

he Door, Cornerstone, Commander, Creator;  
he Faithful Witness, The Good Shepherd, the Great High Priest;

## John Meador's Convention Message

### THE IMPOSSIBLE QUEST

Convention Sermon – 2014 Southern Baptist Convention

1 Chronicles 11:3, 9, 10–14

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God is always sending out to His followers a higher calling and a deeper dependence. In late January, I addressed 1,000 pastors and wives in South India and challenged them to give their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Many of them bore on their bodies the scars of beatings and machete attacks endured while sharing the Gospel in villages – yet their vision, boldness, and tenacity was undeterred. I remember thinking: *"If I did what they are doing – if I gave my life for the sake the Gospel to the same degree, what might happen? If I'm telling them to change the world with their meager resources, what will I do with my many resources?"* Have you ever wondered that?

Does God ever call us to less? And yet, less is what we give Him. When thousands of pastors and leaders come together like this, our conversation should never be ordinary, but earth-shaking and world-changing. In these next few minutes, I want to tell you a story that's changing my life – and bring the challenge that was brought to me this past year.

When I got the phone call to preach this convention message, I was in my car with my wife. It had been perhaps the hardest year of my ministry in Euless, Texas. I'm blessed to pastor a tremendous church with incredible people. I was in my seventh year, and surveys show the seventh year is the best for most pastors. All I can say is they forgot to survey me. Rocked by staff departures, a financial challenge, and an attendance decline – I was weary and wondering. I didn't have many answers, and I was asking a lot of questions! When that call came and the opportunity was extended, I turned to my wife, who'd heard the conversation, and said, "I guess this would not be the year to quit." Truth. Have you ever been there?

Pastor, sometimes you don't know if you're moving up the mountain or off the cliff, but you do know you've been called by a mighty, sovereign God who has an incredible strategy for you in His kingdom, whether you see it or not. When I began praying about what to preach, I simply heard this: "You will preach what you live this coming year." Well, that could have been anything! I was more than a little concerned and a bit fearful about what I would live out, but what God has shown me is changing everything.

My text this morning is **1 Chronicles 11**. The title is true to the call God has placed on each one of us – *The Impossible Quest*.

**1 Chron. 11:3, 9–14:** *"So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord through Samuel. ...<sup>9</sup>David became greater and greater, for the Lord of hosts was with him. <sup>10</sup>Now these are the heads of the mighty men whom David had, who gave him strong support in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the Lord concerning Israel. <sup>11</sup>And these constitute the list of the mighty men whom David had: Jashobeam, the son of a Hachmonite, the chief of the thirty; he lifted up his spear against three hundred whom he killed at one time. <sup>12</sup>And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who was one of the three mighty men. <sup>13</sup>He was with David at Pasdammim when the Philistines were gathered together there to battle, and there was a plot of ground full of barley; and the people fled before the Philistines. <sup>14</sup>And they took their stand in the midst of the plot, and defended it, and struck down the Philistines; and the Lord saved them by a great victory." (NASB)*

These are three of the mighty warriors who walked with David. The background is a small, obscure field on the western border of Judea. The name of the city means, "bloody boundary" due to battles against Philistines. The field was of little value materially; the conflict was a matter of principle for these courageous men.

This was God's field, and the enemies were encroaching upon it. None remained to do battle to protect the land, except these three. The rest had fled. Only three had stayed to claim it for the Lord. Yet, to abandon this field was to lose more than a field – it was to lose a nation.

When you read the Old Testament stories of courage, you're reading what the apostles read that fueled their fires of passion and courage and enabled them under the power of the Holy Spirit to turn the world upside down! You see the examples God has placed in Scripture for us living in this present age.

This battle gives tangible form to the spiritual battles of the present day – and we are at war! The Old Testament battles for land are parallels to the New Testament battles for lives. The promised land in the Old Testament gives way to the promised life in the New Testament. There is a field, an enemy, and a high stakes battle to fight.

For the next few moments, let's walk into the field with those men and watch how God works and how He provides victory through their courage and boldness.

**I. They recognized their responsibility.** *"...the people fled...They took their stand..." (vv. 13b, 14a)*

All Israel fled! The multitude of Israelites had weapons. They had experience in battle. They had a reason to stay and fight. What they didn't have was faith and confidence. When everyone else fled the battle, three men were courageous enough to stand their ground. If they left, the enemy would win. It's not unlike the storyline we find throughout the Bible! Many flee, the odds are stacked against God's people, just a few remain, but God works with the few – the remnant. This is about God's work. It's also about how God worked through Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. It's about the story of Gideon, Joseph, and Daniel. It's David when he faced Goliath – and it's David in v. 3 and v. 9 as God works through him for Israel. In the New Testament, we read Hebrews 11, where only a few recognized their responsibility.

The text we are working with today is about God's work in general, but the application for our present day is about the Gospel, because that's our battle – *our* field. You know this; we have fields. The fields we battle in today are not fields of beans or wheat, but fields of life – fields where eternity is at stake. This is not about a season of crops, but a generation of people!

Jesus' words in the Gospel of Mark make us look at those fields. *"Behold, a sower went out to sow."* In John 4:35, we are directed to the fields. *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white for harvest."* Paul gave Timothy the word picture of the soldier in the battlefield, the athlete on the track, and the FARMER IN THE FIELD. Fields are the places where seeds are sown and where the seeds begin to grow out of the ground.

In these modern-day fields around us (in light of Jesus' emphasis on fields and seeds), you would expect to see courageous sowers out to sow where seed has never been sown. You expect to see dedicated laborers in the harvest gathering from previous sowing, and you expect to see the huge baskets of fruitful labor. But...we...don't.

In some communities today there is no one in the fields. Who is supposed to be there? The short answer is that we are all to be in the fields, but we are clearly not there. We are not getting the Gospel into the fields in America; we are abandoning the fields that the Lord Jesus told us are "white with harvest".

And, why? Our army has fled. They have no heart for the conflict! Some estimate that 95% of Christians in America do not share their faith. Look at the common reasons:

1. Some are ashamed of Christ in an unfriendly culture and don't want to appear foolish.
2. Others believe our culture is "too far gone" to care about salvation.
3. Most people have no confidence in their ability to share the Gospel.
4. We are too isolated from non-Christians and do not have opportunities.
5. Some believe evangelism is only for those who are seminary trained or gifted.
6. Many simply do not know how and have no one to train them.
7. Some say this is a doctrinal problem brought on by the rise of Calvinism!

I have Calvinist and non-Calvinist pastor friends and have deep respect for their biblical views. I actually tried to be a five-point Calvinist once, having been surrounded by godly mentors who have those views – but I concluded I didn't see Scripture in that light. I tell people I wanted to be a Calvinist, but it just wasn't meant to be. In my friends on both sides of that doctrinal distinction, I've observed equal amounts of zeal or apathy for evangelism.

*"Stop casting the stone that Calvinism is to blame for lack of evangelism. Stop it! We have a job to do that demands and deserves our undivided attention."*

There is a bigger problem – and here it is:

Many just do not want to share the good news. Many do not want to share Christ enough to do it. Pastor, when is the last time you lovingly shared the Gospel and planted seeds that grew into fruit? It seems evident that some do not believe the Gospel to be the cure for the immense and overwhelming depravity we face. If we have a doctrinal problem, that's the problem. It could also be that our selfish, comfortable tendencies to avoid the difficult and challenging parts of ministry, keep us off the fields. If you want to find the culprit, the "bully in the room," it's our flesh.

But the Gospel does far more than rescue us from sin and hell. It should also rescue us from self and apathy – nothing else can!

Overall, we have no leadership and no plan in our churches across America to equip people to share Christ in the field, outside the church venues, in the communities and in the neighborhoods where people actually live. Our approach is attractional, not conversational. As a result, the Gospel is losing ground in America and in our community. Most have never heard the greatest story ever told. When Christians do not share their faith, the culture sinks into hopelessness. In the absence of a Gospel-sharing church is the release of unrestrained sin. When the Gospel is absent in society, God-consciousness is diminished, and depravity runs bold and free.

Everyone has asked, "What will change this?" The question is not "What?" but "Who?" This is not about a Convention of 45,000 churches. It's not about an association of any kind, or even a church. This message is about a man. If we have a weak Convention, it's because of weak local churches, and if we have a weak church it's because of a weak man – but not just *any* man. There is a specific man God has called to be a strong soldier.

Paul's letter to Timothy, a part of the pastoral epistles that are letters with instructions to pastors, was a letter to a *man* who was leading the church of Ephesus. And to that man he said, *"But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Timothy 4:5, NASB).

Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. Some will say, "Look, I'm not the evangelistic kind. I'm more of a guy there to clarify the Gospel. Others can communicate it better."

There's no question we are here to "contend earnestly for the faith." The Gospel must be clarified, and it must be communicated. In Acts the progression was clear. Communicate first, clarify when necessary. We'll always do both. We contend earnestly for the faith when the heart of it is being threatened by heresy and perversion, but we communicate the Gospel at all times. We do not halt the communication to give attention to the clarification. And the reason we do not halt the communication is because the Gospel, for the everyday person, does not exist where it's not been heard! Carl F.H. Henry said, "The Gospel is Good News only if it gets there on time!" There's no good new for those who haven't heard.

Pastor, our work does not replace the work of the evangelist, and the admonition is not to be the evangelist, but to do the work of an evangelist. Spiros Zodhiates always said that the New Testament clarifies the itinerant office of evangelist as being distinct from the local office of the pastor. Paul said, "*Don't neglect to do the work of the evangelist as you lead and feed your sheep.*" Be about the continued work of God-sharing Good News with those who've not heard!

In 2013, The North American Mission Board launched a Pastors' Task Force on evangelistic impact in Southern Baptist life. They said, "As pastors we must intentionally model and prioritize personal evangelism while providing clear pathways for our congregations to follow." That's polite talk for, "Get a plan and get in the field."

When I was 14 years old, my father took me to a peanut field where I would work the summer. I'd never done anything like that before. The foreman, and the largest man I had ever seen, stood over about a dozen young boys. I was late that day and he wasn't happy. I asked him what to do. Without emotion, he pointed first to a pile of wooden-handled tools, and then to the fields behind me. He said, "Grab a hoe, pick a row. It's just that simple." Southern Baptists, it's that simple! Grab a hoe and pick a row. Stand on the land God placed you! Your community is your field!

My personal love is preaching. I'd be consumed with that if someone let me, but I must fulfill my ministry. This is where it gets personal for pastors. Will you be that man and fulfill your ministry? Could it be that we have many pastors and leaders who are not fulfilling their ministry and are not, in part, because they are not doing the work of an evangelist? Dr. Fred Luter told us in his president's address that we must have remorse and repent for revival to come. I agree. Since repentance means "to change," and since our problem is that we're not sharing the Gospel in the communities where we live, we must turn from failure and obey! Without obedience, we only have remorse.

**2. They recognized the encroachment of evil.** "...they took their stand in the midst of the plot, and defended it..." (v. 14)

These men drew the boundary line and claimed the land. They took on one Philistine after another. I can imagine the anger at the audacity of the enemy. Human anger isn't righteous, but God's righteous indignation about sin is. These men, to exhibit the level of courage, boldness, and abandonment to the field must have possessed a high degree of the godly righteous indignation! How else do you stand in a field of barley against hundreds?

Recently, I returned from slums of India. I was moved with compassion and with a conviction to act. One of my heroes in the kingdom is a young pastor in a northern state in India. Occasionally at night he would hear the cry of a child who'd been abandoned to die in the city dump near his home. God so stirred His righteous anger within my friend toward that atrocity that he became determined to do something, and he did. He's building an orphanage on the edges of that would-be cemetery.

Our anger and sadness against lostness must equal the outrage that swells in our hearts when injustice toward a newborn spurs us to act as quickly and make things right as God would. We have to draw the line in the field. If we don't speak up for those who are heading to hell, who will? Each of those who die without Christ tell a tragic story equal to the tragedy that would be present if one of our own children died without Christ. If pastors won't lead the way, who will? If churches won't share the Gospel, who will? I've come to believe that if I don't tell my neighbors about Christ, no one will.

David Platt said, "What's it going to take for the concept of unreached people groups to become intolerable for us?" I agree! But let me add this: What's it going to take for our unreached neighbors to become intolerable to us?

Are we capable of that kind of anger? Or are we so tempered by the complacency and apathy of our culture that we don't feel this anymore? While the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God, the anger of God is righteous and accomplishes much!

In "*Quest for More*," Paul Tripp writes, "What took Christ to the cross? The anger of a holy God who could not tolerate a world of sin and rebellion any longer...He died that you would be angry with sin and the way it has harmed you and everyone around you." Tripp goes on to say that God's goal is not to produce an unangry people, nor a people angry at God, but a people angry WITH God's righteous indignation against sin and lostness. It should produce an unquenchable zeal for God's cause that makes us stand in the field even if no one else does.

Our problem is not that we don't understand the problem. It's that we're not moved enough by righteous anger to apply to the solution. The solution is to sow the Gospel into the field.

*\*We spend untold amounts of time as a "reaction culture" putting salve on the extreme wounds of a gospel-less community. It is our failure to spread the Gospel that allows depravity to dominate as it does.*

*\*We don't change the status-quo in established churches because we don't consider the Gospel or the lives it touches important enough for the change.*

*\*We love being salt and pointing out the sins of our culture, but we don't love being light and sharing the solution to sin. There's something odd about that.*

*\*We love the Gospel, but speak of it primarily to other believers. Is it right that we spend more time talking, writing, and debating the Gospel to our other Gospel-saturated friends than we do with a Gospel-starved community? I love the books, but when will we go to the fields?*

So now we are watching the encroachment of evil in our community, the culture at-large and across our nation, just as those three men watched the encroachment of the Philistine on that land. They took their stand as we must do!

**3. They recognized that God was on their side.** "...and the Lord saved them by a great victory." (v. 14b)

This is an incredible story! Outmanned, but determined, they dug in their heels and stood toe-to-toe against evil at the place called "bloody boundary." This is the main idea of our text. The Lord is providing incredible victory for these noble men. They were not simply fighting for victory, but from the victory that was assured in God's promise to David. It's the small battle before the big one. God is going to raise David up, promise him an eternal throne that will be fulfilled in none other than Jesus Christ! It's all linked together. It's all the work of God! I doubt they knew as they began that they would win the game. And if they didn't know for sure, then they were prepared to die.

Today in America, the only acceptable level of commitment to the Gospel is a commitment at whatever cost. I spoke with Ronnie Floyd recently about his heart for the SBC and this convention message. He said, "John, tell them to die on that hill." I told him, "Ronnie, it's a field. We must be ready to die in the field." On [ronniefloyd.com](http://ronniefloyd.com) is a compelling statement:

"For the last several years, I have become convinced that I want to give the rest of my life influencing and investing in others to reach the world for Christ. I know I cannot do it by myself. I know our church cannot do it by ourselves. We need each other. Therefore, anytime, anywhere we can, we must influence others and invest in others to reach the world for Christ."

Ronnie's not alone. Everywhere I turn, pastors are talking this way. We know time is short. There is a deep hunger to see God move among us. We pray for revival and wait for it, but we are being stirred in powerful ways to lead our people into the field with the life-changing Gospel where it's needed the most.

That's what this Convention must be about! That's why our conversation must not be ordinary, but extraordinary in our zeal to work together in the fields! We should be talking together about how to equip and release an army of witnesses from out of the congregation and about how to love our communities and plant seeds of pre-evangelism. Gospel-talk should dominate!

J.D. Greear said, "The greatest potential for the kingdom of God is not the pulpit, but the congregation." Since that is a true statement, pastor, what will you do to mobilize that army? When will you get that congregation into the field with you?

So, what did God do in my life this past year? Just nine months ago, under intense conviction that more must be done, God led me to form a plan to train our people to share the Gospel that I believed would work with our church. I named it "*Can We Talk?*" It's simple. It's pastor-led. It's community-based. We go to people's homes who've been touched in some way by our church's compassion ministry, by our after school Bible clubs called KiDs Beach Club®, or some other outreach we do indirectly. The results have been phenomenal. Now, we've just begun, but we have over 300 adults who are actively sharing their faith with thousands of people. We have hundreds who have come to Christ. That will double in the fall as we train another 300 people. We only started with 15 people and me. We are a different church today because God called me as a pastor to lead our congregation into the field. We have together, as pastor and people, begun to reverse the trend of who shares the Gospel. Our goal is for 95% of our attenders to be actively sharing the Gospel. Imagine this. Already, we're hearing a common vein of response from some who've been witnessed to by our people. Continually they've said, "God is pursuing me through those people in that church. Several have talked to me about Jesus now." Why should we settle for less? It's a higher calling. For the first time, I believe I am fulfilling the ministry God called me to. I'm not an evangelist! I'm a pastor – and many of you today are as well!

Here's what I'm learning:

- When you get into that field, you will learn that God seems to answer prayer more quickly and powerfully when we pray about that which is closest to His heart, the Gospel – that which He created from before the foundation of the world and what He gave His Son to die for.
- When you raise your sword in the lost culture, you will learn that there is nothing that disturbs the enemy more and nothing that God will anoint us in more than the sharing of the Gospel. In the sharing of the Gospel with the lost, we are spotlighting how glorious, incredible, how loving and redemptive our God is – we are reflecting Who He is to others, and that brings Him glory! John Piper said, "Until you know

that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for. Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission." Too many are too removed from that war, and our prayer life reflects it. I've experienced that war, that battle and the huge power of prayer this past year more than ever before in my life. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

When you make the Gospel the single silo of your church, everything else begins to fall into place. Our Convention must become a single silo Convention! Whatever it takes, this has to happen, or nothing changes.

Our problem in the Southern Baptist Convention and with modern evangelicalism is not a lack of resources, a lack of committee work, and it is not even Convention politics. It is not essentially a theological issue. It's a leadership problem at the local level. That was my problem! God showed me it was my responsibility to lead my people into the field, that the community was my congregation, and that I am to do the work of an evangelist. God gave me a plan, and we've seen God bless our church in a new, fresh, revitalizing, and life-saving way! Bluntly, not enough pastors are doing that. We generally have no plan, and therefore have no leadership for evangelism. So we have had little victory.

We don't battle because we'll win. We do it because it's right. It's the solution. It's life. Evangelism is partnering with God in the war against lostness! Evangelism is what we do until the Lord comes and brings the ultimate harvest!

"*And the Lord saved them by a great victory*" (v. 14b). I can see those warriors standing in that field battling the Philistines. I also have another picture fixed in my mind of Jesus Christ, battling the accumulated weight of sin in the world and the entire host of demons, yet not giving up and not giving ground, and we are saved by His great victory. There's still a third picture I have – that of a pastor who is passionate about Christ, in love with his church, deeply disturbed by the lostness of his community – stepping into that field (by himself if he must) battling away and waiting to see God's powerful hand on him.

When that man becomes a warrior, strong and courageous, and when he gets into the field and leads his congregation there, we will have a strong man impacting a strong church. When the church is strong, we will have a strong Convention. A Convention focused more exclusively on the Gospel will attract more involvement from like-minded pastors, and we'll be stronger still! There's a whole generation of pastors watching and waiting to see if we'll get to kingdom business with the Gospel.

With this strengthened Convention will come the greatest movements of church planting and the most aggressive mission initiatives in history. When the Gospel grips your heart at home, it also grips it around the world. We need our people's hearts to be gripped by the Gospel! But it begins with the man.

I've heard several convention messages over the years from some of the greatest preachers of our time that I thought might change the course of our future, but few truly have. We're still the same. A message won't do it. It'll be a man. Pastor, YOU be that man. You be that pastor who goes home and says, "I'm going to go into the field and take my people with me. We'll change the world from that field!"

Pastor, when you believe it is important enough to lead your people to share the Gospel, and when you come to believe that God is on your side, you will get in the field yourself, lead them to come with you and train them to carry the Gospel into the lives of others!

Pastor, get out of the study and off the platform. Get into the fields where the people are and take your congregation with you and with the Gospel to those who've never heard.



Good news! We don't have to have a committee, motion, or resolution. We don't have to have permission from anyone. We simply have to stand before God and say, "God, I am that man. I will lead my people to share the Gospel. I will die in that field for the sake of what is so precious to You. Here I am, send me."

Pastor, YOU CAN DO THIS! Jesus Christ said you can! Jesus Himself promised the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us for the specific and narrow focus of being witnesses for the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

I want to close this message by asking you to join me in a time of prayer. This is one of the last times we have together as a Convention – this afternoon we go home. Call out to God for intervention. It's powerful. It's changing us. We're asking you to do that today. Will you come now to join me in prayer? Will you join our immediate past President Luter, and new President Floyd as we pray? We NEED intervention. We NEED men and women of God to step up and change the game. Come!

— from the office of John Meador

## Part 3

### Ministry Reports to the Southern Baptist Convention

