

# Addresses SBC Forum

(SBC Forum speeches not in booklet were not available at press time.)

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## "The Bells of Liberty"

by Norman Cavender

In the late 1960's I worked in Philadelphia, in an office a few steps from Independence Square. On pleasant summer days I bought lunch from a Philadelphia street vendor and took it to one of the benches under the trees at Independence Hall. I sat, and ate, and pondered the American ideals that flowed from that historic building.

Again and again I went inside Independence Hall to stand and look into the room where visionary American leaders wrestled into being the Constitution of these United States. In my mind I listened to Benjamin Franklin, and James Madison, and George Washington hammering out a nation's dream on an anvil of liberty.

Always before leaving I went to the center of the hall. There, standing against a worn rail, I looked again and again at a symbol of our freedom . . . that great bell which draws its name from words cast on its surface. These words of Leviticus: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." I felt myself looking into the soul of this nation: a message of liberty on a bell of liberty in a hall called "Independence".

I left Philadelphia with a new appreciation for the genius of America. But I also left with a sense of sadness because I never heard the ringing of the Liberty Bell. Oh, how I longed to hear that great voice ring out. But the bell is silent and still.

Shortly after its arrival on these shores, it cracked. The people of Pennsylvania came together and re-cast the bell, and made it whole again. For nearly a century it rang each year on the anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Then, in 1835, it cracked again. This time the American people left it cracked. And so it stands today, silent and still. It remains a symbol of our liberty but it no longer sounds the message of liberty. So I left Philadelphia with sadness, knowing I would never hear the Liberty Bell ring.

Then one day, on a Sunday morning, on a country road, beside a white-framed church, I heard the Liberty Bell ring. It was ringing from the steeple of a Baptist church, pealing a song of liberty to all the land and all the inhabitants thereof.

I suddenly realized I had heard the Liberty Bell ringing all my life . . . ringing from church house and church yard, from Baptist churches on country crossroads and Baptist churches on city squares. For it is the call of liberty, more than any other message, that Baptists have seized and proclaimed, honored and practiced. Baptist bells have always been the bells of liberty.

All that we are as Baptists can be summed up in that word, liberty. It is what we cherish; it is what we preach. The song of liberty is the sound of the living out of Baptist faith.

We preach a message of liberty from the grave and liberty from the fear of the grave. We proclaim liberty from the power of wrong unto the service of right; liberty from the dictates of man, that we might follow

the leadership of God.

We know no denominational kings, we serve no ecclesiastical rulers. We bow no knee to human lords, and tender no part of our conscience to captivity over mind or heart. We demand liberty for ourselves and freely grant liberty to others. In liberty we accept one another, respect one another, and find common room for one another at the point of God's grace and God's own acceptance of each of us.

All we say about our Baptist faith translates into the word "liberty". Priesthood of believers. Soul competency. Autonomy of the local church. The free-church tradition. A free pulpit. And above all, an open Bible in the hands of a free people, each one of us in sacred individual liberty studying for ourselves under guidance of God.

Find a Baptist . . . a *real* Baptist . . . and you will find a believer in liberty. You will find a champion of liberty in both the religious realm and the secular realm. That truth is nowhere better seen than in the experience of that Constitution drafted in Independence Hall.

When the founding fathers finished that document, Rhode Island refused to ratify it because it contained insufficient guarantee of individual liberty. The Baptist spirit planted by Roger Williams in Rhode Island stirred itself and said, No! We will not place conscience under the rule of man; we will have certain liberty, to think for ourselves, speak for ourselves, and believe for ourselves.

The Baptist spirit of liberty spread. North Carolina took its stand on the ground of liberty. Baptists in Virginia, exemplified by a feisty Baptist preacher named John Leland, demanded that their candidate to the first Congress, James Madison, lead the struggle for guaranteed liberty.

So it was that James Madison, after hearing the passionate arguments for liberty by Pastor Leland, attended the first session of the Congress and stood and announced: "Mr. Speaker, I have the honor to present for the consideration of this body certain proposed amendments to the Constitution of the United States".

With that he introduced a set of amendments, before the Constitution had yet been fully ratified. Madison's amendments reflected the Baptist passion for liberty. They were guarantees of freedom: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom for the rights of conscience of all people. They are known to every schoolchild today as The Bill of Rights. They are our national embodiment of the Baptist love for liberty, proclaimed throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants.

Liberty and Baptist mean the same thing. Religious liberty is the cherished gift of the Baptist part of the body of Christ. Deny liberty to others and you reject the Baptist heritage. Renounce liberty and you are no longer Baptist.

Yet today, in 1986, in Atlanta, we Southern Baptists, in the most tragic irony of our history, are struggling for the very existence of liberty within our own fellowship. We face the same decision that confronted those early Americans in Philadelphia. We have to make a choice: whether we will restore our own Liberty Bell, or whether we will leave it cracked, and silent, and still.

The sad truth is, the big bell of liberty in Baptist hall has been broken. Liberty no longer sounds from the platform of Convention office. For the past seven years we have elected presidents who do not believe in liberty among our own people. They believe in fundamentalist domination over the rest of Southern Baptist understanding.

You can test this opinion for yourself by opening your eyes and looking honestly at events today. And please do not be fooled by smiling platform personalities who speak words of love but carry out acts of intolerance and division. I believe it is rank hypocrisy to mouth sugared words about love on a public platform and then practice discrimination against Baptist brother and Baptist sister.

Listen for yourself, and recognize that liberty's voice has fallen silent. There are no platform bells calling for liberty of open and honest Biblical study in individual conscience before God. Instead, you hear silly pro-

nouncements demanding that only one set of opinions of the first 11 chapters of Genesis be tolerated, with no liberty allowed for other views.

You hear no convention messages ringing out authentic freedom of education and inquiry in Baptist colleges and Baptist seminaries. Instead, you hear noisy demands for the removal of professors who do not adopt rigid fundamentalist positions.

You hear no convention bell calling us to respect the liberty of local church decisions in such matters as ordination. Instead, we are hearing thinly veiled threats about voting local churches out of Southern Baptist fellowship and denying room on the mission field for the consciences of all our churches.

There are no notes of liberty for openness and acceptance of all Baptists on Baptist platforms and programs. Freedom of speech does not exist today in the national convention pulpit. Only those persons holding one narrow set of views are invited to speak on the annual convention platform.

You will find no liberty for all the Baptists of all our land in committee appointments and nominations. Look at those for yourself and see again the flagrant stacking and one-sided domination. There is no Baptist liberty to be seen in those committee choices.

That is why we are drawn together in this hall today. Your views have been made unwelcome in current Convention leadership. Your conscience has been pronounced banned and banished, evicted and exiled. If you have not given allegiance to fundamentalist party lines, then your kind of Baptist faith has been judged unwanted in the Baptist family.

And so, Baptists must make a decision this week. Liberty itself is at risk. Abraham Lincoln caught sight of truth when he said, "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God, cannot long retain it."

Perhaps we will vote to restore the Baptist bell of liberty and make it whole again. And practice liberty again, and respect our brother again. Perhaps we will once more choose the kind of leaders we had in the past: leaders who know how to respect all Baptists, accept all Baptists, and include all Baptists in unity and peace. Leaders who know how to be Baptist again.

Or perhaps we will vote again for fundamentalist-minded leaders, and leave the Convention bell broken and silent, as we have for the last seven years. Biblical history teaches us this is a possibility. A majority chose to remain in the captivity of Babylon rather than return to the liberty of a land given them by God. It was only a remnant that chose liberty and kept liberty's dream alive for Israel.

I cannot tell you which road the Baptist people will take this week . . . the road of freedom or the road of no freedom. But I can tell you this, as a certain hope and a surety of faith. *The militant fundamentalist spirit sweeping our Southern Baptist Convention will fail in the end.*

No matter how many convention offices it captures, it can never control the Baptist spirit. No matter how much politics it practices, it can never rule the Baptist conscience. The Baptist spirit is not for barter, the Baptist conscience is not for sale.

Because . . . we are free people. You and I and other Baptists are free individuals under almighty God, today and tomorrow and tomorrow. Fundamentalist domination may claim platforms or classrooms. But it cannot stop Baptist people from thinking, and seeing, and learning for themselves. Fundamentalism cannot halt the movement of Biblical scholarship, no matter how much it opposes scholarship. It cannot stop discoveries of learning and explorations of science, no matter how hard it tries to stop discovery of truth.

This narrow mindset may try to force its opinion upon Biblical interpretation. But it will never be able to shackle the Bible with chains of man's words and definitions. The Bible has been loosed. It is free among us. It is in the hands of the Baptist people. And Baptist people will continue to read it for themselves, and interpret for themselves, and think for themselves, no matter how many would-be Baptist priests or Baptist popes try to stop us.

There is our hope, and faith, and certainty. Even if the large bell of convention office remains split, and still, and dumb the Baptist bells of liberty will never be silenced. Liberty lives among Southern Baptists. It lives in the hearts of Baptist men and Baptist women. It lives in local Baptist churches throughout the land.

We are believers in liberty. We are defenders of liberty. We will remain champions of liberty. And we will ring the bells of liberty. We will ring the bells in our lives. We will ring the bells in our churches. We will ring the bells in our land.

We are Baptist. We will remain Baptist, even if our national convention remains non-Baptist. We will be free in Christ Jesus, free under God, free in the living of our faith, free to the eternity of our days.

And here we take our stand . . . on the blessed ground of Baptist liberty, in the heritage of Baptist freedom. No matter how the winds of fundamentalism blow and rage, we will stand as Baptists and ring the Baptist bells. This is the Baptist message and the Baptist faith, the Baptist song of Christian freedom, throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants.

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## **"Women in Our Southern Baptist Heritage"**

**by Carolyn Weatherford**

You will understand the context from which I speak when I say that while women in the Southern Baptist Convention and Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to Southern Baptist Convention are not synonymous, I view them as such. Although not all women leaders have been WMU members, most of them have been. WMU still is the best training ground for women who are Southern Baptists.

### **WHO WE WERE**

How far back should we go to discover our feminine heritage? For the sake of brevity, I have chosen to go to May 8, 1845, when 328 delegates from Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia gathered in Augusta, Georgia to birth the Southern Baptist Convention. As the constitution was hammered out, the strong voice of William Bullien Johnson led the way. Taking the phrase he had introduced to the organization of the Triennial Convention, he declared for all time the heart of the new convention. He appealed for a "plan by which the energies of the whole Baptist denomination throughout America may be elicited, combined, and directed for the propagation of the gospel." Although the energies of all Southern Baptists have not yet been elicited, combined, and directed toward "giving every person in the world the opportunity to hear the gospel," the desire remains as the controlling passion of Southern Baptists.

When Southern Baptists organized, missionaries serving under the old convention were faced with a choice. Would they be Northern Baptists, or would they be Southern Baptists. J. Lewis Shuck, who had gone to China to begin Baptist work there in 1835, chose Southern Baptists, as did Issachar Jacob Roberts, also in China. The new convention, then, had two missionaries and a foreign field.

Rapidly the foreign mission work expanded, and in the first 18 years of the Southern Baptist Convention, 22 missionaries had gone to China, and 16 had been appointed to the Yorubas in West Africa. Brazil and Japan had been opened by Southern Baptists, and in those 18 years Southern Baptists had given twice as much for mission support as had been given in 31 years with the Triennial Convention.

By the end of the first year, six missionaries were serving in the home land, and within three years the number had grown to 57, valiant missionaries at work in Florida, Texas, and Louisiana. One reported that he was the only ordained minister in Florida in an hour of 450 miles.

Women, along with the men, responded to the missions advance of Southern Baptists. Adoniram Judson was asked if he could use single women in mission work in Burma, and he replied, "Yes, a shipload." The shipload did not come, for though some single women had asked to be sent, they were gently refused. The expressed feeling was that if "God

wants you on the mission fields He will send you a husband who will take you as a helpmate."

In 1849 Harriet A. Baker, of Virginia, dared to pursue appointment. She was endorsed somewhat apologetically, and the announcement was made: "Sister Harriet Baker has gone to this position for the purpose of attempting the establishment of a school for female children. This is an experiment, the beneficial influence of which remains to be tested." Lewis Shuck responded, "Our mission passed a resolution authorizing her to commence a female boarding school on a small scale, but with a view of its gradual enlargement. The general opinion among missionaries seems to be that when a mission has a boarding school for one sex, there should be in the same mission a similar school for the other sex. This is especially desirable in view of future matrimonial connections."

Another mission strategy was developed by Dr. Roswell Graves, who in 1855 went to China, a physician of only 22 years of age. Cut off from his support at home by the Civil War, Dr. Graves had to find help among the Chinese. He employed Bible women, with the thought that one woman, reading the Bible to other women, would multiply Christianity. He wrote enthusiastically to his mother in Baltimore, enlisting her support for the Chinese Bible women.

Within a few years, Mrs. Graves organized "a female missionary prayer meeting for the support of native Bible women belonging to the Canton Mission. Few attended, and the contributions were small and the opposition strong. A friend wrote of Ann Graves: "Every one in advance of their contemporaries must endure some kind of martyrdom. Mrs. Graves' spirit was sorely tried by the coldness and deadness she met, but she was planning better than she knew."

In 1868, her efforts blossomed forth with results. The Southern Baptist Convention met in Baltimore. From all parts of the South, women of influence came to Baltimore with their husbands. Mrs. Graves invited the women to meet her in the basement of the church, and the first general meeting of Southern Baptist Women for Missions was held. Twenty years later, this meeting would have become Woman's Missionary Union.

For 43 years, from 1845 to 1888, women had organized in their churches. And in those difficult years that included the devastating War Between the States, women demonstrated that when missions is at stake, women always have acted out their concern. At the same time, *invisible* is the best descriptive word for women in the infant Southern Baptist Convention. When they dared to speak, they had to be silenced, and in 1885 the women delegates from missionary societies in the churches were refused their seats in the Convention. The constitution was amended to change *members* to *brethren*. Attempting to reassure the brethren, the women asked that two statements be printed in the SBC minutes: (1) Women do not want a separate and independent organization. (2) Women want to work through the churches and to have representation in the SBC, through state conventions, as heretofore.

In 1905, meeting in Kansas City, the women for some reason reaffirmed their intention that "only women are admitted" and "no man will be admitted at any time," as announcements of the WMU meeting at the Central Presbyterian Church were made in local papers. At the Convention that year, however, the first woman to speak at the Convention was Mrs. Minnie Elliott of Phoenix, Arizona. According to newspaper accounts, she rose at the close of devotional exercises to say, "If men give up tobacco and women hats and trains, there will be more money for missions."

Finally, in 1918, 33 years after its earlier decision, the Convention reversed its decision of 1885, replacing *brethren* with *messenger*. Woman's Missionary Union, still in session, extended a vote of appreciation, but that vote was not unanimous!

In 1921, Mrs. W. C. James, president of Woman's Missionary Union, made a stirring speech to the women. She challenged the women's organization to be flexible enough to meet changed conditions. "With all the qualities that make for vitality it would be possible for the Union so to tread in old paths that it might outlive its usefulness and be justly numbered with things of the past. Here is a demand for the highest statesmanship. A knowledge of changing conditions, the foresight to lead rather than be driven, to seize and mold rather than retard progress." With that she reminded the women that the "woman movement has moved with amazing momentum and irresistible power, and the time has come when we must widen yet further the widening work of our WMU."

Mrs. James announced that WMU would bring a recommendation to the SBC that WMU be represented on the Executive Committee with 9 members, and on each of the Boards with 12 members each. She indicated that this was necessary, because while opportunities were widened in denominational activities when women were admitted as messengers, "as yet we have not been given the liberty to function as members of the Convention in any real sense, as serving on committees or what is more

important on the Board of the Convention."

These invisible women of the past persevered. Not theologically trained, they read their Bibles, took God at His word expressed therein, and taught each other and their children. For years without a vote in the Convention, they finally organized their own way of doing the Lord's work. And always there were men of God who encouraged them, knowing that the Father would not disenfranchise half of his children.

In 1929 the first invitation to a woman to address to Southern Baptist Convention was given to Mrs. W. J. Cox, esteemed president of Woman's Missionary Union. And speak she did, despite objections of some of the messengers. In 1940 the WMU officers presented the WMU report to the Southern Baptist Convention, the first time they had been allowed to do so. Until that time, the report was brought by a man representing the women's work committee.

Who we were is best illustrated by the things we did, and what we did reflects how we perceived our role in the Southern Baptist Convention. "Firsts" include these activities recorded in history as begun by women through WMU: (1) First systematic giving approach, mite boxes for missions; (2) first aggressive teaching of the tithe; (3) First use of offering envelopes; (4) first missions curriculum; (5) first church building fund; (6) first support for children of missionaries; (7) first women leaders in the Convention, including Kathleen Mallory and Maude McLure, first women on an SBC program, and Marie Mathis, first woman officer, and Christine Gregory, first first vice-president, both presidents of WMU, SBC; (8) first and only school devoted to the theological education of women.

## WHO WE ARE

Today there is a great deal of debate around the place of women in the church. Why should it be questioned today? Should the Home Mission Board be reprimanded for allowing women to plant churches? Or the Foreign Mission Board for daring to appoint women who are ordained? Why quibble over titles? I dare to say that ordination is not the real question. It certainly is not the Biblical question, since it did not become a part of church ritual until the third century. It is said that Dwight L. Moody was questioned by a new female convert: "Dr. Moody, what can a woman do for Jesus?" He replied with a touch of impatience, "Pray tell, what can she *not* do?"

We are women with knowledge that leads to action. The primary emphasis in Woman's Missionary Union through the years has been missions education. When women know what to do, they do it. Knowledge of the Bible has moved women to become a part of what God is doing in His world. Knowledge of their world has sent them to minister to the hurting, lost people of the world.

Knowledge has put iron in our spines and given us the courage to speak and act. In the critical days of desegregation a home mission study dealt with the issue of racial equality. It was withdrawn from circulation, but Mildred McMurry felt it should be taught. Unofficially she taught *The Long Bridge* across the Convention. For the last 27 years Woman's Missionary Union and the Home Mission Board have developed a literacy missions program that shows the best evangelistic results of anything we do.

Today we are not invisible. We are not silent. Our words are analyzed and our actions evaluated. If we dare say something in support of women we are branded as flaming liberals, feminists who are lobbying for women preachers. If people don't like one direction in which we are moving, they penalize all our teachings. It takes great courage to be a Southern Baptist woman today, but no more courage than it has ever taken to be God's person.

Women's work today is a mission strategy. Commitment to an organization, even one as noble and worthy of Woman's Missionary Union, is not a worthy claim today. Commitment to Christ and to His redemptive work is. And it is this call to commitment that we issue strongly to women.

Ralph Winter, missiologist, Christian friend, spoke to WMU's Executive Board. He drew a picture of missions advance in the United States. Though he is not a Baptist, he commended Southern Baptists for our continued growth in missions, while other major denominations are declining in missions. He said that, without a doubt, Woman's Missionary Union is one reason for this continued growth. He indicated that most women's organizations have broadened their focus, that they no longer have missions as their priority. He cautioned WMU to two commitments: remain true to your missions purpose; reproduce yourselves wherever you go. So . . .

## WHO WE WILL BE

Today's Southern Baptist man and woman are heirs to all that has gone before. Spiritual issue of the courageous women of the past, we stand today at a crossroad. Where will we be tomorrow?

Today's woman is different from her 19th century counterpart. Freed by modern conveniences from the constricting chores of home she finds herself with time and need for employment. No longer limited vocationally she goes to work as an engineer, an attorney, a doctor. Or she remains at home to invest her heart in homemaking and her life in meaningful volunteer activities in her church and community. But, with her sister of old, she can sing: "Because I have been given much I too must give, because of thy great bounty, Lord, each day I live."

Different, yes. Alike, yes. We have the same basic impulses. We are gifted by the same Holy Spirit. We live in a world of overwhelming human need. And there still burns in our hearts the desire to go into all the world . . . to preach the gospel to all the people. Recognizing that missions is proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son, and bearing the witness of the Spirit, we search for, and discover, various ways to be on mission. Encouraged by strong men of faith, we recall the words of John Broadus who almost a hundred years ago said to his militant, missionary daughter Eliza, "Keep on, daughter, the stars in their courses will fight for you."

The women we will be join hearts and hands with the men who will be, as we develop in our day

*organization* that doesn't care who gets the credit. Remembering that we are laborers together with God, some plant, others water, but it always is God who is causing the growth.

*love* that is unconditional. It is easy to talk about loving one another, while we destroy one another with our power struggles and controversies. It is well to hear today the words of the late Dr. J. W. Storer, speaking of the Convention he loved, "Its mission work is financed through the Cooperative Program, but on the basis of voluntary cooperation, not compulsion. In its unity there is diversity, and in its diversity there is unity. In the eyes of the world, the Southern Baptist Convention is the most illogical of all Christian groups. Love is never logical; and that which binds the Southern Baptist Convention into one great body is love—love for Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. Unity of action without centralization of power is the Convention's problem, and it can be solved only by the Holy Spirit's guidance. In the development of the organization, stages are reached, when a higher principle of life reacts upon the accumulated results of previous processes, thereby lifting it to a higher plane whence may be unfolded new potentialities."

*courage* that reminds us that the battle for missions will be won or lost, in this generation, in the churches.

*servanthood* that will draw people to the Christ we serve. We cannot have royalty and servanthood. The ministering Christian of tomorrow must follow the example of her Savior, who "always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant . . . He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death." (Philippians 2:6-8 TEV)

I saw the nature of a servant in the life of a missionary in India. While traveling there in February I became violently, desperately ill. Branded "Delhi belly," the illness was soon over, but it devastated me. I was in a missionary home when it hit. Completely embarrassed by the mess I made, I was too sick to really care. The missionary encouraged me, and assured me that the servant was accustomed to cleaning up after sick people, that she was paid to do so. I watched as the servant did just that, ministering to my needs and cleaning the house. We left that home to go to another, where leaders of WMU for that part of India were gathered. I looked at the food and another wave of illness overcame me. In this home there was no servant. There was no western toilet. As I made another mess, that missionary, not a servant, took the nature of a servant. She wiped my face with a cool towel. She dipped the water to flush the toilet. She cleaned up the mess.

*The Southern Woman, from Pedestal to Politics*, traces the development of the southern lady. She had to get off her pedestal to enter the real world. And while this is uncomfortable, it is necessary. We cannot be waited on, hand and foot, while we are waiting on others. And the Christian woman of today, committed to Christ, aware of His work in the world, accepting her spiritual gifts, will never go back.

This is our heritage. This is our promise.

**For release after 2:45 pm, Monday, June 9, 1986**

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## "The Greatness of God"

by Bill Sherman

TEXT: Psalm 145:3

CONTEXT: Psalm 145

INTRODUCTION: It is Sydney Lanier in "The Marshes of Glynn" who writes: "As the marsh hen secretly builds her nest upon the watery sod, come, O Man, and build your life upon the greatness of God." The Greatness of God is the theme of Psalm 145. In a marvelous doxology the writer speaks of God's majesty and grandeur. In fact, the greatness of God is "unsearchable" vs. 3—beyond man's ability to comprehend. Though we cannot fathom the full nature of God's greatness because of the limitations of our finitude, we can catch snapshots, vignettes, evidences of God's greatness in "his mighty acts," v. 4 and "his wondrous works," vs. 5.

### I. GOD'S GREATNESS IS MANIFEST IN HIS CREATION OF OUR UNIVERSE

In another familiar Psalm the scripture declares "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." Ps. 19:1. Little did the psalmist realize what volumes the universe speaks concerning the greatness of our God. On a clear night your natural eye can see 6,000 stars. They are a part of the cluster of stars known as the Milky Way galaxy. However, our Milky Way galaxy has a total of over 100 billion stars in addition to the 6,000 that we can see. Our solar system, our sun, and nine planets are a part of the Milky Way galaxy. How large is the Milky Way galaxy? Well, our sun and nine planets rotate in our galaxy and it takes 200 million years to complete one orbit. Not only does our galaxy have 100 billion stars in it, on out in space there are 100 billion other galaxies, each having 100 billion stars.

How vast is our universe which God in his greatness has made? If you were to take a single page of your Bible and have it represent the distance between our earth and the sun—93 million miles—it would take a stack of pages 31 million miles high to picture the vastness of the universe our God has made. Light travels 6 trillion miles in a light year. The closest constellation to our earth is 26 light years away or 156 trillion miles away. And our universe is expanding. God's wondrous works are manifest in the quasars, the farthest bodies on the edge of our universe, which emit enough electrical energy every second to care for all the electrical needs of planet earth for years. God's greatness is shown in the Crab Nebulae which exploded in 1054 and has been expanding into space for over 900 years at the rate of 900 miles per second. God's mighty acts are seen in the Black Holes where the pull of gravity is so great that a teaspoonful of matter weighs the same as 100 million elephants.

As the Ninth Symphony speaks of the greatness of Beethoven, as the statue of Moses speaks of the greatness of Michelangelo, as the painting of the Last Supper speaks of the greatness of Leonardo de Vinci, so the universe speaks of the greatness of our God.

### II. GOD'S GREATNESS IS SEEN IN HIS LORDSHIP OF TIME

God says "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Rev. 22:13. Little can we fathom how much is being said here until we see God's hand in the creation and direction of time. Our planet has been in existence some 4½ billion years. It was begun by God and it shall be ended by God. Few of us can comprehend 4½ billion years.

How can we get a handle on it? Let's use our 24 hour day as a measuring stick. One day, let's say, will illustrate the entire expanse of time our world has been in existence. This means that each hour of this one day will represent 180 million years. It means that each minute will represent 3 million years. It means that each second will be 50,000 years. This means that Christ lived 1/25th of one second ago in God's vast timetable and Martin Luther nailed his 95 Thesis on the door in Wittenburg 1/100th of a second ago.

What does this mean? That our God is greater than we can think, He is vaster in his view of time than we can fathom. Did not God say in Isaiah "For my ways are not your ways, neither my thoughts your thoughts . . . for as the heavens are higher than the earth, are not my thoughts higher than your thoughts and my ways, your ways." Is. 55:8.

### III. GOD'S GREATNESS IS SEEN IN THE CREATION OF MAN-KIND

Genesis tells us that "God created man and breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living being." Gen. 1:27. There is much more here than meets the eyes and the ears. God's creation of your body is a marvelous miracle that speaks of the "grandeur of man and the grandeur of God."

Your body is an architectural masterpiece. It has 206 bones and 650 muscles. Your brain is endowed with such incredible abilities that it would take 50 Sears' Twin Towers (buildings over 100 stories tall), crammed full of computers from basement to the top floor to do what your God-given brain can do.

Toscani memorized 136 symphonies and 100 operas and could stand on the conductor's platform and cue in each section of the orchestra, woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion without a score. Your eye focuses 100,000 times a day. Your nose can differentiate 10,000 smells. God endowed your ears with such miraculous sonar that if you were to be in a room that is perfectly quiet, you could hear the blood surging through your arteries and veins.

Your heart will beat over 100,000 times today and over 2½ billion times if you live to be 70 years old. God created your vascular system so miraculously that if you were to take all of your arteries, veins, and capillaries and place them into a single string they would go one and a half times around our earth at the equator—60,000 miles. God's wondrous works are also seen in the pulmonary system. You breathe 20,000 times a day and 515 million times in 70 years.

You will breathe 13½ million cubic feet of air in your 70 years, or enough air to fill 64 Goodyear blimps (in the case of Baptist preachers, throw in 4 or 5 more blimps). As the air enters your nose and passes into your lungs it enters into 30,000 bronchial tubes and into 300 million air sacs. Indeed we "are fearfully and wonderfully made." "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised," and his greatness is manifest in the creation of mankind.

### IV. GOD'S GREATNESS IS ALSO MANIFEST IN HIS MIGHTY ACTS IN HISTORY

George Buttrick pictures history as a framework of time and space in which the mighty acts of God are manifest. He also portrays history as a dialogue between man and God in the language of events. Ever feel like throwing in the sponge? Ever feel like chucking it all? Is "good" going to win? Will God prevail? In the language of events the greatness of our God dispels the pessimism of our chrome-plated chaos. Our world is not the insane asylum of the universe. Because He lives we can not only face tomorrow, but ultimately know that "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Why? Because of God's mighty acts in history.

In 701 BC, Sennacherib swept down upon the Southern Kingdom which appeared virtually defenseless to the Assyrian king. How could they stand up to his chariots, his numbers? What Sennacherib did not know was that our mighty God is operative in history. We are not alone then or now. In the words of the poet:

"The Assyrian swept down like a wolf to the fold with their chariots all beaming with purple and gold. And the sheen of their spears like the stars on the sea as the blue wave rolls deeply on blue Galilee. Like the leaves of the forests when summer is green, that hosts and their chariots at sunset were seen; like the leaves of the forests when autumn hath blown, that hosts on the morrow lay scattered and strewn. For the angel of death spread his wings in a blast, and breathed in the face of the foes as they passed . . . And there lay the warrior, distorted and pale with the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail . . . The tents were all silent, the banners alone; the lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown; for the widows of Asher are loud in their wail. And the idols are broken in the temple of Baal, for the might of the gentile, unsmote by the sword hath melted like snow at the glance of the Lord."

For the Lord, our God, is a great God and his greatness is manifest in his mighty acts in history.

### V. GOD'S GREATNESS IS MARVELOUSLY MANIFESTED IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD

The silhouette of three crosses on the Syrian sky tells of God's ultimate greatness. Jesus comes, lives, cares, loves, heals, helps, dies, and saves. In God's mighty power He is resurrected even as Paul would thunder "that I may know Him and the power of his resurrection." J. Wilbur Chapman said it well concerning God's greatness as shown in the Son: "I know a world that is lost in sin where men oft faint and tire; but I know a name, a precious name, that can set the world on fire. I know a soul that is steeped in sin that no man's art can cure; but I know a name, a precious

name that can make that soul all pure. I know a life that is lost to God, bound down by the things of earth; but I know a name, a precious name, that can give that life new birth." As Johann Schwedler would say, "Ask ye what great thing I know that delights and stirs me so? What the high reward I win? Whose the name I glory in? Jesus Christ, the crucified."

In the riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, Bobby Mitchell and Charlie Taylor were walking through the streets of Washington D.C. Bobby was a new Christian. He and Charlie had been asked to go into the anarchy of the community and bring about some order and calm. He said things were really out of hand. Folks were stealing all over the place. A teenage boy came walking out of a grocery store with his arms full of loot. Bobby said he had had it with what he saw so he stopped the boy. He said, "Kid, take that stuff back. That's stealing. It isn't right. We gotta stop all of this. Take it back!"

He said the boy looked at him like he was crazy. A soul brother telling him not to help himself. Bobby then said the boy began to ease away from him as he stared. He then wheeled on his heel and ran up an alley and yelled over his shoulder as he ran—"They killed my man, they killed my man!" (referring to the murder of Martin Luther King). Bobby then stopped and turned, and said to Charlie Taylor: "You know, Charlie, two thousand years ago they killed my Man, and because He died for me, I now have a brand new life." God's greatness is marvellously manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

### VI. GOD'S GREATNESS COMES INTO OUR LIVES IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Paul speaks of the mighty power of God in Galatians 2:20 when he says: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" Gal. 2:20. In the power of God's Spirit we are to reflect God's greatness in a world that's lost its way.

Patrick Goodland pastors a Baptist Church in England. He serves at Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire. Several years ago he headed a ministry expedition to Ethiopia. British Baptists were helping the Ethiopians by preaching Jesus and digging wells out in the boondocks. Pat said it was incredibly hot. They had had tons of red tape to wade through in the capital and when they finally arrived on location the living accommodations were tough. After two days of hard labor the governor of the province, a Muslim, drove up to the scene. He marvelled at these westerners doing this work for his people in such impossible conditions.

Patrick said the governor stared at the Christians and said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you coming out here and working like dogs for my people?" The governor then paused, Pat said, and pensively said, "Oh, I know why! You are the Jesus men, aren't you? I know—you *have* to be the Jesus men." May God's greatness so fill our lives through Jesus Christ that all men will see the Spirit working in us and say, "We know—you are the Jesus people."

CONCLUSION: "As the marsh hen builds her nest upon the watery sod: behold, we will build our lives upon the greatness of God."