

Renewing Your Passion for Preaching

(In the Military Context)

Introductions and Expectations: 0930-1130

*“Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old”
(Lamentations 5.21 ESV)*

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Introductions

1. Course description
 - a. Renewing Your Passion for Preaching seeks to provide expositional truths from the Pastoral Epistles, expounded and applied to the appropriate setting of preachers/students, for the divine goal of fulfilling God’s purposes in the world, fulfilling the preacher’s calling, edifying and strengthening the Body of those who hear, and encouraging, by God’s help, the preacher to leave the course with a sense of renewal to God’s call to preach the Gospel.
 - i. “Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old” (Lamentations 5.21 (ESV)).¹
 - ii. “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2-Timothy 4.2)
2. Course goals
 - a. That preachers will be recommitted to the “ordinary means of grace “as God’s revealed method for accomplishing His supernatural goals in the world, beginning in the mind and heart of the preacher, and moving to the minds and hearts of people, and to the community and world.
 - i. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4.13-16).
 - b. That the preacher will be renewed in the sacred encounter that led to a personal faith.
 - c. That the preacher will be renewed in a divine calling that led to a vocational decision.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from (*New Reformation Study bible : English Standard version*, 2005)

- d. That the preacher will be renewed in an appreciation for theology, the knowledge of and pursuit of God Himself, which will bring about a renewed zeal to announce His truth to the world.
 - e. That the preacher will be renewed in a love for the sacred text of Scripture as a “Word from Another World” that provides a never ceasing source of truth and inspiration and story and connection with those whom the preacher is called to preach to.
 - f. That the preacher will be renewed in a love for God’s mission fulfilled through the “foolishness of preaching.”
 - g. That the preacher will be renewed in a love for the people: their variety, their various spiritual conditions before you, the image of God inside of them, and the potential that is ever before you being shaped through faithful, exposition of the Word of God.
 - h. That the preacher will be renewed in a commitment that vocational joy and vocational fulfillment comes from vocational holiness, that is, a faithfulness to the divine task of preaching according to the Scriptures as the primary work and passion of the preacher’s life.
3. Course terminology
- a. Renewing: in this course the renewal is a word used to describe a fresh appreciation for the divine calling, divine task and divine goals of preaching the Word of God.
 - b. Passion: Not a fleeting human happiness, which can come and goes, but a “deep-down” God-given-joy that comes from “running free” with your calling to be the person that God has called you to be.
 - i. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2.10).
 - c. Preaching: *The announcement of the Word of God according to the Scriptures by one ordained of God to do so by the Church in order to fulfill God’s purposes and His mission in the world.* This includes expositional, topical narrative, biographical and textual preaching. This includes the Sunday morning message at church or chapel as well as the devotional word given at a Rotary or a staff meeting. This includes the compendium of places and events, which form the platform for the very same thing. Such a definition does not preclude “lay preaching,” or “narrative preaching,” and is not intended to preclude or exempt the forms of rhetoric, i.e., ethos, logos, and pathos. The definition of preaching does seek to ground the work as a supernatural act conducted by called-out human beings, whereby “the man, the method, and the mission” is shaped and controlled by the Scriptures and the work of the Spirit.
 - i. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2.1).
4. Course methods
- a. Lecture: 25 minutes of lecture through outlined syllabus
 - i. Renewing Your Passion for Preaching Course Introduction

- ii. Renewing Your Passion for Your Own Sacred Encounter
 - iii. Renewing Your Passion for Your Own Divine Calling
 - iv. Renewing Your Passion for Your God
 - v. Renewing Your Passion for the Sacred Text
 - vi. Renewing Your Passion for the Mission
 - vii. Renewing Your Passion for the People
 - viii. Renewing Your Passion for Vocational Holiness
 - b. Reflection, Response and Prayer: 10 minutes in group and 10 minutes in small groups with prayer
 - c. Break: a 15 minute break
 - d. Sermon of approximately 25 minutes linked to lecture topic
 - e. Reflection and Examination of the Sermon and Group Discussion of “A Question of the Application of the Text to the Military Setting”
- 5. Course delimitations
 - a. This is not a course on homiletics proper, but an integrative approach of expositional teaching from the Scriptures on the “preacher and preaching” (in the military context) and sermon and classroom sermon interaction and reflection
 - b. This is not a course advocating one particular preaching form over another, though expositional will be the most frequent form employed
 - c. This is not the last word in preaching!
- 6. Course disclosures
 - a. Biases are unavoidable, though the aim of the course is to provide material that will be usable in the broadest context possible. Yet here are biases that will no doubt appear in both the syllabi and in the presenter:
 - i. Biography is attached which will, no doubt, expose biases of being a Presbyterian minister (PCA), etc.
 - 1. Also see:
 - a. <http://www.rts.edu/faculty/StaffDetails.aspx?id=510>
 - b. <http://mikemilton.org>
 - c. <http://thecall.rts.edu>
 - ii. Belief in the Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Bible as the only rule of faith and practice in the Church
 - iii. Belief in the primacy of preaching as a means of grace, that is, of communicating the saving and sanctifying work of the Lord in a believer’s life
 - b. It is hoped that the student will seek out the universal principles taught or at least embedded in the teaching and apply those to his or her own faith and setting
- 7. Course expectations (student learning outcomes)
 - a. Content: That the student will have gained Biblical insights into preaching and renewal for the ministry.
 - b. Vocational support: That the student will have gained encouragement from the course lectures, student interaction and prayer for a life long pursuit of vocational excellence for service to God and others.

- c. **Spiritual Enrichment:** That the whole of the course, with lectures, sermons, interaction with fellow students and instructor, will leave the student with a greater sense of God's presence and power in the preacher's life and ministry.

Lecture One

Renewing Your Passion for Your Own Sacred Encounter

- Prayer
- A review of sacred encounter in 1 Timothy as a context for preaching to accomplish the purposes of God in your ministry
 - The Necessity of Your Personal Calling (1 Tim. 1; 2 Timothy 1.5)
 - Necessary for the challenges we face (vv. 3-11)
 - Necessary for the goals we have before us (vv. 3-11)
 - Necessary for our own self identity and divine authority (vv. 1,2, 12)
 - Necessary for our own humility for the office (vv. 13, 15)
 - Necessary for our theological focus (v. 14)
 - Necessary for our trust in God (v. 15)
 - Necessary for our hope for people in need (v. 16)
 - Necessary for live in patience with others as God was patient with us (v. 16)
 - Necessary to live lives of doxological joy in the midst of inevitable trial (v. 17)
 - Necessary for our vocational mission (vv. 18,19)
 - Necessary to keep us from vocational shipwreck (vv. 19,20)
- Reflections and Responses in Large Group
- Small Group and Prayer
- Break

Sermon One

Renewing Your Passion for Your Sacred Encounter

Trust the God who Calls

Exodus 3.4.1-5

A Sermon by Dr. Michael A. Milton, President and the James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

Introduction to the Reading

In risky times, God is getting our attention. Sometimes we think of surprises in our lives as the interruptions of life. But there can be no journey of Biblical faith without a divine interruption in our lives. And there can be no beginning without a divine interruption of our lives. We call that interruption “The call.” Will you turn with me to Exodus chapter three and the calling of Moses?

(Read 3.1-10)

Introduction to the Sermon

I could not look him in the eye when he asked me. “Are you called?” Dr. Eckley was a retired Nazarene preacher who at 90 years of age was serving as the chaplain at a nursing home in Olathe, Kansas. He probably could have been a resident himself, but he was ambitious as ever to preach the Gospel. He had heard my Aunt Eva telling people that we were all leaving Kansas, going to Florida, to Knox Seminary, in order for me to prepare for the ministry.

“Are you called?” He said again.

“Dr. Eckley, I think so.”

He looked at me like a concerned grandfather. “Son, just ‘thinking so’ is not enough. My boy, you better know that either God called you to preach the Gospel of His Son or not, because the devil is surely set against you and your message. And the world is not going to put up with what you are going to be preaching without some opposition. I have been talked about behind my back constantly, my family has endured cruel rumors and unimaginable and unfair scrutiny, and on one occasion I was told to leave a church because of the strength of my message of sin and the coming judgment of God, and Mike, you will be no different. Mike, when you have lost all, when you are run out, when you are down in the dirt, you have only one thing and that, my boy, is your call. I ask you again and I ask you not to answer me now but to go home and pray about it: Are you called by God?”

I crawled away from him, it seemed, and went back into my prayer closet. And I sought counsel from my pastor, from my elders, from other ministers, and from my wife. And I knelt down next to my bed on the day before I was to resign my position as a manager with the Ashland Chemical Company and I wept and I shook with fear before the living God and I cried out to this God. And the call of God came to me in the words and

encouragement of my wife and family and friends and even my boss at work and I looked again at the Savior who bled and died on a tree for my sins, and who saved me by His rich grace and I opened the Word of God to 1 Corinthians 9.16:

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”

And by God’s grace, I am just a preacher. That is a significant part of my calling and that calling gives meaning and purpose to my life.

Now, today, we turn to this matter of calling and I want to say today that this is a matter for every person here. You say, “I am not a preacher, will not be a preacher, have no gifts or desire to do so.” But that is not the whole story, my friend. In the Word of God, all of who are on a journey of true faith begin with a calling.

To learn about how God deals with us, how He calls, we turn to His Word. The Book of Exodus is the grand narrative about how God leads Israel out of bondage and through the wilderness into a Promised Land. It is the primary motif that will be used again and again for the story of our lives. In this day, when as one writer said, “the overarching stories we used to build our lives on have crumbled or been discredited,” we who believe the Bible to be God’s Word see this as our story, the journey of a life time. God saving us from sin and leading us through the wilderness of a sometimes-difficult life to the Promised Land of eternity with Him.

But it all begins with a call. Now, today, I want to ask a question about what it means to be called in the Bible and then what are the processes of calling.

What do We Mean When We Talk About Calling in the Bible?

When we speak of calling we are speaking of the divine, supernatural intervention of God in our lives. We are speaking of the sacred moment when God’s story intersects the story of our lives and we are swept up, only by His grace and love and His sovereign design, into His Story of Grace. Now this happens in two ways and both of them are quite personal.

There is a Personal Calling to become a son or daughter of the living God. This is a general call. It comes when we hear the call to repent and receive Jesus Christ as our living Lord and Savior. Jesus said that “I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but through Me.” Moreover, this is called a “call” because it is God who comes to us, and He may do it through the means of a parent or a pastor or a friend or a coach or even an author, but He always comes through the presentation of His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that no one could come unless He is supernaturally drawn. At that teaching, many walked with him no more. But calling is always something that God does to us, not to the other way around. It is not a volunteering of your gifts or your interests; it is a divine summons from God.

There is also a Personal Calling to follow Jesus Christ into the life of discipleship. To follow Christ is to begin a journey in which the leader is Jesus and you are the follower. A disciple at its base understanding is simply one who sits at the feet of the Master. This is going to involve, as the old Book of Common Prayers puts it, “renouncing the devil” and then committing to follow Jesus. There must have been a divine change of heart and

now God calls you to follow the Master wherever he leads. And every man and woman here is called to follow Christ.

Then, there is a Personal Calling to share the Gospel. I have pointed out many times that in the Bible, the Great Commission is understood to be directed toward, not only the apostles, or the elders, or selected pastors, but to the whole of the community. I have shown how in Acts 8.4, “They went everywhere preaching” and they were everyday men and women, like you and me, who were discharged by God to share Christ in their daily lives. If you have never heard that before, this is the call of God on every person here today.

Now, all of these are what we might call, “General Calls.” But there is, also, in the Word of God, what we might call “Specific Calls to a Particular Gospel work in the Church.” For instance, Abraham is called to leave his business and his family and to journey to another land, the land of Canaan, which would be a place where Israel is made into a nation and where the Abrahamic covenant would be incubated in the people called the Hebrews. That was a particular call. Isaiah the prophet was summoned before the throne of God to be a mouthpiece to Israel during the days before her judgment and overthrown. Amos, who reminded everyone that “I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock and the Lord said to me, ‘God, prophesy to My people Israel, Now, therefore hear the Word of the Lord...’” (Amos 7.14b-16a). Andrew, Peter, John, Saul of Tarsus, Timothy, are all examples of men who not only received the General Call of God to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, but specific calls to serve the intentions of God toward man in specific ways, namely, as a preacher.

Now, again, you say, this is fine, but I am a homemaker. This is all good, but I am a salesman. This is interesting, but I am a student studying for accounting. I am a brick mason. I am an air conditioner repairman.

Yes, beloved, but what we are going to see in the call of Moses applies to each and every one of us. For what I think God has put before us here is how the process of a call works and what we must do before Almighty God.

These are the five steps in the call in the life of Moses, Chapters 3 and 4.

Retreat

Chapter 3, Verse 1—“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Now this is an amazing passage. Moses, the child prodigy, lifted from the make-shift hiding place in the Nile and made a son in the court of the Pharaoh is now in the back 40 of the Midian desert, married to the daughter of a pagan priest, Zipporah and their son, Gershom, which means “sojourner.” Truly this man is on a journey. And let me tell you about his journey. It is a journey that is a retreat.

I have in this chapter something scribbled from a message at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in 1991:

“Moses thought he was a Somebody; Learned he was a Nobody, and then found out that God uses Nobodies.”

That just about sums it up and this was the learning he was a Nobody stage of life.

The retreat happened because he took matters into his own hands, a perennial problem with God’s people in the Bible and ever since. In this case, Moses gets a heart for the Hebrews, wants them liberated, and kills an Egyptian taskmaster who is mistreating a Hebrew slave. Then, his own people turn against him and reject his leadership. There is much there for twenty-five sermons, but for our purposes, we just need to say that this old boy, Moses had to retreat.

The journey of other faiths can begin and go forward without this. You can adopt a philosophy that “I am the captain of my own soul” and pretty much go forward without interruption. You can determine to be a Buddhist or a Pagan, and I noticed we had a Pagan festival here recently, and you can go forward. But in the faith of our Lord Jesus, in the Biblical faith of God, you cannot go forward without taking a step back to realize some things:

I thought I was a Somebody, I realize that I am just a Nobody, and it is only then that I come to learn that God uses Nobodies.

That is not to demean a human being, but it is to say that your dreams, your vision, like Moses, will not succeed according to God’s will until you come to repent and see that He is in control, not you!

There are many examples of this retreat. A famous contemporary Christian musician believes that his gifts are his qualification and so he strikes out to share them with the world, gets caught up in the music business, falls into sin and goes into retreat to learn that the qualification for genuine service to God is putting God first and seeing your life as a response to His grace, not an indispensable tool of God. In my own life, I had to learn this. I had sought to clean up my act, do some Sunday School teaching, take some classes in the Methodist Church on how to speak and supply empty pulpits when needed, and I was a lay preacher. Through a variety of personal failures, I was quickly escorted to the Midian desert to learn about who God is and who I am.

I wonder how many here today, are being led by God to the back forty? I wonder how many here have not yet learned that success in life is:

“...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (4.6).

But do not despair, dear saint of God. In Chapter 2, after Moses was sent into retreat to learn about who he was and who God is, God was not absent from the need of others. In verse 23-24 that the old king died, but the oppression continued and the Hebrews were crying out to God because of their bondage. And chapter two says that “God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.” What God was doing in Moses’ life was not disconnected with what God was doing with the Hebrews.

What God is doing in your life right now is connected with what God is going to do in other’s lives. The prayers go up, and mingle, but God knows how to connect the dots of our lives and to weave together our lives to accomplish his purposes.

And do not despair, dear saint of God, if you are in the desert. For in the desert there are burning bushes. God often meets us in the humble places, in the broken places, in the backwoods of our lives, during grief, during personal failure, during divorces, during inexplicable circumstances that put us on the bench and out of the game.

This brings us to the second step in a personal call of God on our lives:

Revelation

Chapter 3, Verse 2—“And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold. The bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.” So when the lord saw the he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses! And he said, “Here I am.”

Now the Lord comes to Moses in a burning bush. He comes to others in a dream. He comes to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. So we read in Hebrews 1.1 that God who in times past spoke through to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...”

The Journey of Faith begins with calling and calling, true calling of God must begin with His Word.

The calling to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ begins with God’s Word, which tells the story of a God of grace who sent His Son to save us from our sins. And the command is given from His Word to repent and believe.

The calling to follow Jesus in the narrow road, to embrace life and embrace His love and get rid of the idols in our lives that cannot satisfy, comes from God’s Word.

The calling, likewise, to share the Gospel comes from God’s Word.

And the calling to leave all and follow Christ as a preacher or missionary or teacher of the Word, must be grounded in God’s Word.

Now, that Word comes to us in Spirit, as well. We not only have the clear Outer Call, but an Inner Call. The Word of God, which in principle calls each of us to consider what God would have us to do, is accompanied by wise counsel and also by the still small voice of God in our hearts.

Just this past week, a young minister called me to talk about this very thing. He told me that I had said something at General Assembly, while talking to him in the hall that has led him to think that God is calling him to another Gospel work. I told him that to listen to me alone would not be very profitable. But to carefully see how God’s Word was working with God’s providence and to test these things with counselors, but I told him, “in the end, there must be the overwhelming inner call of God in your life. You must have the outer call and the inner call and one without the other invalidates the other.”

This morning, the Word of God comes clearly to you: God in the burning bush is a great sign. Look at many Presbyterian or Reformed colleges or seminaries and you will find the emblem of a burning bush. It represents the eternal God, who is a consuming fire. It is

the Word of God, which burns but is never consumed. It burns its truth into my life, but there is more for you. It burned for Moses, but it burned more brightly in the life of our Lord, and it burns today as the Spirit of God, proceeding from the Father and the Son, comes to you this morning.

What is God calling you to do? To surrender your life to him, your questions to him. Maybe to surrender to God and give up on trying to make sense of God's greater ways with your limited understanding. Maybe you are a young person being called to the Gospel ministry or to mission field. Maybe you are being called to face up to your utter dependence upon God. But maybe you are in the third phase of a call:

Resistance

Once God gives His Word that He has called Moses to return to Egypt, to the place of his failure, to lead the Hebrews to freedom, Moses digs in and begins to show resistance in the form of a series of excuses.

V. 11—"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"—Moses is saying Who am I?

V. 13—"Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say tot hem?'"—Moses is saying Who are You?

Chapter 4.1—"Then Moses answered and said, 'But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'"—Moses says, But What if they don't believe me?

Moses in resisting with questions that are all a smokescreen and behind that smokescreen is absolute fear: fear of himself, fear of failure, fear of man, everything but a fear of God that says, "If God is calling me then God will sustain me. This is God's Work, not mine. I am just a messenger boy and the message is not mine, but a Word from Another World."

Resistance is the natural response. Before I left to go into the ministry, I shook like a leaf on a tree in Autumn. But I had to learn that it was not about me, but about God.

Jonah was a resistant prophet and we will study more about him later this fall. When God called to go this way, he went the other way. When God called Peter to preach Grace, Peter stutter stepped on grace, began to default back to works as a ground for salvation and had to be corrected by Paul.

I had a cow when I was a child named Bossy, not very original, but that was her name. And I would want to lead her in to a stall to be milked, but she would not go. But I soon learned that the problem was a cat. We had a cat named Tom, which is also not very original. And that cat named Tom frightened old Bossy. One that was figured out, I got rid of Tom, and Bossy almost ran into that stall!

What is keeping you from God's calling? Your skepticism? Or is it a deep pain of being betrayed in another church? Let God get rid of that as you confess it to him. What is keeping you from God's calling to preach, young man? Is it fear that you cannot take care of your family? Listen, God fed the Hebrews with manna from heaven. He fed Elijah with food carried by ravens. When armies hunted down Martin Luther, he raised up a

prince to protect him in a castle and it was there that Luther wrote, “A Mighty Fortress is Out God.”

“God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in times of trouble” (Psalm 46.1)

You let God get rid of that old Tom Cat and you let Him lead you into the place where there is good food for you and rich nourishment for others. He is calling you because He loves you and He has a plan for you to feed others.

This leads us to the fourth step in the process of a call:

Recognition

Chapter 4, Verse 2—“So the Lord said to him, ‘What is in your hand?’ He said, ‘A rod.’”

In the passages from verse 2-5, God cuts the questions short and uses the illustration of the rod in Moses’ hand to show that Moses’ power was not going to be in Moses, but in God.

God asks what is in Moses’ hand, and he said a rod. Why did God ask this? God was getting at the real issue in Moses’ resistance and that was Moses’ fear of failure. You see that rod used to be a scepter. But Moses lost that when he took matters into his own hands. So God says “throw it down.” Get rid of the thing that pains you. The rod turns into a snake. Snakes are dangerous and Moses did what I would do or you would do. He fled from that serpent. But the fleeing was going to be over. Moses need not ever retreat again. He need not fear anything, not even the deadly snakes, and when he was going to deal with Pharaoh he was going to be dealing with a real snake in the grass. No, God said, “Pick it up.” Moses had to see that the thing that could harm him was going to be transformed by God. It became a rod again. The symbol of Pain had become the symbol of God’s miraculous power at work in his life. Then, if you look in verse 17, you will see that God requires Moses to “take this rod in your hand, with which you shall dot he signs.” He is saying, “Raise it high.”

As some of you know, I preached a sermon on this called, “Throw it Down! Pick it Up! Raise it High!” some months ago at a joint service with New City Fellowship. But what I want you to see here, about this passage, is that in the steps to accepting God’s call to eternal life, to follow Him, to love others, to step out in faith, to forgive another person, to follow Christ to preach or to the mission field, the last step before you go is to recognize that the power is not in you, but in God.

This leads to the last thing I want to say about this personal calling:

Resolve

Verse 18: “So Moses went...”

Moses had lost himself in retreat, had seen God in revelation, had seen his sin and fears in resistance, had seen the power for ministry in recognition, and was now ready to resolve to go.

For Moses, the process of surrendering to God took about 40 years. 40 years of his life, being shaped by God, conformed to the image of the Savior, and prepared to speak the Word of the Lord to others.

How long will it take for you?

Conclusion

But how could God call me? How could God use me? I am a student. I am a child. I am handicapped. I am elderly.

One of the most remarkable stories in medical history was told by an anthropologist by the name of Ashley Montagu. Montagu told the story of a person named John Merrick who lived in England in the 19th century and who died in 1890 at the age of 27. His life was not only told in books, but in a famous play a few years ago and in a movie. They called John Merrick, “The Elephant Man.” John Merrick got his name because John Merrick may have possibly been the ugliest person to ever live. He suffered from neurofibromatosis. The disease devoured his body and by the time he was a teenager he was not only an orphan, abandoned by his mother, but a freak in a carnival sideshow. One could pay a few pence to step into a booth and get a peep at the “Elephant Man.” One day a surgeon at London Hospital named Frederick Treves, found him. He paid his two pence and observed the sad, crouching creature. He was treated like a dog by his “owner” the carnie. But Dr. Treves “bought” him from the sideshow scam artist who had mistreated him and took him back to the hospital. He examined him and went on to describe the deformities in detail: (And I quote now from a book I read describing him):

“The bony mass protruding from his brow; the spongy skin, with a fissure resembling a cauliflower hanging in folds from his back; a huge, misshapen head the circumference of a man’s waist; the mouth a distorted, slobbering aperture; the nose a dangling lump of skin; a bag of flesh like the dewlap of a lizard suspended from the chest. His right arm was overgrown to twice its size, its fingers stubby and useless. Flaps of skin in the shape of a paddle descended from one armpit; deformed legs supported him only if he held onto a chair. A sickening stench emanated from the fungous skin growths.”²

The anthropologist, who studied the case, was most amazed, though, by the person inside the hideous body as well as by the love of the doctor. You see, John Merrick, though he had been mistreated all of his life, was one of the sweetest persons who ever lived. He was also very bright, having taught himself to read, he knew large sections of the Bible by heart, and also could quote the beautiful and moving prayers of the English Book of Common Prayer better than many vicars. He knew Jane Austen and Shakespeare was his favorite reading outside of the Bible and the Prayer Book. And though he had been abandoned by his mother and shunned, especially by women, because of his freakish appearance, he loved women. He particularly loved what he felt was their tenderness. He carried a photo of the woman who abandoned him in his pocket at all times. One day, Dr. Treves paid a nurse to go in and show him kindness. The Elephant Man broke down crying, for he had never been shown kindness by a woman in all of his life.

The doctor arranged for a trip to the country for John Merrick and there he took in all of the beauty of the wildflowers. He listened to the songbirds, flushed a rabbit, and

² Phillip Yancy, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth are We Missing?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 192.

befriended a dog. With childlike wonder, he told the doctor, “I am happy every hour of the day.”³

He was given a room in the attic of the hospital and from there he could see the Church of St. Phillip. He loved its beauty and said that the church building was to him, “An imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud.” Though he only had the use of one hand, he started constructing a model of the church, using cardboard. He called it jokingly, “my imitation of an imitation.”

After four years of such happiness, the Elephant Man died in his sleep. But today, I am told, you could go to the museum and see his “imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud.”

John Merrick was called. His calling life was to be a witness to the humanity that lies dormant in an ugly exterior. John Merrick’s calling was like that church outside of this window, and like his cardboard model. John Merrick was “an imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud.” His joy and love for life and others came from this grace.

Jesus being lifted up on a cross, dying for John Merrick and for Moses and for you and me is the real thing: “grace flying up from the mud.” Coming to know that there is such love, such grace is the power that allows us to say “I surrender all.”

³ Ibid., 195.

Lecture Two

Renewing Your Passion for Your Divine Calling

- Prayer
- A review of divine calling in selected passages of Scripture and in 1 and 2 Timothy as a context for preaching to accomplish the purposes of God in your ministry
 - A Theology of Calling
 - General calling, effective calling, special calling
 - Romans 10.13; 1 Timothy 4.10; Jeremiah 1.4
 - Egalitarianism versus Clericalism
 - Problems arising from not distinguishing the call
 - Egalitarianism: a Lack of unction, purpose and identity
 - Clericalism: A detachment from the people
 - A Biblical Answer: Role Relationships
 - Ephesians 4.11
 - 1 Timothy 1.9
 - The Necessity of Your Divine Calling (selected passages of 1 and 2 Timothy)
 - The Necessity of that call for the work before you (1 Tim. 1.18;)
 - Necessary for your authority to speak (1 Tim. 1.3; 4.11; 2 Timothy 1.7, 12)
 - Necessary to sharpen and continue your ministry focus (1. Tim. 4.6-8; 2. Tim. 2.15)
 - Necessary to fulfill God's purposes in the world and in your life (1 Tim. 4.16)
 - Necessary to fulfill the ministry God has given you (1 Tim. 11-14, 20; 2 Timothy 1.14; 2 Tim. 3.14; 4.2)
- Reflections and Responses in Large Group
- Small Group and Prayer
- Break

Sermon Two

Trusting the God Who Sends

Exodus 3.13-17; John 20.19-21

A Sermon by Dr. Michael A. Milton, President and the James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

Introduction to the Reading

Growing up in Louisiana, I have had a lot of personal experience with hurricanes! One thing that always intrigued me was the idea that the United States Air Force would send planes, with human beings inside, right into the eye of the storm. We all know that the eye of the storm is safe. But it sure is bumpy going and coming! They don't just hope the storm will pass. They enter it.

In risky times, the greatest risk may be to do nothing and it will pass. In risky times God sends His people to enter the storms and He calls them to trust Him through the bumps.

Tonight, I wonder who is being called? I wonder who will be sent?

Exodus 3.10-17

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." Exodus 3.10
But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 11
He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." 12

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" Exodus 3.13 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."* And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 14 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. 15 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, 16 and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the

Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.” ’ 17

John 20.19-21

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” John 20.19 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 20 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” 21

Introduction to the Sermon

I recently read the words of a friend of mine, John Huffman, of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, CA. He was reflecting on how God had shut doors and opened doors for him through His life. I was particularly touched as I read of how God opened doors and shut other doors to force John to be sent to the places he has gone. The more I thought about his life, and the life of ministry, the more I thought how being a Christian is, in a real way, a life of being sent. When God called Paul the first thing that happened to him was that he was sent to Damascus. There Ananias baptized him and ministered to him. Then Paul, we learn from other places was sent into Arabia, for a three year time of seminary with God. Then God sent him to Jerusalem. Then God sent him to Antioch. From there God sent him and sent him and sent him again. God sent Paul to accomplish His mission on earth.

When God wants to accomplish something great, He not only saves us He sends us. This is the most basic and fundamental part of being a Christian.

In studying the divine sending of Moses, we come to see something about how God sends us. Consider these four truths about sending.

1. We are sent from his Presence

To begin with let us say that to be sent, you need to hear God and that comes from a calling that comes outward and inward. In the text Moses has a divine encounter with the living God in that burning bush. And the Lord spoke from that bush. Everything we know about everything else that Moses did in his life started with that encounter. And the same is true of us. Trace the Reformation to Martin Luther hearing God speak to Him from Romans that we are justified by faith. Trace the ministry of John Wesley to the time at Aldersgate Street when he knew that God saved him by grace. In our time trace the conversion of James Kennedy to the radio broadcast of Donald Grey Barnhouse. In my life I trace that moment to the seed-sowing ministry of the woman who reared me, Aunt Eva, and to the fish net moment of grace when Dr. Kennedy asked his two famous questions of me. If God sends anyone there must be a time of knowing His presence in your life. When God comes to a man or a woman to be sent for His purposes there is one thing for sure: there has to be an encounter with God. This comes in worship. This comes

in reading and studying God's Word. This may come in times of prayer and reflection. But you must know that God has come to you.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the first day of the week, He appeared and told them “as the Father has sent Me even so I am sending you. In saying “even so” Jesus drew the necessary parallel between His life and theirs. To encounter the risen Christ personally is to be involved with the sending work of God in the world. Or, to put it another way, if you experience the risen Jesus you will have no choice but to begin a new life of being sent. Being sent is what being a Christian is all about. And this happens when we are in His presence.

I have talked to someone who was with Pope John Paul II. And when they left the Vatican, this person, a faithful Catholic before, told me that she would never be the same after being in the Pope’s presence and receiving His blessing. She said that her life had new meaning. Now this is an illustration of how coming into the presence of someone important can change your life. How much more, though, when we come into the presence of Jesus.

I wonder if so many in the church today are weak and our witness in the world is compromised and our heart for missions cools, why we get involved in consumerism in worship, consumerism in church leadership styles and so forth because of this one thing: we have not been in His presence.

My beloved, if we neglect His presence we will forfeit our power. But if we will but ask forgiveness and invite Him to come to us, and if we draw near to Him in prayer and private worship, as well as in small groups and in the assembly like this, Jesus will draw near.

And when He does we will be sent forth from His presence with a mission and with a purpose.

We also see from this that:

2. We are sent in His name

This is what God tells Moses. You shall go in the name of "I AM." This is a special name, a covenant name that is given only to God's people. In other words the people are to recognize that this is not your vision, not your doing, not your calling, but this is the I AM who is present through you.

When you look in your Bibles and you see the word Lord, if it is all in caps then it is translating the Hebrew consonants that is the covenant name of God. Even today when Jews read this they do not say the "holy name" of God. But this is the name that God wanted to be used to identify Himself. The I AM God. He is the God who is here.

We all know the power of a name. When I was commissioned as a US Army officer and made a chaplain, the President of the United States signed my orders. So when I am on duty and serving in uniform I serve at the pleasure of our President and all of the officers under his authority who are over me. I receive salutes; I carry command authority from the President and his officers over me. I am sent forth to do my work in his name.

How much more, my beloved, when you go in His name the demons must flee, the pain must subside, souls will be saved, and lives are to be built up, because of the name of

Jesus. Let us cling to our orders: we are sent in His name and at His name “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

We also see here that...

3. We are sent in His authority

This is a vital truth. Behind Moses' question is the matter of authority. Before when the Hebrews learned of his murder, and Moses made a proclamation, they doubted his authority. So it is natural that Moses should be concerned about this assignment. But the Lord says that you are to tell them that "The Lord, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - appeared to me and said: I have sent me to you."

There is a story in the Book of Acts. Turn with me to Acts 19.11-16”

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them. Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. Acts 19.16

It is always a bad day when the demons start talking back at you! But there is no power over evil just by using religious incantations. There must be the life of Jesus inside of us for our lives to be useful. We always take a beating in the world when we do things in our power, in our authority rather than in Jesus'. The Church must go forward not on business principles but Biblical principles. We are sent forth not with human authority but with divine authority. We speak to the world, to other people, in the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, not our own.

The greatest Christian I have ever known in my life was my Aunt Eva. She had no degrees, no money, no prestige, no name, and no unique giftedness. She just had faith. And I have seen many businessmen in my living room as a boy who had come to ask her for counsel. And when I was church planting and faced challenges, I would go to her bedside and I would kneel with that 97-year-old woman and ask her advice. She lacked many things. But she had one thing: the authority of Jesus Christ resting on her through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This church's place in this community must not be because of programs or prestige or power or history or legacy or money or any of that. It must be on thing: the authority of Jesus Christ in His Word and in the lives of her members.

I believe the world takes notice when a church or a Christian stands in the authority of Jesus and speaks. We will never lack an audience if we are ministering in His name. The powers recognize the name of Jesus and when we are under His authority we are sent with power.

Finally, we see another aspect of Moses' sending and ours”

4. We are sent with His Promise

"And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites - a land flowing with milk and honey."

"I have promised..." That promise was God's covenantal promise—a promise extending back to Adam and Eve that God would send a Redeemer to crush the head of the Enemy; a covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that God would bring about a nation, and a land, and ministry to the world. All of these promises were brought to bear in the sending of Moses. He had God's Word that God would bring them out of slavery, out of misery and into a land of enemies. But as we have seen, the enemies were not going to be able to withstand God's power.

There is no evil today that can withstand the covenant promises of God.

One of my favorite times in the life of the seminary is at graduation. I cherish getting to hand the degree to our graduates. There is a story behind each young man going forth to be a pastor in Kansas or each young woman on her way to be a missionary in Egypt. In a real way, we have called them to be taught, and now God is teaching them to be sent. And they are sent forth from RTS Charlotte with a theology that says that Jesus Christ will be victorious. Christ will establish His Church and the gates of Hell, the encampment of the Canaanites and the Hittites, the well defended fortresses of man made religion, of hatred and rebellion against God. But today I want to commission each of you.

I use the words of John Huffman again:

"Remember this. No matter how old or young you are, you are meant to be sent. Be willing to be surprised by God. Open yourself to a maturing faith that enables you to be continually used by God!"⁴

Amen! Be willing today to release your life into the life of Jesus. Be willing to be sent, as we have learned today,

From His Presence

In His name

In His Authority

With His Promises

To share the life of our Lord with those who are in bondage to sin or sorrow or worry or loneliness.

Because of how Jesus came to us on the Cross, you can trust God that wherever He sends you, He will go too.

⁴ (Huffman, 2007)

Lecture Three

Renewing Your Passion for Your God

- Prayer
- A review of your devotional life as a context for preaching to accomplish the purposes of God in your ministry
 - The Necessity of Your Devotional Life
 - Necessary because the external challenges are unrelenting (see select examples of the challenges of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus:
 - Doctrinal errors leading to division (1 Tim.1.3ff)
 - Disciplinary Issues (1 Tim. 1.20)
 - Divisive issues concerning public prayer (1 Tim. 2.1-8)
 - Divisive issue concerning worship (1 Tim. 2; 3.14-16)
 - Equipping Leadership issues (1 Tim. 3)
 - Diabolical issues involving spiritual pride over religious ritual (1 Tim. 4.1-5)
 - Not being accepted by the people because of youth (or fill in your reason for not being excepted!) (1 Tim. 4.12)
 - Issues involving honoring authorities (1 Tim. 5.1-2; 6.1-2)
 - Issues involving establishing mercy in the community (1 Tim. 5.3ff)
 - Quarreling, bickering, “irreverent babble” among the people (1 Tim. 6.4-5)
 - Controversies over socio-economic divisions (1 Tim. 6.6-10; 17-19)
 - Betrayals (2 Tim. 1.15)
 - Iniquity and those seeking to divide the community (2 Tim. 2.14-19)
 - Need to correct those who are divining the congregation with great and deep cultivated character of God (2 Tim. 2.24-26)
 - Hedonism (2 Tim. 3.1-7)
 - Rebelliousness (2 Tim. 3.8-9)
 - Persecutions because of living a godly life (2 Tim. 3.12)
 - Being poured out in physical ways because of ministry (2 Tim. 4.6)

- Opposition from toxic colleagues in the ministry (2 Tim. 4.14-15)
- A variety of “evil deeds” that converge and collect over time to oppose and weaken your ministry (2 Tim. 4.18)
- Necessary because the internal challenges are persistent (selected examples from 1 and 2 Timothy)
 - A possible desire to run from ministry problems (1 Tim. 1.3)
 - Holding faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1.19)
 - Training in faith (1 Tim. 4.6a)
 - Training in doctrine (1 Tim. 4.6b)
 - Training in holiness of life (1 Tim. 4.7)
 - Your unavoidable weaknesses and liabilities in ministry (Timothy’s youth in 1 Tim. 4.12)
 - Wisdom and discernment (1 Tim. 4.5; 19-25)
 - Contentment in the ministry God has given you (1 Tim. 6.6)
 - Sensual temptations (1 Tim. 6.11)
 - Shame or timidity over your faith (2 Tim. 12)
 - Weaknesses coming from a loss of a grip on God’s grace for your own life (2 Tim. 2.1)
 - Lack of private study for public ministry (2 Tim. 2.15)
 - Getting caught up in “irreverent babble” (2 Tim. 2.16, 3.23-24)
 - Shying away from “keeping the main things the main things in your ministry (2 Tim. 4.1-5)
- Necessary because the goals of God begin and end in your own life as a divine conduit for the message of God to the people
 - Timothy, like all ministers, must attend to personal holiness for he/we are the vessels through which the Word will come in flesh to those he/we serve.
- Practical necessities
 - Care for caregivers involves
 - Mentors or peers to share burdens with
 - Regular methods for Word, reading, prayer
 - A personal word on devotional life

- Family Prayer, Morning and Evening
- Reading Stations to read through biography, theology, history, and fiction
- Daily Personal Prayer
 - Adoration: through reading Scripture, usually Psalms, or a reading plan
 - Confession: i.e., Valley of Vision, or the Book of Common Prayer
 - Thanksgiving: heart-felt or written thanksgivings, or a focus on yesterday's discovery of God
 - Supplication: Interceding on the Fingers
 - Thumb: Those closest to me
 - Index finger: teachers, preachers, missionaries
 - Middle finger: Strongest finger to pray for authorities
 - Ring finger: the weakest finger to
- Reflections and Responses in Large Group
- Small Group and Prayer
- Break

Sermon Three

Trusting God in the Wilderness

Exodus 3.1; Mark 1.12

A Sermon by Dr. Michael A. Milton, President and the James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

Introduction to the Reading

Perhaps you have read J.I. Packer's wonderful book, *Knowing God*.⁵ I believe that this book surely ranks as one of those books that people say, "It made a lasting impact upon my life." We need to know the God of the Scripture to be saved, not the God of our imagination or the God we want. Then there was *Experiencing God*.⁶ This book sought to go beyond Packer's knowledge and emphasized a more personal relationship with this God. But beyond Knowledge and beyond Experience is something else: TRUST. One way to think of TRUST is to say it is "Confidence well placed." Trusting God means that you not only know this God, have experienced Him, but you are now ready to place your life and your future, and perhaps as important, your past, in the hands of this God.

The picture I used in the graphic design for this series is a picture of an older woman with her hands on the Bible. When I saw it evoked the image I remember so well: the hands of my Aunt Eva. Her hands were wrinkled from time. But her trust was strengthened through time. And her stories to me were stories of living often on the far side of the wilderness: in her childhood at when she had to care for the family for her mother was ill; in the hardships of World War One and how that affected our family, and the Depression as a farmer's wife, then again in World War Two when her other brother was killed, in the days of caring for her sick husband, of becoming a widow and trying to make ends meet, of being a widow and being 65 years old and taking in the 9 month old baby having never had children herself, of the years of that child's heartbreaking prodigal experience, and so many other things. I thought of her hands when I saw that picture.

I also thought that as I look in the mirror and see some lines in my face, I think of some things that likely brought those lines. But I also think, "Those experiences were the testing places where I really learned to trust God the most." And maybe you think of how God has really helped you to trust Him through trials.

There is no better place to learn about trusting God than through Biblical biography. And in Exodus chapter three we have one of the most amazing turning points in the Word of God. We have the call of Moses. About 15% of the entire Bible deals with Moses and about 20% of the Old Testament. He is the giver of the Law and is central to Judaism. He is thus a central player in Christianity. Even in Islam his story is told in the Koran and he is a forerunner of their Prophet. And for the next several weeks we are going to deal with Exodus Chapter Three. Exodus Chapter Three is about the Call of Moses, but what we learn is that is about Moses learning to trust God. Thus Exodus Chapter Three is about

⁵ (Packer, 1993)

⁶ (Blackaby & King, 1998)

God. And as we learned on Wednesday Night, it is about Jesus, for all of the Bible is about our Lord Jesus. And because Jesus shepherds us in His Word, the call of Moses is directly related to your life and mine. In what ways? Well that is what we will seek to discover.

This morning look at just verse one of chapter three:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law,
Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west
side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of
God. Exodus 3.1

Let us pray:

Lord, You gave us stories from the Old Testament to show us how your plan of salvation unfolded. This morning we pray that your plan unfolds to each person here. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The First Clue and the First Truth

This past week Dr. D. James Kennedy went home to be with the Lord. God used this man in a powerful way. He will ever be remembered in the Christian Church for equipping the saints for the work of ministry in fulfilling the Great Commission. And Evangelism Explosion, which is now the single largest missions tool on the face of the earth, in every country on earth, began with an encounter with God. For Jim Kennedy, it was an encounter that began when this rather worldly young man could not escape the voice of Donald Grey Barnhouse of the Radio Bible Study Hour preaching on the radio. According to Jim, he couldn't stand his voice or his message. He wanted to listen to music not him. But God put Jim Kennedy in just the right place at just the right time and put that radio in just the right place so that he heard the voice of Donald Grey Barnhouse asking, "If you were to stand before God tonight and He were to ask you why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?" And Barnhouse went on to show that heaven is a free gift, is not earned or deserved. And because of that, according to Jim Kennedy, he learned about the grace of God who sent His only Son Jesus Christ to be His Savior. And the rest is history: the most listened to Presbyterian minister in the history of the Christian Church. And last night my wife and I listened to Jim preach "In Christ and Christ Alone" and it was one of the finest presentations of Jesus Christ to sinners I have ever heard. But it all started with what happened to Moses. In one of my old Bibles, which I used when I was an intern to D. James Kennedy, I have this marked about Exodus 3 and it is a quote from Jim on a sermon he preached on Moses on a Sunday night:

"Moses spent the first 40 years of his life thinking he was somebody, the next 40 years of his life believing he was nobody, and the next 40 years learning that God uses nobodies."

I remember thinking; "there is hope for me." Because life had dealt me some pretty tough blows I had wondered if God could use me.

There is hope for all of us in the Word of God and especially in this text. Exodus Three and even in one simple verse, offers tremendous hope as we learn something about the way that God works in our lives to accomplish His purposes on earth. I believe that God

is shaping your life today to fulfill His purposes on earth. I believe that there is not one thing going on in your life today that God cannot and will not use to prepare you to be a Moses or a Jim Kennedy in your own life and in God's own way for you. And verse one tells us so much about this.

God shapes his people for service in His kingdom by giving us a new identity. How does he do this? The text shows us three simple but life changing ways:

1. God shapes his servants through a humble vocation

Look at this: Moses was “tending” or “keeping the flock.”

Now that is different. “Moses, I thought you were a prince? I thought you ruled in Egypt. You said go here and men went here. You organized, you built, and you led an empire of men. But now you tend a flock of sheep.” We know what happened of course. Moses, born to a Hebrew family, hid in the bull rushes of the Nile, was found and kept and raised by the princes of Egypt though God uses his own mother to be his nanny. And Moses surely loved her and when saw the oppression of the Hebrew people he didn't like it. So Moses wanted to change things. He wanted to be a leader. So Moses encountered an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew. And Moses killed that man. He ran. He ran far across the wilderness. The royal fugitive ended up in Midian, in the eastern Sinai, and he was tending sheep.

Maybe you were a vice president of a bank, but now you could use a loan yourself. And you wonder, “How in the world did I end up here?” Or maybe you are a mom who always looked forward to staying home with your children, but your family's financial crises has caused you to have to work outside of the home. And you are wondering, “How did I get here? This is not what I planned.”

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility
comes wisdom. Proverbs 11.2

My wife used to tell me whenever I had to get up in the night to take care of John Michael, when he was but days old, that we were to cherish each stage of parenting because soon it will be over. The hard things are hard, but love them, because they are just preparing us for another stage in life.

That was wisdom that gave meaning to being up at 3 am giving a bottle! It gave great meaning. And knowing that God is preparing you, working in you, will help you to see that because you didn't get the promotion doesn't mean that God has given up on you. It just means he is preparing you. So cherish each place in life.

Our Savior was, after all, a carpenter's son in Nazareth.

God glorifies himself by giving us a new vocation.

2. God shapes his servants through a surprising relation

Moses was tending the sheep of “Jethro his father-in-law.” Now Jethro is not an Egyptian name. It would be as odd in their ears as it may be in yours. You think of Jethro Bodine and they might have thought about someone just as backwoods as that Jethro. How interesting that this Prince of Egypt is now married to a backwoods Midianite girl and

working for her father! But Jethro is not a Hebrew name! The prejudice against Gentiles that developed later in rabbinical Judaism was not as pronounced at that time, but it was still an assault of the identity of a Hebrew. In fact, it just raised the question, “Who are you Moses? And where you do come from?”

Questions of identity can haunt a man. But what Moses had to learn was that his identity was not in anyone but God. And God caused this man of royalty, this Egyptian-Hebrew married to a Midianite girl and working for a Midianite chieftain, to learn the truth we all need to know; that in our relations we learn to trust God.

Moses was proud. But his pride was bruised severely, I believe, when he had to associate with those Midianites. But they took him in. And he even got his wife from that backwoods tribe. And he got a job from them. But more than that: Many years later, when Moses was overworked it would be his father-in-law, Jethro, who would drop in to see about his baby girl married to this man who hears God’s voice. And he would see that Moses was overworked, and in Exodus chapter 18, God uses the Midianite chieftain and shepherd to tell Moses how to govern the people using elders. Wow.

Maybe God is using a person or people in your life to shake up your world today. Maybe it is an ungodly boss. Maybe a scolding mother in law! Maybe you wonder how someone as high and smart as you are ever ended up married to someone like you are! But I know that God sanctifies us through our wives and through our husbands. Maybe the people in your life today, the last people in the world you would have used to bring God to you, are God’s instruments to help you trust in Him.

3. God shapes his servants in a hard location

Let’s look at this: “and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

There are several Hebrew words, which are very revealing in this text.

One is the name of the mountain where Moses worked. He would work there for the rest of his life. It is an important location. For Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. It means dry and barren. And if you have ever seen pictures of the eastern Sinai Peninsula you would agree that this is a pretty good name for it.

The word for wilderness is also interesting to me. And the Hebrew “Midbar” means desolated placed. “Midbar” is the barren wilderness. Moses learned a great deal about God in the wilderness.

Then there is the word that is in this sentence: For Moses was tending sheep on the “West side of the wilderness.” What does that mean? The answer is an important clue.

I think the translators did that because the Hebrew word **speaks of “the disoriented side” of a place.** East is the direction of orientation. Thus they translated this word as “west.” That western side of the wilderness is the side opposite the sunrise. It is, as the New Revised Standard translates it, “Beyond the wilderness.” But my personal preference here is how the NIV puts it (perhaps less precise but more expositional): “And he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Moses was in control, he thought, when he used his power and position to try and set his people free his way. But his way was not God's way. God had another plan. And Moses had to go to the far side of the wilderness to learn to know God, to experience God, and finally to trust God. You learn to trust God best on the far side of the wilderness.

Have you ever found yourself on the far side of the wilderness? My beloved the far side of the wilderness is a hard place. Mount Horeb is a hard place. But let me show you the Gospel in this story.

Our Lord Jesus went to the far side. Our Savior went to the wilderness and was tempted by Satan but Jesus did not sin. And angels ministered to Him in the desert. But our Lord went to a dry, barren hill called Calvary to die for our sins.

And you will meet Jesus when you have come to the far side of the wilderness in your soul. For Jesus said that you must die to yourself to live for Him. You may have to suffer for His name. You may have to be forced into the far side of the wilderness to come to know Him and trust Him like never before.

One day those old hands on the Bible will not be able to hold that Bible any longer. One day they will slip. One day the far side of the wilderness, the other side of sunrise, the west side of life, the sunset of life will come and the hands will slip. But Jesus will never let you go. And Jesus Himself will lead you to a new place, not to a barren mountain Horeb, but to Mount Zion, the city of God, the place of peace, the place where you have always wanted to be.

Conclusion

God prepares us for Himself often through a humble vocation, an unexpected relation, and a hard location

These are the lessons that Nina Bergman learned. Nina Bergman is a woman who has struggled with MS and who wrote her reflections on her sufferings in a book she entitled *Comfort from the Cross*. She wrote on how God has used her suffering, her far side of the wilderness, if you would, to bring her close to Jesus. In one place she writes about the road she lives on. It is a gravel road. It is hard and bumpy in places, and the county always has to come with road machines to try and fix it. The rocky, troublesome, old gravel road is just a mess. But that road leads home.⁷

Nina's suffering leads her home every day. And it is true: the way of the Cross leads home. The way of the wilderness leads to a knowledge of God, a fresh experience of God and to trusting God.

You see this is what you must remember: Moses had to find God in the wilderness to lead a people to a land that would bring forth a Savior Jesus Christ. And Jesus went back to that wilderness to defeat the devil, to bring not just a small band of people out of slavery, but to bring the human race out of sin and into the family of God.

⁷ (Bergman, 1990) Cited in *First Quarter Sermons*, King Duncan, Dynamic Preaching, 2007 (accessed through esermons.com on September 8, 2007).

He has brought you to the wilderness because that is where we can best find Him. But he does not lead you there to leave you there. But to get your attention and to call your name. Will you follow Him?

If you will. You too will see that your “far side of the wilderness” is really the road home.

Let us pray.

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Lecture Four

Renewing Your Passion for the Sacred Text

- Prayer
- A review of your commitment to being a minister of the Sacred Word
 - The Necessity of a studied minister of the Word
 - "When Only the Word Will Do," a personal story of commitment to the Word in a time of crisis
 - Necessary to believe that this is, in fact, a "Word from Another World" (2 Tim. 2.9; 2 Tim. 3.16)
 - Necessary because it has been entrusted to ministers to preach (1 Tim. 4.13; 2 Tim. 4.1-3; Titus 1.3)
 - Necessary to bring life and eternal life (2 Tim. 3.15)
 - Necessary to equip for every situation (2 Tim. 3.16-17)
 - Necessary to spend time in that Word (1 Tim. 4.15; 2 Tim. 3.14, 4.2)
 - Necessary to place that Word in your heart and in memory (1 Tim. 4.14)
 - I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalms 119.11
 - Necessary to know how to handle that Word (2 Timothy 2.15)
 - Necessary to trust the sufficiency of the Word (Titus 1.9)
 - Necessary to live the Text in order to lead the People (Titus 2.5)
- Reflections and Responses in Large Group
- Small Group and Prayer
- Break

Sermon Four

The Seven Delightful Blessings of the Word of God in the Believer's Life

Psalm 119.169-176

A Sermon by Dr. Michael A. Milton, President and the James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of Pastoral Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

Introduction to the Reading

We have been looking at the place of the Bible in the life of the believer by expositing selected sections of Psalm 119. We come to the conclusion of this fall series. But the end of the Psalm is the beginning of all blessing for the believer.

This past Fourth of July we got to go to Washington DC and we watched the fireworks. I love fireworks anywhere and especially there, because the finale was spectacular! And this twenty second section of Psalm 119 is the finale! It is a veritable fireworks of blessings that come to us through the Word of God, the Bible.

So listen attentively, read carefully, and receive faithfully the fireworks from heaven, the truths of God from His inerrant and infallible Living Word of Almighty God for our lives today.

Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word! Psalms 119.169

Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your word. Psalms 119.170

My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. Psalms 119.171

My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right. Psalms 119.172

Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. Psalms 119.173

I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. Psalms 119.174

Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me. Psalms 119.175

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments. Psalms 119.176

From this passage I want to bring a Bible message I am calling, "The Delightful Seven-Fold Blessings of the Word of God for the Life of the Believer." First let us pray.

“Lord, in your light we will see light. And some of us need light to see our way through a dark time in our lives. And some of us need your light to see the darkness within us. In each of us, let your light so shine that sin will be exposed, the pathway illuminated, and minds filled with the wisdom of God. For we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Introduction to the Sermon

It is important to have sustenance for your journey.

I was reminded of one form of sustenance on a recent trip my son and I took. We rode up to the Smokey Mountains and went fly fishing. While on this trip, I came across a big sign that advertised “cat-head biscuits.” Now some of you know how much I love “cat-heads.” A cat-head biscuit is just really big biscuit. And the thought of a big, hot fluffy, cat-head biscuit, with a slight brown crust on the top and creamy white on the interior, with a large smear of real butter melting in the middle of it, was just too much for me to bear. We stopped and I went in to get two. I ate mine, and John Michael, had just had breakfast somewhere else, so I said, “Just save it for Momma.” But the first one was so good that I announced that I thought that the other biscuit wouldn’t be any good by the time we would get home to Momma and I ate it too. Now cathead biscuits are important to me. For when I was about to take a long trip, my Aunt Eva would take these big biscuits, and wrap them up in aluminum foil and I would put them in my jacket, to be eaten later on the trip.

We all need sustenance for our journey. Life is either getting more complicated or the reality of 24 hour news shows and the Internet is just showing us what was always there anyway. At any rate, we need sustenance for our journey of life.

I cannot remember a time when there were more shootings in schools. In the span of one week, we have been shocked by the slaughter of 5 Amish girls in a one room school, and the shooting of a principle in rural Wisconsin school, and a drifter who kills his hostage, a 16 year old girl, in Colorado.

I got to tell you, folks, I am needing help. And I think of our children and the Post Christian, increasingly violent society they will have to face. They are going to need food for their journey.

The Psalmist concludes the longest Psalm with a seven fold blessing for those who will open their hearts to believe in His Word.

Let’s look together to see what the Word brings you in your life.

Look at verse 169:

Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word! Psalms 119.169

1. The first blessing of the Word: The Word brings understanding in times of trouble (v. 169)

The Psalmist cries for understanding according to God's Word. God's Word gives insight into the plight of Man and the Power of God. It gives understanding that transcends the wisdom of this world to not only see your situation, but to see through it.

We read that Jesus gave understanding to disciples on the Road to Emmaus:

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,
Luke 24.45

and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should
suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, Luke 24.46

and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be
proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from
Jerusalem. Luke 24.47

This shows that we not only need to study the Scriptures, but to add prayer to our study, that we may understand. And as M'Cheyne tells us:

"When you have a question about the Scriptures, take it to
Jesus. He is the answer."

Paul taught this for He said that all of the promises of God are "amen" and "yes" in Jesus. Embrace the life of our Lord, and you will be given the light of understanding that will help you along your way.

Now look at verse 170:

Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your
word. Psalms 119.170

2. The second blessing of the Word: The Word brings deliverance in places of bondage (170)

The Psalmist cries for deliverance for he was surely in bondage.

Could this have been David writing, as I believe it is, he was surely one who sought God's deliverance: from lions and bears as a boy in the fields with his sheep, as a young man facing Goliath, as a young man facing Saul, a madman jealous of his kingdom. But the greatest bondage David faced was the bondage of his own sin. Someone told me recently that they did not like David, for his sins were so many. And it is true. But God shows us David and Peter and others that we may see ourselves.

And when we see ourselves in the Word we see that we need deliverance:

from ourselves, our unbelief, our fears, our grudges. And the Word made flesh brings that deliverance. Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed
me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal
the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,

and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them
that are bruised, Luke 4.18 KJV

The word brings deliverance by pointing to the Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

3. The third blessing of the Word: The Word brings Singing (171, 172)

My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your
statutes. Psalms 119.171

My tongue will sing of your word, for all your
commandments are right. Psalms 119.172

The Psalmist's tongue cannot keep quiet about what God has done. And I think of Wesley's hymn of the Great Awakening:

“O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing My Great Redeemer's Praise, the glories of my God
and King, the Triumphs of His grace.”

If there is anything we need in our world today it to sing—and not just for anything—but
for the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The other day I was listening to the CD recording from the award winning PBS series by
Ken Burns, *The Civil War*. One of the songs from that era is a song of slaves called, “I
am Climbing Jacob's Ladder:”

We are climbing Jacob's ladder, we are climbing Jacob's
ladder

We are climbing Jacob's ladder, soldiers of the cross

Every rung goes higher and higher, every rung goes higher
and higher

Every rung goes higher and higher, soldiers of the cross

As I listened to the tremendous recording, in the Spiritual genre that conjures up images
of that time, you are amazed that they could sing about climbing higher and higher, while
they lived under bondage. They were, to me, like caged songbirds singing, and singing
for the love of the Lord.

But Christianity is a religion of singing. For though we have been slaves of sin, slaves of
our own passions, yet there is, through faith in Jesus, a dramatic snapping of the chain, an
unshackling of the manacles, and in Jesus we see our freedom, our future, our
righteousness.

4. The fourth blessing of the Word: Word brings help in our time of need (173)

For so we read:

Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your
precepts. Psalms 119.173

The Psalmist seeks the help of the Lord, because He has chosen the precepts of the Lord.

When we receive God's Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, into your life, you have help. You have help for your wounds, help for your questions.

When Paul's journey, directed by God Himself, led him to Rome and to chains for the Gospel, Paul sought to encourage others. And he reminded them this:

For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. Philippians 1.19

What are you facing? Today is a day to turn to God for help. God tells us in Hebrews:

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4.16

This is a great blessing of the Word. The Word of Christ brings help in your time of need.

Now look at verse 174:

I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. Psalms 119.174

5. The fifth blessing of the Word: The Word brings salvation in our seasons of longing (174)

One of the paradoxical things about being a true believer in Jesus is that you begin to know longing like you have never known it before. You never longed for God before you knew Him. But afterward you long for Him and for His salvation. And what the Psalmist is saying is, of course, you do not long to be saved over and over again. But you long for the sanctifying virtues of Christ to reach every part of your life and your world. You long for God to be known in your family. You long for God's salvation to come to your workplace, your school, and your friends. Jesus said those who so long are happy and favored by God:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5.6

And the Word gives us hope that in Jesus our longing will be filled. Salvation is on its way in every area of life. This world is under the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

6. The sixth blessing of the Word: The Word brings Life in the presence of death (175)

I love this verse.

Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me. Psalms 119.175

The Word brings life to the human soul, a life that will never end, and therefore because we praise Him with our lives, our praise goes on forever.

Jesus said:

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6.40

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. John 6.47

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. John 10.28

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. John 17.3

And John gives us the reason for the writing of his Gospel:

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20.31

And this is true of the Bible. The Word that brought a world out of nothing, can bring a new life out of an old dead soul. God's Word can bring life to relationships. God's Word can bring life to broken dreams. God's Word can bring new life to your faith.

Finally, look at verse 176:

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments. Psalms 119.176

7. The seventh blessing of the Word: The Word brings God's seeking us when we go astray (176)

The last section focuses on the practical blessings of the Word of God, in particular for the lamb that has gone astray. For he speaks in the last verse of the last section of the 119th Psalm:

"I have strayed like a lost sheep."

Even those like David can stray.

I have quoted one of my favorite blue grass songs before, by Ron Block, but it merits another quote here:

"I'm not holding on to Jesus, He's a holding on to me."⁸

That is what this Psalm is meaning.

Maybe you are that lost lamb today. Maybe grief has made stop holding on. Maybe confusion about God or His will in your life has made your stop holding on. Maybe there is a child who feels like an outsider, who feels different, lonely, and you are losing your grip.

⁸ See the lyrics for "Holding on to Me" at Ron Block's web site located at <http://www.ronblock.com/music/holdingon.html>.

My beloved, if you have trusted in Him by faith, you are His.

One time, I heard Aunt Eva calling. I had done something wrong and I didn't know if she knew, but when she called I thought I had had it. But she had called me to see if I was alright because she hadn't seen me. She had missed me.

Don't let your guilt over your sin, your remorse, and your sense of unworthiness make you think that He is not looking for you. He is calling you, not to scold you, but to welcome you home again. He has been seeking you,

Conclusion

The Word of God makes a difference. And we have seen the seven fold blessings in this last section of Psalm 119:

Understanding, Deliverance, Singing, Help, Salvation, Life,
and Seeking.

I talked about food for the journey. And I talked about how hard the journey is getting in this post Christian culture of ours.

But maybe there is something to learn. Maybe in the midst of the increasing complexity and hazards of this journey, the Word of God causes us to be a “peculiar people” as Peter puts it—not weird “peculiar” but “distinctive,” “different”—in a word, “holy.” And what if the difference brings attention to God's love.

Differences in theology and our understanding of God's grace notwithstanding, you cannot but be amazed as read the reports of the Amish families who lost their daughters—and of the Amish and Mennonite communities who are bearing this horrific tragedy. The cousin of Mary Liz and Lena Zook, sisters who were killed in the schoolhouse, said this to a reporter:

“We don't understand why this happened...and it's hard to accept. But God has a plan because he allowed this to happen. His ways are so much higher than ours. We try to accept his will and just keep on going. That is why we are able to forgive...”

A Mrs. Rita Rhoads, a midwife in the community who delivered two of the girls slain said this:

“...if you don't live in Jesus, and you suffer the loss of a child...you would be in utter despair, without hope, because you would think of your dead child as a pile of dust.

“But these...children who were killed have gone to heaven. Their families know this. So there may be quiet sobbing at the funerals. But God's peace filled the girls at the time of their death. And God's peace fills their families now. That is why they can forgive. And that is why they will heal.”⁹

⁹ (Geringer, 2006)

The truth of Jesus, the power of the Word, brings forgiveness and works healing. The difference that transfixes the world is not in your clothes or your austere lifestyle. It is the Word of Jesus Christ *lived*. This is the difference.

One of the girls, 13 year old Marian Fisher asked the killer, Charles Carl Roberts IV, to shoot her first, and let the younger children live. He shot her and she died. Then her sister, 11-year-old Barbie, asked the murderer to shoot her next.¹⁰

The woman who brought these girls into the world made one of the most amazing statements:

“God was really present...”

In a one room Amish schoolhouse that became a human slaughterhouse, of little girls no less, “God was really present.”

In the hearts of brokenhearted parents, “God was really present.” And on a Friday afternoon, when the Son of God was abandoned to take the sins of the world...

On that Cross, Jesus spoke: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” and the One who spoke the universe into being out of nothing, spoke a new way of life into being.

Just remember: When there is no other place to go, only the Word will do.

¹⁰ (Reuters, 2006)

References

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Lecture Five

Renewing Your Passion for the Mission of Preaching

- Prayer
- A review of how your preaching is used of God to accomplish His mission in the world
 - "Only two times you ever have to preach in the ministry..."—John Guest (2 Tim. 4.2)
 - Your Preaching is used to give a Biblical-historical-redemptive vision to the people (1 Tim. 4.8, 6.17-19; 2 Tim. 2.10, 4.1, 4.8, 4.18; 1.2, 2.11-15, 3.7)
 - From Genesis to Revelation to a New Heavens and a New Earth
 - From Genesis 3.15-Rev. 21.1-5
 - The mission is accomplished, in great part, through your preaching (1. Tim. 4.6, 10-15;
 -

Expository Preaching

The Marks of Biblical Preaching

(Nehemiah 8:1-6; Acts 13:13-20, 26-41)

Dr. Michael Milton, Senior Minister
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Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text.—R. Albert Mohler



In these Scriptures we find the centrality and importance of proclaiming the Word of God. The place of the Word of God and the proclamation of the Word of God are central if you are going to achieve a vision.

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear

with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground (Nehemiah 8:1-6).

Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13:13-20).

"Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

*'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.'*

And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:

'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'

Therefore He also says in another Psalm:

'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the

law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

Behold, you despisers,
Marvel and perish!
For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though one were to declare it to you” (Acts 13:26-41).

A \$50 Bush in a \$2 Hole

I once purchased a very expensive plant and proceeded to plant it in my yard in Overland Park. I had looked at the picture on the tag before I purchased it from my local nursery. The showy bush was profuse with flowers and healthy green foliage, the perfect specimen for my flowerbed. I planted it and waited and waited. It died. I replaced it. It died again. I brought my dead bush to the nursery owner and declared the picture on the tag to be a phony of the highest order. Like a private investigator, he began to inquire as to the placement of the shrub in my yard, the direction of the sun, and so forth. I had done everything right. Then he said, “Tell me about the hole you dug when you planted it.” “Well, it was...just a hole.” He removed his glasses in a very paternal way and said, “Sir, you have to dig it the right depth, prepare the soil, and treat the soil with the right fertilizer, and mulch the soil.” He seemed very disappointed in me at that point, and then he said, “You can’t put a \$50 plant in a \$2 hole.”

\$50 Worth of God in a \$2 Sermon

We mistakenly expect supernatural, divine transformation to happen from humanly–devised, earth-bound methods. We expect the truth of God to change us when we go to church, but all we get from the pulpit is the mind of a man on a particular subject.

We want guidance on how to live life, how to build a marriage, how to rear our children, how to deal with sorrow, and how to find silence and solace in our souls in the midst of a construction site world. We expect and even demand this from our churches. We rather hope this will come from the pulpit, if we bother to go to church to get it at all. Too often, though, we’re not quite sure what we should be getting in the pulpit. Entertaining, jovial, intellectual all seem to describe the sort of preaching we are looking for.

Preachers are aware of this. We sense that while the psychotherapist gets his clients on couches, we get our clients in pews. They do their work one-on-one, and we do ours publicly and generally. We want it to be a meaningful experience for all of us, so we attend seminars, discover the latest trend in oratorical stylistics and rhetorical wizardry to keep you coming back, to try to help you find God, grow in God, and experience meaning in life.

There are a great many people wanting \$50 worth of God out of a \$2 sermon; that is, there are many in the pulpit and in the pew looking for the church to grow a supernatural life change from an earthly, finite, human source.

John Stott has remarked that “Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity is lost.”¹¹ Robert Rayburn, the founder of Covenant Theological Seminary and Covenant College believed that preaching was so important that it must occupy first place in the studies of seminarians after the study of Christ, Himself. Of the study of preaching, Rayburn stated:

Christ is the only King of your studies, but homiletics is the queen.¹²

D. James Kennedy, in his retiring Moderator’s address at the 1989 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, charged the teaching elders of that Assembly with these words from an old pastor:

Why stoop to be a king...when you’ve been called to preach?¹³

There can be no argument about the fact that God’s plan for building His church involves preaching.

*Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
“Son of man, speak to the children of your people...” (Ezekiel 33:1-2).*

God tells Ezekiel that he is a guard on the wall and when he sees the enemy coming, he is to shout the news. In this the people will be saved, if they heed the Word.

In Romans God makes it clear that preaching is primary in His plan for redemption.

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 unless they are sent? As it is written:

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”
But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:14-17).*

It is right for us to expect and desire a great deal from preaching.

The tag on the plant in Scripture shows that biblical preaching produces healthy, vibrant plants. But, it also shows that the source of the message, the hole from which it grows, must be capable of producing such fruit.

In other words, there must be God in the preaching to get God in the hearing and God in the living.

Acts 13:13-41 further records the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas and John Mark. We learn that John Mark departs, and Paul now takes the lead. The Lord directs them to Antioch at Pisidia in Asia Minor. There they attend a synagogue service and are

¹¹ John R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 15.

¹² Robert G Rayburn, Unpublished class notes, as cited by Bryan Chapell in *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) 17.

¹³ Private notes from the General Assembly of the PCA, Los Angeles, CA, 1989

invited to speak. It is Paul, though, who preaches. From this passage I believe we can identify the marks of biblical preaching. If preaching is so important in communicating God's plan for His people and if we can discern the marks of a biblical message here, then we will have identified a key part of God's blueprint for building His church.

In Acts 13:13-41 we may clearly discover and apply those marks of biblical preaching.

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by Divine Appointment.

We cannot expect preaching that is anointed by God to produce blessings in the lives of the hearers unless the whole thing is under the divine appointment of Almighty God.

In the appointment of a preacher

Paul was led there. The events converged under the hands of God to cause the leader of the synagogue to open up a place for Paul to preach. Paul knew that God had sent him there for such a time as this.

In Acts 13:16 the Scripture says, "Then Paul stood up..."

There must be a preacher who stands up. There must be a man whom God prepares and calls and trains and equips and sends to preach. God did this with Paul, and he has done it with countless others. In any great movement of the church there has been a man who stood and said, God has called me to preach.

Before we ordain a man to the ministry in the PCA, we hear his call to preach. In fact, he usually is required to give this to his session, then his presbytery, later to the seminary, again at licensure, then again at ordination. We are to listen carefully to hear if God is in it. We only want those men whom God has called to preach.

I would no sooner go hear a man who approaches the ministry as a career than I would see a physician or an attorney who practices as a hobby. The stakes are too high and time is too short for me to give my life to someone like that.

When we are witnessing to someone, we need to understand that God has led us to that time also. It is a divine appointment.

In the appointment of a people

God also appoints the people to whom the preacher brings his message. In Acts 13, God sends Paul and Barnabas to this city in Asia Minor to proclaim the gospel. The Lord makes a synagogue available to them and these people had come together for such a time as this.

God moves His people around so that they get what they need to be saved and to grow in the grace and the knowledge of God. You are here today by divine appointment and this message is for you. There should be expectancy in listening to a sermon, expectancy in reading God's Word and expectancy in hearing God's Word read.

In all of it God is sovereign, and in His sovereignty He is accomplishing His perfect will through the appointment of a preacher and a people.

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by a Sense of Mission and Enthusiasm.

Acts 13:16 says that Paul stood up and motioned with his hand. We don't know what this means except to say that he was enthused and animated and intentional about what he was going to do. He had a message from God and he was going to get it out.

Biblical preaching is marked by a sense of mission. Paul had a mission, and the preacher whose life has been changed by God and who has been called by God also has a mission. That sense of mission moves him to go, to look for opportunities to speak, and to address the people with enthusiasm.

It is true that this sense of mission and the enthusiasm that bubbles up from the soul appear differently in different men. Jonathan Edwards is said to have very carefully read his messages, word for word, from a manuscript. Yet, the people heard and many were converted to Christ. Then there was the highly animated—one might even say, theatrical—George Whitefield, the great evangelist. He expressed that mission and that unction from on high in a very different way.

What I am saying from this passage is that if we want supernatural transformation in our lives, and if I, as your pastor, want God to answer my prayers for transformation in your lives and in the lives of our community, it must begin with a sense of mission, and that sense of mission must have changed me first.

Please pray that I get the sermon right between the eyes so I can give it to you. It's only in this way that we can expect God to use the teaching in this church to build strong disciples of Christ.

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by an Appeal to the Scriptures.

I almost hesitate to introduce this because it is the most obvious. Yet, preachers and people alike often miss the blatantly obvious.

The obvious is simply that biblical preaching is marked by an appeal to the Scriptures. It must be grounded in God's Word. This is the force of this passage. Paul did not appeal to anything other than Scripture.

The formers of the Westminster Confession of Faith started, not with the Doctrine of God, but with the Doctrine of Holy Scripture. Likewise, we do not appeal to the minds and the souls of men with naturalistic proofs but with the exposition of the inerrant and infallible Word of God.

“Well,” you say, “what if they don't believe it.” Our answer is that God Himself breathed forth this Word and he breathed the air into human beings and His Spirit can take care of Himself. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said that he defended the Scriptures the way he defended a Lion—he got out of the way and let it go! Beloved, we cannot expect supernatural results in the lives of our people by teaching other than the Word of God.

I once visited an old church where the Bible was chained to the pulpit to prevent it from being stolen by visiting tourists. We, too, must demand that this Book be chained to this

sacred desk and that I be chained to the both of them if we are to have anything of eternal value come from this ministry!

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by the Centrality of Christ.

Now, note Paul's sermon itself.

- ◆ It is marked by a narrative of God's redemptive work in the Old Testament as he deals with God's choosing of Israel, redeeming them out of Egypt, giving them a Promised Land, giving them the prophets, saving them, keeping them.
- ◆ Then, he moves to Jesus Christ and His role as the promised one of God.

At the center of Paul's preaching is Jesus and the cross. He is saying that God's activity in the Old Testament was laying the groundwork for His Anointed One and that the Anointed One has come and is Jesus. Paul underscores Jesus' life and ministry and declares that we are saved by faith in His life lived for us and in his death which paid for our sins. He is saying that this Jesus has been raised from the dead.

I tell my preaching students, If there is no mention of Jesus Christ and the cross in your sermon, then you are preaching a sub-Christian message. You may have a great ethical message, a moving narrative of some portion of Scripture, but for it to be Christian, it must contain the message of Christ!

Beloved, we can expect lives to be changed when Jesus is lifted up. We can expect that children will turn to the Lord, that marriages will be healed, that sorrows will be comforted, that broken hearts will be mended, and that amazing consequences will ensue in our lives when we lift up the King of kings and the Lord of lords!

The demand of Phillip in the Scriptures is our demand each Sunday.

"Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:21b, KJV).

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by the Message of Man's Sinful Condition.

Paul tells these Jews in this synagogue that the Law of Moses could not save them.¹⁴ He says that the only way to be saved is through faith in Jesus. He is telling them that they are sinners and have no ability to save themselves through anything they do.

One of the marks of Biblical preaching is the announcement of sin. There can be no healing without the diagnosis of the problem, and true preaching does this.

Many preachers don't like to do this, but it is absolutely necessary. Jesus came to save us from something, and that something is sin and its terrible consequences, which includes, among other things, God's eternal punishment.

¹⁴ Acts 13:39

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by the Offer of Forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Now, while some preachers don't like to preach judgment, others relish in this aspect of preaching and fail to deal with this sixth mark of preaching: the announcement of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Recently a member of another church and another denomination in this community told me that their pastor is constantly scolding his people in the pulpit. The lady told me, "I just want to say, Hey, we're here! We came! Help us with our lives, feed us more than God's judgment!"

Well, Paul does. He offers forgiveness of sins in this passage and says that everyone who believes in Jesus according to the Scriptures will be saved.

God's love and mercy and forgiveness, all personified in His Son, Jesus, must be offered to people. The love of God in Christ can change lives, can heal, can inspire, and can cause love like that in the lives of others.

Biblical Preaching Is Marked by the Warning to Receive Jesus Christ.

Finally, the seventh mark of preaching is shown here.

- ◆ Jesus Christ is offered as Savior to sinners.
- ◆ Without Christ we face punishment, and this must be made clear.

We announce the sinfulness of man and we announce the love of God in Christ and the new life available to all who will confess Him...but we say it with warning.

So, too, I must preach this passage today and warn you. If you had been one of those passengers who perished on the tragic American Airlines crash in Little Rock, and your soul would have been instantly ushered into the very presence of Almighty God, what would you have said to a holy God? How could you stand in your sins before a God who has declared that He will punish sin? How could you hope to avoid judgment if you have spurned His free offer of acquittal through Jesus Christ?

Beloved, we know neither the day nor the hour when we shall leave this world. I must warn you: Jesus is the only way; turn from your sins, from your resistance to His rule in your life, and follow Him. In a phrase, repent or perish.

Conclusion

The sermon of Paul in Acts 13 provides incontrovertible marks of a God-centered message. In this we can hope for new life and eternal life. In this we can expect God to do supernatural things in our lives.

The great English Puritan Richard Baxter composed one of the greatest sentiments I have ever read about the work of preaching and its supernatural consequences. He is said to have prayed this before his messages:

Lord, let me preach as if never to preach again and as a dying man to dying men.

May every message from this pulpit be preached like that. May every soul leave with this sure truth:

*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10, 11).*

Lecture Six

Renewing Your Passion for the People

- Prayer
- Your preaching must be pastorally driven to focusing on God's purposes for the people before you
 - Your Preaching must be supernaturally charged by your acceptance of God's call to serve the people in His name (2 Tim. 2.10; Titus 1.1)
 - Your preaching must be shaped by your time with the people (you have a ministry of presence with the people) (1 Tim. 1.3)
 - Your preaching must be infused with an optimistic understanding that God can transform people, heal people, and use people for His glory because He did so with you (you identity with the people) (1 Tim. 1.16)
 - Your preaching must confront the cultural and personal sins of the people (out of love you are able to speak truth) (1 Tim. 4.6)
- Reflections and Responses in Large Group
- Small Group and Prayer
- Break

Sermon Six

Seeing Souls Safe in the Arms of Jesus A Vision That Is Out of this World

(1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20)

Dr. Michael A. Milton, Ph.D., President and Professor of Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

...Those that sow and those that reap shall rejoice together, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming¹⁵.—Matthew Henry



I once heard someone say that he really wanted to be a part of something that was greater than himself, something that lifted him up and out of the ordinary, something that was simply “out of this world.”

All of us dream, all of us yearn for meaning and purpose. All of us really want to be part of something that is greater than the sum of self. This morning you have come to the right place, for we will get a glimpse, not only of God’s great vision of the future, but also of the pastoral heart of Paul. And what we see is simply out of this world.

I begin by reading 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, and then I shall read my main text today, 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20. Give attention to the inerrant and infallible Word of the living God.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (http://bible.wikt1.com/mhc/1_thessalonians/2.html).

But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).

Heavenly Mindedness

You have all heard the warning, Beware lest you become so heavenly minded that you're of no earthly good. I don't know who made that up, but I think I understand what they were after. They didn't want Christians being so caught up with heavenly thoughts that they had no practical effect in this present life. But I prefer the statement of C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. He contradicted that quote when he wrote:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in"; aim at earth and you will get neither.¹⁶

I know of churches with great programs, but they are essentially earth-bound. I know of sermons that are homiletically well crafted and even motivating, but they are fundamentally of this world only. Indeed, many in our generation, in seeking to reach out to others with the gospel, feel that a more earthly message would be more appealing to the unchurched. More personally, probably a great many of us have been living out our faith with our eyes to the ground, rather than looking up. I pray to God that our new pastorate together will never be guilty of being too earthly minded to be any heavenly good.

This morning, we are going to see that the Apostle Paul would have agreed with C.S. Lewis. Paul's heavenly mindedness influenced everything he did. And in particular, Paul's vision of a heavenly future caused him to be the kind of pastor he was and the kind of person he was. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul's words show that his present ministry is directly influenced by what he expects in the future.

As we make our way into our future ministry together, God has provided the truths in this passage to keep our vision in line with His vision, to make sure that we have a heavenly vision that will influence the way we conduct our ministry here and now.

Under the weight of difficulty, Paul's vision always came through. As he recounted both the persecution of the Thessalonians ("For you also suffered..."¹⁷) and his own suffering

¹⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1943) 118.

¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 2:14b

(“who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us...”¹⁸), the Apostle Paul burst forth into one of the most passionate expressions in Scripture. The whole of it contains Paul’s vision of his own ministry. It is as if God has provided both pastor and people a glimpse of what a truly great biblical vision should look like. This passage contains two great features: a vision that is out of this world, but also a vision that is a blessing to all.

A Vision That Is Out of this World

As we approach Paul’s vision, we come face to face with the fact that

Such a vision gripped Paul’s heart and soul

Note the language of Paul’s vision. In 1 Thessalonians 2:17, we observe that he “endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.” And in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, the heart of the great apostle pulsates with love for God and love for his people as he poses a question, “For what *is* our hope, our joy, or crown rejoicing? *Is it* not even you...”.

I have heard it said that the greatest sin of a preacher is making the Bible boring. If a man will simply unleash the truth of the Word of God, his listeners will come face-to-face with the most passionate people who have ever lived. Paul must rank at the top of those men with great vision, for he was possessed with a vision of the risen Christ. Paul was possessed with a vision of the growing kingdom of God, and he knew that his every step was moving onward toward the realization of this great vision. He was indeed a part of something greater than himself. And much of his ministry was spent in explaining that vision of the grace of God in Christ and calling people into that vision.

A truly great vision must be a vision that is out of this world because only a vision that is greater than ourselves can occupy our thoughts and dreams for a lifetime of ministry.

One of the greatest transformations in the life of a church occurs when pastor and people begin to see a common vision. It is my work, as I follow Paul, to cast God’s out-of-this-world vision. In church planting, I had to do that sort of vision casting regularly. For example, when I came into a new place, as I did in Overland Park, Kansas, and in Savannah, Georgia, I had to cast a vision of the church.

People would ask me, “How many members do you have?”

I would say, “Millions! We are a part of the glorious kingdom of God which includes Christians from all ages!”

The concrete thinkers would then respond with something like, “But how many people in that million-member kingdom do you pastor?”

Of course, I would have to say, “None!”

But I wanted to cast a vision of the glorious kingdom of God! I wanted to lift the eyes of our people to the reality of the church of Jesus Christ. In the beginning, church plants have to meet in places slightly less glorious than our setting today. In Overland Park, we

¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:15

began in an elementary school gymnasium. I actually preached under the basketball hoop. It was difficult for some people to capture what was happening on Sunday mornings, that we were gathered before the King of kings and Lord of lords in an act of public worship. I will never forget one lady in particular. She was a very notable and influential professional woman in the Kansas City community. But her vision was impaired. She thought we were just a gathering of people meeting in a gym. But God reached down and, through His Word and Spirit, awakened her to a new reality. After a service she told me, “When I came in here today, I wasn’t thrilled about having church in a gym. My little boy even wondered if you were going to try a slam-dunk at the end of your sermon! But, as I heard the call to worship, as I joined in affirming an ancient faith, as we sang hymns being sung by believers all over the world, as I listened to the Scripture read and preached, I was changed. What I really want to say is that I came into a gym, but now I think this place rivals the grandest cathedrals of Europe. God was here, wasn’t He?”

My dear friend, I will commit a grave error in my ministry if I do not ask you to join with me to see this vision that is out of this world. Indeed, some of you may even be thinking that you came in here this morning just to sing and say a few words and listen to a preacher. But I tell you that you are sitting among angels. According to Paul, we are on a grand journey through time that will one day bring us face to face with the King of kings and Lord of lords. If you begin to see that vision, your heart will surely beat with the passion of Paul. Your life will share in this great desire.

When Paul casts this vision of people being caught up in the arms of Jesus, I am led to consider another place in Scripture where Paul works out this vision.

Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15.

In that great resurrection chapter, Paul gives us a telescopic view of God’s great plan that will one day bring us all to a most glorious scene.

In 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, we learn that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus set in motion a chain of events that will conclude with a great Resurrection Day. On that Day, the skies will be rent in twain, and Christ shall return, and the bodies of His people will be resurrected. On that Day, the reign of Jesus Christ, which began at His ascension, will be unrivaled as every other authority, all other pretenders, all evil will be extinguished by the cataclysmic in-breaking of His kingdom. All creation will bow before Him, and as Paul says in Philippians, “...every knee shall bow...and...every tongue...confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord”¹⁹ Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:25 that all enemies will be put under His feet. And then, in the language of heaven, Paul ushers us into the far reaches of eternity. He tells us that as the kingdom comes in its fullness, Christ, who received the kingdom from the Father, will turn the kingdom over once more to the Father that God might be all in all.

I do not claim to understand the scene. It is far too heavenly for my sin-affected mind to take in. But this is the vision of God. And our vision at First Presbyterian Church must be subject to this vision. We have only to hitch our wagon to what God is doing in His universe and be led by His Spirit. We do ourselves no favor, we serve no eternal purpose

¹⁹ Philippians 2:10-12

if we speak only of this world. We must begin with the end in mind; we must speak of heavenly things. We must lift up the vision of a victorious Savior who is alive, having been dead, a Savior who is marching through history toward a day when He will be crowned and exalted and the glorious design of Almighty God will be consummated.

A Vision That Is a Blessing to People Today

Now, I return to C.S. Lewis' thought. I believe from this passage in 1 Thessalonians that such an out-of-this-world vision is not too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good, but rather that such a vision always results in blessing. As I examine this passage, I come to see a second great feature: This is a vision that is a blessing to people today.

I return to Paul's summary of the vision in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

Souls Safe in the Arms of Jesus

I have heard some say that every great man has one consuming vision in his life. This certainly was true of Paul. His life vision may be summarized in this passage. He is saying that the vision of his life is wrapped up in God's vision of His great plan for the ages, and that vision has an earthly feature—he wants his people to be there when Christ comes again. Paul wants his people safe in the arms of Jesus.

My dear friends in Christ, this is my personal vision for my ministry. I want to be about the work of the gospel in my own life so that when Christ comes again, my family is safe in the arms of Jesus. I know of no greater vision for the ones I love. I will thus work and plan and give my life to this great vision. I will pray for them and witness to them and seek to live a life of faith so that, as far as it is possible with me, my family will be there. Like Paul, as your pastor I want you to know that my vision is centered upon God's vision, but that doesn't mean that it is not focused on you. No, my dear friend, in the economy of God's kingdom, it is my work to cast that vision, to inculcate you and your family in that vision, to work and plan and give my life so that on the Day when Christ returns, you are there, safe in the arms of Jesus.

Hindrances

We must be careful. There was satanic opposition to Paul's vision. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul wrote, "Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us." Satan is not interested in preachers who are playing ecclesiastical politics. Satan will not muster the minions of hell against congregations who are playing church. But, for a congregation whose ministry is about the coming kingdom of God in Christ; who is preaching and teaching that Jesus Christ is Lord; who is calling men and women and children to turn from their sins, to be free of the bondage of sin, and to yield their lives to this reigning Christ, there will come opposition. But greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.²⁰ Satan might have hindered Paul, but the presence of the

²⁰ 1 John 4:4

church today is a testimony to the fact that Paul and believers then were more than conquerors.²¹ We shall also be victorious if our vision is God's vision.

Conclusion

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown rejoicing? Is it not even you... (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

This is a heavenly vision, but it is a vision that is a blessing to people today.

Some years ago James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, had a heart attack that nearly took his life. During times like that, a man re-examines all that is important to him and makes the necessary adjustments in his life. Dobson did this. He then called his children to his bedside and told them that all he had ever taught them and done for them meant little if, at the sound of the trumpet and the appearance of Jesus Christ, he would not find them meeting Christ in the air. He tells the story with a quivering lip and a cracking voice when says that he summed up his little charge to them with these words: Be there.

These are the most important words I have for Mae and John Michael and our grown children and their children. It's the most basic desire I have as a pastor. I look forward to being here with you and for you and to leading this great church into our future together—but it is all for naught unless every member of this church is there when Christ comes again.

Will you be there? You can be—but not of your own work or plans. Only through receiving by faith and following by faith the resurrected and living Lord of Life, our Savior Jesus Christ, can you ever hope to enjoy eternal life with God. I pray that if you have never trusted in Christ alone for eternal life, you will do so now.

You may rest assured, on the very truth of God's Word, that as you receive Jesus Christ, you have entered into the very plan of God for the ages. God's plan for your life is that you glorify Him and enjoy Him forever, beginning right now. And He will bring blessing to your life as you come to know the peace of God which passes all understanding, as you come to experience the abundant life which Jesus promises to those who come to Him. Coming to know Christ will bless you today, but the greatest blessings are yet to come. For His vision is truly a vision that is out of this world.

²¹ Romans 8:37

Lecture Seven

Renewing Your Passion for Vocational Holiness: Some Personal Closing Thoughts

- Prayer
- Preaching according to the Scriptures requires a vocational holiness—commitment to doing God’s work God’s way in preaching—and that will bring not only missional fulfillment but deep personal fulfillment.
 - Vocational holiness is exercised in the presence of successful imposters
 - That replace unction with technique
 - That reduce preaching to communication
 - That require preaching to adapt to changing audiences without being faithful to changeless truths
 - This does not mean that the preacher should not
 - Exegete the audience
 - Pray for insight
 - Read
 - Walker Percy when you preach in LA
 - Thomas Wolf when you preach in NC
 - William Faulkner when you preach in MS
 - John Steinbeck when you preach in CA
 - *And Generations* when you preach in Anglo-American twentieth century contexts
 - But trust the sufficiency of Scripture and the ordinary means of grace for your ministry, including faithful preaching as the supernatural means to accomplish supernatural ends
 - Vocational holiness requires
 - Faithfulness to a Biblical spirituality
 - Faithfulness to Biblical portraits of the Preacher²²
 - A Steward—the preacher's proclamation and appeal
 - A Herald—the preacher's message and authority
 - A Witness—The preacher's experience and humility

²² (Stott, 1961)

- A Father—The preacher's love and gentleness
- V.A Servant—The preacher's power and motive.

Sermon Seven

Portrait of a Minister Approved by Christ Jesus

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 4.6-16

It is important to get the right portrait of the right person.

Once upon another life, I was a caricature artist. One day, as I was pursuing my work amidst a gaggle of people all gathered around me at a fall festival, I began to draw the person in front of me. It was a tremendous portrait, if I do say so myself. There was only one small problem: the portrait was of the wrong person! It looked nothing like the person who had paid me for the job!

It is important to get the portrait of a pastor, indeed, the right portrait of a Christian! We may all sorts of ideas about what a pastor should do or shouldn't do, what he should or shouldn't look like.

Once I was getting my haircut and I discerned that the barber was not a Christian, indeed had little or no background in the faith. As we were talking, I felt I had finally broken through, when he said, "May I ask you a question?" "Yes, of course," I said with some hope for a breakthrough! "Do all priests and monks and ministers like you have this little round place that cut out in the back of their heads?" Well, he had the wrong picture of a minister to be sure!

It is important that we get the right picture, the right portrait of what God is calling us to be. This is important for a seminary. This is important for a local church. It is important for your own walk with the Lord.

In 1 Timothy 4.1-5 Paul painted a portrait of apostasy. So he turns to Timothy in 4.6-16 and paints the portrait of faithfulness to resist the apostasy and even to save himself and others from the deadly consequences of such teaching.

And so it is in this context that St. Paul the Apostle instructs Pastor Timothy: "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine."

Because we live in a world of falling away from God, and we, ourselves need to be protected and instructed in truth approved by God and produce ministers (and Christians) approved by God, we need to study this portrait of a minister approved by God.

What are the features of this portrait of the Christ-approved man of God?

A Minister Approved by Christ Jesus is a Disciplined Minister (6-8)

The training that Paul speaks of in verse 9 is in fact "discipline." One of the best books I have read on discipleship is based on this very verse and is called "Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life." Paul is calling for Timothy to be practiced, disciplined, trained as he goes out.

The minister is not naturally given to the life of servanthood and sacrifice and trial that is going on at Ephesus. He must be “trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine.” Moreover we read in verse 7 that he should be “trained in godliness.”

At RTS we call this training outcome “a mind for truth and a heart for God.” This is the Pauline combination of faith, doctrine as well as godliness. But what is clear is that God expects training to be in place for ministers and in fact for all of God’s people, but especially for Ministers of the Gospel.

I once had a young deacon, naive about the ministry and sadly ignorant about the Word of God, tell me, “I see you give a speech a couple a times per week and then get all this vacation time. This sounds like a pretty good gig to me! Where do I sign up?”

Well. In the training of Timothy, Paul trained him in order to bring about God’s kingdom to a most unruly situation. Just look in 1 Timothy and see what this man faced:

Timothy faced false teachers in 1.3-11

- Timothy faced the need to be transparent, like Paul, in laying his life bare before enemies in order that they might become, like Paul, a trophy of God’s grace, in 1.12-17
- Timothy must hold to the faith with a good conscience in spite of hardship and in the presence of others who are slipping away (1.18-20)
- Timothy must address controversies in worship (2)
- Timothy must address the issue of how to integrate faith and politics, in praying for kings and all in authority (2.1-2)
- Timothy must address the issue of the role relationships of men and women in ordained ministry (2.8-15)
- Timothy must teach and oversee the ordination of deacons and elders (3); and just to go up to our text and not go any further...
- Timothy must address the issues of demon possessed false teachers who are deceiving the flock and imposing ungodly rules on the people.

Now. Who wants to apply to be a minister?

The Bible is clear. The work of the Gospel is opposed by Satan, not naturally accepted by the flesh, and resisted by the minister himself, once he comes into contact with the demonic and the anti Christian attitudes of not just the world, but those who bring the world into the Church!

In order to face these perils, we must encourage men who are called to be ministers to submit their lives to other pastor-scholars for an extended period. During this time there will be Pauline-like oversight, instruction, and spiritual formation in order to produce the soldier of the Lord for the battles we face in our own day. For in the training up of ministers, we build up the Church.

But let me ask you: How do you approach your life as a believer? No, you may not be called, but you are a soldier in the army of the Lord as well. The answer drawn from this and many other places in the Word of God is that you too need training. For some of you

that may even mean coming to RTS Charlotte. But for most it means sitting regularly under the preaching of the Word of God right here. It means involvement in a small group or Sunday School class. It means daily Bible study and time with God in His Word. It means seasons of prayer, formulated from the Word itself.

Someone asked me not too long ago, as they were facing a remarkably difficult time in their church, “How can we find discernment and wisdom to make the right decision?” I replied that the answer was not just prayer, but the answer is, “The man who can rise to the occasion to lead in times of trial is the man who has been trained to do so, through time spent with God.”

That is what we are trying to produce at RTS Charlotte. But, my beloved, that is what you are to be as well.

How are you doing in your training in godliness?

The second feature of the portrait of a minister approved by God is this:

A Minister Approved by Christ Jesus is a Diligent Minister (10)

For we read in verse 10, “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

The minister approved by Christ Jesus is one who is not just diligent in keeping busy. He is not diligent in becoming a veritable ringmaster of programs and executive oversight of a religious store. No. This man is diligent in preaching Jesus Christ as the Savior of all people.

It was Lesslie Newbigin who said that if the Church does not exist to fulfill God’s purposes on earth then it ceases to be the Church. And we must say that this passage would lead us to affirm that and to add that if a minister is not toiling and striving to preach Jesus as Savior to the whole world, if a minister is not looking to preach Jesus as Savior to his flock, to his community, and also to the whole world, if he is not a global-minded minister concerned about the purposes of Jesus Christ in the earth, then he ceases to be a minister of Christ.

I am a reserve Army chaplain. Recently I did my duty at my new duty station at the Pentagon. While there I talked to a number of our military leaders. And I heard over and over again that one thing they are concerned about is that our nation seems to forget that we are at war. Things look peaceful because there are no firefights in the streets of New York. And many in the media seem to focus on other things. But the truth is we are at war. Our troops are holding the peace we won in Iraq and battling with Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, and in other parts of the world. They were telling me that we are acting like we are at peace. But we are at war. And thus we must work and pray and support our troops in the battle.

And one of the greatest devices of the devil is to make us believe that we are at peace. But the Bible tells us that we are in a spiritual warfare. And we are all soldiers in the Army of the Lord. Our work is spiritual, not physical. And our weapons are supernatural. And the work of the minister is to toil and strive to preach Jesus as Savior to the world. This is a ministry and a minister and a believer’s work that is approved by God.

A third feature of the portrait approved by God is this:

A Minister Approved by Christ Jesus is a Godly Minister (12)

Nothing could be more plain when we read these words:

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Before Paul gets to doctrine, Paul focuses on life. Because if you can recite the Shorter Catechism backwards or for that matter recite the whole book of Psalms perfectly but you have not love, have not godliness in your speech and in your faith in Jesus and in purity of life, what good is it? Indeed, all of the doctrine in the world is useless without godliness. And so Paul begins with a heart for God.

At RTS we like to say that we want to produce men who indeed have a mind for truth, but also pastors who have a heart for God. And if we have a heart for God we will want to please Him with our very lives.

Recently I spoke to a young woman who is at our seminary to be trained to become a missionary. She wants to minister to Muslims in the middle east. She has come here to get her doctrine, to be trained in the things of God, to learn the Bible’s teachings, to sit under godly pastor-scholars in order to be filled with the truth of Christ’s teachings so that she can bring that teaching to others. But before she did that, she first had a love of Islamic peoples. Love drove her to learning. Love drove her to minister.

And this, my beloved, is the pattern in the Word of God.

“For God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.”

Love led Jesus to come to us. Love of Christ leads us to love others. And love leads us to minister.

And whether you are old or young, eloquent or plain, people will not despise those who come to them in love.

And we must produce pastors who love.

But you also must love Christ and love others in order for them to receive your message.

Here is a fourth feature in Paul’s portrait:

A Minister Approved by Christ Jesus is a Devoted Minister (13-16)

In the last 3 verses of this passage, Paul calls Timothy to “devote yourself,” to “not neglect the gift you have,” to “Practice these things, devote yourself to them,” and to “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching,” and finally to “Persist in this” for in doing so you will save yourself and your hearers.

To be called to the ministry is to be called to a life of devotion. Indeed, to be called to be a Christian is to be called to a life of devotion.

We must all be devoted to the Word of God. For the minister he is to devote himself, as we see here, to the public ministry of the Word, to reading it as well as preaching it. I believe that the minister of the Gospel is to be so involved with the public ministry of the Word in worship that nothing in the service goes outside of his purview.

I was the 12th pastor since 1838 when I served at First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga. One of my predecessors was Dr. James Fowle. And I have heard, by those who sat under his ministry during the late 40s all the way through 1968, that he apparently spent as much time working on the pastoral prayer as he did the sermon. And some said he spent as much time on practicing the reading of the Scriptures as he did in preaching them!

But this is an example of what the Bible is saying. We aim to produce ministers who hear this message. In an age where so many want to be entertained by pastors who have become more talk show host than pastor, we believe that pastors ought to spend time in the Word and lead worship according to the Word of God. And for all of us, as the people of God, where is our focus in worship? Where is our focus in discipleship? It must be in the Bible. Too often preachers give the people what they want. And some of the bizarre things that have come into the church have come because preachers have given in to the strange, television-influenced cravings of our people. Oh that God would raise up a generation of Christians who demand the Word of God in worship. Then would our pastors become all the more encouraged in doing what God has called them to do: to be devoted to the public reading of the Word of God.

We must also be devoted to watching over our own lives. The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And lions like weak prey. And a minister who has lost his way, stopped devoting himself to the Word and to prayer, lost his love of Gospel of grace in his own life, lost the love of his flock, and lost a love of the lost and of seeing the Kingdom of Jesus going to the ends of the earth, is like a wounded gazelle who has strayed from the herd. He is a prime target for the crouched lion to spring at him and rip him to shreds.

And the percentage of ministers who are falling is astounding. It is in fact epidemic. Out of 10,000 new ministers who will matriculate this spring and go out to be ordained, it is likely that over 1,000 of them will fall into sin.

We must devote ourselves to Jesus each and every day. Oh that Christ would take me home to be with Himself rather than let me fall into sin and hurt my wife and son and our children and our seminary and our Church and the Body of Christ. But it doesn't have to be that way—for me or for you—if we devote ourselves to the faith personally and privately each and every day and all through the day. The prayed up preacher, the prayed over believer, is safe from the fiery darts of the devil.

Keep watch over yourselves.

But we must also surely devote ourselves to the teaching of Jesus Christ. It is so easy to preach a “do this and do that” religion rather than the Gospel of God's grace. Remember that this is what is before Timothy and what has precipitated this charge. There were those who were teaching that holiness came from doing certain religious things. Refrain from this and follow this rule. But the Gospel is that nothing can provide the

righteousness we need but the life of Jesus. Nothing can take away our guilt before a holy God but the blood atonement of Jesus Christ at Calvary, where He died as a sacrificial lamb on the Cross. Nothing but faith in Him, this Savior of the World, this Christ Jesus, this divine God-Man, this carpenter from Nazareth who is God, can save us from our sins.

This we preach to others. This we preach to ourselves. And if we persist in doing this—that is if we continue in this doctrine of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone to God’s glory alone—we shall save ourselves and those who hear us.

Recently Dr. Albert Mohler of Southern Seminary wrote:

“The task of preaching often feels like a striving after the wind, and we often sympathize with the preacher in Ecclesiastes who laments, ‘What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted’ (Eccl. 1:15). “Furthermore, this work of preaching has a nasty way of getting one into trouble. It seems that the more faithful one is in preaching, the more trouble one encounters. You preach the Word, you speak the truth of the Scriptures, and the next thing you know, you are on the front page of the newspaper, or sitting in front of a group of agitated deacons or elders; even the youth group is up in arms about whatever you said...“It cannot be a fierce determination alone that strengthens us for the lifelong work of preaching. The stakes are much too high and the perils much too deadly for that. Instead, our perseverance in the task of preaching must be based on God’s promise that He will, by His own power, make the preaching of His Word effective...“We preach, not because we have come to the conclusion that preaching is the most rational or most effective means of reaching the lost, but because God has commanded it--and because He has promised to take that which the world would say is foolishness, and use it to save sinners.”²³

This is the minister approved by God. And I would say, this is the Christian and the congregation approved by God.

²³ Taken from *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Moody Press), as quoted in *Preaching Now*, October 28, 2008.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

1998, Ph.D., Theology and Religious Studies, [The University of Wales, Lampeter, Wales](#); dissertation: “The Application of the Theology of the Westminster Assembly in the Ministry of the Welsh Puritan, Vavasor Powell (1617-1670);” Supervisors: [Canon D.T. William Price](#), Professor of History, University of Wales (Lampeter), Canon of [St. David’s Cathedral](#), and The Rev. Dr. [Noel Gibbard](#), Professor of Church History, [The Evangelical Theological College of Wales](#).

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Ministerial Credentials

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1998-2001 – Organizing Pastor and Senior Pastor, [Kirk O' the Isles](#) (PCA), Savannah, GA

1997-1998, Acting President, Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, FL

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1992-93, Intern for Pastoral Care, Dr. D. James Kennedy, [Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church](#), Fort Lauderdale, FL

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1978-1985, Executive Sales Representative, [Dow Chemical Company](#)

1976-1978, Interpreter, (Top Secret) (Albanian), [US Navy Security Services](#), [USN](#)

Military Service

1992-Present, Chaplain, [US Army Reserves](#)

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[Advent: Zacharias’ Prophetic Song \(Luke 1:67-79\)](#), Christianity.com

Other Periodicals

Numerous sermons and articles in [The Christian Observer](#); news reports and arts and entertainment reviews in [World Magazine](#); editorials published in [Overland Park Sun](#), [The Chattanooga Times Free Press](#); featured in articles about pastoral ministry in [Kansas City Star](#), [Overland Park Sun](#), [Savannah Morning News](#), [Chattanooga Times Free Press](#), [Charlotte Observer](#)

Papers Read for Conferences

[“The Once and Future Calvin”](#) (The Taste of Calvin 500 Conference, Orlando, Florida, June, 2009)

[“Preaching from the Footnotes: The Challenge of Textual Criticism in Expository Preaching”](#) (Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, Rhode Island, November, 2008)

[“Cooperation without Compromise: Faithful Gospel Witness in a Pluralistic Age”](#) (Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington DC, November 2006)

“Historiography and Hope in the Westminster Assembly of Divines, 1643-52” (Westminster Confession of Faith Conference, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2006)

[“So what are you doing here?” The role of the minister of the gospel in hospital visitation, or a theological cure for the crisis in evangelical pastoral care”](#) (Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, CO, November 2001)

[“The Pastoral Predicament of Vavasor Powell and Radical Welsh Puritanism”](#) (Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA, November 1999)

Online Audio and Video Sermon Catalogues

The Call with Mike Milton: An Outreach Ministry of Reformed Theological Seminary, Blogs, Sermons, Resources

[SermonAudio.com/thecallrts](#), select online audio sermons from 1998-present

[Atlantic Coast Communications](#), select online audio and video sermons from 1998-present

[Third Millennium Ministries](#), select sermons from 1998-present

Sermons, lectures, and music are all distributed on [iTunes](#).

Courses Taught

“Introduction to Preaching,” Master of Divinity, [Knox Theological Seminary](#), 1997-98

“Church Planting,” Doctor of Ministry, Knox Theological Seminary, 1998-2002

“Church Planting,” Doctor of Ministry, [Erskine Theological Seminary](#), 1999-2000

“Pastoral Theology: Vocational Holiness in the Pastoral Epistles” Doctor of Ministry, Erskine Theological Seminary, 2000

“Spiritual Formation,” Master of Divinity, Knox Theological Seminary, 1997-98

“Reformed Liturgics,” Master of Divinity, Knox Theological Seminary, 1997-98

[“Church Planting,” Reformed Theological Seminary](#), Monterrey, Mexico Partnership, 2009-

[“Pastoral Ministry,”](#) Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, 2009-

Seminary Committees

Member, Curricula Revision Task Force, Practical Theology sub committee, Knox Theological Seminary, 1997-98

Coordinator, Doctor of Ministry revision task force, Knox Theological Seminary, 1997-98

Chairman, Strategic Planning, Board of Directors of Knox Theological Seminary, 2006-

2008

Doctor of Ministry task force, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2009-

Presidential Search Committee, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, 2009-

Radio and Television

The Redeeming Factor, Founder and Radio Preacher, 1993-1997, Atlantic Coast Communications, Bott Broadcasting, Overland Park, KS

The Knox Seminary Radio Hour (later *The Jerusalem Chamber*), Host and Teacher, WAFG, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 1997-1998

The Living Word, Founder and Radio Preacher, Atlantic Coast Communications, 1998-2001, Savannah, GA

The Morning Worship Service of the First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga (later *Faith for Living* television), Television pastor, WGOW, 2002-2008

Faith for Living, Founder and Radio Preacher, Atlantic Coast Communications, Various stations and markets, 2002-2008

The Call with Mike Milton, Founder and Radio Preacher, Atlantic Coast Communications, Various stations and markets, 2008-

Truths that Transform, [“When You Pray.”](#) 9/2/09

Appearances on local and national television and radio including, Coral Ridge Ministries television, Truths that Transform radio, Prime Time America on Moody Radio, Money Matters on Moody Radio, Compassion Radio, numerous local and regional radio outlets, and quoted in national editorials by writers including such diverse writers as

former presidential candidate and frequent television commentator Mr. Pat Buchanan and fellow seminary president, The Rev. Dr. Al Mohler.

Boards

President and Chairman of the Board, [Faith for Living](#), 2007-2009

Member, Board of Directors, [Knox Theological Seminary](#), 2006-2008

Member, Administrative Committee and Board of Directors, [The Presbyterian Church in America](#), 1998-2003; 2007-

Member, Contributing Board, [Preaching: A Professional Journal for Preachers](#), 2005-

Academic Honors

“The Annual Award for Excellence in Leadership,” Mid America Nazarene University, 1989

“Award in Systematic Theology,” Knox Theological Seminary, 1993

“Award in Preaching,” Knox Theological Seminary, 1993

Other Awards

“Who’s Who in America,” Marquis Who’s Who, 2007-

“Who’s Who in the World,” Marquis Who’s Who, 2008-

Memberships

The Evangelical Theological Society, 1993-

The Reserve Officer Association, 2004-

Civic Associations

Member, Advisory Board, Boy Scouts of America, Chattanooga, TN, 2002-2008

Member, Rotary Club, Downtown Chattanooga, TN, 2002-2008