

The Kyle Lake Center for Effective Preaching at Truett Seminary  
Presents

## The Truett Pulpit

### **Contributing Preachers:**

**Dr. Joel C. Gregory**, Professor of Preaching at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Todd Still**, William M. Hinson Professor of Scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Robert Creech**, Professor of Christian Ministry and Director of Pastoral Ministries at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Terry York**, Associate Professor of Christian Ministry and Church Music at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Angela Reed**, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology and Director of Spiritual Formation at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Andrew Arterbury**, Associate Professor of Christian Scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Joel Weaver**, Senior Lecturer in Biblical Languages at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Stephen Reid**, Professor of Christian Scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. David Garland**, Charles J and Eleanor Delancy Chair of the Dean and Professor of Christian Scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
**Dr. Doug Weaver**, Professor of Religion and Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Religion at Baylor University  
**Rev. Mike Fritscher**, Senior Pastor, Cottonwood Baptist Church, Dublin, Texas  
**Rev. Dorisanne Cooper**, Senior Pastor, Lakeshore Baptist Church, Waco, Texas  
**Rev. Jimmy Hunter**, Senior Pastor, Toliver Baptist Church, Waco, Texas  
**Ray Higgins**, Coordinator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Arkansas

### **The Purpose of the Kyle Lake Center for Effective Preaching at Truett Seminary:**

The centrality of preaching to the Christian faith is undeniable. According to the Gospels, "Jesus came after Preaching" (Mark 1:14-15). After his crucifixion and resurrection, he charged his disciples to continue his work of preaching, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). Since the beginnings of Baptist life, preaching has been central to our understanding of the work and worship of the church. This demands that the George W. Truett Theological Seminary be a place which is committed to preparing people to preach effectively. Furthermore, as a servant of the churches, the seminary must be committed to offering ongoing opportunities for those who preach to continue to develop their preaching skills.

The Truett Pulpit

Volume V, 2011-2012

# The Truett Pulpit

Sermons Preached During Worship  
in the Paul Powell Chapel  
at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
2011-2012

# The Truett Pulpit

Volume V

*Sermons Preached During the  
Community Gathering of Worship at  
George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
2011-2012*

The sermons in this volume of *The Truett Pulpit* were preached in the seminary's Paul Powell Chapel during the 2011-2012 academic year. The sermons by Truett faculty members were all chosen from the Gospel According to Mark. Each professor offers his or her own unique insight into this rich gospel on selected passages.

The Kyle Lake Center for Effective Preaching  
at George W. Truett Theological Seminary  
Baylor University  
Waco, TX

W. Hulitt Gloer, Director

Edited by Kessa Payne



# The Truett Pulpit

Volume V

# Table of Contents

Dedication .....	7
A Note On the Sermons.....	29
Joel Gregory, “It’s Good To Get Out Alive” .....	33
Todd Still, “On A Tear” .....	51
Robert Creech, “Feed My Dogs” .....	59
Terry York, “Close the Door” .....	73
Angela Reed, “View From the Mountain” .....	83
Andy Arterbury, “Furious Squalls and Sleepy Nights” .....	91
Joel Weaver, “Even Messiahs Get the Blues” .....	103
Steven Reid, “You Can’t Stay Here” .....	113
David Garland, “Living Life under the Sun or Under God” .....	121
Doug Weaver, “Freedom to Speak What We Have Seen and Heard” .....	129
Mike Fritscher, “The Essentials of Our Call” .....	143
Dorisanne Cooper, “Not What I Had Planned” .....	163
Jimmy Hunter, “Living Within the Parentheses of God” .....	173
Ray Higgins, “Multi-Generational Leadership” .....	183



Dr. Joel Gregory

Professor of Preaching

George W. Truett Seminary

## Dedication

It is an honor and privilege to dedicate this volume of *The Truett Pulpit* to my beloved colleague, mentor, and friend Dr. Joel Gregory. Few, if any, living preachers have had a greater and more wide-spread impact as a preacher and a teacher of preachers than Dr. Gregory. He is known around the world as a preacher *extraordinaire*, an acclamation shared by all who have heard him. So much could be said about this pulpit giant and his accomplishments that it's hard to know where to begin. What I'm saying here barely touches the hem of the garment. Still I hope you can get a feel for his prominence and influence from these brief comments.

Dr. Gregory has spoken in 46 states as well as in Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific Rim, and Middle and South America. He has addressed the Baptist World Alliance meetings in Seoul, Korea and Kuala Lumpur. He has served as Professor of Preaching at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary since 2006 and has taught preaching or preached in venues so diverse as Princeton Seminary, Spurgeon's College, London, Westminster Chapel, London and the International Seminary



of Buenos Aires, among hundreds of other engagements. Dr. Gregory was invited to speak at the historic New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta January 2008. In May 2008, he preached three times at The Hampton Institute.

Dr. Gregory has served as pastor of seven churches, including the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas and the Travis Avenue and the Gambrell Street Baptist Churches in Fort Worth, Texas. He served two terms as President of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He served for years as the speaker on the International Baptist hour, heard on more than 500 stations. For the past seven summers he has taught Proclaimer's Place at Regent's Park College, Oxford University. He is founder and president of Joel Gregory Ministries.

Dr. Gregory is the author of nine books and a multitude of articles. In addition to these writings, more than 600 of his sermons and addresses are available in CD and/or DVD format. In the pages to follow, you will find a complete list of all of these.

He is a graduate of Baylor University with a B.A. Summa cum Laude and Ph.D. He also graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with the M.Div., where he taught preaching in the 80s. He is married to Joanne Michele, a registered nurse, flutist and accomplished signer for the hearing impaired. They are parents of Grant, Garrett, Jimmy and Linda.

For countless numbers of folk around the world whose lives have been blessed by your ministry and for thousands of preachers you have befriended and mentored through the



years, we dedicate this volume as but a tiny token of our gratitude to you.

W. Hulitt Gloer

*Dr. David E. Garland Professor of  
Preaching & Christian Scriptures  
and the Director of the Kyle Lake Center for  
Effective Preaching*

September 2012

Dr. Gregory was the featured speaker at this year's Fall Preaching Conference and Workshop. His is the first sermon in this volume.

Published Works and Sermons  
of Joel Gregory

PUBLICATIONS

**Books**

**1. *What Two White Ministers Learned from Black Ministers.***

Co-authored with Bill Crouch. This manuscript has been accepted by Judson Press. (Please see attached letter from the publisher.) The book is written dialogically between Crouch and Gregory in twelve chapters, each reflecting an aspect of the black church experience. A different prominent African-American pastor comments on the dialogue at the end of each chapter. The foreword was written by Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr., former president of the American Baptist Seminary of the West, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and pastor of the Allen Temple Baptist Church.

**2. *The Preaching Pastor.*** Co-authored with Frank Pollard. Waco: Truett Seminary, 2003.

**2a.** Spanish language translation: *El Pastor Predicador.* Waco: Truett Seminary, 2003.

**3. *Too Great a Temptation.*** Fort Worth: Summit Group, 1994. This best-selling historical account became the basis of one of the most performed plays in America, *God's Man in Texas*, which premiered at the 23rd Annual Humana Festival of Plays in 1999. The book was serialized in *The Dallas Morning News* and received a full article review in *U.S. News & World Report*. The book has been required or suggested reading in many leadership courses for pastors.

4. ***Gregory's Sermon Synopses: 200 Expanded Summaries.*** Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- 4a. Second edition, Fort Worth: Hupomone Press, 2001.
- 4b. Spanish language translation: ***200 Sermons Biblicos Condensados.*** El Paso: Casa Bautista, 2005.
5. ***Southern Baptist Preaching Yesterday.*** Co-authored with R. Earl Allen. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991.
6. ***Homesick for God.*** Waco: Word Publishing, 1990.
- 6a. Second edition, Fort Worth: Hupomone Press, 2001.
7. ***Southern Baptist Preaching Today.*** Co-authored with R. Earl Allen. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987.
8. ***Growing Pains of the Soul.*** Waco: Word Publishing, 1987.
- 8a. Reprinted as ***Come Home to God.*** Fort Worth: Hupomone Press, 2008.
9. ***James: Faith Works.*** Nashville: Convention Press, 1986.
- 9a. Reprinted as ***Christianity in Real Shoe Leather,*** Fort Worth: Hupomone Press, 2008. This book served Baptists for their winter Bible study of the year and sold more than 200,000 copies.

### **Contributor to Books**

1. Gregory, Joel C. "Measuring Creativity with a Different Ruler," in ***Our Sufficiency Is of God: Essays in Honor of Gardner C. Taylor.*** Edited by Timothy George, et. al. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009.
2. —. "An Essay and Sermon" in ***Gardner Calvin Taylor: Submissions to the Dean.*** Edited by Ivan Hicks. Calumet City, Ill: Urban Ministries, 2009.
3. —. "You Can Burn to the End," in ***Oxford Sermons, Vol. II.*** Edited and Compiled by Joel C. Gregory. Fort Worth: Hupomone Press, 2008.

4. —.“Expository,” in *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*. Edited by Jana Childers, Cleophus J. LaRue, John M. Rottman, and Paul S. Wilson. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.
5. —.“From Donkeys to Destiny,” in *Oxford Sermons 2007*, Fort Worth: Hupomone, 2006.
6. —.“Obedience Has Its Consequences,” in *Joy to the World*. Edited by Olivia M. Cloud. New York: Atria Books, 2006.
7. —.“Strong Treasures, Weak Containers,” in *If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach: Nineteen Preachers Reveal What Motivates Them*. Edited by Richard A. Bodey. Ada, Michigan: Baker, 1994.
4. —.“The Voice in Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*. Edited by Michael Duduit. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
5. —.*The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987*. Co-authored with Mark A. Noll and Robert D. Preus. Nashville: Broadman, 1987.

## Articles

1. Gregory, Joel C. “*In the Arena of Faith.*” *Preaching* 8, No. 1 (1992): 2-6.
2. —.“Preaching Where Giants Have Trod: An Interview.” *Leadership* 13, No. 2 (1992): 134-139.
3. —. “Interpretation in Preaching.” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 27, No. 2 (1985): 8-18.
4. —.“Tapestry in Relationships.” *Biblical Illustrator*, Summer (1975). *Texas Baptist Standard* January 1984-June 1984: Wrote 25 adult Sunday School lessons for the *Uniform* series.

### **Denominational Curriculum**

1. “God’s Servant and Depression.” *The Baptist Program*, June-July 1982.
2. *The Youth Teacher*. Published by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, April-June 1972.

### **Oral History**

“Gardner Taylor: An Oral History.” The Baylor University Institute for Oral History. Dr. Gregory received a grant from the Institute to interview Rev. Dr. Gardner Taylor. He has interviewed the pastor in his Raleigh, North Carolina, home; and three of the interviews have now been transcribed and archived at the Institute.

## **MEDIA**

### **Videos**

The video selections below are commercially produced by video producers or recorded at events at academic or church venues. They are limited to those catalogued at A. Webb Roberts Library at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX. They represent a small portion of video materials from the preaching ministry. These are referenced here because they are catalogued in a theological library.

Gregory, Joel C. *Castle and the Wall*. VHS. Nashville: Broadman, 1988. This is a video of Dr. Gregory’s noted 1988 Southern Baptist Convention sermon preached in San Antonio before 35,000 messengers in an effort to bring harmony to the denominational situation.

—*Contemporary Biblical Preaching: Crafting Expository Messages for Today's Needs*. VHS. Dallas: Sampson Ministry Resources, 1991. This is videotaped before a live classroom situation in a studio and post-produced with a manual and graphics. It covers a complete course in homiletics. This video is also available in audio format.

—*Dramatic Presentation*. VHS. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1990.

—*Indigenous Satellite Unit Conference*. VHS. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982. This video reviews Dr. Gregory's leadership of Gambrell Street Baptist Church as it launched and nurtured a house-church movement in Fort Worth to reach unreached people groups.

—*Malachi: Love that Will Not Change*. VHS. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1987.

—*Narrative Sermons and Illustrations*. VHS. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982.

—*The Parables of Jesus*. VHS. Dallas: Discovery Educational Service, 1988.

—*The Roman Road Evangelism Training*. VHS. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1989.

—*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary January 20 Chapel*. DVD. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.

—*Theological Exegesis and Figures of Speech*. VHS. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984.

—*Value of Having a Plan for Your Preaching*. VHS. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982.

—*When God Calls: How to Prepare for Full-Time Christian Ministry*. VHS. Dallas: Sampson, 1991.

## SOUND RECORDINGS

The audio selections below are commercially produced by audio producers or recorded at events at academic or church venues. They are limited to those catalogued at A. Webb Roberts Library at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX.. They include audio materials produced by national audio producers and vendors such as *Christianity Today* and audios from other venues recorded and requested by the library. They represent only a small portion of audio materials existing from Dr. Gregory's preaching ministry. Elsewhere below you will find listed audio recordings from the four years Dr. Gregory preached on "The Baptist Hour" as well as more than 600 audio sermons available on the web for streaming or download. These are referenced here because they are catalogued in a theological library.

Gregory, Joel C. 1988 *Southern Baptist Convention*, San Antonio, Texas. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, 1988.

—. *1988 Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference*. Audiocassette. San Juan Bautista, California: Omega Media Ministries, 1988.

—. *Biblical Preaching for Today*. Audiocassette. New York: Scudder Communications Associates, Inc., 1984.

—. *Birthmarks: Discussion on Message Preparation*. Conference on Biblical Exposition. Audiocassette. Houston: Christian Cassette Library, 1985.

—. *Divine Timing: Divine Revealing*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1987.

—. *Group Worship During the 1984 Pastors Conference*.



Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984.

—*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: No Experience Guarantees Immunity*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1989.

—*First Word: Father Forgive Them*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Travis Media, 1990.

—*The Forgotten Man of Christmas: Matthew 1-2*. Audiocassette. Carol Stream, Ill: *Christianity Today* and *Leadership*, 1991.

—*From Hermeneutics to Preaching*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985.

—*How to Come Back to God*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Travis Avenue Baptist Church, 1981.

—*Human Sexual Identity: A Theological Perspective*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977.

—*January Bible Study Seminar: 1 Peter*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982.

—*Man of God and the Men of State*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Gambrell Street Baptist Church Cassette Ministry, 1980.

—*Marriage in the Spirit's Fullness*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Gambrell Street Baptist Church Cassette Ministry, 1979.

—*The Message of Missions*. Student Missions Conference, 1986. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986.

—*The Nod of Recognition. Motherhood and the Sovereignty of God*. Audiocassette. Fred Craddock Workshop, 1991.

—*Partnership in Missions: Bible Study*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983.

—.*Pastor Looks at Malachi: How to Illustrate the Sermon.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987.

—.*Pastors' Conference (1986: Atlanta, Georgia).* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, 1986.

—.*Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Resources and Illustrations.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978.

—.*Preaching Ideas from Jeremiah: Part 1.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981.

—.*Southern Baptist Convention, 1989: Atlanta, Georgia, Convention Highlights.* “The Baptist Hour.” Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, 1991. This message was preached on the 50th anniversary of “The Baptist Hour” by invitation of Dr. Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, before the annual meeting of the SBC.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary August 31 Chapel.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary August 30 and 31 Chapel.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary January 22 and 23 Chapel.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary October 13 Chapel.* Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 3 and 4 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 3 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 4 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 5 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 7 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.

—.*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary September 20 Chapel*. Audiocassette. Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.

—.*Tough Characteristics of Faith: Hebrews 11:8-19*. Audiocassette. Carol Stream, Ill: *Christianity Today and Leadership*, 1984.

—.*Treasure Hunt: Matthew 13:44-46*. Audiocassette. Carol Stream, Ill: *Christianity Today and Leadership*, 1992.

—.*Trouble and Glory: Praise God*. Audiocassette. Dallas: Sampson Company, 1991.

—.*Upon This Rock I Will Build: 1985 Evangelism Conference*. Audiocassette. Dallas: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1985.

**“THE BAPTIST HOUR” (1988-92)**  
**Recordings and Published Sermons**

Dr. Gregory was invited by Dr. Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, to serve as the speaker on “The International Baptist Hour,” one of the two longest-running national weekly religious radio programs syndicated on more than 500 stations. For years the preacher of this program was Baptist icon Dr. Herschel Hobbs. In addition, Dr. Gregory served as preacher on the nationally televised “The Baptist Hour” broadcast for four years on the ACTS Television Network. The following messages are archived, both in audio recordings and in printed form as they were published and distributed by the Radio and Television Commission, at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. The messages were distributed to a large international mailing list by the Radio and Television Commission. Those published copies are also archived at the historical library.

- Gregory, Joel. “The Joy is in the Journey,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 5, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Diving Potter,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 12, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Gospel: An Obligation Without Shame,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 19, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Right With God By Faith Alone,” sermon from “The Baptist

Hour” (February 26, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Worry,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 4, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Depression,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 11, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Tragedy,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 18, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Fear,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 25, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “The Strength Needed,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (April 29, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Come Back Now,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (May 6, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Out of Your Impossible Situation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (May 13, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “The Great Confession,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (May 20, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Come and Drink,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (May

27, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“The Gate and the Shepherd,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (June 3, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“The Life-Giving Bread,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (June 10, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“Does Jesus Care?: Divine Timing,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (June 17, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“The Joy is in the Journey,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 19, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“The Divine Potter,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 26, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“Praise God,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (December 30, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“The Gospel: An Obligation Without Shame,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 2, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“Right with God By Faith Alone,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 9, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—“Praise God,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (December 30, 1988). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

- . “Finding the Faith That Defeats Doubt,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 6, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Longing for the Lord,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 13, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “God Delivers from an Impossible Situation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 20, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Escape Despair Now,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 27, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Faith and Fear,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 3, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “When God Is All You Have,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 10, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Prediction of the King,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 17, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “A Psalm of Thanksgiving,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 24, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “God Crowns a King,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 5, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “God Our Refuge,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 12, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.



- .“When You Want to Run Away from It All,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 19, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“Evidences That Demand Resurrection,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 26, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“Temptation: A Way Out,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 2, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“Overcoming Temptation: Spiritual Warfare,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 9, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“The Lord Jesus: A Friend in Temptation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 16, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“God Our Refuge,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 23, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“When You Want to Run Away from It All,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 30, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“When Down Is Up,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 6, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“Definite Discipleship,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 13, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- .“Leaving Home,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 20, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Coming Home,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 27, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Misunderstanding Home,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 3, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Right With God By Faith Alone,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 10, 1989).

Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Worry,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 17, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Stumbling Stones or Stepping Stones: Depression,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 24, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “God’s Living, Powerful Word,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (December 31, 1989). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Finding The Faith That Defeats Doubt,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 7, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Longing for the Lord,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 14, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “God Delivers From an Impossible Situation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 21, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

- . “Escape Despair Now,” sermon from The Baptist Hour (January 28, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Encounter With Jesus: A Marvelous Faith,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 4, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Encounter With Jesus: Three Kinds of Folks at Church,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 11, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Encounter with Jesus: Light for Our Night,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 18, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 25, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Definite Discipleship,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 4, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “What Time Is It?,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 18, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “A Description of Discipleship,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 11, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Finding the Faith That Defeats Doubt,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 25, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Encounter with Jesus: Light for Our Night,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 6, 1990). Available at the Southern

Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 13, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “God Calls Us to Rest: In Salvation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 20, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Christ Calls Us to Rest: In Submission,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (July 27, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Treasure Hunt—Finders and Seekers (I),” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 3, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Treasure Hunt—Finders and Seekers (II),” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 19, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Drawing Near to God,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 17, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “The Lord Jesus: A Friend in Temptation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 24, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “God Looks for Those Who Leave,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (August 31, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Whom Do You Trust,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 7, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—. “Write It on Their Hearts,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 14, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

- . “Absolutely Free,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 21, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Christ Calls Us to Freedom Within Conflict,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (September 28, 1990). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Effective Praying,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 3, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Vision That Changes,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 10, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “What is Man?,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 17, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Inventory Time,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 24, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Suffering Servant Substitute,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (January 31, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “Christ Calls Us to Rest,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 7, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “God Looks for Those Who Leave,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 14, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
- . “The Temptation to Forget,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 21, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—.“Drawing Near to God,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (February 28, 1992). Available at The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—.“When Down Is Up,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 6, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—.“Whom Do You Trust?,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 13, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—.“The Lord Jesus: A Friend in Temptation,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 20, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

—.“The Bridge over Troubled Waters,” sermon from “The Baptist Hour” (March 27, 1992). Available at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

**Messages available on the internet and in private archives**

## A Note On the Sermons

The manuscripts collected for *The Truett Pulpit, Volume V* have been kept in the original form from which they were preached and as such vary from sermon to sermon. In the case that a preacher did not use a manuscript to preach, the sermon has been transcribed from the original audio sermon.

Since sermons are intended to be heard primarily and read secondarily, please visit the Truett website so that you may enjoy these sermons as they were originally preached at Truett's Community Gathering for Worship.

The audio and video versions of all of these sermons can be found in the Truett Media Library at <http://www.baylor.edu/truett> under "Resources."





A Sermon  
From the Dedicatee



# It's Good to Get Out Alive



Jeremiah 45

Joel C. Gregory

Professor of Preaching

George W. Truett Theological Seminary

Fall Preaching Convocation

The tourist brochure said that “you can catch the bus to Yosemite Lodge up to Glacier Peak. When you get there, you can stand on the rock where a hundred years ago, Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir had their picture taken. And then you can go to the trailhead, where you’ll take a left. It’s just an 8.8 mile hike called the Panorama Trail, which earns its name from the unprecedented spectacular views of Yosemite’s most famous landmarks. You’ll hardly get down it when you’ll turn to the left and immediately take in a picture-postcard view of Half Dome. Then, 2.2 miles down the trail is an overlook of Illilouette Falls, a ribbon of whitewater cascading 370 feet

down on the rocks. Next, you'll cross over the Illilouette bridge and slowly climb 800 feet to Panorama Point. Five-star breathtaking vistas stretch into Yosemite Valley, all the way to the Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls and beyond to the Royal Arches. After that, you'll go left and descend more than 10 switchbacks. At the three-way junction, you'll bear right on the John Muir Trail and soak in views of the granite baldness of Liberty Cap. As you go further, you'll see the Merced River and the frothy spout of Nevada Falls dropping nearly 600 feet to the valley floor. At milepoint 6, you are there by the Mist Falls, where the rocks are baptized by water and rainbows appear in the air. You'll enjoy your hike downward on a series of 600 steep granite steps. After you cross the Merced River and climb more stairs upward to the 317-foot Vernal Falls, the trail turns to pavement, and longer views unfold of Illilouette Falls. After crossing the Happy Isles Bridge, you'll hike to the trailhead parking lot—and it's all over."

This enticing description sounded like a walk in the park. That's what my two adult sons and I thought last June as we caught the bus and then began our hike down the trail with our backpacks filled with granola bars and assorted energy stuff. (I had bought something in a McDonald's ketchup packet-sized piece of tinfoil called GOO. GOO claimed to give you supernatural energy. When I squeezed it out, it tasted like . . . GOO.)

When we were 2.2 miles into it, we decided that whoever said this was a six-hour hike must have come from an extreme sports show! By the sixth-mile marker, we were 10 hours into the hike, and the sun was setting behind the western peaks. Our feet were slipping on the jagged rocks of the aptly named Mist Trail, and we were within an arm's length of a waterfall plung-

ing hundreds of feet down. We said, “These people who rated this hike ‘moderate’ must be sadistic!”

Then the sun disappeared, and we were inching our way forward in the inky, pitch-black darkness of night by the narrow beam of a little flashlight, astride the roaring Vernal Falls—just one misstep away. One month later, three hikers went over those same falls and were swept away forever. To our horror, we read the big signs that said, “Beware of black and grizzly bears, especially at night.” These signs gave us two pieces of helpful advice if we saw a bear: “Make yourself look large” and “Do not act aggressive.” (It never occurred to us to do the latter.) Somehow, alone in a vast park at 10 p.m., that advice did not encourage us at all.

We limped back to the parking lot at 11 p.m., and to top it all off, we forgot where we parked the car. On a serious note, we never said this to each other, but we were all thinking it: *It's good just to get out alive.*

## A MINOR CHARACTER WITH A MAJOR MESSAGE

In this curious little chapter 45 of the Book of Jeremiah, a pointed word came from the living God through Jeremiah to give to his friend Baruch, the scribe: “Baruch, when this whole thing is over, it's good that you'll just get out alive.” Now, Baruch does not belong to the marquee players of the Old Testament. He's either listed on the secondary, if not the tertiary, credits for the cast of characters at the end of the movie. Baruch is like a meteor that burns brightly for a minute or two, and then disappears. Or, he's like the mast of a ship on the horizon; you see him for a moment, and then he's gone.

Jeremiah 45 frames what is called “Baruch’s colophon,” his personal signature witness to the production of Jeremiah’s prophecy. It’s as if he carved his initials into the tree, sprayed his name on a boxcar, or scratched his name into an old desk, essentially saying, “I’m the one who wrote this.” It gives you a moment’s peek at someone who otherwise would be invisible.

Scholars have discovered colophons in Babylonian, Assyrian, Ugaritic, and Egyptian texts. The scribes would leave a personal word about when and why they wrote the texts, along with a blessing for the one who read the messages and a curse for the person who tampered with them. Jeremiah 45 gives you Baruch’s initials at the end of the letter.

Cameo players like Baruch encourage me more than the titanic figures of the Bible. Who can actually identify with Jeremiah? His life was an emotional roller coaster ride; during his 23 years of preaching, not one person joined the church. Or for that matter, who can identify with Paul and his enduring perseverance through trials and tribulations? Yet I can identify with a Baruch or a Timothy.

Why is this so? It’s because sometimes those of us in ministry just whine. Baruch whines and doesn’t think God overhears him. In verse 3 you hear it. God is telling him what He heard him say: “Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.” Have you ever noticed that it’s hard to find a good key to whine in? A whine is a whine, whether it’s in C major or in D minor. You won’t find any anthologies in the library entitled *Great Whiners of History*.



## YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW HE FELT THAT WAY

Yet you must have some sympathy for Baruch. For 23 years he was Jeremiah's only friend. Can you imagine how depressing it must have been to be the only friend, or homeboy, of Jeremiah? God told Jeremiah to prophesy doom for all those years, and nobody listened to it as much as Baruch. Nobody ate nachos with Jeremiah during the ball game except Baruch. Nobody celebrated Passover with Jeremiah except Baruch. Nobody picked up the dry cleaning five minutes before closing time except Baruch.

But that's not all. He was the amanuensis, the person who had to write all the pronouncements of doom down. Can you imagine writing down 36 chapters of Hebrew? And then, Jeremiah got the flu and couldn't go to church, so he sent Baruch to read the scroll to the whole nation gathered at the great cathedral. Then, the grand poobahs and high muckety-mucks forced Baruch to read it to them in private. Then they warned Baruch to get out of Dodge because King Jehoiakim only liked books about "your best life now"; he definitely wouldn't like what Baruch wrote. Then, after having written God's message once, Baruch must have been dismayed when the king cut up the whole book into little pieces and burned it in the brazier. And then, Jeremiah dictated the whole book to Baruch again. Imagine having to write out Jeremiah 1-36 twice. That is enough to depress a Hebrew professor.

Have you ever read a passage in the Bible and the thought occurs to you later that it's about you? Baruch had heard the word, written it down, and read it to people twice. But it finally dawned on him that these words were about him, his family,

and his career. The doom of Judah at the hands of the Babylonian army meant the end of him and them as well. He had been so busy with the jots and tittles that it took 36 chapters to traumatize him. After a sleepless night he went to Jeremiah and overwhelmed him with his newfound understanding of the word. This made Jeremiah upset because his only friend was about ready to quit, so he prayed to Jehovah and asked Him, “Do You have a word for Baruch?”

The word God gave Jeremiah wasn’t an easy thing. The sentence begins with “Woe” and ends with no place to rest or solid ground to stand on. Dr. Cleo LaRue, associate professor of homiletics at Princeton, says, “Woe is a misery without a remedy.” It was *woe* because of the reading of the content of the book, *woe* because of the personal implications of the book for him, and *woe* because of the burning of the book by the King.

Burning books is hard on friendships. Thomas Carlyle once wrote a three-volume epochal history of the French Revolution. He loaned a copy of the first volume he had written to John Stuart Mill, who left it out in the living room. Thinking the manuscript was just wastepaper, a housekeeper started a fire with it, burning up the only copy of the book. Carlyle was so upset that he could not write the first volume again for a long time. He went ahead and penned the second and third volumes, finally coming back later to write the first one again. This incident led to a deterioration of a great friendship between Carlyle and J.S. Mill.

When you are in the Lord’s service, sometimes loyalty will cost you something. You’re going to find out that for some people you befriend in seminary and early on in your ministry, you’ll have to stand by them for a lifetime. Some of you in ministry know it well—what it costs to stand by people.

I remember preaching on a program in south central Los Angeles with the famed preacher Rev. Dr. E.V. Hill. After we had both preached, we were sitting on the tall platform at Mount Moriah Baptist Church, dangling our feet over the edge. Just the week before, he had been on the ABC program, “Nightline,” and Connie Chung interviewed him. He was defending a long-time friend of his who had been caught laundering money and was sent to prison. I asked my friend E.V. Hill if he had risked his own reputation by identifying with that man. He emphatically poked me in the shoulder with his finger and said, “Gregory, if I am your friend out of jail, I will be your friend in jail.” I have never had a good answer for that. The expression of loyalty in God’s cause by standing with people through thick and thin will always cost you something. A friendship with Jeremiah got them both thrown into jail and probably made Baruch look for Prozac.

## THOSE WHO HANDLE THE WORD NEED A WORD

But then Baruch found out that those who handle the Word also need a word. Here’s this God who speaks so much to the nations, and Baruch had written it all down. Baruch was probably thinking, *But what good is it if God speaks to the Edomites and the Moabites and the Babylonians and the Egyptians and I feel that He never speaks to me?* He said, “I need a word.”

Part of the possibility of peril for us in the ministry is that we become like chefs that cook foods we never taste, transcribers of music we never listen to, or delivery men who deliver packages we never open. We can become like the security guards at the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Louvre, with their eyes

glazed over in the midst of all those masterpieces that they never look at. All they can do is look at the people who come to see them. The peril always looms when we objectify the Word of God, rather than let it speak to us.

It dawned on Baruch, who had written 36 chapters of words about gloom and doom for the nations, that he now he needs a word for himself. Amos Wilder, a theology professor at Harvard University and brother of renowned novelist Thornton Wilder, wrote an amazing little book on early Christian rhetoric. In this work, he remarks that the unique thing about the words of Jesus in the Gospels is that you have the sense of being personally addressed. Wilder's book is a fountainhead of influence, both in narrative theology and narrative preaching. He insisted that form and content cannot be separated in the study of biblical text.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the type of rhetoric in biblical texts has no counterpart in Aristotle or Quintilian. The nature of Christian biblical language is akin to someone who stands up in the middle of a riot and utters an authoritative word that calms things down.<sup>2</sup> Especially noteworthy is the sense of a face-to-face encounter with the speaker by the address of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

To borrow a simple but multifaceted image from German philosopher Martin Buber, we view things as "its" and people as "thous," if we relate to them appropriately. But our lives are turned upside-down if we relate to people as "its," or things, and things as "thous." We also need an I-Thou relationship with the Word of God, not an I-It. After years of transcribing the Word of

---

<sup>1</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

God, Baruch might have begun to treat that scroll as an “it.” He had been working on “it” for years, and now he needed the “it” to become a “thou.” He needed a word spoken directly to him.

So do I—sometimes after preaching, more days than not. Instead of objectifying the Word, I need to let the message address me. Sometimes I need to stand back from dissecting a text and with a second naïveté sing with C. Austin Miles: “He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own” (1913). Sometimes I like to sing those words penned by A. Katherine Hankey in 1866:

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.  
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings, as nothing else can do.  
*I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory,  
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.*

I love to tell the story; more wondrous it seems  
Than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams.  
I love to tell the story, it means so much to me;  
And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

God save us from being channelers to others of words that do not really touch us. There needs to be a sense that the word is not just for everybody, but a word for somebody.

Baruch asked for the word, and he got it. The Bible doesn't say how long it took, but Jeremiah brought back the personal oracle, the individual message, or the specific word from God to Baruch. The word comes to him like a velvet-covered brick.

God the Builder is about to wreck everything He has built, and God the Gardener is about to uproot everything He has planted. In fact, in the Septuagint and the Vulgate the emphatic personal EGO is used: “I myself will tear it down, and I’m going to pluck it up.” The God of the cosmos lavished His care for 1400 years on this family of Abraham, but the whole venture has run off the rails. So, God is going to demolish it and pull it up by the roots.

H. Wheeler Robinson, the great Baptist scholar of Regent’s Park, exclaims, “Nowhere is it more evident that there is a Cross than in the heart of God.” Redemptive work costs something. God could not do it from a detached, antiseptic, clinical, removed, aloof distance. This is not some tribal deity, but the almighty Maker of heaven and earth. Here is the God who didn’t come in generalities; He came in specificity. Here is the God of somewhere, not just everywhere. He took His almighty name and bound it up with this wandering group of Semitic people, even though He had to put up with the shenanigans of people like Saul and Solomon. And now, God has to undo everything He has done.

## ARE YOU SEEKING GREAT THINGS?

And Baruch was worried about his career path! God said to him in verse 5 (KJV): “Seekest thou great things? Seek them not.” The Jerusalem Bible translates this verse, “And you are asking for special treatment?” It’s as if God was saying, “Baruch, you’re asking for the best stateroom on the *Titanic*? You want an upgrade on a doomed jet? You want to be eating at Windows on the World looking out over Manhattan right before

the plane hits the tower? You want the best seat on the beach when the tsunami comes in?"

What's really hiding behind Baruch's pity party? Baruch was a scribe. In the ancient near east, the scribes were a favored elite group. They were literate in a largely illiterate world. Trusted and admired, they got a key to the executive washroom. They parked their chariot close to the office. They had the number for the company membership at the Jerusalem City Club. They were on the inside. They used all those nonverbal cues and innuendoes that signified they belonged to the establishment. Baruch's grandfather had been governor of Jerusalem. His brother would be a chamberlain to King Zedekiah.

Baruch was asking, "What does all of this mean for me? I thought I was going to be the head scribe. I thought they were going to make a sequel to that movie about Elijah and Elisha, and Jeremiah's mantle would fall on me. I thought that if I was the homeboy of Jeremiah, I would at least have a free ticket out of here."

But Yawheh was stern with him here. God said, "Baruch, I will not let you co-opt My big mission for your little program." Without any apology or flinching, God tells Baruch that his program is subordinate to His larger purposes. That's why our Lord could walk up to people and say the most audacious things. If He wasn't who He said He was, how dare He say them? "Look, you fisherfolk, drop your nets and leave them with your father Zebedee." To other people eager to follow Him, He said, "Let the dead bury their dead." If we follow Him, and most especially in ministry, our little programs must be subordinate to His big mission. When we confuse our program for God's mission, He tells us to make an adjustment right now.

In the Heritage Room at Truett Seminary, I interviewed the most famous living American preacher, Dr. Gardner C. Taylor. I asked him for one word of advice that he would give to all young preachers. He did not even hesitate. He intoned in a voice that sounded like the ages, “Avoid vanity. Don’t try to replace the Lord Jesus Christ in His own house.”

Joseph Parker, the egotistical pastor who was a contemporary of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, could strut sitting down. When the architect was designing the blueprints for the City Temple, he tossed them aside with the statement, “Draw up plans for a church so that when Queen Victoria drives by, she will ask, ‘Who preaches there?’” Once approached by a pastor search committee from a smaller church, he replied with a single sentence, “An eagle does not roost in a sparrow’s nest.” Now, Baruch was not infected with that Promethean ego; but he did wonder what was going to happen to him, and he cried, “WOE!” when God’s mission contradicted his own personal program.

Is this not honestly what we face in this thing called ministry? This is not a fair world, but a fallen one. We ministers stand somewhere between ape and angel, dust and spirit, our personal program and God’s majestic mission. Here, we have a career inside of a divine calling. The very best of us are always challenged by this word from God to Baruch, “Are you seeking great things for yourself? Seek them not.” Oh, the insidious, creeping crawl of encroaching entitlement tries to catch all of us with its undertow. I have to watch for it every day.

When I came here [Truett] six years ago, I may have been the most surprised preacher in America. It was almost impossible for me to believe that I was actually graced to be here, that the door was open to me, that an opportunity beyond any



expectation had been handed to me by people who believed in the grace of God. Yet, as the years go by, the hellish, cackling, cacophonous, leering, self-aggrandizing demon of entitlement always peeks around the corner. For those of us in the ministry, our first thought when we wake up in the morning should be, “God, thank You for the grace that lets me stay in this place.” At noon we ought to thank Him for His generosity that allows us to be in the ministry. In our last waking reverie before we fall asleep, we should thank God for having another day to serve Him.

Back in the day when they had big religious conventions, a Baptist preacher and his wife entered a gigantic city center with tens of thousands of preachers filling it to the top seats. The preacher was so overwhelmed by the sight of so many preachers, he spoke a soliloquy into the air to no one in particular: “My God, I wonder how many truly great preachers are here?” His wife, who knew plenty about preachers, responded, “One less than you think.”

## IT IS ENOUGH TO GET OUT ALIVE

Then God gave Baruch the only promise he would get. And if you overhear this, He is telling you what you can get. It was the same thing my sons and I thought as we staggered out of Yosemite National Park at 11 p.m.: “Baruch, you are going to get out of this thing alive. When Jerusalem is in ruins and some are dragged to Babylon, while others are carted off to Egypt and I have demolished this nation, you are going to get out alive. Period. End of blessing. No more Bible promises. You are going to get out of this thing alive.”

Don't you think that's setting the bar low? No. Is that the truth? Yes. Does that make you want to roast marshmallows and sing "Kum Bah Yah"? No. Is it reality? Yes. Does it make the ministry a select career path? No.

This is the same God who responded to the whining Jeremiah with this audacious challenge: "If you can't run with the foot-soldiers, how do you think you'll keep up with the cavalry?" (12:5). God sometimes offers to us bracing words.

Now, I recognize that the phrase, "You'll get out alive," is just an image or a way of speaking. What does that mean in 2011 as a practical matter of ministry? Does anyone want carved on his or her headstone, "I got out alive"? That would be an interesting and oxymoronic monument. Let me put some current significance into what God told Baruch—that it would be enough to know that he would get out alive.

For some reason my ministry, now in its fifth decade, has always been situated around thousands of preachers. I've taught at Truett Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and pastored two churches by that huge seminary in Fort Worth. What's striking and sad is that only a few pastors at the end of the way are still standing in the faith and ministering with a sound mind. Their souls are not cynical, and their testimony does not consist of whining. They have not left the church or given up on the faith. They don't have souls that have shrunk to the size of raisins because of bitterness.

What does it mean to get out alive? It's what Hebrews 4:14 means. When many people wanted to leave the faith, the author exhorted them with these words: "Seeing that we have such a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, let us hold fast to our confession." It's what Paul meant in Ephesians

6:13, "Having done all, stand." Isn't that putting the bar low? No, not from what I've seen.

We need to be right there with Paul, who said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Notice that Paul did not say, "I wrote Romans." He didn't say, "If you really think about it, I won the fight at the Jerusalem Council," or "I was invited to preach on Mars Hill by the Areopagites." He didn't say, "During one missionary trip, I took over the ship and saved everybody in a storm. When we were washed ashore, I fixed breakfast for everyone on Malta." No, Paul just says in chapter 4, verses 16 and 17, "No one stood with me, . . . but the Lord stood with me and gave me strength." That is what it means to get out alive. Stripped of all company, denuded of all dignity, denouncing all credentials, and confessing amnesia about all achievements, Paul triumphantly cries out, "I kept the faith."

Aim at getting out alive. Don't quit the church, give up on the calling, curse the deacons, blame the seminary, or condemn the denomination. Don't aim at fame, because it is more empty in the ministry than anywhere else. Disdain acclaim, for it is a siren song that will always die before you do if you live long enough. Keep this as your goal: to get out alive in the faith.

Make your model another One who must have heard the same question that Baruch heard, "Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not." There is that One, famished in a desert carpeted with little brown stones that looked like the bread cooked in the communal ovens of Galilean villages. That One knew that He had more power in His little finger than in any half-baked messianic thaumaturgist who had ever walked in Galilee. "Do you seek great things for yourself?" No.

There He stood on the rooftop of the Temple, looking down at the caucuses of rabbis expecting the Messiah. “One jump and You’ll have it all,” said the Devil, who was tempting Him. “Do you seek great things for yourself?” No. On that magical, mystical mountain, He could watch the Roman triremes split the waters of the Mediterranean and see the standards of the legions. He knew that He had more power at His command than Tiberias ever dreamed of. “Do you seek great things for yourself?” No. And because He said NO, NO, NO and YES to a Cross on Friday, early on Sunday morning He got out alive—in the greatest sense of the word.

Right now, if you could rend the veil and part the curtain on another world, there would be a little Hebrew scribe standing over there at the corner of Shekinah Boulevard and Glory Avenue. His eyes are wide open with wonder from spending the last 2,500 years in a place he never knew existed and did not expect to be, along with Father Abraham and a now-smiling Jeremiah. All of them are now in a place with no more sorrow, no more pain, no more tears, and no crying again. Instead, they are singing praises to the great I AM and living in the light of the risen Lamb. Every now and then he says, to no one in particular, “Wow, did I ever get out alive!” And so can you.

Faculty Sermons  
on the  
Gospel of Mark



# On a Tear



Isaiah 64:1-14; Mark 1:9-11;  
10:35-45; 15:33-39

Todd D. Still  
William M. Hinson Professor of  
Christian Scriptures

Idioms make language acquisition challenging, if not confounding. Nonetheless, idiomatic expressions lace the English language and sometimes serve as sermon titles. An idiom that includes a homonym begs explanation and illustration. “On a tear” is akin in meaning to its idiomatic counterparts “on a roll” or “on fire.” If you are “on a tear,” you are moving ahead with strength and success, doing very well indeed. There is a sense of purpose and destiny typifying and punctuating one’s activity.

Since “bear” rhymes with “tear,” why not take this opportunity to talk about our beloved Baylor football team in general and

our quarterback in particular? To borrow a line from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose work is, or at least should be, well known at Baylor, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”<sup>4</sup>

Having started the 2011-2012 season with a thrilling 50-48 victory over our old Southwest Conference, and now new Big 12, rivals Texas Christian University, we suffered setbacks by losing three conference games on the road. But the “tide would turn” (no reference to the Alabama Crimson Tide intended!) at our homecoming game against Missouri. In fact, we would go on to win our last six games of the season, including victories over Oklahoma and Texas at home and over the Washington Huskies at the Alamo Bowl—a football game that might well be likened unto a track meet.

Leading the Baylor Bears on this tear was, of course, the inimitable Robert Griffin III, affectionately known to his fans as RG3. By the time the season was in the record books, Griffin had completed 72.4% of his passes for 4,293 yards, 37 touchdowns, and but six interceptions, for a quarterback rating of 189.5. For good measure, he also managed to rush for 699 yards and 10 touchdowns.<sup>5</sup> Such prodigious productivity helped to catapult Baylor to ten victories (for only the second time in school history) and helped RG3 to secure the highly celebrated, much-coveted Heisman trophy (the first in school history).

---

<sup>4</sup> This is the first line from Sonnet 43, which belongs to a forty-four sonnet collection entitled *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The Armstrong Browning Library on the campus of Baylor University houses the world’s largest collection of books, manuscripts, and memorabilia pertaining to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

<sup>5</sup> I culled the statistics in the text above from the official Baylor Athletics website. See [http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/bay/sports/m-footbl/auto\\_pdf/2011-12/misc\\_non\\_event/11-finalstats.pdf](http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/bay/sports/m-footbl/auto_pdf/2011-12/misc_non_event/11-finalstats.pdf).



As something of a Baylor sports nut, it is no small temptation for me to speak also of our ongoing success on the hardwood, that is, of our women's and men's basketball teams. However, in the interest of time, not to mention focus, we now turn to more pressing matters.

In the Gospel of Mark, the book from which your professors will preach when preaching in Chapel this term, Jesus arrives on the scene as a fully-grown man, seemingly from nowhere (as Nazareth could well have thought of as “Naza-nowhere”), to be baptized by John the Baptizer. Richard Burrige seizes upon the symbol associated with the Gospel of Mark in the early church, namely the lion, and likens Jesus unto Aslan, the great lion in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*. As with Aslan in the *Chronicles*, in Mark's Gospel Jesus “was among them though no one had seen him coming.” And as with Aslan in Lewis's *Chronicles*, in Mark's Gospel Jesus is busy, on a roll, on a tear if you will, preaching the gospel of God and incarnating the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

The pace of Jesus' ministry is particularly brisk in the first panel of Mark's Gospel, which runs from 1:1–8:26. With a *kai euthys* (“and immediately”) here and a historical present tense (i.e., to report past events using present tense verbs) there, those who have “eyes to see and ears to hear” do (begin to) perceive and understand the urgency and indispensability of Jesus' ministry. Subsequent to Peter's declaration of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi, arguably the Gospel's hinge (see 8:27-30), Jesus moves more methodically in Mark as his identity and

---

<sup>6</sup> For the insights in and the quotation within this paragraph, see Richard A. Burrige, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 35-36.

destiny become increasingly clearer and his words and deeds become even weightier.

As the flurry of activity gives way to discerning Jesus' true identity and to digesting his grisly destiny, one can miss Mark's subtle literary artistry, which goes beyond "sandwiching," three-fold patterning, and "cliffhanger" endings. The literary repertoire of Mark also includes *inclusio* or bookends, which serve as sentinels for the Gospel and intermingle at one pivotal point in the narrative.

As noted earlier, Jesus first appears in Mark at the time of his baptism in the river Jordan by John. If our baptisms seemed ceremonial and if the scores John was baptizing do not merit special mention in Mark, this was patently not the case with Jesus' baptism according to Mark. Indeed, as Jesus emerged from being submerged in water, there was a divine disclosure. The heavens were not just opened by God, as in Matthew and Luke. No, in Mark Jesus sees the heavens being torn apart, ripped open (*schidzomenos*). Outside of Mark (cf. Luke 23:45), New Testament writers employ *schidzo* to depict the tearing of cloth (Luke 5:36), the splitting of rocks (Matthew 27:51), the would-be tearing of Jesus' tunic (John 19:24), the non-tearing of a fishing net (John 21:11), a division among the people of Iconium (Acts 14:4), and a schism between Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:7). In Mark 1:10, the rending of the heavens ushers in both the anointing of (the Spirit descends) and the appointing of (the voice of the Father "owning" and blessing his beloved Son) Jesus for mission.

Jesus' ministry, begun at his baptism, culminates on a darkened Judean day on a hill outside Jerusalem likened unto a skull, Golgotha by name. Feeling forsaken by God, yet calling out to

the self-same God, Jesus of Nazareth breathed his last. If the heavens were cloaked by night that day, a stream of light yet appeared as the curtain of the Temple, seemingly the curtain that concealed the Holy of Holies, was torn in two, from top to bottom. No less significant was the centurion's confession—"Truly this man was God's son" (Mark 15:39).

Jesus' crucifixion, which tears at our hearts, is to define our discipleship. We, like the sons of Zebedee, prefer "one-ups-man-ship" over discipleship. We, like James and John, want Jesus to give us a blank check that we can cash in for our purposes at a time convenient to us. We prefer convenience banking to counting the cost, being at cross-purposes with other believers over working for the purpose of the cross. David E. Garland puts it this way in his remarkable commentary on the First Gospel: "The disciples [among whom we are numbered] would rather bear a grudge than a cross."<sup>7</sup>

But bear a cross we must, as Christians in general and Christian ministers in particular. We do not jockey for glory or ride roughshod over underlings, basking in the glory of authority. Rather, we learn to drink the dregs, recognizing the correlation between baptism and crucifixion, understanding that the watery grave gives way to life, realizing that the sacrificial service that marked our Master's ministry must no less mark ours. He has paid the ransom for our reclamation and redemption. We take this proclamation to the nations, so that others might join us in seeing more clearly like Peter and the Roman centurion.

What Christ has done for one, he has done for many, arguably a Semitism suggesting all (Mark 10:45). As Jesus shares

---

<sup>7</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark (NIV Application Commentary)*; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 412.

supper with his disciples one last time, he tells them that the cup that he and they will drink is his “blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many [once again, suggesting all]” (Mark 14:24).

Charmed green and gold seasons where we are on a tear are often eclipsed like the sun on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion. Mt. Carmel is often closer to Mt. Calvary than we would wish. We find ourselves in the midst of life and ministry torn in two like baptismal heavens and temple curtains. We would be whole so that we could love God and others wholly (Mark 12:30-31), but we are frail, fractured, and fearful, not unlike the disciples in Mark’s Gospel—who flee naked from Gethsemane and in stunned silence from the empty tomb (14:51-52; 16:8).

What can we do to be saved? We pray anew with Isaiah of old: “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down” (Isaiah 64:1a). And we sing the newer song: “Heaven came down and glory filled my soul; when at the cross the Savior made me whole; my sins were washed away and my night was turned to day. Heaven came down and glory filled my soul.”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus’ baptism and crucifixion, which rip open heaven and earth, the skies and sacred space, are woven together by sacrificial service. Even as Christ’s apocalyptic invasion, seen most clearly in his baptism in crucifixion, frame Mark’s narrative, Christ crucified, yea risen, should frame our lives.

Would that our lives and ministries were characterized by the sacrificial service that typified and vivified the life and death of our crucified, risen Lord. If our lives would but mirror our Master’s, then we would build up and not tear down. Moreover, the legacy of our ministries would last longer...at least longer

---

<sup>8</sup> The chorus of “O What a Wonderful, Wonderful Day” by John W. Peterson.

than the soon-to-be faded memories of Baylor's athletic success in this green and golden age.

Truth be told, we best fling our green and gold afar to light the ways of time by pointing people to a hill far away and to that Day of Days when there will be no more tears or tears and the lion will lie down with the lamb (cf. Isaiah 11:6; 65:25).

So, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> The so-called "Gloria Patri."



# Feed My Dogs



Mark 7:24-30

Robert Creech

Hubert H. & Gladys S. Raborn Professor of  
Pastoral Leadership and  
Director of Pastoral Ministries

'Twas the night before Christmas, 2006. A thousand people were nestled next to each other in the pews at UBC, in the candlelight, anticipating the 11 PM Christmas Eve communion service, one of the most beautiful and meaningful worship services we shared together all year. Poinsettias and evergreen adorned the space. Handbells beckoned us to the hour. A chamber quartet accompanied the congregation as we lifted our voices, visiting the little town of Bethlehem, singing the first noel with the angels upon that midnight clear. A skilled soprano offered “O Holy Night” like she had written it herself and it was the first time it had ever been sung. And

then I, the pastor, stepped up and presented the homily, after which one of my colleagues, Rick, and I stepped behind the communion table and sent the deacons off with trays to serve the congregation the bread and the cup, reminders of our Lord's body and blood.

But there was a problem. A practical problem. I noticed it when I walked in too late to make adjustments. Rather than dividing the shiny silver trays containing the elements of the supper, placing some in the back of the room and some in the front as usual, they were all stacked on the communion table, towering above it.

When the deacons had served the congregation, rather than leaving their trays in the back as we'd planned, they, for some reason, all processed down front carrying their partially empty trays back to us. Twenty deacons arrived simultaneously with two trays each and we looked like a couple of Benihana chefs receiving and restacking them.

And then the unspeakable happened. My wife, having observed my clumsiness on many occasions, had dreaded this moment for years. Taking one of the juice trays, still containing several full cups, I turned to stack it and instead flung it into a pack of deacons like a Frisbee, and they scattered. The clatter of that tray hitting the floor shattered the silent night.

My first thought was, "I wonder if anyone actually saw who did that?" I thought of turning to Rick and glaring at him.

Wanna get away?

Sometimes in ministry you need to take a break for sanity's sake.

In Mark's story, Jesus needs a break. At the end of chapter 6, large crowds pressed in on him with their sick.



When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. (Mark 6:53-56 NRSV)

When chapter seven opens, a group of religious authorities from Jerusalem press in on Jesus with their legalistic traditions, accusing him and his disciples of eating without ritually washing their hands. Jesus challenges their practices, their “traditions” that define things as unclean and defiling when God has not so defined them.

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” (Mark 7:14-16 NRSV)

But even his disciples seem confused by this statement. Inside a house, privately, they ask him to explain. He does so unequivocally:

“Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And

he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:18-23)

Jesus is clear that uncleanness before God has nothing to do with those external categories that these religious authorities had imposed. It is an issue of the heart, not of the hands. It is not what you touch that makes you unclean. It is your heart.

Demanding crowds.

Defiant religious fundamentalists.

Dense disciples.

Wanna get away? Jesus did. It is time for a retreat, for some solitude, some silence.

“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it;...”  
(Mark 7:24)

So, seeking some respite from the demanding crowds and the antagonistic religious leaders, and perhaps his own disciples, Jesus heads north of Gennesaret some 30-40 miles to the region of Tyre. He enters Gentile territory, a place where he will certainly encounter people this group of religious leaders would regard as unclean. He checks into a B&B, puts a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door, and switches off the phone. He intends to have some time alone.

But that proved to be impossible. Mark adds to the end of verse 24 this reality: “yet he could not keep his presence secret.”

People from the region of Tyre appeared earlier in Mark’s story (3:8), already having made their way into Galilee and having encountered Jesus. So his reputation had preceded him to this place. When word got out that Jesus was in the neighborhood, the ears of one young mother perked up.

A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit in his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. (Mark 7:25-26 NRSV)

Mark leads the reader along the way with Jesus. One of the things that becomes clear on that journey is that Jesus holds a really distinctive view about who is on the *inside* of the Kingdom and who is on the *outside*. He thinks differently than his religious culture about that subject, about who and what are clean or unclean. He’s taking in tax collectors and sinners, touching lepers and unclean women. He takes the hand of the corpse of a little girl and converses with a demoniac who’s been living in a cemetery. He even confronts the holy people about the very nature of cleanness and uncleanness.

Then this story happens. Jesus is approached by a Gentile woman. She requests deliverance and healing for her little daughter, who has an “unclean spirit.” As a reader it is a gimmie, a two foot putt, a drop-kick, a slam dunk. We see the situation and we know. We KNOW what is about to happen. We’ve been

following Jesus all this way and we KNOW what to expect. We KNOW what he's going to do and what he's going to say.

But the narrator of the gospel throws us a knuckle-ball. He hits us from behind. We never see this coming. It's a flagrant foul. Jesus rejects the request. A bit rudely, I might add.

He calls the woman a Gentile dog. We didn't see that coming.

He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Matthew's version is a bit different. Jesus encounters the woman out doors. She accosts him and begs for her daughter's healing. He initially refuses to answer her at all. He doesn't pick up the phone. He just keeps walking.

When the disciples take up the attitude and ask him to send her way, he says, dismissively, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." Not "first." Not "primarily." ONLY. Not to be so easily denied, she runs in front of him and falls at his feet. There he and she have the exchange about the bread and the dogs.

But in Mark's account, the story takes place "inside" a house, a significant setting in that gospel. People in Mark who come seeking Jesus in a house are presented sympathetically, as people having full confidence in him. She hears about his being there and makes her way inside to see Jesus. This only adds to our expectation of Jesus' positive reception of her. But no. She's an unclean Gentile dog, a woman, and a Syrophonecian at that—descended from ancient enemies of Israel. She doesn't deserve to eat the bread that rightfully belongs to the children of God, to the Jews.

Well, have we finally caught Jesus on a bad day? Did we find him on the one morning when he got up on the wrong side of the mat, when all the coffee the disciples had was decaf, when he missed his quiet time, when people finally got on his last nerve? Do we finally get to see him lose it? WWJT? What Was Jesus Thinking?

This is a tough text. I heard one preacher say he always dreaded when this text showed up in the lectionary. He didn't want to preach it, but if he didn't then his silence just made it seem that the story is as awful as it appears to be.

I had my pick of the entire Gospel of Mark for this day and I have no idea why I selected this one. It is not my favorite Markan story. But there it is, right in the heart of the book.

Commentators have lined up to defend Jesus here, to make sense of the way he treated this woman.

- Perhaps he spoke gently and tenderly to her, with a twinkle in his eye. Did the diminutive form for “puppies” soften the blow? Unfortunately the video of that event has not yet surfaced, so the close up shot of Jesus with a Gandalf-like twinkle in his eye is still a bit speculative.
- Perhaps Jesus was testing her faith. How loving and kind was that? What if she'd not responded so well? Would he have rejected her request and allowed the little girl and this young mother to continue in the anguish? That's so un-Jesus.
- Perhaps Jesus was genuinely rejecting her at first. Was he himself struggling with the scope of his mission? Did he himself change his mind after this encounter? The problem with this interpretation is that it has no

basis in the text. Jesus has previously crossed the border into Gentile lands in Gerasa and had no qualms about reaching out to Gentiles there. They rejected him, not he them. And he's already ministered to folk from Syrophenicia (3:6).

- Perhaps the story is the invention of the early church, which was then read back into the life of Jesus. And why would they want to do that? Why add a story that only made Jesus look bad? Seems like if you were inventing stories to fill up space you could do better than that.
- Hershel Hobbs, the legendary Baptist preacher and statesman of the previous generation, preached for our congregation in Houston twenty-five years ago from Matthew's version of the story. He suggested Jesus was simply acting like his disciples, taking on their attitude about who is unclean, hoping that they would see their folly and stand up for the woman, but they do not.

Perhaps Hobbs is right, at least about Matthew's account. It is possible that Jesus was testing the disciples rather than the woman, delaying his grace momentarily by expressing their very theology of privilege to see if they yet understand the inclusive nature of the kingdom of God. He simply ignores her request. The disciples tell him to get rid of her. He responds by telling them that he was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He reflects to them their own theology and that of their culture. You're special. You're from Israel. The messiah comes for you. You are the ones elected to privilege. Good call. Send her away.

He watches them. What will they do? Will they say, “But Master, what of all the Gentiles you have served? What of your inaugural sermon?” What of what you said when you healed the servant of the centurion—“many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”? Is she not one of these?

Will anyone intercede on her behalf? Will anyone be touched with the compassion of God for this woman pleading on behalf of the tormented life of her daughter? Will not one of them take up her cause?

No. No one challenges him. They all nod their heads. Except the woman.

She will not leave. Her daughter’s screams still echo in her head and this man is her last hope. She persists. The disciples’ theology and culture say she is to be shunned and rejected and Jesus has expressed their opinion perfectly.

In Matthew’s story, she runs to the front of the procession and falls at Jesus feet. She pleads, “Help me. Have mercy on me.”

Jesus then offers the final insult. He speaks to her, but perhaps his eyes search those of his disciples. Once more he voices their theology: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Jesus expresses out loud the ugliness of their thoughts and feelings in the very presence of another human being, one created in God’s image. Jesus voices the hearts of his disciples and of their culture.

Their hearts. The place he has just taught them that is the source of everything unclean.

Now will someone please speak up for her? Would someone love her? Would someone find some compassion for this

woman? Would someone empathize?

No. Not today. Perhaps another day, on another test.

That's when Jesus finally relents. He turns to the woman and removes the pharisaical mask he has been wearing. The test is over. F- for the 12, the apparent insiders. A+ for the Syro-Phonician woman, the ultimate outsider. She speaks again:

"I'm not going anywhere. You have what I need. I'll wait for a crumb of grace to fall and I'll be all over it. You are right, sir. I'm a dog. I deserve nothing from the hand of God. But I'll bet a crumb will hit the floor before long and I'll not let it go to waste. This is my little girl we are talking about."

Jesus responds, "Woman, you have great faith!"

That reading of Matthew works for me. Or as I like to say about somewhat creative, midrashic, speculative approaches to narrative texts, "If I were making a movie, that's how I'd shoot it."

But how does this story work in Mark? It is not so easy to relieve Jesus of the mess he's gotten himself into here. The disciples are not even mentioned in this account. There is only Jesus and the woman. Only Jesus and the Syrophonecian woman.

- Oh, but wait there is one disciple there.
- One who has been with Jesus from the first.
- One who is already convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God while the others are still in the process of discovery.



- One who has accompanied Jesus throughout the entire account and who has increasingly gained the perspective of an insider.
- This is the only disciple who will later follow him from the Garden of Gethsemane into the courtyard of the high priest without denying him.
- This disciple follows him even into Pilate's judgment hall.
- This disciple goes with him to the cross and stays until he dies.
- This disciple is there for Jesus' burial.
- This is the only disciple who goes with the women to the tomb on Easter morning, EXPECTING it to be empty.
- This is the disciple here with Jesus in the house in the region of Tyre.

This one faithful disciple is Mark's gospel is the reader. And I think that disciple is the one being tested in this text.

In saying this, I'm not asking the question, "What really happened?" "What was Jesus really thinking or intending?" Answers to those questions would be pure speculation, no matter what interpretation I take, since the text does not open Jesus' mind and reveal his motives.

So I'm bracketing those questions for the time and asking a different question. I'm asking about the rhetoric of the text—what is its impact on me as a reader?

In Mark, Jesus' words do not test the woman's understanding, or those of the Twelve, but they do test mine, as the reader. Perhaps I'm supposed to be puzzled by them. I'm supposed to be confused. I'm supposed to stumble over the discrepancy

between what Jesus has already done and said and what he does and says here. I'm supposed to be offended, scandalized. I'm supposed to throw a flag.

If I don't take offense, if I agree that she has no business as a Gentile woman intruding on Jesus' presence and requesting relief for her little girl, that may only demonstrate that *I* haven't gotten it yet. I'm still an outsider to the kingdom. I'm blind and deaf to God's ways and God's word. I'm still defining uncleanness in external ways. I still regard people who differ from me as "the other." I'm still closer to the Pharisees than to the Messiah.

This story occurring where it does (following all that has gone before, but particularly the immediately previous discussion about uncleanness) and as it does, arrests me and interrogates me when I read it. Do you get it? Do you see it? Are you offended by this? Have you yet grasped what the Kingdom of God is really like? Do you know who is welcome? How do you regard those who are other than you? Are they welcome to the bread of the kingdom or must they wait for scraps of grace to fall?

Who are the outsiders (the others) that we easily ignore or exclude? Who are the invisible people in our religious world? Who are the unclean, the outsiders, the unworthy, the intruders?

- Women still get less than a full place at the table in much of the religious world of Baptist life. Crumbs are still more common than slices of bread. This remains true even in other traditions that appear to be more open. "Are you offended by this?" the story asks?
- The poor, the homeless, the emotionally ill are mostly not on our radar, mostly not visible to church going folk

- in the course of our days, and when encountered accidentally are usually seen as intrusions or threats. “Does this bother you?” the story asks.
- Undocumented immigrants, many of whom are working hard to care for themselves here and families back home while living in fear, are vilified in political and religious rhetoric. “How does that set with you as a kingdom citizen?” the story asks.
  - Even among followers of Jesus, one race despises another, regarding the other as in some way unclean. “Are you ok with that?,” the story asks.
  - Christian Democrats and Christian Republicans identify each other as the enemy of righteousness. “What’s your take on that?” the story asks.

Time fails to inquire about the many “others” in our world whom professed followers of Jesus regularly regard as unclean, as defiled, or simply as invisible, deserving barely a scrap of leftovers, and certainly not a place at the table. Our terms and labels for the other fill our sermons, airwaves, and speeches: gays, criminals, Muslims, liberals, conservatives, fundamentalists. The lists go on and on.

I have to admit that all that labeling and ignoring and despising makes a kind of sense in the kingdom of this world, actually. It is a kingdom marked by fear and by survival and by power. Identifying the other and protecting self from the other, even moving to destroy the other makes a kind of sense in that kind of narrative.

But such behavior is senseless in the narrative of the kingdom of God. It doesn’t make sense in the light of Christ’s love

for us and his call to love our enemy as well as our neighbor. It doesn't make sense in light of his demand that we take up a cross and follow him. It doesn't make sense in light of his instruction to surrender the right to judge and of his insistence that uncleanness is something to be found in the heart, not on the surface.

When I read this text in Mark, I think that what I'm supposed to do next is see the way Jesus alters these social, cultural, political, and religious boundaries and to then keep reading. As a reader, I'm to now follow him into the Decapolis, into Gentile territory, in chapter eight, to cross the boundaries with him, to be with him as he breaks bread and feeds multitudes of those "unclean" folk just as he'd done with a Jewish multitude in chapter 6. When I am done reading this story, or being read by it, I'm to abandon the exclusive theology and values of this culture that still cling to my unclean heart and reflect the grace and mercy I see in Jesus. My own heart is supposed to change. That which has kept it an unclean place is supposed to yield to that which makes it clean.

John Ortberg wrote: "Father, Son, and Spirit are determined that the circle of love they share from all eternity should be ceaselessly, shamelessly inclusive. No one is left out except those who refuse to enter."

Sometimes in ministry we do want to get away. Sometimes it is necessary. But there is no place to go on earth where we do not encounter those amazing creatures, however marred, created in the image of God and for whom Christ died. And the Bread of Life is meant for each of them.

# Close the Door



Mark 9:14-29

Terry York  
Professor of Christian Ministry  
and Church Music

A prelude is a big deal to a musician. A prelude establishes the context for what is to follow. This is true for a particular piece of music. It is true for an entire worship service. The prelude gives some hints about how to process what you are about to encounter. Our scripture passage for this morning has a remarkable prelude. It is nothing less than the transfiguration. Jesus has taken his senior staff on a mountain top retreat. It was one of those rare times when heaven comes down and the scriptures come alive. Jesus relaxed and allowed himself to glow, and Elijah and Moses, on retreat from Heaven to spend a little time with Jesus, conversed with him as if they were talking over old times. The always thin veil between heaven and earth was but a

mist here. Peter, James, and John observed all this. Words had left James and John, but Peter still had a few. “Rabbi,” he said. . . . “Rabbi?!!” Isn’t there another title, a bigger title for a teacher who glows? *Elijah* and *Moses* “stopped by” to visit with this “Rabbi.” Peter’s response to seeing such a sight was, “Rabbi, let’s turn this into a permanent retreat sight.” Obviously, Peter didn’t know what to say, for he and the other two disciples were terrified. At least James and John had sense enough to observe a time of silence until some sort of appropriate prayer or praise could be uttered.

A cloud came over them; to shield their eyes? Perhaps, but they’d already seen Jesus glowing. They’d already seen Elijah and Moses. I think the cloud came over them in order to shield them from the sight of a miffed God. From the cloud God said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.” I think the admonition to “pay attention” was more akin to “Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut.” When the cloud left, Peter, James, and John saw only Jesus. Moses and Elijah had gone back up; Peter, James, John, and Jesus headed back down. They walked into our scripture passage for this morning in a scene not unlike what you feel and face when the vans pull back into the church parking lot. This is the prelude to our passage for this morning.

When Jesus and the guys joined back up with the disciples who had been left in the valley to keep the ministry going, they walked into a scene of dusty, noisy turmoil. Jesus addressed the scribes who seemed to be the spokesmen for the crowd, “What are you arguing with my disciples about?” Before they could form a respectable response, a man in the crowd answered, “Jesus, my son is possessed so I brought him to you, but you

weren't here, so I asked your disciples to cast the demon out, but they couldn't do it."

"That's right" shouted the opportunistic scribes. "Your disciples can't live up to the hype."

Just a little while earlier, Jesus was with a couple of the great heroes of the faith from earlier generations. The scene has changed. "You faithless generation," says the fully human Jesus, "how much longer must I be among you?" And with that he lumped the whole crowd into one group. Mountain top disciples, valley disciples, scribes, herd-instinct crowd; the whole bunch, he said, constituted a faithless generation. The fully divine Jesus does have a fully human "last nerve."

Well, the truth of the matter is that the stricken boy's father has a little bit of something that might pass for faith, but he's about half afraid to say so after Jesus declared the lot of them to be faithless. But the worn-out father's desperation has defeated all filters of discretion. Jesus calls for the boy to be brought to him, and the demon hit the boy with another convulsion on the way. Above the noise, through the dust, the boy's father speaks from the depths of his helplessness, "If you still can," says the father, "given all that's gone on here, if you're still able, have pity on us and help us."

And like the earlier blessing of the fish and loaves, Jesus accepts the half a portion of faith, lifts it up and shows it to be enough, and casts out, forever, the unclean spirit.

This would be a great place to end the story, and you know Mark must have been tempted to do so, but when Jesus looked up to perform the miracle, he saw out of the corner of his eye, the balance of the great crowd rushing toward him. The boy who had been healed was in deep peace for the first time in his

life. The folks around him, who knew him, thought he was dead. Jesus didn't have time to explain. He took the boy by the hand and helped him up then handed him off to his father. Then Jesus ran to the house where the disciples had already retreated.

Now, I have an idea that what is true now was probably true then. When the boss walks in and closes the door, something's up. Jesus has just escaped a mob that formed when the disciples couldn't do what they had the authority to do. I can almost hear Peter leaning over to John and whispering, "This ain't gonna be no parable."

And he was right. Sometimes the disciples were a little slow. But given what had just happened, one of the more insightful among them decided to beat Jesus to the punch. Maybe that would soften the blow. "Rabbi, sir, why couldn't we cast it out? Why were we ineffective?" He's banking on the fact that Jesus likes confession.

Jesus' reply is that what they just encountered was a demon all its own, a demon of a particular kind.

As I read and listen to this passage, the demon of which Jesus speaks, the one that tripped up the disciples and stirred up the scribes, appears to me to be the demon that stalks every ministry. It follows us around. It follows us even to mountain top experiences, but can't get a good foot-hold up there. It follows us back down the mountain to the mundane level of everyday life. This particular demon is patient. It can wait until the glow fades. This particular demon twists the fiery faces of the scribes who keep track of our every move and word and misstep. This particular demon stirs the unrealistic expectations and demands of the fevered crowd and then stampedes that crowd toward us. This demon jumps in the middle of our fatigue and convinces



us of the futility of our work and the finality of our weakness. This demon can take a dust devil and make it look like an F-5 tornado.

But there is a one-two punch that can take the demon down. It is the combination of the prayer of confession and the pronouncement of blessing. “My vessel of faith is half empty,” says the humbled father. “It is half full” says the Rabbi, and the miracle is done.

“This particular demon,” says Jesus, “can only be cast out by prayer.” But Jesus didn’t pray over the boy. He didn’t have time. The crowd was rushing toward him. “That’s what did it out there guys, prayer; his kind can only be cast out by prayer.” Why does the word “prayer” in Jesus’ short speech sting us so? Is Jesus being sarcastic? I don’t think so. Jesus didn’t pray, *but the boy’s father did*, perhaps unknowingly. His prayer was, “Jesus, if you will, you can heal my boy.” Sounds like a prayer to me. In fact, the prayer sounds quite familiar.

My brothers and sisters, disciples, it may be that the crowd and the scribes and the accusations and the immediacy of real need is getting to us, causing us, in mild panic, to forget who has given us our authority. Our call to minister as Jesus ministered and to do even greater things was not issued by a mere friend. Our authority does not come from a mere teacher. We handle holy things to the point that we might think of Jesus as merely the most religious of our covenant group or the most insightful of our teachers. Disciples, the One who calls us and gives us authority is the One who can call Elijah and Moses back to earth. The One who calls us to ministry and then ministers through us is the One who glows with the glory of God. We see Jesus rowing to get away from the crowd and we forget that he could

just as easily have walked. We see Jesus praying for a plan B in the garden and we forget that he is sweating blood. We talk to or about Jesus every day. That's what we do here. Might we forget from time to time that talking to Jesus is prayer and that prayer is how One talks to God? This demon, weary disciple, can only be cast out when you remember that your friend and teacher is God, God the Son, the Son of God in whom God the Father is pleased, the very Beloved of the Creator. Familiarity must not cause us to forget that we are called by, equipped by, and accompanied by God, God the Son. This kind will not be defeated by the *occasional* mountain top experience, not even the *recent* mountain top experience. This demon will not be defeated by the authority of our title or the intensity of our study. This kind will not be defeated by stories of past victories or past glory. This kind of demon will not be defeated because Jesus is your friend or your life companion or your teacher. This kind of demon will only be defeated when we remember that we are on God's mission. "This kind," said Jesus, "can only be cast out by prayer," prayer, the act of talking to God; the discipline of remembering who Jesus is, so that his authority might be our confidence.

Jesus' mild scolding of the disciples isn't because he's insulted that he is not being given the respect due him. He is not a young professor with a new doctorate. Jesus is putting things back into proper perspective, for our sake, for the sake of the kingdom, and for the sake of half-believing, desperate people who come to us, his disciples, wanting to know if what they've heard about God the Son is true. "Pay attention," said the voice in the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration. See that Jesus is God.

Scripture does not name the demon in this passage, but I think *I* know its name. “My son,” said his father in verse 17, “has a spirit that makes him unable to speak.” There it is. There’s the evidence. Look at who can speak. Adults who are energized by your arguments, the demon doesn’t care if you speak. Shout away. Defensive disciple, always trying to prove yourself and shore up your position, talk all you want. Squeaky clean scribe, take careful notes and nagging, it does a demon’s heart good. In this passage, the demon stopped only the tongue of the child in their midst. A child speaks hope. This demon can’t allow that. A child speaks trust. A child speaks faith. This demon has silenced the voice of the child; the beautiful voice of hope and trust and faith. *The demon’s name is doubt.* But, he can be defeated. Like the desperate father, we must own our doubt, confess it, and say the demon’s name to Jesus, and in the same prayer claim what faith we have. The demon’s name is doubt and he can’t stand up to faith, not even a little bit. But sometimes we get a little careless, a little casual about our faith. We discount our faith’s importance or misplace it because we are friends with Jesus, we study Jesus, and we want to believe that Jesus can be seen in us. Must we pray to one who is with us every day?

There’s a “baptized” war song in our hymnal, a “hymn” that just won’t go away. It’s *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, also known as *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. It’s included in scores of hymnals. The hymn is numbered 439 in our book, *The Celebrating Grace Hymnal*. We’re not going to sing it. Including war songs in hymnals is risky business. Stanza two states, that “He [Jesus] has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat.” What? Never sound retreat? Not so in Mark, chapter 9. Jesus walks into the chapter taking Peter, James, and John on a

*retreat*. Jesus heals a little boy then beats a hasty *retreat* to the room where his disciples had already huddled. The door was closed and Jesus began to put things back into proper perspective. I think he did so by the use of one key word, “prayer.” I think the word suggests. “Remember who I am, it will give you confidence. Remember who I am...use the word ‘prayer’ if it will help you remember.”

Jesus and the disciples retreated for much needed regrouping. Retreat can mean charging in the opposite direction for the good of the cause. You want a song to sing in response to Mark 9? I suggest we put aside “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory.” That hymn leads us too close to triumphalism. I suggest our retreat song should be hymn 120, “Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His name is called Emmanuel; God with us, revealed in us, his name is called Emmanuel.” (©1976 C.A. Music) Retreat to your office, your study, your special place and close the door, even if it’s the car door as you head up the trail. Retreat and pray, remembering that the Christ in you is God indeed.

In reading this passage with this morning’s chapel in mind, the Spirit showed this Professor of Christian Ministry a *picture* of Christian ministry. Christian ministry is grinding and glorious. It is crowded and lonely. It is success and failure. Christian ministry is mountain top and valley. Christian ministry reveals that Jesus comforts *and* challenges. Christian ministry is pleasure *and* pain.

I have taken away from this reading something more than an attempt at a sermon. I’ve been reminded of the importance of getting away from the crowd, getting with Jesus and closing the door; sometimes with other disciples, sometimes just Jesus and me. I’ve taken away the important reminder that the doubt that

would render Christian ministry ineffective can only be defeated by prayer, and this praying is not to the first among equals, it is to God the Three in One, in the name of God the Son. I have been reminded that doubt doesn't slow God down, it slows me down, but when confessed, Jesus will absorb it.

Scribes in your face? Get with Jesus and close the door, for He is God. Is the crowd that's rushing toward you a reminder that retreat may be the better part of valor? Get with Jesus and close the door, for He alone is God. Is there a cloud of dust between you and the mountain top retreat? Get with Jesus and close the door, He is the God of Elijah and Moses, and of you and your situation. Go ahead, put yourself in the same sentence with Elijah and Moses. Has the roar of expectation and demand drowned out the still small voice? You know what to do. Has the Jesus who called you lost some of his glow and become a little dusty? Get with Jesus and close the door...not to talk things over with your friend, not for another lesson from your teacher...close the door and talk to Emmanuel. God the Holy Spirit will deal with your doubt, interpreting its hesitant words.

Do you know this demon named doubt? Then let the word "prayer" put the word "familiarity" in its proper place. As a result, the phrase "God the Son" will put the phrase "Jesus is my friend" in its proper place.

Get alone with Jesus, close the door, and hear him say, "This kind can only be cast out by prayer. My name is Emmanuel, let's talk."

Amen.



# View From the Mountain



Mark 8:27-34; Mark 9:2-9

Angela Reed

Assistant Professor of Practical Theology  
and Director of Spiritual Formation

The story of Jesus' earthly transfiguration into an unearthly, dazzling divine-like being may be one of the most remarkable mountaintop moments of Scripture. I would imagine that Peter, James, and John, after looking back over all of the things they did with Jesus must have remembered this as one of the most amazing experiences that captured their spirits. I suspect that very few of us can describe a moment in our lives quite like this when we were so dazzled by God's presence, but many of us can point to moments when we have "met God" in some way. Sometimes we even talk about those times as "mountaintop" experiences—of course, the mountain is a symbolic place in Scripture for meeting God.

Reading the story again this week, I was reminded of a Google search I did on the word “spirituality”—a few of our first semester students have heard me talk about this—I don’t mind if you groan a bit to hear it again; my son, Joshua, would probably do the same thing. A while back he and I were talking about something—I forget what exactly—and I said that it reminded me of the spiritual life—and of what God is like. Joshua looked at me, shaking his head slightly and said in the tone that 10 year olds use with such mastery, “Mom, is *everything* about spirituality?” I smiled and said, “YES!” (I had his permission to share that). Once again, I read this text and thought about “spirituality.”

I suppose that I am not the only one to think a lot about spiritual things in our time and culture. The google search on spirituality that I mentioned brought up over 200 million hits. I wonder if you can guess the first 5? (Go ahead—this may be the one and only time in this chapel that you have permission to get out your smart phone...)

1. Wikipedia of course—according to this great source of communal knowledge, spirituality can refer to “an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his or her being.” The website goes on to talk about spiritual practices—about prayer and meditation—some of the same language we might use in covenant groups.
2. The Christian Science Publishing Society—something about practical spirituality and healing prayer
3. Beliefnet asks, “What’s your spiritual type?” I wonder what that means or how to even answer that question...
4. *Psychology Today* suggests that spirituality really means something different to everyone. What, no definitions to



capture the essence? This website was not written by a professor.

5. The University of Maryland Medical Center—spirituality and health again—these often go together in our culture.

A short way down the page we encounter images for spirituality—can you imagine what they might look like? They are images filled with rays of light. We see multiple pictures of people with arms up and light shining all around. Virtually every picture focuses on light. If that's what spirituality is like, I haven't experienced it very much—no bright lights shining behind me at the moment. Though curiously some of these images do remind me a bit of our biblical story, of mountains and of light - what Peter, James and John might have seen and I wonder if there is a connection.

In a fascinating book called, “Do Christians know how to be spiritual?”, John Drane suggests that spirituality in our culture tends to focus on an inward journey to understand one's own purpose in order to live a more fulfilling life; a journey toward wholeness and healing. What is clear in this description is the emphasis upon “me”—my life and fulfillment, an inward search and an outward connection with something beyond myself that meets my own need. (in all but one of these pictures, there is only one person—almost no community at all). For many spiritual seekers in our time this involves the desire for spiritual experiences—from pilgrimages to retreats, to spiritual hiking adventures to contemplative small groups. We long for spiritual nourishment, to encounter God in significant ways.

I wonder in what sense Drane's definition and the Google results do or do not represent *Christian* spirituality? There is much we could say about this, reflecting on Scripture and theology as a whole, but for now, I would like to consider a few possible insights from the biblical story for today, especially from the perspective of Peter's spiritual formation.

We enter the story in chapter 8:27 where we find Peter speaking—this is not unlike him. He is usually one of the first to get his ideas out there. He is also showing signs of leadership. He may be speaking for the disciples as a whole when he responds to Jesus' question about who Jesus really is. This is a central question for the whole book of Mark. Jesus is someone special, people acknowledge that—perhaps even the return of an important prophet. Then Peter has a shining moment, “you are the Messiah” he says. Jesus does not deny it. In fact, in Matthew's version, Peter is told he will be the foundation of the church, he will receive the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Wow! Some of the most significant moments in our spiritual lives occur when we believe we have received a calling from God—this comes up again and again in the spiritual autobiographies I have heard from some of you. I can imagine that Peter himself glowed a bit at this point. He is getting a rare glimpse into his own future purpose—this is part of what John Drane says that spiritual seekers are still looking for today—and Peter has the word from Jesus himself.

For Peter's sake, it would be nice to just stop right there and skip ahead to the mountain. Unfortunately, we must continue on to the next part when Jesus, who is experiencing remarkable success among the people and who Peter has just said is the one true Son of God, describes a future of suffering—of death.

Peter again feels he must speak up and point Jesus in a different direction. This moment almost reminds me of a parent pulling aside a child and saying “that’s enough Johnny—you know better than to talk like that.” This time Jesus looks past Peter at all of them. “Get behind me Satan!” Not a stellar moment for Peter and the rest. This is not a “feel good,” mountaintop experience in Peter’s spiritual journey—this is the lowest valley. I can just imagine their faces—any glow would be snuffed out. This is the moment in your spiritual journey that makes you cringe—the humiliating time you wish you could forget. Don’t we all have these? Just when Peter thinks he has everything figured out, he is getting a little too big for his britches. But who can blame him really, suffering and death? That’s not the expected path for a son of God, is it?

According to the text, just 6 days later everything comes to a head, only 3 are invited to a climb up a very tall mountain. This turns out to be something truly special—beyond imagining. Peter and the others have been on quite the roller coaster ride. It’s a wonder that Jesus even brings these three along—after just looking at them and calling out Satan. I suppose I would have had my doubts, but Jesus does not give up on them. He is remarkably changed before them—far more than anything we saw in the pictures - and then Elijah and Moses arrive. What an experience! It is so awe-inspiring, the disciples are struck with fear. For once, Peter doesn’t know what to say, but, being Peter, he tries anyway. They are told by the great heavenly voice to simply LISTEN to this true Son of God.

What are they supposed to listen to? There could be several things—but several scholars think one of them is a reference back to that earlier valley moment—Peter and the others need

to know that suffering and death are part of this journey with God. That denying oneself and participating in everything the cross represents for the sake of others—this is part of the spiritual journey just as much as the joy of being called and the mountaintop moments when God’s presence and God’s words are overwhelming clear and brilliant.

For many people today, inside and outside of the church, spirituality is all about “me.” It’s about finding peace and joy within and meeting my own personal needs, things that do matter in Christian spirituality. At the same time, if my small group or my church doesn’t meet my needs anymore, I’ll find another one that does. Spiritual highs are often the goal, and lows are avoided. Talking about pain and suffering—living through that with others, and denying ourselves is not the goal of most contemporary spiritual seekers.

Peter and the others have to LISTEN and learn that the spiritual journey often includes hardship. We have to learn that the Christian spiritual journey and the contemplative life involve not just inner spiritual joys, but living in tough daily life, giving up the next promotion if we feel called to do so, choosing to live simply and give more away, staying committed to family members when they are difficult to love, standing up for someone who doesn’t have anyone else, going to seminary because we have believed that somehow we are called—even when our families don’t agree with our decisions or we have to take 2 jobs to make it work—even when we don’t know if a church will hire us.

I have been thinking this week about our year so far as a Truett community. I have remembered our pain—lost dreams, broken relationships, injuries, illness, even death—I see unexpected and unexplained pain...suffering. I see people who have

a course laid out before them getting ready to lead God's people, and suddenly the path took a sharp turn that no one saw coming. There may be moments of arms raised high and light streaming all around, but most of the time it is hard work—writing papers at 1 in the morning, visiting a friend in the hospital late at night.

Walking with God in these moments is true Christian spirituality—the view from Peter's mountain shows that there is a lot more time spent on the climb. Peter can't stay up there, even if he wants to. If he is going to follow Jesus, he has to go back down. In our teaching and preaching, in our pastoral care, and in our own lives, we must reject a Gospel that is only about happy feelings, about financial prosperity, about meeting my own needs.

If I could draw I would want to add some new scenes to this collage—ones without light, without triumph. Some climbing pictures, faces with pain and perseverance, some dark places—these are the places where true spiritual growth happens. These are the places where we are tested and show what we're made of, what God is making us to be. Perhaps something like this—a painting by our own Kevin Miner, entitled "Hope Defined." What is hopeful about it? At the bottom there is a tiny shoot of new life.

Christian spirituality embraces both dark and light, mountain and valley. May God help us to stay the course, wherever it leads, knowing the One who is faithful to stay with us. I find it to be very good news that in the end, Peter has the courage to do that too.

Let's take a few moments now to make this personal. I will ask a few spiritual direction-type questions and pause briefly for you to reflect on them with God.

- Have you had a moment recently when God's presence seemed very real to you? Did you sense any invitation from God through that experience?
- Have you had a moment recently when you sensed God inviting you to do something difficult? What are your thoughts and feelings about that?

Pray: As we approach Holy Week, may we become more aware of our own path on the spiritual journey, the joys and the struggles—help us to hear your invitations—to reflect with you about how we need to grow and change, and to rejoice with you in being called and deeply loved.

Amen.

# Furious Squalls & Sleepy Nights



Mark 4:35-41 & 14:32-42

Andy Arterbury

Associate Professor of Christian Scriptures

## I. Mark 4 - A Great Windstorm of Wind

More so than Matthew or Luke, when Mark narrates the Stilling of the Storm in ch. 4 he **accentuates the severity of the sea storm** that confronts Jesus and his disciples:

Quite literally, the text reads, “a great windstorm of wind arose.”

Translators have tried to capture the severity of the storm with numerous renderings of v. 37. For example, the recent Common English Bible reads—“Gale-force winds arose, and waves crashed against the boat so that the boat was swamped.”

Perhaps my favorite word choice, though, belongs to the NIV. It reads—“A furious squall came up, and

the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.”

Mark, however, does more than merely accentuate the gravity of the storm. He also **accentuates the failure of the disciples**.

The only thing in Mark 4 that is worse than the violent storm that rages over the sea is the reaction of the disciples to that storm.

**Fear** dominates these supposedly hearty fishermen: Fear begins to dictate *their actions*

They panic and begin to work feverishly bailing water from the boat in a futile attempt to save their lives.

Fear also begins to consume *their thoughts*

Their perception of Jesus changes, and they even begin to doubt Jesus’ goodness.

Ultimately, Fear drowns *the disciples’ faith* in Christ

Had they recalled the Scriptures, they would have known that the proper response was to turn to God in **prayer**.

They should have remembered the God who separated the waters and displaced chaos in the Beginning. They should have remembered the God who commanded the waters of the Red Sea and the Jordan River to stand down.

Like Israel in the past, they should have turned to God in faith with pleas, petitions, and even laments.

And finally, they should have recognized that the Son of God was already with them in the boat that was being swamped.



**Instead**, the furious squall that rages above and below the waters eventually **moves inside** of the disciples where it wreaks havoc on their ability to see, hear, or understand the Son of God.

The storm of wind & rain gives way to a storm of doubt & despair.

## II. Storms in Our Lives Today

Unfortunately, we have all experienced similar storms in life. And if we haven't already, we know we will someday. It's merely a fact of human life. At some point, violent whirlwinds and unrelenting waves swamp our boats.

**Truett Seminary** has in no way been exempt from storming seas. Over the years, numerous students, graduates, faculty, and staff have fought life-threatening diseases, afflictions, and severe hardships. Others have been overtaken by their own bad decisions, serious missteps, and severe consequences

Most recently, though, it feels as if Truett has been pummeled by:

The death of Jake Gibbs in January

The death of Dr. Brewer's brother-in-law last month

The serious medical conditions that are facing Cory Schibler and young Ellia Gibson, and

The head injuries sustained by Isa Torres when a car struck him while he was riding his bike at the beginning of Spring Break

(And those are just the storms we are talking about.)

Waves repeatedly crash in upon all of us at some point in our lives. Sometimes those waves are clearly evil, bad, or

at least not good. At other times, even heavy doses of “blessings,” good things like a seminary education, can threaten to drown us.

Consider Dr. Ngan’s oral finals as Exhibit A.

### **Our Reaction?**

As a result, we need to ask **how**—**how** you and I should respond when the great windstorms of life strike? What is the proper response to crisis? Here, rather than providing a one-size-fits-all response to violent squalls, the Scriptures primarily give us **examples** to recall, both positive & negative ones. They often show us what to do or what not do.

The disciples in Mark 4 most certainly provide us with an unforgettable example of **how not respond** to hurricane force winds in our lives. When the storms strike, we should not allow **fear** to rule us.

We should not allow fear to:

- Dictate our actions
- Consume our thoughts
- Or, drown our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

We should never fail to turn to God in **prayer**, even with our pleas, laments, and even complaints, so that those storms will not move inside of us and wreak havoc on our relationship with God.

### III. Mark 4 (cont.)

Despite the disciples’ failure, Mark thankfully includes **some good news** in this story. He not only accentuates the severity of the storm and the failure of the disciples, but Mark also **accentuates the remarkable calmness** that Jesus brings to the

situation. Mark actually uses the Greek word, *me'gas* (or great), three times in these 6 verses.

After describing a great windstorm of wind in 4:37, Mark goes on to describe a great calm in 4:39 and a great fear that the disciples began to fear in 4:41.

#### A. A Great Calm

**Because Jesus was not overtaken** by the sea storm, he was able to introduce a great calm/a perfect calm. Far greater than the typical ending to a storm, this calm was as serene as the squall was violent.

Yet, Jesus was concerned about more than simply the natural elements. He was concerned about the disciples.

**In part, he calmed** the storm, so that he could also **calm the disciples' faith**.

Hopefully, we experience and we proclaim this same, great peace today. Jesus brings a calm that is far better than the cease fire at the end of a long war, the settlement at the end of an embattled divorce, or even the temporary relief that occurs when the Big 12 signs a new TV contract.

Jesus brings the peace and calmness that passes all understanding

#### B. Fearing a Great Fear / A Far More Worthy Fear

**In response** to Jesus' intervention, the disciples began to fear a greater fear/a more worthy fear than the one that just consumed them.

At least temporarily, they experienced the fear that results when one's perspectives are rearranged by an *encounter with the divine*.

They experienced the kind of reordering that forces us onto our knees as we worship the almighty God.

### III. Mark 14 — Disciples' Negative Example

I wish I could say that the disciples learned from their mistakes and maintained a reverent fear forever. Unfortunately, they do not respond any better to crisis at the end of Mark's gospel than they do at the beginning.

**In Mark 4**, the disciples see the storm that is sinking their boats. They panic in the midst of it, their faith in Jesus is exchanged for fear, they fail to cry out to God in prayer, and a chasm between them and Jesus develops.

**At the Garden of Gethsemane, in Mark 14**, however, the disciples completely fail to recognize that another furious squall is gathering steam. They do not even see it coming.

Jesus had just put them on **high alert** at the Last Supper. He warned them about a storm like no other. He raised the warning flags that signal **rough seas** were ahead.

Yet, in Gethsemane, their only reaction to this ominous situation is **laxity**. **Only Mark** tells us that on three separate occasions Jesus exhorts his disciples to pray and to remain alert. Yet, after all three exhortations the disciples fall asleep. The implication seems to be that the disciples may have weathered this storm if only they had been faithful to **turn to God in prayer as Jesus instructed**.

**Instead, the night overtakes them.** They are destined to repeat the same sequence that we saw in Mark 4.

They will soon experience the gale-force winds of Jesus' crucifixion.

They will experience a crisis of faith.

They will allow chaos to conquer them once again.

Whereas they fail in Mk 4 because they are too focused on their **life-threatening circumstances**; the disciples fail in Mk 14 because they **lower their guards** down too far.

They fail to even recognize that danger is lurking.

**In 1995**, my wife, Kristin, and I were living in New Jersey. We were having **difficulties getting pregnant**, and Kristin underwent some fertility tests. Unfortunately, the doctors later realized that Kristin was **pregnant** at the time that they conducted an **internal biopsy**, an action that had the potential to harm the womb and our newly conceived baby.

Perhaps due as much to liability issues as medical protocols, our pregnancy was then **classified as a high-risk pregnancy** and we were slated for more advanced testing in the high-risk neonatal unit at the hospital in Trenton. All of the medical personnel kept telling us how lucky we were to have **one of the top 5 neonatologists** in the world working on our case. And, we soon discovered, that she was very knowledgeable, but she didn't have much of a bedside manner.

Once we finished the tests, we were taken back to **the doctor's office** where we would meet her for the first time. After about 10 minutes, the doctor entered briskly, sat down, looked both of us in the eyes, and asks, "Are you two **biologically related**? For example, are you biological siblings or cousins?"

Now, I realize that I had and still have a very **thick Texas accent**, and I realize that I am not the brightest looking guy in the world, but we were absolutely shocked by the abruptness of her question.

**After we answered** her question (by the way the answer is “no”), the doctor then proceeded to tell us that there was a very high possibility that our son had **Down’s Syndrome**. They had measured various parts of his body & organs, and three of his measurements were outside normal ranges. Then, before Kristin and I could even catch up mentally let alone emotionally to the conversation, she **immediately transitioned** into a description of the process we needed to follow to **terminate the pregnancy**. She did not demand a decision from us at that exact moment, but she stressed that we had no more than ten days to take action.

Our world had just been turned upside down. **Walking in I knew we were facing the risk** that our baby could have been physically injured by the biopsy, but I was **completely caught off guard by a threat I never saw coming**. What’s more, the world starting moving much faster than I wanted it to move. We somehow realized that **our reaction to this crisis** would have a lifelong trajectory. Most of all we realized that we needed to chart our course quickly and definitively.

We **didn’t have the luxury** of saying “I’m not ready to respond at this time.” We didn’t have time to take a seminary course on that topic to formulate or nuance our opinions. Often both **furious squalls and tempting nights pounce** on us when we aren’t looking. And, we often will not have the luxury to delay our responses. The only relevant question is, “How will we respond in that moment?”

#### IV. Mark 14 — Jesus’ Positive Example

**The gospels do not teach us** that Jesus performed miracles so that he could escape peril. **The good news is not** that Jesus

was able to avoid his trials and tribulations. **Instead, in Gethsemane, Jesus faces** his own furious squall. He experiences great agony. Yet he refuses to let his pain and suffering alter his relationship with the Father

In Gethsemane, Jesus **shows us how to respond to crisis:**

- 1) First, **Jesus anticipates** the storms and the temptations that lay ahead of him. In essence, Jesus deals with furious squalls before they even show themselves.
- 2) Second, in the midst of the storm, Jesus **turns to the Father**, not away from him. His reaction is opposite to that of the disciples in Mk 4 when they panicked & in Mk 14 when they fell asleep. In both instances, they failed to turn to God in prayer. **Jesus, however, prayed to the Father repeatedly.** Through prayer and communion with the Father, Jesus leaned into the relationship during the midst of trials and temptations; not away from it.
- 3) Yet, ultimately **Jesus' power** in Mk. 14 is best **seen in his act of submission** to the Father's will. Whereas in Mark 4 Jesus uses his **power to calm the storm**, in Mk. 14 Jesus uses his **power to submit** to the Father's will "rather than exerting his own." (Pheme Perkins, NIB, p. 707-708). He uses his power to deny himself!

Jesus **did not need to learn the fear** of the Lord through crisis as the disciples did. Instead, the Son possessed great reverence for the Father's will long before he even traveled to Jerusalem.

Ultimately, **Jesus charted his course even before the chaos began, before the chaos** could move inside of him or overwhelm him.

He resolved that his **relationship with the Father** would always take precedence over his circumstances.

V. The Call to Action

- 1) Today, we must first and foremost put our **faith in the triune God** who has the power to calm the furious squalls of life. Not because God will prevent all of the storms from happening, but because God is the one who walks with us through the squalls.

**God is in the boat** with us even before the waves threaten to sink us. And, **God is in the garden** with us when we are tempted to fall asleep.

- 2) Consequently, **because our strength is found in God alone**, we must continually **seek communion** with the Father so that we will be ready when crisis arrives, so that we will be prepared for both furious squalls and tempting nights. We must also realize, though, that there is often a **correlation** between the **depth of our communion with the Father prior to the onset of the crisis** and the **amount of strength we draw** from the Father during times of crisis.

**Students:**

If you will permit me, I'd like to **speak directly to you** for a moment. **Please, forgive me** if I'm about to sound too legalistic or too parental. And, please forgive me for speaking with you in a style that sounds more like we're in my office rather than Truett's chapel.

I want you to know that the faculty and I pray for you all often. When I pray for you:



I certainly pray that you will **survive the furious squalls** and the battering waves of crisis that you face now as well as those you will face in the future.

But, honestly, you have repeatedly demonstrated that you know how to turn to God in the midst of storms. You gather together as a community and you pour yourselves out to God with pleas & petitions. You camp out for weeks at a time in hospital waiting rooms. You pay friends' electric bills when no one's looking.

**But, when I pray for you, most often I pray that you will survive the tempting nights.** I pray that you are **preparing even now for future storms, unexpected decisions, and life-altering temptations**—the kind that creep upon on you without warning.

I pray that you will **remain vigilant** not only during the furious squalls on the raging seas, but also during the sleepy nights in the quiet gardens.

I frequently pray that you will **not squander** these seminary years, but rather use this time to cultivate a reverent fear of and deep communion with the Father. The **spiritual disciplines** of reading Scripture, praying, communing with God, and denying self are vital for all of us.

Despite our studies and despite the formation that takes place inside Truett's walls, it is the **decisions we make outside of this building** that may well establish life-long trajectories for all of us.

**The disciples repeatedly squandered** their opportunities to receive a full dose of God's strength and wisdom prior to the

onset of crisis. **Jesus, however, anchored himself** in God's will through prayer. (Garland 544)

But, what about us?

How will we respond?

What will we do?

# Even Messiahs Get the Blues



Mark 15:33–39

Dr. Joel A. Weaver  
Senior Lecturer in Biblical Languages

This morning I would like to talk a little bit about intertextuality. First of all, let me make it clear that intertextuality has nothing to do with students making comments to one another via mobile device during one of Dr. Brewer's lengthy lectures on Englebert Humperdinck... Or perhaps I could be thinking of Balthasar Hubmaier... I'm not really sure. After awhile, all of those reformers do kind of run together. Now, there is no need to look so offended Dr. Brewer; I am not suggesting that these text messages sent by your students are anything other than positive. I am sure they are texting things like: "This is pure gold!" "How can our pastors have kept this to themselves!" That is not what I mean by intertextuality.

Intertextuality refers to the interdependent relationship between texts; it is concerned with how one text shapes another or derives meaning from another. On the one hand, these connections can be broad and structural, as seen in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, which is a retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* set in Dublin, Ireland. On the other hand, these links can be established by a word or phrase that joins one narrative not just to another text, but to a far larger world of interpretive history and communal tradition. It is this type of connection that we will explore this morning.

While we encounter intertextuality on a daily basis, in our age, our "texts" tend to be TV shows, movies, and incidents communicated through social media. We are not immune to this even in the hallowed halls of this academic institution. One of our own sacred communal narratives illustrates this well. No, I am not talking about the seminary's founding... nor am I referring to Professor Fight Club either. I am speaking of the one story that unites us all, regardless of our ethnic, social, or theological diversity. Of course, I can only be referring to what happened in the early hours of last Tuesday morning. If you have not heard of Dr. Still's Jedi-like foiling of a car-jacking attempt, if you have not seen the viral video of his recounting of the incident on the local news, then perhaps I should also inform you that World War II has been won by the Allied Powers, NASA has successfully landed human beings on the moon, the Berlin Wall has come down, and modern technology has made computers available for individuals to use in their own homes!

And so now, our own esteemed and beloved Professor, Dr. Todd Still, has joined the ranks of Epaphroditus, Timothy, Paul, and even Jesus himself, as a model to be imitated. In the words

of Israel's wisdom tradition, he did not repay evil, but waited for the Lord... not to mention, the Waco Police. Like Peter and John in Acts, he spoke with *παρρησία*, with boldness, and so, speaking the truth in love, he has shown us, if I may quote 1 Corinthians 12:31, "a *Still* more excellent way."

1 Peter tells us that, like a roaring lion, our adversary the devil prowls around, looking—metaphorically speaking—to jump into the back seat of our truck. And as we watch that video again and again... and again, Dr. Still has shown us the efficacy of heeding the exhortations of his beloved apostle, Paul.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with the gym shorts of truth, and having neatly tucked-in the Baylor T-shirt of righteousness,

and having shod your feet with the tube socks of the gospel of peace;

in addition to all, taking up the shield of Emily Post's book of etiquette.

And finally take up the sword of lexical loquaciousness. Thus arrayed in such a potent panoply, not even the gates of hell can stand against us!

When a story, such as this, is so well known and used, it can be referenced by a mere phrase from the text, such as: "Excuse me, Ma'am. What do you think you are doing?" Or perhaps even a derivative slogan, such as the new bumper sticker on my Expedition: "Fear the Tuck! Hands off my truck!" Should you

need any more examples, they appear daily on Dr. Still's office door, coming back like Kudzu, despite his attempts to eradicate them. These photos connecting scenes from famous movies with Dr. Still's recent experience are funny because of their intersection with our own experiences with him, particularly his kindness and love of words.

In today's passage from Mark 15, we encounter this type of intertextual connection, in which a phrase provides a link not just to another text, but to a far larger world of interpretive history and communal experience. Jesus cries out, uttering the first line of the 22nd Psalm. Mark 15:33–39 reads,

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>35</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." <sup>36</sup> And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." <sup>37</sup> Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. <sup>38</sup> And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Jesus' Cry of Dereliction, as this phrase from vs. 34 has come to be known, has been the object of a great deal of interpretive speculation. The options are much too numerous to be

recounted here. Furthermore, as is often the case with scholars, varied readings are debated in either/or terms, as if the use of a text such as Psalm 22—which is at once scripture, poetry, prayer, liturgy, and communal tradition—could be sorted into neat piles like laundry.

Some interpreters would like to focus solely on the actual words used by Jesus, but that is problematic given the nature of the text cited. First century Jews were conversant with scripture in the same way we are conversant with television, movies, and music. In addition, this particular text is a psalm, the singing of which both connects it to worship and roots it in memory. Furthermore, Psalm 22 is an individual lament. As such, it had for centuries been appealing and meaningful to Jews with the blues.

In an age of scrolls with no pagination or numbers, texts were identified by their first line or a prominent phrase. Thus, by citing the opening of this Psalm, Jesus provides, in our parlance, a hyperlink to the whole psalm, as well as its attendant traditions. And as we have heard this morning, this well-known psalm has its own narrative arch; in verse 24 it is evident that the pendulum has swung, as the psalmist exclaims, “He did not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.” God *was* there. Moving from lament to praise, the psalm ends with an upward trajectory. Verses 30 and 31 read: “Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.”

In our Protestant tradition, we have our own songs of sadness and suffering... for even Baptists get the blues. Horatio Spafford lost his only son to scarlet fever at the age of four. In 1871, he lost all of his real estate investments when the Great

Chicago fire destroyed the city. And then in 1873, all four of his young daughters were killed when their ship collided with another vessel and sank on a trans-Atlantic crossing. On the subsequent voyage to England to meet his wife, who survived the tragedy, he wrote the words of the hymn *It is Well with My Soul*. Those now old and familiar words have given comfort and hope to generations of believers... for there are times when we can sing what we cannot bring ourselves to say.

The words of this hymn resonated with me as I faced the possible loss of my own daughter. My youngest daughter, Becca—who is doing well now—had a tumor with a high mortality rate that was located in a precarious position on her neck and upper spine. As she faced a particularly delicate surgery, about which we were not optimistic, I remember singing to myself these words:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, You have taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

As they gave us an opportunity to spend some time with her before the surgery and say our goodbyes... It was not well with my soul. I felt nauseated. My heart was pounding. It was hard to breathe as waves of fear and stress rolled over me. And so in our tradition, the lines of this hymn are words that you say when you are suffering, when you don't know what else to say. They allow you to identify with a great cloud of witnesses, fellow sufferers who have gone before. Likewise, these words serve as a prayer of hope. And while this hymn, like Psalm 22, concludes



with a triumphal note, the pain and suffering that proceed it are no less real. And so this proleptic praise, this rejoicing over a deliverance that is yet to be received, serves to remind us that what we see and experience is not all there is. And while you are in the midst of suffering, that can be hard to believe.

The late 60s was a particularly turbulent and disturbing time. Now I am talking about the actual 60s, not the 1960s. Although I have seen some photos of Dr. Garland from the 1960s with fashion choices that could certainly be labeled as disturbing, but we will save those for another day... Let Dr. Still have his moment in the sun. So, look for those pictures of Dr. Garland, coming to an office door near you in the Fall of 2012.

Now, to be a Christian in Rome—which is traditionally regarded as the site of Mark's audience—to be a Christian in Rome in the 60s of the first century was fraught with difficulties. Nero burned much of the city to make way for urban renewal, including his own new palace complex. When grants of tax relief and public benefaction failed to squelch the rumors of his involvement, he conveniently placed blame upon Christians, a group known for their lack of conformity to traditional Roman practices and values. Mass arrests and heinous executions followed. The decade ended with civil war over dynastic succession, not to mention the failed Jewish revolt in Judea that ended with the destruction of the Temple in 70. The choice to follow Jesus in such a setting could indeed have dire consequences. Loss of status. Loss of property. Loss of livelihood. Loss of family. Loss of connections. Even loss of life. I imagine that more than a few wondered, "Where is the resurrection power? Where is the deliverance from the one who sits at the right hand of the Father?"

At the halfway point of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem. And “on the way,” he teaches his disciples to be first in service, and last in power. He teaches them that those who seek to save their lives will lose it. He teaches them to take up their cross daily and follow him. Yet every time he predicts his passion, he encounters opposition and a lack of understanding from those who follow. Peter rebukes him. James and John request positions of honor and power. The group debates who is the greatest. In the end, he is betrayed and denied. One follower flees naked, leaving behind his clothes. And thus, the ones who, in the beginning, left everything to follow Jesus, have now left *everything* to get away from him. Their desires and ambitions have been nakedly exposed. And so as Jesus is crucified, only the women are present, and they are far off. In Mark’s narrative, Jesus hangs there on the cross, abandoned and alone.

In circumstances like that, what is there to say? What else can you do but sing the blues? And so Jesus turns to the Scriptures, to the sacred traditions of his people; he turns to the well-known song of the righteous sufferer. The very psalm that laments God’s absence also testifies to his presence. However, here, in Mark’s crucifixion scene, the pendulum has yet to swing, and so, just as when listening to the blues, we await the resolution of the final chord.

The cross in Mark testifies that God identifies with human suffering. The intertextual testimony of Psalm 22 asserts, furthermore, that God is present and hears our cries. Finally, to a modern Christianity marked by prosperity and triumphalism, the place of the cross in Mark’s larger narrative testifies that the path to glory is through the cross... the path of disciple-

ship leads to suffering. Deliverance will come, but only through Calvary. If you listen carefully, you can hear the intertextual echo of the last words of Psalm 22 reverberating through time... “future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.”

He has done it, indeed. Let us pray.

*For those of us who suffer, hear our cries, O Lord.*

*For those of us who do not suffer enough, give us the courage to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow you, wherever that may lead.*

*In the name of Jesus Christ, who has gone before us and now goes with us, we pray. Amen.*



# You Can't Stay Here



Mark 13:1-3

Steven Reid

Professor of Christian Scriptures

This is the last chapel of the 2011-2012 school year. We say good-bye to another group of graduating class. This time of year I think back to the events of the last several years.

My find went back to a trip. At Truett we have a tradition of travel seminars. Dr. Gloer and the Wilderness Spirituality trip, Drs. Stroope and Wilhite went to North Africa. This year Drs. Still and Weaver went to discover anew the churches of Paul. But last year, March 2011 I accompanied Dr. Still on the Pilgrimage to Israel. For a time we were tourist and pilgrims. We went to the Mount of Transfiguration. It was our habit to have someone read the biblical text associated with the location. Someone read the passage Mark 9:2-13. Peter, James and John were there, as they often are in Mark's gospel. Peter has the speaking part. The

NIV reads “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters...” The Mount of Transfiguration is also known as Mount Tabor in northern Israel. That morning the air was clear and crisp I had to borrow gloves from Rosa as it was so crisp and cold. You looked out and said WOW. Of course you could have a miracle happen here.

But we couldn’t stay there. We were not able to stay there, we were tourist. We were pilgrims. Even Peter, James and John were not able to stay there. This bucolic pastoral context was an experience to have but not a place to stay.

Let me frame the issue in musical terms. So that you might understand the musical frame some background might be helpful. I grew up in Dayton Ohio. I was not in the wave of the first integrated schools in Dayton Ohio but it was still new when I went to school. I went to school in Jefferson Township. The new racial mix meant a new musical mix as well. There were three musical communities at Jefferson Township. There was the rock and roll crowd. There were the folk rock peace kids. The black kids in the school were fascinated by the new black station WDAO-FM the home of the emerging soul sound. I grew up in a household where my mother played jazz every Saturday afternoon when the house cleaning was finished. To this day I associate jazz with a clean house and a relaxed mind.

We first came to Texas in 1983 on sabbatical and permanently in 1990. Texas has broadened my musical tastes. Nonetheless it is with some chagrin that I tell you a secret. You can keep a secret can’t you? I am not going to refer to a song by Nancy Wilson as you might imagine but rather Gretchen Wilson. I was listening to the country singer Gretchen Wilson. Her song “You Don’t Have to Go Home.”

Her song describes a bar about closing time 2 a.m. Being a Texas Baptist I have to take her word for it in terms of authenticity.

*You can walk, you can crawl  
You can be carried out by the law  
But you will get .... Out of here*

I can almost hear Jesus saying to Peter, James and John when Peter proposed building the first religious theme park (see Mark 9), “You can’t stay here.”

The Jesus entourage moved on. By chapter eleven they made their way to a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In the same chapter Jesus enters the Temple. In chapter thirteen Jesus leaves the temple. Once again we see the disciple as foil, the one who sets up a speech by totally misconstruing the situation. Lohmyer in his commentary remarks that the disciple sounds like an enthusiastic tourist. We recognize this as we compare a popular translation and a paraphrase.

The NIV reads, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

Petersen’s *The Message* says, “Teacher, look at that stonework! Those buildings!”

Jesus’ response to the disciples is a question. However, we should note that the same group of three that were there at the mount of transfiguration in Mark 9 continue to represent the disciples here at the temple in Mark 13.

We can understand the sense of awe of the disciple. The history of the Temple goes all the way back to the sacrifice of Isaac; the dedication of the Temple by Solomon in 1 Kings 8; the

leaving of the divine presence in Ezekiel 9; the rededication of the temple; the abomination of desolation and the rededication of the temple in 167 BCE; 19-20 C.E. Herod made extensive renovations and additions. Indeed the nameless disciple was an enthusiastic tourist for good reason.

Nonetheless, Petersen makes clear his understanding that Jesus reprimanded the disciple with his replying question. Petersen's periphrastic rendering of the question is quite provocative." You're impressed by this grandiose architecture?"

Well back to the Still pilgrimage to Israel. We made our way to Jerusalem. The bus pulled up the hill into Jerusalem. The hotel was breathtaking and the sense of history was thick in the air. We were there for Shabbat living in a kosher hotel. The City of David, David's tomb, the old city and the trip to the Wailing Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Empty Tomb all left us asking as the nameless disciple with a sense of WOW. Once again we were tourists and pilgrims we could not stay there.

We often read this text as being a historical account that does not describe our life. It is Jesus' message to those disciples not these disciples. However, this morning I want us to see this address to the disciples as an address to us. The admonitions to those disciples are admonitions we are well to heed.

David Garland in his NIV Application Commentary reminds readers not to approach Mark 13 as if it were a bus schedule but rather appreciate the instruction of Jesus to the disciples. Jesus instructs the disciples that the religious institution, the temple is in the wane. "Jesus tells his followers what must happen before the end comes, but he does not tell them what they long to know—the precise dates and signs." (508)



“The danger is that we want to be popular and accepted by society.” (Garland 512) We can also say that about our Baptist heritage. All too often we are the enthusiastic or nostalgic disciples coveting the past glories. Doug Weaver in his book *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* characterizes the twentieth century as a time when “Baptists an increasingly centralized and efficient denomination.” (146) Our preoccupation with a Baptist past sometimes lures us to stay here and not venture into the Baptist future God prepares for us.

What Jesus might do today is to characterize the debate as idol vs. icon. It is easy to allow our memory to become an idol instead of an icon. The philosophical theologian Jean-Luc Marion in his book *God Without Being* argues that an idol is a reflective mirror. It always plays back an image of ourselves. Often when we get stuck in the bar, on the mount of transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane or even here we exchange the icon of Christ for the idol of Christendom.

I remember an early conversation with Dr. Creech. He told us that things had changed since the time that he was a young seminarian. Seminary was the place a young man went to get a union card. With that card you could receive a call to the FBC, the factory Baptist Church. Today seminary is not a factory or franchise on the way to a call. The contours of ministerial vocation are substantially complex and unpredictable.

A friend of mine pastoring in Austin Texas would present to the graduates on behalf of the church a cross each year on graduation Sunday. So the week before the event she went to the jewelry store to purchase the crosses. The attendant asked her if she wanted an empty one or one with a little man on it. The attendant reminds us that Catholic tradition of the crucifix depicts

Christ's Passion on the Cross. The Protestant tradition celebrates the resurrection of Christ hence the empty Cross. Marion points us to a text that helps us understand Jesus message in Mark 13. Marion invokes Paul who understands the Cross of Jesus Christ as the invisible icon of God. (Col 1:15) (See Marion 17)

Jesus bids us not to stay here. No matter where the here is. As Luther says we must come to the Cross with empty hands.

I can hear Jesus singing low the words of Gretchen Wilson

*You can walk, you can crawl*

*You can be carried out by the law*

*But you can't stay here.*

# Fall & Spring Convocation Addresses



# Living Life under the Sun or Under God



Ecclesiastes 1:1-4

David E. Garland

The Charles J. and Eleanor McLerran Delancey  
Chair of the Dean and Professor of Christian Scriptures  
Fall 2011 Convocation

Zack Hamble has snagged 5,604 baseballs at 48 different major league stadiums since 1990. He has written books on how to do it.

I have caught only two foul balls in a lifetime of going to baseball games. Though that was over 20 and 25 years ago, I can remember the details to this day and especially the glowing admiration of my son who watched me grab them both without flubbing it and then hand the balls to him. I do not know what it is about foul balls but even those who simply pick up someone

else's muff, lift up the ball in triumph, as if they had just won the World Cup.

So, I understood what the father was trying to do at a Ranger's baseball game this past summer when he reached over the railing to try to get a ball tossed to him by an outfielder who happened to be his six-year old son's favorite player. He had to reach out too far, and to the horror of everyone he lost his balance and fell twenty feet to his death. It seemed so meaningless.

But the author of Ecclesiastes, he calls himself Qoheleth, the preacher or teacher, sets down his thoughts about life, and on the surface his basic attitude seems to be that it is all meaningless. As he reflects on the span of life from youth to wise sage, he highlights the absurdity of life. He charts the plunge from the pinnacle of power to the valley of deep spiritual darkness. Ecclesiastes, it seems, is a sour, dour, pessimistic book. All is not right with the world. Maybe that is why it has not always been well-received and rarely preached.

My first real encounter with Ecclesiastes was back in the 1960's when the rock group the Byrds took a Pete Seeger composition and turned it into a hit: "Turn, turn, turn. For everything there is a season." But then in school I realized that Shakespeare seems to have liked alluding to it. In *Macbeth* Act V, scene v, Macbeth gives a famous soliloquy after receiving news of his wife's death. He contemplates the brevity and meaninglessness of life that sounds a lot like Ecclesiastes.

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

This same idea can be found in the biblical book of Ecclesiastes (1:2). “All is striving after the wind.” “All is vanity.” Fifty-seven times the Hebrew word *hevel*, which is rendered “vanity,” “absurd,” or “unknowable,” appears.

That message seems to resonate with people today. Stephen Dunn’s poem “On the Way to Work” captures how some people feel about life. In the poem, he is on the way to work and spies a bumper sticker on a car where a woman driver broadcasts her philosophy of life: “Life is a b###. And then you die.” Why people would want to trumpet this view on their car I do not know, but for all too many these days life seems absurd, too short, a vapor that is like a bubble that pops.

Michael Foley writes in his book *The Age of Absurdity: Why Modern Life Makes It Hard to Be Happy*:

Modern life has made things worse because it has deepened our cravings and at the same time heightened our delusions of importance as individuals. Not only are we rabid in our unsustainable demands for gourmet living, eternal youth, fame, and a hundred varieties of sex, but we have been encouraged—by a post-1970s “rights” culture that has created a zero-tolerance sensitivity to any perceived inequality, slight or grievance—into believing that to want something is to deserve it.

I want it; I deserve it. And if and when we get it, we humans only want more. When we do not get more, we whine and pine our lives away. I would submit that this is the problem with living life under the sun. The preacher is right: *It is all vanity of vanities. It is ultimately meaningless.*

The preacher is a wise man, wealthy, well educated, a member of the elite. He sounds like a king going through a mid-life crisis. He had it all, but now he wearies of life and wonders “What did it all mean?” “What did it all matter?” With all his blessings he reflects on life lived under the sun. There is nothing new under the sun. He accurately describes the plight of those caught in a do it yourself religion. He says, in effect, I am going to get my act together. I am going to find myself.

### I. Chasing after Knowledge

First, he tries knowledge: “I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.” (Eccl. 1:1314). He went to school, so to speak. He acquired all the wisdom he could that was buried in books, or nowadays, in Wikipedia. But it did not bring him what he wanted.

He says: “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” (Eccl 12:12). Many people know that when it comes to education, you can kill yourself by degrees. One thing I have learned over the years, whenever we double the diameter of our knowledge we triple the circumference of our ignorance.

The preacher did not find peace in his great learning. He says: “I said to myself, ‘I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.’ And I applied



my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.” (Eccl 1:1618).

Albert Einstein who had such great learning declared: “We are insignificant creatures on a minor planet of a very average star near the outer suburbs of a hundred thousand million galaxies. It is a difficult to believe in a God that would care about us or even notice our existence.”

## II. Reveling in Pleasure

Knowledge did not bring him what he wanted so he says, “I’ll try pleasure.” In Eccl. 2:14: “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ He did what all the advertisers on TV tell you to do: “Go for the gusto.” “Eat, drink, and be merry, party hearty.” Neil Postman wrote years ago: We live in a society devoted to amusing ourselves to death. The preacher says that he had all these possessions: he made great works, he had houses, vineyards, gardens and parks, slaves at his beck and call, a harem of women concubines, silver and gold to get whatever his eyes desired and the leisure to enjoy it all (Eccl 2:4-8). But all this seeking after pleasure and the things that promise to deliver it does is feed a relentless churning of desire. It is a universal law of spiritual physics that all the things we have now are devalued by the things we want next.

The mother of a star athlete whose career was ruined by his addiction to cocaine said: “You know what I think his problem is? All his dreams came true, and it wasn’t enough.” The sister of billionaire Donald Trump said: “The more he gets, the more he wants.” We are not billionaires, but we know that our yearn-

ings always exceed our earnings. The result of all this pleasure seeking he says in 2:17, “So I hated life.” Seeking pleasure did not work.

### III. Burying Oneself in Work

He says in Eccl 2:24, “There is nothing better for mortals than to find enjoyment in their toil.” That is true. Work brings us a sense of fulfillment, but many people drown themselves in their work.

Wayne Oates was revered teacher who then became a faculty colleague and then a friend. He invented the term “workaholic” in one of the fifty books he published. It arose from a re-examination of his own life of devotion to work. That re-examination was prompted when his young son called his secretary to make an appointment to see him. He had become an “ergomaniac.”

People give their lives to work, devote themselves to it, but workaholism has been shown to lead to early death and make life miserable while it lasts.

### IV. Building a Reputation

So he says, “A good name, he says, is better than precious ointment” (Eccl 7:1). I will work on my reputation, my legacy. I will make a name for myself. I will become an American idol. Lloyd George said acidly of Winston Churchill that he would make a drum of his own mother’s skin in order to sound his own praises.

Today, if you cannot build your reputation legitimately, you can hire “Online Reputation Manager.” It is a company that uses search-engine optimization strategies to repair the online image of clients who have been besieged with unfavorable press.

These include flooding the Internet with positive messages to drown out the negative.

A cancer researcher at Duke University had claimed to have developed a treatment for cancer through genetics. He was forced to resign last year after it was revealed he had faked the results. People died. A further investigation revealed that he had faked some of his glowing credentials on his resume. After he resigned in disgrace, he, or someone using his name, created more than half a dozen websites about him praising his work, lauding his research, and highlighting his devotion to his family and church. He was trying to save his reputation, but reputation is not reality.

#### V. God's Judgment

A concern for hyping our reputation forgets the judgment of God. God, who is no respecter of persons, is not impressed by our earthly reputations. So the preacher warns, "Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, *but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment* (Eccl. 11:9).

The preacher had tried everything under the sun, and then he realized you cannot live your life *just* under the sun. He realized that it is not your problems that are the problem; it is your solutions. You can live life under the sun or live life under God.

The lesson from God comes at the end of this book in the epilogue: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." (Eccl 12:13-14).

Here it is, the secret to life: Fear God and keep his commandments. Jesus was asked more than once, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Studying, pleasure, work, and reputation are important in life, but the secret to life is living in obedience to God, conformed to the life and death of his son Jesus,

On April 18-19, 1981, there was a 33 inning game between to minor league Triple A teams the Rochester Redwings, the farm team of the Baltimore Orioles, and the Pawtucket Red Sox, the farm team of the Boston Red Sox. That marathon game went on until 4:00 A.M. on Easter Sunday morning. Two Hall of Famers played in the game, Cal Ripken, Jr. for the Redwings and Wade Boggs for the Red Sox.

Dan Barry, in his book, *Extra Innings*, asks rhetorically of the players and fans, “Why did you keep playing? Why did you stay?” His reporting led him to this answer: “Because we are bound by duty. Because we aspire to greater things. Because we are loyal.”

If one would do that for a meaningless minor league baseball game, what should one do if one intends to live life under God? We are bound by a greater duty. We aspire to greater things. We are to be loyal to a greater purpose. And we do not live our lives just under the sun but under the God who made the sun and gave his Son to lead us to life.

# Freedom to Speak What We Have Seen and Heard—and Doing It

The Origins of G.W. Truett Theological Seminary



Acts 4:13-20

Doug Weaver  
Professor of Religion and Director of  
Undergraduate Studies  
in the Department of Religion  
Baylor University, Waco, TX  
Truett Spring Convocation and Founder's Day

Today people are often afraid of the word dissent. They think it is a bad word, a negative word. It didn't use to be that way. Early Baptists were not afraid of dissent. They saw how establishments or those who insisted on conformity were willing to deny conscience in the name of unity and theological purity. Early Baptist and religious liberty advocate, Roger Williams,

described it like this: “People in power are seldom willing to hear any other music but what is known to please them.”

For Williams and other early Baptists, dissent was not only necessary, it was an act of freedom; it was an act of voluntary discipleship.

In Acts 4, Peter and John practice dissent against a conformist establishment. They speak what they’ve seen and heard about, what they’ve experienced in Christ, as an act of freedom, an act of voluntary discipleship.

An act of freedom—you sit in these pews at Truett Seminary today because some visionary leaders were willing to dissent as a free act of faith against a tidal wave of encroaching theological conformity.

The remake of the Southern Baptist Convention, called the conservative resurgence by supporters and called a fundamentalist takeover by opponents, had roots dating back decades but officially began in 1979. A political strategy to elect a series of convention presidents who affirmed biblical inerrancy was devised by architects, Texans Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler. Presidents used their appointive powers to place like minded men (note I said men) in positions of leadership with the goal of purifying SBC agencies and seminaries of their liberalism, as Patterson and Pressler defined that term. Opponents, usually called moderates, said the Patterson-Pressler movement was in reality a disenfranchisement, an exclusion of persons not willing to abide by a “my way or no way” creed of narrow doctrinal and social positions. While presidential elections were hotly contested, by 1990 the takeover of the convention was accomplished. The new victorious leaders proclaimed that a “new reformation” had occurred and biblical fidelity had been restored.

Southern Baptists reacted in a variety of ways. Let me cite a few.

Many supported and hailed the new reformation.

Some opposed the new SBC, left Baptist life, or they said Baptist life left them. There are some ex-Baptists out there in Episcopalian and Methodist pews.

Some responses were a variety of what can be called Baptist loyalism.

1) First, some didn't know what was going in the SBC and never found out. Their denominational offerings kept going to the same places and if the ministries had changed, they didn't know or didn't care. People sometimes say "ignorance is bliss." I suppose religious ignorance is even more blissful.

2) A larger response for Baptist loyalists was the desire to stay Southern Baptist, even if they didn't like the new direction of the SBC. These folks had deep roots within the convention. Their love for its ministries and its heritage, especially foreign missions and icons like Lottie Moon, made them hesitant to speak out—they might speak privately—but they decided to go along. Some in this perspective stayed quiet because they thought they might lose their jobs. Others relied on the motto: "Avoid politics, support missions, the denominational pendulum never swings too far; everything will ultimately be fine." Of course the pendulum didn't do that.

3) Some Baptists put a fascinating variation on this hesitancy to speak what was being seen and heard—an attempt to deny that the conflict would have any real impact on them, their church or their Baptist identity. About a decade ago, I wrote the history of Second Ponce de Leon, a wonderful, historic Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The church attempted to stay out of

denominational politics. One state convention leader who was a church member said it like this: “I don’t let nobody blow smoke on my blue skies.” He was going to support what he had always supported and if other people said the skies were dark and cloudy, he still said they were blue. The church changed its tune in 1995 when one of its former pastors was fired as president of the seminary in Fort Worth. It felt like a personal attack—and the skies weren’t blue anymore.

I don’t think I can argue that only people who recognized they were directly affected spoke out against the Patterson-Pressler movement. Or can I? This morning I at least want to say that those who directly experience something, whether it be fundamentalism, or more importantly, whether it be an experience of grace or forgiveness, do seem compelled to testify of what they’ve seen and heard.

4) Another reaction evident in the SBC battles that I want to describe to you this morning is this: If you think the skies are still blue, then you have buried your head in the ground. I must dissent. I must speak of what I’ve seen and what I’ve heard. I am compelled by freedom to testify about my experience and warn about those that want to stifle that freedom I have in Christ.

That was the approach of some—that was the approach of Herbert Reynolds, President of Baylor from 1981 to 1985, and the visionary creator of G. W. Truett Theological Seminary.

To understand Reynolds’ desire to create Truett seminary we must go back at least to 1979, the year of the start of the SBC conflict between conservatives and moderates. Paul Pressler, architect of the fundamentalists, said that problems in the Department of Religion at Baylor University were the last straw and



made him commit to purifying the SBC of liberalism. Pressler said that students he had helped to convert in Bible studies at his church in Houston had been spiritually harmed at Baylor, especially in their required Old Testament class. At issue was a book, *People of the Covenant: An Introduction to the Old Testament* co-authored by religion professor, Jack Flanders. Pressler was irate that the book did not affirm biblical inerrancy and relied on harmful historical critical methodology, for example, contending that the Book of Daniel was a post-exilic writing.

All the kind of things you now study in your classes at Truett.

It wasn't just Pressler. James Draper, pastor in Euliss, Texas, a member of Baylor's governing board, complained to fellow board members about the book. In the fall of 1979, soon after the triumphant election of an inerrantist SBC president, a sixteen page critique of the Flanders book was circulated in Texas with the obvious goal of initiating some changes in the BGCT. Flanders was on the hot seat and took the verbal beatings hard. What did play out at Southern Baptist seminaries had started at Baylor as well.

President Reynolds responded with a strong voice of support for his faculty and for his school. He was theologically conservative but he was not interested in narrow theological attacks or a galloping creedalism at his institution. He staunchly defended academic freedom and he defended Flanders, who had been his pastor at FBC of Waco. When conflict is that direct and personal, Reynolds found it too hard to ignore.

As the conflict unfolded across the Southern Baptist world, Baptist classrooms were occasionally the target of fundamentalist tactics. Religion professors were going to be guilty until

proven innocent. A few students across the SBC tried to tape lectures and find damning evidence of liberalism. I've been there and experienced that.

Reynolds aggressively condemned monitoring of Baylor faculty and promised to expel students caught doing surveillance. He believed the goal was to harass faculty to leave the school or to acquiesce to fundamentalist concerns.

In a survey of articles from *Baptist Press*, Southern Baptists' news outlet, I found several reports of Reynolds speaking loudly, strongly, and pointedly, about what he had seen and heard. Articles from 1984 to mid-nineties trumpet the same themes and concerns. Fundamentalist dominated skies weren't blue; indeed they were dark and people needed to dissent to preserve freedom.

Like most moderate Baptists during the conflict, Reynolds called his opponents fundamentalists who insisted on narrow intolerant conformism. He firmly believed that they desired an oligarchy of power, a hierarchy of a few inerrant interpreters of an inerrant Bible and that, besides taking over SBC institutions; they wanted to take over Baylor and impose their uniform thinking.

Reynolds said fundamentalists had forsaken historic Baptist identity regarding the priesthood of all believers and the priesthood of each believer, or as Baptists often said it, that each person has the soul competency to have a direct relationship with God and the ability to read the Scriptures. Reynolds added a point often made in Baptist history: that at the Last Judgment, each person will answer to God. If that is the case, then freedom for the individual conscience is necessary.

Reynolds affirmed the importance of the church; He was no Lone Ranger; he was involved in the life of the local

church. He is evidence that you can affirm both individual conscience and the importance of church. Reynolds in particular felt congregational polity was being threatened, but he seemed most concerned as a trained psychologist with fundamentalism as a mass movement. He believed it produced a herd mentality of the community where people simply went along with their so called infallible interpreters and where pastors went along with the hierarchy of leaders in order to get prized pulpits.

Reynolds affirmed that Baptists and Baylor believed in the Bible as the inspired Word of God. But inerrancy took away freedom rather than preserved it. Baylor was committed to following Christ as the plumbline of faith, Reynolds declared, and he adamantly concluded that Baylor would perpetuate these Baptist commitments “whether there were any conventions in existence outside these institutional walls or not.”

Reynolds’ concern about fundamentalism left a legacy of two major events.

1) The first was the charter change of the university in the fall of 1990, soon after the SBC convention in New Orleans in which all who opposed the Patterson-Pressler movement knew the battle was over and they had lost. Time doesn’t permit telling the charter story in detail. In short, Reynolds had the school’s charter changed so that the Baptist General Convention of Texas only appointed 25 percent of Baylor’s governing board whereas Baylor’s board selected 75 percent in a self-perpetuating fashion. It is a fascinating and controversial story, one that ruffled many Texas Baptists. The move to a self-perpetuating board has bothered even some of Reynolds’ supporters.

What is important to the story of Truett Seminary is that the decision to change the charter was rooted in Reynolds' conviction that Baylor must not be taken over by fundamentalists like SBC institutions were. When Reynolds left the SBC convention in New Orleans, he would not attend another annual meeting of the convention. He had had enough.

Reynolds would defy what he said that he had seen and been told: that fundamentalist leaders had announced, "We're going for Texas and then we're going for Baylor." In making the charter change, Reynolds declared that Baylor would be known for academic freedom and the freedom embodied in Baptist identity markers. To guarantee these commitments, Baylor must be free of the possibility of fundamentalist dominance and its firing line.

2) It is fascinating that at the very same time as the charter change, the wheels were in motion regarding the establishment of a new Baptist seminary. In July 1990, Reynolds had the name G. W. Truett Theological Seminary reserved with the state of Texas. The move was reported in the press with one of my all-time favorite Baptist history headlines: "Baptist president bans dancing on campus and considers new Truett Seminary." Reynolds ultimately won one and lost one.

The President remarked that Baylor had not yet committed to starting a school; they would watch to see if Southern Baptist seminaries continued their decline and drift away from historic Baptist principles and freedom. If so, Baylor would dissent and be prepared to act on what it had seen and heard.

Why name a school after Truett? It wasn't simply because he was Texas Baptists' most famous preacher of all time. It was because the name of Truett stood for religious freedom.

The next year, 1991, Truett Seminary was incorporated. A fifteen member advisory board was created and they met to help craft a vision for a new seminary. In January 1992, Baylor's governing board approved an opening date for the seminary for 1994; again, the reasons cited included criticism of existing Baptist seminaries declining because of fundamentalist power plays and the need for theological education in an atmosphere of freedom.

The founding of Truett Seminary was clearly to provide an alternative to fundamentalism. Reynolds highlighted for potential supporters a positive vision. First (1), let's see what could result from a focus on freedom and open inquiry in a university setting, a setting much more conducive to providing academic freedom. Second (2), Reynolds and other early advocates agreed that Truett's identity should be Baptist and evangelical. At one early planning meeting when a document identified Truett as evangelical but the word Baptist was missing, an insistence on Baptist identity was quickly reiterated. To no surprise, the school's vision was to embody historic Baptist principles on the freedom of individual conscience, priesthood of believers and congregational church polity.

3) Clearly the Truett vision highlighted the training of pastors and other ministers for Texas. The school was to be a seminary for ministry; not simply a divinity school. Truett would also have a strong mentoring program for the training of its ministers with significant connections to local churches. There is his focus on the church again.

4) Truett would also encompass a broad international outlook: Baylor's motto, *pro ecclesia, pro Texana* meant for the church and for the world. I am not sure if the current focus on

Baylor as a school with an international focus began with the creation of Truett, but the seminary's origins surely gave added emphasis to Baylor's worldwide outlook.

When Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth complained that Baylor didn't need to start a seminary (which in retrospect is so ironic since their president was fired and locked out of his office less than a year later), Houston pastor Daniel Vestal, who was chair of the Truett advisory board, as well as others, emphasized that Truett was not simply starting a new Southwestern. Some key supporters did want that—they wanted to displace Southwestern as the Baptist seminary in Texas.

But the importance of Vestal's response to Southwestern's complaint reveals further details and a fifth (5) point about Truett's original character goals. Truett, because it was attached to a large university, would be able to implement an inclusive identity, which meant, Truett wanted to be multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural. While published goals do not emphasize the role of women, oral tradition says women in ministry was clearly there from the beginning and supported by Reynolds. One of the seminary's founding faculty members was Ruth Ann Foster. When she sadly died back in 2006, she was hailed by colleagues and former students as a pastor to students and leader of Truett's women in ministry efforts. Only in an atmosphere of freedom in Baptist life, would women ministers fully be affirmed. I am only going to repeat one line in this address but this is it: Only in an atmosphere of freedom in Baptist life, would women ministers fully be affirmed.

In 1993, Reynolds' choice to implement the Truett vision as the school's first Dean was Robert Sloan who later succeeded Reynolds as president of Baylor. Sloan, at the time a professor

in Baylor's religion department was known by many Texas Baptists as a popular preacher, interim pastor and evangelical scholar. In tapping Sloan, Reynolds hoped to gather support from Texas Baptists across the theological spectrum who wanted an alternative to fundamentalism. Reynolds highlighted that Sloan was committed to religious freedom just like G. W. Truett.

In the fall of 1994, Truett Seminary opened its doors with 51 students in the B. H. Carroll Education Building at First Baptist Church, Waco. The irony was rich since Carroll had helped started a seminary at Baylor in the early 1900s, the school that ended up moving to Fort Worth and becoming Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Financial support for the seminary came from various directions such as the Piper Foundation. Scholarship support has come from the BGCT and the CBF. The major and indispensable donor was John and Eula Mae Baugh who like Reynolds had a passionate dislike for fundamentalism and felt he had to act upon his personal experiences of what he had seen and heard. Baugh was blunt—he believed the creation of Truett was a battle for Baptist integrity and freedom.

In referencing Acts 4 to reflect on the founding of Truett Seminary, I could say that fundamentalists had no hesitation to speak about what they believed that had seen and heard. Point taken.

But for Baptists in their 400 year story, Acts 4 not only addresses the need to speak and hear about our personal experiences of faith in Christ; it addresses the need to do so as an act of freedom, an act of voluntary discipleship.

The apostles Peter and John were arrested for preaching and then they were commanded to stop speaking or teaching in

the name of Jesus. If they had shut up and conformed as commanded, they would have been spiritually bound to a law which hindered their worship of God. If they had been locked up, they would have been free in their spirit despite their outward chains. Their freedom to speak was rooted in the freedom they received from God. As an act of freedom, they could only speak of what they had seen and heard and experienced.

Acts 4 speaks to the need to speak freely, to dissent as an act of voluntary discipleship against the prevailing winds of an establishment which demands conformity and defines it as orthodoxy.

The establishment in Acts 4 wanted the disciples to be silent, to act as if the skies were blue when they knew they weren't. Peter and John could not do that.

Original identity markers sometimes change; sometimes they get adapted. Part two of the Truett story would deal with those kinds of issues. But Herbert Reynolds emphasized over and over that the original quest was for a seminary that embodied what G. W. Truett stood for: religious freedom for all. May the faculty at Truett, as they do now, remain committed to speaking and hearing and doing in an atmosphere of freedom—then and only then will the dark cloudy skies of pressured conformity be derailed and blue skies will really be blue.



Fall & Spring  
Pastors of the Day



# The Essentials of Our Call!



Luke 5:1-11

Mike Fritscher

Senior Pastor

Cottonwood Baptist Church, Dublin, TX

Fall Pastor of the Day

**Introduction:** It is such a privilege and pleasure to be with you this morning. Truett has always been so gracious to me. And this morning I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you at this Chapel service.

**Prayer:** *Father, we come before you so very grateful for who you are in our lives, for the things you have called us to and to the things you finish in us. And I thank you for this call on our lives: a call to Christ, a call to ministry, a call to love, a call to sacrifice, Lord, a call to servanthood, a call to leadership. Father we stand in this moment as we open your word and ask that you speak to us. For we know unless You build the house,*

*those who labor, labor in vain. And unless you guard the city the watchmen lie awake in vain. We need to hear from you today! I thank you for the power of your word. The word that washes, that sanctifies, that blesses. The word of God that enlightens our eyes, that rejoices our hearts, restores the soul, makes wise the simple. The word of God: Better than money, better than food! We come to this word this morning asking that you speak to us. Holy Spirit of the living God, we thank you for this anointing that you give to us, this anointing that teaches us to abide in Jesus. So if we read this morning, and walk from this place not to abide in Jesus, we have truly met in vain. And I pray that you will speak to us and show yourself strong in our lives. Come and meet the need of our hearts. May we seek you and seek you above all else. I ask these things in the strong name of Jesus, Amen.*

As I approach this pulpit today I am quite aware that all of us in this place have much in common. Hopefully, we are all believers in Christ and a part of the family of God. And if that is so, we have all been called of God. In this common call to proclaim the Gospel there are very specific essentials that we must abide by. Some of you are just beginning in your ministries and others are coming to a close in your ministry. And whether you are just beginning your ministry or coming to a close in your ministry it is imperative to practice these essentials.

Our text this morning speaks to these essentials of our common call in Christ! Peter was called that day on the very familiar banks of the Sea of Galilee. I don't know where you were when you first entertained the thought that God might have a call on your life. But I know exactly where I was! I was nine years old, and it was a Sunday morning. I was sitting on the second

pew of our Church, Memorial Baptist Church in Metairie, Louisiana, listening to our Youth Pastor, Mike Toby, preach. And somehow I knew that one day I would preach and pastor. It was a very special day for me that was just the beginning as other men would come to speak into my life so that at the age of 17 I would surrender my life to the ministry of Christ, the ministry of His church!

Coming to this Passage of scripture and studying Peter's call you will notice three essentials to that call. Three essentials we all have in common are the call to obedience, the call to humility and the call to abandonment!

To the Essential of obedience, I would say to you as a pastor of 27 years:

I. When God Asks You to Do Something Just Do It!

Just Do It! There are so many things in our lives that we know that God has prompted us to do, that we have not done and have regretted it! We've lived with regret! But we also know that the things we have said or done that we knew that God prompted us to do, we never regret that! Even if it seems like a failure in the eyes of the world. If God asks you to do something just do it!

This is where we find Peter who has been asked by Christ to do something that just doesn't make sense. Jesus has been teaching and as my one time preaching professor, Joel Gregory, taught, it is now time to move us from the "then" to the "now". And that's what Jesus does when He says, "Peter, let down your nets for a catch!" What do we hear? An Objection! Peter replies, "Master, we worked hard all night! We've caught nothing!" You hear it in his words! It's as if he is saying, "Lord we have fished

this lake all our lives, we are fishermen by trade and we know that one more cast after catching nothing all night will not be worth taking to market! We are tired, we are weak, we want to go home! But Peter replies, “But at your word, I will do it!” When God asks you to do something, just do it! Even if you are tired, even if you are weary, even if it just doesn’t make sense! Even when you think that doing what God asks you to do, will not be profitable, when God asks you to do something just do it by the power and strength of the Spirit that is in your life!

I believe that these are the lines of heaven. You hear it often where God asks someone to do something that just doesn’t make sense and they agree miracles happen! For example: When God says to Philip who is preaching to huge crowds in towns and villages, Go seventy miles south to the desert road and you’ll find an Ethiopian there. And He does! Abraham, leave the familiar and go to the place that I will show it to you in time and you will find the Promise Land! Noah! Build an ark of gopher wood. You do not understand it now, you have never seen rain, but you will understand and in building this ark you will find salvation for your whole household. Joshua! March around Jericho one more time and you will find Conquest! Moses! Take your staff and cry, “Let my people Go!” and you will find Egypt as history! Yes, things that do not make sense in our finite minds become clear as we follow the essential of *obedience*!

A number of years ago there was a young man in my father’s life named Eddie. Now when my dad became a plumber in the late 1950s, Eddie became his helper and for the next few years was in my dad’s life. After some time, Dad began construction and Eddie became a Master plumber and they parted ways on friendly terms. In those days, dad was lost and did not give His

life to Christ until He was in his mid twenties. But sometime in the early nineties, Eddie came back into my dad's life. Eddie was lost and my dad took His faith serious and began to speak into Eddie's life. My dad shared faith with him on a regular basis. There was even a week where he joined my dad, brother, me, my son and another pastor friend on a four-day hike in the Smokey Mountains where we all joined in sharing faith with Eddie. But Eddie never came to Christ! A few years later, Eddie was found to have lung cancer and was already in the last stages of the disease. He was lying in a hospital room dying, when my dad called and asked if I would come and share faith with Eddie one last time. My dad thought that maybe he would give his life to Christ. I want to confess this to you that when my dad asked me to come, I did not want to. My dad had been sharing faith to no avail, we had the opportunity to share with him with out him making the move towards Christ and to tell you the truth, I just didn't want to make the 10-hour trip to New Orleans. My brother was in ministry in Lafayette, Louisiana and was just a couple of hours away. I thought, "Dad, get Jeff to go." I didn't speak the thought but I want to tell you that I felt that it was such an inconvenience to get in the car to go and yet there was this prompting, "When God asks you to do something, just do it!" But the next morning I loaded two of my children to go see Paw Paw and Nonna and we were on our way to New Orleans to share faith with Eddie Lansing.

I entered the hospital room where Eddie was dying. I took my place at the foot of his bed, my dad next to him on his left. His brother, Larry was sitting in a chair to his right by the window and immediately Eddie starts talking. He said to my dad in his heavy New Orleans drawl, "Hey Mike, I got to tell you

something, Jesus is talking to me right now and He is telling me that if I give my life to him, that if I would believe in him, if I believe in Jesus, that he will save me, and that's what I am doing right now!" And Eddie started talking about this salvation experience right before our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Now my dad's a talker and interrupted Eddie and said, "Yeah Eddie that's right, that's what I have been trying to tell you for two years!" So sacred was the moment that I looked at my dad and said, "Dad, hush up, something significant is happening here!" And we let Eddie talk! And he talked deeply of this salvation story that was so familiar to me and my dad. And what occurred to me was that Eddie was coming to Christ at this very moment and he didn't need the preacher from Texas to lead him!

A short time later in the same room in the same hour, Eddie calls out to his brother, "Larry, come here, I got to tell you something." Larry gets up and goes to the foot of the bed and Eddie says, "Larry, Larry, you know we have done some things in our life. We have done some bad things and good things and we have had some good times, but I got to tell you Larry, compared to Jesus the rest is just BS!" And he didn't use the initials, he said the words. And I thought, "Ew, I don't think I like what he just said, He just said the words it's all BS!" "It's all BS, Larry!" and I thought, "Oh, that's what Paul said, "It's all dung!" It's all dung compared to knowing Christ!

I walked away that afternoon feeling very convicted and we returned to the hospital in the evening. Eddie was now in a critical care room and we walked into a room full of his family. He is dying. He had his ex-wife on his left and he has his mistress on his right. His son, granddaughter, Larry, and Larry's kids all around him. He said, "You all know me. You know me as a



bitter and angry man. I am an adulterer, I have been a liar, we have cheated. I have hated people. But I want you to know that today I believed in Jesus. He has changed my life and if I live 10 minutes, if I live an hour, if I live two weeks, if I live ten years, I will serve him forever!”

He began to speak and as a seminary student I was impressed. He talked about justification and he didn’t know what justification was, except by the practical experience of what God was doing in his life. He talked about sanctification, he talked about evangelism. He talked about all the things that we are taught in church and school right at the moment. And I walk from away from that and said, “Lord forgive me! Forgive me!” First of all I realize that you do not need me! And it’s just by your grace that you invite me to “events” like this! And I didn’t want to come here to New Orleans, but I’ve come and it’s changed my life, to see you at work in a man’s life in a deathbed confession with no Bible open or no radio going or a preacher preaching. But simply from words that have been spoken over the last couple of years from my father. And I saw that that day and I asked God to forgive me of my laziness, my aversion to inconvenience, my weariness to get into a car and travel 9 to 10 hours to New Orleans for a second time this month with gas prices the way they are. And this is a lesson learned, that when God asks you to do something, just do it! God often asks us to do things that do not make sense! It doesn’t make sense to forgive your enemy. It doesn’t make sense to love your enemies, to forgive someone seventy times seven? It doesn’t make sense to believe promises from God. Did it make sense to Abraham to believe that his post-menopausal wife would have a child? Or to a daughter of Israel, Mary, to have a child in her virginity?

Would we dare to believe the impossible that this Jesus Christ would come into our lives to crush the head of the enemy? To appear into our lives to take away sin and destroy the works of the devil and conform us into His image? Will we believe that today?

Will we dare believe God for that which He promises that just does not make sense? Will we dare to follow the Lord in obedience to do the things that He asks us to do, even if it doesn't make sense? Peter did. At the word of the Lord he let down his net and as a result brought up the greatest catch of his life. Then the bible says something very significant. The word says, "Then Peter saw". His eyes were opened, which brings us to the second essential to our call! Humility!

**And as to the essential of Humility, I would say,**

## II. Always Be Ready to Confess Your Need of His Lordship!

That's what Peter does! In that moment he witnesses the glory of God. He sees Jesus like he's never seen him before! He sees His own sinfulness and says, "Depart from me oh Lord" (Yes, you are Lord, Kurios, King, Kaiser, Caesar!) You are Lord! "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord!" He is saying, "I don't even deserve to be in your presence". Yes, there was amazement for the catch that day but I think his eyes got off the catch, off the miracle and they focused on the miracle maker, Jesus. I think that was what was so interesting about my trip to New Orleans that day is because I walked away not so much impressed in the salvation of Eddie Lancing; yes, I was impressed with that but I was impressed with Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ! Often times we have the propensity to be impressed by results or success or this thing we call the great

commission and all the things we're doing and we miss God and our ministries become the god, it becomes the Idol. God becomes second, third, fourth place. And it ought not be. And this is what happens to Peter! It's the greatest catch of His life, but he will not take credit for the fish, or for anything else for that matter. With eyes fixed on the eternal he and his partners are going to do something really unusual again. He's going to leave it all behind.

Yes! Amazement seizes him. He goes to his knees; this big scrapper of a fisherman with calloused hands from a hard life. An uneducated man! What will this man's man do before his friends? He's going to get on his knees and say, "Dear God, I'm a sinful man. I don't deserve it. Depart from me." Depart from me. It's the posture. It's the posture of humility. It's those times that when we think too highly of ourselves that we need to understand and take this posture of humility. And I'll say this, not only when God asks you to do something just do it but also always be ready to confess your own weakness, your sinfulness, your struggle. Humility is a lesson to be learned. And it's a lesson to keep on learning because we are of this flesh. Peter was undone and so must we! Yes, I am grateful for what God does and I look at His promises but I also know that I am just a man and so are you; a man or woman, fallen, needing God's grace and mercy, every single day of our lives! This call is a result of our salvation and our salvation is not just getting a ticket to heaven punched and going our merry way! It's a lifetime of being conformed into His image, doing what God wants you to do in this life according to His power. And this walk begins with humility. This posture of humility is where we see God as God and us as us! And sometimes that's difficult! Especially if

you've grown up knowing that you were headed to ministry!

Especially growing up in a Southern Baptist where everyone in your church knows of your call, who say a whole lot of nice things about you—about your future and where you will end up! Nice people with nice intentions. But do you know what happens? You begin to believe it. And somehow you just believe that that's what you're going to be and that's what is going to happen! And then when things don't work out like everyone said, or like you thought it would be, you find yourself being disappointed. And if you are not careful, disappointment can lead to entitlement and you begin to think that you are entitled to a successful ministry, or godly kids, or a great church or a great marriage. But you're entitled to nothing. I thought I was entitled to godly kids and when my first two rebelled I asked God, "What in the world are you doing here? I didn't sow this. I was a good kid; a good Baptist kid. I came to you at eight, never drank, never smoked, never partied, I was going on to ministry. . . How dare you God! Aren't I entitled to godly, untroubled children? Aren't I entitled to a peaceful ministry? A growing, thriving successful ministry? No you are not! And seeing this, takes humility! It takes us humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God!

Humility is a work of God. It's a work of grace in our lives. It's where you say, "God, I want You more than anything else. I want You more than a great marriage. I want You more than a great church. I want You more than a growing ministry. I want You more than godly kids. I want You, God! But sometimes that's not where we are and when God reveals himself, we possess this posture of humility that says, "Depart from me. I'm a sinful man! I am a sinful woman! And the miracle moves

from the boat with the miracle catch right into a woman's heart. Where Jesus roots out entitlement, pride, the temptation to be relevant, popular, efficient, influential and known! It's where making Him known is more important than being known! It's where you decrease and He increases, because that's all that really matters. And it begins with humility! A humility that brings God's grace in phenomenal ways! Peter would come to know this and understand it. He wrote of it in his first epistle. He said in 1 Peter 5:5 "all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another for God is opposed to the proud but He gives grace to the humble". Wow! Would you like grace today? Clothe yourself with humility! Do not think so highly of yourself! Confess your sinfulness! Confess your weaknesses! Confess your pride! And do you know what grace will do? According to Titus, it will teach you to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live godly, sensibly, and righteously in this present age. It teaches you to look for the blessed hope of the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Do you know why we as believers look forward to the appearing of Jesus? Because the Bible promises in 1 John 3 that when he appears, we will be like Him! It's the very intention of the gospel, the blood, the cross—To Make You Like Christ. That's what Grace does and when you humble yourself and you make much of God, and not of yourself. He gives grace to the Humble! But God is opposed to the proud! The word oppose is a military term. It's a picture of the whole of heaven's armament coming against you! So, not only clothe yourselves with humility but here it is,

*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that  
He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your*

*anxiety on Him because He cares for you.*

*Be of sober spirit. Be on alert, your adversary, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:6-8*

The enemy wants to devour you. But we have a great God who comes to be formed in us, who comes to crush the head of the enemy in our lives! I want to ask, will you believe that today? Will you believe that for your people? Will you believe that for your church? Will you love the church enough to believe that? The lion seeks to kill. Humble yourself. When you humble yourself you come to this place of resistance. We know that humility brings confession and confession brings forgiveness. A very familiar verse of scripture 1 John 1:9 if we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In Luke 18:9 the publican and the sinner went to worship. The sinner went home justified. Why? Because he humbled himself and said, “Be merciful to me—the sinner”. It’s not my wife. It’s not my dad. It’s not my mom. It’s me. It’s not the deacon over there. It’s not the preacher back there. It’s not my teacher. It’s me. It’s me in need! And this humility brought justification in the sinner’s life, just like it does in our lives! That’s what happened to Peter that day. His obedience and his humility in that boat would bring a new chapter in his life! And he does the second thing that morning that wouldn’t make sense to the world. He would leave everything on the banks of the lake and follow Jesus!

Peter, on his knees is spoken to by Jesus and Jesus says, “Do not fear, for from now on you will be catching men!” And

when they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

Obedience brought a miracle, the biggest catch of Peter's life! But the greater miracle was that Peter saw his own sinfulness in the light of God's Glory and Peter humbled Himself and confessed that sinfulness and asked Jesus to depart from Him. But Jesus changed Him and gave him a new call—a new assignment, just as he did for us! And how did Peter respond? It's the third essential element of our call—**Abandonment!**

And as to this third essential element of our call, I would say!

### III. Be Willing to Abandon it all For the Sake of Jesus Christ!

Are you, like Peter, willing to abandon anything and everything to follow Jesus? To follow Jesus and let him make you whatever he wants to make you—to take you where He desires to take you? Are you willing to die to anything and everything in this life that God would ask you to die to and to live for Him and Him alone? That's a hard thing. But it's what Peter did! And he became a fisher of men! That's what God does! He makes you fit for the kingdom and gives you a kingdom assignment!

In 1999 our Church, Cottonwood adopted an unreached people group in China, who for the most part had never heard the name Jesus, much less, salvation's gospel. We were committed to doing everything we could to see this nation reached from Christ. Two of our first team members were Craig and Deb Scoville. When called Craig was a feed salesman from Comanche, Texas without a college education and Deb a housewife. What did they do? They possessed a burden for the Hani, and heard God's call to drop their nets for a catch and sold everything to go

overseas to be a part of reaching these people for Christ! They abandoned everything! Was it easy? Of course not! It was hard. Deb had an adult child with downs syndrome. It was especially hard when her son died unexpectedly while serving in the South East Asia! Again, was it easy? No! It was hard! But when God asks you to do something, you do it, all the while dying to the stuff and things of this world so that you find yourself living for Him! That's the lesson; abandonment. Abandon all for the cross. Be willing the lay it on the altar to say yes to Him, to say God, whatever, whenever, wherever, however. It's what the Scovilles did and now some 11 years later there are thousands of believers amongst this once unreached people group! "Drop your nets for a catch, even when it doesn't make sense!" I praise God for the countless of men and women who have traveled to the places Cottonwood serves even if it means going for two weeks, two months, a summer, two years or a lifetime! We obey, we remain humble, we abandon all for the call! Essentials that we all share!

### **Conclusion:**

When we left Houston, Texas in 1983 and moved to Ft. Worth for seminary I was exhausted. I had served six years of youth ministry, I was 23 years old, and I was already tired. But I had vision and I had a dream and I wanted to plant a church in Houston or maybe on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, a bedroom community of New Orleans. When I was ten years old I had the aspiration to be chaplain of the US Senate one day. People said I was going places and I thought that I might as well as go to those places, right? I had dreams and visions of success, to be the best for Christ! Reach people for Christ. I loved the thought of a city ministry with great impact. So when we came



to Cottonwood, a rural church outside of Dublin, Texas in 1985, I thought that I would be there for 17 months, finish seminary and head back to the city. Now, the church building lies on a stretch of State Highway 6 between Dublin and Hico, Texas. It's a twenty-one mile stretch and averages about two homesteads per mile! Twenty-seven years later it averages about two and half places per mile; not much growth. Its eighty miles from Waco, eighty miles from Fort Worth, eighty miles from Abilene. To this New Orleans boy, it's in the middle of nowhere. No potential for church growth, no potential to be known, in my mind. So when I show up there one winter morning in 1984 to supply preach for a Sunday morning and evening, the leadership asks me to consider becoming their thirtieth pastor! Now there were about 25 people meeting and I thought, not here, Lord and I even told the Deacons that I had 17 months of seminary left and afterwards was heading back to the city. I asked them to consider this before asking me to be their pastor. Their reply was, "That's ok. That's about how long our pastors stay anyway. Come on and be our pastor! So we settled in to our first and at this point only pastorate. Jeremy came along ten months later and was the only child in Cottonwood for the first fifteen months of his life. This place had never run over ten or fifteen in Sunday school. They had a history of faithfulness and a history of faith. Correspondence shows that back in the thirty's and forty's that the folks of this church would write back and forth and talk about Cottonwood and how they just believe it would be more than just a spark for God. In the forties, our worship leader, Fannie Chambers and two of her sisters along with three other teenage girls kept the doors open for 8 weeks when their parents decided to give Cottonwood up. Saturday nights during

those eight weeks the teenagers would plan the service, Fannie would lead in music, Mary would read the Sunday School lesson, they would take an offering and even fill out the attendance board and hang it for all to see—7 in Sunday School, 75 cent offering! Faithfulness. Two weeks, four weeks, eight weeks they met. The adults started back and the church was saved! Fannie Chambers has led worship at Cottonwood since she was fifteen; she's seventy-nine. She still leads worship, in front of a whole band, with a praise team. It's a sight. You need to come see it. She's a hero in my life. When we came there were not a whole lot more people attending, but we felt like God is asking to come and drop our nets for a catch in one of the most unlikely places for a called city boy!

My wife had always dreamed of living in the country so I thought, "I can do this for a few months while driving back and forth to Ft Worth!" Seminary graduation came and not long after God did a new, miraculous work in my life. And I heard God ask me to do something. Stay and pastor these thirty-five people for the rest of your life, if I ask you. And I said, ok. And I had to die that day; had to abandon. Had to die to every dream, every vision, every nice thing folks said of me. I died that day. But I did ask God to do two things. "God, if You're going to ask me stay at this place, in the middle of no where and pastor these thirty five, forty people, I've got to ask You a couple of things. Number one, I'm going to ask You to satisfy me with You and Your presence because I know from past experience that success in ministry and success in all other places is not going to ultimately bring satisfaction! But I do know a little about those seasons in my life when I'm satisfied in You most. Lord, if you are asking me to stay for a

long time to pastor these 30, 35 people you have got to bring them to the place that they are loving one another, because I do not want to spend the rest of my life with a group of people who do not love one another!

I look back over it all and can say that God has answered those prayers. He's answered them. Often, the presence of God is manifested. We see people and although we groan a little bit, we see people loving one another. We see people loving the Lord, their God, with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength; their neighbors as themselves. Who are our neighbors? Our farthest neighbors are the Hani of Southwest Asia. It takes nearly two days to get there. But God asked us to drop our nets and become neighbors to these people and let me say this to Dr. Mike Stroope who sits in this chapel service today, I so appreciate you, Dr. Stroope for challenging us that day in January of 1999. You came to Cottonwood and said that this was not about a mission program. It's about declaring His glory and pursuing that Glory to the ends of the earth!" And we heard that call and we said yes to this task and have seen over six thousand Hani come to Christ! There's over several hundred churches amongst this group! From this dot on the map outside of Dublin, TX our farthest neighbor is the Hani people of SW Asia! To abandon all and become fishers of men, means that we have neighbors to love far away and close and every place in between. We desire to love those of our own families that we worship with to the Hispanic community in our area. We desire to be a people who love God and neighbor well!

I need to say just one other thing. Come to Cottonwood and see the things that God is doing. It's not because some pastor decided on a retreat, that he was going to fill out his

five year plan and see the church grow. I'm just going confess to you that I didn't have a vision. I didn't have a vision to go to the ends of the earth. I'm not a world traveler, still not. It didn't make sense, to me. ESL on Tuesday night was not my idea. Adopting the Zanzibaria on the island of Zanzibar was not my idea. Church based sending is not my idea. It's allowing God to bring people who are hungry and seeing their passions fulfilled. That's what happens when you die to self, to dreams and visions. Or that's what's happened to me. Obedience, humility and abandonment! Are you willing to abandon, even now, even right now, the most successful time in your life to dare to see God to ask you to do something that is just so unfamiliar to you, something so unreasonable to you. Are you willing to do that today? Because I will promise you if you're willing to do that, you'll find life. You'll find resurrection. You'll find it in so many wonderful, wonderful ways, just as Peter did 2000 years ago when he obeyed, humbled himself and abandoned the nets for the life Jesus had for him!

**Bow with me in prayer.**

*Father, there are some of us in this place that you've asked us to do that we have not done. I ask, Lord, even in my own heart right now is there something that You've asked me to do that I've not done? I want You to tell me that right now so that I can go run and do the thing You have last told me to do. Yes, by Your power, by Your strength. Oh, God, remove from us entitlement, pride, arrogance; remove it. Let me walk in humility today as You walked, Oh, God. There's something we need to abandon today. Give us the courage to die so that we might see the life of Christ like never before. Thank You for Your goodness. Thank*

*You for Your word. May it not return void but accomplish exactly what You desire. In Jesus' name, for His sake, and His sake alone. Amen.*



# Not What I Had Planned



Mark 11:1-11

Dorisanne Cooper

Senior Pastor

Lakeshore Baptist Church, Waco, TX

Spring Pastor the Day

Donkey duty.<sup>10</sup> Surely it wasn't exactly what they'd planned their ministry would consist of. We don't know, of course, but what if it was James and John that Jesus sent to secure the colt he would ride on that day? You know—James and John—the ones who not that long before had proposed to sit at Jesus' right and left hand in glory. And here they are—in the glorious moment Jesus is to enter Jerusalem—dispatched to “muck a stable, looking suspiciously like horse thieves... trying to wrestle an untamed and no doubt balky animal

---

<sup>10</sup> Thomas G. Long, “Donkey Fetchers,” *The Christian Century*, April 4, 2006

toward the olive groves.”<sup>11</sup> Tom Long says it’s one of the many realistic details that Mark includes in his gospel, though surely for the disciples it had to fall under the heading “not what I had planned.”

It’s a common enough feeling. Surely we’ve all often felt it during mundane or monotonous times—a friend who is a chef talks about the shock it is for new chef wannabes—that many days the whole afternoon is spent chopping. Parents of newborns—in the midst of seemingly endless cycles of feeding, changing, soothing—are often left wondering when it is that the cooing, gurgling baby kicks in, much less that overwhelming joy of parenting people have told them about. The same kind of thing can be said of a call to ministry, of course. Whether or not we have high expectations for what such a call will do for us, we are typically surprised to find that living it out it can involve a lot of mundane details—planning a lesson, proofing a bulletin, sweeping up a room.

At our staff meeting yesterday we took a moment to talk about all of the Holy Week details we needed to have in place next week—and part of our conversation included talk about child care, who would twirl the ribbons on Easter Sunday, if we had the snuffer for the Good Friday candles, were the palms ordered and when would they be delivered.

It can be a bit surprising to our newer staff members all of these kinds of details. And yet, as Mark in particular points out throughout his gospel, when it comes to preparing the way of the Lord it’s often about performing humble and routine tasks. Mark, despite his being the briefest of the gospels takes time to

---

<sup>11</sup> Long.



tell us that the disciples “get a boat ready for Jesus, find out how much food is on hand for the multitude, secure the room and prepare the table for the Last Supper and, of course, chase down a donkey that the Lord needs to enter Jerusalem.”<sup>12</sup>

Maybe though in a way it’s all part of the theme of the unexpectedness of the gospel message, especially as it pertains to this story. Here we are after all, poised for the entrance of the new king into Jerusalem, and all you might expect...doesn’t come to pass. In fact, in Mark it’s a little anticlimactic. “Where is the horse?” writes David Wells, “the steed that bears the triumphant general, the untamable champion? ...In its place is a young colt—hardly the symbol of leadership. Jesus seems to have no understanding of rank. After all the fuss about procuring, even sequestering, the right animal, just the kind of action worthy of a king, he gets the wrong animal. He chooses an agricultural tool, not a weapon of war; a tractor, not a tank.”<sup>13</sup>

It’s, of course, only another example of the whole way Jesus turns people’s expectations upside down—though Mark has a slightly different picture here than the others. In the other gospels you see, there does seem to be a big crowd of people, in Mark it’s a relatively modest scene. Here mostly those who have been traveling with Jesus are the ones who begin to sing and shout. And the next move is particular to Mark as well. In the other synoptic gospels, just after entering Jerusalem, Jesus goes to the Temple and cleanses it, turning over tables, showing from the beginning what his reign will be about. In Mark, that day he goes to the temple, looks around...and goes on to the hotel.

---

<sup>12</sup> Long.

<sup>13</sup> David F. Wells, “Who is He Kidding?” *The Christian Century*, April 5, 2000.

Really not what I would have planned just after arriving in Jerusalem. Showing again how surprising Mark can be. And yet, it's part of why Mark's version of the story is particularly a good one to start off Holy Week with this coming Sunday. Because, if we're honest, we should say we don't expect a lot of surprises along the way. After years of hearing the story of how this week plays out, from the entry into Jerusalem to the Last Supper, to the crucifixion and the resurrection, it's tempting to think we simply know it. Worse, we let in as a part of that, thinking we know the meaning of these events as well. Or at least the meaning we think we're supposed to know and accept about what it all means.

But I wonder if in this text there aren't a few surprises left that hint to a need to open up a bit about the meaning of it all. Take in particular on the cry of the crowd on the first day of the week. "Hosanna," they say walking alongside Jesus. "Hosanna." Scott Black Johnston reminds us:

"It's a peculiar word—one that is difficult to define. Scholars' best guess is that 'Hosanna' is a contraction of two Hebrew terms—one meaning to save or deliver, and the other meaning to beseech or pray. So you might translate the shouts of the crowd as: 'We beseech you to deliver us.' The people cheered. They tossed branches from the nearby trees to the ground, and they called out, 'Hosanna.' They looked upon this prophet—rumored to be the Messiah—and they cried out to him, 'Save us.'"<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Scott Black Johnston, "Save Us," Day 1 radio broadcast, April 5, 2009.

It's the kind of detail I can easily overlook each year—busy waving my palm without wondering how what I'm saying really connects to me—assuming “Hosanna” instead just means something akin to the ancient Hebrew version of “Yippee!”

One of my favorite stories that keeps me from doing so involves Johnston in his work as a Presbyterian pastor. He tells of a time a few years back when he met with the seventh graders of his church and agreed to address questions they had written on 3 x 5 cards. “Four of the twelve cards asked: ‘Is Jesus the only way to salvation?’ Being an annoying pastor, [he] told them that before [he] would answer that question, they had to answer one for [him]. ‘Since salvation implies that you are being saved from something, what do you think Jesus is saving you from?’ The first answer that came back was ‘hell.’ Jesus saves people from hell.” Suspicious that that might be the answer they simply thought he wanted them to give—like the answer you know your doctor wants when she asks if you’ve been exercising—he decided to ask it in a different way. “Let me put it this way,” he said to them, “if God was [really] on the ball, what would God save you from?” “Suddenly,” he writes, “the conversation got...very interesting.

One of the youth raised her hand and said, ‘Death.’ Another fellow offered that God could really help him out by saving him from an upcoming math test. Then one of the seventh graders said, ‘Pressure.’ And another youth said, ‘My parents’ expectations.’ Then another, shy individual, almost in a whisper said, ‘Fear. I want God to save me from my fears.’ All of these answers struck me as more sincere than ‘hell,’” Johnston says. “Although, I think you could argue that their

comments gave a pretty clear picture of what ‘hell’ looks like to a 7th grader.”<sup>15</sup>

It brings up the question--what if *we* looked to the beginning of this Holy Week, when we wave our palms and boldly cry out, ‘Hosanna,’ we really thought about what we want God to save us from?

I imagine if we did we’d say things like, “Save me from anxiety.

Save me from depression.

Save me from debt.

Save me from anger.

Save me from failure.

Save me from boredom.

Save me from emptiness.

Save me from violence in my family.

Save me from humiliation.

Save me from sleepless nights of worry.

Save me from bitterness.

Save me from arrogance.

Save me from loneliness.

Save me, God, save me from my fears.”<sup>16</sup>

What if, as we marked this celebration, as we move through Palm Sunday and move into a week we think we know, we allowed the depth of what we need saving from to start the week with us? What if we allowed vulnerability to rise to the surface so that we too can heartily say, “Save us”? Though naming it is

---

<sup>15</sup> Johnston

<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Scott Black Johnston for the idea of this list of some of its contents.

only part of the journey. It's probably safe to say the people traveling with Jesus were much less concerned with hell than with the occupying Roman army, something that I think speaks to the complicated nature of what it means even to ask "What does God save us from?" But that's a Holy Week question too. And of course what those in Jerusalem were surprised by was that Jesus did not save them in the way they had imagined—with an overthrow of those in power.

I bring all of this up because I imagine the mystery of this coming holy week is where we're to seek out answers to the questions of what we are saved from and how. And what it means to follow a Messiah whose saving does not mean we'll never suffer.

What does it look like to be saved anyway? I will tell you I think it has something to do with God's presence with us in the messiest, most unplanned for places of our lives. And that it has something to do with those places never being the final word for us. And though it may seem strange to start a week that holds such heavy questions with palms and celebration, I think if we really move through Holy Week, that Palm Sunday is just about right—whether like the crowd we fully understand at all—it's a day to celebrate this one who has finally arrived in our town. It's a day to scurry around with those also on the journey and be busy with preparations for what it will mean to host him, even when that means accepting that a donkey is his choice of a ride. Because it's a day when we also get to say, "Save us." Save us from ourselves, from all that is upon us in life, and from everything that threatens to undo us. Save us so we understand the worst thing is never the last thing. Save us and let us walk with you this coming week to see what that means.



## Special Speakers





# Living Within the Parentheses of God



Job 23:1-10

Jimmy Hunter  
Senior Pastor  
Toliver Baptist Church, Waco, TX

“But God knows the way that I take; when God  
has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Job 23:10

On a particular night while working on a paper for Systematic Theology II, I was wondering if the use of parentheses were appropriate in a particular sentence. Upon referencing the *Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* I found a definition of parentheses that is quite applicable to life. Rule 1 says that we use parentheses to enclose words or figures that clarify or are used as an aside.

Suddenly it dawned on me that what holds true in grammar is often true of life: that much of our life is influenced by things that occur within the parentheses. Much happens in life that we are unaware or ill-informed but they exist within the parentheses. God has parenthetically placed them to give meaning to this journey we call life.

Such is true in the life of Job. All Job saw was life-changing but did not know that within the parentheses of his life, God and Satan was carrying on a cosmic conversation of which he was not privy. Job's response to this parenthetical perplexity is "BUT HE KNOWS THE WAY I TAKE, WHEN GOD HAS TRIED ME, I SHALL COME FORTH AS GOLD."

**How awful it must be to be a major character in a plan and be unaware of the plan and unfamiliar with the plot.**

People turn to various sources in order to cope with crises in their lives. The many societal ills we face today are symptomatic of the lack of direction in our lives, and the inability to manage properly life crises, stresses, or other trials we face. At times we find ourselves plagued by so many things that cause us to lose hope. Without a firm faith in God, our lives can be wrecked and left in shambles. **There is much debate concerning the factual and historical accuracy of Job. Whether Job is mytho-poetic or factual, the reality is 'that' gives a amplified view of the thread of suffering woven into the tapestry of the human experience.** The immortal story of Job helps us to see that no matter how great the difficulties we face, our faith in God sees us through.

***Roger Hahn says: It is not surprising that such a profound book might be difficult to understand. It is surprising***

**that we know so little about the historical background of Job. There is no book of either Old or New Testament for which we have less idea about the author, the date, the place of writing, and even the context of writing.** We are familiar with the story of Job, a man who withstood every test. Job was an extraordinarily pious man especially blessed by God. Yet this same God who once granted Job life, love, and providential care had given Satan permission to put Job to the test of his piety to prove that he would trust God even when he did not understand what He was doing. This testing was based on one condition: that he would not touch his soul. James R. Lowell wrote, “Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong; (Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong); yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.”

The extreme case of Job’s unmerited woe, as with any and every instance of apparent senseless suffering, raises the ultimate question of divine justice and the meaning and purpose of life. What is this purpose? What is this direction, which is known by the Divine that would cause so much anxiety and agony along the way? We too find ourselves baffled by life’s situations, but the lesson to be learned is *hold on; don’t give up; keep the faith; help is on the way*. For God knows what’s going on—even when it appears that we don’t.

Life is going well for Job. His relationship with God is one that even Scripture attests is like none in all the earth. **Suddenly the skies of Job’s peaceful existence are darkened by clouds of calamity and storms of suffering!** Without warning or premonition, the whole universe tumbles down on Job when God allows

Satan to wreak havoc in his life. **Job has become a pawn in the hand of the Divine, yet clutched by a devilish scheme of Satan.** A messenger comes to him and says, “Job, the oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them; the Sabeans fell upon them and took them, and slew the servants with the edge of the sword.” Before he can finish this bad news, another messenger comes and says, “Job, the fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them.” Before this messenger finishes, another comes and says, “Job, your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, and all of a sudden a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house which fell on them and they are dead.” It doesn’t stop there, for Job himself is stricken with a dire disease that causes loathsome sores to spread all over his body. **Yet with his mouth, Job still does not sin.**

In addition to these difficulties, Job has to deal with his family and close friends, which only intensifies his burdens. Job’s wife, his partner in God’s created order, says, “Job, curse God and die!” His friends he has known for many years all come around when they hear of Job’s catastrophes initially sympathetic in all they do to comfort him, only to end up accusing him of sinning against God and those with whom he has come in contact. **What a bewildering indictment!**

But in our text, we hear Job’s response to the charges against him. Despite all the tragic circumstances Job has encountered, he still expresses a deep and abiding faith in God. From where we stand as we read the biblical record, we know that Job is victorious while undergoing these trials. But taking a backward glance at Job’s life experiences, we must ask ourselves—**“How do we live with the parentheses of God?”**

**FIRST OF ALL to live with God's parentheses we must rest in the fact that God knows the direction of all our lives.**

I traveled to Cedar Park, TX a couple of weeks ago to share in a worship service with a friend who was preaching and then lecturing at one of the Episcopal churches there. I wrote down the directions, thinking I had them down, only to go through a couple of tolls and become lost; which is so unlike me while traveling. So I drove a little distance and pulled into a convenience store only to end up even more frustrated because it was run by people unfamiliar with where I was trying to go. I went a few blocks down the street to another store to come into contact with a cashier who had just moved to the area and was totally oblivious to what I was asking. And while sitting in my car without a telephone number to the church, and the time was drawing near, mad at myself for my inability at that moment to figure the direction. A voice spoke to me and said what about your portable GPS System. I realized at that moment what I needed was riding with me all the time. For all I had to do was plug in the address and simply follow the directions. It is within God's parentheses that we find not a global positioning system, but God's positioning system. Job says, "But God knows the way that I take." What a resolution from **one** who has gone through so much; **one** who knew what it meant to follow God so closely; **one** who knew God was leading his life. All of us have a divine purpose in life—**one** that God will help us to understand, for God knows the path that we all take. The Hebrew study of this phrase helps to make clear for us that God knew the "way in Job."

In essence, God knew Job's consciousness—the very essence of whom he was and whose he was. What is to some **deflat-**

**ing, despairing, and defeating** is to others the circumstances in which God's mercy and compassion is powerfully present. **One of the most profound dimensions of the Christian faith is a way of seeing which moves us beyond tragedy to affirm the essential goodness of life, even in devastating circumstances.** Despite Job's human anxiety, this resolution that God knows the way that he takes is for Job a **'nevertheless'**, for it comes out of his experience with the Almighty.

**God is acquainted with all our ways.** Whether on the mountain or in the valley, the way is known by God—because God is leading the way and has a divine purpose for all our lives. Job has not only had to deal with external catastrophe but also internal despair. There are occasions when life just does not make sense, and we too must realize that God has a way, which no man can thwart. Job still rebels, however, though he does his best to repress his complaints. He is still in quest of God, now convinced that if he can just find God, God would treat him reasonably. He says, "Oh that I knew where I might find God; that I might come even to God's seat. I would argue my case with God, but I cannot find God. Nevertheless, I will trust God, for God will vindicate me either in this life or the life to come."

Are there not those times even for us when it seems God is nowhere near, when nights seem long and prayers unanswered, we too resolve to say, "Oh, that I knew where to find God"? Like Job, we must declare, "Nevertheless, I will trust God, for God will vindicate me either in this life or the life to come." Where is God when humanity is crying out? Where is God when children are starving in Darfur; where is God in the midst of all the political incivility? Where is God? When in the words of Dr. Joel Gregory: **The stock market reads like a bad EKG.** I've come

to suggest that God is actively operating within the perimeters of the parentheses. Can God see through human eyes? Does God share humanity's limitation? Job seeks ultimate vindication in spite of death. Job resolves to speak out and question God. It takes a great deal of faith for Job to argue this way in the light of his circumstances. Life deals us some inexplicable experiences, as it does we too wonder at times if God cares. Though it seems that the hand of God is no where near, Job helps us to be ever mindful that even in the midst of trials, there is One who knows the direction of our lives.

How well I remember doing a statistical data document for my Doctor of Ministry program. When I started printing the report I noticed a blank page. I initially thought that the printer was malfunctioning or I had done something wrong. I thought this until I looked near the bottom of the blank page and saw this note, "Page intentionally left blank." After some relief, a different section of the report began to spout from the printer. When that section finished another blank page followed with the same note, "Page intentionally left blank." A few seconds later a new section began to print. As I thought about it I realized that the blank page that came at the end of each section served two purposes. First, it informed me that the previous section had ended. Second, it informed me that a new section was about to begin. Sometimes, God will seem silent in life's parentheses and we wonder what's going on, or where is God. But it's possible that the current page in our life may have been intentionally left blank by God to let us know that a new chapter is coming.

Not only must we know in living within the parentheses of God that God knows the direction of our lives, but SECONDLY living with the parentheses of God we are sustained in the trials

we experience. Trials are part of our very existence and can be instrumental in the growth and development of our faith. Job says “When God has tried me...” Job represents trials in which all humanity struggles in one way or another. We are all tried and tested in different ways, but when we lose faith, we lose the assurance that God will see us through. Oh, that we could reach those who have allowed the demonic forces to claim their very condition of existence or those who say, “I can manage on my own without any help from anybody”. They must realize in these moments that they are clinging to a confidence that will fail. We are so often perplexed by some of the things that happen to us and around us. With what we know about God, we often cannot adapt our knowledge base to what we see, hear, or experience in our lives and in the world. Most of our confusion arises because we have forgotten that God is more than we can imagine. God says through the prophet Isaiah, “My ways are not your ways, neither are your thoughts my thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8)

But there is PARTICULARITY MADE MANIFEST IN THE TEXT, for the trials that Job had to undergo mirrors for us ONE who is embodied in God’s grace. This One knew what it meant to be tried. This One knew what true suffering was all about. This One knew what it was like to be oppressed with the agony of His own personhood questioned. This One cried out in his deep and darkest moment, “Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?” It’s in Job; we find a clue to ‘This One’. Yes, there is One who knows the path we take and who is with us in the midst of our trials. Thanks be to God that living in God’s parentheses we are sustained in our trials and enabled to come out better and not bitter. Dr. A. Louis Patterson tells of his first trip out of Texas to St. Louis, MO. His daddy worked on the railroad



and told him that the journey was some 908 miles. Somewhere along the journey was a tunnel. His sister, a little older than he had gone the year before and she came back, gathered them on the front porch and told them in detail about the dark tunnel. The tunnel was less than a quarter of a mile long, but the mere thought of going through that dark tunnel scared him so much until he considered not taking the journey. In other words he almost missed the journey by focusing on the tunnel. A whole lot of times we miss out on all that life has to offer because we can't get past the 'thought of dark tunnels', but we must remember that most of the journey is tunnel-free! TO LIVE IN GOD'S PARENTHESES, WE MUST REST IN THE FACT THAT GOD KNOWS THE DIRECTIONS OF ALL OUR LIVES; TO LIVE THE PARENTHESES OF GOD WE ARE SUSTAINED IN THE TRIALS WE EXPERIENCE;

**BUT FINALLY, when we live in the parentheses of God, God positions us for the completion of God's ultimate purpose for our lives,** for there is a continual move toward this end. Job says, "I shall come forth as gold." **Shall** looks to the future; **Shall** is 'not yet' (**IT'S WITHIN THE PARENTHESES OF GOD.**) Job is demonstrating for us a **prophetic existence** that even in the midst of trials suffered **we too** shall come forth **more mature, more ready to serve humanity, more humble, and more loving.** Job knew that these trials were mere tests. But when the testing was over, after he had been **pierced through and through and thrown into the refiner's fire,** God Almighty would see the effect it had and that now he had come through as gold. **Gold**—gets better the longer it stays in the fire—because all the dross and all the impurities are burned off. Faith gets better through suffering. Jesus represents for us the ultimate in

suffering. His life, death and resurrection give us hope for our trials.

There are situations in life that shall be hard to understand, but stay in God's parentheses! Let the trials come if they must, but stay in the parentheses! Let the tears flow if they must, but stay in the parentheses! When it seems like you are in this world all by yourself and God is nowhere to be found don't give up, God will see you through! **Paul Scherer tells the story of a man refining gold as he traveled through old Calcutta. The man was cooking the gold in a frying pan. He would periodically look into the pan. When queried by Scherer about looking into the pan, the man replied, "When I can see my reflection in the pan, I know all the dross will be out."** Job declares unto us that which gives us hope for living in the parentheses of God: **GOD KNOWS THE WAY THAT I TAKE, AND WHEN HE HAS TRIED ME, I SHALL ... SHALL IS A GOOD WORD!** Our secret for living life with the parentheses of God is knowing that we do not know what we shall be like when He shall appear, but this 'we do know' -- when he shall appear 'we shall' be like Him. May this be your comfort as you live life with the parentheses of God!

# Multi-Generational Leadership: It's the Millennials, Please



Ray Higgins  
Coordinator

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Arkansas

## INTRO

When an Arkansas governor was running for president, he posted a sign in the war room of his campaign headquarters that read, “It’s the economy, stupid!” The governor knew what was most important, kept a laser focus on it, and became our 42nd president.

When it comes to passion and leadership, I’d like to post a sign that says, “It’s the millennials, please!”

## MISSION CONTROL HOUSTON (1)

Some of you remember July 20, 1969, at 8:17:39 p.m. (UCT). That’s when a team of NASA employees put the first

two human beings on the moon. The oldest person in Mission Control Houston was the Flight Director; he was 35. The other personnel in the room were between the ages of 25-28. Two of the astronauts were 38, and one was 39.

### RELIGIOUS LEADERS (1)

There's a similar pattern when it comes to the accomplishments of religious leaders.

Jesus of Nazareth was 30 when he began his public ministry that changed the world.

St. Francis of Assisi (1181) was in his late 20s when he founded the movement that bears his name.

Martin Luther (1483) was 34 when he nailed his first 95 Theses to the Wittenburg Church door.

Lottie Moon (1840) was 33 when she started her mission work in China that led to raising \$2 billion for Baptist mission work around the world over the past 123 years (1888).

Dietrich Bonhoffer (1906) was 27 when he publically questioned Hitler's authority.

Martin Luther King Jr (1929) was 26 when he led the Montgomery bus boycott.

### BABY BOOMER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

As you look at Baby Boomers, you see the pattern again.

Steve Jobs was in his 20s when he founded Apple computer in his parent's garage.

Bill Gates was barely 21 when he registered the name Microsoft and never returned to Harvard.

Oprah Winfrey was 29 when she launched her TV talk show and then became a billionaire and one of the greatest philanthropist in the world.

As pastors in their 20s, Bill Hybels and Rick Warren broke away from traditional, tall-steeple churches and started new paradigm churches for baby boomers that changed the landscape of church life and the ways Christians grew in their faith and expressed their faith.

## MILLENNIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

And now it's the millennials.

At the age of 19, Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook from his Harvard dorm room.

And, Wael Ghonim is the 30 year old Google employee who energized the pro-democracy demonstrations in Egypt that kick-started the Arab Spring.

## SCRIPTURE TEXT—2 Timothy 1:1-7

In our text from Scripture, we see the Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus.

*From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, to promote the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,*

*To Timothy, my dear son.*

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*I'm grateful to God, whom I serve with a good conscience as my ancestors did. I constantly remember you*

*in my prayers day and night. When I remember your tears, I long to see you so that I can be filled with happiness.*

*I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you.*

*Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands. God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled.*

## PAUL

Paul is a prisoner of the Roman government. He knows he is facing the end of his ministry and his life. He has time to reflect and time to write. He has time to envision the future of the Jesus movement. And, he sees the future in the life and leadership of a young pastor named Timothy.

They are so close they have cried together. "When I remember your tears . . ."

They are so close, that when they are together, Paul is "filled with happiness."

Here in this brief paragraph in a letter, Paul affirms, blesses, and coaches Timothy in his ministry and his life.

## PAUL AFFIRMS TIMOTHY'S AUTHENTIC FAITH

Paul affirms Timothy's authentic faith.

*"I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure this faith is also inside you."*

Can I see a show of hands from those of you who came to faith in Jesus through the influence of your parents, your family? I did as well.

Grandparents and parents hand down their genes, their personalities, their wisdom, their possessions, their estates. And, hopefully, their faith.

But hand me down faith is not enough. Each of us has to choose it, and claim it, and make it our own. That's when it becomes authentic faith.

Paul could have wondered about Timothy's faith. It has a different shape, and style, and sound, and sense to it. But, Paul doesn't. He affirms Timothy for his authentic faith.

#### PAUL COACHES TIMOTHY'S PASSION & PURPOSE

Next, Paul coaches Timothy's passion and purpose.

*"Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands. God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled."*

A lot of coaching is instructing and reminding. "I'm reminding you . . ."

"Revive God's gift that is in you." Power, love, and self-control.

Paul is modeling multigenerational leadership. He is in his 60s, and Timothy is in his 30s.

#### WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE IN A CONGREGATION TODAY?

So what can this look like in the life of a congregation?

David Wood, a 52 year old Illinois pastor, writes this observation in a blog entitled “Do Not Despise Your Youth.”

“Today in many churches conditions are rotten for young leaders. We are in danger of squandering the creative energy and inventive imagination without which congregational life becomes a bastion of cultural self preservation.

“More often than not, young, seminary graduates find themselves placed in congregations where they are generationally isolated. They find themselves surrounded by elders who are yearning for growth and recovery. That yearning is matched, if not exceeded, by an anxiety that change will leave them feeling like aliens in a foreign land. Too often that anxiety trumps the yearning for growth and change. This reality can create the conditions where the young feel despised even when no one ever intends for that to be so.

“... Congregational life has been characterized by too much talk about the importance of congregational history, not enough talk about congregational responsibility to let old things pass away. Perhaps youthful leaders’ capacity to make the case for innovation and experimentation would grow if congregations were genuinely inviting of such process.

“The church must learn how to not fear the emerging role of young leaders.”

## LABORATORIES FOR MULTI-GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

There are four laboratories that are developing young leaders for missions and ministry in the world.



### WILSHIRE'S PASTORAL RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Pastor George Mason founded the pastoral residence program at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas. During the past ten years, 20 pastoral residents have graduated from this two year program.

### PASSPORT

Colleen & David Burroughs founded Passport in 1993, Passport creates missions education for kids, missions and discipleship experiences for youth, and creates students as ministry leaders. 81,000 children and youth, and 700 staffers have participated through the years in Passport.

### CBF'S STUDENT.GO

Amy Derrick leads Student.go, CBF's missions internship for college students. During its 10 year history, 440 students have served as student.go interns. Amy plans to send 50-60 student interns this year to mission places throughout CBF life.

### SUMMER COLLEGIATE CONGREGATIONAL INTERNS.

Three years ago, CBF started a summer church-based internship for college students. Wanda Kidd leads this initiative. 97 students served during the first year; 93 served the second year; and Wanda is working to place 100 college students this summer. Over 40% of the students who have participated have discovered that ministry is their calling.

### CATHERINE BAHN & MOLLIE PALMER

Together for Hope is CBF's twenty year commitment to the twenty poorest counties in the US. We have Together for Hope in

Arkansas, and it is located in two counties in the Arkansas Delta. Catherine Bahn and Mollie Palmer, two recent college graduates and former student.go interns, lead our work in Helena.

## CLOSING

The Apostle was on to something when he poured his wisdom, experience and blessing into a young pastor named Timothy.

And the young Pastor named Timothy was on to something when he forged a relationship with a mentor.

That's a model of the chemistry in multi-generational leadership that we need in order to be the presence of Christ in our world today.

## PRAYER

*Lord of the call to ministry. Create in those of us who are older and those of us who are younger a chemistry of servant leadership in Your Kingdom that enables us to be the presence of Christ in the world.*

*In the name of Christ our Lord we pray, serve, and lead.  
Amen.*

## NOTES:

1. The Mission Control Houston story comes from David J. Wood, "Do Not Despise Your Youth," May 26, 2009, Duke Divinity School Call & Response Blog, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/node/592>.
2. The young religious leaders' story comes from David J. Wood (same reference).

Ray Higgins is Coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR.



