

CHARTING OUR COURSE BY THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

President's Address
1998 Southern Baptist Convention
Dr. Thomas D. Elliff

Text: Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever."

INTRODUCTION

This morning I want to address a matter of crucial significance...a matter upon which our very future as Southern Baptists rests...a matter which will define the scope of our future effectiveness, our usefulness to the Lord. I want to speak on the importance of "Charting Our Course By The Unchanging Christ."

My text is the same as the theme text for this convention: "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever."

Every ship at sea is constantly subject to forces which would either drive it or draw it off course. Shifting winds, strong currents, the powerful energy of the tides must constantly be taken into consideration if a ship is to remain on course to its intended destination. In Zion's fleet our Southern Baptist ship is constantly subject to similar forces. The blowing winds of cultural change, currents of popular, humanistic thought, strong and forceful theological tides...all are relentlessly working against the course God has established for us.

It is to God alone that we must give thanks for consistently raising up among us voices of warning, voices which have sounded the alarm when Southern Baptists began to stray from a course which was soundly Christ-centered, Word-driven, missions-focused and Spirit-empowered. And it is God alone who must be praised for putting it in the hearts of the vast majority of Southern Baptists to rally to these calls often sounded in our history and to rescue our ship from peril. Let me give you some examples:

1. When Southern Baptists first began to take seriously the awesome prospect of taking the Gospel to the whole world the popular trend was to "societal missions." This approach encouraged churches to send their missionaries, or their missions dollars, through a veritable smorgasbord of societies, some proven, some not; some theologically sound, some not; some with careful doctrinal screening, some not; some whose needs all but eliminated the ability of smaller churches to participate; some which minimized their accountability to local churches; others which required that missionaries return frequently from the field to raise all or part of their financial support.

Those were the popular tides blowing us toward the rocks of ineffectiveness. But before we could be swept off by these tides, our convention said, "There must

be a better way! A way that enables us all to participate, a way that insures accountability, doctrinal integrity, a way that provides missionaries with the best support possible so they may focus on the harvest. And thus were born the greatest evangelical missions sending agencies in the history of Christendom...supported by a Bible-centered plan which has an unexciting name but deserves our most enthusiastic and sacrificial support...the Cooperative Program.

2. Here is another example: Our Southern Baptist churches have the opportunity to fill their pastoral and staff positions with the finest, most capable, well-trained and God-called ministers to be found anywhere. Many of these have received their training at our Southern Baptist seminaries...also supported by our Cooperative Program giving. These schools are today the largest of their kind in the world. They are the envy of other denominations, many of which send their brightest students our way. But, over the years, these schools themselves have not been unbattered by the storms of Modernism and post-Modernism, lulled into the doldrums of Neo-orthodoxy, or pulled by the rip-tides of Universalism.

But within the hold of the Southern Baptist ship there arose a rumbling of discontent, a restlessness which some sought to ignore and at which others scoffed. And while some labeled it as a mutinous "takeover" by a few malcontents, Southern Baptists as a whole saw the necessity of a God-ordained "take back" so that the course would once again be established on the inerrant and infallible Word of the living God. We now have every right to expect that those who come to us from our seminaries to be God-called, missions-sensitive, theologically-sound, fire-baptized soul-winners. Our seminary presidents guide those institutions in the spirit of B.H. Carroll who, on his deathbed, said to L.R. Scarborough, "Lee, keep the seminary lashed to the book."

3. Another example: Cultural forces are constantly seeking to invade and erode the structure of this ship of Zion. Under the guise of "openness" and "tolerance" the traditional, biblically-supported definitions of the family, marriage, the roles of men and women in the home are taking a beating in the media, by entertainment giants and by some of our highest officials, both elected and appointed. For many of these compromise, concession and greed rule the day. To them, life, especially the life of the unborn or the aged, is cheap and expendable. Many denominations, having long ago lost their theological bearings, have remained silent during these days when there is desperate need for moral direction.

But Southern Baptists have repeatedly refused to be intimidated by any entity which espouses a lifestyle contrary to the scripture. We refuse to be muzzled by a misinterpretation of the First Amendment while our nation needs a word from God. Now, at this convention, we have the opportunity, while the world looks on, to say "Here is how the Bible defines the family...and we believe our Heavenly Father knows best!"

4. One final example: It is no secret that great ships can become

encumbered by the encrustation of barnacles...parasitic growths which attach themselves to the under structure. Unable to stand the scrutiny of light and with no power of their own they move through the water at the expense of the ship. Imperceptibly, yet certainly, their growth hinders the speed and maneuverability of the ship. Wisdom demands that, periodically, these barnacles be displaced.

Our Southern Baptist ship has not been without similar problems in the past. You see, it takes character to found and forward such a grand idea as the Southern Baptist Convention. How we must thank God for those who have led us forward when at risk was all they held dear. With no assurance of a secure pulpit, no promise of a golden parachute, no certainty of benefits beyond today, these men stood, flat-footed, iron-backed and broad-shouldered, speaking with such prophetic voice that the ships very hull reverberated with their thunder. That thunder shook off the barnacles of parasitic unions, conferences and fellowships...no matter how Baptist or Cooperative they might have deemed themselves...barnacles which debilitated and diminished the power of the convention they held dear. I believe for the cause of Christ, we need to pray for more of that prophetic thunder.

These are only a few of the instances when Southern Baptists might have drifted off course. Apart from God's intervention we might today be relegated to the growing list of denominational "has beens." But what must we do to insure that such a fate is not our's in the future? What must we do if we are to become not less but more effective in the next millennium?

For two years now I have been honored to serve as your president. Now, as these years come to a close, God demands of me that I deliver this singular message: Our only hope for the future is in CHARTING OUR COURSE BY THE UNCHANGING CHRIST! Jesus must be to us as the pole star is to the ocean navigator...that fixed unmovable point of reference by which all we do is judged. We can always know where we, and where we are supposed to be...as long as we know where He is.

This is what is meant by the exclamatory insertion in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever!" But what does it mean to chart our course by the unchanging Christ? How can He remain our constant point of reference? To that question I want to submit the following observations. I challenge you to listen carefully because I believe the Lord will judge you by your response.

I. WE MUST EMPHASIZE THE "BEAUTY OF HOLINESS."

"Holiness" is the forgotten pursuit of this generation. We attend conferences on methods...we are infatuated with the signals sent to us by the most recent demographic study...In many churches bath water, bathtub and the baby in the manger have been thrown out the window in an attempt to become culturally sensitive. But how many of us would stand in line to register for a conference on "holiness?"

Of course we need to speak in a language our culture understands. But that is no excuse for seasoning our sermons with "Saturday Night Live" or the evening fare from Hell's Box Office instead of prayer and travail for the souls of men. The lack of personal holiness will keep any of us from developing personal intimacy with Christ.

1. JESUS IS PERSONIFIED BY HIS HOLINESS.

"Jesus Christ is the same" proclaims our text in an ascription to His holiness. He is Holy! Not just morally perfect...but perfect in his motives, perfect in His manner, perfect in His methods. He never changes because perfect cannot become more perfect. All He is and does is Holy.

Yesterday He said "Be holy...for I am Holy" (Lev.9:44). Today we are reminded that in Christ we are built up into a "...holy temple in the Lord" (Eph.2:21). Forever, creatures encircle His throne, without rest, crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy!" Or as a friend of mine once said, they are crying "Lord, you are right! You are right! You are always right!"

2. JESUS HAS PROVIDED FOR YOUR HOLINESS.

He has made holiness:

POSSIBLE through SALVATION.

"Old things are passed away...behold all things become new."

PRACTICAL through SANCTIFICATION.

"He works within us both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

PERMANENT through GLORIFICATION.

In heaven there will be "none that defiles."

3. JESUS WANTS YOU TO PURSUE HOLINESS.

Isn't this what the Psalmist meant when he penned "Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness." (Psalm 29:2)? And isn't it a requirement for intimacy with Christ? "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully." (Psalm 24:4).

The lack of Holiness will render us absolutely powerless regardless of our personal charisma, human energy, understanding of the culture, or methodological expertise. "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear." (Is. 59:1-2).

There is a move among us, a laudable one, to encourage ministers who

have been brought low by unthinking and uncaring churches. But what of the churches which have suffered interminable grief as their leaders have self-destructed in the throes of personal immorality? How weakened is the Body of Christ by the malignancy of secret sin in both pulpit and pew?

How often has the church been reduced to making casual suggestions to a sin-sick society instead of thundering "Thus saith the Lord" because it is only the righteous who are bold as a lion? And how many of God's prophets are reduced to feeding a church on the Pabulum of positive thinking because they are too embarrassed to preach before their own wives and children who know they are preaching about a standard they do not practice at home?

One of the "woes" the Lord hurled at the Pharisees was in regard to the issue of personal holiness. "You are as whited sepulchers," He said, "which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). In other words, "You go to more trouble to camouflage your spiritual corruption than it would take to confess and correct it!"

I heard of a broken-hearted father who returned to a street intersection where only hours earlier his son had been struck by a car and killed. Standing over a pool of his son's blood he waved his coat into the headlights of oncoming vehicles. "Please don't drive through my son's blood," he wept, "This is my boy's blood! Don't just drive through it!"

Can't you hear the voice of the heavenly Father, "Oh! Southern Baptists, don't drive through my Son's blood! He died to overcome that sin you are racing to enjoy. Oh! Don't drive through my Son's blood!"

If we are to avoid the sinkholes which have destroyed other denominations...not to mention the lives of many leaders...we must heed our Lord's call to holiness. We must deliberately pursue a life that is in the world but not of the world. Our Southern Baptist Convention must be known by its understanding and emphasis on the beauty of holiness!

II. WE MUST MOBILIZE FOR A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST.

If "holiness" describes our Lord's character, then "harvest" speaks of His cause. The text reminds us that the One who is the same yesterday, today and forever is none other than Jesus Christ whose very name means "Jehovah is Salvation." He is not a mere man who through human effort became some minor god among a plethora of others. Jesus is Holy God who became man for this cause...our redemption.

Jesus had the Gospel harvest in mind even before the world was created. Looking into eternity past we see Him as "...the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Looking into eternity future we see that His wounds alone in

heaven will be an eternal reminder that "...for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2)

1. WE ARE COMMISSIONED.

Jesus was perfectly clear regarding His mission on earth. "I have come," he said. "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11). He had a harvest in mind. He is equally clear in the fact that we are to be co-laborers with Him in this harvest. "As the Father hath sent me," he said to His followers, "even so send I you" (John 20:21). His mission is to be ours...we are co-missioned.

During the days of crossover prior to this convention, why did I take time to go visiting? Why is it that I shared the Gospel with a man who works within walking distance of this convention center and rejoiced as he gave his heart to Christ? Why did thousands of others do the same in this concentrated effort of evangelizing? The answer is simple...we are commissioned by our Lord.

The bottom line of a commission is that it removes "having a burden for the lost" as our primary reason for witnessing. A "burden" is subjective. What distresses me may not trouble you in the least. Witnessing, on the other hand is "objective." It is a matter of obedience. Of course we witness out of burden for the lost, the terrible plight of the unredeemed. But we are to witness even if the burden is not sensed at the moment.

Jesus said, "I am here because the Father sent me. Now, in that same manner I want you to go and make disciples. Remember that the evidence of your love for me is that you keep my commandments. And remember this also, do not call me your Lord if you are unwilling to do the things I say unto you." We are commissioned, now ..

2. WE MUST BE COMMITTED...passionately committed, to the fulfilling of the commission.

Fulfilling His mission required Christ's all. We even speak of the events surrounding his crucifixion as His "passion." Somewhere along the way we have forgotten that the servant is not greater than the Master. "Passionate" is a word commonly used to describe the most recent recruit in a multi-level sales organization...but it is rarely used to describe our involvement in the Great Commission.

One of my life's most painful moments occurred only a few years after coming to First Southern as pastor. One of our fine deacons asked if I would give him a ride home after a deacon's meeting one Sunday evening. I could sense something was heavy on his heart and, pulling into his drive, asked if there was something he wanted to share with me.

"Well," he said, "there is something I need to tell you. My wife and I are leaving the church." He then proceeded to tell me that he was growing weary with the emphasis on evangelizing which is so much a part of the atmosphere in our church. "I'm tired of hearing how important it is to share the Gospel," he sighed. Then he told me about some conferences he had attended and about his new-found conclusion that witnessing wasn't our business anyway.

I asked if I could tell him about a recent encounter with a man and his wife while speaking in another state. I told him how happy the man had been to meet the pastor of First Southern. "You know," he said, "My wife and I got saved at First Southern." He then proceeded to tell me a remarkable story of God's grace. He told how he and his wife were passing through our area several years earlier and decided to attend a Sunday evening worship at our church.

"The people were incredibly friendly" he said, "and one couple insisted we get ice cream with them after church. One thing led to another and they finally talked us into canceling our motel reservation and spending the night in their home. When we got to their house, the husband related how two years earlier God had convicted him he was not truly saved. Then he made me listen to a taped message of a crusade sermon". Listening to that sermon, they had fallen under conviction and like their hosts received Christ

I then turned to this deacon and said, I wanted to tell you this story, because the man then told me that you were his host that evening and he wanted me to convey his regards and eternal gratitude. You see, here was a man who wanted to be involved in church but was no longer passionately committed to the harvest.

People who are passionately committed to the harvest are constantly going, helping others to go, or letting go of loved ones so they also may answer the call for laborers in the harvest.

But witness the more common attitude: Junior receives notice that upon graduation he will be immediately employed by a major firm and assigned to an overseas position. His parents are elated at the obvious confirmation of their long-held belief that he is among the brightest and best. They can't wait to share the big news with friends and relatives.

But something happens which causes their elation to dissolve in tears and questions. Junior comes home from a church camp and announces that God has called him to the mission field instead. "Are you sure?" press the disappointed parents. "Will it be safe? What are the benefits? Isn't this a waste of a good education?"

Southern Baptists have more career missionaries on the field in North America and around the world than any other evangelical fellowship in the world.

We have three thousand applicants in the wings for the IMB alone. But even if ten thousand career missionaries were on the field it would represent less than one tenth of one percent of our Southern Baptist constituency on the mission field in career positions. That's hardly the kind of statistic commensurate with the words "passionate commitment."

We are celebrating the greatest Lottie Moon offering in history... over \$100 million for foreign missions. But considering the \$550 million which Southern Baptist churches spent last year in the US on principle and interest for building payments we must ask: Are we really passionately committed to the harvest?

I have an idea...why don't we encourage all our missionaries to raise their support? I'll just let that question sink in a few moments for effect. Now I'm not suggesting that they raise their financial support. Our Cooperative Program giving keeps them on the field while others often must return to tap their financial wells. But what if our missionaries were required to raise a specific level of prayer support before going to the field.

Many already do this...but just think with me for a moment. The applicant receives notice that, before continuing in the process he or she must have at least ten people committed to praying for one hour each week (That's less than ten minutes a day). Then, as the process continues, the prayer requirement increases until, at the time of appointment, each missionary has at least one hundred people praying one hour each week.

Talk about accountability! The missionary keeps them informed...they keep praying. The time, effort and resources required to communicate with one hundred prayer warriors is more than compensated by the spiritual fire attending the work on the field. Five thousand missionaries would generate a half million hours of prayer each week...that's 8.1 years of prayer each week...421 years of prayer in a year for 5,000 missionaries. Now we're talking passionate commitment! And I wonder if those half million praying Southern Baptists would be more passionate about going, helping go or letting go, themselves?

Oh...and what if every individual receiving any kind of Cooperative Program funds was required to raise a certain level of prayer support...including our seminary students. I wonder what would happen in their lives, ministries...and in the hearts of the "pray-ers". Many, I'm sure already do this.

And then, just suppose this caught on so well that pastors, teachers, staff members and lay-people alike began, voluntarily, to solicit concentrated, consistent, continual prayer on their behalf. For several years now, over five hundred men have covenanted to pray for me as their pastor. Each evening at 6:00 P.M. as one man completes a twenty-four hour period of prayer and fasting, another begins so that there is not a time, including this moment right now, when one of our men is not praying and fasting for me, my family and our church. I cannot tell you

what an incredible difference this has made in my life.

Am I just an old man...dreaming dreams when I speak of the impact this kind of praying would have on the work of God? I don't know how much you would have to expend to keep those "pray-ers" informed. But I can tell you that the Kingdom has suffered untold loss for our failure to pray...passionately.

Well...you get the picture. Charting our course by the unchanging Christ involves mobilizing for the harvest...a passionate commitment which Jesus summarized by saying. "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

We must emphasize the beauty of holiness and mobilize for a bountiful harvest. But, then there is one other essential if we are to chart our course by the unchanging Christ...

III. WE MUST PERSONALIZE THE "BLESSED HOPE."

It would be foolish of the author of Hebrews to mention that Jesus Christ is the same "forever" unless there was some prospect of spending that forever with Him.

Yesterday Jesus said "And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:2).

Today the church is reminded that "This same Jesus who has been taken from you shall return in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Tomorrow we are told that "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess.4:16-17)

This is the blessed hope. Not some wishful desire on our part that the Lord might return. He is returning. Our confidence in His return is what gives hope to our lives, motivates us to holiness and keeps us focused on the harvest. Every Southern Baptist should be "future sensitive"...not on a level that is merely sensational or speculative, but in terms of personal interest.

There are two matters related to the Lord's return which must grip our hearts:

1. First, THE COMING OF THE LORD IS REAL...it will happen.

There are many pictures of salvation in the scriptures. Salvation is like adoption in that God is the One who does the choosing. Then again, salvation is likened to birth in that you have no more to do with your second birth than you did your first. It is a work of God. But then there is the manner in which salvation is pictured by the institution of marriage. Jesus, the groom, said "I do" to you. And you said "I do" to Him. Then God, the Father welcomed you into the family as one "accepted in the beloved.

In the Jewish culture of our Lord's day there were a number of specific steps to be carefully followed throughout the process of courtship and marriage. Notice how each of them speaks volumes about our relationship to Christ.

When a young man found himself smitten by the sight and thought of a young lady he would prepare three objects to take to her home on the day of proposal: 1) His pledge of love written out which he would read and leave with her; 2) a priceless gift representing the value he placed on their relationship which he would leave as an "earnest" guaranteeing his return, and; 3) a cup with which he and the young lady's father would seal the covenant should it take place.

Upon that special day the young man would arrive at his intended's home, read the pledge, present the gift and hopefully seal the covenant with the cup. Then he would go away to prepare their home...she hoped he was a carpenter!

Once the home was prepared, whether day or night, the groom would gather the grooms men, race to the home of his bride with trumpets blowing and the shout "The bridegroom comes!" Finding his bride, he would take her away to the home, consummate the marriage, keep her hidden for seven days, then present her publicly at a great marriage feast.

But what if he delayed his coming? How could his intended comfort and encourage herself? She would read the pledge of his love again and again. Then she would open the gift and examine it, remembering that this was his guarantee of returning. And if that was not enough, she would look at the cup on the mantle and be comforted to know that her father would see that the promise was kept.

Now look at the scene as Jesus makes his way to the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion...his partaking of the sorrowful cup of the covenant. He is walking with His intended. Grief, fear and perplexity fill the air. Listen to His words:

"Don't let your heart be troubled. You believe in God...believe also in me. Now, in my Father's house are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also." And He might have added, "Listen Church, my bride, if I seem to take longer than you imagined. Comfort yourself by reading the promises of my love in this, the Holy Word. And don't forget that I am leaving

with you a deposit, the earnest of the Spirit which is a treasure indeed. Oh, and every time you come to the table of the Lord and take this cup, it will remind you of my death until I come"

"But I am coming...and you can count on it!"
The coming of the Lord is real!

2. But remember that, AFTER THE COMING OF THE LORD, THERE IS A RECKONING.

It is called the Judgment Seat of Christ...and all believers will stand before the Lord at this judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). The issue will not be "whether" you will spend eternity in heaven. You would not be at this judgment unless heaven was a certainty. The issue is "What did you do with all I gave you"

You see, life is a stewardship for each of us, an opportunity to exercise discretion over all God has placed at our disposal. And at this judgment all those works will be tried as by fire. Everything you have done is in one of two categories: Gold, silver and precious stones or wood, hay and stubble. Every conscious minute of your life you are sending ahead either treasure or trash.

People who do not have a practical interest in the coming of the Lord can easily grow careless in their stewardship. It is so easy to grow weary in well-doing unless you remember that, in due season you shall reap, if you faint not. Paul said that the knowledge of this judgment and the Lord's perfect justice moved him to get busy in the work of "persuading men" (2 Cor. 5:11) One of these days we'll receive the call home...and, oh how we want it to be followed by "Well done, good and faithful servant." This confidence helps us chart our course by the unchanging Christ.

Just seventeen days ago, I awakened early in the morning to face the final day of a crusade with our missionaries and friends in the Baptist Convention down in Mendoza, Argentina. To be perfectly frank I was pushing myself to get out of bed. I confess that my thoughts were more on the finish line as SBC President than the crusade. I promised you that I would approach this responsibility as a sprint, no looking back, but I had no idea just how well acquainted with Delta I would become. I have shared at least twice in all of our seminaries, attended and shared with almost all of our boards and agencies, some on repeated occasions, visited four continents to work with and be blessed by our IMB personnel, attended each meeting of our Executive Committee unless out of the country, spoken in dozens of churches, at conventions, conferences and rallies, dictated multiplied thousands of letters, gotten cauliflower ear from the phone, conducted interviews and shared on talk shows, and tried to fulfill each writing assignment for SBC periodicals.

Unaware that this presidential privilege would befall me, our church started a satellite fellowship across town. It is a wonderful and exciting ministry but does require that I drive twenty-five minutes across town and conduct another service

after preaching our own service at 9:15 A>M> each Sunday. We first met in a home, then in a hotel and now in a grade school where I preach at 11:00 A.M.. I was just looking for something to do with that hour!

And these have been two busy years for our family. Two college graduations, one wedding, the birth of three grandchildren, a son off to Southern, a daughter and her husband off to Southwestern, and another daughter and her husband commissioned and now with the IMB in Southeast Asia.

On top of that...our dog died....actually a bright spot in all this.

So there I was in Mendoza, Argentina, dreading the thirty-hour trip home which would begin at 7:00 AM the next morning and just trying to gather my thoughts. By noon that day I was seated on a rickety bus headed across town to a new area where Argentine Baptists wanted to start a church. Veteran missionary Robert Crockett was taking up most of the seat beside me, speaking in his animated fashion about the incredible possibilities in this new suburb. He was beginning to get me excited.

We hit the streets but struck out at door number one, door number two and door number three. It was what happened behind door number four that brought me to my senses. At first there was no answer and we turned to walk away. Then a window slid open and a young wife and mother of three asked if she could help us. Using Robert as an interpreter I explained that I was just a few days in Mendoza from the USA and wanted to ask some questions about the future. I then proceeded with the set of questions on the survey: 1. How do you see the future? 2. How do you see your future? 3. How do you see your life in the next five years? 4. If I could ask God to give you anything this week, what would it be?

At the last question she paused and asked, "Could you come in for a minute?" We entered, sat at her kitchen table and told her how she could have peace with God. Just in the middle of presenting God's way of salvation, she stopped us and said "I believe God has sent you to my house." In what seemed only moments she opened her heart to Christ. And as she prayed in a language which she and the missionary and God understood, I thought, "She's right God did send us here" Our course had been charted by the unchanging Christ.

Dear friend, it is our only hope for the future...but it is impossible unless we

Emphasize the "beauty of holiness."

Mobilize for a bountiful harvest, and....

Personalize the "Blessed Hope."

You have honored me and treated me far better than I ever deserved. With Samuel

of old I say" God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (I Sam. 12:23). May God give us grace to chart our course by the unchanging Christ."

Presidential Address
Southern Baptist Convention
June 9, 1998
Salt Lake City, Utah
Dr. Thomas D. Elliff
Reprints By Permission Only