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Victory Baptist Press is a ministry of the Victory Baptist Church of Milton, Florida

Founder *Dr. Thomas F. Woodward (1935 - 1994)* - **Pastor** *Tim Fellure* - **Editor & VBP Director** *Jim Fellure*

The Newsletter is the official publication of **Victory Baptist Press** and is sent free of charge to those who request it. The main purpose of the Newsletter is to promote missions with an emphasis on the printing and distribution of the Word of God. While we may not agree with every statement printed from outside sources, we will make every effort to keep the paper as free from error as possible. To receive the Newsletter send your complete mailing address to: P. O. Box 766, Milton, FL 32572-0766. Phone: 850-623-2505. Fax: 850-623-3502 e-mail: VictoryBaptistPress@msn.com

“If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know - the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out alright, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right won't make any difference.”

Abraham Lincoln

Editor's Notes

Jim & Mary Fellure

I wonder how many newsletters at this time of the year will start by saying "I can hardly believe that 2003 is already here." Believe it or not, 2003 is here but it won't be here long. The Psalmist said in Psalms 90:12 "So teach us to **number our days**, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

I never thought a lot about that verse until Missionary Tony Hess, in our mission conference back in September used a yard stick to illustrate the years of our life. Suppose I am going to live to be seventy two years old. If each inch on the yard stick represent two years of my life then at sixty years old I am at the thirty inch mark on the stick with only six inches left to go. At this stage of my life I cannot afford to waste time nor energy on things that don't really count. I pray every day that God will give me wisdom to accomplish all that He has planned for me. Of course, our real hope is that Jesus Christ will soon come, and I believe He will, and get us out of this present evil world.

"Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." Those words used to be seen on a little plaque in a lot of old fashion american homes. I haven't seen it for years but it is still true in my heart. Some time back I was with pastor Nick Baert in the Bronx of New York City and he said after being away from home for awhile when he started approaching the city and got his first sight of the George Washington bridge it was like pulling the covers up around you in your own bed on a cold night. He enjoyed being home. The famous late R. G. Lee used to tell of a boy from Alaska who left home to live in the warm climate of the deep south. When terminal illness invaded his body and he knew he was soon to pass from this life he began to long for home. They put him on a

train headed for Alaska. Though the boy was deathly ill, he would arouse ever once in awhile and ask, "have you seen any ice yet?" He was home sick.

If I am coming from meetings in the north when I see the Florida state line sign just thirty five miles north of Milton I know I will soon be home. If I am coming from the west when I pass the last Pensacola exit and look out across the beautiful blue waters of the Pensacola bay I can almost see the lights of home. If I am coming from the east when I see the black water river bridge I know the next exit is mine, and I some times call ahead and tell Mary that in just a few minutes I will be home.

I am writing these notes from the comforts of my own home (the dining room table makes a good desk) on Tuesday morning, December 10. I got home late Sunday night from meetings in Louisiana and Mississippi, and Lord willing I won't go out again until the middle of January. I look forward to these days at home and working in the office of the day. There's enough to do in the office to keep me busy the rest of my life but the time will soon come for me to go back out in the field.

It seems that the meetings I have been in in the last couple of months have been unusually blessed of the Lord. I don't keep a record of all the professions of faith made in the meetings but I do remember one open air meeting about six weeks ago on a vacant lot in a little poverty stricken village outside of Monterrey, Mexico where twenty nine people made a profession of faith. Another meeting in Anahauc, Mexico about a month ago in a little church we helped start last year. There was twenty professions of faith and in a couple of meetings we saw seven or eight come to Christ. We don't see as many conversion in the states as we do across the border but we have been in some wonderful services. Just this past week I attended a mission conference at Temple Baptist Church in New Iberia, Louisiana where Brother Harlen Gott is pastor. Brother Joe West and Brother Bill Allan were the main preachers along with three missionaries showing slides and giving testimonies each night.

Brother Sonny Fritz and his son in laws, Ruben Morillo and Antonio Arrellanos and Anotonio's dad, Roberto and his brother Roberto, Jr. and there families came up from Monterrey for the meeting. Brother Rubens's son, (Brother Sonny's grand son) Ruben, Jr. who has also began to start churches in

STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE ACCEPT the Holy Scriptures as contained in the Old and New Testaments as being the verbally inspired Word of God and being perfectly preserved in the King James 1611 Bible. We do not believe it can be corrected or improved upon in any way. It is the final rule of faith and practice.

WE BELIEVE in the triune God, who is eternally in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

WE BELIEVE in the deity of Christ - His virgin birth, His sinless life, His death for the sins of the world, His bodily resurrection, His exaltation at God's right hand, His personal, imminent, and premillennial return.

WE BELIEVE all men are sinners and are guilty before God; in need of a Saviour.

WE BELIEVE that men are born again through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ; that they become the children of God, eternally saved; that the Holy Spirit dwells within every believer to guide and help him in his testimony and service.

WE BELIEVE in the bodily resurrection of the just and unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved in Glory, and the everlasting conscious punishment of the lost in hell. We believe that all believers have a responsibility to get the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ into all the world.

Mexico was also with the group. Brother Sonny's wife, Beverly has been in poor health for several years but lately she has felt much better and was also able to attend the meeting. It was such a blessing to see sister

- continued on page 5



Al & Heidi Berg

Dear Friends and Supporters,

2002 was a good year for Victory Baptist Press, but to be honest, I would not want to repeat it. We shipped out 1,196,574 scripture portions, most of them being John/Romans. It was by far the best year we have ever had as far as output is concerned. On the other hand there were a few hardships along the way. My wife's father died just

before his 80th birthday back in October, my wife has developed some very painful arthritis in her feet, and our daughter Sarah (13) was recently diagnosed with Crohn's disease. I am looking forward to a new year. Its troubles may surpass those of the past, but at least they will be new ones which are all ways to see the grace of God in new ways.

Besides the number of books we sent out last year, the Lord has blessed us with some new faces in the print shop. Over the years people drop out for various reasons, health, old age, move away or die. In 2002 the Lord has blessed our church with a few new families, and some have them have gotten involed in the print shop. It has been a real blessing to have people with a mind to work.

In 2003, we have several projects on the table. Right now, Victory Baptist Press is renovating the old sanctuary of the church in to a fellowship hall, and in turn we will be getting most of the old fellowship hall for

storage and collating. This is cheaper than building a new warehouse, but if the Lord continues to bless as He has, that will be needed soon enough. It has been over a year since we have printed any New Testaments, and we have several languages that are ready to go, and one in the works. Also, we are going to do our best to get a whole Spanish Bible out some time this year. The extra room in the old fellowship hall will make this possible, and it is something badly needed. Unfortunately, this means that we will not be printing very many John/Romans, which have proved to be a very useful tool in evangelization. Pray that God will direct, and that all the needs will be met.

I trust that you will find joy and happiness this year in doing the will of God for your life.

May God bless you,
Bro. Albert Berg



Victory Baptist Press recently received memorial gifts from

***Barbara Cooper
N. Rudolph Sadler
Sonya Sadler
Lindy & John Hornbuckle
Faith Baptist Church***
of Perry, Florida
in memory of
Shirley Grant

.....
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Woods
of Clayton, Indiana
in memory of
Nancy Woods

.....
Anonymous Donor
in memory of
Don Birney
of Lincoln, Nebraska
.....

*"Blessed are the dead
in the Lord from
henceforth: Yea, saith
the Spirit, that
they may rest from their
labours; and their works do
follow them."*



Please be so kind as to notify us of any change of address or duplicate Newsletters you receive. The Post Office will not forward bulk rate material. They return it to VBP and charge us to do so. Please help us keep our costs down.

***Robert & Leonor Schmidt Willing To Help
Ministries With Low-Rate Air Fares***

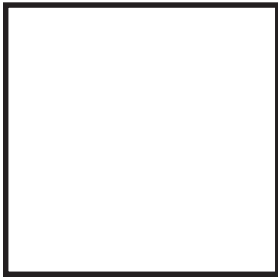
Brother Bob Schmidt and his family are faithful members of Victory Baptist Church. He and his wife, Leonor, are travel agents and do their best to get the best flight rates available for the brethren.



Bother Bob says he can do especially well with overseas flights

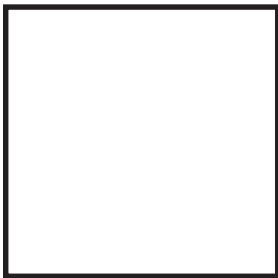
Call them at 850-983-3954 - Fax: 850-983-1358
e-mail: bobleonor3@msn.com

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PRAY FOR THE VICTORY BAPTIST PRESS FIELD REPRESENTATIVES



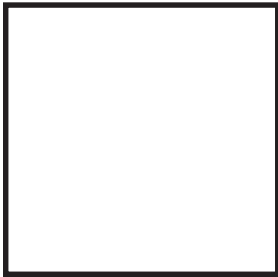
MIKE & DEE PICKENS began with Victory Baptist Press in December of 1994. Brother Pickens is a 1965 graduate of Baptist Bible College of Springfield, Missouri. He has pastored churches in Indiana, Alabama, North Carolina and Texas, and was in evangelism for 7 years.

Mike and Dee have four married children and nine grandchildren. When they are not on the road in meetings they make their home in Candler, North Carolina, and can be contacted at the home office.



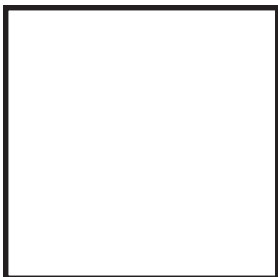
RICK & MELINDA REED have been field representatives for Victory Baptist Press since October of 1996. Brother Reed gave up a very comfortable and secure employment position in order to help send the gospel of Christ around the world through this ministry.

Rick and Melinda have four children, all at home. You can contact the Reeds at 12207 Buckhorn Cemetary Rd., Moody, Texas 76557. Phone (254)853-9353.



BILL AND VICKI RICHBURG left a full-time ministry in South Carolina and became field representatives for Victory Baptist Press in January of 1999. Brother Richburg has pastored churches in West Virginia, Virginia and South Carolina.

Bill and Vicki have one married son and a daughter at home. You can contact the Richburgs at P. O. Box 508, Six Mile, South Carolina 29682. Phone (864)868-9988.



MARTIN AND ANNE FULLER left a full-time ministry in Georgia and became field representatives for Victory Baptist Press in January, 2002. Martin attended Tabernacle Baptist College of Greenville, SC and was on staff under Dr. Harold Sightler. He also served as assistant pastor and youth director in another church and pastored for twelve years

in Texas.

The Fullers have four children all at home. They do an outstanding job with music as a family and Martin is an excellent preacher. If you can use them for a service contact them at 1020 Carlene Dr, Harlem, Georgia 30814. Phone (706) 556-8369.



Ray Bowie

“O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is God: because his mercy endureth forever.” Psalm 118:1

Praise the Lord for the many saved in Mexico by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ this month.

Pro-Trans Trucking Company from Indianapolis, Indiana brings all of our tracts, John/Romans, and New Testaments free of charge to Nogales, Arizona. David, who works in the office of Pro Trans in Nogales, has been a very religious man and has always helped us a lot. I was able to show him how to be saved this month and God was dealing with him. Now he is really happy and wanting to help us even more. He knows that he is saved.

Julio Cruz, who spent almost ten years off and on in prison, got saved, baptized, and graduated from our correspondence school while in prison. He is now preaching on the streets of Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico. Julio is now working with us in the same prison that he was in before. Julio could be best described as a rotten rat before he got saved. Since he has become a born again Christian, he is nice and mellow, wanting to see everyone get saved. God has really changed his life. It is always thrilling to see mens lives changed after they get saved.

Julio Cruz, who spent almost ten years off and on in prison, got saved, baptized, and graduated from our correspondence school while in prison.

We had a great time giving out John/Romans in Magdalena, Sonora, Mexico, for Kino Francisco Days. Men and women walk 37 miles from the American border doing penance. Some even travel longer distances. I saw one man come hobbling in. He laid on the ground, his wife came over and took off his shoes and socks. The bottom of his foot was one big blister that slid in one big piece on his foot. “All of our works are as filthy rags.” They don’t help.

My wife had her first experience in giving out John/Romans in Magdalena for celebrations. She said it was, “stupid people walking so far and drinking, using drugs for pain.” She said it looked silly.

Prayer Needs:
John/Romans
New Testaments
Bibles in Spanish

Yours for Souls in Mexico,
Ray and Juanita Bowie

Editor’s note: All financial support for a field representative should be sent to Victory Baptist Press, marked clearly for the individual it is intended for.

Thank you for all that you do to help our ministry prayerfully, financially, and physically.

-continued from page 2

Beverly feeling well and enjoying the services. I appreciate Brother Gott letting me have lunch with Brother Sonny and the Mexicans on Friday. I love those Mexicans and enjoyed about two hours of good fellowship with them.

On Sunday morning I came up to St. Amant, Louisiana to the St. Amant Baptist Church and preached for Pastor Melvin Meister. I had lots of liberty in preaching and several responded to the invitation. Plans are being made for Brother Bill Richburg to take a group from Brother Meister's church to Monterrey on the bus in March.

On Sunday night I stopped and preached for pastor Joshua Paynter at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Gautier, Mississippi. Once again I had good liberty preaching and several responded to the invitation.

We had good meetings in 2002 and look forward to what the Lord has for us this coming year. We have already booked enough to know that 2003 will be a busy year and we like it that way.

The need for the printed word is greater than ever. The missionaries keep request-

ing scriptures and we are doing our best to fill those requests but we just cannot fill them as fast as they come in. Our field reps. keep traveling and the printers keep running the presses. Every year we print more than the year before but we are farther behind than ever. We need lots of help in order to have a significant increase in the printing and distribution of the sacred scriptures. We deeply appreciate all the faithful supporters of this ministry who make it possible to keep this ministry alive. Because of the Lord leading and you responding to His leadership to support Victory Baptist Press thousands upon thousands and maybe even millions of precious souls, that would have never heard otherwise, have had a clear presentation of the gospel of Christ. Those of you who are not yet supporting Victory Baptist Press please pray about having a part in sending the gospel in it's purest form around the world. Financial and prayer support to VBP will no doubt provide fruit that may abound to your account.

Please pray about it and help if you can. God bless you and may 2003 be the most fruitful year you have ever had.

Jim Fellure

What Is Most Important

God won't ask what kind of car you drove, but He'll ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation.

God won't ask the square footage of your house, but He'll ask how many people you welcomed into your home.

God won't ask about the clothes you had in your closet, but He'll ask how many you helped to clothe.

God won't ask about your social status, but He'll ask what kind of class you displayed.

God won't ask how many material possessions you had, but He'll ask if they dictated your life.

God won't ask what your highest salary was, but He'll ask if you compromised your character to obtain it.

God won't ask how much overtime you worked, but He'll ask if your overtime work was for yourself or for your family.

God won't ask how many promotions you received, but He'll ask how you promoted others.

God won't ask what your job title was, but He'll ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability.

God won't ask what you did to help yourself, but He'll ask what you did to help others.

God won't ask how many friends you had, but He'll ask how many people to whom you were a friend.

God won't ask what you did to protect your rights, but He'll ask what you did to protect the rights of others.

God won't ask in what neighborhood you lived, but He'll ask how you treated your neighbors.

God won't ask about the color of your skin, but He'll ask about the content of your character.

God won't ask how many times your deeds matched your words, but He'll ask how many times they didn't.

God won't ask why it took you so long to seek Salvation, but He'll lovingly take you to your mansion in heaven, and not to the gates of Hell.

-copied.

FOR JUST \$684.96 YOU CAN SPONSOR A COMPLETE DAY OF OPERATION OF THE VICTORY BAPTIST PRESS PRINT SHOP.

Since we started the Sponsor A Day Of Operation program in January we have had 38 individuals or churches sponsor a total of 47 days in the shop. The extra support along with our regular monthly supporters and special offerings given for paper has been a big help in breaking all previous records in scripture printing.

Several others have expressed an interest in the program and hopefully will soon participate. There's a spiritually hungry world waiting for the bread of life and the only way VBP can meet the growing demand for the scriptures is through the help of our supporters.

If you would like to be a part of the Sponsor-A-Day program, send your offering of at least \$684.96, and we will recognize your gift by sending you a personalized certificate on beautiful parchment paper suitable for framing. The certificate, when displayed on a mission display board, office wall, etc. will encourage others to get involved.

Since the last Newsletter the following churches or individuals have participated in the Sponsor-A-Day program by paying for at least one day of operation of the print shop.

Thank you for your help and may God get the glory.

Pastor Tim Fellure, Victory Baptist Church, Milton, FL = \$685.00

Calvary Baptist Church, Toccoa, GA = \$684.96

Mr. & Mrs. Jerry Woods, Clayton, IN = \$685.00

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. James 4:17

The Power Of The Printed Page by Dr. William S. Deal

Someone has suggested that, "One drop of ink may make a million think!" The power of the printed page has hardly ever in history been better illustrated than in the following set of circumstances:

Shorly after 1600 A.D., a man known today only as Richard Gibbs wrote a tract in England entitled, "The Bruised Reed." It seemed of little importance that a dear Christian lady, whose name has been forgotten, dropped a copy of this tract in a convenient place for a very bad man to get it and read it. As a result of reading it, he became one of England's most popular and powerful preachers. That man was Richard Baxter (1615-1691). Baxter is reported to have written upwards of 160 books!

Bringing Men to Christ

Among Baxter's many books was one titled, "The Call To The Unconverted." Tens of thousands were influenced for good by Baxter's books. Among them, Philip Doddridge was brought to Christ by reading "The Call To The Unconverted."

Besides the great good Doddridge did as a mighty preacher, he wrote a book titled, "The Rise and Progress Of Religion." It is

reported that this book "brought thousands and tens of thousands into the kingdom of God." Among them was William Wilberforce (1759-1833), one of England's greatest political leaders. He possibly did more to abolish slavery from all British domains than any other man. His influence was incalculable for God's cause around the world.

Spreading God's Cause

Wilberforce wrote a book known as "Practical View Of Christianity." It resulted in winning a multitude to Christ. In that great throng which it brought to the Savior, was one known as Leigh Richmond. Years later, Richmond wrote a smaller booklet known as "The Dairyman's Daughter." This book, in turn, "has been the means of salvation of multitudes," says one writer.

A Lasting Flame

Before the ending of time as we now know it, doubtless the influence of that one tract by Richard Gibbs so long ago in England, through all the myriads of influence will have brought millions to Christ.

A clergyman in England asked a dying woman where she found the Savior. She handed him a piece of paper which had been

torn from an American Journal. It contained a part of one of the great Charles H. Spurgeon's sermons. The scrap of paper had been wrapped around a package that had come to her from far-away Australia. Someone in America had sent the Journal to Australia. Spurgeon's words which she read brought peace and salvation to her heart. God had taken those words half way around the world to reach that woman's heart just in time for her salvation. How matchless is the grace of God, and how miraculous His power to save!

Someone commenting on this incident has well said, "Think of it! A sermon preached in England, printed in America, in some way coming to Australia, a part of it used as wrapping paper there, coming back to England, and being the means of converting this woman."

What an encouragement are the remarkable stories above to one who gets out the Word by the printed page! Let every writer take heart. God's word will not return unto Him void, but will accomplish that whereunto He sends it (see Isa. 55:11).

-copied from "Gospel Nuggets."

BARBARA COUNTRYMAN 19-- - 2002

This year many of us have had to say good-bye to dear loved ones who have gone on to glory. Our church family has just recently lost one of the dearest ladies I have ever know, Mrs. Barbara Countryman. Mrs. Countryman was the secretary for Victory Baptist Church and Victory Baptist Press until she suffered a stroke in 19--. For the past five years, she was confined to a wheelchair without the ability to take care of herself or even speak. On December 23, 2002 God saw fit to heal her and reunite her with her late husband, Fred Countryman.

At the funeral service I mentioned that it was comforting to me that I could be both kind and honest in my remarks about her. I have been to many funerals where the truth had to be stretched to say a good word about the deceased, but the truth honored Mrs. Countryman. If I were to make a list of the greatest Christians I have known, this lady would be at the top of the list. I think of great Christians who have made an impression on me whom you may have never met - Horace and Dorothy Grady, Dave and Shirley Grant, Don Mangus, Calvin Callaway, Tom Woodward - and none are any greater than this great saint of God.

Not everyone whose name is in bright lights is great, and not all great

people are always recognized by the world. Some of the greatest people who ever lived did so in obscurity. You may either be great in the eyes of God or you could strive to be honored by the world - but you most likely will not be both. Mrs. Countryman's name never made it on billboards or in bright lights, but her name was recorded in the Book of Life. The world never saw much in her to commend, but God welcomed her into heaven with open arms. If Hebrews 11 could be updated through the present, her name could possibly be on the list. For sure, it could be said of her as it was said of those nameless Old Testament saints that "the world was not worthy" of her.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM TO PAY FOR ALL THOSE SCRIPTURES?

Many times people, especially those who know nothing, or very little about missions don't understand how we come up with the money to pay for all the expense of printing and shipping all the scriptures that Victory Baptist Press puts out year after year. Some, no doubt have the idea that we sell what we print and operate from the profit, but we make no charge at all for the scriptures we print. Others may think we are operated by a large, rich church that under wrights the ministry. Though Victory Baptist Church is a giving church, it is neither large nor rich. I would guess the attendance in any regular service to be around one hundred, and the people are common, middle class working people. If there is one rich man, by the world's standards, in the membership I am not aware of it.

Even though Victory Baptist Press is under the authority of Victory Baptist Church, this ministry needs much, much more money to operate than one church can provide. So, how do we get the money to operate.

We presently have four Field Representatives and myself who travel all over the country looking for someone or some church that will get under the burden with us and contribute prayerfully and financially so that we may continue to print and send the gospel in it's purest form around the world.

Let me give you the eight ways that support comes to VBP.

1. The Sale Of Books: We are starting to stock and sell good books with the intent of generating extra money to put back into scripture printing. Any time someone orders a book from VBP they are providing extra income that will help send the scriptures free of charge to the missionaries.

2. The Dollar Each Week Program: For awhile we encouraged individuals to give at least \$1.00 each week on a monthly basis. We had hundreds of people commit themselves but not more than a dozen people came through with their commitment, so we quit emphasizing the DEW program. Some of those faithful few still send five or ten dollars each month and I can't help but think that their reward in heaven will be multiplied many times over. For every dollar they send we ship four scripture booklets to a mission field.

3. Memorial Gifts: What better way could you show your love and appreciation for a departed loved one than by providing the scriptures for someone else in memory of the loved one. Unless requested to do otherwise we always list the memorial gifts in the Newsletter and send notice to the deceased persons family.

4. Regular Monthly Financial Support: By far, the most substantial thing you could do for VBP is to put us in your regular mission budget. The missionaries must be supported in order to stay on the field that God has called them to, but they must also have the supplies to do the work with. Your monthly support will help supply the missionary with the most important tool there is, the written Word of God.

5. Sponsor A Day In The Shop: To print and ship one million scripture booklets per year (we did it in eight months last year) it cost \$684.96 per day to operate the print shop. Some churches have sponsored a full week in the shop, others have done two or three days and several have sponsored one day. We send a beautiful certificate suitable for framing, recognizing the contribution to everyone that gives to the sponsor a day program.

6. Buy A Roll Of Paper: The most expensive item there is in any print shop is paper. \$500 will pay for one roll and we could easily use 175 rolls in a year. It's always a blessing when the secretary opens the mail and finds a \$500 check and I can hear her from across the hall say, "another roll of paper."

7. Buy A Truck Load Of Paper: A complete truck load of paper cost \$18,000 and will print 400,000 John/Romans, or 70,000 New Testaments. Just think, if we could find five churches that would purchase one truck load of paper each in the following year we could provide more than 350,000 New Testaments or more than 2,000,000 John/Romans for the mission field.

8. Prayer Support: Many times people think they cannot do any more than they are already doing, but when they begin to pray the Lord opens up a way to accomplish what we thought was impossible. Will you personally take the VBP ministry on for regular, sincere prayer support?

The distribution of the printed Word is the only logical way to evangelism the world. Even though Victory Baptist Press increases the distribution of scriptures each year, the population explosion puts us farther behind in our effort to fulfill the graet comission. The only answer is for all of us to do more. What will you do toward reaching the world with the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?



Pastor & Mrs. Tim Fellure

The Baptist

John 1:6-9

John the Baptist was a man raised up for his time. Though the political and religious world was not expecting John and did not welcome him, they desperately needed him. The birth and ministry of John was one of those defining moments in history; a monumental event that shaped the future of Israel and the world. John's coming marked a new day and a new dispensation. *"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached,"* (Luke 16:16).

When John came on the scene, the political landscape was at the depths of corruption. Herod was the king of Israel and never a more wicked man had ever lived. It was repugnant to the Jews for Herod to be called their king because he was not even a Jew or descendant of David. Herod's position was a political appointment by the government of Rome. He was a corrupt politician, who through bribery, corrupt politics, and constant scheming, was able to win favor with Rome. He was a moral cesspool and a brutal dictator.

The religious scene was not much better than the political when John arrived on the scene. The priesthood was corrupt and Judaism was a dead shell of its former self. The High Priest was the head of the religious system in Israel, but Herod had taken over the religious system in Israel as well as the political and had made the High Priest a political position.

The Man

John was no polished, seminary-educated, silver-tongued orator. John had no effeminate qualities about him; everything about him went against the grain of society.

His **dwelling** was in the wilderness. Luke 1:80 tells us that John *"was in the wilderness till the day of his showing unto*

Israel." Perhaps as many as ten years, John had lived under the hot sun of the desert in preparation for his ministry. Living in the wilderness is not easy street. The wilderness will weed out the weaklings; only the hardiest will survive. His **dress** was camel's hair and a leather girdle worn about his waist and loins. This was plain dress worn by the poorest of society. While the religious leaders of the day wore elaborate robes and dressed to impress, John came walking into town wearing camel skin and leather.

His **diet** was locusts and wild honey. That tells me that John was not overweight. It also tells me that John was accustomed to fasting – it would not be too hard to fast if you were eating locusts for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The Mandate

John was the born to be the forerunner of Jesus. Zacharias affirmed this when he said, *"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; ..."* The idea of preparing the way for someone comes from the ancient practice of heralds going before royalty to announce to folks that a dignitary was coming through. It was his job to clear the road and make the way smooth and easy for the king to travel on.

Israel was in desperate need of the Messiah, but was not ready for him. They were hoping only for a political savior, but John was sent to remind them they needed to look for a spiritual redeemer. His ministry was to show them that their primary need was not political, but spiritual and moral.

The Message

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea" and his message was *"Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* This repentance message was one the leaders of Israel did not want to hear. They liked the kingdom of heaven part of the sermon for they were looking for the Messiah to come to restore Israel to its former glory. But repentance was not part of their plan. They wanted a prince who would rebuke their oppressors, not a prophet who would rebuke their iniquities.

John's ministry was a very abbreviated one and his message changed right in the middle of his preaching career. When he first started preaching, his entire message was repentance. But one day John was standing on the banks of the Jordan river

preaching when he looked down the road and saw One coming. When he recognized that it was Jesus, John knew that it was time to change his message. From that day on, John began to preach the **Redeemer**. Some of the greatest statements made about the Son of God came from his lips.

John witnessed to the **Sonship of Jesus Christ**. *"And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."* (John 1:34). John was the first man to preach that Jesus Christ, that carpenter's son from Nazareth, was the very Son of God. It is going out on a limb to be the first person to say a thing or to preach something no one else is preaching, but that is what John did. We preach Jesus is the Christ because we have a Bible that tells us so besides the testimony of hundreds of theologians, church fathers, and preachers before us. But John had none of that: he preached the deity of Christ before it was popular to do so.

John preached Jesus and that should be our message to this world. The world doesn't need my politics, my philosophies, my morals – the world needs my Jesus.

John witnessed to the **Superiority of Jesus Christ**. *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: ..."* (Matt. 3:11).

John was a very popular preacher in his days: he was enjoying having large crowds follow him wherever he went. To be mightier than John was to be somebody. Some were even thinking that John might be the Messiah. But John said that Jesus was mightier than he. He was not even worthy to take his shoes off and wash his feet.

One day John's disciples came to John with a troubling report. Jesus and John were both preaching and baptizing but Jesus was beginning to attract greater crowds than John was. Perhaps John would be upset that his ministry was shrinking in size while another man's was growing. John eased their fears when he said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* John's desire was for there to be less of him, and more of Jesus. He had no wish to be glorified but that all honor and glory be given to Jesus.

John witnessed to the **Sacrifice of Jesus Christ**. *"Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). All throughout the Old Testament, millions of lambs had been slaughtered on the brazen altar as payment for the sins of Israel. But now the Lamb of God had come to bear the sins of not just Israel, but of the whole world.