

Digest of Convention Sermon by Dr. Len G. Broughton, Jacksonville, Florida, before the Southern Baptist Convention, Memphis, May 12, 1925.

Text: Joshua 3:4-5 - "Ye have not passed this way heretofore. Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Joshua with his people is passing into a new experience. Many ventures, victories and failures lie behind them. The great leader is not unmindful of them, and in the light of the new way which they are facing, he is profiting from every movement that makes up the past with which he is acquainted. He likewise is familiar with many of the circumstances and conditions that confront them as he points out the way of the future. He sees the great possibilities ahead, and realizes likewise that in reaching the goal there are many difficulties to encounter. A new type of opposition is to be met, which calls for an entirely new line of consideration and a greater exercise of courage.

The first difficulty that confronts him is the passage of the Jordan. Heretofore it has seemed to Israel an impossible task, but Joshua is not disturbed in his faith by this difficulty. He realizes that its crossing is for God, which insures God's presence with them in the crossing. And, looking beyond the Jordan everything is new; hence his call in the text: "Ye have not passed this way heretofore. Sanctify yourselves (stretch yourselves from tip to toe) for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

Now in looking over this interesting, inspired bit of history, and taking into account the words of the text, there is much in it which applies to the Christian church at the present hour. Truly it can be said that we have not passed this way heretofore. Every one present

on this occasion is bound to realize that he is rapidly traveling along a new way.

1. It is seen politically. Since the great World War the political atmosphere of the world has undergone a change. Old systems have passed away and new systems have been set up. Governments that for centuries were held in the grip of monarchs have fallen and other forms of government more or less democratic have been adopted. It is too early yet to prophesy what this sudden change will accomplish. We can only hope and pray that the countries thus involved will be divinely guided through the turmoil and strife which the new order has brought to pass.

Our own country has shared much in this political unrest and strife. We have come upon a time when almost everything and everybody is under suspicion. The old order of service for one's country to a great extent has given place to service for oneself. Graft and greed and disregard for law, even involving the taking of human life, is increasingly becoming the order of society. Wealth, extravagance and frolic is becoming the standard of popular favor, while toiling, unselfish service in the humble fields of human need is being forced into a secondary place. Surely this change in the public conscience, leading us into such a chaotic state, is to a great extent new in our country, and particularly in our own beloved Southland; and like the men of Joshua we are called upon to stretch ourselves from tip to toe, that we may be saved from a sure and fatal doom.

2. The newness of our way is also seen scientifically. It is impossible for us to sketch the scope of the triumph of science in these modern days. Just a while ago the world was startled with the tap of the telegraph instrument, and later with the laying of the cables which held within their grip the secrets of great continents. Then came

the telephone, which was rapidly followed by the wireless message. What a wonderful accomplishment this was! I shall never forget my first experience in sending a wireless message.

I was crossing the Atlantic, and our ship encountered a great storm which caused her to lose two days. I was expected to fill my pulpit in London on Sunday, and I knew that this delay would make it impossible; so I made my way up into the wireless office with this brief message: "Delayed by storm two days. All is well. Love."

As the wireless operator took the message I observed him touch certain keys, and then the lightning began to flash all over the room, and I made an effort for the door. The operator was kind, and said to me: "You need not be afraid; just keep your seat." By that time the lightning was over, and I said: "When are you going to send my message? I want to see you at it." And he said, "It has already been sent, and I have received the o. k. of the operator at Queenstown." I then asked him where else the message went, and he said: "It went everywhere; it touched the remotest star in the great heavens." The thing seemed to me to be uncanny, and I came out of that place wondering what would come next.

But I did not wonder long, for the radio has come, and we are able by means of it to talk without wires to the uttermost parts of the earth. A song flung out into the great ether sea is picked up all around the world. And if it be true, as the scientists are telling us, that all sound, including all the music of ages, is indestructible, we are environed by all the great operas and oratorios that have ever been sung; and if we are able to unfetter our imaginations and find the key it may be possible for us to hear the music of David's harp, and the song of the angel choir as they sang

over the manger!

Truly the great discoveries now getting so common constitute a new way in which the world is traveling, and in it we should not forget that there is almost unlimited opportunity for the dissemination of the Gospel. Indeed, in the providence of God, I believe these things are being rapidly perfected chiefly for the purpose of revealing the glory of God, and the proclamation of His Gospel to a lost world.

3. But in no sense is the newness of our way so important as in the realm of religion. How startling the change seems! Our forefathers with only one book, the King James translation of the Bible, landed on our great new continent and began the development of a civilization which has challenged the world! It is fair to say that all true Americanism, which includes our churches, our schools, our colleges, our universities, and all our great eleemosynary institutions, as well as the government itself, have developed in the light ^{has} that ~~has~~ blazed from this old book, the Bible of our fathers. But conditions have here changed also, and we are now being called upon to walk in a new light. Our old Bible that gave us the noblest manhood and womanhood that the world has ever seen is today, in many sections even of our own beloved Southland, being chopped to pieces, and we are asked to take in its stead a doctored document which dishonors God and deifies man.

It is an interesting document, this doctored Bible, with its unproven philosophies. We may engage in all sorts of mental gymnastics around it, and we may get great delight from the exercises, but when its makers attempt to force us to lay aside the Adam and Genesis and

and accep the built-down man of the Metropolitan Museum, a skeleton ingeniously constructed by so-called sicientists of bones of monkeys, gorillas and the like, and set it up as being actual proof of our monkey origin; I say when it comes to pass that a few so-called scientists attempt to force upon a believing church such humbuggery for the purpose of destroying our Bible, our great believing hosts of Southern Baptist will everywhere enter their internal, external and eternal protest.

It has been long since theology was a department for the theologian, with his Bible, and sience was a department for the scientist with his test tubes and microscope; but rapidly we are seeing the way change. The scientist has demanded the right to invade the field of the e theologian, and is now telling him the ways of God through test tubes and microscopes. We are perfectly willing for the scientist to go on with his legitimate work. He is needed, his work is important, the world eagerly wants for his mahy possible discoveries and inventions in the way of making human life longer and easier; but let the stientist keep his hands off of our theology and our Bible, as he ^{demand}~~demands~~ that theologians shall keep his hands off of his science with its test tubes and its microscopes.

The two departments are separate and distinct, and it is up to us as Christians men and women to see to it that they remain so. If we fail at this point it will not be long before the world will be without a Saviour and the Saviour will be without a church.

4. The newness of our way as Southern Baptists is seen also in the amost breakdown of our denominational machinery. It is true that we have gone forward in the last few years financially and numerically

as never before in the same length of time; but in spite of it we face today a situation that is nothing short of a tragedy unless we are men enough to rise up and meet it. Our various denominational enterprises at home and abroad, for the lack of funds, are brought almost to a stand still. Never before have we faced such a mountain of debt resting upon our boards. There is not telling what we owe as a denomination, if we take into account the debts on our state, home, and foreign work. No wonder our secretaries are almost crushed; and unless a miracle of giving is performed at once, there is nothing ahead of us but retrenchment that will set us back in all lines of our work for many decades to come. Pathetic and heartrendering appeals are coming from every source; never were the fields so white, and never was the harvest so plentiful. Never was our wealth so general, and never was our extravagance so extravagant. And yet our denominational machinery is almost padlocked, while the world rushes on in its madness without a thought of its stewardship to God.

Now, facing this terrible picture, what are we to do to change it? How are we going to contribute our best to remedying the situation? Let me venture a few suggestions:

(1) We are not going to remedy it by surrendering to it. That would be an easy thing to do. For the time being it would be the course of least resistance, but in the end it would result in ruin.

One of the greatest words that was ever given to Moses was when he stood as Israel's deliverer at the Red Sea. He had succeeded in bringing Israel out of the land of bondage, and until he reached the Red Sea everything went well; but there he faced an impossible task judged from a human point of view. There were no boats, and no bridges, and Pharaoh's army was pressing so close upon them

and around them that they could hear the rattle of the hoofs of their horses. It was a trying moment. In all his past Moses had not faced anything equal to it. He believed in God who had called him into this leadership, but while the people around him hurled their complaints and their criticisms upon him for this unexpected situation, Moses looking out over the Red Sea and made his first great mistake, when he said, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." Many preachers have quoted this word as coming from the Lord to Moses, but such is not the case. The Lord never told Moses to give that command. He never tells anybody to stand still; it is contrary to his whole scheme for the race.

Many people have quoted the text to me at times when I have been urging a forward movement; they have taken great delight in the thought that God would have me and have them stand still and see His salvation; they perhaps would have taken more delight had he said, "Sit down and see the salvation of the Lord."

God's command to Moses was, "Speak unto the Children of Israel that they may go forward"---an impossible task if left to their own resources; but with God behind it all difficulties were removed. The sea rolled back like a mountain, and God got underneath it and held it with his great hand, and Moses and his people marched through to victory.

Now, beloved, we have reached just such a time in our history as Southern Baptists. To surrender to our difficulties means to die. God's word to us is; "Go forward, never mind how great the difficulties; I will roll them back as you go, and hold them back until you accomplish your task." To be sure we have our Jordan River ahead of us, but thank God we have our Red Sea behind us. In days gone by God has led through the sea, and he is able to carry us across the Jordan.

(2) We are not going to remedy the situation by allowing ourselves to get over much entangled with the matter of building hierarchies of Scriptural interpretation. Certainly we are forever as Baptists going to contend for the inspired Word of God as our sufficient rule of faith and practice, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation. This we are going to do without taint of trimming; but while we do so, we must stand also for the old Baptist right of private and personal interpretation. The day when we cease to do this, we cease to be Baptists. God has never given to any set of Romish priests or Baptist bishops the right to force upon any individual or group of individuals their interpretation of his inspired word. We will stand for the integrity of the Bible accepting it as his inspired Word, but we will not attempt to interfere with the individual right to interpret it so long as we claim to live in the consciousness of the Lordship of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit to make known his message to the human heart.

(3) Again, we are not going to remedy the situation by ignoring our obligation regarding the affairs of the world. There never was a time when humanity needed the voice of the prophet more than it does today. The church is being pressed upon with a determination never before known. Would you believe it, the world is trying to rob us of our Sabbath. There is a conspiracy on at the present time, ~~tryin~~ especially in our prosperous Southland, to put through legislation that will turn the Sabbath day into a day of money making and godless frolic.

Recently a company of Jews in New York have purchased practically the entire theater business of this country, and they have deliberately set to work with all the money needed to capture our legislatures, our city and town governments, to operate their theatres on the Sabbath day. They

have also many of our leading politicians—thank God, they do not have them all!

A few weeks ago the city of Memphis, where we are now meeting, eased through the legislature of Tennessee a bill to give Memphis the right to operate Sunday theatres and professional ball. The country at large seeing an account of this stood amazed; but when the bill came before Governor Austin Peay, our great and honored Baptist governor of this great state of Tennessee, he had the courage to take his pen and sacredly veto it. Practically the same thing happened about the same time over in Arkansas, where we have another great and honored Baptist as chief executive, Governor Tom Terral; and when the bill came to him he likewise had the courage to veto it. I feel in this presence like proposing three cheers for these two great and brave governors.

The church has got to face such issues, and the preacher has got to have nerve enough to put up and keep up a fight against all such forms of evil, lawlessness, and disregard for holy things that characterize the present day.

(4) But finally, after we have done all we can on the lines I have suggested, there remains one other thing that outweighs them all, and that is a return, as far as possible, to apostolic evangelism. During the past few years Southern Baptist have made much ^{numerical} ~~numerical~~ progress, but our growth ~~of our population~~ has not been in proportion to the growth of our population. It has been far below it. During this time there has been much campaigning to get money and to arouse our people to set themselves against the theological vagaries that

threaten us; and yet the situation remains practically unchanged. What does it mean? What lesson are we to gather from it all? To me the supreme thing iperating in our present condition and breaking down the morale of our people, is our failure to make most conspicuous the work of the evangelist. I fear that we have lost favor with God and the power of his spirit by not making evangelism our chief business. Theyday when Southern Baptists gave up the department of evangelism and ~~xxxxx~~ let our evangelists go, I very much fear we started on a backward march. No institution that we can set up can live unless it is the product of evangelism and nurtured by it. The first great movement of the Christian church was not of stewardship, as important, as that is; it was revival on the Day of Pentecost, when three thousand souls were added unto the church; and then in the fervor of that great revival, "they had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need ... and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

An I feel that I cannot close my message without making an appeal, the appeal of my life I would make it, for a resetting up of our department of evangelism. I would have this Convention go away from this session having provided for an evangelistic program and a force of evangelists many times larger than we have ever had. I would have them go throughout our entire Southland campaigning for souls with such earnestness as we have never known in all our history. I would make it our first pronouncement; and perhaps by a board separate from any other board. Then along with it I would expect

to see a corresponding movement by the other board that would take care of all present financial obligations and provide for a greater future. Brethren, it can be done. The great thing needed is that we shall realize our responsibility to God for the lost around about us, and the willingness of God to give us pentecostal power, when we are groaning in spirit over lost souls.

Pardon me for this personal experience, and with it I close.

A number of years ago my health went down under the strain of the many demands of our Atlanta work, and my doctor shoved me off for a cruise across the Atlantic and along the Mediterranean Sea. After a time I found myself one Sabbath morning in Pisa, Italy. Soon after breakfast I made my way over to the old cathedral, one of the oldest, if not the oldest in Europe. I went around into the cloister and sat down before a wonderful painting on the wall. It represented the devil's quest of a young man. It was in many sections. He began with the boy, and there were all sorts of dangers presented. Step by step he led him on in the lure of these things until finally he got him to the mouth of the pit from which sulphurous smoke was rising, and as he stood upon the brink of this pit, the devil shoved him overboard, and then turning, he faced the way along which he had traveled with such a hilarious, devilish grin that I can never forget.

The picture made a great impression on me. I was sick and did not know if I would ever see home again. I went back to my room at the hotel, and suddenly there appeared before my own boy in Atlanta. He was then a lad, always interested in church, always went to its services, but had never made one move in the direction of professing Christ. I sat down at once and wrote him a letter. I told him about this picture; and how I had felt about his never manifesting any personal interest in his own salvation, and begged him to do so at once, as-

sureing him of my prayers every day so long as I was away, and if I never returned, I assured him that he might know that I prayed for him up until the last.

After several weeks, with health restored, I arrived in London, where I received a letter from him telling me that he had received my letter written at Pisa, but never saying one word about the thing that was uppermost in my heart.

In a short time I was back home in Atlanta. I arrived on Saturday, Sunday morning I appeared before my people and preached my first sermon after returning. When I finished, I gave an invitation to all who would accept Christ to come forward, and if they so desired to unite with the church. I looked out over the audience, and my eyes rested on our boy. He was looking straight at me, singing. The moment that our eyes met, he put down his hymnbook and deliberately marched out into the aisle and down to the front, and stepped up on the platform and put his arms around my neck, saying, "I want to join the church." It was the happiest hour of my life. On the way home that day he got a chance to speak to me, and said, "Father, it was your letter written at Pisa that decided me."

Oh, my friends, hear me in ^{this} closing sentence! When Southern Baptist people come to such a realization of lost souls as I came to that day with regard to my boy, we are going to forget our quarrels and our disagreements; we are going to lose sight of our institutions for the time being, and we are going to plunge in as never before, preachers and laymen, for souls as our goal. We are going to put that goal high above everything else, and then we are going to see in the Southland immediately such a revival as we have never seen; and in the sweep of it we are going to see every other

interest that we foster lifted. No, we are not going to lower our standard; we are going away from the Convention with our goal higher along all lines than ever, realizing that the altitude of our goal today will mark the attitude of our going tomorrow.