

Southern Baptist Convention 2009

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God is gracious, and I praise God for the grace, Pastor _____, that you have shown me and given me the privilege of opening God's Word and the grace that you have shown me as messengers in this convention, for the privilege of opening God's Word with you this morning. If you have _____ of your Bible, I would invite you to open with me to Acts 3, Acts 3.

As I watched that adoption video a few moments ago, I could not help but to be reminded of my own story, my wife, Heather and I. For about five years, longed to have children, wanted to have children, were praying that God would give us children, and God in His sovereign grace and wisdom was withholding that blessing from us. Many of you know the up and down struggle involved in that kind of journey, and as a result of that journey, led us to begin to consider and pray about adoption.

And we began a journey a couple of years ago, where we traveled over to Kazakhstan to adopt our first son, Caleb. We came back from Kazakhstan with Caleb. Two weeks later I came home late one night from a meeting at church, and Heather was still up. She's not usually up that late. I could tell something was wrong. She was sitting on the couch. She said, "You need to sit down." I said, "Okay." I said, "What happened?" And she said, "I'm pregnant." I said, "Okay."

We wanted – we wanted a child, but two in nine months, that's – that difficult to do, apart from twins, and we had been told all along this adoption process not to get our hopes up. You never know what will happen in this adoption process, and we had had friends who, in the pregnancy process, had had unexpected things happened. So we just decided that night we were not going to get our hopes up. We didn't know what was gonna happen. For some reason, for five years we had not been able to have children.

And so for the next month, we didn't get our hopes up. The next two months, the next three, five, nine months, hopes still not up, until one night in the middle of cold December, my wife wakes up, wakes me up in the middle of the night. She turns to me and she says, "Now, don't get your hopes up, but I'm not feeling well and I think we might need to go to the hospital." I said, "Okay."

So we went to the hospital. It's a cold December night in Birmingham. We got to the hospital. It was a bit ironic when we got there. They told us they did not have enough room for us. Huh, okay. Well, do you have maybe a stable outside and a manger we could use? That would be fine.

They put us in this little closet where – where they hooked her up to some machines, and we sat there groggily for a couple of hours, and after a couple of hours a nurse came in, looked at her signs and said, "We need to get you into a room. You're about to have a baby today." And my wife and I locked eyes with each other and we decided it was time to get our hopes up.

And so we went into this room – just a little bit about me. I – I don't do well in hospitals. This is not good for me as a pastor, but I'm getting nauseous right now at the thought of being in a hospital. And my wife knew this, and a couple of weeks before, she had told me that she was praying for me in this whole process, praying that I would make it through the birthing process, which if I could be honest, was a shot at my pride, that my wife was not concerned about her health or the baby's health, but my health in the process.

And so I was sitting there as her and the nurse were talking, and the nurse began to share how the doctor who was going to deliver our child would actually let the husband – let the father help deliver the baby if he wanted to. My wife immediately started laughing. "Ha, ha, my husband

would never do that.” Again, shot number two at the pride, and I decided this was my moment to step up. It was one of those times when words start coming out of your mouth and you can’t stop them. I said, “Well, I’ll help deliver the baby.” My wife turned and she said, “You will?” And I said, “Well, sure. What dad doesn’t want to deliver a baby?” And she said, “Great,” and the nurse said, “I’ll get things ready.”

And I turned around and I think what have I just done? I am nauseous standing in this room, and I’m about to deliver a child. And so I needed to come up with a plan, and here’s what I came up with. I decided I was gonna look at this like it was a mission trip, okay? Follow with me here. When you go on a mission trip into another country, you eat things you don’t normally eat, you drink things you don’t normally drink. When you’re in Rome, you do what the Romans do. When you’re in the hospital, you do what doctors do. And besides, I have a doctorate. Granted, it’s in preaching, but what does it really matter? In the end, they’re all the same.

And so when the time came, the doctor came in and he straps some gloves and a gown and a mask on me. He said, “Here’s what’s gonna happen.” He used about 60 seconds worth of medical jargon that I could not understand. He said, “Do you understand?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “You stand behind me. I’ll tell you when it’s time.”

So I was standing there behind him, and when it was time, he said, “All right, I want you to put your left hand, your right hand on top.” It was like Peyton Manning. I got two nurses flanking me, you right here, you right here, here we go. And all of a sudden – all of a sudden, this little head pops out and time stands still. And this child that we had prayed for for five years, I pull out and place on my wife’s lap, as our child from Kazakhstan is waiting in the room beside.

God is sovereign. He is gracious. People say, “I hear stories like that all the time. Why does that happen?” Something physical – here’s why that happens. There is a God who is gracious and loving toward orphans, and He loved a little guy in an obscure city in Kazakhstan enough to withhold giving us the blessing of a child until we had gone to him. He is the father to the fatherless, and the defender of the weak, and thus, we find ourselves adopting our third now from Nepal. We are the expression of His love, and the entire theme of this conference, that we – we represent the father to the fatherless and defender of the weak.

And so I want to encourage you this morning, with the picture of the people of God in the New Testament, that I pray will be a reality among the people of God today. I want to encourage us this morning with three prayers that we might pray together, based on Acts 3:1-10. One day, the Bible says Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at 3:00 in the afternoon. Now, a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

And when he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us.” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them, and Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Walk.” And taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement and what had happened to him.

First prayer, God – God give us a radical concern for the needs of the world around us. God give us a radical concern for the needs of the world around us. I love the contrast between the end of Acts 2 and the beginning of Acts 3. You know at the end of Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, over 3,000 people are saved. That’s a good day for church growth. But what I find most interesting is the next scene that Luke chooses to give us is not a scene involving masses. The scene involving a man, Peter and John going to a man that everybody else is ignoring. There is a reality

that is being expressed here, brothers and sisters. Those who are most effective in reaching the many are those who are most passionate about reaching the one. Those who are most effective in reaching the many are those who are most passionate about reaching the one.

And they learn this from Jesus. Peter and John had seen Jesus with the crowds gathering around Him, and we think the bigger the better, the more crowds, the better. But Jesus is so unlike us. John 6, when the crowd starts getting big, He starts talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. I can just imagine the look on the disciples' faces and thinking, "We'll never get on the list of fastest growing movements if you keep telling people to eat you. This doesn't work." And it didn't. All the people scattered and they were shocked when he stopped for the blind beggar and when stopped for the woman with the flow of blood, when he stopped for the man with leprosy and the boy with an evil spirit. This is what they had seen modeled, and that – that language in verse 4, Peter looks straight at him.

It's the same language that is used later in Acts 7, when Stephen looked up in the heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This is an intense look. There's a focus here that we see in Acts 3 and all over the pages of this story of the early church. Their care for the poor, the lost, the needy. If I could be honest with you, this is where I, in my own life and young pastor, have come to a bit of a crisis of belief. And the crisis of belief really revolves around whether or not I actually believe this book.

Do I really believe this book? Not – not do I believe it's true or accurate or an error, but do I really believe that this book radically changes the way I live and pastor? Because if this book is true, then the implications are nothing short of staggering. 6.8 billion people in the world, most liberal estimates put the world at one-third Christian, and that's people who claim to be Christian in many contexts; politically, socially. Likely not all followers of Christ, but even if they were, that's still leaves 4.5 billion people on the planet today who at this moment are on a road that leads to an eternity in hell.

And on top of **losses**, the poverty that we talked some about a couple of nights ago, just the reality that today while we meet here, 16,000 children will die because they don't have food. If that is true, and if the Bible says that all throughout the history of God's people, He has chosen to measure the integrity of our faith by our concern for the poor, then there are radical implications here. We do not have time to play games with our lives and we don't have time to play games in the church. There's 4.5 billion people going to hell and 16,000 kids that don't have a meal today. We need God to give us His concern for the needs around us. This is not something we can manufacture. It's something Christ alone can produce in us.

So let's run to Christ and let's ask Him – let's plead for Him to give us a radical concern for the needs of the world around us. He will keep us from turning a deaf ear, because it frightens me, the fact that I can pastor and I can successfully in our church culture today pastor a church in Birmingham and ignore those kids and pretend like they don't even exist. I will miss the whole point. God give us a radical concern for the needs of those around us.

Second, God, give us a radical confidence in the name of the one who's saved us, a radical confidence in the name of the one who's saved us. Who is the hero in Acts 3? Is it – is it Peter? Takes a lot of courage to go up to a man who hasn't walked since birth, 40 years, and to tell him to get up and walk. Is Peter the hero?

What about John? I don't know why John – maybe best actor in a supporting role. Is John the hero? Is – is the lame man the hero, jumping up and down, praising God. Peter is not the hero, John is not the hero and the lame man is not the hero. The hero in the story, in Acts 3 is the name of Jesus Christ. "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

And Luke wants to make sure we get this, and so look down later in the chapter, verse 16. You might even circle it every time you see it. Verse 16, "My faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know is made strong." It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you all can see.

You get over to chapter 4, and Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin, and they ask the question, verse 7, "In what power or what name did you do this?" They know there's a name behind this. Verse 10, Peter declares, "Know this, you and all the people of Israel. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, that this man stands before you healed." Verse 12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved." Verse 17, "To stop this from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

These folks at the Sanhedrin were afraid of the name. They knew there was power in the name. Verse 18, they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. If we had time, we could trace through the whole Book of Acts and you could see over and over and over again. It's the name of Jesus that is causing the most hardened hearts to repent. It's the name of Jesus that is causing demons to flee. It's the name of Jesus for which people are risking their lives all over the Book of Acts, radical confidence in the name.

I mentioned the other night a seminary in Indonesia, where students were planting churches all over that Muslim dominated nation. We were talking with one brother and he was sharing his story with us. He was telling us that before he came to Christ, he was a fighter. He said, "I know ninja, jujitsu." He started naming all these different fighting techniques. He said, "I could take people down." I said, "I'll take your word for it."

He said, "When I came to Christ, when Christ saved me, He turned my heart upside down," and began to tell a story about one time, one day when he was in a village, completely unreached village, first time this village was hearing the Gospel. He was in a home in that village sharing the Gospel, and the witch doctor in the village, which are very prevalent in villages like this, hold spiritual sway over entire villages that are unreached. Witch doctor finds out that he's there, comes to the house where he is sharing the Gospel and confronts him, basically calls him out of the house, wanting to start a fight with him. And this guy said, "Dave, I turned around and I was ready to take the witch doctor down." And he said, "As I was walking out," he said, "I sensed the Lord saying, 'You don't do the fighting anymore. I do the fighting for you.'"

So he walked out and he took a chair and he pulled up and sat down right in front of that witch doctor, and he said, "I don't do the fighting anymore. My God does the fighting for me." He said the witch doctor began to speak, and as he began to speak, the witch doctor began to gasp for air, began to choke on his own words and within a matter of moments had fallen over, dead in front. He said crowds came rushing to see what had happened. He said, "I didn't know what to do, so I just preached the Gospel," and he said people in the village started coming to Christ.

Now, I'm not sharing that story to recommend this particular method of evangelism to us this morning. I don't think that will sell at *Lifeway*. But – but I share that story with you this morning for this reason. 2,000 years ago, there was a name that when it was proclaimed caused the blind to see and the lame to walk, demons to flee and the dead to rise again, and 2,000 years later, the name is still good. It's still good.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot control our – the culture around us and all that's going on, but we can control our confidence in the name of Jesus Christ in the middle of this culture. His name is powerful. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is the final amen. He is the bread of life.

Christ, our creator, our deliverer, our everlasting Father. He is God. He is the good shepherd, the great shepherd, the great high priest, the holy one, the hope of glory. He is the great I am,

the image of the invisible God. He is the judge of the living and the dead, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. He is majestic and mighty, and no one compares to Him, the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He is the power of God, the resurrection and the life, the supreme sacrifice, the very Word of God made less. Jesus is all of these things.

And brothers – brothers and sisters, we in our evangelism do not need to reduce Him to a poor, puny savior who is just begging for people to accept Him. Accept Him? Accept Him? As if Jesus needs our acceptance. He doesn't need our acceptance. He is infinitely worthy of all glory in all the universe, and He doesn't need us at all. We need Him, and we need not reduce the Gospel to a shrink wrapped presentation.

If we can get people to say the right things back to us and pray the right things back to us and we can pronounce them saved, the name of Christ is good to bring anybody in our communities, anybody in our cities and anybody in the nations to Himself. God, give us great radical confidence in the name of the one who's saved us. And God – God, give us a radical commitment to telling the nations about His greatness.

The rest of this story gives us the first glimpse into persecution in the early church. As Peter and John with the beggar, holding a lame man, formerly lame man, holding on to them, preached the Gospel to a crowd and scattered and they were persecuted, by the end of chapter 4, we see the prayer of the persecuted church, in Acts 4:23-30. By the end of Acts 5, they were rejoicing for being counted worthy to suffer for His name. By the end of Acts 7, we see first Christian martyr, and by Acts 8, they're scattering to Judea and Samaria, and by Acts 11, there's a base for ministry to the nations in the city of Antioch. And what we see is a picture of a church that is radically committed to telling the nations about His greatness.

I want my life to count, and I want the church I pastor to count for the nations. I don't want to waste my life. I don't want to waste the church that God has entrusted to me. I find it saddening that one of the most common questions in Christianity in our context today is what is God's will for my life? How do I find God's will for my life? What does God want me to do?

1.4 million Bedouins in Algeria, 100 percent Muslim, no Christian, no church, no missionary, no Gospel, no Jesus, and we're sitting over here saying, "What do you want me to do, God?" God raise up a church that is no longer content to wait for a tingly feeling to go down our spine, to cause us to rise up and do what we have already been commanded to do. We don't have to ask questions. He wants the Gospel and the glory of God in all nations.

So what happens? Not just when missionaries, but when pastors, music ministers and staff members, members of churches, accountants and engineers and teachers and lawyers and doctors and stay at home moms, what happens when we all realize that we were all created for and commanded to accomplish a global mission? What happened – happens when we begin to look at our houses and our cars and our stuff and our lifestyles in light of the radical needs around the world? What happens when we begin to trust boldly in the name of Christ and we commit our lives to telling the nations that He is great? When that happens, the lost find a savior, and the poor find a helper, and the church find a God who satisfies more deeply than any or every – any and everything else this world has to offer us. God made it be so.