

*Mac Brunson's Convention Message***"The Preeminence of Christ in Our Ministry"****John 3:22-36****Dr. Mac Brunson****Southern Baptist Convention, June 16, 2010**

I want to say thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for your leadership and your friendship, and thank you, Convention, for giving me one of the highest honors of my life; to be able to stand here before you and open God's Word.

**COMPROMISING WITH THE ENEMY**

It was July 12. The year was 1191, and the combined kings of the crusader armies came together and defeated Saladin and the Muslim armies there in the fortress at Acre on the Mediterranean coast of Israel.

Richard I, Richard the Lionhearted, was there. Philip of France was there. Leopold V, the Duke of Austria, was there along with some of the combined armies of what was known as the Holy Roman Empire, but really what we know today as Germany.

After that defeat, those kings marched into that fortress and they ran up on standards; the flags of these kings. They ran up the standard, the flag, of Richard I. They ran up the flag of Philip of France. They ran up the banner, the flag of Leopold V of Austria, but when Richard saw that, he became incensed. He said no flag of a duke should ever fly beside that of a king. With that, the arm of Richard tore down the flag of Leopold V and trampled it in the dirt. Well, Leopold had been there for two years prior to Richard's coming. He had fought and invested himself and his wealth into this battle to reach and re-take the city of Jerusalem, but when Richard did that, incensed at Richard he took his army and they marched back to Austria. Richard had also incensed the king of France, Philip, and so he took his army and he left. He incensed the Germans as well, and so the Germans all left, and it left just the army of England and Richard I to attack the city of Jerusalem, and he did just that.

In attacking the city of Jerusalem, he could not defeat Saladin and the Muslim army there. So it became a draw, and in the end Richard met with Saladin, and they decided that the city of Jerusalem would become an open city for everybody and every faith.

He could not win the victory on his own, so he compromised with the enemy and he left to return to England.

That's only part of the story.

As he headed back to England, he could not go as Richard I, because he had made all these other people so mad. He had to disguise himself, and so in disguise he makes his way back to England, but just outside of the city of Vienna, Richard reaches in and pulls out a gold English coin to pay for some supplies and they recognized [him] as the Lionhearted. This is Richard. The armies of Leopold V came down and captured Richard and they took him to the castle of Durnstein. There, on the Danube River, he's held for two years until England pays 65,000 pounds of silver; 32-1/2 tons of English silver to release their king all because there was a king who was better at negotiating with the enemy than getting along with his brothers in Christ.

I'm afraid that in our Convention and across the ministry today we are far better preachers at battling one another than we are at battling our enemy.

I want you to take your copy of God's Word, and I want you to look with me just for the next few moments at John 3. Now when you come to John 3, you come to that great high water

Part 2

mark of the gospels; the meeting at midnight between Nicodemus and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As Dr. Mohler so ably preached this passage the other day, you see these two come together. Here is a rich, wealthy, male rabbi, a moral man, who comes under the cover of darkness because he doesn't want anyone to see him talking to Jesus Christ, and then in chapter four of John, Jesus goes to the polar opposite. He comes to a woman who is not a Jew. She's a Samaritan. She's a half-breed; she's immoral; she's poor. He sees her and meets her at mid-day. It's as opposite as you could possibly get, and yet between these two tremendous events of evangelism and sharing the Gospel comes something that would threaten the sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it's a confrontation between disciples. Nobody ever reads this part of John's third chapter, but in John, chapter three, you come to a very, very interesting situation.

Look with me beginning in verse 22. *"After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim...."* (v. 22)

Which is on the eastern side of the Jordan River in the area of that day known as Perea. It's in the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan in our day, over on that side. Jesus is on the western side over in what we would understand to be the land of Israel today. Jesus is over here; His disciples are baptizing. John is over here and John is baptizing. So you've got the situation, verse 24: *"...for John had not yet been thrown into prison."* (24)

But now watch; this is what happens, because this is going on. John's here baptizing; Jesus and His disciples are over here, and His disciples are baptizing. *"Therefore there arose a discussion...."* (25)

Now just stop right there for a moment. *Zeteo* is the word; *zetesis*; to seek. If you begin to study that word, it means not just to seek, but it means to seek in an investigative type [of] way. It means to investigate. You begin to seek; you begin to investigate; you begin to debate; you begin to argue. You get a confrontation out of this. So they're digging around at this thing. *"There arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification."* (25)

Now this is the situation: You've got this Jew who is watching all of this. He's very familiar with the purification right of the Jews, and he's watching John baptize over here and the Jews have been very familiar with John and his baptism for some time now. Now he sees these disciples of Jesus and Jesus over on the other side and He's baptizing over there. So now this discussion has come up. I can just imagine what it's like. You've got this Jew who's watching all of this and he comes up and says, *I don't understand what's going on here. You've got to explain something to me. We're all Jews here. We know about the right of purification, but you've got John over here and he's baptizing. What's going on with that? Because over on the other side you've got Jesus baptizing. His disciples are baptizing, and I'm watching this. Is this something different? Is this a competition here? You guys are here. They're over there. What's the difference here? What's happening? By the way, let me ask you guys something. Didn't Jesus come to your rabbi to get baptized? And aren't those some of the disciples that used to follow John? Aren't they over there with Jesus now being a part of those that are baptizing, those that are coming? And hey, I've kind of noticed this: There's a larger crowd over there with Jesus now than there was with you and you used to run the big crowds, but where are the crowds going now and what's taking place?*

Now let's go back to the text. They came to John; that is, these disciples of John. *"And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan....'"* (26)

Now watch this! *"...He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."* (26)

They're so upset, they don't even use His name! They're so beside themselves at this point with frustration and upset, and now here is the rub: *Wait a minute here! We don't like this situation! Something is not right with this! This isn't kosher here for us! We don't understand! You baptized Him, some of our guys are over here on that side right now, and we don't like the way this thing is going and we're upset! They were agitated and frustrated and mad!*

I read a study some time back by somebody who used to be in this Convention. You haven't heard his name in a long time: Kenneth Chafin. When Kenneth Chafin was teaching at one of our seminaries, he did a study that I came across. It was a pretty fascinating study. This is what he discovered about preachers in this study that he did. Interviewing preachers and interviewing seminary students as a homiletician, he said he discovered that there was a high rate of bitterness and resentment among pastors. That's what is happening with these disciples right here. Then he said he discovered these three things: He said he found that in those in the ministry and those going to the ministry, number one, they tend toward the negative; number two, they are highly competitive; and number three—are you ready for this? They don't like preachers.

Dr. Hunt was talking about the evangelists having a meeting this afternoon. I was sitting at a table one evening not long ago with one of the leading evangelists in this Convention who looked at me and said, *I'm going to tell you that on any given Monday morning down at the associational office, the average Baptist pastor would rather hear that his fellow pastor had to resign because of adultery than to hear that the Spirit of God fell on the church and fifty people got saved and came for baptism.*

There is something happening among pastors today that absolutely has the watching world astounded, the devil laughing, and our Almighty God grieving! Thank you for you three. This is not going to be a popular sermon!

They were jealous, they were annoyed, they were upset, and it was all because they had begun to focus on themselves instead of the preeminence of Jesus Christ. Now I want you to watch how John's going to handle this. I'm going to just give you two points so you'll be out of here quickly. At least that's what you'll think.

I want to just show you two things; how John comes—and in this moment he says, *There must be a refocusing on the preeminence of Jesus Christ!* He's already pointed them to Christ back in chapter one. He said, *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* So now these disciples come to him, and there's this upset and this frustration and this agitation and this anxiety and stress about, *Our crowds are not here! We're not mentioned in 'Baptist Press' as much as we used to be! We don't get as many hits as we used to! Nobody is coming to us! They're getting more attention in that ministry over there!* He comes and he says, *There must be a focus on the preeminence of Jesus Christ two ways!*

**NUMBER ONE:** *There must be a focus on the preeminence of Jesus Christ in my life personally.*

Now I want you to watch this. I hope you've got a copy of God's Word because I'm just going to walk you through the text beginning in verse 27. Now listen to what he says here because this is, right here, a recognition of reception: *"John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.'"* (27)

He said, *Guys, you just look at this! You see the crowd that's here? This is what God has given to me! I've received this of God. It's a recognition of reception. I have what God has given to me! He has what God has given to Him!*

Do we ever understand that in the ministry? Do we ever understand that what we have is what God has given to us? I am saved solely because of God's grace! I have received His salvation! Let me tell you, I'm in the ministry not because I'm pretty; not because I'm exceptionally smart; not because I have, really, any kind of gift! I'm in the ministry today because I have received a call from Jesus Christ! It's mine because I have received it! It's the sovereign act of a sovereign God! I pastor one of the greatest churches in the world! I love these people, and I want to tell you something: I receive them as a gift from God. They are a gift to Mac Brunson. When I stand up and I look at the people of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, when I look at these young people, do you know what I think? I think that's a gift to me! I've received that because of the goodness of God in my life! I didn't earn it! I don't deserve it! It's God's gift, and do you realize, pastor, you're a gift to that congregation? Now listen, some may want to exchange gifts, but that's a different sermon for another time, but I want to tell you something: You're a gift to that congregation, and that congregation is a gift to you!

I want you to put your finger in John right there. Go with me to 1 Corinthians, chapter three. I want you to listen to what Paul says. He talks about this. First Corinthians, chapter three, verse 5: "What then is Apollos?" (1 Cor. 3:5)

What is Paul? Who are we really, in all honesty? Paul says this: *We're servants!* That's all you are! You're a servant. I'm just a servant. If you are here and you've been ordained to the Gospel ministry, let me just let you in on something: You're just a preacher. You may be a denominational official in this denomination, but let me let you in on something: You're just a preacher. You may have degrees hanging down your walls like the curtains in a mansion; you're just a preacher! You may serve in some kind of office somewhere in our seminaries. You may serve on this Convention floor, but you're just a preacher! And there's nothing better in all the world than to be that. He says, *We're just servants!* Anything you've got, God has given to you and he tells you that. He says, *I planted, Apollos watered.* What happened? God gives the increase. We run off to some seminar somewhere and we come back and we are convinced that if we do something that's been done somewhere else and we get 2-3 people to walk the aisle, we strut around like we've done something. Let me tell you something: Any church growth you have is an act of a sovereign God. You receive it!

There needs to be a **RECOGNITION** of reception, but there needs to be a **REALIZATION** of position.

Now, I'm just going down the text. I don't know any better than that. This is what he says: "You yourselves are my witnesses...." (v. 28)

He said, *Now guys, you've witnessed this!* He said, *You bear witness. I said I'm not the Christ! Do you remember when the Pharisees came to me and they started in and said, Are you Elijah? Are you a prophet? No! Are you the Messiah? No! You have witnessed this! I know my position!*

Listen to what he says: "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said 'I am not the Christ,' but 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'" (28)

You know his father prophesied that? You can look back to Luke, chapter one, verse 76. Zacharias prophesied that very thing; that his son would simply be just the forerunner. Verse 76, Luke, chapter one: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways...." (Luke 1:76)

He gives a hint, but John's going to pick up on it in verse 30. He gives a hint. He says, *You're going to prepare the way, but there's coming a day when the Son will rise! And when the Son rise comes, you're going to begin to fade.*

Now the thing I love about John is this: He gives us a great illustration here. Look at it; John, chapter three, verse 29: He said, *Let me just give you this illustration. Let me just tell you what I'm talking about. I know my position. I'm not the bridegroom. I'm just the best man. I'm just a friend of the bridegroom.* Verse 29: He reaches back into the Old Testament, and John is really the last of the Old Testament prophets. He bridges the Old Testament and the New Testament. He reaches back to this Old Testament concept of God being the bridegroom, Israel being the bride, and then he brings it into the New Testament and look at what he says. "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." (29)

Now just stop right there. He says, *Let me explain something to you. That's the bridegroom over there, guys. I want you to understand this. I know my position. I'm just the best man. I'm just a friend of the bridegroom.* All of you know what a best man is. You've been in a wedding and some of you have been best men, and let me tell you something: When the bride comes down the aisle, when the groom comes down the aisle, what do you do? You don't just stand there like this and kind of move. You move! Your body moves. Why? Because we're drawing all attention to the bridegroom and the bride. That's what he's saying right here. He comes and he says this: *I know my position!*

Now, in Jesus' day, the groom would never speak until the hand of the bride was placed in his hand and then the bridegroom would speak. In Jesus' day, at a Jewish wedding, not the father of the bride but the best man would bring the bride down and take the hand of the bride and put it in the hand of the bridegroom, and then the bridegroom would speak. John says this: *All I am doing is going over here and bringing the bride, these people, to the bridegroom, and I'm putting their hand in the Master's hand, in the hand of the groom, and I heard Him speak and I'm full of joy because of it!* That's what will bring joy in your ministry!

When you get your focus off the preeminence of Jesus Christ, you begin to focus on, *Where am I in this Convention? Why don't I have this office? Why didn't I get asked to do this? Why didn't somebody call me? Why are they doing this? Why are they doing that? Why are they doing the other?* It is proof-positive that in your life personally, you don't have your eyes on the bridegroom; because all we're called to do is go get people and put their hands in the nail-scarred hand, and then we hear His voice! We've got something to shout about!

Now folks, I want to tell you something. We've been so split and so divided in so many different ways over the last little bit. You've got those that are this many points and those that are no points, and you've got young and you've got old, and you've got big and you've got small, and you've got this in favor of that and this not in favor of that.

**I want you to listen to something: It's about Jesus Christ.**

There was a young, small church pastor who used to stand at the front door on the steps of his church, and he could see the large church of an older pastor and literally see the thousands that walked into that church. They say that F.B. Meyer would go and stand on the steps of his church and he would look over and watch the royal carriages of the royal family of England pull up and go up the steps into the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon preach. F.B. Meyer, when he went to that church, had maybe one hundred, maybe 150. Spurgeon was preaching to thousands. Meyer was younger and Spurgeon was older.

You're never going to let me back up here again. Let me tell you something, and I'm telling you this out of Titus: We older men need to walk with these young men, and let me tell you something, young men: You need to walk with the older men. I'm to treat you as a son and you young men are to treat the older men as a father. When Spurgeon died, they went to F.B. Meyer and they said, *What did you think of the preaching of Spurgeon?* F.B. Meyer said this: *I can*



never tell my indebtedness to them. As I read them week by week in my young manhood, they gave me a grip of the Gospel that I can never lose! And listen to what Meyer said: They should take Spurgeon's sermons and record them on tablets of gold! Gold befits gold!

Before Spurgeon died, they asked him about the young pastor of a small church and his preaching. They asked, *What do you think of the preaching of F.B. Meyer?* Spurgeon said this: *When I hear Meyer preach, it's as if I'm listening to a man who has seen God face to face.*

Do you know why that was so? Because you had two men from two generations and two different kinds of churches who did not see themselves and their ministries. They saw the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

**Now let me give you the second thing, and that's the preeminence of Jesus Christ in my proclamation, in my preaching.**

Now you come to verse 31. In verse 31, we really don't know. There are some scholars that say now John the Baptist is no longer speaking. Some scholars say, *This is John the Apostle speaking. It's a new pericope; I know that. I know that there's a little bit of stylistic change here.* It really doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit authored all of this, but let me just tell you what takes place here. There is just this proclamation of exaltation of Jesus Christ. Whether it's John the Apostle or John the Baptist, when you get to verse 30, he says, *He must increase and I must decrease.* Whoever this is, they just erupt with the exaltation of Jesus Christ! The preeminence of Christ! They burst forth into a sermon, and look at this beginning in verse 31. There's the preeminence of His origination: *"He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all."* (31)

That goes straight back to John, chapter one, verse 1: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1)

Let me tell you something: Jesus Christ is God! He is Lord! The preeminence of Christ in my preaching is what will reach this world! Not the preeminence of my ministry; not the preeminence of my program, but the preeminence of Jesus Christ!

**The second thing is the preeminence of revelation;** His Word! Verse 32: *"What He has seen and heard, of that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony."* (32)

I'd love to take off on this because I'm going to tell you what I think John is referring to here. Jesus started preaching what John the Baptist had been preaching and that's repentance, and nobody wants to hear that. Not even Baptists want to hear that. Amen! Just amen!

*"He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure."* (33-34)

Let me tell you something: Men, in our preaching, I'm not so sure that the reason we've not seen dips in our baptism, we've not seen a slide in our attendance, we've not seen some of the things we've experienced because we've not been putting the Gospel in our messages! If you're not preaching Jesus Christ, you ain't preaching! You can call it whatever you want to, but preaching is when you put the cross in it! When you put Jesus in it! When you put the blood in it! When you put the resurrection in it! And I'm here to tell you, because I don't know anything other than what I read in Scripture, when you put the second coming in it!

**Now look at the third thing: Verse 35; it's the preeminence of His resources.**

*"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand."* (35)

Everything needed to save you is in the hands of Jesus Christ! Everything needed to do what God has called you to do is in the hands of Jesus Christ! That must be our focus! The preeminence of

Jesus Christ in my life personally; the preeminence of Jesus Christ in my proclamation; in my preaching; in my teaching! And you say, *Why are you so concerned?* Because there's a verse 36 that talks about an actual hell that people are going to go to. There is a hell. I don't care what Oprah Winfrey says, there is a hell! But we have a Savior who has everything in those nail-scarred hands necessary to save this world. This verse goes right back to John 3:16. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, what whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

Jesus Christ came to die for the world. He came to die for mankind. He came to die for whosoever will! Whosoever will may come! That's who He died for; all of those who would receive Him!

Do we ever hear the cry? Do we ever just stop and think? Do we hear the cry of men and women, boys and girls who are on a fast train to an eternal hell? You ever hear that cry? Do you ever sense and hear the call of the Holy Spirit? It's so convicting! It got loud in here yesterday, if you were able to hear it above the speeches and above the protests and above the admonitions. If you could have heard it you could hear the cry of those that were lost and headed to a Christless eternity on a fast train to an eternal hell. You could have heard the voice of the Holy Spirit. But sometimes we get so religious, we shut out the voice of not only the Holy Spirit, but the cries of the lost.

Just about six or seven weeks ago, Debbie and I were on a train. I had gotten stuck in Paris, and please don't tell me, *Oh, how pitiful! It's sad to be stuck in Paris!* Yes, it is! We were stuck there. It's not cheap and I was ready to leave. We were trying to get into Munich, and no planes were flying in Europe. People were renting taxis and paying unbelievable amounts of money to be taken anywhere in Europe. Trains were full. I got up early on a Saturday morning, went down to the train station in Paris and waited in line for at least an hour, got up there and I said, *Is there anything you can get me out of Paris on and into Germany?* I said, *Have you got something going to Munich?* No, no, no, no. Then Debbie said, *Do you have anything?* The guy looked at her and said, *I've got two places in a sleeper car at 8 o'clock tomorrow night for a 12-hour train ride to Munich.* I thought, *This is great! We're going to walk in, get in a sleeper car. It'll be nice, wonderful, the two of us in our own little places to sleep for the evening. We'll sit and read, go to bed.*

I walked into a little car six feet wide by six feet long with six beds in it. If the Catholics are right and there is a purgatory, I went through it that night. Let me tell you something: You had three beds stacked up, 24 inches in between. Now I want to tell you something. There's no need to laugh at everything. There was not a lot of space between me and the bunk on top of me. But I got in that thing and we went to sleep and that old French lady that slept under me, she snored. There was not a cow in France that could snore that woman down, I'm telling you! I woke up just before the sun came up and the thought hit my mind: We're pulling in, in about two hours to Munich.

Just last year, I was in Dachau outside of Munich, the concentration camp there. We spent the afternoon there until I absolutely could not take it any longer, and we left. I thought to myself, *Am I riding on the rail bed where the trains took Jews to Dachau?* And I thought how cramped I was in that little compartment. I began to repent before God, to tell you the truth, as I thought about the Jews crowded into cattle cars. They pulled in some 200,000 to Dachau, 30-, 40-, 45-, 50,000, we really don't have a clue how many were executed at Dachau. But I wondered, *Am I riding on the rail bed that took the Jews to Dachau as I head toward that direction?*

What happened to the church in Nazi, Germany, during those days? I want to read something to you from Erwin Lutzer's book *When a Nation Forgets God*, that has haunted my soul ever since.

"I lived in Germany during the holocaust; the Nazi holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because what could anyone do to stop it? A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance, then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars. Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow, we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more. Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore, but I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians, yet did nothing to intervene."

I'm afraid in our churches, I'm afraid in our Convention meetings that when we begin to hear the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit, or we begin to hear the hackles and the cries of men and women and boys and girls on a fast train to an eternal hell, we get louder, we sing louder, we debate longer, and we try to shut out those voices that are calling to us.

We don't need just resurgence, dear folks. We don't need just revival. We have got to get back and refocus on the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

—from the office of Mac Brunson

## Part 3

### Ministry Reports to the Southern Baptist Convention