

ACCEPT GOD'S GREAT GLAD DAY!

By William M. "Bill" Hinson

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God is definitely giving us a great day of challenge. He calls for us to accept it with gladness and rejoicing.

I want you to quote with me, in unison, our text for this hour found in Psalm 118:24.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it."

The exciting theme of this Convention is another call for us to join in our "Bold Mission Thrust . . . While It Is Yet Day!" As we stand before this verse, I am confident He wants to urge us to "ACCEPT GOD'S GREAT GLAD DAY!" To dispel our hesitation, He gives us God's Positive Declaration. To reprove our procrastination, He gives us God's Particular Day. To crystalize our sagging loyalties, He gives us God's Primary Demand. And to admonish us for our indecision, He paints an exciting picture of God's People Deciding.

GOD'S POSITIVE DECLARATION "This IS the day"

Too many of us have spent too much time in "speed-reading" courses so that we often move past God's declaration for us today. "THIS IS the day" was the message that the Psalmist sang to a perplexed people. God does not declare: (1) this *ought* to be the day, or (2) this *might* be the day, nor (3) this *could* be the day. He positively states, "THIS IS the day!" This we must accept!

Sir Winston Churchill said, when he was twenty-five years of age, "There is so much for me to do and such a limited time to do it!" No wonder he has been declared by many as one of our greatest statesmen ever. He had that rare ability to live courageously in the "now," and not wistfully wait for the "sweet by and by."

If we are to accept the challenge of our theme, "Bold Mission Thrust . . . While It Is Yet Day," we must do it today . . . not tomorrow. You cannot escape today by taking refuge in tomorrow. We live perpetually in the present tense. The great verb in the Bible is the verb: "to be." There is no separation . . . departmentalizing here from there. We always stand both feet within the very midst of our eternity. This very instant is your past and future living in the NOW. God is declaring that you cannot easily discard a day: all time is in it, and your responses to Him determine more than clocks can count. The whole chronometry of faith has been dis-

torted into short divisions. Let me tell you, only man has made these temporary flat plateaus that he calls "my time." God's concept of time was simpler and more realistic, wrapped up in that one verb, "to be." It is true that Hebrew has no grammar and its verbs no rest; they are continuous. It is a way of saying that God's work in our world is never done. God's hand IS on it, thumping and remolding. God's voice is still declaring, "THIS IS the day."

The writer, Vicki Baum, in *Grand Hotel*, describes this fallacy of manmade interludes. "The real thing," says one character, "is always going on somewhere else. When you are young, you think it will come later. Later on, you think it was earlier. When you are here, you think it is there. But when you get there, you find that life has doubled back and is quietly waiting here . . . here in the very place that you ran away from." So, that puts it graphically. Tomorrow is not somewhere else; the future does not lie in wait. The thing to be . . . already is.

Consider God's positive declaration in His Son Jesus Christ. There are strident voices today that want to make Christ a past event. Many historians still would like to closet Him in those closed quarters called "an ancient time" . . . things done and gone. By placing God into conflicting pockets of chronology, we keep Him out of our today. Too many Baptists live as if He WAS . . . and WILL BE, but He isn't NOW. How different from what He said, "I AM the way, the truth, the life!" "I AM the vine, the shepherd, and the door." I AM, and before Abraham was, I AM" . . . perpetually PRESENT, continually CONSTANT, eternally INSTANT! He is in . . . THIS day!

God is proving His positive declaration beyond any question. Our church-related colleges and seminaries are experiencing record enrollments. Long before we adopted the challenging theme, "Bold Mission Thrust," God was calling, and our young were responding to "do His will" in their lifetime . . . NOW! One of the many thrills that I have at the First Baptist Church of New Orleans is being the pastor of the president, the many faculty and administrative members, plus students of our New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Practically every week we have seminary professors going out with their students from our church to witness for Christ in our world city. Yes, our seminaries are full of dedicated students and professors who are positive about God's declaration to expose our world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We need more churches to accept God's positive declaration. I wonder, was the late Dr. Sam Shoemaker right when he said, "Our churches today are a field of evangelism, rather than a force for evangelism?" Also, was Dr. Arthur Archibald right when he said, "The alarming thing is that evangelism is dying inside the church, not merely outside

of it?" Well, they are both right, if your church and my church does not accept God's great glad day . . . TODAY.

World events are pointing us to God's positive declaration as never before. I remember hearing the inimitable Dr. Hershel H. Hobbs read the following editorial from *Harper's* magazine, "It is a gloomy moment in history. Not in the lifetime of any man who reads his newspaper has there been so much grave and deep apprehension. Never has the future seemed so dark and incalculable.

"In France the political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. England and the British Empire are being sorely tried and exhausted in social and economic struggle.

"The United States is beset with racial, industrial and economic chaos, drifting . . . we know not where.

"Russia hangs like a storm cloud on the horizon of the world, dark, menacing and foreboding. It is a solemn moment and no man can feel indifference, which no man pretends to feel, in the issue of events. Of our own troubles, no man can see the end."

And what was the date of this editorial? Was it June 1979? No, it appeared in *Harper's* on October 10, 1847. The significance of this editorial is not its exact parallel with today's world conditions. Instead, we would note the attitude of the man who wrote it. So weighted down was he with a gloomy international picture that he was ready to throw in the towel, to call the whole venture of life a failure and quit. Had all men in 1847 felt the same way, the world might well have missed the most glorious era in its history! The Word is stronger than ever, "Behold NOW is the accepted time," and "TODAY is the day of salvation!"

GOD'S PARTICULAR DAY

"This is THE day"

I would rather be a Baptist pastor today than at any time in the history of mankind! I do not stand today on SBC statistics. We do have a great history. I am challenged by the great moments in Baptist history that have brought us to this hour . . . but God has given us . . . THIS PARTICULAR DAY, "This is THE day which the Lord hath made."

Dr. Maxwell Maltz said that his research reveals that "The average Southern Baptist wakes up in the morning and his thought processes go something like this . . . 60% of that energy is geared to yesterday, 20% is utilized for today, and 20% is reserved for thoughts about tomorrow." What Dr. Maltz was saying is that too many of us are anchored in the past tense.

Jesus has called us, not to tolerate our day in history, . . . but to accept His particular day of opportunity. "Nostalgia" seems to be the order of the day in too many of our church and denominational gatherings. I wonder if this indicates that we are actually afraid of the future, and we fantasize about the past that actually robs us of the exciting challenge of our particular day?

I wanted to argue with J. P. Allen when he said, "Tomorrow is a dangerous word," but he went on to say, "Not a bad word, just dangerous." But, of course, dynamite is dangerous, and very beneficial. Love, too, is dangerous . . . and good. Money can bless or curse. Great virtues have obverse sides, and we require spiritual sensitivity to "distinguish the things that differ." In reality, Jesus warned us that we must not be blinded to God's positive declaration, "Quit being anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." (Matthew 6:34 R.S.V.). There you have the reason clearly established; tomorrow is dangerous only because it fights to-

day! Whatever robs us of today, robs us of the work and zest, without which we cannot achieve an abundant tomorrow.

To accept God's particular day, we need to have the mind of Christ. Paul stated, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5). Phillips and Moffat expand this verse for our particular day, "Let Christ Jesus be your EXAMPLE as to what your ATTITUDE and PURPOSE should be in life." My close friend, Paul J. Meyer, President of SMI International, shared with me the best definition that I have found when he said, "Attitude is actually a habit of thought." We need to habitually think the thoughts of Christ . . . today. It is extremely important what our attitude should be in claiming our particular day for God's honor and glory. I constantly thank Him that He has called me and put me in a place of service in this time of challenge. We are experiencing the greatest "swing of history" that the world has ever known, and I want to be a part of it, for His honor and glory. Not tomorrow, but today, boldly accepting . . . gladly giving . . . for His honor and glory.

GOD'S PRIMARY DEMAND

"The day which the LORD hath made"

Now we get down to the nitty gritty of this Hebrew parallelism. "This is the day that THE LORD hath made." You see, great programs do challenge us, and often stimulate some human-response success. But we will not march to God's positive declaration for His particular day with any sense of real revival as a Bold Mission Thrust without crowning Him anew as the Lord of our individual lives. For too long we have been waiting for "another program." If "a million more in '54" didn't work . . . "THEY" will come up with another one, and we will give it a try. When in reality, we are merely "playing church." Too many are for "programs" in words only. In an antiseptic kind of way, we actually cheat . . . because we have not made a basic commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

When He is Lord, we will experience the gift of Spiritual Visualization. The reason that many of our church members are confused about "spiritual gifts" is simply because they have not crowned Jesus Christ as the master, the ruler, the Lord of their lives. We usually quote, "Where there is no vision the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18), when we launch a building program at our churches or a fund drive for our institutions. The Revised Version gives a better interpretation of the word perish, "Where there is no vision the people 'get out of hand.'" When He is not the master sentiment of our life, we "get out of hand." When He is the Lord of our life, we will have a sense of spiritual visualization that will literally captivate us to accept God's great glad day . . . now! Vance Havner was right when he said, "He will be Lord of all, or not Lord at all."

I realized this when I read that Southern Seminary opened in 1859 in Greenville, South Carolina with a faculty of four. Dr. John Broadus and three other men gave themselves to the task of a theological education for young men from our Baptist churches. Those few students felt that God was leading them to claim their day in His name. Several years later, after the Civil War, the South was impoverished. There was a great sense of futility that followed the "defeat" of many Southerners. Baptists in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia had nothing . . . and it looked as if that little seminary could not make it. History reveals that one day John Broadus called that small faculty together and said something like this, "Men, why don't we decide that Southern Seminary may go under, but each one of us will go under first. If we believe

that Jesus is truly the Lord of life . . . then Southern Seminary may die, but each one of us will die first." They had a prayer meeting. From that prayer meeting came their affirmation from the Lord. Out of that commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ has come a tremendous power of religious education. My education grew out of that commitment in that room over 100 years ago. Men that I never saw. I didn't go to that school, but the two seminaries that I did graduate from came out of that spirit of commitment. In the midst of their shattered world, the Lord gave them a vision to accept God's great glad day!

God has declared the day and when He is Lord, He will determine the hour, and He will always deliver the power! God's Holy Spirit is definitely convicting of sin today and pointing to the Lordship of Christ. We must not ignore His primary and basic command.

God's primary demand calls for us to stop talking about our Convention, and start talking about Jesus!

God's primary demand urges us to stop "classifying Christians" and start edifying one another in Him!

God's primary demand should inspire us to stop propagating half-truths and start praying for our mission agencies in a spirit of cooperation for this particular day.

I occasionally hear of "power plays" in the Southern Baptist Convention. Well, my friends, let me tell you, as one rural pastor that I will always love adequately said, "The Southern Baptist Convention ain't nothing without my church." And he is right! My challenge is calling the First Baptist Church to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that we might claim the soul of the city of historic New Orleans! We "cooperate" with our mission giving. We pray for our agencies to act as a clearing house for God's blessings for our church with the young He calls from our families and fellowship. The only "power plays" that score for eternity are the result of God's Holy Spirit through His Word working through committed Christians everywhere.

It is now becoming more evident that the "critics without credentials" are a bore; and actually keep many Christians on the sidelines with their debates . . . instead of boldly sharing Christ in life's struggles. Many of them are better known for what they are against, rather than what they are for! They are constantly out to denounce something, or denounce someone. They organize all of their loyalties around whatever they oppose. I repeat . . . when Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives . . . we will accept God's great glad day . . . and let His Holy Spirit admonish and repudiate those that do not "walk in the Spirit!" And . . . He will do just that!

When God's primary demand is acknowledged by His people, extraordinary things happen. I have seen Southern Baptists scattered all over our nation (into geographical areas not traditionally interested in "Southern" Baptists) make a difference in their community. I have seen some people go into a church (it is also true in a business) where "nothing is happening," and because of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they don't catch the "nothing happening" spirit, but they are able to point others to Christ as they accept God's great glad day.

GOD'S PEOPLE DECIDING

"We WILL rejoice and be GLAD in it"

God's gift becomes very personal now, as we accept "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we WILL rejoice and BE GLAD in it." God can positively declare His particular

day, but we must sense the urgency as His people to respond, even now, "while it is yet day!"

Tonight, when we move to the Astro Dome for that dramatic commissioning service with Billy Graham preaching, we will be joined by thousands of our church members in major cities across America. This will be accomplished through the miracle of transmitting that service via satellite. Audiences that will be made up of Baptists assembling during their regular prayer meeting hours will be with us through the use of closed circuit television. The exciting reality of capturing the potential of THIS DAY came from the vision of our President, Dr. Jimmy Allen. This is but a foretaste of boldly deciding to do it today.

After the Spinx-Ali fight in our New Orleans Superdome last year, we were informed that over one billion people either watched on television or heard on radio that fight "live." It staggered my imagination. One out of four inhabitants on the globe being able to either listen or watch a fight that was going on in my city. Dr. V. L. Stanfield was right when he recently challenged his seminary class, "One day soon we will see one man committed to Jesus Christ, preaching to over two million people at one time on television." When will we decide to do it?

On April 13, 1979 ABC apologized that a newscast for April 6 (Friday) was played again in error on Friday, April 13. The week old newscast was telling of the dangerous accident at the nuclear power plant on Three Mile Island, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. There was a call for the people to evacuate (on Friday, April 13) when in reality, the "new news" for April 13 was that the danger had passed and families were already re-occupying their homes and businesses in nearby Harrisburg. It reminded me of W. B. Sutphin saying that it was actually true that every word we utter is eternally recorded out in space. In England, several years ago, it was authenticated that a television program which had been abandoned in America for several years, never re-run, and never kinescoped, a one-shot live participation show, appeared one night all over England, five years after its performance. No one could explain it. It was hanging somewhere in the atmosphere; nobody could get rid of it. Imagine that! But even worse, imagine you, yourself, as forever. Today is always more important than we make it. For it is not the sum of them that counts, but anyone of them that suddenly already IS, and always "WILL BE."

My "father in the ministry," and former pastor, Ralph E. Gwin, preached a sermon when I was a teenager that I will never forget. He preached on the "Attitude of Gratitude." God's Spirit made me glad that I was a Christian. I wanted to rejoice. I want to rejoice in the Lord daily and let Him claim, through me, my world.

Some are bewildered by the phenomenon of the "electric church" and para-church groups. Could it be that they are filling a surface void because too many of our churches are dead in tradition and ritualism? Our prayerful logo-reminder at F.B.C.N.O. is koinonia en Theos, "The Fellowship of Enthusiasm." Yes, we need to rejoice and be glad "IN God" because "GOD is IN us!"

When I was a young boy, a playmate and I received a small toy replica of a sliding trombone from the dime store. From our driveway I called to my mother . . . I can still see her peering through the kitchen window as I said, "Mother, we have something to play for you on your birthday." We made an effort to hum through "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." My friend, Stanley, said, "Hey, your mother is crying." I knew that our music

wasn't good, but I didn't realize that it was that bad. I said, "Mother, what is wrong?" She replied, with a broad smile, "Billy, these are tears of joy. When I think of the amazing grace that God has given me through Jesus Christ, I am so glad, that my rejoicing brings tears to my eyes. One day, Billy, I pray that you will know of that amazing grace!"

Everytime I sing "Amazing Grace," I realize the challenge of "when we've been there ten billion years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." God is calling for us to REJOICE and be GLAD as we accept His great day NOW.

I was recently talking to our Pastor Emeritus, Dr. J. D. Grey. I asked him to verify some of the exciting and humorous stories for which he had been given credit (he denies many of them with a smile). He challenged me by responding, "Oh, beloved Pastor Hinson, today is more exciting than all the days that I have ever known. We must decide to claim the power of God in Christ at all costs, for our world . . . today."

If we are to accept God's great glad day, we must decide . . . NOW that we will be willing to take a RISK in His name. Dr. Sol Ray Rosenthal, formerly Professor of Pre-

ventive Medicine at the University of Illinois, and Medical Director of the Research Foundation in Chicago, recently revealed his studies in a paper entitled, "RISK EXERCISE." Dr. Rosenthal asked the questions, . . . "why do individuals enjoy flying airplanes upside down; racing high-powered motor cars, climbing mountains with frostbite and no oxygen; plus water and snow skiing, etc.?"

Dr. Rosenthal states, "The thesis of risk exercise is that calculated risks on a physical or mental basis are necessary for our daily well-being. They maintain our very evolution and aging processes." Rosenthal went on to say that many individuals today dream of retiring, completely changing their lifestyle, and in essence, "doing nothing." He goes on to reveal that death comes prematurely to such individuals.

God has called us to take a risk for Him. The euphoria that an athlete feels following a great achievement in his "risk exercise" is but a small picture of "we will rejoice and be glad in it." If we are going to reach our goal of sharing the Gospel with every person in the world by the year 2,000 . . . we must decide to take spiritual risks today.

THIS IS THE DAY TO RESPOND . . . AS NEVER BEFORE . . . BY ACCEPTING GOD'S GREAT GLAD DAY!