

Thus Saith God's Word

by Rev. Ted Brooks, West Saddle Creek Baptist Church

Who Am I?

"And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not, for behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest." (Jeremiah 45:5)

My friend, when you and I go to church and listen to the sermon, what we want to hear is his word. We are not to deny his word. Yet something has gone wrong. Jeremiah sent out a warning to the people of God not to seek great things for thyself, seek them not, for I will bring evil upon all flesh. Jeremiah is saying if earthly things mean more to you than God, your life shall be a prey in all places.

Our real problem is that the pure word of Jesus has been overlaid with so much human fiction and burdensome rules and regulations, false hopes, and consolations that it has become extremely difficult to make a real decision for Christ. Preaching has become overburdened with ideas and expressions which are hopelessly out of touch with the mental climate in which one lives.

For instance, the only time that we seem to recognize sin is when someone we know is killed or our loved ones commit a great sin. We ride through our local town, we see the homeless, the beggars, those who are starving, children who are caught up in a family of things, yet the only time we call in the politician is when our friends or neighbors are in trouble.

The folks are convinced that it is not the word of Jesus Himself that puts them off, but it is the super structure of human institutional and doctrinal elements of our preaching. When the pure word of God is not preached it makes it easy for us to ride through our towns and notice not the have not. When we are bound by rules and regulations of false hopes, we will always show up at the funeral with flowers. When the pure word of God is preached, the church will abide in God's word. We have been told by Christ alone to abide: "If you abide in my word then you are truly my disciples," Jesus is saying, "If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. If you keep obeying my teaching," (John 8:31)

A person who readily begins to believe will continue in or hold on to the Lord's words. One will continue to study and to do the word. (1 Timothy 2:15) When the word of God is preached in its purity, we will reach those who are on drugs, reach those before they commit suicide, save a home before it is broken up.

The problem in the past and now is "Seekest great things for thyself?" There has been too much preaching which contains too much of one's own opinion and conviction and too little of Jesus Christ.

And now somebody needs to do something. When 1.4 million babies are aborted every year in this country, somebody needs to do something. When 51% of church involved youth drink beer and 52% use marijuana and these do not differ greatly from youth who are not in church, somebody needs to do something.

When in 1999 there was an average of one auto alcohol related fatality every 33 minutes and an average of one alcohol related injury approximately every two minutes, somebody needs to do something. (Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Department of Transportation.)

When three million alcohol related violent crimes occur each year and three out of four cases of spouse abuse are alcohol related, somebody needs to do something. When Christians are actively persecuted and discriminated against on the job, in our schools and by our government, somebody needs to do something. When we can no longer pray or hang a copy of the ten Commandments in our public schools, somebody needs to do something. Before I tell you about the need, let me ask you this question: Are you sure of God's hand and guidance? Are you really glad of the way you are going? Has your pastor managed to spare you the great ordeal of serving God here locally? Are you one of those who are held by rules and doctrinal teachings which lead you abroad? Could that be the reason we can go to our local post offices and see the local beggars and we are frightened, rather than having compassion? Something needs to be done here at home. Listen to these words spoken by Red Cloud at the close of Wounded Knee: "There was no hope on earth and God seemed to have forgotten us. Some said they saw the Son of God, others did not see him. If he had come, He would do some great things as He has done before. We doubted it because we had seen neither him nor his works." Oh my friend, they're all around us. People who hope to see Him (God) and they think God has forgotten them.

You and I need to ask the question: Who am I? Said Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Who am I? They also tell me I bore the days of misfortune equally smilingly, proudly, like one accustomed to win."

"Am I really that which other men tell of? Or am I only what I myself know of myself? Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat."

"Who am I? Tossing in expectation of great events. Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance."

"Who am I? Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making."

"Who am I? Faint and ready to say farewell to it all."

"Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine."

"Who am I? Whoever I am thou knowest, O God, I am thine."

"Who am I? Not I but Christ be honored, loved, exalted. Not I, but Christ be seen, be known, be heard."

"Not I but Christ in every look and action. Not I but Christ in every thought and word. Not I, but Christ in lowly silent labor; Not I, but Christ in humble earnest toil. Christ only Christ. No show. No ostentation. Christ only Christ, the gatherer of the spoil. Christ, only Christ ere long will fill my vision. Glory excellency soon, full soon I'll see. Christ, only Christ, my every wish fulfilling. Christ, only Christ my all in all to be." (by A.A.F. Worthfield)

O, my friend, the church needs to be happy, but we won't be happy until we make all the lost happy. We need to learn real joy is to forget self in helping others.

If you are going to be Christ's disciple, let the church become the homes for incurables. Let the harbored, the poor, wretched bodies come in. It is here that the Psalmist said I will both lay me down in peace and sleep; for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8)

O my friend, do you want real joy? The ambition for happiness is ours, by right, but what a mess the most of us make of our search for happiness. Happiness does not grow on bushes. It cannot be plucked like berries. Happiness cannot be bought by rivers of gold or mountains of bonds.

Education may make more keen our dissatisfaction with life. The library or the graduate school is no certain place to seek the happy. Happiness is an attitude of mind and heart, an inner satisfaction that is never consciously sought and found. Life service is the way to happiness. Joy floods the life that gives itself for others. They that lose their lives shall find them.

Who am I? I am a Christian, a disciple of Christ with a high motive for Christian life service. Do you have this high motive, joy? Oh, but there is a higher joy. As followers of Jesus we must come close to Him that we can catch somewhat of His sympathetic look at man.

As Christians here is a strong motive for life service. He serves, you and I must serve. He looked out upon humanity with pitying eye, we must seek to see with his saving sight. Jesus is walking along the Jericho road. A blind beggar sits by the road side with his wooden bowl before him. His voice is high and piercing as he shouts for alms. Down the road comes the master, talking as he walks - wonderful words of love tell from his lips. Never a man so spake. What wonder that His disciples hang on every word. The harsh insistent voice of the man louder now for he has heard that the great healer is passing along the road. Strange tales of his power over blinded eyes have filtered through to him from the daily passing crowds. Now he fairly shrieks his call for mercy. The master stops. The disciples are disgusted. They look at the beggar and all they see is a bundle of rags, dirty and ugly. They see a beggar and nothing more. So they try to stop his mouth. He cries louder. "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

Jesus looks. Back of the dirt and rags he sees a man, a discouraged, disappointed man. He sees those boyish dreams and ambitions for a man's place in the world shattered by blindness. He sees the bitter struggle with a life that in his day condemned the blind to beg or die. He sees the inner crash of a faith in kind providence, and reads the sins that despair have written on his heart. The man that Jesus sees is the man that Jesus helps. Sight restored, heart cleansed, he sent him on his way to take his place once more in the life of his home town.

Who am I? We ask this question again. Do we see with the eyes of

Along The Robeson Trail

by Dr. Stan Knick, Director, UNCP Native American Resource Center

Occasionally a book comes along which cuts through the academic rhetoric about Native American culture to give us a look directly and simply into the heart of the matter. Often such a book relies primarily on Native Americans' speaking in their own voices, giving their own version of cultural reality. One such book is *Native Heritage: Personal Accounts by American Indians 1790 to the Present* (edited by Arlene Hirschfelder).

Native Heritage contains stories, essays and conversations by some of the best known Native Americans of our time: Wilma Mankiller, Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz and others. It even has a short narrative about traditional Indian sports by Joseph Oxendine, former Chancellor of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. These and other modern voices help explicitly to explain Native American culture in the context of modern-day reality, and we will return to them later.

But the earlier voices set the tone of the book, firmly anchoring it in the traditions of the past. In some of these narratives we get a first-hand look into parts of Native American culture which we would otherwise have to depend on second- and third-hand accounts to study. It is one thing for a writer, even the best and most reliable authority, to talk about what happened six or eight generations before, but a

very different thing to have an actual account from long ago. This is the greatest utility of *Native Heritage*.

Take for example the narrative of Hendrick Aupaumut. Aupaumut was a Mahican Indian born about 1757 in the Massachusetts Colony. He was educated at the mission school at Stockbridge, and eventually became a translator who was highly respected among both Indians and non-Indians. Aupaumut wrote in 1790: "In order to please the Great, Good Spirit..., the following custom was observed, which was...considered as communicated to them by Good Spirit."

"The Head of each family — man or woman — would begin with all tenderness, as soon as daylight, to waken up their children and teach them, as follows:

"My Children — you must remember that it is by the goodness of the Great, Good Spirit we are preserved through the night. My children you must listen to my words. If you wish to see many good days and evenings you must love all men, and be kind to all people."

"If you see any that are in distress, you must try to help them. Remember that you will also be in distress some time or other. If you see one hungry, you must give him something to eat: though you should have but little..., give him half of it.... But if you will not assist, or have compassion for the poor,

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Jesus? To see with his eyes is to see men, not as they are but as they may be if he rules their lives.

Again, find Jesus as he sits teaching. Mothers crowd close with their children in their arms. They love Jesus. They would have him hold their babes in his arms and bless them. The disciples look and see just little noisy nuisances. Why don't the mothers know enough to keep them at home? Or if they must bring them, why don't they keep them quiet? The disciples try to send the mothers away. But Jesus looks on those same babes and sees the men and women they may become. Perhaps he sees these very children, grown and in manhood and womanhood giving their lives for love of him. Jesus rebukes the disciples for meddling and Christ gives out a beautiful invitation: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Listen my friend, no satisfactory service will ever be done by those who do not seek to see that which Jesus saw when he faced human need. Here is a motive that will make it possible to love the unlovely and service the ungracious. High motive for Christian service, to seek to see with Jesus' sight. This is a higher motive.

Who am I? Am I then really that which other men tell of? Or am I only what I myself know of myself? Who am I? Whoever I am thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

"When people want to slaughter cattle they drive them along until they get them to a corral and then they slaughter them. So it was with us. My children have been exterminated. My brother has been killed." (Standing Bear of the Poncas.)

you will displease the Good Spirit, you will be called *Uh-wu-theet*, or hard-hearted, and nobody will pity you in the time of your distress....

"My little Children, if you see aged man or woman on your way..., you must pity them, and help them instantly. In doing so you will make their hearts glad, and they will speak well of you.... And you must always listen to the instruction of old folks; thereby you will be wise. And you must not be hasty to speak, when you hear people talking.... And you must never quarrel..., but live in peace with all people: thereby you will please the Great, Good Spirit, and you will be happy."

This type of culture — this belief system — seems as far as it could be from the way many people live in modern America. Aupaumut's view of how the world had been in his youth, of how it had been since the Creator first instructed the human beings on how to live, puts in very simple terms the rules of behavior in traditional Native American culture.

In the next segment, we will look further into the narratives and the culture revealed in Hirschfelder's remarkable book. For more information, visit the Native American Resource Center in historic Old Main Building, on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (our Internet address is www.uncp.edu/nativemuseum).

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Planning meeting Scheduled at West Robeson UMC

A planning meeting for the church's annual activities is scheduled at West Robeson United Methodist Church on Tuesday, January 30 at 6 p.m. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. and the planning session will begin at 7. Trustee Erwin Jacobs encourages members to attend and bring their children. Someone will be available to assist with the children during the planning session.

In the Armed Forces

Army Pfc. Heather R. Chavis has graduated from basic military training at Fort-Sill, Lawton, Okla. During the training, the trainee received instruction in drill and ceremonies, weapons, map reading, tactics, military courtesy, military justice, physical fitness, first aid, and Army history and traditions. Chavis is the daughter of Jenny Lewis of Alfordville Road, Rowland, N.C. The private is a 2000 graduate of South Robeson High School, Rowland.

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