

Paul W. Powell

Looking
At Life

Through

The Rear View Mirror



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Through The
Rearview
Mirror

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Dedication

*Dedication to
B. G. Hartley
and the
Officers and Directors
of
Southside Bank
Tyler, Texas*

Good people who keep me focusing on the future

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Introduction

Recently my wife and I took a defensive driving course. I took it not because I had received a traffic violation but in order to reduce my insurance rates. Our instructor, Rose, told us that to be a safe driver we need to glance into our rear view mirror every 3-5 seconds to see what's approaching. Our primary focus, of course, needs to be on what's ahead of us but we also need to know what is behind us. We need to look in both directions.

I have learned through the years that looking back occasionally is as important to wise living as it is to safe driving. We need to look back to learn from our past experiences and to remember the grace of God that has brought us thus far. We need to look forward in anticipation and dedication, living for and serving him for the rest of the journey.

The Psalmist was doing this when he prayed, "O God, you have helped me from my earliest childhood – and I have constantly testified to others of the wonderful things you do. And now that I am old and gray, don't forsake me. Give me time to tell this new generation (and their children, too) about all your mighty miracles. Your power and goodness, Lord, reach to the highest heavens. You have done such wonderful things. Where is there another God like you?" (Psalm 71:17-19 – *The Living Bible*).

Today, I find myself glancing at the rear view mirror more and more. Perhaps it is because at age 72 I have more of life's journey behind me than I do in front of me. But it is also because the experiences of age give a perspective on life and an appreciation of God's grace that youth does not have.

But I am not dwelling on the past. Heavens no! When you stop chasing dreams your future is behind you. So I'm

still focused on the future. I am as excited and optimistic about what's ahead as I have ever been in my life.

So, like a good driver, I am looking in both directions. In this book, another book of sermons, I am attempting to look both forward and backward. I have looked back at my own life and the things the years have taught me. I have looked back at the history of Texas Baptists and the secret to the great work we have done. I have looked back at the life of George W. Truett to gain inspiration and insight for daily living.

But, at the same time, I am looking forward to see what the church ought to be, what good people can do in today's world, and how we can best serve the Lord.

The journey has been good so far. Enough bumps in the road to keep me humble and enough blessings to keep me optimistic.

At this juncture I'm tempted to say with Browning, "Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be..." Come join me in the journey through this book. Hopefully we can learn from the past and look to the future as we live in the now. It will be good to have you along for the ride.

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One

Looking at Life Through the Rearview Mirror

Psalm 90: 10-12

The late Ray Charles said, “Live every day like it’s your last, ‘cause one day you’re gonna be right.” The Bible often reminds us that we should live our lives with the end in view. One of those scriptures is Psalm 90. “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our heart unto wisdom” (vs. 12).

This admonition is set against the backdrop of the eternal nature of God. The Psalmist begins, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:1-2).

He then presents a series of contrasts that show how brief and uncertain our lives are. Our life is like a “watch in the night” (vs. 4). A century-man’s watch in the night is only four hours long. In the wee hours of the morning four hours may seem like an eternity, but in reality it soon passes. That’s our life.

Our lives are like a flood (vs. 5). In the hill country of Texas they talk about “flash” floods. It can rain in another region upstream, and create a wall of water that comes with a vengeance, suddenly sweeping away everything in its path. That’s our life.

It’s like a dream in the night. (vs. 5). Dreams seem to last all night but those who study them say they last only

a few seconds. That's our life.

Our life is like the grass that grows up in the springtime and then withers in the hot sun (vs. 5-6). That's our life. And, it is like a tale that is told (vs. 9). When a person is telling the story, it sometimes seems like it will go on forever. We want them to hurry up and get to the point. But in reality, it takes just a few minutes. Our life is like that.

Then the Psalmist reminds us that the years of our life are three-score and ten (seventy years) and if we are extra healthy, we may live to be eighty years old. That's still above the average of 77.6 years that most Americans live today. But even then, we are soon cut off. With this in mind, the Psalmist issues the admonition to remember how brief our days are and live wisely in the light of that fact.

I've lived my three-score and ten years, and I am now a long way down the road of life. I haven't quit looking forward but more and more I find myself looking at life through the rear view mirror. As I look back, what have I learned? What have the years taught me about wise living? This is not all I've learned, but here is a part of what I've learned in my three-score and ten.

- The most important things in life are not things.
- All glory is fading.
- Even if you have a pain, you don't have to be a pain.
- Only God is in a position to look down on anyone.
- When we die, it's more important to leave a testimony than a title.

Never Too Busy for a Cup of Coffee

First, as I look back I realize that the most important things in life aren't things. When we're young, we think so. Cars, clothes, houses all seem so very important. Then, as we mature, our perspective and values change and we

realize how unimportant they are.

This truth became most vivid to me several years ago when my wife's mother, Mrs. Vaught, died. Mr. Vaught had died several years earlier. By the time Mrs. Vaught passed away, she had lived in the same house for 61 years. As you would imagine, there was a lifetime of collectibles in that house—clothes, furniture, books, pictures, and novelties. Things that represented and reflected their life. The will was probated, and within a few days relatives, mostly grandchildren, started taking things from the house they wanted, a chair, a table, a lamp, and a dining room set. In a few hours, we took everything of value from the house, except the memories—sixty years of memories!

As I walked through the cold, empty house, I realized just how unimportant all those things were. What had made that house a home were the people who had lived there and their relationships to one another...and the memories that were still there.

An e-mail I received about a philosophy professor illustrates what I am saying. He walked into his class one day and placed some items in front of him. When the class began, he wordlessly picked up a very large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So the professor picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly, and the pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He again asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up the rest of the jar. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous, "yes."

The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table, and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The

students laughed.

"Now," said the professor as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that the jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things—your family, your children, your health, your friends, and your faith— if everything else were lost and only these things remained, your life would still be full.

"The pebbles are the other things that matter, like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else—the small stuff.

"If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for our life—if you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important for you. Pay attention to the things that are critical for your happiness.

"Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out to dinner. Play another 18 holes. Worship God regularly. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal.

"Take care of the golf balls first—the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the coffee represented.

The professor smiled, "I'm glad you asked," he said. "It just goes to show that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a cup of coffee with a friend."

He was reminding us that the most important things in life are not things. They are relationships. Relationships with your parents, children, family, friends, and, most of all, God. And let me just remind you that no matter what your relationship is to your parents, you'll miss them when they are gone.

Whose Bid Is It?

Second, as I look back in the rear view mirror I realize that all glory is fading. So, don't take yourself too seriously, no one else does. The movie *Patton* ends with General George W. Patton, the colorful and controversial general of WWII, describing the victory parade of a Roman general returning from a triumphant conquest. At the head of the parade were the trumpets. They were followed by the strange animals from the country he had conquered, and then came the chariots laden with treasures he had taken.

In a chariot rides the conquering general. Before him, in chains, march the prisoners he has taken. Beside him, or perhaps riding on the trace horses, are his children dressed in white robes, and behind him stands a slave whispering in his ear, "All glory is fading."

That was true not only in ancient Rome, but it is also true here and now. Our rewards and achievements mean little to anyone but us, and they will soon be forgotten. Recently, I conducted a funeral service for Dr. Oren Murphy, a longtime Tyler physician. His wife had died several years earlier. He had Alzheimer's disease and was in a nursing home so his house and possessions had been disposed of years before. After the service, a lady approached me as I stood near the casket.

She said that a few days earlier she had been in a small restaurant in a nearby community and had seen Dr. Murphy's medical school diploma leaning against a wall. She asked the proprietor where he got it and he said, "I bought it at a garage sale for twenty-five cents." She then asked him what he would take for it and he said, "Aw, take it. It's not worth anything."

As she told me that, I thought of how hard Dr. Murphy had worked to earn that diploma, how happy he must have been the day he received it, and how proudly he had displayed it on the wall of his office. Now it had been reduced to, "Aw, just take it, it's not worth anything."

Then I realized that in my home I have all kinds of diplomas, awards, and recognitions that naturally come from over 50 years of ministry. But when I'm gone, do you think my children will want them? Like Dr. Murphy's diploma, those recognitions will be sold at a garage sale for twenty-five cents. Worthless! Of value to no one except me.

There was a time when I was fairly well known in East Texas. In fact, the other day I was playing golf and one of my partners introduced me to a friend, "This is Paul Powell; he used be somebody." I pastored the largest church from the Red River to the Gulf of Mexico, from Dallas to Atlanta. Our church was on television and had the largest viewing audience of any Sunday morning broadcast before the Dallas Cowboys came on. But one day I realized just how fading fame was and how insignificant I was. I imagined a group of ladies sitting at a table playing bridge when the phone rang. On the other end of the line, someone said to the lady of the house, "Have you heard the news? Reverend Paul Powell died this morning." She would hang up the phone, and then tell her friends at the table about my death.

Probably one of them would say, "Oh, what a shame. He was such a nice man... Whose bid is it?" And the game would go right on.

Don't be too impressed with yourself. No one else is and if they are, they won't be long.

Don't Lose Your Enthusiasm

Third, looking back, I've learned even if you have a pain, you don't have to be a pain. Life deals a hard blow to some people—sickness, accidents, and misfortunes of all kinds. These things can make us bitter, or they can make us better. The choice is ours.

Someone has said that suffering is inevitable but misery is optional. Life is ten-percent what you make it and ninety-percent how you take it.

I have learned that there are different kinds of pain. You can have one or you can be one. Some Christians are so mean, if they were in the arena with the lions, I'd pull for the lions.

Don't let the years and the tears steal your enthusiasm and your optimism. Several years ago, I was asked to perform the wedding ceremony for Winfred and Sue on the 69th anniversary of their first date together. They had been sweethearts before they went off to college. Then Win went to Texas Tech and Sue went to Mary Hardin-Baylor. At college, they each met other people and married them. Sue had been a widow for 30 years and Win a widower for five when they became reacquainted and decided to marry. They asked me to perform the service on the 69th anniversary of their first date together.

We gathered at the church and Sue, who was 87, made it to the altar on her own. Win, who was 89, used a walker and had the help of his son to get to Sue's side.

I began the ceremony by saying, "Win, do you take Sue to be your lawfully wedded wife, and do you promise before God and these witnesses to love her, comfort her, honor her, keep her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, to keep thee only unto her so long as you both shall live? Do you so promise?"

And instead of saying, "I do," he said, "I'll try."

I like that! That's enthusiasm. That's optimism. Eighty-nine years old and still willing to try. The years and tears had not stolen his joy or his optimism or his willingness to venture.

Lifting Others Up

Fourth, looking back I realize that only God is in the position to look down on anyone, and he never does. Jesus treated all people with dignity and respect. He once met a woman at the well in Samaria where she had come to draw water. She had come alone because respectable women

would have nothing to do with her. She had been married and divorced five times and now had a live-in boyfriend. But Jesus did not treat her as a slut and shun her. When He looked at her, He saw her life, not so much in terms of badness as sadness. She had flitted from man to man, from marriage to marriage, from relationship to relationship looking for something she had never found—inner peace and happiness. She always thought her spiritual thirst could be quenched by another man, another marriage, another relationship. But after all that, her soul was as parched and as dry as ever. So Jesus, using the well and the water she had come to as an object lesson, told her about the Living Water that could satisfy her deep thirst within. When she heard of it, she said, “O, sir, give me that water.”

Some of you reading this may have drunk at every well the world has to offer, and your soul is still as dry and parched as ever. Come to Jesus, he can satisfy the deepest thirst of your life.

His critics brought to him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They wanted him to stone her to death. That’s what the Law of Moses required. Instead, he stooped down and wrote in the sand without making a response. This is the only record we have of Jesus ever writing anything. We don’t know what he wrote. Perhaps he wrote the names of the men that had been consorting with her. After all, if she was caught in the act of adultery, a man had to be involved. Where was he? When he looked up, all of her accusers had slinked into the shadows. He then asked her, “Where are thine accusers? Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more” (John 8: 3-11).

He did not condone her lifestyle. He called what she had done what it was—sin. And he told her plainly to go and live a life of chastity. But he did not condemn her. Why? There was no need. She already lived under self-condemnation. People like that always do. What she needed was hope, mercy, and forgiveness and that’s what

he offered to her.

Someone may be reading this who is living under self-condemnation just like that woman. You've done things in the past that you are ashamed of. Things you wish you could forget. Things you wish you'd never done. You don't need to go on that way. Christ will forgive you if you'll come to him.

One day, Jesus met Zacchaeus, the tax collector. The childhood song about Zacchaeus has made us think he was an adorable little man. The truth is, he was a dirty, rotten thief—a scoundrel. He was a traitor to his people. Israel was occupied territory, conquered and occupied by Rome and ruled over by marshal law. Zacchaeus had gone over to work for the enemy and because of that was hated and despised by his fellow countrymen. He was short in stature so he climbed up a tree and out on a limb so he could get a glimpse of Jesus as he came through Jericho. When Jesus saw him, He stopped and told him to come down, "For today I'll abide at your house." Jesus did not treat him as a traitor or a scoundrel. He rather invited himself to Zacchaeus' house and ate with him, something no respectable person would do. And before Jesus left, he led Zacchaeus to salvation.

Someone reading this may feel like Zacchaeus—up a tree and out on a limb. I've been there. I assure you Jesus won't saw it off. He'll come into your life if you'll let Him and make it whole again.

People did not always treat Jesus kindly. When He cast the demons out of a man and into a herd of swine the citizens of the region asked Him to leave. He was hurting business (Mark 5:17). It's always humiliating to be asked to leave a place. When he preached in his hometown of Nazareth, announcing that he was the Messiah, the people there were so incensed they wanted to throw him over a cliff to his death (Luke 4:29). Rejection always hurts, especially when it's from people you care about. And when he was

called to the home of a father and mother whose daughter lay dead, he startled everyone by saying, "She's not dead; she's just sleeping." When he did, "they laughed him to scorn" (Luke 8:53). It's never fun to be laughed at. They knew the difference between sleep and death, but they did not know the difference between Jesus and other men. So Jesus reached out, took the girl by the hand, and restored her to life.

None of these experiences were easy to bear, but, amazingly, Jesus never struck back at any of those who struck out at him. Neither should we.

Thaddeus Stevens has been called "the best white friend Black Americans ever had." A congressman from Pennsylvania, Stevens opposed slavery with a vengeance. He flayed his fellow congressmen over the issue every chance he got. Brilliant, fearless, unyielding, Stevens believed that slavery was the lone blot on the world's noblest document, the U.S. Constitution, and he was determined to have it erased.

But in the midst of the conflict, he never became bitter. His wit grew famous. Once, an enemy met him on a narrow path and snarled, "I never step aside for a skunk." Stevens moved out of the way saying, "But I always do" (*Reader's Digest*, June 1971, 169).

Good move, Thad! Don't ever stoop to another person's level except to lift him/her up.

A Testimony, Not a Title

Fifth, looking through the rearview mirror, I realize that when we die, we ought to leave a testimony, not a title. Tony Campolo, is a white sociologist and popular campus speaker who also serves as an assistant pastor at an African-American church in New York City. On one occasion, when the college students from his church were home, the pastor asked them to share with the congregation about their college life. They told what degrees they

were seeking and what they hoped to be in life. When they had finished, the pastor stood and said something very startling. He said, in essence, "One day, young ladies and gentlemen, you will die and they will carry you out to the cemetery and throw dirt in your face. Then the mourners will come back to church and have ham and potato salad and talk about you. When they do, what do you suppose they will say? They won't talk about your titles or positions, but rather what you did in life to make the world a better place."

Then he said, "The question I want to ask you is this: 'When you die and are gone, will you leave a title, or will you leave a testimony?'"

That's a question for every one of us.

Life has a way of filtering out the ideas that are unnecessary and instilling others that are crucial. It has taught me that if we are to live wisely, we need to heed these admonitions and focus on what's important.

I remind you that life is not a dress rehearsal. This is the real thing and we get only one shot at it. The poet, C.T. Studd, put it best:

*Just one life
Will soon be past
Only what's done
For Christ will last.*

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Two

The Cross and The Crown

Luke 9:23-25

Some time ago I visited the grave of my great-great grandfather, Henry Jackson Powell, the first of my ancestors I know about to come to Texas. I had known for years that I was born in my grandfather's log house, not one of the modern pre-fab kind, but a real pioneer log house. He had felled the trees in the forest, peeled the bark off the logs and chinked the cracks between the logs with a mixture of mud and moss to keep the wind and rain out. So, I knew my ancestors were early pioneer settlers in Texas, but no one ever talked about them. I am not sure why. Perhaps it was the same reason Adam Clayton Powell, the black congressman from New York, gave when he said, "I had my family tree looked up and then I had it chopped down." There were probably some horse thieves hanging from the limbs somewhere back there.

Great-great grandfather, Henry Jackson Powell, was born in Mississippi in 1824. In 1861 he and his wife, Nancy, and their 7 children traveled by ox cart across the Mississippi River, through Louisiana, and into Texas. It took them six months to make the journey. They intended to settle in Polk County near Livingston and Huntsville, probably because of relatives and friends. But, soon after crossing the Sabine River into Texas, their little girl became ill and they camped to tend to her.

They found a piece of land with a clean-flowing spring

of water and decided to settle there. Henry Jackson bought the land from a man he thought was the owner only to find out later that he had received a false deed. When the real owner appeared he had to negotiate the buying of the land a second time. He and his wife, Nancy, eventually had 11 children. He died in 1908 at the age of 84.

When a cousin of mine who is into genealogy, sent me information about him and when I learned he was buried in the Brookeland Cemetery, in Sabine County, I wanted to visit his grave. I found the grave where he and Nancy are buried in the center of the cemetery with a rusty iron fence around it. The tombstones were almost 100 years old and barely legible. I went inside the fence, knelt by the tombstone to brush away the mud and sand that had been splattered there by a hundred years of rains and read the epitaph:

*"Here I lay my burden down
Changing the cross for a crown."*

Tears welled up in my eyes and I said, "Henry Jackson, I guess you were a believer. If so, you are the only Powell I know of in my immediate family who had a serious relationship with Him. Maybe I'm a preacher today because you took up the cross and followed Him."

That day on my knees I decided I had to preach a sermon on the cross and the crown. There is a crown in the Christian life. The apostle Paul spoke of his converts as his joy and his crown (Philippians 4:1). They were his prize, and evidence that his work had been successful. But most often the crown the scriptures speak of is the victor's crown—the victory that we receive over sin, suffering and death. Paul wrote of this crown when he said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth it is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall

give to me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing" (II Timothy 4: 6-8).

And the living Lord said to His churches, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). We are to be faithful not until we are tired, or until we retire, but until we are expired. We are to be faithful until death.

But there is also a cross in the Christian life. Jesus spoke of that cross when He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Actually in this passage, Jesus speaks of two crosses: His and ours. Just preceding this statement He asked his disciples, "Whom do the people say that I am?" They answered and said, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets is risen again."

He then asked them, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answering said, "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:18-20).

Peter, answering for the apostolic group, declared that Jesus was the Savior, the Messiah that God had promised. He made the right confession but he did not have the right concept. He, like the people of his day, thought of the Messiah in political and military terms. The Roman empire had conquered the known world and were policing it under a state of marshal law. Israel chafed under their domination and longed for the messiah, who they believed would overthrow the yoke of Rome and restore Israel to the glory of the kingdom of David. But that was not the kind of Messiah Jesus came to be. His kingdom was not geographical, but spiritual. He would rule over the hearts and lives of men and women and set them free from the bondage of sin, suffering and death. He came not as a conquering general, but as a suffering servant. And, He would enter Jerusalem, not on a prancing steed, but on a lowly donkey.

The disciples needed to know what was ahead for him and for them. Up until now He had not spoken directly

of His passion. He had hinted of it through symbols. But they did not understand them.

Jesus had said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." He had said, "I give my flesh for the life of the world." He had said, "The children of the bridegroom will fast when the bridegroom is taken from them." He had said in response to their request for a sign, "The only sign that will be given to you is the sign of Jonah. Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so must the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

But all of this was symbolic language and they did not fully understand it. They had to be told in plain shocking language what lay ahead of him. So he said "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day" (verse 22). He would tell them a total of five recorded times of these events before they arrived in Jerusalem (*Haley's Bible Handbook*, 436).

He was speaking of the old rugged cross on which he would die for the sins of the whole world. That's what lay ahead for Him in Jerusalem.

But there was a cross for them also. That's why He added, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up **his** cross daily, and follow me" (verse 23).

What did Jesus mean when He said a person must take up his/her cross? These disciples well knew what a cross and crucifixion meant. When Jesus was a lad about 11 years of age, Judas the Galilean had led a rebellion against Rome. He had raised the royal armory at Scepchoris, which was only four miles from Nazareth. The Roman vengeance was swift and sudden. Scepchoris was burned to the ground; the inhabitants were sold into slavery; and 2,000 of the rebels were crucified on crosses which were set in lines along the road side that they might be a dreadful warning to others tempted to rebel. To take up the cross meant to

be prepared to face things like that for loyalty to God. It meant to be ready to endure the worst that others can do to us for the sake of being true to God (*The Daily Study Bible; the Gospel of Luke* by William Barclay; Westminster Press of Philadelphia, 1956, 122.).

Jesus makes it clear that following him will not be easy. We tell people, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Jesus said, "God loves you and has a difficult plan for your life." He would experience rejection and death and anyone who follows him must be ready for the same.

To take up the cross means we are committed to following Christ no matter what the cost. It means putting aside our own ambition, yielding our will to his, and walking in obedience after him.

Today we have substituted believing about Jesus for commitment to following Him. You can believe certain things without it costing you anything in terms of money, power or prestige. But if you dare to follow Him, you may have to give up your job, move to another country, lose your popularity because you cut across the grain of social behavior. It is by decision that we follow Him.

A disciple is not one who memorizes vast amounts of scripture, observes ceremonies, keeps traditions but commits one's life to follow and obey Jesus no matter what. The cross clearly represents surrender and obedience to the will of God.

And it requires continuous commitment. We are to take up the cross daily. This takes the cross out of the past and makes it a part of contemporary experience. It is not just an instrument on which Christ died, but also involves daily offering up oneself to the will of God. In these experiences Jesus is dealing with competing loyalties-the loyalties to wealth and the loyalty to family relationships.

Three things need to be said about taking up the cross:

- Taking up the cross is necessary
- Taking up the cross is voluntary
- Taking up the cross is revolutionary

No Cross, No Crown

First, taking up the cross is necessary. While Jesus stated that taking up the cross was a part of discipleship in this text, He is even more emphatic later on. In Luke 14:27, He says, "And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Cross bearing then is not optional, it is a necessity. Cross bearing precedes crown wearing. Years ago, members of our congregation gave me a beautiful, framed needlepoint that depicted this truth. It said, "No cross, No crown." That's what Jesus was saying.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor who was executed by Adolph Hitler for his participation in a plot to kill the Nazi leader, called upon Christians to make a radical break with the past. "When Christ calls a man," he wrote, "he bids him come and die." Then he added, "Grace is the way to heaven, but he who travels that road must pay the toll." Bonhoeffer paid the toll April 9, 1945, when he died for his faith.

And, a part of the toll for all of us is this, "We must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him." There is an old song we don't sing anymore, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me."

He Calls But He Does Not Compel

Second, taking up the cross is voluntary. Christ calls us to the cross, but He never compels us to take it up. The Christian army is an all volunteer army.

To be sure, the scriptures tell us that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus (Matthew 27:32).

But I remind you it was the Romans who compelled him to carry the cross, not Christ. And it was Christ's cross and not his own that he was compelled to carry. Christ compels no one to carry the cross. It is something we take up voluntarily.

There are a lot of queer ideas about cross bearing. Alan Redpath, in his book *Victorious Christian Faith* recalls that a man once said to him, "I have a fierce temper, but I suppose that is my cross!" Redpath replied (lovingly, I hope!), "My friend, that is not your cross. It is your wife's cross, but it is your sin!" At other times people speak of an affliction, a disability, an illness, a financial reversal as "their cross." But those are not crosses. Those things are not optional in our lives; the cross is something that we take up by our own choosing.

I was speaking in a church once and at the close of the service a man told me that when he was a 17-year-old student at the University of Texas, God called him to preach, but he did not answer that call. As he put it, "The phone rang, but I did not pick up the receiver because I knew who was on the other end of the line." God will let you do that, you know. He's got your number even if it's unlisted. He's got your cell number also, so he can reach you anywhere, anytime. And you'll know when he's calling, even if you don't have caller ID. But you don't have to pick up the receiver. You can just let it ring until it stops if you want to.

He will allow you to walk away. Remember the story about the Rich Young Ruler? This young man came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He wanted to know what he must do to attain it.

Jesus told him that he should live by the commandments, then he began to name them: "Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not cheat other people, honor your father and your mother."

The man answered that he had observed all of these

things from his youth. It was obvious he thought of discipleship as keeping rules and regulations and not sacrifice and service. So Jesus spoke with exactness, "One thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatever thou hast, give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, **take up your cross** and follow me" (Mark 10:18-21).

The young man then turned and walked away sorrowfully for he had much wealth and Jesus let him go. I once worked as a salesman in a ladies' shoe store. One of the rules of the manager was "never walk a customer" i.e., don't let them out the door without selling them something. Jesus would never have made it there. He let people walk if they wouldn't pay the price. He did not beg this young prospect and he won't beg us or bribe you or lower His standards. He never does. His terms are always the same, take up your cross and follow me. He let him go and will let us go if that's our choice.

Jesus did not tell every rich person He encountered to sell all that they had and give it away. He told this young man that because he readily saw that the young man's wealth was more important to him than anything else. It stood between him and total commitment and absolute obedience to Jesus. So, it had to go. Anything or anyone that stands between you and Him must go if you want to be His disciple. On another occasion He said that if anyone loved father or mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even one's own life, that person could not be His disciple (Luke 14:26).

The Lord did not intend us to have contempt for our family and loved ones. He simply meant the supreme loyalty in our life must belong to Him and to no one else. Otherwise, we could not be His disciple.

Sometimes it comes down to that kind of choice. Jim Denison, the pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, tells that during his college years, while serving as a summer missionary in Eastern Malaysia, he observed

the baptismal service of a teenage girl sharing her faith in a small warehouse that was used for a church. She was baptized that day in the baptistery, which was a bathtub. While all of this was going on, Jim noticed some old worn-out luggage leaning against the wall. He asked a church member for an explanation of the suitcase. He pointed to the girl who had been baptized, and said, "Her father told her if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So, she brought her luggage." That is the kind of deep commitment Jesus calls for from you and from me.

That kind of commitment is necessary for one to be a disciple. But it is voluntary; we don't have to become a disciple.

The Principle of the Cross

Third, taking up the cross is revolutionary. Jesus reminds us, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Matthew 16:25). To affirm Jesus is Lord changes our lives. It means He sets the rules, determines the agenda, He is in charge. But it is in surrender to Him that we find a satisfying, fulfilling, complete life.

Jesus spoke of the principle of the cross when He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

It was an everyday principle from agriculture. Every harvest is based on seeds dying, and out of that death comes the life intended for the seed. Seeds left in a package or a pouch will come to nothing. They can stay there a year or ten or a hundred and they will not produce. But if they are planted in the ground and allowed to die and germinate, out of that death, new life will come forth. Just so, many lives today are sterile, barren, fruitless, joyless because we will not die to self. We live for ourselves and not for Christ

and His great kingdom. The selfish life is always an empty, unfulfilled life. It never reaches its potential.

It is in commitment to a cause that is greater than ourselves, more important than ourselves, that we find the real joy and happiness that life was intended to bring. Through dedication to Christ life takes on new meaning. It now has purpose. That's why Jesus asks, "What does a person profit if they gain the whole world and lose their soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

There are only a few days we can date—days that changed the world. October 31, 1517, was one of those days. On that day Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses for dispute on the door of the Wittenburg church and the Reformation began. Another day that changed the world was December 7, 1941. On that day, a day which President Roosevelt said "would live in infamy," Pearl Harbor was attacked and World War II began for the United States. On that day, as one historian said, the old world ended forever. Then there was September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center was destroyed and life for all of us, in a minute, was changed forever.

But there is another day that I can say without reservation changed my world forever. It was the day when the Lord Jesus, figuratively speaking, walked down the aisle of First Baptist Church of Port Arthur, Texas, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Come, follow me and I'll make you a fisher of men." And that day I said no to my ambitions, which really wasn't a big deal because I didn't have much, took up my cross and began following him. I have not followed him perfectly. There were times when He had to look around to see where I was and there were times when He back-tracked to get me back on the trail. But I began following Him that day and I have never been the same since.

The question now is, will you take up the cross and are you following Him? Dallas Willard teaches philosophy at

the University of Southern California. He is a gifted teacher who is deeply committed to Christ. Recently, at a Texas gathering for evangelism and missional churches, he said, "Sometimes students step alongside me as I walk across the campus and ask, 'Is it true that you are a follower of Jesus?' I ask, 'Who else did you have in mind?'"

That is my question to you. If you do not follow Jesus, who will you follow? Who else is there to follow?

Jesus said we must take up the cross daily. Some of you reading this picked up the cross once and then laid it down. You need to pick it up again, today. Whether for the first time or the second, that is His call, "Take up the cross and follow me."

So, I ask you in the words of the song, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me." There is a second verse to that old song written by Thomas Shepherd that we need also:

*The consecrated cross I'll bear
Till death shall set me free,
And I'll go home, my crown to wear.
For there's a crown for me.*

(*The Baptist Hymnal*, Nashville: Convention Press, 1991, 475).

When I come to the end of my days, I want to be able to say as Henry Jackson did, "Here I lay my burden down, changing the cross for a crown." You can, too, if you'll begin following Him today.

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Three

The Worst Deception

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The easiest deception of all is self-deception. Deanna Laney, a young mother from Tyler, took her two sons, ages 6 and 8, into her yard, bashed their heads with rocks until they were dead, and then permanently crippled her 2-year-old while he was still in the crib. Then she called 911 to report their death and said, "God told me to do it."

Guadalupe Lopez, the mother of Jennifer Lopez, won 2 million dollars from a slot machine in an Atlantic City casino. She said, concerning her fortune, "It was divine intervention." I am inclined to agree with Jay Leno, who said, "With all the war, famine, and pestilence in the world, you would think God had enough to do."

Karen Dammann, a Methodist minister, was recently tried by the judicial council of her denomination for living in a lesbian relationship. She said, "I felt called to be ordained, but I couldn't bring myself to choose between Meredith and my life as a pastor. It felt right. I just can't believe God makes a mistake."

How easily we deceive ourselves. Not every voice is from God. Not every force is from God. Not every feeling is from God.

Martin Luther must have had that in mind when he said, "The ultimate proof of the sinner is that he does not know his own sin." That's why, I think, God keeps telling us not to be deceived.

We can deceive ourselves about sin. The Apostle John said, "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have

fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:7-8).

We can deceive ourselves about worship. James says, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). We can fool ourselves into thinking that coming to church and hearing the Word of God is enough when we are expected to live the Word.

We can deceive ourselves about true religion. James said, "If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is in vain" (James 1:26). Things are not always as they seem. If your relationship to God doesn't change the way you talk—and I'm not just referring to profanity, but to being sharp, critical, gossipy, etc.—then you deceive yourself.

We can deceive ourselves about judgment. Paul warns, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

But the worst of all deceptions is to deceive ourselves about salvation. It is the one thing about which we can be most easily deceived. That's why, in our text, Paul declares, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: . . ." (I Corinthians 6: 9a).

There are three truths that flow from this passage:

- Not everyone is going to heaven.
- No one is beyond redemption.
- There is only one way of salvation.

Illustrative—Not Exhaustive

First, not everyone is going to heaven. There is an idea abroad called "universalism" that believes that in the end everyone is going to heaven, everyone is going to be saved. We preachers have contributed to that by "preaching people

into heaven” at funerals, i.e. suggesting that everyone, no matter who they are or how they lived, will go to heaven.

I did read of one exception recently. Father Scott Mansfield, a priest in St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Chama, NM, said at the funeral mass of Ben Martinez, that he was a “lukewarm catholic living in sin.” He added that “the Lord vomited people like Ben out of his mouth into hell” (*Baptists Today*, September 2003).

I don’t recommend that, but the scriptures are emphatic, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The word “unrighteous” in the original language variously means, “the unjust,” “the wicked,” i.e. “the heathen.” It is another word for sin. The scriptures say, “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17).

Paul then gives us a catalogue of some sins. He says, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, NASV).

This list is not exhaustive, it’s illustrative. It simply points out the kinds of things Paul is talking about. He is not saying that anyone who ever did any one of these things is excluded from heaven. That would mean none of us could be saved. We are all sinners. The scriptures say, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). They declare, “There is not a just man on the earth that doeth good and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

I saw a cartoon years ago that speaks to this. Two sheep are in a pasture and one remarks to the other, “All we, like people, have gone astray.” Sheep do wander away from the fold and get lost and so do people. All people.

The tense of the verbs used here suggest continuous action. He’s saying that people who continuously do these

things will not enter into the kingdom of heaven, i.e. those who are content to stay in their sin. Thus, they indicate that they are not saved, have not been converted, have not experienced the life-changing power of Christ. They are unrepentant sinners.

When I was a pastor, we often closed our worship services by singing, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be." Then I would remind the people, "Not everybody is going to heaven, and some will never know the way unless we show them." Don't live under an illusion concerning your own life. Don't be deceived about your children, your parents, your brothers and sisters, or your friends and neighbors. God's word to us is clear, "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

God Works With Mud

Second, no one is beyond redemption. Having said that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God and cataloging sins that characterize the unrighteous, Paul quickly said, "And such were some of you." He speaks in the past tense of what they once were, but no longer are. They have been changed.

That's a word of hope for all of us. The scriptures say, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). That's all sin. A man came to his pastor and said, "Preacher, my sins are so vile, God could never use me." The preacher responded, "Yes he can. God is a potter, he works with mud."

Recently, a man e-mailed me and asked, "What is the greatest truth of the Bible?" I responded, "The story of the prodigal son, or more appropriately, the story of the loving father." It's the story of a young man who decided that his father was out-of-date, out-of-touch, and put too many restrictions on him. So he said to him, "Give me my part of the family inheritance, and I'm out of your house and out

of your hair forever." He then took his money and headed to the big city, bright lights, and boisterous crowds.

Scripture speaks of this as "the far country." The far country is not a geographical location, but a spiritual condition. It is where the trail runs out when a person runs from God. In time, his money was gone, his friends no longer had time for him and life turned sour. When he came to his senses, he decided to return home. So he said to himself, "I will arise and go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am not worthy to be called your son. Take me back as a hired servant.'"

He rehearsed that speech over and over until he had it memorized perfectly. Then he arose and went to his father. When he was yet a great way off, the scriptures say the father saw him and ran to meet him, throwing his arms around his neck and welcoming him home.

Aristotle said, "Great men never run in public." But Aristotle never knew Jesus. He told us that God runs in public to meet sinners who come to him.

He didn't greet the boy with crossed arms. He didn't scold him saying, "I told you so." He didn't question him saying, "Where have you been and what have you done with your inheritance?" He just welcomed him home with open arms and the boy never got to make that speech. (Luke 15:11-27).

That is God's good news. He will run to you if you will come to him. That's the greatest truth of the Bible. That's the amazing love of God.

If I was a rapper, I would put it this way: God loves the Washington page and the carrier of AIDS...the college president, and the nursing home resident...the zookeeper and the street sweeper...the office flunky and the back-alley junkie...the cab driver and the financial advisor...the chain smoker and the goat roper. God loves all people and wants to see them come to redemption.

Beneath the Statue of Liberty are these words written

by Emma Lazaras,

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, the tempest—tossed to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

Beneath the cross of Christ, there is an invitation broader than that. It says, “Whosoever will, let him come and drink of the water of life freely.” And Christ lifts high His lamp to the door of life, inviting us in.

What He Did or What We Do

Third, there is only one way of salvation. Paul declares, “But ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Billy Graham, in one of his sermons, tells that some years ago missionaries from India were speaking in Chicago. At the close of one address, a critical young man asked this probing question, “Why do you go to India to bother those people about Jesus Christ—aren’t they getting along all right without him?”

The answer was straightforward and very significant. The missionary replied, “No, young man, they’re not getting along all right without Jesus Christ. No one, anywhere, is getting along all right without him.”

That’s true because there is no other name under heaven whereby men must be saved, except the name Jesus (Acts 4:12).

All religions but Christianity pump at the well of human effort or religious zeal. If you become a Hindu practitioner, you would devote years to ascetic discipline. To become a practicing Buddhist, you would need to master the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Noble Paths, and commit your life to their pursuit. To become a practicing Jew, you

must learn to keep the law and all its applications to your life. To become a Muslim, you must master and obey the Koran and its "Five Pillars of Religion."

The Five Pillars of Islam are not a list of beliefs; they are things to do. They are:

- Acknowledge that there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.
- Follow a certain ritual of prayer and worship at five specified times a day.
- Give 2-1/2% of your net worth (not just your income) to the poor each year.
- Fast during the month of Ramadan on the Muslim calendar. To "fast" means to refrain from all food, liquids, and sensual pleasures from the very first to the very last light of day.
- At least once in your lifetime, make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

These are all things we do. The Jews have a saying, "A man can change what he does, but not what he is." Only Christ can do that. In East Texas, we have a saying, "You can load gold on a mule, but it's still a mule." You can change what it does, but not what it is.

Somebody said, "You can teach a horse to jump, but when you are finished, all you have is a jumping horse." You can change what it does, but not what it is. Bob Hope said that he bought Arnold Palmer shoes, Arnold Palmer slacks, Arnold Palmer shirts, Arnold Palmer clubs, then went out and played like Betsy Arnold! You can change what you do, but not what you are.

Our problem is, we must be born again. We can recycle, repaint, remodel, but not remake. And that's what we need. We can't just do exterior work. It's got to be an internal, interior job. We must start from the heart. Only Jesus can do that.

What he did can wash away our sin. Through faith in Him we can be justified before the judgment bar of God.

He can set us apart as His children and disciples.

It comes down to this:

*Life is short,
Death is sure,
Sin the curse,
Christ the cure.*

Be careful that you don't deceive yourself. Not everyone is going to heaven. No one is beyond redemption. There is one way of salvation, and that's through Christ the Lord.

When David Brainard, the great missionary statesman, was 17 years old, he was confused about God's plan of salvation. He knew that the Bible told him to come to Christ, but he didn't know how to come.

He said, "I thought I would gladly come to Jesus, but I had no direction as to getting through."

While he prayed, Brainard thought, "When a mother tells her child to come to her, she doesn't tell him how to come. He may come with a run, a skip, a jump, or a bound. He may come crying, singing, or shouting. It doesn't matter how he comes so long as he comes."

It's the same with Christ. His call is simple: "Come" and He doesn't care how we do it, just so we do it and His promise is "He that cometh unto me, I will in no-wise cast him out."

Four

Branded by Jesus

Galatians 6:17

One of the darkest pages in American history has to do with slavery. Our nation was founded on a noble idea - the equality of man. The framers of the Declaration of Independence wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

They believed that, but they did not practice it. Indians were not considered as equals, so they were moved from place to place until they were confined to prisons without walls, called reservations.

Women were not considered as equals. If a husband beat his wife, the law was on his side. The law made it virtually impossible for women to divorce their husbands. And they did not gain the right to vote until 1920. (*Freedom: The History of Us* by Joy Hakim, Oxford Press, 2003, 90).

Perhaps the worst contradiction of all was slavery. Our forefathers knew slavery was wrong, but did not deal with it. Thomas Jefferson wrote of slavery, "We have the wolf by the ears and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go." He hated slavery and said so, but he owned slaves and kept them. It was a great paradox, slavery in the land of the free.

In addition to the indignity of being owned by another person, slaves were often treated cruelly. If a slave seeking freedom and equality tried to escape and was captured, he was beaten, branded and sold to an owner where the work

conditions were much more difficult. (Ibid., 114).

It was the practice of branding slaves that is behind my text—not slavery in America, but in the Roman Empire. Slavery has an ancient and worldwide lineage. Estimates vary, but some experts say that as many as two-thirds of the people in the Roman Empire lived under some form of bondage. (Ibid., 96). This slavery had nothing to do with race. These were people taken in battle or for their debts.

In the Roman world, the master had absolute authority over his slaves. He could set them to any task, send them to any place, separate them from their families and friends, and even take their life if he pleased. The master often branded his slaves, especially if they tried to escape. They branded slaves like we brand cattle, and for the same reason—to show ownership.

It was in that context that Paul wrote, “From henceforth, let no man trouble me for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Galatians 6:17). The Greek word for “marks” is *stigmata* that literally means brand marks.

The marks Paul referred to were the scars from the beatings and stonings he had received in missionary service. He was saying, “I belong to Jesus, and I’ve got the scars to prove it.”

Why did Paul feel a need to say that? He had gone to the region of Galatia and preached the gospel with great success. Many of the pagans had turned from idol worship to trust in the living God. He had preached the simple gospel of justification by faith, i.e. a person is saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the works of the law.

False prophets called Judaizers were hot on his heels as soon as he left the region. They were called Judaizers because they attempted to make Judaism the door to Christianity. They taught that no one could be saved apart from the Law of Moses. Keeping the Jewish law, especially the initiatory right of circumcision was essential to salvation.

Had they been successful, Christianity would have become nothing more than a sect of Judaism.

In order to be successful, they not only had to refute Paul's message but discredit his person. They said awful things about him. "He is not an apostle! He didn't get his message from God but from man. He is a fraud, an imposter, and he preaches what men want to hear, not the truth of God. You cannot trust the man or his message." All of this was deeply troubling to Paul. It would be to anyone. They were taking his new converts back into legalism, and they were attacking him personally. No one likes to be the object of constant, carping criticism, especially if it's not true. It was in response to these vicious attacks and slanderous accusations that Paul wrote the book of Galatians. It is basically a defense of himself and of his message.

He comes to the end of his defense to say, "Henceforth, let no man trouble me. I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

He was saying in essence, "I've made my case, so the voices that have been vexing me can stop. I am not troubled by them any more. I have been branded by Jesus. I am his servant. I've got the scars to prove it."

What does it mean to be branded by the Lord? What does it mean to belong to Him? It means at least three things:

- Jesus is the Lord of your life.
- The cross is the focus of your life.
- His approval is the concern of your life.

It Makes a Difference

First, to be branded by the Lord means that Jesus is the Lord of your life. Paul spoke of his commitment, saying, "I bear in my body the brand of Jesus." What brand was that? It was the "LJC" brand for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was his earthly name. Lord and Christ were his title, like Paul

is my name and Dean of Truett Seminary is my title.

Jesus was the name of a man born in Bethlehem, a man who grew up in Nazareth as the son of a carpenter, and a man who died on a Roman cross outside the walls of Jerusalem. That man, said Paul, was the Messiah, i.e., the anointed of God and He is Lord. The Greek word translated "Lord" is "kurios." It means "the supreme authority," "master," or "God."

When Paul said, "Jesus is Lord," he was committing high treason against the Roman empire. The official religion of Rome was emperor worship. They believed that Caesar was Lord. Every coin in the Roman empire had those words inscribed on them. Just as our coins have inscribed on them, "In God we trust," their coins—every one of them - had inscribed on it the words, "Caesar is Lord."

To say that Jesus was Lord was to defy imperial theology that said Caesar was God. Paul was saying that Jesus, not Caesar, was God. Jesus, not Caesar, was the supreme authority, the master of his life.

That meant that Jesus could set him at any task, send him to any place, separate him from his family and loved ones, and even take his life if He pleased. Paul belonged to Jesus, and he had the scars of persecution to prove that Jesus was the lord of his life.

Whose slave are you? Whose brand do you wear? There are only two. The scriptures say clearly, "Whoever commits sin is a servant of sin" (John 8:34). Sin is a master, a demanding, controlling master. But Jesus is also a master, and we choose to serve whichever master we want. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters . . ." (Matthew 6:24).

If Jesus is your Lord, it ought to make a difference in your life. Gerald Kennedy, the well-known Methodist minister of the past, tells of one of his seminary professors, John Wright Buckham, who was a personification of Christian caring and compassion. However, he was neither contro-

versial nor colorful in his presentation in his theology class, a deficiency for which Kennedy often criticized him. Kennedy says that his criticism of Dr. Buckham was silenced by another student one day who told him, "Whatever you want to say about John Wright Buckham's theology, just remember, it has made him a good man. I hope yours will do the same for you." (Gerald Kennedy, *While I Am On My Feet*, New York: Abbingdon, 1963, 40)

Following Christ as Lord, having him as the supreme authority in our lives, ought to make us better people. When it doesn't, people have trouble believing our message.

In the colonial days of America, some preachers went from Boston to attempt to convert the Seneca Indians to Christianity. The Senecas listened politely. Then Sagoyewantha, their chief, replied, "Brothers, we have been told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while to see what effect your preaching has on them. If we find it does some good, makes them honest, and less disposed to shooting Indians, we will consider again what you have said." (Joy Hacum, *Freedom: A History of Us*, Oxford Press, 2003, 53).

Perhaps the world is waiting to see if our message does us some good, makes us more honest, makes us more loving and compassionate before they believe it. It ought to, and it will, if we take Christ's lordship seriously.

Making Your Work Look Good

Second, to be branded by the Lord means the cross will be the focus of your life. Judaism had become a religion of work, i.e., a person was made right with God by keeping the law of Moses. The Judiazers were trying to get these new believers to return to the legalism of Judaism.

Paul warns that if they do go back into legalism, they go away from Christ. They make His death of none-effect

in their lives. Circumcision doesn't help and it doesn't hurt, so it doesn't matter. What matters is that we become new creatures (Galatians 6:15), and only Christ can enable you to do that.

Without a question, the greatest teaching of Jesus was that salvation comes not by what man does for God, but by what God does for man through his Son. A group of people saw Christ and inquired, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he (God) has sent" (John 6:28-29).

Salvation by faith, not works, is revolutionary because every other religion in the world teaches that man is saved (if there is salvation in that particular religion) by good deeds. Jesus repeatedly emphasized good works, but never as a means of salvation.

Oswald Chambers said, "I cannot enter the kingdom by virtue of my goodness. I can only enter as an absolute pauper." Our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6).

Dr. Paul McBride, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in The Colony, Texas, told how he grew up with a dirt front yard, but whenever company was coming, his mother had the kids get out and rake the front yard and make it look its best. He would complain and say, "But, Momma, it's dirt!" Her response was always the same, "Well, then, make our dirt look its best!"

I grew up in a house like that until I was in the second grade. We didn't have grass in our yard. Nobody had lawnmowers. We kept the grass and weeds chopped out with a hoe. Occasionally, we would sweep the yard with a broom called a brush broom, made by tying small limbs together in a bundle to resemble a broom. I, like Paul McBride, never understood why we had to sweep the yard.

Religion without Christ is like raking the yard. All it does is make your dirt look good.

That's why the apostle said, "God forbid that I should

glory save in the cross of Christ." Why glory in the cross? It is the way to God. It is the way to happiness. It is the way to forgiveness. It is the way to heaven. It is the cross that makes salvation possible, powerful, and personal. If you ask Paul what his favorite hymn was, he would say, "Turn to page 141 in your *Baptist Hymnal*."

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suff'ring and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.*

*Oh, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
Has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above,
To bear it to dark Calvary.*

*So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.*

(George Bennard, 1873-1960; *The Baptist Hymnal*. Nashville: Convention Press, 1991).

It Doesn't Take Much Size to Criticize

Third, to be branded by the Lord means the approval of God is the concern of your life. Paul closes his letter by saying, "Henceforth, let no man trouble me . . ." This whole experience was deeply troubling to Paul. Not only were the Judiazers leading his new Christians away from the gospel, but they were attacking him unmercifully. No one wants to be the object of constant attacks on their character.

I have often felt like Paul. As a pastor, I'd spend my days with people who were dying or divorcing or depressed only to come to a meeting and have someone harp on some insignificant issue. I often wanted to say, "Stop troubling me over trifles!"

But Paul came to terms with his critics by reminding them who he was and who he belonged to. He said, “You can spare me further distress. I belong to Him. I’ve got the brand marks to prove it.”

One of the great tragedies of the church today is it has its share of critics, and any one who sets out to serve the Lord today can expect a fair amount of criticism from both inside and outside the church. George Barna who does surveys about Christian work wrote, “When you ask people on the street what comes to mind when you say people are Christians, they gave these two answers: They go to church a lot, and they are very judgmental.”

I think that must be why Clovis Chapel, the renowned Methodist minister, said, “I have prayed throughout my ministry for holy numbness.” You need that when your work is for the Lord.

Earlier Paul warned the Galatians about a critical spirit when he wrote, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed of one another” (Galatians 5:15). It was a caution to not back-bite and chew on one another. Chewing on one another will destroy a church. It will destroy a marriage. It will destroy a team. I remind you that it doesn’t take much size to criticize.

Sam Rayburn, Texas congressman from Bonham, Texas, was a member in the United States House of Representatives for 48 continuous years of service—the longest record of service ever established. He was Speaker of the House for 21 of those years. His personal integrity was legendary. He accepted no money from lobbyists. He went on only one congressional junket in 48 years, and he paid his own expenses then. And he refused travel expenses from the government for his speaking tours.

Sam was both a politician and member of the Primitive Baptist church in Tioga, so he knew what he was talking about when he said on one occasion, “Any jackass can kick down a barn, but it takes a good carpenter to build one.” Let

me ask you, do you want to be known as a good carpenter or as a . . . ? Well, you can fill in the blank.

Criticism will come to you but when it does, don't strike back. Don't get embroiled in a fight, verbal or otherwise. It was race-car driver, Cale Yarbrough, who reminded us, "Don't ever wrestle with a pig. You'll both get dirty, and the pig will enjoy it."

To be true to Jesus, we must be free from the disturbing influences of human voices—from the things that annoy us and distract us. We are servants of His, not men. Let men think what they will. The one who will judge us is the Lord. Above the pressures of public opinion is the voice and eye of Christ. We must please Him and not care too much what other people think.

Paul found freedom in remembering he belonged to Christ. You can, too. Christ is the Master, and it is his opinion that counts. Remember we will all stand before Him one day, and it is only His "Well done" that will matter then.

Whose brand do you wear? There are only two masters. If I could go through this congregation, whose brand would they see on you? Whose servant are you?

For a number of years, I preached at Paisano, the cowboy camp in the mountains of West Texas between Alpine and Marfa. They have an unusual way of describing a man's conversion. When a man comes to Christ, he says, "I have come under to the Master."

Behind that saying is the image of a wild horse—spirited, strong, self-willed. Then one day he is herded into a corral, a rope thrown around his neck and he's snubbed up to a post. Then a saddle is thrown across his back and a rider mounts him for the first time. When he's untied, he kicks and bucks and twists and turns using every ounce of his strength to throw the rider. If the rider can stay in the saddle, in time the horse surrenders out of sheer exhaustion and gives up to the rider. He's come under to his master.

As they say, he's now saddle busted.

After that, the horse is as strong and as spirited as ever, but now it yields to the reins of his new master. That's what it means to be branded by Jesus. It means you have come under to the Master. You now yield your life to his reins. You have been saddle-busted by Jesus.

5

What Can Good People Do?

Psalm 11:3

I know every generation thinks theirs is the worst ever, but I think we may be close. I don't want to be like the childhood character Chicken Little, who, when hit in the head by a falling apple, said, "Goodness me! Oh, my goodness! The sky is falling. The sky is falling!" However, nor do I want to do like that other childhood character Pollyanna, who was blindly optimistic about life.

I do know this: no nation that has ever gone into history's garbage dump has been defeated from without. They have all committed suicide. The people have become weak and immoral, and when there is nothing to believe, there is nothing to defend. We are moving dangerously close to that.

The whole entertainment industry has become a vast wasteland of profanity and pornography. If I had talked the way they talk on television and the movies, my mother would have washed my mouth out with soap . . . and my daddy would have knocked the suds out of me.

Hollywood produces 400 movies a year, and the pornography industry produces 4,000. That's 80 a week or 10-15 a day (Fox News, 4/16/04). It takes a lot of pornography to satisfy this sick appetite.

There are 3,500 divorces in America each day. That puts over a million more children in broken homes every year (*On Mission Magazine*, January/February 2004).

Americans now gamble more money than they spend on groceries (*Money Matters*, June 2003). One out of every three women is physically abused.

Homosexuality has moved out of the closet into the courthouse, out of the courthouse into the schoolhouse, out of the schoolhouse into the church house. What we used to blush about, we now brag about, and what we used to brag about, we now blush about. One out of every 138 U.S. residents and one out of every 75 men in America is in prison (*Tyler Telegram*, 5/29/04).

Islam is the fastest growing religion in America. One in five people in the world are Muslims. They are the majority in 56 countries, and one in four Muslims is under 15 years of age. That adds up to more prospects for terrorists. Islam within itself is not a violent religion. The word means "submission" and represents submission to Allah. But fanatical fundamentalists are using it as a weapon to disrupt the whole world. While Islam grows we close three times as many churches as we begin each year (*SBC Life*, June/July 2003).

Look at us today. There has never been a time in our history when we've had so many expensive houses, and yet so many broken homes. There has never been a time when there have been so many fine courthouses, and yet so much injustice among the people. There has never been a time when we've had so many laborsaving devices, and yet so many nervous breakdowns. There has never been a time when we've had so many books on how to raise children, and yet so much juvenile delinquency.

I think Anne Graham Lotz was right, "If God doesn't judge America, he's going to have to apologize for Sodom and Gomorrah."

It's time for us to ask the question with the psalmist, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). All about us are crumbling foundations – moral, spiritual, social and denominational. Do you know

of one major denomination not in turmoil? And there is hardly a church that is not.

Having raised the question David quickly adds, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, his eyelids try (search) the children of men, . . ." (vs. 4). He saw the Lord still on his throne watching over his own.

I like the response of the African school-teacher whom Denton Lotz, Executive Director of the Baptist World Alliance, tells about. She was in a war-torn country that was disrupted by a revolution, and many people had been displaced. Out in the bush, he saw a church and a sign that said, "Displaced Baptists," above the door. It was a church for Baptists who had been displaced by the revolution. On down the road, he saw another sign that said, "Displaced School." The school had no pencils, no paper, no blackboard, no chalk, and no books. He remarked to the teacher, "You must be very discouraged." The teacher smiled and replied, "No, Dr. Lotz, we may be helpless, but we're not hopeless."

In my text David raises the question we should all be asking and he gives the answer we should all anchor to. If the Lord is still on his throne and watching over his own, we may be helpless, but we are not hopeless. We can build our lives and hopes on Him. There are at least four things God's people can do in the face of a decaying society.

What are they?

- We can repent – we can get our lives right with God
- We can pray – we can ask God to intervene
- We can witness – we can point people to the one who can save them
- We can do good – we can brighten the corner where we are

Touching the High Spots

First, we can repent. We can get our lives right with God. Unless we start there we start at no beginning and we work to no end.

In Isaiah's day Israel was facing a threat to their national security. They prayed for the threat to be removed, but the Lord had not answered their prayers. Some suggested it was because the Lord was unable to remove the threat. Others said that he was unable to hear their prayers. But Isaiah severely rebuked them and told them it was their sins that kept their prayers from being answered.

He went on to explain that their sins were like a wall of partition between them and God.

That truth comes out in Isaiah 59:1-2, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot 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."

The nearer we live to God the more aware we are of our sins and the need to confess them and repent of them. Daniel is one of the few people in the scriptures about whom no evil is spoken. Yet Daniel prayed, "We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly, we have rebelled against thee, we have departed from thy precepts" (Daniel 9:5). He prayed "we," not "they."

David was a man after God's own heart, and yet he prayed, "Lord, have mercy upon me, and according to thy loving kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, and thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Psalm 51:1-4).

Isaiah was in church when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and the glory of God filled the temple. And he cried out, "Woe is me! For I am undone: because I am a

man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

The Apostle Paul called himself "the chief of sinners."

We need that kind of honest confession, that kind of repentance. The scriptures say, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

What is your besetting sin? What is the weight that keeps you from being all God wants you to be? Surely you know what it is. If your heart is attuned to God, he has revealed that to you. Is it pride, the king of all sins? Anger? Greed? A critical spirit? An ill temper? Lust? A filthy mouth? Gossip? Jealousy? Lying? Addiction to alcohol, drugs or pornography?

My guess is that you know what it is. If you're married, your mate has told you. Then confess it and turn from it.

The late Ernie Staulkner, longtime assistant coach with the Dallas Cowboys, was mistakenly injected with a near-lethal mixture by the team doctor while playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

As a priest hunkered over him in a pre-game locker room to hear his last confession, Ernie reflected on his boisterous years with Bobbie Lane and said, "Father, I just have time to hit the high spots."

When it comes to repentance, we can't stop with the high spots. We've got to cover the whole gamut.

How long has it been since you were on your knees in sorrow for your sins? How long since you shed a tear of repentance? Jonathan Edwards reminded us that we'll not see revival until "our wet-eye and our amen are both in church again." If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? We can repent.

Powerful Praying

Second, we can pray. We can ask God to intervene. The first time I preached this sermon I put prayer as the first thing to do. Then I remembered that the scriptures say, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). The word "regard" means to cherish. If I have sin in my life and am content for it to stay there the Lord will not hear me. So if we want to be effective in our praying, repentance must come first. We must confess our sins, and then turn from them if our prayers are to have effect. So repentance comes first.

The first response of the people of God to difficulties has always been to pray. When the children of Israel under Moses' leadership came to the banks of the Red Sea with the army of Pharaoh in pursuit, what did they do? They prayed.

When Jerusalem was besieged and surrounded by the Assyrian army under Sennacherib, what did they do? They prayed.

When Daniel was cast into the lion's den, he prayed. When the three Hebrew children were cast into the fiery furnace, they prayed.

When Peter was locked up in prison after Herod had put James to death by the sword, the church met in fervent prayer.

Why did they pray? They knew what prayer could do. They knew that prayer could part the waters of the Red Sea. They knew that prayer could conquer the armies of Assyria. They knew that prayer could shut the mouths of lions. They knew that prayer could quench the fires of persecution, and they knew that prayer could open prison doors and set the captives free.

When the thirteen colonies declared their independence from England, Oliver Hart (1741-1795), pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, SC, joined in the revolutionary cause. It was said that the British feared the prayers of

Oliver Hart more than they feared the Revolutionary Army. We need prayer warriors like that today.

When the children of Israel found themselves in exile in Babylon, they lost all hope. The foundations of their life seemed destroyed. The psalmist said, "We hung our harps on a willow tree." And when their captors tormented them, saying, "Sing us a song of Zion," they responded, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Before you hang your harp on a willow tree and weep, I want to remind you that there is a way out of this sinful mess. It is first down, and then up. It's down on our knees in humility and repentance, and then up to God in prayer.

If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? I'll tell you what. We can repent and we can pray.

The Sin of Silence

Third, we can witness. We can tell others about Jesus who can change lives. Dr. Charles Malik, Lebanese statesman, educator, diplomat and former General Secretary of the United Nations, said, "If we're going to change the world, we've got to change men's hearts. And only Jesus Christ can change men's hearts." So, in this world of crumbling foundations, we must renew our efforts to bring men and women to faith in him. He can change us. He can save our sick society and straighten out our warped lives.

Years ago, when Nikita Khrushchev visited America, he gave a press conference at the Washington Press Club. The first question from the floor – handled through an interpreter – was: "Today you talked about the hideous rule of your predecessor, Stalin. You were one of his closest aides and colleagues during those years. What were *you* doing all that time?"

At the height of his power he was exterminating 40,000 people a month. Khrushchev's face got red. "Who asked that?" he roared. All five hundred faces turned down. "Who

asked that?" he insisted. There was no response, only silence. Then he answered, "That's what I was doing."

It may be that our greatest sin is the sin of silence. Not speaking the message of salvation that can save us from a crumbling foundation.

Martin Niemoller, a German Lutheran pastor, was imprisoned for his resistance of Nazism in WWII. He had been a U-boat captain in WWI prior to becoming a pastor and was a supporter of Hitler before he came to power. But he broke with the Nazis very early and organized resistance against them. He was eventually arrested for treason and on Hitler's direct orders, was held in Dachau concentration camp until the end of WWII. Near the end of the war, he narrowly escaped execution.

One night, in his prison cell, he had a dream about Hitler standing at the judgment bar of God, pleading that he had never heard the gospel. Niemoller wrote, "I heard the voice of God asking me, 'Were you with him one whole hour and didn't tell him about my son?'" When he awoke, he remembered that he had indeed spent an hour with Hitler and said nothing of Jesus Christ. From that moment on, he made every effort to witness to guards and fellow prisoners and was faithful to that task until the end.

Niemoller spoke about the sin of silence when he said, "In Germany, they first came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by then, no one was left to speak up."

Louis L'Amour, the western novel writer, in his book, "The Last Breed," said, "There are good men everywhere. I only wish they had louder voices." That was never more true than when it comes to Christian witnessing.

How long will we wait before we stand up and speak up for Christ? It's one of those things we can do and must do in a day of crumbling foundations. If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? We will pray, we will repent, we will witness.

Making Christianity Believable

Finally, we can do good to all men. We can brighten the corner where we are. When bearing witness to Christ to the house of Cornelius, Simon Peter summed up the life and ministry of Jesus by saying, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). We may not be able to heal all who are oppressed but we can "go about doing good."

What good did Jesus do? He fed the hungry, He ministered to the sick, He befriended sinners and other outcasts. And He met human need wherever he found it. He taught us that giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, friendship to the lonely, and ministry to the sick and imprisoned, were ways that you could minister to Him.

Our world needs that. What does that mean to us practically? It means, at least in part, to be a good neighbor, a good friend, a good employer, a good employee. It means to be kind, sensitive, and helpful to others. It means to meet needs when and wherever you find them. If you do that you will be like Jesus.

When Jesus went about doing good, we cannot be content just to go about. We, too, must reach out to the poor, needy, lonely, hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, and sick around us, and minister to them in his name. When we do not live like Christians, we make Christianity unbelievable. The one thing that characterized Jesus as much as anything is that he went about doing good.

And we will remember that God is still on His throne.

Jim Denison tells that when he was teaching at Southwestern Seminary years ago, he asked the students to share ways they had grown through hard times. One described financial struggles he had been through, and the way he learned to trust God. Another told about his marriage difficulties and how they learned to rely on God's grace. Then a young man named Walter stood to his feet and told about the year his wife and four children died, each in a separate tragedy. The class was shocked by what he said. When Jim asked Walter how he survived that year, he told them that he had a pastor who called him every day and said, "Walter, God is still on the throne." Then Walter turned, tears in his eyes, and said to the class, "God is still on his throne" (*The Word Today: today's news in spiritual perspective* by Dr. James C. Denison, Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, www.Godisssues.org, March 24, 2000).

He is and that is our only hope. I believe the survival of America depends on revival in the church. And it has to begin in places like this and with people like you.

Six

The Four Dimensions of Life

Genesis 5:25-27

When John F. Kennedy, Jr. died in a tragic airplane crash, his uncle, Ted Kennedy, said in his eulogy, "He had every gift but length of years."

That's all some people have. They live and die and it is as if they had never been. The most famous person like this was Methuselah, who lived 969 years—the oldest man who ever lived. The scriptures say, "And Methuselah lived a hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech. And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died" (Gen 5:25-27).

An interesting sidenote is that Methuselah was 187 years old when his son, Lamech, was born. Lamech was 182 years old when his son, Methuselah's grandson, Noah, was born. And Noah was 600 years old when the flood came. Those years together total 969 years. Apparently, Methuselah either died in the year of the flood or in the flood, and for all we know, if there had been no flood, he might still be here.

But all that is said of him is that he lived, bore children and died. He stretched his life out longer than anyone before or after him, but that's all. His solitary virtue is that he lived a long time. If he did anything worthwhile, it was not recorded. He was just a link between generations. He

lived a one-dimensional life.

Methuselah's story is not just a resume of a life before the flood. It sums up the lives of many people today. They live, they have children, and they die.

There has to be more to life than longevity. We are made in the image of God. We have a higher heredity. We can't be satisfied just to pump blood. There are other dimensions to life that need to be added.

This is not to minimize the importance of a long life. We all want to live as long as we can. We want to have many birthdays. Herschel Hobbs said, "Birthdays are good for you. People who have a lot of them usually live a long time." We ought to eat sensibly, exercise moderately, and have regular checkups. But don't be a fool about your physical health. Besides, as Red Foxx reminds us, health nuts are going to feel stupid one day lying in a hospital bed dying of nothing. I think that's why a friend of mine says he refuses to exercise. He says he wants to be sick when he dies.

Ultimately, of course, death wins out. As Marcus Aurelius said in the movie *Gladiator*, "In the end, death smiles at us and all we can do is smile back."

In the meantime, we grow old and wear out. Buckner Fanning said to his friend, Browning Ware, "I think God is calling me home on the installment plan." Me too. When I exercise nowadays, I hurt in places I used to not know I had. To tell you the truth, when I bend down to tie my shoes nowadays, I look around to see if there's anything else I can do while I'm down there.

Length of years can't be all there is to life. The important thing is not how long we live, but what we do with the days allotted to us. We need quality as well as quantity. The measure of life is not its duration but its donation. Jesus lived only 33 years, but he lived a life of eternal significance. Our prayer ought to be that of martyred missionary Jim Elliott who wrote in his diary, "I seek not a long life, but a

full one like yours, Lord Jesus.”

What makes for a full life? There are four dimensions of life that we all need:

- Length of days
- Depth of commitment
- Breadth of compassion
- Height of hope

It takes all four to make a well-rounded life.

One Walked and One Talked

First, we need depth of commitment. Apparently, Methuselah did not have this. Methuselah’s father was Enoch. The scriptures say of him, “Enoch walked with God: and was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). He was one of two men who went to heaven without having to die. The other was Elisha who was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11).

Someone expressed it this way, “Enoch and God were once walking in the cool of the day, and God said to Enoch, “We are closer to my house than we are to yours, why don’t you just come on home with me,” and he did. However it happened, Enoch went to heaven without dying (Hebrews 11:5).

Methuselah’s grandson was Noah, a preacher of righteousness. Methuselah’s father walked with God and his grandson talked for God, but apparently Methuselah had no such commitment to God. If he had, surely the scriptures would have said something about it.

We are living in an age of shallow commitments. We are not committed to marriage. We are not committed to work. We are not committed to morality. We are not committed to church. We are not committed to Christ. This is the “me-generation.” As someone has said, “If Galileo had been a baby-boomer, he could have proved that the universe revolved around himself.”

The poet, Sydney Lanier, expressed it this way: “We

live in an age of half-faith and half-doubt; standing at the Temple doors, head in, heart out."

And because of a lack of commitment, we live impoverished lives. Jesus said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

Mark those words, "for my sake and the gospel's," for they express the commitment necessary to have a meaningful life. This is no new struggle. It is a personal choice for every person.

The made-for-TV movie, "Master Spy: The Robert Hanssen Story," is the true account of a double spy who betrayed America by giving secrets to the Russians. The movie opens with the wedding scene of Hanssen and his wife marrying in a Roman Catholic Church. Following the service, he and his father-in-law are talking, and he says, "I'd like to convert to Roman Catholicism, but I'm not ready."

His father-in-law replied, "It takes some people a lifetime to convert and for others, the road to Damascus is a bus ride" (CBS, Nov. 11, 2002).

The road to Damascus where we meet Christ and bow to his lordship is never a bus ride. Self dies hard. I am told that in the Vatican there is a picture of a stallion running wild with his eyes blazing with fire and foam coming out of his nostrils. There are bits in his mouth pulling back ferociously. The inscription under the painting is "The Conversion of Paul." That's what it is like to surrender our will to his will, but that's the secret to a full life.

Jesus, I love you; Jesus, I love you

Second, our lives need the breadth of compassion. The Apostle Paul prays for his converts that they might comprehend "the breadth, and length, and depth and height"

of Christ's love (Ephesians 3:18). He suggests to us that Christ's love is as broad as the human race; as long as eternity; as deep as human misery; as high as the heavens.

That love is the secret of Christ's great life. In 1912, B.B. Warfield wrote about the emotions of Jesus. He suggested that Jesus experienced every emotion that we experience: anger — when he cast the money-changers out of the temple; sorrow — when he wept at the grave of Lazarus; despair — when he sighed in the Garden of Gethsemane; rejection — when he cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But by far, the most common emotion Jesus experienced was that of compassion. And it was his compassion that marked his earthly life as being so unique. It was his compassion that caused him to give his life for us on Calvary's cross.

And it is that kind of love that will give our lives significance also. There is no life so empty as a self-centered life. There is no life so centered as a self-emptied life. A person all wrapped up in him/herself makes a very small package.

Every life needs a purpose. The greatest tragedy of life is not death, but life without reason. The deepest craving of the human heart is significance. As Marcus Aurelius said to General Maximus in the movie *Gladiator*, "When a man comes to the end of his life, he wants to know it had some purpose." Our purpose is summed up by Jesus when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and being, and the second commandment is like unto that: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39). We find our reason for being is loving and serving God and our fellow man.

A.W. Tozer reminds us, "The widest thing in the universe is not space but the capacity of the human heart. Being made in the image of God, it is capable of almost limitless extensions in all directions. And one of the tragedies of life is that we allow it to shrink until there is room

for little besides our own selves.”

I was in a business board meeting recently when the chairman was lamenting that one of his key management team members seemed to have no love for others. He turned to me and said, “Preacher, that’s your business. How do you teach people to love?” I responded, “Only Jesus can do that.”

According to Sister Burnet, the last words on the dying lips of Mother Teresa, who embodied the love I’m talking about, were, “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you.” The more we love Jesus, the more we have compassion on those around us. It’s a dimension of life we cannot afford to be without.

I Know Where I’m Going

Third, we need the height of hope. Hope is expectancy of a better tomorrow. And we must have that to have a full life. The apostle Paul puts hope in perspective where he writes, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

John Ortberg, one of the pastors at Willow Creek Community Church, tells that when he was growing up, his grandmother was an incredible Monopoly player. Whenever she came for a visit, the two of them played Monopoly often. She had an absolutely vicious game and she always wiped him out. By the end of the game, he had nothing and grandma had everything. Then she would smile and say, “John, someday you will learn to play the game.”

John said one summer, a new kid moved in next door who was also a fabulous Monopoly player. John practiced with him every day and he really improved. He was thrilled because he knew Grandmother was coming to visit in September.

When she arrived, John gave her a big hug and kiss, and said, “Grandma, how about a Monopoly game?” Her eyes lit up and she said, “Sure, John.” John was ready for

her this time. By the end of the game he had wiped her out. He owned everything. At the end of the game, his grandmother smiled and said, "John, now that you know how to play the game, let me teach you a lesson about life - it all goes back in the box."

"What do you mean?" John asked. "This is the greatest day of my life! I want to have the game bronzed!" She said, "No, everything you bought, everything you accumulated - at the end of the game, it all goes back into the box."

Isn't that the way it is with life? When the game is over, the only thing you get to keep is your soul. If you lose that, you have lost everything.

A friend told me that in 2000 Billy Graham was honored at a dinner in Charlotte, North Carolina. When he stood to speak, he touched the lapels of his suit and said, "Do you like my new suit? I bought it to be buried in."

Then Graham told about Albert Einstein riding a train once. When the conductor came by to get his ticket, he felt around in his various coat pockets, top and bottom, and couldn't find his ticket. The conductor said, "That's all right, Mr. Einstein, I know you. I'll come back later and get your ticket."

When the conductor came by later, Mr. Einstein was on his hands and knees looking under the chair and around the floor for his ticket, but he still could not find it. Once again the conductor said, "That's okay, Mr. Einstein, I know who you are." Einstein responded, "I know who I am also, but I don't know where I'm going."

Then Billy Graham said, "When you see me in my suit at my funeral, you can rest assured I know where I'm going." Do you know where you are going? Do you have the hope of heaven in eternal life?

George W. Truett, after whom my seminary is named, was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas for 47 years. In addition to building the largest and greatest church of his day, he was the driving force behind the founding of

Baylor Healthcare System, Baylor Medical School, Baylor Dental School, and the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He was also a major influence in the founding of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and president of the Baptist World Alliance. And he was one of the most popular and powerful and influential preachers in America.

The last year of his life, Truett was very ill with cancer. He tried to resign his church, but the deacons would not accept his resignation. Instead, they gave him a six-month leave of absence. He returned to the pulpit only once during that time. After his message on that final Sunday, the choir began to sing very softly:

*He leadeth me, O blessed thought
O words of heavenly comfort fraught
What e're I do, where're I be
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

*And when my task on earth is done,
When by thy grace the victory's won
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee
Since God through Jordan leadeth me.*

*He leadeth me, He leadeth me.
His faithful follower I would be,
For by his hand He leadeth me.*

(Joseph H. Gilmore, 1834-1918;

The Baptist Hymnal, Nashville: Convention Press, 1956, 58).

That's a whole new dimension to life, the spiritual dimension, and it must not be overlooked. We need length of years. We need depth of dedication. We need the breadth of compassion. We need the height of hope. And we need the assurance of His leadership.

Seven

The Way of Greatness

Mark 9:33-41

If all people on earth have a set of common ancestors—Adam and Eve—and, therefore, a common point of origin, we should expect them all to speak a common language. How, then, does it happen that there is, in fact, a multiplicity of tongues in use throughout the world?

The Bible addresses this question in the account of the Tower of Babel. What was it? It is the story of men following the flood saying, “Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top to heaven, and let us make ourselves a name” (Genesis 11:4).

They believed that if they built the tallest tower, a heaven-scraper, they would acquire instant fame. Instead, the Bible tells us that they were doubly punished. They suffered a confusion of language and all they could do was babble unintelligibly, and they were scattered abroad on the face of the earth.

What was their sin? Arrogance and ambition. Their mistake? They mistook bigness for greatness, size for significance. This particular sin did not disappear with the tower builders; it is yet alive and well among us today.

We live in a time addicted to and enamored with bigness—big cars, big houses, big salaries, big churches, big business and big shots. But to the contrary Jesus emphasized the importance of little things: the widow’s mite, faith the size of a mustard seed, and about giving a cup of cold water to a child.

The scriptures speak about the importance of little

things on the occasion of Jesus and his disciples arriving in Capernaum. The disciples had been quibbling along the way about who among them was the greatest. Jesus asked them what they were disputing about and they would not answer. They were ashamed to reveal such unworthy motives. But, he knew—he always does.

I heard about the food service manager of a small Christian school in the Midwest who placed a sign above the cookies, “Take just one cookie, God is watching.” Down the line a ways, at the fruit section, a student had printed a card of his own, “Take all the apples you want, God is watching the cookies.” We know, of course, that God is watching both.

The scriptures say, “The Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts” (1 Chronicles 28:9). And again, “Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” (Jeremiah 23:9). The answer, of course, is no.

So, knowing their thoughts about greatness, Jesus said to his disciples, “If any man desires to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (vs. 35).

Then He took a child and set him in the midst of them and said, “Whosoever receives one of these little children in my name receives Me: and whosoever shall receive Me receives the one who sent Me” (vs. 37). At that point, John said, “Lord, we saw a man casting out devils in your name, and he was not a part of our group, so we told him to stop.” Jesus said, “Don’t stop him, for no man can do miracles in my name and speak evil of me. He is not against us, but he is with us.”

Then he added, “Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward” (Mark 9:33-40).

Knowing their thoughts and ambitions for greatness, this desire for recognition and reward, Jesus reminded them

that the measure of greatness is service and the simplest act would be rewarded. In this, he reminded them and he reminds us that the way to greatness is to:

- Do the simplest acts
- For the smallest people
- In the Savior's name

All Service Ranks the Same With God

First, greatness consists of doing the simplest acts. Jesus talks here about befriending little children and giving a cup of cold water in his name. Could anything be simpler? If we want to be great in his sight, we must stop thinking in terms of preaching eloquent sermons, singing stirring solos, teaching memorable lessons, or writing best-selling books. We need to stop thinking big and begin thinking little.

The church, of course, must have its great orators, its bright and shining lights and its noted teachers, but it must also have those who serve in obscurity, behind the scenes in love. It must have people to do little things.

John Brodie, perhaps the first of the many great San Francisco 49ers quarterbacks, had as one of his jobs holding the ball for the field goal kicker on the extra points. He was once asked by a fan, "How come a great quarterback like you has to hold the ball for the kicker?" Replied Brodie, "Because if I don't, it would fall over" (Elton Brooks—*Fort Worth Star Telegram*).

Somebody in life has to do the little things. The kicker kicks and gets the extra points and is often the hero of the game, but somebody has to hold the ball. Both are important. It is the same in Christian service. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning reminds us, "All service ranks the same with God." The person who sweeps the floor, passes out bulletins, and keeps the nursery, is as important in the service of God as the person who stands behind the pulpit.

Henry Ward Beecher expressed it this way: "The world has to be cleaned by somebody, and you are not called to

God if you are ashamed to scrub.” Perhaps the greatest mark of greatness is that a person is willing to do little things.

Paul, giving instructions to Timothy about an order of women some believed to be deaconesses, said, “Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man. Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (I Tim 5:9-10). Note that the five things mentioned here are little, ordinary things that constitute good works. He uses the word “if” five times. The church doesn’t need “iffy” people in places of leadership, men or women.

George W. Truett is the greatest preacher ever to come out of Texas, and perhaps out of America. For 47 years he was the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and built it into the great church it has been through the years. In addition to accomplishments which have been mentioned earlier, he saved Baylor University from financial ruin by raising \$92,000 to pay off her indebtedness. He also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance.

At the request of Woodrow Wilson, Truett went to Europe during WWI to minister to our troops for six months. He often worked eighteen hour days, preaching up to six times a day to as many as 15,000 of our troops. In between preaching assignments, he counseled with scores of young men. Then at the end of the day, when everyone else was at rest, he wrote a personal note to the families of every Texas boy he met.

Think of the encouragement that was to those families. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-A, who was named after George W. Truett, was encouraged by his wife to be an encourager. He asked her, “How do I know if a person needs

encouragement?" She said, "If they are breathing."

I submit to you that this action of Truett, sitting in his tent and writing notes by candlelight to the families of a Texas soldier, was as much a mark of his greatness as when he was standing in the spotlight preaching one of his marvelous sermons.

It was said of an actor who had played minor roles for twenty-five years, "He was indispensable in small parts." May that be said of us. It is a mark of greatness to do the simplest of things.

How Do You Treat People You Don't Need?

Second, greatness consists of doing the simplest of things for the smallest of people. Jesus talked about treating a child with kindness and respect and, in a comparable passage, about giving a cup of cold water to a child (Matthew 10:42).

Most scholars agree that this reference to little children should not be limited to those young in years. He was rather talking about those who are least in importance, helpless, dependent, defenseless, people who are easily overlooked.

The Lord taught Peter in his encounter with Cornelius, a Gentile, that he was not a respecter of persons. The phrase "respecter of persons," literally means "acceptor of face." He does not accept us or reject us on the basis of race or wealth or education or position or anything outward, and neither should we.

Jesus so identifies with needy people that He considers what is done for them as being done to Himself (Matthew 25:31-46).

Edwin Markham's well-known poem, "How the Great Guest Came" drives the point home well. Conrad, a kindly German cobbler, lived alone. One day he received the revelation that Christ would be a guest in his home. With this news, his joy knew no bounds.

He busied himself feverishly with preparation for the holy visitor. But he was not so busy that he could not help three needy strangers who came intermittently to his door throughout the day — a cold beggar, a hungry woman, and a homeless child.

The day sped on and still the expected guest did not appear. As the day slipped away, Conrad knelt in puzzled prayer: “Lord, what happened?” Out of the silence came a voice:

*Conrad, do not be dismayed, for
Three times I came to your friendly door.
Three times my shadow was on your floor.
I was the beggar with bruised feet;
I was the woman you gave to eat.
I was the child on the homeless street.*

(Edwin Markham).

Lee Corso, who announces the college football game of the day on ESPN, was announcing the game between TCU and the University of Southern Mississippi on November 20, 2003. TCU was undefeated and nationally ranked, but was being thoroughly trounced by the University of Southern Mississippi. Commenting on this, Lee said that character is measured by two things. The first is how we deal with adversity — when we get knocked down, do we get up again? And the second is how we treat people whom we don’t need.

When Jesus speaks of little children, He is speaking about the kind of people we don’t need; treating people with kindness and respect is a mark of greatness.

I spoke earlier of the greatness of George W. Truett. He was not alone in helping the poorest around him. A funeral director once called the First Baptist Church of Dallas, hoping to speak to Truett’s associate about a funeral for a destitute family who lived in a dilapidated little shack. But Truett answered the phone, and upon hearing the re-

quest, asked, “Can’t I do it?” And he did go to that humble dwelling and minister to that poor family the same way he always ministered—with love, care and sincerity.

Truett stands in stark contrast to many mega-church pastors whom people can’t get to today, many of whom even have unlisted phone numbers.

Joann Jones said that during her second year of nursing school, her professor gave the class a pop quiz. “I breezed through the questions until I read the last one. ‘What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?’ Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times, but how would I know her name?

“I handed in the paper, leaving the last question blank. Before the class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our grade.”

“‘Absolutely,’ the professor said. ‘In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello.’”

“I have never forgotten that lesson. I also have learned her name was Dorothy” (*Guideposts*).

Waitresses, checkout clerks at the grocery store, maids, tellers at the bank, yardmen, these are the little people. We need to treat them with kindness and respect. And we need to learn their names. By the way, the name of Truett Seminary’s cleaning lady is Maria.

Outwitted

Third, greatness consists of doing the simplest of acts for the smallest people in the Savior’s name. Four times in this passage, he uses the phrases, “in my name” (vs. 37, 38, 41.) We sometimes sing:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there’s just something about that name.

*Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim.*

*Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,
But there's something about that name.*

(Gloria and William Gaither, c1970, William J. Gaither, Inc.)

And there is. We are saved by His name. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

We are baptized in His name. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

We are to pray in His name. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

And, we are to serve in His name. We do not render service in the name of humanity, but in the name of our Savior. Jesus is the Messiah in whom we trust; the Mediator whom we praise; the Master for whom we work.

While Jesus was talking about these things, John interrupts, telling Him of a man who has been casting out demons in His name, but is not a part of their group. John and the other disciples told the man to stop. Jesus reproved them, saying that a person who worked in His name could not speak ill of Him.

The disciples wanted to shut him out because he wasn't one of them. We often do the same thing. We become narrow, exclusive. But Jesus wanted to take him in. That's the way of our Lord, always enlarging the circle, always trying to bring people into the fellowship.

Edwin Markham, the poet, was once betrayed and defrauded by a man he trusted. Angry and bitter he came to the place where he could no longer write poetry. One day, sitting at his desk doodling and drawing circles because

he could not concentrate to write, the Lord convicted him that he must forgive the man. In response he prayed, "Lord, I will, and I do freely forgive." With the bitterness gone, joy returned to his life. He then penned perhaps his most famous poem, "Outwitted":

*You drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But love and I had the will to win;
We drew a circle that took him in!*

(Edwin Markham).

That's the Christian way. And it's all because of Jesus.

Jesus then reminded his disciples that those who do the simplest acts for the smallest of people in the Savior's name would, under no circumstances, lose their reward. In another place, the scriptures say, "The Lord is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love that you have shown toward his name" (Hebrews 6:10). You do serve with absolute confidence that the Lord will reward your good deeds. He never forgets.

In the movie *Gladiator*, the Roman General, Maximus, speaks to his troops as they prepare to launch an assault against the Germanic hoards. He says, "What we do in life echoes in eternity."

It is so with us. Anything we do for anybody in Christ's name counts. Our simple acts of service are like a pebble thrown into a pond. The ripples keep moving until they reach the farthest shores. What we do for Christ does echo in eternity. He remembers. He rewards.

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Eight

The Church As It Ought to Be

Acts 13:1-3

The only movement Jesus left on earth to represent him was the church. It is, therefore, in my estimation, the most important movement on earth. He intended it to be a lighthouse to point men and women to salvation in Christ. He intended it to be an outpost to extend the kingdom of God into new frontiers. He intended it to be a voice crying in the wilderness and calling people to repentance and faith.

But so often, the church is anything but that. Instead of being a lighthouse, it has become a guardhouse for dead orthodoxy. Instead of being an outpost, it has become a hitching post to tie us to the status quo. Instead of being a voice for God, it has become an echo of the culture that surrounds us.

We need to think of the church, as it/we ought to be. Antioch is a model for us in this respect. We are told about the church at Antioch in Acts 13:1-3. This chapter is a watershed chapter in the book of Acts and in Christian history. Up until now Peter had been the dominant leader of the church. From this point on, the apostle Paul will be. Up to this point, the Gospel had been taken almost exclusively to the Jews. From this point on, it will be taken to the Gentiles. Up until this chapter, Jerusalem was the center of Christianity. From here on, the center moves to Antioch. Somebody said that the book of Acts is “a tale of two cities.” First Jerusalem, then Antioch.

Jesus foretold of his church when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Then after his death and resurrection, he told his disciples, "You will receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost that promise was fulfilled, the Holy Spirit came, and the church was constituted.

His followers did not immediately launch into world missions. They seemed content, for a period, to bask in their newfound faith and in their fellowship with one another. Then persecution came, and with the death of Stephen, the disciples were scattered. Some went as far as Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Antioch of Syria. We hear much about Syria today because it borders Iraq and it harbors terrorists. It is the same Syria that is talked about in the scriptures. And, the city of Antioch is still there; only today it is called Antakier. In the New Testament era, it was a thriving metropolis of half million people. Today, it has about 30,000.

The disciples who went there preached the Lord Jesus, and many turned to the Lord. So mighty was their work there, that the scriptures say, "the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

The church at Jerusalem heard about the work at Antioch and sent Barnabas to investigate. He found a thriving church and stayed there a year, teaching and encouraging the brethren. He needed help with his work, so he enlisted the apostle Paul to come from Tarsus to assist him. By this time, Paul had been a Christian 13 or 14 years and was well grounded in the faith.

Antioch was a remarkable church. It was the church as it ought to be. It had both prophets and teachers in its fellowship. Prophets were inspired preachers, who got their message directly from God. In the days before the New Testament had been written, these preachers walked in such close communion with God, that he gave them their

inspired message. The teachers were the pastors of local churches who stayed in their community and taught the people the word of God. Five of their leaders at Antioch are named here – Barnabas, a Jew from Cyprus; Simeon, who is called Niger, which is a Roman name so he must have moved in Roman circles; Lucias, who was from Cyrene in north Africa; Manaen, who was a childhood companion of Herod; and Paul, who was a trained Jewish rabbi from Tarsus. These five are symbolic of the universal appeal of the Gospel. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost spoke to them, telling them to set aside Paul and Barnabas for the work that He had called them to do. In obedience they laid hands on them and sent them out on a great missionary enterprise. Up until now, the gospel had been spread by refugees. Now it was being spread by missionaries called and sent by churches.

There are three things that characterized the church at Antioch that we need today.

- We need to be worshipping churches
- We need to be listening churches
- We need to be sending churches

Putting the Spotlight on God

First, we need to be a worshipping church. The scriptures say that the leaders ministered to the Lord and fasted. The Greek word “ministered” refers to the performance of public service. It was first employed for civil service in Athenian law. It came to describe the official service of priests and Levites. It is used only three times in the New Testament (here, Romans 15:27, and Hebrews 10:11). It means they were public servants leading in public worship by teaching and preaching. Publicly they were teaching and preaching. Privately they were fasting. It meant they were conducting worship services.

Worship is the central purpose of the church. Several years ago, the prominent pastor of a large historic church

suddenly resigned amid controversy. It shocked and rocked the old church so much that one of the church leaders said that their services that day were not “business as usual, but to find the face of God.” An 18-year-old boy reading the statement in the newspaper remarked to his parents, “I thought seeking the face of God was the usual business of the church.”

The young man was right. Seeking the face of God is the primary work of the church. Jesus made that clear when he said, “My Father’s house shall be called a house of prayer” (Mark 11:17). In Jesus’ day, the outer courtyard of the Temple, the place where Gentiles could worship, had become a place of merchandising. Booths had been set up to sell animals that were used for sacrifices. In the beginning, it was for the convenience of the worshipers. They did not have to bring a sacrifice from home and they were assured that the animal would pass inspection because it had been pre-approved. Tables had also been set up in the courtyard to exchange foreign coins for the coins necessary for paying the Temple tax.

However, the merchants were gouging the worshipers by charging exorbitant prices for their services and there was so much haggling over prices that a person could hardly think, much less pray. So Jesus turned over the moneychangers’ tables and drove those who sold animals out of the Temple, saying, “My Father’s house shall be called a house of prayer.” The root meaning of the word “prayer” means “to proceed, to go forward, to take a journey.” Jesus was saying that God’s house is a place where people go to meet him, where they journey into his presence. It must ever be so.

Not all churches seem to understand that. I read of a church recently that had a Minister of Jazz. There’s nothing wrong with jazz, but what does that have to do with worship? My local newspaper ran a church ad inviting people to hear a John Wayne impersonator. The ad said,

"It will make you want to wave a flag and salute the men and women that kept our country free..." I don't want to disillusion you but Jesus doesn't march under the red, white and blue flag and he doesn't wear a top hat, a frock tailcoat and red and white striped pants. All week long we focus on what man does and can do, what man says and thinks. At least once a week, we need to put the spotlight on God and focus on what He does and is doing, what He thinks and is saying. We need that to be whole.

Are you Listening?

Second, we need to be a listening church. In the atmosphere of worship, the Holy Ghost said to them, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to" (Acts 13:2). Throughout the scriptures, God has spoken to individuals. He spoke to Abraham (Genesis 12:1), to Moses (Exodus 3:1-12), and to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1-10).

But here God is speaking to a church. Later He would speak to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelation, but this, to my knowledge, is the first time He spoke to a church. What did He say? He revealed His will and purpose for the world.

If we are going to hear God speak, we must first be silent. Our generation seems to be afraid of silence. We can't even shop in stores or be put on hold as we use the telephone without the ever-present racket of Muzak in our ears. We leave the television on, even when we aren't listening or watching. We pull up to a traffic light and a young person pulls up next to you, and their car radio is so loud that it not only rocks their car, it rocks yours, also.

Even our churches have a hard time being quiet. I read another church ad from the newspaper recently. It was advertising the "Life of Glory Church." It said, "A spirit-filled, shouting, laughing, crying, jumping, dancing, rolling-kind of church." One of 'those' kinds of churches! I wonder how

much listening they do?

We'd better be quiet because God doesn't shout. Elijah heard the voice of God, not in the powerful winds, not in the thunderous earthquake, not in the crackling and consuming fire. God spoke to Elijah with "a still, small voice" (I Kings 19:12). God spoke to Samuel, not with a shout, but in a whisper. He spoke so softly that Samuel hardly understood what he was saying. Three times he thought it was the voice of the aged priest, Eli, in the next room. Finally the old man told young Samuel the next time he heard the voice to say, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth thee." Samuel did that, and God appointed him a prophet.

The scriptures say, "Be still, know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Hebrew scholars tell us that this is a polite rendering of a rather harsh declaration that could better be translated, "Shut up and listen to me."

Does God speak? I have no doubt about it. He spoke to me. You ask, "Did you hear an audible voice?" No, no, he spoke much louder than that. And his voice still rings in my ears after fifty years. The most important voice we can listen to is the voice of God. Not the Gallup pollsters, not the Barna research group, but God himself. The scriptures say, "Wherefore today if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart."

Don't Waste God's Time

Third, we need to be a sending church. What did the Holy Spirit say to the church at Antioch? "Separate Paul and Barnabas for the work I have called them to do." The word "separate" means "to border off, to fence around." God had a special work for these men to do, and so they were to be set aside for that. The church listened and obeyed. They laid hands on them, symbolic of their blessings, and their recognition of God's call on their lives. Up until now, the Gospel had been spread chiefly by the witnessing of refugees. Now men were set apart and sent for the specific

purpose of telling the good news where it had never been heard.

I am sure the church at Antioch would have been content to bask in their newfound faith and to enjoy the teachings of their wonderful leaders. That's always a temptation – to turn inward, to think only of ourselves, to be comfortable where we are. Like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, we want to camp there and enjoy the glory of the Lord.

Look again, and this time more closely at the leaders of the Antioch church: there was Barnabas who had been a respected leader in the church in Jerusalem. There was Simon. His nickname was "Niger" which means "black" or "dark complexioned." Some have suggested that this was the very Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross to Calvary. If so, can't you imagine the brethren in Antioch saying to Simon, "Tell us one more time what it was like to carry Christ's cross up that hill? Tell us what Jesus was like in those last hours. Tell how you came to faith."

Then there was Man'ae-n who was a childhood companion of Herod the King. There are three Herods in the New Testament – Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, his son, and Herod Agrippa, his grandson. This was a cruel and ruthless family. Herod the Great killed the children at the birth of Jesus. Herod Antipas cut off the head of John the Baptist. Herod Agrippa put James to death with the sword. Man'ae-n had grown up as a relative or a childhood companion with Herod Antipas. I can imagine these early believers saying, "Man'ae-n, tell us what it was like growing up in aristocracy. Tell us what it was like in the King's palace. Tell us how you came to faith from that environment."

Then there was the apostle Paul, a trained rabbi, who knew the scriptures from alpha to omega. I can imagine them saying to Paul, "Tell us again of the prophecies of the Old Testament pertaining to the Messiah and how they

were fulfilled. Tell us again about your wonderful experience on the road to Damascus.”

But the Lord would not let them sit and soak and sour until the Second Coming. Nor will he let us. He flushes us out of our comfort zone into a world of need.

The church of Antioch obeyed and they sent their best on this great missionary endeavor. This was a small beginning of something that would ultimately change the course of human history.

What’s the end of all of this? What was its purpose? Winning souls to Christ. That’s what our churches must be about today. We must get outside ourselves to see and seek the lost of the world. The book “The Color of Water” is a black man’s tribute to his white mother. His mother was a Jewish girl named Ruth Zylska, who immigrated with her family to the United States from Poland in the early 1900s. Her father was a Jewish Rabbi, so they moved numerous times before settling in Suffolk, Virginia. Her father was sexually and physically abusive, so as soon as she graduated from high school, she left home, moved to New York City, and married a black man. With him, she had 8 children.

After her first husband died, she married another black man and together they had four children. The book got its title when her eighth son, James, asked his mother what color God was. He was black, his mother was white, and that confused him. She told him that God was a spirit and he didn’t have any color. But the boy continued to question, and finally his mother responded, “God is the color of water.” That seemed to satisfy him.

Ruth’s first husband, Dennis, was called to the ministry, and together they started New Brown Baptist Church in the Red Hook area of Brooklyn, New York. Dennis died and a new pastor was called to the church. One of his first acts was to remove Dennis’ picture from behind the pulpit and to place it elsewhere in the church. New pastors change

things, you know. And we must let them be themselves. But this hurt Ruth. Then when she returned to visit the church for the first time after the new pastor came, he failed to appropriately recognize her. This hurt her feelings even more and she vowed never to go back. But she did, and on the 40th anniversary of the church, she was invited to speak on the program, so she went back. On the way home, James asked his mother, "So, I guess you're not mad at the new minister?"

"Leave that man alone," she said, "He's doing a good job. They are lucky to have a good minister the way things are in the churches today." Then she said to James, "You should be a minister. Do you ever think about that? But you need foresight and vision. You got vision?"

James replied, "I don't think I do."

Then Ruth said, "Well, if you don't have it, don't waste God's time." (James McBride, *"The Color of Water,"* New York: Riverhead Books, 1996, 258).

There are a lot of churches and people today wasting God's time. They have turned inward and become self-serving. Their only concern is their own comfort and need.

In June of 1984, 39-year-old Terry Wallis of Mountain View, Arkansas, was involved in an automobile accident that left him in a coma for 19 years. It was not until June 19, 2003, that he came out of the coma. When he went into his coma, Ronald Reagan was president, Bill Clinton was governor of Arkansas, the Soviet Union was our enemy, and the World Trade Center still stood. When he came to, he began to realize that he had re-entered a world that was vastly different. The world had changed, and he didn't know anything about it (Waco Tribune-Herald, July 10, 2003, 10A).

His experience reminds me of Washington Irving's imaginary ne'er-do-well character, Rip Van Winkle, who went to sleep and slept for 20 years. When he went to sleep, George III was King of England. When he awoke, George

Washington was president of the United States. He had slept through a revolution.

We must not let that be true of us. When God puts a church in a place, it is not to make a show. It is to make a difference. It is not to make a name but to minister in his name and to win the community and the world to Jesus Christ. The winds of a moral and social revolution are blowing, and unless we become the church we ought to be by worshipping, listening and going, we'll be blown away with the rest of society.

Nine

Do It For God, Not Man

I Chronicles 29:1-21

Preachers have the reputation that they are always asking for money. One man said to his pastor, “Preacher, when you die, I would like to preach your funeral. I’ve already picked the text. It is Luke 16:22, that says, ‘And it came to pass that the beggar died.’”

Not all fundraising is unwelcome, however. Edgar J. Goodspeed, well-known Bible translator, tells of an encounter his father had with John D. Rockefeller. He asked Rockefeller for a donation to help pay the debt of a seminary and then apologized, saying he would never ask him for anything else. Rockefeller responded, “Dr. Goodspeed, I don’t feel that way at all. If a man shows me how I can do something good with my money, I think he is doing me a favor” (Edgar J. Goodspeed, *As I Remember*, New York: Harper and Bros., 1953, 34).

In this chapter, I want to show you how you can do some good with your money. You can help build a house for God.

To my recollection, there are only two great financial campaigns mentioned in scripture. One is in the Old Testament, the other is in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul was promoting an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In that context he says, “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 has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when

I come" (I Corinthians 16:1-2). Then in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9, he reminds them of their pledge and urges them to follow through on their commitment.

The greatest financial campaign mentioned in scripture is the building of King Solomon's temple. David was a man after God's own heart. He longed that God should have the glory and recognition that was rightfully his. One day, in talking to his preacher, Nathan, he pointed out that he lived in a house of fine cedars while God's house was a tent. To David, that was not right. He understood, as we need to understand, that a church is a physical monument to the spiritual presence of God, and God deserved better.

Nathan encouraged him to do what was in his heart. But as he proceeded, God told David that he could not build the temple because he was a man of war. That task would belong to his son, Solomon. David would, however, have the privilege of leading the financial campaign to raise the money to build the building. The scriptures tell us how he began in I Chronicles 29:1, "Then King David said to the entire assembly, 'My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is still young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple is not for man, but for the Lord God.'"

David began by telling the people what he was going to do. He would give or pledge the equivalent of \$60 million in today's currency. He would not ask others to do what he would not do himself. Then he challenged the congregation saying, "Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?" (vs. 5b). One by one, the people responded willingly with their gifts. First, the rulers of the households, then the princes, then the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and then the overseers, and finally all the people. When the giving and pledging was finished, the scriptures say, "Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their

offering to the Lord with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly” (vs. 9).

When the giving was complete, David turned the experience into a service of praise and Thanksgiving to the Lord. He personally “blessed” the Lord and challenged the people to do the same. The root meaning of the word “bless” is “to bend the knee, to bow, to worship.” David put the focus on God, who gave them all that they had, not on himself or the people.

The heart of his prayer was, “Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But 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” (1 Chronicles 29:13-14).

In this chapter we have the ingredients of a successful financial campaign. There are three:

- You need a worthy motive.
- You need a willing mind.
- You need a worshipful spirit.

You Can Pick the Hymns

First, to have a successful campaign, you need a worthy motive. David began by making it clear, “The temple is not for man, but for the Lord God” (vs. 1). He wanted the people to understand, “This is not for me. This is not for Solomon. This is not even for you. It is for the Lord.”

So much of what we do today is for man and not for God. Recently the city of Arlington voted a \$225 million tax increase to build a 75,000-seat stadium with a retractable roof for the Dallas Cowboys. (Arlington Stadium, *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, 11/03/2004). That was for man and not for God.

We have just completed a national presidential campaign between George W. Bush and John Kerry. The two parties together spent more than \$600 million on advertising alone. When you consider the other expenses of a cam-

paign, more than \$1 billion was spent to elect a president of the United States (Political Campaign, *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, 11/08/2004). That was for man, not for God.

The University of Texas is one of the largest universities in America, second only to Ohio State University. Their annual budget is \$1,348,000,000 (University of Texas at Austin, Office of Executive Vice President and Provost). That's for man and not for God. The Texas Highway Department budget for 2004 is \$5,833,000,000 (Texas Highway Department, Accounting Management Section, The Financial Division, Official Records). That's for man and not for God. Will Rogers understood this. He said once, "Government taxes people to build highways and Baptists wear them out going to meetings."

All of these things are good in some respects. But they are all for man and not for God. Even what we do in our churches is often for ourselves. We give for what we can get out of it. One Sunday a pastor told his congregation that the church needed some extra money and asked the people to prayerfully consider giving a little extra in the offering plate. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to pick out three hymns.

After the offering plates were passed, the pastor glanced down and noticed that someone had placed five \$100 bills in the offering. He was so excited that he immediately shared his joy with the congregation and said he would like to personally thank the person who placed the money in the plate.

A very quiet, elderly, saintly lady all the way in the back shyly raised her hand. The pastor asked her to come to the front. Slowly she made her way to the pastor. He told her how wonderful it was that she gave so much and, in thanksgiving, asked her to pick out three hymns.

Her eyes brightened. As she looked out over the congregation, she pointed to the three handsomest men in the building and said, "I'll take him, and him, and him."

There's not much we can do for the Lord, but we can do this. We can build a house for Him. That's a worthy project and a worthy motive.

John Ruskin reminds us, "Only once in a lifetime comes the privilege of helping to build a church that will stand for generations in the community for which it is built.

When we build, let us think we build forever. Let it not be for present use alone. Let it be such a work that the time is to come that these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say, as they look upon them, 'See! This our fathers did for us!'"

A Heart to Give

Second, you need a willing mind. The scriptures say when the project was completed, "The people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly . . ." (verse 9). This passage speaks six times of their willingness in giving. Four times the scripture speaks of their joy in giving. It means that they gave voluntarily, freely, gladly, and no one was compelled to give.

That's always the right way to give. The apostle Paul in encouraging stewardship to the Corinthian church said, "If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to what he hath not" (II Corinthians 8:12). It is not the size of the gift, but the spirit of the giver that makes a gift acceptable.

Then again he said, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or out of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7). He loves the old skinflints, too, but He has a special affinity for those who give cheerfully.

Not all giving is from a willing mind. Some people feel compelled to give. I heard about the preacher who passed the collection plates and he didn't get as much money as he wanted. So he said to the congregation, "I'm going to pass the plates again, and if I don't get a \$20 bill, I'm go-

ing to tell who I saw out with somebody else's wife last Saturday night." He passed the plates, and he got three 20's and one 10 with a note attached saying, "Don't tell. I'll pay the rest next week." That's not exactly giving with a willing mind.

Paul Chance, a friend, complimented another friend, Tommy Young when he said, "God gave Tommy the ability to make money and the heart to give it away." May he give you and me the same kind of heart.

Dr. Ernest Campbell, former pastor of New York's Riverside Church, said in a sermon to his congregation, "Many people now in this church are in the middle income bracket. They got there not by dropping down from a higher bracket but by coming up from a lower. One of the hardest things to learn when you come up is how to let go.

"I grew up in the Depression years. I can recall my mother giving us those little envelopes each Sunday—5 cents in one side and 1 cent in the other. That was about all we could spare at the time. When you grow up poor like that, you become imbued with what has been called 'ethic of privation.' You feel that you had better hold onto whatever you have."

"The pity is that some of us have not matured. We are still in the 'taking in' and thinking that is all there is to the Christian life."

"To be young is to study in schools you did not build. To be mature is to build schools in which you will not study."

"To be young is to swim in pools you did not dig. To be mature is to dig pools in which you will not swim."

"To be young is to sit under trees you did not plant. To be mature is to plant trees under which you will not sit. To be young is to dance to music you did not write. To be mature is to write music to which you will not dance."

"To be young is to benefit from a church which you did not make. To be mature is to make a church which you will

not benefit from.”

A monk, on his travels, once found a precious stone and kept it. One day he met a traveler, and when the monk opened his bag to share his provisions with him, the traveler saw the jewel and asked the monk to give it to him. The monk did so willingly and gladly. The traveler departed overjoyed with his unexpected gift of precious stone that was worth enough to give him wealth and security for the rest of his life. However, a few days later, he came back in search of the monk, found him, and gave him back the stone, saying, “Now give me something much more precious than this stone, valuable as it is. Give me that which enabled you to give it to me” (Alister McGrath, *The Unknown God: Searching for Spiritual Fulfillment*, Grand Rapids, MN: William D. Eerdmans, 1999, 47). A willing mind, that’s what we need.

Don’t Forget

Third, we need a worshipful spirit (verses 10-19). When the giving was complete, David “blessed” the Lord for all the people recognizing that He was the Lord of all creation and that riches and honor came from Him. It was the Lord who provided the abundance out of which they had given. He freely acknowledged that all things came from the Lord and it was from His hand that they had given.

David then turned to the congregation and encouraged them to “bless the Lord” also. David could have congratulated the people on their generosity. He could have patted himself on the back for leading such a successful campaign. He could have bragged, “Look what we have done.” Instead, he put the spotlight on God, bowing in humility and thanksgiving and praise before Him.

Most of us take far too much credit for what we have and what we give. It’s a tendency of human nature. Do you remember this nursery rhyme?

*Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner
Eating a Christmas pie;
He put in his thumb,
And pulled out a
Plum,
And said,
“What a good boy am I!”*

There is no evidence that Jack Horner planted the plum tree or pruned it on a regular basis. There is no evidence that he picked the plums when they were ripe. There is no evidence that he cooked or even served the pie. All he did was eat it and take credit for it. He stuck in his thumb, pulled out a plum, and said, “What a good boy am I!”

That’s the way we often are. We receive the blessings and benefits of God and take the credit ourselves. The scriptures warn us about forgetting God and the source of his blessings. They say, “Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied. Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Again, the scriptures say, “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord

your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

When the Lord says something once, we need to listen. When he says it twice, we had better pay attention. Twice, then, he warns us about forgetting the Lord our God and all he has done for us.

I am determined in my life that I will not forget the Lord. I grew up in a poor family. We were never deprived, but we always bought the cheapest of everything. While the other students were wearing Levi jeans, I wore off brands and homemade shirts. While they wore US Keds, the finest tennis shoes of that day, I wore a cheap Sears or Penney’s brand. Like a typical teenager, I was embarrassed and envious. When I was fourteen, my dad told me to get a job. I asked, “Where can I get one?” He said, “That’s your problem, just go get one.” I got a job working as an usher in the theatre for 35 cents an hour. It was about that time that I was saved and became active in my church. Our church was having a building campaign, and they wanted everyone to pledge. The first money I pledged and gave away was to that church building program. It wasn’t much but it was a sacrifice. I’ve been giving ever since.

When I graduated from high school, my dad said to me one day, “I’m going to get you a job at the Gulf Refinery.” That was the best job he ever had—union wages, retirement program, insurance. He wanted the best for me. But I responded, “No, Dad, I am going to college.” He said, “You don’t need to go to college. You’ve got all the education you need.” I responded, “But you don’t understand. God has called me to preach.” And he didn’t understand because he was not a Christian. The scriptures say, “The natural man understandeth not the things of the spirit.” There is no way that a person who is not a Christian can understand how God could speak to the human heart.

So, in anger, he said, “OK, you are on your own, don’t ask me for any help.” By that time, I was just like him, and

I responded, "OK, I won't ask." So I never asked, and he never gave.

We were living next door to the lot where a masonry contractor stored his bricks. The foreman of that project offered me a job, and I earned enough money to attend Baylor University for the first quarter. I returned home in the summer and earned enough money to attend Baylor the next year. The following summer I worked again, and Cathy and I were married. I then went to work for the maintenance department of the university, mopping floors and cleaning commodes for 75 cents an hour, and she worked in the library for 50 cents an hour. During all of that time, though we had very little money, we tithed. Before the next year was up, I was called to be pastor of the Bell-Falls Baptist Church that paid me \$30 a Sunday, and we had all we needed and then some. From that first building pledge until now, we have tried to be faithful stewards of the Lord.

When I think of where I came from and what I have come through and what I have come to, I am determined that I will not forget the Lord God who brought me out of the land of Egypt and out of bondage.

The results of this wonderful fund-raising effort on the part of King David was a revival. The people bowed before God, worshipped him, and offered sacrifices to him. That's always the result of having a worthy motive, a willing mind, and a worshipful spirit.

The challenge for us is the challenge David gave to the people that day. "Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?" If we will give ourselves to him, then our finances will follow and the name of the Lord will be honored and glorified as we build him a house.

Ten

Texas our Texas: The Rock from Which We Were Hewn

Isaiah 51:1-3

Repeatedly in scripture we are admonished as the people of God not to forget our divine heritage and the people God used to bring us to where we are today. One place he does that is Isaiah 51:1-3: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock (God) whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged (the quarry from which you were cut). Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."

Our help and hope is always in the Lord, but he has always used people to accomplish his purposes just as He used Abraham and Sarah to bring Israel into being. I want to remember the people and events the Lord used to bring Texas Baptists to where they are today.

The first Baptist sermon preached in Texas was by Joseph Bayes in 1820. He had come to Texas with Moses Austin and 300 other people. The group camped on the Louisiana side of the Sabine River to wait for Austin to secure a permit to enter Texas. But Bayes grew impatient, and he crossed the river and began preaching.

Mexico was beginning to welcome new settlers into the country, and offered free land to entice them, 177 acres

to a farmer, and a sitis, or 4,428 acres to stock raisers (*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, July 4, 2005). And according to lectures at the Alamo you could buy all you wanted at 12-1/2 cents an acre with 6 years deferred payment. But they didn't want just anyone. They wanted people of good character, no drunkards, thieves, idle loafers, or profane swearers. They expected all settlers to become Mexican citizens, to abide by Mexican law, to speak the Spanish language, and to convert to Roman Catholicism.

There was no religious liberty in Texas at that time. The law allowed for no public preaching, reading of the Bible was not permitted, marriages were not recognized as legal unless celebrated by a Roman Catholic priest, and in order to own land you had to be a Roman Catholic. Many Texans converted, at least in name, to Catholicism for that reason alone. Sam Houston was among them. The saying was, "A Texas ranch is worth a Mass." (Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History*; Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1993, 5.)

So Bayes' preaching was illegal. He was arrested in 1823 in San Felipe and taken to San Antonio for trial. While camped at the head of the San Marcos River, the guards were busy with the duties of the camp, and Bayes caught them by surprise, clubbed them with their own weapons and escaped to Louisiana. He and his son later returned to fight with Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto (*Ibid*, 79).

In 1835, the year before Texas won its independence, Z.N. Morrell, a pioneer preacher from Tennessee, came to Texas to see if it would make a suitable home. He arrived in the springtime, when the bluebonnets were in bloom, and from that day on, he said he had Texas on the brain. By all accounts, he was the greatest pioneer preacher to come to Texas and perhaps the greatest in all America. From the moment he crossed the Sabine River, he caught a vision that Texas would become a Baptist stronghold.

White visiting Nacogdoches, on his way home to get his family, he said, "My very soul burned within me to preach Jesus." So he found a suitable place and began to sing:

*Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His name?*

(Issac Watts, 1674-1748. *The Baptist Hymnal*, Nashville: Convention Press, 1956, 405).

A crowd gathered and he preached a sermon from Isaiah 35:1, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose." It was an evangelistic message about God's redemptive power.

At the conclusion of this stirring, impromptu sermon, Morrell said, "My soul was full to overflowing, and at that moment I believed that text." That text became the golden text of his life and the persistent faith and expectation of his ministry.

Morrell came back the next year to stay. He and his family arrived just as many Texans were fleeing the approaching army of Santa Anna. The people leaving warned them not to go on. It would be foolish to do so. They said, "If the Mexicans don't get you, the Indians will before you get to the Sabine River." But Morrell said, "I believed God sent me to Texas and it would never do to run" (Z.N. Morrell, *Fruits and Flowers of the Wilderness*, St. Louis: Commercial Printing Co., 1872, 17-18).

Morrell, sometimes called "Wildcat Morrell" was just the kind of man who fit the character of the country. He had an abundance of courage and faith. He was plainspoken as well as outspoken. By his account he carried two weapons, his spiritual weapon, the "Jerusalem blade" in his saddlebag, and his "carnal weapon," a Tennessee long rifle across his saddle horn, and he knew how to use both.

According to historian Leon McBeth, “For 40 years he rode horseback, swam swollen rivers, braved Texas ‘blue northers,’ outfought and outran Indians; preached to people wherever he could find them, and organized converts into cooperative Baptist churches.” And again, McBeth said of Morrell, “He traveled more extensively, preached more frequently, and suffered more severely than any other preacher who preceded him or followed him” (*Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History*).

We need more “wildcat” preachers today. We’ve got plenty of alley cat preachers—women chasers; we’ve got some hep-cat preachers, always chasing new ideas and wanting to be mod; we’ve got lots of pussy-cat preachers, lying around and wanting to be coddled; and we’ve got some pole-cat preachers, just plain stinkers. What we need are preachers like Morrell who have the grit and grace necessary and will pay the price to win our state to Christ.

The First Missionary Church

Texas won its independence at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836 and with that came religious liberty. The next year (1837) Morrell organized the first missionary Baptist church in Texas at Washington-on-the-Brazos near Brenham. There were only eight members of the congregation, five men and three women. Three of the men became preachers.

This was not actually the first Baptist church in Texas. It was the first missionary Baptist church. Daniel Parker, when he learned that a church could not legally be “formed” in Texas, returned to his native state of Illinois and formed one with seven members, and, in 1832, moved it lock-stock-and-barrel to Texas. But it was an anti-missionary Baptist church.

The first act of the new missionary congregation was to petition the Home Mission Society in New York City to send missionaries to Texas. Two years before that, Colonel William B. Travis, Commander of the Alamo, had made a

similar request of the Methodist leaders of America. (Centennial Story of Texas Baptists, The Executive Board of the BGCT, 1936, 26).

Jessie Mercer, after whom Mercer University is named, responded and deposited \$2,500 with the Home Mission Society to be used for the support of missionaries to Texas. Two missionaries were sent, James Huckins and William Tryon. Some of Mercer's friends protested against the expenditure of money on such a field, saying that Texas was infested with thieves, murderers, and scoundrels who were fugitives from justice. Mercer was a man who thought and acted for himself in view of his accountability to God, and replied, "You'd better not tell me any more about such characters in Texas or I'll be compelled to double the amount of money and set apart \$5,000." He had the conviction that Texas had fertile soil and a good climate and would attract the attention of a large number of good people. Christ had saved the thief on the cross and if some of those in Texas were great sinners, Christ was a great Savior, and they needed the gospel.

Before Huckins and Tryon could arrive, R.E.B. Baylor (after whom Baylor University is named) came to Texas on his own (1839). He was a lawyer and a preacher. He had been a member of the state legislature in Kentucky and a U.S. Congressman in Alabama, but he came to Texas to preach. In Texas he served as the district judge and on the Supreme Court of the Republic of Texas. He held court by day and preached at night.

The next year, James Huckins, the first missionary, arrived in Galveston. He found a small group of believers and began preaching to them. As providence would have it, Gayle Borden, Jr., who subsequently became famous for his condensed milk products, and his wife, Penelope, who was a relative of Mercer, were the first people to respond to Huckins' preaching, and they were the first people to be baptized in the Gulf of Mexico.

A year later, (1841), Tryon arrived. In 1848, Rufus Burleson came. Burleson, who was twice president of Baylor University for a total of 22 years, ten years at Independence (1851-61) and later for twelve years at Waco (1861-99) when Baylor was consolidated with Waco University (1885-1897), did not come to Texas to be an educator. He came to preach. Never a man to be daunted, he planned and thought big. He set out to win the new state of Texas for Christ. The salvation of the frontier state had preoccupied him since his college years. When he landed at Galveston, he dropped to his knees in the sand and prayed, "Oh God, give me Texas for Jesus or I die."

Those five men—Morrell, Baylor, Huckins, Tryon and Burleson—would be the most influential leaders in the building of our Texas Baptist Zion.

The First Missionary Association

In 1840, just three years after the first church was established, three small churches with a total of 92 members met in Travis to form the first Baptist missionary association. They were reproducing what they had known in the states they had left.

This was actually their second effort at forming an association. They had tried first in June of that year and failed. There were two missionary churches and two anti-missionary churches. In typical Baptist fashion they could not agree so they split before they could unite. In October they gathered again, this time all three churches were missionary churches and they succeeded in forming the Union Association.

In that first meeting they adopted 11 brief articles of faith and then stated two inalienable rights—the right of every church to govern itself, and the right of every individual to give their money to missions and benevolences as they saw fit.

In their second session the next year, the association had

nine churches and 384 members. This time they formed the Texas Baptist Educational Society which eventually led to the chartering of Baylor University. They believed that a university would be “a nucleus around which the denomination will rally and there will be a school of the prophets from which their children will go forth as missionaries to varied parts of the earth.”

And they formed the Texas Baptist Mission Society and sent three missionaries—Z.N. Morrell, Noah T. Byars, and Anderson Buffington. They were paid \$250 a year, and Morrell said it took \$300 a year to keep up his horse and himself.

The First State Convention

In 1848, 42 churches met and organized the first state convention. Its primary purpose was missions and evangelism. They began by disclaiming “absolutely and forever” any authority over the churches and then began publishing a paper, participating in foreign and home missions, distributing Bibles, and ministering to blacks and Germans.

Through the years, God prospered their work and Texas Baptists became the ninth largest denomination in America with eight universities, two theological schools, one seminary, one academy, seven hospitals, twelve homes for the aged, 45 childcare institutions, 5,000 churches and 1,200 missions.

How did they, in such a short period of time, accomplish so much? The secret was:

- Visionary leadership
- Missionary churches
- Voluntary cooperation

That’s what brought Texas to its place of greatness in the kingdom of God and that’s what Texas needs again today.

The Same Sky—Different Horizons

First, we need visionary leadership. That is what made Texas great from the beginning. Z.N. Morrell, from the first time he crossed the Sabine River, caught a vision of Texas as a great Baptist stronghold. The men who established Baylor University planned a school “that would meet the demands of all the ages to come.”

At the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the first Baptist association (1890) Rufus Burleson said, “If our brethren with three small churches with 92 members surrounded by 8 million hostile Mexicans and 60,000 Indians increased 2,000 fold in 50 years, what may we not do by 1940? Can we not establish a Baptist church and a Sabbath School in every neighborhood in Texas, and girdle the entire planet with Texas Baptist missionaries?” (McBeth, 278).

Did they realize their vision? I ask you, is there a community in Texas that does not have a Baptist church and a Baptist Sabbath School? Have we not girdled the entire planet with Texas Baptist missionaries? These were visionary leaders who saw the world around them and the world beyond them.

Anyone can see what is. Leaders see what can be and ought to be. We must have visionary leaders again. Texas has again become a mission field. Over half of our population is un-churched. Since 1990, more people have been added to the total population of Texas than the total population of 21 states in our union.

Ten million people live along the southern banks of the Rio Grande from El Paso to Brownsville. Three-and-a-half million people live along the northern banks. It is projected that by the year 2020, 37 million people will live there—about twice the current population of Texas. By then, we will have a population of 60 million people and 60% of them will be lost.

Today, 53.1% of Texas is Anglo, and 32% is Hispanic.

By the year 2020, that will be reversed—53.1% will be Hispanic and 30.5% will be Anglo. The other ethnic groups, Indian, Asians, and Blacks will double from 3.3% to 7.3% (*Tyler Morning Telegraph*, October 14, 2002).

How will we reach these masses? We must have people of vision. We need bifocaled leaders—a part to see what is near at hand, and a part to see what is off in the distance.

Konrad Adenauer, former Chancellor of Germany, said, “We all live under the same sky, but we don’t all have the same horizons.” We need to lift our horizons! We need to see the fields white unto harvest. If Texas is to achieve its former greatness, it must again have visionary leaders.

Nothing But Wilderness

Second, we must have missionary churches. That’s how our pioneer forefathers met the challenge of their day, and that’s how we will meet it in ours. The first thing Morrell did was establish a missionary Baptist church. It immediately in turn petitioned the Home Missions Society to send missionaries. When there were enough churches, they formed a missionary association and sent out three missionaries. And when they had still more churches, they formed a missionary convention to reach the entire state for Christ.

These churches were not just missionary in name. They were missionary in practice. They put feet to their prayers and made their dreams a reality. Most of us today talk a better game than we play. But they didn’t.

Someone wrote David Livingston, “I have a group of men who want to come and serve with you if there are roads to get there.” Livingston responded, “If they must have roads, tell them not to come. I want men to come whether there are roads or not.”

These pioneer missionaries had no roads for travel, only trails in the wilderness. And the only thing they had to guide them was their passion and their commitment.

One of the first three missionaries sent by the first association was Noah T. Byars, the blacksmith in whose shop Texans had met to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. He was a member of the first missionary Baptist church formed in Washington-on-the-Brazos and was later called to preach. It is estimated that Byars rode 100,000 miles on horseback, four times around the world. He established 60 churches, five associations, and two schools. He came to old age destitute and the convention voted him a pension of \$8 a month for the rest of his life.

We have lost most of that pioneer spirit of sacrifice. By and large, we've become soft, complacent, and at "ease in Zion." Most of us, preachers and churches alike, need a "kick in the attitudes." We need to get off our seat, on our feet and in the street where people are.

How We Stayed Together

Third, we need voluntary cooperation. Baptists have always been strong-minded, opinionated, independent people and at times, downright cantankerous. It was said of leaders like B.H. Carroll, R.C. Buckner, J.W. D. Creath, and O.C. Pope that they were happiest when they had their own way, and "they were happy most of the time." These early leaders could be demanding. How then, did we manage to work together and achieve so much? We did it by voluntary cooperation.

Oh, there were controversies. One of the biggest was caused by S.A. Haden. He was the caustic and divisive editor of the Texas Baptist Herald. He was essentially anti-denominational. He accused the officers of the convention of receiving unusually large salaries, lording it over the churches, and misappropriating funds. Although investigation could produce no evidence that his charges were true, he kept making them. He became so disruptive that he was denied a seat at the convention. He filed suit against

the officers of the convention, and they went all the way to the Supreme Court of Texas. The Court ruled that Baptists could handle their own affairs and dismissed the suit. In 1907 his followers split off and formed a new convention in Texas. The next year they merged with other dissidents to form the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of Texas.

One of the men with whom Haden had the greatest conflict was J.B. Cranfill, editor of the Baptist Standard. Cranfill had grown up in west Texas and was accustomed to carrying a .45 pistol. He said, in fact, he would feel more undressed without his gun than he would his pants. In 1904, both Cranfill and Haden were on the same train headed for the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, and got in a shootout. They both missed, which goes to show Baptists are better at shooting off their mouth than anything else. (Presnall Wood and Floyd Thather, *Prophets With a Pen*, Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing Co., 1969, page 31.)

Cranfill was embarrassed and offered to surrender his ministerial credentials if found guilty of any impropriety. The only response he got was, "We hope if you're disciplined, it will not be for shooting, but for missing."

What then kept these independent Baptists together? Three things: a common experience—personal regeneration; common beliefs—they believed the lordship of Christ, the authority of scripture, the autonomy of the church, soul competency, the priesthood of the believer, religious liberty and separation of church and state, and a common commitment—the great enterprise of taking the gospel to all people. And a three-fold cord is not easily broken.

After 40 years of labor in Texas, Morrell who had dreamed of Texas blossoming as a rose could say of his initial vision, "God has not disappointed me." Texas did blossom as a rose. Mrs. Sybil Leonard Armes caught the spirit of Texas Baptist history in this haunting poem:

*Out of the wilderness they carved
A spiritual empire for the Lord.
In blood and tears and sacrifice
They sowed his glorious, living Word.
And the desert blossomed as rose.
But what it cost, God only knows!*

*And we who follow in their wake
Mark well the price they paid.
This mantle lies upon us now,
But we are not afraid.*

*If God be with us, this we cry
'The light of Jesus shall not die!'
Till the earth's remotest corner knows
And the desert will blossom as a rose.*
(qtd. by Robert Baker in *The Blooming Desert*).

The day in 1847 when Rufus Burleson graduated from a seminary in Covington, Kentucky, according to his biographer Harry Haynes, while his classmates were consecrating themselves to various mission fields, he raised his boyish face toward heaven, stretched both arms toward the west and exclaimed, "This day I consecrate my life to Texas" (Georgia Jenkins Burleson, compiler and publisher, *The Life and Writings of Rufus C. Burleson Containing A Biography of Dr. Burleson by Hon. Harry Haynes*, 1901, 57). That's the need of Texas today.

Marquis James' account of the death of General Sam Houston is moving. "The physician told Margaret he had contracted pneumonia. On July twenty-fifth he fell into a drug-like sleep. The family gathered about the couch and Revered Doctor Samuel McKinney offered a prayer.

General Houston slept through the night, with Margaret at his side. When morning dawned she asked for her Bible and began to read in a low voice. '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.'

As the words fell from her lips General Houston stirred. It was mid-afternoon. Margaret put down the book and clasped her husband's hands. His lips moved, Texas – Texas! – Margaret— And he slipped away" (Marquis James, *The Raven*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956, 472-3).

May all of us live and die with the salvation of Texas on our hearts and perhaps on our lips.

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Postscript

A Tribute to George W. Truett: Texas Baptists' Gift to the World

When Texas Baptists wrote "The Centennial Story of Texas Baptists" in 1936, they dedicated it:

To George W. Truett

Pastor FBC Dallas

President Baptist World Alliance

Texas Baptists' Gift to the World¹

(*Centennial Story of Texas Baptists*, The Executive Board of the BGCT, 1936).

That was years before Truett's death and while he was still active in the pastorate. What an honor for fellow pastors to bestow on one of their own. What could prompt such recognition by one's peers?

Truett was, by all accounts, the greatest preacher ever to come out of Texas, the greatest preacher ever produced by Southern Baptists, and according to one writer, perhaps the greatest preacher ever to come from America (Burton, J. W. *Prince of the Pulpit*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1936). As such, he built the largest and greatest church of his day. In addition, he was the leading force in establishing Baylor Medical Center with its College of Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing. He was one of the principal founders of the Relief and Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (now Guidestone), and was instrumental in the establishment of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance.

At the age of 30 Truett was called to be pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas where he served for 47 years until his death in 1944. In those years, the church grew from 715 members to 7,454 members. He filled the 4,000-seat auditorium Sunday after Sunday, and averaged 115 baptisms and 412 additions by transfer of letter per year—an average of 10 new members per Sunday for 47 years. As his fame spread, he became one of the most sought-after speakers in the world. His respect was such that it prompted a Houston businessman to remark, “Dallas has only two things Houston would like to have—Neiman Marcus and George W. Truett.”

Born to Preach

Truett was born in the mountains of North Carolina on May 6, 1867. His mother, Mary, the daughter of a mountain Baptist preacher, was a devout Christian and the greatest influence and encourager of his life.

He was converted in a revival meeting at the age of 19. The revival was to conclude on a Saturday night because the evangelist had another appointment. To everyone’s surprise, the evangelist was back the next morning, saying he felt impressed the revival should continue. That morning, Truett, along with many others, made his confession of faith in Christ. That night, he gave his testimony and was accepted into the church for baptism.

On Wednesday night after his conversion, the pastor, after the visiting preacher’s sermon, turned to Truett and asked him to exhort the hesitating people to turn to Christ for His great salvation and service.

He was taken by surprise, and with fear and trembling, Truett rose to his feet and offered his first public exhortation for people to come to Christ. It was such a powerful appeal that many responded, and from that hour on, wherever he went, Godly men and women would call him aside and say to him, “Oughtn’t you to give your heart to preaching the

glorious gospel of Christ?"

But young George's ambition was to go to college to become a lawyer. No money was available to attend college, so he conceived the idea of starting a school for mountain children. It grew so successful that it was soon known all over Georgia.

Georgia Baptists supported these mountain schools and at the Georgia Baptist State Convention in 1888, George was again called on to make an impromptu speech to the Convention about his school.

He was caught by surprise just as he had been when he gave his first public exhortation. For a few seconds, he stood utterly aghast and speechless. But when he began to tell of the work he and others were doing, he did so with such passion that people wept under the influence of his speech and pocketbooks were opened to give financial support to carry on his work.

A wealthy layman, C.B. Willingham, who heard him speak was so moved he offered to pay all his expenses if he would go to Mercer University. This would be the fulfillment of his lifelong dream to be a lawyer, but Truett would never enter Mercer. His family had moved to Texas, near Whitewright, and he and his older brother soon followed.

I Surrender All

In their new home George enrolled at Grayson Junior College, still intent on being a lawyer. The family joined the Baptist church, and George immediately began teaching Sunday School. It was not long before he was elected superintendent of the Sunday School, and on occasions when the pastor of the church was away, he was called upon to speak to the congregation. When he did, he always made it a point to stand in front of the pulpit instead of behind it, feeling that the sacred spot should be reserved for God's ordained ministers and for them alone.

The people of Whitewright quickly took George to their hearts, and the conviction grew upon the members of the Baptist church that George ought to be a preacher.

Within a year of living in Whitewright, the conviction grew so strong that the church took an unusual step. In that church they held an old Saturday meeting for worship and business. When George arrived on one occasion, he noticed the attendance was unusually large. After the church had conducted its business, and the minister preached his sermon, one of the elder deacons began to talk deliberately and very solemnly. He said, "There is such a thing as a church duty when the whole church must act. There is such a thing as an individual duty when an individual, detached from every other individual, must face duty for himself, but it is my deep conviction, and yours—for we have talked much with one another—that this church has a church duty to perform, and that we have waited late and long to get about it. I move, that this church call a presbytery to ordain George W. Truett to the full work of the gospel ministry."

The motion was promptly seconded, and Truett immediately jumped to his feet to protest. He was appalled at their actions and pled with them to wait six months before taking a vote.

Then, one after another, tears ran down the cheeks of the people, and they said, "Brother George, we have a deep conviction that you ought to be preaching. We won't wait six hours: we are called to do this thing, and we are going ahead with it. We are moved by a deep conviction that this is the will of God. We dare not wait. We must follow our convictions."

That afternoon, George talked with his mother about what he should do. She said, "Son, they are praying people. They are God's people, and you saw how they felt. They felt that they couldn't—being in the face of your plea, your protest, your exhortation to the people—they couldn't delay

The whole church was in solemn conference assembled" (James, Powhatan W. *George W. Truett: A Biography*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1939).

That night, he walked the fields of his father's farm, fighting a fierce inner battle. Before the night had passed, Truett's mind and heart surrendered. The next day, he said that he was now willing to yield without debate or further delay to the will of God.

Ask and It Shall Be Given

Soon thereafter he preached his first sermon at First Baptist Church, Sherman. His text was, "Let there be light." He recalled years later, "My light went out in about ten minutes."

Within a few weeks, at the age of 23, he was called upon to help save Baylor University from financial ruin. Baylor was burdened under a crippling debt of \$92,000 and was looking for a new financial agent to raise money to relieve the debt. George's pastor at Whitewright Baptist Church loved Baylor and wrote a letter to B.H. Carroll, Chairman of Baylor's trustees and pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, and recommended Truett for the job. In his letter he said, "There is one thing I know about George W. Truett—when-ever he speaks, the people do what he asks them to do." After one interview, Carroll hired the 23-year old Truett and within 23 months, Truett and Carroll had raised the needed funds and virtually secured the future of Baylor.

In a former effort to raise money for Baylor, many Texans had given promissory notes to agents of Baylor but had never paid them, though long past due. Truett insisted that he be given the privilege of returning these notes to those who made the pledges, whenever and wherever in his judgment, he thought it best to do so. He expressed unusual wisdom when he said, "We can get along at Baylor without their money, perhaps, but not without their friend-

ship. People are the important thing. Win the people and they will willingly give the money.” (Ibid, 60).

And they did. Wherever Truett went people did what he asked them to do. By the time the campaign was finished Truett had not only talked Texas Baptists into saving Baylor, he had talked himself into entering Baylor. So, in 1893, at the age of twenty-six, he enrolled as a freshman student. This remarkable feat, like nothing else could have, made Truett known and loved by Texas Baptists.

Two Great Inspirations

It was also the beginning of a deep friendship between Truett and Carroll, who was the most powerful preacher in the Southern Baptist Convention, and who would later found Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Carroll’s home became Truett’s home for the 23 months of the campaign and afterwards—until he married.

Carroll was one of the most widely read and best informed men in America. He read with lightning speed and averaged 250 pages a day for 35 years and remembered what he read. He became Truett’s tutor, mentor, and friend. Truett had free access to Carroll’s private library, which was one of the very best in the South. Dr. Carroll took delight in introducing his young friend to his books on theology, history, literature, biography, philosophy, homiletics, Christian apologetics, biblical criticism, and other subjects of special interest to an alert young preacher. That in itself was a liberal education. Soon the small East Waco Baptist Church invited him to become their student pastor. He gladly accepted and continued there through his years at Baylor University. It was during those years that he met and married Josephine Jenkins, who became the constant inspiration to him for the rest of his life. In later years, he would call her his “chief comfort and inspiration.”

Called to Dallas

Upon graduation from Baylor, invitations to consider calls to several distinguished pulpits in the South came to him. He gave them no encouragement. Among them was the First Baptist Church of Dallas, one of the leading churches of Texas. When they wrote him about becoming their pastor, he urged them not to extend the call. He was quite happy at East Waco Church and his plans were to perhaps get away for study at Southern Seminary and then return to his East Waco flock, but the church ignored his plea and voted unanimously to call him. This forced the young pastor to face the issue. And so, at the age of thirty, he became their pastor.

He soon found his way into the hearts of his people. It was not long before his fame as a preacher spread throughout Texas and beyond. He became one of, if not the most, sought after preachers in America.

At the height of his ministry he would hold as many as a dozen revival meetings in other cities while he carried on his own duties as pastor. He dedicated more church houses, raised more money for the denomination, and made more special talks to special groups of people than any other preacher alive. He averaged making one such talk every day for forty years.

Triumph Out of Tragedy

The defining moment in his ministry came out of a great tragedy that nearly crushed his spirit. It was his own personal Gethsemane. While on a quail hunting trip with the Chief of Police of Dallas, Truett's gun accidentally fired and a load of birdshot went into the calf of Chief Arnold's leg. It was not a very bad wound, but almost instantly, Truett had the premonition that it would prove fatal. Before the week's end, Chief Arnold died, not of the gunshot wound, but of coronary thrombosis. Though he knew it was not his

fault, the accident and the Chief's death was such a blow to Truett that he felt he could never preach again. For the next several days he read his Bible, especially the Psalms and Job, and the closing chapters of the four Gospels.

Over and over he could be heard saying, "My times are in Thy hands." Late Saturday night, for the first time since the accident, he fell asleep.

Sometime during the night, he had a dream in which Jesus appeared to him and said, "Be not afraid, you are my man from now on" (*Pastoral Themes in the Life and Ministry of George Washington Truett: An Evaluation in the Light of the Pastoral Theology of Thomas C. Oden*. Joe Dowell Loftis, Dissertation for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree of SWBTS, 1994, 29). He awoke and told Josephine of the dream. A second and a third time, the same vision and the same words were repeated.

When he appeared in the pulpit Sunday, he was a different man. There was a note of sadness and pathos in his voice that people had not heard before. As one member said, "He seemed to carry the burden of all the grief in the world."

That ordeal molded him more than any other. As Paul could not be explained apart from his vision on the road to Damascus, Truett could not be explained apart from the dream he had that night. If you're looking for the secret to his power, it is to be found in the experience of that Saturday night when Jesus said to him, "Be not afraid. You are my man from now on."

A Shepherd's Heart

When World War I came, President Woodrow Wilson selected twenty of the outstanding preachers of America to go overseas to minister to troops. It's not surprising that Truett was one of them. In his six months in Europe, he frequently worked 18-hour days, preaching as many as six sermons a day to as many as 15,000 of our troops in a day's

time. Then after talking privately with scores and scores of men, he would write letters far into the night. He wrote to the families of every Texas boy he met while in Europe.

Truett was not a trained theologian nor an academician, but a pastor... he had been in Dallas only a few years when the trustees of Baylor University offered him the presidency of Baylor. They brought such pressure to bear to induce him that he gave the matter serious consideration and then declined saying, "I have sought and found the shepherd's heart of a pastor. I must remain in Dallas."

Truett's greatness was not in the profundity of thought nor brilliance of rhetoric nor originality of exegesis nor cleverness of homiletics, but for his simplicity of language, singleness of purpose, force of delivery, depth of compassion, ability to reach humanity's heart and will, and power to exalt Christ as Savior and Lord. It could be said of him as it was said of Spurgeon: "The pulpit was his throne and he occupied it like a king."

A part of the secret to his effectiveness was that he never lost touch with people. He spoke their language, knew their problems, was in touch with their feelings and their infirmities, and always had compassion on them.

The day was never too hot, or the night too dark or the storm too severe for him to go cheerfully to any one of his members or to any friend who may really need him. Truett was not just a great pastor, he was a great person.

The Secret of His Life

What is the secret of his great life? There is no easy answer to that question. Countless attempts have been made to penetrate the secret of this quiet preacher's power but none has been wholly satisfactory.

1. Magnetism

One thing was his magnetic personality. If you came in contact with him in the midst of a crowd, you would immediately pick him out as a great man. He had the ability

to reach his arms around an entire congregation and pull them close to himself.

2. Sincerity

Another thing was his sincerity. He lived his message and everybody knew it. Though he was the most prominent preacher in America, he was not above helping the poorest around him. A funeral director called the First Baptist Church hoping to speak to Truett's associate about a funeral of a destitute family who lived in a dilapidated little shack. But Truett answered the phone. On hearing the request Truett asked, "Can't I do it?" And he did go to that humble dwelling and ministered to that handful of poor people the same way he always ministered—with love, care, and sincerity (Truett Collection, Southwestern Seminary, page 114).

3. Single-Mindedness

Another secret was his single-mindedness. The overriding purpose of his life was to serve God and lead people closer to him. His life was devoted to "soul-winning, life-saving, and kingdom-building." Always seeking to win souls to Christ, he gave an average of two mornings each week writing letters to unsaved persons to win them to Christ. He did that all the years of his ministry and won thousands to the Savior that way. (R.C. Campbell, *Anniversary Awakenings*, First Baptist Reminder 8, September 13, 1936:1)

4. Integrity

He was a man of the highest integrity. During hard days when church loans were difficult to obtain, banks usually required several wealthy laymen to co-sign notes. Once when an agency of the Baptist General Convention of Texas sought to borrow money from the First National Bank of Dallas, the banker was asked what security he would require. Ethan Adams, then president of the bank, asked if George W. Truett would sign the paper. Receiving an affirmative answer, he said, "There will be no limit to your

line of credit at our bank as long as the paper is endorsed by Truett. He is all the security we need" (*History of First Baptist Church, Dallas*, 206).

5. Humility

Another mark of his greatness was his humility. In spite of all the accolades he received, he maintained that humility. He never attempted to draw attention to himself, he never tried to put himself forward, and he was always quick to give credit to others. It was perhaps this realization of the destructive power of pride that kept him humble all of his life.

6. Generosity

His generosity was legendary. As a youth, he had not hesitated to give his last dollar to the Baylor University campaign he led. As a pastor in Dallas, he sometimes had to be protected against his own generosity. He used many overcoats in the winter, for it was nothing unusual for him to be walking in downtown Dallas on a cold day, and give his warm coat to some unfortunate, ragged person. He explained himself saying, "The only good of money is the good you do with money." On one occasion the church paid for a lovely and spacious home for the Truett family but insisted it be deeded to Mrs. Truett, lest he give it away.

7. Love

He had a genuine love for all people. Truett believed in prohibition and spoke often for it during the days when our nation debated the issue. Yet it was said at the time that if he were to die every saloon in town would probably close for the funeral.

He lived in a day of great controversy, denominational and otherwise. But he always rose above controversy and kept his focus on the gospel. He was bitterly attacked by J. Frank Norris of Fort Worth. Norris was a scrappy fighter whose vicious attacks upon Truett were almost unbelievable. But Truett never retaliated, referring to Norris only as "that man in Fort Worth."

The ultimate secret was his dedication to Christ. At his baptism, Truett wrote in his diary, "I am endeavoring to serve God according to his word . . . I want to do the will of Jesus, and I humbly pray that He may help me" (Dr. George W. Truett, 1967-1944, Treasure Room: Fleming Library). As someone has said, "When God got Truett, he got all of him." And that was the real secret to his great life. He lived near God and served Him with his whole heart.

8. Prayer

He was a man of prayer. He believed in it, he preached about it, and he practiced it.

9. A City Mourns

Late in 1943, Truett was stricken with an illness that would prove fatal. As his condition grew worse, the deacons passed a resolution giving him a six-month leave of absence. Only once during that time was he able to return to the pulpit to preach.

At the end of the service, he recited the last verse of the hymn "He Leadeth Me":

*And when my task on earth is done,
When by thy grace the victory's won,
E'en death's cold wave I shall not flee,
Since God through Jordan leadeth me.*

(The Baptist Hymnal, 58).

Truett's task on earth was done. Never again would he be able to stand in the pulpit.

At Truett's death the flags at Dallas City Hall were flown at half-mast during his funeral service, for their number one citizen had died. 4,600 people filled seats in the auditorium. Another 1,000 were seated in adjacent Sunday School rooms and hundreds more stood in the blazing sun to listen to tributes to a man who had been called "the number one Christian in the world" (Truett Diary, 14 November 1936, File 662, Truett Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas).