

In our passage from John, chapter six, Jesus was looking over and searching the crowd for a lad that day. There is a lad here. Can you see the lad? He steps out and moves forward. I can just hear a woman in the crowd, "Oh, where is that boy's mother?" I can hear another one saying, "Yes, and look how dirty his hands are." And then I can hear a man, as the lad creeps along beside all those who should have been going, "Hey, where are you going?" Another man grabs him by his coattail and says, "Wait just a minute, son. Who are you? What do you think you're doing?" And the little boy tugs loose, and he looks over his shoulder toward the man. Then with those stinking little dried-up fish and that crumbling bread, with those dirty hands and unseemly clothes, he says, "I may be it, I may be it." And he continues creeping forward, and just then he sees Jesus with that overwhelming, inviting "Come to Me" smile. Jesus reaches out, and the little boy's pace picks up. The lad lays the fish and bread in Jesus' hands, and then the miracle starts as Jesus looks at him and nods in the affirmative. And the little boy's eyes spring open, and he turns around to the crowd. "I'M IT! I REALLY AM IT! I'M IT! I may not look like much, and I may not have much, but bless God, this is Jesus calling me and I'm not missing it. I'm coming with what I've got, where I am, and I'm doing it now, because **"EVERYONE CAN AND I'M IT."**

That's all that needs to be decided by this Convention. The rest of it is only a distraction. Everyone Can, and you're it. God help you. God help us not to mess this up with this great opportunity of ours. Right now Jesus is searching this very crowd for a lad or a lady today who will believe God and declare, "Everyone Can, and I'm It!"

Maudellen and I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for the high and holy privilege to just be one of you...saved and hanging out with you. Thank you for letting us serve in this job this year. I promise you this: I'm not retiring from Daytona Beach First Baptist Church to just lay in the sun! This Convention is worth the best of the rest of all our lives and the best of our going and giving for the sake of lost souls and Christ's kingdom! I commit myself to that end tonight, and I pray you will too. Maudellen and I thank you for the privilege. God bless you!

Donald J. Wilton's Convention Message 2006 Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2006, Greensboro, North Carolina

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Dr. Don Wilton

What an absolute privilege it is to stand here today before my beloved Southern Baptist denomination. How much I love my wife of 30 years and my precious congregation of people, our choir and Steve Skinner, who have traveled here this morning just to come and share some joy and to fellowship in the riches of God's grace.

I have prayed long and hard about this moment, and I am going to submit to you that God has put a word upon my heart. This is the word of the Lord, and I have every expectation and anticipation that our Savior is going to speak to our hearts, and I am going to ask you to get ready to respond. I am going to say to you that at any time during this message if there is any person in this place who needs to get up out of their seat and make your way down to the front for whatever reason God places in your heart, I want to invite you to do so. I believe in the preaching of the Word of God, and I believe in the power of the cross. I believe that it is through the foolishness of preaching that God, by His Spirit, draws all men unto Himself.

I have no one planned or planted here today, but I will guarantee you that if you need to give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you need to step up and step out for the Lord Jesus Christ, there is someone in this audience who will step up and pray with you when you come down here. You might say to me, "Pastor, I don't want to interrupt your message." You cannot interrupt my message, because it is not mine. I don't believe God is pleased with our organization or our disorganization. What God is pleased with is the unapologetic movement of His grace upon His people.

I want to speak to you today about the People of God. I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen of the Southern Baptist denomination, that we are a people who are no longer of the North and of the South. We are no longer a people who are black or white. In fact, I am going to submit to you today that as proud as I am to be an American, and as delighted I was to enter into the joy of an incredible lady, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, representing our beloved nation, I am going to submit to you as believers in Christ Jesus we are not even of America. We are the people of God. We march according to a different drumbeat. Ours is not the Constitution of the United States of America. Ours is the Constitution of Almighty God in Christ Jesus, found within the pages of this Book, from Genesis to Revelation. I am going to say to you today that it is time for all Southern Baptists to reignite the vision, to reenlist our energies, and to realign our focus not as anyone other than the people of God.

I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles today to 1 Kings, chapter 9. I do not believe I have anything to say outside of God's Word. I am always compelled to read the unsearchable riches of God in Christ Jesus. I believe the mandate today is for those of us who love the Lord to come to grips with what God has to say to us through this complete revelation of Himself in the pages of this Book – this inerrant, infallible Word of the Living God. We are going to draw our nourishment from the life of Solomon.

My brother, Murray, whom I love so much, challenged me when this body elected me to preach the Convention message. He said, "Don, I am going to pray God will give you a fresh message for our people." So, for one year, I have found myself in the company of the committed, asking God to give me a fresh message and to speak to my own heart and to give me the opportunity to share these things with you. Why Solomon? Simply put, because Solomon was a man who had it all. He was a man who was immeasurably blessed and then lost it all.

I want to read to you in 1 Kings, chapter 9, and verse 1. The Bible tells us, "*When Solomon finished building the temple of the Lord, the royal palace, and all that Solomon desired to do...*" You will be interested to know that phraseology there is all-encompassing because it incorporates a man of God at

the foot and at the feet of the One who gave him everything that he had. He was blessed to the point at which his very heart's desires had been fulfilled—not unlike those of us who call ourselves Southern Baptists. Some of us have been blessed so long we have forgotten what we have been blessed about and Who has blessed us.

In verse 2, the Bible tells us, *"The Lord appeared to Solomon a second time."* Now, we are going to discover in just a moment, and I do understand I do not have time, as I do in my beloved pulpit, amongst my people whom I love so much. It is rather interesting to me that here in the context, the Bible tells us that this was a second significant visitation of God into the life of Solomon. We are going to look at that just briefly. Because God had appeared to Solomon at Gibeon. You can read about that, for example, in Chapter 3, verses 1 and following.

Now, on the second occasion, the Lord said to Solomon, *"I have heard your prayer."* Why is He talking in the past tense? Because in chapter 3, when God first visited with Solomon, He made a request of him, and He gave Solomon the opportunity to ask. The Bible tells us we can ask of the Lord, and He will give to us. Some years have now lapsed, and Solomon is being revisited. *"I have heard your prayer and petition you have made before me."* Watch what happened in response to that. *"I have consecrated this temple you have built, to put My name there forever. My eyes and My heart will be there at all times."*

Now, evidently, we are going to have a theological conflict at this juncture, because we are soon going to discover that God says, *"I will do this and I have done it forever, but My forever is not going to find its heartbeat in the heart of a man who is willfully disobedient to my commands and my statutes."*

Southern Baptists, I want to submit to you today that it is time for us to wake up as a denomination. It's time for us to stop the nonsense. It's time for us to roll up our sleeves and go to work and become the soul winners that we claim to be. It's time that in our pulpits we begin to preach the unsearchable riches of God in Christ Jesus. I submit to you today that God has given us our marching orders, and if we do not obey what God teaches us to do, contrary to public opinion and theological dispensation, God will no longer bless this denomination.

Let's see what happens. He says in verse 4, *"as for you"* (somewhat rather personal if you would ask me). He points a finger right at the heart of God's man. He points a finger at this platform. I told Dr. Morris Chapman just a moment ago that in all my years as a Southern Baptist, I was so deeply grateful for the leadership that the president of our Executive Committee gave yesterday when he stood up and called a spade a spade. That is the kind of leadership we expect from the leaders of the Southern Baptist denomination. I can never thank God enough for Dr. Bobby Welch. This man has given us his heart and his body and his soul. As I sat next to his beloved wife just a few moments ago, I reached out and I took that dear lady's hand, and I said to her, *"Thank you so much for who you are."* In this particular passage, God personalizes His Word at a very deep level. He looks into my heart as the pastor of a wonderful church. He examines my heart as a preacher of the gospel. He looks into my heart as a father and as a husband. He looks into my heart as the president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. He looks into my heart, and He says, *"What about you, son?"*

I submit to you today that there are some men and ladies here today and God is speaking to you, as He is speaking to me.

"As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing everything I have commanded you...." You will note these conditional clauses here, *"...and if you keep My statutes and ordinances, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David: You will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel. If you or your sons turn away from following Me and do not keep My commands—My statutes that I have set before you—and if you go and serve other gods and worship them, I will cut off Israel from the land I gave them (Southern Baptists), and I will reject the temple I have sanctified for My name. Israel will become an object of scorn and ridicule among all the peoples. Though this temple is [now] exalted (Look at this place. Look at us. Just imagine what God has done.), every passerby will be appalled and will hiss. They will say: Why did the Lord do this to this land and this temple? Then they will say: Because they abandoned the Lord their God."*

This dramatic account here of the life of Solomon raises several significant issues for us as Southern Baptists, as well as the issues God raised in the life of Solomon. I want to share four of these issues with you. I am so grateful for our people and the church that I serve in Spartanburg and for our seminaries. I am so grateful for all that God is doing. I believe in sending out people to find new ways of doing things, whether it be Willow Creek or Saddleback. I believe we need to be innovative. We need to be on the cutting edge. I think we need to be attending seminars. We need to be sharpening our tools, and we need to heighten our understanding, and we need to be willing to do whatever it takes that by any means we might win this world to Jesus Christ. Four critical issues that are raised in this passage.

1. THE ISSUE OF UNOBSTRUCTED ACCESS TO GOD.

The Bible tells us in 1 Kings, chapter 3: Solomon loved the Lord. He was walking in the statutes of his father, David, except that he sacrificed incense at the high places. There was an exception as far as he was concerned. He was a sinner. We know all about that. I don't have time to get into the historical context. We understand that the Israelites had inherited these high places from the Canaanites. We understand the significance of pagan worship, and we understand the Levitical code, and we understand that God, by His grace, forbade them from doing what they did, and yet, Solomon disobeyed; and yet, Solomon still was visited by God, and Solomon was given unobstructed access. When we talk about unobstructed access, my friend, we are talking about the fundamental issue of our communion with our God and with our Father—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we are nothing. Our eloquence and our abilities, our elect-ability, our popularity contests, the churches that we build, and the money that we raise, and the mission trips we take—nothing is more important than having unobstructed access into the heart of God Himself in prayer and in discipline and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

I believe in order to have unobstructed access to God, beloved denomination, we've got to do some serious forgiving in our denomination, and it is across the board. Our father preachers need to be forgiven, who were too busy to give us the time of day. Our husband ministers need to be forgiven who treated us like second-class citizens. Our ministers who behaved in a manner which discredited the Lord's work need to be forgiven. Our church members who continually acted as blood clots in the flow of God's grace need to be forgiven. Our theologians who have placed a higher premium on theological correctness than on the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus need to be forgiven. Our small groups of power brokers who have systematically disenfranchised so many of our faithful brethren need to be forgiven. Our leaders who do not practice what they preach need to be forgiven. Our enemies who have turned their backs on the Word of God need to be forgiven. We, as Southern Baptists, need to confess and forgive each other for not following the Great Commission to go into all the world and to preach and teach and baptize and tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems to me there are three issues facing the church. I have taught my people this. The three greatest issues in the church—teach your people this.

1. The issue of absolute truth.

What is absolute truth? Start in Genesis, chapter one, and go right through the Bible. The Word of God is absolute truth. It is not open to discussion. It is not open to a popularity contest. It is not open to debate or a political race. Teach your people; give them permission. Insofar as I am able to do so, I give my people permission never ever to compromise on absolute truth.

2. The issue of personal conviction.

All of us have personal convictions. We teach our young people to have personal convictions. They are the finest things in the world. Our personal convictions should come out of absolute truth. But insofar as I am able to do so, I do not ever give my people permission to impose their personal convictions on God's people as absolute truths.

3. The issue of personal preference.

The matter of personal preference, in my opinion, is eating the Southern Baptist Convention alive. Whether we sit up or stand down; whether we sing choruses; whether we clap or whether

we don't clap; whether we sing hymns; whether we preach loud; whether we walk around the pulpit or stand behind the pulpit or whether we use the King James, or the Holman Bible, which I am reading from today, we have personal preferences ad infinitum. Insofar as I am able to do so, I do not give my people permission to ever impose their personal preferences on our congregation as absolute truth.

Friends, the Southern Baptist Convention is no longer being built on absolute truth. It has been built on personal preferences, and we are in trouble because we have moved away from the mandate of the Word of the Living God. We have moved away.

I tell you, friend, I could be as eloquent as the noonday sun, and you and I could preach until the cows come home, but if we don't have access into the heart of our Savior, we are nothing, because we will never hear from Him.

II. THE SECOND MOST CRITICAL ISSUE IS THE ISSUE OF UNLIMITED TIME.

Contextually, I wish I could talk about this in great detail. We know the historical context. The temple was built in 966 B.C. and completed in 959 B.C. The Lord appeared to Solomon in 946 B.C. Do you know that only twelve years passed between the time of the first appearing and the second appearing? Do you know what Solomon accomplished with the passing of time? This issue of time that God gave him, Solomon accomplished three major things:

1. He accomplished the gathering of the people together.

That is what the Word says in verse one of Chapter 9. He gathered the people together. He gathered them for worship and for fellowship.

2. He accomplished the comfort of the king.

The Bible said he had taken care of his own immense needs.

3. He accomplished the fulfillment of all of his dreams.

In the time he had available to him, from the time of the first appearing to the time that God came back to him and lectured him about the things God was not pleased about, he accomplished three very, very significant things: the gathering of the people; the comfort of the king; the fulfillment of his dreams.

Sounds like Southern Baptists, doesn't it? Since 1845 – more than twelve years. Think of us as a denomination, corporately. Look at us – the largest Protestant denomination in the world! Look at us individually. Our comfort zone is unsurpassed. Why don't you come with me to Africa and see how the rest of the world lives? Why don't you go on that mission trip to China and see how the rest of the world lives? Why don't you go to some of these places where people meet for fear of their lives and where they have been persecuted and beheaded and subjected to unruly crowds and persecuted in unsurpassed ways? We hardly have to walk out of the coliseum and there is a hot dog at our right hand and a latte at our left hand. We have places to go and eat. We have magnificent houses. We have pulpits and cushions and microphones and beautiful ties and suits that we wear. We have accomplished great things, not just with regard to our people, but also with regard to ourselves. We are one cushy denomination. I mean we are "fat cats" if you will beg my pardon. Just look at us. What have we accomplished? You know how we appease our consciences? We rally our people and say, "Well, I did twelve mission trips." We send our people to poor countries, and we ought to do that. But as soon as we come back, we go back to business as usual.

Solomon accomplished great things, but I am going to submit to you the issue of unlimited time is something we, as Southern Baptists, need to sit up and take note of. I do not believe we have unlimited time, do you? I do not believe we have until tomorrow, because there are people just like you and me who are dying and leaving this world without the Lord Jesus Christ. I could stand here today and share with you one account after another of people who are perishing because you and I were too comfortable, because our people had been gathered into fine monuments of nothingness sometimes. We spend half our conversation at conventions walking around trying to tell each other what our building fund is and

how big our churches are and how many churches have our names written on them instead of telling one another about the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that has cleansed us from all our sins.

We have looked at two issues: the issue of unobstructed access and the issue of unlimited time. Solomon teaches us a third one:

III. THE ISSUE OF GOD'S UNDESERVED PRESENCE.

There are two things juxtaposed against one another here. I wish I had time. I love in my pastoral ministry, with these precious people who are behind me, the inestimable privilege of standing week by week and being able to expound upon the Word of God and build precept upon precept and teach God's people the truth of the Word of God. But it is interesting to note the difference between God's first appearing to Solomon and His second. When He showed up the first time, in chapter 3, it was altogether different, because God said to Solomon, "You ask me." Well, what did he ask? What was his petition? It was sixfold:

1. **He thanked God.** – for the One who had gone before him through David

2. **He acknowledged God.** – the One whose hand was upon him

3. **He recognized God.** – the One who had placed him on the throne

4. **He confessed to God.** – Interesting concept for a king of his stature to have confessed to a holy God, don't you think? What did he confess, by the way? If you are going to do a Bible study, he confessed his immaturity. He said, "I am as a little child." This is the king! This was Solomon we are dealing with here. This was the president of the corporation. This was the CEO. Why did he confess his immaturity? Because humility and a listening heart are two fundamental prerequisites of the pastoral ministry. Why did Solomon confess that he was a little child? We've got to be so careful as Southern Baptists. Some of us have become so important, we strut even while we are sitting down. What is God saying to us?

5. **He observed with God.** – Herein lies the essence of the heart of compassion. He observed the crowds of people around the fields, which are ripe unto harvest.

6. **He requested from God.** – What did he request? What did King Solomon ask of God in chapter 3? Two things:

1) *An understanding heart*, which speaks to compassion. It speaks to that essential ingredient in the heart of a man who has compassion for the people for whom Christ Jesus died.

2) *A discerning heart*. What is a discerning heart? From a spiritual perspective, it is that ability to disseminate that which is spiritually acceptable and that which is not. That is what a discerning heart is.

It is interesting to me that when God appeared the second time, things changed. On the second appearance, God didn't stand there and say, "Solomon, my son, why don't you just ask me anything?" No, the second appearance is a lecture, folks. If you will beg my pardon, this second appearance in chapter 9, God laid the smack down. There was no beating around the bush.

What is the final analysis? God showed him four things that God's people cannot do without. You and I say we just cannot do without our air conditioning, can we? We just cannot do without our padded pews. We just cannot do without that new sanctuary. We just cannot do without our trumpet player in the orchestra. We just cannot do without that position. We cannot do without power. We cannot do without that sense of self-importance. God just drew a line in that, and He looked into the heart of the great King Solomon and said, "Solomon, there are four things you, as God's person, cannot do without."

Here they are:

1. You cannot do without the guarantee of God's presence.

You cannot exist. Folks, this doesn't go in the budget. You don't need a budget item for any of these. You don't need to have a program. I am involved in FAITH Evangelism Strategy through the

Sunday School. We go out and witness every week. We have the National FAITH Evangelism program in our church in August. I am for it and I am involved, but there are some things you cannot do without. Southern Baptists, God spoke to Solomon.

2. You cannot do without the guarantee of the placing of God's name.

That is what God says in chapter 3 and verse 3, and chapter 9 and verse 3. Why? The Bible tells us blessed be the name of the Lord. Write His name upon your heart. The Bible says there is no name under heaven whereby we might be saved other than the name of Jesus! It is at the name of Jesus Christ that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! That cannot be budgeted, either.

3. You cannot do without the conferring of His grace.

That is what He talks about in verse 5. What is the grace of God? God's grace is God confirming Himself. The word "established" literally means that God, who is sovereign, who is rich in mercy and grace, reaches down to a wretched sinner like me, and He places His hand upon me, and He says, "My son, despite who you are, I died for you, and I establish, I confer, My grace upon you." You cannot budget for that.

Some of us are operating as pastors and ministers without the conferring of God's grace upon us. We do not have the guarantee of His presence. His name is not written upon our foreheads. His grace has not been conferred upon us.

The fourth thing we cannot do without:

4. You cannot do without the gaze of His eyes and of His heart.

You cannot budget the gaze of His eyes and His heart. My wife and I have been married for thirty years. I love that sweet little duckling today more than I have ever loved her in my entire life. Folks, you and I know what we are talking about. All of us get up and say we need to say something about our wives. Let me tell you something about my wife. Thirty-seven years ago when I met her, I couldn't stop gazing upon her. I have now spent thirty-six years gazing upon her. When we sat up here just a moment ago, my precious little duckling took me by the hand and held my hand and we just gazed upon one another. Folks, God is talking here about the gaze of the Son of the Living God, without whom we are nothing. We've got to realign our focus as the people of God. We have to get back to basics. We've got to understand what God was telling Solomon, in no uncertain terms.

The guarantee of His presence; the writing of His name; the conferring of His grace; and the gaze of His eyes and of His heart.

IV. THE ISSUE OF UNAPOLOGETIC WARNINGS

We cannot let this one go. Not just the issue of unobstructed access and the issue of unlimited time. It doesn't matter. We cannot do it whenever we feel like it. Not just about the issue, my friends, that God gives to us His undeserved presence, but the issue of unapologetic warnings. This is action-packed in this text here. If you do a thorough exegesis of this, my brothers, you could do a ten-week Bible study on Sundays just in what I am about to share with you right now. What was the content of the unapologetic warning that God gave to Solomon? It was fivefold:

1. The warning of generational decline.

This is found in verse 6. For those of us who are "older," we must think about the way in which we minister to the children. Dr. Ed Young, on Monday night at the Pastor's Conference made an impassioned plea that we would love the kids. He talked about the future. It is all very well for us to stand and make decisions today for tomorrow, but we must ask God that He will visit upon our young people, and future generations, that when you and I are long gone that the church will stand, because the Bible says, *"On this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it."*

God warned him about the issue of generational decline.

2. The warning of a lack of focus.

Found in the second part of verse 6, God says we better focus on Him. We have forgotten what it means to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing. I know you do this in your church. We made a decision fourteen years ago in my church. The only reason we do anything is because it focuses everything on Jesus Christ. Traditions and all the other things are irrelevant as far as we are concerned, and it is no wonder that God has blessed the church and so many people have come to know Him.

3. The warning of disobedience related to the keeping of His commandments.

4. The warning of the Word of God.

His statutes.

5. The warning of idolatry.

You say to me today, "Pastor, we're not an idolatrous denomination. We don't worship other things." Folks, we do! We need to stop this. We are worshiping our wherewithal and our budgets and our abilities. We are worshiping our padded pews and our organizations. We are worshiping our Sunday School classes and the statistics that give us bragging rites and certificates at the associational offices. We are worshiping our personal preferences and our personal convictions.

He said, "Be careful, because if you don't, I will cut you off." The Lord has brought calamity upon them. How does He cut them off?

1. God will disgrace their people.

2. God will defrock their priests.

3. God will destroy their house of worship.

4. God will demean their witness.

That little word in the Hebrew text, as some of our Old Testament scholars will tell you, is the word "hiss." More and more people are looking at us Southern Baptists with a hiss. They are smirking. We have churches all over America today who at one point in time were powerhouses for the gospel of God's grace, and today they are nothing. You say, "Pastor, where does that leave us?" I submit to you today it leaves us where we need to be – at the foot of the cross. It leaves us on our faces before God, saying, "Oh, God, would You pour out your Spirit upon us? Would You visit upon us, a people? Oh, Lord God, would You enable us to become the soul winners that You called us to be? Would You let us be a people who are a people of pastors and shepherds who love people without distinction, with no apology, and preach the Word of God without apology? A people who refuse to impose our own basic presuppositions upon the text of the Word of God; a people who are humble and contrite; a people who are upon our knees; a people who are calling out to the God of the Ages and saying, "Oh, God, we give ourselves to You, because You alone are worthy, and we cannot imagine why You have done this."

I cannot even begin to imagine how God could have reached down and taken a little boy who ran around in the hills of Zululand and would have allowed me to tell people about the wonderful, saving grace of God in Christ Jesus. I don't know why it is that the Lord Jesus has allowed me the privilege to be loved by a people in Spartanburg, South Carolina, to have graduated from a seminary like the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, to be surrounded by friends and family, and to be loved and to be able to be about the Father's business. I do know this one thing: God called me, there is no doubt in my mind, and by His grace, I want to be part of the people of God.

God bless you.