

The Carey Pulpit

*I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...
preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1-2a).*



A Ministry of the Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies
William Carey College
Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Vol. 6 • 1996

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?

As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!’”

—Romans 10: 13-15

Table of Contents

William Carey College and MBC Churches: Supporting America's Work Ethic	Page 2
Tuition and Fees of SBC Colleges and Universities 1991-1996.....	Page 3
Comparative Costs of Education—Ten Private Colleges Fall 1996	Page 4
Scholarships and Grants for Church Related Students 1996-1997	Page 5
Church Partners Support for Work Scholars Program 1996-1997	Page 6

Sermons by Hardy R. Denham

Director, Church and Denominational Relations
William Carey College

"Doing a Great Work"	Page 7
"The Back-Up Systems of Life"	Page 8
"Asahel: The Man Who Might Have Been"	Page 9
"Gideon: The Man Who Overcame Despair"	Page 10

Sermons by Jerry Watts

Pastor, Bay Vista Baptist Church
Biloxi, Mississippi

"The Operation of a Growing Church"	Page 11
"The Obstacles to Church Growth (Breakout)"	Page 12

Sermons by Chuck Pourciau

Pastor, First Baptist Church
Louisville, Mississippi

"True Freedom"	Page 13
"Narrow-Minded Baptists"	Page 14

Sermon by Bob Rogers

Pastor, First Baptist Church
Poplarville, Mississippi

"Making the Best of a Bad Situation"	Page 15
--	---------

Sermon by Keith Johnson

Pastor, Southside Baptist Church
Lucedale, Mississippi

"Being God's Man in Tough Places"	Page 16
---	---------

Sermon by Larry W. Kennedy

Dean, Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies
William Carey College

"The Raising of Lazarus"	Page 17
--------------------------------	---------

Sermons by Argile Smith

J. D. Grey Professor of Preaching
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

"Who's in Charge Here?"	Page 18
"Asking the Right Question"	Page 19
"Getting Back on Track"	Page 20

The Carey Pulpit

William Carey College and MBC Churches: Supporting America's Work Ethic

Like previous issues of *The Carey Pulpit*, this edition is about sermons. It is also about the students and families to whom you preach each week.

A review of pages 3-5 shows that William Carey College is one of the best buys in Christian education in our region and in the Southern Baptist Convention. We have achieved this goal in a period of unprecedented enrollment growth that has occurred primarily because of the hard work and sacrifice of our faculty, staff, and trustees and the support of our Mississippi Baptist churches. Many of you have helped with our enrollment growth. You have sent us more CRV and Mississippi Baptist students. This growth has helped us to better utilize our facilities and keep the cost of tuition, room, and board from growing as much as it has at other Baptist colleges and educational institutions.

As shown below, students who attend William Carey for four years can save nearly \$40,000 as compared to Spring Hill College and Millsaps College. Compared to enrolling at Louisiana College, Mississippi College, or the University of Mobile, savings are about \$6,000, \$8,000, and \$10,000 respectively. Tuition at William Carey is 1/3 lower than the average at all SBC colleges and universities. In addition to these savings, we have further reduced the costs of education for CRV and Baptist students through the scholarship program shown on page 5. Those scholarships have been primarily funded by Cooperative Program gifts from your churches.

<u>Institutions</u>	<u>4-Yr. Savings</u>
1. Spring Hill College	\$39,780
2. Millsaps College	\$39,200
3. Samford University	\$20,564
4. Belhaven College	\$13,580
5. Ouachita University	\$11,340
6. University of Mobile	\$10,420
7. Judson College	\$ 8,660
8. Mississippi College	\$ 8,428
9. Union University	\$ 7,356
10. Louisiana College	\$ 5,964

During recent months our admissions staff has worked to generate enough new student applications to replace a record number of May and August graduates. **Freshman admission and student housing applications may set records for fall 1996. The number of more highly qualified students accepting scholarship offers is up.** Many other top quality students are waiting on financial aid offers. Because of early high rates of acceptances, the scholarship budget for 1996-97 is very tight. More outstanding students are still applying.

These are "good" problems to have. Part of our strategy for addressing this situation is to begin implementing a plan which I initially proposed in my inaugural speech in 1990: **to start a partnership of churches, businesses, alumni, and friends who will help students work their way rather than borrow their way through college.** Our plan will continue to provide students with significant scholarship support, but we will shift some of our resources toward a new Work Scholars Program that will involve students:

- working 15 to 20 hours per week on our campuses for stipends of up to \$3,300.
- receiving some college-funded scholarships, Pell grants, and MTAG awards which help cover the total cost of education.
- working in internships through churches, businesses, and other organizations.
- being placed in full-time jobs after graduation.

I hope that you will ask your congregation to consider becoming a Church Partner and supporting the new Work Scholars Program at William Carey College. As shown on page 6, there are at least five ways that you can support this new program.

PRAY for the success of the Carey students who want to earn more rather than borrow more of their educational expenses.

REQUEST someone from Carey to speak in your church about the Work Scholars Program.

AGREE to let a Carey student work as an intern in your church.

RECOMMEND a student who wants to be a Work Scholar at William Carey College.

GIVE financial support to be matched 100% by WCC.

At least three of the sermon outlines in this edition relate to our new Work Scholars program. Hardy Denham's sermon on page 7 indicates that we need to focus like Nehemiah on the priority of work, the power of work, and the perseverance of work. Jerry Watts' sermon on page 11 indicates that growing churches require a transfusion of the Holy Spirit. Many of today's partially functioning organizations just need a transfusion of good hard work by every person on the payroll. Argile Smith's sermon on page 20 addresses getting Elijah back on track. As a Christian nation, revitalizing the American work ethic is one means of using our talents to get back on track with God.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TUITION AND FEE COSTS

1991-1992 through 1995-1996

Source: Southern Baptist Education Commission

Institutions	Total Tuition and Fees					% Incr.
	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1991-96
1. University of Richmond	\$11,695	\$12,620	\$13,540	\$14,400	\$15,500	32.5%
2. Wake Forest University	\$10,800	\$12,000	\$13,000	\$13,800	\$14,750	36.6%
3. Furman University	\$10,827	\$11,700	\$12,605	\$13,440	\$14,576	34.6%
4. Stetson University	\$10,020	\$11,110	\$12,015	\$12,870	\$13,700	36.7%
5. Mercer University	\$ 9,425	\$10,287	\$11,160	\$11,988	\$12,987	37.8%
6. Averett College	\$ 8,750	\$ 9,090	\$ 9,360	\$10,275	\$11,150	27.4%
7. William Jewell College	\$ 8,300	\$ 8,970	\$ 9,720	\$10,060	\$10,580	27.5%
8. Virginia Intermont College	\$ 6,570	\$ 7,320	\$ 8,270	\$ 9,250	\$10,075	53.3%
9. Carson-Newman College	\$ 6,670	\$ 7,140	\$ 6,900	\$ 8,600	\$ 9,480	42.1%
10. Belmont University	\$ 5,900	\$ 6,680	\$ 7,100	\$ 7,800	\$ 9,250	56.8%
11. Chowan College	\$ 5,380	\$ 6,280	\$ 6,730	\$ 8,000	\$ 9,200	71.0%
12. Georgetown College	\$ 6,250	\$ 6,810	\$ 7,390	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,940	43.1%
13. Campbell University	\$ 7,150	\$ 7,678	\$ 8,024	\$ 8,430	\$ 8,850	23.8%
14. Anderson College	\$ 6,220	\$ 7,210	\$ 8,320	\$ 8,026	\$ 8,821	29.5%
15. Baylor University	\$ 6,110	\$ 6,590	\$ 7,090	\$ 7,630	\$ 8,750	43.2%
16. Samford University	\$ 6,540	\$ 7,064	\$ 7,770	\$ 8,236	\$ 8,648	32.2%
17. Palm Beach Atlantic College	\$ 5,400	\$ 6,350	\$ 7,200	\$ 7,950	\$ 8,600	59.3%
18. Gardner-Webb College	\$ 6,720	\$ 7,180	\$ 7,680	\$ 8,180	\$ 8,590	27.8%
19. Wingate College	\$ 6,120	\$ 6,740	\$ 7,410	\$ 8,160	\$ 8,400	37.2%
20. California Baptist College	\$ 6,390	\$ 7,210	\$ 7,482	\$ 8,500	\$ 8,236	28.9%
21. Charleston Southern University	\$ 6,522	\$ 6,880	\$ 7,292	\$ 7,730	\$ 8,192	25.6%
22. Cumberland College	\$ 5,296	\$ 5,880	\$ 6,198	\$ 6,630	\$ 7,930	49.7%
23. Mars Hill College	\$ 6,650	\$ 6,950	\$ 7,500	\$ 8,000	\$ 7,850	18.0%
24. Bluefield College	\$ 5,400	\$ 5,940	\$ 6,500	\$ 7,150	\$ 7,770	43.9%
25. Shorter College	\$ 5,300	\$ 5,810	\$ 6,600	\$ 7,100	\$ 7,610	43.6%
26. Southwest Baptist University	\$ 6,192	\$ 6,401	\$ 6,796	\$ 7,222	\$ 7,486	20.9%
27. Grand Canyon University	\$ 6,330	\$ 6,330	\$ 6,730	\$ 7,240	\$ 7,440	17.5%
28. Hardin-Simmons University	\$ 6,050	\$ 6,180	\$ 6,480	\$ 6,780	\$ 7,320	21.0%
29. Missouri Baptist College	\$ 5,670	\$ 6,220	\$ 6,440	\$ 6,760	\$ 7,270	28.2%
30. Houston Baptist College	\$ 5,555	\$ 6,230	\$ 5,900	\$ 7,200	\$ 7,200	29.6%
31. Dallas Baptist University	\$ 5,550	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,784	\$ 6,880	\$ 7,140	28.6%
32. Meredith College	\$ 5,720	\$ 6,020	\$ 6,340	\$ 6,720	\$ 7,100	24.1%
33. Ouachita Baptist University	\$ 5,370	\$ 5,800	\$ 6,230	\$ 6,630	\$ 7,070	31.6%
34. Union University	\$ 4,550	\$ 4,900	\$ 5,380	\$ 5,780	\$ 6,950	52.8%
35. University of Mobile	\$ 4,730	\$ 5,090	\$ 5,850	\$ 6,150	\$ 6,510	37.6%
36. North Greenville College	\$ 5,900	\$ 5,900	\$ 6,200	\$ 6,500	\$ 6,500	10.2%
37. Hannibal-Lagrange College	\$ 4,980	\$ 5,456	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,310	\$ 6,428	29.1%
38. Campbellsville College	\$ 4,900	\$ 5,400	\$ 5,720	\$ 6,060	\$ 6,420	31.0%
39. Mississippi College	\$ 5,010	\$ 5,316	\$ 5,618	\$ 5,888	\$ 6,350	26.7%
40. Judson College	\$ 4,750	\$ 5,190	\$ 5,560	\$ 5,780	\$ 6,130	29.1%
41. University of Mary Hardin-Baylor	\$ 4,450	\$ 5,200	\$ 5,910	\$ 6,210	\$ 6,210	40.0%
42. Louisiana College	\$ 4,160	\$ 4,870	\$ 5,288	\$ 5,410	\$ 5,961	43.3%
43. Oklahoma Baptist University	\$ 4,664	\$ 5,386	\$ 5,436	\$ 5,920	\$ 5,960	27.8%
44. East Texas Baptist University	\$ 4,350	\$ 4,650	\$ 5,100	\$ 5,420	\$ 5,960	37.0%
45. Howard Payne University	\$ 4,162	\$ 4,430	\$ 5,070	\$ 5,346	\$ 5,940	42.7%
46. Wayland Baptist University	\$ 4,137	\$ 4,600	\$ 4,970	\$ 5,450	\$ 5,750	39.0%
47. William Carey College	\$ 4,300	\$ 4,300	\$ 4,650	\$ 4,950	\$ 5,340	24.2%
48. Truett-McConnell College	\$ 3,723	\$ 3,885	\$ 4,335	\$ 5,100	\$ 5,100	37.0%
49. Brewton Parker College	\$ 3,625	\$ 3,885	\$ 4,521	\$ 4,680	\$ 5,070	39.9%
50. Williams Baptist College	\$ 3,110	\$ 3,262	\$ 3,592	\$ 4,102	\$ 4,400	41.5%
51. Blue Mountain College	\$ 3,372	\$ 3,556	\$ 3,718	\$ 3,932	\$ 4,090	21.3%
52. Florida Baptist Theological College	\$ 1,434	\$ 1,750	\$ 2,240	\$ 2,334	\$ 2,968	102.0%
53. Clear Creek Bible College	<u>\$ 2,000</u>	<u>\$ 2,000</u>	<u>\$ 2,070</u>	<u>\$ 2,120</u>	<u>\$ 1,950</u>	<u>-2.6%</u>
54. Yearly Averages	\$ 5,994	\$ 6,509	\$ 7,003	\$ 7,542	\$ 8,069	34.6%
55. WCC % of Yearly Averages	71.7%	66.1%	66.4%	65.6%	66.2%	

LEARNING, WORKING, AND SAVING at William Carey College

Where Quality Education is Affordable!!

Comparative Educational Costs at Selected Colleges and Universities — Fall 1996*

<u>Institutions</u>	<u>Tuition and Fees</u>	<u>Room and Board</u>	<u>1-Yr. Totals</u>	<u>1-Yr. Savings</u>	<u>4-Yr. Totals</u>	<u>4-Yr. Savings</u>
1. Spring Hill College	\$13,170	\$4,960	\$18,130	\$9,945	\$72,520	\$39,780
2. Millsaps College	13,088	4,902	17,990	9,805	71,960	39,220
3. Samford University	9,070	4,256	13,326	5,141	53,304	20,564
4. Belhaven College	8,390	3,190	11,580	3,395	46,320	13,580
5. Ouachita University	7,650	3,370	11,020	2,835	44,080	11,340
6. University of Mobile	6,910	3,880	10,790	2,605	43,160	10,420
7. Judson College	6,400	3,950	10,350	2,165	41,400	8,660
8. Mississippi College	6,992	3,300	10,292	2,107	41,168	8,428
9. Union University	7,084	2,940	10,024	1,839	40,096	7,356
10. Louisiana College	6,670	3,006	9,676	1,491	38,704	5,964
11. William Carey College (WCC)	\$5,760	\$2,425	\$8,185		\$32,740	

*Survey of Institutional Business Offices

- WCC costs are lower than at 10 other private church-related colleges in our region.
 - Recent tuition increases have been among the lowest in the nation.
 - Low student to faculty ratio -- 16 to 1 -- individualized attention.
 - Convenient 10-week trimesters -- finish your degree in three years.
- WCC scholarships, Pell and work scholar grants are often higher than at state universities.
 - Scholarships average over \$3,000 annually for eligible students.
 - Work scholar grants range from \$1,000 to \$3,300 annually.
 - Pell grants average over \$2,300 annually for eligible students.
 - Mississippi resident grants of \$500 to \$2,500 are available for eligible students.
- WCC has a 2+2 Plan with Mississippi Community Colleges
 - Maximize your transfer credit to graduate sooner.
 - Personalize your degree plan for your academic major.
 - Continue your studies where teaching is the priority!

For Admissions, Transfer Credit, and Financial Aid Information - Call (601) 582-6103 or 865-1514

Scholarships and Grants for Church Related Students

William Carey College

1996-1997

MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION (MBC) students may apply for William Carey College tuition and leadership scholarships ranging from \$750 to \$2,000 per academic year (1, 2, and 8 below).

CHURCH RELATED VOCATION (CRV) students may apply for William Carey College scholarships ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,500 per academic year (1, 3 or 4, 5 and 8).

CHURCH RELATED VOCATION DEPENDENT (CRVD) students may apply for William Carey College scholarships ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,500 per academic year (1, 6, 7, and 8 below).

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1. **Baptist Student Tuition Scholarships** range from \$250 to \$500 per year for students who are recommended by a pastor of a Mississippi Baptist church.
 2. **Baptist Association Student Scholarships** range from \$250 to \$500 each year based on a nomination from the Director of Missions in local Mississippi Baptist associations. These scholarships are available to students who are active members of a Mississippi Baptist church.
 3. **CRV Tuition Scholarships** range from \$500 to \$1,000 per year for church-related vocation students who enroll at the College.
 4. **CRV General Studies Tuition Scholarships** range from \$500 to \$1,000 per year for CRV adult students, age 25 or older, who enroll in a CRV concentration area in the Bachelor of General Studies degree program.
 5. **Baptist Association CRV Student Scholarships** range from \$500 to \$1,000 per year based on a nomination from the Director of Missions in local Mississippi Baptist associations.
 6. **CRV Dependent Student Tuition Scholarships** range from \$500 to \$1,000 each year for sons, daughters, and spouses of pastors, missionaries, and other full-time ministerial employees of local Baptist churches, Baptist Associations, or other Mississippi Baptist or Southern Baptist agencies.
 7. **Baptist Association CRV Dependent Student Scholarships** range from \$500 to \$1,000 each year for sons, daughters, and spouses of pastors, missionaries, and other full-time ministerial employees of local Baptist churches, Baptist Associations, or other Mississippi Baptist or Southern Baptist agencies.
 8. **Church Leadership Grants** range from \$250 to \$1,000 per year based on a nomination from a church pastor or minister of a Southern Baptist church. Students must have demonstrated leadership abilities in Acteens, RAs, Baptist Student Union, and summer missions or similar activities in community-service organizations.
 9. **Alumni Dependent Scholarships** range from \$250 to \$500 each year for sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, and spouses of alumni.

In addition to the awards shown above, students may be eligible for WCC leadership, academic, athletic, and departmental talent scholarships of \$500 to \$6,000; Mississippi Tuition Assistance Grants of \$500 to \$1,000; Eminent Scholar Grants of \$2,500; and Work Service or Work Scholar grants.

Southern Baptist CRV students may also apply to the Board of Ministerial Education of the Mississippi Baptist Convention for additional financial aid. This aid is applied for in a separate process through the School of Missions and Biblical Studies at William Carey College. Call 601/582-6115 for more information.

Church Partners Support for Work Scholars Program

William Carey College

1996-1997

- YES, I will pray for the success of the Work Scholars program to teach America's work ethic system at William Carey College.
- YES, I would like to have someone speak to my church and provide more information about the Work Scholars program.
- YES, I am interested in having more information about a student working as an intern in my church.
- YES, I would like to recommend the following student as a prospect for the Work Scholars program.

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____

- YES, my church is interested in providing financial support for a student as a Work Scholar at William Carey College. We will provide financial support for a student Work Scholar in the following amount (please circle one):

\$ 600 for books
\$ 1,000 for housing
\$ 1,500 for meals
\$ _____ for tuition support

As a Church Partner, our support will be paid \$ _____ monthly
\$ _____ annually
\$ _____ one-time gift
\$ _____ from endowment income

with the agreement that this support will be matched 100% by the College.

Your Name _____
Church _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone Number _____

Please tear out and mail this form to the following address:

Dr. Jim Edwards
Office of the Chancellor
498 Tuscan Avenue Box 1
Hattiesburg, MS 39401-5499.

DOING A GREAT WORK

Nehemiah 6

Introduction:

The "Angelus" by Jean Francios Millet is one of the most famous paintings in the world. Millet came from a peasant background and the painting portrays a peasant couple in a field praying. In the background one sees a church steeple and senses that the church bell has rung, calling people to prayer. One important facet of the painting is the way the light is focused on the tools the couple had been using in their work. The painter thereby gave emphasis to the dignity of work.

One of the greatest things God has given us is a work to do. Thomas Carlyle wrote: "Blessed is he who has found his work. Let him ask no other blessedness."

Nehemiah had been given a work to do and he was faithful in doing that work. Consider:

I. The Priority of the Work.

- A. Nehemiah described his work as a "great work" (vs. 3). It was because of the origin of the work (God had put it in his heart to do it - 2:11) and because of the objective (it was more than building a wall; it was doing something for the Lord).
- B. God has given us a great work to do and it should have priority.
 1. True, service in God's kingdom is not the only activity we have, even though that activity cannot be divorced from other duties (Colossians 3:23).
 2. The greatness of God's work should not lead us to allow other activities, as important as they are, to cause us to neglect it. J. C. Penny once said, "If a man has so much business to do that he doesn't have time for God, he has more business than God intended."

II. The Power for the Work.

- A. A great work demands supernatural power. Normal work requires the resources with which God has naturally equipped us - intelligence, ability and strength. He has endowed each of us with these for the normal works of life.

- B. The Lord had given Nehemiah a work demanding more than normal resources.
 1. As shall be noted, Nehemiah had to do his work in the face of the most adverse circumstances.
 2. The Lord provided him with the power for the work. Nehemiah prayed for strength (vs. 9), and when the work was done other people knew that it had been done by God (vs. 16a).
- C. God has provided us with the power of His Holy Spirit with which to do His work.
 1. Jesus told his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit and in His power to serve (Acts 1:4-5, 8).
 2. One of the greatest sins of the church today is that we seek to do the work of God in the power of men.

III. The Perseverance in the Work.

- A. Nehemiah persevered in spite of attempts to divert him from his great work.
 1. First, there was a solicitous invitation to attend a conference (vs. 2).
 2. Second, there was a questioning of Nehemiah's motive (vss. 5-7).
 3. Third, there was a threat against Nehemiah's life (vs. 10).
- B. The work God gives demands perseverance in spite of the temptations to quit.
 1. Satan doesn't care how much we agree with God's program so long as we don't do anything.
 2. He will use every weapon in his arsenal to attack, divert us, and dishearten us in service. Discouragement is one of the most effective of these weapons.
 3. Let's learn from Nehemiah to persevere in spite of it all.

Conclusion:

Like Nehemiah, we too have been given a great work to do. It deserves priority in our lives, requires a power beyond the realm of human ability and endurance, and demands perseverance in the face of every solicitation to quit.

THE BACK-UP SYSTEMS OF LIFE

1 Samuel 8:4-9

Introduction:

On April 13, 1970, Apollo XIII, manned by astronauts James Lovell, Fred Haise, and John Swigert, was 207,000 miles out in space on the way to the moon. At 10:08 p.m. an oxygen tank exploded in the service module. Thus began a tense and potentially disastrous four days as the three in space and numerous people in the Houston Space Center worked to bring the crippled capsule and its human cargo home. The fact that back-up systems were available was a major part in the successful return of Apollo XIII.

Life has its unexpected crises. Those who survive these crises as victors have back-up systems on which to depend when life seems to fall apart. This was true of Samuel. He had the back-up system of:

I. The Character of His Home.

- A. Samuel was the son of godly parents. Elkanah and Hannah were devoted to the Lord God and to each other. They lived their faith before their son and instilled in him a sense of self-worth.
- B. The character of the home is related to the conduct of life. Child psychologists have pointed out that by the time a child is five years of age his value system and basic moral standards have been set. These are set in the years spent in the home under parental direction.

II. The Commitment to His Lord.

- A. The Lord God called Samuel (1Samuel 3:2-10). Samuel heard God speak and came to know the Lord as a result of this nocturnal experience.
- B. Samuel committed his life to the Lord.
 1. First, he answered when the Lord spoke (vs. 3:10).
 2. Second, he did what the Lord commanded him to do. Commitment involves obedience to God's will.
 3. Third, he dedicated his life to service. His mother had dedicated Samuel

before he was born, but he had to do it for himself.

- C. Samuel found help in his crisis because of his commitment to God. He was a man of faith and knew he did not have to experience life alone. During the Apollo XIII crisis in 1970, the parents of the astronauts were interviewed. Swigert's father, J. Leonard Swigert, said, "There's a fourth astronaut riding in the capsule with them."

III. The Conduct of His Lifestyle.

- A. Samuel did not deal with the crisis in his own wisdom. He lived in a time when men acted on the basis of their own judgments (Judges 17:6), but Samuel did not. He turned to the Lord in his crisis (8:6b).
- B. To survive the crises of life as a victor, a person must look to God and not himself.
 1. The wise man of old wrote, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).
 2. William Stidger told about a construction worker who fell from a high beam to his death. The foreman lamented, "I told him to quit leaning against the wind." He explained that there is the tendency to use the wind to help maintain balance, but the wind is fickle and can suddenly shift. People fall when they lean against the fickle wind of their own understanding.

Conclusion:

What could have been a major space disaster with the loss of three lives and the \$308 million dollars involved in the flight of Apollo XIII was averted. Even though the mission was aborted, the men and their craft came home safe because there were back-up systems.

Like Samuel, we also need back-up systems when the unexpected crises of life confront us.

**ASAHEL:
THE MAN WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN**

2 Samuel 2:18-23

Introduction:

His name is not familiar, for it has rarely been heard. The deeds assigned for him to do have never been reported, for he never did them. The monuments to perpetuate his memory have never been seen, for they were never built. In short, he was the man who might have been.

Asahel was the youngest of three brothers. His brothers, Joab and Abishi, were outstanding in David's administration. But Asahel is virtually unknown in spite of the fact that he could have become greater than either brother.

Asahel became the man who might have been because he had:

I. A Goal Without God.

- A. Asahel failed to consider God in setting a goal for his life. When he saw Abner fleeing the field of battle, he set out after him without first consulting the Lord. Apart from the immediate goal of capturing and perhaps killing the fleeing general was the greater goal of making a name for himself.
- B. The Lord God is to be considered in setting life goals. In Charlotte, NC, there is an area known as Myers Park. The streets in that section twist and turn in a confusing maze. But this section is bisected by a street named Providence Road. In the midst of all the wrong turns and dead ends of life, a person must find Providence Road if life is to become all that it can be.

II. An Enthusiasm Without Equipment.

- A. Asahel was enthusiastic in his pursuit of Abner. The Bible says, "He turned neither to the right hand nor to the left" (vs. 19). Furthermore, "Asahel would not quit" (vs. 23, TEV). It was that enthusiasm which killed him, for Asahel ran right into the blunt end of Abner's spear and was killed.

- B. Enthusiasm is an essential element in success.

1. Achievements in life are usually in proportion to attempts. We never excel at what we do not try to do.
2. As a rookie player, Frank Bettger of the St. Louis Cardinals was told by a manager, "Wake up! Put some enthusiasm in your playing or you'll never make it." He got a minor league job in Chester, PA, and three days later went to a team in New Haven, CN, and in two years was with the St. Louis Cardinals.

- C. Enthusiasm by itself is never enough. Asahel had so much enthusiasm it killed him. His problem was that he wasn't equipped for the task at hand. Zeal without knowledge is very dangerous. Enthusiasm for the task must be coupled with equipment for the task.

III. An Advice Without Acceptance.

- A. Asahel rejected good advice given him. Abner recognized that Asahel was no match for the seasoned warrior and advised, "Turn aside from following me" (vss. 21-22).
- B. People need to learn to weigh advice carefully.
 1. Not all advice is credible. A man stopped daily at a jewelry store to set his watch by a big clock in the window. One day the jeweler asked the man why he did that. The man responded, saying it was his job to blow the 5 o'clock whistle at the plant and he wanted to do it on time. The astonished jeweler said, "I set my clock by the 5 o'clock whistle!"
 2. Good advice, even if given free, is not to be rejected. It can be the avenue to salvation.

Conclusion:

Asahel was the man who might have been. He had what it took to become a champion, but he died prematurely. The testimony of his life stands as a warning to people.

**GIDEON:
THE MAN WHO OVERCAME DESPAIR**
Judges 6:11-24, 34

Introduction:

In his book, *Bill Wallace of China*, Jesse Fletcher relates an experience in the missionary's life with which many people can identify. In 1938 Wallace, having just arrived in China, went to Chungking, a city of 200,000 people. There he saw the opium traffic, cholera, dysentery, and a whole array of other diseases. He also saw the herb doctors with their weird recipes. Overcome by the enormity of need, Bill Wallace expressed his despair to a fellow missionary, asking how one could do enough to meet the needs, even in a lifetime.

Gideon was aware of the needs of his time. What he saw drove him to despair. As Phillips P. Elliott wrote, "He had brooded so long over Israel's wrongs that he could not see the help God had been in the past, and could not believe God would give help in the future" (*The Interpreters Bible, Vol. II*).

Since many people have a firsthand acquaintance with despair, we can profit from a consideration of Gideon, the man who overcame despair. In this see:

I. The Expressions of His Despair.

- A. Gideon despaired over the situation in Israel.
 1. The Midianites and Amalekites had overrun the land (6:1-6). It was a time of national crisis which drove Gideon to a state of despair (6:13).
 2. Our life situations often cause some to despair, and in that despair the situation is judged to be hopeless. Furthermore, we often see ourselves as helpless to do anything. Like Gideon, in despair some folks even blame God for the situation.
- B. Gideon despaired over his supposed inability to do anything in the crisis.
 1. When the angel of the Lord approached Gideon telling him to do

something about the situation, in his despair, he responded in words of self-depreciation (6:14-15).

2. People in a state of depression are more prone to focus on the problems than the possibilities and think more of what they can't do than what they can do.

II. The Encouragement for His Despair.

Celeste Holm once said, "We live with encouragement or die without it—slowly, sadly, angrily." The Lord God encouraged Gideon in a three-fold fashion.

- A. First, the Lord came to Gideon. The angel of the Lord confronted Gideon (6:11-12). The angel of the Lord was none other than the Lord Himself. The Lord God comes to people before they ever turn to Him.
- B. Second, the Lord encouraged Gideon by giving assurances. The Lord gave Gideon an assignment in the crisis and then told him that He would be with him and give him victory (6:16). Gideon learned he could do what needed doing because the Lord would be with him.
- C. Third, the Lord demonstrated His power to Gideon. When Gideon prepared a meal offering, the Lord sent a fire which consumed it, thus proving God's power to accomplish what He promised (6:18-21). We have power in the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. His power is more than adequate for our crises.

Conclusion:

Many of us can identify with Gideon in his despair. Like him, and Bill Wallace, we also often experience despair in the face of crisis situations.

Just as the Lord came to Gideon and led him to become a dauntless champion in a crisis time, so despair and defeat can give way to victory for us if we will hear God's voice and obey Him.

THE OPERATION OF A GROWING CHURCH

Acts 2:1-41

Introduction:

Most people drive an automobile to work. Few people actually know that within the engine the gasoline is pumped into a chamber where it is compressed by a piston until it ignites against the sparkplug, which throws the piston back, which, by design, turns the crankshaft. This action is repeated time and again inside the engine. The repetitive nature of this action causes the engine to run and results in the car moving forward. For the car to operate effectively, this same repetitive action must continue to take place.

In a spiritual parallel, the growing church must operate properly and repetitively. The text lays forth the actions and subsequent actions needed to experience Biblical growth.

I. In a Growing Church, there is a Transfusion of the Holy Spirit.

- A. Only 120 souls had remained at Jerusalem waiting for "something" to happen. After Jesus' three-year ministry, resurrection, and ascension, only this small crowd remained. Why? Most were frightened by the possibility that the Roman government would continue the persecution.
- B. All of a sudden there came a sound like that of a might rushing wind, and every person was filled with the Spirit. This filling turned weak, soft-spoken Baptists into shouting Bapcticostals. Excited, ecstatic, enthusiastic, they were telling people about Jesus. The results in this place were quite plain and clear to see. When the Holy Spirit takes control, people get saved. Today, we are no longer waiting on the Holy Spirit, now the Holy Spirit is waiting on us.
- C. In an emergency room, Sam was brought in from a car accident where he had been critically injured. The severe blood loss prompted the physician to do two things. First, he stopped the bleeding. Next, he performed a transfusion so that each

organ in Sam's body could receive the necessary fluid required to function. Spiritually, it is not enough just to stop the bleeding; we must have a transfusion—"a filling of the Holy Spirit."

III. In a Growing Church, the Truth is Transmitted.

- A. This is a natural outgrowth of revival. Telling or sharing the gospel is normal and natural for the spirit-filled Christian. Peter connected Old Testament truth with the life of Christ. He totally focused on the truth of the gospel. The only way for anyone to come to faith is by hearing the gospel. The Bible says, "Faith comes by *hearing*, and hearing by the word."
- B. Truly we must live the Word and shine the light, but it is not enough just to live it; we must share it. The truth of the gospel will never be known apart from the spoken word.

IV. In a Growing Church, the Hearts of Men are Transformed.

- A. The crowd asked, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized." The transformation of the heart is basically a three-step process. First, a heart is confronted with the truth. Secondly, a heart is convicted by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, the heart is changed. Verse 41 says, "As many as received the word were baptized."
- B. Church growth for us means eternal life for someone else. It means new life, spirit, and direction for the body. It means we bring people to Jesus.

Conclusion:

A growing church will emerge when the body is properly functioning. When the body operates the way in which it was designed, lives are changed, people get saved, and the local assembly grows.

THE OBSTACLES TO CHURCH GROWTH (BREAKOUT)

I Corinthians 9:19-27

Introduction

In the 1992 presidential election, the big talk among the candidates was about "government gridlock." We can become caught up in "religious gridlock" and continue doing what we have always done, or we can desire to break out of that mold, reach for God's best, experience revival within the fellowship, and enjoy a growing church fellowship.

In I Corinthians 9:19-27, we find the Apostle Paul trying to encourage the Christians at Corinth. No other person in history has been as effective as Paul in spreading the gospel and church growth. In this passage, we discover three obstacles to church growth that must be overcome.

I. Obstacle 1: Unclear Purpose.

- A. After describing what he is willing to do, Paul clearly states his purpose: five times within four verses, Paul states "that I might by all means save some." These words express his deep desire to reach lost souls. Confronting people with the gospel was his first, last, and driving concern. Paul never had to think about what his purpose in life was, for it was as basic to him as living, eating, and breathing. For any assembly to experience breakthrough, there must be a clearly understood unifying purpose. This purpose must be centered around the Great Commission.
- B. One pulpit committee was asked, "What is the main purpose of your assembly?" Surprised by the question, this group of church leaders sat silently until one man with a sheepish grin said almost apologetically, "to win the lost?" An unclear purpose is a great obstacle to any growth within the church.

II. Obstacle 2: Unsound Principles.

- A. The principles spoken of here are not principles of conduct; rather, they are principles of church growth and reaching

people. Remember that Paul had been a real life traditionalist. The "old-man Sāul" would have been the first to say the seven last words of the church, "We never did it that way before"; however, the new man Paul was saying, in effect, "whatever it takes."

- B. In the text he covers all his bases, "to the Jew, weak, lawful, and unlawful." He then concludes with a great statement of commitment, "I have become all things to all people." When we revisualize the cross and are reminded of the cost to Christ for our lives and the church, we then realize the need to turn loose of useless and meaningless traditions and buy into a "whatever it takes" philosophy in order to experience the church growth to which Christ has called us.

III. Obstacle 3: Uncommitted People.

- A. This obstacle is one which is tearing down lives, churches, and even our society today. It is a matter of commitment versus participation. The prevailing attitude about commitment is summed up in the words of Elizabeth Taylor during an interview several years ago. She said, "...any marriage that lasts more than two years is successful..."
- B. But how do we find commitment in this text? Paul possesses a logical, legal, and scholarly mind. Yet in these verses he uncharacteristically used over 20 personal pronouns to describe his commitment. He was stating, in effect, "I am not waiting on or for someone else—I will be the one." He accepted the task, put his hand to the plow, adjusted his life, and was totally committed to the task of reaching people and the growth of the church.

Conclusion:

God is calling us to a clear purpose, sound principles, and a committed life. These are the biblical keys to church growth.

TRUE FREEDOM

John 8:31-38; Matthew 11:28-30

Introduction:

On March 5, 1770 there was a disturbance in Boston. British troops fired on unarmed colonists. It is believed that Crispus Attucks was the first colonist to die at the hands of the British. That gives him the distinction of being the first of 1.3 million Americans to die in pursuit and defense of freedom. I want you to consider a question. If those 1.3 million who gave their lives for freedom could rise up out of their graves and see the land of the free and the home of the brave in the 1990s, what would their reaction be?

I think America's present version of freedom is very sick indeed. Let's see if we can get a better understanding of true freedom by examining the words of our Lord.

**I. The Myth of Absolute Freedom
(John 8:31-35).**

- A. Jesus informed his Jewish listeners that they could be truly free if they adhered to His Word. They laughed and said they didn't need to be freed, because they had never been slaves. He pointed to their internal masters. In essence he was saying, "You may think you are free, but you have become slaves to sin. And until you accept my will, you will always be slaves."
- B. We need to get a clear understanding of a very important truth. There is no such thing as absolute freedom. Absolute freedom leads to the worst kind of bondage, bondage to sin. Both the Bible and present day America show the myth of absolute freedom. Oh yes, there is one freedom that has been rolled back in the wake of this mad rush toward absolute freedom—freedom of religion. Why? The answer is in vs. 37. An environment of absolute freedom has no room for the Word of God, because it is a mirror that shows the horrible condition of what we thought we wanted.

II. The Source of True Freedom (John 8:36).

- A. Jesus had clearly identified their master as sin. They could break the shackles of sin only by placing their faith in God's Messiah. That is why Jesus claimed that the only source of true freedom was himself.
- B. So many of us think that we are the captains of our destinies. We say, "Why do I need to be free? I'm an American. This is the land of the free." We sound like those Jews. If we are not slaves of Jesus, we are slaves of sin.

III. The Nature of True Freedom (Matthew 11:28-30).

- A. Jesus spoke to the Jews who were under the bondage of legalism and sin. He said, "How many of you are fed up with your life and its bondage? How many of you are weary although you've tried everything? Come to me. Take my yoke, and I will give you rest."
- B. There are many differing views in America, but there is one thing almost everybody is saying. "I'm tired of the way things are. I'm weary and nothing seems to be helping." True freedom does not exempt one from work. It makes the work manageable. Jesus is not forcing his yoke on you. He is saying, "Join me in my yoke. We will work together." The nature of true freedom involves personal responsibility and accountability. Will we come to Jesus and experience that true freedom?

Conclusion:

Let's hear from some men who understood the nature of true freedom. These are men who sacrificed to give us the freedom we have today. Noah Webster: "The religion which introduced civil liberty, is the religion of Christ and his apostles." John Adams: "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Patrick Henry: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ."

NARROW-MINDED BAPTISTS

Matthew 7:13-14

Introduction:

During the fall of 1995, I preached a series of sermons on ethical issues. The topics included everything from abortion and feminism to gambling and homosexuality. I certainly received a lot of feedback, some direct and some indirect. For example, I preached a sermon on alcohol in which I advocated abstinence. A Christian friend of one of our members had this to say about that sermon: "You Baptists are so narrow-minded." After some meditation, I decided that I was quite proud to be given such a high compliment. Here are three reasons that I'm proud to be a narrow-minded Baptist.

I. The Broad-minded Approach Hasn't Worked (vs. 13).

- A. In this brief word of our Lord, we see His prophecy concerning the effectiveness of the broad-minded approach to life. Jesus recognized the danger of opening up and letting everybody do whatever they wanted. The broad-minded approach didn't work then, and it doesn't work now. Just look around you and see where the broad way philosophy of life has led. Since 1960 there has been a 560% increase in violent crime; more than a 400% increase in illegitimate births; a quadrupling in divorce rates; a tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent homes; more than a 200% increase in the teen suicide rate; and a drop of almost 80 points in S.A.T. scores. The broad-minded approach never has worked and never will.
- B. Why do we choose the broad way? John Stott said, "Superficiality, self-love, hypocrisy, mechanical religion, false ambition, censoriousness—these things do not have to be learned or cultivated. Effort is needed to resist them. No effort is required to practice them. That is why the broad road is easy." So many people take the broad road because it's easy. It is like the difference between floating with the current and paddling against it.

II. The Way to Life Is Narrow (vs. 14).

- A. Jesus pointed out that the way to life is through a narrow gate and up a narrow road. Since the way to life is narrow, we should say "thank you" when we are accused of being narrow-minded. He didn't want the disciples to worry about not being in the majority. R. T. France wrote, "True discipleship is a minority religion."
- B. The Lord's way is not the popular way, but it's the only way. That is why we must preach the narrow-minded truth of the Bible. The distance between the leather covers of our Bibles is rather narrow. Compared to the many pagan philosophies that thrive both inside and outside the church, it is really narrow.

III. The Truth Is the Truth.

- A. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one cometh to the Father but by me." How did the world of Jesus evaluate him? Was he able to sway the majority opinion over to his way of thinking? Absolutely not. Jesus was so narrow-minded that he was crucified. The majority didn't want to hear his truth, so they killed him.
- B. The truth's popularity does not determine its validity. Because we live in a day when there are many different options for almost every decision, many people are offended by Christianity's claim that Jesus is the only way. But that is still the truth. Here in this parable, Jesus summarized life's most important decision as one choice with only two options. Why does Jesus insist on this? Because there is only one choice. The truth is the truth, and we are duty and conscience bound to tell it and live it.

Conclusion:

A favorite condemning word of today's society is the word "extremist." It generally refers to one who has an uncompromising stand with which the speaker disagrees. If that be the case, we must proudly bear the label, for Jesus was certainly extremist.

MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION

Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction:

Joni Eareckson was a teenager who had everything she could ask for: beauty, athletic ability, and a great-looking boyfriend. One day while swimming, she dove into the water and hit her head on a rock. In a split second, she became a quadriplegic. Her boyfriend and other friends deserted her.

Joni desperately cried to God, "Why?"

The Apostle Paul was beaten and jailed for preaching the gospel. He didn't ask why. Sitting in a Roman jail, he wrote in his letter to the Philippians that he was able to make the best of a bad situation. How did he do this?

I. He Focused on How the Gospel Was Being Advanced (vss. 12-14).

- A. He had reason to despair over being chained in prison. You and I can despair over a broken marriage, a broken car, or a broken body; or, we can see it as an opportunity to serve God.
- B. Paul said his imprisonment "has really served to advance the gospel" (vs. 12). Was he crazy? How can he say that it helps the gospel for the greatest missionary to be taken off the road and thrown in a Roman dungeon? Paul gives two reasons:
 1. The whole palace guard, an entire fortress full of elite Roman soldiers, had heard his witness (vs. 13).
 2. Christians had been encouraged by his example to witness boldly (vs. 14).
- C. Paul used his chains to witness to his guards. Joni Eareckson learned to paint with a brush in her mouth and wrote an inspiring autobiography about her new-found faith. What problems plague you? Does God want you to use them for His glory?

II. He Focused on How Christ Was Being Preached (vss. 15-18).

- A. Although he was brave on the outside, he could have let bitterness destroy him from the inside. Some were preaching the gospel "out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains" (vs. 17).
- B. These insincere preachers may have wanted to take Paul's place in the hearts of his churches. "Selfish ambition" means to campaign for office. Or they may have hoped that by being loud and obnoxious with their preaching, the guards would take it out on Paul. Either way, Paul could easily have been embittered by the betrayal of these men who were supposed to be brothers.
- C. Paul simply saw his situation as an advancement of the gospel. Paul rejoiced because the important thing was that "Christ is preached" (vs. 18). Paul chose joy instead of sorrow. He chose to see God at work instead of evil men at work. You, too, have reason for joy because God wants to work even through your sorrow and stress.

Conclusion:

On the American frontier, many homes only had two books: the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was a Baptist preacher who was arrested for holding a church service not endorsed by the Church of England. For doing that he spent 12 years in jail. Did Bunyan give up? No, he stood in the jail cell window and preached to his congregation as they stood outside, and many people were won to faith in Christ.

John Bunyan knew what Paul knew: when trouble strikes, God does not desert us, and He wants us to make the best of the bad situation.

BEING GOD'S MAN IN TOUGH PLACES

Daniel 1:1-21

Introduction:

During WWII the Germans developed an encryption device that became known as the Enigma Machine. The Axis powers believed messages coded by this machine were impossible to break. Unknown to them, however, one of the men who worked on the machine managed to inform the allies. He was asked to stay at his post until he could collect enough information to build an entire machine. After several months, he was rescued by the Allies. The machine was produced, and for the remainder of the war, the Allies were able to intercept and decipher Axis messages.

This feat would not have been possible were it not for someone who was willing to be the right man in a tough place. The work was dangerous, but it resulted in thousands of saved lives. Daniel was forced into a similar situation. As it turned out, he was God's man in a very tough place. Daniel exhibited some qualities that we would do well to imitate if we expect to be God's men in tough places. Let's consider these qualities.

I. The Right Attitude (vss. 1-7).

- A. Daniel seemed to have every right to be angry and bitter about his condition. He grew up under the religious revival of King Josiah and undoubtedly made a genuine commitment to God. However, he was taken captive in the first deportation by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet in all of this, he maintained a right attitude and didn't become embittered.
- B. We need to have a right attitude if we expect to be God's man in tough places.
 - 1. Circumstances will never be perfect in our lives, and we must resist the temptation to say, "if only." This will only lead to bitterness and despair.
 - 2. If we'll accept our situation as divine providence and begin to look for the hand of God, we'll be able to join Him and be His man in tough places.

II. The Right Behavior (vss. 8-16).

- A. Daniel was far from home, and the temptation to forsake both his religious training and commitment to God must have been strong. But Daniel was faithful. He concluded that no matter where he was, God was there looking for someone to be His man in tough places.
- B. Our community doesn't need men who can't seem to find the strength to obey God in tough places. What it needs are Christian men who aren't afraid to stand tall and declare that Jesus is Lord.

III. The Right Communication (vss. 17-20).

- A. Daniel was a long way from home, but he wasn't alone. He wasn't afraid to speak of his faith in God with the unbelievers. The result of this communication was that many Babylonians were able to hear about the One True God for the very first time.
- B. To be God's man in tough places, we need to have meaningful communication.
 - 1. With each other.
 - 2. With the lost.
 - 3. With God (this is where we come to know the mind of God).

IV. The Right Dedication (vs. 21).

- A. Daniel remained in his tough place for over 70 years, and to our knowledge he never returned to his homeland. But he was faithful to the end and was truly God's man in tough places.
- B. God's call often requires us to be in tough places. We must remain dedicated and at our post until He calls us elsewhere.

Conclusion:

Things didn't always go just right for Daniel, but he was determined to be God's man in tough places. He was willing, and God used him in one of the toughest places of all.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

John 11: 1-57

Introduction:

An African Christian once said, "When an African native is dying, the witch doctors place into his hands a bone which supposedly serves as a passport to the other world. When the Christian dies, he does not grasp a dead bone. He grasps the living hand of the living Christ."

Lazarus experienced the living hand of the living Christ. How are we to understand the raising of Lazarus from the dead?

I. The Raising of Lazarus is a Declaration of Divine Love.

- A. Mary, Martha and Lazarus had a very special place in the ministry of Jesus. The Gospel of John clearly states, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus" (vs.5). It was this love that compelled Christ to the village of Bethany to give life to Lazarus.
- B. When Christ returned to Bethany, He knew His enemies would attempt to destroy Him; however, He was willing to sacrifice His own life for His beloved friend.
- C. Fielding Lewis was a patriot during the American Revolution. He loved his country, and he used his wealth (\$50,000) to make small arms for General Washington's army. By the end of the war, Lewis was penniless and in poor health. At his death, he said, "If I had to do it over again, I would change nothing. I love my country more than I love life." Jesus loved Lazarus more than life.

II. The Raising of Lazarus is a Display of Divine Power.

- A. In the Gospel of John, there are a series of miracles called "signs" which demonstrate the deity of Christ. Those "signs" are as follows:
 1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).
 2. Healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:43-54).
 3. Healing of the crippled man (John 5:1-9).
 4. Feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14).
 5. Healing of the blind man (John 9:1-7).
 6. Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-46).
- B. The divine power that was manifested at the tomb of Lazarus will be revealed for every believer. The day is coming when Christ will shout with a loud voice and "The dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

III. The Raising of Lazarus is a Drama of Divine Consequences.

- A. The Pharisees and chief priests were men of cold hearts. To their thinking the raising of Lazarus threatened their very existence as men of position and power. The Scripture states, "Then from that day they took counsel together for to put him to death" (vs. 53).
- B. Within days after the raising of Lazarus, Christ was nailed to the cross. The Jewish leadership thought they had eliminated Jesus; however, the divine consequences were just beginning.
 1. On the third day Christ was resurrected.
 2. For a period of 40 days, Jesus appeared to His disciples to confirm His resurrection.
 3. Christ ascended into heaven, and the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit.
 4. At Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles preached the good news about Christ, and 3,000 people were saved.
- C. At this very moment in almost every corner of the globe, the Gospel is being shared, and men and women are being changed by the living Christ. Yes, the raising of Lazarus continues to have divine consequences.

Conclusion:

The raising of Lazarus was a pivotal moment in human history. This event reverberates through time filling the heart of every believer with the hope of eternal life.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

Colossians 1:13-23

Introduction:

Nothing grabs and holds our attention quite like witnessing a daring rescue in progress. For instance, the heroic attempts of the firemen, policemen, and ordinary citizens of Oklahoma City to rescue innocent children from a toppled government building captivated us. We celebrated every time another child had been rescued.

Our text reminds Christians of the most daring rescue of all time. God delivered us from the jaws of eternal death and transported us to the safest place of all: inside the walls of the kingdom of Jesus Christ (vs. 13).

In our new spiritual home, we can rest assured that Jesus is in charge.

I. Christ is in Charge of Our World (vss. 15-17).

- A. He alone is the supreme visible expression of God in the world (vs. 15). Knowing God requires knowing Jesus.
- B. He alone has control over all authorities and powers in the world (vs. 16). Knowing Christ means not having to be worried over world powers or supernatural phenomena.
- C. He alone can enable people to make sense of this world (vs. 17). Knowing Christ is the only way people will find meaning in this world.

II. Christ is in Charge of Our Church (vss. 18-20).

- A. He is the head of the church (vs. 18). He supplies leadership and vitality. Without Him the church would be a corpse.
- B. He is the source of God's fullness for the church (vs. 19). Churches experience God's fullness because they follow the leadership of Christ.

- C. He is the heart of the ministry of the church (vs. 20). God saves people through Jesus Christ. The ministry of the church lifts up Jesus so people can come to Him.

III. Christ is in Charge of Our Lives (vss. 21-23).

- A. He delivered us from what we could have been (vs. 21). A snapshot of where we were headed helps us to appreciate even more where Christ has placed us.
- B. He intends to present us to the Father whole and complete (vs. 22). Now that He has saved us, Jesus is in the process of making us the kinds of followers of whom God will be proud.
- C. He expects us to remain faithful to Him as He works in us to complete the process (vs. 23). The word "if" in the text challenges us to understand that we must cooperate with Him by being faithful through the maturing process.

Conclusion:

Christ is in charge! We can rest assured that the world, the church, as well as individual Christians belong to Him.

How does that assurance make a difference? Does it shape us as we face our world? Is it evident in the ministry of our churches? Does it inspire each of us to a deeper level of faithfulness to Christ?

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

Luke 10:25-37

Introduction:

Are you comfortable? The word “comfortable” means different things to different people. For some, it means financial security. For others, it implies a soft recliner. What does this word mean to you?

The lawyer identified in the text seemed to consider himself comfortable in his relationship with God. When he asked Jesus about eternal life, he probably only wanted confirmation. For him, eternal life involved keeping the commandments. He thought he had kept them, so to hear Jesus mention them would only add to his religious comfort.

In a flash, though, Jesus made the lawyer very uncomfortable (vss. 28-29). With the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus must have made him squirm in his seat!

The story intends to disturb us about what being a neighbor really means. It implies that we are compelled by one of two questions when we are faced with the needs of people around us.

I. If I Help, What's it Going to Do to Me?

- A. The story is about a traveler who is robbed, stripped, beaten, and left for dead in a ditch. This unfortunate man could be anybody, perhaps someone we may know. How many people do we encounter daily who have been robbed of their future, stripped of their dignity, beaten by injustice, and left for dead by the evil one in his relentless quest to destroy people?
- B. The story is also about some religious people who were supposed to be sensitive to people in the ditch. But they weren't. Perhaps they feared for their safety. Or maybe they were in a hurry to get somewhere important. They could have been concerned that helping the poor fellow might complicate their lives too much. They left him.

- C. In passing by the man in the ditch, the religious people seemed to ask themselves the question: If I help this guy, what's it going to do to me?
- D. That same question seems to be the motivating factor for generations of other religious people. People cry out for help, but we don't respond. If we get involved with them, what's it going to do to us?

II. If I Don't Help, What's it Going to Do to Him?

- A. In the story, Jesus introduced us to a Samaritan. Considered a half-breed by the religious people then, the Samaritan normally wouldn't be cast as the hero in a story. But Jesus made him the hero and showed us the ingredient that made him heroic: his compassion (vs. 33). Because he knew what it was like to be in the ditch, the Samaritan had no problem going to all the trouble to help the poor fellow in the same situation.
- B. In rescuing the man from the ditch, the Samaritan seemed to be asking himself the question: If I don't help, what's it going to do to him?
- C. That same question has motivated countless people to give themselves to caring for others. Church history is filled with stories about men and women who sacrificed their lives to reach out to people.
- D. That seemed to be the motivating question of Jesus. It drove Him to preach, teach, heal, bless children, talk with tax collectors, train disciples, and tolerate religious leaders. It prompted Him to go to the cross and die for us. If He didn't, what would happen to us?

Conclusion:

The important issue is not who qualifies to be your neighbor. Rather, it is what kind of neighbor you are. Determining what kind of neighbor you are results from acknowledging which of the two questions you ask. The story of the Good Samaritan should compel us to ask the right question.

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

I Kings 19:1-18

Introduction:

The rising smoke from the fire of God on the altar of Mount Carmel had been mixed with the falling rain that ended a long drought. The prophets of Baal had been defeated. Elijah's God had been validated as the only God worth worshiping. The multitude of onlookers had broken into spontaneous shouts of praise.

All in all, it had been a very good day's work. But Elijah wasn't finished. He wanted to see what God would do in the stone-cold heart of Jezebel once she heard about what had happened. So he wouldn't miss a thing, he outran the king's chariot to her palace.

That's where it all fell apart for him. Jezebel didn't repent. In fact, she threatened to get even. Elijah reacted to her threat by running as fast and as far away as he could. He must have been exhausted when he stopped under a juniper tree and begged to die (vss. 1-4). He had gotten off track.

What happened to Elijah can happen to anyone who follows the Lord. Moments of extreme courage can be followed by fits of extreme fear. If our expectations are not realized, our courage melts. We want to run; sometimes we do. At other times we wish we had. The fear and discouragement can get us off track.

According to our text, Elijah got back on track. So can we if we take the steps the beleaguered prophet took.

I. Get Some Food and Rest (vss. 5-8).

- A. God fed Elijah and allowed him to rest. He didn't rebuke the tired prophet for running. Instead, He gently helped Elijah regain physical strength as a necessary first step to spiritual recovery.
- B. Supermarkets can substitute for ministering angels. Beds can replace juniper trees. The principle, however, is the same. Do not underestimate the value of proper food and rest on the return of spiritual vitality. Apparently, God doesn't.

II. Get a Fresh Word From God (vss. 9-14).

- A. God led Elijah to the mountain so they could talk privately. There God spoke to him in a new way. The prophet was accustomed to God speaking through storm winds, earthquakes, and fire. But the sound of a gentle whisper was completely new and fresh to him.
- B. Getting a fresh word from God is somewhat easier today. We have the written Word of God through which He speaks to us. Going to a place where we can meet Him is easier, too. It doesn't have to be a mountain; it can be anywhere.

III. Get Back to Work (vss. 15-18).

- A. Elijah's visit to the mountain did not result in an immediate cure. Even after God spoke to him, he still showed no signs of change. What did God do? He gave the prophet an assignment and sent him back to work. He also assured Elijah that the prophet was not alone.
- B. Getting back on track may take time. Even after we hear from the Lord, we may still be spiritually lethargic. Can we excuse ourselves until we feel better? No. We must continue in our work, taking on smaller portions of the task at a time. When we can't see the future, we can at least see today.

Conclusion:

Can you identify with Elijah's situation? Do you need to get back on track? By taking the steps suggested in the prophet's story, we can begin to experience spiritual rejuvenation.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

—1 Cor. 1:18

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

—1 Cor. 1:21

“For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

—1 Cor. 9:16

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.”

—2 Cor. 4:5