

TED TRAYLOR'S CONVENTION MESSAGE

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It was September 9, 1965 – James Stockdale became the highest ranking naval official ever taken captive as a P.O.W. He was shot down over North Vietnam. When Stockdale was taken to the Hanoi Hilton with McCain and others, he knew that as the highest official, before him was the pressure of keeping the men together. Stockdale was a master at secret communication. He came up with various phrases and one that was used by him in Vietnam again and again was the phrase, U.S. This phrase did not stand for United States or for the word “us,” rather it was used when a brother was taken to torture, or when someone was offered an easier route for information, or when people, like Stockdale, were beaten. The code? Unity over self. Stockdale knew that remaining one together rather than being one alone would be vital for his and his mates’ survival. Unity over self.

David had a word like that and you probably will not believe my text. From Psalm 133 David wrote these words. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It’s like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard. Coming down upon the edge of his robes. It’s like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.” How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity over self.

Spurgeon says that the background of this text is found in 2 Samuel when David has had the kingdom wrestled from him by his own son, Absalom. Absalom took the kingdom by standing outside the gate and saying, “You know, if I were the president of IMB, I wouldn’t do it that way. If I led the North American Mission Board, that wouldn’t be the way I would do it,” and then along came the brothers. You know the story. Absalom took the kingdom as David went into hiding, but he wound up hanging from the oaks by his hair and Joab ran him through with three spears. In the latter part of 2 Samuel 19, Spurgeon says that we find the people of God, after weeping, coming together and, verse 14 says, their hearts were as one man. How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.

Graham Scroggie, however, says that the text background comes from 2 Chronicles chapter 30. He said when Hezekiah was king, the kingdom was divided – Judah, Israel, Manasseh, Ephraim – and they had not gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover. Hezekiah sent the runners out and said, “Tell the people to come from Israel, from Judah, Manasseh, Ephraim and let’s have together the Passover meal.” When he did that (2 Chronicles 30:10), the Bible records that many laughed and mocked the king. But when you move to verse 26, you find that they came together as one man, bone of bone, heart of heart and it says that there was great joy. When they came together for the Passover from a divided kingdom, how good and pleasant it was for brothers to dwell together in unity.

Look at the very preamble of our convention – you know it, you’ve read it. One hundred seventy-one years ago in 1845, they got together to found this convention and they organized a plan for doing three things. These very words are important: eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort. For what? For the propagation of the gospel. The reason we exist – one item – to take the gospel to the world. It is to combine. It is to elicit. It is to direct all of our energy so we can take the gospel forward.

We often hear the *Baptist Faith and Message* quoted when we come together. We very rarely deal with the 14th article, but concerning cooperation it says, "New Testament churches should cooperate with one another." Several years ago while pastoring a church in Texas, an elderly gentleman died who had been a Sunday School teacher; his widow brought me all of his books. In that box of books, I found a little book entitled *The Baptist Spirit* written by I. J. Van Ness in 1914. I said, "I've got to read that." I've read about the Holy Spirit and always thought there was a Baptist spirit lurking around somewhere. As I began to look through I. J. Van Ness' little book, I noticed that he says, "How do independent Southern Baptist church bodies join together?" He says they do it one way, with the Baptist spirit of cooperation. They come together. How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.

You know and I know that we've got issues. Our own president wrote it months ago and shared it yesterday in that dynamic message that he preached. Dr. Floyd said that Southern Baptists are no longer in a battle for the Bible, but are in a battle with one another. The very soul of our convention is at stake. Adrian Rogers said years ago, "We used to stand shoulder to shoulder and march forward against the enemy and now we've turned face to face to fight one another."

Keith Taylor, a young, Ph.D., evangelism student at New Orleans Seminary wrote me not long ago. He said, "Pastor, with all of the division among Southern Baptists, we need to get back to telling the gospel story. I think that will bring us together." That young seminarian smelled something in the Southern Baptist air that disturbs him and that disturbs many of us. David Dockery, one of the sharpest theological minds and administrative geniuses we have among us; has written in several places these words – "Southern Baptists need a new spirit of mutual respect. We need to move from controversy and confusion to a new consensus and renewed commitment to cooperation." Dr. Dockery has got it right. We've got to move to Psalm 133. How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.

You know, we've got a big tent. It's a Baptist tent. I tell our people all the time, "You're a Baptist and it's a big tent and a lot of people come, but it does have flaps on it. There is a sidewall." As the Moses of Florida, Dr. John Sullivan used to say – and he's told me a thousand times – "You can't just believe anything and be a Baptist." Well when we come into the tent, there's got to be some doctrinal moorings. We've settled that – the deity of Christ, the inerrancy of scripture, baptism by immersion, the atonement, atoning death and physical resurrection of Christ, and regeneration by grace through faith. We believe in that doctrinal purity. Inside this tent, however, there is not only doctrinal purity, but there is variety and not uniformity. We're not a monotone convention. You'll hear all the notes of the octave when Baptists get in the tent. We're here and we're broad.

There's also liberty in this tent. There is no real unity existing where disagreement is not allowed. In the name of our Lord, we saw that yesterday, did we not? We saw the liberty, but now we come together to go forward. There's life in this tent. There's no strife in a graveyard; dead conventions are peaceful enough because nobody's moving and no one is doing anything. Thank God for life in the Baptist tent! Yet I have friends that come to me and say, "Yes, pastor, I'm in the tent, but I really would like to have a seat at the table. I keep hunting the table. I can't find the table. I've been to a few meetings that had tables and I wish I had not been in those meetings." I began to think, "What do they mean?" Well, they want to come and have a voice, but let me tell you, when you come in the Baptist tent there's only one table, and it's got the cup and the bread on it. We come to that table and we bow at the sufficiency of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 to come to the table and examine yourself to see if you are in the faith or not. When we come in this tent, we need to examine our sins. Oh, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.

I had no idea that Steve Gaines and J.D. Greear were going to walk up here and do what they did prior to me reading Psalm 133. How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. This unity is like the oil. It's like the dew. It's like the agreement of two candidates for president – that's the unity we have. I just want to unpack Psalm 133 for us this morning and then call us to unity. There are three simple truths I want you to see.

Number one – *unity is released*. Released. Notice it in the text. This unity is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard – even Ed Stetzer's beard – as well as coming down upon the edge of the robe. Take into consideration the high priest Aaron. They would put a turban on his head where a crown would set and then they would anoint him. The oil would come down on the head and beard, run down on the robes and then across the breastplate where the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were written, uniting them together.

Hear me. If the leaders don't get together, how in the name of our Lord will our churches ever come together? Unity is released. It is released from the pastor's heart, from the deacon's heart, from the president's heart, and from the trustee's heart. It flows down from the head. It flows through us.

We are in the great city of St. Louis. When you go to the arch, you see the mighty Mississippi – over 2,400 miles long. We find it coming from Lake Itasca in Minnesota and as it makes its way down to gush out into the beautiful Gulf of Mexico, it touches ten states and picks up some helpers along the way. The Missouri joins in. The Arkansas joins in. The Ohio joins in and brings the Tennessee along with it. If you back up out of those four great tributaries, you'll find smaller rivers. If you go to my home in rural northeast Alabama, you'll go to Little Bryant Creek where my daddy taught me to swim; that creek runs into the Tennessee. The Tennessee runs into Ohio. The Ohio runs into the Mississippi and the Mississippi, with that brackish water, flows into the gulf and goes out unto the oceans of the world.

Hear me, my dear Baptist friends. We dare not dam up our own lakes. We must build dams and we must build locks so that we can control the flow, but we must always release the resources, the people, and the energy so that we can flow together, not just to the Mississippi. We're going to the oceans of the world. You can't do it by yourself, I can't do it by myself, but we can do it together as God fills us now. Hear me, you don't just let the rivers run. You have to build those dams. There are scores of them from Minnesota all the way down. There are times we keep resources and there are times that we release them. There are certain places where state conventions keep an amount of money and others give another amount. There are times we give more and times we give less, but the goal is always to get to the mouth of the Mississippi, into the gulf, so we can send more and more and more to try to touch the oceans of the world's lostness. It is released. If we don't get together in here, we'll never get together out there.

Unity is first released. Secondly, this text tells us that *unity is refreshing*. It is like the dew coming down from Herman. If you've visited that wonderful country in Israel, remember Galilee? Turn to the north and you will see Herman and all the snow there in Syria. When the atmospheric conditions are right, that dew will gather from Herman and fall on the mountains of Zion. There are months when they have no rain and it's the dew that waters the land, and oh how refreshing it is. At my mountain home in rural, northeast Alabama, we know about the dew. You can walk out on a crisp, spring morning and your shoes will not just be damp, they will drip. The dew will come up your pant legs and you'll be wet with the refreshing dew of a north Alabama morning. I'm telling you, unity is refreshing.

Was it not refreshing to see J.D. Greear and Steve Gaines stand here? That's the dew of Almighty God coming to the Southern Baptist Convention. It's like coming from Herman when the spiritual atmospheric conditions are made right, one brother praying for another. Think also about our president praying here last night and others joining together; there was a refreshment that came.

I was a kid preacher in the early 1970s. It was the golden era of state evangelism conferences. We gathered in Birmingham, Alabama and we were there at the great Central Park Church. I sat in the balcony against the back wall on seven song books I had stacked up. Remember those hymn books we used to use? I stacked them up as a seat so that I could look over. We packed almost 3,000 people in that auditorium that only had 2,300 - 2,400 seats in it. People were sitting everywhere. E.V. Hill preached. Then my hero, Dr. Stephen Olford, came and preached and he would roll his "R's." Dr. Olford preached on a hardened heart, a yielded heart, and a flooded heart. Although a diminutive man in stature, he was a giant with the scriptures; when he released us, he said, "I want you to walk out of this building and not make a sound."

We emptied that building in silence, just as the old prophet instructed us. I walked down the steps with tears in my eyes. When we got to 43rd Street, people were milling around in silence. Finally I heard one old brother down the street shout out, "Glory to God!" — and the meeting began. There were people falling on their face. There were brothers grabbing brothers. There were old Baptists and young Baptists hugging each other. It would do us a world of good for some old Baptists and young Baptists to hug each other. It's refreshing. There were black preachers and white preachers that came together there on 43rd Street that day. There were pastors from what became known later as mega churches, big places — places where you could put all of the people in my hometown in the building five times. And then I was there. I was from the new Lebanon Baptist Church. We ran 44 in Sunday School and that was on the first day. I came to that service and as God dealt with my heart, those older preachers with big churches hugged me and loved on me.

When we walked out on the street, there were Calvinists. You say, "How do you know they were Calvinists?" Because Sam Cathey told us they were. If you know Brother Sam, he was a great evangelist, but as Calvinistic as could be. There were anti-pelagian people there. How do I know? Because they all had a red soul-winners New Testament and a tract coming out of every pocket. But we didn't talk about theology, we just got together on 43rd Street and shouted because the refreshment of the dew of God had fallen on His people. It is what we're praying for in these rallies like last night — O God come and fall. O God, fall, fall, fall on us. I'm telling you, unity must be released. It comes from the head down.

Unity is refreshing. But thirdly, in this text, *unity is rewarded*. For the Lord, when He sees that, commanded the blessing. He commanded it. He said bless, and the blessing is life forevermore. I'm like you. I'm concerned about our baptismal projection. But could it be that our downward turn in baptisms is due at least in part from a spirit of independence rather than cooperation? Similar to a spirit like the Rabshakeh of 2 Kings 18, who told to the people of God to not trust their leaders or brothers and trust only themselves. Could it be that a portion of our downward turn is our independent spirit? What if God were to look down and say, "My eyes run to and fro, seeking a people whose heart is completely turned toward Me so that I would show Myself strong on their behalf." Could it be that He would look over the precipice of heaven and look into this arena and find us together, one bent and bow, and would show Himself strong on our behalf?

Unity. It is rewarded. Could prayer gatherings like the one Dr. Ronnie Floyd led us in last night — and I've been in several across America — be the revival for which we've been praying? God has met with us. Could it be that God is waiting on us just to bend? Could it be that J.D. Greear and Steve Gaines sparked something today? Could it be that this picture of unity could be like the oil on Aaron and like the dew from Herman? Could it be that Gaines and Greear are a picture of what we ought to be all together so that God would look down and say, "I command the blessing"? Oh, that He would fall on us in freshness.

I'm aware that no convention sermon preacher can compel you or force you or command you to cooperate. I can't make you do that, but I can ask you to do it. I preach to people every Sunday that don't want to do stuff, but I ask them to. I'm telling you and I'm asking you, as the convention preacher on this Wednesday morning, for cooperation. Many of us, however, have a spirit like my little three year old granddaughter who will look at me and say, "Papa, I can do it by myself!" Yet when she goes to get in a swing, she will say, "Papa, would you help me?" Do I say, "You can do it by yourself?" No, no. I run like a doting, old man and gather her up in that swing and I push.

I'm asking us today, in Jesus' name, that God would turn our hearts. I can't make anybody love another. Neither myself or Dr. Floyd can make you come together, but we can ask you. Love one another. I can't compel you to do it, but we can work for it. We can do better. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32). Accept one another, love one another, and refuse disunity. Refuse to be critical. Refuse to be stingy. We need our Cooperative Program money to spiral. I've been in this convention for a lot of years. I've seen those 10% stickers. You couldn't stick something on me and make me cooperate just because you wanted me to, but you could ask me. Dr. Floyd asked a lot of churches to say, "Can we just raise it?"

I understand there's some of you that don't have the means to do more this year, but if God blesses, you could. I'm asking you to just not be stingy. Be unified. It is the only thing we do together. We do it for the gospel. It is why we educate. It is why we have NAMB. It is why we have IMB. It is why we run our money through. It's because — we hear it all the time — we can do more together than we can do apart. We work at it.

We think today that everybody is for the Cooperative Program. They weren't all for it in 1925. Memphis was a hard meeting. In 1925, M.E. Dodd stood like a giant and called our Convention to this cooperative agreement. In 1931 it was said regarding CP, "It is the greatest step forward in kingdom finance that Southern Baptists have ever taken because it is sane, it is scriptural, it is workable, and number four," they said in 1931, "it is unifying." Unifying. Bringing us together. No preacher can compel you, but they can ask you. No preacher can compel you to cooperate, but we can work at it. No preacher can compel you, but we can ask God for it.

It is what Jesus did in John 17:20-23, when He said, "I do not ask on behalf of those alone but for those who believe in Me through their word that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in Me and I in You. That they also may be in Us so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given to Me, I have given to them. That they may be one just as we're One. I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected — be perfected." God is working on us, in unity. "So that the world may know that you sent Me and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (John 17:23).

We can also pray for unity. Our dear president has asked us to pray on September 11. When I heard about that, I planned a little meeting which grew out of a story I want to tell you. I was with Dr. Floyd in Atlanta where we were having an interdenominational prayer meeting. As I looked across the room, I saw Dr. Joey Rogers, the pastor of Pace Assembly of God which is the largest Assembly of God church in my area. I went across the room and said, "Preacher, it's a shame we have to come all the way to Atlanta, Georgia, to pray together, isn't it?" We smiled at each other and said, "You know, we ought to get together." So we did. We planned the night and when we were back in our area, we had a joint prayer meeting – the Baptists and Pace Assembly. We even brought 25 other churches together, but it was mostly Pace Assembly and Olive Baptist.

I introduced this to my deacons. They had eyes as large as saucers. My security group came to me and asked, "Preacher, what do we do if somebody falls out down in the front?" I said, "Do you mean, 'slain in the Spirit?'" He said, "Whatever it is, but sometimes they fall down over there." I said, "Just wave on them a little bit. They'll be all right." But I said, "You come."

We packed in that place and I'm here to tell you, I've had nothing in my city that has captured hearts and had so many people respond. Even pagan men would say, "You mean to tell me you got the charismatics and the Baptists together? Ya'll had a meeting?" Yeah, we met for two and a half hours and prayed – all in one night. We didn't preach. We just prayed. It was good. Now we have rented the Bay Center in Pensacola with 8,200 seats in it and on Sunday, September 11, we're going to put over 8,000 in the center and we're going to pray. I'm telling you, if an Assembly of God church and a Baptist church can get together and pray, in heaven's name, I believe some Southern Baptists along the way could get together and be one in prayer. How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Everything that's good is not pleasant, and everything that's pleasant is not good. But it is good and it is pleasant when brothers dwell together in unity.

Here's how I would like to conclude. I would like you to turn to a person where you're seated, that you preferably don't know. You may have to turn around or across. I would like you to take their hand and have the privilege of praying for God to continue to make us one as we go forward together. Find a friend, grab a hand, and let's pray together.

Father, in Jesus' name, I thank you that You're pleased when your people come together. Lord, we have watched Psalm 133 be demonstrated in front of us this morning. I thank you for Dr. Greear and for Dr. Gaines. I thank you for a united Convention as we come together this day. Lord, I know a simple vote will be a good picture, but it will not bring our spirits together unless we repent and love you with all of our heart and love and trust each other to go forward cooperatively together. As we join our hands just now, make us one. Unite our Southern Baptist Convention that we might do more, go more, win more, and baptize more than ever in the history of our 171 years of this grand 'ole denomination. We love You, we give You praise, and we thank You that it is good and it is pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

— from the office of Ted Traylor