuity, trying to work up from beneath that which can only come down from above. Because we don’t know Him, we

grow busier and busier attempting to make things happen on our own.

Where are the frustrated souls who long for Him to such a degree that they willingly lay aside everything else to seek Him, to pray this prayer with Moses, "Show me Thy glory"? Remember, the prophet Daniel exclaimed that "those who know their God will be strong and take action" (Daniel 11:32). Baptist evangelist Vance Havner once commented, "He who waits on God loses no time."

So what should prompt us to pray "Show me Thy glory"? We pray this prayer because: (1) When prayers are answered we are encouraged to offer larger requests of Him. (2) When communion with God has been granted we are encouraged to seek a broader view of Him. (3) When responsibilities have been increased we are encouraged to long for a deeper knowledge of Him.

2. What reply can we expect when this prayer is offered?

When we seek Him we will find Him, and in finding Him, we will exult in the reaffirmation of His character!

Because of his physical limitations, Moses was unable to view God's glory completely. So God said to him, "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live." And God continued, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:20-23). It was as if he was seeing the afterglow of a jet engine. He saw the radiance of God's presence after He passed by.

Then Yahweh said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you."

What is the glory of God? His goodness! One of God's favorite descriptions of Himself is that "He is good." The closer we dwell near the divine presence, the more we will know that He is good. But our natural tendency is to think that if God is good, and if He loves humankind, then He will make life pleasant for us. Consequently, when things go well for us, we're inclined to believe that God is good, and when they don't, we question His goodness and even His existence. However, our current circumstance is not the standard by which we judge God's goodness.

We are not the center of the universe, not the reference point against

which goodness is determined. It sounds silly even to say it, but we think and act as though God's character shifts and changes with our circumstances. We are not in the position to judge the goodness of God's actions.

The only way we can know whether God is good or not is to know Him, to experience His character firsthand. When we know that God is good, then we will begin to understand that through good times and bad He is working for our good and His glory. Then we will begin to see Him as He turns our tragedies into triumphs, and our sorrows into joy.

This is the form God's goodness takes in the world: He works to bring every individual to a knowledge of Himself and to an active relationship with Himself. This is goodness personified, to experience His love and guidance in our lives. Just rehearse the benefits which He gives you daily (Psalm 103).

We must never allow ourselves a moment's unbelief in regard to His goodness. Whatever else we may question, it is absolutely certain that "He is good, and His mercy endures to all generations." This is that of which Moses needed to be reminded. The people had sinned; and God reaffirmed to him that He is still good.

In finding Him, we will enjoy the revelation of His Word. Moses not only saw something, he heard something; he heard the Word of God. Though the visible magnificence of this theophany is apparent from the text, the emphasis falls on the revelation to Moses of God's sovereign, gracious, and compassionate nature. We read in Exodus 33:19, "And he said, I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Then in Exodus 34:5-7, we're told, "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.'"

God said, "I will proclaim my name" to you. In hearing His name, Moses heard God's own commentary on what the prophet had just seen. "Moses," He declared, "I can't show you who I am completely, but I will tell you who I am completely. And what is His name? I am the LORD."

We know that when our English word LORD is rendered with all upper case letters that the name behind the translation is Yahweh, meaning that God is the great "I am," the God who was, is, and always will be. He is the self-existent One, the all-sufficient One, the eternal One. This God needs nothing outside of Himself in order to exist. If suddenly, somehow, all humanity ceased to be, so that human history remains nothing but a memory in the mind of God, He would not be diminished to any degree; He would continue to enjoy the same quality of life He always has. He is the sum and substance of all being, of all life.

God also said, "My name is merciful God." This phrase means that a God of infinite superiority bends to bless a being of finite inferiority. Then He said that His name is "grace." This is a word of hearth and home; picturing a mother who constantly cares for a sick and suffering child.

To this He added His "long suffering." God is slow-to-anger, a God who takes a breath, who isn't quick to judge. And because His essence is merciful, and gracious, and patient, He is a fountain that overflows with deeds of loving kindness and tender mercies. His goodness is the motivation behind all the blessings He bestows on us every day.

He continues by saying His name is "truth." That denotes His integrity. He is a promise-keeping God who is faithful in every word He utters. And once more He says, "My name is holiness and justice," a God of whom no one can take advantage. What a wonderful declaration of His sovereign, gracious, and good nature.

All Scripture is God's attempt to communicate His essence to fallen mankind. His ultimate statement of His nature is found in Jesus Christ, who is "the express image of the Godhead, in bodily form." He longs to show Himself to the world through His children today. He longs to reveal Himself to those who want Him, and through them, to the ends of the earth.

In finding Him, we will experience a renewal of His covenant. In Exodus 34, God instructed Moses to cut two new tablets of stone, and thereon the Lord rewrote the commandments which Israel had just broken. Then in verse 10, God declares that "I am making a covenant" with the people of Israel. The commandments had been violated, broken, yet thank goodness He will write them again; but this time not merely on tablets of stones, but on fleshy tablets of the heart. This is the God we experience at the cross of Christ. He is a holy God who will judge all sin; and in Christ all sin was judged forevermore. That is the God we reveal to a waiting world.

3. What are the results when we seek even a glimpse of His glory?

As we stand next to Him: (1) We exult in the reaffirmation of His character. (2) We enjoy the revelation of His Word. (3) We experience a renewal of His covenant.

Now, finally, what happens to us when we pray “Show me Thy glory”? When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, Moses did not know it but the skin of his face was unusually illuminated (Exodus 34:29).

After standing near God, viewing the afterglow of His presence, and hearing the name of God spoken by God Himself, Moses came down with the glory of God etched on his countenance. The text tells us that his face was illuminated in a strange way. Coming down from the mountain he was not thinking about himself but of God and what he learned. “And the skin of his face shone.” The Hebrew word translated *shone* simply indicates a general glow. He became what he contemplated. Having beheld God’s glory he now reflected that glory.

Strange, isn’t it? You would think that a fast of 40 days, twice, would not necessarily improve anyone’s appearance. To begin with, Moses was already 80 years old. Add to that, life in the barren wilderness near Sinai under the blazing heat of the midday sun. And then with 80 days of fasting he would obviously look old, worn, and haggard. But far from appearing old and wrinkled, his face had become parchment upon which God had written His glory.

What did this strange glow mean?

First, it meant God’s special favor for Moses. By this God seems to say, “This is My man! I have chosen him above all others.”

Second, it meant God’s special favor for Israel. His illuminated face said to the people of God, “I have accepted your intercessor. You are still my children.” The pardon of God had been written across Moses’ brow. Third, it meant God’s special favor for the world. By this God said to the world, “My man has come with My Word.”

More than anything else, it was the reflection of God’s glory on God’s man. When light shines on a reflector in the dark of night, the reflector catches the light and hurls it farther into the darkness. When we spend the

needed time with God, our lives will catch the radiance of His glory and will reflect it to a lost world; our character and communication will reflect His character and Word.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote an interesting story called "The Great Stone Face." He told of a tiny village nestled in the mountains near an unusual rock formation. At a certain time of the day, and in a certain light, the rocks seemed to present the definition of a man's face.

Legend had it that one day a man with a face like the one etched in the formation would come to town and bring with him peace, prosperity, and hope. One day a little boy heard the story and became enamored with it and began a daily ritual of climbing the mountain and thinking about the coming of the man with "the great stone face." He thought of what the man's coming would mean to the village, what he would be like, and how life there would be changed by his coming.

Years came and went and with it the seasons of the little boy's life. He grew through boyhood, adolescence, young adulthood, maintaining the ritual of climbing the mountain and thinking about the coming of the man with "the great stone face." He lived on through middle age and into old age, continuing to contemplate the legend. By and by, a day came when, as he walked through the village late one evening, everyone started to shout as they gestured toward him, "Look, the man with the great stone face." He became what he contemplated!

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Apostle Paul encourages us with these words, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another." The world needs to see the glory of the Lord, but how will they? They will see His goodness reflected in the faces of those who will spend the time praying with Moses, "O God, show me Thy Glory."

1992 – James Forlines

The Mind of Christ: What Is Needed to Be a Witness to the World

Text: Philippians 2:5-8

I am confused. No, it is not nervousness in standing before thousands of people. I often get perplexed by the flood of information we receive telling us the latest on how we can win our world and cause our churches to grow.

Sociological and demographic studies have flooded us with information on the people we are trying to win: their likes, dislikes, tendencies, and interests. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate greatly the enlightenment. I've read many of the books and attended some of the seminars, and I think I have learned something from all of them.

But, after a while it gets confusing. We all have heard of the Baby Boomers (those born from 1946-1964). They are a part of the largest birth rate ever in America. They have a lot of clout. So much has been written about them. There are television programs designed especially with them in mind. Recently I heard my dad say, "I've heard so much about Baby Boomers I decided that I hated them, until I found out that my two sons were Boomers." If they were the only generation we were worrying about it would be easier. But that is not all!

We also have the Baby Boosters. These are the parents of the Baby Boomers. They were born from 1927-1945. Then we have the Baby Busters. They were born from 1964-1980. After them are the Boomlet Children, the children of the Boomers' children.

Then you have the groups with acronym names. Young Urban Professionals—the Yuppies. The Black Urban Professionals—The Buppies. I suppose, then, that the Pentecostal Urban Professionals are the Puppies.

To add to the confusion, how big your church is affects the methods. Many share my frustration of going to high energy seminars on church growth only to be disappointed. And what about evangelistic efforts in other countries? There is a different methodology yet. And what about the future? Things will change.

I am thankful for those who help us evaluate the ever-changing trends. I think, however, the Navigators have the key. They have a motto that I like, "Anchored to the Rock, and geared to the times." Above all, we must be anchored to the Rock!

So, I started looking to see if there were any principles in God's Word that would transcend culture, time, and location. Are there any that would give some ideas of how to "Witness to Our World"?

As we turn to Philippians 2, I believe God has given us some timeless principles. If we will follow these principles, we can have a positive impact on our world.

Look first at verses 10 and 11. They tell us every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the goal—ultimate glory to God. How are we going to achieve that goal? Paul tells us that as well in the verses leading up to verses 10, 12. It begins in verse 5. We must have the mind of Christ. We must see the world as He sees it. As we do, we will be obedient to His call. Then we will have a biblical vision.

These verses urge us to have the mind of Christ. If we do, we will follow in His steps. These verses list three things we must be willing to do in order to have the mind of Christ. All three are against our human nature. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we do these.

I. We Must Be Willing to Leave Our Safety and Security (Philippians 2:7).

In the throne room of Heaven, Jesus reigned as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The cherubim and seraphim declared His glory. All honored Him as the Son of God. But He left that safety and security to come and pay the price for our sin.

In Ephesians 2, Paul paints a dismal picture of our condition before Christ. He says we were "dead, disobedient, and doomed." Then, in verse 4, one of the greatest verses in the Bible it says, "But God, who is rich in mercy . . ."

God was not content to sit back and let us go over the precipice into eternal damnation. His very nature demanded that He get involved. The hymn writer put it this way,

"He left the splendor of Heaven, knowing His destiny was the lonely hill called Mt. Calvary, where He suffered and died for me.

If that isn't love the ocean is dry, there's no clouds in the sky, and the sparrow can't fly. If that isn't love then Heaven's a myth. There's no feeling like this, if that isn't love."

For those of us who know Christ, we must have His mind. If we do, we will not be able to sit back and let others go to eternal damnation either. Our very nature will demand that we get involved.

I see three problems in the church today that must be addressed for us to leave our safety and security to reach out to others:

A. Fortress Mentality

For some, the church is a place of retreat from the moral decay of the world. It is here that we manifest our spirituality. It is here that we publicly identify with our Lord. It is here where we perform our service for Him.

In effect, we have developed 20th century monasteries. We are "just holding on." We have developed a maintenance mentality which does not fulfill the promise that "the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."

B. Separational Overkill

If I learned anything in Systematic Theology, it is that there are poles of tension—two sides to truth—and they must be balanced.

Second Corinthians 6:17 says, "Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you." But, we can separate so far that we have no contact. We can have no impact without contact.

Hebrews 7:26 says that Christ was "separate from sinners," but we know that He was with sinners constantly. We have a responsibility to develop relationships with unbelievers. The church is not a museum for the display of the saints. It is a hospital for the healing of the spiritually sick.

C. Unintentional Oversight

As a denomination we are still predominantly white, lower, and middle income people in the suburbs and rural areas. I am 110% for Foreign Missions, but we are living in a cross-cultural America now! Do we realize there are eight million international students studying in the United States from nations around the world?

There is a flood of Hispanics, Asians, and people fleeing recently opened Communist countries coming here. We must reach out to them or we are

not even fulfilling the biblical admonition to reach our Jerusalem.

On January 7 of this year, I was listening to a “Focus on the Family” broadcast. There were two ladies on the broadcast named Sarah and Connie. They were part of a village in Beaumont, California, that takes in severely abused children. They specifically referred to a boy who had been raised in a pen with pit bulls and was only able to eat dog food as he ate on all fours.

Dr. Dobson asked them, “How do you do it?” He went on to say that when he worked at the pediatric unit of the University of Southern California’s medical center, there were areas he did not go into much because he did not have the emotional strength to handle it all the time. He asked them, “How are you able to see such terrible abuse all of the time?”

I will never forget their response. They said, “The abuse is terrible and we never get hardened to it. But, in a sense, when we see the children come, we are happy for them. We know what kind of care we are going to give them, and we realize how they have been abused. We at least know these people are safe. We cry, but not for those we have. We cry for those we never see. We cry for those who suffer abuse with no end in sight.”

I thought, “We ought to feel that way for those we never see in church.” Those that we have are being ministered to. But we must somehow reach out to those we never see. We must leave our safety zones, as Jesus did, when He came from Heaven to reach out to our need.

II. We Must Be Willing to Serve (Philippians 2:7).

That is also mentioned in verse seven. Jesus took the form of a servant. When we look at the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, it is not that we see people serving Him as much as we see Him serving them. He is feeding them. He is healing them. He is reaching out and talking to people that no one else would talk.

We need everyone today to understand the biblical role of service—a willing giving of yourself. The Baptist Missionary Union Seal has an ox in the middle with a plow and altars off either side. The motto underneath says, “Ready for Either.”

Our natural man does not like this. We would rather be served. But when we have the mind of Christ, there is a great joy in serving. This is a critical difference between Christianity and other religions. We do not seek

conversion by coercion. We do not try to keep people bound by fear. We do not create superstitions to enslave people. Jesus urges us to serve.

It is in our serving that they see Him. It is in our serving that their hearts are prepared. Through our service we earn the right to be heard. Let me ask you a question. What is your involvement in serving? Are you using that to advance the Kingdom?

Recently, I was on a flight headed to a preaching appointment. I began talking to the young lady sitting beside me. I found out her name was Charlene Wyatt. She was a radiologist, a Southern Baptist, and on her way to a mission hospital in a third-world country for two weeks of her vacation. I thought, wow, there are thousands of Free Will Baptists who could do the same thing.

Sometimes I am afraid we have adopted a mentality that words alone are sufficient to reach people with the Gospel. This isn't the example of Jesus. He not only taught about the Kingdom of Heaven and how to get there. He lived Kingdom principles as an example for us. He met human need and in so doing was able to share eternal principles with His hearers.

In order to have the mind of Christ, we must be willing to leave our safety and security. We also must be willing to become a servant.

III. We Must Be Willing to Sacrifice (Philippians 2:8).

This is found in verse eight, "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Once again, this is not what the natural man wants. We want to have it easy. We want comfort. But let me ask you a question. What if Jesus had had that attitude? All of us would be eternally lost. Every one of us. So let me ask you another question. What will happen if we have this attitude? Remember, we have been given Jesus' ministry of reconciliation.

The story is told of the sinking of the ship the *R.M.S Empress of Ireland*. After being fatally struck by another ship, the vessel sank quickly in the early morning of May 29, 1914. This accident claimed 1,073 lives, making it the deadliest maritime disaster in Canadian history.

Aboard the *Empress of Ireland* were 167 members of the Salvation Army. It is said that they gave their lifejackets to others while saying, "We can die better than you can."

If we are unwilling to sacrifice, many will not hear. They will go out into eternity unprepared to meet God. This world will not be won without sacrifice. So, what is our sacrifice today?

Free Will Baptists have many examples of sacrifice. Our early missionaries went to some challenging areas and endured great extremities with the joy of the Lord as a constant companion. There has been similar sacrifice displayed by those Stateside who have given so that frontline workers could do their job. K. V. Shutes was my mother's pastor in Cordova, Alabama. The following story was passed on to her through some of the Shutes family:

Brother Shutes came to a National Association one year. At that time the missions service was evidently on Sunday evening. He was so moved by the need that he gave all the money he had in the offering. He checked out of the hotel he was staying in and checked into the YMCA where, at that time, he could stay free. He did not eat anything until the National Association was over and he was back at home in Cordova. All he kept was his train ticket back home.

Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice. He gave His life. Jesus is also our example of how to obey God. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies [selves] a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God which is your reasonable service."

Reasonable? What is reasonable? I suppose that depends on what you are talking about. Let's look at an example:

Suppose you are on your way home from the National Association and you hear a strange noise in the engine of your car, and all of a sudden it stops. You tow it to a mechanic, and after looking at it you ask him how much it is going to take to fix it. Suppose he tells you \$15,000. You know what you are going to say? That's unreasonable!

Now, suppose you are driving around the finest most upscale neighborhood in your city. You see a large home with a manicured front lawn. It is beautiful. To your surprise there is a "for sale by owner" sign in the front yard. You walk to the front door and ring the doorbell. The owner comes to the door and you ask him how much he wants for the house. He says, "\$15,000." So, you say, "Well, that's reasonable."

What is the difference. Both are \$15,000. The difference is in the value. One is a house; the other is an engine.

Consider what God has done for us. He created us. When we fell into

sin, He came for us and redeemed us. He is now preparing a place for us. And, praise God, one day He is coming back for us. Knowing all of that, what could He ask of us that would be unreasonable? Nothing!

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all!

Having the mind of Christ will work in any time, any place, and any culture. As we leave our safety and security, reach out in service, and willingly sacrifice, we can truly be an effective witness to our world!

1992 – David Archer

Witnessing to Our World

Text: Luke 4:18

The Gospel of Luke has always been special to me. I appreciate Matthew's picture of King Jesus, Mark's record of the servant Jesus, and John's majestic story of the Eternal Son of God, but my heart is drawn to the Gospel of Luke. Luke is the Gospel of sympathy, love, and compassion. In Luke we meet individual people rather than crowds. Luke is the story of childhood and home of Jesus. It is the Gospel of singing as well as weeping.

Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth after His baptism and the 40 days of the wilderness temptation. He enters the synagogue, walks to the front, opens the book, and reads these words from the Prophet Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Jesus as He announced that He was the fulfillment of this prophecy, and that it was His mission to reach out to:

- Spiritually Bankrupt Souls
- Spiritually Broken Hearts
- Spiritually Bound Sinners
- Spiritually Blind Eyes
- Spiritually Bruised Spirits

Almost half of Luke's Gospel is devoted to the record of our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem. He knew why He was going there, yet Luke 9:51 says, "He steadfastly set his face toward Jerusalem." All along His journey, Jesus met people, individuals to whom He ministered and witnessed.

Good News to the Bankrupt

Jesus speaks of a poverty of the soul and not the body. Much like the rich young ruler who had riches yet was spiritually destitute. We all know people

like this who live in the lap of luxury and yet Hell has them in poverty.

Healing for the Broken

Jesus speaks of the burdened of heart. People much like the woman at the well who was emotionally depressed and mentally stressed. What a good description of today's society. To those people Jesus says, "Come unto me and I will give you rest." He says, "I am the Prince of Peace."

Release for the Bound

I am thinking of Legion, bound by the demons that controlled him. Jesus set him free. What passes for freedom today is actually slavery. People are prisoners of the new morality. Jesus came to free people who are bound by their crimes. Those bound by society's so-called norms of chemical dependency, adultery, homosexuality, and abortion.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

He was bound to the cross to set us free. While on that cross He set the believing thief free. He proclaimed to all, "If the Son hath set you free, you shall be free indeed."

Sight for the Blind

Not a physical blindness like Bartemeaus suffered, rather a spiritual one like Nicodemus. Even though a religious man and schooled in the law, he was blinded from the truth of Jesus the Messiah. Countless souls blinded by Satan need their eyes opened to the truth. Fanny Crosby, though blind physically, had a spiritual sight far beyond limits. Her hymn, "My Savior First of All," reveals that spiritual sight as it proclaims, "I shall know Him. I shall know Him when redeemed by His side I shall stand. I shall know Him. I shall know Him by the prints of the nails in His hand."

Liberty for the Bruised

Emotional and psychological oppression runs rampant in our society.

People bruised by guilt, fear, anxiety, bitterness, hatred, and a multitude of negative emotions. Like the adulterous woman and the woman at the well who had wasted a good deal of their lives

Yes, Luke is a Gospel of people Jesus met. The Spirit of the Lord sent Him to heal, free, restore, and save them. Time constraint allows us to mention just a few of the hurting, helpless, and hopeless people Jesus came to reach. But no story is a more fitting example of Luke 4:18 than the story of Zacchaeus recorded in Luke 19:1-10.

It is fitting to remind you that if we are going follow His example and heed His call, "As my Father has sent me, even so, send I you."

We must continue the work of salvation and restoration of the fallen race. We must:

See as Jesus Saw

That is our Vision! Luke 19:5 says, "He looked up and saw Him." People saw Zacchaeus as a crooked tax collector, a traitor, a turncoat. Jesus saw Zacchaeus as a sinner in need of a Savior. He saw him as bankrupt though wealthy; broken-hearted and lonely; bound by his greed; blinded by worldly possessions, and bruised by the attacks of Satan.

We often see the sin, but Jesus sees the sinner. We treat the symptoms, but Jesus cures the sickness. He wept over Jerusalem's masses and saw them as sheep without a shepherd. We must focus on the souls more than we focus on the sin. As the song says, "People need the Lord. People need the Lord. At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door."

Sit Where Jesus Sat

That is our Mission! Luke 19:7 says, "He went to be the guest of a man that is a sinner." Jesus was willing to go where the sinners are. We, on the other hand, build our buildings and expect the sinners to show up. He spent most of His time "outside" the walls of the Temple at the pool of Bethesda with the cripple, with the Samaritan woman at the well, and on the road to Jericho.

We are in this world but not of this world. We should not be isolated from sinners but insulated from the influence of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are encouraged to go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves inside

the wall of our churches isolated and out of touch with sinners. We will be content to prepare our worship and preach our sermons to the already convinced. We pray, "Lord, if there be any lost in this service, may they be saved today." There aren't! We must go to sinners!

We can spend our time debating Great Commission methodology—how we will go. Debating issues like friendship or life-style evangelism versus confrontational evangelism. Other issues like small groups versus Sunday School. Or, we can concentrate on Great Commission Theology and go into our Jerusalem, our Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts and sit with sinners.

If we are not careful, we spend our time and energy inside the walls of our church—out of touch with the lost and dying just outside. Church people tend to have the "yours, mine, and ours" attitude while the lost perish.

Say What Jesus Said

That is our Provison! Luke 19:10 says, "This day is salvation come to this house." Jesus offered Zacchaeus love, hope, acceptance, and forgiveness. He offered him salvation. He did not speak condemnation. He didn't speak judgment. He spoke salvation.

Jesus treated everyone the same. He lovingly spoke forgiveness to the adulterous woman, the woman at the well, Nicodemus, the rich young ruler, and the list goes on!

I am sure that the conversation Jesus had with Zacchaeus extended beyond what we read here; however, I believe what is recorded is what God, who inspired Luke to write these words, intended for us to hear. Jesus came to a world full of people whose lives are bankrupt, broken, bound, blind, and bruised. He came to save us from our sins.

Seek as Jesus Sought

That is our Compulsion! Luke 19:10 says, "The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." Luke 15 illustrates this point with the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. He asked, "What shepherd who has 99 sheep safe in the fold with one who was gone astray would not go and seek the lost sheep until he finds it?"

It appears at first reading that Zacchaeus found Jesus. He went down the road and he climbed the tree to see this man from Galilee. But in reality, Zacchaeus didn't find Jesus. He had a divine appointment—Jesus found Zacchaeus! He was bankrupt though wealthy. He was broken and lonely, bound by greed and the lust for riches, blinded by doubt and bruised by guilt. And Jesus found him. The song says, "I was lost, but Jesus found me, Found the sheep that went astray, Threw His loving arms around me, Drew me back into His way."

Think about when you were saved. My date with redemption came as a 15-year-old boy. I was the eighth of nine children born into the troubled, godless home of a dairy farmer in northeast Oklahoma in 1951. As a young boy, I was taken to the RLDS Church (Mormon) by my grandmother. It was the only church I really knew growing up.

My mother and siblings and I moved off the farm and to the Widows Colony in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, after the death of my father when I was three. Growing up in a community devoid of God, I was in trouble at an early age. Then I was invited to a tent revival service by a friend in the summer of 1966. It was there I met some loving people. Among them pastors Homer and Waldo Young and Connie Cariker—all preaching the good news that Jesus saves! It was there that I found Jesus. No...He found me!

"I was lost, but Jesus found me, Found the sheep that went astray, Threw His loving arms around me, Drew me back into His way." Yes, Jesus found me...bankrupt but He made me rich...broken but He made me whole...bound but He set me free...blind but He gave me sight...bruised but He healed my wounds.

My prayer is that we become Jesus' eyes and see beyond the sin to the desperate sinner. And we become Jesus' feet and go to the lost and dying world. And we become Jesus' lips and speak salvation to those who are lost. And that we become Jesus' heart and be compelled to seek the lost until we find them.

1993 – Clifford Austin

On Counting the Cost

Text: Luke 14:25-30

“And there went great multitudes with him; and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he has sufficient to finish it? Lest perhaps, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:25-30).

In this passage, Jesus issues tough standards for His followers. His call to discipleship is also a call to life—eternal life. The two calls are conterminous, that is the two calls fall within the same boundary. His call concerns the soul. It is a call to a lifetime commitment. He provides the resources to reap the rewards both in the here and in the hereafter. And, as Jesus illustrates in this parable, when counting the cost to start and then to stop is not only disgraceful but deadly!

In Counting the Cost, Consider the Person Calling.

Because Jesus is Lord, He has the authority to call and demand obedience to the call. In John 3:16, Nicodemus was right in his address to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God” In His response, Jesus confirmed His authority. Descending from Heaven, He has divine authority (verse 13). Through suffering He has redemptive authority (verses 15, 16). Having perfectly obeyed the Father, He has authority of character (verse 16). However, His greatest source of authority is that of love (verse 16).

Supernaturally conceived, Jesus was virgin born. Through the vehicle of a woman the Ancient of Days appeared among men. He was hailed by angels, adored by shepherds, worshipped by wise men. Here was the Christ-child, the incarnate God, divested of divinity and robed in human flesh.

Out of the ivory palaces of Heaven where angels adored Him and the beast and elders hailed Him, He came to the poverty of earth where men

would mock Him and His own would betray, deny, and desert Him. He the creator writhed in the dust from whence He made man to mix His tears and blood to redeem man. For a throne He hanged on a cross. For a diadem He wore a crown of thorns. For a crosier or staff of authority He had nails in His hands. He was the total expression of the mind, the will, and the purpose of God among men. Jesus was the love of Heaven poured forth into the life of earth.

Does the buckling on of armor entitle a man to the character of real bravery, so much as fighting valiantly and conquering his antagonist? Does one single step in the course of righteousness ensure a man the prize of glory?

Does laying the foundation of a house count as a completed work? Does sitting in the grandstands count as a home run? Does announcing your candidacy for a political office count as winning the race? Does diving into a glass of water count as swimming the Atlantic Ocean?

How then do you account for Paul's genuine concern about the possibility of becoming a castaway and his subsequent warning about the unbelief and death of many Hebrews who left Egypt as recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:27 and 10:1-6?

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.

- All baptized unto Moses.
- All did eat same spiritual meat.
- All did drink the same spiritual drink.
- But with many of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.
- Now these things were our examples.

How do you explain the apostasy of Judas? Of Demas? Of fallen angels? In prayer meeting a few weeks ago, a young man in his testimony said, "I don't believe in eternal security, but I sure would like to!" Adam and Eve felt the same way. The first lie Satan ever preached is that you can sin and get by.

In a taped message, one brother succinctly said, "If what you've got don't make you live like you ought, then what' you've got won't take you where you think you're going."

There is Heaven to gain and Hell to shun. Man has only one soul. It is the most precious commodity he holds. The soul shall endure for eternity in Heaven or Hell. When as a boy visiting my father's hometown of Louisa, Kentucky, I was fascinated by a solemn question positioned over the courthouse entrance: "Reader. Where wilt thou spend eternity?" It was a good question, although eternity cannot be spent. It has no end, but Jesus places the choice of where a man shall exist for eternity squarely on his own shoulders!

In most instances the choice an individual makes also affects others. Family and friends are influenced by one's decision. The story is told of a father who was trudging through snow to the local bar. Looking behind, he saw his little son jumping from one of father's steps to another. He gleefully exclaimed, "Daddy, I'm walking in your footsteps!" Where are we leading those we love?

In John 6, Jesus declared that He was the bread of life, Heaven's honey cake for man's hungry soul. Hearing Jesus described as the Bread of Life, many of those listening misunderstood His figures of speech—the metaphors describing His message. He was simply saying that unless we totally absorb His words, His life, and His purpose into our being, we have no spiritual life. Many said, "This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?" (verse 60). Verse 66 sadly relates that many of His disciples—like many modern disciples when the message gets tough—"went back, and walked no more with him."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a 20th-century Christian martyr. On April 9, 1945, he was hanged on Hitler's gallows at Flossenbug, Germany. A Christian minister who opposed Hitler's Nazism, as a prisoner he faithfully served the sick and dying in concentration camps. Before his death, he wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship* in which he described the impoverished condition of German spiritual life. It sounded like America's spiritual life today. Bonhoeffer stated that cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. Cheap grace is essentially the preaching and practice of:

- Forgiveness without repentance.
- Baptism without church discipline.
- Justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.
- Grace without works.

Bonhoeffer further declared that only he who believes is obedient and

that only he who is obedient believes. He wrote that faith is only real when there is obedience and becomes faith in the act.

These ideas were not new to Bonhoeffer. Jesus demanded a working faith. Listen to His commands: Follow Me. Launch out into the deep. Fish for men. Rise up and walk. Stretch forth thy hand. Go and sin no more. Come forth. Go wash. Go show. Go tell. Son, go work. Come down. Come to Me. Take up thy cross. Today wilt thou? Go preach!

We stand and split hairs over faith versus works when Jesus said that even believing is work. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

Among the exhortations of Saint Paul are these:

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12b, 13).

"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6: 16).

Jesus promised, "As a token of my affection, sincerity and fidelity, I confer upon thee the gift of the Holy Spirit and with all the wealth of Heaven I thee endow."

The bride holds forth her hand enflamed by the gift of the Holy Spirit and solemnly repeats, "I will wear this ring as a symbol of my constant faith and abiding love; with this ring I thee wed, with all my earthly goods I thee endow."

You can almost hear the Father say, "Forasmuch as My only beloved Son and His bride have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before Me and the world, and have declared the same by joining their hearts through the new birth, I pronounce that they are husband and wife. Those whom I have joined together let not man put asunder!"

The bride is named, "My Disciple!" The newlyweds turn toward the world and as the crowning redemptive act is displayed, I hear a spectator ask, "Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? And whence did they come?"

An elder responds, "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the

lamb" (Revelation 7:13,14).

These are they who are the light of the world. These are they who are the salt of the earth. These are they who are the leaven of society. These are they who are the Lord's living epistles. These are they who are the trumpeting voices of the redemptive work of Calvary. These are they who have their feet shod with the Gospel of peace. These are they who carry hope to the interface of human despair. These are they who are the contact point where the rubber wheels of Heaven strike the hard surface of earth.

A probable recessional for such a wedding would be:

How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in his excellent word.

What more could he say than to you he hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus hath fled.

That soul who to Jesus hath fled for repose, I'll never, no never, desert to his foes.

That soul though all hell shall endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

The church is claimed, named, and enflamed. She is accepted, excepted, and expected. Expected to live out the principles of Christ in this world. Expected to demonstrate through their own homes that Christianity works. Expected to challenge each other to be the best possible person that we can be. Expected to share the word of hope with the lost.

Naked and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

He now is looking to the left side. There in the crowd! I can see my old college professor. He made fun of religion and invited anyone who believed in Hell to come to his office and try to save his poor soul. His face is etched in horror.

There are the murders, the whoremongers, the liars, the adulterers, the cheats, the idolaters, the hypocrites, the drunks, the sorcerers and all unbelievers. And, sitting over in a corner is Satan. He is laughing and mocking those whom he has deceived.

Jesus says, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in;

naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not“ (Matthew 25:41-43).

Over the door through which the doomed and the damned must pass are written the words, “Abandon all hope ye who enter here!”

Conclusion:

In closing, let me remind you that in counting the cost:

1. Jesus has the authority to call and demand obedience.
2. He challenges us to the greatest pursuit of life.
3. As Lord of all, He must have preeminence.
4. He through a life of rigorous discipline forms our character for eternity.
5. And, He encourages us ever upward with the rewards of Heaven.

Just think of the words of the old song: “Often I’m hindered on my way, burdens so heavy I can hardly pray. Then I hear Jesus so sweetly say, Heaven will surely be worth it all.”

1993 – Wendell Walley

Christ the Wall Breaker

Text: Matthew 8:1-15

Imagine that it is Saturday night, and you have had a busy week. Sunday is approaching fast. You studied when you could, but you still do not have a message. Sermons keep popping in your mind—a dime a dozen, but still no message grips your heart.

Sunday is bearing down, and you are about to panic because you have to say *something*. Relax! It's not as bad as you think. True, you have to say something, but it's better than that. You have something to say; you have the greatest message on earth—life giving, life changing and full of authority.

Life is full of barriers, visible and invisible. Some are designed to keep people out to provide safety and privacy. Others form barriers based on sex, age, membership, education, status, and more. Even Heaven has walls and entrance requirements. But Jesus is the great wall breaker!

Matthew's material may be viewed as more theological than chronological. He is making a statement by his arrangement of the divinely inspired materials included in his Gospel. That is especially true in the text that forms the basis for this message.

Careful study unveils the presentation of the King in chapters 1-4, the principles of His Kingdom in chapters 5-7, and the power and authority of the King in chapters 8, 9. These chapters portray 10 miracles exhibiting the "touching Jesus."

Miracles are sermons in action, and like parables they help you see the sermon. In these two chapters, they are arranged in triplicates with discipleship lessons serving as dividing buffers in between. The healing Jesus has both the power and the desire to help even the most excluded.

Christ's grace reaches even to the most ostracized of society—unclean lepers (Matthew 8:1-4). The fate of lepers is portrayed throughout Scripture for they were considered unclean in the community and before God. They were people under a curse (Leviticus 13,14), required by law to cover their face and cry "Unclean, unclean!" to protect the community from spiritual

pollution by contact. Lepers were excluded from walled cities and forbidden to enter the Temple.

Despite the barriers, this leper's faith in Jesus is declared in his cry "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (verse 2). His observation was reserved, for he said "If thou wilt" not "If you can." It was clear and confident, for he declared "Thou canst." We may pray but not command or prescribe.

The favor the leper received and the fact that "Jesus put forth His hand and touched him" (verse 3), is astonishing. Had Jesus stepped back several steps and merely spoken words of healing, it would have been a totally different miracle. The touch of Jesus spoke volumes. For the first time since becoming ill, the leper was being touched not shunned, accepted not rejected, included not excluded.

The whole Gospel is contained in that touch, and by placing this miracle first in his Gospel, Matthew was saying something—Jesus touches first those we would touch last...if at all. Jesus was demonstrating His evangelistic method by showing that believable evangelism communicates its love by contact and identification with those it seeks to reach. Modern research tells us that tone of voice and body language make up 92% of communication. Words make up only eight percent. Talk is cheap unless it is supported by complementing actions.

The story concludes with Jesus instructing the cleansed leper to go show himself to the priest for a testimony to them. Too many are willing to go and tell but they are void of the evidence to back up their story. Too few show the essential evidence of a changed life. Both are needed as we go and tell. Actions alone are unclear. Words alone are unimpressive.

The second miracle in the Gospel of Matthew regards a Gentile centurion who considered himself unworthy for Jesus to enter his house (verses 5-13). Only a leper was more unclean than a Gentile who could enter the city but not the Temple. They were confined to the outermost court, the Court of the Gentiles.

The concern of the centurion for his servant is impressive: "Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented" (verse 6). In that culture, no one interceded for servants. Their life was no more valuable than an animal.

The reaction of Jesus is once again compassionate and immediate. "I will

come and heal him" (verse 7). The message that the church should have burned into its memory is that Jesus is extremely eager to help. He gives twice who gives quickly.

The stunning faith of the centurion draws commendation from Jesus. Following the offer of Jesus to come to his house, the centurion said, "Speak the word only" (verse 8), setting the stage for the first long distance healing in the Gospels. Oddly enough, it was prompted by a Gentile, and Jesus marveled, saying, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel" (verse 10).

This is the first explicit mention of faith in the New Testament, and of all the virtues of those who come to the Lord, He praises faith alone. Faith is the channel of blessing. Christ is the source, and faith is what we need most since we always encounter an eager Lord.

The centurion understood authority and the power of words associated with it. He knew that as he spoke with the authority of Rome, so Jesus spoke with the authority of the Father. We need confidence in His Word, not in the power of our ability. The power of the spoken word was established in the beginning when He spoke and the worlds came into being (Hebrews 11:3). His word is still just as powerful. The story of the centurion also provides a wonderful example of the power of intercession on behalf of others.

The third outsider in this passage was a woman, Peter's mother-in-law, illustrating that Jesus is just as eager to touch and heal the unequal (verses 14, 15). Women were not allowed as far inside the Temple as Jewish men and have been referred to as half-castes in Israel. Even in the synagogues, women were regularly placed behind screens to the rear, as in modern Muslim mosques.

One of 18 prayers prayed by devout Jewish men each day was a prayer of thanks that they were not born a woman, a Gentile, or a leper. In Matthew's account, no petition or intercession is made for her, nor does she request healing for herself. Absolutely no conditions are set forth here in the text leaving the impression that Jesus simply wanted to heal her.

Only eternity will reveal how many times God in His sovereignty blessed, protected, and healed us simply because He is a kind, loving, and merciful Heavenly Father eager to run to our rescue. When Jesus entered Peter's house, He saw his mother-in-law lying there sick with a fever and He immediately and eagerly touched her hand and the fever left her.

Neither of these three miracles was the result of a specific request. Each was unsolicited and unmerited.

The woman got up and immediately began serving Him. Rabbis forbade women to serve them lest they become accustomed to being around men. But it was not her service that released His grace. It was His grace that released her service. Some rush to serve God who have not first been touched by Him.

All three of Jesus' first miracles were grace healings of outsiders—a leper, a Gentile, and a woman. The reach of the church should be no less inclusive. Who are the outcasts in your community today—AIDS victims, prostitutes, the chemically dependent, migrant workers, rebellious teens?

Jesus breaks down walls and barriers. First, He broke down the outer wall letting in the leper who was physically unclean. Then, He broke down the wall of the Court of the Gentiles letting in the racially unworthy. Next, He broke down the wall of the Court of Women clearing the way for the sexually unequal.

The death of Jesus split the veil of the Temple letting “whosoever will come to the water of life freely.” Under grace there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, free nor servant. We are all one in Christ.

Ravi Zacharias tells the following story. In 1974, a few weeks before Cambodia fell, he was preaching in Phnom Penh and went to see a play. In the play, a prince had stolen the wife of a peasant who was newly married. The prince refused to give her back and told the woman that if she said this man was her husband, he would kill him in front of her.

When the peasant went to the king to ask that the prince return his wife, the king said, “Let’s call her in and ask her.” She came in and said “That man is not my husband. The prince is.” The peasant was heartbroken.

A priest jumped into the scene and said, “Your honor, I have a medicine. When both men drink it, they will have to tell the truth in 10 minutes.” Both men drank it then he said, “Since one of you is going to die, each of you may spend five minutes with the girl.”

They hung a huge barrel on a rod, and they were to hold each end of it and not have contact with each other. One held one end, the other held the opposite end of the rod as they talked. The peasant spoke with the woman first. The woman said, “Please forgive me. The only reason I said what I did is to try to save your life.”

The peasant objected that he would rather die than lose her.

Then the prince spent five minutes with her. He said, "If you say that man is your husband, we will kill you and him."

Then the magic happened. The barrel popped open, and a little boy stepped out. The "medication" was only a fake. He had secretly recorded the two conversations and handed the evidence to the priest. He read it aloud and said, "King, your son is a liar. The peasant is telling the truth."

The evangelist admits that he was ready to celebrate until the final tragic moments of the play took a surprise turn. As they left he said to his non-Christian interpreter, "What was missing in that play?"

The interpreter replied, "Mr. Zacharias, what was missing in that play was a savior, no one to take up the cause of the needy."

Our great privilege as Christians is to tell the lost of a Savior for the unclean, the unworthy, and the unequal. Let us sing with new conviction and appreciation the wonderful hymn written by the converted slave trader, John Newton: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

1994 – Kenneth Frisbee

The Greatness of God

Text: Psalm 104:1-4

I. Introduction

- A. The more we try to declare the greatness of God, the more convinced we are of our own inadequacy.
- B. His greatness is shown through Jesus, from the virgin birth to the Cross.
- C. His greatness will be demonstrated in His glory when He returns.

II. Body

- A. He is great in creation (Job 26:7).
 - 1. Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God...." Genesis 2:1: "His created work was completed...."
 - 2. Ephesians 3:9: "God created all things by Jesus." John 1: 1, 2: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and not anything was made that He did not make."
 - 3. Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made...and all the host by the breath of His mouth."
 - 4. Three Heavens: Genesis 1:20; 2 Peter 3:10; 2 Corinthians 12:2; Psalm 19:1.
- B. He is great enough to love the whole world (John 3:16).
 - 1. God is love.
 - 2. "God So loved the world...."
 - 3. Jesus said, "I will drink the cup."
- C. He is great enough to answer prayer (John 14:13).
 - 1. Jesus made many promises to us if we pray.
 - 2. Jeremiah 33:3: "Call unto me...I will answer."

3. Matthew 7:7: "Ask, and it shall be given: Seek and you shall find; Knock, and it shall be opened."

D. He is great enough to write a perfect Book.

1. Sixty-six books; 40 Writers.

2. He used imperfect men to write a perfect Book because He is perfect.

3. Jesus is the Living Word.

4. The Bible is the written Word of God.

5. A perfect book to be saved by, lived by, and die by.

E. He is great enough to defeat the devil (1 John 4:4).

1. "Greater is he that is within you than he that is within the world."

2. God will defeat the devil within you.

III. Conclusion

A. He is great enough to save you, keep you, and give you a home eternal.

1. Only one Savior according to Acts 4:12, "Only one name whereby we must be saved."

2. There is no other way but His way.

a. Not church membership, good works, ordinances, or studying catechism

b. John 14:6.

B. Prayer of Invitation.

1995 – Keith Burden

Revive the Redeemed

Text: Psalm 107:1-3

“O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.”

The matter of what produces a revival has been, and will be addressed during this convention. Those of us who are directly involved in the ministry of the local church are especially interested in this aspect of revival. But I would like to shift the focus of our attention this evening to another area which I believe is of equal, and perhaps even greater importance—how to perpetuate a revival.

I am confident that all of us recognize the fact that while certain scriptural principles figure into this equation of spiritual renewal, there are also other factors which cannot be predicted, programmed, or produced through human effort. I am talking about the dimension of revival that is totally dependent upon a special, sovereign, supernatural act of God! I am convinced that God has more to do with revival than we do.

That fact, however, does not entirely eliminate man from the process that leads to a moral awakening. Once God the Holy Spirit ignites the fires of revival, it becomes incumbent upon those of us within the church to keep the fire burning. The text I read just moments ago deals specifically with this vital issue.

When genuine revival comes to the church, every thread and fiber within her will be touched by the rejuvenating power of God. The Psalmist identifies two key areas that are profoundly affected when the fires of revival begin to blaze. They can neither be ignored nor neglected if revival is to be produced or perpetuated.

In order for us to understand and appreciate these two key areas, it is important that we have at least a basic familiarity with the historical background and context of this psalm.

This psalm is without a title, and its author is unknown. The occasion on which it was composed is not totally clear. Most scholars agree, however, that it was probably written by one of the exiles returning from the captivity at Babylon, and that the psalm was designed to be used at the rededication of the Temple after the restoration. It would eventually become one of the standard songs of praise used in worship services.

In view of this, I believe our text makes it clear that revival will affect the worship of the redeemed. Verse one indicates that at least two areas of our worship will be affected by revival.

To begin with, revival will affect our attitude toward worship.

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord.” Do you see the attitude I’m talking about in that phrase? Many of our churches approach worship with the wrong attitude. Most folks come to service with the idea of getting from the Lord instead of giving to the Lord. When the average churchgoer enters the sanctuary on Sunday morning, he brings a consumer mentality into the worship service, a “What’s in it for me?” attitude. He comes, not primarily to bless the Lord, but rather to be blessed by the Lord. Tragically, much of our worship has become more “me” centered than “God” centered.

This attitude is graphically illustrated by Peter and John’s encounter with the lame man at the Temple gate in Acts 3. Like him, too many of us look at the preacher expecting to receive something when, in reality, we ought to come expecting to give something.

In the October 1993 issue of *Reader’s Digest*, J. Allan Petersen wrote an article about wrong attitudes in marriage that beautifully parallels what I’m talking about here.

He says, “Most people get married believing a myth—that marriage is a beautiful box full of all the things they have longed for: companionship, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, friendship. The truth is that marriage, at the start, is an empty box. You must put something in before you can take anything out. There is no love in marriage; love is in people, and people put it into marriage. There is no romance in marriage; people have to infuse it into their marriages. A couple must learn the art and form the habit of giving, loving, serving, praising—keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will empty.”

And so it is with our worship. Is it any wonder that our church services have become so lackluster, predictable and lifeless? It should come as

no surprise given our attitude of always receiving but never giving back anything to God in return. If we could reverse that one attitude, it would revolutionize our worship services and revival fires would begin to burn across our denomination!

Furthermore, revival will affect our approach to worship. A good deal of today's worship is one-dimensional. But our text suggests that biblical worship has at least three dimensions.

First, biblical worship will affect our volition. In other words, it involves an act of the human will. The psalmist willingly gave thanks to the Lord. His expression of gratitude and praise was the result of a willing heart...not a sense of duty, obligation or responsibility. The Bible is clear—God loves a cheerful or willing giver.

Second, biblical worship will affect our emotions. When the writer of this psalm contemplated the goodness of God, it created a ground swell of emotion within him.

Why do I believe that? Because he could not stop talking about this aspect of God's divine nature. Four different times, in verses 8, 15, 21, and 31, the writer makes that same soul-stirring proclamation, "Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" He was obviously impressed by the fact of God's goodness.

Worship that focuses on the divine nature of God will stir the emotions. I'm not talking about the carnal, superficial manipulation of people's emotions through music or preaching that exalts human experience over inspired truth. Those kinds of emotional outbursts do not impress me or the Lord.

But when a man or woman comes face to face with the reality of God's divine nature, as it is revealed through biblical music and preaching, under the anointing of God's Spirit, you can't help but have your emotions profoundly affected. There is nothing wrong with crying, shouting or any other emotional expression when it is motivated on that basis.

Third, biblical worship will affect our intellect. Biblical worship will not just cause us to exercise our will and express our emotions. It will force us to think. Unfortunately, many of us do not want to do that when we go to church.

I submit that you cannot contemplate such a great Bible doctrine, for

instance, the mercy of God, without having your mental powers challenged. This great theological truth demands that we use our brain. The individual who shifts his mind into neutral when he enters the house of God will never be able to experience true spiritual worship in its fullest biblical sense.

Mark it down, my friend, whenever you bring a giving attitude into the presence of God, and you follow this three-dimensional approach as you worship Him, you are destined to experience personal renewal on a level you've never known before.

The second key area our text identifies is this: revival will affect the witness of the redeemed. I need to point out something here before I proceed any further. Vital worship and witnessing go hand in hand. The two are inextricably linked together. You cannot have one without the other. Show me a church that has an improper or distorted view of evangelism, and I will show you a church that, more likely than not, has a problem in its attitude and approach toward worship. Our focus on the lost will never be correct until we have an appropriate focus on the Lord. Once we truly begin to worship God, we are then ready to witness to others about Him.

Revival will affect at least three areas of our witness. First, revival will affect our motivation. It must be correct. This is reflected in the phrase in verse 1, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so," or literally, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say this."

This phrase suggests that the redeemed are to bear witness of God's goodness and mercy of their own free will. They are not pressured, pushed or prodded; they do not have to be shamed or embarrassed. They take the initiative. They share the good news because they want to.

What creates that desire? What motivates them? Verse one tell us it is gratitude. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord." Frankly, I've never found any other motivation for witnessing that has much long-term effectiveness. Folks who share their faith for reasons other than being thankful for His goodness and mercy usually don't stay at the task of evangelism over the long haul.

Second, revival will affect our message. It must be clear. In a word, ours is a message of redemption. Redemption is the result when God exercises His mercy in a sinner's life. Redemption characterizes the people of God. Notice that the psalmist referred to them as the "redeemed of the Lord."

When he speaks of those "whom He hath redeemed from the hand of

the enemy," he is doubtless thinking of how God had delivered him and others from Babylonian captivity. God had rescued them from the power of the enemy. The Lord saved them and did not allow their enemies to destroy them. What is said here is also true (in the most literal sense) of those who have been saved, and been delivered spiritually.

This is not an endorsement of one evangelistic method over another. There are a variety of effective personal evangelism programs. But, regardless of the approach, they all must share one thing in common—they must extol the virtues of God's plan of redemption, and do so in the clearest way possible.

Third, revival will affect our mission...it must be cooperative. The Babylonian captivity had resulted in the dispersion of God's people. They had literally been scattered to the four winds.

The task of communicating this message of hope, this "mission" if you please, had come to serve as a rallying point for the redeemed. Although they had been divided by geographic boundaries, language barriers, cultural differences and basic philosophic views, they now had to put aside their differences, and come together, joining hands to work cooperatively in the cause of taking this message of deliverance to the rest of the world.

That, my friends, is the great challenge that lies before us as a denomination. Are we willing, in spite of our differences, to accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and work together to take this message to a lost world? Failure to do so will hinder the growth of our movement, but more tragic than that, multitudes will perish without having heard the message of hope; a message they could have heard had we been willing to cooperate.

George Sweeting tells in his book, *The No-Guilt Guide to Witnessing*, that during a serious shortage of currency in Great Britain, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) selected a group of men to search for silver to meet the need. Several months later they filed this report: "We have searched the empire in vain to find silver. To our dismay, we found none except in the great cathedrals, where the saints are constructed of choice silver."

When he heard that discouraging report, Cromwell issued this order: "Let's melt down the saints and put them into circulation." Sweeting concludes, "That's our need today!"

Yes, we all need a "meltdown" brought on by a burning compassion for

lost sinners and a fiery zeal motivated by love to lead them to Christ. But how? Where must this “meltdown” take place?

I submit that it must begin at the house of God as we worship. With the proper attitude and approach in our worship, God can melt our hearts and put us into circulation as His witnesses. May our collective prayer this evening be, “Oh God! Let the meltdown begin here tonight.”

1995 – Roger Harwell

Revive the Redeemed

Text: Micah 6:8

Would you please take God's Word and open to Micah 6:8. When you have found it, look up here. Three days after Easter, April 19, 1995. We were absolutely, totally, numbingly shocked as word began to spread through our community, our homes, our churches. The unthinkable had happened.

A massive bomb exploded at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The explosion brought not only a building crashing down but also brought so many lives, so many hopes, so many dreams, crashing down with it. Two Free Will Baptist men (Steve Curry, a deacon in the Calvary Free Will Baptist Church and Jerry Parker, a member of the Pleasant Hill Free Will Baptist Church) were among those killed. We began to think. "What is happening in our world? What is happening in America? In the very heart land of America?" We began to ask, "Are we safe? Is anybody safe? What can we do?"

The Bible says in Micah 6:8, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Our theme today is "Revive the Redeemed." If there ever was a time the Church needs to be revived, it is now! But so many do not care. I am afraid we are like the man who was asked "What is the biggest problem in the church today? Ignorance or Apathy?"

He replied, "I don't know, and I don't care." Well, I believe in a God who knows and a Savior who cares.

The redeemed need to be revived. We need revival. When we look closely at our theme, we remember that *revive* is a Christian word. The lost are not revived. They are dead in trespasses and sin. The lost need to be resurrected. They need to be born again.

It is the Christian, the member of the family of God, who needs to be revived.

Revive is a church word. It is an assembly turning hearts and hands

upward to receive God's goodness and Heaven's blessing. Revival is not getting the roof off. Revival is getting the walls down. When we can say, "Pray for me; I hurt, I have a need" and not be met with judgment.

To dwell up above with those that we love,

Oh, that will be glory

To live here below with those that we know,

Oh, that's another story.

Let me say this about our theme, "Revive the Redeemed."

It is not about trying to revive the world or save the world. For those who are hoping to save the world, all I can say is you have a misplaced hope. Learn this about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was never intended to save civilization from wreckage. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was intended to save men from the wreckage of civilization.

That's what we are here for—to save people out of this world. I believe we ought to do all we can to alleviate human suffering, to bring peace and righteousness to this world. We ought to do that, but if that is all you do, you are only rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*. This world is headed to judgment.

Our text, Micah 6:8, has been called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Some time ago, while praying about this message, the Lord impressed me to use Micah 6:8 for my text today.

May I share six simple keys that have helped me prepare this message and perhaps will help you as you study God's Word. As you read, ask yourself:

1. Is there a promise to claim?
2. Is there a lesson to learn?
3. Is there a blessing to enjoy?
4. Is there a command to obey?
5. Is there a sin to avoid?
6. Is there a new thought to carry with me?

In this passage I want us to see: what God reveals, what God requires, and what God restores.

I. What God Reveals

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good?"

Question: "What is good?"

Question: "How do we become good?"

Question: "Can we behave ourselves into Heaven?"

This is an age-old question. "What has God revealed about being good?"

If you have been in church very long, I am sure you will remember the Bible story of the rich young ruler. He said to Jesus, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus replied, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God."

Jesus was telling this young man that you cannot "behave yourself" into Heaven. Now, this young man claimed to be good. He claimed to have kept all the commandments. But Jesus asked him to do one thing, and his refusal revealed what he really wanted and where his treasure really was.

Suppose you and I went to the shopping mall and asked average Jane and Joe, "What do you have to do to go to Heaven?" Most of their answers would be, "Be good, do well, mind your own business, keep the golden rule, treat your neighbor right, and behave yourself."

But if you were to start with Adam and Eve, go through all of human history and take all the best traits and make one person, that individual would still have to kneel at the cross in order to go to Heaven.

What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! Precious is the flow

That makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know,

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Remember, the Bible says that it is not according to your fortune, but according to your faith be it unto you.

Nature forms us; sin deforms us. Education informs us; penitentiaries try to reform us, but only Jesus can transform us.

James said, "Faith without works is dead, being alone." Don't tell me you are saved. Don't tell me you are trusting God. Don't tell me you are on your way to Heaven if your faith has not transformed your life.

God reveals that you are a sinner and you need a Savior. "He hath showed thee, oh man, what is good."

II. What God Requires

"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

A. To do justly

Jesus said, in Matthew 23:23, "You have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith."

I have been serving the Lord and Free Will Baptists in the state of Missouri for more than 20 years. Most of you know Missouri as the "Show-Me State." I'm sure you have read or heard about Mark Twain and Tom Sawyer. Missouri is the state that gave America President Harry Truman and his "The buck stops here" slogan. Many know these things. However, there is another story, a true story about Missouri that is not so well known.

Some years ago, a Missouri farm boy by the name of Fred Hicks was on an FFA trip to New York City. Fred was introduced to a New York banker by the name of James A. Cobb. The New York Banker began to laugh at the Missouri farm boy. Someone asked him, "What's so funny?"

He said, "Do you know what we do with Missouri hicks in New York City?"

The farm boy replied, "No sir, but I know what we do with cobs in Missouri."

Jesus did not tell us how to treat hicks from Missouri or Cobbs from New York, but He did tell us in Luke 10, how a Samaritan treated a stranger. We call that man the Good Samaritan.

There are three classes of people that Jesus talked about in that story.

1. The Beater-uppers
2. The Passer-uppers
3. The Picker-uppers

The beater-uppers were the thieves who robbed this man and left him. The passer-uppers were the Priest and Levite who had no compassion, no concern. The picker-upper was the Good Samaritan.

What does the Lord require? But to do justly. What did Jesus say? "You have neglected justice."

We need more Good Samaritans in our churches today. Are you a passer-upper or a picker-upper?

B. To love mercy

President Jimmy Carter read this part of Micah 6:8 at his inauguration. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy."

Remember, we are not just saved *from* some things. We are saved *for* some things. Once a person has experienced the mercy of God, He becomes a merciful person.

The spirit of the world is anything but Christian. We are too much like the little girl crying because her little brother broke her doll. Mother said, "Your brother said he was sorry. I hope you will forgive him."

She said, "All right, I'll forgive him, but I could forgive him a lot easier if I could swat him one first."

We always want to fight back, hurt in return for hurt. Yet, this is not what Jesus did. To get God's mercy for our sins, we must not harbor resentment and grudges. They eat away our soul and destroy our peace with God and effectiveness as a believer.

The spirit of mercy is reflected in a story I heard recently. In Middle Tennessee, a 14-year-old boy broke into three country stores and stole some rather insignificant things. He was caught, brought before the judge and jury for trial. The first two testimonies came from two of the men who owned the stores.

The first said, "Boys will be boys. Release him. When I was a boy, I stole some watermelons and other things, and I understand the temptation."

The second owner said, "The law is the law. He is a criminal. Punish him

severely so it will teach him a lesson.

The third store owner was a frail, small, older woman. She turned from the judge to talk to the boy, whose name was Billy. "I'm more concerned about you, Billy, than I am about the robbery. I can't believe what happened the other night is all there is to you. There is a better boy underneath."

She asked the judge to convict him but parole him to her. "I'd like to see what I can do to help him and keep this from happening again."

She gave him the time and love no one else gave. Today, Billy is an outstanding Christian businessman in a city in Tennessee.

Sam Jones once said, "I used to have a hard time forgiving people until I made up my mind that I was not going to fall out with anyone until that person had treated me worse than I had treated Jesus Christ."

People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

C. To walk humbly

"What doth the Lord require of thee...but to walk humbly."

John Maxwell tells the story of Howard Nagle who was spending some time with his 12-year-old grandson Chris. During their days together, Howard tried to teach him Micah 6:8.

As Chris was getting the verse down pat, a thought struck him, "But Grandpa," he said, "I don't quite understand. It would be hard to be humble walking with God."

Someone has well said that, "Humility is the ability to see ourselves as God describes us."

During the 1970s, Muhammad Ali reigned as the heavyweight boxing champion for most of the decade. No one was more aware of his greatness than Ali himself. He called himself the king, Superman, and on countless occasions reminded everyone, "I am the greatest."

After boarding an airplane one day, however, Ali met his match. The flight attendant was walking up the aisle making sure everyone had their seatbelts fastened. When she noticed Ali had not fastened his, she asked him to do so.

He just grunted, "Humph! Superman don't need no seat belt!" Unimpressed, the flight attendant just smiled and said, "Sir, Superman

don't need no airplane."

Ali buckled his seat belt.

The Bible says, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." The New Testament tells us to be clothed with humility. The Greek word for clothed means "To tie a knot."

That is to tie on a servant's apron. Remember the first Lord's Supper? Jesus took a towel and a basin of water and began to wash the disciples' feet. When He came to Peter, he refused the Lord at first. Jesus told Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head."

Suppose Jesus were here today and said to you, "May I wash your feet?" Suppose Jesus said, "Will you wash my feet?"

According to Matthew 18:20, Jesus is here: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Would you like to wash His feet today? You can, according to Matthew 25:40. "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

III. What God Restores

We have seen what God reveals. We need a birth from above not a boost from beneath. We have seen what God requires: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly.

But how does God restore? Second Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

When we get to Heaven, I believe we will wonder why we didn't pray more. The passage we just read is one of the greatest Scriptures on restoration and revival. And the key to this verse is "Pray and seek my face." Someone has said, "We can do more than pray after we have prayed; but we can do no more than pray until we have prayed."

Luke 18:1: "And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Philippians 4:6: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

First Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing."

Finally, I speak of our church and our denomination. Whether we live or die, and the lost of our people, whether they are saved or perish without Christ, is determined by whether we care enough to pray or are filled with indifference. We have many assignments, but our first and primary assignment is always to have a compassionate, prayer-filled heart that seeks after those who do not know Christ as a living Savior. This is our present and greatest need. We must have a burdened heart, a face that knows tears, and the prayer that the lost might be saved.

I believe Free Will Baptists can have revival, and it could start right here in Kansas City, Missouri.

1995 – James Munsey

What Are You Doing? Why Are You Here?

Text: 1 Kings 19:1-18

In 1963, when I was 13 years old, my dad took me to my first national convention. It was in Detroit, Michigan. I don't remember who preached, but Bill Gardner was there. I could not believe a man could sing like Bill Gardner. My dad bought one of his records, and I took that record home and listened to it over and over. It was such a blessing to me. It is an honor to preach tonight after Bill Gardner sang. Brother Bill, I thank God for you, and for the example that you've given us, and the ministry God has given you.

I want you to open your Bibles to 1 Kings 19. I want to thank everybody. There must have been two or three hundred people who told me they're praying for me and praying for this service. I believe something important could happen tonight in this service. I sense an urgency about this meeting. I want to ask you, whoever you are, young or old, to listen to the voice of God tonight. If God is speaking to you, there is a reason.

Let's look in 1 Kings 19. You know that after King David, his son Solomon reigned, and after him, Solomon's son Rehoboam reigned. The kingdom was divided, and there was spiritual decline. The glory, height, and the zenith of the days of David had fallen off into the sunset and the nation of Israel was in spiritual decline. God took the kingdom away from the house of David because of the obstinance of Rehoboam and gave the bigger portion of it to Jeroboam and the nation of Israel.

From that point on, it was Israel and Judah. In the southern kingdom of Judah, Rehoboam continued to rule. After him, others ruled until finally Omri took the kingship, and his son Ahab after him. And, of course, Ahab is the one who took a queen of Tyre and Sidon, Jezebel, and they became synonymous with wickedness, idolatry, moral breakdown, and destruction.

Something happens in I Kings 18 that has never happened anywhere. Certainly there's no parallel to it anywhere in the Word of God. Elijah the prophet challenges the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel. Of

course, you know that God won that day. He always does. He won against the forces of evil and Elijah slew the prophets of Baal. There were hundreds of them.

But then in chapter 19, immediately after this great victory, we read in verses 1-4, "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with a sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah saying, so let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

Elijah fell asleep, and when he woke up the angel of the Lord came and gave him food. He slept again, and again the angel came and told him to take the food because he had a long journey. We read in verse eight, "And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, what doest thou here, Elijah?"

I want to speak to you tonight on that subject, "What are you doing here?" What are you doing with the opportunity that God has given you? That is the question I want us to answer. Free Will Baptists are special people, and I am proud to be a Free Will Baptist. We have much for which to be thankful.

Southern Baptists, during one of their recent conventions, made a proclamation or resolution to collective repentance because they had stood for slavery many years ago. Did you know that back in the beginning of the Free Will Baptist movement, we were against slavery? At least that's one collective sin for which we do not have to repent.

When Benjamin Randall, who founded the Free Will Baptists in the North began preaching, he was living in an area and an atmosphere where not only the religious climate, but also the political climate was Calvinistic. In those days, they did not take very lightly to a man preaching free will, free grace, and free salvation. Benjamin Randall was declared a heretic. He could not preach in those churches that did not believe in free will, free grace, and free salvation.

After him came David Marks, an unusual young man who had been called to preach at the age of 15 in a Calvinistic Baptist church. They ridiculed him because he preached free will, free grace, and free salvation. Then, he found out there was a group called the Free Will Baptists, and he came into the Free Will Baptist movement.

He was baptized and began a long and fruitful ministry preaching the Gospel. He rode thousands of miles on horseback. He preached three and four times a day, hundreds of times a year. He preached to huge crowds, much larger than this crowd tonight. It seems incredible, but there was a strong movement of the Lord in those days, and David Marks availed himself of that opportunity.

He started many schools, among them Bible colleges and seminaries. He started the first Free Will Baptist publishing house. He rode one horse until he literally wore it out, and the horse died of exhaustion. David Marks, after abusing his body and preaching in all kinds of weather and under all kinds of conditions, died of exhaustion before he was 50 years old. But he left us something to work for, and he blazed the trail we're on today.

Back in the beginning, after the founding of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, one of the first missionary couples to go out was Mom and Pop Willey. They pioneered the work in Panama and then when the political situation made it impossible to continue, they went to Cuba and pioneered our Free Will Baptist work in Cuba.

They traveled extensively among Free Will Baptists and made people who had never been aware of missions aware of what God was doing in Cuba. All over this denomination, people began to work and believe in missions. They would visit Cuba and see what God was doing. That was only the beginning of what God was doing for Free Will Baptists. But that was the beginning, and it was important.

My Cuban friends, Juan Carlos and Maribel, are here with us tonight. They were both born after the Willeys left Cuba. They did not know the Willeys, but they have shared with me how the Cuban people would not let the memory of the Willeys die. They have immense respect for him. They said their families and peoples in the churches all speak of what God did through this great man and his wife—how that when he would ride through the countryside on his horse, he was an imposing figure. It was phenomenal the response he received because of his demeanor, because of his elegant wife, and because of the love and the warmth he had for the

Cuban people. They keep that memory alive in Cuba, because there was something special there.

It is no wonder that a tremendous revival is taking place in Cuba today. They tell me that every church in Cuba has at least one mission. I believe that is a tremendous challenge for us here. If they can experience revival in Cuba where there is a Communist totalitarian government, where there is the tremendous economic hardship, where people struggle just to get daily food, what can we do here with the resources we have in America? I believe with all my heart we can do more than we are doing. What are you doing? What are you doing here?

What are you doing with your life? I think that's the question the Lord was asking Elijah. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Elijah was at the low point of his career when he should have been at the high point. He had just experienced a victory like no other victory—unparalleled in scripture—yet Elijah is at the low point. He turns and runs from a mere threat. Consider three reasons why. First, he misunderstood himself. Second, he misdirected his anger, and third, I think he misjudged his God.

1. Elijah misunderstood himself.

This took the form of three doubts. First, he had doubts about his own identity. This was God's prophet. This was the man, who in chapter 17 said to Ahab, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Now, let me ask you. Would you dare go and tell President Clinton it's not going to rain in the United States for three years? That took a lot of boldness. That took a lot of confidence, but Elijah was the prophet of God. Elijah knew. Elijah was a man of boldness.

In 1 Kings 18:17, after three years of drought, Elijah went again to see Ahab. Ahab said to Elijah, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" And Elijah said, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

It took courage to say that. It took courage to challenge the prophets of Baal to that contest, where in 63 words he prayed to God and God answered with fire and consumed the altar, and the sacrifice, and the rock, and the water in the ditch. It was a tremendous outpouring of God's grace in a

manifestation like nobody had ever seen. The last verse of 1 Kings 18 says, "And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah."

Here, I find another Elijah. It seems as though it's a contradiction. Elijah doesn't know who he is. A threat has come, and Elijah runs off. You know, you may have come to this convention this week discouraged in spite of past victories. You may have come to the convention thinking that as soon as you go home, you're going to resign from your church. You're fed up with it. You're not doing any good.

Well, let me tell you something. Elijah was just a man like us. James said he was a man with like passions as we are, yet Elijah called upon the name of the Lord and the Lord shut the heavens for three years and a half! Sometimes, we forget who we are. We're the children of Almighty God. By the time Elijah got to Beer-Sheba, the last thing he wanted to be was a prophet. I've had a few Mondays like that, haven't you? I know how he must have felt. I'm sure you do too.

Elijah was not even sure of his own self-worth. Paul Woolsey, from the mountains of East Tennessee where I was reared, went to India in 1947. When I visited India in 1979 with Carlisle Hanna, we crossed a bridge traveling to the different churches. Brother Hanna said, "Brother Munsey, right down there on the banks of this river, Paul Woolsey spent a miserable night, just about dying of typhus."

I confirmed the story with Dan Cronk. It seems Brother Woolsey had slept in a sleeping bag that had fleas in it that had come off a rat. They didn't have a Hampton Inn or Days Inn in India at that time. But Paul Woolsey was willing to endure hardships because he knew God had called him to India. He didn't forget who he was. He spent that night there, deathly sick with typhus.

Brother Cronk told me that streptomycin had just come out on the market, and somebody had given them a vial. The doctor gave him the injection. Without it, he surely would have died. If you didn't know Paul Woolsey, he had a speech impediment. He had congenital health problems. Don Robirds told me that no missions agency would send him out today because there's no way he would qualify according to today's standards. But let me tell you something, when Paul Woolsey went to India, he knew who he was and he knew who had called him. It was tremendous the work he did. The Indian people, even though he never fully dominated the language, knew that the old man loved them. They talked about him for years even

after he was gone. He was worth something. He was somebody.

Elijah had doubts about his worth. He said, "Lord, I'm no better than my fathers. Let me go on and die. I'm not worth anything."

Last night Bill Evans spoke, and he said, "I am what I am by the grace of God." We can all say that. But you know what? How can people say "I am what I am by the grace of God," and then say, "I'm nothing."

That's saying I am nothing by the grace of God. I don't believe the Lord works that way. It's true that we are not worthy to be His children, but we *are* His children. He has saved us. He's given us life. I want you to know tonight I'm a child of the King. That does count for something. I'm here for a purpose. God called me for a purpose. God has me in His work.

There's a reason why I'm here, and there's a reason why you're here, and we want to honor God with our lives. If we do that, I'll guarantee that God can use us as He did Paul Woolsey and Pop Willey. God certainly honored them. You go back to Cuba today and ask any of our Cuban Free Will Baptists and they'll tell you who Pop Willey is.

Elijah also had doubts about his future. In 1 Kings 19:3, the Bible says Elijah ran for his life. Verse four says that he begged, "Lord, let me die." Elijah was confused. It's not pleasant being confused and disoriented, but sometimes it happens to us. Elijah didn't see that he had a future. We just had a team from Foreign Missions visit in Mexico. Brother Ken Eagleton and his wife, Marvis, brought eight young ladies and two young men down. They were such a blessing. They're with us tonight, and I thank God for every one of them.

When you think you're not worth anything, I want you to remember this story. One of the young ladies, Michelle, came up to me about the second day and said she had a Spanish Bible, and the folks in her church in West Virginia wanted her to give it to somebody in Mexico. I told her to wait until their visit was almost through, and I thought the Lord would tell her who to give it to.

Sure enough, on the last day, she came to me and told me she wanted to give it to Amanda. Immediately, I knew her choice was a good one. Amanda was born with a curved spine. She's 16 years old and walks with a limp. She doesn't have much self-confidence because of her physical disability. She lives in a one-room, plywood shack with no running water, electricity, or indoor bathroom. I knew she could never afford a Bible. We

went over the next day, and Michelle gave the Bible to Amanda. Amanda began to cry softly, and she wouldn't stop crying. After a while, when she had regained her composure, she said, "Brother Munsey, I want you to tell Michelle why I'm crying. This is the first gift I have ever received in my life. My parents have never had anything to give me, and this is the first gift I've ever received."

Amanda was crying, I was crying, Michelle was crying. Everyone who heard it was crying. Amanda had never received a gift, but she's worth something in God's eyes, and she can mean something to the work of God.

Elijah may not have felt very worthy, but I believe he was. I'm thankful tonight for Leroy and Fay Forlines. At the time when most people are planning their retirement, they're going to go to Russia to teach in the seminary. Thank God. I admire them. Brother Waddell tells me there are literally hundreds of thousands of Baptists in Russia, and they are mostly Arminian Baptists. They believe like we Free Will Baptists do.

Brother and Sister Forlines could be the pioneers to open another field. In a generation to come, we could speak about them like we do the Willeys. I hope God gives them a harvest that is great. Don't think that because you're nearing retirement age that God can't use you. It could be that tonight God is telling you to sell out and give Him what's left of your life!

2. Elijah misdirected his anger.

The Lord says, "What doest thou here?" And he said, "I've been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts...I only am left."

Elijah was overzealous. You can have an overwrought zeal. Paul Woolsey said one time to a young man who had a lot more zeal than he had sense, "Young man, I admire your zeal, but I pity your judgment."

I understand that Elijah was zealous, but he was directing his anger at the wrong place.

When I look around, I see a nation in terrible shape. I don't deny that. We can't close our eyes to it. It ought to make us work even harder knowing that so many people are without Christ! Since that first national convention I attended 32 years ago until today, I have noticed, my friends, a tremendous difference in the morality in our country. Our standards have dropped a long way. But I want the devil to know one thing: a few people still love

the Lord!

Elijah underestimated God's people. He said, "Lord, I'm the only one. Nobody wants to do anything! Nobody wants to serve You!"

Well, why don't you go with me and let's visit India and let's see if anybody is serving the Lord. We've got a group of national workers in India who are working for the Lord. God is bringing a revival in India. That's something to rejoice about.

In Cuba, every church has a mission. Some churches have more than one mission. That's a challenge to us. In Panama, the work is growing. There's a tremendous national leadership. We have associate missionaries in China and Russia, and we are sending a missionary couple to teach in the seminary. Master's Men and Helping Hands have built 56 churches, nine of them in foreign countries. Praise God!

I'll tell you, somebody is doing something! But some of those men who have labored and worked on these churches are now old. Who will take their place? We have churches in our denomination that are financially capable of going 15-20 miles in any direction and starting their own mission. They ought to do it. Is God speaking to you tonight? Do you think nothing is happening?

Did you know that in Mexico, in 10 years, the work has grown 300%? God is doing something in Mexico. I thank God for all those Mexican pastors who are standing out there and meeting the challenge. When I visit the Free Will Baptist National Office Building, I thank God for the vision of people in our national offices who realized we needed a better place to represent Free Will Baptists. When I walk in that building, I'm not ashamed to be a Free Will Baptist, and I thank God. Our Bible College has embarked on an ambitious program to move the school. If you heard the report of the Bible College, you know why. There's a need for it. Thank God the school is full! Thank God there's no more room.

Poor Elijah saw himself all alone. But he wasn't alone. When he said, "Lord, I'm the only one," God said, "Elijah, I've got news for you. There are 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

People in this denomination still know what it means to love God and serve God. I know some of them. Some of them are here right now, and they're praying and asking God to manifest Himself in this service. These are people who are out there in the field working and laboring for God.

One of my dear friends, Brother Wade Jernigan, is here. He just celebrated 50 years in the ministry, called to preach when he was 17 years old. He's preached up and down the trails of this denomination from one end to the other. He's pastored churches, helped establish about 20. He has been president of a Bible college. He's written songs, he's written poems. He's done just about everything that you can do in the ministry. He's been 50 years, and I hope the Lord gives him a whole lot more time, but I don't think he'll have 50 more years. That means somebody needs to be making that kind of commitment. I'd love to have 50 years. If God tarries, I'd love for Him to give me 50 years to preach His Word and be faithful to Him.

3. Elijah misjudged God.

He thought God had lost track of him. Have you ever felt like God has lost track of you, that you kind of dropped in a hole somewhere? God's not lost track of you, my friend. He knows where you are, and He knows what you need. When Elijah was at the lowest point in his whole ministry, the Lord came to him. "Elijah! Wake up! Look, I brought you some food. I know you're here. I know you're hurting. I know you're sad. I know you're defeated. But Elijah, I still am your God and I love you. And I've got something for you."

Have you ever felt God has abandoned you? Nearly five years ago, on October 28, 1990, our third child Rachel was born. We went to the hospital, and it was all over in a couple of hours. It was an easy delivery. I asked the doctor that delivered Rachel how she looked. He said, "She looks great, a nine or a 10 on the APGAR score."

It was Sunday morning, so I stayed around a little while and then I went back home to get ready to preach that night. About 4:30 that afternoon, the phone rang, and it was my wife Mitzi. She was crying. She said, "James, the doctor needs to talk to you."

I knew something was terribly wrong. She put the doctor on the phone, and he said, "Mr. Munsey, I hate to tell you this, but where there should be kidneys, there are only two big lumps. We think your daughter may have been born without kidneys. She hasn't urinated, and we don't know what's wrong."

I put the phone down and rushed back to the hospital. They had Rachel in the nursery getting her ready to transfer to the NICU unit. I could tell by

the way the nurses and doctors acted that they didn't think she would live. They let us go in the nursery and sit with her and hold her. The chaplain came by. She was a woman, and I promptly forgot all my theological problems with women preachers. I was glad to see her, but I knew she came because they had told her that the baby was seriously sick. She said, "I'm a fellow minister and I came by just to pray with you."

We prayed for my baby, and I said, "Lord, right now we're going to give her to You. If she lives or if she dies, I'm not going to say anything about it. She's Yours and I'm giving her back to You. And however long You give her to us is good enough."

I knelt down and settled it right there. Rachel is right here with us tonight. Thank God! He's kept her alive. But if she lives or if she dies, God has never let me down. He taught me some things through Rachel's sickness that I did not know. I thank God that through this tragedy, He has brought understanding to me and to my wife.

Elijah misjudged God. He said, "God doesn't know what I'm going through, and He's left me all alone here."

It wasn't true. The Lord did not abandon him. He had a plan for him. In verse 15, He said that He wanted Elijah to go and anoint Hazael, king of Syria. He was to anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, to be king of Israel. He was to anoint Elisha to be prophet in his stead.

It took three men to do what Elijah was doing. Did you notice that? The ones that escaped the sword of Hazael, Jehu would slay. And the ones that escaped the sword of Nimshi, Elisha would slay! God had a plan for Elijah.

Did you know there is another soul out there somewhere that is without Jesus Christ? You are needed. Don't ever give up.

On a summer afternoon in 1952, a young man walked into a barber shop in Greeneville, Tennessee, to get his shoes shined. M. L. Bowman, a Free Will Baptist preacher, saw the young man go into the barbershop, and he followed him. There were only two seats to have your shoes shined, so the young man sat in one and Brother Bowman sat in the other.

He reached over and put his hand on the young man's knee and said, "Son, I want to invite you to come to church with me Sunday." Brother Bowman knew that this young man desperately needed Jesus Christ. His life was not complete, and he had no purpose in life. That young man went

to church, and he got saved in a Free Will Baptist church in Greeneville, Tennessee. That young man was my dad, Howard Munsey.

When I was 12 years old, Dad took me to the mission field in Mexico, and I could never get over it. I was 28 when God called me to the mission field, but I never forgot that first trip. Some young people here will never forget going to Mexico. By 1955, my dad had been saved for two or three years. He was already preaching.

One night, he was with Brother Henry Bailey, one of our fine elderly preachers who has gone on to be with the Lord. They were out in the countryside visiting and inviting people to come to church. They came upon a young man who had a flat tire. My dad invited him to church, but he refused because he had to change his flat tire. Dad offered to change the tire for him if he would go to church.

He didn't go to church that night, but the young man never forgot that a man offered to change his tire to try to get him to go to church. That young man, Talmadge Brown, got saved later, and now he's preaching the Word of God.

Let me tell you, God still has something for you to do. Don't give up! Don't think it's over! You look around and see the misery, but remember that it's not over yet. God still has something for you to do.

God gave Elijah a plan, and then He gave him rest. One of these days, I'm going to lay my Bible down for the last time. I'm going to preach the last message. I'm going to invite the last person to know Jesus Christ. And, I'm going to graduate to a better land where there's no pain or suffering. One day, you and I will rest.

I so look forward to it. I want to rest, but I want to rest when God's ready for me to rest. What are you doing tonight? Why are you here?

1995 – Jim Turnbough

I Can't Go Home Without My Brother

Text: Genesis 44: 17, 30-33

Introduction

Review previous events: Joseph, the favorite son of Jacob, was sold by his brothers as a slave to Ishmaelite traders who took him to Egypt. There he rose to prominence in Potiphar's house, only to fall prey to an adulterous Mrs. Potiphar. While in prison unjustly, he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's butler and baker. When a dream troubled Pharaoh, the butler remembered Joseph's ability to interpret and he was summoned to the palace. His God-given message of seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine caused Pharaoh to appoint Joseph as governor of the land.

The famine developed just as God had revealed to Joseph and stretched into Canaan. At last Jacob sent 10 of his sons to Egypt where they unknowingly encountered Joseph as they sought food. He questioned them thoroughly concerning their family, accused them of being spies, and finally kept Simeon as a hostage until they returned with Benjamin as proof of their story.

On the journey home, they discovered the money they had taken to Egypt to buy grain in their sacks. Jacob refused to allow them to return with Benjamin, at least until the famine grew desperate. Only when Judah became surety for Benjamin would Jacob let them go.

Their second trip found them well received, even though they admitted they still had their money from the first trip. They dined with the ruler Joseph who continued to hide his identity. With Simeon and Benjamin in tow, they finally started back to Canaan, only to be stopped and accused of stealing Joseph's cup.

To their surprise it was found in Benjamin's bag (planted at Joseph's direction), and they were hauled back into Joseph's presence as though guilty.

Genesis 44:17 presents the crux of the matter. The 10 were free to return to Canaan, but Benjamin was required to stay as a slave in Egypt. How did

they respond to this situation? What would they do about their brother?

Most of us stand where these men stood. We have been pardoned by God's grace and are headed home. But what about our brothers?

Judah stepped forward (Genesis 44:30-33) and responded with the poignant statement, "I can't go home without my brother."

I. I Can't Go Home Without My Brother; My Father Loves Him.

(Read Genesis 44:20.)

A. We readily understand Jacob's love for Benjamin. It is the love of a father.

1. Remember his immediate love for Benjamin's mother, Rachel.

a. It was "love at first sight," and it lasted a lifetime.

b. Jacob was willing to work an extra seven years for her after Laban tricked him into marrying Leah.

2. So much occurred before Rachel finally was blessed with a child.

a. Genesis 37:3 clearly states, "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." (I didn't say it was like God or even right, just a fact.)

b. He gave Joseph a special coat, symbolizing firstborn status.

3. Now Rachel is gone, Joseph "is not," and as far as Jacob knows, only Benjamin is left of his beloved family. Oh, yes, he loved Benjamin.

B. But what about Judah's love for Benjamin? It is the love of a brother.

1. Recall the hatred of all the brothers for Joseph displayed early and often.

a. Genesis 37 tells us three times the brothers hated Joseph (in Hebrew literally enemy, foe).

1) Joseph reported their wickedness to Jacob. He was a tattletale in their eyes.

2) He was promoted above them though younger.

3) He told them of his dreams of reigning over them.

4) Genesis 37:4 tells us they couldn't even speak peaceably (shalom).

- b. Had not Reuben and Judah intervened, the other brothers would have killed him instead of selling him as a slave.
- 2. Don't you imagine Benjamin was about as "spoiled" by Jacob?
 - a. He wouldn't let Benjamin go to Egypt the first time with the other 10 boys.
 - b. He waited until all were about dead before consenting.
 - c. The brothers were grown men with families and their own children were starving due to Benjamin.
- C. Judah's cry is not based on his own feelings but his father's. He loved him because his father did.
 - 1. "His life is bound up in the lad." If he loved Jacob, he had to love Benjamin.
 - 2. Our attitude toward others should also be based on our Father's feelings.
 - a. God loves the saved. He loves all His children equally.
 - 1) God loves the fundamentalist and the F.O.E. supporter
 - a) We have differences and dissensions, but what of love?
 - b) Have we forgotten John 13:34, 35? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another as I have loved you...by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."
 - c) I am embarrassed for my church members to know how we preachers attack and argue with one another. We don't follow biblical commands for handling our differences. Why should we expect our people to do what we are unwilling to do?
 - 2) God loves the saved in Europe, Africa, India, the Ukraine, etc. We are not special just because we are American Christians.
 - b. God loves the sinner, regardless of how we feel.
 - 1) No matter what color they are. God's chosen are the Jews—not white, middle class Americans. Thus we must reach all.
 - 2) The wino, drug addict, prostitute, the gay and lesbian, the liar, the thief, the rapist, the abortion doctor.

- 3) God loves those in our families, our neighbors, those with whom we work—even the foul-mouthed, obnoxious ones we seek to avoid.
- 4) We often tend to be snobbish about the up and out. My church is probably rare in that we have doctors, lawyers, and successful businessmen. They have the same needs we do.
- 5) Are we avoiding the lower class? One young man came to Garner with an attitude—long-haired, dirty, ex-convict who was a professional grass mower; his marriage was in trouble, his two knot-headed boys in need of lots of love and discipline. He was into drugs, alcohol, rock music, and even the occult. Like the prodigal, he had “spent all.” But God loved him and his family, and so we tried to do the same.

He and his family shine brightly in the trophy case of God’s grace. I remember when he first was confronted with tithing; he called the church and said, “Preacher, now about this tithing thing,” and I thought, “Oh, boy, this is where we have trouble!” But he continued, “Is it on your net or gross?”

3. Our Father loves them as much as He loves us. No one can escape His loving reach.
 - a. John 3:16, Romans 5:8: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
 - b. God paid the supreme price for every one of His creations.
 - 1) You won’t meet anyone Jesus didn’t love enough to die for.
 - 2) We must love them because our Father loves them.

1996 – Tim Hall

What Doest Thou Here?

Text: 1 Kings 19

Why does God ask a question when He already knows the answer? He knew why Elijah was there. Perhaps God wanted Elijah to consider what he was doing there. God questioned Adam in a similar way when he asked, “Where art thou?” Not that God needed Adam to reveal his whereabouts. God wanted Adam to fully realize his whereabouts.

It’s a question we all need to consider from time to time—to stand still and know that He is God; to consider closely what we are doing and where we are heading.

What are we doing as a denomination, as a church, as a preacher, as a Christian worker or layman? If Christ will build this part of His Church, He will need us on duty.

In regards to Elijah, consider these points with me:

1. The Place. Where was Elijah?
2. The Problem. Why was Elijah there?
3. The Presence. What did Elijah receive there?

I. Where was Elijah?

Elijah was at Horeb, the mountain of God, where God had shown His presence and power to Moses and the children of Israel. Elijah was downcast, despondent, and even defeated. Can we not sympathize with him? Political corruption and spiritual decay were severe when Elijah came across the stage of history. Some days, it seems, are darker than others, yet God has promised more grace where sin abounds and darkness closes in. Clouds have a silver lining for those called forth in such times. Greater grace of God is made available.

Consider Elijah and what might have been going through his mind. We know nothing of Elijah’s parents, upbringing or spiritual preparation, but we can safely assume he was raised in a devout Jewish home, learning all the tradition and history of Israel. He knew about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; about Joseph’s ordeal and exaltation; about Moses and Pharaoh and

the opening of the Red Sea; of God descending on Mt. Sinai giving unto Israel the divine law. He was acquainted with the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

He knew about Gideon, Samson, and Debra. His young eyes no doubt widened every time he heard about David and Goliath, and his chest swelled over the glory and wisdom of Solomon's kingdom. But look at it now. He spoke of jealousy for God, of how the people had forsaken His covenants, thrown down His altars and slain His prophets.

Ahab, the current king, was the most wicked man ever to sit on the throne of Israel, provoking God to anger above all that was before him, surpassing his father Omri, who had earned the same infamy before him.

How broken Elijah was for his nation. We can sympathize with him. America has a similar story. Let not dishonest historians who attempt to rewrite history take away the spiritual roots that characterized this country from its inception. A recent study by the Department of Education found that the top 60 textbooks on history contained 670 stories of American history. Only five related the true nature of how America was founded, and even these were not good representatives of the heart and soul of our founding fathers.

The truth of the matter is this country has deep Christian roots which cannot be separated from her identity. The first colleges in America were founded on the teaching of Christianity:

Harvard was established in 1636. John Adams, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams attended Harvard. The requirements stated, "Let every student be plainly instructed and consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ; and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning."

Yale required every student to have private prayer and attend public prayer, morning and evening. Princeton educated 87 of our founding fathers, and Princeton's founding statement was "Cursed is all learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ."

Of the first 126 colleges formed in America, 123 were built on Christian ideology. In 1872, the Teacher's Union commented: "If the study of the Bible or Christianity ever ceases to be a part of the public education, let education be given back to the churches."

George Washington said to the Indians who wanted to benefit from the

white man's educational system: "You do well to learn our arts and way of life and above all the religion of Jesus Christ."

The Northwest Ordinance required schools to teach religion and morality along with knowledge, or a territory could not become a state; the Northwest Ordinance was concurrent with the First Amendment and all state constitutions reflected this requirement in becoming a state. How tragic it is that the history of our beloved country has been rewritten.

Noah Webster gave us the dictionary. Webster said: "The Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children under a free government ought to be instructed... the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people."

Dr. Jedediah Morse, top educator during the time of the revolution, was called the father of American geography, the one who instituted the study of geography in this country. He said, "The influence of Christianity had brought the freedom and happiness we enjoy, and when that influence is diminished, in the same proportion will that people recede from the blessings of genuine freedom."

U.S. presidents have testified to the impact and influence of the Bible and Christianity upon themselves and upon America. The list includes the first President, George Washington; first Vice-President, John Adams; third President, Thomas Jefferson; the sixth, John Quincy Adams; the seventh, Andrew Jackson; the 13th, Calvin Coolidge; the 16th, Abraham Lincoln; the 26th, Theodore Roosevelt; the 28th, Woodrow Wilson; the 33rd, Harry Truman; the 38th, Gerald Ford; the 40th, Ronald Reagan; and the 43rd, George W. Bush.

A quote from this list and from our sixth president, John Quincy Adams said, "No book in the world deserves to be so unceasingly studied, and so profoundly meditated upon as the Bible" (1812).

What a contrast to the outcry of editorial writers, columnists, and cultural elites who criticized Justice Antonin Scalia after a speech, April 9, 1996, at the Mississippi College School of Law, where he openly admitted his Christian faith, stating, "We are fools for Christ's sake." He went on to say, "We must pray to endure the scorn of the sophisticated world."

Gary Bauer, of the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C., said no other word but "scornful" could be used to describe the reactions of the

working press.

Intellectual parasites in high places are having a feeding frenzy on anyone who dares to stand for Christ today, calling them simple-minded, foolish, and unqualified to occupy prestigious positions such as the Supreme Court.

Marian P. MacDonald, a 32-year public school veteran with an outstanding record in Greensboro, North Carolina, was forced to resign her post in April 1996. It was because she invited Teen Challenge representatives to her health class where they testified that God had helped them overcome their drug addiction, adding that they were not pushing their religion off on anybody, just stating the facts. That wasn't good enough. The school principal sent a note home to parents apologizing for the teens' "insensitive comments."

Other recent examples include county officials in Minneapolis, Minnesota, who censored religious speech in jail; a military couple who had to fight to win a reversal of an anti-religious army policy; a school in Decatur, Illinois, that censored God from a graduation poem; the junior high student fighting for the right to have a Bible club in Lombard, Illinois; and the federal judge who ruled June 3rd that a Mississippi school's Bible classes and prayers were unconstitutional.

It's not difficult to identify with Elijah. We too have witnessed a similar decline in our nation as the moral and spiritual fabric has deteriorated. According to the Citizen's Committee on Human Rights, since the 1960s, rape has increased 355%; assault 415%; violent crime 520%; and murder 100%. (America, America, God shed His grace on thee.)

II. Why was Elijah there?

It all started with...

A. The Report of Elijah (1 Kings 19:1)

1. Ahab reported what Elijah had done. God created the circumstance and performed the miracle, but Elijah was inseparably connected to it.
 - a. You cannot separate a man from his ministry. Sinners and saints will not allow it.
 - b. It was reported of Paul and Silas that "they had turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

2. What is the report on us?
 - a. What are people saying about us?
 - b. Is there anything to say?
 - c. What has God done lately through us?
3. We cannot displace or diminish the importance of the individual in ministry. It appears that God does not bless the method or ministry as much as He blesses the men and women who administer those methods and ministries.
 - a. James underscored when he spoke of Elijah's role in the drought and the rain by concluding that the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16b-18).
 - b. In almost every great movement of God, there are human personalities which accompany it. God chose Noah, a man who found grace in His sight, to prepare the ark of deliverance; Joseph, that youthful illustration of Christ, kept the faith under temptation and was brought from poverty to the palace; Moses chose his lot with God's people and was chosen by God to lead His people to freedom; David, a man after God's own heart, felled his giants; Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, remained faithful to an unfaithful people; Daniel and the three Hebrew children remained faithful at great risk to themselves; David Brainerd left a prosperous church in Long Island, New York, and went to the savage Indians, caring more for souls than for his life; Adoniram Judson left a successful church in Boston to reach the teeming millions of starving souls in Burma; John Bunyan refused to submit to the preaching police, accepted no license, spent 13 years in a Bedford, England, dungeon but gave the world one of the greatest Christian novels of all time; Peter Cartwright with great simplicity stirred great revival; Billy Sunday, an ex-baseball player, threw hard balls at sin and Satan and caused many a sin-sick soul to walk the sawdust trail; D. L. Moody, by the power of prayer, touched two continents for the glory of God.
4. We desperately need men of God in America again who will walk with God, feel what God feels, say what God says.
 - a. Recently, I ordered a book based on the title alone. It read

Best Sermons, volume 5 (Harper-Collins, publisher) and was a collection of 40 of the best sermons during a certain period. First place went to a female Jewish Rabbi who entitled her sermon, "God Is a Woman, and She Is Growing Older." The reader is invited to imagine God as an elderly woman, lonely, wandering about, seeking her wayfaring children, powerless to change them.

- b. On Friday, June 21, I was disappointed when the news broke regarding Billy Graham's contention with the Southern Baptist Convention resolution to continue efforts to convert Jews to Christianity. It was reported that Dr. Graham said, "It was a Jew, born in Bethlehem, in whom I've put my trust." Unless he was misrepresented, Dr. Graham has altered somewhat in his message to the world that Christ is the only way (John 14:6).
- c. The media continued to give prime coverage to the silly, sin-sick theological debate on whether the homosexual should be ordained. Presbyterians recently decided to ordain a homosexual as long as he was a non-practicing homosexual.
- d. This generation is being led to believe that God is some great cosmic teddy bear to cuddle and shape into what each individual desires Him to be. We are being pressured to believe that love is synonymous with tolerance, acceptance, and moral relativism.

And who has given such latitude to this idea of "unconditional love"? This idea has been stretched by unbiblical hands to the point that the wrath of God has been neatly tucked away. The Bible still says that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). They say, "Peace, Peace, when there is no peace, sayeth the Lord God Almighty" (Jeremiah 6:14). Tell the rich man in Hell, who stills desires a drop of water to cool his tongue, that God loves him unconditionally. The love of God is greater than all man's sin, but the holiness of God is greater still and He will not tolerate unforgiven or unforsaken sin.

- 5. God is still looking for men who will represent Him. The church cannot be built without them.
 - Ezekiel 22:30: "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land,

that I should not destroy it: but I found none.”

- 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”
- Revelation 3:2: “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”

May the report be in Heaven above and on earth beneath that Free Will Baptists are those men and women for which God has searched and found!

B. The Retaliation Against Elijah (1 Kings 19:2)

1. Jezebel retaliates! With pride, arrogance, deceit, maliciousness, murder and self-rule, Jezebel illustrates the sin nature very well. She threatened Elijah’s life. Jezebel was the daughter of the Tyrian king, Ethbaal, a former priest of Melkart, the Tyrian Baal. This wicked woman had brought Baal worship to Israel, persuading her husband Ahab to build a temple to Baal in Samaria. She persecuted the followers of Yahweh and threatened its existence.
2. Taking a stand for truth in a world full of lies will bring retaliation. Satan, sin, and sinners who love their sin will oppose the message and messengers of God.
3. History records the undeniable fact that those who take a stand for Christ, the truth, and an uncompromised delivery of the whole council of God will receive negative reactions.
 - a. The Bible record supports this fact:
 - 1) Jeremiah: chosen to be a prophet of God before he was born and called to deliver God’s word in dark days of the kingdom of Judah, was belittled, rejected, put into stocks, thrown into a miry dungeon, and finally carried into Egypt.
 - 2) The Apostle Paul described hostile retaliation against himself in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.
 - 3) The Lord Jesus Christ: Severe opposition and retaliation were leveled against Christ when God sent His sinless Son into the midst of vipers and hypocrites. In John 15:22, He said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not

had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.”

- b. The Free Will Baptist record reveals qualified opposition as well. Qualified, because some religious movements should be opposed by virtue of their heresy. With great confidence, we have held forth the Word of Life and this was not done without opposition.

Benjamin Randall was called upon to give an account of his preaching in July 1779. While the founding fathers of our nation were paying a price for freedom, our predecessor, Benjamin Randall, paid a dear price for freedom of another kind: Free will, free grace and free salvation.

Calvinists persecuted him severely. On a street one day, someone threw a piece of brick at him, brushing the back of his head. Another swung a brick bat at him while another grabbed his arm causing the blow to miss. A group assembled as he was preaching intending to kill him when he came out, but a drenching rain disbursed the crowd.

Forty men vowed to kill him, but after hearing him preach, several were converted and the rest did not have the courage to harm him. There will always be a degree of retaliation in this world to Christ and His followers.

C. The Response of Elijah (1 Kings 19:3, 4)

1. Elijah retreated. It's doubtful that history contains a faster descent from the mountain of victory to the valley of defeat and despondency, than that of Elijah during this event.
 - a. He went for his life. He lost focus for just a moment; his mission was not complete; he failed momentarily to seek God's direction. Taking no time to pray or seek God's will, Elijah became a victim of his own success. Off guard with his armor down and thinking the battle was over, he was hit broadside with a severe assault. Satan knows when to strike.
 - b. Let us be warned against seeking to save our life, prestige, salary or popularity at the expense of God's perfect will. We must not retreat from the grave responsibilities put into our trust.
 - c. Free Will Baptists must resist retreating from the conservative positions we've held. Last December, the Leadership Conference in Nashville was well attended with a wide representation of the denomination. It felt as though we were in an examination room,

and the patient undergoing diagnosis was our denomination. State and national leaders made out as spiritual surgeons, considering the symptoms, making diagnosis. There was no small discord. Some suggested there was no reason for alarm and concluded treatment was unnecessary. Others warned of irregularities, unhealthy changes, and loss of spiritual vigor, recommending treatment lest the patient worsen. My heart burned with concern for the spiritual health and the future of this body. Allow me to share a few observations.

- 1) Faith and confidence in the name Free Will Baptist has diminished. *Free Will, Free Grace, Free Salvation* has been the message since Christ and the Apostles. We have been so privileged to carry the name *Free Will* in a theological world that has often, at various times, threatened to take it away from the Gospel. There should be a “Free Will” sign prominently displayed in every city. What a glorious privilege and sobering responsibility God has granted to every person by giving them a free will. Don’t take ‘Free Will’ off your sign. Don’t give in to the pressure of religious marketing analysts who are caught up in baby-boomer and baby-buster marketing. God’s Word, pure and unfiltered, will convert this generation like any other generation.

If we cater to this, we may corrupt the Gospel. We have no need to remove “Free Will” from our signs—the world needs to see it and even to ask what it means. Someone needs to be standing along the theological highway with a strong message of the free will and its power, before and after salvation. Believers were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26), and Benjamin Randall received the name “Free Willer” out of ridicule and contempt by the clergy who opposed his views. This led to the label of our movement, a label we accept and defend, because it has an important message for all.

- 2) We’ve weakened our stand on total abstinence regarding alcohol. There’s an obvious softness and drift away from our traditional anti-alcohol stance. The idea that moderate alcohol consumption is acceptable is among us and seems to be

growing. It may be so small that you are not yet alarmed, but brethren, we appear to have a deficit in teaching and preaching when it comes to total abstinence. We need to sound the alarm and reaffirm our opposition to alcohol consumption.

Alcohol use is America's pet sin, raping and ravaging this land, while the pulpit has grown strangely silent in selfish fear. In this day of drunkenness and the resulting evils, someone needs to stand along the roadside of life and call people to a higher standard of Christian living. Let those who think they are theologically superior laugh at us—God is pleased with us on this issue and somebody needs to stand in the way and show people the good way. Many will scoff and go on but many will listen and live. We must not retreat on this one.

- 3) There is a sense of unworthiness within me as I mention this, but we seem to have problems defining modesty. Definitions draw lines, lines bring retaliations, and retaliations have caused some to retreat, but God needs someone along the way with guidance and scriptural instructions concerning the issues of decency, modesty and shamefacedness. There seems to be no shame these days. God help our weakness.
- 4) Elijah retreated from his bold stand. One step leads to another, and if we're headed in the wrong direction, it doesn't take long to be wrong. Jonah went down to Joppa, down into the ship, and down into the belly of the great fish. Retreat is a downward path.

2. Elijah requested that he might die!

- a. He wanted to quit. Death and quitting seem synonymous for preachers. There's no place to quit, no honorable place.
- b. He had enough. Have you ever had enough? Have you felt like the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 was being severely tested?
- c. He sensed his failures, proclaiming he was no better than his fathers. His courage and self-confidence were gone. He blew it! Elijah realized he had retreated to save himself and felt he had abandoned the nation and people he loved. He felt responsible.

He wanted God to take his life, but God was not through with him. There was yet another job for him to do.

III. What did Elijah receive there? (1 Kings 19:5-17)

He received a visit from God! God came down to meet with Elijah. God is not going to forget or forsake His faithful who have walked with Him and worked with Him. Elijah had stumbled and failed, but God in all tenderness and loving kindness came to meet with His servant. Hebrews 6:10, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shown toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

A. God Restored Elijah (verses 5-8).

1. With the touch of an angel: They may not be visible, but they're here as the extension of God's hand.

– Hebrews 1:14: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

– Psalm 34:7: "The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them." Have we forgotten the presence of spiritual things in this world?

God restored him.

2. With the strength of that meat (verse 8). Only the blessed meat and manna of Heaven can give you the strength mentioned here.

a. Jesus described it in John 4:32, "But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of."

b. It belongs only to those who desire it (Hebrews 5:14): "But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Have we forgotten the spiritual meat?

God restored him.

3. With a special visitation (verses 9-14) and a special lesson from God.

a. God taught Elijah that He doesn't always speak by moving mountains or earth shaking or bright attention-getting fire. Why do we look at the power and success of an organization

or movement and translate that as the approval and blessing of God? Such criteria should not be used solely as evidence of the hand of God.

b. God speaks to saints and sinners alike with a still, small voice. His voice can best be heard if we would be still and know that He is God. Have we forgotten the Holy Spirit?

B. God Returned Him (verses 15-17). God had work for Elijah to do. He has work for us to do as well. Do we need to return tonight? Return to a former commitment? Return to a former confidence? Return to our first love?

C. God Reminded Him (verse 18). God reminded Elijah that He was still in control. There were more on the front lines than he thought, more who were committed, more who had laid down their all and followed God. He had 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal.

Paul added scope to that number in Romans 11:4 when he identified the 7,000 as men. There may also have been women and youth who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Baal is still around. He's taken on a different image and name. Call it new age, ecumenical, unity, tolerance, whatever takes God's glory away. Let us not bow our knee to the diminishing of one iota of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What doest thou here?

1996 – David Williford

Essentials for Church Growth

Text: Matthew 16:13-18

When we meet Jesus in this passage, the tide of public opinion is turning against Him. He has enjoyed a period of popularity, but those days are over. Jesus knows what is happening, and He knows He will soon journey to Jerusalem where He will be crucified.

While He never encouraged it, some of His disciples developed grand hopes of an earthly kingdom with Jesus reigning and the disciples serving as His right-hand men. He warned them later in this chapter that His goal was not to establish a temporal kingdom; instead, He said, He came to die. Aware that they might be discouraged by this, He tells them that He is going to build something...something that will last for time and eternity: the Church.

On the heels of Peter's great declaration of faith, Jesus uttered words that echo down the corridor of time: "I will build my Church." The early disciples took those words and set out to conquer a world. Their amazing success can be traced and documented in the Book of Acts as they spread the Gospel of Christ and won men and women to the Savior.

The tragedy of our day is that we are not, by and large, building the Church. According to Ken Hemphill in his book, *The Antioch Effect*, nationwide, church growth cannot be documented. The church in America today is not keeping up with the population increase. From 1960 to 1990, the population increased by 39%, but membership in U.S. churches increased by only 28%.

We're all concerned about church growth. I don't know anyone among us who would not like to see their church grow and see people saved. We may disagree on methodology, but our goal is the same. We all want to see people saved and develop into mature believers.

We all want to be "teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:21). We no more want a group of carnal, immature babes in Christ who believe that, because of grace, anything goes and holiness is optional, than we want a group of

legalists who believe that the essence of spirituality is found in a list of do's and don'ts.

So, the question is, why isn't the Church growing? Since man's fall in the Garden of Eden, he has been looking for someone to blame for his problems. We are no different. We spread the blame for lack of growth.

Some blame denominational leaders. "They're out of touch," we say.

"The programs don't meet the needs of the churches," others tell us. Colleges come in for their share of the blame. We are told that colleges aren't preparing young men to minister in today's complex society.

On the local level, I can tell you who gets the blame: the pastor. It is said that today's pastors are not like the old-timers, that they're more concerned with their benefit packages than they are the lost.

I can also tell you who the pastor blames. He blames the people. "If people cared enough," the pastor says, "our church would grow."

And then we all blame the world, don't we? "It is an evil and wicked day," we say. "People are hardened to the Gospel. There is no sense of sin anymore. People don't feel a sense of condemnation and conviction; therefore, they do not sense a need for the Savior." And on our excuse list goes.

We can make excuses all day long, but that will not solve the problem. It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness, so how do we go about fulfilling the task Christ left us? How do we build the Church? Let me suggest four principles from this passage that we must grasp and apply if we are to successfully build Christ's Church.

I. Remember the Person of Church Building: "I Will Build My Church."

Church growth is a divine activity. Granted, there is a human element in the work of God. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 6:1 that we are "workers together with him." The question may be asked, "Does God need us?"

The obvious answer is no. God is God, and He is entirely self-sufficient. But in His wisdom, He planned it so that man has a role to play. God has given us certain responsibilities: proclaim the Gospel, be witnesses, share His truth. It can be phrased a number of ways. What He has commanded us to do, He will not do. He will not send angelic messengers to preach if we fail to communicate His message. He will not write the message of

salvation across the night sky; He will not align the stars to spell out the message of salvation.

But when we've done all we can do—when we have planned our programs, developed our ministries, and organized our outreach—we must realize that we have not and cannot build the Church. It is a divine activity.

Yes, God has given man certain responsibilities, but He has reserved certain elements for Himself. He and He alone can bring conviction. He and He alone can bring about the transformation of character called the new birth. He and He alone can take that which is sinful and depraved and set it on the road to Heaven.

In the final analysis, building God's Church is not something we can do; it can only be done by Him, while He, in His grace, allows us to participate in the process.

We may build buildings, multiply ministries, develop strategies, and increase budgets, but God and God alone builds His Church. The Church is the body of the redeemed, and we cannot add to it by our intellect or our abilities. It must be done by God.

We are not left to wonder if this will happen. God promises to build His Church. That is the second principle we need to remember.

II. Remember the Promise of Church Growth: "I Will *Build My Church.*"

The Church is a body designed to grow; it is a building yet being added to by living stones. Peter reminded us, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house."

The early church was a church of growth. Luke says in Acts 2:47 that the Lord added to the church daily. As population increases, we must grow. To fail to grow is a sign of retreat, and God did not intend that for His Church.

Jesus said in this passage that the gates of Hell would not prevail against His Church. Matthew Henry said, "The gates of Hell are the powers and policies of the devil's kingdom by which he makes war with the Lamb. These fight against the Church by opposing Gospel truth and persecuting good Christians and ministers. The design of the gates of Hell (is) to root

out the name of Christianity.”

While this may be the goal of Satan, it will not succeed! The gates of Hell will not prevail.

But there is another truth here. Gates were not weapons of offense, but of defense. They were, in ancient cities, the strongest line of defense against attack. What Jesus really said to His disciples is, “As you go forth, preaching my name, forces of evil will fall before the power of My word. You will overcome the evil that rules and reigns, defeating it, and establishing a righteous reign within the hearts of men.”

Oh, that we had more of that confidence! For too long we’ve acted like Baptist monks in our fundamental monasteries, closed up tightly within the walls of our churches, not venturing into the arena of life. We’ve been content to talk about how evil the world has become and how hard people are, and we’ve been afraid to go head-to-head with Satan.

The truth is, we face the basic problems the early Church faced. Our society and culture mirrors that of the first century. I remember Dr. L. C. Johnson (former president of Free Will Baptist Bible College) telling us students that we needed to learn how to minister in a pagan society. We are there now, but the Church has been there before.

Immorality and sexual impurity were not invented in the last half of the 20th century. Homosexuality did not first appear in modern day America. Our age did not invent drug usage or alcohol abuse. Ours is not the first day when marriage as an institution has come under attack.

Man’s fascination with the occult is not new. The New Age philosophy is not all that new. Cults have not suddenly, for the first time, challenged the truths of Bible-believing Christianity. Why, then, did the early church, in an era arguably worse than ours, have success? Why does the Church today seem to struggle and the Gospel languish?

I submit to you that the Gospel has not changed. It still has power to change lives when we carry it into the arena of life. God still lives, and He is still supreme; it’s time we the people of God began to act like it!

There’s a song we sing occasionally that tells us, “Hold the fort a little longer in your struggle over sin.”

I don’t like that song. I saw enough cowboy movies as a kid to know that if you’re holding the fort, you’re in big trouble. You’re in danger of being

destroyed by the enemy, and you're just hanging on, hoping that help will arrive before it's too late.

That's not the attitude we need in the Church. We should be the Church militant, and we should expect the Church to be the Church triumphant!

I'd love to see the forces of Hell tremble before the power of the Cross for a change. It will never do that if we remain afraid to carry the Gospel into the highways and hedges of our communities, and there unleash its awesome power.

In the words of the old song, "We've a story to tell to the nations, that shall turn their hearts to the right, A story of truth and sweetness, A story of peace and light. We've a song to be sung to the nations, that shall lift their hearts to the Lord. A song that shall conquer evil, and shatter the spear and sword. For the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noon day bright. And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, a kingdom of love and light."

Another old hymn reminds us, "From all the dark places of earth's heathen races, Oh see how the thick shadows fly! The voice of salvation awakes every nation, 'come over and help us they cry.' The sunlight is glancing over armies advancing, to conquer the kingdom of sin; Our Lord shall possess them, His presence shall bless them, His beauty shall enter them in. The kingdom is coming, O tell ye the story, God's banner exalted shall be! The earth shall be full of His knowledge and glory, as waters that cover the seas."

I am reminded that Jesus, in His hometown of Nazareth, "did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58). Let's not make the same mistake and hinder God from working because we convinced ourselves that times are too difficult for Him to work.

The third principle we need to remember relates to:

III. Remember the Possessor of the Church: "I Will Build My Church."

We must remember to whom the Church belongs. It is not my church, or even our church. It is His Church. He purchased it with His blood (Colossians 1:14). He loved it and gave His life for it. He can receive anyone into it that He chooses. If we remember that, we will never have to question if "those kind of people" are to be welcomed into "our" church. If they are

souls for whom Christ died (and they are), then they are to be welcomed into our church.

Because it is His Church, He directs it. I saw a cartoon once that depicted a board meeting in progress. One of the members was saying, "Our constitution is very specific. It takes a three-fourths majority to override the will of God." We laugh, but how often do we put our will ahead of His will for His Church? He is the Head. The Church's direction, its strategy, even its location and size are not ours to determine, but His.

If the Church is His, and the responsibility for growth is His, what are we to do? What is our role in growing the Church? Mark 4:26-28 leads us to principle four. "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

IV. Remember That Church Growth Is Spontaneous (Mark 4:27).

Neither the farmer, the pastor, nor the people can take glory for growth. Only God can give it. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:6, that it is God who gives the increase. Our responsibility is for the soil. No seed, no matter how good, will grow well in poor soil.

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) declares that the seed, the Word of God, went into different types of soil and had different results, depending upon the type of soil where it was cast. It was true then, and it's true now, that the environment into which the Word goes has an effect upon the results.

Every preacher has experienced preaching in places where preaching was easy and the Spirit had freedom of movement. And we've also experienced preaching in places where it seemed we labored, and there was no sense of the Spirit's activity. What's the difference? The soil.

No church can grow unless the environment is conducive to growth. Ephesians 4 gives the key to the right type of environment. Basic to all growth is the environment of verses 1-3, described as manifesting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We must direct our efforts there. We must preach, pray, and live so that a living, loving body of believers experience and display an environment of spiritual maturity that is comfortable to

those who are within and attractive to those who are without.

That's church growth. That's God's plan. That's our part in God's plan.
I'm ready! Let's do it!

1997 – Melvin Worthington

The Scope of Stewardship

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; 1 Peter 4:10; Luke 16:1-4

(Numbers in this sermon denote definitions from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.)

Introduction

The biblical mandate of stewardship often goes unheeded by the Christian because of a lack of understanding. Scriptural stewardship is a vital concept that needs to be embraced by every Christian.

A. The truth regarding stewardship:

1. It is an occurring truth, a persistent truth.
2. It is an overwhelming truth, a profound truth.
3. It is an obvious truth, a practical truth.
4. It is an offensive truth, a painful truth.
5. It is an opposed truth, a persecuted truth.
6. It is an obligatory truth, a presented truth.
7. It is an observed truth, a practiced truth.

B. The terms regarding stewardship:

1. The terms *steward* or *stewards* refer to the person. *Steward* occurs five times in the Old Testament and eight times in the New Testament (Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; Titus 1:7). *Stewards* occurs one time in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; 1 Peter 4:10).

Steward/Stewards #3623 refers to a house distributor (i.e., manager), overseer i.e., an employee in that capacity; and by extension, a fiscal agent (treasurer) figuratively, a preacher of the Gospel.

Stewards need to be: responsive, reliable, responsible, reportable, recordable, and rewardable. A *steward* (from *Oikos*) refers to a person who manages the domestic affairs of a family or minor, a treasurer.

It can be applied to the apostles and ministers of the Gospel as well as individual believers.

2. The term *stewardship* refers to performance. *Stewardship* occurs three times in the New Testament but nowhere in the Old Testament (Luke 16:2-4).

Stewardship #3622 refers to a house distributor (i.e., manager) an overseer, i.e., an employee in that capacity, by extension: A fiscal agent (treasurer) figuratively, a preacher of the (Gospel) administration (of a household or estate, specifically a religious economy).

Thus, *stewardship* is the administration of the house or of property, one's own or that of another (Luke 16:1-4).

C. The texts regarding stewardship:

1. The survey/overview/comprehensive portrait of stewardship
2. The summation/ought/clear precepts of stewardship

I. The Focus of Stewardship: The Essence, the Assumptions (1 Corinthians 6; 2 Corinthians 8, 9)

- A. The Sovereign's ownership (1 Corinthians 6; 2 Corinthians 8, 9)
- B. The saint's obligation (1 Corinthians 6; 2 Corinthians 8, 9)
- C. The stewardship opportunities
 1. The personal opportunities
 2. The practical opportunities
 3. The plentiful opportunities

II. The Facets of Stewardship: The Essentials, Emphasis, the Areas

- A. The stewardship of truth (occurs 224 times in Scripture)
 1. The Author of truth
 2. The acknowledgment of truth
 3. The authority of truth

4. The acceptance of truth
5. The appropriation of truth
6. The allegiance to truth
7. The articulation of truth
8. The adornment of truth
9. The ambassadors of truth
10. The adequacy of truth
11. The application of truth
12. The adherence of truth
13. The abhorrence of truth

There are two areas regarding Truth: (1) The body of truth, systematized truth, the Scriptures, the composition, and the institutionalized truth;(2) The believer's talk, spoken truth, the speech, the Christian, the individual truthfulness.

We must learn, love, live, and be loyal to the Truth/Scriptures.

We must hear, heed, honor, hold, and herald the Truth/Scriptures

We must discern and perceive, deliberate and ponder, demonstrate and practice, and declare and proclaim the Truth/Scriptures

B. The stewardship of time (occurs 563 times in Scripture).

1.The concept of time:

- a. The past, the commencement of time (Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 9:24-28; Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Peter 3:4; Galatians 1:13).
- b. The present, the continuance of time (Hebrews 9:26; Revelation 1:19; Galatians 4:4; Romans 8:8; Ephesians 1:3, 4; Romans 8:18).
- c. The prospect, the climax of time (Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 1:19; Philippians 3:9-16; Revelation 10:6). The word *times* occurs 142 times, *time* occurs 563 times. *Times* and *time* occur 705 times in the Scriptures. Second Peter 3:8 notes the Sovereign/Second Coming, and Salvation (past, present, prospect). The three tenses of salvation are justification, sanctification, glorification.

2. The context of time (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8):

- a. The process of time
 - b. The period of time
 - c. The purpose of time
 - d. The perspective of time (Psalm 31:15)
3. The commitment of time:
- a. The priority of time
 - b. The preservation of time
 - c. The preciousness of time
4. The challenge of time:
- a. We must read the times (Romans 13:11-14).
 - b. We must redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5).
 - c. We must respond to the times (2 Timothy 4:1-6).
5. The constants of time:
- a. The invisible, immutable Sovereign
 - b. The infallible, inerrant Scriptures
 - c. The indwelling Spirit
 - d. The imperatives of service
 - e. The individual stewardship
- C. The stewardship of talents (Romans 12-13; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4)
- 1. The origin of spiritual gifts/natural abilities
 - 2. The observation regarding spiritual gifts/natural abilities:
 - a. The distribution of spiritual gifts/natural abilities
 - b. The diversity of spiritual gifts/natural abilities
 - c. The design of spiritual gifts/natural abilities
 - 3. The obligation regarding spiritual gifts/natural abilities
- D. The stewardship of treasure/treasures (occurs 90 times in Scripture; Matthew 6:19-21)
- 1. God demands the tithe.

2. God deserves the offering.
3. God defends saving.
4. God directs spending.

Treasure occurs 35 times in Scripture. *Treasures* occurs 55 times in Scripture. *Treasure* #2344 refers to a deposit, i.e., wealth, literally or figuratively. *Treasure* #2343 means to amass or reserve, literally or figuratively, to lay up treasure (keep) in store (heap) treasure (together, up).

E. The stewardship of the tithe occurs 35 times (Malachi 3:8-10; Hebrews 7:4-9; 2 Corinthians 8:7).

1. The defined portion
2. The denoted practice
3. The designed purpose
4. The described profit
5. The distinct peril

Tithe occurs 13 times in Scripture, *tithes* occurs 21 times in Scripture, and *tithing* occurs one time in Scripture totaling 35 times for all three words. *Receive*, take, receiveth, paid tithes (Hebrews 7:5, 8, 9). *Give* (Luke 18:12). *Pay* (Matthew 23:23).

Tithing commenced with Jacob, continued by Isaac, confirmed by Moses, commanded by Malachi, commended by Christ, consistent with concept and characterizes Christians.

Tithing #1183 describes a tenth, i.e., as a percentage or (*tech*) tithe, a tenth part (Hebrews 7:6-8). *Tithe* (Old Testament #4643) means a tenth, especially, a tithe—means a tenth. *Tithe* (New Testament #586) is to tithe (as a debtor or creditor), to give, pay, or take tithe (Matthew 23:23; Luke 18:12; 11:42; Hebrews 7:5).

F. The stewardship of our testimony occurs 73 times in Scripture (2 Corinthians 5:17-20; 1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3; Philippians 1; Titus 2).

1. Our character/person
2. Our conduct/practice
3. Our career/pursuits

G. The stewardship of our temple

1. We must give Christ our bodies (Romans 12:1, 2).
2. We must glorify Christ in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).
3. We must guard our bodies (1 Timothy 4:16; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; Colossians 3:5).
4. We must govern our bodies

Temple #3485 means habitation, dwelling place of God.

H. The stewardship of our thoughts occurs 130 times in Scripture.

1. Christ discerns our thoughts (Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Luke 6:8; 1 Corinthians 3:20; Hebrews 12:4).
2. Christ directs our thoughts (Philippians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:5).
3. Christ discloses our thoughts (Proverbs 23:7).

The word *thoughts* occurs 53 times in Scripture. *Think* occurs 62 times in Scripture. *Thinketh* occurs six times in Scripture. *Thinkest* occurs nine times in Scripture for a total of 130 times.

I. The stewardship of our tongue occurs 160 times in Scripture (James 1:26; 3:5, 8; 1 Peter 3:10; Mark 7:33, 35; 16:24; Jeremiah 23:31; 1 Corinthians 13:1).

1. The caution regarding our articulation (Ephesians 4:15, 25; James 1:26; 3:5, 8; 1 Peter 3:10)
2. The cited areas
3. The confirmation regarding our accountability (Matthew 12:34-37)

Tongue occurs 126 times in Scripture, and *tongues* occurs 34 times in Scripture for a total of 160 times.

J. The stewardship of our tribe (family, children)

K. The stewardship of our territory

III. The Foes of Stewardship: The Enemies, the Adversaries

- A. Materialism
- B. Marketing
- C. Manipulation
- D. Misinterpretation

- E. Misinformation
- F. Misunderstanding
- G. Mentors

IV. The Fidelity/Faithfulness in Stewardship (1 Corinthians 4; 2 Timothy 2:4)

- A. The allegiance required; the fidelity required
- B. The accountability required; the faithfulness required
- C. The assurance required; the focus required

Conclusion

Songs:

#493 "All for Jesus"

#498 "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go"

We judge men by gifts or by a correspondence with our own peculiarities, but God judges by fidelity. Many a dull sermon is the result of humble powers honestly cultivated, while many a brilliant discourse arises merely from a love of display. Many a diligent and active ministry proceeds from the love of power. Be neither depressed unduly by blame or too exalted by praise.

Every true preacher preaches the Gospel as it has passed through his own mind. And as it passes through his own mind, it will, of course, be more interesting to the minds of most in harmony with his own, thus it is that some of the most inferior preachers are overrated and the most devoted degraded; whereas all true ministers are servants of Christ, the stewards of the mysteries of God, and as such should be honored.

1997 – Earl Hendrix

Edifying the Saints

Text: Ephesians 4:11, 12

Introduction

1. The Book of Ephesians, like so many of Paul's letters, falls naturally into two sections:

- a. The first three chapters contain our creed—doctrinal.
- b. The second three chapters contain our conduct—practical.

The doctrinal chapters are concerned mainly with the great facts of redemption which God has wrought for us in Christ.

The practical chapters present us with the demands, in terms of Christian conduct and zeal, that God is making upon us in light of that redemption.

2. The fourth chapter gives us, "The Walk Worthy of our Calling."

Verse 1: The call of the walk

Verse 2: The care of the walk

Verse 3: The caution of the walk

Verses 4-6: The companionship of the walk: the emphasis is on the word *one*.

Verses 7-16: Gifts from the ascended Christ. The gifts, relating to conduct, have a three-fold purpose in verse 12:

- (1) Perfecting the Saints (verse 12a). Equipping the saints.
 - (2) Promoting the Ministry (verse 12b). The work of the ministry.
 - (3) Prospering the Growth of Saints (verse 12c). Building up or edifying.
3. Christ gives individual gifts (verses 7, 8; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12).
4. In verse 11, Christ gives gifts to the Church. These are men He divinely calls to edify and equip the Church. That is the reason it is a divine calling, not a profession. We should do the work of the ministry in a

professional way, not shoddily.

5. How do we edify the saints? Make edification of the church your specific aim. Edify the saints by equipping them to serve. Edify the saints by exposing sin (verses 14, 17-32).

I. Make Edification of the Church Your Specific Aim.

- A. First, by insight to the nature of the Church (sharpen the focus of the Church).

The Great Commission says, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

The Church is all important to Jesus Christ, its founder. It is difficult to see how even the casual reader of the New Testament can miss this fact. In more than 100 of 114 uses of the word *church* in the New Testament, it refers to a local congregation.

What is the nature of a New Testament church?

1. A church proclaims the Gospel.
2. A church witnesses to the world.
3. A church is a fellowship.
4. A church magnifies worship.
5. A church educates.
6. A church nurtures its members.
7. A church ministers to the total needs of people.

- B. Second, by involvement in the growth of the church.

1. Bring them in. Many churches wait until they come. They do not go out of the four walls.
2. Build them up. You cannot teach them until you win them. Dead churches have no life. Dr. M. R. DeHaan said, “Stick your hand in the radio.” Dr. Bob Gray, former pastor of Trinity Baptist Church,

Jacksonville, Florida, said, "You can have the same results with tacks in the pews."

3. Broaden their ministry. (Illustration: Carson Woodfin, now leader of the shut-in ministry.)

C. Third, by investment in the life of the church.

1. Time. Joseph Stowell in his book, *Shepherding the Church*, said, "Years ago a person that got saved would ask 'What can I do?' But now they ask, 'What can you do for me?'"

2. Talent. (Illustration: Hazel Clubb)

3. Tithes. God robbers. Roy Rikard said the difference between a thief and a robber...

II. You Edify the Saints by Equipping Them to Serve.

A. The great object of the ministry is the building up of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The ministry is for the improvement of the saints as well as the conversion of sinners. We must not rest in attainments already made, but continually strive to the character of "a perfect (mature or complete) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

The word *perfecting* or equipping in verse 12 basically refers to that which is fit, restored to its original condition, or made complete. The word was often used as a medical term for the setting of bones. The job of the pastor is to equip the laity to do the work of the ministry. He is to work himself out of a job.

B. In the Book of Acts 6:1-4, we find an interesting story:

The 12 apostles were unable to meet all the needs of the growing number of disciples in the early church. The apostles needed help (as Moses did at the time his father-in-law gave him advice). Shared ministry was the answer for Moses' busy days (Exodus 18:13-24). They asked the church to choose seven qualified men to help them serve. The laity today, like these seven, must lead the church in ministry to the community's needs and in reaching those outside the church.

"For we are labourers together with God" (1 Corinthians 3:9). All Christian disciples are God's fellow workers. No one is left out, and all are

needed. The abilities and expertise of the laity are needed in the ministry of the church today. Not all serve in the same way, but all are called to serve in some way.

Paul pictured the church as a body with many members, and with every member having a distinct task. A witnessing and serving laity is essential to a functioning and growing church. The challenges are great. Too few workers produce too many burnt-out preachers. Christ still is the head of the Church. He still can and will use all of His disciples in His extended ministry.

C. God has given four basic tools for the spiritual equipping of the saints.

1. The first and most important is God's Word. The pastor is to feed himself and the people. Second Timothy 3:16 states, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."
2. The second (indicated in Acts 6:4) is prayer.
3. The third is testing. James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."
4. The fourth is suffering. Remember the words of 1 Peter 5:10, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Philippians 3:10 says, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

D. The process of equipping the saints.

First Free Will Baptist Church in Inman, South Carolina, has over 170 people ministering through the week and on Sunday. Here is the process to equip members for the ministry.

1. You, the pastor, do it.
2. You do it, and take somebody with you.
3. He does it, and you are with him.

4. He does it.

5. He does it with someone else with him.

I hear, I forget.

I see, I remember.

I do, I understand!

III. You Edify the Saints by Exposing Sin (Ephesians 4:14, 17-32).

You know, it's a great privilege to know what sin is. Living apart from grace blinds one to the nature and will of God. Human reason can defend any lifestyle because sin controls reason. Sin hardens our intellectual capacities and leads us away from the life God wants us to live. Sin gives us a consuming desire to do what is wrong. By letting human intellect control our lives, we ignore grace and choose a life that may lead to depravity.

Paul contrasted the way of the Gentiles and of Christians as the difference between darkness and light. He put particular emphasis on the change of attitudes caused by the indwelling of Christ. Christ within us evokes changed actions, particularly the verbal ones noted in Ephesians 4:17-32.

Conclusion

What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about tonight? Perhaps you are a pastor about to give up, and you don't know where to turn. Why don't you obey the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps God is calling you to a ministry, but you have been holding out, you need to come. (Illustration: Jimmy Miller who answered the call of God at the convention when Fred Warner preached).

Maybe the Holy Spirit has spoken to you anew and afresh that you need to get busy in the work of the Lord and hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

1997 – Robert Prichard

The Place, the Power, and the Purpose of Expounding

Text: Luke 24:13-27

The definition of *expound* is to make known. In this case, to make known what the Scriptures are saying. “Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts” (Isaiah 28:9).

Doctrine is defined as an announcement—God’s announcement from Heaven. What does He want us to understand? I have been asked to address the place, power, and purpose of expounding, that is preaching according to the Scriptures. According to the convention theme, “Church Aflame,” there will be an emphasis on Bible preaching when the church is in flames. (By the way, this is meant to be spiritual fire and not literal fire.)

I. The Place of Preaching: Expounding the Scriptures

I remember Dr. Charles Thigpen saying back in 1967, “You must keep preaching on the mainline in your church!”

In Kansas City in 1899, during what would be D.L. Moody’s last revival meeting, he leaned across the organ and asked, “Will you ministers allow me to say a word to you?”

“Of course, say what you want,” they answered.

“Well, I’m not a prophet, but I have a guess to make that I think will prove true. You hear so much nowadays about the preacher of the 20th century. Do you know what sort of man he will be? He will be the sort of a preacher who opens his Bible and preaches out of that. Oh, I’m sick and tired of this essay preaching! I’m nauseated with the ‘silver-tongued orator’ preaching! I like to hear preachers and *not* windmills!”

I share the same concern as we approach the 21st Century. We must have preachers who will open God’s Book and announce to the world what He said—and we must trust what He said. We must believe it still pleases God to save people by preaching His Word to them.

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:17-21).

Preaching the Word was Paul’s priority. He did not change his preaching to fit the culture. He expected the culture to change as a result of his preaching. First Corinthians 9:22 says, “I am made all things to all men... by all means.” Taken out of context, this passage sounds like the Apostle Paul was dancing to “Jailhouse Rock” on Mars’ Hill so he can identify with the culture to get a chance to witness to them. But Acts 17:18 tells us how he really got their attention. “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods; because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”

He preached unto them Jesus and got their attention! Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 9:22 to the church at Corinth that he preached to the Jews things they should have known from the Scriptures; that he preached to the rest of the world that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” and “hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness” and “commands all men everywhere to repent.”

Note: It was the preaching of Jesus, the very Word of God that captured their attention. How did the men of that culture respond to Paul’s preaching of Jesus? The same way people of all cultures of all ages have responded. Some mocked, some put it off, “howbeit, certain men clave to him, and believed.”

Note also: Preaching the Word was the priority of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospels close as they opened—with Jesus preaching, expounding the Scriptures.

The beginning of Jesus’ ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,

and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

The end of Jesus' ministry: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

II. The Power of Preaching: Expounding the Scriptures

Leaving Mars' Hill, Paul went to Corinth, where he preached in the synagogue every Sabbath to the Jews and the Greeks. Acts 18 tells where Paul's power for preaching came from when he faced opposition; although he considered the opposition of the people as against themselves and against God, he still suffered at the hands of both Jews and Greeks. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth, I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace" (Acts 18:9).

These verses give insight into Paul's feelings when we read what he later wrote to the church at Corinth.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

Yes, Paul's power for preaching came from being endued with the Holy Ghost power the same as the other apostles, but he felt it necessary that he and all preachers of the Word be blameless and above reproach. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Corinthians 6:3).

It needs to be said of the preacher what that great woman of Shunem said to her husband about Elisha, "And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually."

(2 Kings 4:9)

The preacher must be perceived as a holy man of God. Isaiah 52:11 says, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." There is no power for preaching if the preacher is not clean.

III. The Purpose of Preaching: Expounding the Scriptures

Preaching the Scriptures will cleanse the sinner—restore him to God—and preaching the Scriptures will keep the cleansed sinner clean. Simply put, when the Church is aflame with the fire of God and expounding the Scriptures—making known God's announcement from Heaven—we can determine very quickly what will stand the fire test Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 concerning God's building.

"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:9-15).

Paul knew about this "fire test" from the Old Testament Scriptures (Number 31:14-23) where the people were under a plague because they listened to immoral counsel from Balaam, which their leaders were going along with, and Moses ordered a cleansing that included a fire test (verses 22, 23). He told the people that if it passed the fire test, it would be clean.

There is a sense, no doubt, that 1 Corinthians 3 points to a final judgment, but when the church is aflame, and the Scriptures are being expounded, the fleshly, sensuous methods of building a sanctuary for God will be consumed in the fire.

Exodus 25 records God's announcement from Heaven to Moses for a sanctuary: "And let them make a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

Nadab and Abihu discovered that God's fire burns hotter than strange fire. The preacher who makes the Scriptures known will have to spend a lot of time fighting "wildfire." We have some "spiritual arsonists." They don't care how they start a fire, just so they get a crowd to watch it burn.

Throughout history, people have gotten so involved in doing religious activities that appeal to the flesh that they fail to understand God's doctrine—His announcement from Heaven. Remember Isaiah's question: "Who shall he *make* to understand doctrine (God's announcement)?"

John 1:1 clearly states God's announcement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Note the Word was God, emphasis on God! The pharisees were astonished at John's doctrine, but they missed it. Even Jesus couldn't make them understand; they refused to understand. The Apostle Paul almost missed it. He tried to serve God in the flesh, but found himself chained to a body of death—separated from God in the flesh with no earthly way to God. But when the Scriptures were opened to him, he found the way. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin" (Romans 7:24, 25).

Paul told the Corinthians that knowing Christ in the flesh will not make us new creatures. "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:16, 17).

Paul finally got the message Jesus expounded to Nicodemus. Jesus told Nicodemus that he should have known from Scripture about life from above (John 3:3, 10). A master teacher such as Nicodemus should have been familiar with Psalm 87 which summarizes God's doctrine—His announcement from Heaven—about being born from above.

This psalm is written to be the song of the sons of Korah, whose name signifies fallen man. Spurgeon quotes William Romaine who says Korah signifies the state of trees during the winter—bare and fruitless.

In the same sense, it is used of the bald head. He says the bald head is a "lively description of fallen man." Perhaps deadly would be a better word. The Hebrew word for Elisha's bald head is the same word translated Korah

(Strongs, 7142).

“His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee” (Psalm 87:1-7).

Note that verse four makes mention of Egypt, known as Rahab for her haughtiness; Babylon, city of depravity and confusion; Phlistia, so long the bitter enemies of Israel; Tyre, with Ethiopia, the covetous, the rich, the slaves of ignorance concerning God. This man was born there! This is the purpose. Make it known to the world!

One of Spurgeon’s quotes points out that the word used here for man is not Adam, the common name for man but *ish*, which signifies distinction, excellency, and honor. Those who had no right to citizenship could claim birthright in God’s holy city, because the Highest Himself said so (verse 6). Lifted from total depravity to become the sons of God, born from above. Selah! Ponder that! “This man” also means a teenage boy born in a little hollow called Coal Branch—worlds away from Jerusalem and God. As Squire Parsons sings, “When I could not get to where He was, He came to me.”

Psalm 87, as stated earlier, summarizes God’s announcement from Heaven—that men and women whose lives have been wrecked and ruined by sin can become the “habitation of God” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Look again at Luke 24:32. When the Scriptures are opened, hearts will burn with the fire of God. “And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

The other 11 also had their understanding opened—flesh and blood had not revealed what they now could see—God’s announcement from Heaven. “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations,

beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.

“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

“And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:45-53).

They rejoiced in the Temple. With great joy, they praised and blessed God as they viewed the rent veil, the Ark no longer there. Perhaps they did not know that when the priest had been going behind the veil with the blood of an innocent animal for years he had been sprinkling the blood toward a rock—the Foundation Stone as it was called according to Edersheim.

What mattered now was that they had a commission—a mandate from Jesus the very Word of God. Go. Preach. Expound. Make known that there is a way to God that does not depend on an earthly temple and an earthly priest because “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once in to the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 24).

Isaiah 28:12 says, “This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; this is the refreshing.” Jesus said, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Satan had sifted my son for many years, and his life was wrecked by sin and the devil. A few weeks before he died, he wanted me to pray with him. He confessed his sin to God and begged forgiveness. I could promise him that God said in the Bible, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Word of God works. Expounding Scriptures works. It pleases God to save them that believe His Word. That’s His announcement from Heaven.

1997 – Jerry Norris

The Importance of Soul-Winning

Text: Mark 16:15

Introduction

We do what we think is important. We make all manner of sacrifices for those things we believe to be of importance. It doesn't matter what the cost; if we esteem it to be important, we will do it. Why do we not win souls? We do not believe it to be important. For if we believed it to be important we would be engaged in it. In this sermon I desire to discuss this thing of soul-winning and its importance.

I. It Is Important Because of the Peril Waiting the Lost Man.

Every person who has not received Jesus Christ as his personal Savior is already condemned. He doesn't have to wait until he dies to know where he is going to spend eternity.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

The unsaved person is already under the death penalty. One day your heart will stop beating and the penalty will then be carried out.

The Scriptures make it very clear that the unsaved man who dies in his sin will spend eternity in a place called Hell. I wish we could really understand that. I am afraid that we have lost the realization that there is a Hell. If your teenager dies without Christ, where do you think he will go? Where will your unsaved spouse go? We love them so much that we cannot comprehend the fact that they will actually go to Hell.

If somehow we could load up our buses and take a trip into Hell, when we returned we would all become tremendous soul-winners. Do you remember the heart's desire of the rich man in Luke 16:27, 28? He suddenly had an overwhelming desire to see his brothers saved. He didn't give the whole matter much thought while he was alive, but one moment in Hell made him a dynamic soul-winner.

Our responsibility is to warn. Suppose that several years ago someone found a cure for cancer; not just a treatment, but a 100% cure for this

dreaded disease. Let's say that the scientist who discovered this cure informed a select group of people, but neither he nor his peers ever shared it with anyone else. Since their discovery, hundreds of thousands could have been saved, but for some reason they did not tell anyone. How would you feel about those people? We have the best news in the world and we are keeping it to ourselves.

If our responsibility is to warn people, how can we do this? We often think that evangelism can be done only one way. Let me identify six different styles in the New Testament.

First, there is confrontational evangelism. An example is found in Acts 2. But there are not many people who can take the Bible, walk up to a person, and seek to win that person to Christ. Less than 14% of church people have the gift of evangelism.

Second, there is intellectual evangelism. This style is illustrated by Paul in Acts 17, and involved reasoning with Jews and God-fearing Greeks from the Scriptures, "explaining and proving that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." This seemed to be the style used by Paul before Felix.

Third, is testimonial evangelism. This is demonstrated by the blind man in John 9. When questioned by others, the man testified, "One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see" (John 9:25). This style was also used by Paul before Agrippa. This style becomes even more effective if you have a dramatic conversion. We still recount Paul's conversion today.

Fourth, is relational or lifestyle evangelism. A good example is the demon-possessed man in Mark 5. Here Jesus casts a demon out of a man who then desires to live with his Savior. Instead, Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and hath had mercy on you." Through your changed life, let people know that you are a Christian.

Fifth, is invitational evangelism. A good example is the woman at the well in John 4. She had five husbands and the man with whom she was now living wasn't her husband. After trusting in the Savior, she went back to her people and invited them to come hear Jesus (verses 28, 29).

Sixth, is service evangelism. Dorcas modeled this style of evangelism in Acts 9 through her acts of kindness.

II. It Is Important Because of the Price Paid to Keep Lost Souls

Out of Hell.

We will never truly understand the price paid to keep us out of Hell. The songwriter correctly wrote:

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

We sing the little chorus:

He paid a debt He did not owe,
I owed a debt I could not pay.

In 1968, the Lord blessed Brenda and me with a set of quadruplets. However, prior to Brenda getting pregnant we did not have any health insurance. There was another Jerry Norris in North Carolina, and we kept getting our coverage mixed up. In the process of switching companies, we were without medical coverage. During that brief window, when we did not have health insurance, Brenda became pregnant.

One of the quads, Samuel Lee, lived only 17 hours. Another quad, Stephen Edward, lived two days. Stephanie Lynn and Suzanne Rene survived. But the quads were born prematurely. Samuel weighed only three pounds, Stephen weighed two pounds, 11 ounces. Stephanie and Suzanne each weighed two pounds, 15 ounces. They spent the next six weeks in pediatric ICU. The hospital bill, even in 1968, was astronomical. The payment plan worked out by the hospital was little more than a courtesy because Brenda and I could not see ever paying off that hospital debt.

Later, I was called to pastor a church in Elgin, Illinois. Shortly after moving to Elgin, we received notification from Spartanburg General Hospital that our bill had been forgiven. We didn't owe them a dime!

In much the same way, we owed a sin debt that we could never pay, but Jesus paid our debt for us.

When Jesus went to the cross, He took every sin of humanity. Can you comprehend that? Every sin that every human being from Adam to the last person to be born prior to Jesus' return was laid on Jesus. That is what the Bible means when it says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew

no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

III. It Is Important Because of the Products of Soul-Winning.

If you would ask any pastor what he desired for his church, everything he desired could be accomplished through soul-winning. First, most pastors desire a larger attendance. If they had a 50% increase in attendance, they would be ecstatic. Soul-winning will bring that increase.

"He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

The truth is that the more you sow, the more you will reap. Why don't we reap more? Because we do not sow more! "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns" (Matthew 6:26).

Why don't birds reap and gather into barns? They do not sow.

One of our largest attendance days was on Friend Day in 1990. On that day we had 468 in the morning service. Do you know why we had such a large attendance? Everyone was sowing. Can you imagine what would happen if all of our people sowed the Gospel every week?

A second product of evangelism is joy. Every pastor wants a happy congregation. What is the happiest place in a hospital? The nursery! Why? Because that is the place where babies are being born. You see parents, grandparents, friends, etc., all smiling, laughing, and just enjoying each other.

When babies are born in a local church, it makes everyone happy. When children walk forward to make a public profession, it does something to you.

A third product of soul-winning is love. Two people cannot dislike each other very long if they go visiting together.

A fourth product is clean members. I have never seen a backslidden Christian winning souls. Nor have I ever seen a Christian with sin in their lives actively involved in reaching people for Christ. When you are trying to get people in church, and to Jesus, you will automatically begin to try to live more Christlike.

A fifth product of soul-winning is finances. Every pastor would like for his church offerings to be larger. Ask any pastor if he would like an additional

thousand dollars in the offering every week starting next week and what do you think his response would be? Every budget crisis ever experienced has been successfully met with an increase in attendance. Instead of asking our folks to double up on their tithes, why don't we just go reach more people?

Jesus gives us a very interesting story in Matthew 17 as to how we can raise money. When Peter was confronted with a tax question, Jesus told him to go catch a fish. In the mouth of the fish would be a coin. Take that money and pay the tax. Even though this should not be our primary goal, Jesus told us that we can meet our financial needs by going fishing—fishing for souls.

IV. It Is Important Because of the Power of Jesus to Save.

Let me tell you one of the marvelous things about witnessing. The disciples had just received the Great Commission. Mark 16:20 says, "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them."

When we obey the Lord in this thing of soul-winning, He works with us. Let me give you three illustrations. In Acts 8, Philip is led by the Spirit to talk to an important government official from Ethiopia. When he got there, he found this important dignitary in his chariot reading.

Like us, I am quite certain that Philip was hesitant, but he went over to the man, and found that he was reading the Book of Isaiah, and was trying to figure out what and who the prophet was speaking of. Philip led the man to Christ and baptized him on the spot. That is the Lord working with us.

In Acts 9, a man named Ananias had an even tougher assignment. He was told to go witness to a man who had spent the better part of his life crusading against Christians. We would have come up with a thousand excuses not to go. When Ananias got there, he learned that Saul had already met Jesus on the Damascus Road and was waiting for someone to tell him what to do next. That is the Lord working with us.

In Acts 10, the Lord told Peter, a Jewish fisherman, to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile army officer. Peter was very reluctant to go. When Peter finally got there, he found that Cornelius and his entire household were assembled to hear Peter's message. That is the Lord working with us.

By our estimation, every one of these men were unapproachable. Have you ever thought that about someone? "That person wouldn't want to hear what I have to say." This is a work that we are not compelled to do alone. God promises to work with us.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Jesus is our example as a soul-winner. In John 4, He came to the woman at the well. Notice at least four things about His method. First, He came to one person. Do you realize that the vast majority of Jesus’ ministry was one-on-one? We read much about the Sermon on the Mount, but examples such as the one in John 4 are the norm.

Second, He had to go out of His way. It was not convenient to visit this woman. Folks, soul-winning is rarely convenient. It is not convenient to get out on a cold night, go several miles, etc.

Third, He had to overcome natural barriers. There was the sin barrier. He was holy, sinless, perfect in every way; and she was an immoral adulteress. There was the race barrier. He was a Jew, she was a Samaritan. There was a sex barrier. He was male, and she was female; and nobody ever talked to the opposite sex in public in that area in that day. There was a religion barrier. She worshipped at Sychar; He worshipped at Jerusalem.

Fourth, He had a burning desire to get this person saved. The passage says, He “must needs go through Samaria.” It was as though He had a divine appointment. The truth of the matter is, most of us don’t care whether or not a person gets saved. Isn’t it interesting that we care when someone is sick.

When someone loses their job, it concerns us. When someone loses a member of their family, it concerns us. When some dear couple suffer through a divorce, it concerns us. However, when a person is lost, and on the way to Hell, it seems as though no one is concerned. We are more concerned about getting to the restaurant before the rush, or our own personal comfort.

When David was in the cave fleeing from Saul he said in Psalm 142:4, “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.”

Man can say that about man, but he cannot say that about Jesus.

I like the old song written by C. F. Weigle:

No one ever cared for me like Jesus,

There's no other friend so kind as He;

No one else could take the sin and darkness from me,

Oh, how much He cared for me.

Soul-winning is important because Jesus cares about you, and wants to see you saved.

1998 – Thurmon Murphy

Why We Believe What We Believe

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:6

Let's take at least a brief look at our biblical text. Paul told the Corinthians "Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written.' Then you will not take pride in one man over against another" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Today, we will focus on "Do not go beyond what is written."

This statement, in quotation marks in the NIV, was a very common proverb, frequently quoted in Paul's day. The verse is one of the difficult passages in Paul's writings to interpret. Simply put, it means for us that whatever we believe in the matters of faith and practice must be based on what is written in the Scriptures, the Word of God. We must not go beyond the teachings of Scripture. The Scriptures are our source and authority for what we preach and teach.

The theme for this year's national convention, "Belief Behaves," has been adhered to by all of the speakers, so far. This isn't always done and perhaps, at times, it shouldn't be. In this message I shall endeavor to continue with the theme, "Belief Behaves," emphasizing the belief part rather than the behaves part.

My subject this morning is "Why We Believe What We Believe." This is an issue which needs addressing in our denomination, as well as in any and all other denominations and various branches of Christendom.

You and I each have a set of beliefs as Christians and as Free Will Baptists. In most aspects of our faith, our beliefs are the same. We believe in the inspiration of Scripture, holding to its infallibility and inerrancy. We believe in the deity of Christ, His physical, bodily resurrection from the grave, His second coming, the reality of Heaven and Hell, and so forth.

There are some things, however, on which there are differences among us. Perhaps the most obvious is the matter of eschatology; some of us are amillennialists and some of us are premillennialists.

On the matter of the atonement, I presume that most of us believe

that Christ's death was substitutionary; He died on the cross suffering the punishment for our sins. Many of us identify our view as being the penal satisfaction view of the atonement. Others among us, however, believe in the governmental view of the atonement, denying that Christ's death was substitutionary, believing that Christ died to maintain God's government.

There are other differences, of course, but the purpose of this message is not to point out those differences and stir the waters of controversy. The point of this message, "Why We Believe What We Believe," is simply this, and I only have one point: all of our beliefs as Christians and as Free Will Baptists should be based on one thing, and one thing only—what the Bible teaches. That sounds simple, and to that statement we can all say a hearty amen.

But the fact is, though it is easy to say we believe what we believe because it is what the Bible teaches, in reality we don't always put that into practice. We say we are a people of the Book, and for the most part we are, and I'm thankful for our commitment to the Bible. Let me try to be clear here.

Many of our beliefs, perhaps even most of our beliefs, did not come to us individually as a result of our having directly studied and researched the Bible and then having reached firm conclusions as to what it teaches on the various subjects of our belief system.

This may sound idealistic and beyond the scope of what is humanly possible for us to achieve as individuals. But it should be our goal, a lifelong goal if you will, especially for those of us in the Gospel ministry, that we believe what we believe as a result of having studied the Bible and having reached firm convictions as to what it teaches.

We often give lip service to the notion that we are a people of the Book, that it is our final rule of faith and practice, that everything we believe in those areas is based on the Bible. It is easy to make that statement, but it is a little more difficult to put it into practice. We don't always practice that as you can easily see when you look at our history.

We love to pick on the Scribes and Pharisees. In the Synoptic Gospels, we often find Jesus in conflict with them. They were people who put a lot of stock in what the Old Testament said. But they also had other sources for their religious beliefs, the oral traditions, the writings of the Misnah, the Midrash, writings of famous and influential scholars and rabbis of the past. They drew heavily from these writings and based many of their

interpretations of Scripture upon them. That's why they were in almost constant conflict with Jesus about what He did and taught.

We see this illustrated in Matthew 12:1-8. On a Sabbath day as Jesus and the Twelve went through a grain field and, because they were hungry, began to pick some heads of grain, probably wheat or barley, and eat them. I've done this myself, eating a few heads of ripe oats, while out hunting. It isn't the Golden Corral, but it'll get you through a long day.

The Pharisees objected to what they viewed as being an unlawful harvest on the Sabbath. Where was it written in Scripture that Jesus and the Twelve could not do this? Nowhere. As a matter of fact, Deuteronomy 23:25 says, "If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands."

What, then, was the basis of the Pharisees' objection? Simply this: one of the ancient rabbis had written in the *Misnah* that the amount of grain that could be thus thrashed and eaten lawfully on the Sabbath was that which was equal to a lamb's mouthful. Evidently, they thought Jesus and the Twelve had exceeded this amount. But what Jesus and the Twelve did was not a violation of Scripture, it was a violation of the rabbinical interpretation of Scripture. Their interpretation was based on a non-biblical source: tradition.

Many of the things we practice and believe today with great passion, devotion, and deep feelings are simply traditions of our fathers based on writings and or practices of famous evangelists and great soul winners of the past. For instance, here are just three things:

- The list of what are the fundamentals of the faith and what makes one a fundamentalist
- The altar, or mourner's bench
- The altar call

It is interesting that though altars and the altar call, or public invitation to come forward to accept Christ as Savior, are traditionally very important to us, the altar call was the invention of American evangelist Charles G. Finney (1792- 1875). Finney was a good friend of our beloved David Marks, and it is easy to see how some of Finney's influence filtered in to Free Will Baptists through Marks.

We chide other groups within Christendom for basing so many of their

beliefs and practices on sources other than the Bible. Take Roman Catholics, for example. The things which form their identity and distinguish them from evangelical Protestants are sourced in tradition, not in the Bible. Here is just a short list:

- The immaculate conception of Mary
- The perpetual virginity of Mary
- Praying to Mary
- The assumption of Mary
- The pope
- Purgatory
- The use of images
- Celibacy of priests and nuns

And look at Mormons. Their beliefs and practices are based on what they call the Four Standard Works. Those books include:

- The King James Version of the Bible, “insofar as it is correctly translated”
- The Book of Mormon
- The Pearl of Great Price
- Doctrine and Covenants

No wonder their beliefs and practices differ so much from our own. Many of our own beliefs, perhaps even most of our beliefs, came to us first from other sources rather than from our own personal thorough study of the Bible.

This includes beliefs which are biblically correct: there is a God, the God of the Bible; Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins; those who accept Jesus by faith as their Savior go to Heaven. But it also includes beliefs and viewpoints that are not biblically correct. Those other sources, as helpful as many of them are, were not and are not infallible. Let me list a few of those sources and illustrate what I mean.

We adopt the beliefs and views of our parents. Some would say that I am a Christian and believe what I believe as a result of an accident of birth, that if I had been born in some other place I probably would have been a

Roman Catholic, a Muslim, a Buddhist, an atheist, or something else. There is some truth in that.

But I was born into a family where both parents were Christians. I admit that I am to a large extent a Christian because they were Christians. However, I am a Christian now because of my own convictions about the Bible, the existence of God, Jesus Christ, and the reality of the Christian faith. My father was a good man and a Free Will Baptist deacon. He was a mechanical genius, but he had trouble understanding abstract concepts such as theology and scientific theory.

He once told me that man would never land on the moon, stating that if God had intended for man to be on the moon He would have put him there. He was wrong, of course. I remember that it was his job at the Columbia Hill Free Will Baptist Church in Overton County, Tennessee, to prepare the necessary items for the Lord's Supper and feet washing. He referred to them as sacraments, though I'm sure he did not mean by that term that they conveyed salvation. Rather than the word *sacraments*, I believe it is more biblical to use the terms *symbols* or *memorials*. I don't say this to diminish the man my father was. He was a great man and a very intelligent man. But not everything he believed about God and how He works was correct.

What I'm saying is that, in the final analysis, we shouldn't believe something just because it was taught to us by our parents. The ultimate question is what does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe.

We adopt the beliefs and views of our first pastors and other preachers whom we have heard. This is why some of us are premillennialists. It is also why some of us are amillennialists. Way too many of us hold to one or the other of the views on eschatology, not because we have thoroughly researched the Bible on the subject, and objectively considered both views, or even a third view, and then reached a firm, objective, knowledgeable conclusion. We simply adopted the first view we heard and never studied or considered any other view. We may not even know anything about the other views—except that they are wrong.

Another illustration of this is concerning the death of Christ. How many of us heard our pastor or some other preacher say that the death of Christ was God's payment to the devil to ransom us from the devil's hold or the devil's captivity? It sounded logical. It even sounded biblical. After all doesn't the Bible say, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but

to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28)?

The ransom analogy is just that—an analogy. To say that the ransom price of our salvation was paid to the devil is pushing the analogy too far. While it is true that God paid the price to redeem us, it is incorrect to say that the ransom price was paid to the devil. The Bible never says that. Furthermore, the devil had no hold on God and God had no obligation to the devil which required Him to pay the devil for our salvation.

The Bible doesn't say to whom the ransom price was paid, it doesn't press the analogy that far. But if you have to have an answer as to whom the price was paid, the best speculation is that the price was paid to God Himself, particularly to His attributes of holiness and justice. The point is we shouldn't just hear something that sounds good from a trusted preacher and then adopt that into our belief system and preach it. The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe. We adopt the beliefs and views of our denomination as stated in the *Treatise*. We have a lot of faith and confidence in our *Treatise* and for me to suggest that it might not be correct in some areas may sound like a foolish and disloyal statement.

What I'm trying to say is that we should believe the things we believe because we are firmly convinced that that is what the Bible teaches, and we should not just automatically adopt something in the *Treatise* as being what we believe. But don't they teach one and the same thing? Not necessarily. I have on a number of occasions heard someone say on the floor of the national that our *Treatise* (or our Free Will Baptist doctrines) comes closer to what the Bible teaches than the doctrinal statements of any other denomination.

But I have never heard anyone claim that they teach one and the same thing. No one I ever heard of claims that it is absolutely in line with the Bible. I well remember hearing one of our Oklahoma pastors say on the floor of the national, for instance, that feet washing teaches only one thing: humility. According to the *Treatise*, feet washing "teaches humility and reminds the believer of the necessity of a daily cleansing from all sin" (Chapter XVIII).

Many Free Will Baptists do not believe that second clause, that there is a need for daily cleansing from sin. I did not agree with that pastor, but I admired him for openly stating his convictions about what feet washing does and does not teach. I think it is notable that no one stood to point out

that he had just openly stated that he did not agree with something in the *Treatise*.

Let me make this point. When we begin the process of licensing and ordaining a new preacher we should not hand him a copy of the *Treatise* and say, "This is what you are to believe." We should hand him a Bible and say, "This is what you are to believe." If his beliefs turn out to be sufficiently in line with the *Treatise*, we can then ordain him as a Free Will Baptist minister.

Let me make the point another way. Our task as preachers is to preach the truth. The truths we preach are found in the Bible. The Bible itself, then, should be the ultimate source of the truths we believe and preach. If we look to our denomination's official doctrinal statements as being fully correct, then all Free Will Baptist fledgling preachers end up being Free Will Baptist in their theology (and we say that's great), but by the same token all Nazarene students end up being Nazarene, all Southern Baptist students end up being Southern Baptist, all Methodist students end up being Methodist, all Lutheran students end up being Lutheran, all Presbyterian students end up being Presbyterian, etc.

There should be some movement among denominations toward the truth. If we all cling to our denominational handbooks and doctrinal statements as being absolutely true, then there is no movement among us toward the truth, there is only continued division. That is, of course, until we get to Heaven and finally learn for sure what is true and what isn't. That's when you will hear many of us, including Free Will Baptists, say, "Well, I'll be John Brown, so that's the way it is!" The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach.

They are why we believe what we believe. We adopt theological positions which are stated in some church council or councils. Several church councils met over the centuries, beginning with the Council of Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 15, almost always in response to some crisis in the church. These councils made various proclamations as to what was biblically true and what was not. These councils were sometimes necessary and served important roles in the Church. The Council of Jerusalem met to decide the issue of whether Gentile converts were required to be circumcised. The decision was that they were not (Acts 15:19).

The Council of Nicea met in 325 and proclaimed the full humanity and full deity of Jesus. The Council of Constantinople (381) made important

pronouncements about the unity and trinity of God: "God is a trinity; the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God; there is only one God."

The Council of Chalcedon (451) stated that we are not to worship angels. It also proclaimed that in the one person Jesus Christ there are two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. The Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563, was Rome's response to the Protestant Reformers in which they condemned most everything Protestant and declared things Roman Catholic to be true.

I believe in the full deity of Jesus Christ and in His full humanity. I believe God is a trinity in spite of the fact that the concept is incomprehensible to me. I believe we are not to worship angels. I believe in the blood atonement, the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ, and the inspiration of Scripture.

I believe these things, not because some church council proclaimed them to be so, but because the Bible teaches them. I believe them even if there had been no church councils to proclaim them. I believe what I believe because I have reached certain firm conclusions about what the Bible itself teaches as a result of personal, thorough study of it.

The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe. We adopt the beliefs and views expressed in resolutions passed by the National Association. Resolutions normally deal with some issue or issues current at the time they are presented, something deemed important enough for the convention delegates to make a statement affirming their position. There have been some interesting ones passed by our national body over the years. For instance, in:

- 1828 we passed a resolution disapproving of the use of written sermon outlines and sermon notes.
- 1828 we passed a resolution against the use of instrumental music in our churches.
- 1829 we passed a resolution stating that kneeling was the biblical position for prayer.
- 1844 we passed a resolution against the use of tobacco...and coffee and tea.
- 1847 we passed a resolution stating that it was a violation of the Lord's

Day to make unnecessary calls on the sick on the Lord's Day.

Today we, rightfully I think, disregard those resolutions. Just look at us today. It is a pretty safe assumption that every speaker at this year's convention has used or will use written sermon outlines or notes. We have not only a piano and organ accompanying our singing, we have an orchestra as well. We have very few kneeling in prayer in our services, but we have lots of people who pray while standing or sitting. Most all of us have had or will have a cup of coffee, a glass of iced tea, or a cup of hot tea. Some will even step out for a smoke, albeit discreetly.

So, on the surface, it seems that we eventually disregard many of the resolutions we pass at the national. And that's okay for a couple of reasons. One is that some of them are just plain unscriptural. Another is that most of the resolutions we pass are non-binding resolutions. And we need to remember that fact.

But some of them are binding resolutions. For instance, in 1988, we passed a binding resolution that the basketball team at Free Will Baptist Bible College, the college owned and operated by the National Association of Free Will Baptists, could not wear regulation uniforms in intercollegiate basketball games. There was passionate and heated discussion as this issue was debated prior to the vote. Regulation uniforms were considered by many as being immodest and worldly.

However, the very next year, 1989, at our convention in Tampa, Florida, we passed a resolution which again allowed the team to wear regulation uniforms rather than the warm-ups in which the team had played intercollegiate games during the 1988-1989 season. My point here is not to debate the rightness or wrongness of the opposing resolutions, my point is that neither of the resolutions should be the basis of our beliefs about what is or is not modest or the right thing to do.

The college was bound by the resolutions because it is under the control of the National Association, but my personal beliefs and convictions are not and should not be determined by a resolution passed by any denominational body, district, state, or national.

The Bible teaches modesty for women in 1 Timothy 2:9: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety" I think it is safe to say that the modesty principle also applies to men, though not necessarily in every detail as preached by some of us. For instance, proper necklines

on women is a greater issue than proper necklines on men. I once read a statement in a church newsletter by one of our Free Will Baptist pastors that it was as sinful for a man to go topless as it was for a woman. Somehow I always thought there was a difference. But maybe I'm wrong; I've been wrong before.

The point I'm trying to make here is the same point I've been trying to make all along: the things we believe, along with our convictions and standards, should be the result of what the Bible teaches, not what some church body passed in a resolution. I may discuss with passion and deep feelings the contents and implications of some resolution, but my beliefs about the issue dealt with in the resolution are formed by the Bible, if the Bible speaks to that issue.

Anyone who would change his belief, or adopt a belief, as a result of a vote by some delegation isn't worth his salt. Resolutions don't usually change what we believe anyway. The delegates who voted against the resolution to ban the wearing of regulation uniforms by the college team in 1988 didn't change their minds or positions just because the resolution carried. Conversely, the delegates who voted against the resolution the next year to allow the team to wear regulation uniforms didn't change their minds or positions, either. The question is: What does the Bible teach?

We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe. We adopt the beliefs and views of those in our denomination whom we especially admire. Our denomination went through some turbulent times for about two decades beginning in 1975 in Dayton, Ohio. We debated hair styles, hair length, necklines, hemlines, collars on shirts, and women wearing slacks. In 1978 in Kansas City, Missouri, we even discussed putting ushers at each entrance to services at the national convention to turn away anyone who was not dressed according to our proposed dress code. The force of this debate was whipped up by strong personalities who could command a following, who could exert great influence on others, especially younger pastors. Younger, more immature men and women, adopted "standards and convictions" which were held and promulgated by these charismatic pastors. Thankfully, and hopefully, those days have passed.

Modesty and appropriateness of attire are addressed in the Bible, but the Bible does not say that a modest hemline is "at the middle of the kneecap," "at the top of the kneecap," "at the bottom of the kneecap," or even "at

the ankle." The Bible allows some diversity among us. We don't need to be adding "rules taught by men" (Matthew 15:9). The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe.

We adopt the beliefs and views of a particular Bible teacher or teachers whom we admire. There are some really good Bible teachers and preachers whom I personally admire and for whom I have great respect and appreciation. It is a good thing to learn from those who are gifted at teaching the Bible, whether in the classroom, by reading their books, by listening to their recordings, or by some other means. It is biblical to listen and learn from those who know. The sons of the prophets learned from Elijah and Elisha. The Twelve, and others, learned from Jesus. Many young preachers, including Timothy and Titus, learned from the Apostle Paul. I have learned from a number of mentors and I thank God for them.

Let me just offer one caution here: It can be a dangerous thing to lock in on one or two well-known Bible teachers and adopt everything they teach. This is not intended as a slam on anyone, but it is best that you not just tune in to a skilled Bible teacher such as John McArthur and accept everything he teaches as being what you believe. You can learn from him, and from others. But it is wise to realize that none of the Bible teachers since apostolic times were or are inspired and infallible.

Listen and learn from many people, but when you more or less finalize your belief about any particular religious matter, let your final authority be the Bible. The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe.

We adopt the beliefs and views of our religious culture at large. By a process of osmosis we absorb a lot of ideas from our cultural, religious environment, ideas popularly held yet which may not be biblical. We just sort of assume that these things are true, partly because we keep hearing them all the time. It can be easy to repeat them in our teaching and preaching, without ever checking to see if the Bible really teaches them.

Here are a few examples:

- Everything happens for a reason.
- There's no such thing as an accident, or
- There's no such thing as an accident for a Christian.

- The date of your death is predetermined and there's nothing you can do to change it.
- God has chosen just one mate in the whole world for each person and the two will meet by a divine destiny.
- Bad things that happen to people are punishment for some sin.

All I'm saying here is that before you adopt these things and preach them as being true, be sure and check to see if the Bible really teaches them. Otherwise you may end up believing and preaching things which are no more than common religious superstitions. The question is: What does the Bible teach?

We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe. We think we have a direct revelation from God. This is a touchy subject because so many of our people believe that God speaks to them directly. I do not. I believe He spoke directly to people in Bible days, the prophets, Bible writers, etc., but that He does not speak directly to us today.

Lots of my preacher friends believe that every thing they preach was directly given to them by God. Let me speak of one preacher in particular. There are a number of reasons I do not believe he receives his messages directly from God, even though he believes it:

- The Bible does not teach this, Luke 12: 11, 12, notwithstanding.
- His sermons contain a great many little pieces of information which are not correct. For example: "We don't know how old Joseph was, but he was just a kid, too young to tend the flocks and herds." The Bible says he was seventeen and was tending the flocks (Genesis 37:2). "David picked up seven smooth stones." The Bible says he picked up five (1 Samuel 17 :40). These little pieces of incorrect information did not come from God.
- His sermons regularly contain doctrinal or theological errors of major importance; these erroneous teachings were not given to him by God, either directly or indirectly.
- He almost never preaches on the great themes of the Bible, and does not give a clear presentation of the Gospel. If God was giving him his sermons he would surely preach the great biblical themes, at least occasionally, and he would give a clear presentation of the Gospel, at

least now and then. God has given us revelation in two ways. One is what we call natural revelation. He has revealed some things about Himself in the world of nature, in His creation (Romans 1:20). The other is what we call special revelation and it is found in the Bible, and it is the Bible which defines what we believe, and it is the Bible, God's Word, that we are commissioned to preach (2 Timothy 4:2).

The question is: What does the Bible teach? We shouldn't go beyond what the Scriptures teach. They are why we believe what we believe. Now, let's focus for a minute or two on our one point in this message: we should believe what we believe, in the areas we commonly refer to as faith and practice, because of one thing and one thing only—what the Bible teaches.

Again let me try to be clear. It is helpful, even essential, that we use good Bible commentaries and other scholarly reference books, but we use them for only one purpose, to help us determine exactly what the Bible teaches. We need to be very familiar with church history, proclamations of church councils, doctrinal statements and resolutions passed by our own denomination, and differences between our denomination and others. But in the final analysis, we are to believe what we believe because of the Bible. It is our authority on matters of faith and practice.

Please allow me a moment more. And this is important for us to understand. Sometimes in order for us to discern how the Bible applies to us we have to interpret some passages in light of cultural equivalents. The Bible was written half a world away and was completed approximately 2,000 years ago. It was a different time, a different place, and a different culture. To be sure its principles and truths are timeless, to be lived and followed wherever and whenever we live. But unless we interpret some biblical passages in terms of cultural equivalents, we can easily miss what it intends to teach us.

Let me illustrate. Five times the Bible commands us to greet each other with a kiss. Those five places are: "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16a); "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Corinthians 16:20b); "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (2 Corinthians 13:12); "Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss" (1 Thessalonians 5:26); and "Greet one another with a kiss of love" (1 Peter 5: 14).

This Middle Eastern form of greeting was done by men to men, lips to lips. You've seen this in television news clips from countries that to some

extent approximate biblical culture, at least ancient culture. You are always saying that you just take the Bible for what it says, that you do exactly what the Bible tells you to do.

But how many of you men when you came into this service this morning greeted each other with a kiss on the lips? How many? None of you. Did any of you men even kiss one or more of the other men on the cheek? I'd be worried about you if you did. By the way, I'm glad none of you men tried to kiss me this morning. If you had you probably would have ended up with a fat lip!

But why don't we greet each other with a kiss? Because that's not what we do in our culture. We use the cultural equivalent, the handshake. That cultural equivalent is totally and fully accepted by each and every one of you without debate, bickering, or controversy. We American Christian men just don't go around kissing other men.

Other passages must also be interpreted in the light of cultural equivalency. And here we may not all agree on which verses should be included on this list. But I will list these, just as examples:

- “And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head” (1 Corinthians 11:5, 6).
- “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:14).
- “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is a disgrace for a woman to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35).
- “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:11, 12).

The cultural equivalent of what Paul says in the above passages is this: Christian women and wives should not dress or act in any way that gives the impression that they are loose and immoral, or that they are insubordinate to their husbands. The dress and demeanor of Christian ladies should give

the impression that they are godly, holy, Christian women who have a biblical relationship with their husbands. It would be easy to take what Paul says and apply it literally to our culture. But we would be wrong to do so, just as we would be wrong to require that men kiss men.

Our time together this morning has quickly flown away, but let me say as I draw this message to a close that those of us in the Gospel ministry must devote our lives to Bible study. Any of you young people who are contemplating going into the ministry, or have already started in the ministry, must realize the absolute necessity of spending many hours each week, not just in sermon or lesson preparation, but in developing a richer, fuller understanding of the Bible and biblical theology.

Out of the richness and fullness of your knowledge of the Bible you can then preach meaningful, relevant, practical, biblical sermons. Unless you say yes to a lifetime of Bible study, you are not really saying yes to God's call to the ministry.

1998 – J.L. Gore

The Crisis of Decision

Text: Hebrews 11:24-27; Matthew 13:45, 46; Luke 6:46

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your love and all that we have in You. We thank You for the reminder of our hope in glory, which is Christ in us. Dear God, I pray that You would bless this message today. I ask that You would take this servant and use these lips of clay, just as You would have them to be used. We do want You to be the Messenger. Help me to step aside and may You completely take over. Touch each of our hearts and lives we do pray. As I stood in this place and prayed, while it was empty, and asked for Your Holy Spirit to touch here in a special way, not only as I speak, but as we have this meeting. Lord, we need something. It may be hard for us to identify it, but there is something we need. Help us to be willing to pay a price and may God in these days stir our hearts in a special way that we could see great things happening over this denomination. In Jesus we pray, Amen.

I think all preachers realize that when we do have faith, something happens in our lives. The theme of our conference is “Belief Behaves.” We have been tip-toeing around what should be said. I remember one time Trymon Messer was telling a story. (He tells a few.) He was telling that after he got saved, he told his preacher, “I have been coming to this church, and you ain’t preached nothing I want to hear yet.”

I think we have preached all around this subject. We need to zero in on what “Believe and Behave” is about. I like that motto. If Free Will Baptists have had anything to guide us through the years, it’s that slogan. What is happening in our world today is that some people feel they can believe and *not* behave. You can believe in something, you can profess something, you can sing the good songs, pray the good prayers, and then live as the world—not have a separated life. I certainly believe when we have faith it brings a crisis in our lives.

Faith brings a crisis of belief. Belief means there is action and if there is no action, there is no obedience. When we obey, we do something. Unless there is some action, unless there has been some work, unless God does

something in us, and we do something outwardly for Him, it has not been obedience. Belief brings a crisis.

I want to speak to you on, "The Crisis of Decision." That is where we exercise belief, we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are brought to the place of a crisis of making a decision, to live on what we know, to act on what we know, or to stay in disobedience. If the Holy Spirit through the Word of God speaks to our hearts, speaks to our souls, if there is going to be fruit from you and me; we have to make a decision. We have to decide to do something.

A young man walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of the photograph: "My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity."

It was signed by Diane, and it contained a P.S. "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."

We, who have been baptized, have professed our love for God and for others, and have made our decision to belong to Christ. We have made our decision to follow Him. There can be no P.S. in our life. We can never "break up" with Him. We are His. Our decision is to belong to Him, live, and serve Him—forever. It means a life focus. It means determination. It means a decision: "Here I stand, and this is what I do; this is who I am. I am the Lord's and I will do the Lord's bidding."

The greatest achievements in life are usually accomplished by people who have a singular desire that becomes the ruling passion of all they do.

For example, when Bob Feller was a child, he loved to throw a ball. By the age of five he spent hours every day pitching through a hole in the barn wall. At 10, his father bought him all the necessary equipment and provided him with a playing field on the family farm. At 13, he pitched for a local team and averaged 20 strikeouts a game. At 17, he began playing for the Cleveland Indians. As a major leaguer he had six seasons as a 20-game winner, three no-hit games, 11 one-hitters, 266 wins, and he set a record of 348 strikeouts in one season. He is a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. Bob Feller had one desire—baseball!

Something of that same focus in life, that same kind of decision is seen

in every Christian who is being used of God in a special way. We must be like the Apostle Paul, who said, "This one thing I do." He simply says, "I determined that is what my life is all about."

Let me tell you something about decision. The place of decision is a very revealing place. When we have been brought to the place when we must decide whether we are going to walk with the world or walk with God, much will be revealed about our inner character. It will reveal much to us and to others what the Lord really means in our lives. Here every man shows himself for what he is. The place of decision. God pity the Christian who has lived for years and never faced any decision about living and serving God. Our churches are full of them. Many people have never come to the point of making a decision that their life's work is serving Jesus.

Many stand long in indecision. I think that's what happens to many people—they just keep waiting. I suppose some wait to see if a better decision will come along. Many try one thing and then another.

This is a subject of major importance. It is an essential for successful living. If you know where you're going and are determined to get there, you are well on your way to success. But if you cannot come to a definite decision as to your goal then no amount of preparation or education will help you reach your goal. Truly, for the ship bound for no harbor, no wind can be favorable. No wonder, therefore, that our Lord is constantly calling us to be decisive: "Let your language be, 'Yes, yes, or no, no.'" It is difficult to get people to think. It is more difficult still to get them to be decisive.

There are two main elements in making a decision. There is a negative element. Some things require a definite no. Many adolescents and young adults cannot "just say no" to drugs because their whole approach to life has been shaped by television, the land where *no* does not exist. Yet there is the positive element in making a decision. Some things require a positive yes. We refuse to travel one way, not that we might stand still, but that we might travel another way. We must remember that certain things must be given up to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We must also remember that no man ever becomes a Christian or a servant by virtue of what he does not do.

Imagine we go up to a mannequin in one of the stores. Suppose he is approached and told where he could drink liquor with a group at their "happy hour."

He would show no interest at all. If told he could bet on a sure thing,

he would still be indifferent. Even if someone sought to amuse him with a smutty story, he would not be amused. When told he was not as handsome or well dressed as the other mannequins, he would not turn green with envy. To every temptation he would quite indifferent.

Well, since he has done so well in what he refused, let's invite him to prayer meeting. He is as unresponsive as the average church member. When we pass the collection plate, he does not even look at it. When we urge upon him the need to step up and become involved in Christian service, he looks straight ahead unmoved. Therefore, I cannot call this handsome fellow a follower of Christ.

The truth of the matter is that Christ is calling on you to say no—not simply because He wants you to practice self-denial as an end. He is calling on you to say no to the lower because that is absolutely necessary in order for you to say yes to the highest. Jesus is asking you to say no to the darkness so you can say yes to the light. He is asking you to say no to the puddle in order that you may say yes to the sea. He is asking you to say no to the molehill in order that you may say yes to the mountain. He is asking you to say no to sin in order that you may say yes to righteousness. He is asking you to say no to uselessness in order that you may say yes to usefulness. He is asking you to say no to the devil in order that you may say yes to Himself.

The crisis of decision—what is involved? Decision is costly. There will be much to be given up. Sacrifice and self-denial will be chosen instead of self-indulgence. Moses was a man who faced a road that he knew would lead him to suffering, agony, disappointment, battle, conflict, and tears. Hebrews 11:24 describes his moment of decision. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

Yet, with his eyes wide open, he made the right choice. Hebrews 11:25, 26: "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Certain qualities are needed to make that kind of decision. There must be a clear eye for distinguishing the will of God. There must be a proper evaluation of the cost of discipleship. When wishing won't work, *work*. There must be the inner conviction that the service of Christ is the greatest and highest achievement attainable. There must be a clear vision of the reward

to come. Hebrews 11:26, 27: "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

There are great achievements in this decision. The development of a Christlike character, the personal value of a useful life become evident. Helen Keller once said, "One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar."

Then there is commendation from the Lord Himself. The crisis of decision means a wholehearted commitment. We must make the decision to make a wholehearted commitment because nothing else pleases the Lord. Luke 6:46: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the truly great leaders of the Salvation Army. A man of scholarship and singular spiritual power, he outlined the road to spiritual authority and leadership in challenging words:

"It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart-searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in Heaven, on earth and in Hell."

We must make the decision to wholehearted commitment, because nothing else will satisfy our souls. Woodrow Wilson said, "We grow great by dreams. All big men are dreamers. They see things in the soft haze of a spring day or in the red fire on a long winter's evening. Some of us let these great dreams die, but others nourish and protect them; nourish them through bad days until they bring them to the sunshine and light which comes always to those who sincerely hope that their dreams will come true."

My friend, don't let anyone steal your dreams!

We must make the decision to wholehearted commitment because it settles all other questions. A wholehearted decision to follow Christ brings

us to our highest usefulness. We must make a wholehearted decision to follow Christ because refusing to do so, we decide against Him.

The crisis of decision: determined action. We must be possessed by a definite purpose. Matthew 13:45, 46: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

In the book, *Disciples Are Made—Not Born*, Walter Henricksen writes, "When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with a small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move—forward into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way.

In paying the price for being Christ's disciple, you must purposefully destroy all avenues of retreat. Resolve that whatever the price for being His follower, you will pay it."

We must aim for the best in Christ's service. We must not be confused nor consumed by lesser issues. We must be ready to act at the command of the Lord Jesus. Do we really have commitment? A.K. Chalmers in *The Constant Fire* tells about two men in China. One was a writer of great ability; the other was a working man whose devotion to the cause of the revolution made him a trusted leader. The two men were rounded up by the existing government, and put under torture to make them speak their secrets. Released, they were soon again under suspicion and were sought by the authorities.

They escaped and eventually reached the seacoast where a boat was waiting to carry them to safety. There at the water's edge, the worker stopped, held out his hand to the writer and said, "Goodbye."

"Why goodbye?" asked the writer.

"Because," said the other, "I've decided not to go with you. You must go to America and Europe to interpret to the world by your understanding mind and brilliant pen the meaning of our struggle. But I must go back to face whatever I must with the rest, so that you, dipping your pen into my blood, can make the world understand that we mean what we say."

Christian commitment. Do we have it?

1998 – Edwin Hayes

The Kind of Belief Christ Is Looking For

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

Introduction: Our beliefs are very important. They form the basis of our behavior. We do what we believe. Our beliefs cause us to do what we would not ordinarily do; to say what we would not ordinarily say; to think what we would not ordinarily think; to ask what we would not ordinarily ask. Belief will cause us to behave in various ways. In fact, our behavior defines our beliefs even more so than our professions.

Illustration: A man who believes he will become rich by investing in a certain company will follow through and use his resources to back up his belief. On the other hand, a man who sincerely believes the building is on fire will make arrangements to exit as soon as possible!

It is the same in the Christian life. Our behavior is a reflection of our belief.

- Like Abraham leaving home and looking for a city whose builder and maker was God.
- Like Moses who turned his back on the luxury of Egypt for the hardship and slavery of Israel.

What is it that we could do this evening that would most impress Jesus? As a denomination—great works? New ministries? Or programs? As individuals—to begin preaching? Become a missionary? No!

As admirable as all these are, they are not the greatest things we could do. The greatest thing we could do is simply believe Him. To trust Him. To exhibit faith in Him. There is the battleground. Many times we are busy trying to improve our behavior when what we need is to have our faith increased. We think we have a behavior problem when the real issue is a belief problem.

Belief will cause us to:

- Work when we see no immediate results.
- Restrain our desire when all within we says, “We want it!”

- Be humble when we feel like bragging.
- Give when we feel like keeping.
- Forgive when we feel like holding a grudge.
- Refuse to quit when times are difficult.
- Have hope, satisfaction, and joy when there is no apparent reason.

When Jesus was on earth, He met much unbelief. In the midst of all this unbelief, we are told the daring story of a woman with a great belief who came to Jesus. We can see in this story what her belief caused her to do. We all have varying degrees of belief. The quality of that belief is revealed by our behavior. What kind of belief is Christ looking for in your life? We will see in this encounter the kind of belief Christ is looking for.

I. The Woman's Two-fold Problem (Matthew 15:22)

A. Her nationality: "Woman of Canaan."

1. A Gentile, a Greek, an outsider, an enemy of Israel, not a child of the covenant.
2. Ephesians 2:12: "Without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in this world."
3. Not a good "prospect" for belief.

B. Her daughter "grievously vexed with a devil."

1. A problem greater than she could handle—beyond her ability to resolve.
2. A mother's concern for her child is one of the strongest we will ever see.
3. This love, this need drove the woman to Jesus.
4. Many times in life this is true of us.

II. The Woman's Two-fold Request (Matthew 15:22)

A. Have mercy on me.

1. She knew she had no right or claim to the Son of David: she was a foreigner.

2. "Mercy" a kindness greater than expected.
 3. This is the only basis on which to petition Jesus.
- B. Help my daughter! Straight and to the point.
1. No doubt she had heard of Jesus—how He helps others.
 2. She believed that Jesus was her only chance. He is our only chance.

III. The Woman's Obstacles (Matthew 15: 23, 24): Belief always has obstacles when you exercise faith.

- A. The silence of Jesus (verse 23a). No response.
1. Was He unconcerned? Didn't He care about her situation? Has this ever happened to you? No answer.
 2. At times, the Lord allows us to be tested to examine the type of belief we possess and dig deeper to develop an even greater faith.
 3. Sometimes He gives us a test.
 - a. Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22)
 - b. Gideon (Judges 7:2, 4). "The people that are with thee are yet too many."
 - c. Philip (John 6:5). "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"
- B. The attitude of the disciples (verse 23b)
1. Impatient, annoyed, troubled, unconcerned, heartless, selfish. "They don't want me here!"
 2. Is this the picture the world sees of us? "I just don't want to be bothered!"
- C. Her position (verse 24)
1. Jesus came to offer the kingdom to Israel first. It was not time for the Gentiles.
 2. She had no claim on His promises.
- D. Her dilemma. Consider what this woman faced.
1. What would she do? Jesus made her wait, the disciples complaining.

- It was not time for her.
2. She is at the crossroads of her life. What she does now will determine the rest of her life. What kind of belief does she have? Her belief will be revealed by her behavior.
 3. What would you do?

IV. The Woman's Response (Matthew 15:25-27)

- A. "Lord help me" (verse 25).
- B. Jesus' seemingly gruff reply (verse 26)
 1. Gentiles were referred to as dogs.
 2. If we had not left by the end of verse 24, I imagine most of us would exit now.
 3. But in these times we have the greatest opportunity to display our faith.
 4. Here is the belief that Jesus is looking for in our lives.
- C. Her behavior revealed a broken spirit (verse 27).
 1. She was not insulted. She fully accepted her position. She agreed with Jesus.
 - a. She admits, "You are right, Jesus; I am not under the covenant." "I don't deserve it."
 - b. She asks for what fell off the table, what the Jews didn't want.
 - c. She said, "I won't take anything that belongs to the Jews."
 - d. When the opportunity came, the Gentiles flocked to the Gospel (Acts).
 2. Many today miss out on the best Christ has to offer because their egos are greater than their belief. Example: the Pharisees.
- D. Her behavior revealed a great faith (verse 27).
 1. A persistent plea that refused to be discouraged. She wouldn't walk away.
 2. She took hold and simply refused to let go. Illustration: Jacob with the Angel of the Lord.

3. She took advantage of the passing opportunity. "Sometimes those with the least opportunities receive the blessings of God while those with the greatest opportunities let them pass by."

V. The Woman's Two-fold Success (Matthew 15:28)

A. Her prayer was answered.

1. She trusted, she believed, and Jesus answered.
2. She conquered, she overcame, and she received what she asked.

B. Her belief was commended: "Great is thy faith."

1. When Jesus commends your faith, it is great.
2. Luke 7:9: "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."

Conclusion

Is your faith great? Does your behavior say that your faith is great? What obstacles are you now facing in your life? How much or how little does it take to stop you? What obstacles are we facing as a denomination? What will it take to stop us? Jesus did not disappoint the Canaanite woman's faith—He will not disappoint your faith either.

1998 – David Taylor

There Is No Substitute for Obeying

Text: 1 Samuel 15:22, 23

Subject

The most important choice you will ever make is to obey God, no matter what.

Sermon Thoughts

Saul is Israel's first king; Samuel is God's spokesman. The prophet comes to the king with a message from God (1 Samuel 15:1-3, paraphrased): "Go and execute My judgment upon the Amalekites for their unrepentant sins."

The message sounds rather cold and harsh, even unloving, until you understand the sins of the Amalekites and that God is now going to carry out His righteous judgment upon them.

Background

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. They were on their way to Mt. Sinai to worship God, to receive His law, and to be put in order as a nation. But before reaching Mt. Sinai, the Amalekites ambushed them (1 Samuel 15:2).

The battle that ensued went back and forth. As long as Moses held up his hands, Israel won the fight. But when his hands got heavy and dropped, the Amalekites started to win. The battle was long, and the day was hot. So, Moses sat down on a rock, and Aaron and Hur supported his raised hands until Israel defeated the Amalekites and gained the victory (Exodus 17:8-16).

Consider the evidence behind the righteous judgment of God that Saul was to carry out against the Amalekites.

1. The Amalekite Ancestry

The Amalekites were a nomadic, marauding people who were ancient enemies of Israel. There is considerable evidence that they were descendents of Amalek, the grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12). If so, they were descendants of a man who did not care for the things of God. Esau cared more for his belly than he did his birthright and its blessing.

2. The Amalekite Attitude

The Amalekites were the first nation to go to war against Israel after the exodus (Numbers 24:20), and they did so without provocation. At Rephidim, there was no water for the people to drink, but God miraculously supplied water from the rock.

Here is the special heinousness of the Amalekites' sin in the eyes of God; they tried to deprive Israel of a necessity of life (water), which God had miraculously supplied. The fight, therefore, was not so much with Israel as it was with God. Remember, of Amalek it was said, "And he did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18).

3. The Amalekite Attack

A third reason for God's righteous judgment was the way the Amalekites engaged Israel in battle. It was an ambush from behind (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

At the back of the huge Hebrew caravan were the old folks, the weak, the young, and the defenseless. Remember, they had not yet been organized by tribes for the purpose of travel and camping. The Amalekites attacked Israel from the rear, as only cowards would.

Several hundred years had passed, ample time for the Amalekites to repent and change their ways, but they did not. Now, King Saul's instructions were to punish the Amalekites for their sins. God clearly said to put everyone and everything to death (1 Samuel 15:3).

It is also important to note the occasion of God's judgment against the Amalekites was also an occasion to test the obedience of Israel's first monarch. Sadly, when King Saul met the Amalekites in battle and defeated them, he did not do all God said to do (1 Samuel 15:8, 9). As a trophy of war, Saul brought Agag, the defeated Amalekite king, back alive. He also spared "the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that

was good" (1 Samuel 15:9).

On the surface, it seemed like Saul had done a very good thing—the Amalekite king was paraded throughout Israel in humiliating defeat, and the best of the Amalekite possessions were brought back for sacrifice. But the truth is, Saul had disobeyed God, and that is the real focus of the story. Also, notice that his disobedience led him to sin twice more.

1. Without being prompted, Saul lied—not once, but twice (1 Samuel 15:13, 20).
2. Then Saul tried to justify his sin; he tried to make an excuse for it. Again, not once, but twice (1 Samuel 15:15, 21).

It is at this point that Samuel declares the eternal value, virtue, and victory to be found in simple obedience. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

What the prophet means, I believe, is that our "sacrifices," our "good deeds," our "good intentions" are meaningless when they are done as a result of disobeying God. The end result does *not* justify the means. God desires and requires that His people obey Him.

Saul's disobedience did not happen out of the clear blue. It came about as the king turned his life in a direction that looked less and less at God, and more and more at himself. Saul had a stair-step problem with obeying the voice of the Lord.

I. King Saul had an attention problem.

Saul did not pay attention to the Instructor or the instructions. It was not as if Samuel hem-hawed around the issue. Three times in the first two verses, the prophet identifies the LORD as the source of the directions.

First Samuel 15:1: "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel.

First Samuel 15:1: "Heed the voice of the words of the LORD."

First Samuel 15:2: "Thus says the LORD of hosts."

Samuel seems to be saying, "Saul, pay attention!" Attention needs to be paid to both the Instructor and to the instructions because the voice that gives these directions is omnipotent. It is the voice that spoke and the worlds came into existence. It is the voice that spoke and there was

light where it had not previously been. It is the voice that spoke out of the burning bush and thundered from the mountain.

“Saul,” Samuel says, “now is not the time to have an attention problem.”

II. King Saul had an acquaintance problem.

The king’s attention problem may have stemmed from the fact that he had an acquaintance problem.

Saul makes a statement (twice) that makes me know he no longer had a personal acquaintance with God. Notice what he said to Samuel,

First Samuel 15:15: “For the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God.”

First Samuel 15:30: “I have sinned; yet honor me now...return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.”

Samuel became acquainted with the voice of God at an early age (1 Samuel 3:1-14). However, Saul did not pay proper attention to God’s voice, and now he was no longer personally acquainted with God.

III. King Saul had an acceptance problem.

Saul’s acquaintance problem may well have been the result of his refusal to accept what God said.

Unlike a lot of folks today, Samuel did not sugar-coat the king’s acceptance problem; neither did he try to excuse Saul. When the king had disobeyed on an earlier occasion (offering the burnt offering at Gilgal), the man of God said to the monarch, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:13).

The prophet goes even deeper now as he tells the king, you have rejected the word of the LORD (1 Samuel 15:23). God’s word, God’s way, God’s will, God’s work—Saul did not accept these as his own; he rejected them. The things of God were not the things of Saul.

IV. King Saul had an action problem.

The king’s acceptance problem led to an action problem. Saul’s problems with obeying the voice of the Lord to this point in the story have been mostly

mental in nature (in his heart and mind). But now we see his disobedience express itself in action.

“He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people...but Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep...oxen...fatlings...lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them” (1 Samuel 15:8, 9).

It is important to remember that this warfare was not an act of revenge on the part of Israel; they were merely the executioners of God’s sentence against Amalek made many years earlier (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

To help Israel understand this truth, they were prohibited from taking the spoils of war. When Saul and the people took of the spoils to gratify themselves, even under the pretense of religion and sacrifice, it was the very thing that betrayed a spirit of disobedience.

Saul’s actions betrayed the image of his outward demeanor, and the intentions of his inward desires.

V. King Saul had an answering problem.

At some point in time, everyone has to answer for what they have done. Saul just added to his problem when he openly lied about all he did (1 Samuel 15:13). Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandments of the Lord.”

Notice, first of all, how the king tried to deflect attention away from himself and what he had done by giving Samuel a flowery compliment, “Blessed are you of the Lord.”

By the way, do not think that Saul simply had a slip of the tongue in all the excitement of the moment, for after Samuel pointed out his lie (1 Samuel 15:13), the king said again (1 Samuel 15:20), “But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord.”

This just confirms the truth that if you tell a lie loud enough and long enough, in time you will convince yourself that it is true. With men we might get away with our answers. We might be able to convince one another that a lie is true. But not so with God. His ability to know truth is seen in a later statement He made to Samuel: “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Of God’s ability to separate truth from a lie, Jeremiah wrote, “I, the

LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10).

You can answer with a lie to everyone, except God.

VI. King Saul had an anxiety problem.

Despite the fact he was king, Saul had a problem that we often think of as a modern-day concern for our youth—peer pressure.

After the defeat of the Amalekites, Saul had an anxiety attack. He thought to himself something like this: "This has been a great victory! But what will the people think, or what will they do if I tell them we can't take any of the spoils home with us?"

Notice what the king said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24).

Classic peer-pressure. And, by the way, this was not the first time Saul had yielded to the peer pressure around him; nor was it the first time he had used the people to justify himself for disobeying. When Samuel asked the king why he had offered the burnt offering at Gilgal instead of waiting for the prophet to arrive, Saul said, "When I saw the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come...I felt compelled, and I offered a burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:11, 12).

By *compelled*, Saul meant he felt "forced to do under the circumstances." Leadership needs to be sensitive and supportive of the needs of the people. But by its very nature, leadership demands doing what is right regardless what the majority, the minority, the masses, or the multitudes think, say or do.

VII. King Saul had an atonement problem.

I suppose Saul's deepest and most urgent problem was spiritual; his heart was not right with God. Saul had an atonement problem. And that problem was magnified in that God had withdrawn Himself from the king.

First Samuel 15:10, 11: "Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, 'I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.'"

(15:24-29) "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD...please pardon my sin, and return with me.' But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.'"

By reason of his later actions, it is evident that Saul's repentance ("I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandments of the LORD") was neither sincere nor genuine.

King Saul was like a lot of folks today. He was sorry he got caught but not sorry for what he had done. The God of the prophet Samuel was not the God of King Saul.

You may be the "king" of your little world, but if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, your kingdom will come apart and collapse around you, and destroy you in its demise.

Summary Truths

The theme verse of our convention says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). In short, "Belief Behaves." Being a Christian, being a Free Will Baptist, is not a matter of doing more good things than bad things so that at the end of one's life the good outweighs the bad. Being a Christian means obeying what Christ Jesus says to do.

The difference in the spoils of the battle with the Amalekites and the spoils of war to come later in Israel's history is that in the battle with the Amalekites God was executing righteous judgment against sin. When God judges and punishes sin, we can keep no prisoners and no prizes.

Footnotes

Disobedience has some serious earthly side-effects. King Saul's failure to obey God came back to haunt him. Scripture tells us that he died at the hand of an Amalekite (2 Samuel 1:6-10).

Capturing the enemy may sound like a good idea, but obeying the voice of the Lord is better. Saving the unholy spoils of our sinful life, even to sacrifice them to the Lord, may sound like a good idea, but obeying the voice of the Lord is better.

Do you fear God? Are you obeying the voice of the Lord? There is no substitute for obeying God. Obedience to God is the natural expression of one's belief through one's behavior. Nothing else does God require of His people. Do you truly believe? If so, does your belief express itself in good, godly behavior? There is no substitute for obeying the Lord.

1999 – Roger Hogan

United We Can, Divided We Fail

Text: Acts 4:31-37

I sincerely thank God for Free Will Baptists, and I'm very appreciative of what they have meant to me. I believe a word of tribute would be appropriate at this time. I came to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior on Tuesday June 8, 1976, at First Free Will Baptist Church in Farmington, Missouri. I thank the Lord for my pastor, Rev. James McAllister, who preaches the Word of God with anointing. I'm thankful that he took time to be a friend as well as a mentor to me.

It was while he was preaching on Wednesday night, at the 42nd Session of the National Association in 1978, in Kansas City, Missouri, that I answered God's call to preach. I am grateful for the opportunity he gave me to work on his staff and to learn about ministry from him. Because of him, I've had the opportunity to meet many outstanding denominational leaders that I love, respect, and look up to.

I'm glad I am a Free Will Baptist. I think that we have the greatest denomination in the entire world. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of the living God. I like our doctrine. I like the fact that we're autonomous. I like the fact that we believe in free will, and that God governs us by moral laws and motives.

It's thrilling to read and hear about the great work of both home and foreign missionaries. I'm grateful that we have always taken seriously and magnified the Great Commission. I thank God for all of our Bible colleges and those who attend, who sacrificially teach and work and serve there. I also thank God for our National Offices and executive secretary; you're all doing a great job! When I consider our denomination, leaders, churches, preachers, and missionaries, I believe we have a wonderful future before us. God is doing some mighty things both home and abroad. We're living in times of great opportunity, and we need to be about the Father's business of building the Lord's Church until He returns.

I remind you that we're in a spiritual business, and because we are, we must remember that we have an adversary, Satan, who has and will come

against us. Whatever God is attempting to do, Satan is endeavoring to undo. Satan is attacking the unsaved today with darkness, with procrastination, with materialism, and with worldliness. Satan attacks the Church of the Lord Jesus with worldliness, pride, division, bitterness, pettiness, selfishness and independence from Christ, and doubt. Satan attacks God's saints with disturbance, doubt, disobedience, discouragement, diversity, and defeat. Satan is attacking the Word of God.

But Satan doesn't stop there. He's attacking our marriages, our homes, our families, our schools, and our leaders. Satan is attacking evangelistic denominations. He is attacking Free Will Baptists. As we discover in the Book of Acts, there have always been enemies of the Church. While trouble is always a possibility, it does not have to become a reality!

Tonight, I want to preach on the subject, "United We Can, Divided We Fail." The great thing God desires for His Church—and I believe for our denomination—is unity. On the other hand, the devil would rather start a church or denominational fuss than start some "Hell hole" any day. That being true, we need to learn again, anew and afresh, the basis of unity. The Bible says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). I want us to think about unity, and the first thing that I want us to think about is what I'm going to call:

I. The Basis of Our Unity.

The Bible says in Acts 4:32, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."

What is the basis of our unity? There are two things that I see as the basis for our unity. First, there is:

1. A common birth

Saved people have a common birth. And because we have a common birth, we have a common Father. These early believers were of one heart and of one soul. Because they had experienced the same spiritual birth, Jesus Christ became their life, will, purpose, and mission. They lived to serve the Father.

Not everyone who is a member of our churches has been saved. That's just a fact. They may think they're saved, but the truth is there will be some come into our ranks who have not truly been "born again."

They are the tares that grow with the good seed. Satan has planted them there and they will hinder and hurt our unity. There are even some here tonight that have never truly been saved. You have head belief, but you've never had a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit. And so, you're religious but you're lost, and you need to be saved. These early believers had a common birth. But not only do we have a common birth, we have:

2. A common body

Because we have a common birth, we have one spirit. Because we are members of Jesus Christ, we're members of one body. Everyone who has been saved has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into this one Body. (By the way, we're not the only ones going to Heaven.) Therefore, we have a common family. Now what is unity?

- a. It is not unison. Don't ever mistake unity for unison. When the choir sang a while ago, they sang the same song, but they did not all sing the same parts, and that's what made it so beautiful. We all don't have to sound the same note! God puts different members in the Body, and we don't have to be a church or denomination full of clones to have unity
- b. It is not uniformity. Do you know the difference between unity and uniformity? Uniformity comes from pressure without. Unity comes from life within. It's not everybody being squeezed into the same mold.
- c. It is not union. Unity and union are not the same. You can be in union and not have unity. You can be members of the same church and not have unity. It's not union but unity that comes by life and that life comes when we're made partakers of the divine Spirit. We have been born again; we are brothers and sisters. We have come from the same womb of grace. We are part of the family of God. We are here; we are united together through the Lord Jesus Christ. The body is to be coordinated; we're to function with unction together. United we can; divided we fail!

What is the basis of our unity? We have a common birth. We're in a common body. Now consider:

II. The Blight to Our Unity

We don't have to go very far into the Book of Acts to see spiritual

opposition arise against the Church. It's been a longstanding battle that began when Lucifer rebelled against God and declared war upon Him. It is warfare unto death. It is a warfare in which every born-again believer is involved. It is warfare with Satan. I know you know that, but I'm reminding you of it tonight.

This battle is staged on two fronts. Satan uses forces from within the Church and from without the Church. There are two things I want to say about this spiritual warfare. First:

1. It is the desire of Satan.

When attacks come from without the church, it's usually an indication that you are doing something for the cause of Christ. You preach against sin. You take a public stand against the tide of society and there will be things said about your church.

But it's not the enemy on the outside that can do the most damage. If a church or denomination fails, it will not be from the attacks on the outside, but from within.

I've been a pastor 17 years, and I can tell you that when attacks come from without the body it can have a unifying effect on the church. But when the attacks come from within, great damage can be done. Satan works inside the church and tries to divide it, disgrace it, and destroy it.

In Acts 20:29, 30, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that wolves would enter in from the outside to attack the flock, but also that men would arise "of your own selves." What prompts these attacks?

- Sin. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira committed the sin of "keeping back," and God judged their sin.
- Change
- Jealousy and envy
- Power struggles
- Those who are legalists or those too liberal
- People who develop a critical spirit. Those who develop a critical spirit usually aren't even aware of it. But if you notice, after a while no one wants to be around them and they lose their influence. The Bible says, "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

- Spiritual shallowness. Most of the people sitting in the pews today are spiritual babies. They never grow spiritually, and they never mature. They are carnal Christians still being led by the flesh.
- Preachers. Preachers are far too often guilty of attacking one another. We preach against division, discord, and strife in our churches, but sometimes we're the world's worst when it comes to attacking a brother. It seems that if someone is doing something for the cause of Christ better than we can do it, we've got to find something wrong with him or her or their church. If they're preaching the Bible, winning souls to Jesus Christ, and building His church, thank God for them!

I've learned that if there's "sin in the camp," God will purge the sin from His people and His Church. You just make sure that you're all right. The blight of our unity is the desire of Satan, but it's also:

2. The dread of the saints.

The majority of God's people hate disunity, and they dread it when it happens. It kills the Spirit in the church. People dread coming to church. Attendance falls off. Too often, there's a split. The church or denomination's reputation is blemished, and God can't use it. They are placed on the shelf.

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief. A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethern" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

God hates discord among His people. United we can, divided we fail. There's the basis of our unity, the blight to our unity, and third, there are:

III. The Blessings With Our Unity

Jesus prayed in John 17 that we might be one, even as He and the Father are one. But for that to happen, many barriers have to fall. Suspicion has to be replaced with oneness, uncertainty with willingness, and fear with love. On the day of Pentecost, that is precisely what happened. The barriers came falling down, the Holy Spirit moved in, and He produced a wonderful unity in that first group of believers.

Our text describes the extent of that unity as it existed at the beginning. For a while, they were allowed to live in the glorious oneness, which only

the Holy Spirit can produce. I believe this oneness can be found where people truly allow Christ to be Lord, and surrender to be led by the Spirit in their personal lives.

As we look at the unity the Spirit produced in this young church, we can see the kind of unity He can produce in us. It was:

1. A mystical unity.

When the Holy Spirit took charge of the lives of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, He produced a mystical unity among them. These believers were of one heart and mind. They experienced a oneness, a unity that they did not produce. Those things which before divided them faded away into insignificance. They had met the Lord! They were together; they were in one accord. They were one.

The last part of Acts 4:32 says, "No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." They acknowledged to one another that they were one. They said, "What's mine is yours; what's yours is mine."

We're in this thing together! This was a mystical unity—something born of God, begun by the Holy Spirit, and carried on in His power. God blessed. Because this unity is a mystical unity, a unity produced by God through the power of His Spirit, then I have hope. We can possess this kind of unity if we will yield to the Holy Spirit to produce it in us. We must surrender to Him. Not only was it a mystical unity, but it was:

2. A ministerial unity.

Acts 4:33 says, "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." These people were not only one in Spirit, they were one in purpose. And their purpose was to preach the Gospel to every person.

There is nothing quite like a church being united in purpose. A unity in terms of our ministry produces an even greater unity among us. Over and over, it is confirmed that churches or denominations that are united are the ones accomplishing something for Jesus Christ. Effective ministry can only be done by churches united in their desire to see that ministry done.

In this area of unity and purpose, it is vitally important that we understand the place of decision. Our mystical unity comes as the result of the Holy Spirit's action in our lives. Our ministerial unity comes as the

result of our decision to pull together to fulfill the commission of Jesus. We need everyone on board, pulling together, sharing the load. "United we can; divided we fail!" There's a mystical unity, a ministerial unity, and then, there's:

3. A material unity.

This material unity was produced by the love of Jesus Christ. In order to provide for the needs of all among them, those who had possessions sold them and laid the money at the apostles' feet. The unity they felt, they expressed by sharing everything they had. The result was that no one lacked. They cared, so they gave.

There are many things we aspire to do for Christ, which we may not be able to do. But one thing all of us have within our power to do is give.

In order to emphasize the nature of what was happening among these early disciples, we are given a specific example of one who knew how to live because he knew how to give. His name was Barnabas. Barnabas was a giver, he was an encourager, and he was an interceder. Here was a man whose heart was toward the Lord. We need more men and women like Barnabas. We need more encouragers in the body of Christ. Sadly, as we see in Ananias and Sapphira, not all are like Barnabas. But what Barnabas was, we can be.

What happened in the life of this early Church can happen to us. We can be filled with the Spirit of power, united in vision, united in purpose, united in our love and concern for one another. We can become a people, a denomination, who make a difference in this world, if we are people in whose lives Christ makes a difference. We can enjoy the unity of the Spirit, the power of God, effective ministry as we allow Christ to live His life through us. These are the blessings that will come with our unity—united, we can!

Tonight, there are some preachers who are discouraged. Satan has come against you. There's trouble in your church. You're thinking about quitting. Listen, you come tonight and let the Holy Spirit minister to your heart.

Tonight, some here have a critical spirit. You need to come. Some need to make it right with a brother or sister. Some need to come get saved. Some need to rededicate their lives. God has been dealing with some about ministry, and you need to come.

You come if everyone comes. You come if no one comes, but if the Holy Spirit has spoken to your heart, you come. Start coming while I pray.

1999 – Robert J. Morgan

Lord, There's a Little Bit of Jonah in Me!

Text: Jonah 1-4

It is an honor to be invited to speak at the Wednesday night service of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. I want to begin by telling you something I've never shared before with an audience, and I'm not even sure I've ever told this to my family or friends.

It was on just such a Wednesday night as this, at a national associational service many years ago, that the Lord began dealing with my heart about Christian service. I wasn't very committed to Christ at the time—just a confused teenager—and I recall sitting in the high galleries as far away as possible, with Jon Wilson, son of Foreign Missions director J. Reford Wilson. It was a long, hot service, and I was glad when the preacher finally rambled to an end.

But to my surprise, there was response to the invitation. The Holy Spirit seemed to descend upon the crowd, and from my perch looking down on the hall, I saw scores of people leave their seats and clog the aisles. Without saying a word to me, my companion slipped from his seat and went forward. Suddenly I felt the Lord knocking at my door that night, saying, "Shouldn't you be up there, too? What are you waiting for? Why not give yourself fully to Christ tonight?"

But there was a little bit of Jonah in me; I just stood there, and it wasn't until later that the Lord got hold of me. But it was that service that first pricked my conscience about surrendering my life to Christ for fulltime Christian service.

And perhaps tonight you're in the same boat.

It's no accident we've gathered together here on this summer's evening at the end of the 20th century. It is a poignant time in history, and we are here by divine appointment. You are present by divine providence. You may be a young person, but perhaps you are like I was. You haven't yet fully committed your life to Christ and to His kingdom.

Maybe there's a little bit of Jonah in you, too. Tonight I'd like to speak on

the subject, "Lord, There's a Little Bit of Jonah in Me," and I'd like to ask you to turn to Jonah 1:1. "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and cry.'"

A Story of Weeping

I'd like to say three things tonight about this book in the Bible, and the first is this: The story of Jonah is a story of weeping, for Jonah was told to go to Ninevah and to cry—to cry out—to proclaim a message that reflected the weeping heart of God. It is the story of the heart of God weeping for a lost city and a confused world. We, too, live in times that make us cry.

We live among people who are hurting very badly. I know of a family that was raising a teenage daughter, and one night there was an argument in the home. The teenager stormed up to her room and locked the door, and the anxious parents went to bed disheartened. The next morning, when the girl didn't get up for school, they knocked on the door. There was no answer. Breaking down the door, they saw the trap door into the attic opened, and going up there they found her hanging by her neck. In an instant, the lives of every member of that family were ravaged forever. We are living in times that make us cry.

I've been following news from Zambia. Ninety thousand children live on the streets of Zambia, most of them orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. More than half the 600,000 children of Zambia have lost at least one parent. Death is so common that coffins are sold out of brightly colored vans parked alongside the roads. Young children living on the street find abandoned petrol or aerosol cans to sniff, trying to remain numb. Teenagers live in a state of constant drunkenness from a homemade beer and from smoking something called jekem, fermented human feces scraped from sewer pipes. They are an abandoned, lost generation, living dazed on the streets and dying in the sewers. We are living in times that make us cry.

The other night on the television news, there was a story about a man on the New York subway—37 years old, five feet, six inches tall, and 170 pounds. He had on jeans, a gold polo shirt, and black boots. He sat on the subway as people got on and got off, coming and going, bustling all around him. But he was dead. He sat down and died, and nobody noticed.

Here we are, Christians, living in a world full of dead people. We come and go and ride around in circles, and sometimes we lose our burden. We

forget we're surrounded by people who are dead to Christ and dead to hope. We forget that we are serving a Savior who wept over the city of Jerusalem and by the tomb of Lazarus. He weeps tonight over this city of Atlanta, over this state, over this backslidden country, over the 259 nations of the world, and over the 10,000 tribes that remain unreached with the Gospel.

A Time of Sleeping

So the Lord told Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry. Care about them! Do something for them! Evangelize them. Save them." But what happened to Jonah? That's the second thing to notice—the story of Jonah is also a story of sleeping.

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

The Book of Proverbs says, "He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame." I wonder if it isn't the same with us. Here we are at the end of the second millenium, in the middle of the greatest harvest season the Church of Jesus Christ has ever known in its entire history, but most of us, to be honest about it, are relatively unaware and uninvolved.

A couple of years ago Don Robirds asked me to write an article for *Heartbeat* magazine on whether or not our denomination could afford to substantially increase the number of missionaries we were sending out. I was shocked to discover that our entire international missions budget could be met if the average Free Will Baptist church member gave just 7.5 cents a day to the cause.

To put it differently, if each one of us gave the 50 cents we spend on a morning newspaper, we would increase our denominational missions budget seven-fold, and instead of 100 missionaries, we could support 700.

Somebody's asleep!

And what about our prayer support? J. O. Fraser was a missionary to

China in the early 1900s. He credited the conversion of hundreds of Lisu families to the prayers of his earnest little prayer group back in England. He said, "Christians at home can do as much for foreign missions as those actually on the field. It will only be known on the Last Day how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest believers at home."

Most of us don't take those prayer letters very seriously. We're more likely to scan them and toss them in the trash than we are to spread them out before the throne in earnest prayer like Hezekiah during the Assyrian crisis.

Somebody's asleep.

And what about internationals flooding into our country? Approximately 800,000 international students are in the U. S. right now for training. Some will go back to be the political and military and educational leaders in their countries. We can reach some of them. But not if we're asleep.

Recently, a missiologist friend of mine related to me what she called "the biggest lost opportunity in missionary history." A 13-year-old in Mongolia inherited a bit of land from his father. The boy was a precocious warrior with instinctive brilliance as a military strategist; he was also ruthless, and he formed fighting bands that went from village to village until he ruled over two million people in a Mongolian Empire that stretched from China to India, and from Siberia to edges of Western Europe. They gave this young man the title of Genghis Khan, and he ruled over more territory than any other man has ever ruled.

Meanwhile, in Western Europe a great revival was taking place under the preaching of men like St. Francis of Assisi, and thousands were becoming Christians.

Following Khan's death, the bulk of his empire went to his grandson, Kublai Khan, who established his capital city in Beijing. He had two Italians in his court named Polo, the father and the uncle of famed explorer Marco Polo. They began to tell Kublai Khan about Christianity, and the great ruler became very interested. He sent the Polo brothers back to Europe with a request for 100 missionaries to tell the Mongolians and the Chinese about Christianity. "When we learn about Christianity, there will be more Christians in my empire than in all Europe," he said.

The Polos returned with the message, but no one was interested in going. Finally two friars agreed to go with the Polos (and Marco Polo accompanied

them) but along the way the friars got fainthearted and turned around and went home. When they got back to Kublai Khan, he said, "Where are the missionaries?"

No one came. Eventually the church did send a small handful of missionaries, but by that time the opportunity had passed.

Perhaps tonight the Lord is speaking to you about being willing to travel overseas for his cause.

Well, the story of Jonah ends better than the one about the Polo brothers. You're aware of the story of the whale, how God eventually got Jonah headed in the right direction. And thus we discover that the story of Jonah is not only one of weeping and sleeping; it is one of reaping.

A Time of Reaping

Jonah went to Nineveh, went around the city preaching a sermon of one sentence, and the entire city was converted. Jonah 3:5 says, "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them."

I want to suggest that just as the Book of Jonah brings us to the greatest single ingathering of souls in the Bible, so you and I are privileged to live during the greatest single harvest season ever witnessed by the Church of Jesus Christ.

According to Bob Sjogren, it took from the beginning of church history until the year 1900 for committed believers to become 2.5% of the world population. It took only 70 more years for that percentage to double. By 1970, committed believers were five percent of a much larger world population.

Then it took just 22 years to double again. In 1992, committed believers grew to become 10% of a still larger world population.

According to George Otis of the Sentinel Group, 70% of all the church's outreach since its beginning until today has been accomplished in this century alone, and about 70% of what has been accomplished in this century has taken place since 1945. And 70% of what has happened since 1945 happened during the 1990s.

According to missionary statistics, over 260,000 people every day are now being presented the plan of salvation, and there is a growing sense of excitement among missiologists that we could actually be within striking

distance of seeing the Gospel presented to every known people group within the lifetime of some who are in this great hall tonight.

But the greatest areas of harvest are overseas. Only about 15% of the worldwide body of Christ lives in North America, and we aren't doing so well. Eighty-five percent of our churches have plateaued or find themselves declining. American society is entering a post-Christian era. Our culture is becoming so secularized and cynical that only a revival of biblical proportions will save the church in the United States.

North American missionaries are, overall, becoming fewer and older while missionaries from new, emerging overseas fields are increasing and youthful.

That means this: If you and your church are not heavily invested in our overseas subsidiaries, you're going to miss out on 85% of what God is doing in this world.

- I want to know when I lay my head down on my pillow at night that someone somewhere in the world is getting up to continue the work, sent out by our church, supported by our dollars and sustained by our prayers.
- I want to have part in a ministry on which the sun never sets.
- I want to be a part of something bigger than I am, something wider than the brick walls of my church.
- I want to be involved in a global harvest of global proportions at the very twilight of history.

I'd like to close tonight by telling you of two hall mates of mine in Bible college. Bill Harding and I graduated together in 1974, but after graduation we both had got married and went our separate ways.

Bill went to seminary and later to Ethiopia with Sudan Interior Mission. Ethiopia at the time was under an oppressive Marxist government that did not welcome missionaries, and Bill had to find some reason to justify his stay in the country.

In earlier days, Bill had worked on golf courses, installing irrigation equipment. So he told the government he knew something about water resource management, and they put him in charge of drilling wells for the populace. He learned quickly on the job, and for several years successfully oversaw the drilling of wells, helping provide Ethiopians with fresh water.

All the time, he and his wife Grace were looking for opportunities to quietly witness and share their faith. He especially poured himself into three Ethiopian Christians whom he was able to teach and train.

At length, the Marxists fell from power, and Bill suddenly found new freedom in preaching. These men asked Bill if they could invite some people over to the Harding house to hear more about the Gospel, and Bill excitedly said yes.

The day came, and imagine how stunned Bill and Grace were when 10,000 people showed up. There was a large field in front of their house, and for four days, sometimes in the driving rain, the people stayed. Bill preached without microphone and amplification, but multitudes were converted. The crowds would stand in the driving rain for four hours, listening to the Word of God being shouted to them over the sound of the downpour.

Bill is now stationed in Addis Ababa, with a circuit of preaching points in which thousands show up. He told me that whenever he preaches, he can see nothing but “boom boxes” being held aloft in the first several rows, as people record his sermon. When he later returns to the same spot, he finds many people who can preach his sermon word-for-word, having listened to the tapes over and over. Thousands have come to Jesus Christ, and it is a time of harvest, a time of reaping, a time of revival.

I had another hallmate named Chet Bitterman. I’ll never forget Chet. The thing that impressed me about him was his cocky self-possession, exhibited chiefly in a smile that always bordered on a smirk. He would stick his head through the door of my room, flash his devil-may-care grin, ask how things were going, then disappear as quickly as he had come. He always left too soon, and he seldom looked back.

Chet walked across that stage as we got our diplomas, and that’s the last time I ever saw him. He married and had three daughters just like I did. He ended up with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Columbia, South America. On January 19, 1981, terrorists burst into his apartment, tore him away from his family, and a few weeks later his body was found stuffed in a truck, a single bullet in his chest.

When he had realized that God was calling him to be a missionary in Latin America, Chet penned something strangely prophetic in his journal:

Maybe this is just some kind of self-inflicted martyr complex, but I find this

recurring thought that perhaps God will call me to be martyred for Him in His service in Columbia. I am willing.

I believe there are some people here with some Jonah in them who need to say, "I am willing."

- Some young people who need to give their lives to Jesus Christ tonight without hesitation or reservation. I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Some pastors who need to get serious about leading their churches into earnest missionary involvement. I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Some here who feel God may be summoning you to full-time Christian service, and He's just waiting for you to say "Yes." I have decided to follow Jesus.
- Perhaps tonight you feel that God would have you seriously dedicate yourself to a ministry of prayer for global outreach.
- Perhaps tonight you feel that God would have you dedicate your goods to extend the global harvest.
- Perhaps you've been resisting the Lord, like Jonah.
- Perhaps He's calling you to go, and you're ready to say, "I have decided now, to follow Jesus."

Why not say: "Where he leads me I will follow"?

What not say, "Here am I, send me"?

Why not be a reaper?

1999 – Danny Williams

Opportunity Knocks

Text: Joshua 3:1-6

Introduction

I am honored when I think of those who have preached from this platform and humbled when I think of those who I love and respect who have never had the opportunity.

Several years ago, a couple of young preachers and I were discussing the great issues of life and one of them asked, "If you could preach at the national convention, what would you preach on?"

Not expecting such an opportunity, I gave it little thought and just spouted an answer I have long since forgotten. Let me tell you, when the invitation became a reality, that question became much more serious and difficult.

The Executive Committee helps us with our theme, "All in Accord." I believe the Lord has directed me to preach on the children of Israel, a group of people who, like others I know, are not well known for their unity.

I am reminded of the Peanuts cartoon with Lucy and Linus. Linus is watching television with his beloved blanket when Lucy walks in and changes the channel. He asks, "What makes you think you can do that?" Lucy holds up her hand and slowly makes a fist. Linus walks away pulling his blanket, looks at his hand, and says, "Why can't you guys get together like that?"

I trust we can get together using the principles of this passage and become a force to be reckoned with.

As we read our text, Joshua 3:1-6, Israel stands at the door to Canaan. It's not the first time. Back in Numbers 13 and 14, we find the account of the 12 spies sent by Moses. Because of the divisiveness which came from doubt and led to disobedience, Israel was turned back into the wilderness. In this passage, 40 years of going around in circles and watching each other die is over. Opportunity knocks once more for God's people. Under the leadership of God's man, Joshua, it is time for the wilderness wanderers to

become the Canaan conquerors.

But notice verse four: “They have not passed this way before” (marched in this manner before). They must be wondering, “What is it like over there?” No one had been there except four men (Joshua, Caleb, and two spies). What is going to happen? They are uncertain about the future. How will we get across? It is flood time (verse 15). What kind of leader will Joshua be? He is not Moses.

It is not so unlike the circumstances in which we find ourselves—new millennium (no one’s been there); uncertain future (can’t be sure of events); crisis time (a flood of difficulties).

Yet, this time is different for Israel. We learn that he and all the children of Israel passed over. They all seized the opportunity God gave them. What made the difference when opportunity knocked? Let’s find three principles that will enable all of us to open the door of our opportunities.

I. Essential Preparation of God’s People: “Sanctify yourselves” (Joshua 3:5).

- *Sanctify* was first used in Genesis 2:3 when God sanctified the seventh day (set it apart).
- *Sanctify* means set aside for God’s use (to make sacred).

The first thing the people were commanded to do was not pull out their swords, polish their shields, or plan their strategy. Instead they are told to prepare themselves, their hearts.

When we start with programs, plans, and promotions, we get the cart before the horse. God is interested in getting us as people right. He wants us sanctified first.

A. Sanctification has two major emphases:

1. Cleansing and separation from sin (Exodus 19:10). Aaron and the priests were washed, even their clothes. Filthiness and defilement had to be removed (ceremonial cleansing).
 - Leviticus 20:7, 8: Sanctify, be holy, keep statutes.
 - 1 Peter 1:16: Be ye holy. We are never ready to step into the unknown future without God’s forgiveness and cleansing from sin. We must be clean (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

Illustration: Clean house (no dirt under bed or stuff hidden in closet).

2. Consecration and surrender for service (Exodus 30:27-29). Vessels and instruments were dedicated to the service of the Lord. They belonged to God, even the priests.

- Romans 12:1: Present your bodies. Giving of one's self for God's purpose requires total dedication. Such an act can be costly, but God deserves it.

- 2 Timothy 2:21 For the Master's use. Clean is not enough. We are to be vessels that are used, not set on a shelf to be admired.

Illustration: Baseball bat (not a trophy, but a tool).

B. Sanctification has three primary elements:

1. Water: Exodus 19:10 (Scripture)

2. Blood: Exodus 29:21 (Savior)

3. Oil: Exodus 30:25 (Spirit)

II. Exciting Promise of God's Power: "The Lord will do wonders" (Joshua 3:5).

The Lord had already done some amazing things. The context reveals two specific wonders (miracles) the Lord will do:

A. Crossing of the Jordan (verses 12, 13).

- Flooded (barley harvest) from melting snow of Mt. Hermon.

- No means of fording river, building bridge, nor diverting river.

- Only divine intervention will work (thus no personal glory).

- It must be crossed.

Application: A river of difficulty (and death). "I won't have to cross Jordan alone." Crossing is done by faith and obedience (Isaiah 43:2).

B. Conquering of Jericho (verse 10)

- Natives of land were idolatrous enemies, forces that resisted.

- Great walled city stood between the people and the Promised Land. Their inhabitants must be defeated and driven out.

Application: Walls that stand between us and God's best for our lives can

come down by faith. (Hebrews 11:30; 1 John 5:4).

III. Effective Progress by God's Preeminence: "Took up the ark" (Joshua 3:6).

The Ark of the Covenant is a symbol of Jesus Christ. The Ark had to be:

A. First (verse 3)

- Romans 14:9 (Lord).
- John 1:30 (preferred).
- John 3:30 (increase).
- Colossians 1:18 (all things preeminent).

B. The Focus (verse 4)

- Stay away out of respect for His holiness.
- Stay away so we may see the way (half mile); eyes on Him (Peter in Matthew 14).
- Eyes on the potential and power rather than problem.

C. Followed (verse 3)

- Had to walk after the ark.
- Deny self and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

Conclusion

- In verse 17, all the people completely crossed.
- Psalm 114:3, 5, 7: The presence of God.

What will it take for us to seize our opportunity?

- Preparation: clean and committed.
- Faith in promises of God.
- Submission to the preeminence of God.
- Will we do what is necessary? Opportunity is knocking!

2000 – Tim Owen

Why Have We No Power?

Text: Acts 1:8; 2:1-4(a)

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

I want to tell you about an individual who searched far and near for the perfect automobile. He finally settled on the most beautiful, luxurious, technologically advanced auto he could find. He drove his new automobile home and promptly parked it in the garage.

Several years later, a friend was visiting him and during their conversation they began to talk about automobiles. As the friend was leaving, the gentleman mentioned his search for the automobile. Well, the friend asked to see it and the two walked out to the garage. Entering the garage, the friend began to talk about how beautiful the car was.

He sat inside and was mesmerized by all the buttons, the lights, and digital indicators throughout the car. He turned on the engine, and pulling the hood latch, opened the hood to look at the powerful engine. He oohed and ahed, looked to his friend and said, “You must really enjoy driving down the road now. Why, folks probably look and can’t believe it’s you in this beautiful and powerful automobile.”

To his amazement and shock, the friend replied, “Drive it down the road? Never! Why I haven’t so much as backed it out of the garage since I drove it home.”

If that were your friend or mine, we would more than likely throw up our hands and tell our friend how absurd it was to have such a beautiful and powerful automobile to do nothing with except put it in a garage. Absurd? Yes! But it’s an automobile, and that’s the owner’s prerogative. No harm, no foul.

What is more absurd and tragic is that more often than not we are guilty of leaving the power of God in the garage of our lives. This power is God’s very own Spirit sent to dwell within the heart and life of the Christian.

No greater power has been or ever will be possessed by anyone than this power. Those receiving God's power here in the Book of Acts never asked again about earthly power. Having received power from God, nothing else was needed. Jesus had carefully trained and prepared His disciples to experience this power, and through it become His channels of ministry.

There is no greater need tonight than for the church to take the power given out of the garage and live and minister in and through His power.

In a convention such as ours, we should be talking about benefits and the evidences of His power. However, the evidence is to the contrary. In an hour when we should be speaking of the demonstrations and exploits of His power, we are compelled to address the chilling absence of His power.

I would like to pose a question to each of us this evening. It is simply, "Why have we no power?" Why are we failing to follow through? Why has our walk and ministry for God become so cold and stale in the most opportune age in all history? Is it because we have become (1) hazy, (2) crazy, or (3) lazy?

1. Hazy

Perhaps we have little power because we've become hazy.

In 1976, a man stood up on a plane, grabbed a stewardess and put a gun to her head demanding that the plane go directly to Detroit. She said, "It is going to Detroit." The man quickly sat back down and said, "Oh, sorry about that." That's a true story from the book *Heroic Failures*.

Sadly, much of the church is like a heroic failure. We've lost our sense of direction. When you're hazy, you're not able to see things as they actually are. Consequently, we no longer see things through the eyes of God.

Has the cancer of relative truth numbed our conscience like society? We're cautioned not to judge the actions of others. What is wrong for one person (we are told) may not be wrong for another. We're guilty of playing the same game, but we call it better interpretation. In the name of new interpretation we often come dangerously close to redefining sin.

Heaven has become the popular place where everybody will eventually end in his or her own way. While I'm certain we don't believe that, could we be guilty of it in a practical sense? Have we become hazy concerning the eternal destiny of people? We have no problem talking and preaching

about Heaven, but how about Hell?

Preaching and teaching on the realities of Hell are kept low-key. It's not good for attendance. It's not upbeat, cheerful, or user-friendly. It's much easier to bypass it altogether or treat it as almost an afterthought and move quickly along.

William Perkins, Jr., reported in the *Mississippi Baptist Record* that Southern Baptist churches will be asked to observe Reality of Hell Sunday annually on the first day of the new church year. Evangelist Bailey Smith stated June 14, in the convention sermon at Orlando, "I have asked the cooperation of our (North American Mission Board) to make within the SBC, the first Sunday of October Reality of Hell Sunday and request every pastor and every evangelist to preach on the scriptural doctrine of Hell and offer an evangelistic invitation."

When's the last time you preached a message totally given to the realities of Hell, Pastor? I pray it will never become necessary to have such a resolution passed in one of our meetings. But suffice it to say, I'm concerned.

We're not going in the power given. Is it because we're hazy?

2. Crazy

Second, perhaps we have little power because we've become crazy. I know that's not a very flattering word. Perhaps I should use the word foolish. In Jeremiah 1:9, God touched the mouth of Jeremiah giving him His words to speak to Judah. In chapter 4, God tells Jeremiah to say to Judah, "For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish (silly) children, and they have none understanding; they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jeremiah 4:22).

I wonder what Jeremiah would say should he walk among us here tonight? Beloved, remember we are to be childlike, not childish, not foolish. Our generation has witnessed the rise of what has been called "new paganism" whose roots reach deep into the church. The values, beliefs, habits and priorities of the average Christian could be summed up with one word: crazy or foolish!

We legitimize sin today by our silence and often with our participation. For example, many think nothing of watching shows or movies that take the Lord's name in vain, have off-colored and suggestive humor, or even nudity. I know, it sounds crazy, but it's happening. We justify it by comparing

it with the very worst and feel good that we're not doing that. Other times we chalk it up as expressed historical or artistic value. That's about like putting on a wetsuit to swim in sewage: It's just crazy, foolish!

And by the way the "R" rating on movies isn't there to identify it as Religious! Have we forgotten, or have we reinterpreted 1 John 2:15, 16, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

A. E. Martin wrote, "You can only get into the realm of deliberate sin when you move out of the realm of the fear of God." Through the fear of God we depart from sin. "Having, therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Proverbs 16:6). Soft sin has reaped a harvest of those who do not fear God.

A father and his son go on a camping trip and the lake, though great for fishing, is infested with alligators. The father tells his son to fish only from the pier and the son agrees. On the third day the son decides to go against his father's word, and he takes a boat out on the lake. Later, as he is fishing a gator comes close to the boat, and as he is turning away his tail crashes against the boat, capsizing the boat and throwing the boy into the lake.

Hearing the screams of his boy, the father runs and dives into the water and pulls his son to the bank. Safe on the bank, the son sees the horrifying torn flesh where a gator has sunk his teeth into his father's leg. The son then stands and promptly tells his father that while he appreciates what his father did, he enjoys the thrill and excitement of fishing with gators, then he heads back to the lake.

What is wrong with the son? Has he no idea from what he has been saved? But how different is it with us?

Paul wrote in Titus 3:3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers (various) lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

Any and all sin is lethal for the Christian, and sin still renders us powerless. We have little power. Is it because we are hazy, crazy, or just plain...lazy.

3. Lazy

The biblical pattern is to relate our doctrine, what we believe, into what we're doing. We do what we really believe is important. I suggest to you that our problem is not one of ignorance, but rather lazy obedience. It's been said, "We are already educated far above our level of obedience."

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples. John 20:22 says, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.'"

I find it interesting that having the Spirit in them, Jesus instructs them to wait in Jerusalem until they were "endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

What made the difference between the filling of the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed upon them, and their being endued with power in the Upper Room? It certainly wasn't a second work of grace! Rather, it was their faithfulness in a test of obedience.

Earlier, the disciples had failed to stay awake even one hour in the garden, and the result was their denial of the Lord at the time of His greatest need. They had failed the test of obedience and were rendered powerless.

Now, they passed the test of obedience and went out in power. This is Scripture's pattern. For example, note the temptations of Jesus.

In Luke 4:1, "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Having fasted, the devil, we read, began to test His obedience in three areas. Then in 4:14, we learn that He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about."

A second example is seen through the nation of Israel. Having come out of Egypt and passing through the Red Sea, they were given tests of obedience in the wilderness. They failed these tests and perished, having not reached the promised land.

But then, their children were given a second chance through a series of tests to conquer the land of Canaan. And to the degree they were obedient, they had power to conquer. When they disobeyed, they lost that power.

These tests of obedience are required to experience the power of the Holy Spirit. In passing the tests we can identify with Paul who wrote in

2 Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

How easy it is to become lazy in our obedience to God. How easy it is to become lazy in our faithfulness and in our commitment to God. Things begin to slide and God's power slips away.

In Romans 12, Paul wrote about relationships and the gifts. In verse 11 he wrote, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." Paul's warning is for us not to be lazy or complacent in our zeal for the Lord.

Listen folks, too much is at stake for us to be lazy or lackadaisical. Dr. Bob Jones, Jr., once said, "God doesn't care what you think about His plans. He wants you to obey His orders. If you don't force yourself to do the things you ought to do, you'll never do them."

Beloved, we're not on a pleasure ship on its way to Heaven, but rather on a battleship positioned at the very gates of Hell! There's no time to be hazy, crazy or lazy. Someone has written:

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world;

As I grew older and wiser I realized the world would not change, and I decided to shorten my sights somewhat and change only my country. But it too seemed immovable.

As I entered my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I sought to change only my family, those closest to me, but alas they would have none of it.

And now here I lie on my death bed and realize (perhaps for the first time) that if only I'd changed myself first, then by example I may have influenced my family and with their encouragement and support I may have bettered my country, and who knows I may have changed the world.

In a moment, each and every one of us will respond as God speaks to each of us. You will either answer yes or no as God has touched your heart and brought to your mind a commitment and response you need to make. It's time to respond as God speaks to your heart.

2000 – Ed Cook

God Has Always Had a Witness

Text: Acts 10:34-43

A four year old boy told his dad, "I have a bad stomach ache."

His father replied, "That's because it's empty. You'd feel better if you had something in it." So, he gave him a glass of juice. A few days later the Pastor came by to visit and mentioned he had a bad headache. The little boy said, "That's because it's empty. You'd feel better if you had something in it."

I hope this sermon has something in it for you!

We have before us Peter's sermon or witness to Cornelius, the Roman Centurion and his household. This had been preceded by Peter's vision of the great sheet where God confirmed to him the Gospel is for both Jew and Gentile. It is remarkable that down through the centuries God has always had a witness.

David proclaimed in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and firmament sheweth his handy work."

The Apostle Paul validates that witness in Romans 1:19, 20, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

The writer of Hebrews tells us of that great cloud of witnesses, all those heroes of the faith who have been God's witnesses in the world.

Even during the so called "silent years" between the Testaments, God had a witness. It was the Old Testament Scriptures that guided Israel through difficult times.

In the February 2000 issue of *Current Thoughts and Trends* is an article titled, "Against All Odds, Christianity Thrives." The author writes these interesting words: "What is most fascinating about history is not what happens but what doesn't happen. One of the most notable examples of what didn't happen in the past 2,000 years is the demise of Christianity. In spite of the predictions of many, God seems to be alive and well."

It was German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who started the “God is dead” rumor in 1882. George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells fueled the speculation by suggesting that the 20th century would mark the end of religious history. As late as the mid-1950s Julian Huxley, then the director-general of UNESCO, said “God is beginning to resemble not a ruler, but the last fading smile of a cosmic Cheshire cat.”

Yet here at the dawning of another millennium, Christianity—not to mention God—is flourishing. In West Africa, Russia, Latin America, and China, Christianity continues to grow, often in the face of official resistance.”

Note Peter’s message to Cornelius in Acts 10. On more than one occasion he said, “We are witnesses and witnesses chosen by God.”

1. Verses 34, 35: Witness of God’s fairness.
2. Verses 36-38: Witness of God’s faithfulness.
3. Verses 39-41: Witness of God’s flawless power.
4. Verses 42, 43: Witness of God’s fabulous plan.
5. Verses 44-48: Witness of God’s fantastic provision.

It’s incredible; think of it. Peter denied the Lord, he failed the Lord, but the Lord didn’t consider Peter a failure! He trusted that man to be a witness with the Message. Let me make three observations about a genuine witness: He’s trusted with the message; he’s true to the message; he’s telling the message.

I. He’s Trusted With the Message (Matthew 4:18-20)

The Lord entrusted the message to His disciples. He handed it over, He delivered it, He assigned it to them, and He trusted them to do the job.

A. God is committed to His witness (Matthew 28:20).

1. He encouraged Abraham on Mt. Moriah.
2. He empowered Moses before Pharaoh.
3. He enlightened Mary and Martha at Lazarus’ tomb.
4. He invaded a jail cell and set Peter free.

God is committed to His witnesses. Uneducated, common people were sent out to challenge Caesar’s empire, confront great scholars and unfriendly

tribunals. Many were sentenced to death. They were burned at the stake, fed to lions, and persecuted beyond imagination. But in the darkest night there was the brilliant star of God's commitment to His witnesses! "Lo I am with you always."

When G. Campbell Morgan was a young man, he had Bible study with a group of elderly women. When he finished Matthew 28:20, he said, "That's a wonderful promise!" One of the ladies said, "Young man, that's not a promise, it's a fact!"

B. God is counting on His witness (Galatians 2:7).

Paul told the Galatians that God entrusted to him the task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. He's counting on Paul to do this. First Timothy 6:12 says, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called."

1. To keep pure (1 Timothy 5:22).
2. To keep positive in your vision, your voice, and your vocation. "Keep that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Timothy 6:20).
3. To keep preaching (2 Timothy 4:2). Perhaps one day, like Isaiah, you said, "Here am I send me." And perhaps the LORD said, "Go for it, son. I'm counting on you!" He trusts us with His message.

C. God cares about His witness.

"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

"For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

Maybe you have come here feeling your ministry isn't successful, that God doesn't care and no one else does. Perhaps it is like the pastor I read about. He was disappointed that things were not happening in his church, so he asked a deacon, "What's wrong with our church? Is it apathy or ignorance?" The deacon said, "I don't know and don't care."

Well, God cares! He cares about you, His witness.

D. God charges His witness (Luke 24:48).

"And ye are witness of these things." This is not an insignificant responsibility.

1. We are charged to be strong in His Word (2 Timothy 2:1).
2. We are charged to be sharing God's Word (2 Timothy 2:2).
3. We are charged to be steadfast in His Word (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Spurgeon said, "The Word is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is to let the lion loose and the lion will defend itself." God's Word can stand on its own merits, what we are to do is preach and teach it.

II. He's True to the Message (Proverbs 14:5, 25)

"A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies." "A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies." One thing about telling the truth, you don't have to worry how many times you tell it, it always comes out the same. The witness doesn't deviate, dilute, or distort the message of God. He declares it!

You don't have to reinvent the message as some today try to reinvent themselves. They say President Clinton was a master at reinventing himself. The Word of God doesn't reinvent itself or change, but it *does* change things and people. The message of God is not only pure but also purifies.

Today, the Bible is ridiculed, rejected, rewritten, and even removed from America's soul; but the witness just keeps staying true to the message!

A witness is true to:

- A. The inspiration of the message (2 Timothy 3:16; it's holy.)
- B. The integrity of the message (Psalm 119:160; its honesty).

Back in May 2000, the Arkansas Bar Association began procedures to disbar Mr. Clinton for lying under oath regarding Monica Lewinski. His response was this, "My testimony was not false by *my* definition of false."

Give me a break! What's the criteria for truth? "And judgment is turned away backward and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter" (Isaiah 59:14). As God's witnesses, we are to proclaim John 8:32 faithfully.

- C. The intent of the message (Mark 16:15; its heart).

In December 1999, Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura said, "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength

in numbers. It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people's business."

From whom do we receive our commission? Do we receive our commission from the President of the United States or the Governor of Minnesota? No! We receive our commission from the King of kings and Lord of lords! Stay true to the message.

III. He's Telling the Message (1 John 1:1-3).

"Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people" (Psalm 96:3).

"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak anymore in his name. But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

A witness is:

A. Preaching its simplicity (John 3:16).

G. Campbell Morgan told the story of great English actor Macready. A prominent preacher once asked the actor, "I wish you would explain something to me. What is the difference between you and me? You are appearing before crowds night after night with fiction, and the crowds come wherever you go. I'm preaching the essential and unchangeable truth, and I'm not getting any crowd at all."

Macready answered: "It's quite simple. I can tell you the difference. I present the fiction as though it is fact; you present the fact as though it is fiction!"

B. Proclaiming its salvation (John 3:3, 7; Romans 10:13).

On April 11, 2000, Larry King hosted pianist John Tesh on his program. Mr. Tesh writes and performs New Age music. During the interview, it was noted that Mr. Tesh considered himself a Christian. This caught my ear, so I listened a little more intently. Larry King asked him if he considered himself a born-again Christian, and he said no. I want to know how you can be a Christian if you are not born again?

C. Praising its Savior (Psalm 35:28).

"And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the

day long." Dr. D. James Kennedy put out a video called, *Sudan, the Hidden Holocaust: Land of Horror and Hope*. In the video, Dr. Kennedy talks of the crimes and atrocities against Christians by the northern Muslim troops.

One particular picture grabbed me. A Sudanese evangelist was captured and both feet were cut off, but it didn't stop this man of God. He continued to preach and evangelize traveling by donkey or crawling on his knees, praising the Savior. God has always had a witness. In the darkest hour there has always been a light praising the Savior.

D. Publishing its solutions (John 6:67-69).

Our problem today isn't social, it's spiritual. It's not our nation's schools, it's our nation's soul; it's not economic but evangelistic; it's not money, it's missions. We don't need government revisions, we need a godly revival. It's not a new President (although that will help in my opinion), it's a renewed purpose. We don't need a new Gospel, we need a new demonstration of the Gospel.

Our kids have had the authority of God stripped from their minds, and accountability to God erased from their souls. Today we butcher our babies and baby our butchers. Our institutions aren't socially sick, they are sin-sick. The answer isn't education but edification. Our courts pamper perversion and penalize purity. We denounce holiness and deify homosexuality. We canceled prayer and coddle pornography.

By today's standards, adultery is only an affair, homosexuality is an alternative lifestyle, a liar has a lively imagination, and killing babies is pro-choice!

God's Word holds the solution, and we are witnesses of that truth. We need to quit fearing foreign governments and get back to fearing the forsaken God. This world doesn't embrace us but tries to embarrass us. We don't need people power, we need Pentecost power. We may have our plans, but God wants us to submit to His Plan. "Ye are witnesses!"

A pastor tells of being invited to Oshkosh, Nebraska, to preach. His secretary began to make travel arrangements but finally told him, "Pastor, you can't get there from here." He called the conference coordinator and said it would take six plane changes, an overnight stay in Chicago, and lots of money."

The Coordinator replied, "Come on, everyone has trouble getting to Oshkosh!"

Many hours later he arrived at the little, white-framed church, walked inside and saw a sign that read, "There is no other place anywhere near this place like this place, so this must be the place."

He laughed and said to himself, "God's place of service is the best place in the world."

It is! God always has a witness, even in Oshkosh.

When I turned 62, someone asked, "Are you going to retire?" I may slow down, but I'm not going to retire. In the golfing world, they speak of players who are grinders, grinding out the round and not letting up. Well, we need to keep on grinding, pastoring, preaching, and witnessing. Then, when we can't grind any longer, maybe the Master will be gracious and take us on home.

Even then, He will have other witnesses to take our place. For God has always had a witness He has trusted with the message who is true to the message, and who is telling the message.

Prayer

Father, thank you for those who prayed for me and witnessed to me: Mom, Jim Marchbanks, and Pastor Roger Reeds who challenged me and channeled me to toward Free Will Baptist Bible College and your service. Father, help each of us here tonight to resolve to be witnesses in this world!

2000 – David Shores

Mobilizing a Denomination for Missions

Text: Matthew 9:36-38

Forty years ago, my wife Pat and I were invited to travel to California by our friends, Gene and Jane Norris, to attend the National Association meeting in Fresno. That was one of the best invitations we ever received. Not only did we get to see this beautiful state, but Gene's sister and brother-in-law were commissioned by the Foreign Missions Board to go to Africa as medical missionaries to set up a medical clinic and present the Gospel to the people of Ivory Coast. Dr. LaVerne and Lorene Miley personified every idea I had about what a missionary should be.

That Wednesday evening, we sat with Mrs. Miley's parents, saw their tears of joy and concern. In 1960, Africa was a long way from the United States. It took weeks for a letter to find its way there. The country was very primitive, roads were poorly constructed, and it was a rural country with few modern conveniences. I thought LaVerne and Lorene were the two bravest people in the world.

About that time, our world began to shrink and nations became more interdependent upon one another. Now, just 40 years later, you can email a letter in a matter of minutes, go to a remote village in Brazil, and the people have access to magazines printed in the United States. In Latin America the young people listen to American and English rock stars. You can go to Russia and buy a Big Mac at the local McDonald's. The same dance craze in America is found everywhere, soap operas are broadcast in multiple languages, and our kids watch French-produced cartoons on Saturday mornings.

Eddie Bowerman sent us some pictures showing the Cuna Indians of remote Panama, unreached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, yet they already have basketball goals set up in their villages.

In this new type of world, Free Will Baptists must mobilize our forces and help fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. Tonight, I want to emphasize the areas from which we must draw in order to do what Jesus told His church to do 2,000 years ago: become a missionary denomination

mobilized for action. This is the vision of our Foreign Missions Board.

Scriptural preparation is needed to reach the unreached.

We state our belief in the power of the Word of God as we recite the opening words of our Church Covenant, "Having given ourselves to God by faith in Jesus Christ, and adopted the Word of God as our rule of Faith and Practice."

The Scriptures have always been the means to evangelize. When the Apostle Paul visited Athens, he found the whole city wholly given over to idolatry and he corrected them with preaching, not philosophies of men, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All his preaching was based on the Holy Scriptures. His preaching was not his ideas, his preaching was the Word of God powerfully presented.

The reason some people and some churches do not show prayerful, financial, intellectual, or spiritual interest in missions is because they have not made a consecrated study on the subject as it is presented in the Bible. People are not saved until the Word of God is presented and Jesus Christ explained.

It is impossible to study the Scriptures and fail to see the significance of global evangelism. The person, pastor, or people who say, "I don't believe in world-wide missions" show a lack of spiritual understanding of God's program. Jesus said, "Ye shall be witnesses of Me...unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The Great Commission was not an afterthought from Jesus. He had already told His disciples to look upon the ripened fields. He told the 70 to go and preach the Gospel, so it was not a shocker when He said we were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, even to the most remote areas of the world. The Great Commission was simply a reemphasis of three-and-one-half years of teaching. The business of world evangelism was always in the mind and heart of God. And as a believer, you should thank God it was!

A strong biblical presentation of our global responsibility is a must to help us become a missions denomination.

Spiritual priorities will keep us focused. We Free Will Baptists cannot allow our mission to be sidetracked or derailed by simply taking a stand against current fads. The devil would love to keep our attention away from our primary task and focus all that energy and attention on other "things."

It is easy to go on a rampage against body piercing and tattoos—such things are repulsive to me—but I know these fads will pass. Some of us have experienced the days of other fads: long hair, short hair, rainbow-colored hair, Afro hair, and now it's no hair! Don't get lost in all that hair. You may express your opinion about such things but emphasize the primary task of being a good witness for Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:36-38).

Our Foreign Missions Board has concluded that to mobilize Free Will Baptists, will involve everything from a total overhaul of our administrative office to a renewed vision of our churches. This must be our priority as a missions denomination.

Priorities come by commitment—commitment to truth, not simply a philosophy but to a Person, Jesus Christ. Priorities are enhanced by vision, the ability to see the world and its needs. Priorities are fulfilled by love. We must preach, teach and reach the lost, and do it with love as described in 1 Corinthians 13.

A man came to our church and asked to meet with me. He said, "Can you put up with me and my attitude toward your world missions program? I want to attend your church, but I do not believe in giving money to missions."

I replied, "That is not the question. The question is, 'Can you put up with us?' Because this church is going to share the Gospel to everyone in the world and we're going to send missionaries everywhere. This is our priority and we are committed!"

Strong preaching will challenge our people. Strong preaching is not a style of delivery. It does not matter if the preaching is loud and boisterous or quietly presented. What makes strong preaching is a commitment to truth. What style did Jesus use? We don't know how loud or how emotional He was, but we do know this: He preached truth! And that type of preaching had good results because people heard what God was revealing to them.

I think the best illustration I've heard concerning strong preaching was something I heard years ago attributed to Vance Havner. I now paraphrase his thoughts: "God needs men—godly men who can be quiet enough to get a message from God, brave enough to preach it, honest enough to live it, and humble enough to give God the credit for it."

Pastors, you need to realize the global significance of your ministry. Through our preaching we must bring this denomination to embrace the

vision that we can reach an entire world for our Savior. Get your troops together. Your church is filled with people, talented people, talented people who love God, talented people who love God and want to do something for Him in bringing the world to the Lord Jesus.

I challenge you to challenge them to speak the truth in love. Not only do we need to challenge the older folks, we need to challenge the young people who will respond to a positive message of truth.

I've heard people say, "If I preach a commitment to missions, the people will not support the other programs of the church." This is probably one of the least grounded oppositions to strong missionary preaching. In almost every case, the church that gives so that others may live is blessed beyond measure financially and spiritually.

A young man in our church heard the challenge to share the Gospel and decided to host a fish fry in our little community of about 350 people. As he invited the townspeople to come and eat, he promised them that he would share his testimony of God's wonderful grace. They came, over 400 of them. He spoke and some were saved. His sermon: strong preaching about a Savior who reached down to him and saved him. Nothing fancy, nothing the newspapers reported—just the truth about a God who loved the world and loved people in our town. That's powerful.

Sincere prayer is necessary support for our workers. If we keep the church focused on its mission, it will be because of prayer, and lots of it. We all know the words of Jesus when He said the fields are already "white unto harvest." He told us to pray for more workers (Matthew 9:36, 37), and we also know that when the Lord chose His first missionary team at Antioch, it was preceded by prayer and fasting (Acts 13:2, 3).

What will cause us to pray faithfully for men and women serving as our representatives for outreach in other countries? For Free Will Baptists to be a force in world missions, we must mobilize our churches to meet and pray for those already serving and for those whom the Lord will call.

A Simple Program for Denominational Mobilization

The Foreign Missions Board has already taken steps in this direction. The home office is changing, and they outline the simple plan on page 133 of the *Digest of Reports*. Here are five points of emphasis outlined for us to follow:

1. Challenge a whole generation of Free Will Baptist young people to find their role in God's plan to reach the nations.
2. Create professional volunteer networks for adults across the country to find how God can use them and their careers to reach the unreached.
3. Provide the channel for a surging number of retirees to make an eternal difference in the sunset years of life by personally getting involved in God's plan to reach every people group with the Gospel.
4. Mobilize churches that have not yet sensed the call to be involved in reaching untold millions with the Gospel.
5. Double the Free Will Baptist missionary force around the world through such mobilization efforts.

Special Parents: The Key to Our Entire Missions Program

It is not enough to have super parents, spiritual parents, smart parents or sensible parents, we must have submissive parents. How many young people have been touched by God and felt the call into this great mission work only to have parents stand in opposition to their decision to follow Jesus?

Mom and Dad, some of you have made commitments to your church. You give your time, money, interest, you are a giving couple, but have you ever given these precious children? Before God can you honestly say, "Lord, use them as You will"? We hold tightly to those things we love, and we love our children. You will never know the joy of surrender until you surrender to Him that which you love most.

I love my children. I would love to be near them, but I would rather have them live 12,000 miles from me and be in the Lord's will, than be next door and not serving Him.

When the invitation is given tonight, some of you parents need to accompany your child down to the altar and together agree on this commitment.

Mobilizing a denomination for missions begins right there in your heart... offering your best to the Lord. Will you make that commitment tonight? May God help you to do it!

2001 – Danny Dwyer

Watch, Wait, Work

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction

There is a popular saying, "He who waits on God loses no time." That's true in many applications, but I want to add, "Depends on what you're doing while you're waiting." That is the concern of Christ as shown here.

You will recognize that the parable of the talents is given in the context of Jesus' teaching about His return, the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25). In dramatic fashion He describes the events of the future that will culminate in the appearance of the Son of God "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory" (Matthew 24:30).

I am of the school that believes in a literal, visible return of Jesus Christ to this earth one day to resurrect and reward the saints of God, judge the wicked, and bring everlasting righteousness. Ultimately we will dwell with Him forever.

I believe that because I believe the Bible is the inerrant, complete, and only Word of God, and that's what it clearly teaches. If that makes me a "Fundamentalist" then so be it.

It is also inherent in Jesus' teaching that there would be a period of time between His resurrection and ascension until His return. Please note this in Matthew 24:48; 25:5, and 25:19. This "Doctrine of Delay" is clearly a part of His plan now verified by 2,000 years of delay.

Here it is, the turn of the century from 1999 to 2000 and, it seems, we are all teaching and preaching from Revelation and about prophecy. We have gotten excited about the possibilities of the end-time events and the return of Christ (and rightly so). Vance Havner said, "We are not just looking for something to happen, we are looking for Someone to come! And when these things begin to come to pass, we are not to drop our heads in discouragement or shake our heads in despair, but rather lift up our heads in delight."

The coming of Christ and the consummation of time as we know it is

closer now than ever in human history.

But what if His coming is not as close as we think? After all, only He knows the day and the hour. What if it is delayed another century? That's where we must learn to be faithful to Him during this time of delay. It is a part of His teaching—perhaps the most important part—that we are to be faithful to Him even if there is a delay in His return. Sadly, some people, some churches, and some denominations have not remained faithful to Him during the delay. And it is essential that we Free Will Baptists learn from this.

Jesus tells three parables that are predictive about human nature, describing how people will respond while they are waiting.

A. The Parable of the Evil Servant (Matthew 24:42-51).

While he was waiting: his heart grew impatient, he attacked his fellow servants, and he associated with the wrong crowd. Brethren, there is something about our hearts that we tend to get impatient and mean-spirited when we take our eyes off Heaven. We can become divisive and critical. The end result is tragic. The evil servant was "cut asunder." Ministries can be cut off and rendered ineffective if we become so. Throughout church history, there have been many examples to demonstrate this. Free Will Baptists are not immune.

It seems to me that Jesus' word to us in Matthew 24:42 is "Watch in faithfulness."

B. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).

While these were waiting, they grew weary at the delay and slept. The time came to light the way of the bridegroom, but some were not prepared. They went to get more oil, and while they were gone the bridegroom came and they missed him.

It seems to me there is a lot of scrambling for "oil" these days. Some are saying you have to go to Canada and get the "Toronto blessing" or travel to Florida for the "Pensacola power." "Get in on the revelation," we are told.

Brethren, the Scriptures teach us that we are "complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10). God has given us His fullness in His Son. We can find "fresh oil" where Jesus is, and He is here. Detroit, Michigan, is a good place to find "fresh oil" while we wait for His return.

Jesus' word to us in Matthew 25:13 is "Wait in fullness."

C. The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

While these were waiting, some invested their talents to gain a profit to please their master. But one hid his talent in fear and faced the wrath of the master. Again, this is true of our tendencies in service with the abilities God has given us. Some can't seem to do enough for Him. Others seem to cower in fear.

Jesus' word to us from this parable is "Work in fruitfulness."

Watch in faithfulness. Wait in fullness. Work in fruitfulness. From these three summaries, I want to make some observations and applications that have challenged my own heart. By the way, I want you to know that I accept full responsibility for these thoughts although I have read and studied from every source I have. As one preacher said, "I milk a lot of cows, but I make my own butter."

**I. The Assignment of Substance by the Master
(Matthew 25:14,15)**

A. The master's call: "Called his own servants."

B. The servant's capabilities: "According to their abilities."

II. The Activity of the Servants for the Master (25:16-18)

A. The investments of faith: "Went and traded."

B. The inactivity of fear: "He hid...I was afraid."

III. The Accounting of Service to the Master (25:19-30)

A. Accounting resulted in reward: "Well done."

B. Accounting resulted in rejection: "You knew...you ought"

Conclusion

A. Recap of main points.

B. God blesses methods of service that win souls, minister to people, and engage our service.

C. Opportunities given must be used or we lose.

2002 – Melvin Worthington

Our Obligation to Obey

Text: Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-14

(The numbers in this sermon denote definitions from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.)

Introduction

Song: Trust and Obey

(Verses)

When we walk with the Lord In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our Way! While we do His good will,
He abides with us still, And with all who will trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, Not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away: Not a doubt or a fear,
Not a sigh nor a tear, can abide while we trust and obey.

(Chorus)

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Definitions:

Trust (134 times; Proverbs 3:5). *Strong's* #982 prop. To hide for refuge, figuratively, To trust, be confident or sure: be bold (confident, secure, sure) put confidence (make to) hope (put, make to) trust. To attach oneself, to trust, confide in, feel safe, be confident, sure; to be careless. This type of hope is a confident expectation, not a constant anxiety. We truly relax when we know who is in control.

Obey (66 times; Exodus 23:22). *Strong's* #8085. To hear intelligently

(often with implication of attention, obedience. To hear intelligently (with attention or obedience), to give undivided listening attention. This is one of the most important verbs in the Hebrew. In the Old Testament it appears 1,160 times. The main idea is perceiving a message or sensing a sound.

- Acts 5:29. *Strong's #3980*. To be persuaded by a ruler, to submit to authority by analogy to conform to advice: hearken, obey (magistrates).
- John 4:20; Matthew 23:23. *Strong's #1163* It is (was, etc.) necessary (as binding): behooved, be meet, must (needs), (b) need (ful), ought, should. Must, necessary in the nature of things; obliged to, morally or by virtue of personal obligation. An unavoidable, urgent, compulsory necessity.
- 1 John 2:6; 3:16; John 13:14. *Strong's #3784*. Through the idea of accruing; to owe; figuratively, To be under obligation (ought, must, should) mor. To fail in duty: behoove, be bound (be debtor) be due, duty, be guilty (indebted), (must) need, needs, ought, owe should. Ought to, must, out of moral or personal obligation, a service which one owes anyone (Romans 13:7; 1 Corinthians 7:3) debtor.

Obligation (duty, eight times; Luke 17:10; Romans 15:17) *Strong's #3784*.

Obedience (12 times; Romans 16:19; 1 Peter 1:2; Philippians 1:21). *Strong's #5218*. Attentive hearkening, i.e. (by implication) compliance or submission: obedience (make) obedient, obey, obeying. Obedience, unknown in Classical Greek, from *hupakouo* (#5219), to obey, listen to something, hearken. More especially, it refers to subjection to the saving will of God revealed in Christ and referred to as obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22); obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26) or obedience unto faith or by faith (Acts 6:7; 2 Corinthians 10:5); the obedience that is demanded by Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). The word also stands alone as a mode of the manifestation of the Christian faith (Romans 15:18; 16:19; 2 Corinthians 7:15; 10:6; Philemon 21; 1 Peter 1:2, 14).

These verses (Luke 5:1-11) record the account of the history of what is commonly call the “Miraculous Draught of Fishes.” It is a remarkable miracle for two reasons: (1) It shows us our Lord’s complete dominion over the animal creation. The fish of the sea are as obedient to His will as the frogs, flies, lice, and locusts in the plagues of Egypt. All are His servants and all obey Him in all things. (2) There is a singular similarity between this miracle, worked at the beginning of our Lord’s ministry, and another which

we find Him working after His resurrection, at the end of His ministry, recorded in John 21. Both miraculous draught of fishes and the Apostle Peter has a prominent place in the story.

To fulfill our obligation to obey our Master, Mediator, and Messiah: The Lord Jesus Christ, three things are essential.

I. We Must Hear His Word, Be Attentive to His Word: The Attention We Need (Luke 5:1-4; Matthew 13; Revelation 2-3).

A. The Circumstances (Luke 5:1-3).

1. The place: The sea (verse 1). Lake Gennesaret, Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias. *Gennesaret* was the ancient name. Here, Jesus performed some of His first miracles and selected His disciples. It was 13 miles long, eight miles wide, 680 feet below sea level, and pear shaped.

Multitudes came to hear, listening to the Word (multitudes, miracles, mandates). People pressed upon Him. Successful preaching of truth must be accompanied by eager, honest hearing.

2. The pulpit: The ship (verse 2). Ships were no more than little fishing boats. One historian notes that there were 230 boats, with room for five men in each boat. *Standing by* indicates they were anchored by the Lake or drawn upon the beach.

– *Washing*. *Strong's* #637. To rinse off.

– *Nets*. *Strong's* #1350. A seine for fishing.

3. The preaching: The sermon (verse 3). *Prayed Him* indicates they asked Him. He sat—the common position of Jewish teachers (Matthew 5:1). He continued teaching them.

– *Taught*. *Strong's* #1321. To learn, to teach.

B. The Command (Luke 5:4)

The omniscience of Christ.

The omnipotence of Christ.

1. “Launch out.” Go out with your vessel into the deep. Into the sea at a distance from the shore. It was not the time to fish, for night-time is the best for fishing. It was not the place to fish, for moderate water is better than deep water fishing.

– *Draught. Strong's #61.* Haul or catch; catching of fish, a haul of fish.

2. "Let down." For a draught of fishes or let down your nets for the taking of fish.

3. "Lift Up." A draught, a haul, a catch of fish.

II. We Must Heed His Word, The Application of the Word: The Application We Note (Luke 6:5-9).

A. The Compliance (verse 5).

1. Full obedience
2. Faithful obedience
3. Fearless obedience
4. Focused obedience
5. Fervent obedience

Peter acknowledged his failure and asserted his faith. Peter declares that the fact that Thou has spoken commands my will. "On thy utterance" I will trust and obey.

Lenski notes, "It is essential to note 'on thy utterance' and 'having done this.' Any deviation from the Lord's utterance in word or action is fatal to success. Improve on His Word and you fail. Say that Jesus would today modify His Word (utterance), and you are trying to justify your deviation from it. Nothing saves souls except the Word, and that Word unchanged in any way. The Divine saving power is in the Word and in nothing else."

"At thy word." At Your command, though it was improbable, yet Peter was willing to trust the Master's Word and obey Him. What a remarkable instance and demonstration of faith. Peter experienced failure, exercised faith, and enjoyed the fortune.

– *Toiled. Strong's #2872.* To feel fatigue; by implication to work hard: bestow labor, toil, be wearied. Biblical examples include: Noah (Genesis 6:1-22; Hebrews 11:7); Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4; 22; Hebrews 11:8-17); Moses (Hebrews 11:24; Exodus 3:1-6; 3, 4); Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15; 6); Peter (Acts 5:29; Luke 5:1-11); Paul (Acts 9); Jesus (Philippians 2).

B. The Catch (verses 6, 7).

1. The large catch: The big problem (verse 6)
2. The loaded craft: The beckoned partners (verse 7)

“Their net brake.” Their nets began to break or were about to break. This is implied in the Greek word. So many fish, their nets were at the point of breaking.

– *Partners*. *Strong’s* #3353. Participant, sharer, by implication an associate.

“Beckoned.” Gave signs, for they were quite a distance away and could not be heard. Partners: James and John.

C. The confession (verses 8, 9).

1. Peter’s action, Peter’s position (verse 8a; Genesis 18:27; Job 42:6; Isaiah 6:5; Exodus 20:19). “Master” (verse 5). It is the Master whose orders must be obeyed. “Lord” (verse 8); It is the Lord whose holiness causes moral agony to the sinner. He was astonished “for astonishment laid hold on him.” *Catch* means to take alive. When Peter saw it—the great amount of fishes, the remarkable success of letting down the net.
2. Peter’s attitude, Peter’s petition (verse 8b). Peter fell at the feet of Jesus, the common position of supplication. Consider what Peter saw, sensed, and said. Refer to Romans 7.
3. Peter’s astonishment, Peter’s perception (verse 9).
 - *Sinful*. *Strong’s* #268 from #264. Missing the mark, to err, sinful, i.e., sinner.

Jesus’ power, wisdom, knowledge. The words “depart from me” show Peter’s humility and his unworthiness.

III. We Must Herald His Word, the Articulation of His Word: The Articulation We Neglect or Must Nourish (Luke 5:10, 11).

- A. Jesus calmed their fears (verse 10a). “Do not be afraid.” Stop being fearful. “Catch.” Take alive.
 - *Fear*. *Strong’s* #5399. To frighten, i.e., be alarmed, by analogy to be in awe of, i.e., revere: be sore afraid, fear exceedingly, reverence.
- B. Jesus changed their focus (verse 10b). “From henceforth or hereafter

you shall catch men."Be ministers of the Gospel and engage in the business of winning men to the truth that they might be saved."Catch men."You will be catching men rather than fish."

C. Jesus challenged their faith (verse 11).

1. They returned to land, the finishing: They listened.
2. They refocused their lives, the focusing: They looked.
3. They relinquished their livelihood, the forsaking: They left. They left all their living, showing their willingness to deny themselves as real as if they had forsaken palaces of gold.
4. They revealed their love: They followed; they loved. All that Jesus asks is that we should leave all we have for Him; that we should love Him more than we do friends or property we possess and be willing to give them all up when He requires it (John 21; Luke 14).

Conclusion

Obedience is an obligation (duty) but not a burden. Obligations do not need to be onerous. When we are inspired by love, filled with the Spirit and walking in the light, fulfillment of our obligation of obedience becomes joyful.

"Trust and Obey"

(Verses)

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doeth richly repay; not a grief nor a loss,
Not a frown or a cross, but is blest if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love,
Until all on the altar we lay; for the favor He shows,
And the joy He bestows, are for those who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,
Or we we'll walk by His side in the way: What He says we will do,

Where He sends we will go, never fear, only trust and obey.

(Chorus)

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

Illustration(from *Biblical Illustrator*):

"Sir," said the Duke of Wellington to an officer, who urged the impossibility of executing the directive he had received. "I did not ask your opinion; I gave you my orders, and I expect to have them obeyed."

Such should be the obedience of every follower of Jesus Christ. The words which He has spoken are our law, not our judgments or fancies.

As our Master, Mediator, and Messiah:

The Lord Jesus Christ desires our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ demands our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ directs our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ denotes our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ describes our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ delights in our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ defines our obedience.

The Lord Jesus Christ deserves our obedience.

2002 – Alton Loveless

Plug Into the Church for the Shock of Your Life

Text: Galatians 3:28; Hebrews 10:25

Introduction

A number of years ago, I preached on the Church in Dayton, Ohio. Afterwards, a 14-year-old girl told me, "I really enjoyed your sermon this morning, but the title was too bland."

I thanked her for her compliment and asked what she would have changed it to. She said a sermon should have something "electric" in it. I would have called your sermon today, "Plug Into the Church for the Shock of Your Life!"

From that day forward, I have used her title and will do so today since I want to preach to you about the Church.

Years ago when I was in college, I heard noted Quaker preacher, Dr. Elton Trueblood, preach on the "Bigness of the Church." I remember well his remarks. He said "To many, the church is when you are driving down a street and see a sign that says church zone, and you look at a building made of stone or timber, and continue until you come to the end of the church zone and think 'That is the church.'"

He went on to conclude that we are the church at our jobs, or at school, or at the bank. This is when the church is at its best...or its worst.

My dear friend and Dayton pastor, Dr. Hobert Ashby said, "There are no small churches. The church is a big business. It is the only business that reaches from time to eternity."

I enjoy church signs and record them as I drive down the highway. Recently, I saw one I liked on a Methodist church. It said, "Join us today for a faith lift!" One of my favorites was on the sign of a Mennonite church in Ohio. "All sinners not welcome." This disturbed me until I read the next line, "For we only have room for 350." One I read in Alabama said, "When you were born you cried, and the world rejoiced. When you died, you rejoiced and the world cried." Another church sign in Tennessee stated, "Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, faith looks up."

Raymond C. Ortlund in his book, *Let the Church Be the Church*, tells of a pilot who announced over his intercom system, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we have a tailwind and are making excellent time. The bad news is that our compass is broken, and we have no idea where we are going."

There is a story in *The Last Hurrah* that illustrates my concern. The mayor of Boston was watching a parade. He said, "There go the people. I am their leader. I must follow them."

I. Congregate

For many years, I have reviewed the Church in the Bible. The word *church* appears 77 times, *assembly* 49 times, *sanctuary* 137 times, but *congregate* 364 places in both testaments.

In Psalm 78:54, a beautiful thought appears, "And He brought them to the border of His Sanctuary...which His right hand purchased."

We congregate for a number of reasons but let me look at two:

1. We congregate because we are a part of a permanent union. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).
2. We congregate because Jesus Christ is alive and coming again. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

Illustration:

Years ago two churches in Kentucky were praying together weekly that a brewery in their town would close down some way. After an evening of prayer, the people returned home and a storm came and lightning struck the distillery and burned the entire building down.

Do I have to tell what these two churches preached about that morning? The owner of the business was an atheist, and he heard about the churches boasting of their responsibility for the destruction. He sued the two churches, much to their chagrin, and the three parties met in court where the churches protested their innocence.

After much deliberation, the judge made a disturbing statement. "As I

have listened to all in this preceding, it appears to me we have two churches that deny the strength of their prayers and an atheist who now believes in the power of prayer.”

Do we, like them, deny the power of prayer? Do we limit the power of God? Someone once wrote:

You will know that you have a God-size vision when it meets the following criteria:

- a. It originates with God.
- b. It is centered in and supported by His Word.
- c. It requires supernatural empowering.
- d. It is grounded in the Great Commission.
- e. It leads the church to exalt Christ.
- f. It requires radical obedience.
- g. It produces natural growth.
- h. It demands a willingness to change.
- i. It requires every church member’s best effort.

II. Celebrate

The church is a place where we should celebrate because we have victory and are able to give praise and honor to Him. “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout to him with psalms” (Psalm 95:1, 2).

“It shall be a Sabbath of rest...from even unto even, ye shall celebrate your Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:32).

Illustration:

I was invited to Annapolis to perform a wedding for a young man who would graduate from the Naval Academy and a young lady from our church in Columbus, Ohio. We arrived early for the commencement, and it didn’t take long for the stadium to fill to its capacity with thousands of people. I began to watch as the dignitaries found their place on the stage, observing the dress uniforms of many high ranking Navy and Marine officers and the colorful robes of the academia. I was in awe with the pageantry of the

affair.

Then, I watched as 1,014 young men and women marched to their seats in the middle of the field. In a short time each would be awarded a commission in either the Navy or Marines—an event for which they had waited four years.

After they were seated and the designated speakers had all finished, the president of the academy acknowledged the person who graduated first in the class. The crowd replied with a thundering applause. As each student was recognized and came across the platform, I noticed that President Bush greeted each one after the award.

We had been there for hours, and my body was back in slumberville. But it did not stay there long, as I was awakened by a thunderous applause that was even greater than that given the first fellow.

I turned to the young lady who would marry the newly commissioned Marine within hours and asked what was the sudden stir about. Her answer made me raise my eyebrows. “Oh, he is the one graduating last in the class.”

“Last in the class?” I muttered. She explained, “There is an old naval academy custom that the one who graduates last receives a standing ovation because he saves the other graduates from the humiliation of being last.”

She continued by telling me that all the other graduates would give him one dollar each for the same reason. Well, my math teacher would have been proud when I immediately realized that amounted to \$1,013 dollars!

When he reached the platform to receive his award, he was jumping with excitement. He stopped just long enough to shake the hand of the nation’s president. President Bush, a former naval graduate himself, who probably knew this custom, slipped off his watch and gave it to him. I thought to myself, I bet it wasn’t a Timex!

As he departed, this happy guy held his certificate high with both hands, jumping all over the platform. He was oblivious to all of the important men and women all around him.

As I observed this excited lad, I remembered that in his address, the academic dean revealed that 167 students who started with the class had failed to finish. No wonder he was rejoicing. He may have finished last, but he finished.

Consider the many who used to be regular in church but dropped from their attendance. Will they graduate?

We celebrate by singing, giving thanks, sharing our offering, encouraging one another, reading and hearing God's Word, and reaching to others to celebrate with us in Christ.

Church specialists tell us why churches fail:

1. Loss of evangelistic focus.
2. Loss of emphasis and commitment.
3. Loss of vision for the total work of the Sunday School.
4. Dismantling the components.
5. Lack of a clear purpose statement.
6. Fear of innovation.

III. Commemorate

We should remember especially the following things.

1. At the table as we remember His death, resurrection and coming again.
2. In our testimony as we commemorates His birth, baptism, death, resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Don't ever forget that although you may succeed beyond your fondest hopes and greatest expectations, you will never succeed beyond the purpose to which you are willing to surrender. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these other things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

The secret of the surrendered life is giving God

- The first part of every day,
- The first day of every week,
- The first portion of your income,
- The first consideration in every decision, and
- The first place in all of your life.

When we surrender to Him, then we have a power that really caps off

the formula for success. Surrender is what brings power.

We fight for power and we lose it; we surrender and we find it.

IV. Communicate

The church has many purposes, but I want to stress the following:

1. Preaching. The recipe for revival is made up of: People who are dedicated, preaching that disturbs, prayer that is definite, power that is divine.
2. Proclamation. Worship involves witness to God, church, and lost world. Today, these purposes are unchanged. The church exists to: edify, encourage, exalt, equip, and evangelize.

Remember the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This passage is central to Jewish life and worship. The Jews call it the *Shema*, the Jewish word for hear, as in, "Hear, O Israel." The Jews quote this verse in all their services, and every Jew is to recite it every morning and every evening.

It is also the traditional passage recited at the time of death or martyrdom. To the Jews, this one passage, more than any other Old Testament Scripture, sums up their beliefs and their duties. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus Himself quoted from the *Shema* during a dispute with the scribes (Mark 12:28-30).

This familiar passage says three things to me about Christian parenting. We must carefully perform three duties if we want to instill Jesus Christ into the hearts of our children (from the writings of Robert J. Morgan):

1. Love your God deeply. First, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our strength.
 - a. There are two principles here. The first is derivation. We derive from God the love, wisdom, and strength we need in child-rearing. You cannot adequately love your child until you deeply love your God. The Bible says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."
 - b. A second reason for loving God first is demonstration. Children learn best by modeling. If they see in you a genuine, warm love for Christ, they will desire the same. Do you remember the story of the

little boy in Sunday School? The teacher asked him why he loved God, and, after thinking a moment, he said, "I guess it just runs in our family." He was following in his dad's footsteps.

2. Treasure your Bible dearly. The second step is similar. Not only must we love our Father deeply, we must treasure His Word dearly.
3. Teach the Word continually.

V. Consecrate

This word does not appear in the New Testament but is found 14 times in the Old Testament, and each time it refers to the subject listed.

1. Attendance (time to the Lord).
2. Offering (means to the Lord).
3. Talents and gifts (Our lives for the Lord's use).

Ask yourself seven questions:

- A. Am I consecrated to Him? Romans 12:1, 2 tell us that we have to be consecrated before we can know the plan of God.
- B. Am I spending time with Him? I find God's plan more and more as I spend more time with Him.
- C. What are my gifts? Most of the time the plan of God fits right in with the gifts God has given us.
- D. What are my desires? More often than not our desires and gifts fit together.
- E. What are my Christian friends saying? What do they say are my strengths and weaknesses?
- F. What are my opportunities? What lies before me that God may be giving to me as an open door to walk through?
- G. Am I in ministry now? It's amazing how many people who want to know God's plan for their lives are doing nothing now.

VI. Contemplate

If you can gain a proper vision of the end, you will

1. See sin in its proper perspective.

2. Put the Savior in His proper place
3. Put service in its proper relationship.

Illustration

A number of years ago, my wife and I were traveling with friends in Vienna, Austria, and noticed the final performance of a Mozart symphony to be held that night. We flagged a taxi and headed to the concert hall.

The program was about to begin, and I was intrigued as about 150 people had entered the stage in the dress of Mozart's era—white wigs and the garments of the period. The man in first chair of the violin section rose and stepped before the wind section, pulled his bow down, and we began to hear those instruments sound their tune. Then he went to the string section and we heard the screeching from their instruments. Finally, he approached the remaining sections and we heard screech, boom, boom and toot, toot! It was disconcerting.

When the conductor entered the stage, the first thing he did was shake hands with that violinist. I didn't understand why he did this, but later the answer was revealed to me. Then, a group of six played a tune together and each, as they took their seats, shook the hand of the man in the first chair. This went on throughout the performance.

Finally, during the next to the last song, the conductor left the room. While we sat patiently waiting, I noticed every eye in the orchestra was directed toward this man as he raised his bow, and they started exactly at the same time as he came down the strings of his violin.

It was beautiful. And I realized it was this guy who was responsible for training, teaching, and practicing with the others. I thought to myself, "They don't need the other guy. This guy does all the hard work!"

Then the conductor returned, shook hands again, and the final piece was outstanding. I left as a convert to the music of Mozart. But it wasn't the sound but the organization that made it great.

Let me make an application. The Lord Jesus has gone away and left behind the work of training, teaching, and outreach to the Church. Our leadership is responsible for leading programs that encourage the fulfillment of the Lord's plan. At His time, He will return and reward the Church for its faithfulness. I can already hear the words of the eternal song, "All hail the power of Jesus' name. Let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem,

and crown Him Lord of all!"

2003 – Keith Burden

Founded on the Rock, Focused on the Future

Text: Matthew 16:13-20

Two cities in Judea are called Caesarea. One was situated on the coast of the Mediterranean, and the other was the one mentioned here. Caesarea Philippi was situated about 120 miles north of Jerusalem in the boundaries of the tribe of Naphtali, at the foot of Mount Hermon. It was from here the headstreams that fed the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River ushered forth. It was considered by many to be the last outpost of the Jewish frontier.

If you harmonize Matthew, Mark, and Luke's account of this event, you will discover that this conversation between Christ and His disciples took place as they were entering the area that surrounded Caesarea Philippi. It appears He deliberately led them to this remote region to escape, if for only a brief time, the relentless resistance and criticism they usually encountered. It was as though He was preparing them before He made His final trip south where He would spend the last months of His life and ministry. You cannot read these words without recognizing that He was clearly focusing on the future.

In the introduction I wrote for this year's convention program, I stated that the familiar words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18 are both reflective and prospective. Reflective in that they look back to the God of eternity past when Jesus pointed to this "rock" upon which He was building His church.

In Ephesians 2:20, Paul reminds us that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." When the Free Will Baptist denomination came into existence, it was established upon this foundation and has remained firmly fixed there until this day. We have a rich, biblically based heritage. Our forefathers gave us something solid upon which to build.

It is upon this prospective dimension that I want us to center our attention. This evening I shall attempt to look at this passage in its historical context, while at the same time considering some practical applications for

us as it relates to our future as a denomination.

At the risk of appearing to over-simplify our Lord's words, I'd like to suggest that Jesus was, among other things, forecasting what His followers would be facing in the days ahead. As I see it, those things were divided into two broad categories.

First, Jesus predicted His followers would face an identity crisis. That seems to be the reason for the questions, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" and, "Whom say ye that I am?" Obviously, Jesus did not ask these questions for His own benefit. He knew who He was! But there was a lot of uncertainty and confusion about His true identity, especially among those who were not His followers. Thus the first question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" There was an identity crisis regarding the Messiah.

The Jews, for the most part, were looking for a political or military messiah; someone who would deliver them from the yoke of Roman domination. Jesus' demeanor and teaching did not fit that mold. They could not explain away the many miracles He performed; yet, they were not prepared to admit that He was the anointed one or Messiah. Perhaps that's why many speculated that He might be John the Baptist risen from the dead, or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets returned to earth. A good man; a great teacher; a mighty miracle worker for sure. But the Son of God; the promised Messiah; God in the flesh—never!

In case you haven't noticed, there's a similar identity crisis going on today. In the name of religious tolerance, the world insists that there are many roads that lead to God...that there are various ways to Heaven. A lot of people readily admit that Jesus was a good man; a great teacher; a miracle worker; but to them, He is merely one of many options. They accept Him as a historical figure, but they reject Him as the only "Way, Truth and Life" revealed in the Bible.

I am reminded of the conversation Dr. D. James Kennedy once had with a woman with whom he was sharing the Gospel. When he explained the consequences of her sin she exclaimed, "Oh, my God would never send a person to Hell!"

"You're right," Dr. Kennedy said, agreeing, "Your God wouldn't; but your God isn't the God of the Bible!"

There is an identity crisis today regarding the Messiah. But there was

also an identity crisis regarding the minister. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we find an early encounter between Christ and Peter. "He (Andrew) first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:41, 42).

In time, some groups, most notably the Roman Catholic Church, have interpreted Peter, the stone, and the rock, upon which Jesus promised to build His church, to be synonymous. Consequently, they consider Peter to be the first Pope and they teach that he, and all his successors, when speaking *ex-cathedra* (or in an official capacity for the church) to be infallible.

Interestingly, in our text, when Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," He uses two words to differentiate between *the stone*, Peter, and *the rock*, upon which the Church would be built. On that basis, I submit that Jesus never intended to ascribe papal status to Peter, and based upon subsequent events it is clear that he was not infallible. Case in point: In Galatians 2:11, Paul said, "I withstood him (Peter) to the face, because he was to be blamed."

I see a similar identity crisis in some circles within the church today—ministers who have a high and exalted view of themselves; preachers who consider themselves to be above the authority of the congregation and the final word on every matter, rather than the servant leader described in the Bible. Please don't misunderstand me, folks. I believe the man of God is a very special individual who occupies a sacred place of honor. But, he is not infallible and he should not be exempt from being held accountable for his words and actions!

Fortunately, Peter was straight on both of these issues. In his mind there was no identity crisis. He understood the identity of the Messiah when on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:36 he boldly proclaimed, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

He understood the identity of the minister when in 1 Peter 5:2-5 he declared, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being over lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a

crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

Second, Jesus predicted His followers would face some incredible challenges. The disciples were not very far-sighted, but Jesus could see well beyond the horizon. He spoke prophetic words with pinpoint accuracy, not just for that day, but for ours as well. I have identified three things that are particularly relevant.

First, Jesus said a challenge would come in the form of a dangerous temptation. This is so subtle that it can be easily overlooked. Notice what he said in verse 18, “I will build my church.” As I see it, there are essentially two dangers here.

1. *There is the danger of egotism.* It’s the false notion that building a church is a human endeavor. It’s the foolish idea that church growth is the result of hard work or that it can be reduced to the application of a set of principles. Pastors and Christian workers who fall into this trap commonly use words like “my church” or “my converts.” Of course, hard work and sound principles are important, but ladies and gentlemen, building a church is something only God can do. Remember, Jesus said, “I will build my church!”

2) *There is also the danger of exclusivism.* Now I know what some of you are thinking. Didn’t I say earlier that Jesus is the only way to God? Yes, I did. And in that sense we are exclusive. But I’m talking about a different kind of exclusiveness here. It’s a very narrow view that sees us, and only a select few as being genuine members of the body of Christ. It’s the inability (or the unwillingness) to see anybody outside our little circle as a bona fide member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The word that Jesus used in verse 18 for *church* simply means the called out. There are no denominational parameters mentioned. He was clearly talking about the invisible or universal church, and we need to understand that the Church is much larger than Free Will Baptists. We are a vital part of it for sure, but we are not the only ones.

Second, Jesus said a challenge would come in the form of a daunting threat. Here again the subtlety is easily overlooked. In verse 18 Jesus said, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Another translation reads, “The gates of Hades shall not overpower it.” Still another renders it, “The powers of death will never have the power to destroy it.”

More often than not the focus on that phrase is upon the Lord's assurance that the gates (or powers) of Hell (or Hades or death) will not prevail against (overpower or destroy) the Church. Praise the Lord for that guarantee. But, that doesn't mean they won't try.

Even though we've been promised the ultimate victory, we ought not to assume the enemy will roll over and play dead! All of the powers of evil and darkness are dedicated to our defeat. If you've offered yourself to Christ as an instrument to be used in the building of His Church, you can be sure that you will face this daunting threat.

Third, Jesus said a challenge would come in the form of a doable task. In verse 19, Jesus said, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." A key is that which is used to unlock a door. It is an instrument used to give a person access to something. Peter used this key with great effect! In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter used that key as he preached, and opened the door of salvation, and 3,000 Jewish souls repented, were baptized, and added to the kingdom of Heaven.

Later, in Acts 10, after being summoned to the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, Peter used that key as he preached, and opened the door of salvation to a group of Gentiles who repented, were baptized, and added to the kingdom of Heaven. In both instances God did something that Peter and the other apostles previously believed was not doable when He saved a crowd of proud Jews and a group of pagan Gentiles.

There are skeptics today; naysayers who insist that God cannot use the Free Will Baptist denomination in any significant way. They claim that we are too small, too conservative, or too divided to make a difference. But I disagree. We have a rich heritage that we should be proud of. We have the right doctrine and need not apologize for what we believe. We have adequate resources to fund denominational enterprises, but we need to stop patronizing only select ministries and start supporting the total program! Cooperative giving is not evil! It will work!

There are some who might suggest that the problem is weak leadership. They assert that our boards and the heads of our departments lack the convictions and vision necessary to move this denomination forward. I'll be the first to admit that we are not perfect. We do make mistakes and errors in judgment sometimes. But as far as I know, none of us have ever claimed infallibility.

I am convinced that God has providentially assembled our present group of leaders. If Free Will Baptists will love them, and trust them, and support them, and pray for them, and follow them, God can do more through all of us than anyone could ever imagine.

I have asked the other directors to join me here on the stage this evening; first, to show their solidarity, to let the denomination know that they are a team. We are not working in competition with one another, but are genuinely interested in each other's success. Second, we are standing before you this evening, publicly asking you to love us, trust us, support us, pray for us, and follow us. A solid foundation has been laid. Let's thank God for founding us on the rock—let's ask Him to help us focus on the future!

2003 – James Forlines

It Is Time We Adopt a Warfare Lifestyle

Text: 2 Timothy 2:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:11

It is a distinct honor to be asked to preach the missions message at the National Association this year. Before I get into the message, though, there are some special people here tonight that I want to honor.

Earlier this year Don Robirds approached me about honoring pioneer missionaries who had already gone to Heaven. We have such a rich heritage, and I thought it would be a wonderful tribute [Presented the framed picture of pioneer missionaries already in Heaven]. This is the finished product. Each missionary in this oval was involved in a pioneer effort in opening one of our current fields. Laura Belle Barnard is in the middle.

There are four individuals here tonight whose spouses are in this oval. In one case, both the spouse and the parents are included. What an honor to have these pioneer missionaries with us tonight. As I call their names, I would like to ask them to stand where they are and remain standing

Trula Cronk: India (Husband, Dan)

Carlisle Hanna: India (Wife, Marie)

Fred Hersey: Japan (Wife, Evelyn)

Tom Willey, Jr.: Panama/Cuba (Wife, Emma Ruth; Parents, Thomas and Mabel)

We love all of you. We honor your legacy, and we will heed the admonition of Charles Spurgeon when he said, "Note what we owe them, and let us pay to our children the debt we owe to our fathers."

When I speak about world evangelism, I am very intense. In fact, I can get so intense sometimes I may even look like I am angry. Some of my friends feel I need to add a little humor now and then to give people a break. One of them said, "Make sure you say something funny."

Now, I know that shouldn't sound like a problem. After all, I spent 18 years in the Leroy Forlines school of humor and comedy. So, it should be a piece of cake. But alas, there will be little humor. But, I do hope that God

will meet with us and broaden our vision for the future we as Free Will Baptists can have in declaring God's glory.

The Bible has a lot to say about warfare. In fact, the Christian life is often compared to being in a war. Second Timothy 2:3, 4 says, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

Second Corinthians 10:4 reminds us, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

In Ephesians 6:11 we are urged to, "Put on the whole armor of God."

Matthew 10:34 even says, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

As we look at world evangelism I would like to propose tonight that it is time that we adopt a warfare mentality. And, I would like to do something a little different. I would like to look back at World War II, when our country was united against a common enemy, and make some parallels to the posture we should take as individuals and as a denomination if we were to adopt a "warfare" mentality.

During WWII, a man invited his friend to meet him at Fourth and Broadway downtown. The man knew of a hotel having a grand opening that night. He was sure he had been invited to the banquet to celebrate the opening. As he rounded the corner, he saw his friend motion him to come to the recruiting station set up outside the hotel. He thought he had been invited to a banquet when, in fact, he had been invited to a war.

Some people, when they come to Christ, think only of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Heaven. They cannot wait for the celebration. But, in fact, Christ has invited us not only to the joys of Heaven, but to join the warfare here in this present world.

What would it look like if all of us here tonight, and throughout the Free Will Baptist denomination, would adopt a warfare lifestyle?

I. Everyone Will Find a Place of Service.

World War II: During the Second World War, the whole country went into warfare production mode. Everyone found a place of service. Rosie the Riveter was an example immortalized by Norman Rockwell in one of his

paintings. Many of the men had gone off to war leaving jobs in factories across the country. Rosie took their place putting rivets in ships, planes, and tanks. They all were essential to the war effort.

Now: I'm afraid we have been asking the wrong question for years as it relates to world evangelism. For years, we have only asked people (especially young people), "Has God called you to be a missionary?"

We should ask, "What gifts, talents, training, abilities, and resources has God given you to help fulfill His heart for reaching the world?" What would happen if everyone would get involved?

Not long ago, I was in a church in the coalfields of West Virginia. I met a lady there who was 75 years old. She was crippled by arthritis. She will never get on a plane. She will never go to another country to be a missionary. What can she do for world evangelism? Well, she makes fantastic fried fruit pies.

So, she got the ladies of the church together, and twice a year they spend a week making and selling thousands of fried fruit pies. The proceeds go to missions efforts around the world. So, has she found her role in global evangelism? Yes, it is in making fried fruit pies.

One Sunday morning I was in rural Alabama challenging people to use whatever God has given them to advance the Kingdom. A man came up to me afterwards and asked, "Can God use me?" I said, "What do you do?" He told me that he and his brother own a small trucking company and they go all over the country. He said it would be okay to call him sometime to see if they could help.

A few months later I called, and he freighted all the worldly possessions of a family moving to Ivory Coast, West Africa. They saved the Mission nearly \$5,000. Has he found his role in global evangelism? Yes, it is in driving a truck.

These are only a few illustrations. What would happen if across the denomination thousands of laymen and laywomen were to creatively think of ways in which their gifts, talents, abilities, training, and resources could be used for the advancement of the Kingdom around the world?

II. We Will Focus on Prayer as a Key Weapon for Victory.

WW II: During World War II, prayer was seen as essential, and the intervention of God as evident in the winning of the war. Every time a

church gathered for worship they prayed for the war effort. It was a top of mind issue that permeated the thought processes of an entire nation. I recently heard of a Free Will Baptist church in Oklahoma that had the names of every serviceman in their county on the back wall of their church. They wanted a tangible reminder to pray every time they gathered for the men who were serving in harm's way.

Now: If that was true for those serving in our military, what should our prayer life hold for those serving to take the Gospel to those who have never heard?

Second Corinthians 10:4 reminds us, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds"

In a *Missions Frontier* article in 1999, John Piper said, "Life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den."

We come to the Father in serious prayer on matters that are of critical importance to us. How important is it to us that 2 billion people still do not have access to the Gospel?

III. We Will Accept Sacrifices and Inconveniences in Order for the Spread of the Gospel.

WWII: Rationing was an accepted part of life during World War II (gasoline, sugar, rubber, metals, coffee, nylon, etc.). Whatever was needed on the front line, everyone was willing to sacrifice. If President Roosevelt had come on the radio and suggested that more sacrifice was necessary in order for the front-line soldiers to have what they needed to win the war, the country would have accepted an even greater sacrifice.

Now: We cannot expect to live a life without sacrifice if we take the job of world evangelism seriously. It will come at a high price.

There is a striking illustration of the need for austerity and sacrifice. The ship, the *Queen Mary*, is currently lying in repose in the harbor at Long Beach, California. It is a fascinating museum of the past. It was used both as a luxury liner in peacetime and a troop transport during the Second World War. Its present status as a museum the length of three football fields affords

a stunning contrast between the lifestyles appropriate in peace and war.

On one side of a partition you see the dining room reconstructed to depict the peacetime table setting that was appropriate to the wealthy patrons of high culture for whom a dazzling array of knives and forks and spoons held no mysteries. On the other side of the partition, the evidences of wartime austerities are in sharp contrast. One metal tray with indentations replaces 15 plates and saucers. Bunks, not just double but eight tiers high, explain why the peacetime complement of 3,000 gave way to 15,000 people on board in wartime.

How repugnant to the peacetime masters this transformation must have been. To do it took a national emergency, of course. The survival of a nation depended upon it. The essence of the Great Commission today is that the survival of many millions of people depends on its fulfillment, and our willingness to adopt a warfare mentality and lifestyle.

IV. We Will Coordinate Our Work.

WWII: During World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. In today's world, it seems hard to believe that we were allies with Joseph Stalin. Though there were very significant differences, they were allies because of a common enemy, Nazi Germany.

Even among the American military, there was no shortage of disagreement, and even outspoken and open conflict. Everyone was aware that Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur were in very little agreement of how to conduct the war in the Pacific. But, they realized that the Axis powers were the enemy and they focused their greatest energies in that direction.

Now: Free Will Baptists have not been real good at this. Surely if the USA could ally with Joseph Stalin, and if Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur could work through their differences to construct a strategic approach, Free Will Baptists can find a way to work together in spite of our differences. We do, after all, have a common enemy.

In John 17, Jesus prayed to the Father in His high priestly prayer. As He prayed, He said, "that they all may be one...that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

A few years ago, the film *Schindler's List* chronicled the heroic efforts of a German industrialist named Schindler. Through his unselfish activities, over a thousand Jews on the trains to Auschwitz were saved. The film has

some very graphic and disturbing scenes which depict the horrors of the holocaust. Some of these should have been edited when it was shown on television (where I saw it), but the message itself is profound.

After Schindler finds out what is going on at Auschwitz, he begins a systematic effort to save as many Jews as he can. For money, he can buy Jews to work in his factory which was supposed to be a part of the military machine of Germany. On one hand he was buying as many Jews as he could, and on the other hand he was deliberately sabotaging the ammunition he produced in his factory. He entered the war as a wealthy industrialist, and by the end of the war he was bankrupt.

When news of the German surrender was announced, Schindler scheduled a meeting with all his workers. He announced that at midnight they were all free to go. The most emotional scene of the film is when he is saying goodbye to the financial manager of the plant, a man who himself was a Jew and had become a good and trusted friend of Schindler. As he embraced his friend Schindler sobbed and said, "I could have done more."

He looked at his automobile and asked, "Why did I save this? I could have bought 10 Jews with this." Taking another small possession he looked at it and cried, "This would have saved another one, why didn't I do more?"

This should cause a great reflection on our part. One day, Jesus is going to split the eastern sky and come back for His own. It will not matter then how much money we had in a mutual fund or 401(k), or how many bedrooms we had in our home. The temporary satisfaction of vacations and nice cars will be gone. Only what we have done for Christ will matter then.

What would happen if Free Will Baptists took seriously God's call to take the Gospel to every creature? What group of people will not hear the Gospel because our missions giving was only equal to what we spent on dog food, video rentals, cable TV, internet access, cell phones, hunting supplies, fishing, or golf? John Greenleaf Whittier said, "Of all the sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, It might have been."

In the context of eternity, what true measure of sacrifice should we be willing to assume to do our absolute best to send the Gospel to those who have never heard?

2003 – Larry Powell

Founded on the Rock and Focused on the Future!

Text: John 1:29; Acts 17:26, 27

Introduction

John Baptist, herald of the first Free Will Baptist message, spoke clearly on that day when he saw Jesus coming out of the Galilee to Jordan and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

John then provided the pathway to deliverance and release from the bondage of sin when he cried, “Repent! Repent!”

As Free Will Baptists we must continue that cry of repentance. I believe that we need to cry out with tears of brokenness and preach, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God!”

For we in America are seeing an eclipse on the character of God. People are not seeking God because there is no fear of God. God is still angry with sin but loves the sinner. We must preach repentance before grace. We cannot take out the offence of the cross, or we offend God. Before there will be revival in our country there must be profound repentance. Certainly our message must be sprinkled with compassion and a heart of love. For the Scripture gives us instruction, “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seeds shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

I. Our Mandate

Acts 17:26, 27 says, “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though He be not far from every one of us.”

What does this mean? Every year more than 1.5 million people from the nations of the world come to America. There are now more than 100 million people belonging to some 500 ethnic groups, with 638 languages

living in our country. A vast harvest field lies in our neighborhoods. God has sent millions to America from all over the world. Our mandate is to reach them with the message of God's love.

We are building on the solid rock as we are focused on the future.

II. Our Mission

Free Will Baptist Home Missions North America exists to fulfill the Great Commission by communicating the Gospel, making disciples and planting Free Will Baptist churches in North America. God in His providence has brought millions to our shores and to our doorsteps in Hometown, USA. Our mission is clear. We are to preach the cross of Christ and Jesus the only way to the Father.

Our church planters are going into cities all over America sharing this good news.

When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, giving Rome control for five centuries, he sent his famous message to his senate, "Veni, vidi, vici." I came, I saw, I conquered.

Our missionaries are going into towns and cities across North America and connecting with hundreds of people. They say, "Veni, vidi, velcro." I came, I saw, I stuck around. Our hard-working church planters are sticking with the task of winning the lost to Christ.

There is no other foundation but Christ. There is no other message but the Cross. That is our mandate and that is our mission.

III. Our Motivation

"Souls for Jesus" is our battle cry. We love the souls for whom Jesus died. The heartbeat of God is to save a lost America and to reach the unreached people groups of our world. We are building on the solid rock Christ Jesus as we focus on the future.

Recently, I emailed our missionaries to ask them what nationalities are visiting their missions on Sunday. I received many emails. Here are the nations they reported.

People from: China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Ecuador, Germany, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mexico. Panama, Philippines,

Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, and Sweden—20 nations!

These people are bringing their religious beliefs, various philosophies and sometimes non-Christian views. This great influx is bringing conflict and cultural war to our society.

What a challenge and opportunity for Free Will Baptists to share Christ. We are broadening our vision to encompass this multitude in order to share the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For we have learned that:

- there are more Hispanics in America than any other country in the world with the exception of Spain and Mexico. Today there are more than 40 million in the United States. They are now the official majority of the minority groups.
- there are more Hispanics in America now than the total population of Canada.
- there are more Cubans in Miami than in Havana.
- there are more Polish in Chicago than in Warsaw.
- there are more Jews in America than in Israel.
- there are now 13 million Asians living in the United States.
- the Asian community will become the majority in our country and Anglo-Americans will become the official minority.

Our mandate is clear, our mission defined, and our motivation is strong!

As we build our lives on the Rock, Jesus Christ, let us focus on the future with a great urgency to reach North America and our world with the message of salvation.

2003 – Ron Hunter

Altar Your Course

Text: Genesis 22:1-19

Research shows that when a person writes a book, as much time is spent on the title as in the writing itself. I have entitled this message, “Altar Your Course.” Let’s notice the word choice that I labored over.

I did not choose alter but rather altar.

- Alter: synonyms for it would be modify, vary, transform, adjust.
- Altar: had no synonyms in my computer program, but I would submit to you that it means the same as alter.

You see, when we come to the altar and find ourselves before the throne of God, we see where we can improve. We see where we should be challenged. Because we are not perfect, we find ourselves making commitments to God to modify, vary, transform, or adjust our habits, direction, careers, or emotions. When we come to the *altar*, we *alter* our lives!

I am proposing as we examine the Scripture, that we do as described above and altar our course. I realize this is a play on words. You may say this is simply semantics. It reminds me of something a pastor from Ohio gave me after a recent message I preached at their state meeting,

He said Zig Ziglar uses the following to illustrate how the words we choose make a big difference: “A young country boy was practicing compliments to impress his girl like, ‘When I gaze into your eyes, the hands of time stand still.’

But when he shared the compliment he had practiced with his girl, he became nervous. So instead of saying, ‘When I gaze into your eyes, the hands of time stand still,’ he inadvertently said, ‘Honey, you have a face that would stop a clock.’”

Our word choices are important, and I believe our ability to use the altar is still vital to our worship time. We regularly use the altar at our church and I hope you are comfortable enough to do so as well. We live in Christian surroundings that sometime place us on the defense and we fail to do what God desires for fear of what others think. How many decisions were never

made with lasting power because someone worried about what others would say if they came to the altar? What if Abraham had worried about what others thought about him on the day he found himself in need of going to the altar?

We have all had major life-changing events happen: learning to drive; first trip on a plane; getting married; geographical move for your family; changing churches; changing jobs or job roles; having your first child.

No matter how much you prepared for these, you just did not know how much your life would change. Our lives are forever altered by most of these events, and we will never be on the same path again. I was in a rental car in West Virginia last year that had a GPS that tells you directions on getting to your destination. It helps you follow a map on a small screen via satellite communication and warns verbally about upcoming turns.

The computer voice said: "Prepare to turn right in 1.5 miles." Then: "Prepare to turn in .2 miles." Well, they had just built a new parkway or interstate in West Virginia, and it was not in that computer. It kept telling me, "Please turn around and proceed back to the correct route."

While the GPS was in error, I am convinced we ignore the warnings of the Holy Spirit for the paths we find ourselves heading down. He (the Holy Spirit) warns us, "Please turn around and proceed back to the correct route."

From our passage, we will look at three points of perspective: (1) Abraham, (2) Isaac, and (3) Free Will Baptists. I would like the first two—Abraham and Isaac—to be viewed from the perspective of the older generation and the younger generation. Now, I will let you decide into which generation you fit on your own. However, you can learn from each generation what God expects.

At the end of the message, I will ask you to altar your course by placing on the altar today your serious prayer support of those who are in another generation other than your own. "Altering" our course will not be easy, but we will achieve it through the principles learned in Genesis 22.

First of all, for us to altar our course we must:

1. Altar Our Choices (focus on Abraham).

Let's focus on Abraham and the choices he had to make. Some choices

we make are easier than others, and some have more lasting implications than others. Some wrong choices will stick with us a long time. Let me tell you about a choice I made that has lasted a considerable length of time (consequences I am still paying).

While pastoring in central Florida about five years ago on a Friday evening, I was going to the grocery store to buy some stuff for the lunch we were hosting for the Indian River Association the next day.

Before leaving, I asked my wife if there was anything else she needed, and she said, "Oh yes, will you please get me a box of hair color so I can do my hair tonight before our big day tomorrow?"

I replied, "How will I know which one to get?" She told me the brand and said to go in and look at the line of boxes and get the one on the far left hand side that would be the blondest blonde they have.

"That sounds easy," I thought.

Sure enough, her instructions were perfect. On the far left side of the row of boxes sat the blondest blonde box. Now, before I proceed, I want to share with you that I really like red hair—especially auburn red hair color. While looking for the blondest blonde box, I saw the auburn red color and thought she would never go for it, because I had encouraged her to try it before.

Then it dawned on me what to do. I made a choice and bought the blondest blonde box and the auburn red box and swapped the contents on the way home. I thought it would be a funny practical joke. When I got home from the store I gave her the platinum blonde box with the auburn red contents. When she began the process of coloring her hair, she removed her glasses (she does not see very well without her glasses) while I went outside to work on a project in the yard.

Making sure the project did not take me so long that I could not get back inside before she realized what I had done, I went in to check on her progress. She was just rinsing it out and blow-drying it when she saw me peek around the doorway. She remarked, "This sure does look dark."

I said, "You're right." When she put her glasses on to look at it while continuing to blow dry it, she said, "This looks red!" At that point, I could not contain my smile any longer. She quickly deduced what I had done, and no amount of compliments was going to make it look pretty in her eyes.

I gave her the auburn box with the blonde contents and she redid the

process. So when she went to the associational meeting the next morning, she was a strawberry blonde. I loved her hair, but she was not sure she loved me at that point.

Some choices have greater consequences and are harder to make than others. Don't swap contents of hair color on your wife and don't disobey what God tells you to do.

If anyone had a tough choice to make, it was Abraham. He was not choosing a hair color for Sarah. But his choice had lasting implications. I want us to learn from the decision-making process of the generation of Abraham.

When we make wise choices as Abraham did, we will see that:

A. Our choices cause us to expand our boundaries.

In Genesis 12, Abraham was called to leave home and go to a place God would show him. He did not get to see a travel or mission brochure prior to leaving.

I have watched the older generation through history leave their comfort zones to do and go where God was calling. In America, it was the older generation—the first generation—that chose to leave their homes and parents to venture out beyond normal traveling distance and follow God's leading. Today, our younger generation ventures far and wide but not always at the Lord's leading.

It was this expanding of boundaries that brought new ministries into existence to help the people. It opened Christian schools, colleges, daycares, and on the national level sent missionaries to countries that had no witness, built churches where we had no Free Will Baptists, provided enrichment and service opportunities for both our men and women. It has seen this convention and the National Youth Conference grow into a place that gives training, preaching, and complete family support.

We also see that:

B. Our choices can engulf relationships.

When you have that "I am willing to wash your feet attitude," your relationships are better than expected. In Genesis 13, 18, 19, we see discord among the people (family) and the difficult choices Abraham faced. Remember they had come out of the familiar land of Ur and into a strange land. Then Abraham had to separate from those whom he perhaps had

been an example to and loved dearly. He gave Lot, his younger nephew, the first choice, and the younger do not always make the best decisions. Lot looked out over the well-watered plains of Sodom and made the choice—the wrong choice—because Lot’s choice was based on a different value system. Abraham did not lecture or berate Lot. He did not talk about Lot for making poor choices. Abraham valued the relationship and wanted to leave the door open for the future, much like the approach of the father of the prodigal son.

Even when the words “I told you so” or “See, I warned you” would have been very appropriate, Abraham never uttered them. In fact, he was constantly praying for young Lot and seeking and expecting good from him. In fact, when he prayed, he expected Lot had won more than he had. Later on in the story, Abraham bargained with God about how few righteous there could be in the city of Sodom and the city still be spared. Abraham knew that God would discern and judge, and that his job was to pray for Lot and be the constant encouraging mentor even when he thought he might have lost him.

Abraham was not just related to Lot, but he also had a good relationship with him. Being related to and having the right relationship with someone are two different things. The Book of 1 John tells us that our relationships with our brothers must be right or we are in darkness and are not in a right relationship with the Father. James confirms this relationship in the New Testament.

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God’” (James 2:21-23).

The Holy Spirit inspired James to call Abraham the “friend of God.” Does He call you a friend of God today based on all your relationships?

We can see when:

C. Our choices can affect our future blessings.

These verses demonstrate Abraham’s attentiveness to God, resulting in a close walk with God. He transferred that walk to Isaac throughout his childhood. This is the capstone event showing that Isaac had his father’s obedience and servant’s heart. Had Abraham not been the dad he needed,

then Isaac would have bolted and never returned, saying "You are not going to sacrifice me." I can hear Isaac saying, "Dad, you can keep your religion!"

We see in verses 16, 17 that when the right choices are made, we enjoy right standing and blessing from God and the promise of transfer to the next generation coming after us. "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come" (Hebrews 11:20). Correct choices made them forward-looking men.

If we are going to altar our course, we first altar our choices and then:

2. Altar Our Confidence (focus on Isaac).

The generation coming after you will be different than you because their perspective is different. We understand perspectives change based on our experience, but this does not make our perception right. I have in my hand an activity sheet my daughter filled out in church on Father's Day when she was six.

It asked certain questions like:

My daddy's eyes are _____ (green).

He has _____ hair (black).

His favorite thing to do is _____ (kiss my momma).

My daddy is _____ tall (eight feet).

This was no doubt from her perspective, but that does not always accurately portray reality. But let me hasten to say I always want to be eight feet tall in her mind.

Let me share some differences about this current generation who graduated high school this past month and will start college this fall:

- They were 10 when the Soviet Union broke apart and do not remember the Cold War.
- Tiananmen Square means nothing to them.
- They have always had cable television.
- There have always been VCRs, but they have no idea what BETA was.
- They cannot fathom not having a remote control.

- They don't know what a cloth baby diaper is, or know about the "Help me, I've fallen and I can't get up" commercial.
- Bottle caps have always been screw off and plastic.
- Atari predates them, as do vinyl albums.
- They have never owned a record player. Therefore the statement "You sound like a broken record" means nothing to them.
- They have likely never played Pac Man and have never heard of Pong.
- They may have never heard of an eight track. The Compact Disc was introduced when they were a year old.
- They have always had an answering machine.
- Most have never seen a TV set with only 13 channels, nor have they seen a black and white TV.

Are you feeling older? I am. In our text, Isaac was the younger generation. Allow me to speculate on some "what ifs" like we do in American history like, "What if Abraham Lincoln had never been shot? What if the Pearl Harbor attack had been detected and avoided?"

Now Consider:

- What if Isaac had chosen to rebel and not go along with the sacrifice?
- What if he had said, "I do not want your religion; it nearly killed me."
- What if he had rebelled against everything Abraham had stood for?

What kept him from doing those things? With all these perspectives, remember one cannot simply assume you have the correct view or philosophy. There has to be a trust or confidence that is not in yourself.

When we sacrifice our self-confidence on the altar, we:

A. Must have confidence in the older generation.

Isaac respected his father even when he did not fully understand the whole situation. Go back to that scene on Mount Moriah and imagine you are Isaac. You are between 18 and 25 years of age, without a doubt a strong young man by any definition. What we do not see recorded here but had to take place was what transpired just moments before the raising of the knife. Abraham had to share with Isaac that he needed to place him on the altar. He had to finally say, "The reason we do not have an animal is because God is requiring much from both us today." Isaac could have run, overpowered

Abraham, or rebelled entirely. But Isaac had confidence in his father, and trusted him to follow what he did not understand, knowing his father was a man of God. Isaac, like Jesus, offered his life voluntarily. I am talking to the younger generation now—just because we do not understand something does not give the green light to make fun of, rant, rave, or run it down.

You have to stop making excuses and get in and get yourself waist deep in ministry. Grab two or three older ministers that are at least 10 years your senior and ask them questions. Then listen to them. Learn as Isaac not to rebel even when you do not fully understand, but be patient waiting on God, Jehovah-jireh, to provide answers and insights.

When we sacrifice our self-confidence on the altar, we:

B. Must have confidence in the omniscient God.

Isaac knew what had been prophesied, and that he was to be the seed that carried the Jewish nation forward into all time. When that whole future hung in the balance, he trusted God for the future. For a moment, he had to question the future, if he would live, if he would see his mom again. His whole idea of the future he was planning was now in question.

D.L. Moody understood questioning the future. When he wanted to join the church, the people blocked him. When he wanted to be ordained, the ordaining counsel said no. He sure had to question his future and what God was trying to do in his life. The confidence to go on was not in himself, but God.

There were several occasions in my life when God did not make sense: When the door was closing on the future to be a chaplain in the US Army; when I questioned my ability and future as a minister; when Pam and I lost our first child to miscarriage; when the physical future of our son's life hung in the balance because of a seizure, and he failed to regain consciousness for almost an hour as I held him in my arms. It is during those times that you wrestle with difficult issues, and when confidence cannot be placed in self because you are feeling completely helpless.

We have to learn to place absolute confidence in God even in the darkest hours. I have heard a wonderful principle that says, "Never question in the darkness what you know to be true in the light."

When we sacrifice our self-confidence on the altar, we:

C. Must have confidence in the diversity that God gave to us.

Isaac could not be Abraham, and Abraham could not be Isaac. Although Abraham would want to trade places with his young son, he knew he could not. God was working in each of them through these events in their particular roles. Isaac had the desire and passion to dig wells when his father built altars. This carried over to Jacob. Abraham could have scoffed and said "That's not how we used to do it." But those wells stood the test of time and nourished many generations and at least one still stands in Israel today.

Can you apply the substance test? Is the same content, message, and principle being accomplished through a different method or philosophy? The older generation and the younger may not use the same methods but if they are keeping the Gospel and doctrine then let's respect the diversity of God as He uses each with our differences. A great example of this is seen when one reads a book today, or when someone listens to that same book in audio form. The same content or substance is present, but each was delivered in a different form or method.

Respect for each generation allows them to respect your differences. I was told a long time ago to be very kind to your parents as they grow older for the way you treat them is the way your kids will treat you. Be careful what you model to the next generation.

If we are going to altar our course, we must first altar our choices, then altar our confidence. But we must also:

3. Altar Our Challenges (focus on Free Will Baptists).

Let us now turn our focus to where we are as Free Will Baptists and let's dream about the future.

I can see when our Sunday Schools become the growth tool for the church. It already has all the key elements that all the fads and trends have tried: small group, best assimilation of new people, friendship development, grounding in the Word of God, and a place to solidify the congregation in Free Will Baptist teaching and doctrine.

I am looking to the day when Sunday School teachers do not read their quarterly when they stand before their class, but rather they connect and show their class the real truths that make a difference in the lives of their students. They teach students not lessons.

I can see the day when the whole family can study their lessons together around the same theme. It may not be the same passage, but it will be

the same theme so the ride to and from church can build up the family. I see more color in the lessons, more missions emphasis, and more teacher training.

We will show the students how to incorporate sharing their testimony with a witness of the Gospel making Sunday School an outreach for the local church. Sunday School will be the growth arm of churches today and in the future, because other methods come and go but the principles of Sunday School remain the same. We simply are not currently utilizing all the principles.

I can see when we have women within our denomination who can write lessons better than Beth Moore and men who will prepare lessons that rival Henry Blackaby. I can see the day when we have our own select line of curriculum that offers topical studies for mid-week services. I can see our own children's church material that rivals Cook and a nursery curriculum that lays such a foundation that parents are challenged to raise that child scripturally and to always be pointing them in the right direction.

I dream of walking into any local bookstore—LifeWay, Family, or Barnes & Noble—to see the Randall House logo displayed on books that challenge the broad market and place Free Will Baptists on equal footing with any other denomination.

Can you picture a day when the younger generation takes the business sessions as seriously as the older generation? I dream of the younger having an admiration of the older and the older being proud of the younger, each knowing the other has made mistakes along the way but looking at their heart and intent, not their shortcomings. As the younger steps up, then the older must remember that you were young once also.

I see our denomination adopting integrated yearly themes, with each agency working closely together within those themes. I see an inter-departmental cooperation like we have never experienced. We as directors are currently praying together. Agencies are already helping one another. We are less territorial. Even this year you will hear results from the missionary-in-residence home on the campus of Free Will Baptist Bible College resulting from four agencies working in conjunction with local churches to help bring this project to completion. You will hear this week about Randall House and the Retirement Board working together on a special rewards program for all pastors.

I dream of continuing to see Truth and Peace students (now celebrating 20 years) standing in the pulpits of America, filling key roles as youth ministers and ministers of Christian education, and school teachers, because we need godly young men to stand in the pulpits while both men and women fill key career field positions across America.

I also dream of seeing one of them run for senate and congress and one day the presidency. Why? Because then we would have an influence in changing laws that have almost removed morality in America. We must be careful in our desire not to be like the world lest we forget to be a witness in the world. I long to see students who have grown up under our curriculum and training who will be college professors in the various colleges of our denomination and shape the thoughts and philosophies of our next group of leaders.

My heart truly breaks because in our present atmosphere, we cannot achieve most of these dreams because we are all working in different camps. Our children deserve these dreams. They deserve a denomination that has altered its course. These dreams are simply unattainable in the way we currently operate, unless the cooperation of both Abraham and Isaac (older and younger) are willing to risk the future, to risk our differences, to risk ourselves.

On Mount Moriah, who had the more difficult task that morning? I don't know. Who among us has the more difficult task? I don't know. Who has the most difficult task today of reaching across these boundaries? I don't know. But it must be done on an altar—dying to one's self, dying to our own agendas.

Invitation

For Abraham and Isaac, the altar was the most pivotal point in their lives. Being on the altar of God changed how Isaac viewed his father and it changed how he would view his sons and those coming after him. What the two of them found on the rock of that altar that morning allowed them a more correct focus on the future.

The altar has a profound affect and a profound effect. It will alter your life, and those around you. It can alter our denomination's future.

The music is playing. I am going to ask you to do something right now. I want you to look across the aisle you are sitting in to the aisle beside you.

Look past those you are sitting with; you know them too well. I am going to ask you to turn around at the rows behind and in front of you, but look some distance to someone not sitting with you. Someone you do not know. Look for someone from a different generation. Look for someone older or younger who would fit into the Abraham or Isaac category.

Look into their eyes, and when you have seen several, I want you to lock eyes with just one of them. Go ahead. Do not be embarrassed to keep looking into their eyes. Acknowledge from a distance we must apply these principles:

- To give our choices to God on the altar.
- To give our confidence (to admire and respect one another) to God on the altar.
- To give God the challenges of the future of Free Will Baptists.

As its success depends greatly on how we deal with these issues, will you now, while still looking at each other, step out and meet each other in the aisle and come pray together?

Let's have Abraham and Isaac represented on this Altar. Pray for our denomination's future. Pray for each other. Pray God will powerfully use each generation of Free Will Baptists.

2003 – J. Matthew Pinson

The Risk of Loving One Another

Text: Matthew 5:21-26; 18:15-20

Our convention theme is “Founded on the Rock, Focused on the Future.” My prayers about what the topic of this sermon would be led to a total change of focus in the subject of tonight’s sermon. I began to pray about our greatest need as a denomination, and that resulted in a shift in emphasis. What I want to preach about tonight is something that lies at the basis of all our attempts at Christian education. It’s something that is the bedrock of all our attempts at witness and church growth and missions. And if we don’t get this one thing right, then everything else we do will be wrong.

My topic this evening is “The Risk of Loving One Another,” and my texts are Matthew 5:21-26; 18:15-20. God has a word for us tonight. This is something to which we need to pay close attention. As local church members, as members of the body of Christ, as members of the Free Will Baptist church, we need to be attentive to what God has to say to us tonight. He has a message for us. And my prayer is that we will put away our prejudices, that we will put away our sometimes petty concerns, that we will be broken before God, that we will truly come to understand what it means to run the risk of loving one another. Let’s be openminded tonight and ask the Lord to build us up in His most holy Word.

I’m not going to give you an exposition of these two passages. That would take too long. What I am going to do is draw out some practical applications from these texts that deal with the topic, “The Risk of Loving One Another.”

Running the Risk of Loving People (Matthew 5:21-26)

The first theme I want to address is from Matthew 5:21-26: “Running the Risk of Loving People.” If we are to be true Christians, and if we are to exemplify Christ’s command that we love one another and show the world we are Christ’s disciples because we love one another, we must take certain steps that Jesus gives us to love each other truly and to show that love to each other and to the world. But love involves risk. Because when

we truly love someone, we make ourselves vulnerable to them. We break down barriers between ourselves and them. We risk losing the closeness in friendships that has become so dear to us.

Have you ever had the sense that you don't know if you should open up to someone because one day that person could turn against you? We have all struggled with that possibility. There's a sense in which we often close ourselves off in little shells and refuse to be vulnerable, open, and honest with each other for fear of a ruined relationship. But loving truly, as Christ would have us love, as Christ Himself loves, involves taking risks. It's a risk-taking love that we must be involved in. And from this passage we can learn what it means to take that risk.

Four principles from this passage will help us learn what it means to run the risk of loving people. The first principle is: we must control our anger.

In Matthew 5:21, Jesus said that Jewish tradition required that if you murder someone, you would be in danger of the judgment, the local Jewish Law Court or Council. Jesus was not improving on the Law here. The antithesis between "you have been told" and "I say to you" is not between the Law and Jesus' own views. It is an antithesis between Jesus' own views, which are in harmony with the Law, and the traditions that had grown up in the Judaism of His day. The Law is God's righteous will and cannot be improved upon. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it.

1. We must control our anger (verse 22).

Jesus says, "You have heard it said, if you kill, you will be in danger of the judgment." But in verse 22, he says, "I want to tell you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Here Jesus points to one of the greatest root causes of broken relationships: anger. We must deal with our anger if we are to love each other truly and completely.

This means, for one thing, that when we are angry, we must be angry and sin not. It's possible to express righteous anger—to be angry rightly and justly. Yet so often, even when we have righteous anger, we allow it to consume us and take us over. We allow it to rule our passions. Indeed, we become passive to it, allowing it to be in control. It takes us over, and it's in the driver's seat. It is active, and we are passive under its domination.

We need to be very careful about our anger, even when it's righteous anger. Anger gets the best Christians into trouble. And if we are really to

love one another, we must realize the seriousness of anger. We must realize that anger can kill. If you let your anger get out of control, it can be like killing people. In another place, Jesus says if you hate someone in your heart, it's as though you've killed that person. Jesus would tell us, don't think the only way to kill people is by physical violence against them. You can kill them—spiritually and emotionally—with your anger.

And just as physical murder is a violation of the image of God in man, so is spiritual or emotional murder. In God's covenant with Noah, God says: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Here God ties the death penalty to the value of human life, indicating that human life has value because human beings are made in the image of God. But if we are to apply Jesus' application of the Law, we will realize that our anger can kill, and this can be a spiritual violation of the image of God in man, just as murder is a physical violation.

Abraham Kuyper ties our love for one another to this image of God in man. True love for another person, he says, is realized when we understand that "in every man . . . however deeply fallen and however dead in sin, there always remains the evidence that he has been created after God's Image and that it is still possible for this image to be restored. The lover of [fine] porcelains gathers with great care the [pieces] of the broken dish, recognizing their worth, in the hope they may be put together again."

So the first thing we must do, if we are to take the risk of loving people, is to control our anger.

2. We must watch our words (verse 22).

Second, we must watch our words. Jesus condemns two other kinds of verbal violence in verse 22: "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

Jesus is telling us that our words can kill. Our words can have a deadly effect on other people, and they can affect our own spiritual condition, even to the point of putting us in jeopardy of Hell-fire.

The word *Raca* here is an expression of derision and contempt for someone. It is treating a person as though he or she is not made in the image of God. When we hold someone up to contempt, when we slander someone, when we say something about a person that is not in his best

interest spiritually, we are guilty of saying “Raca” to or about that person. And we are in danger of judgment from God.

This warning applies not only to people in the pew. It also applies to Free Will Baptist preachers. It applies to preachers and denominational leaders and denominational personalities. If we are to be Christians who truly love each other, we will not hold our brethren up to contempt. We will not slander our brethren, no matter how much we disagree with them. We will be in danger of divine judgment if we speak in these ways about our brothers and sisters. We need to be careful that everything we say to or about a brother or sister is to build them up, not to tear them down.

This does not mean not to say anything negative about anyone. Jesus said a lot of negative things about people. He said of the Pharisees, “You brood of vipers.” He called them whitewashed tombs full of dead men’s bones. He even came out with some choice criticisms of His own disciples. So this is not to say that we should not say negative things about a brother or sister. Rather it is to say, “Don’t say anything that will hold a brother or sister up to contempt. Don’t say slanderous things about a brother or sister or say things you may or may not know are true. Don’t say anything that is not in that brother’s best interest. Don’t say anything that would tear someone down. Don’t say anything that would not lift someone up or help him.”

Most Free Will Baptists don’t engage in this kind of behavior. But we know that there is a greater tendency in our age to speak contemptuously about our brethren. Perhaps it is because of the postmodern mood of our current media-saturated culture. We live in a day when perception is more important than reality, when 24-hour news programs and daily newspapers can say slanderous things publicly without repercussions. We have a tabloid mentality. I believe this attitude has had an effect on Free Will Baptists, and we have forgotten that we should not hold fellow believers up to contempt. We can let things fly from our mouths without thinking about whether it harms them or helps them. This attitude will make us liable to divine judgment!

Jesus goes on to say, “Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (verse 22). In the original, the word *fool* means “a wicked, reprobate man, who will be eternally damned.” Saying “Thou fool” would in our day be like cursing someone. Few of us here would be guilty of cursing anyone with words. Perhaps we might think we’re off the hook. But this

doesn't apply merely to the words that we use, but to the attitudes we have toward one another. The person who curses others, whether outwardly or inwardly, Jesus says, is in danger of Hell-fire.

We must watch our words. Words can kill.

3. We must reconcile with others if we are to worship God (verses 23, 24).

We must reconcile with others if we are really to worship God. This is so vital. If we don't love each other, can it really be said that we love God? This is where the rubber meets the road in the Christian life. First John 4:20, 21 says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."

We must exhibit behavior that shows that we love our brothers. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

This is our testimony to the watching world of the fact that we are followers of Christ. We can have right doctrine, right practice, the right methods, and the most beautiful facilities. But if we don't love each other, the world will know that we are liars.

Jesus bears this out in John 17:21. Jesus prays, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Francis Schaeffer, in his wonderful little book, *The Mark of the Christian*, says: "This is the final apologetic.

In John 13, the point was that if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he is not a Christian. Here [in John 17], Jesus is stating something else which is much more cutting, much more profound: we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians."

We must reconcile with others if we are to worship God. Jesus says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (verses 23, 24). This was the Jewish context of worshipping by sacrificing at the

altar. But we must apply this to the Church—to ourselves. The only way we can worship God truly, having that fellowship with God we so desperately need, is to have a reconciled relationship with our brothers and sisters.

The ordinance of feet washing is a beautiful and vivid symbol of this truth. It symbolizes the breaking out of our relationship with God into all of life. The Lord's Supper is a symbol of our vertical relationship with God in Christ—what Christ did for us on the cross, our justification in Him.

But when we wash feet, we are symbolizing the breaking out of that relationship with God into our horizontal relationships with others. It's not just "Me and Jesus, we got our own thing going." Isn't that the individualistic message that we hear in today's consumer-oriented evangelicalism and fundamentalism?

Feet washing teaches us that, yes, we have a right relationship with God through Jesus who died for us and justifies us. But we also have sanctification, daily cleansing from sin—and we also have love for our brothers and sisters. Yes, our relationship with God breaks out into every area of life. It shows up in our love for one another. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Michael Card recently wrote a song called "The Basin and the Towel." In that song, he says,

In an upstairs room a parable is just about to come alive.
And while they bicker about who's best
With a painful glance, He'll silently rise.
Their Savior-servant must show them how
By the will of the water and the tenderness of the towel.

And the call is to community,
The impoverished power that sets the soul free.
In humility, we take the vow, that day after day
We must take up the basin and the towel.

In any ordinary place, on any ordinary day,

The parable can live again
When one will kneel and one will yield.
Our Savior-servant must show us how
By the will of the water and the tenderness of the towel.

And the space between ourselves sometimes
Is more than the distance between the stars.
By the fragile bridge of a servant's bow,
We take up the basin and the towel.

And the call is to community,
The impoverished power that sets the soul free.
In humility, we take the vow, that day after day
We must take up the basin and the towel.

In our local churches, we don't need to wash the feet of only those people we like or only those people who are in our group. The same must be said of this body. Even when we have serious disagreements with a brother—even when we think he is dead wrong—it might be helpful to imagine ourselves washing his feet. When we have aught against another believer, that is the person whose feet we need to wash the most.

This speaks to another thing that feet washing can do: It can bring about spiritual and emotional healing in the body of Christ. That is why I implore you to continue to practice it. Don't stop washing feet, because when you stop washing feet in the context of Christ's Church, you take a whole scriptural healing process out of the Church. So often people are healed, relationships are healed, and ruined relationships are mended through the ordinance of the washing of the saints' feet.

And the space between ourselves sometimes
Is more than the distance between the stars.
By the fragile bridge of a servant's bow,
We take up the basin and the towel.

We must reconcile with each other if we are to worship God. Our worship can be correct, our doctrine can be correct, and we can be the person who preaches the truth the loudest. But if we do not treat our brothers and sisters as people who are made in the image of God and have been redeemed by Christ, we are hypocrites.

4. We must put others first (verses 25, 26).

The fourth application I want to draw out of this passage is that we must put others first. In verses 25, 26, Jesus says, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

There are differences of interpretation on this passage. While we disagree with John Calvin on a number of things, he was right on this text. What he says this verse means is that we are to make the first move to make things right with someone who is at odds with us, asking ourselves whether we indeed might be in the wrong. Calvin says:

"I interpret the words as having been spoken with [a] view to take away hatred and resentment, and to point out the method of cherishing goodwill. For whence come all injuries, but from this, that each person is too tenacious of his own rights, that is, each is too much disposed to consult his own convenience to the disadvantage of others? Almost all are so blinded by a wicked love of themselves that, even in the worst causes, they flatter themselves that they are in the right."

We have too much self-suspicion going around. There's not enough self-criticism going around. The problem is always with someone else. But, as we've all heard, when you have one finger pointed at someone else, you have three pointed back at you. We tend to point the finger at others and not ourselves. So, rather than saying, "I'm going to go to this person and make the first move, to try to work things out and reconcile myself with him. Maybe there's something in my heart that is wrong. Maybe there's something I have done wrong."

Rather than saying that, we fold our arms and say, "I have done nothing wrong, and I'm going to wait for this person to come to me."

There are some of us who are always being offended, always being wronged, and we always point the finger at other people, never back at

ourselves. We need to engage in self-criticism, self-suspicion. We need to pray with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:23, 24). We need to be self-critical, and go and make the first move to make it right with a brother or sister who has offended us.

One principle I think applies here is that you don’t have to like someone to love them. You may not like someone, and he may not like you. But even if you don’t like him, and he doesn’t like you, you can still love each other. That’s good news. You don’t have to like someone to love them.

Sometimes, as a child, I would say I hated someone. (I didn’t say it too many times, because I would be punished for it.) But my father and mother would tell me, “You don’t hate them; you just hate their actions.”

That was hard for me to say. But we must admit that there are some people whose actions we hate. We just don’t like them. They rub us the wrong way. They make us nervous when we’re around them. We just don’t like them.

That doesn’t matter. We’re still commanded to love them, to love them selflessly, to give of ourselves to them, to run the risk of loving them, to make ourselves open, to make ourselves vulnerable. That is what Christ commands us to do. It holds true for us in individual relationships. And it holds true in the context of the local church and the denomination. You don’t have to like someone to love them, and that’s a good thing, because there are probably a lot of people in the Free Will Baptist denomination you don’t like.

But that’s what I love about coming to the national convention and traveling to various state and local associations and churches. We can come together for worship and education and mission, and liking each other is not the point—it’s that we love each other, because that is what Christ has taught us. And we’re coming together around our love for each other and our common confession of faith. It’s risky business really to love people. Because it often means making yourself vulnerable to people you don’t like.

I read an article recently in *Christianity Today* about suburban spirituality. The author, David Goetz, was criticizing some people’s tendency to skip from one suburban megachurch to another. He says that’s bad, because it takes away risk. When you are in a church where you really know the

people over a long period, and you stay there for the long haul and are part of the body, and that's your family, you put yourself at risk and this builds you up spiritually.

Staying put and immersing oneself in the life of a gathered community forces one into eventual conflict with other church members, with church leadership, or with both. Frustration and conflict are the raw materials of spiritual development. All the popular reasons given for shopping for another church are actually spiritual reasons for staying put. They are a means of grace, preventing talk of spirituality from becoming sentimental or philosophical. Biblical spirituality is earthy, face-to-face, and often messy.

In a congregational meeting, two young male professionals made a presentation to update the sanctuary sound system. There was some tension in the air, because the system was pricey. They delivered their pitch well and then began fielding questions. A retired man, a former physician, challenged one presenter's use of a technical term. I don't remember the exact phrasing that sparked the fireworks, but the young presenter and this retired doctor began to quarrel about who was right, as if they were the only two in the room.

I felt embarrassed for the older man, since his comment and persistence provoked and sustained the interchange. The discussion ended awkwardly, with the congregation voting to upgrade the sound system, and the meeting came to a close. Afterward, I saw the elderly man amble toward the presenters. Later, I heard that the retired physician had apologized for his conduct and asked one of the young professionals out for breakfast to discuss the sound system.

At its best, the local church functions as an arena in which conflict and hurts among participants who choose to stay can open up possibilities for spiritual progress. Where else will people still accept me after I stand up in a church meeting and harshly criticize something? "Ah, that's just Dave," they say. They know me. I learn about the Christian virtues of acceptance and graciousness even as I am not accepting and gracious. By not taking my toys and playing elsewhere—that is, finding a church that connects with my spiritual journey—I move forward in my spiritual journey. I give up control. I forfeit my options, in an environment of choices.

Let me repeat the last section, substituting denomination for local church.

At its best, the Free Will Baptist denomination functions as an arena in which conflict and hurts among participants who choose to stay can open up possibilities for spiritual progress. Where else will people still accept me after I stand up in a business session and harshly criticize something? “Ah, that’s just Matt,” they say. They know me. I learn about the Christian virtues of acceptance and graciousness even as I am not accepting and gracious. By not taking my toys and playing elsewhere—that is, finding a denomination that connects with my spiritual journey—I move forward in my spiritual journey. I give up control. I forfeit my options, in an environment of choices.

Loving people means risk-taking. Running the risk of loving people. Whether in personal relationships, or the local church, or the Free Will Baptist denomination.

Loving One Another Means Being Truthful With One Another (Matthew 18:15-20).

But there is another side to loving people, and that brings me to my second, shorter theme: “Loving One Another Means Being Truthful With One Another.” There is a positive and a negative here. The positive of love is seen in Matthew 5—not being angry, watching our words, reconciling with others, and putting others first. But there is also a negative to love. There is a risk of ruined relationship.

Matthew 18:15-20 teaches the hard truth that to love someone means to be truthful with that person. Now, we don’t have to say everything just because it’s true. We don’t have to “get everything off our chests.” But sometimes in life, when there are serious issues at stake, or when there is serious error or sin in the life of a brother or sister, we must speak the truth. Our speaking of truth is an expression of love to that person.

It’s a beautiful irony that loving someone means running the risk of hurting them. And yet when you run that risk and do confront them, you’re careful not to hurt them too much. This involves what Paul calls “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

That’s what we see in Jesus’ four steps to take in being lovingly truthful with an erring brother: (1) Admonish the brother privately. (2) If he’s obstinate, admonish him before one or two other believers. (3) If he refuses to repent, tell the church. (4) If he still refuses, let him be as a Gentile

(unbeliever) and a tax collector.

What verse 15 says is most interesting. It says, "If he shall hear thee," that is, if he heeds your admonition, "thou hast gained thy brother."

That is wonderful! It means you have an opportunity to win him back. There's a wonderful balance in this passage. Loving means not wanting to be too harsh with our brothers and sisters; it means not harming their reputation and trying not to make their sin public. Yet at the same time, really loving means being honest with them about serious problems in their lives. There is a delicate balance between bitterness and airing dirty laundry, on the one hand, and ignoring sin, on the other hand. That's a wonderful Jesus balance.

Most people today, however, fall into one of three categories:

1. They don't reprove people because they love them and don't want to hurt their feelings.
2. They are bitter and contentious in their stand for truth and drag people's sins into public view.
3. They don't reprove people, yet they gossip about their sins behind their backs.

Yet Christ's method is a balance between "forbearance" and "reproof" (Calvin). This is the only real way to love people. How can you say you love your brother if you don't try to win him back (KJV: "gain" him)? Yet, the only way to win a brother back is to tell him the truth about his sin. In this we show real love—the love of Christ—to our brothers and sisters.

If we are to know where we are going, if we are to be focused on the future, we must heed these words and thoughts from the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ. And we must daily take up the basin and the towel, embodying the truth that is taught in the ordinance of feet washing, even toward brethren we don't like or with whom we have serious disagreement.

Free Will Baptists are in need of these truths. All of the organization and fundraising and numerical growth and nice conventions will amount to nothing if we don't truly run the risk of loving one another. This is our witness to the watching world. And if we want lost people to see that we believe what we say we believe, and if we want them to believe it for themselves, we must run the risk of loving one another. Yes, we must have a biblical kind of love, the kind of love Jesus had for people. And that means

exhibiting a love for each other that is a bold love, a tough love, love that is not afraid to tell each other the truth. But we must speak the truth in love—a self-sacrificing love that puts ourselves at risk. If we are to do this, we must control our anger and watch our words. We must be careful of the reputations of our brothers and sisters. We must put each other first. And we must realize once and for all that we cannot truly be in harmony with God if we are at enmity with our brethren.

My prayer for us tonight is that we will run the risk of loving one another, and that we will realize that loving people involves the risk of telling them the truth. May our Lord help us as we run the risk of loving one another. Let us pray.

2004 – David Archer

Send, Sent, Sending

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

I invite you to go on a journey with me this morning that spans almost 3,000 years. As we journey, we will tour the ministry of several key preachers of the scriptures.

1. The Ministry of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8)

The Book of Isaiah is like a miniature Bible. The first 39 chapters, like the 39 chapters of the Old Testament, are filled with judgment upon immoral and idolatrous men. Because of Israel's (Northern Kingdom) wickedness, they have fallen captive to the Assyrians' reign of terror. Judah (Southern Kingdom) has sinned, religious ceremony is empty, the government weak and failing.

God will not let blatant sin go unpunished forever. Judgment is coming and its name is Babylon. The final 27 chapters, like the 27 books of the New Testament, declare a message of hope and redemption. The Messiah is coming. Isaiah's prophetic ministry spans at least 40 years during a period from 750 to 700 BC.

Isaiah's Vision and Call

- The revelation of God (verses 1, 2). Isaiah saw the Lord. We must have an upward vision in worship to God.
- The realization of His holiness (verses 3, 4). The angel cried out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." We need a vision of God's almightiness, His holiness, His goodness, His grace and mercy.
- The recognition of Isaiah's sinfulness (verse 5). Isaiah saw himself as a sinner. "Woe is me, I am undone." We must have an inward vision that leads to self-examination.
- The renewal of Isaiah's perspective (verses 6, 7). Isaiah saw divine assistance. The angel touches Isaiah, and he is cleansed; he speaks to Isaiah and gives him a renewed perspective.

–The response of Isaiah’s life (verse 8). Isaiah saw the world. He ultimately says, “Here am I, send me!” We, too, must have an outward vision of lost and dying humanity in need of a Savior. “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35).

Authentic worship requires broken hearts over our sin and the lost. Answered prayer requires bended knees for our churches and the lost. Added souls requires bold witness by our church to the lost.

Isaiah did not say: “Where do you want me to go?” “What’s in it for me?” “What is the salary?” or “What are the retirement benefits?” Isaiah signed a blank check on his whole life. He didn’t try to strike a bargain with God; He didn’t attempt to negotiate a compromise. God called. Isaiah answered. God commanded. Isaiah obeyed. Such an unconditional response comes only from the heart of one who has seen the vision: one who’s met with God.

Isaiah’s Commission

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:1, 2).

Sent to preach good tidings about whom? “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Preach good tidings about what? “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:3-6).

There is a little Catholic Chapel in the German Alps. The walls of the sanctuary are lined with statues of all the Old Testament prophets standing with their arms raised with one finger pointing toward the front of the church where a statue of Christ stands with open arms. Isaiah, the prince of the prophets, leads the way!

Fast forward 700 years. God had been silent for generations. Wickedness reigned. The Roman Empire ruled the world with terror and fear. Religion was cold, empty ritual and legalistic. Spiritual leaders were frauds and hypocritical. Enter John the Baptist. His ministry: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe" (John 1:6, 7).

2. The Ministry of Jesus

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

"And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee" (Luke 4:43, 44).

A Man Fell Into a Pit and Couldn't Get Out (Author Unknown)

Subjective person: I feel for you down there in the pit.

Objective person: It is logical that someone would fall in the pit.

Pharisee: Only bad people fall in pits.

News reporter: Wants to write an exclusive story on the pit.

Realist: Now that's a pit.

Geologist: Appreciates the rock structure of the pit.

IRS agent: Are you paying taxes on that pit?

County inspector: Do you have a permit to dig that pit?

Professor: Gave a lecture on the elementary principles of the pit.

Evasive person: Avoided the subject of the pit all together.

Self-pity person: You should be in my pit.

Optimist: It isn't so deep, it could be worse.

Pessimist: That's a deep pit, and it will get worse.

Christian Scientist: You only think you're in a pit.

Fundamentalist: You deserve that pit!

Calvinist: If you were saved, you couldn't fall in that pit.

Charismatic: Just confess you are not in the pit.

Jesus: Reached down and lifted him out.

"I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psalm 40:1, 2).

Jesus was sent to seek and save that which is lost. He was sent to suffer and die on the cross wounded, bruised, whipped, crucified for you and me.

Christ's Commission

"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37, 38).

"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matthew 10:1-5).

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

"Go ye therefore and make disciples" (Matthew 28).

"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel" (Mark 16).

"Ye shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1).

Those first disciples were sent into Jerusalem, sent to Judea, sent to Samaria, and eventually sent to the utter most parts of the earth preaching the good news. In spite of dungeons, in spite of persecution, in spite of the sword. As the Old Testament prophets' preaching pointed forward to the Savior being sent; the New Testament apostles pointed backward to the Savior having been sent.

Paul's Conversion and Call

"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" (Acts 9:6, 7).

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared 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. 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" (Acts 9:17-20).

Acts 13 records Paul's commission to service. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus" (Acts 13:1-4).

Paul's 44-year ministry included preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, planting churches as the great missionary all over Asia and Europe. He spent his life as an evangelist and soul-winner. He authored a huge portion of the New Testament in writing the epistles. He served as a mentor to young servants of God. Whipped, stoned, starved, ship-wrecked, imprisoned and pressed beyond measure, his last journey took him to Rome. He told the Ephesian elders that he chose this last journey sent by his Master.

Paul's testimony to Agrippa: "Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:12-19).

In Paul's farewell letter to Timothy, he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Timothy 4:7-17).

Rome thought they had silenced Paul but he sent these men who took up the mantle preaching the Good News and building the early church in spite of persecution and hardship.

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

This verse reminds me of “The Power of One Witness,” that I first heard from John Maxwell. It reads like this:

“Sunday school teacher Edward Kimball led shoe salesman, D.L. Moody, to Christ. Moody became an evangelist. In a crusade in England a preacher by the name of F.B. Meyer was called into evangelistic work. Meyer’s preaching on an American college campus brought to the Lord a young man by the name of Wilbur Champman. He got into YMCA evangelistic meetings and employed a young man by the name of Billy Sunday. Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina. The businessmen of the town were so enthused about Sunday’s revival that they planned another city wide revival in which Mordecai Ham was the evangelist. In that meeting a young man by the name of Billy Graham was saved.”

3. The Ministry of Others Also?

Who are these others also? They are faithful men like the first-century pastors who preached the Good News in spite of Roman persecution. Others also who kept the faith in the Dark Ages, who finished their race in spite of Roman Catholic domination. Martin Luther and those who fought the good fight during the Reformation, and preached justification by faith and those who preached and prayed down revivals in America. Men like Paul Palmer and Benjamin Randall who birthed our spiritual movement. Men like Oklahoma’s John West, Ed Morris, and Doc Yandell along with men from Tennessee and North Carolina churches who forged the National Association from the ashes of the disaster of the northern merger over the past 70 years.

Our personal spiritual others are also our heritage. (We all have at least one.) Will Harmon has a Carl Cheshier. Keith Burden and Bob Thompson have a Bailey Thompson. Frank Wiley has a Homer and Waldo Young. Buddy Drake has an Earl Jensen. Randy Wilson has a Ray Gwartney and Keith Burden. Mike Wade has a father in Edwin Wade. Dennis Cariker has a Connie Cariker and Bob Ketchum. You have your others also.

My Personal Others Also

Homer and Waldo Young and Connie Cariker are my others also. All were there at my conversion and laid hands on me at my ordination. They all have been my pastor. I lived with Waldo during my college days. I traveled with Homer when he was Oklahoma executive secretary, and I worked for Connie at the West Tulsa Church. I have recently been a part of Connie's 40th year of ministry and Homer's 50th year of ministry celebrations.

Denominational Application

In a recent conversation with a friend from a small California church that was a spiritual oasis for me during my years in US Air Force, he asked the question, "Why are Free Will Baptists not growing and reaching the lost?"

I quickly replied, "With all of our shortcomings and weaknesses, Free Will Baptists did reach out to me in 1967 and to you there in that little church in California."

With that said, let's cut to the chase. My generation has dropped the ball. We have settled for good but not best in kingdom work. When I entered Oklahoma Bible College (Hillsdale) in the early 70s, I was introduced to men like Bill Jones, Keith Kenemer, Trymon Messer, and Bob Shockey. I went to work for Connie Cariker who introduced me to attendance campaigns, bus and van ministry—church growth!

Denominational statistical reports listed 2,600+ churches, near 270,000 members in the mid-1970s we were listed as one of the growing denominations in a Wall Street Journal article. There was the Attack Campaign and Two-to-One-by-Two. Twenty years later the 2003 Statistical Report lists 2,400 churches with 190,000+ members, less than three average baptisms for the year! What has happened? As someone said, "We have settled on being keepers of the aquarium instead of fishers of men." Content just to feed the fish we already have.

Church growth consultants say that over 80% of the growth in members in our church is attributed to transfer growth. In communities with several churches, we have people who do the Free Will Baptist shuffle. You know how it works. People get upset. They don't like something and just shuffle off to the next church, stay a while there, and shuffle off to the next church.

In one church where I was pastor, we employed a church growth consultant. One part of their consulting work involved a congregational

survey. One bit of information said that our congregation gave mental assent to evangelism. That is, they believe in it, and nod yes to evangelism sermons but just don't practice it.

I know some evangelism programs may not work in some areas. I know some may not agree with some methodology of evangelism. D.L. Moody, when criticized by one preacher about his evangelism tactics asked the man, "What is your evangelism strategy?" The man replied, "I have none." Moody said, "I like mine better."

Personal Application

For over 30 years I have been in full-time ministry. I find myself busy with the professional aspects of a church pastor. More and more isolated and insulated from the lost, I have to make a place in my ministry for personal evangelism. For me, being on the front line of witness has meant going out on Saturday mornings through the years and visiting homes of children and teens who have attended my churches.

This personal witnessing effort, that began at West Tulsa Church and shaped my ministry in 1973, has kept me on the front line for 30 years. I heard a preacher say one time that he could think of a thousand things more important than that. I say, I can't think of one thing more important than personal evangelism in ministry. Do you personally evangelize? Are you on the front line? I am reminded of a story told by Stan Toler in his book, *God Has Never Failed Me, But He Sure Has Scared Me to Death a Few Times*:

Missionary Milton Cunningham illustrates this truth so wonderfully. Milton was flying on a plane from Atlanta to Dallas recently. When he sat down on the plane, he happened to have the middle of the three seats on one side of the aisle. To his right, sitting next to the window, was a young girl who obviously had Down's Syndrome. This young girl began to ask him some very simple but almost offensive questions.

"Mister," she said to Cunningham, "did you brush your teeth this morning?" Cunningham, shocked at the question, squirmed around a bit and then said, "Well, yes, I brushed my teeth this morning." The young girl said, "Good, 'cause that's what you're supposed to do."

Then she asked, "Mister, do you smoke?" Again, Cunningham was a little uncomfortable, but he told her with a little chuckle, no, he didn't.

She said, "Good, 'cause smoking will make you die."

Then she said, "Mister, do you love Jesus?" Cunningham was really caught by the simplicity and the forthrightness of her question. He smiled and said, "Well, yes, I do love Jesus."

The little girl with Down's Syndrome smiled and said, "Good, cause we're all supposed to love Jesus."

About that time, just before the plane was ready to leave, another man came and sat down on the aisle seat next to Cunningham and began to read a magazine. The little girl nudged Cunningham again and said, "Mister, ask him if he brushed his teeth this morning." Cunningham was really uneasy with that one, and said that he didn't want to do it.

She kept nudging him and saying, "Ask him! Ask him!" So Cunningham turned to the man seated next to him and said, "Mister, I don't mean to bother you, but my friend here wants me to ask you if you brushed your teeth this morning."

The man looked startled, of course. But when he looked past Cunningham and saw the young girl sitting there, he could tell her good intentions, so he took her question in stride and said with a smile, "Well, yes, I brushed my teeth this morning."

As the plane taxied onto the runway and began to take off, the young girl nudged Cunningham once more and said, "Ask him if he smokes."

And so, good-naturedly, Cunningham did, and the man said that he didn't smoke. As the plane was lifting into the air, the little girl nudged Cunningham once again and said, "Ask him if he loves Jesus."

Cunningham said, "I can't do that. That's too personal. I don't feel comfortable saying that to him." But the girl smiled and insisted, "Ask him! Ask him!"

Cunningham turned to the fellow one more time and said, "Now she wants to know if you love Jesus."

The man could have responded like he had to the two previous questions—with a smile on his face and a little chuckle in his voice. And he almost did, but then the smile on his face disappeared, and his expression became serious. Finally he said to Cunningham, "You know, in all honesty, I can't say that I do. It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I don't know Him. I don't know how to know Him. I've wanted to

be a person of faith all my life, but I haven't known how to do it. And now I've come to a time in my life when I really need that very much."

As the plane soared through the skies between Atlanta and Dallas, Milton Cunningham listened to the fellow talk about the brokenness in his life and shared his own personal story and testimony. He explained how to become a person of faith.

He did that all because a little girl with Down's Syndrome asked him to ask the fundamental question that all Christians should be finding a way to communicate, "Do you love Jesus?"

May we heed the call of God upon our lives, may we say with Isaiah, "Here am I Lord, send me."

All the fields are white,
Ripened unto harvest
And so swiftly comes the night.
Christians must get busy
There is work to do.
Here's an urgent task awaiting you,
Souls are crying men are dying
Won't you lead them to the cross?
Go and find them, help to win them,
Win the lost at any cost.
Go out and win, rescue from sin,
Day's almost done, low sinks the sun.
Souls are crying, men are dying
Win the lost at any cost.

2004 – Allen West

Hassled But Not Defeated

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Acts 27:20

A few weeks ago, I was on my way to work and was discouraged and depressed over something I can't even remember. I have a 35-minute drive to work, so I put in a CD. I didn't know what it was—just that it was Gospel. As I began to listen, the following songs began to play:

“What a Day That Will Be” and “When We See Jesus.” I thought to myself, “That is true; it will be great to see Him.”

Then came “We'll Soon be Done With Trouble and Trials.” We will soon be done. That is also true. “Safe from heartache, pain, and care.” Life is a vapor, James says. It is short. But more than that, Jesus may return at any moment. I replayed this one several times.

Then came “Oh, What a Savior” with those haunting lyrics, “No hope within could I see; searched Heaven and found a Savior to save a poor lost soul like me. Oh, what a Savior.”

What love Jesus had to die for me. By this time, I was feeling ashamed of myself for being discouraged. But then I heard, “What a Lovely Name.” “He'll return in clouds of glory, and we shall behold His face.” I thought, “What a name, Jesus, how precious and beautiful.”

Finally, the CD played “Hide Thou Me.” I didn't expect the first words of this song: “Sometimes I feel discouraged....”

By this time, I had pulled into the parking lot with tears running down my face. I told God I was sorry for feeling discouraged and thanked Him for everything I could think of. I began to feel that this was the message God wanted me to share with you.

I saw a sign the same day that said, “The storms of life show us the strength of our anchor.” Speaker Joyce Meyer once said, “Self pity is idolatry.”

Satan has a tremendous arsenal to tempt us. There are a few things Satan tempts me with, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I can overcome the temptations. However, I am more susceptible to the following weapons and that is why I think they are Satan's greatest weapons against Christians:

1. Discouragement

Discouragement weakens our intention, and we lose our focus. On July 4, 1952, a young woman named Florence Chadwick started out to make history. She waded into the waters off Catalina Island intending to swim the channel to the California coast. She was the first woman to swim the English Channel, so this was not new.

The water was cold and the fog thick. Several times sharks had to be driven away as she swam for 15 hours. Finally, she asked to come out of the water. Her trainer and team tried to encourage her to keep going because she only had one mile to go—just a mile.

After she came out of the water, she said she could have made it if she had been able to see the goal. It wasn't fear, exhaustion, or cold; it was the fog. She lost her focus. When we lose our focus, we become discouraged as Chadwick did. Our fog is not always physical. Sometimes it is. But most of the time it is spiritual for the following reasons:

A. Hardness of the way. Do you ever wonder why God doesn't make life easier? Why all the hassles? Why do you get water in the basement when no one else does? Why do we always have car troubles when we are in a hurry? If we are honest, living a life of faith is not always easy.

Do you feel you are living in a hostile environment? You are! You live in a hostile environment. With the attacks Satan is making on the family, the church, and individuals, it is easy to get bogged down in the hardness of the way.

You deal with a hostile environment in two ways: 1) Change it, or 2) Get equipped to handle the environment. NASA did just that. They couldn't change the environment of space, so they equipped the astronauts to handle it with space suits.

We can't change the environment in which we live, because God tells us in His word that Satan is in control of this earth until He sends Jesus back. What has God done to help us handle the environment in which we live? He has given us His Holy Spirit. He put the Holy Spirit in the most fragile vessel on earth—us. By utilizing the Holy Spirit, we can handle the hardness of the way.

B. Difficulty of the task. We get overwhelmed by the difficulty of witnessing and leading people to Christ. It seems no matter how hard we

try, people are just not interested in hearing about Jesus.

C. Disappointment. We become disappointed by people who profess to be Christian and don't serve Him or see the need to attend church or spend time with Him in prayer and study. They don't want to mature in Christ. Instead, as Paul says, "They still have to be fed milk instead of meat because they haven't grown up."

We are also disappointed because we begin to think we deserve something. We have served God faithfully in a difficult place, and we deserve to have a big church, more money, better home or whatever you begin to think you deserve. The truth is, we deserve nothing except Hell. We are born sinners, and without Christ we die sinners, separated from God. It is only God's grace that saves us from Hell.

All of these lead to depression and discouragement.

"I never allow myself to become discouraged under any circumstances. The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are, first, hard work; second, stick-to-itiveness; third, common sense." –Thomas Edison

"If you think you are beaten, you are. If you think you dare not, you don't. If you'd like to win, but think you can't, it's almost a cinch you won't. Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or faster man; but sooner or later the man who wins is the one who thinks he can." –Anonymous, *Speaking for the Master*, Baxter, 1954, p. 51.

2. Despondency

Despondency leads you to stop trying; you see only uselessness of further effort.

- A. Joshua (after Achan; Joshua 7:7-9). Look at God's response: "Get up, there is sin in the camp."
- B. Elijah (after Carmel and Jezebel; 1 Kings 19:4).
- c. Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13)

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly God was speaking: "My name is I Am."

I waited. God continued:

"When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I Was.

“When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I Will Be.”

“When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is I Am.”

(From a plaque on the wall of the guesthouse kitchen, St. Benedict’s Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado.)

3. Despair (hopelessness)

Ephesians 2:12. This is how we are before we are saved. We are given a new chance when we are born again. We get to start all over. We had no hope of tomorrow. As newborn believers we now have hope not hopelessness.

Acts 27:20, 21. They feared all was lost and when you look at Paul, it appears he did, too. But look at the difference in the way the men handled the situation. Paul began to fast and pray. How many of us would do that in the face of utter destruction and hopelessness, despondency, discouragement? Paul’s turning to Christ gave him:

4. Deliverance (victory)

A. God gives us strength, but we have to wait on Him (Isaiah 40:31).

B. We are not alone. God has been there and will help us (1 Corinthians 10:13). And we see (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

C. This, too, shall pass (Psalm 30:5)

D. Christ on the Cross (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

E. Victory of having the Holy Spirit living within us to help us overcome these things. God putting His Holy Spirit into fragile earthen vessels.

Now to tie it all together, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, that God’s Holy Spirit is living in us to show God’s power in all situations and circumstances:

– *Troubled*: pressed, squeezed, afflicted but not distressed; cramped with no way out.

– *Perplexed*: without a passage and unable to find a way out but not in despair; lost; we may be at the end of our rope or at our wits’ end but never at hope’s end (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).

- *Persecuted*: pursued, hunted intentionally but not forsaken; left down in, behind, or abandoned; even though all leave you, family, friends, remember Hebrews 13:5.
- *Cast down*: leveled with a sudden blow but not destroyed; killed. We may be devastated by all of the problems of life, but we always have the sure and firm foundation of Jesus Christ to rebuild on.

The supreme test of Christian character is not that we don't fail, but that every time we do fail, we rise up again through the divine grace of the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in fragile earthen vessels.

Therefore, if you have been discouraged, despondent, or in despair (without hope), you can find deliverance through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

2004 – Glen Johnson

Free Will Baptists and the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Text: Romans 1:16, 17

Introduction

To borrow the words of Charles Dickens, “These are the best and worst of times.”

Twenty years ago, who would have thought that our president would be promoting faith-based initiatives and faith-based lifestyles, or who would have imagined that *The Purpose Driven Life*, *The Prayer of Jabez*, and the *Left Behind* series would be on the nation’s best-seller list, or that the film *The Passion of Christ* would be a box office hit.

On the flip side, who would have believed the wholesale display of pornography, the granting of homosexual marriage licenses, and the removal of God from our nation’s pledge would be up for discussion, let alone given legal consideration.

But more disconcerting than the coexistence of good and evil in our day is the wholesale confusion of the two. For these are days when infidels can proudly proclaim, “God bless America!” and when professing Christians can unashamedly promote a homosexual to the status of bishop of the church. You can no longer tell the good guys by the white hats and the bad guys by the black ones. Gray has become the fashion of choice in our day. The honky tonk now plays, “Amazing Grace,” while the church is doing the “Hallelujah Hop.” Both are quoting Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” as their mantra.

Yet what would you expect in a land where (at least in one survey) 66% of Americans deny the existence of absolute truth, and 53% of evangelical Christians follow suit? In that malaise, you are left to the mercy of fads, fashions, and sound bites. In that atmosphere, it is very difficult not to get swept up with the crowd who is doing what is right in their own eyes.

And how are we to minister in such an atmosphere as this? You will get a plethora of responses to that question. The spiritual doctors differ radically on their diagnosis of the church, and so their prescriptions are just

as varied. But our day is not as unique as we might suppose. The Roman Empire in Paul's day was, to say the least, a pluralistic society. And from Paul's approach to the Romans, we can learn some exceedingly valuable lessons to guide us and to keep us on course even in the settled fog of confusion that characterizes our postmodern world.

Transition

Tonight, as we think about Free Will Baptists and the Gospel to which we are called to minister, I offer three guidelines from the Apostle Paul to keep us on course in the days ahead:

First, what Paul thought was the Gospel (his definition of it).

Second, what Paul thought the Gospel was (his description of it).

Third, what Paul felt about the Gospel (his devotion to it).

I. First, What Paul Thought Was the Gospel (His Definition of It)

He has not left that to conjecture. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, he has given us in his own rapid way a summary statement, abbreviated to the very bone, and reduced to the barest elements, of what he meant by the Gospel: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you...how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

So, to begin with, we see the Gospel is not a statement of principles, but a record of facts—things that have happened in history, things that have happened in this world of ours. As John Stott says, "The Gospel is not preached if the saving power is proclaimed and the saving events omitted, especially the cross."

Belief in the historic person of Christ and the work which He accomplished in space and time are essential to saving faith.

To illustrate this point Ray Stedman relates a story concerning Larry King, the famous CNN interviewer, who found himself in the unusual position of being the interviewee instead of the interviewer. He was appearing on *The David Letterman Show* and during the conversation Letterman asked King, "If you could interview any person from history, who would it be?"

Instantly King replied "Jesus Christ."

Letterman was so surprised it took him several seconds to ask a follow-up question, "Well, what would you ask Him?"

"Oh, a lot of questions," King responded, "but my first question would be, 'Were you really born of a virgin, for the answer to that question would define history.'"

King is exactly right. The answer to that question does define history. For if God has visited this planet, being incarnated as a man, and dying as our sin payment, it makes all the difference in the world. For our faith, unlike the religions of the world, is not grounded in philosophy but in history.

Either Jesus was born of a virgin or He was not. Either He died on the cross as a substitute for mankind's sin or He did not. Either He arose bodily from the grave on that first Easter morning or He did not. And if you do not believe these historic assertions as facts you have no ground to call yourself a believer. A believer in what, for Heaven's sake?

Recently a young woman told me she was a Christian, but she rejected the miracles, the supernatural in the Bible. Such people are utterly deluded and know nothing of the Gospel. As John said, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and antichrist" (2 John 7). To reject the facts of the Gospel is to reject the Gospel of life.

But the least part of a fact is the visible part of it, and it is of no significance unless it has an explanation, and so Paul goes on to bind up with the facts an explanation of them. He tells us that Christ died according to the Scriptures: that is, He was the fulfillment of all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament with all that they symbolized.

And why did He die? "Christ died for our sins." There is no explanation for that statement unless you admit the atoning nature of His sacrifice for our sins. And is His resurrection important? "And that He arose again from the dead according to the Scriptures." A great fact without which Christ is a shattered prop, "and ye are yet in your sins," says Paul.

It is not enough just to claim to be followers of Christ. Even the cults make this claim. But who is the Christ you claim to follow and what did He do and what is the significance of His work? These are essential questions of which we dare not give a wrong answer. And these are the very questions that this Book of Romans (from which we have drawn our text) develops

and answers thoroughly. The first eight chapters may be summarized briefly as:

- The universality of sin with its awful burden of guilt,
- The tremendous outlook of penalty and the impossibility of man delivering himself from it,
- The incarnation, and life, and death of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins and the hand of faith grasping that offered blessing for salvation,
- The indwelling in believing souls of the divine Spirit and the consequent admission of man into sonship, power, peace, victory and glory.

These are the teachings which make the staple of this epistle. These are the explanations of the Gospel which Paul preached and which we are called to believe.

Application

Now, why have I dwelt so long upon this matter? Because it is no use talking about the Gospel unless we understand what we mean by it. After all these years it is extraordinarily tragic that so many still do not understand the Gospel. Even in the pulpits of our land are legions of wolves in sheep's clothing who like Ahimaaz of old have taken off to bear the news to others when they themselves do not know the news.

American pulpits are filled with unskillful guides who know nothing of true salvation. They have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. And the pews are also filled with self-righteous, unregenerate church members who are on the broad road that leads to destruction because they have never truly understood what it means to be saved.

In many cases, such people have never really been under the burden of what it means to be lost, and their decision to follow Christ is little more than a superficial decision to conform themselves to certain requirements. But this religious humanizing falls way short of the new life offered in the Gospel.

If the Gospel is to be understood, sin must first be taken seriously. Neil Postman was right when he said, "I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether."

We must guard against the superficiality that our amusement-crazed culture breeds and make sure that reverence characterizes our message. Grace can only survive in an atmosphere where holiness is welcome. Be assured that wherever sin is viewed lightly, religion become an addendum, nice but not necessary. When sin is viewed lightly, grace is emasculated, selfishness is liberated, powerlessness is tolerated, evangelism is strangulated, heresy is propagated, and worship is adulterated. The Gospel demands a high view of God and a deep view of sin. We must not lose that note in our churches.

We must not let people's felt needs dictate our ministries. Describing our present day situation, D. A. Carson said, "There is too little stress on God's character and the requirements of the kingdom, and far too much stress on our needs.

"Worse, our needs are cast in preeminently psychological categories, not moral ones (alienation and loneliness, not bitterness and self-seeking and hatred; frustration and fear, not prayerlessness and unbelief). To top it off, peace, joy, and love are preached as desirable goals. These are desirable, but they suffer from two defects—first, virtues such as peace, joy and love can easily be interpreted in merely personal, almost mystical terms. As a result, the biblical emphasis on peace with God and men, joy in the Lord, and tough-minded love which gives sacrificially to both God and men, are reduced to a warm, pleasant glow.

"Second, these virtues need to be set alongside complimentary virtues such as justice, integrity, righteousness, truth, humility and faith."

In our attempts to reach people in our culture, we have labored hard to connect and to be relevant to our audience. We have been tweaking the church menu feverishly in the last few decades in an attempt to give people what they want. But we are approaching the time when we must start giving people what they need, not what they want.

When I was a boy and I did not like what my mother had prepared for a meal, she would respond to my complaints saying, "Don't eat it, Glen, there are only a few hours difference between a good meal and a bad one."

Solomon put it this way, "A full soul loatheth a honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

My mother thought it wiser to work on my appetite than on her menu. She knew peevish little children did not have a good read on what was

best for them. Os Guinness summarized it well, "A spoon full of sugar may help the medicine go down, but that is not good policy if your problem is diabetes."

We must give people what they need and not what they want. We must preach the same Gospel that Paul proclaimed and make sure that the culture does not change the message but that the message changes the culture.

II. What Paul Thought the Gospel Was (His Description of It)

A. The Gospel is the power of God.

First, note that he thought the Gospel was the power of God. To him it was no mere enchanting philosophical concept. It was not merely an ideal philosophical concept. It was not merely an ideal or an ethic, though it possessed both, but it was a dynamic which enables us to realize the ideal and reproduce the ethic. It was a power to change men from the inside out.

A communist was declaring the virtues of his party when a drunken beggar staggered into his audience. Pointing the man out, the speaker boasted, "Communism will put a new suit on this man!"

To which an elderly lady responded, "Yes, but Jesus Christ will put a new man in the suit."

To Paul, this is exactly what the Gospel afforded, not simply the turning over of a new leaf, but the beginning of a new life. The Gospel was the power of God that could change sinners, not into nice creatures but into new creations. It was the power of God to put a new man in the suit.

(Illustration of My Grandfather)

The Gospel is not a self-help religious program grounded in human motivation. It is the power of God extended to man that reorients his life around the norms of the Kingdom of God. Writing to the Corinthians Paul said, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

And again Paul said, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4, 5). And yet again he wrote, "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

The perception of the Gospel as a force pervades throughout the epistles to Corinth; its proof, so to speak, is dynamic, not logical. It is demonstrated, not by argument, but by what it does.

Then what does the Gospel do? Is it the ability to leap tall buildings at a single bound? Is it the ability to create health and wealth? No.

B. It is the power of God unto salvation.

It is God's power to save us from our fallen state. It is God's hand let down to lift us out of the miry pit of our sin (Matthew 1:21), of our lostness (Matthew 18:11), of our gross and willful spiritual ignorance (Hosea 4:6; 2Thessalonians 1:8), of our evil self-indulgence (Luke 14:26), of our natural state of enmity toward God which provokes His wrath. To summarize—the Gospel is the powerful means and the only means by which sinners are brought into redemptive reality whereby they may fellowship with God and live according to His will.

C. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

And to whom is this power of redemptive reality manifested? It is manifested to everyone who believeth. And who are these believing souls but they who have been convicted and convinced of the truth of the Gospel. As Ayn Rand said, "Honesty is adherence to the truth, (for there is no dishonest way to get saved) and who through that truth have discovered God's glorious salvation (for there is no other place to discover salvation except in the Gospel.)"

And so when the power of the Gospel to convict has done its full work, the power of the Gospel to convert is made manifest. Suddenly, the faith that was grounded in evidence goes beyond evidence and becomes its own best evidence. As someone has said, "Faith is the crater that is left when the Gospel explodes on you." When a believing soul experiences salvation, the very experience becomes a testimony to the reality of that salvation.

D. It is the power of God unto salvation that reveals the righteousness of God.

Again, it is important to realize that only through the Gospel is this powerful salvation manifested. In all the universe there is no other power that can save a soul; for, Paul says it is in the Gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed. It is not revealed in man-made religion. It is not revealed in self-righteousness. It is only revealed through the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Only through the Gospel can a holy God and a

sinful man find a meeting place; all other wisdom ends in unrighteousness. It is only in the Gospel that God "breaks the power of cancelled sin, and sets the prisoner free."

Only there is a sin payment and a sufficient righteousness to be found to deliver a sinner from the penalty and power of his sin. Forms of even so-called Christianity which have lost the significance of the incarnation and crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and which have struck out with a differing message or obscured the central facts of the Gospel message have forfeited the power that brings salvation and are to be soundly rejected.

Says Paul, "Let them be anathema!" The devil is absolutely unmoved by any other message. For you can be sure that if a man tries to eject the demonic forces of this world with any less potent charm than Paul's Gospel, they will turn on him with "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?"

III. How Paul Felt About the Gospel (His Devotion to It)

In verse 16, Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." His restrained expression is perhaps the stronger for its moderation. It witnesses to the fixed purposes of his heart and the attitude of his mind, while it suggests that he was well aware of all the temptations in Rome to be ashamed of it there. For Paul knew that his message of Christ crucified would be completely incompatible with this world's way of thinking. He knew his message of Christ crucified would be regarded as intellectually foolish (incompatible with wisdom), religiously exclusive (incompatible with tolerance), personally humiliating (incompatible with self-esteem), morally demanding (incompatible freedom), and politically subversive (incompatible with patriotism).

Nevertheless he said in verse 15, "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." Like young David who entered the valley of Shocoh with just a sling and five smooth stones, the apostle was prepared to go to the capital of the empire and try his Gospel against the mightiest power in the world.

Paul had seen the power of the Gospel. He had experienced in his own life its power and was living daily in its renewing force. He had seen what it did in Antioch, in Galatia, in Macedonia, in Achaia. He had been maimed for it in Lystra, mocked for it in Athens, and would be mobbed for it in Jerusalem, and martyred for it in Rome. But he would never be ashamed of it.

We are living in trying times when many are ashamed of the Gospel as is evidenced in their trust in pragmatic methods, amusements, and human wisdom that are grounded in a man-centered theology rather than in the Gospel. The reproof of the Gospel is largely removed in such an atmosphere and the power of the Gospel is lost.

Writing almost a century ago J. Gresham Machen warned about this substitution in saying, "The new reformation for which we long will not be brought about by human persuasion or by those who seek to save souls through skillful use of ecclesiastical influences. It will come through the instrumentality of those in whom the Gospel has become a burning fire and who care nothing for the praise of men, but speak the Word that God has given them and trust Him for the results. In other words, it will be brought by men of faith."

Certainly there are temptations for us in the 21st century; plenty of them for us to batter our confidence. The earmarks of postmodernism are doubt, uncertainty, ambivalence, contingency, relativism, pluralism, and tolerance. It is not a world in which it is popular to dogmatize and stand firmly on absolutes. This is a day of animated question marks rather than of bold exclamation points.

But Paul was no waffling preacher. "We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen," he said. He was not ashamed of the Gospel and did all he could to encourage those around him to not be ashamed. But the best way to not be ashamed of it is to realize its power in your own life. For those who are experiencing such a reality need not that any man should testify of Christ for they have the witness within themselves. So whatever we do we must make sure we are experiencing the power of the Gospel in our own lives. If we fail to do so, we are certain to be ashamed of it simply because we did not live worthy of it.

We must be mindful that nothing makes a difference in this sin-energized world like grace-energized men and women who have experienced the glorious power of the Gospel. Revisionists would like to rewrite history and remove the record of the Gospel's influence on this world, but the record is clear that this world owes more to the Gospel for its civility, sociality, and care for humanity than any other force it has ever known. Out of grace comes the best of humanity. So we must not forget what the Gospel has done and what the Gospel will do. "We are debtors" to those who are without Christ.

It is unreasonable that those who are on their way to Heaven not be deeply concerned for those who are on their way to Hell. It is my prayer that if any Free Will Baptist here tonight is harboring a "Plan B" for reaching this world that they would throw it overboard and decide now to live and die with the Gospel as their only hope.

Dr. Baldwin related his slow arrival at this commitment stating, "At the age of 30, there was nothing better than the Gospel, at 40 there was nothing as good as the Gospel, at 50 there was nothing to compare to the Gospel, and at the age of 60 there was nothing but the Gospel."

May we settle it early and settle it good that there is nothing but the Gospel.

Conclusion

I began this message stating "these are the best and the worst of times." It may be that the lines of demarcation are now being drawn between those who will stand for the Gospel and those who will fall for this world's delusion. The last days will be characterized by a great falling away. Now is the time to prepare for the challenges that await us. And the way to prepare is to fully live by the Gospel in every area of our lives and to boldly proclaim it to a lost world.

2005 – Jeff Manning

Preaching That Pleases God

Text: 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Growing up, I thoroughly enjoyed playing ball—basketball, football, baseball—I played them all. While playing, I wanted to please my coach, my teammates, and, of course, my mom! But most of all, I wanted to please my dad.

Preachers, it is one thing if our deacons and church members are pleased with our preaching (and hopefully they are). It is one thing if your wife is pleased with your preaching (and hopefully she is). But, it is something totally different if God, our Heavenly Father, is pleased with our preaching! It's one thing for your fellow preachers to be complimentary of your preaching; it's something totally different if God is pleased.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.”

- Galatians 1:10: “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

My purpose in preaching this message is to share three requirements for pleasing God with our preaching. Pleasing God with our preaching requires:

I. The Preacher to Be Exemplary (1 Timothy 4:12)

Timothy had been called to Christian leadership beyond his years. His responsibility to “command and teach” was in danger of being undermined by his youthfulness. The term *youth* was used to describe anyone under the age of 40. Yes, Timothy was young and inexperienced. But, according to verse 14, he needed to remember that God had called him, equipped him, and commissioned him. He now needed to live an exemplary life in their presence.

Since Timothy didn't have a long track record to establish credibility, he would have to slowly but surely earn the respect of his people. Do not underestimate the power of an exemplary life! A minister's life is his most powerful message and must reinforce what he says, not contradict it. Authoritative preaching is undermined if there is not a virtuous life backing it up.

– Philippians 4:9a: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do."

– Hebrews 13:7: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith, ESV.)

Word and speech. He begins with speech because every Christian sins more readily with his tongue than with any other part of his body. But also the tongue has the greatest potential for good of all the members of the body.

We must guard our own. Preachers can sometimes be as guilty as anyone for gossip and slander and even sowing discord among the brethren.

Conversation reflects the heart:

– Matthew 12:34b: "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."

– James 1:26: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Conversation receives God's judgment:

– Matthew 12:36, 37: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Conversation (conduct/life/behavior). "You talk the talk, Timothy. Now make sure you walk the walk." A preacher must have a consistency of word and life. A man cannot preach alone. He must also live. The life we live either confirms our preaching or contradicts it.

– 1 Thessalonians 1:5: "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

– 1 Thessalonians 2:10: “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.”

Paris Hilton has become quite famous for her immoral escapades. She may live like a common harlot, and yet she could enter the theater on Broadway at eight o’clock on a Friday night and play the role of Joan of Arc in such a way as to move the entire audience to tears. The way in which she lives would probably have no direct relationship with her ability to act.

Mike Tyson, former world heavyweight champion while in his prime, was one of the greatest boxers of all time, virtually unbeatable for years because of his power and speed, but there was essentially no relationship between his skill in the boxing ring and how he behaved outside it.

How different is the preacher! Al Martin says, “If preaching is the communication of truth through a human instrument, then the particular truth thus communicated is either augmented or reduced in its effect by the life through which it comes.

“The secret of the preaching power of Whitefield, M’Cheyne, and others like them, is not found primarily in the content of their sermons or in the manner of their delivery. Rather it is found in their lives” (Al Martin, “What’s Wrong with Preaching Today?” *Banner of Truth*, page 6).

Tom Howley, a personal friend of mine, is the strength and conditioning coach at Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. He helped me develop an exercise regimen and helped me make dietary adjustments for improved health. Just image how hypocritical it would be for someone like Tom, a strength and conditioning coach, to be overweight and out of shape—to smoke and constantly eat fatty foods.

How much more hypocritical for a preacher not to live what he preaches.

Love. First Corinthians 13 needs to be personalized by every preacher: Jeff is patient and kind? Jeff does not envy or boast? Jeff is not arrogant or rude? Jeff is not irritable or resentful? Jeff does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth?

Men, we are to love all the sheep of our flock, not just those who agree with us. Jesus had love for all His disciples, and what a varied bunch of men they were. Either you see people with problems and have compassion, or you see people as problems and have contempt.

Some of us are probably doing our children a grave disservice by talking harshly or critically of those within our church family that have “been giving us a hard time.”

What kind of a mixed message do we send to our kids when, on the one hand, they hear us preach about love, and on the other hand, they hear us talk about others in such an unloving fashion?

Spirit. We get all excited over athletic events, or the fact that our mutual funds have increased by 20 percent, but have little genuine excitement about the things of God.

The Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses put many of us to shame. They have more excitement and drive than many of us who do have the truth.

Faith.

– Hebrews 11:6: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Only two times in Scripture did Jesus marvel: (1) The centurion’s faith in Jesus’ ability to heal his sick servant (Matthew 8:5-10) and (2) The peoples’ unbelief in Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6).

Purity. Purity refers primarily to the area of sexuality, both in our actions and the thoughts of our minds.

– Job 31:1: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”

– 2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

For 20 years, churchgoers first in Birmingham, Alabama, and then Cincinnati, Ohio, trusted, revered, and believed the impeccable reputation Mr. Burgin built from his pulpit. But beneath the thick varnish of smooth oration and doctrinally sound sermons, this conservative pastor secretly harbored a monster. “I was a master of duplicity,” he said.

Six years ago, the shadow-dwelling beast got out; Mr. Burgin was addicted to internet pornography. For the entirety of his ministry and even before, Mr. Burgin tumbled silently through a cycle of shame, repentance, and broken vows. Seasons of apparent victory collapsed in times of stress, when the comfort of habit proved too difficult to resist. Despite a guilt-ridden conscience, Mr. Burgin often preached on sexual purity, slogging

through such sermons undetected. “I compartmentalized it in my mind,” he said. “I rationalized. I minimized. I would stop while preaching and teaching on it.”

Mr. Burgin’s wife of 25 years did the catching and unlocked the cage of her husband’s secret monster by releasing printouts of his activity to various church leaders. She then chose divorce, taking the couple’s young daughter with her. (“Porn Again,” by Mark Bergin in *World* magazine, April 23, 2005.)

Mr. Burgin’s disaster is far from unique:

- A 2003 survey from *Internet Filter Review* reported that 47% of Christians admit pornography is a major problem in their homes.
- An internet survey conducted by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in 2002 found 30 percent of 6,000 pastors had viewed internet porn in the last 30 days.
- A *Christianity Today* leadership survey reported in 2001 that 37% of pastors have viewed internet porn.

Think what it would mean if you fell into sin, for your wife, your children, your closest friends, your congregation, your whole future life. What kind of church would my church be, if everyone in it were just like me?

A preacher who is married must maintain total and uncompromised allegiance is to his wife. She must be the sole fountain from which we drink for the fulfillment and satisfaction of our physical and sexual desires—both in thought and action. Our behavior to those of the opposite sex is to be above reproach.

Verse 15 says, “So that everyone may see your progress.” How much of a lie are you telling when you sing, “What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart”?

Many of us had homemade growth charts. You know, the kind where Mom placed a ruler on your head and then made a pencil mark on the door or wall in your room to measure your physical growth. Well, what would your spiritual growth chart look like? Are you growing and maturing in your walk with Christ “so that everyone may see your progress”?

Verse 16 puts it this way: “Take heed unto thyself.” In other words, make certain you pursue personal purity. By doing so, you give outward evidence of the inward work of redemption and sanctification (thus the phrase, in

doing this thou shalt save thyself).

– 2 Corinthians 1:12a: “For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity.”

Pleasing God with our preaching requires the preacher to be exemplary, but it also requires:

II. The Preparation to Be Exhaustive

Verse 16 focuses on integrity (“take heed unto thyself,” dealt with above) and instruction. We must prepare diligently, exhaustively, so that when we preach and teach the Word, we’re communicating what God said.

Exemplary living and exhaustive study that leads to accurate teaching has an evangelistic impact on others: thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. God uses human instruments in the divine work of saving souls. He delights in using a godly person and his faithful teaching of the Word to have a saving impact on others.

One commentator says this verse is best understood by stating it negatively: If you do *not* combine godliness with proper doctrine in your life, you will give the lie to your own claim to salvation and be a hindrance to others who seek to be saved.

The context of chapter 4 is dealing with false teaching (verses 1-5): cults (doctrines of demons, verse 1d) take passages out of context to create their heresies; we might not be teaching or preaching actual heresy, but if we teach or preach something out of context, we’ve shown equal disrespect for God’s Word. When we take Scripture out of context, we exegete no better than Satan.

– Matthew 4:5, 6: “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

Consider the message of verse 11. How can you “command and teach” with authority if you haven’t fervently prepared? Imagine a surgeon not properly preparing for surgery. He fails to carefully study the patient’s charts. He does not read up on the patient’s medical history. He fails to

stay up-to-date on the latest techniques that could make the operation much less invasive. Consequently, during and after surgery complications arise and the patient's health is permanently damaged. Most would be ready to sue his pants off. Well, some preachers ought to be sued for their lack of preparation. If malpractice suits were allowed against "unprepared preachers," how much liability insurance would some of us need?

Glenn Wagner was a successful megachurch pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina until one of his elders heard a sermon on the radio that was identical to one he heard from the pulpit. Mr. Wagner confessed that he had been preaching other people's sermons off and on for two years, including some he broadcast on Christian radio. He resigned from his ministry last fall. (*World* magazine, "Word for Word," by Gene Edward Veith, April 30, 2005.)

Kent Edwards, president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, cites "the pressure today's preachers face to be effective communicators" as the reason some get mired in plagiarism. According to Mr. Edwards, "If at the end of a sermon a congregation incorrectly believes that a preacher authored the sermon, then the preacher is guilty of deception."

Pastors are better off allowing adequate time to prepare a sermon and getting advanced training in how to create their own engaging sermons, Mr. Edwards said. "Learning from a master is wonderful. Pretending that the work of the master is your own is wrong."

– 2 Timothy 2:15: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

– 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV): "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."

We are to be diligent; we are to do our best in order to avoid embarrassment (not ashamed). We must give maximum effort in studying, interpreting, preaching, and applying God's Word. There is no other way for us to safeguard ourselves against preaching/teaching the Word in ways the Lord of the Word never intended.

– 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."

Shame can be defined as "a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety" or "the painful feeling arising from the

consciousness of having done something dishonorable.”

Men, do you want to stand before the Lord and feel this kind of shame because you mishandled the Word? One day we will be “presented to God” for “final inspection.” May we exercise diligence in rightly handling the Word of truth so that our “inspection” will not be full of pain and shame.

The participle translated *rightly handling* literally means “to cut straight,” and was used of a craftsman cutting a straight line, of a farmer plowing a straight furrow, of a mason setting a straight line of bricks, or of workmen building a straight road.

We must always view the Scriptures as a sacred trust and strive to handle them accurately for our own spiritual well-being and that of our people. The careful exegete and expositor of God’s Word of truth must be meticulous in the way he interprets and pieces together the many individual truths found in Scripture.

The only way our message will be indisputable is if our content is what the Bible says, all the Bible says, and no more than what the Bible says. Our mandate is to “preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). If someone would have an argument with us, let it be with God because we have represented Him fully and accurately.

When Paul wrote Timothy regarding his instruction of the church, he could not have been clearer. The content of his preaching was to be the inspired text of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-4:5).

It follows, then, that the only kind of preaching that is indisputable is expository preaching. Expository preaching is the logical conviction that flows out of a commitment to the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. If we preach expositionally through the Bible, the authority and offense of what we say are rooted clearly in what God has said in His Word.

We often talk about people leaving services with “sore toes” because the preacher stepped on them while he was preaching. Personally, I want my people to go away with a sore neck! Why? Because they are constantly bending their neck, looking down at the text, and then looking back up at me.

Everyday it seems we hear of someone abusing a precious, young child. The Roman Catholic Church has long been mired in sexual scandal as scores of its priests have been accused of molesting children, particularly young boys. Can you imagine how upset you’d be if someone was abusing

one of your children?

Well, God has entrusted something to us far more valuable than even our own children. It's the Word of God! And He does not want us to abuse it when we stand behind the sacred desk and preach on His behalf.

– 1 Timothy 6:20: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust."

The imperative (literally, *keep the deposit*) is a metaphor, drawn from common life, reflecting the highest kind of sacred obligation in ancient society, namely, being entrusted with some treasured possession for safe-keeping while another is away. A person so entrusted was under the most binding sacred duty to keep "the deposit" safe.

– 2 Timothy 1:14: "That good thing (good treasure/good deposit) which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."

How secure is His deposit of truth with us? The most solemn responsibility that any believer has, especially those the Lord has called to be preachers and teachers, is to uphold and defend the integrity of His Word.

– 1 Thessalonians 2:4: "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."

– 1 Corinthians 4:1: "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Pleasing God with our preaching requires the preacher to be exemplary, the preparation to be exhaustive, and:

III. The Presentation to Be Extraordinary

It's easy to think that extraordinary preaching is connected to the preacher—his communication skills, vocabulary, charisma, choice of illustrations, and ability to tell a good story. But preaching that is extraordinary should not be thought of as such because of the man, but because of the subject of our preaching.

"In verse 11, Paul's command to Timothy contrasts sharply with much contemporary preaching. Preaching in our day is often intriguing, but seldom commanding; often entertaining, but seldom convicting; often popular, but seldom powerful; often interesting, but less often transforming. Paul does

not ask Timothy to share or make suggestions to his congregation. Rather, he is 'to command,' or 'to order' as in a mandate, a call to obedience by one in authority" (John MacArthur).

– Titus 2:15: "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."

The excellent minister's boldness is tempered with gentleness, and never causes him to be abusive or ungracious. Nevertheless, every sermon should have an unmistakable tone of authority. *Command*: to charge the consciences of his hearers to obey the Bible.

John Flavel said that real preaching is "hissing hot, searching, and expository." It is to bring the most serious indictment upon any minister when he is judged to be "a pastor and not a preacher."

Command does not mean "shout at them." After you have been shouted at for 20 minutes, you want to shout right back at the preacher. *Command* means persuade the people what they ought to do, and also help them know how they can do it.

Consider verse 13: "Give attention to" (present active indicative). Timothy was to continually give his attention to those things; it was to be his way of life. First, he was to "give attention to" the public reading of Scripture. Every worship service should have a time of reading and explanation of the Scriptures.

The reading of the Scriptures was accompanied by an exposition of the passage read so that the hearers could understand it (Nehemiah 8:1-8; Luke 4:16).

Our preaching must also "give attention to exhortation," which involves the application of the truths they have been taught. This exhorting can take several forms, including rebuke, warning, counsel, or comfort. But since it seeks to apply the truth to the hearts of the hearers, it must always involve an appeal to the conscience.

Our preaching must also give attention to teaching, that is, the systematic explanation of the Word of God. No congregation ever gets beyond the need for the exposition of the Word of God. If a church is doing its job in evangelism, it is a perpetual kindergarten. There will always be those who need the fundamentals.

– 2 Timothy 4:1, 2: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord

Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

What is the subject of our preaching? First, it’s the whole counsel of God—Oh, the need for expository preaching (Acts 20:22, especially verses 26-28).

– Acts 20:22-28: “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

If you’re going to be an expositor, you must be willing to be confined to the intent of the author.

What is the subject of our preaching? First, it’s the whole counsel of God. Second, it’s the wonderful person of Christ

– 1 Corinthians 2:2: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

– 1 Corinthians 1:21-23a: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified.”

Our presentation should be extraordinary because of the subject of our preaching and because of the source of our power: The Spirit of God.

– Romans 8:8: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

It is assumed by the apostle here as everywhere in his writings, though it be not stated, that if Timothy became a genius at commanding and teaching all his labors would be barren without the work of the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Thessalonians 1:5: “For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:1: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”
- 1 Corinthians 2:3-5: “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

It is not by a preacher’s personal authority or persuasiveness—no matter how well he knows Scripture or how highly he is gifted—but solely by the authority and power of Scripture itself, illuminated and applied by the Holy Spirit, that any ministry or Christian service can be spiritually effective and pleasing to the Lord.

If the preacher’s life is not exemplary, God’s power will not be, yea, it cannot be on his preaching. And if the preacher’s preparation for preaching is not as exhaustive as it could have/should have been, then he shouldn’t expect God’s power to be upon him.

But if the preacher’s life is exemplary and his preparation is exhaustive, then his presentation of the Gospel may well be extraordinary because of his subject matter and the source of his power.

Men of God—preachers, in particular—may God help us to please Him in our preaching!

2005 – Fred Hanson

Pleasing God Through Our Going

Text: Galatians 1:15, 16

Introduction

Thank you, colleagues in ministry in Canada for sharing in this service tonight. Those responsible for my being the messenger have asked *not* to be identified. If the message is flat, they will be safe and remain anonymous. If it is on target, *they* will let you know who they are.

Pleasing God—what an appropriate touchstone in light of spiritual bankruptcy of this world; what a rallying cry as we come face to face with our cold, unresponsive hearts. What relevance it brings to our redemption. What a clarion call to our commitment.

And what messages:

1. Pleasing God Through Preaching: Elevating the Word
2. Pleasing God Through Living: Emphasizing Our Walk
4. Pleasing God Through Serving: Energizing Our Work
5. Pleasing God Through Going: Enduement of our Witness

Home and International Missions directors, Brother Powell and Brother Forlines, their boards, staff, and missionaries deserve our prayer, our praise, and our promotion. God is using them to do outstanding work in these crucial days in spite of obstacles.

Now, convention time is fellowship and business. Tonight we are confronted with the most important item on God's agenda, for our salvation and service are the capstone of our Father's business.

Convention time is for reports. And tonight it the time for recommitment.

Convention time is for votes, election of officers and board members, and a time meeting our "Macedonian Mandate" of reflection. But above all, it is a time of spiritual inventory. To give us life and a sense of direction, it must be a time of faith and fervor, salvation and service, decision and declaration.

There must be an adherence to God's Word:

- Adjustment of our walk
- Application of our wealth
- Abundance of our work
- Authority in our witness

We have a divine appointment tonight. We need to meet God afresh and anew. Perhaps you're not a believer in Christ; you've meant to come to Him; you've wanted to. You just haven't done it, but you're going to do it tonight because His Holy Spirit is drawing you. In fact, He's moving in your soul right now.

Perhaps you're cold-hearted, calloused, backslidden. And you know what you need. And you're hungry and thirsty for it. Tonight is your night of victory.

Perhaps you're a nominal, average Christian and you're in a rut. It's all predictable and mechanical. You long for God to do something unusual, and He's going to meet you here at this altar tonight and you're never going to be the same.

Perhaps you're older, and you think it's all over. Your potential is gone. Opportunity is past. You're going to meet God here in a few minutes and you're going to get your second wind spiritually and be a marathoner for the Master. Maybe your greatest days of service are yet to be.

Or perhaps you're a young person tonight, and you're here because a friend came. Tonight, you're going to come under the Lordship of the Friend of all friends, Jesus Christ. Or maybe you've been wondering what your life is ever going to amount to. Tonight, God is going to give you an undeniable call to serve Him.

God has a challenge for you. In Acts 16:9 we read, "Come over into Macedonia and help us."

Tonight we must catch the vision and through Home or International Missions we must plug into God's power and answer the Macedonian call!

Mastering Our Macedonian Mandate

Canada is one such Macedonia with 33 million people sharing 2,500

miles of border and with an economy so intertwined we are each other's largest trading partner. Did you know that 65% of all Canadian residents live within 200 miles of our common border? Most Canadians are spiritually malnourished, living under the shadow of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

Encompassing present day northern Greece, Macedonia boasted cities of renown such as Thessalonica, Berea, Philippi, and Neapolis. Macedonia had a swelling population, growing wealth from trade and shipping routes, and cross-cultural influences second to none. Still, the region had failed to recognize Macedonia's greatest need—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The people saw themselves as independent, self-sufficient, a progressive society, doing better than most.

In fact, this crowd had the Laodicean lament down pat for they thought "I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing."

But God sees us as we are to minister to us, and sees us as He would have us, to minister through us.

The challenge is to see ourselves in the mirror of His Word—to see our potential in the depths of His grace; and to see our lives consumed in His service, our souls anchored in the center of His will, empowered in the flood-tide of His Holy Spirit.

Here we have a vision, a voice, a void, a vessel, a vow, and a victory.

As you listen to the Holy Spirit tonight, will you ponder these three questions:

- In your Christian life, what are you doing that you need to keep on doing?
- What are you doing that you need to change?
- In your Christian life, what are you not doing that you need to begin doing?

I. A Vision That Includes the Globe

Acts 1:8 reminds us of the sphere of influence of the Gospel. From Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. Our world's six billion souls are mostly lost and languishing. It amazes me that we can use phrases like World Vision, Long-Term View, Global Focus, The

Big Picture in such a nearsighted, dry-eyed manner. It is as if a spiritual glaucoma has covered our eyes. It is as if we have selective hearing. It is as if we have been paralyzed and are unable to respond to the needs.

In Proverbs we read, "Where there is no vision, people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

- There is opportunity. The fields are white.
- There is obligation. The Father is waiting.
- There is oppression. The sinner is wanting.

In God's sovereign grace, He led Paul west into Europe, not east into Asia. The Industrial Revolution, the printing press, the English and Welsh revivals, America's Pilgrims, and Canada's Loyalists might never have been otherwise.

In Lamentations 1:12, the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, cries out: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?"

"On the dark side of the road
Where the sick and wounded lie
They're calling for help and for mercy
Oh! Why do you pass them by?"

So we have a vision which includes the globe. But we also have:

II. A Voice That Invites Divine Grace

Paul often heard voices (Christ, the Holy Spirit, etc.) After hearing Christ's on the Damascus Road, he was forever changed.

Whoever this Jesus was, He was Lord. And was from that moment Paul's Lord! So began a life of service which set ablaze much of the world with the glorious Gospel; ignited a passion for souls which has burned for generations, reaching nations and continents. This Gospel has inspired hosts of men and women to receive Christ and take up the cause, many laying down their lives in the process, so that others could find life in Christ.

Paul's was a life of service that stood in the midst of chaos and carnality, as a shining beacon, directing shipwrecked mariners to soul's harbor. A life of one under complete sway of the Holy Spirit, with quill at the ready, who

sat in prison cells and wrote half the New Testament, conquering empires.

How? Because in the midst of a plethora of voices, a cacophony of cries, and a world full of things empty of purpose, Paul distinguished the voice of God. So we have a vision which includes the globe. We have a voice that invites divine grace. And we have:

III. A Void That Imposes Upon God's Greatness

What emptiness. What pathos. What utter despair. What helplessness. "Come over into Macedonia and help us."

The cry is similar today. "How can I understand," pleads the sinner, "unless someone guides me, teaches me, leads me?"

It was Augustine who said "Man's heart is designed to rest in Christ, and finds no rest outside Him."

The axiom "Man's extremity is God's opportunity" has never been more true and relevant than it is at this moment in world history.

The Psalmist's cry, "No man cared for my soul" should hunt us and haunt us until we fall upon our faces before God, broken, yielded, consecrated to Him (Psalm 142:4).

The Great Commission is still in effect. We have our marching orders. Jesus Christ, our Commander-in-Chief, calls us to "Come unto Him" and commissions us to "Go and tell!"

I have traveled the length and breadth of Canada, much of the United States, and much of the world, and every need I've ever seen can and must be met in the mercy and grace of God.

- Whatever the sin, Christ is forgiveness.
- Whatever the sickness, Christ is the Great Physician.
- Whatever the question, Christ is the answer.
- Whatever the burden, Christ is the burden-bearer.

While observing the Lord's Supper in our church recently, a three-year-old boy wanted to participate. His parents whispered that he could not. He protested very loudly: "But why can't I have a little taste of God?"

Why not indeed?

We have a vision that includes the globe, a voice that invites divine grace,

a void that imposes upon God's greatness, and now, consider:

IV. A Vessel Where Indwells Godliness

Paul, this mercenary who had become a missionary and one day would become a martyr, was full of God. He was selfless, sanctified, and serving.

His faith was the active ingredient of his life for God. He knew his people needed redemption, not religion. They needed faith, not form. If we say we have faith, but we do not serve then our faith is theoretical, not experiential.

Paul and his colleagues prayed, waited on God for His perfect will to be made clear, and prepared themselves for their work. It has never been enough to know where God wants us; we must know when, and how we are to serve.

Are you a vessel, emptied, sanctified, filled and ready for service?

V. A Vow That Inspires Growth

Long ago, Paul had settled the salvation and the service questions. "Lord," he cried out, "what will You have me to do?"

"Send me anywhere, only go with me. Ask anything of me, just give me of your grace. Superimpose your will over mine, and teach me to trust You in all things."

The cults vow to spread their cause. The liberals are on the march. Satan works 24/7 to tear down and destroy. And much of organized religion offers up heaping servings of cheap-easy-believism! Churches are closing. Pulpits are silent. People lost in sin are waiting—waiting for a missionary. Scripture in their dialect, waiting for a church, a pastor. How long must they wait?

VI. A Victory Which Indeed Is Glorious

If we expect to wear a crown in Heaven, we must bear the cross here on earth. Victory comes at the end of the battle. We are in need of unction, a holy boldness, a burdened, broken heart compelling us to take Christ to our world.

In his book, *The Great Omission*, Robertson McQuilken writes: "Ours is a world where 11 of every 12 souls are lost, and three of four have never

heard the Gospel. One of every two have little or no access to God's truth. And the Church sleeps on."

Summary

My friends, a church, an association or a denomination is not just a spiritual parking lot. It is to be a launching pad for ministry.

Listen. There are cries coming from a Macedonia near you. Do you hear what I hear? Look. There are spiritual needs everywhere. Do you see what I see?

Labor. So many mission fields. So many great, effectual, open doors. Shall we commit? Surrender? Will you obey God? Will you answer His call right now?

- Lord, strengthen our hands for this good work.
- Lord, reach down in sanctification that we may reach out in service.
- Lord, empty us of self that You may fill us with saintliness.
- Lord, fill us that You can pour us out upon a waiting world, a lost generation.
- Lord, bend us to Your will, that we can go to a world bent to sin.

"Come over into Macedonia and help us."

Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Africa, Russia, Korea, Australia, Asia, The Middle East. The design is His. The duty is mine. The delight shall be ours.

- Until everyone has prayed, given, sent or gone.
- Until every race has heard.
- Until every land receives angels unawares.

May we lift up our eyes and see, our voices and pray, our hearts and love. May we lift up our hands and give. May we lift up our feet and go.

Let's allow the love of Christ to constrain us in divine service tonight. Come as we sing. Heaven is waiting. Christ is waiting. The *world* is waiting.

2005 – James Kelly Caudill

Pleasing God in Service

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:18

Paul wanted these people to understand that they needed each other, and that every member of the body is essential to the life and growth of the church. Paul wanted them to understand the effect they had on each other, and that there be no division in the body since we all share the same life through the same Spirit. But it is not enough simply to avoid division, we must also care for each other and seek to build the church and strengthen the body.

All of us agree that everyone is saved to serve and that God has gifted every believer for service. In fact, according to Ephesians 4:7, God not only gives the gift but the grace to exercise the gift. Paul said, "But unto every one of us is given grace (serving grace or divine enablement) according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

If God is pleased where He has placed us, then it is our responsibility to be pleasing to Him. According to 2 Corinthians 5:9, it was Paul's desire to be pleasing to God. "Wherefore we labor, that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him."

But in order for our service to be pleasing to the Lord, the Word of God must be our rule of faith and practice. This is the very first thing set forth in our Free Will Baptist Church Covenant.

Having adopted the Word of God as our rule of faith and practice, I would like to suggest several reasons why the Word of God plays a crucial role in our service.

I. Because of Its Power to Confront Us (2 Timothy 4:1, 2)

Preaching is confrontational! Paul said to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

This must have been a solemn hour in the life of this great apostle. I think he wrote in full realization of the fact that time was running out and this was in all likelihood his farewell to his “beloved son.”

Paul had already elaborated in great detail the responsibility which rests upon a Christian ministry. Now he lays upon Timothy the demand that he assume this burden in full realization that for the discharge of his obligation, he is answerable finally to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. This is serious business. God is in it.
2. This is final business. Judgment is coming.
3. This is about our responsibility to preach straight and live right.
4. This is about doctrinal purity in a polluted society. Don't dilute it or delete it, just declare it.

By *the word*, Paul means the message concerning Christ as Redeemer, Savior and Lord. Of course, Christ is the living Word; the Bible is the written Word, and both are in perfect harmony. The written Word will always exalt the living Word.

The most urgent need in the Christian church today is true biblical preaching. Paul talked about a dangerous time that would come when there would be those with a form of godliness who denied the power thereof. We are living in a time when many forces are suffocating biblical preaching. And now, more than ever, pastors must return to their highest calling, the divine summons to preach the Word. There is a new way of having church today.

Preaching is being replaced with entertainment, doctrine with drama. We have Heaven without Hell, Jesus without Lord, Christ without the Church, faith without repentance. Martin Luther said, “The pulpit is the throne for the Word of God.”

A new wave of pastors are reinventing the church and repackaging the Gospel into a product to be sold to consumers.

I believe the crying need of the hour is that the modern-day pulpit be restored to her former glory of generations past, days when God's truth was fearlessly proclaimed, days when doctrinal clarity, theological precision, and heart-searching application once poured forth from pulpits. Until there is a reformation in the pulpit, there will never be one in the pews. (Refer to Acts 3 when Peter and John heal the lame man.)

Why did Paul tell Timothy to preach the Word? Because the Word of God does have the power to confront us (Paul on the Damascus Road).

What on earth is going to motivate and convince people they need to get saved if we only preach the grace side of salvation? We must preach against sin and a judgment to come, that there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun. In order to declare the whole counsel of God, we must preach the law side of salvation. The preaching of the moral law does not lessen the glorious news that Jesus saves, but it makes the Good News of the Gospel even more glorious.

Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:8, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully."

The law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Paul's words echo the words of the psalmist in Psalm 19:7-11, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. And by them thy servant is warned and in keeping of them is great reward."

So, Paul praises the work of the law in a similar statement in Romans 7:7, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! I had not known sin but by the law where, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good."

No one was a greater champion of salvation (by grace through faith) than Paul, yet he praised the work of the law and its power to confront and convince men of their need of Christ. (You can't get a man saved unless you get him lost.)

The work of the law is threefold (Romans 3:19).

1. It will silence the sinner. That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. So what does the law say? "Guilty as charged."
2. It shows the sinner his sin. Romans 3:20: "Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law does not tell us how good we are but how sorry we are. So, if we are going to please the Lord in our service to Him, our preaching must do more than simply inform the mind, it must grip the heart and challenge the will. It presses for a decision and calls for a verdict. If there is no summons, there is no sermon.

3. It shows the sinner his need of a Savior. Galatians 3:24: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Christ was the end of the law, so the law was honored and God glorified.

Since the law shows men their sin and their need of a Savior, it is a necessary part of the Gospel. If there is no bad news that men are lost, then there is no good news that Jesus saves.

John MacArthur said, "Any Gospel that ignores the law and sin is not true Gospel."

Under the law the best of men are condemned, while under grace the worst of men are justified by faith.

Do you ever ask yourself questions like:

1. Why aren't more people being saved?
2. Why do so many people who claim to get saved fall by the wayside?
3. Why is there so little conviction today?

Could it be that we are better at proclaiming the grace side of salvation than the law side of the Gospel? If we fail to preach that sin is a transgression of the law, what then will confront and convince them? How can sinners understand the gravity of their sins if we fail to declare the moral law that reflects the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man?

Paul said in Romans 7:9, "For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."

Paul had only the letter of the law in his hand and in his head, but not in his heart. This is why Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ."

II. Because of Its Power to Convict Us (Hebrews 4:12)

The Word of God plays a crucial role in our service not only because of its power to confront us, but because of its power to convict us. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word is the sword of the Spirit: "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

In the context there are numerous warnings regarding the hardening of the heart and the deceitfulness of sin. For which those, who were disobedient

in the wilderness, were denied the privilege of entering into God's rest.

The writer, therefore, warns his readers to be diligent in their obedience to God, lest they also come short of the grace of God. He warns them not to trifle with the Word of God. It is always of great consequence. It is a blessing if obeyed and a burden if not.

Matthew Henry said, "We are either great gainers or great losers depending on what we do with the Word of God."

Immediately we are told that the Word of God is *quick*, literally *alive*.

In John 6:63, Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

It is obvious then, this Book is a living Book! It is old but not obsolete. It never needs to be modified or updated. When God speaks, it is forever.

Next, we are told that the Word is not only alive but it is powerful. When this Book is preached with something besides enticing words of man's wisdom, it has the power to convict men of sin. This Book breathes life into those who repent and believe its precepts and stand on its promises. In Jeremiah 23:29, we learn that it is a hammer that convicts and a fire that refines.

Examples of the power of this Book to change lives:

- Martin Luther, the reformer grew weary of a works salvation but one day while reading Romans, his eyes fell on the words, "The just shall live by faith." He was converted and became the main player in the Reformation.
- St. Augustine, the theologian, lived a very immoral life, but he had a praying mother who had prayed for him for years, and one day like Luther, he was reading the Bible and his eyes fell on the verse that said, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lust thereof:"
- Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, was an intellectual and spiritual giant, who one Lord's Day was forced by a snowstorm to attend a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. He listened to an unlearned layman preach from Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else."

We are also told that the Word of God is "sharper than any two-edged sword." The writer was probably thinking about the Roman sword of his

day. The sharp two-edged Roman sword could separate the joints of the human body and lay open the bone revealing its marrow. By the same token, the Word of God is even sharper than a two-edged sword.

Someone has said it like this: "The word is all edge. It has no blunt side. And if I may add, it cuts going and coming." It is no respecter of persons. It will cut saint and sinner alike.

But its primary purpose is never to harm or kill but to heal. It kills nothing but that which needs to be killed. Things like pride, envy, lust, and bad attitudes. Notice how sharp the Word is: "Piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow."

The laser of God's Word divides the undividable. God's Word unlocks every door and shines the light in every dark corner of our soul.

I can't explain all about that, but I know this sword of the spirit can go where nothing else humanly speaking can go. (Secrets only exist between people—with God it is all an open book.) The Word of God is what makes the difference. Do you remember Jeremiah 20:9?

Vance Havner said that Jeremiah resigned and "re-signed" all in the same verse. But what made the difference? The Word of God! "But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones." The Word of God is a living fire; handle it with care.

The Word of God is searching. Because of its power to penetrate, we are told that the Word of God is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." I know of nothing that explores, examines, exposes, analyzes, discerns, inspects, and passes judgment on us like the Word of God. God not only knows all the facts, He understands our motives and monitors our thoughts. It not only tells us what we want to know about ourselves, but what we don't want to know. It not only tells you what you have done, it tells you why you have done it. The Word of God can make you shout, or it can take the shout out of you. Yes, the Word of God does have the power to convict saint or sinner for sin.

III. Because of Its Power to Conform Us (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

"And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. That the

man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Only the Scriptures can fully equip a man for service that will be pleasing to God. The Word of God has the power to conform us because it is "divine in origin." It is "God-breathed." The Bible is not the product of human ingenuity. God could not be the author of anything less than perfect revelation. (I believe it from Genesis to Revelation.)

The Scriptures are holy in nature because God is holy. They will produce conviction in sinners and holiness in saints. (Psalm 119:11; Word hid in the heart.)

The Scriptures are unified in content: the message of the Bible is one message. Note the term "all scripture." Written over a period of 1,500 years by over 40 writers, in 66 books, yet they all harmonize completely. The Bible was given to man from God, revealing Jesus Christ as God's only Son and man's only Savior.

It's dumb to stay dumb when God offers wisdom. It's all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, salvation, faith, holy living, Scripture truth. Those who refuse to be conformed can expect to be condemned.

2005 – Mike Wade

Pleasing God Through Our Living

Text: Hebrews 11:5

My topic is “Pleasing God Through Our Living.” What an awesome responsibility to stand and share with you what God says in regard to what pleases Him.

My temptation this morning was to take this topic and read the text they assigned to me and then just go and pick a bunch of Scriptures from everywhere and make a good list of dos and don’ts. I would then add in a couple I’ve made up. (Those are my personal favorites.) I wanted to throw in a couple that I think would be some of your favorites so I’d get some hearty amens. But to do that, I would certainly have missed the context of the text assigned to me, and it would only be a partial picture of what it means to live a life that pleases God.

Please don’t think that I am diminishing the importance of living by the commands of God. I understand that God is pleased when we are obedient to His commands. But that’s not all there is to living a life that is pleasing to God. My assigned text is Hebrews 11:5. Verse six is a companion verse and I want to read both of those to you:

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death and was not found because God had translated him. For before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God. But, without faith it is impossible to please him. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

First and foremost as we consider the life of Enoch for just a few moments this morning, Enoch’s life was marked by his perspective of faith. The Scripture says by faith Enoch was translated. We know also that the Scripture goes on to say, still speaking of this man who had pleased God, but without faith it is impossible to please Him.

What does it mean to have a perspective of faith? Many folks believe and in our society many folks go by the label of Christian. What they mean when they say they believe is that is they have accepted intellectually some facts. They have accepted intellectually that there is a God. Some of them

have accepted intellectually that Jesus is His Son, that He lived and died and rose again. But what is true faith? Is it more than that? It's got to be. James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

Faith is more than just believing some facts about God. Let me see if I can help flesh out for you the kind of faith that is talked about here in Hebrews 11. Verse one states, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

It is in this context of faith that it is declared that by faith Enoch was translated. It is also in this context of faith that it is written, "Without faith it is impossible to please him." What does it mean to have this type of faith? Let me see share a few stories to help illustrate the type of faith described in Hebrews 11:1.

We have a precious deacon in the church where I have pastored 23 years. Seventeen years ago, we stepped out on faith and decided we were going to build a new sanctuary. At the time we were a congregation of about 120 people. Such a project was a leap of faith. We did the best that we could do. It was an expensive project. It was a great undertaking for so few people. Within weeks after the building was finished and we had begun to make the large mortgage payments, on a single weekend five families got upset over something and left our church. In fact, a few of them even stated that the little church wouldn't make it with the new building payment and so many gone.

About three or four weeks later, we had our yearly budget meeting. The precious deacon I mentioned earlier was leading this meeting. Being the pastor, I had come to the meeting with a plan. I said, "Men, I know we are in bad straits. We have a big building payment and have recently lost some significant income. We are going to have to make some cuts. I have considered this and would like to recommend several areas we can cut, including my offer to go part-time and decrease my salary so that it would take some of the load and the burden off the church.

This precious deacon shook his head and smiled very gently. He said, "Brother Mike, I know things look bleak at the moment. Let's pray and ask God what He wants to do in our church next year. The budget should then be reflective of what God's leadership is." He continued, "I do not think that we need to cut these areas that you have mentioned, and we are not going to cut your salary. We are going to give you a raise."

You might have noticed that I have not told you his name. That is because I don't want about 300 of you pastors sending him a letter begging him to come to your church. He is a man with faith based on the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. His recommendation was adopted. Not only were all bills paid on time during the following year, but the church was able to give over 20% to outside causes. God is pleased with real faith.

On April 19, 1995, you probably remember when the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City was bombed. Many people were killed in the bombing. This all occurred about 30 miles from where I pastor. Another deacon in our church, Steven Curry, was killed in that bombing. He left behind a lovely wife Kathy and two children, Jennifer and Jay Curry. During the week after that bombing, one of the national morning news shows called in several family members of victims. Fifteen-year-old Jennifer Curry was one of the ones interviewed.

She sat with several others who had either been injured or had lost loved ones in the bombing. As different individuals were asked questions and they began to speak, many spoke with great anger, many spoke with great bitterness, and many spoke with great hopelessness. And then they asked some questions of this 15-year-old girl.

She looked at them with great boldness and said, "I loved my father very much, and I am going to miss him so much. But he's gone now to be with the Lord that he served and I will join him there someday."

Even in her great grief, Jennifer exhibited her belief that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It is possible even when we face the harshest realities of life, that we can look through eyes of faith and see beyond what is seen with our eyes.

More recently, in our church three other tragedies have occurred. I am sharing these difficulties with you, because I don't want you to think that I have some "pie-in-the-sky" attitude that if you just have enough faith, everything will be okay. Sometimes in this life everything is not okay. About two years ago, a precious young 19-year-old girl, who was attending Hillsdale College and singing with the New Life singers, was killed in an accident by a drunken driver. Her parents were critically injured as well and are now left behind to struggle with the loss of their only child.

Not long after, another family in our church faced major loss. Their two-

year-old daughter, one of the most beautiful and brightest two-year-olds you could ever hope to see, was diagnosed with cancer. Her name is Allison Webb. She battled to within just a few days of her third birthday and then succumbed to the cancer. I watched that dad as he carried the lifeless body of his nearly three-year-old daughter to the waiting funeral hearse. I've also observed their lives since that time.

Let me mention one other incident that took place in our church earlier this year. Associate Pastor Kevin Harper and his precious wife Jennifer experienced the birth of their first child whom they named Jackson. He was born with several severe physical needs. He lived for only 13 days. A few days after his death, I watched Kevin speak of his son at the funeral service and saw the amazing grace of God upon his life.

I've witnessed the grace of God upon these other families, and I'm here to tell you today, they exhibit a hope that is beyond what can be seen with human eyes. They are living examples of the faith described in Hebrews 11.

It is one thing for me to get up and testify about the goodness of God when everything has gone well. It is quite another thing for a man who has just carried his two-year-old daughter to a waiting hearse or buried his 13-day-old son to talk about the goodness of God. I have told you these stories to make this point: If people can face the harshest realities that life has to offer and live with a faith that is of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, then what about you and me today. What kind of people ought we to be in life? What kind of joy and peace should we express as we face this life?

Sometimes, Christian people are the most miserable people you would ever hope to find. Why the long faces? We believe in a God who loves us and a God who is in control of all things. And we should hope beyond hope and we should continue with that hope even though our reality speaks against it.

I remember hearing about a little boy who went home with his grandpa after church. His grandpa lived on a farm. He saw a colt out in the pasture prancing along and the little boy began mimicking the colt. His grandpa said, "Son, this is Sunday and we're Christians."

Then the boy saw a rooster. Pretty soon the little boy forgot and he started mimicking the rooster across the lawn. Grandpa said, "Son, this is Sunday and we're Christians."

Finally, the little boy saw the old mule with his head stuck over the fence. He went over and put his head on the fence and he said to that mule. "Mule, me, you, and grandpa are the only Christians on this whole farm." How ought we to be in this life if like Enoch we live with a perspective of faith?

Second, Enoch's life was marked by his perception of God. The Scripture from Hebrews says if one cometh to God, he must first believe that He is. We have already pointed out that just believing that He is, is not the real context of what's being said here. What does it mean to come to God knowing and believing that God is? What is your view of God?

I remember hearing of a little girl in Sunday School. The teacher let them draw a picture of whatever they wanted. She began to draw and the teacher said, "What are you drawing?"

The little girl replied, "It is a picture of God." The Sunday School teacher pointed out that no one has actually seen God, therefore none of us really know just exactly what He looks like. The little girl looked at her undaunted and said, "In just a couple of minutes they will."

I don't know what your view of God is. I don't know what your understanding of God is. Some folks have a concept of God as being out there somewhere, that He left behind some rules and now He's out there watching us to make sure we keep them.

As I think about that, I can't help but think of a popular song from a few years back. I believe Bette Midler was the one who sang it. The song spoke of a god who is watching us from a distance. How sad. How sad to think of God as "out there somewhere." That was certainly not Enoch's concept of God.

The Lord promised us that His very Spirit would indwell the lives of all who believe. From our text, we learn that the living that pleases God is far more than just being keepers of the law. In Enoch's day, the law hadn't even been given and wouldn't be given till centuries later. Regarding Enoch, we find in Genesis 5:21 that Enoch lived 65 years, and begat Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah 300 years, and begat other sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were 365 years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Clearly Enoch understood about a present God that he walked with daily. In Adam's early years we are told that God would walk through the

Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Adam was still living during three hundred of Enoch's 365 years. Possibly a young Enoch may have asked his great, great, great, great-granddaddy, Adam, "What was it like when God actually walked through the garden?"

Or perhaps by the later years of Enoch's life, it might have been Adam who asked Enoch, "What is it like to walk with God every day?"

As we think about our perception of God, it is important for us to have the understanding that Enoch did. He is not a god out there somewhere, He is a God right here. He walks with us daily.

Let me tell you something about rule keeping. It will come much easier to the one who understands this great truth; that God is present in us. It will help you with what you say, it will help you with where you go, it will help you with what you watch on television and what you look at on the internet.

When we understand what it means to walk with God, we will have a right perception of God. It is important to note that Enoch was a man who clearly understood and agreed with God, because Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Folks, if we're going to walk with God, we are also going to agree with God. Let us have the perception that God is very near.

Third, Enoch's life was marked by his pursuit of God. Our Scripture says, that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Some of you might have the idea that seeking God means that we just somehow look until we have found Him and then consider our pursuit is completed. I don't believe that is what is intended here.

I believe that Enoch walked constantly, continually, diligently seeking God, and he was rewarded for that by being translated and never having to face death. What about you and me and our pursuit of God? Do we have a real heartfelt longing for God?

I think folks either have a canine approach to God or a feline approach to God. I had a great dog named Rex. When I would come home, no matter what time of day or night, Rex would hear the car pull up and run to the car, wiggling with anticipation. He couldn't wait to see me get out of the car. He believed that he lived to serve me. I could tell Rex to fetch. He would fetch. I could tell him to sit, and he would sit down and wait for my next command. Rex would sit there all excited about what I would tell him to do next. He

loved me. He couldn't wait to be with me. He longed to be with me. It was the joy of his life just to spend time with me.

My wife has a cat. It's her cat, not mine, and she loves that cat. I still don't know why. The cat could care less when I come in. In fact, the cat ignores me most of the time. If the cat gives me any attention at all, it will come and roll over so I will scratch its belly. The difference between the dog and the cat is this: the cat thinks that I exist to serve it. The dog thought he lived to serve me.

Some of us have that same kind of approach to God. Some of you think that God exists to serve you. But here we find the life that pleases God is constantly and diligently in a pursuit of God: To know Him better, to love Him more, to serve Him more faithfully.

What does all this mean to you and me? Let me make just a couple of applications because you know what? Enoch has already gone into the presence of God. This message isn't about helping Enoch. It's about you and about me.

What do we take from this place today? What kind of a relationship do you have with God? What's your perspective of life? Do you see life through eyes of faith? Or do you just get bombarded and defeated by the realities of life? What about your perception of God? Is He just out there somewhere, and you hope that somehow you can be good enough in following His rules to make it? Or do you see Him as a loving Savior who has come into your life and indwells you and works in your life daily?

Do you seek God as someone you have a longing and a desire for? Do you follow Him faithfully? What testimony will you leave behind whenever you're gone? What testimony will I leave behind whenever I am gone?

More immediately, we're here in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Free Will Baptist convention, what testimony will we leave this week? Will we be long-faced, miserable, defeated, negative people? Or will there be something different about this group than the other groups that come in?

Will we look through a perspective of faith knowing God loves us and He's in control? What will we leave behind? Will these folks say, "They just seem to have a presence about them." "Those folks seem to really know God." Will they see in us folks who have joy and peace? Folks who have a genuine pursuit of God?

Folks, if we care about what God cares about, we are going to care about

the people of Louisville, Kentucky—the ones that wait our tables and the ones who greet us at the hotel. What will our testimony be? Oh, that we would live such a life that others would say of us, “He or she lives a life that pleases God.”

It is far more than just wearing the right clothes and saying the right words. Let me tell you something. I preach in a suit every Sunday. I have nothing against suits; I wear suits. But preacher, our suits don’t make us holy. They don’t even make us good. Our perspective on faith, our perception of God, and our pursuit of God will help us to live lives that please God.

The first several years of my ministry, my concept of Christianity was that of simply living a life of rule keeping. I had a “regulation mentality” about serving God. Somewhere along the way, I discovered that what God really wants is a relationship. He just wants me to fall in love with Him, and the regulations will take care of themselves.

Closing Prayer

Father, I pray today that these won’t just be words from my mouth, that they would be expressed in my conduct every day of my life. Lord, I thank You so much for Your presence. I thank you for Your Spirit who dwells in my heart. I thank you, Jesus, that You would give Your life so that I could have such a relationship with You. Lord, I pray right now that every heart will determine that we’re going to leave behind a testimony in this city that “those folks are pleasing to their God.” Lord, we thank You, we thank You for Your presence and for Your power. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.

2006 – Len Blanchard

Open Our Eyes to Our Sin

Text: Genesis 3

If Free Will Baptists were to fail, it would not happen because we have differences of opinions on social issues; not because we have differing standards concerning dress habits.

If Free Will Baptists were to fail, it would not happen because we have different philosophies concerning education and the way we train our young men and women. It will not happen because we have differences of opinions about the male and female service in our churches. It will not happen because we have different views on eschatology

We will fail like so many other groups, however, if we forget what sin is. Many have forgotten. It would benefit us greatly at some point to investigate those. Let me give you three reasons at this point as to why I believe we see sin being forgotten or overlooked:

1. Willful ignorance
2. Intentional blindness
3. Planned disobedience

How does someone arrive at ignorance, blindness, or disobedience?

The subject matter assigned to me is “Open Our Eyes to Our Sin.” The text is Genesis 3.

First, let me address the fact that Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened to their nakedness from a state of innocence. That would not be the case for you and me tonight. If our eyes are to be opened, then we must allow God by His Holy Spirit to pull away the heavy shade from our eyes that we have allowed to cover us in these dark and deceiving days.

If we are to see accurately what happened in the days of Adam and Eve, then we must try to uncover how they lost their innocence. Not only did they become aware of the good things of God, they became aware of what is evil. *Evil* an interesting word that means moral deficiency, unable to meet God’s standards.

To understand our world today, to understand our need to have our eyes opened, we must understand Genesis 3 in light of it all. Sin is real. Satan is real. Darkness is real. Our world is in chaos.

How did we get here? How did this world become so decadent? When you read Genesis 1, 2, you find that everything was good—God’s own confession of what He had done. He looked at man and woman, looked at all He created, and said that it was “very good.”

Genesis 2 closes with man and woman naked and unashamed. Then chapter three occurs. The word *sin* is not found in chapter three nor the word *fall* but that is exactly what happened. How? We can sum it up in one word—lawlessness. This can be understood as “living as if there were no laws of God.” And that is exactly what Adam and Eve did. They made a choice to live as if God had not spoken to them concerning what they did.

Since that time, all that was good has become evil to them. They no longer have the ability to see or come to the standards God had set.

Everything wrong in our world today is due to sin. Everything should be very good but it is not. Everything has turned evil due to sin. Terrorism, world wars, hunger, famine, rape, incest, serial killers, drunken murderous drivers, heart disease, cancer, drugs, orphaned children, child abuse, crime, pride, selfishness, hatred, prejudice, adultery, homosexuality—all of it is due to sin.

If we do not believe in this fall, if we do not see and understand the depravity of all mankind, we will never see a need to have our eyes opened. Don’t think for a moment that if you had been Adam or Eve it would have been different. Why? You are Adam, and you are Eve! You and I were in their loins. We came directly from them. Our nature is no different from theirs. That is why we, too, are depraved.

What led two pure, good, and holy people to sin and fall?

I. Consider the Subtlety of Satan.

It is important to understand that Satan begins by working from the outside of your life and works his way inward. He appeals to our bodily senses. “She saw the tree was good for food.”

This was and is nothing more than “the lust of the flesh.” He appealed to her desires and emotions. “She saw that it was pleasant to the eyes.” This

is the lust of the eyes. And, finally, he appealed to her intelligence. "She believed it to make her wise." This, then, is the pride of life. Isn't this always his subtle way? It has been his tactic from the beginning and remains so to this day. What was the result of the fall?

II. Consider the Seriousness of Sin.

As Adam and Eve, and all living humans since them, considered this threefold temptation their pure eyesight became blurred as John Phillips likes to describe it. Isn't that the way it works with all of us? We become a little unclear about sin, what it is, and how serious it can be. After all, we think, the tree is good for food. How can that be all bad? Our vision is blocked; again as John Phillips says, we tend to become disillusioned about God, about His Word because we let our desires and emotions control us.

We think, "Come on, can't you see how pleasant it is? Can't you see how pleasing they are to look at, to be with? Is that really so wrong?" All the while we are moving farther away from our Lord.

In the end, there is blindness; if I may borrow Phillips' words again, we have no spiritual sight, nor did Adam and Eve. Why? They believed in their own wisdom. So do we at that stage. After all, if I do this I can become wise enough to control my own affairs. That was the rationale.

"Such is the sleep of sin; it places the soul on the precipice of peril, and when the spell is broken it leaves the sinner to fall headlong into the gulf of woe" (Adamson).

May Heaven above help us! That is the reason for such debauchery, treachery, evil, wickedness, tyranny, and mayhem in the world today. But, we have come tonight to ask the Lord to open our eyes from this blindness. Will He do it? If we ask Him, will He give us back our sight?

III. Consider the Service of the Savior.

Allow me to make a passing reference to verse 21 concerning the coats of skin. We see clearly that a sacrifice was made. The sacrifice of one was made so that a covering could be secured to clothe their nakedness.

One would become our eternal sacrifice in order to clothe our sinful nakedness with His righteousness. Let's use that verse as a place to fast-forward a few thousand years.

A. The cry of a baby (Luke 2:6, 7)

“And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Cup your ear and listen carefully. Can you hear that baby cry? What does He say? I'll tell you. He says “Emmanuel!” It is the greatest, the biggest, and the most wonderful thing God ever said. Why? He is God with us. Praise His name! Why is God with us?

In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world. If you follow Me you will not walk in darkness.”

The Savior has come to bring light into this dark world. He has come to open our eyes so we may see our sinful selves as we are. Are your eyes opened yet?

B. A cry in the days of His flesh (Hebrews 5:7a, 9b)

“Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death...He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.”

1. Can you hear the Savior crying out?
2. Could you possibly doubt that Jesus cried aloud at times when praying for mankind?
3. Do you not believe that He wept over us as He did over those in Jerusalem?
4. These were prayers of intercession for you and me
5. These were prayers in His agony (Matthew 26:39; 27:46).
6. These were prayers before His agony (John 17) and were prayers for His disciples then and for all who would believe.

But, most of all, He suffered and prayed that our eyes would be opened so that we might see His great salvation and mercy. Are your eyes opened yet?

C. Cries from the Cross (Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46)

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli,

lama sabachthani? That is to say, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?'"

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit'; and having said, He gave up the ghost."

Are we still listening? Do you hear God's redemptive plan for man to bring him out of darkness? Christ cried on the Cross when His Father turned from Him. Why? Your sins, my sins, the sins of the world were visited on the Savior in that moment. He bore them on His own tree so you and I, would not have to.

He cried on the Cross, enduring horrible pain and agony, and it finally came to an end as He committed His Spirit into the hands of His Father. Though these words are not left us as a cry, I want to mention them.

"It Is Finished!"

Oh my! What did He mean? This was not a statement of agony. This was not a statement of anguish. No. Ten thousand times no! It was a statement of victory!

Listen. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12).

"Desire realized is sweet to the soul" (Proverbs 13:19).

His cries were for me and you. His plan was to redeem us from our blindness, our darkness. He set out to open our eyes so that we might see the Light of the world. He has arrived at the gate; He has reached His goal. Indeed it was finished. Are your eyes opened yet?

There will be a final cry for those who have eyes opened. I pray yours are.

D. A cry in the sky (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord, Himself, shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remains shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

1. *Shout*: a cry, a yell, a scream. (There is a vast difference between this cry and the others.)
 2. No more will He cry as a baby getting used to this sin-cursed world.
 3. No more will it be a cry for suffering and hardship in this dark and decaying world.
 4. No more is it a cry from the horrors of a death you and I deserved but will never have to understand.
 5. This is the cry of total redemption, and we will be on our way home!
- Are your eyes opened yet?

2006 – Stephen Ashby

The Cry of Strife

Text: Mark 15:33-38

In this passage, we find the fourth word of Jesus from the Cross. This is the only one of the statements found in both Matthew and Mark. The week had been long; the day had been longer. The week began with hosanna. But as the Sabbath approached, they were heard to say, "Hurry! Break His legs." We've gone from triumph to treason...from glory to gory.

By the time we reach the fourth word, we've already considered:

1. Jesus' prayer for His murderers.
2. Jesus' promise to the malefactor.
3. Jesus' provision for His mother.

Each of these statements was proclaimed in the light of day. But from this point onward, from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, darkness covered the whole land. And out of this darkness came the cry, "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"

What a dark statement in this, the darkest moment of human history.

The Scriptures declare that Jesus was "tempted in all points like as we are...yet without sin." But He was expressing in that hour what people have felt, in varying degrees, and for various reasons, i.e., "I need to know, and I need to sense the presence of God."

Recall with me for a moment:

1. The Triumphal Entry (John 12:12-21). On this special occasion, many people came to the feast when they heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. The Greeks came to Philip saying, "We would see Jesus." Truly, on special occasions, people need to sense the presence of God.
2. Jesus' presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:25-32). Remember Simeon? It was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Indeed, before death, people need to see Jesus.
3. When Jesus was back again in Cana of Galilee (John 4:46-50). Here,

we see the nobleman's request: "Sir, come down ere my child die." In times of sickness, people need to have the presence of God.

4. As Jesus taught on servanthood then went into Jericho (Mark 10:46-52), He encountered blind Bartimaeus saying, "Jesus, thou son of David...Have mercy on me." And they told him, "Hold your peace." When others ridicule, people need the help that Jesus provides.
5. As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1-8), Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the sepulchre where the Lord lay. Surely, on Sunday, people need to know the nearness of the Lord.
6. When others are of no help (Job 23:3), we need to know God cares. Recall Job as he cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find him. That I might even come into his presence." In times of despair, people need the presence of God.

I think, what Jesus was expressing in that dark hour on the Cross, was certainly the feelings of His own heart. But He was also expressing the feelings of millions of others through the ages. "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" I need to sense the presence of God in my dark hour.

"Sir, we would see Jesus!" But the writer of Hebrews says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

Well, since we see Jesus, and this is the Jesus we see, it behooves us to give careful thought:

- "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."
- To "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners."
- That "We see [this] Jesus who was crowned with glory and honor that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

That day, the scene was dark. From this point on, everything was dark. Everything that took place from this point onward, we know, was happening in stone-cold darkness. There were yet four statements that Jesus would make which would accompany the previous three:

4. One is a cry of desertion: "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"

5. One is a cry of exhaustion: "I thirst."

6. Then, there's the cry of completion: "It is finished."

7. Finally, the cry of consummation: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

All of this happened in the dark. It was probably a darkness similar to the darkness that came as the ninth plague on Egypt. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days" (Exodus 10:21, 22).

The first thing we should recognize as we consider this scene is that Jesus' death was attended by visible signs. There were others, but I wish to consider two signs in particular. First, there's darkness. Second, the text tells of the rending of the veil in two. Both were miraculous events. Both had a deep meaning attached to them. Both were intended to arrest the attention of the multitude in Jerusalem.

Think of the darkness. It was the sixth hour. It was noon. The darkness would strike even thoughtless Gentiles like Pilate and the Roman soldiers. If it was anything like the darkness over Egypt in the ninth plague, the darkness could be felt. They couldn't see one another. In that plague, no one ventured from their house for three days.

What about the rending of the veil? It would strike even Annas and Caiaphas. In most every house in Jerusalem on that night, people were saying, "We have heard and seen strange things today." The event itself is history. But what about the meaning of the event? Is that mere mystery? I don't think so! Oh, I know there are theological issues we don't completely understand—things like the hypostatic union or details about eschatology. But when it comes to this darkness, there's not a lot of mystery here at all.

The darkness tells us of the exceeding wickedness of the Jewish nation. They were crucifying their own Messiah. They were killing their own King. Peter later said in Acts 3, "You have killed the Prince of Life."

Remember, "He came to his own and his own received him not." Some had said, "We'll not have this man to reign over us." Jesus told the parable of the unjust stewards, in which God had sent His servants time and again. "But last of all He sent his Son and they said, Let us kill the Son."

What great darkness was upon that nation! God was merely manifesting in the physical realm, what was true of them spiritually all along...“Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19).

What about the rending of the veil (Mark 15:38)? There’s certainly no mystery here. This event tells of the termination of the whole Jewish Law of Ceremonies. Now, the Holy of Holies is open to all mankind: Gentiles as well as Jews, women as well as men, children as well as adults, laymen as well as clergy.

Hebrews 9:8 says,“...the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.”

But the shadow is past; the figure’s fulfilled.“For we have an High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

We need no human priest! All the barriers between God and man have been cast down, forever. Jesus is our great High Priest, and He abides, forever, to make intercession for us. The darkness has been broken through by Him who is the Light of the World. The veil has been torn, forever, from top to the bottom, and we may now enter boldly into the light of His presence.

We do well to remember:

1. Jesus’ death was attended by visible signs.
2. In Jesus’ death, the agony of vicarious suffering was exhibited.

In the Gospels, what happened between noon and three o’clock is a complete blank. All we know is that during these three hours of intense darkness, Jesus suffered indescribable agonies. He was “made sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was “made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). He was “wounded for our transgressions” and “Bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). And the Lord laid on him “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

If we can be sure of anything, we can be sure that Jesus did not die merely as an example; He died as a Savior. He was not there as a martyr; He was there as our atonement. To think, as some do, that Jesus was nothing more than a man, or that His death was only a great example, makes His death cry completely unintelligible. It makes Him appear in death, less patient and calm than many a martyr. Indeed, less patient and calm than some

heathen philosophers. Only one explanation will suffice. Christ died as the vicarious substitute for our sins.

When He uttered his dying cry of dereliction (abandonment), He did so under the heavy pressure of a world's sin laid upon Him and imputed to Him. Isaiah 53:10 says, "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief."

Isaiah 53:4 reads, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted."

Jesus never forgot, and He never once compromised what He was doing. In Mark 10:45, the evangelist records "the Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Sometimes, Jesus' enemies spoke better than they knew. They said, "He saved others. Himself He cannot save."

But had He been a self-saver, He could not have been the world's Savior. Jesus Himself had said, "Whoever will save his life shall lose it." Jesus became a life-loser in order to be our soul-saver.

We need not only to:

1. See the visible signs.
2. Recognize the vicarious suffering.
3. Hear the voice of sorrow: *Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*. "My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?"

What does this mean? Certainly, of all the seven words from the cross, this is the most puzzling. Had the Father actually forsaken the Son? But how could God forsake God?

The meaning cannot possibly be that there was ever a time when God the Father stopped loving His Son. We hear Jesus say, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" And yet, in the same breath, He addresses Him as "My God."

What are we to say? We know God is concerned when a sparrow falls from the sky. Can we possibly believe that He did not care when His only-begotten Son suffered and died? Perhaps, the answer rests in the thought that Jesus was forsaken for a season. And, yet, He was the beloved Son, in whom the Father was well pleased.

Human analogies can't possibly do justice to what we are considering. But sometimes we may gain a little insight by thinking in terms of what we know on a personal level. When my son, Serogia, was five, we had just started treating him with interferon for a severe case of Hepatitis B. After his fifth shot, he had a seizure in the middle of the night, which caused him to stop breathing.

By God's grace, he fell out of the bed, waking his mom who began attending to him. Once he fully stopped breathing, he didn't breathe by himself for more than 13 hours. The doctors at Riley Children's Hospital were scrambling, searching computer databases while doing lots and lots of tests.

He was in Intensive Care for three days. During that time, they tested him for bacterial meningitis, trying to figure out what had caused the seizure. When they got the results back from the meningitis test, somehow the sample had become tainted. So, they had to do the test again. The next day, they took him back to the same room to repeat the test.

This time, he knew what was coming. There were six of them to hold him down. He was able to see the long needle they were about to insert into his spine. He was alone in that room, alone, with only his tormentors.

I heard him scream. He screamed and screamed and screamed. "No! No! Don't do it! Mama, I want you! Daddy, don't leave me!" He was all alone, or so he thought.

While this was going on, Dr. Phillips came to the room and said to me, "What are you doing here? What parent can stand to listen to this?"

I was right outside the door listening to every cry, ready to rush in and help if I was needed. I held myself back so they could complete what had to be done.

Now I know this is a feeble example, but it's the best I can do. I don't know how God felt that day, as His Son cried out. But I know how I felt. Serogia was never forsaken, but he certainly felt all alone. Jesus could not be forsaken by God, but He felt all alone.

You and I may feel all alone and forsaken by God sometimes. You may feel like Job when he said, "Oh that I knew where I might find him. That I might even come into his presence" (Job 23:3). And yet, we can know this: Jesus is touched by the feeling of our infirmities. And yes, our feelings are real. But He's really there for each of us, in whatever may be our need.

2006 – Richard Hendrix

The Truth About the Harvest

Text: Matthew 9:35-38

When Jimmy Aldridge was 13 years old, he put his finger on the Ivory Coast, and God called him to the mission field. He prayed and prepared to spend his life in the Ivory Coast. Why? Because he heard the Lord of the harvest's voice and obeyed.

At 53, Paul Thompson resigned a great church and moved to Arizona. God used him to plant and build a great church. Why? Because he heard the Lord of the harvest's voice and obeyed.

When Mike and Cathy Corley were entering their 50s, they left their careers and grandchildren and moved to Russia. This opened a great mission field to Free Will Baptists in both Russia and some closed fields. Why? Because they heard the Lord of the harvest's voice and obeyed.

After her husband passed away in her 60s, Icy Mae Fredrick moved to Haiti with no support from any mission agency, but today there is a great church, school and hospital because she heard the Lord of the harvest's voice and obeyed.

These saw the truth about the harvest, heeded the call, and it changed their lives and the eternal destinations for thousands of people around the world.

What are you doing about the harvest? A lot of Christians are like Mark Twain. Mark Twain loved to go fishing, but he hated to catch fish. The problem was he went fishing to relax, and catching fish ruined his relaxation, since he had to take the fish off the hook and do something with it.

When he wanted to relax by doing nothing, people thought that he was lazy, but if he went fishing, he could relax all he wanted. People would see him sitting by the river bank and they would say, "Look, he's fishin', don't bother him."

So Mark Twain came up with the perfect solution: he would take a pole, line, and a bobber, but he didn't put a hook on the end of the line. He

would throw the line out into the water and lay back on the bank. That way, he could relax all he wanted and he would be bothered by neither man nor fish. Mark Twain is like a lot of Christians you and I know. They have their poles in the water, but there is no hook on the end of the line. People want to hear stories about what missionaries go through; people want to be identified with the church that is reaching people, but they never become a part of the outreach. They have a float bobbing on the water but no hook.

The Lord would have you to put a hook on the end of your line and help with the harvest. But in order to do this our eyes first must be opened to the harvest, and there are certain truths that we must realize about the harvest. These truths are:

I. The truth is that Jesus cares about the harvest.

The harvest is precious to Jesus Christ. Matthew 9:37, 38, show us one of the most revealing things that Jesus ever said. Because it gives us a glimpse into the heart and motive of Jesus Christ.

You see, the religious leaders of that day saw the crowd of ordinary people as chaff to be destroyed and burned up, In their pride they looked for the destruction of the sinner. But Jesus cared. He saw the people as a precious harvest that must be reaped and saved. Jesus in love died for the salvation of sinners. Verse 36 is a snapshot, not of a man overwhelmed by the enormous tasks, but of the face of God moved to tears at the depth and depravity of human suffering.

Jesus cared so much He literally ached for them, as a father would ache for his suffering children, and compelled Him to sacrifice everything to save them.

G. Campbell Morgan said, "There is nothing in man that God should save, the need to save mankind is born in His own compassion, for deepest in the being of God is love and compassion."

Now if one is born again, this same love and compassion is within you. From the moment you were saved, you received the Holy Spirit. The problem is that He must be unleashed in your soul. "For the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts" (Romans 5:5). When you are right with God and walking close to the Lord, that compassion and love is evident. And you can't help but feel as Christ felt. And then you have to do something about it.

There is a story about St. Francis who lived in the 13th century. He announced to his young monks that he was going to the village on a preaching mission. He took a young novice along with him.

On their way to the village they passed a man who had been injured and they stopped and saw to the man's wounds. They went on and passed a homeless man, and again they stopped and helped and fed the man the best they could. So it went throughout the day. They would come across people who were in need and St. Francis would minister to their needs the best he could.

Finally, darkness was about to set in, not a single word had been preached, and they had to head back to the monastery. The younger man was upset. He said, "Brother, you said we were going to the village to preach to the people."

Francis simply smiled and said, "My friend, that is what we've been doing all day."

Unless there is a heart like Jesus' heart, a heart full of compassion, there is no evangelism. You cannot be a true worker in the harvest.

II. The truth is that the harvest will never be reaped unless there are reapers to reap it. The harvest will perish.

Our text marks a significant change in Jesus' ministry. To this point, the disciples have just been onlookers. All the actual ministry—teaching, preaching, healing—had been performed by Jesus Himself. Here, Jesus prepares them to join in the harvest with Him. A joint effort. It's time to go to work in the fields.

It is a great Christian truth that Christ needs men and women; when He was here His voice could reach so few. He never traveled outside of Palestine, but there was a whole world out there that He wanted to hear the Gospel.

He still wants people to hear the Gospel, but they will never hear unless other people who have heard will go and tell them; unless others are willing to cross the seas, the mountains, different cultures, and—let me also add—the streets in your town to bring the Good News.

The harvest will perish unless it is reaped. There is an urgency in Jesus' voice, because He sees the ultimate consummation of divine judgment.

Paul said, "knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

Our Lord knew the anguish of Hell: "the fire that never shall be quenched, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

That grieved His heart. "Not the will of God that any should perish."

"But," you say, "I am only one, I can't make a difference."

There is a familiar story of a boy and his grandfather walking along the beach. The beach was covered with starfish that had been washed ashore. Every so often, the grandfather would stop, pick up one of the starfish and toss it back into the ocean. After a while, the little boy said to his grandfather, "There are thousands of starfish on the beach. Throwing a few back into the ocean can't possibly make a difference."

As the grandfather tossed another starfish into the ocean, he said, "It will make a difference to that one."

You have the power to make an eternal difference in the harvest.

III. The truth is that prayer is God's solution for the shortage of workers.

The main problem that hindered Jesus' ministry is the same problem today: the harvest is enormous but the workers are few.

And I ask you, who will reach our generation? Who will reach a Hell-bound world of sinful hurting people who need to hear and accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Who will tell them of their condition and show the only way of escape? Who will share with them Jesus' love, compassion, and power?

The first need of our generation is for workers, and the most important thing we must understand is that numbers of workers can only be increased by the awesome power of God. Our first responsibility is to come to the Lord in prayer. Waiting on the Lord is a crucial part of serving Him. At Pentecost, when Peter and John were let go, they prayed (Acts 4:29-31, 33). Great power, great grace, and great fear were upon the church and great numbers were being added to the church. Workers!

An old deacon was leading in prayer using one of his stereotypical phrases, which was "Oh, Lord, touch the unsaved with Thy finger." As he intoned this phrase in this particular prayer, he stopped short. Other

members came to his side and asked if he was sick. "No," he replied, "but something seemed to say to me, 'Thou art the finger.'"

Will you be the finger of God? Will you rise up and reach your generation?

IV. The truth is that prayer is not enough to reap the harvest.

We have to put feet to our prayers. One might say, "I will pray every day for the harvest." That is good, but it is not enough. Because faith without works is dead.

Martin Luther had a friend who agreed with him in matters of faith. So they came to an agreement. The friend who was also a monk would stay in the monastery and pray while Luther went out into the dust and heat of the battle for the Reformation of the world. So they began that way.

Then one night, Luther's friend had a dream. He saw a vast field of corn as big as the world; and one solitary man was trying to reap it, an impossible and heartbreaking task. Then he caught a glimpse of the man's face, it was Martin Luther. And the friend awoke and realized the truth. I must take my prayers and go into the field and get to work.

We must see the harvest as Christ saw it—precious, worth more than all the world. What would one give in exchange for his soul? We must put ourselves on the scene.

To summarize, there are four essentials that make our working in the harvest productive.

1. *We must see clearly.* Though there were needs all around Him, Jesus stopped and saw the people to whom He was ministering. They were individuals with hearts and eternal souls. We have to stop being preoccupied with ourselves. We have to see them as Jesus sees them.
2. *We must feel deeply.* Before He said anything to His disciples, Jesus first felt the depth of the people's pain. Try putting yourself in somebody else's shoes. What would it make you feel like if you couldn't make it through the day without a drink? What would it feel like if your spouse for 15-20 years left you? Try to connect, to care about what others are going through.
3. *We must pray specifically.* Jesus wanted His disciples to pray for sensitive, capable workers for the harvest. And part of that kind of

worker means taking care of others through prayer. Prayer is the important aspect of evangelism, yet it's the easiest to overlook. Do you know just three people you could hold up in prayer? Start kneeling today, and watch God's power go to work. Key to the Kingdom, it is the key to Heaven.

4. *We must go willingly.* Matthew doesn't record a single sign of reluctance among the disciples when Jesus sent them out. This is where we put our faith to work. Where we move from feeling sorry for ourselves to feeling Christ's compassion for them. God may send us as His workers, but He won't go for us. He may open the door, but only you can walk through it. The decision is yours, will you walk through it?

2006 – David Potete

Open Our Eyes to the Possibilities

Text: 2 Kings 6:8-23

I hope you listen to my heart tonight and let God speak to you. If nothing else, you can confirm your faith in the Word of God. A. T. Robertson once said, "The greatest proof that the Bible is inspired is that it has stood so much bad preaching."

1. When you are pursuing God's will for your life, life will be full of surprises.

A surprise birthday party is cool. It was a pleasant surprise when I was contacted about preaching here tonight. But a lot of life's surprises are not pleasant.

We react to surprises in odd ways for a Christian. Doubt. Anger. Revenge. Bitterness. When the king was frustrated, he struck out at those closest to him. Sometimes in our frustrations and failures we strike out at others. Why? Maybe it gives us a sense of control.

Second Timothy 4 teaches us to keep our heads in all situations; maintain your integrity; be holy because He is holy.

I would say this was not a comfortable situation for Elisha's servant. I am not too sure it was comfortable for Elisha.

But we are often surprised at the bumps in the roads of our lives because we have bought into the notion of a health, wealth, and prosperity religion more than we care to admit.

"Death by Suburbs." Affluence is sucking the spirituality out of us. There is a soft underbelly to American, western, Bible-belt Christianity. This is often seen in our prayers. When we have prayer time at our church, our people have a lot of the typical prayer requests, and they are valid. A lot of requests are about health and wealth. But if they share requests without mentioning the lost people in their lives, I remind them what it's really about.

I recently ran across a cartoon of several Christians sharing prayer requests. Then one of them leading in prayer by saying, "Lord, I lay before

you the prayer concerns voiced this morning, even though most of them sound like whining to me.”

Have we become more concerned about lost stock market value than we are about the value of lost souls?

It’s time we became uncomfortable and step out on faith to live a life of purpose: God’s purpose.

2. When you are pursuing God’s will for your life, He will watch over you.

Frederick Farrar in *The Expositor’s Bible* put it this way, “As long as a child of God is on the path of duty, and until that duty has been fulfilled, he is inviolable and invulnerable.”

Now understand, this does not mean that just because you say you are doing something for God that you cannot be stopped. It means that as long as God is doing something in you, that you cannot be stopped. And it may be that the very thing God wishes to do in you is suffering or even death. But if it’s God’s purpose for you, what’s wrong with that?

This is the advice I give when someone asks me about becoming a missionary or anything else for that matter. First, make sure God is leading you. Second, don’t let anything get in the way.

Spurgeon has a neat little outline on this passage:

1. The natural eye is blind to heavenly things. True for unbelievers and believers.
2. God alone can open man’s eyes.
3. We may pray to Him to open men’s eyes. The dying prayer of William Tyndale was, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!”
4. God does open men’s eyes.
5. Even those who see need more sight.

Nice sermon, huh?

We have opened our eyes to the limitations, not the possibilities!

1. Look for where God is working and hop on board.

We tend to do what we want to do, you know, what is comfortable for us, and then ask God to hop on board what we are doing.

I would suggest that we are not to be like the Israeli army in 2 Kings 6. They were trying to avoid contact. We are to initiate contact. And to do that, you are going to have to go where there are people—lost people. Like say... a city. For some reason, we have adopted the wrong methodology in waging the battle God has commissioned us to fight.

We allow the possibilities to intimidate us, to scare us, instead of letting them excite us.

Remember the old story of the shoe salesman who went to an uncivilized country? The first salesman said, "Bring me home, no one wears shoes." A second shoe salesman went to the same country and said, "Send me every pair of shoes you can find. Everyone here needs shoes!"

We are to go into the world, not run from it. When Jesus told Peter that the gates of Hell would not prevail against the Church, Jesus was not suggesting a defensive posture. He was setting up a scenario where an offensive posture was necessary.

And we must get into the cities of the world.

Aw, come on. You guys didn't really expect me to preach a sermon and not mention the city did you? You could have given me any text in the Bible, and it is urban connected. See, the Bible begins in a garden, but it ends in a city. You could have given me Psalm 23, and I would talk about cities. While the shepherd leads us beside still waters and in green pastures, the psalmist ends up in a banquet hall, in the city. A big city—the capital, no less.

Look at a demographic map of the U.S. showing where believers are and where unbelievers are, and you will find that most of us do not have the right to criticize Elisha's servant. At least he was where the action was; we are not.

It's like we have these little mini-fortresses set up all through the Bible Belt, and they are our sanctuaries, our escape from the messed up world around us. We have to incarnate the Gospel just as Christ did.

Christ incarnated the Gospel, and we must do the same. Can I suggest that over half of you are not listening to God? I used to tiptoe around this, but no more. God is calling His people into the city, and they are not listening! The reason I can confidently claim most Christians are not listening to God is that most of us are not where the lost are.

2. We need God to open our eyes. See, while we may not be totally blind,

we do seem to have some blinders that hinder us.

Blinders may help in horse racing, but they do not help believers walk circumspectly in this world. Even Charles Spurgeon said that those who see need more sight.

Some years ago I was in a quarterly meeting at a church in the southeastern part of the country. The missionaries present were asked to share for a few minutes about their works, and I talked about urban ministry.

As a missionary to Chicago, I mentioned how few churches we have in the North and how few churches we have in the inner cities of the U.S. I was interrupted and asked, "Why did I think this was so? Why don't we have more churches in the cities?" I wimped out and gave some lame answer. That very night, I vowed to never let that happen again. And tonight I wish to remedy that response.

Let's open our eyes to the possible answers to that question. I believe the answer is that we are:

Cheap. We are not cheap about everything, just some things. Our homes, cars, all the latest gadgets that everyone else has. We are not cheap when it comes to the national convention. But we are cheap when it comes to Kingdom giving. We are quite comfortable.

The cost of living in major cities is high. So what? Get over it. When I left Chicago Saturday, the cheapest gas in my part of the city was \$3.29, most places were \$3.34 or \$3.39. I could cash out in Chicago and be debt-free in some comfortable small town.

But it's not about comfortable. The spending patterns and giving to charitable causes of believers is basically the same as that of unbelievers. Look at Acts 2, where those in the body sacrificed when others had needs. Look at the sacrifice Paul and others made to get the message of the grace of Christ out to the world. Far too often, we give what is comfortable instead of what is sacrificial.

Scared. In verse 15, it seems like the servant knew that the army was gunning for Elisha. I wonder how he knew that? It was because Elisha was not afraid to step into the battle.

Scared to go ourselves and/or to let our kids go. One of the more common questions I get when youth groups come to Chicago is, "Will my kids be safe?"

I don't know, and I don't really care. Don't misunderstand me. We take hosting groups seriously and do all that is reasonable to keep them safe. We do not take unnecessary risks. But as long as we are doing God's will, I cannot vouch for 100% safety.

I have quite a collection of neckties. I try to wear a tie relevant to the sermon I am preaching. Hence, tonight I am wearing my chicken tie.

It's not just crime we are afraid of. We are afraid of people with different worldviews than ours. We are scared of the mess, the clutter. We are afraid of the density, the nearness of others. I could go to some safe, small, comfortable town but it's not about being safe.

"One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time" (Andre Gide).

Immature. Get over being offended at every little thing. This is not even a biblical use of the concept. James McDonald said, "The essence of immaturity and self-centeredness. You can tell whether or not a person is growing up by how much they focus on themselves even if they are 50 years old."

The gist of it is that a lot of us are spiritually immature because we are so focused on ourselves that we have not seen God's vision. We have not seen the opportunities. The reason we don't see His vision is that we are so focused on our vision. We don't see His will because we are focused on our will.

It would be much more comfortable to stay in the nursery of Christianity, but it's not about being comfortable.

Traditional. The most difficult thing to achieve in life is balance. And we need a balance between tradition and progress. It would be cool if some of you younger guys were to get some books with a copyright more than 20 years old. And it would do some of you older guys some good to read some less than 20 years old. We need balance in this area. The challenge is to teach our younger generation to appreciate tradition and our older generation to avoid the dangers of traditionalism.

The problem with a statement like this is that the younger generation only listens to what I have said to the older generation, and the older generation only listens to what I have said to the younger generation. Here's a thought: Why not apply this sermon to yourself?

“People who insist on banging their heads against the wall have no right to complain about chronic headaches” (T. D. Jakes). We must get over the way we’ve always done it.

Lawrence Wood said, “Stubbornness is not the same as faithfulness.”

Of course, we are comfortable doing it the way we have always done it. But that is not 1 Corinthians 9 Christianity. That is not Acts 10 Christianity.

That great wise man and philosopher (and former coach of the Chicago Bears), Mike Ditka said, “Only cowards and fools live in the past.”

Let me tell you where I stand. I stand and live for the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, the virgin birth, the substitutionary death of Christ, His literal, bodily resurrection, and His imminent return! Hell is real, and it’s hot, and Heaven will be beyond our imaginations!

I believe and preach that Jesus is the only way to forgiveness of sin and wickedness and to eternal life. I will not sell out nor remove these ancient landmark doctrines that the people of God have lived and died for since the New Testament.

But I also stand for and live for the God of change, the God of progress, the God who has been changing people ever since the Old Testament. The God of 1 Corinthians 9.

I stand and live for the God who changes men and women, boys and girls, into His children. I am unashamedly progressive in using any method, and means—any media available so that I might win some to Christ. And a lot of you are too. I have been to a lot of your churches, and when we talk about this stuff one-on-one, many of you agree.

But just as we have allowed political correctness to ruin this country, we are in danger of allowing denominational correctness to render us ineffective and irrelevant to the contemporary world around us. So when we get around each other, we are afraid to talk progressive for fear of being labeled a liberal.

We have got to not only tolerate or accept diversity; we must embrace it and celebrate it. Here is a great quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.”

Just because I follow Christ a little bit different makes me no threat to you. I am not your enemy.

Come on, guys. When was the last time you really allowed God to significantly change you? Your attitudes, opinions, or interpretations? When was the last time you were reading the Bible and you allowed God to floor you by seeing a deeper and uncomfortable understanding of His Word? When was the last time you bowed before Him and admitted, "I have been wrong"?

We have a problem in Chicago with political correctness. Many people will agree with me on many issues in private, but in public, they are scared. I have been in meetings in local school councils, chamber of commerce meetings, and others, where I would give a point of view which many of the people there agreed with, but when someone pointed out that it was against the establishment's view, it was immediately rejected, even though many of them believed it privately. We need to admit that we have a problem with denominational correctness!

Can I chase a rabbit here? It's not like I would be the first speaker at a national convention to do it.

I love single women. In fact, there is one particular category of single women I really love! Got your attention? Those ladies are our single missionaries. They serve a vital role in mission works around the world, but we are afraid of having them speak at our churches lest we be accused of promoting women preachers.

Now I am not going to ordain them, but I will do anything I can to support them and encourage them. And if that means letting them speak to my church about what God has called them to do, and our mission department has approved them to do, then ladies, you are more than welcome at my church.

I love history. I love our past. But I am concerned about the future.

Prejudice. We are more concerned about being American than we are heavenly citizens. We get more of our political views from Rush Limbaugh than we do the Bible. When I hear racial jokes, I cringe. You know where I hear most of the ones I hear? In our churches. We have substituted an American, middle class, western, Bible-belt, Anglo-Saxon sub-culture for radical Christianity, and we have been wrong.

We have been so afraid of "them" that we have not reached them. We have been failing to reach the world, so God has brought the world to us and we are mad about it!

There are over 200 foreign language newspapers sold in the Chicago metro area. Makes me wish I were charismatic—you know, so I'd have the gift of tongues.

Commenting on John 4:27-38, the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* reads, "We don't have to wait to harvest. All that is needed is spiritual vision and perception."

This is where Jesus says the fields are ripe for harvest. And He said this in Samaria of all places. Not the Temple; not some all-Christian commune; but in Samaria. Samaria is here, now. Let's reach them because Christ died for all.

Tired. Not quitting is a big issue with me. Someone has said, "The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking places." Vince Lombardi said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all."

Man, I can't believe I just quoted a Green Bay Packer!

When you quit, do you consider the consequences in your own life? When you quit, do you consider the ramifications in the lives of those around you? The influence you have on them?

I may not have much going for me, but one thing you can always count on is that I will not quit. Try me. And unfortunately, some have. In the days of meager results and tough sledding, I was pressured to leave the city and go build a church in the suburbs where it is easier.

I have been told by some of those closest to me that I'd never build a church in Chicago. Well, I've known they were right all along. I can't and I never will. But God has and God will continue to build His church. And I want to be a part of it, so I will not quit.

Buddy Green has a line in his song, "I Don't Belong," that says, "I don't belong, but while I'm here, I'll be living like I've nothing to lose...."

"It makes little difference how fast you are in the 100 meters when the race is 400 meters long." Gordon MacDonald said this, but I slightly disagree. It does make a difference how fast you are. I am tired of people warning me that the Christian life is a marathon. I know a little about marathons, and yes, the Christian life *is* a marathon. I know you can't use it all in the first mile or you won't have anything left at the end. But I also know that the guys who win it average under-five-minute miles. They are flying! So don't give me the lame excuse of "saving some for the end" to be lazy now.

I was talking to my wife about this on the way down here. I told her what to put on my headstone. "He loved his wife, he loved chocolate, and he never quit."

She said, "What if I die first?" I told her I would put "She was a good cook" on her headstone.

So there is my list of blinders—cheap, scared, immature, traditionalists, prejudiced, and tired. There are more, but time is short. If you think these things are not true then why is it so hard to convince you to go to Chicago or New York City and start a church? Why has it been so challenging to get laypeople to move to help us?

Do I sound angry in this sermon? Maybe I am. But I am also brokenhearted because we are more concerned about being comfortable than reaching the world.

When was the last time you allowed God to impact your life and heart in such a way that you could see a significant change? So that you could see something different today from yesterday? An instantaneous, significant change?

When was the last time you allowed God to open your eyes to the possibilities?

Can you imagine how much a difference we could make? Just imagine if Free Will Baptists stepped up to the plate. I've heard guys say at previous conventions, "It's our time. It's our turn." It's always been our turn and our time. The Great Commission and the Great Commandment are not recent additions here, guys. They have always been here in the Bible!

If we were to alter just one area of our lives in a significant manner, just one area, let's take giving. If we were willing to alter our giving patterns in such a way that it literally and significantly impacted our lifestyle, what a difference we could make. If we truly gave sacrificially, so that it changed our daily routines and habits, that we gave as much or more as we spend on cell phones and cable and satellite and restaurants, etc. Look at what we are already doing with a half-hearted approach. Imagine what we could do. We give more to the heirs of Sam Walton than we deliberately give to missions!

When was the last time you went to Wal-Mart and only bought what you went for? Almost everyone ends up spending \$20-\$40 or more than they planned to before they get out the door. What if everyone here accidentally

dropped another \$20-\$40 bucks in the offering? Not just this Wednesday night but every month in our churches?

Can you imagine having money ready so when someone finally heard the call to go, we could just send them instead of them having to do a dog and pony show to raise money? Every missionary I know has tried the "If everyone would just give [fill in the blank amount of] money" routine. But it never happens. Can you imagine setting the example for other denominations? Being the pacesetter? Of them looking at us and seeing the level of giving?

That's just giving. How about going? Suppose we really upped our level of going? Over the last 15 years, I have been as much a recruiter as I have been a missionary. That's why we host four to six youth groups a year in Chicago.

I find it sad. It would be comical, except it's so true. I find it sad that we look at Israel and point the finger at them and how bad they were for blowing it in the Old Testament. We say, "They were supposed to be a light to the other nations, they were supposed to take up the mantle, but they couldn't even keep their own nation focused."

Are we any better? It's not comical, it's hypocritical.

The sad thing is that our missions offering will be about the same this year as it was last year. Our level of blood donations this Wednesday will be about the same as it was last year. Of all people who should be donating blood, it should be us who believe the only way to life is through the blood. With few exceptions, our level of missions giving throughout the year will be about what it was last year.

Paul Borthwick said, "God's direction is more effective on someone who is moving." I think he said it in the context of someone who is doing something for God as opposed to someone who is sitting.

Susan Ashton sings a song that I listen to many mornings when I first get to my office. (And I often put the CD player on repeat.) The song is called "You Move Me," and one of the lines that slams me is "I can't go with you and stay where I am."

This is true on so many levels. Geographically? Yes. How you interpret Scripture? Yes. How you live it? Yes. But even before that, it's a matter of your mind and your heart.

“What could be worse than being born without sight? Being born with sight but no vision.” Do you know who said that? Helen Keller.

Will you let God open your eyes to the possibilities? For the sake of a lost world, I hope so.

“Dream so big that you *must* trust God” (Rick Warren).

2006 – Jim Puckett

Open Our Eyes to the Reality of Christ

Text: Luke 24:13-35

It's so great to be here! I am thankful for the opportunity...I think!

I have received a lot of advice, but not a lot of help. My son is a preacher, my son-in-law is a preacher, and several brothers-in-law are preachers, and they all said, "You're on your own." Seriously, I appreciate your prayers. Our theme this week is Open Our Eyes, based on the story in Luke 24:13-35.

My topic is, "Open Our Eyes to the Reality of Christ."

Wow! What a wide-open topic. You can go in so many different directions: Does He really exist? Who is He? What has He done? What is He doing? Is He real today and relevant in our world? Because there are so many directions, I hope I don't go in all of them tonight.

It is a blessed moment in anyone's life when we see Jesus. Thank God for the invitation given to all mankind, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

It's an old song, but the message is still new.

Even though the invitation goes out to all, I'm convinced there are so few who really see the reality of Christ. But for us who preach Christ and Him crucified, it is imperative that we see Him. For if we do not see Him, we cannot portray Him to a lost and dying world.

And if a clear picture of who Christ is and what Christ has done is *not* preached, lives will never be changed. Let's stay before Him until we *see* Him, and then let's *share* Him.

Luke 24 has always been an intriguing story to me. If we look closely, we can see not only the reality of *who* Christ is, but also the avenue by which we can know Him. But first, let's examine

The Reality of Their Pain

Here we find two disciples on the road to Emmaus. One is identified by

name as Cleopas. The other is not named. Some suggest that the second is Peter, and others suggest that it is Luke himself. There is a very logical argument that this is Mary, the wife of Cleopas.

Facts support that belief because she was in Jerusalem with Cleopas. John 19:25 says she was present at the cross. Luke 24 seems to indicate that these two were going home, to the same town, possibly to the same house because they both constrained Jesus to “stay with us.” They both broke bread with Jesus.

Whatever their names, we know for sure that they were two hurting disciples. You could see it in their eyes, you could hear it in their voices, and you could feel it in their steps. The past three days had been filled with stress. They were tired, heartsick, discouraged, and defeated. As they dragged along the rocky road discussing the events of the past few days, Jesus joined them. But their eyes were blinded so they could not recognize Him.

Isn't that the way it is many times? Most of us have worked with depressed people and often hear them say, “I can't seem to pray anymore.” When we hurt, are grieved, disappointed, discouraged—and especially when we are depressed—it is hard to see the Lord. But He was with there with them all the time.

There is a message here for another day: The real truth is that even when we hurt and can't see Him, Jesus is there, all the time.

Then Jesus spoke: “What are you talking about? And why are you so sad?” (verse 17).

In response Cleopas asked, “Who are you, and where have you been that you are not aware of all that has happened?”

Jesus asked, “What things?”

Cleopas sadly explains, “All that has happened to Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word” (verse 19).

Keep in mind, they were blind, and their blinded eyes would only let them see a prophet, a good man, a great teacher. Because they were blind to His deity, they could only see that this good man was condemned and crucified and buried and with His death all their hopes of an earthly kingdom were dashed—gone forever.

Then Jesus begins His sermon in verse 25. And what a sermon it was! “He began with Moses and all the prophets. He expounded all the Scriptures

concerning himself.”

Wouldn't you like a CD of *that* message? I would buy that manuscript. By the way, I'm thankful for all the CDs, books, and tapes we have to help teach and encourage us. I have learned and grown from them. But there is a need for caution. It is easy to anticipate a new book or a new word from our favorite author in the place of anticipating a word from God. But they are not even on the same field of play. A word from others may inspire us, but only a word from God is truly inspired!

So verse 27 tells us that He opened the Scriptures. He could have given a vision, a prophecy, or a revelation, but He didn't. He opened the Scriptures. If eyes are ever to be opened, if people are ever to be saved, and if Christians are ever going to grow up and mature in Christ, and get on with the Master's business, then the Scripture must be opened and expounded honestly, passionately, and consistently.

Did you see the news last week about the new drug on the streets? It claims to enhance your relationship with God! It promises an unbelievable experience with God. I'll tell you where to find that for free—in the Book. No drug can enhance your relationship with God, only time spent in the Scriptures.

Jesus opened the Scriptures, and began with Moses. There are over 300 prophecies concerning Himself, yet He began with Moses. Since He began with Moses to explain His suffering, I think He must have started with the Exodus. He must have spoken about the innocent lamb that was slain, and the blood that was swiped on the side posts of the door and over the door as a token that this house belongs to God.

And when the death angel passed by and saw the blood, He passed over that house. What a simple truth, yet profound. I learned it early in my childhood—the blood on the door post was a picture of things to come. The blood of Jesus' cross would save me from sin and death. We can't get away from preaching the blood of Christ.

I'm sure Jesus spoke of the brazen altar, another illustration of the innocent dying for the guilty and blood being shed. Surely He included Isaiah 53:3-6, 11, 12, which tell us, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken,

smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

I imagine He used some of David's poetry, such as Psalm 8:1: "O Lord, Our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth." Or Psalm 19:1-3: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."

Possibly he quoted Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Or Psalm 34:3, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."

Jesus may have said, "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen" (Psalm 72:17-19).

The Lord must have spoken about the three Hebrew children and the amazed King who just had to take a peek to see if their God was really able to deliver them. Nebuchadnezzar asked, "Didn't we cast in three? I see four men and the fourth is like the Son of God."

And as the Lord spoke with them, as He opened the Scriptures, and as He shared bread with them, their eyes were opened. What wonderful things happen—what glorious things transpire—when we open the Scriptures. When the Scriptures were opened, they saw the reality of His person.

He was not just a good man, not just a miracle worker, not just a great teacher, or just a prophet. He is the Son of God! The Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is our Sacrificial Lamb.

Over 250 names are given to Jesus in the Scriptures, names like Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. The Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In all 66 books, we find pictures of Christ.

Why so many names? Because He is infinitely beyond all that one name, or even many names, can express. He is God!

Jesus had no servants, yet they called Him Master. He had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. He had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

We should feel honored to serve the One who loves us so much that He died for our sins that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. When the Scriptures were opened, they saw the reality of His power. They had witnessed His power before. His words were so powerful that people marveled: "Never a man spoke as this man speaks."

Just three simple words, "I am He," and the arresting army fell backward. They had tasted a little of His power when He fed the 5,000, opened the eyes of the blind, cast out demons, and raised the dead. But they were not prepared for this! Not His closest friends—not even the disciples.

They had left Him in a tomb, wrapped in grave clothes, with a huge stone securing His grave. But that didn't last. He couldn't stay! He had to go. He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it." He is alive! The grave couldn't hold Him.

The best news the world ever heard wasn't reported on ABC, NBC, or CBS. It didn't come from CNN or Fox News. It came from a tomb when the stone was rolled away and Jesus stepped forth, alive forever more.

We need a new vision of the risen Lord. We need to know Him as Paul said, "In the power of His resurrection." There is no task too great, no distance too far, no cost too high. He is alive, and He supplies all our needs.

We can't be satisfied with the status quo or business as usual. We are called to great things for His sake, and not one of us—preachers and laymen alike—should settle for anything less than the best we can be for Jesus.

When we understand the reality of His person and experience the reality of His power, then we can rest in the reality of His promises.

They had experienced turmoil, stress, and anxiety. Now they knew where to find peace. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

What a promise! But it gets better. They had experienced powerlessness

and fear. Now they knew where to find power: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

What a promise! But it gets better. They had experienced death, the death of the Master. Now they knew where to find life. "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25).

He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." What a promise! But it gets better. They had experienced homelessness. Now they knew where home was. "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again" (John 14:3).

He's coming again! What a promise. How can it get any better?

Few have captured the reality of the person of Christ like the late preacher, S. M. Lockridge. As we close, here is his description of Jesus, the King:

"My King was born King. The Bible says He's a seven-way king.

He's the King of the Jews—that's a racial king.

He's the King of Israel—that's a national king.

He's the King of righteousness.

He's the King of the ages.

He's the King of Heaven.

He's the King of Glory.

He's the King of kings, and He is the Lord of lords.

Now that's my King. Well, I wonder do you know Him?

Do you know my King?

David said the Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.

My King is a sovereign King.

No means of measure can define His limitless love.

No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of His shoreless supply.

No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessing.

Well, well, He's enduringly strong.

He's entirely sincere.

He's eternally steadfast.
He's immortally graceful.
He's imperially powerful.
He's impartially merciful.
That's my King. Do you know Him?
He's the greatest phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world.
He's God's Son.
He's the sinner's Savior.
He's the centerpiece of civilization.
He stands in the solitude of Himself.
He's honest and He's unique.
He's unparalleled.
He's unprecedented.
He's supreme. He's preeminent.
He's the loftiest idea in literature.
He's the highest personality in philosophy.
He's the supreme problem in high criticism.
He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology.
He's the cardinal necessity of spiritual religion.
He's the miracle of the ages.
He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him.
That's my King.
Well, He's the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient Savior.
I wonder if you know Him today?
He supplies strength for the weak.
He's available for the tempted and the tried.
He sympathizes and He saves.
He's strengthens and sustains.

He guards, and He guides.
He heals the sick.
He cleanses the lepers.
He forgives sinners.
He discharges debtors.
He delivers the captives.
He defends the feeble.
He blesses the young.
He serves the unfortunate.
He regards the aged.
He rewards the diligent, and He beautifies the meek.
Do you know Him?
Well, my King is a King of knowledge.
He's the wellspring of wisdom.
He's the doorway of deliverance.
He's the pathway of peace.
He's the roadway of righteousness.
He's the highway of holiness.
He's the gateway of glory.
He's the master of the mighty.
He's the captain of the conquerors.
He's the head of the heroes.
He's the leader of the legislators.
He's the overseer of the overcomers.
He's the governor of governors.
He's the prince of princes.
He's the King of kings, and He's the Lord of lords. That's my King. Yeah.
Well, that's my King.

His office is manifold.

His promise is sure.

His light is matchless.

His goodness is limitless.

His mercy is everlasting.

His love never changes.

His Word is enough.

His grace is sufficient.

His reign is righteous.

His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Well. I wish I could describe Him to you, but He's indescribable.

Yes. He's incomprehensible.

He's invincible. He's irresistible.

The Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, let alone a man explaining Him.

You can't get Him out of your mind.

You can't get Him off of your hands.

You can't outlive Him, and you can't live without Him.

The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they couldn't stop Him.

Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him.

The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.

Herod couldn't kill Him.

Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him.

That's my King. Yeah. Praise the Lord! That's my King."

What a powerful description of Christ! I not only believe in the reality of Christ, I have experienced it. When I am hurt and have lost my dearest friend, let me see Jesus! When I am talked about and trashed out, let me see Jesus! When I am sick and facing death, let me see Jesus!

2006 – Tim Campbell

Opening the Eyes of the Lost

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

As he sat at a barren table in Macedonia, Paul didn't look well. In fact, he looked years older than his age. He had experienced difficulties before, but for these past couple of years, the pressure and tribulation of ministry had taken its toll. In fact, he wrote earlier to the Corinthians that the affliction he had experienced in Asia had caused him to despair of life itself.

And then there was this Corinthian congregation—converted pagans and a few Jewish Christians who had proven to be more than just a handful. From heinous sins to divisions in the congregation, the difficulties were enough to try even a seasoned apostle.

As we look back through time to this scene, it seems like a pitiable moment. But appearances can be deceiving. Sure, Paul's outward man was perishing, but the inward man was being renewed day by day. In fact, as Paul raised his quill there was a distinct glimmer in those squinting eyes.

As the ink touched the parchment, it was evident his hand and heart were indeed borne along by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the words he penned were the very breath of God.

He wrote:

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

I think sometimes we come to the mistaken assumption that Paul's ministry was made up of exciting miracle services, scholarly theological declarations, successful church plants, and massive evangelistic crusades. The truth is, his work with the churches, especially the Corinthian church, was sometimes difficult and grueling. I don't doubt that he wondered if he was making an impact.

As I said before, the Corinthian congregation was Paul's most troubled church plant. Because of their problems, while Paul was on the road, he wrote several letters to them (a couple quite severe) and even made a return visit that we have come to know as the "painful visit."

But as of this writing, things had gotten better. A specific sin had been appropriately handled, the congregation was at least somewhat more unified, and the church had become more amenable toward Paul.

However, there were still false teachers challenging Paul's authority. These insiders were mixing the law with the Gospel. They were seeking to integrate mysticism and Hellenistic free thinking philosophy into the church. They claimed to have a secret, higher knowledge than Paul. They promoted a perverted view of liberty. And to top it all off, they challenged Paul's message by saying; "If your Gospel is all that you claim, why do so many people reject it."

So, emotionally weary, yet doggedly sure of his ministry, Paul wrote the most personal of any of his letters: 1 Corinthians. The verses I just read are a continuation of Paul's words in chapter three, which focus upon the superiority of the Gospel and the power, strength, and purity of its message.

Oh, what appropriate verses these are for the church. Born out of troubled times, they serve as an anchor for us today in our Corinthian-like culture. They show us the need of reaffirming our commitment to, and utter dependence upon, the unadulterated presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In light of our text and our subject, let me pose some pertinent questions. Just how powerful is the Gospel? Now, I could become all preachy and work us up into an "Amen! Hallelujah! tizzy" right here, but let's not just answer with our emotions; let's contemplate the question in light of our beliefs and practices.

Is the Gospel powerful enough to overcome false teaching? Does the

Gospel of Christ have the power to save people who are morally bankrupted? Is it powerful enough, in and of itself, to redeem people out of this culture . . . any culture? Can the Holy Spirit reach those who don't believe there is any truth with the truth? If so, how?

Let me pose some similar questions from another perspective. Can we add anything to, or take anything away from the Gospel to make it more effective? Can, or should we change the agenda for the Gospel's presentation, or do we have that prerogative?

Do you ever wonder if the Apostle Paul pondered these questions? Our text would lead us to answer in the affirmative. Let's examine Paul's affirming declarations about the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in light of the questions we just posed.

First, he makes the point that the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the focus of his ministry) was the only thing that sustained him. "Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not."

Because of the glorious transforming power of the Gospel, Paul did not become faint-hearted, or quit. In fact, the effectual nature of the Gospel was the reason that this apostle did not cower in the face of overwhelming adversity, suffering, and even the threat of death.

Then he takes us one step further by declaring that the Gospel's power was manifested in its purity and unvarnished truthfulness. "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Remember, Paul was meeting the criticisms of his heretical detractors. Unlike them, his message was based on a clear presentation of the truth of God. He didn't veil the truth or hold back anything in order to make his message more appealing to the masses. Paul didn't package his presentation based on the latest trends, felt needs, or attitudes of the culture.

No, Paul said, I have refused to keep anything secret that might not be acceptable to those who hear my preaching. Paul declared that in his ministry he had not *walked* (tread about in a winepress; referring to the work of his ministry) in craftiness. He had not carried out his ministry by deception for gain. He hadn't used wily methods in order to obtain a response.

Nor had he handled the Word of God *deceitfully* (to falsify, corrupt; or

adulterate; extra-biblical literature: to water down wine). The root word has been also been used to refer to catching with bait; devising in order to make something to appear as one thing in order to catch someone or make gain.

This word gives me pause, because many church growth experts tell us that this is our only hope—to entice people with things other than the clear presentation of the Gospel; to bait people by catering to their tastes and desires. But I must go on.

Nor did Paul weave his ministry around himself. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Paul did not preach to gain a following or to make a name for himself. But he said, “What I have done is made a clear manifestation of the truth wherever I have been and to whomever I have spoken.”

He said, “I have placed the truth dead center in the sight of every man’s conscience. That is the method I have used. That is the power of the message of the Gospel.”

I believe some have bought into a secular, corporate, ideology of vision and success. And the truth is, all of us, to some degree or another, feel the pressure to reach more people, build more churches, build bigger churches, and to present a vision so big that—how do we put it—“only God can accomplish it.” In fact, I have said those very things.

But in our noble quest for success, we cannot become so desperate for results that we lay aside discernment and make adjustments in order to gain the numbers or reach self-imposed goals. We dare not become so enamored with secularized models of vision and achievement that we tamper with the clarity of the Gospel message.

I would point out that Paul, in a culture just as hardened as our own, did not build bridges to popular culture to gain a following (even in Acts 17) but presented the truth of Jesus Christ without a hint of change or concession.

I believe this very strongly. I believe it is a biblical stance. But, do you know what? Going off on a tangent will not solve the problem before us because when I read verses three and four, we still face a tremendous dilemma.

“But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest

the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

The question is, How do we reach people for Christ? Remember Paul’s critics were saying that if he were doing things right, if his methods were effective, he would be in high demand for church growth seminars. Why he would be writing how-to books instead of trifling letters dealing with problems.

Considering Paul’s track record, why, his evangelistic methodology must be defective. In fact, his ministry methods are not only ineffective but they alienate people. Even Paul admits his words are a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Why, he should be more sensitive. He needs to attend a conference and go to some church growth seminars presented by some successful pastors.

So what was Paul to do? What are we to do?

I go back to Aiden Wilson Tozer’s statement that I believe to be right on target: “All our problems and their solutions are theological.”

Now here is where we must think deeply and ask two questions:

Question 1: How has Satan blinded people’s eyes?

When we speak of people’s *worldview* or their outlook on life, we are in essence referring to their view of ultimate reality. Most people have a short-sighted, distorted view of the essence of life and existence. For them, ultimate reality is rooted in a worldly view of existence that is tied to the flawed realities of a false religion or philosophy.

Some Enlightenment advocates say ultimate reality lies solely in human reasoning. Others say that empiricism (science) is the explanation of ultimate reality. There are those who say that the essence of existence revolves around economic forces. Still others declare that our existence is temporary, so the only reality is the “eat, drink, and be merry” pursuit of pleasure.

Postmodernism says that we just sort of slide into our own individual, socially constructed realities and they can be whatever we wish. Still others don’t give a “hoot” about reality, so their reality is simply a listless approach to life. Their approach to life is for people to leave them alone and don’t bother them with the truth.

That is why I assert that among the unconverted, this Satanic blindness is a distorted view of what is ultimate reality. The realms of imprecise realities are woven into the "mind." Paul says that Satan blinds their minds; their ability to reason and think; to understand if you will. Their mental discernment is blunted; they do not know the nature of things. Man's field of vision does not embrace the truth about the dual destinies of eternity.

In our day, as in Paul's, there are more philosophies and spins (religious and secular) on true reality and existence than you can shake a stick at. And many worldviews are heresies that lie in the gray areas and the shadowy places of light and truth that have infiltrated the church.

But Christianity affirms that ultimate reality emanates from the nature of the only true and living God. In fact, we declare that God is reality. He is the uncaused Cause. He is the only being who has not been created, whose existence is not bound by time or space. He is infinite and eternal. The theologians say that He is the only necessary being of pure actuality and asceity. In other words, He is being. He is existence. Geisler says, "He is pure existence, who gave existence to everything else that exists. Without Him nothing else would be."

Therefore, if God is existence, then ultimate reality can only be discerned through His revelation: the Bible.

I believe that ultimate reality is eternity. (By the way, for an excellent discussion of this, read chapter 9: "The Universe and Two Chairs," from Francis Schaeffer's book *Death in the City*.)

Satan has blinded people to God's revelation of reality. Some are avidly conscious of their heretical doctrines and others are woefully oblivious to the false reality they live. But they all are clinging to a distorted belief of what is real and what really matters. They have a false view of the world, existence, and eternity.

Satan panders to their depravity, caters to their flesh, and weaves a view of reality according to the course of this world. He tells them what they want to hear. Then he leads people to mix those false views of reality with a smidgeon of truth. And he tries his best to get these views in the church!

But God's Word says reality is:

1. God is God and beside Him is no other.

Reality is:

2. We were created for His pleasure, glory, and purposes.

Reality is:

3. We choose to disobey Him, go our own way, and pursue our own ideas of what really matters, therefore, we are lost and apart from His will. We are alienated from God, living in our own realities.

Reality is:

4. God in His Wisdom chose to save us through sending His Son to die for us on the cross; paying the penalty for our disobedience so that we can be relationally restored to Him and could glorify Him by His grace in the here and now, and glorify Him with perfect praise for all eternity (true ultimate reality).

In a nutshell, Paul is saying that reality is revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ which saves men in order to set them in their proper place in ultimate reality (which is eternity) glorifying the Trinity.

In fact, in the last verse of this chapter affirms that view of reality: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Folks, eternity will be the fullest expression of existence. When we enter into eternity with God, we will sing that old song, "We've Just Begun to Live." We will turn to each other and say this is what it is all about! This is the reality for which we have been longing."

The realities of this world do exist, but they are temporary. But we, as Christians, fix our eyes on the unseen, the eternal; ultimate reality. Satan has blinded people's eyes to what is real and to the truth of the Gospel.

Which bring us to . . .

Question 2: What can be done to open people's eyes?

The trend for the last few decades has been to reach people by being sensitive and catering to various aspects of their views about reality. Some people call that being "relevant." I believe that is a flawed view of relevance. What we need is the proper view of relevance.

Listen to one of my favorite authors, Os Guinness, as I quote from my favorite book he has written, *Prophetic Untimeliness*:

“Never have Christians pursued relevance more strenuously; never have Christians been more irrelevant. Let’s be crystal clear at the outset... If relevance is properly understood—the quality of relating to a matter in hand with pertinence and appropriateness—we who define ourselves and our lives by the good news of Jesus Christ should be, of all people most relevant.

“By our uncritical pursuit of relevance we have actually courted irrelevance; by our breathless chase after relevance without a matching commitment to faithfulness, we have become not only unfaithful, but irrelevant; by our determined efforts to redefine ourselves in ways that are more compelling to the modern world than are faithful to Christ, we have lost not only our identity, but our authority and our relevance. Our crying need is to be faithful as well as relevant.

“Indeed, relevance is at the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus and is the secret of the church’s power down through history.

“The Gospel is the good news. In fact, it is ‘the best news ever’ because it addresses our human condition appropriately, pertinently, and effectively as nothing else has, does, or can—in generation after generation, culture after culture, and life after life.”

What is Dr. Guinness saying? He is agreeing with the Apostle Paul. The Church’s only hope to be relevant is to bring to bear the reality of eternity upon men through the proclamation of the Gospel. We are to compassionately tell people how things really are. Don’t veil the Gospel’s content. Don’t adjust the message to accommodate popular culture’s false assumptions about reality. Don’t alter the methodology for the sake of a secular view of success.

For the Gospel is sufficient for any day, for any culture, for any problem. It is the power of God unto salvation, for the Jew and guess what, also for the Gentile (the pagans).

Now I am *not* here to take cheap shots at those who might disagree with me. I *am* here to make an impassioned plea to my denomination from my heart based on the practical application of the Scriptures before us.

1. We need to return to biblical preaching. Preach the whole counsel of God and the Gospel in its fullness. Speak the Christic message of redemption. To the preachers: Spend time in study. It is nothing less than a travesty to pull sermons from books or the internet or from Olford, Rogers,

Spurgeon, Morgan, or anyone else instead of delving into the Scriptures.

We need to quit idolizing and mimicking television evangelists. Almost all are short on orthodoxy and big on marketing.

Also, we short-change our people when we cram our messages with emotional filler and make Sunday preaching nothing more than a “commotion emotion fest,” a time for amusing, entertaining stories for the sake of popularity. By the way, you can become quite popular—even in our ranks—by using those tactics.

Instead, pray, labor, study, agonize, and preach the Word of God. God allows us the privilege to preach so that we can stand and say, “Thus saith the Lord!”

When we ascend to the pulpit, we stand in Christ’s stead, and our commission is to cause people to see the reality of their eternal destiny. And if we use that opportunity for anything else other than leading our hearers to face the true reality of eternity, then we have defiled the ministry. Preach the whole counsel of God. Preach the Gospel.

But in that same vein, we can all preach like Paul and sing like angels, but if we do not go out and compel people to come and hear the message, there will be no one to hear. What I am saying is that we are spinning our wheels when we preach evangelistic messages to a congregation full of Christians. We must return to a commitment to evangelism. Person-to-person evangelism works.

2. I also make a plea for us to return to an expanded view of the regulative principle. The view commonly held among churches today is that if something is not forbidden in the Scriptures, then it is allowed (the normative principle).

But the regulative principle says that nothing is permitted that is not prescribed in the Scriptures. While I know this principle was applied to worship (which by the way, I am in agreement), I make a plea for its application to the broader context of evangelism and ecclesiology (church life).

I believe our only hope in opening the eyes of the lost is to present the Gospel as prescribed in the Bible, being faithful to biblical methods and depending on the Holy Spirit to do His work in the hearts of those who hear. We must find our model and develop our methods from the teachings of Christ and the Apostles.

While I am not advocating looking for Ethiopian eunuchs riding on chariots, I do advance being faithful to the methods of reaching people that are laid down in the New Testament.

We can be innovative in their application, but we cannot improve the purity and power of the foundation of New Testament methodology.

3. I would also make a plea for intensive pre-conversion evangelism, purposeful, profound times of invitation (which may constitute more than a single altar call), and consistent discipleship training after the initial salvation experience.

We live in a post-Christian culture. We are facing men without Bibles. Most people have little or no idea of what it is to be a Christian. Before people can be saved, they must be led to a basic understanding of the truth of Christ and His work on Calvary.

Conversion is not a light thing and shallow invitations that hide the realities of eternity have no place in the church. Conversion is an eternal decision in response to a divine summons to die to self and live for Christ. We cheapen the Gospel when we count raised hands or mass, half-hearted affirmations instead of changed lives. If conviction of sin and sorrow of soul is not there, then we will reap congregants who might be in the church but who are not in Christ.

The true Gospel demands a process of conviction, repentance, reconciliation, and a decisive commitment. If we demand anything less, then we are offering a lite version of Christianity. We must reject a “no-evidence-required” brand of faith.

Also, discipleship must be addressed in our churches. Many times we lead people to a decision, but then leave them to fend for themselves. If anyone ought to be about discipleship, Free Will Baptists should.

Salvation is not just about justification but justification *and* sanctification. The process of salvation extends to the finish line of eternity, and we should do everything we can to be used of the Lord to make sure converts get there.

We need to be biblically relevant. I would remind us all that Satan, the prince of the world and god of this age is still in the business of blinding people. And he is much more effective by changing the church within than by using pagans without. He perverts the right understanding of “being relevant.” He wants us to mix our message with spirit of the age. He wants

our methods to cater to worldly views of reality.

So, my plea to my denomination is to be biblically relevant, to understand the times, but not abandon the clarity of the Gospel. And I believe Paul agrees with me in verse 6. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

It was interesting for me to note that in Greek culture it was sometimes thought that sight was restored when a specific command of deity was carried out. You know what? They were not far from the truth because the light of the Gospel is the only cure for blindness, and Jesus Christ is the only Physician.

Dear friends, the only hope for blind people, perishing people is not a new method, not a different approach, not a book or a program, not the secession of a number of days, nor another seminar or conference. Their only hope is an authentic understanding of ultimate reality through the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

No syncretism of the secular—that is, mixing inappropriate worldly techniques with biblically mandated models and methods.

No adjustments made for approval.

No veiled views of reality.

Ours is the highest calling to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ in shining clarity. For Jesus Christ is the radiance of true reality. He is the light of the world. Eternity is ultimate reality and the message of Christ’s Gospel is the only cure for blindness.

My prayer is that at the end of this message as we sing the invitation hymn, we may be led by the Holy Spirit to think seriously about the Gospel and be led to reaffirm our commitment to commend Christ to all men. To the degree we do, the blind will see, the lost will be saved, and the perishing will live in the eternal reality of the glory of God.

Stay in the fray. Don’t faint. Don’t let up. Don’t quit. Through the clear, unadulterated proclamation of Christ the eyes of the lost can be opened. That is our only hope for relevance.

The Gospel will take anyone, from any culture, from any circumstance, from here to eternity. And even on the darkest day and the bleakest of circumstances, it can enable the blind to see . . . forever.

I leave you with the almost prophetic words of Francis A. Schaeffer written in the late 1960s that provide an eerie challenge for the church today: "Christianity is not romantic, not soft. It is tough-fibered and realistic. And the Bible gives us the realistic message that...I am convinced the church today must preach if it is to be any help in the post-Christian world."

Schaeffer goes on...

"Christianity is not a modern day success story. It is to be preached with love and tears into the teeth of men, preached without compromise, without the world's concept of success....If there seem to be no results, it does not change God's imperative. It is simply up to you and me to go on, go on, go on, whether we see the results or whether we don't. Go on!"

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth . . ."

2006 – Burt Hall

Let Us Be Christlike

Text: Isaiah 6:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:18

I. If we are to become like Christ, we must behold Christ:

1. He is revealed in the Word—the Bible.
 2. And as we behold Him in the mirror of God’s Word, the Spirit of God changes (transforms) us into the image (likeness) of Christ.
 3. The more we see Him and receive Him through the Word, the more we become like Him.
 - a. The problem is, we don’t always see and hear what God intends.
 - Ezekiel 12:2: “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.”
 - b. Time and again, Jesus told His listeners, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
 4. The idea of being Christlike is taught throughout the Scriptures.
 5. Salvation provides the means for our Christlikeness. We have been given the new birth. We are made partakers of the divine nature. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We were predestined before the foundation of the world to be conformed to the image of Christ.
 - Romans 8:29: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”
- A. Christlikeness is the purpose of God for us.
- Ephesians 1:3-5: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of

children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

1. Paul gives us an outline of Christlike traits that should characterize our Christian lives:

- a. We should be holy (sanctified), consecrated (set apart for God).
- b. We should be without blame, without blemish (flawless), since only such people can abide in the presence of God forever.
- c. We are to live before God (conscious of His presence), making Him a part of every activity and conversation.
- d. In love

(1) Love is the one Christlike character that really identifies the followers of Christ.

– John 13:34, 35: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

(2) God is love, and He created us with the capacity to love.

(a) I’m not talking about some mushy emotion that tolerates every person, doctrine, action.

(b) I refer to the “God so loved the world” kind of love that motivated God to give His only begotten Son, to die for us when we were yet sinners.

(c) I refer to that kind of love that motivates us to: “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

(3) Love is the essential relationship which must be the bond among God’s people and between God and His people.

– Matthew 22:37-40: “Jesus said unto him, “Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

(4) Love is the bond between the persons of the Trinity.

- John 3:35: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”
- John 15:9: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”
- John 17:23-26: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

(5) To be Christlike is to possess these characteristics.

- Romans 8:29, 30: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

(a) God elected to save those who believe on Christ

(b) He predestined (pre-determined) that those who believe will be conformed to the image, fitted into the mold of Christ.

- 1 John 3:2, 3: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

(c) We shall be like Him. The man who believes this, has this hope, this living expectation to be like Christ, purifies himself and becomes Christlike.

(d) How? "With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

1. We behold Christ in the Word.

2. And as we make application of the Word in our lives the Spirit changes us into the image of Christ.

B. Christlikeness is the work of God in us.

– Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

1. God began His work in us, continues His work in us, and will complete His work in us through His Word and by His Spirit.

2. The Word of God has power:

a. The word has power to save us

– James 1:21: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

b. The Word has power to cleanse us.

– Psalm 119:9: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."

c. The Word has power to transform us.

C. Christlikeness is a transformation that takes place in us.

– Romans 12:1, 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

1. To present our whole selves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God is to be like Christ.

2. This is accomplished in a two-fold way:

a. Negative. Not being conformed to this world.

- b. Positive. Being transformed to his image and experiencing a metamorphosis which is a change from within.
- 3. To be transformed, our minds must be renewed.
- 4. The Spirit of the Lord will transform us into the likeness of Christ as our minds are renewed through the Word of God.

Let us look into the mirror of God's Word and behold Christ and call upon the Spirit of the Lord to conform us into the image we see (Philippians 2:1-11).

D. Three of the Christian's greatest sins that prevent us from being Christlike are mentioned in verses 3 and 4.

– Philippians 2:3, 4: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

1. Strife

a. The Philippians had a party spirit about them. They had their cliques.

(1) They were like the Corinthians, the "I am of Paul-Apollos-Cephas-Christ" crowd.

(2) Some were amillennialists, some were premillennialists.

(3) Some leaned toward Calvinism while others toward Arminianism.

(4) Some believed in apostasy, others in backsliding or repeated regeneration.

(5) Some supported the Bible College. Others Southeastern, Hillsdale, or California Christian College.

(6) Some were KJV only, others used the NKJV, NIV, etc.

b. In short, they were majoring on the minors and minoring on the majors.

(1) There is nothing wrong with diversity; it is the attitude they had for those with whom they differed.

c. They needed to practice the motto:

In essentials, unity.

In non-essentials, liberty.

In differences, love.

In all things, Christ!

– Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

2. Vainglory (empty pride) is another hindrance to Christlikeness.

– Proverbs 29:23: “A man’s pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.”

a. A sure cure for strife and vainglory is given in this verse.

– Philippians 2:3: “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.”

3. Self (looking out for old #1) is the root sin of strife and pride and all other sin.

a. Verse four exhorts us, “Look not every man on his own things.”

b. Self can only be subdued as we live for others.

c. The sin of self is the sin of attitude-disposition-mind.

d. Let us not be self-like. Let us be Christlike.

E. The pattern for victory over self is given in this verse.

– Philippians 2:5-8: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. . . .”

1. Have this attitude in your dealings with one another.

a. Have the disposition of Christ (the spirit of Christ).

b. Think like Christ.

2. Perhaps the reason we fail in our Christian life, Christian service, and Christian relationships is because we claim other Christians as our pattern.

3. We look to great preachers, teachers, writers, motivators and never pick up on the real thinker—Christ.

4. To be like Christ is to think like Christ.

– Proverbs 23:7: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he”

II. To be like Christ, think selflessness.

– Philippians 2:6: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

A. Jesus was God.

– John 10:30: “I and my Father are one.”

1. The Jews sought to kill Him for making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

2. Jesus was equal with God the Father but...

B. He laid aside His position of equality with the Father.

1. He stripped Himself of the heavenly majesty associated with His deity.

C. He emptied Himself.

1. Not of His attributes.

a. He was still omnipotent (miracles).

b. He was still omniscient.

– John 2:25, “And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”

2. He emptied Himself, gave up His rights (authority).

a. He did not say: I am equal with God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit, and I am going to hold on to my position.

I am going to exercise my authority.

It is my right and privilege, and I will not turn it loose.

D. He had no ambition for earthly recognition.

1. He did not fear what man thought of Him.

2. He did not fear what man could do to Him.

3. He was not looking to make His mark in this world.

4. He sought only to please the Father.

a. You can't do anything with a man like that.

- b. You can't lay hands on Him.
- 5. He was a man of integrity, full of soundness—undivided.
- E. Our world is in a mess because everyone is demanding his rights and proper recognition.
 - 1. We have: civil rights, women's rights, kiddy rights, gay rights, and illegal immigrant rights, pastoral rights (authority), deacons' rights, congressional rights.
 - 2. Christ gave up His right to enjoy the glory and majesty due Him.
 - 3. He could honestly say, "I'm not in this for Myself but for My Father and you—the world."

III. To be like Christ, think serving

- Philippians 2:7: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."
 - 1. The form of a slave
 - 2. He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister."
 - 3. At His incarnation, He did not lay aside the form of God but took unto Himself the form of a slave.
 - 4. He stepped down from the throne, knelt before His inferiors, and washed their feet.
 - a. He said, "I, your Lord and Master, serve you."
 - b. He said, "You are not greater than your Lord, so, you are to serve one another."
 - (1) He said, "He that would be greatest among you, shall be the servant of all" (Mark 10:44).
 - 5. It is easy for us to overlook the difference between rendering a service and being a servant.
 - a. A preacher can go 15 hours a day, seven days a week visiting the sick, marrying the young folks, burying the dead, counseling the troubled, preaching to the lost, representing Christ and His church, studying and preparing—rendering service and never serve, never be a servant.

- b. He may say, "I know what this church needs. I know how to do it, and I'm going to. So get out of the way and let me render my service."
 - c. A hireling will render a service...until the wolf comes.
6. What would happen if...?
- a. Pastor to deacons: "What do you want me to do?"
 - b. Deacons to pastor: "What do you want us to do?"
 - c. Pastor and deacons to congregation: "What do you want us to do? What can we do to help you?"
 - d. Congregation to the pastor and deacons: "We're behind you. Tell us what to do."

IV. To be like Christ, think sympathy

- Philippians 2:7: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."
1. Christ the Son of God identifies Himself with the sons of men.
 - a. This is the deeper meaning of the word *sympathy*.
 - b. We have limited its meaning to tears at a funeral or a card of condolence dropped into a mail box.
 2. The full meaning of the word *sympathy* is to feel with, which is much more than feel for.
 - a. We used to have a saying, "I feel for you, but I can't reach you."
 - b. Such was the attitude of the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
 - (1) When they met at the Temple:
 - (2) Priest: "I saw a terrible thing on the road from Jericho."
 - (3) Levite: "I saw that, too. I stopped, but there was nothing that I could do."
 - (4) Samaritan: demonstrated the ability to feel *with*.
 1. He put himself in the place of the victim.
 2. Out of this identification flowed action:

a. First aid was given, wounds were bound up, hospitality of the wayside inn, assurance of full recovery promised.

3. The writer to the Hebrews attributes this attitude to Jesus.

– Hebrews 2:16-18: “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved [obligated] him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.”

a. He can be merciful, hold back the punishment we deserve.

b. He can succor us, come along side and help us

c. Because He sympathizes [feels with] us.

– Hebrews 4:15, 16: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

V. To be like Christ, think submission

– Philippians 2:8: “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

1. He was obedient in life.

2. He was obedient in death.

– John 10:18: “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

3. To be like Christ, to think like Christ, to have the attitude [mind] of Christ means death—not the death of the Cross:

a. Death to strife.

b. Death to pride.

c. Death to self.

4. Death to the sins that disrupt the unity of the body—the Church.

VI. Conclusion: What will this kind of thinking produce in our Christian experience?

Selflessness. Servant. Spirit. Sympathy. Submission.

– Philippians 2:9-11: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

1. Because Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient, God exalted Him.

a. Even in His exaltation, it is to the glory of the Father.

2. This is what we need: to be exalted.

a. But God will not exalt us until we humble ourselves

– 1 Peter 5:6: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

– Matthew 23:12: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

When everything fails, follow the instructions:

1. Who was the greatest Person who ever lived? Jesus.

2. He demonstrated that the way up is down.

a. Let’s try it His way.

b. Let this mind be in you:

– 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Think:

Selflessness: God first, others second, me last.

Serving: What can I do to help you?

Sympathy: Feel with, be touched by the feeling of others’ infirmities

Submission: I will have the mind of Christ.

2007 – Nelson Henderson

Our Personal Missionary Journey

Text: Acts 16:6-10

I honestly do not know how to appropriately express my appreciation for the honor of speaking at the mission service of the National Association. I told someone that when I received the call I had to repent. I have been guilty of leaving the National Association before and asking, How in the world do they pick the speakers? Now it is your turn to ask this question. I do want to express my thanks to the Executive Committee for this honor. It is a highlight in my ministry.

I am very proud to have my family supporting me tonight, as they always have. I too want to say thanks to a group of people from the church I pastor who came to support me tonight. They have graciously allowed me to practice preaching on them for the past 18 years. And they still come back each Sunday, well most of them do. They even paid \$20 to ride a bus here tonight. I'm glad they did not read the fine print which said, "No refunds in case their pastor blows this message." Thanks church for being here for me tonight.

I have been given the assignment of preaching on "Helping Reach Our World for Christ." I have entitled this message, "Our Personal Missionary Journey." If you have studied anything about the life of the Apostle Paul (the main character in the passage we will look at tonight), you know that his ministry is usually divided into three or four missionary journeys. Each journey reflects a certain time period in his life. But I would like for us to consider that there was actually only one missionary journey for Paul. It began at the moment of his conversion and ended with his death.

It is no different for you and me. From the moment we receive Christ as our personal Savior until our death, we too are on this journey for God. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) literally, Jesus is saying, "As you go or as you are going."

In other words, as we walk through this earthly life, we are on our personal missionary journey. Oh, by the way, this journey is not just for people who are called—missionaries or pastors; this is a journey each of us

is on at this moment in time. No matter if you are a teacher, farmer, factory worker, homemaker, student, or whatever you do, if you know Christ as your personal Savior you are on a missionary journey.

On this journey there are many choices to make, decisions which will determine our effectiveness for God's kingdom. Decisions which may seem insignificant at the time, but which can have a huge impact on the entire journey. Decisions such as our lifestyle and choices, the place we attend college, the career we choose, the person we marry, the relationships we make, and dozens of other decisions that impact our missionary journey

In the passage of Scripture we will look at tonight, Paul was faced with some decisions. They may have seemed small or trivial at that moment in time, but looking back they were critical decisions in Paul's missionary journey.

One of the mistakes we often make as we read Scripture is that we forget to figure in the time element between verses. Just from reading this it might seem that this all happened in just a matter of a few days or weeks at the most. We actually do not know the exact time frame, but it probably covered several months maybe even up to a year.

As you study these verses, you begin to see the gravity of this setting. I don't want to over-state the importance of this setting, but I believe these verses represent one of the most crucial occasions in all of Christianity, and without doubt, the most critical in Paul's personal missionary journey.

We find three separate events recorded in these five verses which God used to change Paul's ministry. Each of these events corresponds with a city or place: Asia, Troas, and Macedonia. What's really interesting is the fact that these places also represent certain events in our life. As we consider these, think about where you are in your missionary journey. The first area is what I have labeled the Asia Principle.

1. The Asia Principle

The first part of this principle says this: The same God who opens doors, also closes doors. This was the first time Paul had been confronted with this truth. At this time, he was riding high off the wave of the first leg of his missionary journey which was a huge success. Sure he had encountered problems:

- Expelled from Antioch (Acts 13)

- Fled from Iconium (Acts 14)
- Stoned and left for dead at Lystra (Acts 14)

Plus he had to deal with the situation with John Mark who left the team and returned home. But all in all, Paul's first outing was successful.

As Paul and Barnabas (his ministry partner) planned to leave for the next leg of their journey, they got crossways with each other over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take John with them, Paul didn't. So, Paul and Barnabas separated. Paul took Silas and headed into Asia. It was in Asia that Paul encountered the first closed door from God.

Doors had been closed in the past (from the rejection of the people), but this was the first time God had closed the door. This closed door will bring Paul into a critical juncture of his faith and his missionary journey.

Have you ever had God close a door in your life or ministry? I have, and no matter how you view it, the event is painful. It is confusing, difficult, and downright painful. The best way for me to illustrate this closed door is with a commercial we probably have all seen—a Windex commercial.

Two black birds are sitting on a telephone wire looking at a home where the windows have been cleaned with Windex. The owner of the home is sitting leisurely on his back deck. One of the birds flies to the front door and rings the door bell. The man gets up and walks through the open patio door to see who is at the front door. The other bird flies down and slides the patio door shut. Frustrated that no one is at the front door the homeowner makes his way back to his lawn chair on the patio and walks face-first into the closed glass door.

This happened in my life. It was at a time when I knew exactly where God was leading me and my ministry, or so I thought. An opportunity was available, and I felt God leading me in this direction. I visited with several of my trusted friends and mentors asking their opinion about this decision. Not one single person raised a red flag of concern or gave me anything but encouragement. I just knew this had to be the direction God was leading. Like someone said, If you want to make God laugh, just tell him your plans.

My wife and I began to make plans for this new chapter in our lives, all the time asking God's will to be done. But it was almost a formality, because we knew where God was leading, or so we thought. While I wasn't looking, God gently slid the door shut and when I tried to go through this door, I slammed into it full force. It hurt. It hurt my pride, my self-confidence; it

injured my faith in God and in myself. It hurt so deeply that it literally took months to recover. Even though God reassured me over and over that He had closed this door, yet the pain can still be felt today.

Paul experienced this closed door two separate times as he made his way through Asia. First, it appears that God simply would not let things work out. Things just wouldn't click. So Paul continued into Asia to Mysia and planned to go into Bithynia and God simply said no. Some translations use the words "the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them."

I could stop right here and spend the rest of my time reminding us that there are some places God will not open the door for us to minister. There will be cities in America that will be closed to the Home Missions Department. There will be countries closed to international missionaries. Not because there is no need, but because of God's sovereign will. I don't understand this, but there is much about God that I don't understand.

The same God who had opened so many doors in the past for Paul had suddenly slid the door shut in Asia. Paul finds himself at Troas trying to sort through his emotions and to determine exactly what God was doing.

2. The Troas Perplexity

Luke did not tell us how long Paul stayed in Troas, but one commentator said it could have been close to a year. Perhaps he even started the church located there during this time. The length of the stay is not the importance of Troas, neither is the city. It is not about the city, but the setting that is important. Troas was the place where Paul was forced to come face-to-face with who he was, and who God is. Paul would never be the same after his first trip to Troas. Other than his Damascus Road experience, this time spent at Troas shaped Paul's life more than any other event.

After a door is closed in our missionary journey, it is a critical time period. The entire future of our ministry weighs in the balance. Closed doors can be some of the most frustrating things in our lives.

They can include: an uneasy feeling; loss of enthusiasm; unexpected move; company downsizing; physical sickness or illness; death of someone special; a spouse who feels uncomfortable with a move; a church board refusing to follow the vision of the pastor; a vote of the church body; inability to raise finances for a particular ministry; a college which does not accept you, or an injury which keeps you from accepting a college scholarship;

personal failure; and dozens of other things. It may be just the Spirit of God saying no.

It is during such times that the future looks so uncertain and perplexing. Corri ten Boom said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

But that is difficult, especially when you are at Troas. When a door has been closed there seems to be no future. Troas is a waiting period, a time for us to slow down and listen.

In his book titled, *God's Call to Be, When Being Precedes Doing*, Al Cadenhead, Jr. shares the following words: "In this story, Timothy has just joined Paul and Silas. Paul is wired up and fired up to go. The text indicates that Paul and his group want to preach in the province of Asia.

"For some reason, the Spirit prevents them from doing so. At that moment, there is no clear explanation of why. I have to believe that freely accepting any restrictions was a serious challenge to Paul. After all, he was doing the Lord's work! Waiting is not passive surrender. Waiting is not life on hold. Waiting is a verb. It means using the moment to gain perspective, to lean on One who sees the unseen future, and to know that God has not forsaken."

The reason I said this event in Paul's life might have been the most crucial event in all Christianity is the fact that if Paul gets discouraged after these doors are closed, we might have never heard the Gospel. The 13 New Testament books written by Paul might have never been written. If you look at a timeline in Paul's life before and after Troas, you can visualize the gravity of this moment in Paul's missionary journey.

I believe Paul may have been experiencing some of the same emotions for which he had rejected and judged John Mark. John Mark is normally blamed for getting homesick, when actually he might have been simply trying to sort out where God fit into his life. God is trying to get Paul to see that his missionary journey is about God, not about Paul. It is not about Paul's great intellectual ability, it is about God's sovereignty. (Your personal journey is not about you, it is about God.)

Have you ever been in Troas? Maybe you're there tonight. The reason Troas is so critical is that Troas is where we want to quit. It is at Troas when ministers step out of the pastorate. (You don't quit at Macedonia.) It is at Troas that faithful Christians begin to compromise, a time when we

get disillusioned about our place in God's Kingdom. It can be a time of confusion, but if you wait, God has something great in store. If Paul had not been forced to wait in Troas, he never would have heard the call from Macedonia.

I was struggling with the last point in this message when I found myself in an International Missions Board meeting. Josh and Alicia Crowe were being interviewed. One of the board members asked Alicia why she felt led to Japan. She began to share her story about the open and closed doors in her journey and how God had used these events to give her assurance of the direction she was to go. Then she said, "I have a peace about going to Japan."

The word *peace* was exactly what I was looking for. (Besides it begins with a "P.") Thanks Alicia!

3. The Macedonia Peace

Here is where we see the last part of the Asia Principle. The same God who opens doors also closes doors. The same God who closes doors also opens doors. Paul received this vision of a man from Macedonia, and immediately they left for Macedonia. I doubt if Paul could have told you why God had closed the doors in Asia, but he knew He had opened the doors in Macedonia.

When Paul left Troas that day he had no clue what God was about to do, but he had a peace that he was exactly where God wanted him to be. This peace makes the time in Troas feel worth it. Someone said: To be in Troas with the Lord is better than to be anyplace else without Him.

This peace Paul finds makes it worth spending time in Troas. But to find this peace you must be willing to "wait" at Troas and you must be willing to leave. If you look at Paul's life journey, you will discover that God never let him go into Asia. I don't understand this, because there were people in that area who needed Jesus, but the sovereign God said no. God is in control and we are not.

It is interesting that when you leave Troas, following this peace from God, that ministry or direction you felt was so vital and important (the one God closed the door to) suddenly doesn't look the same anymore.

When God closed the door in my life which I mentioned, it was devastating. I think my wife wondered if I would ever be the same again. For weeks, the

tears were close to the surface, the confusion was overwhelming, and anger was a close companion. I preached each Sunday, but I don't know if I made any sense. It wasn't until I left Troas, accepting the fact that God's will was involved in what happened, that God began to show me the open doors. And He has been faithful. I don't have the time to tell you the many ways God has shown Himself faithful.

Some of you might be thinking: "You haven't said anything about supporting missions," or "You haven't mentioned accepting the call of being a missionary." I believe when we finally accept the fact that we are all missionaries, living out our missionary journey where we are, then your pastor does not have to beg you to give to those we call missionaries. Your pastor does not have to remind you there are still people who have not heard.

When you finally accept the fact that you are on a personal missionary journey, you are willing to link up with those who are going places God has not called you to go, and you are willing to keep an open ear to listen for God as He leads you. There are some amazing adventures on this missionary journey, and you don't have to go to some foreign country to find these adventures. If you will simply let God lead, you will be surprised what God has in store.

To the youth tonight: If you are looking for adventure, excitement, challenge, and the fulfillment of doing something no one else has ever done, link up with God and you'll be surprised the doors which will open to things you never dream about. When it comes to adventure, the world cannot match the exciting things God has to offer.

Sure, there will be times of disappointments. You will have to travel through Asia and experience some closed doors. You will even find yourself at Troas sometimes, because to get to Macedonia you almost always have to stop off at Troas. But if you will remain at Troas until God opens the door and sends His peace, you will one day be able to say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all those also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

Where are you tonight on your missionary journey? Has God recently closed a door which has left you confused, disillusioned, or defeated? How long have you been in Troas? God has a purpose for you and that open door

is probably closer than you think.

I want to give you an opportunity to respond to what God has said to you concerning your personal missionary journey. Let's take time tonight to allow God to do what He alone can do.

You may have just started on your journey and you're still uncertain about where God wants you.

You might be planning for a career change, but something deep inside is saying that isn't the direction you need to go.

You might be signed up for college, have plans for a bright future. You may have your life planned out in detail, but don't forget that your life is about God, not yourself.

There may be some pastors or missionaries here tonight, and Troas has been your mailing address for several months. The only hope you can see is to give up, but I encourage you to wait just a little longer. God still opens doors.

There have been times when I have attended the national and put on a false front that all is well, but inside I was struggling, grasping for hope. I'm sure glad I did not give up.

There may even be some marriages in jeopardy and families broken tonight, because Troas can take its toll on the home.

Maybe some of you young people need to make a commitment to link up with God tonight and allow Him to take you on a lifelong adventure. In the end you will never regret your decision.

You know where you are on your journey tonight. Some of you need to take some time with God. Don't leave this convention without allowing God to give you hope. You may not see the open door yet, but allow God to give you the courage and perseverance to wait until you see the open door clearly.

2007 – Wendell Walley

Steps to Resolving Conflict

Text: Philippians 4:2, 3

I. Introduction

Shortly after World War II, a general and his lieutenant boarded a train in England. There was only one seat left, and it faced a beautiful young lady and her grandmother. They seated themselves facing the ladies as the train pulled out of the station. Shortly thereafter the train entered a tunnel and total darkness followed for 15-20 seconds. During the darkness two familiar sounds were distinctly heard—a kiss and a slap. Each has his or her own thoughts as to what happened.

The beautiful young lady thought, “I’m flattered that the lieutenant would find me attractive enough to kiss, but I’m embarrassed that Grandmother would slap him.”

The grandmother thought, “How dare that young man take advantage of my granddaughter that way, but at least she had the courage to retaliate.”

The general, on the other hand, thought, “I admire the courage of my lieutenant, but why did the girl slap me.”

Only the young lieutenant really knew exactly what happened, and he thought, “This is probably the only opportunity I will ever have to kiss a beautiful young lady and, at the same time, slap my general.”

He knew how to take advantage of the opportunity.

A. A confession to the women.

1. I did not choose the text. (It was an all-male program committee.)
2. The Bible is full of male conflict, yet they chose one of the few texts dealing with women in conflict.
3. They could have chosen Paul and Barnabas’s heated squabble over whether to keep John Mark as their associate.
4. Or Paul’s public blasting of Peter who was afraid of rocking the boat of traditionalism, forbidding his eating with the Gentiles in the presence of the Jerusalem delegation.

5. How about James and John's political end-run to out-manuever the other 12 in their bid for the top seats in the Kingdom?
 6. If they wanted to be fair about it, they could have at least selected a brother-sister duo such as Miriam and Aaron who attempted to undercut the authority of their younger sibling, Moses.
 7. And this is but a few of the vast variety of possibilities available.
- B. We joke about the text, but the relevance of the topic of conflict is no joking matter.
- C. Read text: Philippians 4:1-3.
1. Philippians is one of Paul's most personal, intimate letters.
 2. What is the key word? Joy—used 19 times in Philippians.
 3. As I read the book repeatedly in preparing this sermon, I discovered an underlying theme, something that threatened that joy and was the presence of conflict—disunity.
 - a) There was persecution from without the body of Christ.
 - (1) Paul reminded them that along with the gift of salvation they had received another gift of grace—the privilege of suffering for Christ. It was given unto them to suffer for Christ, to have the same conflict they saw in Paul (beaten, jailed), and now here to be in him (Philippians 1:29, 30).
 - (2) Intimidation by their adversaries: Paul urges them to not be terrified by them (Philippians 1:28).
 - b) Conflict from within the spiritual family
 - (1) Preachers motivated by “envy and strife and impure motives” who desired to render harm to the Apostle Paul.
 - (2) The broken relationship between Euodias and Syntache.
 - (a) These were Christian women; names in the Book of Life.
 - (b) Members of the church.
 - (c) Still “beloved” by Paul (Philippians 4:1).
 - (d) Former teammates of Paul, Clement, and others.
 - (e) Currently ticked with each other “in the Lord.”
 - (f) Their conflict was public knowledge.

(g) Each is exhorted to initiate reconciliation.

(h) Intervention is recruited from a special comrade.

c) Such “envy, strife” (Philippians 1:15) and impure and “selfish motives” (Philippians 1:17) seem such contradictions but distressingly, are not rare.

D. Conflict is one of the greatest hindrances in the church today.

1. The sobering fact is that our inability to unite for maximum effectiveness results in the loss of souls for eternity and is both inexcusable and totally uncharacteristic of everything we confess and believe about Christ and Christianity.

2. I qualify to speak on this subject on at least two accounts:

a) I have had my share of dealing with conflict of various kinds, and made my share of blunders in the process.

b) I have been entrusted by God to serve two of Free Will Baptists’ most strategic states—states where far greater men of God than I have served with notable distinction.

c) But these states, in my humble opinion, are performing far beneath their God-given potential because of conflict and strife.

d) I know first-hand the painful consequences of disunity.

(1) For 12 years, I pastored in North Carolina, one of the strongest Free Will Baptist states.

(2) For the last eight years, I have served in California, our most populous state that has seen the number of Free Will Baptist churches drop from the mid-80s to the upper 50s and a reported membership of 2,500.

3. Now let’s look at some key steps to managing conflict.

II. Managing conflict commences by discovering the unconscionable cost of unresolved conflict.

This is a matter for the head! We need to get our head out of the sand. Conflict is real and is not going away. There must first be a willingness to acknowledge the presence of conflict and a desire to seek resolution. Churches and organizations do not drift into unity. Harmony is intentional; it is hard work by people willing to pay the price to obtain it.

Wake up! Take notice! Nothing will happen until you get concerned about it.

A. First let's look at the price paid by the parsonage.

1. Conflict in relationships is the primary reason pastors say they lose sleep at night, according to Marshall Shelly, author of *Well Intentioned Dragons*.
2. In his column, "Pastors in Glass Houses," Terry Mattingly adds that "Each month 1,300 pastors are fired or forced to resign" (1996).
3. Nearly 30% of ministers have been terminated at least once, and that in 10 years, 40% of today's pastors will be in another line of work.
4. Seventy percent of pastors report that they have no close friend.
5. Eighty percent say their work has a negative impact at home.
6. One-third go so far as to say the pastorate has been a hazard to their families.
7. Perhaps diplomas issued to young pastors should have a warning label that reads "Beware, you are entering a war zone. Apply for hazard pay."

B. Look also at the price paid by the church.

1. Lyle Schaller says in *The Pastor and the People* that ministry in three-fourths of all churches on any given Sunday is significantly reduced because of destructive conflict.
2. That means 75% of pastors labor in a situation where their maximum potential is thwarted due to conflict.
3. Conflict is so severe in 25% of those churches that the church cannot accomplish anything productive until the conflict is reduced or resolved.
4. The average pastor spends 20% of his time dealing with conflict (1 day in 5) or nearly one week per month
5. Perhaps that is what Stan Toler had in mind when he suggested that *You Might Be A Preacher If...* "You'd rather negotiate with a terrorist than with the church organist."
6. No wonder Billy Sunday said when God threw Lucifer out of

Heaven, he landed in the choir.

7. The first recorded church council meeting in the New Testament Church resulted in the election of a board of deacons to handle the complaint department. It is too bad that in many churches the deacons are now the *cause* of most of the problems.
 8. The Christian fellowship is a wonderful place of acceptance, grace, and fellowship, but it can quickly turn into an unbelievably vicious den of betrayal, gossip, criticism and emotional carnage that can leave you feeling like you have been dragged through a knothole backward.
- F. We also need to look at the price paid by the denomination.
1. California, where I serve, is a strategic state. I believe it is the greatest mission field on earth, and it has been targeted by Satan.
 2. We could reach the world from our western shores. Yet, Free Will Baptists have gone from 86 churches down to the mid-50s with only 2,500 members. At least part of the problem has been conflict. The only way we can succeed in California or anywhere else is through unity, not division; through peace, not conflict. I live with the brutal reality of irreconcilable partisanship every day.
 - a) I'm on the phone to discouraged young pastors who live with intimidation from older pastors steeped in traditionalism.
 - b) I sense their struggle as they teeter on the brink of losing hope for their denomination they feel has lost its relevance in the post-Christian world.
 - c) I struggle every day to maintain the survival of a college.
 - d) Each of our other college presidents faces similar struggles, though hopefully on a somewhat lesser scale.
 - e) The strategy of the enemy is to divide and conquer.
 - f) To dilute in any way possible the power of the church.
 - g) What we face at the college level, many pastors face on the local, district, and state level.
 3. Disunity is like a car out of alignment.
 - a) It wants to pull you to the side and get you off target.

- b) That is what happens when we get divided. We lose sight of the goal and the vision.
 - c) It also creates wear and tear on the automobile. The tire and steering linkage get worn, and you burn more fuel, use more energy and it takes longer to get there—all because of conflict.
 - d) But the consequences to a car are insignificant when compared to the cost in ministry.
 - e) People begin choosing sides and claiming to be of Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Jesus.
4. John Maxwell suggests five stages of conflict left unresolved:
- a) The remedy stage: People are saying, “Let’s fix it.”
 - b) Repositioning stage: “Finger pointing; who caused it?”
 - c) The rights stage: “Who’s to blame?” It’s no longer about fixing the problem but fixing the person who caused it.
 - d) Removal stage: “Trust is gone.” It is no longer about getting your way but getting the opposition out of the way.
 - e) Sacrificial lamb stage: “It is not good enough to get rid of the person, but now there must be blood, revenge, the elimination of the opposition.”
5. Time is too short. The cause is too great. The economics are too high. The talent drain is too costly and senseless, and the advancement of the Gospel is too important. We can no longer afford struggling churches, mission boards and educational institutions, and struggling pastors in the parsonage.
6. The accumulative differences have been described by Marshall Shelly in *Well Intentioned Dragons*: “Perhaps the greatest damage done by true dragons (people who cause conflict) is not by their direct opposition. It’s more intangible than that. They destroy enthusiasm, the morale so necessary for church health and growth. People no longer feel good about inviting friends to worship services.

“The effect on pastors is equally serious. They sap the pastor’s energy. Just as damaging they goad the pastor into reacting. They divert the pastor’s attention and keep them off guard.

“You find yourself not planning, not thinking of the future, not seeking a vision for the church. You’re just trying to survive. If pastors become preoccupied with the dragons, afraid to challenge them, they often lose their spontaneity and their creativity. Change is stifled, growth is stunted, and the direction of ministry is set by the course of least resistance which everyone knows is the course that makes rivers crooked.

“When a pastor is forced to worry more about putting out brush fires than igniting the church’s flame, the dragons have won and the ministry has lost.”

7. Lack of unity is a contradiction to the unifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the thrice-repeated appeal for unity in the high priestly prayer of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ which He prayed on the night of His betrayal (see John 17).
8. It is a contradiction to the very name that we bear. After all, we are “Christ-ones.”
9. If the prayers of couples are hindered because of discord, do you not think that the prayers of churches and denominations are equally hindered when we break fellowship with other brothers and sisters in the Lord (1 Peter 3:7)? God, the great Confronter must have upset Adam and Eve by His penetrating call, “Adam, where art thou?”

Having looked at the cost of conflict, it is now important for us to commit ourselves to doing something about it.

III. We Must Demonstrate an Undying Commitment to Manage Conflict.

This is a matter of the heart. There is a price to be paid. Neither neutrality nor retreat is an option. We have to work at it. If you were a frog, you could eat what bugs you.

- A. The witness of a heavenly citizenship demands it (Philippians 1:27; 3:20).
 1. *Conversation* refers to citizenship here. The Church is a heavenly colony on earth.

2. Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia, a privilege that provided certain rights and privileges while imposing certain responsibilities.
3. The Philippians, like us, held dual citizenship which they were to exercise in a "manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ."
4. Living in harmony with the Gospel meant:
 - a) Unswerving tenacity. Standing firm in one spirit with one mind, having the same goals, the same purpose.
 - b) Unbroken fellowship and unity with one soul or one spirit.
 - (1) United in heart and intent; in spirit and in soul.
 - (2) A common purpose, passion, or enthusiasm.
 - c) Paul is not talking about loss of individuality or "cookie-cutter Christians" but hearts beating as one for one goal and one purpose, "striving together." Standing shoulder-to-shoulder like ancient wrestlers.
5. It is not everyone playing one note but notes in harmony with one another.

You are writing a Gospel, A chapter each day,
 By the deeds that you do And the words that you say,
 Men read what you write, Whether faithful or true:
 Say! What is the Gospel according to you?

The last chapter has not been written yet. You can choose the end of the book. The pen is still in your hand. Make it a happy ending. How will you be remembered? Who are you trying to impress? The greatest weapon against unbelief is a consistent Christlike life.

- a) Don't let your lifestyle be a contradiction to your name "Christ-ones."
- b) The two women of Philippi were a contradiction to their very names and the Gospel they sought to advance
 - (1) *Euodias* means *fragrance* or *prosperous journey*, a breath of fresh air, but she was a stench.

(2)*Syntychē* means *fortunate* or *good fortune*, but she was bringing misfortune.

- B. A good healthy corporate body demands that we are committed to doing something about conflict.
1. The goal of unity is not uniformity which may be obtained through rules but does not guarantee unity.
 2. Uniformity is a matter of appearance (outward).
 3. Unity is a matter of the heart (inward); it does not mean that everyone looks alike.
 4. Unity is about one mind, one heart for one Lord Jesus Christ, for one message, for one purpose, and for one goal. It is one thing to understand the cost of conflict. It is another to be committed to doing something about it. But we must take positive action if it is to be managed.

IV. Managing Conflict is Consummated by Demonstrating Undaunting Courage to Confront in Love.

This requires an act of the will. God is the Great Confronter. It was God the Great Confronter who said, "Adam, where art thou?" "Elijah, what are you doing here?" "David, thou art the man."

The Gospel by its very nature is confrontational.

- A. First there are reactive methods that should be avoided.
1. Some years ago *Christianity Today* contained a tongue-in-cheek article about a new *Conflict Bible*.
 2. "Take heart, timid Christian, the next time you are persuaded to confront a backslider but don't know where to begin. Help is available thanks to the new *Conflict Bible*. You need no longer hem and haw with cryptic references, subtle hints or suggestive innuendoes about the errors of his ways.
 3. The *Conflict Bible* contains a coordinated system highlighting verses on relevant themes. Rebuking is in passion pink. Sins to be avoided are in stop-sign red. Straying off the straight and narrow is in off-white. In the event the rebuked does not respond to your speaking the truth in love, try any of these suggested alternatives.

4. Try Nehemiah 13:25: I pulled out their hair.
 5. Judges 15:5: Set their fields on fire.
 6. 2 Kings 2:24: Called out the she-bears.
 7. Build a bridge and get over it.
 8. If these Old Testament remedies seem too extreme, you might want to try some verbal insults I found in the New Testament:
 - a) "O you generation of vipers," or "Ye are of your father the devil," or "Go tell that fox," or "You are like whited sepulchers."
 - b) Of course, it might cost you your head like it did John the Baptist.
 9. Don't spiritualize everything by saying "Let's just pray about it."
 10. Don't adopt the gladiator mindset of "Win at any cost."
 11. Avoid the "Uncle Syndrome," peace at any price.
 12. Don't fall for the Adam and Eve Syndrome, the blame game.
 13. Don't do the monkey syndrome: See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.
- C. Proactive steps for managing conflict:
1. Show courageous leadership.
 - a) It took courage for David to say, "Is there not a cause?"
 - b) Ninety percent of pastors never address people with whom they have conflict.
 - c) The Bible says "If your brother has ought against you, go to him."
 - d) It says "If your brother has sinned, go to him."
 2. Pick your battles wisely.
 - a) This is true at home and at church.
 - b) A bulldog can whip a skunk but usually it's not worth it.
 3. Select the timing carefully.
 - a) Pastors, don't use the pulpit to intimidate and embarrass your opponents into leaving.

- b) Have a heart-to-heart, face-to-face conversation. Not on the phone either.
 - c) Dear member, never “get” the pastor on his way to the pulpit or at the door following the sermon.
 - d) Before you put others in their place, put yourself in their place.
4. Confront in love.
- a) A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.
 - b) Paul’s appeal to unity was motivated by genuine love for the Philippians.
 - (1) “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3).
 - (2) “I have you in my heart” (Philippians 1:7).
 - (3) “God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:8).
 - (4) “My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1).
 - (5) Do you think the ladies were offended when Paul said “Get your act together”?
5. Check your motives:
- a) Is it to embarrass or help?
 - b) Are you trying to manipulate the other person?
 - c) Am I playing power politics?
 - d) Do I feel contempt or respect for that person? If it is contempt, then get right first.
 - e) If you are slinging mud, you are losing ground.
6. Be the initiator.
- a) Accept the blame.
 - b) Assume responsibility for the resolution of the problem.
 - c) Illustration: Mrs. Coy Owens.

D. Practice humility and forgiveness:

1. Paul practiced humility.
 - a) He felt no resentment toward preachers with impure motives.
 - b) He preferred the good of the Philippians over his own good.
 - c) He stood ready to be poured out and offered up as a drink offering.
2. Christ is our supreme inspiration and motivation (Philippians 2:1-8).
 - a) Christ Himself is our pattern of humility, infinite condescension.
 - (1) Being in the form of God, He was willing to set it aside.
 - (2) He made Himself of no reputation and became a servant.
 - (3) Fashioned as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.

E. Give unconditional forgiveness.

1. We all have a deep-seated desire to be forgiven.
2. Ernest Hemingway's short-story, "The Capitol of the World," described an estranged relationship between a father in Spain and his son named Paco. The father so yearned for his son that he placed an ad in the newspaper: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office tomorrow at noon. All is forgiven. I love you." Eight hundred boys named Paco showed up.
3. Forgiveness is not about establishing guilt but restoring a relationship.
4. Failure to forgive hurts you more than the other person; it keeps you prisoner to them like dragging around a ball and chain.
5. Freedom is found only in forgiving the offender.

The bitterest of politicians have been forgiven. In the late 70s, two bitter political enemies, Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, waged a brutal political campaign against each other in a bid to become President of the United States. It was regarded by many as a classic political battle between a liberal Democrat and a conservative Republican. Humphrey's crushing defeat ended his long-time dream of becoming president.

At Hubert Humphrey's funeral, Richard Nixon sat beside Humphrey's wife at Humphrey's request. They had been bitter political adversaries, one a liberal Democrat and the other a Republican. Hubert Humphrey had been kept out of the White House by Richard Nixon.

This was after the stigma of Watergate and Nixon's disgraced departure from the highest office in the nation.

One of Humphrey's friends visited him at the hospital three days before he died and he was on the phone to Nixon. He heard Humphrey say, "I'm going to die. Would you sit by my wife at the funeral?"

The friend was flabbergasted and asked, "What are you doing?" Humphrey said, "From my vantage point, with the sun setting in my life, all the speeches, the political conventions, the crowds and the great fights are behind me now. At a time like this you are forced to deal with your irreducible essence; forced to grapple with that which is really important to you, and what I have concluded about life is this: when all is said and done, we must forgive each other and redeem each other and move on."

Friend, quit keeping score. Confront the problem. Go to that person. Go the extra mile.

But I'm not at fault. Fine. Go anyway! Treat others as you want them to treat you. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Forgive them and take the blame. Hold no grudges or resentment. Bitterness and an unforgiving spirit is a choice.

Unlock the ball and chain you are dragging around. Be freed from the bondage of the past.

You cannot always control what happens to you, but you *can* control what happens in you. Cut the ball and chain loose. Only in that way can you be set free.

Build a bridge and get over it. Our Savior said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

2007 – Eddie Moody

Helping the Fallen

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on this important passage this evening. Somewhere, a young couple sits confused and bewildered. The responsibility of being a pastor and a pastor's wife are far greater than they ever imagined. The cutting remarks and unrealistic expectations have taken their toll. They scratch their heads as they consider all the responsibilities they have. It's their first pastorate, and frankly, they're overwhelmed. There are prospects to visit. The sick need to be prayed over. The dead need to be buried. And, oh, there are sermons to prepare to preach. They feel lonelier than one could imagine, as if there is no one to talk to or trust. They feel like there is no one who understands and there is nowhere to turn. They cry out to God and beg for Him to send a confidant. On the outside, they look like they have it all together, but on the inside they are desperate for a listening and discerning ear. They haven't fallen, but they are stumbling. They need someone to help them stay up.

Somewhere, another has fallen. Sin has taken him places he never thought he'd go. His ministry is destroyed and his family is on the brink of disintegration. So much promise of great things to do for God—that's all gone now, never to be realized. He's down and won't get up unless someone helps him up. He may not look like it, but inside he cries out and begs God to send someone who will help him. He's fallen and won't get up unless someone helps him up.

Somewhere, a couple in the ministry are done with it all. They are ready to walk away from the ministry forever. People they've poured their lives into have attacked them. Those to whom they've been devoted have disparaged them. Those they thought had their back have stabbed them in the back. They've been knocked down, kicked around, and at this moment they're wondering, why bother? They are stumbling and on the brink of falling unless someone comes and helps them stay up.

Somewhere? Oh no, these people aren't *somewhere*, they are in our churches, our associations, our states, our denomination. They are with us

right now, right here in this very room.

Tonight, we are given a difficult but important topic to address, “Helping the Fallen.” It’s a subject we often avoid. It’s the elephant in the room that we don’t want to acknowledge, but it is important that we discuss it. Not just for our own wellbeing but for the good of our denomination, for the good of the Kingdom of God.

This important passage is from God, and it was written more than 3,000 years ago. You see, the problems we are dealing with are not new, and our God has given us what we need to address them.

This phrase is making it clear that we are not to be alone. The implication is to find a friend. The message for those in ministry is don’t go it alone. If you fly into enemy territory, make sure you have support.

Illustration: F-111 Aardvark—Tom Donalds GF1

This is a picture of an F-111 from the first Gulf War. This plane can fly at twice the speed of sound. It could fly at treetop level or 60,000 feet up. It could carry up to four nuclear bombs. Despite all of that firepower, they didn’t send this plane to war alone. It was just too dangerous. In fact, this plane had many planes that played a supporting role for it.

Sometimes we have a go-it-alone attitude in the ministry. But if you are going to go to war you’d better not go alone and if you are in the ministry you are at war. Your adversary is far more capable, far more effective and far more deadly than a MIG fighter or surface-to-air missiles.

The Bible teaches us to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). He’s watching and studying and tracking for how he might devour you, and you are vulnerable without a partner. When I think about a partner for ministry, I think about my wife Lynne.

The most important decision—after asking Christ into my life—was to marry Lynne. She’s my confidant; she’s everything. She’s my partner.

When I was getting ready to go to Tippett’s Chapel, people at the University told me I was crazy. Lynne was six months pregnant and taking care of her mother who was ill. We were about three miles from her parents’ house and moving about an hour away. Someone at school said, “Your wife is six months pregnant and taking care of her dying mother. (Lynne’s mother had cancer and died 15 months later. Her dad died two years after

her mother). If I were her, I'd tell you to go down there all alone."

I told them I didn't have an ordinary wife. She's quite extraordinary actually. Your spouse will make you or break you. She'll tell you the truth when no one else will. She'll stand by you. Work together because you're not going to succeed without working together.

The devil works against us, and engages in psychological warfare, "Look at what he's gotten you into," he says. Remember, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). You are vulnerable if you and your spouse are not in sync.

The tone is set with the phrase "they have a good reward for their labor." The writer tells us if we work together, if we cooperate we will accomplish more. We'll have a good reward for our labor. One day, we will give an account to God for the kind of partner in the ministry we've been. But to have the good reward that is described here, we must partner together in ministry. This is taught throughout the New Testament.

Here's an example: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

Yes, you have liberty. But don't use that liberty to go your own way. Use it to serve one another. How do we serve one another? Have you noticed how things have changed a bit? I mean take a look at a fifth grade science book. My daughter Mackenzie has a tendency to ask me to check her homework when I come home. I'm afraid she assumes I know all the answers. I've started having her put numbers beside the answers in the book so I can check them. I do that because I don't know the answers.

One night, while riding home with my son Mitchell, who is a recent graduate from kindergarten, I started talking to him about the importance of being bilingual. He asked what *bilingual* meant. After I explained, he said, "Oh dad, I'm already learning Spanish. Uno, dos, tres..." and off he went counting. Then he started saying all these Spanish words and telling us what they meant. It didn't help that I didn't know them. Our world has changed. What you had to know a generation ago isn't enough for the next generation.

It's not any different if you're in the ministry. Today's pastor is a preacher,

soul-winner, administrator, counselor, conflict mediator, builder, teacher, fundraiser, janitor and all around good guy. There is a lot to know and the only way we're going to know and get where we need to go is together.

What does that new pastor need in his first year? He needs someone to come alongside him and help him out—help in setting up his sermon series and Bible studies. It's one thing to learn about doing sermons in Bible college. It's another thing when you're doing three of them a week. He needs help acquiring the wisdom that is needed to work with people who are in marital conflict. He needs help finding the right kind of books and resources that will help him along.

Consider that young pastor's wife. She might be called on to be the nursery coordinator, pianist, secretary, WAC leader, mother, caregiver to parents, and well, the pastor's wife. Now what does she need as she is beginning her ministry? She needs someone who will listen to her without judging her. She needs someone who will tell her, "There are some people you can never please. Make sure you take care of your family and concentrate on pleasing God."

They both need someone who lets them know that you're going to have church hoppers and shoppers. Sometimes, it isn't your fault when you lose a few. We need to get in there and help these people so they have a good reward for their labor.

Now I'm afraid that sometimes we say, "Well no one ever did that for me! I had to learn everything the hard way." Or we are afraid of someone accomplishing what we have not. Let's be honest. We get jealous because in our mind it is all about us. That is a problem. If you aren't happy to see other Christians—other preachers—succeed then there is something wrong with you. The Bible says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15).

No one ever taught me Spanish in kindergarten or the kind of science they learn in the fifth grade these days. But I want my kids to have it better and to be better and be more effective than I've ever dreamed of being.

Part of deciding to serve one another is that we make the next generation of servants better and more effective than we've been. And you know what? If we don't serve them, they will not be what God wanted them to be. And far too many of them will fall.

Right now the Lord has laid some people upon your heart that are new

to the ministry. Write their names down. Commit to praying for them and helping them. Commit to being the kind of friend and mentor to them described in Proverbs, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). Commit to helping someone become sharper. You will give an account to God for how you've served or failed to serve others.

We serve one another to prevent people from falling. What if someone falls? Look at Ecclesiastes 4:10: "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

The writer says as you go through life you just might fall. If you fall, you better have someone to help you up. Get yourself a friend for the bad times in life. Do you have such a friend? Are you this kind of friend?

This kind of friend will not leave you when you get knocked down. If you don't help someone when they've been knocked down then you're no friend at all. So, lift up one another. It is your role and your responsibility to lift up one another. What do we do when someone falls?

We don't usually run over and embrace them, do we? Especially if it was a fall due to sin. We begin to rationalize and say, "Well, we weren't really all that close anyway."

Do you remember the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10? Jesus said, "Love...thy neighbor as thyself."

What did the lawyer say? "Who is my neighbor?" The point of the parable is if you're walking down the road and you see someone lying on the side of it, help him or her up. They're your neighbor. Don't just walk by and act like you don't see what is happening.

Why did those other guys walk by the man on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem? Perhaps they were busy. They had other things to do. There were sermons to prepare, people to visit, church growth conferences to attend. Perhaps they even prayed for him..and departed, leaving him half dead (Luke 10:30b).

Perhaps many who passed by that man felt there was no hope for him. Do you ever think we look at the people in our midst and keep on walking because we say, "There's nothing we can do anyway. Their ministry is over. He can never pastor again. Keep going."

I worked with a couple in the ministry after they fell as a result of sin. One of the things they noted, "We've spent our whole lives helping others, but no one seems to care about us when we need them most."

No one called, no one came over. Nothing. Sure, their ministry was over, but does that mean we just leave them on the side of the road and keep going?

On October 28, 2005, on hill 2911 in the mountains of Afghanistan, 16 US paratroopers were searching for people the local villagers referred to as "bad men with guns."

They were al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, and they'd been launching rockets at a nearby U.S. post. By daybreak, the only enemies they'd faced were the frigid temperatures that were exacerbated because they were two miles up. It was so cold the water in their backpacks froze.

Around 7:00 a.m., Staff Sergeant Patric Trattles spotted two men. Trattles had eight men with him and another Staff Sergeant, Travis Nixon, several yards away had eight others. Sergeant Nixon radioed his commander to see if there might be any locals in the area to keep from firing on civilians. The captain indicated there were only bad guys around them. As soon as Nixon signed off, his men came under attack.

Trattles came to that group's aid with what was later determined to be more than 60 guerrillas all around them. The whole mountain came under fire with attackers firing from different directions including nearby Pakistan. During the melee, Trattles ventured 75 yards from his men to assist Nixon and his men. That is where he saw Sergeant Nixon, his friend of five years, fall after being shot in the side. Trattles ran to him while the enemy fired at him.

When he got to his buddy, he could see he was gravely wounded. If he survived, he would never be a soldier in the United States Army again. Trattles picked Nixon up and began to carry him to safety. He came under heavy fire and had to stop. He began administering CPR to his friend. Then he picked him up and began running down the mountain. He ran with his friend on his back for 150 yards until he reached a Humvee.

Nixon was airlifted to a field hospital, where he died. All of that, and he died. Did Staff Sergeant Patric L. Trattles waste his efforts? No. Not from the viewpoint of the US Army. They awarded Sergeant Trattles a silver star. Why? Perhaps there's something to be said about refusing to leave a fallen

comrade behind.

Perhaps it says something to the enemy about how we honor those who have fallen when we go to such effort to help them. Perhaps we could learn a little from Sargeant Trattles.

When you see someone mired in something they had no business getting into, extend a hand and try to help them out. There are no assurances they will make it. You can't be sure their family will survive, or that they will ever have a vibrant relationship with the Lord again. You can't be sure they will not return to sin. But we can reach out to them because every person matters to God, and we have the hope that they will let Him rebuild their life.

God picks up the fallen and salvages them. What did God say to Jeremiah? "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:4, 5).

Do you believe that? You know, I've quoted that passage to sex offenders. They've asked me if they were doomed to go to Hell, and I've responded by telling them God will forgive them and change them if they repent and follow Him.

If those words are good enough for a sex offender, don't you think they are good enough for some of our folks who have fallen into sin? Do what you can to salvage as much as you can of a person's life. If that fellow who fell into sin has repented, befriend him. Be an accountability partner for him.

One day we will answer to the Lord for how we've helped (or failed to help) the fallen. Look at Ecclesiastes 4:11: "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?"

The image of two people out in the cold comes to mind. By huddling together they can endure. Sometimes ministry can be a cold and lonely place. What happens to a person who has no one with whom to talk? They are in danger of falling.

We did a survey of Free Will Baptist pastors in North Carolina, Arkansas, and Cuba. Lots of folks indicated they felt unfulfilled in ministry. Some of the responses were like this:

"I feel unfulfilled because sometimes I don't feel I'm accomplishing much."

Now if you are doing the work of God, you will have days where you will feel like nothing is being accomplished. Consider the words of Jeremiah: "Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me" (Jeremiah 20:7).

In other words, "God, you lied to me." It got worse. Basically he said, "I wish I'd never been born."

"Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed" (Jeremiah 20:14).

People in the ministry get down. But, that's Jeremiah, the weeping prophet.

How about Elijah? "And he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4b).

And that was after he prayed and fire came down from Heaven. If the likes of Elijah and Jeremiah can have a really bad Monday, can't you? You not only can, you will. And you'd better have someone to support you. And you'd better look for someone to support on their bad day.

We need all the counsel we can get. In the survey a theme of isolation emerged. Many believed they had no one to whom they could talk. When we asked them if they could talk to other pastors, sadly many said no and gave some blunt reasons for why not. Here's one's response,

"I don't trust many; if I confide in them I would be the topic of next Sunday's sermon."

Here's another response,

"In my experience, I've learned it is pastors you cannot trust."

That's unacceptable. The devil is pretty pleased with that because he wants us isolated, jealous, and bickering. Be someone people can talk to. The Bible says, "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

Be someone that a young couple in the ministry can bare their soul to safely and trust that you will not betray their confidence. Be someone who

will listen, support and help others. We've got to support one another or more of us will fall. Help people before they fall, lest we find ourselves giving an account of our lives later before God.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:12: "And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

What's the point of this verse? Defend one another. Sometimes, people fall because they get knocked down. "If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him." In other words, if someone gets attacked, you come out and defend him. It seems to me that non-believers don't knock us down a lot. We seem to knock each other down.

Consider Lieutenant Colonel Tom Donalds. I showed you a picture of him earlier flying an F-111 in the first Gulf War. He was stationed at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, as operation Iraqi Freedom began. He and his squadron went to Iraq and flew these F-15 Screaming Eagles. One day, I asked him about friendly fire. He said, "There is no such thing as friendly fire. It doesn't exist."

I said, "But what would happen if you dropped one of those 500-pound bombs on U.S. or British forces. He said, "I'd go to jail."

Interestingly enough, that afternoon the *Sunday News and Observer* published a communication recorded between two American pilots after they dropped bombs on friendly forces. They said, "We're in jail now."

I wish Christians had the same attitude. If we did, we would think twice before we attacked another brother. If we got into the habit of withstanding those who attacked others, perhaps there would be more talking *to* other people rather than talking *about* them. What would happen if the next time someone called and asked you about a brother, if you gently pointed out that if they had time to make calls about others they just might have too much time? Maybe God was calling them into some kind of bivocational ministry. If you've got enough time to attack someone else, you need less discretionary time.

This passage is a call to defend. If you see someone being attacked, get up and do something about it.

When I was a kid there was a bully in our neighborhood. I'd heard about him but didn't really know him. He'd never bothered me. Late one afternoon we had a basketball game going at my neighbor's place. My brother who was younger was there as well as this bully. I was on one side of the yard,

and they were on the other. Before I knew it, this guy was hitting my brother and saying some terrible things about him.

I couldn't get to that bully quick enough. As soon as I did, I hit him as hard as I could, and I hit him again and again. Every time I hit him, I said, "Don't touch my brother; don't call my brother names."

When I stopped and walked away, I could almost hear the thoughts of my friends. "We'll never see Eddie again. His parents are going to kill him, or at least he'll never be able to sit down again."

You know what? I knew I would not get a spanking over knocking down a bully. I knew if I'd allowed that bully to hurt my brother I would have had a lot of explaining to do to my parents. They would have asked why I didn't intervene, "Why did you let that happen?"

My mom used to say, "Any boy who will not take up for his brother is not much of a boy." And anyone who will not take up for a brother in Christ is not much of a Christian. If you can sit and watch another brother be attacked, there is something wrong with you.

The couple that is about to quit because they've been betrayed one time too many needs someone to get their back.

Do you know what that bully yelled to me as I left that yard that day? "I didn't know he was your brother."

I responded, "You do now!"

Maybe it's time you let some people know not to attack your brother. We've let far too many people get by being bullies. We've had far too many people fall because of it. Some of you here tonight are laypeople. You need to have your pastor's back. That doesn't mean that you are a "yes man." But the Bible is pretty clear on this. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

Constructive criticism is good. It will be edifying. By the way, it's usually one-on-one and not in public. We need more constructive criticism, and we need to declare war on destructive criticism.

It's best for the Kingdom and best for the bully for us to confront him. Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

If we don't deal with the bully, God will. Right now, you are thinking of

someone who is under attack. Commit to being there for them. Commit to God to be their defender.

Sometimes when we hear a message like this, it is easy to feel sorry for ourselves. We can say, "No one helps or takes up for me."

But it isn't about you. What others have or have not done for you is irrelevant. The question is, "How can you serve others?"

When I was a little boy, my dad ran a gas station along Skinners Bypass in Kinston, North Carolina. I was there on a July 4th, and I'd long since missed the fireworks at nearby Vernon Park Mall.

The evening had not turned out as I had intended. I was pouting in the back of a car with my brother, and July 5th was getting pretty close. I pointed that out to everyone in the car. My mom turned and looked at me. She said, "You stop."

You see, my dad was working on the car of a family who'd broken down on their way through Kinston. My mom said, "Now look at those little children."

She pointed at the people who owned the car my dad was working on. She said, "Look at the clothes they are wearing. Look at the car that family is riding in. Now look at your dad. He's doing the best he can. He knows how to do stuff. He can help them. But if your dad doesn't help them, they won't go home tonight."

Yes, we were hot and sweaty, but we had a nice bed we'd go home to and a car that worked. I needed my attention redirected from myself to others.

If you want to feel sorry for yourself, there will always be a reason you could go that way. If you want to serve, there will always be someone who has fallen or is on the brink of falling who needs you. Choose service.

One day we will sit in God's living room and we will give an account for our lives. What will He ask you? "Why weren't you a more supportive spouse? Why did you let that young couple drown in the ministry? Why didn't you reach out to that fellow who had fallen into sin? Why did you let someone pummel your brother or sister?" May He never find it necessary to ask those questions of us.

Somewhere in the world, an older couple is celebrating wonderful years in the ministry. They had their bumps along the way and stumbled a bit, but there was always someone there to help them up. They had people who

showed them the ropes. They had friends in whom they could confide and trust to keep a confidence. God has used them, because someone helped them stay up.

Somewhere, there is a man who fell into terrible sin decades ago. He'll never forget that real friend who came to him when everyone else treated him like a pariah and said, "You call me 24/7-365 days a year. I'm here for you, and I'll hold you accountable and help you out of this mess." He lost his ministry, but his marriage was saved, and today his children follow the Lord. Though there isn't a day that goes by that he doesn't miss the ministry, he is grateful for the relationship he has today with the Lord. God salvaged his life because someone helped him up.

Somewhere, an older couple says they are retired now, although no one ever really retires from the ministry. They look back on decades of service and smile now as they remember the terrible time when they almost walked away from it all. But they remember a deacon who defended them and helped them.

They'll never forget his words of encouragement when the criticism got especially hot: "You know, they even crucified Jesus once, and He was perfect."

They stumbled, but he helped them stay up.

Somewhere? Why does it have to be somewhere? Why not here? Why not now? Let's make it happen.

2008 – William Smith

Walking in the Spirit

Text: Galatians 5:16-26

Introduction:

In the Book of Galatians, Paul speaks out against those who preach the Gospel of works and he defends the Gospel of faith. Paul proclaims that blessings come from God on the basis of faith, not law. The law declares men guilty and imprisons them; faith sets men free to enjoy liberty in Christ. However, before Paul closes this epistle he reminds us that our liberty requires that we “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). Freedom in Christ means freedom to produce the fruits of righteousness through a Spirit-led lifestyle.

My goal tonight is to show you how we can live a godly life and impact our world for the cause of Christ, and how this can only be accomplished by “walking in the Spirit.”

With *Walking in the Spirit* as our theme, I want to talk about the foundation for walking in the Spirit, the fallacies of walking in the Spirit, and the fruit from walking in the Spirit.

1. The Foundation for Walking in the Spirit

- A. Walk. Twice in this text, Paul says to “walk in the Spirit.” The word *walk* suggests that we are on a journey. The Galatians did not enjoy the comforts of our modern day transportation. To walk or travel a long distance took patience and perseverance. There was no jumping in the car or on an airplane.
- B. In the Spirit. This journey is a spiritual journey. The journey begins when we accept Jesus as our Savior. Outside of Christ, you cannot walk or live in the Spirit. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Paul said “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans

6:4). To walk in the spirit is to allow the Holy Spirit to dominate and control our everyday life.

- C. The conflict. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 9:16). Once we receive Christ as Savior, we enter into a great spiritual battle. Many refer to this battle as spiritual warfare. There is a continual conflict between the flesh and the spirit (1 Peter 5:8). The word *flesh* describes man's fallen nature and the word *spirit* describes man's new nature. We see the contrast between the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:1).

Every day, we face the battle between the first Adam (our fallen nature) and the second Adam (our new nature in Christ). This is a battle that we cannot win on our own. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, the old nature or old man will continue to win. When Paul declared, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13), he realized that he was totally dependent upon the Lord in this spiritual battle.

2. The Fallacies of Walking in the Spirit

- A. The Judaizers. The Judaizers taught that you were spiritual as a result of keeping the law (being circumcised) or by the works of the flesh. When studying church history, we see this has been a battle fought from the time the Church was established until this very hour. People produced both short and long lists of requirements for the spiritual life that have caused great division in the body of Christ and our own denomination. False teaching always leads to strife. These teachers were self-serving. We must always declare that man is saved by faith and faith alone.
- B. Education. Education can be a great blessing when we allow Christ to control the mind. Paul said "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Education and knowledge without the Holy Spirit is a detriment.
- C. Spiritual Gifts. Spiritual gifts have been given to unite. Diversity of gifts in the church should not divide and cause jealousy but strengthen

the church to proclaim the Gospel and edify the saints. God bestows spiritual gifts as He chooses; therefore we should not think we are more spiritual as a result of the gift He has given. Gifts are given as it pleased the Father. Paul said "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18).

- D. Talents. Our society is performance driven. It is sad to see how much of a premium we put on performance, especially in the worship service. At times, worship turns into a local version of *American Idol*. John Maxwell says, "We live in a day when there is more value placed on charisma than on character." God help us.
- E. Pluralism. Satan and the forces of evil continue to challenge the fact that true spiritual life only comes through Christ. There are many spirits that lead to destruction, but only one that leads to real spiritual life. Some appear on television claiming to be in touch with the spiritual world and they have no clue when it comes to a real relationship with God. Once a week for several months, Oprah has been giving instructions on how to get in touch with your spiritual side. This is no more than the New Age philosophy being marketed under a new name. I don't need Oprah who lives with a man who is not her husband to explain to me spiritual truths. I would rather spend an hour listening to my Pastor Kent Barwick than an hour listening to Oprah and her spiritual guru.
- F. Reality. Any teaching or proclamation that does not stand up to the scrutiny of the Scriptures is false. This spring, a popular televangelist was being interviewed on CNN by Larry King. She said "God had led her and her husband to divorce so one could minister on the East Coast and the other the West Coast. This is contrary to the Scripture.

Another popular pastor is telling us to buy his book if you want to know what God is going to do with Israel and Jerusalem. He claims that God has an extra codicil or appendix for Israel and God has revealed it only to him. If you buy his book he will explain it all to you. God is not making any additions to his Word! But still people are buying these books every day.

3. The Fruit From Walking in the Spirit

- A. Gifts versus Fruit. God gives various gifts and talents to each one of us. Gifts are manifested outwardly, whereas the fruit of the Spirit is a series of inward changes that can only take place by the work of the Holy Spirit. We may only possess one gift or talent but we are to possess all the different types of fruit.
- B. Fruit Explained. In the Randall House *Commentary on the Book of Galatians*, Dr Thomas Marberry gives the following explanation of the “fruit of the Spirit”:
1. Love: the essence of God’s character and God’s greatest gift.
 2. Joy: joy grows out of a relationship with God.
 3. Peace: peace or harmony with God.
 4. Longsuffering: patience, steadfastness, endurance.
 5. Gentleness: goodness, kindness, generosity.
 6. Goodness: goodness, uprightness, generosity.
 7. Faith: faithful, reliability, trust, confidence.
 8. Meekness: gentleness, humility, courtesy, consideration, meekness.
 9. Temperance: self-control.

“Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:23). Walking in the Spirit gives me liberty that the law never could. The law produces guilt, walking in the spirit produces fruit.

- C. What walking in the Spirit does for me:
1. Conforms me into the image of Christ.
 2. Corrects me when I begin to stray.
 3. Comforts me in time of crisis.
 4. Consoles me in time of conflict.
 5. Causes me to love His church.
 6. Challenges me to carry out the Great Commission.

On the outside, it appears the church has more than she has ever had. We are highly educated, we have the latest technology, we have great wealth and resources, and with the help of Madison Avenue, we have become marketing experts. With this in mind, why are we struggling to keep many of our church doors open, why do we see so much conflict in the church,

and why are we not having a greater impact on our world for Christ?

Could it be we are not walking in the Spirit? Remember Paul's command in Galatians 5:25, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

You cannot live in the spirit without walking in the spirit. Thank God for education, knowledge, and wisdom, but before you make a trip to the campus you need to make a trip to the Cross.

Thank God for technology, but instead of spending hours on PowerPoint, we need to spend more time with God who is the point of the power.

Thank God for great wealth and resources, but I am reminded that I serve one who fed 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread. I long to see the day when the church again has the power Peter and John displayed in the Book of Acts when the Bible declares, "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6).

Thank God for marketing abilities, but God help us to see that we are called to minister to a world without hope. The task before us of living a godly life and impacting our world can only be accomplished by "Walking in the Spirit."

2008 – Stanley Outlaw

Walking Circumspectly

Text: Ephesians 5:15-21

I have been asked to speak on the subject, “Walking Circumspectly,” or “Walking Carefully,” from Ephesians 5:15.

The term *walking* in the Bible seems to signify at least three different things in different contexts. Sometimes it points to the idea of fellowship or harmony between groups or individuals, as when the Bible speaks of God’s customary walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden “in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8), or when the Prophet Amos asks, “How can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). At other times, the stress is on obedience and submission. Moses challenged the Israelites to “keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him” (Deuteronomy 8:6). And Isaiah pictures a time when Spirit-filled Israel would hear a voice from behind saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

But in the New Testament, the writers seem to use it primarily to refer to a way of life, to habitual behavior, to that which characterizes a person in his daily practice. Luke tells us that “the churches had rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

In Romans, Paul declares that believers “should walk in newness of life” (6:4), and that we must also “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (8:1). Thus, here in Ephesians the apostle makes this idea of the Christian’s *walk*, his constant way of life, one of the primary emphases of the Epistle. He uses the word six times in this letter, and the passage to which we are giving tonight is the final such reference.

He challenges the Ephesians to “keep on walking circumspectly.” The continuous action in the verb also stresses the constant behavior which is called for. The term *circumspectly* describes the carefulness, the accuracy that is needed in our walk for Christ. It describes a Christian who is always wary, always concerned about the enemy without as well as the Spirit

within. Peter says it when he challenges us to “be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Since Satan’s walk against us is always so consistent, then our walk for Christ must also be consistent. I am taking this entire passage, through verse 21, as an explanation of what it means to “walk circumspectly.”

1. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Wise Living (Ephesians 5:15)

The apostle challenges us to a constant and careful walk “not as fools, but as wise.” He first stresses the negative that we might better understand the positive: “not as fools.”

How does a fool walk? Jesus describes it in detail in His account of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21. When God blessed this farmer with an unusually prolific harvest, instead of thinking how he might share his blessings with others less fortunate, he set out on a plan to hoard everything for himself.

According to his plan, his future was bright with nothing but comfort, ease, and enjoyment. But his temporary enjoyment was dramatically interrupted by the one who always has the last say. “But God said” ...and that is always the key. What does God say about your future? In this tragic case, God said, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!”

A fool looks to all that is in this world for satisfaction; as John sums it up in 1 John 2:15-17, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Such things only bring temporary satisfaction, but, sooner or later, the enjoyment always runs out. Those who are satisfied with such temporary things are properly branded as “fools.”

Thus, as believers who would walk circumspectly, we must walk as wise men, not as fools. People can know a great deal without being wise. Wisdom always involves the practical application of knowledge. Some of the most educated people can be the least wise in practical and spiritual matters. But let me be quick to add that wisdom does involve the application of some degree of knowledge, whether that knowledge has come formally or informally. Wisdom and ignorance are never likely partners.

First and foremost, wisdom involves the practical application of the teachings of Scripture. Jesus made this clear when He stated, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he

that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). If we at times find ourselves lacking in the wisdom to properly apply God's Word, James says that we can "ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

In Colossians 4:5, Paul is more specific. He says that we should "walk in wisdom toward them which are without." We need God's special wisdom to know how to most effectively maintain and communicate the life-giving doctrines which we hold dear to a hostile world around us.

2. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Opportunities (Ephesians 5:16)

The apostle says in verse 16, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." The word for *time* here does not refer to time in reference to chronology, but rather to time in relation to opportunities for ministry. We must constantly remind ourselves that our lives at best are brief. Even if the Lord, in His mercy and grace, allows us "fourscore years or more by reason of strength" (Psalm 90:10), that too seems but a moment when it is past.

I would think there are few of us who could say we never missed an opportunity for ministry to others. I still remember that time decades ago when I was very tired and other issues were pressing, and I drove by the house of a man who had been sick. His family was not expecting his death immediately, and I thought there was plenty of time. How shocked and disappointed I was to find out the next day that he had passed away during the night. Perhaps I could not have helped him spiritually anyway, but I will never know.

In his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, Billy Graham tells of an occasion when he was riding with John F. Kennedy right after he was elected to the presidency in 1960. Kennedy stopped the car and asked Graham if he believed in the literal second coming of Christ. Mr. Graham assured him that he, indeed, believed it, and that the Bible clearly taught it. He proceeded to tell the president-elect about Christ's first coming, and His sacrificial death to redeem us from our sins, and that, when Christ started back to Heaven, He promised that He would come again for His children.

Mr. Graham met the president again at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1963. Graham had the flu that week, and at the time of the breakfast was

still running a fever. After the breakfast ended, President Kennedy asked Mr. Graham if he could accompany him back to his office, that he had something he wanted to ask him. But Mr. Graham said that he begged off, still being very weak and expressing fear that he would give his flu to the President. But he assured him that they would talk soon. Of course, that was never to be, since the President was assassinated in November of 1963 in Dallas, Texas.

Bob Shockey, who went to be with the Lord earlier this year, was one of the best persons I have known to take advantage of every opportunity for witness. It is said that when someone accidentally called his house as a wrong number, he would often take advantage of that contact to tell them about the Lord. "Oh, Lord, help us to repent of missed opportunities and make a greater effort to be more aware when opportunities for witness or for service present themselves."

But I must stress a balance here. I once heard of a man who became so obsessed with the possibility of a missed opportunity that he could not pass someone on the street without stopping to witness. His appropriate desire developed into a mental illness. While we don't want to miss appropriate opportunities, we must also trust our sovereign God who is in complete control of building His kingdom. Though He would use us in winning others to Christ and in ministering to other saints, thankfully the burden of this work does not fall disproportionately on any one individual. We are all, as brothers and sisters in Christ, in this together. Thus, we must trust Him to show us step by step what He would have us to do.

But the apostle adds that we must be careful to purchase our opportunities for service for Him "because the days are evil." And we must stress that the moral climate is, if anything, worse today than it was then. According to Scripture, the prospects show no promise of getting any better. This same apostle assured us that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

The eschatological view of postmillennialism is held by very few conservatives in our day, but I have read and heard that it was quite widely held by conservative Christians in the early part of the 20th century. Perhaps the world seemed better than it really was to believers in those days in light of the highly successful ministries of such evangelists as Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, Sam Jones, Mordecai Ham, and many others. Citywide campaigns often closed down saloons and brothels and

dramatically changed the social life of a community. Such efforts likely played a major part in bringing in something almost unbelievable in our day: the adoption of the 18th amendment which brought in the years of prohibition from 1920-1933. Many Christians held the optimistic hope that the Gospel was on its way to producing worldwide conversion.

How we wish, from our limited point of view, that such dreams could have been fulfilled. But it was not to be, and the Bible had told us that all along. Since the days are still evil, taking advantage of every opportunity for service is even more important.

3. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Knowing God's Will (Ephesians 5:17)

Wherefore at the beginning of verse 17 connects our knowing God's will with the need to take advantage of every opportunity for service which is presented to us. We best take advantage of our time and opportunity when God's will is clear to us. No Christian can ever expect to walk carefully who is not entirely sensitive to what God wants in his life. There are at least two broad considerations in knowing God's will in our lives: (1) His will for us day by day, and (2) His will for our lives over a longer period of time: the calling, vocation, or direction which our lives should take.

The primary way of knowing God's will on a daily basis is to be thoroughly schooled in His Word. It is the Word of God which most specifically directs us in the will of God. For the godly man, the psalmist emphasizes that "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

Furthermore, we must make the will of God a priority in our lives. James warns about those who would make their plans with little or no consideration for what God wants. He explains, "For we ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Any plan for our lives that does not put God's will up front cannot possibly be God's plan.

A young man once lost his job, and growing somewhat desperate about his plight, went to see an old preacher that he knew. As he poured out his heart to the preacher, he angrily declared, "I've begged and begged God to say something to help me, preacher. Why doesn't God answer?"

The old preacher, who was sitting across the room, spoke a reply so

quietly that the young man was unable to make it out. The young man stepped across the room. "What did you say?" he asked.

The preacher repeated himself, again in a soft tone. So the young man moved closer until he was leaning on the preacher's chair. "Sorry," he said. "I still didn't hear you."

With their heads bent together, the old preacher spoke once more. "God sometimes whispers," he said, "so we will move closer to Him."

The Word of God also plays an important part in finding our calling or vocation by which we serve God over a longer period, often our entire adult lives. In Romans 12:1, 2, Paul outlines a threefold process for knowing God's will in our lives. (1) We must, once and for all, present our bodies, our whole self with nothing held back, as a living sacrifice to God. In Galatians 2:20 he refers to it as being "crucified with Christ." (2) Then we must stop being conformed to this world. A Christian who is attracted to this world and its values can never know God's perfect will for his life. And then finally, (3) we must be completely transformed, metamorphosed, by the renewing of our minds. Knowing the will of God for our lives must involve the whole person: body, mind, and soul. Nothing can be held back. To serve Him we must trust Him with our complete person.

4. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Being Filled With the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)

As Free Will Baptists, we believe that the only proper position in relation to alcoholic beverages is total abstinence. The road to becoming an alcoholic or a drug addict always starts with the first participation.

But here, Paul's primary reason for referring to wine is to make both a comparison and a contrast to being filled with the Spirit. The comparison is in the matter of control. A person who drinks wine soon finds himself under its complete control. His behavior in both word and conduct clearly manifests that control. In like manner, a person who is filled with the Spirit clearly demonstrates His control.

This comparison is brought out in the description of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. It must have been obvious that these men were not themselves, that their words and conduct were quite different from what people were used to seeing in them. The difference, in fact, was so marked that some said that they were "full of new wine." But the similarity between

those who are filled with wine and those who are filled with the Spirit stops with the matter of control. It is the contrast that stands out greater.

One writer summed up the contrast like this, "One is ruin, the other is salvation; one degrades, the other exalts; one is from without, the other from within; one is temporary, while the other is permanent; one makes us act like the devil, the other causes us to reflect the very nature of God in our lives" (*Homiletic Commentary*).

In the New Testament, the baptism of the Spirit refers to the initial experience of the believer with the third person of the Trinity. Just as Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:43, 44, believers today receive the Holy Spirit when they believe. Paul says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). On the other hand, the filling of the Spirit is to equip us for power and effectiveness in service. The same disciples who were baptized by the Spirit at Pentecost were filled with the Spirit on several other occasions in the Book of Acts.

For the Christian, being filled with the Spirit is not meant to be mysterious or difficult to attain. The requirements are very similar to those for finding God's will in our lives, which were discussed above. (1) First, we must confess and put away all known sin in our lives (1 John 1:5-9); (2) We must be completely emptied of self (Galatians 2:20); (3) We must willingly yield ourselves to His control (Romans 12:1, 2); and (4) We must allow ourselves to be steeped in and guided by the Word of God. As Paul says in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

A person who is filled with wine usually becomes obnoxious and belligerent, and no one, including other drunks, enjoys his presence; but a person who is filled with the Spirit is a joy to be with, and his joy acts like a magnet, drawing others to the Savior that he serves.

5. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Praise and Thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:19, 20)

One of the most obvious ways to demonstrate that we are filled with the Spirit is by rendering praise and thanksgiving to God in both testimony and song. This is the fifth way, then, in which we walk circumspectly as Christians. Since the writer uses the term *speaking*, I judge that he includes the giving of praise and thanksgiving here through both testimony and song. Commentators do not agree on what Paul means by the three different

words for songs. Some think they may be three different ways of saying the same thing, with little if any difference in meaning. Others think that they are meant to indicate different types of songs, different ways in which we may express both praise and thanksgiving through singing. I am inclined to lean toward the latter position. Paul would not have used three different words without having some degree of variation in mind.

When he uses the word *psalms*, there can be little doubt that he was referring to the original hymn book, the Old Testament Book of Psalms. The individual psalms were originally composed for the purpose of communicating various kinds of messages from both individual singers as well as choirs. Many of the psalms were addressed “to the chief musician” with various details given as to the occasion of that psalm’s composition. The psalms were put to music and sung publicly down through the ages, and some churches even have this practice to this day.

Hymns and spiritual songs obviously refers to some variation in the type of music used, most likely to more recent compositions that reflect the current experiences of the church. Every church, to have a vibrant music program, should have some variation of the type music that is used. Surely there is nothing wrong with newer compositions as long as they truly say something worthwhile with regard to testimony, praise, and thanksgiving.

But I do believe that any church’s music program is grossly lacking if it totally forsakes the traditional hymns of the church. I personally believe that a church’s music program will be much more healthy if it has a proper approach of blended worship rather than one that exclusively uses contemporary compositions.

A friend of mine, a musician, and I had a little debate a few years ago about whether instrumental music without words can be a means of true worship. His contention was that he could truly worship God through beautiful music that has never had words added.

I, too, can worship with instrumental music without words, but I believe that a person can only truly worship God if that music communicates a known message, a tune that brings a reminder of a beautiful message already known to the worshipper. I concede that a tune may be beautiful which has never had words, and perhaps even set an appropriate atmosphere for worship, but I believe true worship can only take place when there is communication both to the mind and the heart. Perhaps this is just a difference in the make-up between musicians and preachers, and maybe

we should leave it at that. But, at least in this context, the writer does say, "Speaking to yourselves."

Note two other phrases used in verse 19 in reference to worshipful singing. It must be done "in your heart to the Lord."

Singing, whether by a soloist, choir, or congregation, must be from the heart, truly sincere, for it to bring the impact that is needed. In turn, it must be given to the Lord. It is He whom we are worshipping; thus, from our hearts our singing must be addressed to Him.

Though songs in our worship may certainly deal with subjects other than just praise and thanksgiving, such as testimony about our salvation, yet thanksgiving to God must always remain at the heart of our worship. And Paul stresses that our thanksgiving should be all-inclusive. We are to give "thanks always for all things." We may not be able to honestly give thanks specifically for every event that comes our way, such as the loss of a loved one, or our own personal suffering, but even in such tragic happenings in our lives, we can always find things to be thankful for in the midst of such circumstances.

Remember that Paul is advising such thanksgiving in the midst of his own imprisonment in a Roman dungeon. Perhaps he shows us how to give thanks under such tragic circumstances by his own words in other places. In writing to the Philippians, Paul says, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel, so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:12-14).

This does not mean that Paul was thankful for the suffering and imprisonment in itself. When preaching to Festus and Agrippa, he declared, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:29). Though not thankful specifically for the cruelties of imprisonment, Paul was thankful that God used such circumstances for the advancement of His kingdom, and that God was with him through those circumstances.

When we are suffering personal tragedies, we may chafe when friends quote Romans 8:28 to us, but in our own hearts we must always claim that wonderful verse as our own: "We know that all things work together for

good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." According to verse 29, God would make us into His image, and such a wonderful goal may involve some difficulties along the way.

6. Walking Circumspectly in Regard to Mutual Submission (Ephesians 5:21)

The final way in which we are to walk circumspectly, to walk carefully, in our lives, is with reference to mutual submission. This verse is obviously a transition verse. It ends the subject started in verse 15, but it also deftly brings us to the next subject which will take us over into chapter six: the relationship of wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters.

But he would introduce these important subjects by first saying, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." If there are to be proper relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, master and slaves, or, for our day, employers and employees, there must first of all be a submissive attitude on the part of each individual Christian. All of these relationships may, and usually do, exist in the same congregation. Someone has said, "All ground at the foot of the cross is level ground."

In the Church, we ultimately all fit into one category: sinners saved by grace. It took the same shed blood to save me that it took to save you. James gives this advice, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9, 10).

All believers stand together as having been redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

One of the best examples of mutual submission and mutual dependence was demonstrated in the early church soon after Pentecost. The Scripture says, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostle's feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts

4:32-35).

I don't believe that God intended this approach to continue down through the church age, but what an excellent way in which to get the church started. I believe that the same sharing and submissive spirit should always be present among the saints of God. What a wonderful statement, "Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own."

May the Lord help each of us as Christians to continue walking circumspectly with regard to wise living, taking advantage of our opportunities for ministry, always pursuing God's will in our lives, continuously seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, testifying and singing praises and thanksgiving to God, and willingly submitting to one another as we work together in this great common cause.

2008 – Jim Christian

Walking in Truth

Text: 3 John 2-8

I have been given the topic, "Walking in Truth." My text is found in 3 John 1-4, but I would like to begin reading in verse two and read down through verse eight. I think its good to get the Scripture in its proper context, and then we'll take it from there.

Third John is a short book but a great book. It's the third letter John wrote and contains only 14 verses, but the word *truth* is used five times in those 14 verses. If I could go a little further than that, the word *truth* is used 194 times in the Bible. Of those 194 times, the Apostle John used 44 of those references in his writings. Forty-four of the 194 times that "truth" was used, John used it.

I believe John was excited about the truth, don't you? I believe that John was one that loved Jesus above everything else. In fact, if you'll remember, John was considered and called the "disciple whom Jesus loved." That used to bother me somewhat as a young Christian and I thought, "What does that mean? Is Jesus showing partiality to John?"

But as I began reading Scripture and studying Scripture and then pastoring, I found out that Jesus loved John because John loved Jesus so much. Do you know that at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, only one of the apostles stood by His side at the cross. Not that the other apostles weren't called. They were. But John was somewhat special. He was there at the feet of Jesus. In fact, Jesus gave him charge to take care of His mother here on earth.

John was special and John loved the truth. He loved what the truth taught. He loved what the truth meant and here he talks about it in the Scripture.

In our text, John was overjoyed about this man named Gaius. By the way, Gaius is whom John was writing this letter. We don't know much about Gaius. There were many men named Gaius in the Bible, and we really don't know which one this was. After reading after a lot of writers, I found out they didn't know either. But Gaius was special to John. And I believe he was special to John because this is one that John had led to the Lord.

In fact, he said in our text, that he had no “greater joy than to hear that his children,” and I believe that word right there tells us that John led Gaius to the Lord, “that his children continue to walk in truth.”

There is no greater joy on earth than pointing someone to the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there is no greater heartache than to see them go back to the mire like a pig and wallow in the dirt. Or go back like a dog to his own vomit.

The greatest thrill, no doubt, is pointing a person to Christ. The greatest thrill and joy is to lead a person to Him and to see them go on with the Lord and build a life for Jesus Christ—when we can see their efforts and their work—when we can see souls who follow after them who come to know Jesus Christ. And so, I believe John was thrilled that Gaius was going on, serving the Lord.

Tonight, I would like for us to consider a couple things. I would like for us to consider, first of all, this word “truth.” And what is this *truth*? Now the world has many, many definitions of truth as to what it is; what it means; what they should follow; what they should do; what they should say, and how they should say it.

I want us to look at some of those definitions. There is a variety of them. In fact, there is such a variety of definitions of the word truth, that I went to the internet and pulled up on Google, “Religions of the World.”

Folks, I couldn’t count them all. There are literally thousands of religions in the world. And there are many definitions of truth. I also went to the internet, and I pulled up a site called, “The Barna Group.” Perhaps you have been there. It is “The Barna Research Group,” and on that site, I found the latest poll they had taken on born-again Christians, and I would like to share that with you. It will not take long, but before I do, let me explain what “The Barna Research Group” studies.

In these studies, the term “born-again” is defined on the basis of two questions. The first is this: Have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today? Now, if the respondent says, yes, they ask the follow-up question, or the second question, and it is about life after death.

There is one out of seven perspectives a respondent may choose, and one of them is, “When I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.”

Individuals who answer yes to the first question and select this statement as their belief about their own salvation are categorized as “born-again,” and the survey is taken with these folks. The survey concludes the following: 92% of born-again Christians believe the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches. The study continues to report that:

1. One-third of born-again adults say that abortion is morally acceptable behavior. Did you hear that?
2. Thirty percent of all adults consider having a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex as morally acceptable behavior.
3. Sixty-one percent of adults view gambling as a morally acceptable behavior. And, with all of the state lotteries and all of the things that are going on, I wouldn't be surprised if there were some in this auditorium tonight who accepted that also. How many of you played the lottery tonight? Many believe it is acceptable, and it is morally acceptable, but I am convinced God's Word says it's not!
4. Enjoying sexual thoughts or fantasies about someone: 59% of those interviewed agreed it's okay.
5. Living with someone of the opposite sex without being married, sometimes called cohabitation: 60% agreed. Now listen, pastors, I know you have had people come to your church that want to be a part of your church who are not married but living together. I've had it happen, and I have had to tell them no, but I have seen pastors accept them into the fellowship of the church. God says it's adultery; God says it's sin; God says it's wrong! And we should be taking a stand.
6. But then also, having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex to whom you're not married: 42% say that's okay.
7. Looking at pictures of nudity or explicit sexual behavior: 38% of those interviewed says it's okay.
8. Using profanity, 36%. It boils my blood when I hear people who say they love Jesus using filthy language. God says, “Do not let any profane communication come out of your mouth.” Don't do it!
9. Thirty-five percent said getting drunk is okay.
10. And finally, using drugs not prescribed by a medical doctor: 17% agreed.

How can someone who says that they believe the Bible, and all of the

principles it teaches are totally accurate go on to believe such trash as this? Folks, it cannot happen.

I am afraid we are quickly becoming a society of acceptance. Now, I know Brother William touched on this last night, and I thought I would not do it because he did, but then God said, "No, Jim, do it."

So, in that God gave William this thought and He gave it to me, you must need it because you're getting it two nights in a row. We have many professing Christians who are giving in to this "Oprah Winfrey America."

Now listen, ladies and gentleman, and I think ladies more in particular: be careful of how much you think of someone outside of the fold of God—outside of the will of God—who is leading you in ways that you should not go. Be careful of that.

Listen to what Oprah advocates. (You may have read this. You can find it on the internet.) My wife said, "Jim, you better be careful. You might get in trouble saying that stuff," and I said, "If she said it on the internet, I can say it in church."

She says this by her own mouth as she follows this "pastor" of hers:

1. Who you are requires no belief.
2. Heaven is not a location but refers to the inner realm of consciousness.
3. The man on the cross is an archetypal image. He is every man; He is every woman.
4. My mind is part of God's; I am very holy.
5. My holiness is my salvation. (Hmm, I didn't see that in the Bible.)
6. My salvation comes from me.
7. Let me remember that there is no sin.
8. Do not make the pathetic error of "clinging to the old rugged cross." (Oprah, I'm sorry, but I'm wrapped all around it tonight! He's my Lord! He's my Savior! He's my all! Hallelujah!)
9. The only message, she says, of the crucifixion is that you will overcome the Cross.

It is so sad to hear those who claim to be followers of the truth also claim that all roads lead to Heaven. It's not true. Jesus said it very clearly in John 10:7, "Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am

the door of the sheep.”

Folks, when a person has accepted Christ, become a believer and a Christian, you have only one choice; you have only one way; and there is only one path that will get you to Heaven. And if you claim to be born again, what you are saying is that you have Jesus Christ living in your heart; you have Jesus in your life, and there has to be a change from the old to the new. This is the truth John is speaking about.

There has to be a change, and I believe it is high time that we Christians quit defending those who say they are Christians but are still living by the world’s standards. I have heard Christians making excuses for them by saying, “Oh! They’re just backslidden and living a carnal life” or “The truth of the matter is they are already saved; they’re okay.”

We need to preach the truth. We need to preach repentance—turning away from sin and turning toward God. God’s Word teaches that repentance is a prerequisite of salvation. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 4:17, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Mark 1:15: “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

Luke 5:32: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 13:1-5: “There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

You see, folks, it is no longer acceptable to suggest in our society that there is only one way—even if that way comes straight from the Bible, straight from the Word of God. The Apostle John knew there was only one way. In the Gospel that bears his name, John quoted our Lord in that familiar Scripture, John 14:6. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”

He is the only way to Heaven. There is none other and we must trust Him for that salvation. We Free Will Baptists must keep our eyes upon Jesus

Christ. He is the Author; He is the Finisher of our faith. And in spite of all the obstacles that the world may put in our way, we must run the race that God has set before us.

In our text, John has a great joy because Gaius continued walking in this truth. God has called you and me to walk in truth. God has called us to perform the task set before us. You know it is amazing, but we are all different, aren't we? We all have different abilities.

I have always thought it amazing how God made us all different. Can you imagine, there are approximately 6.7 billion people in the world. I began thinking about this and it is just really mind-numbing to me, but I think of 6.7 billion different sets of fingerprints. Only God could do that! I think of 6.7 billion unique strands of DNA. Only God could do that!

A number of years ago, I hosted Brother Raymond Riggs in revival and Brother Raymond and I were talking one day about people being different. He said, "Jim, let me tell you something; if you find two people just alike, shoot one of them because they are unnecessary."

Certainly we don't want to do that. But the point is, we are all different and God has called us to serve Him through these differences. One of the hardest lessons I had to learn when I accepted God's call into the ministry was that God called me to be me. I can't be anybody else. Oh, I've tried.

As a young minister, I listened to a lot of tapes, and I would read a lot of sermons. I must admit, I was really impressed with Jack Hyles. He was so powerful, I thought. Brother William Smith talked about plagiarism last night and I confess, I plagiarized Dr. Jack Hyles. I got in the pulpit and I started preaching and man, I tell you what, I found out in a heartbeat that it didn't work.

I thought, "What's wrong? It worked so good for him!"

And God just seemed to impress upon my mind, "Jim, I called you. I already have him."

You know what? That is some of the greatest peace I have found in my life when I discovered that I could be me. I didn't have to be anybody else. I want to impress God, and I believe when we impress God we will make a mark in this world for Him. So just be what God has called you to be.

I believe God has called us all to reach certain people. I am convinced there are some folks that you will reach that I could not because of your

gifts, or even your personality. But I am also convinced there are some I will reach that you will not. But that's okay, because God has called us all to be His witnesses. He has given us the Great Commission to go into all the world and we have a responsibility of sharing our faith with others, using the gifts God has given us.

I am convinced that God has called Free Will Baptists to be Free Will Baptists. I am convinced that God has given Free Will Baptists souls to reach. We will not reach them all, but we must reach those God has given us, that we may share the Gospel with them and that we will be that which God has called us to be. And that we, as Free Will Baptists, will use our differences to unite us rather than to divide us. Oh, may God use us for His glory!

The truth will change hearts. The truth John is talking about will give folks new direction. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Bible tells us, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Once we are saved, we cannot continue a life of sin. Listen to what John said in his first letter, chapter 3, verse 9: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

What's John saying? John is saying that those born of God cannot continue living a life of sin. We have to change. People say, "I will do what I want to do." If you are a child of God, and you are going to live for Jesus, you will do what Jesus told you to do, or you will not be where you ought to be, and you cannot live for Him as you should.

Jesus said you cannot continue the old life and still live for Him. And so we must change. We have no choice. Someone told me that when you get saved, God changes your "wanter." And I believe that's true. He changes us. It's not hard to change because there is nothing to go back to. I love the life that God has given me, and I know that I must live in the realm of that life.

So He has given us a new direction in life. We want to serve Him, or we should want to. We don't want to serve the world any longer. And if we do, it grieves the Holy Spirit who lives within us. I can't understand how people can say, "I believe I am saved, and I love Jesus," yet they live with someone outside of marriage. How can they do that? Jesus says, "That's adultery."

John says, "If you are born of God, you can't do that." Granted, we, as

human beings, make mistakes which we call sin. But when that happens, the Holy Spirit is grieved and we feel terrible. "Oh, Lord! What have I done?" "What have I said?" And we have to repent. That's why John said in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God wants us to live for Him! It is a new direction.

He also gives us a new desire. Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth, we should not serve sin."

First Peter 2:2: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Walking in truth transforms us into the perfect will of God. Living in the truth that John is teaching will transform us into the image of Christ. I think of the Scripture in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

And then Romans 8:29, though folks have a hard time understanding this Scripture. But it's not hard. Paul said, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son."

Listen Christian friend, you have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and oh, may we walk in His love, in His way and in His truth.

Let me ask you tonight: where are you? Are you walking in truth or are you listening to the trash of Oprah? Are you walking in truth, not being conformed to this world but being transformed? Are you walking in truth that you are not allowing the pressures of life and this world to overtake you, to rob you of your peace in Jesus Christ?

Or do you think, "Well, I'll slip in and play the lottery today. Nobody will know it." Let me tell you, the lottery is nothing but a tool of Satan used to destroy lives and to make children go hungry. And you say, "But I can afford it!" Well, if you can afford it, there's 10,000 more that can't and you're just contributing to it.

We have responsibilities. Where are you tonight? Are you living for Jesus? I would like for us to bow our heads, and I would like for us to consider the life that we are living for the Lord. I know that probably the majority, if not everyone here, gives testimony of being a Christian and that's great,

but where is your life right now as far as walking in truth? Are you living for Jesus? Are you doing all that you can that He might get glory from your life? That's God's will for your life.

Are you walking in truth? Oh, I pray that if not, you will make a decision for Christ tonight. You say, "But folks think that I'm okay."

Listen people, it doesn't matter what folks think; it's what God knows. And if you are not where you ought to be, there is no better time than right now to come and kneel at the front of this auditorium. An altar is wherever we make it. Let's make an altar here tonight and just say, "Lord, I'm sorry. I want to walk in truth. I want to be Your servant. I want to know Your joy. I want to know Your peace."

Closing Prayer

Oh, God, I pray that you will touch each one of us here this evening. You're so good to us. You love us so much. In spite of our weaknesses and in spite of our failures, You still call us.

And Lord, You're calling folks here tonight. I pray that they will accept that call and they will say, "Yes, Lord. I'll follow You. Lord, I'm sorry for not being what I should be for You. I just want to recommit my life. I want to surrender my all tonight."

Oh Lord, I pray that you will speak to their hearts now; draw them to Yourself. May they come and make that decision for You tonight is my prayer in Christ's name. Amen.

2008 – Ivan Asbury

When We Walk by Faith

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:7

I. We Have the Product of God's Blessings.

A. We know...

1. That if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building (2 Corinthians 5:1).
2. That while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6).
3. The terror of the Lord, we persuade men (2 Corinthians 5:11).

B. We Are...

1. Always confident (2 Corinthians 5:6, 8).
2. Home in the body (2 Corinthians 5:6).
3. Absent from the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6).

II. Walk Is the Path Dedicated to God.

A. The name *Enoch* means dedicated.

1. He walked with God (Genesis 5:24).
2. He knew that he pleased God. This proves that he had faith in God. (Hebrews 11:6).
3. He witnessed for God (Jude 14, 15)

3. Faith Is the Way, Not by Sight.

A. Substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1).

1. Substance of hope:
 - a. Looking at eternal things: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Word of God (2 Corinthians 4:18).

- b. Look at the faith in others (Romans 1:17).
- B. Evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).
 - a. Evidence not seen
 - 1) Knowing we have a home in Heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1).
 - 2) Peace now in the body, soul, spirit (2 Corinthians 5:6).
 - 3) Desire to witness and tell what good things He has done (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Conclusion

In the context of verses 1-21, the word *we* tells the message when we walk by faith

Verse 1: We know; we have.

Verse 2: We groan.

Verse 3: We shall.

Verse 4: We that; we would.

Verse 6: We are always confident; we are at home; we are absent.

Verse 8: We are confident.

Verse 9: We labor; we may be accepted.

Verse 10: We must all.

Verse 11: We persuade men; we are made manifest.

Verse 12: We commend.

Verse 13: We be beside ourselves; We be sober.

Verse 14: We thus judge.

Verse 20: We are ambassadors; We pray.

2009 – Fred Warner

The Promise of Power

Text: Acts 1:4-8

Our text brings us to our Lord's final briefing with His disciples before His ascension. Verse 8, which is the key to the book, emphasizes both the promise of power and a simultaneous, systematic approach to world evangelism. But before we look at verse 8, I want to give a brief overview of context.

In verses 4, 5, we see the promise which confined them. Jesus commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father" (Luke 24:49). For 10 days, they met in the Upper Room and prayed; not to bring about Pentecost, but in preparation for it.

In verses 6, 7, we see the prophecy which consumed them. Like all patriotic Jews, the disciples longed for what the prophets had predicted and their interpretation of it; meaning they fully expected Christ to set up a literal earthly kingdom.

And when they were told to return to Jerusalem, to wait for the "promise of the Father," they apparently thought the time had come. But Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times and seasons the Father hath put in His own power;" meaning the time-table for future events rests with God the Father. And with that said, the Lord turned their attention to the pressing matter of world evangelism.

Then in verse eight, we see the power which changed them. Now with this bit of background, I want to call your attention to four things regarding this great missionary text.

The Promise of Power

Note the words: "But ye shall receive power...."

First, we need to define *power*. Note that the two words used for power in verses 7, 8, are not the same. In verse 7, Jesus refers to the Father's power, meaning "absolute authority, to do whatever He pleases." The risen Lord was also given this same authority. Jesus said, "All power (authority) is

given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

His authority then, is the basis for the Great Commission; As He said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

In verse 8, however, the word for *power* means "ability, might, strength, or force." This aspect of God's power is seen in Acts 4:33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ...," meaning they preached in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Second, we need to document the *promise*. The promise originated with God the Father. In fact, it is called the "promise of the Father." The Prophet Joel predicted God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28); John the Baptist preached Christ would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11); Jesus prayed for the Father to send "another Comforter," the Holy Spirit, which would "abide with them forever" (John 14:16); and finally, the Apostle Peter proclaimed the promise fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when he said: "But this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16).

The Person of Power

Note that Jesus said, "After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you..." The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual power. The Acts of the Apostles would not exist if the Holy Spirit had not acted through them. If you remove the 70 references to the Holy Spirit in Acts, you remove the "supernatural" and all you have left is a helpless church in a hopeless world.

Zechariah 4:6 is more than a word to the prophet; it is a message to every believer: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." No wonder the songwriter said, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down!" His role in redemption is indispensable.

What the Father promised, the Prophet predicted, the Baptist preached, the Lord prayed for, and Peter proclaimed fulfilled, is personalized by the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. This brings us to two important terms.

Chapter 1 speaks of being "baptized with the Holy Ghost." Initially, this marked the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church.

It is the divine act whereby believers are incorporated into the body of Christ and positioned to serve. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." It takes place at the moment of conversion and results in a reciprocal indwelling. The Holy Spirit not only indwells the believer, the believer dwells in the body of Christ; which is the true Church.

In chapter 2 and following, we find the terms *filled with* or *full of* the Holy Spirit. Being "filled with the Spirit" is not a crisis experience one seeks, but a Person to whom he yields. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to seek an experience, but over and over again we are told to seek the Lord (Jeremiah 29:13).

When one finds Christ, he finds He is all he needs. Herbert Lockyer defined the fullness of the Spirit well; "It is the blessed Spirit Himself in all His fullness!"

It means to be constantly under His control. The verb *filled* in Ephesians 5:18 can be translated, "Be ye being filled with the Spirit" which suggests a continuous process. In other words, being filled with the Spirit is not a matter of us having more of the Spirit but the Spirit having more of us. It should also be noted that numerous references are made to believers being filled or full of the Spirit after Pentecost. This means the Holy Spirit may manifest His power through special anointings as described in Acts 4:31, when the disciples prayed for boldness to witness in the face of persecution. The Bible says: "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the Word of God with boldness."

I love the story of the two men down at the altar praying for their pastor. One of the men kept saying, "Lord, 'unctionize' our pastor...."

He repeated the same phrase over and over, but the other man had never heard such terminology. When the man finished praying, the man asked him what he meant by "Lord, unctionize our pastor?"

The man replied, "I don't know exactly what I mean but I can sure tell when he doesn't have it!"

The Purpose of Power

The reminder of our text says, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the

earth." Years ago, I read Dr. John R. Rice's little booklet, entitled "Great Soul Winners." I've never forgotten what he said: "All great soul winners are filled with the Spirit, but they are filled with the Spirit because they want to win souls."

Many people are like Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8, who wanted the power of the Holy Spirit to magnify himself rather than to glorify Christ. But the power of the Spirit is not only divinely given, it must be divinely used. And with that said, I want us to look briefly at two things:

The Extent of Their Witness

God's grace was to be preached in Jerusalem, in the very place where Jesus was crucified. The results were phenomenal. Three thousand souls were saved on the Day of Pentecost alone, and within days, the number of converts, not counting women and children, had risen to 5,000.

Only the Holy Spirit could have produced such results in such a hostile environment. Judea is mentioned next; then Samaria. The Samaritans were a mixed race whose religion was a mingling of Judaism and idolatry. And even though they were hated by every devout Jew, they too were to be evangelized. This did not happen, however, until Stephen's death triggered widespread persecution against the church, and believers were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the Word.

It was then that Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ with nothing less than miraculous soul-saving results. And last but not least, the Gospel was to be proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike to the uttermost part of the earth. No longer was Israel to wait for the nations to come to her, she was to take Christ to the nations! Our Lord's command still stands—the sphere of our witness is universal and the Gospel has not reached its final destination till all have heard.

The Essentials for Witnessing

A study of the events surrounding Pentecost reveals four important prerequisites for effective witnessing.

1. The Courage to Stand

One is not apt to witness if he does not have the courage to stand. And who is a better example of this than Peter. This is the same Simon Peter,

who cursed and swore and denied His Lord; not once, but three times, and said, "I know not the Man!"

But this is also the same Simon Peter who went out and "wept bitterly" in repentance. But look at him on the Day of Pentecost. He is a changed man. No longer is he in retreat; no longer is he paralyzed with fear; he witnesses fearlessly! No longer is he afraid of the devil's crowd; now the devil's crowd fears him. Luke says, "But Peter, standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice" (Acts 2:14).

He not only stood up, he spoke up. The Holy Spirit made the difference. As someone has said, "Smart alecks are a dime a dozen, but men filled with holy boldness are few and far between."

2. A Compulsion to Speak

Witnessing is most effective when it comes out of the overflow of one's relationship to Christ—when it is spontaneous, when it comes natural, when one can't help but witness. And Peter felt compelled to witness. In fact, the very One he had denied became the centerpiece of His message on the Day of Pentecost. He proclaimed Christ as the renowned Savior; the rejected Savior; the resurrected Savior; and finally, the risen Lord. And His compulsion to witness did not wane after Pentecost. When he and John were arrested later for preaching Christ (Acts 4:20), they said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." No wonder E. M. Bounds said, "Preaching in Acts was not the performance of an hour but the overflow of a life."

3. A Commitment to Suffer

Philippians 1:29 says, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, to but also to suffer for His sake."

Those of us in the American church know little about suffering for Christ's sake, but as someone has noted, the handwriting is already on the wall; the question is not *if* persecution will come, but *when*. Some form of the term *witness* appears 39 times in Acts and comes from the Greek word for martyr. Warren Wiersbe observes that "Not all witnesses were martyrs in the New Testament sense, but all martyrs were witnesses—such as Stephen and Paul who witnessed all the way to martyrdom."

4. The Capacity to See

The Spirit enabled the disciples to understand things about God's plan

for the present age that they had not understood before Pentecost. As already noted, they were still thinking about a political kingdom instead of a spiritual kingdom. But the coming of the Holy Spirit and the salvation of 3,000 souls on the Day of Pentecost changed all that.

Finally, they were able to get past arguing over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. They were able to see that God's immediate purpose was not to establish an earthly kingdom but a heavenly kingdom; a spiritual kingdom (if you will) in the hearts of men, women, boys, and girls, who embrace Christ by faith.

Thus we see the promise, the person, and the purpose of power, however, one more point needs to be made.

The Path to Power

While verse 8 does not mention prayer, in the broader context of Acts, prayer played a crucial role in empowering the disciples to witness. In fact, one cannot help but note the critical link between fervent prayer and anointed preaching. And no verse shows this beautiful balance better than Acts 6:4, when the apostles refused to be side-tracked into waiting on tables. They said, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word."

Thus prayer and preaching are married in Scripture, and as we say at the marriage altar, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Note how the Lord honored their decision: "And the Word of God increased: and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

So the Holy Spirit not only worked externally through preaching but internally through prayer. In the 28 chapters that make up Acts, there are no less than 29 references to prayer. The Early Church thrived in an atmosphere of prayer—a lesson we need to learn again. Paul Billhimer said: "Any church without a well-organized, systematic prayer program, is simply operating a religious treadmill."

For years I have contended that nothing takes precedence over preaching, and I still believe it. Dr. Steven Olford said it even more emphatically, "Nothing takes precedence over preaching but greater preaching!"

Nevertheless, it is effectual, fervent prayer that paves the way for "anointed" preaching. Unlike music and a host of other things we often allow

to compete with preaching, prayer never does. It enhances and empowers preaching. Listen to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course (may spread rapidly) and be glorified even as it is with you. And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith."

Note his twofold request: First, for the success of the message, and second, for the safety of the messenger. God help us to get back to doing the Lord's work the old fashioned way—prayer is still the path to power.

Closing Remarks

As we come to the invitation only one word comes to mind—surrender! If salvation is the greatest need among sinners, then surrender is the greatest need among saints. And yet, we hear far too little these days about selling out to the Lord.

When William Borden, millionaire and heir to the Borden Dairy estate, graduated from high school, his parents gave him a trip around the world. While he was circling the globe, the Lord called him to be a missionary to the Muslims. In a letter to his parents, he wrote, "I'm giving my life to serve God as a missionary."

At the age of 18, he wrote in the back of his Bible; "No Reserves!" After graduating from Yale, he entered two more words in his Bible, "No Retreats!" And upon finishing his studies at Princeton, he sailed to Egypt to begin his ministry. But within a month of his arrival, he developed meningitis and died. Was it all for nothing? Not at all. No life lived in the will of God is ever wasted. And in his Bible, underneath the words, "No Reserves" and "No Retreats," Borden had written the words, "No Regrets!"

The greatest tragedy of all is to lose one's soul, but the second greatest tragedy is to come to the end of a misspent life haunted by thoughts of what might have been. There is only one way to avoid such a tragedy, and that is "unconditional" surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Surrender can be summed up in one word—availability. As Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

2009 – Paul Harrison

My Grace Is Sufficient

Text: 2 Corinthians 12

Please take your Bibles and turn to 2 Corinthians 12. While you're turning, let me express thanks to those who are responsible for my being invited to speak. I am most grateful for and humbled by the opportunity. Let me also say what a privilege it is to have several family members and Cross Timberites and other friends in attendance this evening.

In 1820, in the historic halls of Cambridge University, 12 young men formed a secret society. They called themselves the Cambridge Apostles, and the group has perpetuated themselves over the years. They would meet every Saturday night for secret discussions. There's nothing like secrecy to forge close relationships, so it's not surprising that many of these men became the closest of friends.

While the group's history is shrouded in mystery, we know the names of some of its members, the most famous of which was surely the great poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson. He developed his closest relationship with fellow apostle Arthur Hallam. Hallam actually became engaged to Tennyson's sister, but tragically, at the age of 22, a brain hemorrhage swept the young man away. Hallam's death devastated Tennyson. He took up his pen and wrote the poem, "The Two Voices," which opens with these mournful words:

A still small voice spake unto me,
"Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?"

Sometimes, life can be sweet, but it can also be terribly bitter. I surely am thankful for days with blue skies, but there's no doubt that many days include ominous storm clouds. And when the storms come, they sometimes beat upon us with great force: failed ambitions, broken relationships, disease, death. O the depth of grief we humans experience! I wonder what load you're carrying tonight.

Are we at the mercy of these heartaches? Can we prepare for them? Can

we survive them? A great apostle provides answers to these questions, not a Cambridge Apostle, but an inspired apostle, the Apostle Paul.

Paul had planted the church in Corinth. That congregation owed him a huge debt, but nonetheless, some feisty men had set themselves against the apostle, and when writing what we call 2 Corinthians, Paul found himself needing lessons in self-defense.

Toward the end of the letter, one defensive approach he took was to allude to special experiences he had with the Lord. A bit hesitant about this, he used somewhat veiled language. Second Corinthians 12:2 reads: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago . . . such an one caught up to the third heaven."

In verse four, he alluded to how "he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Second Corinthians was probably written around A.D. 55 or 56, so "fourteen years ago" points to about AD 42, during what is sometimes called the "silent decade" of Paul. Since these visions were unutterable, we don't know their content, but you can only imagine that Paul's heart and mind were filled to overflowing.

After referring to these experiences, Paul turns in verses 7-10 to explain some of what went along with having received a taste of Heaven. Follow along with me as I read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

From these verses I want us to examine three encouraging truths about how God treats his children.

First, God tells us that He sometimes allows His children to experience great suffering. Second Corinthians 12:7: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me."

The word rendered *thorn* is quite interesting. It means literally "what is

pointed,” and in ancient Greek literature, the term was used in a number of contexts. It could certainly refer to a thorn, but it was also used for bigger things that were pointed, such as a “pointed stake” and to “fortifications to repulse attackers,” as when armies would dig pits for defense and put stakes in the bottom to impale the enemy when they fell in. On such stakes, the head struck off an enemy was sometimes impaled.

This range of meaning has led to various translations. For example, John Wiclif in 1380 called Paul’s thorn “the pricke of fleisch.” Wiliam Tyndale in 1534 translated it “unquyetnes of the flesshe.” One or the other of these two renderings was followed in various English translations until the King James Version in 1611 offered “a thorne in the flesh.”

There have been any number of theories about just what this thorn was. Some have thought Paul referred to people. The great old church father Chrysostom said, “He [Paul] means Alexander the coppersmith, the party of Hymenaeus and Philetus, all the adversaries of the word.”

My friend Darrell Holley asked me about this sermon a few weeks ago and when I told him it dealt with Paul’s thorn in the flesh, he mentioned that I might offer an alphabetical list of all the people I know who qualify as thorns. So let’s begin with the A’s.

Most, however, have not thought Paul’s thorn was a person. John Calvin, for example, wrote: “My opinion is, that under this term [thorn in the flesh] is comprehended every kind of temptation, with which Paul was exercised. For flesh here, in my opinion, denotes—not the body, but that part of the soul which has not yet been regenerated.”

The note in the 1599 version of the Geneva Bible reads: “He meaneth concupiscence, that sticketh fast in us, as it were a prick [the word this Bible used to translate here], insomuch that it constrained Paul himself being regenerate, to cry out, I do not that good that I would, etc.”

Most scholars think Paul referred to some physical malady, some bodily handicap. The theories read like a medical dictionary: malaria, epilepsy, headaches, a speech impediment, bad eyesight—you name it. So, which one of these theories about Paul’s thorn is correct? Well, I don’t know, but I am inclined to agree with those who think of the thorn as some physical ailment, one troublesome enough to prompt Paul to pray repeatedly to be rid of it.

Whatever it was, it was some serious difficulty in Paul’s life, and God

allowed him to suffer from it. We should note that the thorn God sent is called "a messenger of Satan." The devil sometimes takes on the role of mailman to deliver packages of woe. But little does he realize that who ultimately sends him is the great Postmaster General Himself, God Almighty. God is in charge of our lives, and I say again, He tells us that He sometimes allows His children to experience great suffering.

In this context, reference to a thorn is quite interesting because in verse two, we encounter "Paul wrapt up into the third heaven," and then in verse seven "the same Paul quickly after in a kind of hell upon the earth." Here in the same passage we've got Paul in ecstasy and Paul in agony.

Now perhaps you're thinking: "You said you were going to offer three encouraging truths about how God treats His children. I don't see how it is encouraging to say God tells us that He lets His children suffer. "Maybe I should leave now," you say, "before you really encourage me with points two and three."

Well, I understand such thinking, but I still maintain, given the world we live in, that it's encouraging for us to know that this is how God often deals with His children. I can surely imagine a world in which God allows no trouble and it would be, at least in my mind, better than this one. In fact it would be Heaven. But in this world, the real world, the fallen world, it's quite helpful to know that God allows trouble.

Think of it this way: Think of an airplane flight and the pilot tells you that you are going to have some turbulence. Isn't it good that he warns you? First, it lets you buckle up in advance. Second, when the turbulence comes, it lets you know the pilot knows what he's talking about. I like it when a pilot knows what he's talking about. I like it when I know that the pilot knows what he's talking about.

I feel sorry for people who have so interpreted the Scriptures as to think that if they just love God enough, they won't have any trouble. What mental and spiritual torture they must experience when trouble then comes along, as it inevitably does.

So, establish it firmly in your heart: God sometimes allows His children to experience great suffering. And this has always been His way. In fact, it seems that the Lord's dearest ones may actually suffer the most. Paul was the greatest missionary that ever lived, and look how he suffered. In 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, he says: "Of the Jews five times received I forty

stripes save one [that's 195 stripes by my math]. Thrice was I beaten with rods [these were Roman beatings and they didn't set limits on the number of stripes that could be given], once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

His thorn in the flesh was on top of all that. Paul didn't exactly have it cushy.

Or think of Job. He was, the Scriptures say, "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil," and in one day he lost about all his possessions and all 10 of his children were killed. Then he was smitten with sores from his head to toes. Job was a blameless man, an upright man, and a suffering man, all at the same time.

Christian history is filled with great servants of God who, after enjoying the heights, were plunged into the depths.

Chrysostom, the great fourth-century preacher I cited earlier, never married out of devotion to Christ. He preached boldly to multitudes and even reprov'd royalty as it was called for. But instead of receiving earthly rewards, he died in exile.

John Bunyan, that great Baptist of the 17th century, who penned *Pilgrim's Progress* and so many other great works, was railed against for what he believed and taught. He was called a witch, a Jesuit, a highwayman, was said to have mistresses and multiple wives. Eventually, he was sent to prison. His crime? Preaching the Gospel. The shock of his sudden imprisonment caused his wife Elizabeth to miscarry. Bunyan suffered in that Bedford jail for over 10 years. Mary, his blind teenage daughter, would come and bring him food daily. Bunyan appreciated the food, but he struggled terribly to think what might happen to his blind daughter, and he unable to do anything about it.

Though we have our differences with him, nonetheless John Calvin was one of God's great servants. He labored tirelessly to preach and minister in Geneva, but he was constantly plagued with illnesses of every kind. Charles Cooke, a medical doctor, described the Reformer as suffering from

kidney stones, joint trouble, gout, chronic pulmonary tuberculosis, pleurisy, intestinal parasites, irritable colon, migraine headaches.

Time fails me to tell of Martin Luther and his terrible anxiety; or of Spurgeon and his dark melancholy. So many of the Lord's men and women have traversed deep and dark valleys. And it's still that way today. God still sometimes allows His choicest servants to suffer deeply.

I beat this drum long and hard because as soon as trouble comes, I almost immediately think, "Where's God?" I doubt and fear and worry and complain. It's incredible how many heart-monsters come out in the darkness of suffering.

A part of our problem is that suffering just seems wrong to us, but it is as when we put a straight stick in water and it appears crooked. The effect of the water misleads us. So with earthly afflictions. Earth's view makes God's decisions about suffering to appear crooked and wrong, but, rest assured, they're absolutely straight and right.

First: God tells us that He sometimes allows His children to experience great suffering.

Second: God has the well-being of His children in view when He allows them to suffer.

In Paul's case, God preempted sin by sending suffering. We'll look at that in a minute. But, as an aside, let me say that the Lord also uses thorns to rescue those already fallen into sin.

Richard Baxter said: "Many thousand recovered sinners may cry, 'O healthful sickness! O comfortable sorrows! O gainful losses! O enriching poverty! O blessed day that ever I was afflicted!'"

Remember, the great Paul himself had been rescued from sin after having suffered from "kicking against the pricks."

Psalm 119:67 says: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word."

Sometimes the venom of sin can only be counteracted by the anti-venom of affliction.

But now let's look specifically at Paul's case in our passage. He gives two examples of this well-being that comes from suffering: First, suffering helped him to avoid evil. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there

was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.”

Special revelations of God could easily lead to exalted estimations of self, and having been caught up to the Third Heaven, to Paradise, Paul was in danger of just that. So to help the apostle avoid this trap, God afflicted him.

While suffering inherently involves pain, suffering for this reason is actually good, good for us. As Thomas Fuller said: “It is better to be held in the right road with briars and brambles, than to wander on beds of roses in a wrong path, which leads to destruction.”

This “protection by suffering” continues to be God’s approach. He helps us in an ultimate way by hurting us in a temporal way.

So God uses suffering to keep us from evil, but, second, He also uses such hardships to help us experience good. “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Paradoxically, suffering is good for us. Affliction helps us. Affliction helps our ears. It makes us listen to God as we never would otherwise. We are deaf to many a sermon in good times; rarely do we not hear when afflicted. C. S. Lewis said: “God whispers to us in our pleasures...but shouts in our pains.”

Affliction helps our tongues. Paul’s thorn drove him to prayer. “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice” (2 Corinthians 12:8). Second Samuel 21:1 records: “During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the Lord.”

Affliction helps our eyes. It was when he was being stoned that Stephen said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man.” God reserves many glorious sights for eyes that have been washed by weeping.

Affliction helps our minds. Calvin, no stranger to suffering himself, said that “pestilence, war, particular sicknesses, harms, reproaches, and all other such things as cause us grief or displeasure...are all chastisements by which God reminds us of our sins and faults with the purpose of humbling us that we might know what we are, and finally to prepare us to forsake the world the more willingly.”

John Donne, after having lain in a sick bed, said that God had "catechized" him with affliction.

From so many angles, trouble works for our well-being. Wax, unless heated, will not take the desired impression. So we, unless heated by the fires of affliction, will not take the desired impression of the image of Christ.

Longfellow wrote:

"Only those are crowned and sainted
Who with grief have been acquainted."

It is one of the great paradoxes of life, that God blesses with curses, He strengthens with stripes.

Samuel Rutherford served as minister in Anwoth, Scotland. He was most conscientious in his labors for God. His biographer wrote: "He used ordinarily to rise by three a clock in the morning; he spent all his time either in prayer, or reading, or writing, or in visiting families in private, or in publick employments of his ministrie or profession."

But in the course of time, he was ousted from his work by a hostile government and confined in Aberdeen. In a 1637 letter, written during this exile, Rutherford said: "I never knew, by my nine years' preaching, so much of Christ's love, as He has taught me in Aberdeen, by six months' imprisonment."

In another letter that year Rutherford wrote: "My enemies have contributed...to make me blessed. This is my palace, not my prison."

Let me add that the Lord many times uses the sufferings of one to bless the hearts of many. How many have taken comfort from Paul's thorn? Genesis 50:20 records Joseph saying to his brothers who had earlier sold him into slavery, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Joseph suffered, and a nation was blessed.

Now hear me, it's one thing to believe in theory that a hardship is actually a help. But it's an entirely different matter to hold on to this when you are in the midst of the suffering. To believe that God is blessing when it feels like cursing takes strong faith.

I suggest that in such times you cling to "the theology of the cross." If

back in time on Good Friday you had stood near Golgotha and seen Jesus suffer and bleed and die, your senses and mind would have told you that evil was triumphing, that good, the ultimate Good, was lost. The reins of government were perverted: this was a Roman crucifixion. Religion had derailed: the Jews, God's chosen people, had instigated this execution. Even Jesus' friends refused to stand up for Him but fled instead.

So bleak was the entire scenario that nature herself seemed to revolt with an earthquake and a blackened sun. But at just the time when God seemed to be doing nothing, He was in fact accomplishing the greatest feat in all human history. This teaches us that when we can't see, we should believe anyway.

So we have seen . . .

First: God tell us that He sometimes allows His children to experience great suffering.

Second: God has the well-being of His children in view when He allows them to suffer.

Third: God gives His children the grace they need to bear up under their suffering. Paul suffers with his thorn, he calls out to God for relief, and in 2 Corinthians 12:9 we get God's response: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee."

God says, "I won't remove the thorn, but I'll give you what you need to bear up under it." "My grace is sufficient."

Grace is a broad term. It refers to God's giving nature, His favor, His kindness. Every good thing we experience springs from God's grace.

Many times when we think on this subject we envision God's saving grace. We sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." And surely it is only due to the grace of God that any sinner has hope and salvation.

Let me say in passing that I weary of the Calvinists, the hard predestinarians, referring to their system of theology as "the doctrines of grace." You understand that they believe in limited atonement, that Jesus only died for the chosen few with a view of saving only them. You could just as well call this "limited grace."

The "free will" understanding of Scripture presents Jesus as dying for the sins of the entire world, none excluded. If we were to argue over words, our

position can better be termed “the doctrines of grace.”

But laying that aside, in our text God speaks not of grace to save the sinner but of grace to sustain the believer. Grace surely saves us, but it also supports us. The life of the child of God, from beginning to end, is nothing but a grand display of God’s grace.

In our text, God refers to “my grace.” He has grace. Grace characterizes Him. He possesses it and He gives it to us. The Scriptures are soaked full of the goodness, the grace of God. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul refers to “the riches of God’s grace.” Peter wrote of “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). The author of Hebrews told us to pray that we may “find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). John described Jesus as “full of grace” (John 1:14). God is a God of grace.

The wording God uses here is most interesting. Remember, Paul is quoting God. God says, “My grace is sufficient for you.” *Sufficient*. I would have expected abundant or overflowing. But he says “sufficient.” Why? Well, I’m not sure why. Perhaps, and I say this reverently, perhaps God said this with irony, speaking to one who knew full well that God’s grace was in fact extravagant.

Perhaps it’s kind of like a fireman opening up a massive fire hydrant for a little boy on a hot summer day and, as the water gushes forth, the fireman says to the boy, “I hope there’ll be sufficient water for you.” “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Truly, we have every reason to be confident that God’s grace will be enough and more than enough for us.

To doubt the sufficiency of God’s grace for our need is like one doubting that Niagara Falls will quench his thirst, like doubting that there’s enough air in the atmosphere to fill one’s lungs. It’s like one walking up to his own private smorgasbord of the universe and wondering if there’ll be enough for supper. God has promised grace, sufficient grace, and He always keeps His promises.

That means, pastor, there’s enough grace to support you when you labor faithfully for God and little seems to come of it and you’re discouraged.

That means, pastor’s wife, there’s enough grace to support you when you feel lonely and helpless and broken.

That means, parents, there’s enough grace to support you when your

children break your heart and go against all you've taught them.

That means, sick one, there's enough grace to support you when you hear the doctor say, "We've found cancer."

That means, grieving one, there's enough grace to support you when you stand beside a coffin and say goodbye to your dearest friend.

"My grace is sufficient for thee."

The result of God's dealing with His children in this way is that He receives glory from our reliance on His grace. "For my strength [i.e., God's] is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). This doesn't mean that God's strength actually increases or is literally perfected when we have trouble. You can't increase absolute omnipotence. It rather means that His strength is manifested in its perfections when we experience suffering and weakness. Our problems display God's power. This leads Paul to conclude: If God gets glory from my trouble, then bring it on.

Christians used to sing regularly the songs of Anne Steele (1716–1778), the daughter of a Baptist preacher in England. When she was three years old, her mother died. At age 19, Anne suffered a hip injury that left her a lifelong invalid. When she was 21, on the day before her wedding, her fiancé went for a swim and drowned. Heartbroken, she never married. Yet Anne Steele wrote nearly 150 hymns, among them one entitled "Our Father," which includes the lines:

Whate'er thy sacred will ordains,
Oh, give me strength to bear;
And let me know my Father reigns,
And trust his tender care.

"My grace is sufficient for thee." It is truly amazing, but repeatedly, the pains of God's people lead to the praise of God's name.

I trust it is clear from our passage that God is absolutely sovereign. Paul was not floating on the ocean of chance as to his physical and/or spiritual condition, and neither are we. God was and is in control. If Calvinists think that we Free Willers are short on believing in the sovereignty of God, they are deeply mistaken. We not only believe in it but revel in it. We know that God has given us freedom, but we understand also that this freedom is exercised in the context of divine sovereignty. We may not fully understand or be able to articulate just how these facts fit together, but we recognize

that they are facts. God is sovereign.

So how do we respond to this passage?

First, expect suffering. It will come. Prepare for it. Think about it. Anticipate it.

Second, take comfort in knowing that God has your well-being in mind, even when you're hurting.

And third, know that God will give you the grace you need to do His will, to hold up under your suffering, your thorn. His grace is and will be sufficient for you.

Let me ask you: Are you hurting? Is your heart burdened? Is there a thorn piercing your soul?

Then, perhaps the best exhortation I can give you is in the words of a favorite hymn of the church:

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; thy best, thy heavenly, Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.
Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.
Be still, my soul, though dearest friends depart
And all is darkened in the vale of tears;
Then shalt thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrows and thy fears.
Be still, my soul; thy Jesus can repay

From His own fulness all He takes away.
Be still, my soul; the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

2009 – Mark Price

The Promise of Eternal Life

Text: 1 John 2:24-28

First, while I am aware that you will receive the official welcome tomorrow evening, I would like to welcome you to the great state of Ohio. We are thrilled to be your hosts.

Second, I am also aware of whom I am preaching to. You might say that I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels. It is humbling; not only because of the audience that I am speaking to, but also because of those who have stood where I stand this morning. It is certainly an honor to have this opportunity, and I thank the Executive Committee for allowing me to be a small part of this year's program.

I would also like to thank my family—Deanna, Lacey and Hannah, as well as my church family—for their love, support, prayers and encouragement, as well as those of you who have sent emails, cards and words of encouragement.

What a wonderful theme is this year's theme: "God's Great and Precious Promises." His promises are so much greater, and so much more precious because of the nature of the Giver Himself.

My assignment this morning is to preach on "The Promise of Eternal Life." Of course *eternal life* speaks of immortality.

In Cleveland, Ohio, there is a sculpted statue called "Fountain of Eternal Life." It was designed by Marshall Fredericks and was dedicated on May 30, 1964, as a tribute to the men and women who served in World War II. The sculpture portrays a man escaping the flames of war, reaching heavenward for eternal peace and immortality.

Since the beginning of time, man has always had an unquenchable hunger for immortality. For instance, in the year 1513, Ponce de León discovered and explored Florida after hearing of the fountain of youth from the people of Puerto Rico. While he was one of the first Europeans to set foot on the American mainland, he never found the fountain of youth.

Then, there is the ancient Japanese fairy tale of the Fountain of Youth.

The story goes: “An old couple lived in the mountains. The man would cut wood, and the woman wove every day. One day, the man found a spring and drank from it. After drinking, he became a young man. Delighted, he ran home. His wife said that a young man needed a young wife, so she would go and drink. But they should not both be away at the same time, so he should wait. He did wait, but when she did not come back, he went to look for her. He found a baby by the spring; his wife had drunk too eagerly. Saddened, he carried her back home.”

And who can ignore all the commercials with journalist Bill Curtis? In one, Bigfoot is in the background while in another the Abominable Snowman, and in yet another, a leprechaun with his pot of gold. But, my favorite is the one in which elderly folks get into a pool of water, only to emerge younger. In each of these commercials, Curtis—standing in the foreground—is so proud that he has “discovered the internet.” Never mind the deeper earth-shattering discoveries. But, of course, they are nothing more than fable and fiction.

It seems that despite his unquenchable hunger for it, man just always comes up short in his quest for immortality. The reason, of course, is simply because he is always looking in all the wrong places.

The rich young ruler knew the proper source. Each of the Synoptic Gospels records his search. As he ran to Jesus, he asked the timeless question, “What shall *I do* to inherit eternal life?”

You know, people today still make the mistake of asking this question: “What can we do to possess immortality?” Of course, we know that the source is the Son of God, as found in Scripture.

Titus 3:4-7: “But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

In the King James Version of the Bible, the theme of *eternal life* appears 30 times, and *everlasting life* appears 15 times. It is a theme woven through all of Scripture. Let’s read our text together.

Let that...what? “That which they had heard from the beginning” is the Gospel; the teachings of the apostles, the original message which had been

proclaimed. It had not changed, and would not change.

“Therefore.” We need to ask, “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?” In the Greek, it stands emphatically at the beginning of the sentence. “Ye, therefore, acknowledge the Son, and so shall ye have the Father also” (1 John 2:23).

In verse 24, John literally says, “But as for you, let that therefore abide in you.” The word *abide* means “to adhere steadfastly to; to allow to obtain a permanent lodging in your soul; never let it depart from you.”

So, John says, “As for you, let the Gospel of Jesus Christ (which you have heard proclaimed from the time you first heard) abide in you forever.” “And,” he continues, “if you will continue in that same Gospel, you shall continue in (abide) the Son, and in the Father.”

Verse 25: “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (13 words).

Kenneth S. Wuest translates it this way: “And this is the promise which He Himself promised us, the life, the eternal (life).”

In our time together this morning, we will consider:

1. The Promise
2. The Source of the Promise
3. The Recipients of the Promise
4. The Purpose of the Promise

1. The Promise

Promise signifies a free promise, given without solicitation. What does the promise contain? Eternal life. This phrase is so precisely worded that it suggests that there is but one kind of life that forms the sum and the substance of the believer’s hope.

Jesus spoke of it in John 17:2, 3: “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

“That he should give eternal life.” The word *give* suggests a gift. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Jesus is God's gift to fallen man, that those who believe on Him may be included in the Bride of Christ—the Church. "To as many as thou hast given him." The Church is God's gift to Jesus Christ.

The Eternal Life: Life that belongs to God; life that flows from God, and because it does, it is not affected by the limitations of time.

So, we see the promise.

2. The Source of the Promise

"And this is the promise that he hath promised us."

If you or I were to make such a promise, it would be worthless, because we are incapable of keeping such a promise. No one but the Lord of life could guarantee its fulfillment. This is the greatest of all promises given by the greatest of all promisers.

For the original readers of John's letter, as well as for us today, we can rest on the promise of eternal life, because of the Promiser Himself, the source of the promise.

During the time that I was preparing for this message, I struggled with what the word *he* refers in our text. My thanks to Dr. Stanley Outlaw, Dr. Garnett Reid, and Mike Mounts for helping me resolve this question. I found evidence such as what Paul wrote in Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."

This verse and many like it indicate that this hope was promised in Christ Jesus, before the world began, by the Father who is unable to default on His Word.

For the sake of the context of our text, we will consider the source of this promise to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God (in verse 28, the *he* and *him* are clearly referring to Jesus Christ). We are also aware of Jesus' statements found in John 10:30, 17:11, and 17:21, "I and the Father are one."

He is eternally God. He was present prior to creation. We are made in His image. He is truth. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me" (John 14:7).

Because He is God, and because He is the Truth, He can be trusted to deliver on His promises. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. It has been added that "He owns the hills and the 'taters (potatoes) beneath those

hills." His resources are infinite.

We have considered the promise, and the source of the promise. Now, let us consider:

3. The Recipients of the Promise

The recipients of the promise are us, very simply, us (verse 25). By us, he means all.

- Romans 3:10: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."
- Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
- Romans 5:8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
- John 3:14-18: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Whosoever means us, and us means all.

- 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

All!

- John 6:40: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Us! The greatest promise, given by the greatest promiser, is extended to us!

We have considered: The promise, the source of the promise, the recipients of the promise, and finally:

4. The Purpose of the Promise (Eternal Life)

Question. Do you remember what Jesus said in John 17:3? "And this is eternal life, that (1) they (Us) might know thee the only true God, and (2) and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

"That they might know thee." It is not the amount of knowledge you have, but the kind of knowledge that is important. It is who you know.

In the same way, it is not the amount of faith you have, but the kind of faith that is important. Spurgeon said, "It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee. It is Christ. It is not thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument. It is Christ's blood and merit."

It is Christ who saves. Life eternal is to know God and to know Jesus Christ. To know Him means to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Christ.

So, the *promise* is to know the Father and the Son and to abide in them ...eternally.

Verse 28 of our text states:

1. We shall have confidence in His substitutionary and sacrificial death as payment-in-full for our sins.
2. We shall not be ashamed at His appearing.

From the foundation of the world, it has been the desire of God's heart to both know and be known by His creation. Mind you, He knows every man, woman, boy, and girl.

He knows our names, and beyond that, He knows the hairs of our heads He knows our DNA! Jesus gives us a clear definition of eternal life in John 17:3; that we might know the Father, the "only true God, and Jesus Christ, who the Father has sent."

He desires that we know Him intimately. By the way, that is the very reason that Jesus came, to restore a damaged and deficient relationship between man and God.

Emmanuel means "God with us." Our heavenly Father has gone to the extreme to provide a means through which we can both know Him, and be reconciled to Him. He desires that we walk again with Him in perfect, righteous fellowship just as He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, before the fall.

But the Bible is clear that, because of sin, man is spiritually dead and alienated from the life of God. Spiritual and physical death are the result of man's sin. Eternal death in Hell is the ultimate penalty for sin. The Scriptures are also clear that it's only through Christ's death that we might live.

- “For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).
- “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [presently] abides on him” (John 3:36).
- “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11, 12).
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Jesus is the very essence of this life. Simply put, Christianity is Christ's life made living in men. If Christ lives in you, then you presently possess eternal life. It's not only a quantity of life (regarding the future), more importantly it's also a quality of life (regarding the present). It has never been about merely living forever, but rather our living in complete harmony with a righteous and holy God. Note some of the words that describe this life:

- a. It is eternal life (John. 3:16).
- b. It is abundant life (John 10:10).
- c. It is uncreated life—the very life of God!
- d. It is divine life.
- e. It is resurrection life. The believer has “passed from the realm of spiritual death into the realm of spiritual life” (John 5:24).
- f. It is new life (Romans 6:4). A newness of quality and character. This new life is characterized by righteousness.

Kenneth Wuest defines and describes this life in this way: “The word *life* here is not *bios* but *zoe*. This word speaks of life in the sense of one who is possessed of vitality and animation. It is used of the absolute fullness of life...which belongs to God. It is used to designate the life which God gives the believing sinner, a vital, animating, spiritual ethical dynamic which transforms his inner being and as a result, his behavior.”

That is the kind of relationship He created us for.

And Adam and Eve had free access to every tree in the Garden, *except* the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That means that they must have had free access to the Tree of Life, and to experience God's perfect eternal life. But because of their disobedience, they were evicted from the Garden of Eden.

Why? Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

Consider: Genesis 2:9, 15-17, "And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

And Genesis 3:22-24: "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

By questioning God's Word and authority and twisting His words, the serpent (Satan) initially tempted Eve into eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, an act explicitly forbidden by God. Adam and Eve ate the fruit in rebellion against God's command, despite the warning that "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

As a consequence of their sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden and were denied access to the Tree of Life. Having been separated from the Tree of Life, Adam and Eve became mortal and died, as God had said. Sin has always kept us from God's best.

Then, in the Book of Revelation, a phrase appears in the Greek three times. This phrase, which literally means "wood of life," is translated in nearly every English Bible version as "tree of life" (see Revelation 2:7 and 22:2).

- Revelation 2:7: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”
- Revelation 22:2: “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

In 1 John 2:27, the “anointing” refers to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Look at 1 John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

- Matthew 25:23: “His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (eternal life).
- Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death; But, the gift (promise) of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- 1 John 2:25: “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”
- John 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that (1) they (us) might know thee the only true God, and (2) and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

As I close, I want to leave you with a passage and a question: 1 John 5:11-13 says, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

The question? “Do you know?”

2010 – Jeff Blair

Caller ID

Text: Isaiah 6:1b-4

When it comes to just about any kind of call, the first thing we want to know is the identity of the caller. Who is calling? The phone rings, you pick it up, and the first thing you expect to hear is, “Hello, this is so and so.”

You ever answer the phone, “Hello,” and the caller just takes off talking? You say, “Wait, wait, hold on there; who is this?” It doesn’t matter what they’re saying, I want to know first of all, who is it?

When the technology became available, everyone wanted caller ID: “Wow, this is great! I can see who’s calling me before I even answer the phone! Depending on who it is, I may or may not answer.”

These days, almost everybody has it—on our home phones, our cell phones, and it even flashes up on our television screens. It must be important to us. We don’t want to wait until the phone is off the hook; before anyone has a chance to say anything, we want to know the identity of who’s calling.

Our text is a “call narrative.” It’s an account of a call, a man named Isaiah being called to be a prophet. We find a number of passages like this in the Bible, but this is one of the most intense and dramatic. The first and most important question this passage answers is: Who is the One calling Isaiah? What is the identity of the caller? The title of this message is “Caller ID.”

This year’s theme is “Who Will Go?” On Wednesday night, during our final service, Brother Stan Bunch will preach from verse eight, the best-known phrase in this passage, “Here am I; send me.”

Who will go? Here am I. Send me. Very appropriate for a year when we’re celebrating 75 years of the Free Will Baptist International Missions agency. But the truth is, “Who will go?” is a secondary question. The first question is, “Who is calling?”

“Here am I” comes after “Who are You?” has been established. In other words, there never would’ve been a “Here am I” if there hadn’t first been “Who are You?”

The most important issue is not the identity of the missionary. It's not even the nature of the mission; the first question is, "Who is calling? Who is sending?"

After Peter had been fishing all night long, Jesus told him to put out into the deep for a catch. Peter complained, "But we've been fishing all night long and haven't caught a thing (the mission makes no sense), and now You're calling me to keep fishing? Nevertheless, because it's You, I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5). For Peter, the main thing was not what he was being called to do, but "Who are You?"

If Isaiah is going to answer this call that is coming, he needs to know up front who it's coming from, and that'll make all of the difference. Is this Someone worth listening to? Someone worth risking my life for? Someone who knows what he's doing? So, who is this One who calls men? There are two aspects of this text I want to explore. The first is The revelation of God's character.

On this day in Isaiah's life, God pulled back the veil and revealed Himself to Isaiah. We don't know for sure if Isaiah was physically at the Temple in Jerusalem or not. It doesn't matter. What matters is that he was transported into the presence of God. He says, I saw the Sovereign (Hebrew, *Adonay*).

It's a vivid description Isaiah gives. He tells us what he saw, what he heard, what he felt, what he smelled with the smoke (possibly incense), and even what he tasted as the angel touches his lips with the live coal. Every part of his being is engaged in this encounter.

When God pulls back the veil, what does Isaiah see? He sees the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up, and he sees the train of His robe filling the room. Isaiah only makes it as far as the threshold; he doesn't get into the room because there is no room; it's already filled. He sees the six-winged seraphim standing above God's throne as a servant might stand by his seated master, waiting to do his bidding.

Seraphim means "burning ones." It is not a title; it's a description of the appearance of these beings (*Prophecy of Isaiah*, Motyer). They were as a flame of fire, blazing, burning, brilliant, radiant, as lightning. And they sang with all of their might. When they sang, they shook the whole house with their voices, and the room was filled with smoke.

Standing at the center of this revelation is the song of the Seraphim. This was the song Isaiah heard them sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:

the whole earth is full of His glory.”

They sang this to one another. Some believe they sang antiphonally, responding to one another. But I think it means what Paul said to the Colossians and Ephesians when he told the church to “speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

The theme of their song about this One sitting on the throne is: He is holy. But what does that mean? The word *holy* means “to be separate.” It means to be absolutely distinct, completely other, totally unique; apartness; to be in an altogether different category, *sui generis*.

There are two aspects of the holiness of God: majestic holiness and moral holiness. My kids are still young—eight, almost six, and one, and when we gather around the table to eat, we hold hands and usually pray like this: “God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. Amen.”

In that little prayer are two categories of God’s holiness. God is great—that’s majestic holiness. God is good—that’s moral holiness.

When most people today think of holiness, they’re thinking of moral holiness, being pure, righteous, and good ethically; the opposite of sinful or corrupt or filthy. But moral holiness is *not* the original meaning of holy. The first meaning is not that He’s clean and we’re dirty; the first idea of God’s holiness is that He’s way up there (high and lifted up) and we’re way down here. The moral aspect of God’s holiness is derivative. It comes out of the original idea of God’s majestic holiness, that He is other than us. The children’s prayer has it in the right order: God is *great* then God is *good*.

The Hebrews did emphasize God’s moral holiness, but it comes out of God’s majestic holiness. We can see both of these side-by-side in the scene from Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, 20. They are at the foot of Mount Sinai, and God tells Moses to get the people ready. The people aren’t even allowed to touch the foot of the mountain of God; they can’t go up the mountain. They have to purify themselves and stay down on the ground. If they touch it, they die.

On the day of God’s revelation, there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud. All the people trembled, and Sinai was covered with smoke like it was billowing up from a furnace because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the whole mountain trembled violently. (In Isaiah’s vision, the threshold trembled. Trauma is the natural reaction to God’s majestic holiness.) God was on the top of the mountain—way up there—shrouded in

smoke, and the people had to keep their distance. This is God's mysterious/majestic holiness.

Then in chapter 20, God gives Moses the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. This is a display of God's moral holiness. So, God was on top of the mountain wrapped in mystery, and He gave the perfect Law, revealing His moral character. God is great, and God is good; He is holy.

But, of course, the question is just how holy? (The question of God's moral holiness is for tomorrow night and Brother Charlie Murphy.) How does this text communicate God's majestic holiness?

How holy is this Lord? The seraphim sang that He is the most holy of all. When they called out "Holy, holy, holy," they were saying that there is none holy like He is holy. A.W. Tozer said "Holy is the way God is."

Holy is supremely God's character. In the Old Testament, God's name is qualified by "holy" more often than all other qualifiers combined! Merciful? Yes. Loving? Yes. Just? Yes. But more than all—holy! He is not just holy, He is holy, holy, holy, the most holy of all. Absolutely, entirely, completely, utterly, thoroughly, positively, wholly, holy. Who is this One who calls men? He is the most holy.

Yes, but just how absolutely, positively, completely, utterly holy is He? He is so holy that Isaiah's description of Him can't get off the ground. Isaiah said that he saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up (referring to God, not the throne, as in 52:13). But what does Isaiah actually say he sees? "His train filled the temple."

That's it. The train of His royal garment covered the floor, and Isaiah's eyes could look no higher. He says nothing else about God's appearance. Try to draw a picture of the God Isaiah "saw" based on his description. He tells us about a throne, the train; he describes the seraphim and the scene, but his description of this holy God never gets off the ground.

In Exodus 24, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders go up and see God, and the description of God is of the ground below His feet. Their description literally doesn't get off the ground below Him. In Isaiah's vision of God there is nothing specific, everything traumatic.

This holy God is too profound for words, beyond description. Rudolph Otto coined a term for this mysterious holiness—*mysterium tremendum*. With simple subjects, everyday subjects, words will do. The more profound the subject, words become less adequate, less capable, so we have art, music,

painting, sculpture. These expressions speak to us in ways that words can't. "A picture is worth a thousand words." Our most profound subjects are communicated through non-verbal means. These move us to the core of who we are and create in us a sense of awe and mystery in the presence of this beauty. We talk of a sunset as "beyond words."

Isaiah is standing in the presence of One who is ineffable, too overwhelming to be expressed in words—indescribable, unspeakable. As a matter of fact, He is so profound that even artistic representation is forbidden when it comes to His being (the second commandment) because such imagery would fall far too short. Neither words nor images can handle the essence of who He is.

But we have this "Word" that describes Him. It's true, we have this Word that tells us something about Him. But if God is the night sky, this word is a single star. What the Bible tells us about Him is accurate but not comprehensive; it tells us true things but not everything.

The point is not to make the Scriptures smaller but our God bigger, and God is much bigger than this book (last verse in the Gospel of John and the whole world). Not only can He not be adequately described by words, nor adequately portrayed through art, but He is so holy that He cannot even be seen! He is so holy that no description of Him could ever get off the ground.

Just how holy is this One who calls men? We could understand why a holy God couldn't be seen by the eyes of a sinner like Isaiah. But He is even too holy to be seen by the blazing, sinless seraphim. Isaiah says they each have six wings: with two they cover their feet (humility); with two they flew, perfectly doing God's bidding. But with two they covered their face. They are burning, flaming, blazing beings, yet even they cannot look upon this "most holy One of all."

It's not just Isaiah's eyes but the eyes of blazing angels that are forbidden. Even the fiery seraphim are like a man who has lived a lifetime in a cave down in the depths of the earth, who never has a ray of light fallen upon his face, who one day emerges into the full light of day with the sun blazing in all its glory, and he can't take his hands from his eyes. Even the seraphim.

You see there are three beings in this scene—the holy One, the fiery seraphim, and sinful Isaiah. Two are alike. Which two? Look at Isaiah and the seraphim. What do they have in common? I can't prove this, but I'll bet

if we had Isaiah here he might say something like this, "If I had only seen a vision of the seraphim, with their wings and their voices and their blazing brilliance, I would have been compelled to fall on my face before them! But being in His presence together, I realized they are more like me than they are like Him. Next to Him, they are like me—nothing."

I can't prove it, but John did it in the last chapter of the Apocalypse. In a moment, Isaiah doesn't say, "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the seraphim!" He says, "Woe is me, for mine eyes have seen the king." Isaiah and the angels are two ant hills, one twice as tall as the other, but both piled at the foot of Everest.

He is the most holy of all. But that's not the whole song of the seraphim. C. S. Lewis writes in *The Problem of Pain* that "God is both further from us and nearer to us than any other being."

Did you notice that the angels of Heaven sing about God's glory on the earth? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."

How holy is the God who calls men? So holy that the whole earth is filled with His glory. You say, "That's something else." No, they are just two aspects of the same thing: His glory is His holiness revealed; His holiness is His glory concealed. What do the seraphim sing about His glory? It fills! They sang holy three times but fullness three times also. The Temple *filled* with the train, the house was *filled* with smoke, but the whole earth is *filled* with His glory.

When this Temple was first built, its builder Solomon said, "The highest heaven can't contain you. How much less this Temple."

The whole earth is filled with His glory. It's all around us. Notice they don't say, "The whole earth *was* filled with Your glory." Not *was* but *is* filled with His glory. We sometimes make the mistake of not treating God's world as if it is still filled with His glory. Is—not was. Good eschatology is built on texts like this. It treats this world seriously. To Isaiah, this was not a throw-away world. That's why it was not originally John's vision but Isaiah's vision of a new Heaven and a new earth.

His glory fills the whole world. This is the foundation of Paul in Romans 1. The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven because we've ignored His glory that fills the whole world. In our text, there's not just a unique prophetic call, there is a call in it for all of us. No one is exempt, because

His glory fills the whole earth. You can't get away from it. If you can't open your eyes to His holiness, you can't close your eyes to His glory. You may not admit it, but you can't miss it.

I think Isaiah's experience opened his eyes to the glory all around. His glory is everywhere. Jesus saw it. Jesus sees the glory of God in the blind man, the sparrow, the lily. Everywhere He looked, He saw God's glory. And in this recognition of glory, there is an inherent call to treat them as glorious.

God made everything and called it good. There is the call to treat them as glorious and to love one another. The heavens declare God's glory. It is available to us all, not a unique thing for special people. But your eyes must be opened to it. And that brings us to our second point of emphasis here. Not only the revelation of God's character but the reality of Isaiah's encounter.

This is a call narrative, and it's an account of an encounter. I began by describing God pulling back the veil. When the veil was moved, Isaiah saw and heard and felt and experienced the presence of God. Isaiah didn't overhear; he didn't receive second-hand information. He didn't react as he did to a theology lesson, reading a text, or listening to a sermon. He encountered the Holy One firsthand, and this experience changed his life forever.

As far as we can tell, this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that lasted him a lifetime. In Isaiah, the title for God, "the holy One of Israel," occurs 26 times. In the rest of the Old Testament, it occurs only six more times. This one glimpse of God—how long did it last? Thirty seconds? A minute? This one glimpse fueled Isaiah's ministry for a lifetime.

This was the most important moment of his life. How and why did it happen? We have to be very careful here. We're taking this text and applying it to modern-day calls to ministry. But what do these verses show us? Someone might argue that it was important that Isaiah was "at church" when he encountered God and was called, that Isaiah put himself in the right place with the right attitude, so we ought to do the same.

Imagine with me for a moment, a scene in Heaven. There's a table there. Some great old saints pull up a chair. There's Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Matthew, Peter, and there's old brother Paul. Imagine they start having a conversation, and the talk turns to their call.

Abraham says, "I was already an old man in Ur minding my own business,

worshipping the moon-god when Yahweh interrupted my life.”

Moses says, “I was hiding out on the backside of the wilderness of nowhere, and I saw a burning bush.”

Gideon: “I was hiding in a pit when God called.”

Elijah: “I was running away. I was ready to give up when I was ‘recalled’ when Yahweh whispered.”

Jeremiah: “I was only a boy.”

Jonah: “I wasn’t particularly interested in God’s call when it came.”

Matthew: “I was collecting taxes as a traitor.”

Peter: “I was finishing up a failed day of fishing, down on the seashore.”

Paul: “I was on my way to persecute the Lord’s people.”

Isaiah looks around the table, “I guess I was the only one at church when God called me.” Someone might even say that Isaiah was the only one in the right place when God called.

If we learn anything, it’s this: God has to be the One who steps forward and pulls back the veil. The holy God whose glory fills the whole earth calls who He wants, when He wants, how He wants, and where He wants. Salvation belongs to our God, and so does the call.

Sometimes, He confronts us when we seek Him, and sometimes He confronts us with His call while we’re running from Him, and sometimes He confronts us with His call when we are persecuting Him.

Don’t make Isaiah’s call typical! Don’t make the extraordinary ordinary. This is not the way people are called to God’s service, and you do not have to have this kind of experience to have a real call. It’s extraordinary and unique, and probably each of our calls is unique and each of them is the same. We are at different places, hear different messages, see different sights, but we all experience in these encounters—the same presence of God—sometimes in a whisper, sometimes in an earth-quaking, door-breaking, thundering song of angels.

Where were you when God pulled back the veil and issued the call? I was at home getting in the shower. Where were you? In a hayfield, on the highway, kneeling by your bed, kneeling at the altar at church?

Where is not important, or even when or how. The important thing is the

Identity of the caller. Paul said, "Who art thou, Lord?"

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "God is not always silent, and man is not always blind. In every man's life there are moments when there is a lifting of the veil...Each of us has once caught a glimpse...But such experiences are rare events.

"To some people, they are like shooting stars, passing and unremembered. In others they kindle a light that is never quenched. The remembrance of that experience and the loyalty to the response of that moment are the forces that sustain our faith."

Who is this One who calls men? The holy One of Israel. His majestic holiness is not really a concept we can grasp; He's the God we might glimpse, but just a glimpse is enough to last anyone a lifetime.

2010 – Charles Murphy

The Condition We Must Correct

Text: Isaiah 6:5-8

Do you have a desire to serve God? Do you want God to use your life? If you are indeed saved, the answer is a definite yes. That desire is given to us by the Holy Spirit when we are born again.

At times, we may fail to cultivate that desire. We may let it dwindle from a roaring flame to a faint flicker. But if we are saved, that desire will be in our hearts. If it is not, the reality of our profession is called into question. And also the strength or weakness of that desire is a gauge of our spiritual health.

So, I ask again, do you long for your life to be used by God and for God?

Yet another question: Do you long to be holy? Do you have a passion for the holy One and His holiness?

Isaiah's story is one of spiritual preparation to do God's work. God had a work for Isaiah to do, but He had to do a work *for* Isaiah and *in* Isaiah before He would work *through* Isaiah.

Isaiah had a condition that needed to be corrected, and that condition was sin. Isaiah's story must become our story. We have that same condition that must be corrected. God must also do a work for us and in us before He will work through us.

Isaiah had to get thoroughly right with God, and we must get thoroughly right with God. We place a great deal of emphasis on methods in the church (and methods are needed), but we are prone to neglect the fundamental truth that God is looking for a holy people to do His work.

We must deal with sin, we must correct this condition, we must get thoroughly right with God, because of sin's hindering effect in our lives. Listen up to God's warning through the prophet, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it can not save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2). Contrast

that indictment with the Lord's blessing upon some no-name preachers of Cyprus and Cyrene as they preached the Lord Jesus at Antioch: "And the hand of the Lord was with them" (Acts 11:21). So, the Lord's hand —will it be with us, removed from us, or even against us?

Also, we must correct this condition because of sin's hardening effect upon our hearts. When Isaiah answered the Lord's call, he was given a difficult mission and message that would result in the people's hearts being hardened—hardened because of sin. God's message delivered by His chosen messenger would actually result in the hearts of the vast majority being hardened even more because of their continued rebellion (Isaiah 6:8-13).

Sin hardens hearts. Listen to this solemn warning: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). Daily. Today. We must deal with this deceitful and destructive condition now.

But how?

1. We Must Be Awed by God.

Isaiah confesses, "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (6:5).

"Then said I."

Then when, Isaiah?

He answers, "When I saw the Lord."

What did you see, Isaiah?

"I saw the Lord, the absolute Lord, the sovereign Ruler of the whole universe and my life, the Lord of heaven and earth."

"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." I saw the King of Kings.

"I saw the Lord high and lifted up, exalted above all. I saw His glory" (John 12:41).

"And I heard the cry of the seraphims, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.' I saw that God is absolutely distinct and infinitely above us in His whole being and in His righteousness, both in His person and in His purity.

"I saw the Lord of hosts. I saw Almighty God!"

"Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory."

So, Isaiah saw God as the sovereign Ruler of the universe, as almighty God. He saw God exalted in His glory. He saw God as perfectly holy. He had a clear vision of God and was overwhelmed, awed!

In seeing God, he understood his accountability to God. This experience impacted his whole life and ministry. He lived the rest of his life in the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is still the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7). The Scriptures teach us that we are to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long (Proverbs 23:17b) and that we are to live our lives in the fear of the Lord (1 Peter 1:17c; 2:17c).

We will one day stand before God as He truly is, not as others wish Him to be or think He is, not as we wish Him to be or create Him to be in our minds (all of which is idolatry unless it falls in line with the true character of God).

Do we want to see God for who and what He is? Do we seek Him for who and what He is? Do we love Him for who and what He is? God has revealed Himself in His Word. Let us study His Word to see Him. Let us then be awed, gripped, overwhelmed, overcome by the greatness of God.

If we are going to deal with sin in our lives, families, and churches and impact this sinful culture, we must be overcome by a biblically true, clear vision of God. And we must accept that vision, embrace it, be glad for it, and proclaim it. Yes, let us see God for who He truly is, rejoice in Him as He is, and proclaim Him!

2. We Must Be Broken Before God.

Isaiah was crushed, humbled, contrite. He saw his sinfulness and unworthiness as never before.

"Woe is me!" was his trembling cry. If you see God, you won't say, "Wow is me!" You will say, "Woe is me!" *Woe* means "alas, grief, sorrow, misery." Isaiah considered himself to be doomed, destroyed, damned.

"For I am undone," he agonized. "I am unraveled. I have come apart. I am lost, ruined."

“Because I am a man of unclean lips,” he confesses.

Keep in mind that Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34b). So, what does this say about Isaiah’s heart? What does it say about our hearts? The truth of the matter is there’s enough to condemn each one of us before God just with what comes out of our mouths.

Sin is not only something we do. It can also be what we say or think, even motives or attitudes. It can be what we fail to do or say.

Listen up: What I have said, done, or thought reveals my sinful heart. And further, I am more sinful than anything I have ever done, said, or thought. I have not just committed sins. Apart from Christ, I am a sinner. Sin is what I am without Christ.

Charles Spurgeon said, “We must confess that we are ‘nothing else but sin,’ for no confession short of this will be the whole truth; and if the Holy Spirit be at work with us, convincing us of sin, there will be no difficulty about making such an acknowledgment. It will spring spontaneously from our lips” (Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1991, pg. 115, February 26).

Is this taking our sinfulness too far? Hear the Word of the Lord. David confesses, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). Paul expresses certainty on this matter, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18a).

“I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”

Isaiah is convicted of his conformity to the godless culture in which he lived. This is a serious issue. Why?

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15, 16). Enough said? Wake up, Christian!

Is there any place that the world’s values are more clearly evident than in the entertainment industry, particularly music and movies? These are the very avenues that Satan gets his hook in us. We Christians seem to just let

the world take us by the hand and lead us vicariously into its immorality and godlessness through the media, and we hardly give it a thought.

This compromise demands deliberate and drastic action. God desires for us to be holy and obedient children. And that means not fashioning ourselves according to the lusts of the world (1 Peter 1:14-16). The issue is obedience or disobedience, love for the Father or love for that which offends and opposes our holy Creator. So think. Evaluate. Discern. Separate from the evil not from the people.

Don't be fashioned by the god of this world but be transformed by the One Who is Holy! Holy! Holy!

3. We Must Be Cleansed by God.

Actually, sin is a condition we cannot correct. Only God can and He has made glorious provision.

Picture this scene: One of the seraphims leaves the throne area (at God's command, I believe) and goes to the altar. With the tongs he takes a live, hot coal from off the altar. He then flies to Isaiah, lays the coal upon Isaiah's mouth, and declares (with the authority of the holy, sovereign Lord), "Lo this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Now, where did this coal come from? The altar. The place where the sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people. This is the picture of and the pointing to the true Lamb of God, the only acceptable sacrifice, the perfect Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, the Savior, my Savior.

Isaiah later gives us a powerful description of the sufferings of our Savior on the altar of the cross.

- "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...."
- "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities."
- "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."
- "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted."
- "For the transgression of my people was he stricken."
- "It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief."

–“Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.”

–“He shall see of the travail of his soul...he shall bear their iniquities.”

– “He hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bore the sin of many; and made intercession for the transgressors.”

(Selected from Isaiah 53:4-12)

Paul summed it up this way: “For (God) hath made (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God poured out upon His only begotten Son the punishment my sin deserves, the wrath that should have been mine. If the Holy God demanded the one and only perfect sacrifice for sin, do you think He has a casual view of any sin or anybody’s sin?

But let’s not stop there. If God was willing to pay the price my sins required by pouring out His wrath upon His Beloved Son He had loved perfectly for all eternity, how much do you think He loves you and me.

Let Paul testify here, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20b).

When Isaiah was overwhelmed by the vision of God, he trembled before God and confessed, “I am a condemned, corrupt, and conformed-to-the-world sinner.”

God graciously and gloriously sent a seraphim with His message, “Isaiah, full atonement has been made for your sin. Your iniquity is gone; your sin is cleansed. You are forgiven, cleansed, justified.”

4. We Must Also Consecrate Ourselves to God.

We see this consecration in the altar. That which was sacrificed on the altar was consecrated, sanctified, set apart to God. The altar speaks first of atonement for sin by the Lamb of God. But the altar also speaks of our consecration to God. Paul pleads, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Romans 12:1b).

Consecration is illustrated by Isaiah’s answer to God’s call. After being cleansed by God, Isaiah “heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’”

Immediately and without hesitation, Isaiah answered, "Here am I; send me."

The spirit of his answer was, "I am Yours. I am consecrated to You, Lord." That same spirit of being set apart to God should be ours as well. Sin must be dealt with, not only in our standing with God, but also in our daily sanctification, our daily living.

The Holy Spirit tells us through Peter, "Be holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:15). Be holy in all you do. How can we be clean in our every day lives?

(1) By the Word of God

- "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3).
- "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalm 119:9).
- "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

This is vital for the church as well as for the individual. Paul said, "That (Christ) might sanctify and cleanse (the church) with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

So, what place are we giving the Word in our lives and churches?

(2) By our union with Christ, by our identification with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6).

Paul declares here that, first of all, we must know this spiritual reality, this truth: in Christ, in our union with Him, we are dead to sin and alive to God.

He reasons: Christ died unto sin once and is raised from the dead. He dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him; He lives unto God.

He further reasons: We have been baptized into Jesus Christ, into His death. We have been buried with Him into death. This being so, we are crucified with Him, dead to sin, freed from sin. The power of sin over us is broken. Also, we are alive unto God through our union with Jesus Christ.

Knowing this spiritual reality, we must truly believe it and wholly

accept it (verse 11).

And knowing it and believing it, we must now and continually act upon it by yielding ourselves to God for obedience (verses 13,16).

The result: we will not serve sin, we will not continue in sin, we will not live any longer in sin, but we will walk in newness of life.

To sum it all up: Through our Lord Jesus Christ; by His death, burial, and resurrection; in our union with Him (being baptized into Him, into His death, burial, and resurrection) we are, in truth, in reality, dead to sin and alive to God. Be sure of it and act on it.

(3) By Taking Personal Responsibility

I am not speaking of self-effort. Nothing is of our own power or ability. Our sufficiency is in God and Him alone.

But we live in the realm of His grace. And His resources are ours in this realm of grace. However, this does not mean that victory over sin or that a clean life is automatic. In the realm of grace we are to take personal responsibility to appropriate the means of victory.

There must be deliberateness and intentionality in battling with sin. Listen to these Scriptural admonitions that stress personal responsibility:

- “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41a).
- “Abide in me” (John 15:4a).
- “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9bc).
- “Flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18a).
- “Take heed lest ye fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12b).
- “Flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).
- “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).
- “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11a).
- “Be strong in the Lord...Put on the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:10, 11).

- “Mortify...your members which are upon the earth” (Colossians 3:5).
- “Keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22c).
- “Flee youthful lusts...but follow righteousness” (2 Timothy 2:22).
- “Be sober, be vigilant” (1 Peter 5:8).

Just a sampling.

Conclusion

Do we want God’s hand with us or against us? Remember, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6).

We must get thoroughly right with God. Therefore, let us fully accept our accountability to God; and humble ourselves before Him, hating our sinfulness and confessing our sins; and joyfully receiving His grace and cleansing by the blood of Jesus; and daily consecrate ourselves to Him.

Prayer of Consecration

Take my life and let it be
 Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
 Take my heart, it is Thine own,
 It Shall Be Thy Royal Throne.
 Take my will and make it Thine,
 It shall be no longer mine.
 Take my moments and my days,
 Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
 Take my silver and my gold,
 Not a mite would I withhold.
 Take my hands and let them move
 At the impulse of Thy love.
 Take my voice and let me sing

Always, only for my King.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take...

- My life.
- My heart.
- My will.
- My time.
- My money.
- My hands.
- My voice.
- My feet.

Lord, I give my life to Thee, Thine—Thine forever more to be.

(Adapted from “Take My Life and Let It Be” by Francis R. Havergal, 1874).

2010 – Bert Tippet

The Crisis We Face

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; 2 Chronicles 26

Introduction

Theme: Who Will Go?

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8

Tonight: Jeff Blair, "I saw the Lord."

Monday: Charles Murphy, "Woe is me, I am undone."

Tuesday: Karl Sexton, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Wednesday: Stan Bunch, "Here am I, send me."

My Part: "In the year that king Uzziah died."

A foundation for the messages to follow.

Text: 2 Chronicles 26 (probably written by Ezra)

Outline

1. The piety that guided him
2. The prosperity that blessed him
3. The pride that destroyed him

I. The Piety That Guided Him

A. Made king at age 16

1. The example he followed:

What kind of kings had Judah had? Israel had 19 kings, all evil. Judah had 17 kings, eight good, nine evil. What kind of king would Uzziah be? We read in 2 Chronicles 26:2, "And he [Uzziah] did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did."

In 2 Chronicles 25:2, we read a similar description of his father Amaziah: “He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.”

- a. Every parent hopes children will pick up their noble qualities, but we can’t control that, and often the opposite is the case.
- b. Uzziah had seen his father at his best, when he sought God, and he determined that he would follow his father’s example. The power of parental example is illustrated by Ken Simpson (Jodi), Calvary Fellowship, Fenton, Missouri; WWDD? (What Would Dad Do?)

But Uzziah’s father was dead. To whom could Uzziah look now for spiritual guidance? Verse 5 says, “And he sought God.”

Illustration: In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus is going away to fight the Trojan wars and wants someone to train his son Telemachus for manhood. So, he asks his friend to do it while he is away. When he returns, he finds his son a noble, courageous man, all because of the training given him by his mentor, his father’s friend.

2. The mentor who guided him:

Uzziah needed someone to teach him the ways of God. Zechariah had understanding in the visions of God. Uzziah needed to know how to be the king God intended for him to be.

We often need someone to help us make spiritual decisions (Dr. Johnson, Dr. Miley, Dr. Picirilli). We need mentors in our churches for:

- Young married couples
- People in financial distress
- Infant believers (discipleship)

Illustration: Rudolph Outlaw tells about Roger Russell, who led him to the Lord, then disciplined him.

II. The Prosperity That Blessed Him

As long as Uzziah sought the Lord, God made him to prosper (2 Chronicles 26:5b). When we serve the Lord, He is pleased to prosper us.

– Psalm 1: “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water... and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

– Psalm 35:27: “Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servants.”

A. Military prosperity

God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gurbaal, and Mehunims. Judah had been beaten on the battlefield under Uzziah’s father, Amaziah. But God helps Uzziah reverse that.

B. Agricultural prosperity

“He built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle...Husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry” (2 Chronicles 26:10).

As king, Uzziah was required to wage war and defend Judah; even expand her borders. But that was not his love. One translation renders it, “For he loved the soil.”

Illustration: My grandfathers and father-in-law.

C. Personal prosperity

– “And his name spread far abroad” (2 Chronicles 26:8, 15b).

D. Inventive prosperity

– “Engines invented by cunning men...to shoot arrows and great stones” (2 Chronicles 26:15).

E. God’s help: the greatest prosperity

– “For he was marvelously helped” (2 Chronicles 26:15b).

When it says in verse 7 that God helped him, it reminds us that some of God’s richest blessings are those that come in our times of need. In my own life, I have found that a bad diagnosis is no match for the peace and blessings that God gives.

Raymond Edman says that when we find ourselves in storms we should remember four things:

1. *I am here by God’s appointment.* Yes, God leads us through valleys, even sends us into storms, as the Lord did His disciples. You may not like it, but God knows you need it! John Piper, when he was diagnosed with cancer, wrote a list of ways to waste your cancer. The first was, “You

will waste your cancer if you do not believe that God designed it for you. "You may have trouble swallowing that, but believe it is true. My brother was diagnosed with cancer after I was. His was treatable and he appears to be in remission. Mine may be slowed, but it cannot be cured. Why? Because one of us is more spiritual? No, because God is working out a different purpose in each of our lives.

2. *While I am here, I am in God's keeping.* For now, your circumstances may be difficult. But God is there, too. He knows where you are and how you feel. And He will continue to be with you for as long as you are in the storm. His promise to never leave nor forsake you still holds.
3. *There is a purpose for me being here.* Some lessons can only be learned through adversity. If God has placed you in a hard place, He is working out a purpose that will make you a better servant on the other side. Vernon Brewer was dean of students at Liberty University in 1985 when he was diagnosed with cancer. In the foreword of his book, *Why?* he says, "My struggle with cancer was extremely difficult, but I can truly say the most painful period of my life is now the most meaningful to me."

To that I can say amen. In my own life, cancer has been the most powerful revival I have ever experienced.

4. *When it is time, He will bring me out.* I love Rob Morgan's book, *The Red Sea Rules*. Based on Exodus 14, Rob gave the book a sub-title: "The same God who led you in will lead you out." We may be tempted to run from the trying situation we are in, to find a means of escape. But, like the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, it is better to be in the flame with the Son of God than on the outside without Him. And when the time is right, He will bring us out."

God will probably not change our circumstances until we allow our circumstances to change us.

III. The Pride That Destroyed Him

"But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his own destruction" (2 Chronicles 26:16).

A. His strength perverted him.

1. Preachers and manipulation

2. Paul warned (2 Corinthians 12), "Lest I be exalted above measure."
3. My temporal lobe seizures. But "my strength is made perfect in weakness."

B. His trespass blinded him.

His was not the usual offense of kings who built idols and dedicated temples to false gods. Uzziah wanted to be more involved in the worship of Jehovah by offering incense. Why did God judge him so dramatically as to make him a leper?

1. Not all that we call worship is acceptable to God. This includes music, behavior, etc. What makes us feel good may not please God.
2. God strictly divided the responsibilities of priests and kings. Only priests were to burn incense. However, there would come a day when one—only one—would combine the offices of priest and king. That was not Uzziah. It was the One who said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." God would not let anyone else usurp that office.

C. His stubbornness condemned him.

"And they withstood Uzziah, the king" (2 Chronicles 26:18). Saving grace, keeping grace, restraining grace—the priests showed great courage in opposing the king, attempting to keep him from transgressing.

1. Abigail showed great courage in restraining David from killing Nabal. "Blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from avenging myself with mine own sword" (2 Samuel 25:33).
2. God stopped Abimelech from taking Sarah. "I also withheld thee from sinning against me therefore I suffered thee not to touch her" (Genesis 20:6).

Illustration: I try to keep an FWBBC student from dropping out, but he leaves. In time, he tells me he knows he made a mistake, but it was too late to back out. Over time, he stops pastoring and leaves his wife and family. He ignored the restraining grace.

Uzziah ignored the pleadings of the priest until he saw the judgment of God appear in the form of leprosy on his forehead. He had the warning and he had time, but he ignored both. He never enters the Temple again. He spends the rest of his life under the curse of leprosy.

Closing Thoughts About Uzziah:

- A. Uzziah was a leper from that day until the day of his death. "The king was a leper until the day of his death" (2 Chronicles 26:21b).
1. There is no record of him asking forgiveness. Can God forgive you, but still leave the judgment in place? Yes, He forgave David's sin with Bathsheba, but the sword was still turned against his house.
 2. Based on Uzziah's character, I believe there was a time when he sought and received forgiveness. I see this as my opinion of Uzziah's heart but have little scriptural evidence. If you see it otherwise, share your opinion with me.
- B. Because of the leprosy, Uzziah was never able to reenter the house of God. "For he was cut off from the house of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 26: 21c). It was not his failure to repent, but the lifelong presence of the leprosy that excluded Uzziah from the place of worship.

Closing Thoughts on Isaiah and Uzziah:

"Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write" (2 Chronicles 26:22).

The four Jewish kings under whom Isaiah served are listed in the first chapter of his book. That shows us that at approximately the age of 20, still green behind the ears, the young prophet wrote the full biography of the only king he had known at that time.

He wrote it "from first to last." That meant he spent much time in the room with Uzziah (probably at a great distance so as not to be made unclean by the leprosy). This project must have taken much time, weeks and months, "first to last." They must have come to know each other well.

After 52 years on the throne, all of Judah, including Isaiah, would have seen the approaching rulership change as a crisis. So, when Uzziah died, they knew great change might lie ahead.

But it is a young man who recognizes his own ability to link up with God and see Judah get through a time of crisis with an administrative change.

In our own denomination, there are critical needs in our national departments from International Missions to Home Missions and FWBBC, and works outreaching to our men and women.

But it is Isaiah who, at the death of Uzziah says, "I saw the Lord!"

Tonight, Jeff Blair will open that to us and remind us that if we want to see Free Will Baptists muscle through these times and meet these needs, it will depend on each of us seeing the Lord and responding to His claim on us. Are you ready to do that?

2010 – Karl Sexton

The Call We Must Consider

Text: Isaiah 6:8

Introduction

From one of the greatest missionary chapters in the Bible we have seen:

- The Crisis We Must Face: “In the year that king Uzziah died”
- The Concept We Must Grasp: “I saw the Lord”
- The Condition We Must Correct: “I am undone”

The theme I have been given to share tonight is one that is timely and has the potential to change our denomination and even the world. Tonight, my assignment is to look at verse eight of this great chapter and, “The Call We Must Consider: ‘Whom shall I send; who will go for us?’”

Before we get to the text I think it is important to define the call we are talking about tonight. You see, there is a general call and there is a specific call. I agree with missionary and author Thomas Hale when he said, “This distinction between God’s general call and His specific call is very similar to the distinction between God’s general will as revealed in Scripture and his specific will for the individual. God’s general will (call) is that I be a witness. His specific will (call) is that I be a witness in Nepal, Chicago, or wherever.”

Calling in the General Sense. “If we have a choice, and unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, the Christian worker should choose the place of greatest need. Failure to give adequate consideration to this factor has caused the incredible inequity in the distribution of workers” (Gordon Olson, 1998).

As one mission leader of another denomination put it: “No one escapes the general call to missions. No one can say, ‘Witness is not for me.’ The critical question is not whether we’re called, for we are. The critical question is ‘To where am I called?’ The answer may be to serve Jesus right where we are already, among those we live with and work beside. That is a wholly legitimate calling.”

Calling in the Specific Sense. “Being a missionary begins with being called.

You don't choose to be a missionary: you're called to be one. The only choice is whether to obey" (Thomas Hale, 1995).

Yes, God has given us a plan that can literally change the world. He just needs some people to get passionate about Him and then passionate about the plan He has given us. It is a plan that can change the world. It is called The Great Commission. It is a universal call that has gone out since the beginning and has come to us here today. Let's take another look at this great text and see the clarion call that is still going out today.

I. The Question of the Sovereign

- A. We see the Questioner. "Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

It is critical that we understand who is asking the question. It was the voice of the Lord. This is the Hebrew title, *Adonai*. This is the most exalted title given to God in the Old Testament, representing absolute sovereignty. Adonai means "master; owner."

In the Old Testament, this title is used mainly for God but it is the title used for Jesus in the New Testament. The Greek equivalent is the word *Kurios*. It is at this name that "every knee shall bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10, 11).

He is the sovereign Lord and has every right to ask "Who will go?" The question we are examining tonight is not the question of this denomination, the Executive Committee, or this preacher. It is the question of our sovereign Lord, our master, our owner!

Notice the plurality of the questioner. "Who will go for *us*?" The same blessed Trinity who said, "Let us make man in our image" now asks, "Who will go for us?" Here we see the unity of His nature and the Trinity of His persons with a threefold utterance, "Who will go?"

The phrase "for us" brings much more punch to the question.

- B. We see the Question. It is interesting to note that God did not address the question directly to Isaiah. Isaiah got close enough to God that he heard the question or the call. The call is universal and is going out to every believer. The problem is that we are not hearing it.

It is actually two questions: The first is "Whom shall I send?" This first

question has to do with consecration because Isaiah's response is, "Here am I." God's call is going out to all who will hear.

The second is "Who will go for us?" While the first question is about consecration, the second question from the sovereign Trinity is about the commission because Isaiah's response is, "Send me."

God will send us with His authority and power but we must be willing to go. This question:

1. Demands a decision. Because of who is asking, your *Adonai*, your owner and master. Because the Blessed Trinity is asking, "Who will go for us?"

We must understand God is asking the question, and it is our responsibility to do the answering. Notice that Isaiah did not have to be coerced—he just needed the opportunity!

2. Denotes a duty. Isaiah realized that it was his calling, thus his duty to take the message of God into his generation. This task is the task of our generation. It is our duty to reach our generation.

In the Book of Judges, we see what can happen if God's people do not share His Word with other generations. In Judges 2:10 we read, "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."

Multitudes are born and die whether or not anyone is prepared to reach them. If we do not evangelize our generation, this generation will not be evangelized at all. This may indeed be the "terminal generation." What a duty we have to answer the call and go to our generation. Who will go and reach this generation? This is your generation.

II. The Qualifications of the Servant

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

God must qualify us before He can send us. Herein lies the great problem of the lack of laborers. Too few laborers because too few are ready! The call is going out but too few are hearing it. We will not hear what he heard until we see what he saw.

Isaiah saw a vision, a picture of God that curled his beard and knocked his sandals off. It was a bone-shaking, heart-melting, soul-searching encounter with the Lord. The ceiling of the Temple faded away to reveal God installed on His heavenly throne, the hem of His royal robes dropping down to fill the sanctuary with burning glory. His robe filled the Temple until there was no room for anything or anyone but the Lord.

Isaiah had been to the Temple on countless occasions. Much of his work was at the Temple. What made this trip different? Rather than another day just full of religious activity, he saw the Lord. His crisis led to a wonderful confrontation with the Lord—a fresh vision of the Lord.

I fear we go to church and see everything but Jesus. I fear that we will come to this national convention and see everything but Jesus. Until we see what Isaiah saw, we will not hear what he heard; and until we hear what he heard, the masses will remain lost without Christ. Isaiah was accustomed to seeing the king as he ministered in the midst of the court. But in the year the great and godly King Uzziah died, Isaiah also saw the King, the Lord, Adonai on a throne unlike he had ever seen Him.

Free Will Baptists, we need a fresh vision of the sovereign Lord. Isaiah went to church and got a new view of the Lord and thus a new view of himself. Let's see what happened as a result of this vision of the Lord:

A. He was confronted and convicted. We have already heard messages on the subjects "The Concept We Must Face" and "The Condition We Must Correct," but this must be understood before the question can be heard, much less answered.

Once Isaiah saw the Lord for who He was, he saw himself for who he was. What's the natural response when you've seen God? You're convicted of sin. "Woe is me, for I am undone."

The closer I walk with God, the more quickly I feel my sin and realize how much I need God. Until we are confronted by the sovereign Lord and deal with our sin, we will not hear the call (Isaiah 6:5).

1. Isaiah was confronted by God's preeminence.

Uzziah, the earthly king, died and now he saw God, the eternal, heavenly King and Him alone. Yes, a king had died, but the King shows up! That is what we need at this National Association. We need the King to show up, and we must see Him. We have to get our eyes off our earthly hopes and dreams and on the

heavenly King and what His Kingdom has for us. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

God must become real to us again.

2. Isaiah was confronted by God's purity (holy, holy, holy).

Once confronted with the holiness of God, Isaiah saw how unholy he was. It is a vision of God's holiness that leads to the greatest missionary call we read of in God's Word. That is not just true in the Old Testament, it is also true in the New Testament as relates to the call of the Church.

Before the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:18-20, we read these words: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

When they saw Jesus, they worshipped Him. We too need to see, to get this vision of Jesus as the risen Lord of life. He has conquered the humanly unconquerable foes of sin, the devil, and the grave. There in living proof He stood. The sinless One whom sin, the grave, and the devil could not hold. The One worthy of all glory and honor.

If our heart and mind will capture who Jesus Christ really is, it will evoke worship within us that emits a witness around us. Worship always precedes witness; vision precedes mission; conviction precedes calling.

3. Isaiah was confronted by God's power (the foundations trembled). Isaiah needed to see the power of God because he would need it for the call that was on his life. Isaiah's task would not be an easy one. He would find that his message would be rejected. The work of the Great Commission is not an easy task either. No one could do it by his or her own power. It takes the power of God for anyone to survive any missionary venture.

One author puts it this way: "The power and authority to do what our Lord has commanded are His, not ours...Christ's power, presence, and authority gives us the courage and the right to go from place to place sharing the good news of salvation. If we did not have his power and his command to share the Gospel, our efforts to win persons to him would be futile." He was convicted.

- B. He was cleansed. God is not going to use a dirty vessel. Always remember that God does not demand a perfect vessel, but He does demand a clean vessel. Only a cleansed man with a vision of the holiness of God can serve the Master faithfully and fearfully.

Isaiah opens this chapter by seeing Adonai from a distance, but after confession and cleansing he is now able to hear Adonai. Isaiah was now ready to receive his commission, positioned to accept his duty from the deity. God was making him holy for a purpose.

Illustration: Robert Murray M'Cheyne, who himself died at a young age, gave this advice to a young ministerial student: "I know you will apply hard to German, but do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success."

- C. He was called. Having his iniquity taken away and his sin purged, Isaiah then hears God ask the question that we find as the theme of our national convention: "Who will go?"

My friend, the call is still going out, but I fear that many have allowed the things of this world to clutter their hearts and stop their ears so they cannot hear this universal call. We have become so worldly that we cannot hear the Word of the Lord.

Once Isaiah was convicted and then cleansed, he heard the call of Christ. Until now, Isaiah was not ready to hear. Cleansed, now he is commissioned; purged, now he can proclaim. The "woe man" becomes the "go man."

The servant must see God's glory before he can proclaim it. The servant must be convicted over his own sins before he will be convicted over the need to help others with theirs.

Isaiah is now willing to serve, not out of obligation but out of gratitude and out of a desire to exalt God's glory. Isaiah wants the world to know the greatness of God—to know what he knew and to see what he had seen. That is our calling today.

"Having believed with certainty that he was about to be crushed into non-existence by the very holiness of God and having received an unsought for, and unmerited, complete cleansing, what else would he rather do than hurl himself into God's service?" (Oswalt, 186).

Having seen God, what else can we say but "Here am I, send me."

III. The Quest of the Saints

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

While our quest is not exactly the same as Isaiah's, our quest or mission is very similar. Isaiah's very name means *salvation* and his message was that salvation comes by the grace of God through the redemptive work of Christ. That is our message as well. Our message is the same and our basic mission is the same: To go and share the message of redemption

Just as Isaiah, our call comes from *Adonai*. Our call is also to go. And it is to go with a message from the Lord. Look at Isaiah 6:9: "Go and tell." That is our call. It is found in all four Gospels. It is the call "to go and make disciples."

From Abraham in Genesis 12 until the end of the age we are to go and take the Good News of the Gospel into all the world. The mission of the saints has always been to "Declare His glory among the nations."

The Quest (call) is:

A. Personal: "Go ye." No one is exempt from the responsibility to evangelize the lost. Christ's command means that you are either sent or you send, but you cannot remain uninvolved and be obedient to Jesus Christ. Evangelism is not an option. "Go ye therefore" is more of an assumption than a command. It is the expected action of our lives. This means all of us are to be doing it, not just the preacher and missionaries. It is the clarion call of all believers. The call is to all. The plan is the same: "Go and make Disciples."

B. Pertinent. The question that God asked in the presence of Isaiah over 2,700 years ago is pertinent. It is relevant for today. The call is still

going out: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

The question cannot go unheeded this week—Who will go? Our *Adonai*, our Lord is still asking:

- Who will be my mouthpiece?
- Who will be my hands and feet?
- Who will be my ambassador?
- Who will be my witness?
- Who will be my watchman on the wall?
- Who will be the light?
- Who will be the salt?
- Whom shall I send? Who will go?

God blesses any church, people, or denomination who are outwardly focused on what He values most—the life and souls of mankind. Who will go for Him?

C. Pressing: It is a pressing call. It is a call to be seriously considered because it is a:

1. Call from Heaven. We have seen Isaiah’s call from Heaven but what about our call from Heaven: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Heaven is still calling, “Who will go for us?” These are the last words Jesus uttered on earth before He ascended to Heaven. We call it the Great Commission. This is the call for the church to consider. This is the cry from Heaven to the church. The sovereign Lord is calling, “Who will go for us?” This is Heaven’s plan and Heaven has no Plan B.

2. Call from humanity. Remember the man from Macedonia who cried out, “Come over and help us.” And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 19:6).

Some say this was an angel, but I believe it was a human cry. How

can we avoid or disregard the cry of others? Humanity is still crying out to God and God is asking, "Whom shall I send?" and "Who will go for us?" Aren't we glad that Paul heard that call and responded to the call to go into Europe with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Once you hear the call from Heaven you can't help but hear the cry from humanity. Can you hear their cry? When you hear humanity's call you realize the magnitude of our mission:

- There are now more than six billion people on this planet— Global population has quadrupled in the last 80 years.
- Every second, three people die and six are born.
- Every year, 100 million people are added to the population of planet earth.
- The equivalent of the U.S. population is being added to the planet every three years.
- Approximately 1.7 billion people have absolutely no access to the Gospel and never hear the name "Jesus Christ."

The greatest opportunity of all history is before our generation, and we are in danger of squandering it. There is no other plan to be saved and there is no other plan with which to reach the unsaved! In Romans 10, we see the Lord's plan laid out to reach all people and that plan involves every Christian for every creature.

In Romans 10:11-15, we find four compelling questions:

- a. How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?
- b. How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?
- c. How shall they hear without a preacher?
- d. How shall they preach unless they are sent?

I deduct two realities from these four questions:

- a. No one can believe on Jesus and call on His name unless they first hear about Him.
- b. No one will hear about Him unless we tell them. God does

not write the story across the sky. God does not send angels to tell the story. The only way God has chosen for telling His story is through us. There is no other plan!

Do you hear the cry of humanity this evening? Who will go?

“Hear Their Cry” by David West

Hear the cry of the shackled from their prison bars of sin. Fearing death without the Savior, No one cares their souls to win.

We must go to the dying, in a while 'twill be too late. Still are many lost in darkness; Their salvation dare not wait.

Feel the pain of the broken tossed about by sin and shame. Do you see their souls are searching for the truth, and why He came?

Chorus:

Hear their cry, oh, hear their cry. Sad and lone, no peace inside. Who will tell them of His love, boundless as the heav'n above, Saving grace, so full and free. Hear their cry, oh, hear their cry. Who will go? Oh, hear their cry.

3. Call from Hell. It is not only the call of the Godhead from Heaven: “Who will go for us?” and the call of humanity on earth, but it is also the call of the damned from Hell. “Send somebody home! Send someone to my five brothers, to my sister, my mother, my father, my child. Send them so they won't come to this place” (Luke 16).

Illustration: “When I see monstrous lusts defiling the temple of God, and many gods and many lords usurping the throne of the Almighty, I can hear the loud cry, ‘Who will go for Us?’ Do not perishing souls suggest to us the question of the text? Men are going down to the grave perishing for lack of knowledge! The tomb engulfs them, eternity swallows them up, and in the dark they die without a glimmer of hope! No candle of the Lord ever shines upon their faces.

“By these perishing souls we implore you this morning to feel that heralds of the Cross are needed—needed lest these souls be ruined everlastingly! Needed that they may be lifted up from the dunghill of their corruption and made to sit among princes redeemed by Christ Jesus! The cry wells into a wail of mighty pathetic pleading—all time echoes it and all eternity prolongs it—while Heaven, earth, and Hell give weight to the chorus” (Spurgeon).

Illustration: From a small village in India, Amy Carmichael wrote: "I could not go to sleep. So I lay awake and looked; and I saw, as it seemed, this: that I stood on a grassy sward and at my feet a precipice broke sheer down into infinite space. Back I drew, dizzy at the depth. Then I saw people moving single file along the grass. They were making for the edge. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and another little child holding onto her dress. She was on the very verge. Then I saw that she was blind. She lifted her foot for the next step—it trod air. Oh, the cry as they went over!

"Then I saw more streams of people from all parts. They were blind, stone-blind; all made straight for the precipice edge. There were shrieks as they suddenly knew themselves falling, and a tossing up of helpless arms, clutching at empty air. Then I saw that along the edge there were sentries set at intervals. But the intervals were far too great; they were wide; there were unguarded gaps between. And over these gaps, the people fell in their blindness, quite unwarned, and the gulf yawned like the mouth of hell.

"Then I saw, like a little picture of peace, a group of people under some trees, with their back to the gulf. They were making daisy-chains. There was another group. It was made up of people whose great desire was to get more sentries; but they found that very few wanted to go.

"Once a girl stood alone in her place, waving the people back; but her mother and other relatives called, and reminded her that her furlough was due. Being tired and needing a change she had to go and rest for a while; but no one was sent to guard her gap, and over and over the people fell, like a waterfall of souls.

"Once a child caught a tuft of grass that grew on the very brink of the gulf; it clung convulsively, and it called, but nobody seemed to hear. Then the roots of grass gave way, and with a cry the child went over. And the girl who longed to be back in the gap thought she heard the little one cry, and she sprang up and wanted to go, at which they reproved her; then they sang a hymn. Then, through the hymn, the pain of a million broken hearts rung out in one full drop, one sob. It was the Cry of Blood."

Well, my friend, there is a cry and there is a call going out tonight. Will you answer that call? Will you stand in the gap? Will you stand on the precipice with the Good News that Jesus saves.

Have you seen the King? When Isaiah left church that day, he walked out a missionary. Isaiah had seen the Lord, he had seen himself, and he had

seen the need. Knowing that God was on the throne, and that God had called him, he was ready to share the Word and be faithful to death. How will we leave this service tonight? It all depends on what we see, what we hear, and how we respond. Can you hear Him say, "Who will go?"

David Livingstone once wisely remarked, "He is the greatest master I have ever known. If there is anyone greater, I do not know him. Jesus Christ is the only master supremely worth serving. He is the only ideal that never loses its inspiration. He is the only friend whose friendship meets every demand. He is the only Savior who can save the uttermost. We go forth in His name, in His power, and in His Spirit to serve Him."

Titanic survivor Eva Hart told about her memories from the night of April 15, 1912, when the gigantic ship plunged 12,000 feet to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean two hours and forty minutes after an iceberg tore a 300-foot gash in the starboard side. She said, "I saw all the horrible sights of its sinking, and I heard, even more dreadful, the cries of the drowning people."

Although 20 lifeboats and rafts were launched (too few and only partially filled), most of the *Titanic's* passengers ended up struggling in the icy waters while those in the boats waited a safe distance away. Lifeboat number 14 did row back to the scene after the ship slipped from sight at 2:20 a.m.

Alone, Lifeboat 14 chased cries in the darkness, seeking and saving a precious few. Incredibly, no other lifeboat joined it. Some were already overloaded but in virtually every other boat, those already saved rowed their half-filled boats aimlessly into the night, listening to the cries of the lost. Each feared a crush of unknown swimmers would cling to their craft and turn it over. I fear that is happening today in the lifeboat of the church. How can we hear their cries and not respond!

Christian, we must hear this call and respond! It is the call of Heaven, humanity and Hell. Isaiah heard the call and responded. What will we do tonight?

Free Will Baptists, do we hear the call? Who will go? What about you? Whether it is across the street or across the sea—Will you go? Will you go for them? Will you go for Him?

Oh God, touch us, change us, Use us!

2010 – Stan Bunch

The Commitment We Must Make: “Here am I Send Me”

Text: Isaiah 6:8

Consider the political climate of the day. Uzziah was 16 years old when he began to reign. He reigned 52 years. He began well. “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did” (2 Chronicles 26:4).

He fought the enemies of God, rebuilt cities, defense towers, and the military. “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense” (2 Chronicles 26:16).

He finished poorly, filled with pride, arrogance, unfaithfulness, and leprosy.

Isaiah had an encounter with the God of all grace. While acknowledging that he was a man of sin, living among a people of sin, he experienced the cleansing grace of God.

Consider the spiritual climate of the day when Uzziah’s son Jothan began to reign. “And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD. And the people did yet corruptly” (2 Chronicles 27:2).

“For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves” (Isaiah 3:8, 9).

God deals in a special way with Isaiah. He makes him a prophet. He enjoys dialogue with God and receives instructions for dealing with God’s people.

Then, Uzziah dies. Sometime during the year of the king’s death, God gives Isaiah a vision. Isaiah sees God, holy, exalted, glorified. The earth is full of His glory. But lacking was the glory His people should give to Him.

God wanted most the glory and praise and worship of His people. God wanted His people to live in godliness, and the first five chapters show us their wickedness

God calls Isaiah to commit to a calling. God's method for building His Kingdom is by using willing and obedient servants, people who avail themselves to God's call upon their lives. For some, the call may be to international service, to others, to minister through career paths or in the homeland. Regardless of where we serve, there is a call for those whom God can use to accomplish His purposes.

God is still calling messengers just as He called Isaiah. "When Isaiah left the temple that day he was no longer an anguished prophet but a missionary. He was no longer a simple spectator, but rather a participant. God would equip him for the job, Isaiah saw the Lord, he saw himself and now he sees the need around him. Knowing that God is on the throne, that he had been called and commissioned, he is now ready to preach the Word from God and be faithful till death. May God give us more examples like Isaiah" (Warren Weirsbe).

Here am I send me, not, "Here am I, and I know a really faithful man who would be a great choice for the task."

1. Isaiah's Commitment Came After Brokenness and Cleansing (Isaiah 6:5).

A. Isaiah was God's prophet, yet God was still shaping Isaiah's life.

1. Before God can do a work through a person, He needs to do a work in a person. Brokenness and cleansing led to:
 2. A Commitment to listen to God.
 - a. "I heard the voice of the Lord" (verse 8)
 - b. Illustration: James Forlines said, "We need to hear from God."
 - c. When was the last time you genuinely heard from God? He still speaks in a still, small voice, through His Word, the counsel of others, circumstances, even pain.
 - d. How well are you listening?
 - e. How strong is my commitment to listen to God? I get so involved in exercising, emails, preparing, counseling, teaching, preaching

that it is so easy to step into the sin of not listening to God.

3. A commitment to obey when God speaks
 - a. Without conditions, not "Here am I; use me where I am."
 - b. Illustration of counseling someone and they do the opposite.
 - c. Isaiah's response implies a desire to obey.
 - d. Obedience can be costly and is not easy.
 - e. Obedience will affect your future, intimacy with God, friendships, and lifestyle.
 - f. How far will your current level of obedience and surrender allow you to go?
4. A commitment to speak (Isaiah 7:13).
 - a. Ninety-eight percent of Christians will live their entire life and never introduce someone to Jesus. Some will never clearly present the Gospel.
 - b. Friendship evangelism: "Let my life speak." When you get the cleansing, burden and call that Isaiah had, you won't be able to keep from sharing with others.
 - c. Spurgeon on Isaiah's call: "Isaiah was sent to preach very unpleasant truth, but like a true hero, he was very bold in preaching it. 'Isaiah is very bold,' says the Apostle. Now if you are called of God either to preach or teach, or whatever it is, remember the things you have to preach or teach will not be agreeable to your hearers. Scorn on the man who ever desires to make truth palatable to unhallowed minds. If he modulates his utterances or suppresses the Truth which God has given him even in the slightest possible degree to suit the tastes of men, he is a traitor and a coward!"
 - d. *Beacon* commentary states, "The true calling is the cry of the heart that has listened to a heaven sent message and deeply desires to go out and announce to the world, the love of God."
5. Brokenness and cleansing will bring blessing upon the calling.
 - a. When God breaks a Sunday School teacher, his class will see it, and the result will be growth in the students.

- b. When a student has a contrite heart before God, it will be evidenced in his desire to submit, share the Gospel and prepare himself well.
- c. When a preacher, pastor, or missionary has a commitment that is rooted in a brokenness before God, he will have holy passion in what he does, surrender that will defy logic, and vision that will confound human reasoning.
- d. When a Christian's commitment is born out of brokenness and cleansing, it ceases to be carnal, fleshly, human, and dead and becomes spiritual, blessed, and fruitful.

2. Isaiah's Commitment Came Without Knowing the Details.

A. Isaiah committed before he understood.

1. He commits (verse 8) and he receives clarity from verse nine forward.
 - a. God reveals His plan to a surrendered heart—no reserves.
 - b. If Isaiah had reservations, God would have stopped here.
 - c. How far can God trust you with a call? Will you commit to go to the inner city? West? Northwest? North? Northeast? Muslim world? Hispanics in your community?
2. If you are waiting for total clarity before you commit to God's call, you will be sitting on the bench while the game is going on. Abraham stepped out of Ur and started for the Promised Land, not knowing where he was going. Commitment without total understanding—but a strong desire to please God and obey.
3. All over the world, God has servants who have experienced His call. Without understanding all the calling involved, they said "Yes, here am I, send me."
 - Tim Lewis: Utah
 - David Potete: Chicago
 - Steve Lytle: Panama
 - Donnie McDonald: Japan

Countless single ladies like Laura Belle Barnard, with courage that

puts many men to shame, have heard the call and said "Yes," not fully understanding that such a call would take them to the poor of India, the Muslim world and the brothels of Bolivia. Rise up, Oh church of God, and answer your call. God will clarify things one step at a time.

4. There is something exciting about following God and not knowing.
 - a. We hold back because we want answers, insight, clarity, but in His timing God will give them to us.
 - b. First, we need to step up without reservation and declare with sincerity, boldness, and resolve, "Here am I, send me."

Illustration of older couple in Cuba who started a house church when they were 80 years old.

Illustration of Luis Gigato, a retired layman who became the cook at the Seminary. He travels each week to attend to the mission to which he has been assigned.

Spurgeon once said, "If I were to ask which sister here would take a class of young women, all anxious to find Christ, why you would all hold up your hands! If I could say, 'Who will take a class of boys who long to find the Savior?' you might all be glad of such an avocation—but I have to put it another way lest you should afterwards be dispirited.

"Who among you will try and teach the truth of God to a drunken husband? Who among you will carry the Gospel to despisers and profligates and into places where the Gospel will make you the object of rage and derision? Who among you will take a class of ragged roughs? Who among you will try and teach those who will throw your teaching back upon you with ridicule and scorn?

"You are not fit to serve God unless you are willing to serve Him anywhere and everywhere. You must, with the servant, be willing to take the bitter with the sweet. You must be willing to serve God in the winter as in the summer. If you are willing to be God's servant at all, you are not to pick and choose your duty and say, 'Here am I, send me where there is pleasant duty.' Anybody will go then! If you are willing to serve God you will say today, 'Through floods and flames if Jesus leads, I will, by the Holy Spirit's aid, be true to my following.'"

Now, though I have said nothing with particular regard to foreign missions,

I have preached this sermon with the view that God will stir you to serve His cause, and particularly with the hope that the missionary feeling may show itself in a desire also to carry the Gospel into foreign parts.

B. God calls us to commit out of a broken heart, and while trusting Him to lead us where we need to serve.

1. Isaiah's commitment was not based on the reception of the audience, but rather on the holiness of God and his desire to please God regardless of the resulting outcome.

a. God is calling, and commitment must be based upon the fact that God is holy, glorified, and He alone sits on the throne of the universe. He alone has the authority and right to expect a commitment from His people.

b. A reservation in our commitment reveals a deficiency in our cleansing.

2. Isaiah's commitment was to speak to a sin-hardened society. Ours is no different.

a. They'll hear, but they won't respond.

b. They'll see, but they won't perceive.

c. They'll smile and nod but remain hearers of the Word and not doers.

3. The conditions stated in chapter five are that they were guilty of seven charges:

– Selfish coveting

– Frivolous search for pleasure and vice

– Idolatry of materialism

– Perverting the norms of morality

– Intellectual pride

– Giving themselves over to mind altering substances

– General corruption

4. Isaiah's commitment was to continue faithfully, even when things did not go as desired.

a. Will keep you going when you are unjustly criticized?

- b. Will keep you going when you sin, err, and flat out blow it?
- c. Will keep you serving when you are not seeing fruit and your prayer life stinks?
- d. Will your commitment keep you serving where God has placed you even when your will is not being done?

A God-borne commitment will hang in there when things don't go the way I think they should.

Illustrations of Charley Hingst and Mark McPeak

Illustrations of commitment:

- Bruno and Elodia are in their upper 50s, yet they travel by bus to El Capuri, Panama to share the Gospel in a mountain town.
- Cirilo, a young seminary student, studies, works, hosts Friday night youth meetings, Saturday house meeting, personal discipleship with a young convert.
- The Williams, York, and Alvis families have left everything behind to start a church in Buffalo, New York.
- Families in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah often go it alone.
- Faron Thebeau ministers alone on the border of Mexico with a million Hispanics
- Steve and Judy Lytle left the air-conditioned offices of Free Will Baptist International Missions, their children, and their grandchildren to return to the tropical heat of Panama, because they are committed.

We need you to be part of denominational commitment to cooperation, mutual dependency with our brethren around the world and the heart of a servant that will take us to our knees to realize our objectives.

God asks, "Who will go for us?" not because He didn't know the answer. No, God was giving Isaiah the opportunity to step up and commit.

My Commitment as a Christian

(written by a young African pastor)

A young African pastor wrote, "I have Holy Spirit power. The decision has been made. I must go till He comes, and work till He stops me.

"I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

"My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

"I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

"My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

"I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problems recognizing me—my banner will be clear!"

Historical Chart of Convention Speakers

Year	City	Speakers	Service
1935	Nashville, TN	Winford Davis S.H. Styron Thomas H. Willey M.F. Van Hoose C.B. Thompson	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1938	Nashville, TN	George Dunbar James F. Miller J.W. Alford M.L. Hollis J.K. Warkentin	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1939	Bryan, TX	Melvin Bingham J.R. Bennett Winford Davis J.W. Addington Mabel Willey	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1940	Paintsville, KY	L.R. Ennis George Dunbar Thomas H. Willey Clarence Bowen B.F. Rogers	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1941	Drumright, OK	James F. Miller Winford Davis M.E. Tyson Robert Crawford Laura Belle Barnard	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1942	Columbus, MS	C.F. Zinn J.W. Alford Damon Dodd Raymond Riggs	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1943	Nashville, TN	Bob Jones, Sr. L.R. Ennis, NC Thomas H. Willey	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening
1944	Flat River, MO	Fred Rivenbark L.C. Johnson Laura Belle Barnard	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening

		Floyd Cherry Melvin Bingham W.J. Sheppard	Thursday Morning Thursday Evening Friday Morning
1945	Middlesex, NC	John L Welch Robert Crawford L.C. Johnson L.R. Ennis	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1946	Oklahoma City, OK	C.B. Thompson James F. Miller Mabel Willey J.R. Davidson E.E. Morris	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1947	Highland Park, MI	M.L. Sutton L.C. Johnson Ralph Lightsey	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Thursday Morning
1948	Pocahontas, AR	Harold Pitts M.L. Johnson Mabel Willey L.E. Colliver	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1949	Columbus, GA	Floyd Cherry J.R. Davidson Damon Dodd Benito Rodriguez Howard Edgil	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Wednesday Afternoon Thursday Morning
1950	Richmond, CA	N. Bruce Barrow E.E. Morris Raymond Riggs John L Welch Damon Dodd	Tuesday Evening Wednesday morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Thursday Evening
1951	Nashville, TN	Floyd Cherry W.A. Hales	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning
1952	Shawnee, OK	J.R. Davidson Wayne Smith Mike Moroney Raymond Riggs	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1953	Mt. Vernon, IL	E.E. Morris L.C. Johnson	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning
1954	Spartanburg, SC	Clarence Bowen	Tuesday Evening

		Charles A. Thigpen Bob Jones, Jr.	Wednesday Morning Wednesday Afternoon
1955	Tulsa, OK	Louis Moulton Burkette Raper Daniel R. Cronk Fred Rivenbark Ralph Staten	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Afternoon Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1956	Huntington, WV	Charles Thigpen John L Welch Ivan L. Bennett Estenio Garcia Willard Day	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Afternoon Wednesday Evening Thursday Evening
1957	Birmingham, AL	Bobby Jackson Billy Melvin Mabel Willey M.L. Sutton	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1958	St. Louis, MO	Rufus Coffey Harold Pitts Oswald J. Smith Dean Moore	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1959	Asheville, NC	L.C. Johnson Herbert S. Merkeel Clyde Taylor Floyd Cherry	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1960	Fresno, CA	O.T. Dixon Ralph Lightsey Bob Pierce Reford Wilson	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1961	Norfolk, VA	William Hill John L Welch	Wednesday Morning Thursday Morning
1962	Nashville, TN	Billy Melvin W.S. Mooneyham Winford Floyd	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1963	Detroit, MI	Ben Scott Raymond Riggs Joe Ange Tom Hamilton	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1964	Kansas City, MO	Jack Paramore	Tuesday Evening

		Damon Dodd Robert Cook Ken Walker	Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1965	Raleigh, NC	Malcolm Fry Robert Picirilli LaVerne Miley Henry Van Kluyve	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1966	Little Rock, AR	Ronald Creech Russell Spurgeon Wade Jernigan E.E. Morris	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1967	Jacksonville, FL	Milton Worthington Bob Shockey Lonnie Sparks Luther Gibson	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1968	Oklahoma City, OK	Eustace Riggs Gordon Sebastian Guy Owens Jerry Rhodes	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1969	St. Louis, MO	Winston Sweeney Paul Ketteman Homer Willis Dale Burden, VA	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1970	Fresno, CA	Henry Litteral J.D. O'Donnell Archie Mayhew J.E. Blanton	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning
1971	Nashville, TN	Van Dale Hudson Herman Hersey Larry Powell Richard Cordell Dave Wilkerson	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1972	Fort Worth, TX	Tom Malone Lonnie Graves Walter Ellison Homer Young Milton Worthington	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1973	Macon, GA	Jack Williams Galen Dunbar	Sunday Morning Monday Evening

		James Denton Bob Ketchum Claudie Hames Don Pegram Ken Doggett Mike Crain	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Afternoon Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1974	Wichita, KS	Charles Thigpen Rue Dell Smith Leroy Forlines Calvin Evans Raymond Riggs Melvin Worthington T.S. Rendall	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Morning Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1975	Dayton, OH	Roy Rikard Robert Picirilli Jack Williams Bill Jones Billy Morris Ted Wilbanks	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1976	Tulsa, OK	John West Wade Jernigan John Conlan Bob Shockey Winford Floyd Robert Shelton	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1977	Detroit, MI	Dennis Wiggs Joe Ange Frank Davenport Fred Warner Trymon Messer Billy Bevan	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1978	Kansas City, MO	Dennis Wiggs Jack Stallings Connie Cariker L.C. Johnson James McAllister Floyd Wolfenbarger Leonard Ravenhill Al Worthington	Sunday School Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning Bible Messages (3) NYC Keynote
1979	Charlotte, NC	Paul Thompson Charles Thigpen Gordon Sebastian	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening

		LaVerne Miley Edward Johns Eugene Hales	Wednesday Evening Thursday Morning NYC Keynote
1980	Anaheim, CA	Jack Richey Roger Reeds Hobert Ashby Willie Justice	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening
1981	Louisville, KY	Carl Cheshier Gene Parish Jerry Dudley Bobby Aycock Richard Adams Keith Burden Robert Picirilli Billy Samms Jim Shepherd	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1982	Fort Worth, TX	Clarence Burton Don Pegram Ben Scott Bill Fulcher John Edwards Richard Kennedy Tom Lilly Bailey Thompson Nate Ange	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1983	Columbus, OH	Elro Driggers David Sutton Harold Pitts Lester Horton Don Sexton Lynn Wood David Boggs	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1984	Little Rock, AR	Vernon Barker Lonnie DaVoult Terry Forrest Jimmy Aldridge Keith Burden J.M. Creech Billy Jackson Ken Walker	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening NYC Keynote Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference
1985	Nashville, TN	Herman Hersey L.C. Johnson	Sunday Morning Monday Evening

		Alton Loveless Floyd Wolfenbarger Bobby Jackson Connie Cariker Robert Picirilli Eugene Waddell Jonathan Thigpen	Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening* Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1986	Tulsa, OK	J.D. Norris Carl Vallance Bob King Frank Wiley Richard Cordell Brian Atwood Nuel Brown Wayne Phillips Rupert Pixley	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference
1987	Birmingham, AL	Larry Condit Delbert Akin Ken Riggs Dale Skiles Milton Worthington Fred Hall Johnny Pike	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference
1988	Kansas City, MO	Wallace Malone Larry Hughes Bob Thompson Glen Rehkop Fred Warner Roger Duncan Tim York	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference
1989	Tampa, FL	Larry Montgomery Waldo Young Delmar Sparks Milburn Wilson Norwood Gibson Garnett Reid Kent Hubbard	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1990	Phoenix, AZ	Ken Walker J.B. Varney David Joslin Jim Shepherd Larry Powell George Crowden	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Bible Conference

		Milton Hollifield	Bible Conference
1991	Charleston, WV	James Earl Raper Keith Woody Robert Picirilli Billy Hanna Howard Munsey David Reece Will Harmon	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1992		Richard Bowers Randy Sawyer James Forlines Ronald Creech Rick Bowling David Archer Archie Ratliff	Sunday Morning Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference NYC Keynote
1993	Louisville, KY	Nathan Ruble Clifford Austin Bailey Thompson Bobby Ferguson Douglas Little Curtis Lilly Wendell Walley	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference
1994	Little Rock, AR	Gary Fry Kenneth Frisbee Dean Dobbs Don Guthrie Mark Paschall Glen McGriff	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors' Conference
1995	Charlotte, NC	Roger Harwell Jim Turnbough Keith Burden William Evans James Munsey Norman Geisler	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors' Conference
1996	Fort Worth, TX	Gerald Fowler David Williford Tim Hall Trymon Messer Will Harmon Bob Shockey	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Leadership Forum
1997	Cincinnati, OH	Robert Prichard	Sunday Morning

		Matt Upton Earl Hendrix Melvin Worthington Jerry Norris Ronnie Adkins Richard Atwood Connie Cariker	Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Church Growth Forum Church Growth Forum
1998	Tulsa, OK	Loyd Locklear Randy Wilson David Taylor Edwin Hayes Eugene Waddell J.L. Gore George Lynn Thurmon Murphy	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Bible Conference Bible Conference Bible Conference
1999	Atlanta, GA	Clifford Donoho Danny Williams Kent Barwick Roger Hogan Robert J. Morgan John Maxwell	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Tuesday Wednesday Pastors/Laymen Conference
2000	Anaheim, CA	Ron Helms Edward R. Cook Doug King Tim Owen David Shores H.B. London, Jr. Richard Atwood	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference Home/Foreign Missions Rally
2001	Detroit, MI	David Bishop Danny Dwyer Leonard Pirtle Gene Norris Carlisle Hanna Patrick McGlaughlin	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference
2002	Memphis, TN	Alton Loveless Carl Cheshier Kerry Steedley Melvin Worthington Curtis Linton Stan Toler	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference
2003	Tampa, FL	Ron Hunter Larry Powell	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening

		Keith Burden Matt Pinson James Forlines T.S. Rendall	Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference
2004	Kansas City, MO	Glenn Murray Kerry Gandy Randy Wright Jose Rodriguez Glen Johnson David Archer Allen West	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Preaching Conference Preaching Conference
2005	Louisville, KY	Mike Wade Jeff Manning Millard Sasser James Kelly Caudill Fred Hanson Stan Toler	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference
2006	Birmingham, AL	Tim Campbell Len Blanchard David Potete Jim Puckett Richard Hendrix Steve Ashby Burt Hall	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference Pastors/Laymen Conference
2007	Little Rock, AR	Roy Harris Joe Grizzle Eddie Moody Wendall Walley Nelson Henderson David Crowe Paul Smith	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference Pastors/Laymen Conference
2008	Charleston, WV	Ivan Asbury William Smith Jim Christian Stanley Outlaw Tim York Bobby Welch	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening Pastors/Laymen Conference
2009	Cincinnati, OH	Mark Price Jeff Sloan Paul Harrison Henry Horne Fred Warner	Sunday Morning Sunday Evening Monday Evening Tuesday Evening Wednesday Evening

	Steve Berry	Pastors/Laymen Conference
	Ken Simpson	Pastors/Laymen Conference
2010	Oklahoma City, OK	Bert Tippett
		Jeff Blair
		Charles Murphy
		Karl Sexton
		Stan Bunch
		Sunday Morning
		Sunday Evening
		Monday Evening
		Tuesday Evening
		Wednesday Evening

* In 1985, Floyd Wolfenbarger died before he could fulfill his speaking engagement. Evangelist Bobby Jackson filled his place on the convention program.