

ALL  
OUT  
FOR  
GOD

By  
Walter R. Alexander

# All Out For God

The Challenging Career  
of  
**John C. Cowell**  
*A Trophy of Grace*

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153 Institute Place  
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copyright, 1946

**DEDICATED**  
to  
our loving daughter,  
**RUTH ALEXANDER COWELL,**  
John's true helpmeet  
nine happy years,  
and  
to  
their only child,  
**JOHN CHRISTIAN COWELL**  
whom,  
in the providence of God,  
his father  
did not live to see.

## INTRODUCTION

What is as interesting as the story of a life? Biography has always held the attention of book lovers, and rightly so.

Even our great God uses the story of human life to enrich His grand Book. Genesis gives the tremendous sweep of history, but it actually has to do with the comings and goings of eight men. And what would one say of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews? Entire periods of time are clustered around the characters God mentions. He makes them significant because they made Him dominant.

Dr. Alexander has here portrayed another man of whom it can be written - "By Faith." It is true that the subject of this narrative had abilities and capabilities, but he also had capacity. How important it is for the young preacher to learn that it is not what we do for God which counts, but what we allow Him to do through us.

John Cowell brought to his work many native gifts. He had an attractive personality, a good mind, business ability, and platform power. But all of these were put under subjection to Christ, and everything was made to contribute to the great end of soul-winning.

This little book does more than paint a portrait; it presents a power. The recital itself is an exhortation to ministers and all Christian workers to be zealous for Christ and loyal to His Word. I hope the book will have a wide reading, particularly among young preachers.

Will H. Houghton

President, Moody Bible Institute

## Chapter 1

### A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST JESUS

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17

It was most unusual. So much so that numerous pedestrians who slackened their pace to read suddenly stopped short to read again, as if unable to grasp the full significance of the news at the first reading.

“Born to the late \_\_\_\_\_,” it said. Thus, in the first four words was the announcement of the coming of a new life and the reminder of the passing of another.

It was the assistant pastor’s idea. The church bulletin board, read by passing throngs every day, usually carried some Bible verse or equally terse, pithy saying of man’s, except toward the close of the week when news of the approaching Sunday services was thus broadcast to the community. But this particular day the news was decidedly out of the ordinary, and Brother Brannen had seized this medium of publicity to give the news to the people of the city.

Decatur Alabama, is a very busy southern city clinging to the south bank of the meandering Tennessee River, and not many miles south of the Alabama-Tennessee border. It is strategically located. The tides of traffic flow north and south through the facilities of the Louisville and Nashville Railway, thus linking the great northern cities, Chicago, Detroit, and beyond with the Gulf Coast and with Florida. At right angles to the L&N, the Southern Railway passes through Decatur, making possible a closer intercourse between the nation’s capitol and other points to the far northeast and the city of Memphis, Tennessee’s gateway to the vast southwest. In addition, a network of fine roadways and the advantages of a mighty river-way combine to bring the world to its doors and provide every known opportunity for trade to the thriving city.

Located in the deep South, in the far-famed “Bible belt” of America, Decatur is a city of many churches and numerous faiths. The largest of all these in membership, and housed in the most beautiful edifice of worship, stands the Central Baptist Church, easily the most influential of that denomination in northern Alabama. It was the bulletin board on the front lawn of this Church that was broadcasting to the city that Fourth of July morning the news of the posthumous birth early that day of the pastor’s child.

For, on May 15th, the talented young pastor, so dearly loved by the entire community, had suffered a severe heart attack and had passed away. Six weeks later, his young widow had placed in her arms her first born child, a handsome baby boy. Thus, a new life had come into being just a little while after his illustrious father had passed away.

It was the second time John Cowell had died!

One day in the late 1920’s, two men met on the main street of a small town in North Carolina. The older man abruptly stopped the younger one with the query, “aren’t you the John Cowell I

used to know in Wilmington?" The younger man evidenced no sign of recognition, save for a merry twinkle in his eye as he replied, "You are mistaken, sir. I am not the man you refer to."

"Well, that is strange," continued the first speaker as he made apology. "You surely do resemble him. I knew him well as a growing boy. Knew his father and mother, also. You certainly look enough like him to be his twin brother." "But you see, sir," continued the youth, "I knew him also, and the John Cowell you refer to is dead."

"Dead!" The news was evidently a shock. "Tell me about it. When did he die?"

"Yes, John Cowell is dead. He died rather suddenly one night several years ago. It was the eighth of April, 1923, to be exact. He died on the corner of Franklin and Anderson Streets in Fayetteville. I was there at the time; I saw him die. You see, my name *is* John Cowell, but that night in the great revival then in progress in that city the John Cowell you knew died to the old life of sin and shame, and the John Cowell speaking to you now is a new creature in Christ Jesus. I am not the John Cowell you knew as a lad and a youth. I have been reborn."

That reply was typical of John Cowell. From that memorable night in April, 1923, to the moment he was called higher twenty-one years later, he was conscious of a genuine Christian experience. Through those years, there was one thing he knew: whereas he had been blind, he now had received his spiritual sight. He was indeed a new creature. And no one who knew him ever had occasion to doubt his regeneration. For to him to live was Christ.

It had not always been so! Time was when the young social set of Fayetteville thought of John as the best dancer in the crowd, and a carefree leader of social whirl. For, although John Cowell was only forty-three years of age at the time of his death, he had lived two strenuous lives in that short time, two lives so radically different each from the other that all who had known him as a worldling, and came to know him as a follower of Christ, soul-winning evangelist, and compassionate pastor, throughout of him always as another outstanding trophy of divine grace.

He was indeed that, a trophy of grace divine. A power from above, a power not of man, had arrested the young worldling and, lifting that dynamic personality to a higher level, had diverted his energies into new channels. As Saul of Tarsus became Paul the apostle, as John Newton the dissolute became John Newton, hymn writer and church divine, as Billy Sunday, professional ball player, became Sunday the evangelist, so John Cowell, from the hour of his second birth, lived a life that was *all out for God*.

John was born right after the turn of the century. Had the renowned evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, lived just ten more days, he would have beheld the dawn of the closing year of the nineteenth century, the year 1900. For that great soul-winner of two continents had slipped away to his heavenly reward at noon on Friday, December 22, 1899 and many who read of his passing in the great papers of that period had reason to recall the words he had spoken not many weeks before to a congregation in New York City: "You may some day read in the newspapers that Dwight L. Moody is dead. It will not be so! God has given me the gift of life everlasting."

It was Dwight L. Moody who, in later years, became John Cowell's ideal as soul-winner and evangelist. It was undoubtedly the record of his life and service that exerted greater influence over John than that of any other. From his days at the Institute throughout his labors, John had one all-consuming ambition: to be such a winner of souls in his day as was he who, two generations earlier, had so mightily stirred both Great Britain and America.

It was only six months after the great Moody had only been laid to rest at Northfield that the young parents of the little girl in an old and historic North Carolina town became aware they were soon to become parents of a second child. When the twentieth century was but a few weeks old, their home was blessed by the advent of a son. It was natural they name him for his father; indeed, the proud mother gave the lad his fathers full name, and he became John Christopher Cowell, Jr. The day was February 25, 1901. The town was Fayetteville. The house stood at 137 Cool Spring Street.

Fayetteville, one of the oldest towns in the state, was a sleepy southern community at the turn of the century, and far more conscious of its illustrious sons of the past than it was of its children of the present. How were its citizens to know that the newly-born Cowell baby would become a winner of many souls in later years, and that some day the townsfolk would speak with great pride of the lad?

Her citizens of that day who were middle-aged or older remembered well the days of the sixties; in fact, some of the men had marched with Lee, and hot summer days found them seated in the friendly shade of the old slave Market swapping yarns of Antebellum days. To them there seemed to be more of charm in the past than there was lure in in the future. Times were changing too rapidly to suit the quiet tenor of their ways; innovations threatened that were resounded by the older, more substantial citizens; one prominent man sought to have a city ordinance passed that would forbid the blowing of the mill whistle, as it disturbed the slumber of the more favored sons of fortune. What if the street were unpaved, who wanted them paved anyway? As for modern sewerage, "The ancient wooden water pipes in the street were good enough for our fathers, there are good enough for us."

But the changes that came were not all bad, perhaps not as bad as the ancient fathers of the city had reason to fear. Today, Fayetteville is one of the most prosperous and most progressive of North Carolina's smaller cities. Few cities, even larger, have a more beautiful or better-appointed main business street, while it abounds with fine schools, churches, hospitals, and lovely southern homes, both of the older hospitable type and the more modern, less spacious design. Just outside the city limits sprawls, far across the countryside, the nation's largest army post, the now permanent Fort Bragg.

It was this city of eastern North Carolina that was John Cowell's home the greater part of his life, to which he loved to return again and again from his various evangelistic campaigns, and where today his mother<sup>1</sup> and married sister still reside.

It was a goodly heritage into which the baby boy entered. The father was a progressive business man of the city, operating a growing furniture manufacturing establishment in Dunn, twenty miles away. He had come east from Missouri, his native state, where he had been reared in the home of a preacher father. Rev. William Henry Cowell was a pioneer saddlebag preacher of the Disciples of Christ, a man of fine bearing, untiring energy, and unquestioned devotion to the cause of Christ. His son John, a young traveling salesman, always felt that destiny directed his footsteps to this particular town in Carolina, for, as he alighted from the train on his first arrival, his gaze fell upon the face of a beautiful southern belle of that city, and forthwith he set his cap to win her affections. How good a salesman he was we cannot say, but he sold himself to the young lady with dispatch. She had been saved under the preaching of the renowned Dr. Arthur T. Pierson, and was quite active in her church at the time this stranger from the West came to pay his attentions to her. Back of her also were ministerial forebears. One of them had greatly influenced her girlhood days, the Rev. Thomas B. Newberry, also a

pioneer circuit rider, but of the Baptist persuasion. He founded the *North Carolina Baptist*, now the *Biblical Recorder*.

From his father, the baby boy inherited a genial disposition, a bright, happy outlook on life, and a liberal portion of ambition to succeed coupled with the indomitable spirit of resolution so native to the pioneers of the West. His mother bequeathed to her son many other admirable qualities, notable among them the courtly manners of the old South that always thereafter marked him as a gentleman.

Perhaps these preacher forebears on both sides of the family were overshadowing the lad with their presence, for he insisted to the day of his death that he had felt called to preach at the tender age of eight. Ten years later, however, no one of his acquaintance would have suspected for a moment that John Cowell would ever stand behind the sacred desk calling sinners to repentance.

But even in the midst of those happy years of early manhood prior to his conversion, John never got far away from childhood's first impressions. The first vivid memory to linger throughout his life was of a religious nature. His father, long a nominal Christian, was taking life more seriously now that two children had come to bless his home, and on September 4, 1904, he was baptized and became a member of the Christian Church in Dunn. His thriving business connections there had made it almost imperative that he live there, so, a few months before, the family had taken up residence in that city.

That memorable Sunday, the little family sat on the front pew of the church, the lovely young wife and mother with her two children. Perhaps the boy, only three and a half years of age, was a trifle frightened by the strange sight of his father plunged beneath the baptismal waters. Certain it is he had no conception of the significance of that ordinance, but something of the solemnity of the occasion, his mother's quiet tears, his father's radiant face, were stamped indelibly upon his memory. Those formative years were conducive to an early Christian experience, for the church was the center of their social, as well as their religious, life. The six years they lived in Dunn, the father served as Superintendent of the Sunday school. Sunday meant Sunday school and preaching, Wednesday night meant prayer meeting.

One golden opportunity was lost during those days, however. John was but eight at the time, and the father could not believe then that one so young could be brought into a genuine Christian experience. Special services were on in the church, and the whole family was there that night, John sitting by an open window. His parents were listening to the man preaching in their own pulpit, but something else had captured the attention of the lad. Across the street was the open tent of a visiting evangelist over whose head flared a kerosene lamp. The lad's eyes, big with wonder, were fattened on that lamp gently swaying in the night breeze. "That's what I am going to do when I get big," he was thinking, "have a big tent and preach in it to the people." John, the man, always insisted that God called John, the boy, that night to become a preacher. How correct his interpretation of his childhood dreams we cannot say, but quite evidently the lad that night was entertaining serious thoughts, for, when the family was home again, John asked his father what that preacher meant by being "saved," and said he wanted to be a "Christian."

Was the Spirit of God calling then? Undoubtedly, but the father could not see that at that time; to him, the boy was such a little fellow and so young. His reply was perfectly natural, "Son, I'll tell you about all that when you get older."

Thus was brushed away, unintentionally of course, what might have proven to be childhood's golden opportunity. The experience destined to change John's later life so radically did not come for many years. How much of heartache, how much of wasted years for which he later sought to atone, all might have been spared, had John found Christ at that tender age?

The carefree years of boyhood followed hard upon each other, years that saw him living close to nature. Fishing in the Cape Fear River that flowed hard by Fayetteville and hunting in the swamp lands of the back country became his life, until he knew every bird call and could imitate them perfectly, and was expert with both the rod and the gun. As for school books, his attention to them became the irreducible minimum necessary for satisfactory progress. Unfortunately, perhaps, his was too keen a mind to necessitate intense application; thus, he did not hold studious habits to be very important during adolescent days.

At seventeen, he was finishing high school, and should have gone on to a full college education; but America was plunged into the war in Europe, two million young Americans were in France, and jobs paying well were beckoning on every hand to boys who were becoming impatient with the tyranny of school books. Had his soul been bent then on the goal it sought five years later, nothing could have persuaded him to leave the classroom for any lesser task. He later saw his error, but not at the time he made it.

It was an unusual situation that took him from his studies. The Federal Government was surveying vast tracts of the county, preparing to locate Fort Bragg, and John, who had hunted quail and rabbits over every inch of the terrain, got a big-paying job for Uncle Sam as surveyor's guide, not only lured by "big money," but thrilled to believe that he who was too young to fight for his country was in this way doing his bit. A very natural reaction and praiseworthy motive, but it had disastrous results.

Seldom does a lad return to school once he quits; so with John. One job followed another, working for a time in his father's plant, then for a time in a large bank in Wilmington, North Carolina, finally back to an accounting position in Fayetteville.

In Wilmington he demonstrated marked business ability, rising in a short time to post of assistant cashier in the largest bank of that city, the Farmers and Merchants. They were the days immediately following the close of the war: jobs were still plentiful, wages unusually high, and youth riding on the crest of the postwar waves of hysteria. John, a handsome young chap with radiant personality, a pocket full of money, and a heart bent solely on pleasure, was one of the ringleaders of that city's social whirl. His were the prizes as the best dancer at Wrightsville Beach; he was the crack shot with billiard ball and cue. The lad of seventeen had become the sophisticated young man of twenty-one when he returned to Fayetteville. His father's ambition, in which the youth naturally shared, was to operate a banking institution of their own, father and son in the top ranking offices. Until the hour would dawn propitious for such a venture, John busied himself as a bookkeeper for a large firm in his native city. Not knowing Christ, he had lost all interest in the church and Sunday school, apparently living from day to day for the next dance, whiling away many precious hours in the pool halls where some of his money went for the game and much of it was lost in gambling. One cigarette after another kept him company, while the social glass was frequently upon his lip. Late hours became the usual thing night after night. Yet, with it all, he was not finding that deep satisfaction he was inwardly seeking; life was rapidly proving to be a hollow disappointment when the thing happened, which was destined to change his course for the remainder of his life and for eternity.

It was April 8, 1923. The little city had been agog with excitement for several weeks past. The Ham-Ramsay evangelistic party had erected a large tabernacle on a prominent corner almost in the heart of the city, the singing was most inspiring, the bold preacher was drawing vast throngs to every service, and religion was rapidly becoming the topic of the day on every side.

However, it's sweeping influence had not yet captured the younger set in which John moved. Elders urged him to attend the services, but he entertained no serious thought of doing so. Surely there was nothing there to interest him. He might never have gone, except for a strange providence. In speaking of his conversion in later years, he always said God had to break his wrist to stop him in his worldly ways.

Attempting to crank up the family Chevrolet<sup>2</sup>, only to have it kick back with terrific force, he re-entered the house with a broken wrist. The hurt could not be mended in a day. His services as a bookkeeper were of no value for some weeks.

He was unable even to play pool. Time began to drag heavily on his hands, so much so that he decided one night to go see what it was that drew such vast crowds to that preacher's tabernacle. Truly, "God moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform." That night and the next few nights to follow mark the turning-point in his human life.

The first visit was followed by a second. Some who knew he had a good singing voice invited him to sit with the large chorus choir. He did so, and began to enjoy what he termed "a good show" from that vantage point. But the second or third service sent him home deeply disturbed. Who can explain it? Who can understand what was taking place in the soul of the carefree lad? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest he sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

On the way home, he was aware something was wrong, radically wrong. Lying awake in bed, he reflected, "If what that preacher said tonight is true, I'm on the road to hell." It was a poor night's rest John Cowell had that night. He finally fell asleep only after he had made God a definite promise - if God would spare his life and permit him to return to the meeting the next night, he would respond to the evangelist's invitation and go forward in confession of his sin. He meant it from the depths of his heart, yet the next night at the meeting he sat riveted to the seat and, when the service had ended, John Cowell knew he had failed to keep his word with God!

Another night of heart-searching. Another midnight promise to God. Sunday night came, April 8th; the tabernacle was packed to the doors; three boys, one of them John, arriving late, started to leave, but someone showed them to seats on the far last row at the top of the choir stand.

The song service ended, the preacher announced his text. It seemed to John, God had written it for him. It was Proverbs 29:1 "He, that, being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

The stricken youth never heard another word the preacher said. He sat waiting the invitation. His mind was fully made up, his will already surrendered; he waited eagerly the opportunity to make public profession of faith in Christ as his personal Savior. Would the preacher never close his sermon? How could he wait any longer? The minutes dragged by like hours. Now, at last, his Bible closed, Dr. Ham was speaking the first words of an appealing invitation. He never finished it just as he had planned. A commotion behind him in the choir, a handsome young man was working his way down to the pulpit, another moment and John Cowell was

standing before the preacher, face flushed, lips trembling, but a radiance as from another world lighting his eye as he gave the preacher his hand in token of a public surrender.

His spontaneous action opened the flood gates. Many others followed. W. J. Ramsay, leading the singing, had stared at the unexpected interruption; even Earl Rodgers at the piano seemed thrown off balance for the moment. Both men, in after years, became associated with John as his song leaders, but none of those involved could foresee that then.

That night, the lad walked home on air. So many of the leading business men of the city had grasped his hand telling of their delight, and touching him deeply by their statements they had been earnestly praying for him. Something had happened to him he could not understand, but that something very radical had taken place he could not doubt.

He arose the next morning a new creature. He stepped forth upon the streets of the little city to walk life's ways as a follower of Jesus Christ. He never turned back. He never even glanced back.

Just a few weeks before his death, John wrote a lengthy letter to a young man who had recently interviewed him, stating he believed God was calling him to preach. From the pages of that letter, John tells us of his conversion and of the early days of this Christian experience:

*"The little season of fellowship we had together in the quietness of your room a couple of days ago was indeed refreshing to my soul.*

*The earnestness with which you plied me with questions about the early days of my ministry was reminiscent of the days that I sat at the feet of the man who led me to Christ and regaled him with questions about how to start out in the Lord's work.*

*I had been a Christian only a few days, but I knew that God had called me to preach His Son. To be exact: the Lord called me to preach when I was only a child eight years of age, but I didn't understand that call until I became a Christian at the age of twenty-two. The call came in a little church in Dunn, N. C., in which my father was a deacon. It was clear, definite, irresistible. Since you, too, have been called of God to preach, you will understand perfectly what I am talking about.*

*All through the days of my boyhood, I knew that I was going to preach the gospel, though no one else ever knew it; it was a secret shut up in my soul that I myself did not fully understand. When I was saved the night of April 8th, 1923, at the corner of Franklin and Anderson Streets in the city of Fayetteville, N. C., under the ministry of Dr. M. F. Ham, that call to preach came back with renewed force and meaning. Five days later I surrendered my life fully to Jesus christ to preach His glorious gospel to the ends of the earth. It was a decision second only in importance to the one that made me a child of God.*

*From the very first, I was consumed with a zeal to make Christ known. I went on the streets of my home town the day after God saved me - long before I was baptized and joined the church - to witness for Christ. Some of my friends told me frankly that I was 'carrying religion too far'; that I was making a fool of myself; that I would soon have no friends if I persisted in accosting everyone with the question, 'Are you a Christian?'*

*Strange to say, I was not discouraged, Instead of deciding to 'calm down,' as I was advised to do by my close friends and associates, I became even more zealous and determined to win the lost.*

*I mention these things because you are right now in your Christian life where I was then - a young Christian full of zeal and consuming passion for the lost. It thrilled me to talk with you; it set my own heart to pounding with new love and zeal for Christ and souls; it stirred precious memories of the early days of my own Christian life."*

As this letter indicates, John was "on fire" for his Lord. Within a few days, he had done two striking things. He called a meeting of his boy friends at the Y. M. C. A., witnessed before them, and sought to win them to Christ. He then called a meeting of the girls of the younger set at the home of Dr. Patterson, and there gave a ringing testimony that resulted in the salvation of several of them. He made it clear to all, in spite of their incredulity, that he was through with the old life. That same week (Friday the 13th it was), he definitely surrendered to preach. In the presence of his father, he placed all his cigarettes in the fire, an act symbolic of his complete break with the past. Galatians 2:20 became the motto for his life - "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." He had become a new creature in Christ Jesus.

## Chapter 2

### IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:15

The school of Christ is for all His followers. We matriculate in that school when regenerated by the Spirit of God, but we never finish the course in this life; we are simply transferred at death to a higher grade. Too many “babes in Christ” make no effort to learn, however; their lives manifest no growth in grace; there is no indication of progress. Not so with John Cowell!

From the day he made profession of faith in the Saviour until the day of his death, he had an insatiable thirst for spiritual wisdom. The fun-loving youth had taken all too lightly his books during grammar school and high school days. At seventeen, a job that would guarantee money in his pocket held greater attraction for him than any school assignment calculated to place knowledge in his head.

But, over night, he became a seeker after wisdom, an inquirer for truth, a devout student of anything and everything that would increase his usefulness as a true servant of Christ. That the man was a “new creature” was as evident henceforth in his mental attitudes and his intellectual outlook as it was morally and spiritually.

The questions he asked Dr. Ham almost daily after his conversion were such as: “What books shall I read to help me preach sermons that shall win the lost?” “How shall I go about studying the Bible?” “Where can I go to school to prepare myself for an effective soul-winning ministry?” “Where are some good Bible conferences I can attend where I may hear God’s word expounded by the greatest living Bible expositors?” “How shall I go about getting engagements to preach?” “Will it be all right if I just get up on a street corner somewhere and go to preaching?”

Dr. Ham proved himself a warm friend and a wise counselor to the zealous youth. He saw in John latent talents, untold possibilities. He often referred to him as the most promising convert of all his ministry. It was he who put the lad to work for the Lord. His next engagement for a citywide revival was calling him from Fayetteville, North Carolina to Sumter, South Carolina. He persuaded John to resign his position in the business world and accompany him as a salaried young people’s worker. Accordingly, the young convert worked faithfully and most effectively throughout that campaign in that capacity. His all-consuming desire was to go to school at once, but the follies of his other days had left him with personal indebtedness upward of seven or eight hundred dollars, and this had to be paid off first. Unfortunately, his father, who would have been quick to furnish financial aid in that hour, had suffered severe reverses in his business affairs, and the lad would not accept any aid from him under the circumstances. Therefore, the summer of 1923 revealed to the lad who had been so free with his money heretofore the necessity of living most economically now. This he did, seeking to pay off his indebtedness as soon as possible in order to pursue his scholastic preparation.

It was early that summer that the Ham-Ramsay party erected their tent in Decatur, Alabama. Here John was destined to hold his first and last pastorate many years later. Scores of people in that community recall with pleasure the young man of radiant personality who came there as one of the evangelistic party and gave such a ringing testimony to the transforming, saving power of Jesus Christ.

His special work lay with the young people. His special assignments were preaching and personal soul-winning in the extension services in outlying sections of the county throughout that campaign. So excellent was his spirit, so promising were his manifest gifts that it was Dr. Ham himself who urged John to enter Moody Bible Institute in September, graciously offering him financial aid for the year that lay ahead.

Among the many students to matriculate at that famous Bible school that fall was a young man who seemed eager to study everything the Institute had to offer. He succeeded in arranging a very heavy schedule; then, to insure studious habits from the very first, paid the additional cost of a room to himself. Thus nothing was allowed to distract, not even the companionship of a roommate, and soon he was "burning the midnight oil" endeavoring to acquaint himself with the treasures of theological wisdom, biblical interpretation, the art of sermonizing, church history, etc.

But his labors were not confined to the classroom or his study desk. He knew that there was no knowledge to equal that gained by experience, so the long winter nights that year, particularly Saturday nights, found him in the haunts of sin seeking the lost, preaching on the street corners, in the city missions, jails, hospitals, and other institutions.

One night, the ground blanketed beneath a fresh snowfall and an icy wind blowing from Lake Michigan, John and a friend stopped for a cup of hot coffee at the little "hole in the wall" cafe. A drunk entered, scarcely able to stand, yet very talkative. He asked the two youths to buy him a drink. "I'm thirsty," he said to John, who sat on a counter stool close to the door. "All right," he replied, "here is what you need," and he pulled out his pocket Testament. Opening it to John 4, he read to him the words, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Then followed a short but very direct message on the satisfying effects of the Water of Life - and he preached unto the man his need of Jesus. The Spirit of God honored this effort at soul-winning, for the man seemed to listen intently, finally falling on his knees as he asked the young preacher to pray for him. That coffee shop never saw a stranger sight than that - three men on their knees while one of them wept and the onlookers wondered. The man accepted Christ, and a little later, as the small group separated, he told the young men he was going straight thereafter. The last John ever saw of him was his hand waving them an affectionate farewell as they moved down the snow-clad sidewalks toward the buildings of the Institute. Only heaven knows the outcome of that evening.

But not all efforts were as fruitful as that one. Preaching in the Jewish Ghetto one night, he was stabbed with a pen knife in the back, providentially only a glancing blow that caused but a shallow wound. On another occasion, a Jewish woman tried to throw boiling water from an upstairs window on the bareheaded youth preaching on the sidewalk, but he fortunately stepped to one side at the right moment. "The worst thing that ever happened to me during those days," said John in later years, "was the blow that was given my pride. I had extravagantly indulged myself in a brand new Stetson hat. I felt so well dressed when I wore it I dare say I strutted with pride. But the first time I wore it on a preaching mission someone with

most excellent aim scattered a juicy, ripe tomato from one end of it to the other. I was incensed at the time, but have long since accepted the experience as a much needed lesson which I never forgot.”

Thus, with classroom duties and practical assignments on the streets of Chicago, that fall, winter, and spring quickly sped away. Into everything he did, he put his best, and received from the studies and the contacts at the Institute all they had to offer. It was a year well invested, for, although circumstances that arose later did not permit him to complete the full course the institution offered, he learned habits of study that year that he observed throughout the remainder of his life.

Particularly was he impressed by the life and work of the school’s founder, and it became his ambition and daily prayer that God might be pleased to use his consecrated talents, whether many or few, in the great task of soul-winning, just as He had used Dwight L. Moody.

Thus the first year’s work came to an end. It was August. He would go home for a brief rest and a visit with the loved ones back in North Carolina.

Sunday morning, August 16, 1924, the auditorium of Hay Street Methodist Church was taxed to capacity. Although midsummer heat was sending many to the mountain resorts and to the beaches, the news had spread up and down Hay Street that John Cowell was going to preach there that morning, and curious throngs had filled every pew in eager anticipation.

What would the home-town boy say? Would he make good? He had been a fine dancer, but could he preach? Remembering the sensation his profession of religion in the Ham-Ramsay meeting had occasioned more than a year before, it was a natural curiosity that brought former friends of the family from all the churches of the town that morning, and many who represented no church at all.

It would be difficult to say who was the more nervous that memorable morning, John or his father. Blessed with self-confidence, the youth was nevertheless impressed with the fact that this was his first sermon inside a church house in that city at a formal Sunday morning hour, that in a sense his reputation was at stake, for he was among home folks where he was very apt to be taken for granted. But he showed his nervousness less than did his father. In later years, he was prone to tease his father, telling in public how that morning he sat slumped down in his seat as if he anticipated embarrassment before all his friends of long years standing. As the message progressed, however, he gradually came up until he was sitting fully erect, head up, shoulders back, as if to say, “That’s my boy up there preaching.”

The sermon was most direct, in language unvarnished, and was unusually well delivered for a speaker so young. He was then only twenty-three years of age. Found among his many treasured papers after his passing, it appears here exactly as he delivered it, breathing something of the young man’s zeal and fervor after all these years.

## SINS OF SOCIETY

Text - Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

"I have chosen for my text this morning Romans 3:23, which gives us a view on the universality of sin from every walk of life, but I am only going to deal with some of our most prominent sins, and have therefore classified them under the head of "Sins of Society."

I realize that this is a very disagreeable subject to deal with because Satan has dressed up some of our cherished pleasures in such a manner that there are thousands of men, women, boys, and girls who unknown to themselves are servants of Satan.

I am not a pessimist nor a calamity howler, neither do I look upon the dark side of life, but I feel that the time has come for us to face the facts regarding our social life, as well as all of our walks of life, and I feel that God has chosen me to the task of unmasking some of our modern so-called amusements and pleasure.

I am a firm believer in the fact that the home is the origin of all things good or bad, maybe not directly, but indirectly, but in either case the home exerts its influence. The home is to the child what the clay mould is to the molten iron in the crucible. It makes a boy or a girl just exactly what he or she is.

If I see a boy hanging around a pool room, I know that there is something wrong in the home. If I see a boy or a girl at a bridge whist or progressive euchre party<sup>3</sup>, or hanging around some filthy dance hall, I know that there is something wrong at home.

Men like John Knox, Martin Luther, Dwight L. Moody, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Wesley and the like, did not come from homes where cards were more prominent than the Bible, or where sensual, suggestive dances were in progress four nights out of the week. God rarely calls men for Christian service from homes that are contaminated with these damnable social sins. Neither does any moral, Christian man go to a place like that to look for a wife. No man wishes to marry an exhausted, weary, sophisticated, physically burned out piece of humanity to cure her of cigarette smoking and cocktail drinking and excessive rougeing<sup>4</sup>. Yes, you mothers and fathers say, 'Oh! they'll settle down soon enough,' but as a matter of fact, these years of racing, chattering, drinking and dancing; of unnatural lights and daring jokes; mouths smeared with paint or burned with strong drink; soft mops of young hair twisted and scorched and marred; these years of manicuring and dress buying, of perfuming and telephoning and overeating; of leaping from hot rooms into low slung motors are all a society girl's life and what is left isn't worth talking about.

They say, 'Oh, there isn't harm in dancing.' No, they can't see any harm in it because it's the mildest thing they do. There is harm in it. It is an open door to hell and girls and boys by the millions are taking that way today, and what are you doing to stop them?

Statistics show that 60 percent of the dancers go to the bad. They also show that the dance and the white slave traffic go hand in hand. Dancing breaks down restraint and things can be said to a girl on a dance hall floor when a boy has his arm around her that could never be said at any other time.

Often the argument is presented that dancing is scriptural. I hasten to say that it is not. The Greek work 'Komo' or 'Komos' translated 'rioting' in Romans 13:13 and 'reveling' in Galatians 5:21 and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:3 means 'dancing' in the original.

Separate the sexes and you will abolish the dance in one week. Why? Because it is strictly a sensual proposition.

These social sins are the very things that are taking our minds from our duty today.

There are 27,000,000 children in this country today without Sunday school instruction, and there are 8,000,000 growing up in non-Christian homes. What are we professing followers of Jesus Christ doing to remedy this appalling situation? Morality cannot save these children, even if they were to grow up into moral beings. Putting fruit on a tree will not make it live. They have got to have Christ and it is our duty to give Him to them. And it has to be done while they are young in order to save them from the evils of this world.

One judge said that 80 percent of all criminals he had ever sentenced were adolescents. Statistics show that 80 percent of all criminals are under twenty-five years of age. If all the people that will be murdered this year by adolescents were to march past this church four abreast, it would take them three hours. What is the cause of all this? Here is the reason: the secular education of a child consists of 1000 hours a year while he gets only 12 hours a year in Bible training. The thing we Christians have got to do is get the gospel of Christ to these boys and girls and it can't be done by putting pool tables in Y. M. C. A.'s and teaching our boys crime under the guise of Christianity.

Quit laying the stress on morality and put it on spirituality where it belongs. Just being a 'good fellow' is not all that God requires of a fellow. The name good fellow among your associates is not going to carry you into the pearly portals. You have got to have Christ before you can enter heaven.

Be not deceived, mothers and fathers, you are going to reap in your children exactly what you have sown in them. That is not only a law of God, but a law of nature. Take for example Belgium: she reaped what she sowed in the Belgian Congo district when her soldiers tortured and killed the black men. Germany paid her back fourfold.

Haman was hanged on the very gallows he erected for Mordecai. Those who threw the three Hebrew children into the fiery furnace were consumed by the very flames they had kindled for their victims.

Nero's mother murdered all heirs to the throne save Nero and was in turn murdered by him.

The dogs licked up the blood of Ahab and Jezebel on the very spot where they had shed the blood of the innocent victim, Naboth.

For every child that was torn from it's mother's breast in the time of slavery, our own fair South gave her choicest sons on the field of battle, an awful reaping for what she had sown.

Yes, men and women here this morning, you are going to reap just exactly what you are sowing. God doesn't save on the installment plan. You can't rid your town of the baser sins until you let go your so-called nice social sins.

This morning I plead with you in the name of Christ to let go of these cherished social sins and get back to the Old Book and the Christ who has the power to save."

He had been a Christian almost a year and a half now, and as yet had not affiliated himself with any particular church. This strange lack on his part was in no sense due to any want of interest in or love for the church; it was prompted rather by his determination to see for himself

first what church or denomination was closest to the pattern revealed in the New Testament. It will be remembered he had preacher forebears both of the Disciples of Christ and the Baptist denomination; his only sister had married a steward in the Methodist Church, and John was at a loss to know which pathway to take when he was converted. So he had bided his time. At Moody, he had studied not only church history with avidity, but had acquainted himself with the doctrines of the various denominations; and now that he had returned to Fayetteville he had reached a final decision in the matter. Certain Methodist leaders were still hopeful of winning him to the ministry of that denomination, and were the more eager after he had preached so acceptably in Hay Street Methodist Church.

In addition, a gentleman and his wife, members of the Christian Church, offered to finance four years of college training for him if he became a servant of that church. Such offers were the harder to decline, since his funds were exhausted at the close of his first year at Moody, and he saw no immediate prospects of replenishing them.

But convictions in his soul which he could not betray led him to ask for baptism into the membership of the First Baptist Church of Fayetteville and he received that ordinance on September 21, 1924, at the hands of the pastor, Dr. Joel S. Snyder. Not so many months later, he was ordained to the Baptist ministry in this same church, the sermon for the occasion being brought by Dr. Chas. H. Durham of nearby Lumberton.

His financial condition being what it was, he saw no chance of returning to Moody that fall, so decided, as opportunities arose, to conduct some revival services in nearby churches. He let his closest friends know he was open for invitation to hold revivals here and there. It appeared reasonable to him that, if the Lord wanted him to preach, He would open doors of opportunity for him to do so. In the privacy of his own room at home, John put out the fleece. But weeks passed and no invitations came! That was disappointing, to say the least, and sorely trying as well. Had he mistaken God's call? Several months passed by, Christmas came (a mighty lean one, for the boy was "broke") and the old year gave way to a new one, 1925.

But wisely, the young man was improving these days of waiting. No loafing at the corner drugstores now, no hanging around pool halls, no frittering away precious hours at the card table! Instead, he worked as faithfully in his study at home as if he had been a student again at Moody. The day was scheduled with very definite tasks for each and every hour. Day after day was spent thus, shut off from the world that he might prepare himself to deal with the world in the great evangelistic campaigns yet to follow.

At seven he rose and, by eight, was at his desk ready for work. The schedule was as follows:

8:00 - 9:00	Prayer and Old Testament Study
9:00 - 10:00	Study Some Old Testament Book
10:00 - 11:00	General Reading or Writing
11:00 - 12:00	Correspondence
12:00 - 2:00	Relaxation - lunch - read Newspapers
2:00 - 3:00	Prayer and New Testament Study
3:00 - 4:00	Sermon Research and Building
4:00 - 5:00	Study Some New Testament Book
5:00 - 7:30	Relaxation, Shave, Supper
7:30 - 9:00	Study Second Coming and Prophecy
9:00 - 10:00	Read Religious Papers and Magazines
10:00	Retire

Thus, each day was planned for nine and a half hours of work, six and a half hours of rest and relaxation, and eight hours of sleep. The year at Moody had enabled him to develop study habits; he had learned what he ought to study; if he were temporarily unable to return to the classroom, he would not waste his time, anyway. Thus the months of that fall beheld some fine work accomplished and further established habits to which he would adhere during the years that followed. In all this, John revealed his strength of character, for the average youth might have had good intentions but stopped at that. He continued to sharpen his axe until the day of his death, and the friends of his earlier, happy-go-lucky days of youth were amazed at the encyclopedic sweep of knowledge he revealed in his mature preaching.

First among his textbooks for intense study throughout the years was his Bible. Of few preachers can it be said, as it is truthfully said of him, "He read the Old Testament through every three months, and the New Testament every ten days." This sounds like a gross exaggeration, but it was the schedule he followed for several years until he was thoroughly saturated with the Word. In all his preaching, he was able to quote any passage he desired to use, giving chapter and verse; never was he at a loss or known to misquote a single passage.

Along with this systematic reading of the Bible went Bible study, book by book, doctrine by doctrine, aided by the best works in theology, the finest commentaries, and other helps. Beyond any doubt, his zeal consumed his energies during the next ten years of his evangelistic career, and the lengths to which he went to equip himself to render a maximum service weren't far toward undermining his health, thus shortening his life.

For, although the schedule of work call for retirement at ten o'clock, many a night interest in the task at hand compelled him to forget or to ignore the clock entirely. His father has told the writer how often, long after his retiring hour, he would waken and see a light under John's door. Thinking surely his preacher son had fallen asleep and neglected to put out the light, he would tiptoe in the room, only to find John propped up in bed against his pillows, books scattered all around him on the bed while he was so absorbed in the volume in his hands he had no idea of the passing of time. Was it midnight? More often one or two in the morning; occasionally three or four! During those days, he devoured church history, volumes of theology; read sermons by Beecher, Spurgeon, Finney, Wesley, and Moody, together with biographies of all the great church leaders of all time.

Sometimes drowsiness overtook him at one in the morning and he was only half through the book he had planned to finish that night. Then it was he would dash cold water on his face until wide awake, then continue his search for knowledge another hour or two.

Such days of intense study were impossible once he entered upon his evangelistic career, but even then the rest periods between meetings would see this schedule resumed eagerly and followed conscientiously until the day arrive for him to be off again for a new campaign.

On these campaigns, one companion always went along. At Moody, he had purchased a specially-built library trunk, an enormous affair containing desk, numerous pigeon-holes, and a compartment for a score or more of books. It always left the house filled with unread books; at the end of a three or four weeks' campaign, it would return to Fayetteville, the contents of the books well mastered. His was the rare gift of a photographic mind; he read, absorbed, and was able to reproduce in his own words sentence after sentence, even paragraph after paragraph of the most abstract or abstruse treatise.

Paul had written to the Philippians, "This one thing I do." John was also a man with one all-consuming zeal or passion: to know Christ better and to make Him known. Throughout the more than a decade of revival meetings he conducted, he had no eye for the opposite sex at all. Many a young woman, held spellbound by the fervent oratory of the gifted and handsome young preacher, cast rather wistful glances his direction, but he was totally oblivious to them all. His one passion was lost souls, his one purpose the preaching of Christ, his one program anything and everything that would increase his ability and usefulness as a preacher of the Word.

Maybe he had taken lightly his opportunities for an education at eighteen, but at twenty-eight, he was well versed in history, mathematics, science, philosophy, biography, etc., and far more widely read than the average university graduate. But he did not stop at twenty-eight. At thirty-eight, he was a most gifted conversationalist, speaking intelligently on almost any subject that might be introduced, and reading more widely than ever in his life. During the last five years of his ministry, he was preparing new sermons every week, giving a Bible message every day over the radio, publishing a virile church paper with a wide circulation, all the while carrying on the varied and manifold duties of the pastor of a church of two thousand members, and finding time "in between" to read some thirty-five to forty magazines weekly, all types. Usually a dozen books lay on top of the bedside radio and, unable to fall asleep at once on retiring, he would devour half a volume, then lay it down, only to finish it on waking in the morning.

For a man of his years, he possessed an unusually fine library at his death, about twenty-five hundred choice volumes. Thus did he seek, throughout his active years, to atone for earlier short-sightedness, and marvelously did he succeed!

In the school of Christ he had matriculated at the age of twenty-two; he was pursuing post-graduate studies, when at forty-three the Lord called him to a higher task in the world beyond our mortal vision. Surely he had studied to show himself approved unto God, a "workman needing not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

## Chapter 3

### CAMPAIGNING FOR SOULS

“I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.” 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:22

From the spring of 1925 until the early days of 1937, a period of twelve years, John gave himself unsparingly to do the work of an evangelist. During the first half of that period his labors were confined almost entirely to the eastern portion of his native state; during the latter half, he held revival meetings as far west as Oklahoma and Texas, with a number of most fruitful meetings in Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, and the two Carolinas.

While he was greatly blessed of God in all his years of service, even to the day of his death, he seemed to enjoy unusual results during those first few years. It was a good day for evangelism. From the World War and its moral slump at the close, there seemed to emerge, especially in the deep South, a day of renewed religious interest. The decade of the '20's saw many evangelists in the field and great throngs waiting upon their preaching. The interest of those days was the more marked when, later on, they were contrasted with the '30's, years of economic depression and religious indifference.

Perhaps the zeal and youthful fervor of the stranger had something to do with it also, for to this day many of the smaller towns in eastern North Carolina recall how their entire communities were stirred, how hardened sinners were saved, and how churches took on new life. Whatever human factors they were that entered into these early victories, quite evidently the power of God was on John and living in his messages.

His was a rare combination of gifts. Youth, with all of its freshness, fearlessness, and enthusiasm, is always a rich asset. For one so young, he had deep convictions; these gave force to all he had to say. He spoke out of reservoirs of divine truth with a smooth, ready flow of choice and chaste English, enriched by a marvelous use of the qualifying adjective. Knowing the worldly life from personal experience, he was expert in exposing sham and denouncing sin with caustic pungency, yet possessed of a most winsome smile that followed his denunciatory phrases time and again like the sunshine breaking through after a savage storm. He had a genuine love for the souls of men, and an intimate knowledge of the ability of Christ to redeem the lost. He was never hampered by false modesty or intimidated by any self-consciousness; thus, he might even break out in song at the psychological moment in his gospel invitation, singing his appeal in the words of some tender hymn of entreaty. He was a born master of crowd psychology; he knew exactly how to handle a crowd, keep sustained its interest, play upon its emotions, and finally to hold it in the hollow of his hand. All of his gifts he dedicated fully to the service of Christ, doing his utmost through the years to increase his talents by their diligent use.

Some of these earlier meetings were productive of unusual results, with now and then elements of humor entering into the picture. This was certainly true of his very first venture. When, finally, an invitation came from a Methodist pastor in the extreme eastern section of the

state for a two-weeks' meeting in his church at Roper, John was radiant. At last! He put his few sermons in his bag, together with a few clothes, and set out for Roper. The preacher, Rev. R. F. Taylor, met the train and looked inquiringly into the faces of the two men who alighted. Surely this farmer was not his visiting preacher! But surely this boy in a rather seedy suit of clothes could not be either! When John introduced himself, the preacher's face betrayed his disappointment and chagrin. John afterward learned that the preacher call his stewards together that night before the first service and apologized to them, explaining he had invited this young man on the urgent recommendation of a brother pastor, that he did not dream he was having an inexperienced boy to come to assist him, etc., etc. Anyway, they could close out the meeting at the end of the first week. But the young man revealed in his first message a grasp of Bible truth beyond his years, and, before many days had passed, no one was considering for a moment closing the meeting before the two scheduled weeks had expired.

This first of more than one hundred revivals John was to conduct opened on Sunday, March 8, 1925, and closed on Sunday, March 22<sup>nd</sup> - two full weeks with three Sundays. In addition to the thirty-two sermons, he conducted six special services for young people - and saw fifty people rededicate their lives, while seventy-nine others made a profession of faith in Christ as Saviour. Truly a great beginning! - and by no means the most important, but important none the less in his financial state, he found \$111.69 in his free-will offering at the close of the meeting. He felt rich as he left Roper to open his second meeting at once at LaGrange, a somewhat larger community much nearer to Fayetteville. Having secured this invitation for a second meeting to open as soon as the first one had closed, other invitations followed in quick succession. In fact, he had but little leisure time between meetings that first year, all of them being in east North Carolina and in Methodist churches, except for the three weeks' meeting that fall in the First Christian Church in Dunn, where he had lived as a child. The records of the ten revivals he led that year reveal unusual success along all lines. He preached two hundred eighteen sermons. In all, nine hundred fifty people publicly rededicated their lives to the service of Christ. A total of eleven hundred seventy-three unsaved people made a profession of faith in Christ as their Saviour. One hundred thirty-eight young people became volunteers for Christian service, in sixty-three homes family altars were established, and the total offerings for his services that first year astonished him beyond measure, the fabulous fortune of \$2,525.25! In addition to all the foregoing, his soul had been thrilled by the privilege of preaching the gospel in all to more than fifty thousand people, a conservative estimate of the total of his congregations. It had been the greatest year of his life thus far!

The success of that year seemed conclusive proof God wanted him to continue in the evangelistic field. He was financially able to return to school for another year, but somehow, now, felt he could not take time out from this all-absorbing task of winning souls. He would continue to hold meetings and continue to pursue most diligently his study habits as heretofore. Under the circumstances, such a conclusion as he reached can be well understood. And the results of the second full year seemed to be full justification of the position he had taken.

He held that year, 1926, only one more meeting than the year before, but the tabulated figures at the year's end were far in advance of the first year. Instead of two hundred eighteen sermons, he preach two hundred thirty-two. Instead of nine hundred fifty rededications, this second year saw nineteen hundred eighty-four. Instead of eleven hundred seventy-three professions of faith, he rejoiced in three thousand two hundred ninety. Whereas the first year saw sixty-three family altars established, this year saw two hundred thirty-one. The total of all

his audiences he conservatively estimated at one hundred fifty thousand, or three times the number of the receding year - and the love offerings had totaled \$3,173.82

Fortunately, for his own spiritual health, his offerings year after year did not continue to increase. Thus, he was never subjected to the temptation to which all too many professional evangelists have succumbed, becoming mercenary, loving money more than the souls of men.

This financial return at the age of twenty-five was the largest of any of the twelve years he was in the evangelistic field. In fact, only two years out of the twelve did he receive over three thousand dollars, only four out the the twelve did he receive over two thousand dollars. Three of the depression years that followed netted him only one thousand dollars average, and his average for the entire twelve-year period was only nineteen hundred dollars - surely far, far less than he could have commanded with his splendid talents in any other profession or in the business world. Like thousands of consecrated men before and since, John Cowell was not seeking financial return, asking only a living while he spent himself so unsparingly for the Christ whose service was his very life.

His remuneration was the joy of doing the will of God, and the results of his service, both those he could see and those he took on faith (unseen at the time), gave him the deepest satisfaction he had ever known in life.

And, beyond any doubt, he was accomplishing far more than he knew at the time. All true servants of the Lord do. A most interesting story from those early days of John's ministry serves well to illustrate this truth. It is a story told to John's father by the man himself, and retold to this writer since John's death.

The days of the '20's were days of national prohibition, with bootlegging and rum-running becoming a thriving business in many sections, particularly in coastal Carolina. The man in question was a bootlegger, proud of the big money he was making, but quite evidently somewhat ashamed of the way he was making it. But to the story:

A few years ago, Mr. Cowell, Sr., an honored citizen of the front rank in Fayetteville, was coming down the post-office steps, and was greeted by a fellow-townsmen who called him by name as he wished him a good morning. At the calling of the name, a stranger approached.

"Do I understand your name is Cowell?" he asked. "Do you know a young preacher named Cowell, John Cowell? Your son? Well, I am delighted to meet you. Have you a few minutes to spare? I want to tell you a story I have been wanting to tell him if I should ever meet him again. You tell him for me, will you?"

They stepped over to one side, out of the flow of traffic, and the man continued:

"A few years ago I was a bootlegger." Mr. Cowell's surprise was quite evident. "I don't look like it now, do I?" the man continued. "At least, I hope I don't. I'm a Christian man now, and have been for several years, thanks to the Lord and to your son, but I was a bootlegger, a godless wretch, a lost sinner. I was hauling bootleg liquor, making regular trips to Norfolk for my customers in Wilmington, I was coming back with a load of liquor in my car and was entering Jacksonville, North Carolina. A terrible-looking cloud was about to break and looked so bad I parked my car and took shelter from the wind and rain in the courthouse building. I heard speaking, and thinking a court trial was in progress, entered the courtroom. But, instead of a trial, there was a young preacher standing on the rostrum addressing a room full of people. He was preaching against the evils of liquor, I thought I would listen. He spoke of the drunkard's

hell and how the man who helped make him a drunkard would keep him company there. Then he seemed to point his finger right at me as he called sinners to repent and accept Christ as their Saviour.

I lost no time stepping out, and, as the storm had somewhat abated, was soon leaving the town behind me - but did not leave the memories of that bold young preacher and his searching message.

I made a number of my regular trips during the next three years, and each time felt condemned before God as I would pass through Jacksonville and by the courthouse.

Try as I might, I could not forget that young preacher's earnest face or his finger pointed so accusingly at me, and, although several years finally passed and I was still bootlegging for my old customers, I was becoming more and more dissatisfied with myself all the while. I didn't know it then, but I can see now that I was under deep conviction of sin, hounded by the Holy Spirit of God.

On this particular trip, as I left Norfolk and crossed the line into North Carolina, I felt I just couldn't drive through Jacksonville again and by that courthouse on the square, so I took the highway slightly to the west, coming down through Burgaw. It was a little farther home that way, but I wouldn't be so miserable in my spirit. Little did I know what lay ahead.

It may sound strange to you for me to tell it, but, as I neared Burgaw, a terrible storm seemed about to break, so I drew up on the town square there to let the worst of it pass. Knowing a notorious case was being tried those days in Burgaw, and seeing the cars parked everywhere around the courthouse, I decided that particular trial must be in progress, so, before the storm would break, I would drop in. I did so. Imagine my utter astonishment to enter that courtroom only to face that same young preacher again! There he stood, facing that packed courtroom, telling them how the very trial I had in mind was caused by liquor, reminding his hearers of God's certain judgment on all who manufactured the stuff, or sold it, or consumed it. And he seemed again to point his finger at me as he called sinners that day to repentance.

You'll not be surprised when I tell you I got out of that room in a hurry. I felt that God himself was after me. In spite of the storm raging in all its fury, I drove my car hurriedly away. But, Mr. Cowell, I soon found that, while I had left that preacher far behind me, God was still talking to me all the way along the road.

The liquor in my car was already paid for, and I determined to deliver it, but, as I drove into Wilmington at last, I had promised God if He would forgive me my sin, if He would save my soul from hell, I was through with bootlegging and henceforth would go straight.

Mr. Cowell, I have kept that promise I made to God that day. My wife and I joined the church soon after that experience, and from that day to this I have been wanting to meet again that young preacher. God used him to save me from a bootlegger's hell, but he never knew it, and I had no idea where to find him. You tell him for me. I thank God for him and for what he did for me. Some day, perhaps, I shall see him myself. Goodbye."

But he never did see John to tell him. Many surprises await all true servants of Christ on eternity's shores.

Painstaking records John kept of the results of those early years, but he could record only the results that were visible to him at the time. His loose-leaf binder shows he held a union meeting in Jacksonville in June, 1926, the services held in the courthouse, and in Burgaw in

June, 1929, and the results of each are tabulated, but only the recording angel whose all-seeing eye nothing escapes knew of the sinner whose life both meetings touched under such unusual circumstances.

John always said that the Stantonsburg meeting, early in 1927, saw the greatest demonstration of spiritual power he ever witnessed. It was here he ventured for the first time in a tobacco warehouse meeting, seating six hundred people. On the opening night, a blizzard struck, and the next morning the North Carolina countryside lay blanketed under a snowfall unusually heavy for that far south. High winds had caused drifts as high as several feet, and some roads were impassable. It looked like defeat at the outset. But the ingenious young preacher secured a number of empty oil drums, had them filled with burning coke all day, and at night placed them inside the warehouse. They gave forth no smoke or fumes, but quickly heated the building. News soon began to spread abroad that the place of meeting was warm, and people began coming.

From the first, possibly because of this handicap at the outset, those deeply interested in the meeting were most prayerful that the endeavor might result in a sweeping victory for the Lord throughout the community. Prayer changes things, and the meeting began to grow in interest and power. Weeks passed, and the warehouse no longer held the crowds, driving in from the countryside in every manner of conveyance. Toward the close of the meeting, John's father arrived for a service, occupied a seat on the platform as a guest of honor, and he counted that night one hundred thirty-five men, women, and young people coming forward in acceptance of Christ upon the call of the gifted young evangelist.

For the most part, John was now holding meetings in larger towns, places like Clinton, Mt. Airy, Burlington, and that same year a long campaign in Durham. This last named saw a spirited and fearless fight waged against the entrenched liquor interests and their henchmen. Friends of the young evangelist began to fear for his safety, the whole community being so aroused and such wide publicity given by the daily press.

The campaign in Warsaw is worthy of note because of the contest between John and the Chautauqua<sup>5</sup> representative. Nothing reveals the young man's popularity or power as does this incident. His large warehouse seated several thousand in this campaign. Toward its close, the Chautauqua was scheduled to make the town for a one-night stand. The advance man, who had made the engagement with the community months before, asked John to call off his warehouse service for that one night. This John refused to do, on the ground nothing was as important as the preaching of the gospel. "You go right ahead with your plans and program that night," he said. "If you have all the crowd and I have only a corporal's guard, I'll understand the situation. But, on the other hand, if I get the crowd and you are left in the lurch, I want you to be just as good a sport." To this the man finally agreed. It was the beginning of a great publicity campaign by both parties, the Chautauqua man seeking the ears of the people for one night only, and the preacher asking for them every night. including the long-awaited Chautauqua night.

The night arrived. The warehouse was crowded, the Chautauqua tent had less than a dozen. About midway of the preacher's sermon, he saw the Chautauqua man and a half dozen of the local citizens enter the rear of the warehouse. The preacher had the crowd, but the Chautauqua man exhibited a fine spirit. The preacher stopped in his sermon, called the stranger to the platform, introduced him to the people, had everyone "give him a hand," then gave him a seat of honor on the platform and resumed his sermon.

It was during this period of outstanding success, while still in his twenties, John stepped aside from his evangelistic labors to matriculate at Louisville Seminary, but the call of the lost was in his blood; he could not content himself to stay in the classroom, much as he desired to do so, when invitations were coming to him in such a steady stream to come here and there to hold revival meetings. He remained but a few months, then plunged again into the task that consumed his time and energies all his waking hours. Somehow, he felt convinced he could accomplish more for the Lord if he heeded those calls. No doubt, this feeling was definitely accentuated by the fact that his several years of intense study and wide reading had taken him over practically all the ground the Seminary course promised to cover; therefore, he felt his place was back on the evangelistic platform. In after years, he regretted, however, he did not complete the Seminary course and secure its diploma, realizing that he had missed much in the way of fellowship the Seminary life had to offer, as well as the rich deposit faculty contacts would have made in his life.

More and more now, the invitations for meetings were coming from Baptist pastors, although his largest meetings were in warehouses and specially constructed tabernacles sponsored by all the churches of a given community.

Although a thorough-going Baptist, and by conviction so, he held tenaciously to the view that there is a very definite place for union evangelistic efforts, a belief evidently shared by all the leading evangelists of the time.

Perhaps the greatest campaign he ever conducted was such a one. Thirty-two churches of all faiths united in the great campaign in Decatur, Alabama, the summer of 1934. It ran on for many weeks, interest mounted daily. Extension services were held in towns adjacent, the evangelist was preaching three times daily, hundreds were making profession of faith in Christ, and a lasting impression was being made upon all that section of the Tennessee Valley.

Many saved in that revival are to this day active leaders in their respective churches all through that section; and it was the high spiritual tide reached in that meeting which resulted, several years later, in the coming of "Bro. Cowell," as they loved to call him, to the pastorate of the Central Baptist Church of that city.

But not all John's soul-winning efforts were convinced to the pulpit. He saw opportunities everywhere and seized upon them. Many unusual and interesting experiences might be cited here, but space forbids. But, because of his former associations with the dance floor and its habitués, this one must be recorded.

It was a warm summer night. John had just closed a good meeting and was driving back to Fayetteville, nearing the town of St. Paul. Bright lights, happy music and numerous parked cars attracted his attention, and he brought his own car to a stop outside the rural dance hall, evidently a very popular spot. Taking a handful of religious tracts (he always carried quite an assortment in his car), he strode toward the entrance. At the door, a young fellow who had imbibed too freely surprised him with the question "What'cha doin'? Gettin' votes for \_\_\_\_\_?"

A warm political campaign was just then stirring the entire state. The half tipsy youth concluded the tracts in John's hand were ballots! Like a flash, John replied, "No, not for \_\_\_\_\_. I'm canvassing for Jesus Christ. But I don't suppose you know him. How about helping me?"

"Don't care if I do," replied the youth, scarcely comprehending the significance of John's statement. But John took him at his word, saying, "All right, come on. You give one of these to

every person inside,” and he thrust a batch of the tracts into the hand of the volunteer. Together, they went in.

The stranger in a lovely white suit must have made quite a figure as he walked out on the dance floor and began handing his tracts out to the dancing couples. His helper was meanwhile handing them out to all those sitting around the walls of the room. Then the orchestra players were given one each, and finally John handed one to the proprietor, who, by this time, had come up to see what all the disturbance was about.

“I’ve been preaching to many of the parents of these young people,” he said, “and many of them have asked me to pray for their boys and girls, so I am giving out these tracts asking them to live for Jesus Christ and not for the devil. Read it after I’m gone.” And, walking to the door, he had stepped out before the crowd had recovered from their surprise.

Just before he started his motor to drive off, he took a look back. Through the open door, he could see the proprietor standing in the center of the floor reading the well-illustrated religious message. The place was strangely quiet; evidently, he was not the only one reading the message the bold visitor had left behind. The tract was an illustrated folder, very attractive and well written, with choice Scripture verses. What the results of that witnessing may have been, only the recording angel knows.

Thus the years passed, rich, fruitful years of hard work, with the preacher nearing thirty, studying and reading widely, and preaching more and more effectively. As the decade of the '20's gave way to the memorable '30's, the nation was sinking into the financial depression that was to grip it economically until shortly before Pearl Harbor.

The day of the evangelist was seriously threatened by changing conditions, especially the financial problems involved. Churches were reducing pastors' salaries, people's thoughts were far from outside matters such as community-wide soul-winning campaigns, invitations for meetings became very few and far between, and the remuneration for such scarcely enough to pay one's board and keep.

With all his consecration of talent, with all his readiness to spend himself unsparingly, John suffered along with all others. In fact, many men in evangelistic work sought secular employment. John, still single, stuck it out. Having put his hand to the plow, he was determined not to turn back. Twelve meetings in 1930 returned him less than twelve hundred dollars for the entire year, ten in 1931 less than one thousand dollars, while the year 1932 brought only five invitations and but small financial return.

Recalling what a happy experience he had had with Dr. Ham in Sumter, South Carolina, in 1923, he determined to venture into South Carolina again as 1933 was about to dawn. He was probably influenced to do so by his companion in service, his singer friend, Bishop J. Willis, whose home was in Sumter; so together they turned their faces that way.

Their first objective was the city of Florence, a strategic railroad center on the Atlantic Coast line. They registered at a local hotel late Wednesday afternoon, December 28, 1932; then sought the midweek prayer service of the First Baptist Church that night.

The pastor of that church, the writer of these lines, saw two well-groomed strange young men enter soon after he had started the service. It occurred to him they were being honored with a visit from two more Mormon elders! On several occasions, just such visitors had worshipped with them, only to call on the pastor the next day in the name of the Church of the Latter Day

Saints. But he was to learn with pleasure, at the close of the service, that the fine-looking men were Baptist preachers and evangelists.

A strange thing happened that night. For at least two people present at that prayer service, the hour of destiny was striking. Across the aisle from the strangers sat a lady with a lovely girl, evidently her young daughter, by her side. It was perfectly natural for them to be there; they were always there; had been regular attendants at prayer meeting all their lives. But John had never seen either one of them before, yet, for some reason he could hardly understand, his gaze was riveted on the young girl. He could barely see the profile of her face, but the purity of innocent youth was written there, framed in lovely auburn hair.

In all probability, he heard but little of the pastor's message that night. He was scarcely aware of the fact himself, but time was to reveal that his heart had been completely captivated.

He who had preached to many hundreds of lovely girls in his congregations of the past eight years, without seeing any one of them in particular, said to his friend, Willis, on the way back to their hotel room that night, "Did you see that girl across the aisle from me . . .? I was strangely attracted to her. I wonder if I'll ever see her again?"

Imagine the pleasant surprise in store for him the next morning. Nine-thirty saw them at the parsonage door. They were seeking an interview with the pastor to discuss with him the advisability of holding a revival meeting in that city, and, when the parsonage door was opened in response to their ring of the bell, "that girl" of the night before stood before them! She was the preacher's daughter!

For once the young evangelist, always master of the situation, was caught off guard. His surprise and embarrassment were quite evident to his friend, who found much delight, long after, in twitting<sup>6</sup> him because of it.

The revival campaign held that winter in a large tobacco warehouse on Coit Street was eminently successful. Great crowds attended night after night. Rich harvests of souls marked the final service.

The last night of the campaign, Dr. Alexander, serving that year as the president of the Pastor's Conference, made some appropriate remarks in expressing appreciation to the hard-working strangers. Calling them to his side, he threw one arm around the shoulder of Brother Willis, the other around Brother Cowell.

"It is impossible for me to put into words all we feel concerning your work in our midst," he said.

Then he continued: "Brother Willis, your work as song leader has been so fine, but we would not forget what a vital part was played by Mrs. Willis at the piano. Now, thanking Brother Cowell here for his masterful preaching, I cannot thank his wife, as I do in your case, but we all express the fond hope that the next time this fine young preacher comes to Florence he will bring a wife with him."

He expected the congregation to laugh at that, and they did. But the laugh was not on the young preacher; the laugh was on the speaker! He did not know it then, but it was rather generally known by others that the young preacher was desperately smitten by the pastor's daughter. So much so, that he had confided his attitude of heart to many of his warmest admirers and friends, many of whom were members of the Baptist church, and were secretly enjoying the interest he was manifesting in the preacher's daughter.

The next two years witnessed a beautiful courtship culminating in John Cowell's marriage to Ruth Alexander on April 12, 1935. It was a church wedding that was of real interest to many far and wide.

John's friends were amazed, for they believed him wedded to his work alone, and had given up all hope that he would ever marry. He was thirty-four, and, while very youthful, both in appearance and in spirit, they thought him a confirmed bachelor. In distant Chicago, two men were talking in the Moody Institute barber shop. "Who do you suppose got married the other day?" one asked the other, then continued, "You never would guess. John Cowell!" To which statement the other replied, "I can scarcely believe it. He's the last man in the world I ever thought would get married."

The man who reported this incident was the barber, a student working his way through school. When, in 1938, he became John's assistant pastor at Decatur, Alabama, he told John of it, saying, "That was the first time I ever heard your name." In such a strange way was Homer Britton introduced to one whose funeral service he was later to conduct.

Ruth's friends were somewhat surprised also, but because of her youth. She was only nineteen, and was finishing her sophomore year at Coker College, a Baptist college in South Carolina. A daughter of the parsonage, she was a consecrated Christian girl who had entertained no thoughts of marriage as yet, except to say again and again to her parents that, if she ever married, the man would have to be someone who was serving the cause of Christ in an outstanding manner.

Neither she nor her parents had thought of anything but a complete college education, but, as the courtship progressed, the parents gave their consent to the marriage rather than compel the happy couple to wait two more years. The mutual friends of the two young people thought them ideally mated, as indeed time proved them to be. In fact, the entire church seemed happy when their engagement was formally announced in the Florence Morning News. By a strange coincidence, the pastor gave as his text for the morning sermon that day John 1:6, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." It was only when the congregation laughed that he made the connection in his own mind, and was compelled to enter into the humor of the situation.

On the day of the wedding, the ceremony was performed by the bride's father, assisted by Dr. Snyder of Fayetteville, the pastor who had baptized John many years before.

Two more years of strenuous evangelistic campaigns followed, into which the young wife threw herself with all the ardor of youth and the fervor of a real soul-winner. They traveled together for meetings during this period through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, thence through the southern states as far as Terrell, Texas, and Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. One of the most fruitful of all these campaigns was centered in Ft. Pierce, Florida. Here the high school students came to be under deep conviction and burdened because of sin. Many of them were saved and came to the services to pray for the salvation of their buddies. It was here also that a prominent character, a bootlegger, said to John, "I'm certainly enjoying your sermons." "I don't see how you can, seeing the business you are in," replied the preacher, always very direct in his soul-winning. The man, amazed at the turn of the conversation, went away angry, only to come under deep conviction of sin. Soon he was gloriously saved and became an ardent worker for the Lord, himself.

In the fall of 1936, John made an engagement to hold a meeting in the Central Baptist Church, Decatur, Alabama, to open the first Sunday in January. Before that date had arrived, however, the pastor had resigned the church and moved to another pastorate. John at once tried to release the church from the engagement. Their reply was that, now pastorless, they needed the special services all the more. So the date set found him there to open special services to run two full weeks. Memories of other days: John's first visit to Decatur in the Ham-Ramsay party when only twenty-two, and memories of the marvelous meeting he had conducted there in the summer of 1934 led the church to the conviction that here was God's man for the pastorate; so, out of a clear sky, the church called him as pastor before the meeting had come to a close.

This was a wholly unexpected turn of events. John was an evangelist, not a pastor. He was eminently successful in that field of endeavor, but there was no guarantee he would succeed as a settled pastor of a church.

His methods might not be acceptable as a steady diet, for a lengthened stay. His first inclination, therefore, was to decline the call, continuing his peripatetic ministry as a flaming evangelist. It was a very difficult decision to make, requiring an earnest weighing of the factors involved and a prayerful search for a clear revelation of the will of God in the matter.

The Decatur newspaper of Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937, conveyed to the public this statement, "Rev. John C. Cowell, Jr., of Fayetteville, North Carolina, and south wide known evangelist, Sunday accepted the call to become pastor of the Central Baptist Church." The entire community was thrilled at the news.

In the spring of 1937, John and Ruth moved into the spacious parsonage adjacent to the church to set up house-keeping together in what was to be his first and only pastorate. He was thirty-six years of age, right in the prime of vigorous manhood. She, the pastor's wife in a church of over two thousand members, had just celebrated her twenty-first birthday. They were entering upon a challenging task - one that proved to be the most fruitful of his life. It was here he was to come to maturity in the full use of all his splendid talents.

## Chapter 4

### SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

For twelve years, John Cowell had spent himself unsparingly as an evangelist. During waking hours, his one thought had been for the souls of men. With passion for the unsaved in his soul, he had studied his Bible, he had prepared his messages, he had laid his heart out in almost daily preaching. He saw humanity divided into but two groups, the saved and the unsaved.

And his labors to win men had been blessed of God beyond his fondest hopes. In scores of communities, far and wide lived redeemed men and women who blessed his memory, for they had found the Savior in his tent or tabernacle during special meetings he had held in their town. Many of them had been hardened cases, for to an unusual degree his ministry had been most fruitful among adults through the years. This one-time drunkard now was sober, this broken home had been restored, this worldly church member had come to experience the difference between a possession of Christ and a mere profession of religion.

Some converted under his preaching were now preaching themselves, others were leaders in their respective churches, while many gave witness daily to the work of grace his ministry among them had wrought in human hearts.

It was a major operation for the evangelist to become the pastor. No one realized this more than did the man himself. As a pastor, he would remain in one place month in, month out - perhaps through many years. Heretofore, he seldom stayed in any community longer than a month, or, at the most, six weeks. The sphere of his influence would be intensive, rather than extensive. Every type of Christian message would be in order, along with the evangelistic note he had sounded so long. He would know fewer people, but in time would come to know them more intimately. He would know them individually and in family groups. He would share their sorrows and their joys, for he would be pastor and friend, as well as preacher-evangelist.

He must provide administrative and executive leadership, for the modern church is a highly complex piece of denominational machinery. He must develop patience, for the problems of a pastorate are not removed over night or solved by wishing.

When finally the decision was reached, it was only after a frank conference with the deacons of the church in which he stated the case clearly, showed them his heart, outlined his policies, and asked for their prayerful support and loving counsel in the joint undertaking.

They assured him of the whole-hearted support of the entire church in the event of his acceptance, and to their credit be it said that the years that followed demonstrated to a marked

degree the utter sincerity of their purpose, for the realization of that promise was brought to pass again and again.

His first sermon as pastor of the church was based on Acts 10:29 "I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" In it he made it clear to all that evangelism would become and would remain forever primary in the church program. "We must not permit our energies to be sidetracked by lesser things," he said. "With our various organizations, our numerous gatherings and denominational meetings, it will be easy to remain forever busy about tasks that are quite worthwhile, only to find neither time nor energy left for the most important of all." Soul-winning was to take precedence over all else. Whatever else they might do, they would evangelize. Every church service would become a golden opportunity for the winning of lost souls, they would worship to that end, he would preach to that end, the choir would sing to that end, the Sunday school teachers would teach to that end, and, one and all, the entire church would pray and would labor to that end.

In the revival meeting just closed, ninety-one new members had been received into the fellowship of the church. It became the pastor's happy privilege to baptize the great throng among the number who had come on profession of faith. He who had seen thousands come to Christ under his preaching now was privileged to perform his first baptism as a pastor, and the experience so thrilled him he determined under God that the baptismal waters would be troubled week after week as men and women, finding new life through Christ, would thus picture their inner experience to the world.

Accordingly, everything about the church, its services and its activities, was geared to evangelism. A large chorus choir was developed under the leadership of the young man called to be the pastor's assistant, later ordained by the church, Mr. Paul Briggs. It laid aside the singing of formal anthems and cantatas, the members giving their talents to the singing of heart-searching gospel songs. Simple but convicting messages of gospel truth fell each Sunday from the pulpit, with the inevitable appeal at the close for a surrender of heart and life to the Saviour. A warm, friendly atmosphere of fervent prayer and of joyous anticipation was created in the church services, an atmosphere conducive to the birth of spiritual children unto Zion. To reach a still larger constituency, the ministry of radio was sought and secured, the church contracting for a full hour and a half broadcast of every Sunday morning service over WMSL.

The results were soon phenomenal. Old and young found the Saviour. The services were crowded Sunday after Sunday. Baptisms were frequent. The messages, conceived in prayer, preached with passion, and empowered by the prayers of the worshippers, carried conviction across the ether waves to radio listeners far removed from the church building. One such message, a Mother's Day sermon, brought under conviction a listening woman who summoned her husband from another room where he and three other men were busy playing cards and gambling. Six people were saved in that home that day, and the home itself saved from a threatened divorce suit.

Best of all, a great host of the church members, imbued with soul-winning zeal, sought instruction in that art from their pastor, then went forth to "compel them to come in." Religious tracts and publications were used wisely and widely. Cottage prayer meetings held, and forth went personal workers, two by two, on definite assignments. The church was glowingly alive, the members enjoying their spiritual experiences, and the Lord was adding "to the church daily such as should be saved." A fine Christian woman, naturally very timid, talked to an old beggar

at her door, then phoned the pastor to come to her aid. He led the old man, eighty-nine years of age, to Christ. When he baptized him, he asked the aged believer why he had never accepted Christ years before. He replied, "Nobody ever asked me to." Then and there both pastor and people determined afresh that henceforth it would not be possible for anyone to live for any length of time in that community and be able truthfully to make such a statement as that.

As the fires of evangelism burned with ever-increasing warmth and glow, the Spirit of God was fast consuming the dross in the lives of the members of Central Baptist Church. It was all-important that the unsaved be able to see the beauty of Christ in those who sought to represent Him. The pastor continued to denounce sin unsparingly, calling for his people, the members of the true Body of Christ, to come out from the world with its sensuality and sin, thus separating themselves from everything unworthy of a genuine Christian, that they might live truly "separated" lives.

With words as incisive as John the Baptist's, the pastor laid the axe at the root of the tree, calling for repentance and a closer walk with God.

Thus the battle was joined. In the lives of some, victories were won for Christ with comparative ease; in the hearts of others, mighty struggles ensued; while still others, offended by such direct preaching and challenging claims in the name of Christ, "from that time . . . went back, and walked no more with him."

Slowly but surely, however, the wheat was being separated from the chaff. A large group of members, old and young, seeking an ever closer walk with God, consecrated themselves to the church and its program with complete abandon. They laid aside worldly practices, long frowned upon by most churches yet countenanced in more recent years because so commonplace in many sections. The card table found their places vacant. The dance floor missed them, even the moving picture theater saw them no more. They were placing Christ first in their lives, and anything that they felt would grieve the Holy Spirit or reflect upon the Savior as they sought to win lost souls, they were gladly nailing to His cross.

The evangelistic note sounded from that pulpit was aggressive as well as dynamic. The preacher, in storming the Citadel of Mansoul<sup>7</sup> for Christ, waged an uncompromising warfare against every evil that sought to drag men down. He gave no quarter in dealing with the two greatest evils of the day, as he saw them, the legalized liquor traffic and the motion picture industry.

The friends of Christ, regardless of denominational affiliation, became the young pastor's staunchest admirers and warmest friends. They were for him first and last, and in many ways gave evidence of their admiration. On the other hand, some of the "devil's crowd," as he termed them, became openly antagonistic, hating him and his influence with a hatred deep and abiding. It was preeminently a divisive ministry. One did not always agree with the preacher, but no one was ever left in doubt as to where the preacher stood on any issue that arose. Central Baptist Church became increasingly the Voice of Righteousness in the city, and, through its radio ministry, was easily the outstanding church in leadership in all northern Alabama.

It was not surprising when Morgan County, already "dry," was joined by the neighboring counties of Limestone and Lauderdale, for the radio ministry of Central Baptist Church was firing one broadside after another against legalized liquor, and thousands were daily listening

in. Nor was it strange that certain citizens who lived daily on the borderland of crime detested even the name of Cowell and referred to that preacher with qualifying adjectives that are very expressive but do not look well in print.

Thus the new broom swept clean. In fact, when two years had passed, the pastor could say with evident satisfaction, yet without exaggeration, "I do not have a deacon or a Sunday school worker or a choir member who dances, plays cards, or even attends the moving picture shows anymore." They had "come clean" for God. But let no one think their testimony was a negative one, that they were known only for the things they did not do; like their pastor, they had become aggressive for the Lord, and were "on fire" to win the lost to Christ.

Such results could not have been accomplished had the pastor not stayed faithfully at his post of duty during those days. He had accepted the call of the church, and had determined to give his full time and strength to that one task. Therefore, outside opportunities for service, he, for the most part, passed by. During his first year in Decatur, more than fifty invitations came for revival meetings elsewhere! He declined them all, save for one or two. The evangelist gave himself to the task of creating and leading a separated soul winning church in the very heart of the Tennessee Valley. He had wisdom to see that this was a full-time task, not permitting of constant journeys afield.

But soul-winners, to be effective must know how to wield the "Sword of the Spirit"; in short, must be well versed in the Word of God.

Well did the pastor understand this. He planned therefore, at the outset of his ministry among them, for a program, well mapped and well executed, of Bible teaching. He was eminently qualified to assume the leadership here. Three things he did. He turned the midweek prayer meeting into a Bible class, teaching Bible doctrines week after week, teaching the books of the Bible one after the other. Several hundred participated in these midweek study periods, using their own Bibles and notebooks, services that frequently lasted an hour and a half, even longer. But rich they were with soulful song, fervent prayer and testimony, and occasionally gladdened by some soul's profession of faith in Christ.

Almost a year was thus spent in Romans, verse by verse. One winter and all of the spring, it was First Epistle of John, another winter First and Second Peter. To these studies, were added Hebrews, First and Second Timothy, Jude, Philemon, and Revelation. For these studies, the pastor made painstaking preparation. His well-stocked library included scores of the best devotional commentaries and the works of the outstanding Bible expositors of all the ages. When their pastor was called away by death, the members of Central Baptist Church were far better versed in the "faith once delivered" and in the peculiar tenets of their own denomination than one finds in the average church. Scores of them had learned to handle skillfully and effectively the "Sword of the Spirit" in their soul-winning efforts.

In the second place, he inaugurated the Radio School of the Bible, a full thirty-minute broadcast over WMSL every weekday - and this he continued for the more than seven years he was their pastor. This soon became an institution in the community, with a daily listening constituency estimated by the station at some twenty-five thousand or more. Sacred song, prayer, especially prayer for the sick and shut-in, together with a brief Bible message, and the pastor's farewell as he signed off, "Remember, keep looking up," was the order.

Thirdly, the pastor brought to the pulpit of the church from time to time outstanding Bible teachers from far and near, men whose names were household words among all Christian

people, together with nationally-known evangelists, and outstanding leaders of his own denomination.

Prominent among these Southern Baptist were such men as Dr. John R. Sampey, then president of the great seminary at Louisville, Kentucky, together with the secretaries of the two mission boards, Dr. Charles Maddry and Dr. J. B. Lawrence.

One fall brought Dr. Harry Rimmer of New York City, one occasion Mr. "Billy" Sunday thrilled a large congregation, Dr. William L. Pettingill, Bible teacher, came for a full week, and Dr. W. B. Riley of Minneapolis, Minnesota, another week. In addition to these were Dr. William Ward Ayer of the Calvary Baptist Church, New York; Dr. "Bob" Jones, founder and president of Bob Jones College at Cleveland, Tennessee; Rev. Hyman Appelman, Southern Baptist evangelist; Dr. Bance Havner (then of the old First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina), and literally scores of others. Each one made his peculiar deposit, instructing and inspiring. Long remembered were Dr. Northcote Deck and Col. F. J. Miles, both of London, England.

Horizons were broadened, and Central Baptist Church, although located in a relatively small southern city, felt the mighty surge of world currents as such personalities as these from other sections touched her borders with their messages.

Church members as well versed in the Scriptures as these came to be could not easily evade the implications of the Word with reference to Christian stewardship. Every page of the New Testament had something to say about the stewardship of life with insistent emphasis upon the stewardship of one's material possessions.

It is not surprising, then, that the church never experienced any financial difficulties during these days. The financial load was heavy, but scores of the members were faithful with God's tithe. The expense involved in underwriting radio contracts, revival meetings, Bible conferences, was always met with comparative ease. Even the indebtedness remaining on the handsome church edifice, \$60,000.00 when the pastor came in 1937, had dwindled to \$23,400.00 by 1942, without special efforts to reduce it. On the fifth anniversary of the pastorate, the church solemnly resolved to pay the balance in full at the earliest possible date. This aim was realized in the late summer of 1943, and, on September 27th of that year, the lovely church house, carpeted and improved in many ways, was formally dedicated. At that glad hour, the special message was brought by the youthful president of the Baptist Bible Institute at New Orleans, Dr. Duke McCall.

But, as beautiful as it is to see Christian men and women honoring the Lord with the first fruits of all their increase, there is a sight more beautiful still, and far more touching. It is to see youth surrendering to the will of God for Christian service wheresoever the Lord may choose to lead. Central Baptist Church saw this to a most unusual degree during those days.

Perhaps the winsome personality of their young pastor had much to do with it, perhaps in part it was his very courageous stand against every form of sin or entrenched evil, perhaps it was the atmosphere of fervent prayer in which their young Christian lives were being nurtured, perhaps their elders laying tithes on the altar influenced youth more than any one ever realized - but, whatever the factors were, the Holy Spirit did not call in vain for recruits in the membership of this church.

Early a band of young Christians grouped themselves around their pastor and his young wife, eager to serve. So zealous were they that many of them were soon dubbed "Cowellites" by the worldly and sinners of the city, but all the more eager seemed they to win souls and to stand by

Christ and his church. One night, a group of them, led by the assistant pastor, Rev. Homer Britton, and his wife, a consecrated, gifted couple, met at the church for an all-night prayer meeting. The pastor was away. They would especially pray for him, for their church, for the lost.

A distraught, elderly woman, seeking peace and knowing not where to find it, was attracted to the church by the joyous singing of the group - and, before the all-night prayer meeting had ended, she had been led to the Savior and had found peace. She is today a most devoted member of that church.

Soon some of these zealous young Christians were interviewing their pastor. God had called them to preach, they said. God wanted their lives on the mission field. What was his advice? Always, his word of counsel was such as expressed in the familiar saying, "God's call to serve is a call to prepare," and invariably it was his advice that they seek at once the best education possible under the circumstances, as God never placed any premium on ignorance. In a short time, two fine young men had entered Howard College, Birmingham, Alabama, as ministerial students. Two others matriculated at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Ft. Worth, Texas. Three other boys and a girl found their ways to the Baptist Bible Institute at New Orleans. Half a dozen were at Bob Jones College, all headed for Christian service, one form or another, and even a larger number were preparing themselves for whatever God might have for them to do at the great Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

The fact that their pastor, whom they fairly idolized, was a Moody man was a strong determining factor with many. But equally determining was the fact that Moody offered unusual opportunities to young people circumstanced as many of them were. The Moody Monthly of the fall of 1941 pictured a group of twenty-three students from this one church. However, there were thirty-four there at one time, a larger group than from any other church anywhere in the world.

Then, too, it was from Moody that Homer Britton and his wife had come to take up the duties laid down by the former assistant. In January, 1938, he was ordained by Brother Cowell, and together they served for several years in a remarkably sweet fellowship, more like two brothers than aught else. This couple wielded great influence over the youth of the church, while he, with his sweet tenor voice, was a master in choir directing and leading of congregational singing, particularly in evangelistic services. He left finally to accept a full-time pastorate of his own, but is again active in the double role of evangelist and evangelistic singer, making his headquarters in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

From Bob Jones College came Elmer Piper and his wife when the Brittons left. At the close of 1943, he too accepted his own church, and the fourth young assistant came to be associated with Brother Cowell, another Moody man, Rev. Ted Brannen. He and his gifted young wife have done excellent work during the trying period following Brother Cowell's rather sudden passing in the late spring of 1944.

While great changes were coming over Central Baptist church under the virile and spiritual leadership of her pastor, changes just as marked were coming over the pastor also. It was apparent to all who knew him that the one-time evangelist was growing a shepherd's heart.

There is nothing at all surprising about that. In fact, it was to be expected. Formerly, seven weeks in one place was the rule. Seven years instead gave the roots of life opportunity to strike deeply into the subsoil. The city had become a veritable mosaic of memories.

Decatur had once been just another town to John Cowell. He had seen so many such in his time, all of them so similar, yet no two exactly alike. To the evangelist, the community had been simply a cross-section of human society: before he knew the name of a single inhabitant, he knew what he would find there, all the ingredients he had ever found elsewhere. Perhaps there would be more of one and less of another, but nothing would be missing entirely, nor would there be anything absolutely new. Like every other place his evangelistic labors had carried him, he knew he would find here everything that makes the angels smile and everything that makes them weep.

But now he knew every street and by-path. The houses of the people smiled at him like old friends as he passed. In that large home with the hospitable porch, he had married the daughter of the family; from that humble cottage down yon side street, he had led the procession forth that carried the widow's only son to the cemetery; up those rickety stairs, he had gone one night, late at night, to have prayer with a man and his wife, threatening to go their separate ways; over on that corner, he had led a drunk to Christ one night, later to baptize him into the fellowship of the church. Truly a mosaic of memories!

Seven years he had faced the same people twice every Sunday. He had fed them; and in so doing had fed himself as well. While the evangelistic note was still sounded at every service, while sin was as bitterly denounced as ever, there was a new quality in his messages. They evidenced a more sympathetic understanding of human frailty, a tender solicitude over human faults and weaknesses. He knew not only their names and faces now, he knew their hearts also. He had some conception of their problems, knew what burdens some were bearing, what sorrows others had experienced, in fact knew many things about individuals not known to others, for many were the hearts that had confided in him. Secrets were locked in his soul forever, but the knowledge he possessed colored, tempered, gave feeling to his messages as not heretofore. The watchman who so faithfully sounded the warning to lost men and women had assumed now the road of the shepherd, tenderly carrying in his arms the lame lamb, or giving "first aid" to the one so torn by the wolves.

Especially at funerals did the shepherd heart reveal itself. He did not allow himself to become perfunctory or professional. To him it was not just another funeral - it was someone's heartbreak, it was some home's darkest day, and he sought ever to keep that fact in mind. Subdued and tender grew his voice, comforting and practical his words. Often his own eyes were moist, his own voice faltered - and his people knew here was one who loved them and found it his highest privilege to share with them their sorrows and their burdens.

If that parsonage living-room could only speak! What strange sights it witnessed, what secrets it heard. Surely it would tell of the day the pastor was privileged to lead his only nephew to Christ. There they knelt together, he and Joe McPhail (Joe Mac as he was always called), as the lad gave his heart to the Saviour. When later, in the uniform of his country, the lad went to the far Pacific, joyous were the messages of christian faith he sent back to his preacher uncle.

From the rural sections they came to consult their "radio pastor" about their many spiritual problems, and that living room became a clinic. It was here he tried to lead to Christ a young couple who had come to be married. The youth was under the influence of liquor at the time, and the preacher would not marry them. Instead of the marriage service, he used the plan of salvation. On their knees they wept, but, going away unsaved, also went away unmarried.

On another occasion came a divorced couple. She had divorced her first husband for infidelity, then had married a second husband only to divorce him. Now she and her first husband

sought remarriage, and it was this couple who came to the preacher's home that day. Straight from the shoulder, the preacher told the man, "I wouldn't encourage any woman to marry you. You are not fit for marriage. This woman could not be happy with you before; she cannot be happy with you again. What she needs is a 'new man, a new creature in Christ Jesus.' Give Him your heart, and there can be some basis for a happy married life." This case had better results than the one quoted above. Conviction seized the man, both parties professed Christ, the pastor remarried them and lived to see them happy in the Lord and in their restored home.

Many cases presented problems to the young wife. A peculiar one came late one Sunday afternoon. The pastor had called at the home of a man who was drinking heavily. Knowing the man was trying to rid himself of the evil habit, the pastor not only talked and prayed with him, but took away his half-filled whisky flask when he left. Arriving home, he poured the poison down the kitchen sink, then hurried to the church, as it was almost time for service. The young wife, who had never had a whisky flask in the house, hesitated to throw the empty bottle into the trash can (its presence could so easily be misinterpreted, especially by the "liquorites" of the city) so she spent the next half hour with the hammer, trying to smash the empty flask into pieces too small to reveal its original purpose, then placed the results of her Carrie Nation<sup>8</sup> act in the trash can.

Another time, they returned home together to find a man slumped on the front porch in a drunken stupor. Between them, they dragged him through the house, one arm around the preacher's neck, the other embracing the young wife. In that fashion they succeeded in getting him back to the garage and into the car; then, with the preacher acting as chauffeur, he was driven home to his wondering wife.

Thus the seven years passed all so quickly, years so busy about the Master's service there was little time or thought or energy left for aught else.

Calls to other churches had come only to be declined. The pastor and his wife had no plans except to stay in Decatur until God's call to move elsewhere had come. The church membership, more united than ever before, settled down content to believe the relationship they had enjoyed those seven years would continue indefinitely. They knew their pastor was preaching more profound messages than ever before, messages with depth of thought and feeling; they knew he was still young, only in his early forties, and believed him coming to maturity now, to ripeness - to his days of greatest usefulness! But they could not see what May 15th, 1944 held in store for him, for his young wife, or for any of them!

## Chapter 5

### THE FRUITS OF HIS SERVICE

“... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Matthew 25:21

Mother’s Day, 1944, John Cowell preached the last sermon he was ever to deliver from that pulpit or any other. It had been carefully prepared for that particular occasion, and it was the verdict of all who heard it that seldom, if ever, had he risen to greater heights than he did that hour.

Reading Mark’s account of the anointing of Jesus by an un-named woman, the preacher took for his text the words of the eighth verse: “She hath done what she could.” It was both a beautiful tribute to holy motherhood and a scathing rebuke to the type of mother too often found, with a touching appeal for such loving service as was manifested in the immortal act of this woman.

He knew he should not have preached that morning, for he was far from well. But it was a special Sunday, his sermon was ready; then, too, he had just returned from an absence of two weeks from the city, and his people would be terribly disappointed if he failed them. Yet he knew he was running a great risk, and ought to be at home in bed.

For, just two nights before, he had nearly passed away in his hotel room in Birmingham of a severe heart attack, And that had not been the first one, either.

The first one had come six years before, back in April, 1938. For more than two months he had been confined to his bed, and, when at length allowed to take up his work again, it was with certain limitations and under certain restrictions. Slowly, he had gotten back into his former stride, reminded ever and again by chest pains that he must exercise reasonable care, but for the past two years had been most active and apparently doing very much better. Slowly at first, but steadily, he had assumed more responsibilities, for he possessed unlimited zeal, and abilities to achieve far beyond his physical strength to empower. The last day of April, he had opened a two-week revival meeting with the Norwood Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama, his friend Homer Britton leading the singing. Twice daily, the services continued through Friday night, May 12th. It was early in the morning of that closing day he had been seized with excruciating pain in his sleep, and, closing the meeting out that day, had come back to Decatur, quite busy all Saturday with a variety of pastoral duties.

Unfortunately for one so zealous and so gifted, John had never been overly strong. As an infant, his parents had almost despaired of his life on several occasions, and, along the years of childhood and youth, there had been several close calls. So, during the entire seven years in Decatur, there had been periodic seasons of enforced rest, and there had been scarcely a day that had passed without some pain, more or less, in his chest.

But his mental suffering because of his condition and the gnawing fear in the heart of his young wife were even more keen. How much he suffered in mind after he had experienced the

first attack is revealed in a paper found among his effects in his desk. He had written it one day at his typewriter, finding some solace in the simple fact of expressing his inner thoughts on paper; even his wife had never seen it until after he was buried. For the comfort and consolation it may afford some reader of these lines so situated, we include it here exactly as he wrote it. Though it bears no date, it is thought this was written shortly after he had spent a week at the Mayo Clinic and had there, had his fears confirmed.

*“Here I am at forty years of age with a heart ailment. It is not the kind that might terminate fatally without warning, but is of sufficient seriousness to make me alter my life-plans and give up some of my cherished ambitions.*

*When first I learned that I had a slightly sclerosed coronary, I became frightened and then despondent. I saw myself walking slowly down the street panting for breath, avoiding everything that would cause the slightest exertion and being extremely careful about everything I did. I imagined myself at best a semi-invalid with but a few years to live. It was enough to make one despondent.*

*The prospects for one who had been unusually active and vigorous were both bitter and unpleasant. I found myself becoming resentful.*

*For ten long weeks I lay in bed during which time I had little to do but think. Books and magazines were denied me. I was nervous, irritable, and couldn't sleep without the aid of various derivatives of barbituric acid<sup>9</sup>. I saw visions and dreamed dreams that were far from pleasant.*

*When I was permitted to leave my bed I could sit up only for brief intervals. My breath was short. I thought my condition more serious than it was. I had to count twelve on each step of the stairway on my journey to the second floor.*

*The doctors were encouraging but the peculiar feelings and darting pains in my chest made me skeptical. All the bad things I had ever read or heard about heart trouble haunted me.*

*My first problem was to adjust my mental attitude. Laborious as the job might be, I had to develop a cheerful outlook towards my affliction. I was not to be pessimistic about it; yet I had to avoid the attitude that nothing was wrong with me. Either would have been wrong. I had to be realistic.*

*It was my task to face frankly my condition and understand that there were some things I could do and some things I couldn't do. I had to make myself see that life was not only not hopeless, that my ailment did not consign me to the ranks of the useless, but rather that there was plenty left for me to do; much for which I had to live.*

*With the gradual achievement of that victory my horizon began to expand. Strenuous exercise was taboo but a reasonable amount of physical activity was necessary. Participation in competitive sports, save, perhaps, for a game of ping pong with my wife, was altogether out of the question.*

*But fishing, my favorite sport, and photography were left for me. I was even permitted to take my 38-pound outboard motor out of the car and attach it to the transom of the boat. I was against the doctor's orders to carry it any distance, but if it could be lifted from the car to the boat without too many steps, that was all right.*

*At first, in the painful and wearisome period of adjustment, my patience was taxed to the utmost. Once or twice I said to myself, 'Pshaw! What am I pampering myself for like I am a baby? I am a strong man; I'll do what I please.' But those warning pains with resultant shortness of breath quickly brought me to my senses. They said with unmistakable clarity 'This far shalt thou go, and no farther.'*

*I had always done a lot of studying. My work required reading of the heavy type. Long periods of concentration were the rule rather than the exception. Long hours of work I had known and liked. Sitting at a typewriter for hours at a stretch had hitherto caused little appreciable fatigue.*

*But now that was all changed. Concentration produced those disturbing pains. Any amount of work at a typewriter caused fatigue and tightness in the upper central part of the chest that simulated esophageal spasms, only it was worse. I feared a return of the laryngeal spasms that were forerunners of the attack that brought me low.*

*'What can I do and not produce pain?' was the question uppermost in my mind. And I was also annoyed over the amount of rest I had to take. It all seemed so silly and unreasonable. Here I was a young man with a good position, in the prime of life and with every reason in the world for wanting to live and enjoy life, with an ailment that stared me in the face every moment of my waking day. It was like being followed by a bandit threatening your life with every step.*

*But with the passing of each month hope returned like an argosy from afar with the promise of richer, fuller days. After all, if I lived sensibly, my life expectancy was as good as anyone's. It was true that I was constantly reminded by those ever-present warnings (and still am) that I had to live within certain limitations; but now I was doing it without fear or forebodings.*

*At forty I am looking to the future. which I have every reason to believe will be kind to me. I am gradually becoming resigned to the fact that there are some things I can never do again. But I am happily aware that there are many things I can do; things that I like to do and that will benefit others.*

*I am not an invalid; nor a semi-invalid. I am going right on with my work. Most of the time I am free of pain. The things that would aggravate my condition, I avoid. Maybe sometime in the future - but this a perfectly natural supposition - I will lose this battle and suddenly (I hope quickly and quietly) dismantle my spirit of the flesh. But I am not worrying about it. My job now is to live the life God has given me.*

*When ends life's little day, when the race is run and the port is gained, His 'well done' will be my joy and blessing."*

Thus he lived with this dread for six of the seven years he was in Decatur, and, throughout that whole period, it cast its baneful shadow across the pathway of their married life. On several occasions, that last spring, he had expressed the fear he would not live to see their baby which was expected in July. After more than eight years of hopeful waiting, a little one was at last expected, and both father and mother were anticipating the coming with great joy. But the night of the attack in Birmingham, early in the morning of May 12th, the fear returned to both hearts that he might not live until that happy event had taken place. How tender he had been that night when the worst of the pain was over and the wife sat by his side pleading with him to take care of himself, she needed him so greatly now. Yes, he would. And he tried to do so. But a

pastor's strength, time, all that he has and is, he must share with his people also, so that last Sunday was a full day, too full for his own good.

The morning services over, there were calls that afternoon upon his nerve energy and physical strength, with a funeral in the church at a late afternoon hour. Then the night services, although he wisely did not try to preach himself, one of his "preacher boys" bringing the message at that hour.

Monday morning, the wife and her mother, who had arrived Saturday afternoon to spend Mother's Day with her daughter, insisted the preacher remain in bed. He did so, seeming in happy spirits as his breakfast was carried to his bedside.

But it was easy to be in a happy mood that morning. The day before had been a good day in the church, "one more day's work for Jesus" in very truth. The morning was a May beauty, lovely springtime in Alabama. The trees on Grant Street gave evidence of new life returning after the sleep of winter. Great fleecy clouds floated in heavens blue like ships putting forth to ports far distant. On every side, the happy notes of joyous song birds trembled on the air. It was good to live.

And he had so much to live for! What were his thoughts the next hour or so after breakfast that morning? We shall never know. For, about nine-thirty o'clock, a severe attack forced a cry from his lips that someone summon the doctor at once. An hour or so later, a second attack brought even greater suffering. Three physicians and a nurse gave every aid humanly possible. With his wife sitting by holding his hand, he spoke but a few words of tender farewell. His weary spirit then slipped away to be greeted at the portals of the heavenly home by many whom he had led to Christ in former days, who had preceded him to their eternal reward. It was a few minutes past twelve o'clock noon.

Song birds singing? So sing the angels of heaven!

Cloud ships drifting by? Dropping anchor in the harbor of God's love carrying a precious cargo!

New life in the trees? In Christ is new life here, and new life forevermore!

"There is no death!  
What seems so is transition."

In an hour's time, a pall like the pall of the darkest night settled over the city of Decatur. All were stunned at the news - and heart-broken! And the almost universal reaction, voiced by every tongue, was the terse comment "so untimely!"

Certainly it did seem so. We can judge only with human judgment, and from every human standpoint John Cowell's passing was a tragedy.

It was a tragedy for the stricken home and family. It was a tragedy for the church and whole community. Indeed it was a tragedy for the organized work of Christ everywhere, for the man's usefulness was increasing each passing year, and, had he lived another decade or two, it seems certain he could have accomplished much greater things for the Master. But the one most sorely stricken, his young wife, the expectant mother, took her stand courageously on Romans 8:28, thus setting a noble example to all others concerned.

He had lived well. He had lived a full life. Its days had not been empty ones. And at forty-three he left visible results behind him of those consecrated years, results that shall be evident through years yet unborn.

What had been accomplished in the Decatur church can be best seen, perhaps, if we read together a letter he wrote exactly one month before his death. It had come to his attention from several sources that a very prominent church in the nation's capitol was inquiring concerning him as they sought a pastor for their strategic pulpit. A preacher friend had written him asking for detailed information on many matters relative to his work in Decatur. It was his purpose to pass that information on to the pulpit committee of that church. As John's reply sets forth answers to those questions, we quote from it very liberally the following paragraph:

*"I would not care to go unless I knew it was the Lord's will for me. I have no desire to pry open doors and force myself into a situation when God's hand has not led me.*

*I have only one life to invest for Christ, and I shouldn't care to waste it futilely struggling with an indifferent group whose only interest in spiritual things was to be entertained twice each Lord's Day in a cold, dead 'church' (?) Unless a church was interested in an aggressive soul-winning, Bible-teaching ministry, and was willing to back it to the best of its ability, I should not want to become its pastor."*

After a few such introductory paragraphs as these, he attempts to record some of the achievements of the years, writing again:

*"I am reluctant to say these things, because it all sounds like boasting; but the Lord knows my heart; that it isn't. They are facts that I think you should have.*

*First of all: I spent twelve consecutive years in evangelistic work. There is very little to say about that other than that the meetings I conducted, for the most part, were eminently successful and marvelously blessed of God. I came to the pastorate of Central Baptist church January 1st, 1937. At that time, the church owed \$60,000. Now, it doesn't owe a dime and has about \$15,000 cash on hand. When I came, annual receipts amounted to approximately \$15,000. Last year they were \$42,000 plus, and will probably go above that this year.*

*In the seven and a third years I have been here there have been between 1,200 and 1,300 additions to the church - most of them on profession of faith for baptism. That may not seem large until you remember that there are no less than 37 separate religious bodies (called churches) in this little town of only about 20,000 people. What is sometimes called religious competition is, here, both keen and strong. The results we have achieved here are wholly the fruit of the Holy Spirit's power and presence.*

*In the time I have been here no less than 38 of our young people have gone to the Moody Bible Institute alone. Quite a number have gone to other schools. For instance: one of our boys graduates from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary this month and three more of our young people graduate from the Baptist Bible Institute this month. We have four of our finest young men at Bob Jones College, Cleveland, Tennessee - one of them taking his master's work; he will go to Southern at Louisville in the fall.*

*Some of these young people have already finished their school work and are now engaged in full-time Christian work. One of the young ladies is now a missionary in Nigeria, Africa, and our church supports her. Several of the young men are now pastors in Alabama and Tennessee and one is pastor in Wisconsin. One of our young women is working in Bremerton, Washington under the auspices of the First Presbyterian Church, where C. R. Scafe, Jr., a former M. B. I. man, is pastor.*

*Here is something I think is well worth mentioning: In the time I have been here we have ordained 17 of our young men to the gospel ministry and quite a number of others have been licensed. This will give you some idea of how far-reaching the work among the young people has been. To God be all the praise and glory. It is all of Him.*

*Another extremely important phase of the work here has been the radio and written ministry. Our church has broadcast its Sunday morning service ever since I've been here. We also broadcast a Back Home Hour every Sunday evening at 9:30 o'clock from the main auditorium of the church by remote control. Besides this, for over seven years I have conducted each weekday, Saturday excepted, a thirty-minute program known as the Radio School of the Bible. This broadcast has become an institution here in the Tennessee Valley. For about a year I broadcasted a Sunday morning service at 8:30 o'clock over the North Alabama Network, but discontinued it because we found it difficult to carry it on without instantaneous equipment. We have the money in had to purchase this equipment and resume the network broadcast, as soon as the government releases it.*

*As a result of our radio ministry, I have received literally thousands of letters from people all over the Tennessee Valley. Multiplied hundreds have been saved and an innumerable host of backsliders have been reclaimed. We have indoctrinated this whole country. Not only have I taught them God's Word, but the best Bible teachers of this age have been brought to our church since I've been here. and our radio listeners have heard them.*

*As you know, I am now publishing The Rod and Staff, and 3,000 copies of this paper are being distributed each month. It goes literally everywhere. By the end of this year, we ought to be distributing 5,000 copies per month. Formerly, I published The Baptist Beacon. There is other writing that I do to keep the work of our church before the people and to get out the gospel message. The local paper carries a full column each Monday afternoon of our Sunday services.*

*Until I came here, the church had no paid workers except the pastor and janitor. Now we have a fine chorister-assistant, pastor-young people's worker and a full-time secretary, who is also my secretary. The church has authorized me to employ a woman who will be known as church visitor, but I haven't been able, yet, to find just the right person.*

*May the Lord bless you abundantly and give you wisdom and grace and strength for every task. And may He bless all those near and dear to your heart. Remember me when you pray.*  
*Yours in the Blessed Hope."*

If there remained any souls in the city of Decatur or the surrounding countryside who did not hear that very day the sad news of John's passing, one can be certain they heard it the next morning, for, at the accustomed hour, the Radio School of the Bible went on the air and the announcement was made to the listening radio audience. In the spirit of "God's workers die; God's work goes on," Rev. Ted Brannen came to the microphone as usual at ten o'clock, with faithful Mrs. Burr at the organ (she had missed but few days in the entire seven years at the instrument she played so beautifully every day in the week, Sundays included).

Through every means of publicity available, news went abroad that the funeral service would be held at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday the 17th, the regular broadcast hour. It was a natural assumption the church edifice would be crowded to capacity, but no one was quite prepared for the great throng that came. The members of Central Baptist Church, members of other churches of Decatur and vicinity, townfolk of all churches and of no church came. They came,

white and colored. They came from town and countryside. They came on foot, in cars, and, where gasoline was lacking, in cotton trucks, on horseback, in buggies. And the floral tributes from high and low filled the church and the parsonage, while scores of them (for which there was no room) the young widow sent to the sick beds of the city's hospital and to other shut-ins after the service was over.

Knowing what a multitude was gathering to pay their respects to the loved pastor, his widow had now but one thought, that somehow a testimony must be given to the sustaining grace of Christ, and a living witness borne to His power to save.

In keeping with this noble purpose, the three young men who had served successively as the pastor's assistants arranged the service. It was not funereal, it was a paean of praise from outset to its close, sounding a note of sweet resignation and of victorious faith. The service opened as the Radio School of the Bible opened every day, with the organ strains of "Whiter Than Snow," and closed with the accustomed signature, "Take the Name of Jesus With You." An appropriate hymn was beautifully sung by Mrs. Marion K. Vickery and Rev. Homer Britton. It was "Only Glory By and By." John's best loved hymn was feelingly rendered by Rev. Britton and Rev. Piper, "Grace That Is Greater Than All Our Sins." Toward the close of the service, a very fine message was brought by Rev. T. A. Brannen on Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Then, in keeping with all public services John had conducted in that church, Homer Britton made an appeal at its close for sinners to accept John Cowell's Savior as their own.

Then, from the church where he had been so dynamically alive, he was carried out by the willing hands of six of his preacher boys serving as the pallbearers, truly a touching sight.

It had been thought best, under the circumstances, to carry John's body back to his boyhood home for burial, so the long trip across and through the Great Smoky Mountains of Western North Carolina was undertaken. On Friday the 19th, for the benefit of his loved ones and many friends in Fayetteville, a second service was held. In the spacious auditorium of the First Baptist Church where years before he had followed Christ in baptism, the present pastor, Rev. Louis S. Gaines, conducted the service, assisted by Rev. Homer Britton and the writer of these lines.

A little later, and a new mound of flowers in Cross Creek Cemetery marked the resting place of the body. In the great pine woods, a stone's throw away, he had hunted quail as a lad; in the slow-moving stream over the hill, he had fished many a long afternoon. He was back home - back with loved ones of other years, back amid the scenes of his boyhood and youth.

But he came not back the John Cowell many had known some years before. That John Cowell had died in 1923. For a little over twenty-one years, he had been "a new creature in Christ" - long enough to have come of age, and truly he had. The "babe in Christ" of 1923 came back to the city of his natural birth, to the city of his spiritual rebirth, a mature man in the things of the Spirit, a trophy of the grace of the risen Christ.

A single marker was set at his grave by his companion of the parsonage, but a difficult task she had selecting an appropriate Bible verse as an epitaph. There seemed so many, dear to his heart, all of them most fitting. Which should it be? "By the grace of God I am what I am"? or "Not I but Christ"? or "A new creature in Christ Jesus"? Her decision was finally determined by a remark he had made in a more recent sermon. Preaching on the life of Enoch from Hebrews

11:5, her husband had said he could ask nothing more of life than to be worthy of those closing words as his epitaph when his labors were ended. Thus the stone set at his grave reads:

John C. Cowell, Jr., D.D.

Born Feb. 25, 1901

Born Again April 8, 1923

Called Home May 15, 1944

As a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

“He Pleased God”

Hebrews 11:5

Unusually strong had been the father-son tie in the Cowell family throughout the years. Frequently the father’s business trips had taken him into the vicinity of Alabama, in which event he inevitably passed the weekend in the parsonage in Decatur. No one listened to the fiery eloquence of the youthful pastor with such justifiable pride as did the father who had been his confidant and pal since early childhood.

John’s passing was a tragic loss to him. Sixteen months, to the day, from the day John was called home, the father went to meet him, his body laid by the side of his boy in Cross Creek Cemetery. In those sixteen months very few days had passed that did not see the father at his boy’s grave some hour of the day, although, in the depths of his grief, he maintained his usual buoyancy of spirit, his bright, cheerful outlook on life, and a true Christian spirit of resignation to a higher Will he believed to be best.

His last act of devotion was his oversight of the placing of the marker at the head of his son’s grave.

The poet once wrote of the felling of a giant tree of the forest, how it left “a lonely place against the sky.” To all who had known him, John Cowell was such a man. In their skies of life there is today a lonely place where once he stood so tall for the Lord and so straight for the cause of righteousness.

How highly they esteemed his worth, and how deeply they would miss him now, was evidenced in many letters that came from friends far and wide to his sorrowing widow within the few weeks following his passing.

Dr. Bob Jones, president of the college in Tennessee that bears his name and stands so without apology for the truth of God’s word, wrote as follows:

*“John C. Cowell, Jr., came into my life for the first time about ten years ago. I knew when I talked to him for five minutes that I had met a sincere, upright minister of the gospel who had not only been genuinely converted, but who had been divinely called to preach the gospel, and I also knew that I had met a man who had strong convictions about what was right and what was wrong. It is refreshing in these days to meet a man of that type.*

*In my wide experience in the ministry which has covered a period of many years, I do not know any man who in a few years of faithful ministry has done a higher type work or who has done a more constructive job for God than my friend, John C. Cowell, Jr.*

*Bob Jones College, which stands without apology for the “old-time” religion and the absolute authority of the Bible, recognizing the intellectual force and the spiritual convictions and the outstanding leadership of John C. Cowell, Jr., and at the suggestion of the founder and president of the institution and by a unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees, conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity - an honor to which he was justly entitled.*

*We, of course, sympathize with Mrs. Cowell and all of his loved ones in the loneliness they must feel, but we wish to congratulate them on the wonderful ministry of Dr. Cowell, and then, too, after all it isn't so bad to have a loved one in heaven with his Lord. Our heart feels like saying, ‘Goodnight John. We will see you in the morning’.*”

Dr. L. L. Gwaltney, Editor of the Alabama Baptist wrote:

*“I have not known during my long observation of pastors in Alabama one more thoroughly dedicated to the cause of sincere and genuine religion than was my friend, Dr. Cowell. He often spoke about the extreme need of Christian people being separated from the things of the world and I never knew one who was more thoroughly detached from the affairs of this world or who more genuinely lived in the spiritual realm while abiding on this earth than he.*

*I am aware of the great work he did for Central Baptist Church and for the Morgan County Association, and by means of his radio messages. Though in the providence of God his death seemed a tragedy, being so young and with such promising future, yet it was dynamic, influential, and far-reaching; he did enough during his short years to abide forever in the hearts of a multitude.”*

Dr. Duke K. McCall, President of the Baptist Bible Institute, New Orleans, Louisiana wrote:

*“Again and again, I have found his name cropping up in my conversation as an example of an ideal minister. The depth of his convictions and his aggressiveness in sharing them were bound to secure the admiration of all who came in contact with him.*

*The influence of the Central Baptist Church has been felt afar. The Baptist Bible Institute has many ties with the church through support graciously given through many years. We have rejoiced that under the ministry of Dr. Cowell, so many young men and women were called to the work of the Lord. As some of them have come to the Baptist Bible Institute for their theological training, we have come to feel that the ministry of Dr. Cowell was being multiplied in such a way that the passing of time would not diminish it, but magnify it.”*

From Mrs. William A. (Billy) Sunday of Winona Lake, Indiana, came these gracious words:

*“It was my good fortune to have been a guest in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Cowell and two more lovable folks I never met. I know he had an abundant entrance. Some of us may just barely squeeze in, but John has a full reward. I'm so glad I knew him. I am much richer for having contacted him. I thank God for him. I know he has struggled against health odds for a long time, and God, in His wonderful mercy, said, ‘John, that's enough. You have fought a good fight, you finished your course.’ Blessed be the Name of our Lord.*

*I would say to his friends, ‘Try a bit harder to follow his example and precept’.*”

From his spiritual father in the Lord, Dr. Mordecai F. Ham of Louisville, Kentucky, came this beautiful testimony:

*“There are many things which we cannot understand here, and this is one of them. It was my honor and pleasure to point this young man to the Lord Jesus Christ. Out of all of my children of faith, there was not one to whom I could look with greater pride than our Brother Cowell. The next day after he was saved, I discovered a courageous soul with a great future. I was also convinced that the Lord had called him to the Work.*

*Brother Cowell was not only courageous and diligent, but brilliant and spiritual. If there was one thing in which he excelled our other young ministers, it was his diligence in the study of God’s Word. and his absolute dependence on Him as Lord and Master.”*

The eminently successful Southern Baptist evangelist, Rev. Hyman Appelman, expressed himself thus:

*“John Cowell, Jr., was my friend. I loved him in every way in which one man can care for and believe in another. There were so many wonderful angles and attributes in and about his life that it is quite difficult to pick out the outstanding ones. The Lord’s hand and Spirit were definitely upon him and upon his ministry.*

*First, he was a good man, clean, loyal, true, open-hearted, generous, affectionate, dependable. Second, he was a superlative Christian. His life was wholly on the altar for God. He knew the Lord Jesus Christ by a definite personal experience. He was in constant communion with Him in prayer and in the study of the Word. He was a great preacher, his sermons being marked by the Spirit and the Scripture’s fervent evangelistic contents. They brought results in the hearts and lives of Christians and unsaved. He was a great pastor and an equally effective evangelist, his ministry in both spheres being marked by the fruitful blessings of God.*

*His memory will remain forever a constant source of inspiration to those of us who knew him, who loved him, who had fellowship with him. Thank God for John Cowell, Jr.”*

His friend of the years, Rev. Vance Havner:

*“We were speakers together at Dr. Riley’s great Bible Conference in Medicine Lake, Minnesota. And now John Cowell is gone in the prime of a fresh and fruitful and Spirit-filled ministry. No one pretends to understand why some so useful are taken and some so useless are left. But John believed Romans 8:28 with all his heart and I am sure that from heaven’s vantage point now he comprehends perfectly what puzzles us who remain.*

*My last contact with him was in Chicago when he gave what I felt was one of the finest messages of Founder’s Week at Moody Institute. He could preach. He gave himself without stint. He was willing to spend and be spent for God. He had a good combination of faith in God, love for souls, a fund of good humor and plenty of common sense. God used him because he was willing to be made usable.”*

Then, too, Miss Lill B. Wilson of Greenville, North Carolina, who had worked with John while he was still in his twenties, wrote:

*“When God’s finger touched John and he slept, our hearts were so saddened, and yet we know God makes no mistakes, but has transplanted him to a greater life beyond where he will finish the work he loved. His span of life was short, but he accomplished so much for the Kingdom of God. I had the privilege and pleasure of being associated with him for three years in evangelistic work, and I have never known a more deeply consecrated and fully surrendered life than his, and thousands have been won to Christ through his ministry.*

*Because of his influence, I too have a closer walk with God and know his life was really and truly 'Hid with Christ in God'."*

Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin, President of the Columbia Bible College, Columbia, South Carolina, referred to John's great campaign for souls in that city some years before, then added:

*"This is but one of many precious memories of John Cowell that links him with our ministry. He was a speaker at Ben Lippen Conference Center, scheduled as the Bible teacher for the Ministers' and Christian Workers' Conference this coming August, a member of the Board of the Ben Lippen Boys School and elected as a member of the Board of Trustees of Columbia Bible College on the very night that word came of his sudden departure to be with Christ.*

*The words of the Lord Jesus, 'What I do thou knows not now,' surely apply in the case of this sudden call. Perhaps the very intensity of his passion for Christ, and passion for souls, and the marvelous results of his comparatively brief ministry, first as an evangelist, then as a pastor-evangelist and teacher, were an indication of the Lord's purpose to call him to be with Himself at the very time when we thought he was launching on a wider ministry."*

Beautiful messages came from scores of others, too numerous for inclusion here, from Dr. William L. Pettingill, Rev. Cecil S. Ward, the Baptist pastor in Birmingham with whom John held that last revival meeting, Dr. A. C. Baker of Macon, Georgia, pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church; from Chaplain J. E. Berkstresser of Camp Barkeley, Texas, but long a pastor in Alabama, from Earl Hotalen, Executive Secretary of the Alabama Temperance Alliance, and others in many states. Many of these were quoted in the Memorial Edition of the Rod and Staff under date of June, 1944. But we must quote at length from one other at least. Mr. Earl S. Rodgers of Nashville, Tennessee, at one time associated with John in the evangelistic field, and pianist of the Ham-Ramsay evangelistic party when John was saved. He recalled pages out of John's early life which we give here to our readers:

*"It was my privilege to arrange and direct the preliminaries in many of the group meetings held immediately after John's conversion in which his personal testimony was so wonderfully used and blessed of God. I stood with him on many dry goods boxes, trucks, and car fenders at the curbstone of many North and South Carolina towns as John courageously and zealously witnessed for his Savior to the passing throngs on the streets. I was intimately familiar with the many testing experiences through which he passed as a young Christian whose new-found loyalty inevitably led to the complete severance of his old associations and habits of living. I lived with him through his soul-searching consideration of his call and ultimate surrender to the Christian ministry and the succeeding years of his preparation as a student in Moody Bible Institute and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.*

*Out of the innumerable memories that flood into my mind as I recall those days of blessed and inspiring Christian fellowship, is an outstanding recollection - outstanding, no doubt, because of its frequent recurrence. During his vacation periods from Moody Bible Institute, John would visit with me and share my hotel room for days at a time wherever I happened to be assisting in a city-wide revival effort. Invariably, his suitcase was well stocked with the various medicines even then necessary to insure the proper functioning of his frail body. But, to his tireless and indefatigable spirit, his ever-present physical handicaps were simply crosses to be borne with quiet and uncomplaining cheerfulness - just another obstacle to be overcome as a good soldier of Christ. 'Vacation' was no temptation and 'physical*

*incapacity' no justification for relaxation to this young man. His insatiable hunger for a deeper knowledge of the Word of God and his driving, zealous determination to equip himself as a 'workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth' knew no bounds - hence, my outstanding recollection of these early years of our fellowship is of the countless nights that John would have me hold his Bible and follow him for hours on end, and until far into the night, while he quoted from his seemingly inexhaustible memory page after page, chapter after chapter, of the Book which had become to him truly the very Word of Life.*

*I was in another city when the news of John's passing reached me in a quiet hotel room. When I read the telegram, the room seemed suddenly very empty and for several days I was deeply conscious of a yawning void in my life. A true, devoted friend, a staunch pillar, bulwarking my own faith, was no longer there. Instinctively the question rose in my mind - why? Why should this consecrated, richly effective life be cut off at the very peak of its effectiveness - and when such a powerful witness is so sorely needed in our world? But with the passing days has come the realization that John had done his full share. A man who lives and works with the consecration and ceaseless zeal the John did can do a life's work in very few years as time goes. The majority of us could live a hundred years and not approximate the work John did in one brief year of his intensive ministry."*

One other testimony remains to be shared with the public, a rather remarkable newspaper editorial. It appeared under date of May 18th in The Decatur Daily from the pen of the editor, Mr. W. R. Shelton. Coming from the community where John labored as pastor, it carries unusual force, and we print it in full herewith:

*"In our time there has been no personality here to influence so many people in so many walks of life as that possessed by John C. Cowell, Jr., in his earthly ministry.*

*Dr. Cowell's influence was no halfway impression upon the people with whom he came in daily contact. People under his influence were committed to two camps, either they were his devoted followers or they were very much opposed. He wanted it no other way.*

*John Cowell fought the devil and all his works. He did it every day with every energy at his command. He neither gave nor asked compromise. He carried the cause of Jesus Christ in his heart, in his spirit, in his mind and there is no way of knowing how broad his ministry might have become had he remained in our midst.*

*Any objective aside from leading souls to be saved was secondary in his daily tasks. He sought the soul of any man, any woman, any child. John Cowell accepted all human beings as of one and the same value in the eyes of his Lord. Prince or potentate, beggar or criminal, Cowell wanted that soul saved, he wanted that soul to know the one and only way to eternal life through acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Under his ministry the Central Baptist Church became the church of the largest congregation in the city of Decatur and probably the largest in any of the secondary cities of Alabama. Under his guidance the church was freed of a considerable indebtedness, but as we have said, such things were secondary to the young minister.*

*His business was the business of soul-saving and he stayed about his business for he believed it was his Father's business.*

*What he spoke, he believed.*

*What he did, he believed to be right.*

*Not the least of his earthly ministry was the number of young people influenced to enter the ministry. to become missionaries, others to devote their lives to church duties right here at home. The young people of Central Baptist Church could well be said to have worshipped the Cowell ideals of Christian religion.*

*As we attended the final respect paid to him here at a great church service, the full story of the Cowell ministry was impressed upon us. There were his youthful followers, crowded into a large choir and singing the praises of the Master. There were the young ministers to whom he had meant so much even in the comparative short period of his teaching. They sang the songs he loved and they sang those songs at his funeral service as he would have had them to sing on any Sunday morning at Central Baptist. Their voices were triumphant, victorious, militant. Their spirit that of St. Paul, far more historic than the story of Alexander the conqueror.*

*To John Cowell the Christian religion was a great adventure, he was a warrior fighting for his Lord and his Redeemer.*

*There is no doubt in the mind of this writer that John Cowell could have been with us many more years, but he could not have remained with us unless he ceased the taxing of his physical capacity. He chose as we expected he would choose. He chose to keep fighting the good fight, he chose to keep the faith. We doubt that he died in the service of his Lord, for he knew as well as any man that his physical well being demanded rest from his labors.*

*John Cowell did not want to rest. He wanted to take the word of the Savior to all classes and kinds of men and so he gave his life in the service of his Lord.*

*Decatur, the whole Southland is going to miss the growing impress of John Cowell and we do not contend for a minute that another will come along to take his place. In our time we have seen such great figures in the newspaper world as Arthur Brisbane, Will Roger, O. O. McIntyre do their work on this earth and pass on to a reward of eternal life. We have not seen anyone take their places in the hearts and minds of the people. John Cowell joins that throng gone on. We shall not in our time see another of such powerful pulpit personality among the people of North Alabama.*

*To him farewell, this part of the world has been a better place in which to live for his ministry. Good night, good friend."*

With these words "Good night, good friend" we too bid John Cowell farewell until that happy day when on another shore, he shall bid us "Good morning." He rests from his labors. The record stands as he wrote it. We can do nothing either to add or to detract, but we can draw inspiration from his own valiant life. If he could speak today to all of us, his first word would be of the glories of his Saviour, and his last word a testimony to His saving and sustaining grace, of which grace he was and must forevermore remain a shining trophy.

Let us too, live courageously. Let us go all out for God from this hour henceforth.

## **John Christian Cowell**

So it was the church bulletin board read that Fourth of July morning "Born to the late \_\_\_\_\_," For early that morning, a trifle past midnight, a fine baby boy, seven pounds two ounces in weight, cried his first cry, and in so doing made glad the hart of his widowed mother. They had been six weeks of lonely waiting for a brave heart that shared a supreme joy with a tragic sorrow. But no word of complaint or rebellion had passed her lips during those weary days. Instead, she had said again and again to her mother, "Why should I complain? I am so thankful to God for the nine happy years we had together." The June issue of The Rod and Staff carried the following:

*Today the editor of The Rod and Staff, my beloved husband, is in glory. He is absent from the body, present with his Lord, whom he served fervently, fearlessly and faithfully from the very moment the Lord Jesus saved him until his home-going. My grief knows no depths, yet my gratitude to Our Heavenly Father for having shared nine precious years with one of His choicest servants knows no bounds.*

*During this grief-filled hour clearly and with a forceful reality, He has given to me, even more so than in the gloriously happy days, deeper knowledge of that blessed truth that 'My grace IS sufficient for thee - my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Underneath ARE the 'Everlasting Arms.'*

*From many of you have come tokens of sincere and loving sympathy; flowers, telegrams, cards and letters which I shall always cherish and which have brought to me much comfort and blessing. To you dear friends in Christ, I wish to express the deep gratitude of my heart.*

*Until He comes, may God bless, keep and use each of you to His glory.*

*Mrs. John C. Cowell, Jr."*

Such was Ruth's spirit throughout her sorrow. She had been a true helpmeet to John, all that a pastor's wife ought to be, and, now that he was removed from the community by death, all were more aware than ever before of her quiet courage and sweet resignation to the will of God.

The devoted mother who had come to spend Mother's Day week-end with her daughter stayed over three months instead, endeavoring to stand by and share the sudden sorrow. She was at her daughter's bedside when the little son arrived, and throughout the long trying days that followed, days that saw the home broken up, furnishings sold, and the little family, mother and babe, made ready to move to their new home. For the church must find a successor to the late pastor, and the parsonage must be vacated.

Central Baptist church rose to the occasion in a magnificent manner. Their many deeds of kindness to that stricken home were innumerable, their gifts to the young son all that a mother's heart could ask. They evidenced their loving sympathy in every possible manner and to such a degree their kindnesses shall never be forgotten. As a last service to their beloved pastor the church paid in full the entire funeral bill, including the additional cost of the long trip back to Fayetteville, his boyhood home.

Mrs. Cowell and little John Christian now reside in Dallas, Texas, with her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Walter R. Alexander, and with them she holds membership in the First Baptist Church of that city.

The babe, physically the image of his late father, seems blessed with a sturdy body and a happy disposition. Truly he is God's gift to the bereft mother, who now cherishes but one fond hope. That is that the lad shall grow to manhood's estate a consecrated servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, accepting his father's Savior as his own, and throughout his earthly pilgrimage shall live a life that is

**ALL OUT FOR GOD.**

# **THREE REPRESENTATIVE SERMONS**

Preached by

Dr. John Cowell

over a Southern radio network

## WHAT GOD COMMANDS SINNERS TO DO TO BE SAVED

The most important question ever asked by mortal man was that which fell from the trembling lips of the fear-gripped Philippian jailor that midnight hour when he cried out to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

It was the question of a man whose soul had been stirred both by the mighty Spirit-filled witnessing of Paul and Silas, and by the divine demonstration of the earthquake, its God's mighty "Amen" to their fervent, faith-filled prayers.

The answer to his question was straightforward, forth-right, simple and final - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Nothing more is required of a convicted, penitent soul seeking his way out of the darkness and bondage of sin. God, through Paul and Silas, makes plain the way of life; simply states the one and only condition of salvation; clearly answers in understandable language the cry of a soul in distress.

Through the centuries well meaning men in their blind zeal and ignorance of the total revelation of God have confused the minds of troubled souls by adding unwarranted demands to this simple condition of being saved. In some instances elaborate rituals have been devised and adherence to forms and ceremonies required before the penitent soul could find relief from the guilt and stain of sin. By some, the administration of an ordinance is said to be absolutely necessary before one can believe himself saved. The sovereign grace of God is thereby nullified, and the salvation of a soul is made dependent upon the act of another individual. In the Bible the salvation of no man is made dependent upon the observance of any ordinance of any human being or agency.

To one and all, God says through the apostle Paul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

You remember well Luke's thrilling account of the jailor's conversion as recorded for us in chapter 16 of the Book of Acts.

Paul and Silas had been ministering God's Word in Asia Minor. In their journeying they had come to the maritime city of Troas. In a vision Paul saw a man who said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us," and he rightly interpreted it as a call from God to take the gospel of God's grace to Europe. Shortly thereafter he and Silas embarked and sailed the blue waters of the Aegean Sea to the northern shores of Greece.

They went almost immediately to Philippi and there they heard of a prayer meeting at the riverside. It was at this meeting Paul made his first European convert to Christ - a business woman named Lydia, a seller of purple from the Asian city of Thyatira.

On their return from the riverside prayer meeting to Philippi a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, whose infirmity was being exploited by a group of unscrupulous men, followed Paul and Silas, crying, "These men are the servants of the most High God which show unto us the way of salvation." After many days Paul, through the power of Christ, delivered the damsel from the evil spirit and brought down upon his own head the wrath of her exploiters.

For this act of goodness Paul and Silas were cast into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks. Men of lesser faith and strength might have despaired and given up; but not Paul

and Silas. They were not easily discouraged. Instead of bemoaning their fate and crying over their predicament, they began praying and singing God's praises.

God heard their prayers and deliverance came in a miraculous way. An earthquake shook the foundations of the prison walls. The jailor awaking out of his sleep thought the prisoners had fled and was about to take his life when Paul reassured him that they were all there.

At this he fell at Paul and Silas's feet and cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" This is the only place in the Bible this question is asked. And Paul's answer is God's answer to every convicted soul who, today, asks this question - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Misguided religious leaders are confusing the minds of multitudes who, today, are asking the way of salvation. People are being told that baptism is essential to salvation; that they must keep the Law to be saved; that they must unite with a certain church; that they must do good works.

Over against all these unscriptural demands as conditions of salvation stands the clear Word of God - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The one and only condition of salvation in this day of grace is faith in Christ; not mere mental assent to the truth about Christ, but saving faith in Him as one's own personal Savior.

It is instructive to note that Paul did not say to the Philippian jailor, in response to his question, "If you would be saved, you must quit sin, reform yourself, turn over a new leaf, live a moral, upright life." Morality is good but it has no power to save the soul from hell. Morality is the fruit of salvation; not the root of it.

A man may be moral and lost. The rich young ruler was possibly more moral than any one listening to me today, but he was not saved. When he came to Christ as a moral man, Christ cleverly revealed to him that he was lost by showing him that, though he had kept the Law, he needed something more - he needed a Saviour. If keeping the Law could save a person, the rich young ruler would have been saved. Jesus never denied that he had perfectly kept the Law.

Paul could say of his own morality as a Pharisee, before he met Jesus on the Damascus road and was saved, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." But, after he met Christ and was truly born again, he saw the awfulness of sin and referred to himself as the "chief of sinners."

Morality can and does exist apart from faith in Christ. Multitudes of moral people have never been born again. They would not think of stooping to many of the sins that besmirch the lives of Satan's slaves or stamp as moral derelicts the habitués of the underworld. They hold in contempt the adulterer, the thief, the profane swearer, the perjurer, the hypocrite. They believe in principle, integrity of character, honesty, truthfulness. They have ideals, moral standards, precepts they would not think of violating. But they have never been born again. They are as much lost as if they were guilty of every crime in the catalogue of sin.

Morality is no substitute for faith in Christ. We cannot offer to a holy God the fruit of a fallen nature as an acceptable sacrifice. Any one who expects to be saved on the basis of his own good works is guilty of rejecting the atonement of Christ upon Calvary.

In the twenty years I have been preaching the gospel I have seen literally hundreds of moral people get saved; people whose lives in the community were above reproach; people who enjoyed the confidence and respect of every right thinking person who knew them.

To moral men and women listening to me today, men and women who have never passed from death into life through the miracle of saving faith in Jesus Christ, men and women who have given mental assent to the truth of God's Word but have never trusted Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior and confessed Him before the world - to them I would say that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done that we are saved but by the mercy and grace of God, by the work of the Holy Spirit in response to saving faith. God's Word plainly tells us that all our righteousness is as filthy rags in His sight - not all of our evil deeds, but all of our righteousness.

Salvation is a gift offered by God in mercy to penitent, hell-deserving sinners who reach out the hand of faith and receive it. It is not a reward to be earned, nor something to be merited, nor a prize to be won.

Paul did not tell the Philippian jailor simply to quit his job, go down to Athens and matriculate in one of the schools and get a first-class education.

Education is a good thing; God sets no premium on ignorance. But education has never saved, and never will save any one. It is not a substitute for saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Education is the training of the natural man. Regeneration, which is required by God, is the quickening into life of men and women dead in trespasses and sins. You may have a trained mind, heart and hand and still not know God. You may be a shining product of the schools, have diplomas of many kinds to prove that you are educated, be able to put many degrees back of your name as evidence of the work you have done, and still not know Christ.

You may hold an important chair in some great university or denominational college; you may even be president of a renowned university and highly regarded as an educator, and still not know Christ as Savior and Lord. It is possible to have a head knowledge of the Scriptures and know nothing about them experientially. Your philosophy of life may be rooted in the moral precepts and spiritual ideals set forth in the Word of God; you may publicly champion what some people call Christianity, and yet not be truly saved.

I am a firm believer in education. I urge young people everywhere to get the right kind of education. I urge them to take both graduate and post graduate work; not to stop until they have gone as far as they can. But I also warn them against the common fallacy that education will commend them to God. Educated people can go to hell as quickly and as easily as others - some times quicker and easier.

Education will not change the nature of a man. Educate a criminal and you only make him a more proficient criminal. Educate a thief, a man who is habitually guilty of petty larceny and you will put him to doing business on a grand larceny scale. Educate a godless man and he becomes, not a Christian but simply and only a smarter man without God.

The tragedy is that much of what we call education today doesn't educate; and some of it is not only not conducive to moral living and straight thinking, but it is positively harmful and soul-destroying. The education some young people have received has made infidels and atheists out of them. The wrong kind of education is worse than no education at all.

Mentally, Paul was as brilliant before his conversion as afterwards. He was Gamaliel's star pupil and a coming scholar likely to succeed Gamaliel as Jerusalem's leading educator. If education could have saved anyone, Paul would never have needed Christ.

Paul did not tell the Philippian jailor, in answer to his question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" that education was all he needed. Paul knew that he needed something more - he needed Christ.

Nor did Paul tell him to join the church and be baptized to be saved. He was baptized later, but baptism always comes after salvation, not before it or as a part of it. Baptism is not a saving ordinance. To preach salvation by baptism is to dishonor Christ, not exalt Him; it is to preach against the blood of Christ and play down the finished work of the Savior upon Calvary. Baptism has its place but not as a part of salvation. It is something subsequent to the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the penitent sinner.

Only the untaught believe that uniting with a church has any saving merit. Misguided, self-appointed religious leaders who confuse the minds of simple folk by telling them if they do not belong to a certain church they will be lost. They will have to answer to God in that dreadful day of judgment for the souls of the people they have ignorantly led astray into darkness.

There are many unsaved people who have been baptized and are now in churches; some of them are in the pulpits as preachers. When a person is truly saved he will seek and desire the fellowship of redeemed people; he will find his way to the house of God where truth is preached; he will be led of the Holy Spirit to cast his lot with God's people in the holy enterprise of soul winning; he will turn from all heresy and perversions of the Scriptures and shun as a plague every form of doctrine that detracts from the atonement of Christ. He will never be deceived into believing that anything other than the sacrifice of Christ, received by faith only, is the ground of his acceptance before God. The Holy Spirit will save him from embracing the specious doctrines of those who handle the Word of God deceitfully and preach for truth the traditions of men. The devil can quote Scripture to prove his point and unless one knows the Word of God in its entirety, he may be easily deceived by false ministers of the gospel, who pervert God's Word to bolster their theories.

What was Paul's answer to the Philippian jailor's cry - "What must I do to be saved?" Across the centuries it comes to us today clear and pointed, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Just as man went away from God in unbelief he must return to Him in faith. Salvation by grace through faith plus nothing - this is the theme of Holy Writ.

We come to Jesus as helpless as the thief on the cross, who, with hands nailed to the tree, wholly unable to do anything for himself, cried out to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," and heard the Son of God say, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." What did this helpless man do to merit the mercy of the dying Savior? Nothing. In penitence he cried for mercy and in grace it was granted him.

To the woman of ill repute who came to Jesus for pardon and cleansing that only He could give, He said: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Not faith plus baptism, good works or anything else; but faith alone.

To every lost soul listening to my voice today; to every man, woman, or young person who knows he is not saved; to every tempest-tossed, sin-driven, individual; to one and all, rich and poor, educated and unlearned, high and low, who realizes his need of Christ; who knows from

experience that he cannot save himself, that he is without strength to open heaven's gate, and bring into his life the blessing of eternal life and sins forgiven, and in whose heart is the cry, "What must I do to be saved?" I would say in the words of the apostle, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Verily, verily, I say unto you he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Could God use plainer language in telling us the way of life, the way to heaven?

Today, as you listen to this broadcast I beseech you in the name of Jesus Christ to put your trust in Him. Look away from everything to Christ. Commit your soul to Him. No longer spurn His love and refuse His gracious invitation. While the Holy Spirit pleads; while the voice of God in this message is ringing in your heart; while you hear His call and feel the urge to turn from sin to the Savior, yield to Him your heart and life. Like the penitent of old, cry out: "God be merciful to me a sinner." He will hear and answer that cry. I plead with you to come to Him today.

## THE BIBLE: GOD'S IMPERISHABLE WORD

On a day in late September in the year 1832, when England's renowned Queen Victoria was only a budding adolescent of thirteen, and Karl Marx was only fourteen years of age, one of Great Britain's most renowned writers, Sir Walter Scott, lay dying at Abbotsford, in Scotland, surrounded by his children.

At 61 years of age his phenomenal career was at an end. His wife had preceded him to the grave only a few years before and her body lay quietly in the old Abbey of Dryburgh. The vast fortune his pen had won for him had disappeared as a result of the failure and collapse of the printing and publishing business in Edinburgh in which he was interested with his old friend, James Ballantyne. His latter years had been spent in comparative poverty and arduous toil to satisfy the legitimate claims of his creditors and, most likely this led to a breakdown in health which a trip to Italy, at the expense of the British government, failed to restore.

As the slanting rays of the evening sun filtered through the tiny windows and long shadows cast their grotesque figures over the friendly countryside, Sir Walter Scott, surrounded by the magnificent tomes of his great library, turned to his son-in-law, Lockhart, and said, "Read to me from the book." Glancing first at the many volumes that lined the walls, neatly placed and carefully classified, and then at his father-in-law, Lockhart said: "What book?" to which Scott replied, "There is only one book, The Bible."

Among all the books that are known to men there is only one to which we refer as the Book, for it stands alone among all the writings of men, separate, distinct and apart. It is The Bible.

It has been translated into over 1,000 languages and dialects. To people of every race and clime it speaks as if it were written in their mother tongue.

The American public was astounded recently by the report that Wendell Wilkie's book, *One World*, which is a graphic and thrilling account of his epic round-the-world flight in an American bomber, had sold a million copies within a few weeks of publication.

But the same astounded public may be interested to know that the Bible, the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of the living God, each year sells millions of copies and is more widely read today in Germany than Hitler's own *Mein Kampf*.

No book in the history of mankind has ever been so widely distributed and none has ever exercised such power over the lives and thinking of men both great and small. Its miraculous power can not be explained apart from its divine origin.

Though written centuries ago by men of diverse origins and interest, it lives today in youthful strength and exhibits all the vigor and vitality that belong to the freshness and keenness of youth.

Many books written 50 years ago have long since been forgotten. The books that were popular even ten years ago are practically unknown by the boys and girls now in high school.

Someone has said that "It has been computed that, out of every 1,000 books printed, 650 are forgotten by the end of the first year; 150 in three years, and that only 50 survive seven years." Of the 50,000 books printed in the 17th century, barely 59 have been reprinted. Their force is spent, their power is gone; no longer do they interest men and women.

Can you name a single book written 500 years ago on astronomy, physics, medicine or science, that is accepted today by intelligent people as trustworthy, reliable, or authoritative?

But the Bible, written over a period of years extending from about 1500 B.C. to about 100 A.D., is more popular today than at any time in its turbulent history. The government is encouraging its sale and distribution. Soldiers, sailors, and airmen are requesting copies of this precious book, The Bible.

Not long ago a modern writer, recognizing the essential worth and value of this book, said: "I welcome with the welcome of my whole heart and soul anything that establishes, strengthens and settles faith in the Bible as God's written word. The need of the hour for 20th century Christians is to come out of the mists and shadows of uncertainty and unbelief, into a faith in the Bible which is an absolutely dominating conviction of its authority and verity as the living word of the living God."

Thomas Carlyle said, "There never was any other book like the Bible, and there never will be."

Thoughtful men in every age have paid tribute to this matchless volume. Of it, George Washington said: "Above all, the pure and benign light of revelation has had an ameliorating influence on mankind, and increased the blessings of society."

Another of America's truly great presidents, John Quincy Adams, said: "The first and almost the only book deserving of universal attention is the Bible. I speak as a man of the world to men of the world, and I say to you, 'search the Scriptures.' The earlier my children begin to read the Bible, the more confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society."

President Andrew Jackson, indomitable Indian fighter and one of the most rugged characters ever to occupy the White House, said: "The Bible is the rock on which our republic rests." At his famous home, The Hermitage, some 12 miles east of Nashville, Tennessee, where he spent his last hours, the room in which he died is preserved and it is said that, in those closing moments, he gazed intently at the picture of his wife, whose sweet Christian influence had played such a major part in the development of his Christian life, and said, "I believe the Word of God."

One of America's greatest statesmen was Daniel Webster, a man of profound and scintillating intellect. Said he: "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on and prosper; but if we and our posterity neglect its instruction and authority, no man can tell how suddenly a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity."

It is not without reason that we are being told today that all our troubles are the result of our departure from God and His Word. It is an unpleasant truth to which multitudes turn a deaf ear, but none can deny that sorrow and heartache and tears always follow neglect of God and His Book.

It has been truthfully and aptly said that the Bible is "supernatural in its origin, inexpressible in value, essential in the salvation of the soul and in the worship of God, infinite in scope, divine in authorship, recreative in power and infallible in authority."

It is the only book in all the world that teaches us how to "multiply our joys, subtract our sorrow, divide suffering, add to the sum of true happiness and cancel selfishness."

In it we find the best law - the Golden Rule; the best science - the extraction of sunshine from gloom; the best biography - the life of One who wrote LOVE in the largest letters and the most unselfish deeds.

It contains, so we are told, God's law for man's conduct; God's light for man's guidance; God's comfort for man's sorrow; God's warnings for man's peril; God's food for man's spiritual life; God's armor for man's conflicts; God's answer to man's questions; God's history of man's fall; God's method of man's redemption; God's purposes concerning man's future and God's revelation of His eternal unchanging love.

I quite agree with Huxley who said: "By the study of no other book, can people be humanized and civilized."

The public school system owes its origin to the Bible, for it was the desire of our American forefathers that everybody be educated that all might be able to read the Bible. The first text book used in our public schools was the Bible.

When the Revolutionary War cut off our supply of Bibles from the mother country the Continental Congress took steps to get them from Holland.

America's oldest colleges and universities owe their existence to the Bible. The first institutions of higher learning in this country were established by God-fearing men and women for the purpose of training men for the ministry.

There are some today who seem to think that man has outgrown his need of the Bible; that he has advanced so far in the realms of science, philosophy, psychiatry and the arts that he no longer needs the comforting message of the old Book; that its message is antiquated, outmoded. But these views are neither novel nor new.

The French infidel, Voltaire, once said; "In 100 years there will be no need of the Bible; we will have outgrown it; knowledge will have advanced beyond it." But later the very building in which Voltaire made his home was used as a center from which to distribute the Bible to the French people.

The story is told of the famous and eloquent American infidel, Bob Ingersoll, that one day he was going into Denver, Colorado on a train. Across the aisle from him sat a young man reading his Bible. In scorn Ingersoll arose from his seat and said to the young man, "In another generation Bibles will be seen only in museums." That was almost 100 years ago, but Bibles are not found only in museums. They adorn the tables and library shelves of almost every home in America.

The Bible lives because it is the world's greatest moral and spiritual dynamic. All the great reform movements owe their origin to this book. As man forgets the Bible he sinks into confusion and darkness. In his despair and degradation he begins to reach out for God and again discovers the life-transforming, soul-saving truths of this miracle-working book.

Many throughout the nation are praying that God will again speak to the hearts of men and women, young men and young women, and bring us back again to the book which we have forgotten in our mad rush to make money and gratify our carnal desires. The drift of modern civilization needs to be checked by a re-discovery of the teachings of the Bible.

What is that drift? Deserted churches and prayer meetings; the luxury of an ease-loving age; the lack of respect and reverence for women; the presence of violence in our daily life;

dishonesty and treachery in business; the wide-spread misuse and desecration of the Lord's Day; the increase of suicides all over the country; the rising divorce rate as a national scandal; the wide diffusion of materialistic thought; pornographic literature everywhere; impiety and impurity on every hand; fruitless and impotent pulpits; belief that we can get along without God and His laws.

Revival will come to our nation to purify our national, social, religious, and commercial life when we return to God's Word and renounce the impotent religious philosophies that have usurped its place. When the Bible is ignored or rejected, civilization decays and rots.

In commenting on the causes of World War I, Bishop Nicolai of Serbia said: "It was the natural child of a wicked and Christ-less peace, a Christ-less education, politics, business and literature on the continent of Europe."

It is a significant fact that if you take a map of the world and draw a red line around the nations that have the Bible, you draw a line between barbarism and civilization, light and darkness, life and death.

It is no wonder that the great Dr. Payson said: "Destroy this volume and you will take from us at once everything that prevents existence from becoming a curse."

Look at the nations of Europe that have dispensed with, or tried to dispense with the Bible. Europe's mad dictators seemed not to know that the destruction of the Bible, or rather the destruction of its influence over the lives of the people, meant the destruction of everything that held European civilization together.

Hitler and Mussolini, as well as Joseph Stalin, would have done well to sit at the feet of Coleridge and hear him say: "For more than a thousand years, the Bible, collectively taken, has gone hand in hand with civilization, science and law; in short, with moral and intellectual cultivation of the species, always supporting and leading the way."

Not only does the salvation of individuals depend upon their understanding and acceptance of this Book and the Christ whom the Holy Spirit presents to us in its pages, but the progress and happiness and well-being of nations depend upon it also. The quickest way to restore peace to the warring nations of the world is to bring them to an acceptance of the Bible as God's Holy Word. May God hasten the day when that shall have been accomplished.

When we consider the indispensable part this book plays in the salvation of sinners, we cease to marvel at the bitter and relentless assaults upon it through the centuries by Satan and godless men. It is no wonder that the cities of the ancients were lighted by bonfires with the pages of Holy Writ as fuel. It has been the most intensely loved and the most intensely hated book in all the world. It has well tested Huxley's law "the survival of the fittest." It stands today, despite all its enemies, as the one book to which distressed, tempest-tossed, sin-laden humanity turns in the hour of defeat, frustration, heartache and death.

Its grand subject is Jesus Christ and His power to save. This glorious theme meets us on the opening pages of Genesis and is developed with a consummate skill of which only the Holy Spirit is capable. From Moses on through the Old Testament everything points to the incarnation and to Calvary. In the four gospels we walk with the Son of God, hear the great sermons that fell from His lips, listen to the parables He utters, witness His miracles of mercy, see Him heal the sick, feed the hungry, raise the dead, save the lost. We walk with Him up the rugged slopes of Golgotha and hear the pounding of the hammers as the cruel nails are driven

through His quivering flesh. We hear the seven cries from the cross culminating in the triumphant shout, "It is finished"

We see Joseph of Arimathea come and claim His body and take it away to his own newly-hewn tomb. We behold the helplessness of both Satan and the guards to keep Him in the grave and we shout praises of gladness with those who came to the tomb that first Resurrection morning and found it robbed of its victim.

We thrill to His ascension and the message of the angels that He is coming again just as He went away, and are awed by the miracle of the Holy Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost.

For 2,000 years He has been away but the Spirit of God has been here convicting men of sin, righteousness and judgment, and performing a ministry among Christ's own blood-bought saints that He Himself would have performed had He remained in the flesh on earth with them.

Today, the Holy Spirit of God through the book is calling to you. What will you do with Jesus who is called the Christ? What will you do with this Word of God by which you will be judged in that day when all men shall stand before Him to give an account of the deeds done in the body? What excuse will you give to God for your lost condition, if you face Him in that day without Christ and without hope?

Again, I call upon you this day to trust the Savior to save you; commit your soul in faith to Him; receive Him as Savior and crown Him as Lord. Again I say to you in His words, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Come just as you are. Come without delay. Throw your excuses to the winds and call upon Him for mercy, grace and salvation. Don't wait to clean up, to change your habits of life, even to right old wrongs. You may die before the job is finished.

Today, this moment, while the Spirit calls, while your heart is stirred, while you have the desire to receive Him as your Savior, yield to Him, trust Him, believe on Him unto salvation.

May God save right now all who are without Christ. That is the prayer, the burden and the plea of our heart.

## **GOD OUR REFUGE**

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

A generation ago Dr. George Adam of London, England, was one of the world’s most renowned preachers of the gospel.

During the last world war he was supplying, one Sunday, the pulpit of the City Temple, London. In the congregation on that particular morning was the famous Scotch humorist, Harry Lauder, and his wife.

The preceding week Harry Lauder’s only child, a keen-eyed, strong-limbed, husky young man with great promise, had been killed in battle. At the close of the service Mr. and Mrs. Lauder tarried to speak to Dr. Adam. Seeking to comfort Mr. Lauder in his great sorrow, Dr. Adam said, “Harry, we are all proud of the wonderful way you have borne this blow,” to which Mr. Lauder replied: “When a man has been hit as I have been, there are only three ways open to him - drink, despair, or God; and I am looking to God for the consolation and courage I now need.”

Like Harry Lauder in that hour of crushing grief and overwhelming sorrow, millions throughout the earth in this hour of universal distress and heartache are also looking to God for “consolation and courage.”

In these trying times in which, by the grace of God, your life and mine have been cast, uncounted millions throughout the civilized world are learning anew the meaning of the Psalmist’s words, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Many also are today voicing the words of David when, in Psalm 91, verse 2 he cries: “I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.”

### **Life’s Storms**

When the storms of life begin to break over the helpless heads of men and women; when the foundation upon which we have built our lives and hopes begin to quake and tremble; when the winds of adversity blow with increasing velocity and the roar of the tempest strikes fear to our quivering souls, instinctively, intuitively, we turn to God. He becomes to us a fortress, a high tower of safety, a city of refuge, an unshakable temple in which the calm of faith and child-like trust replace the howling of life’s gales and bitter winds.

The storms of war with all the bitterness of soul and inextinguishable sorrow that are an inextricable part of war, lash helpless humanity today on every continent and, despite the fervent longings of people everywhere, there is no trust-worthy evidence of immediate abatement.

The foundations upon which men and nations have built their lives are crumbling. The anti-Christian political philosophies to which the millions of Europeans were fanatically committed are being weighed in the balances of divine judgment and found wanting. Europe is a shambles today because the nations tried to build without God. They ignored His foundation and built, rather, upon shifting sands of human wisdom.

Maybe the discussion on a world plane of this foolhardy phase of unchristian conduct lessens the force of the truth I am seeking, this morning, to enforce. Let me bring it right down to where you are living and say that any man, or woman, or boy, or girl, who tries to build his, or her life on any foundation other than that which God has set forth in His Word, is headed for disaster and sorrow.

The day of crisis and testing is coming; it is inescapable. Like Harry Lauder, when it comes, will you turn to God, or to drink and despair?

How a person faces sorrow and disaster is a true indication of his inner life, his character, his real self. If you are overwhelmed with despair or turn to drink, or dope, it proves that you have been building your life on a foundation of sand.

### **A Time of Universal Testing**

It would be difficult to find anyone today who would dispute the assertion that all the world is being tested and tried. We are passing not only through the fires of divine judgment but also through the fires of temptation and trial. Thousands are cracking up and going to pieces morally and spiritually; others are holding on by the skin of their teeth; by the grace of God a minority are standing like giant oaks defying the storms that threaten to destroy them.

The greatest havoc and loss wrought by this war have not been in the realm of material values, but rather in the realm of moral, spiritual, and eternal values. Instead of the epic struggle for existence turning our people back to God, hearts have become hardened; consciences have been seared; souls have become incorrigibly wedded to lustful, sinful practices and whatever moral conscience men and women may have had has been stultified<sup>70</sup> and deadened.

I readily admit that this is a dark picture, but no informed person will deny that it is a true one.

For years, in this nation, we have been fed on a diet of unscriptural optimism and theological poison. We backslid from both the power and fruit of the great revivals of the 19th century and started on our downward path when we sought to evolve a moral code that was not rooted in religious truth and spiritual concepts. We practiced self-deception so successfully that the transition from reality to a fool's paradise was, to everybody but those who knew their Bibles and were taught of the Holy Spirit, a short and pleasant journey.

Our departure from God and His Word was so gradual and pleasant, and the fruits of our unbelief and unrighteousness so delicious to the corrupt nature of old Adam, that we refused to believe that we had not already found the long-promised millennium.

The years leading up to this present war were filled with carnal indulgence, disregard of God's Word, love of sensual amusements, unlimited consumption of strong drink and growing unbelief in the validity and necessity of the moral code set forth in Holy Writ.

We are still pursuing a course of self-deception; we are not yet awake to the dangers that confront us; we are still a luxury-loving, ease-loving people. We are still rebellious and defiant. We still have confidence in our own wisdom, strength, and ability. We are not yet fully aware of our helplessness apart from God. We still consider the church a kind of useless appendage to civilization and multitudes are convinced that we would be better off without it.

### **Reality?**

Reality to millions is not Christ and all the spiritual treasures we have in Him; not God's imperishable Word which alone reveals to us the way of life and salvation; not the church with

all its wealth of moral values and undying hopes; not the Holy Spirit of God who is on earth to convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and to reveal the things of Christ to believing and trustful hearts.

Reality to confused and bewildered millions is the cinema with its lurid depiction of the eternal triangle feeding the lusts and inflaming the passions of moral paranoiacs and spiritual imbeciles.

Reality to countless thousands is the shorter working week and fatter pay envelope; it is the packed football stadium delirious with delight when a favorite star makes an end run.

Reality to an innumerable host is the seductive music of the dance orchestra that soothes to moral slumber amid the tinsel and pageantry of a world of make-believe. It is beautiful gowns, costly liquor, fine automobiles, and all the accoutrements out of which that world of fantasy is created.

Reality to thousands is fanatical devotion to the godless ideal of a so-called better world. To others, it is social security, old-age pensions, collective bargaining or world peace.

The prevailing universal confusion is attributable to one thing, and one thing only: departure from the Word of God. The crime of our age is the attempt which is being made to build an enduring civilization without the personal presence and help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All the world-planning that is being done is sponsored by men whose regard for God is simply and only conventional, and, therefore, is destined to fail.

### **Is Permanent Peace Possible?**

It is cruel to lead unsuspecting men and women to think that, following this war, an era of peace and prosperity will come. The teaching of God's infallible, inerrant Word is the exact opposite of that. This generation will know nothing but trouble, and probably the generations immediately following. Like the angel in the book of Revelation at the sounding of the fourth trumpet heralding coming judgments, prophets of God in our day can truthfully say, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth. . . ."

Not even among the victorious allies will there be peace and helpful co-operation. No intelligent person believes that America, Great Britain and China will be able to satisfy the territorial demands of Russia and keep peace among their own people. It is yet to be settled who will have access to most of the raw materials of the world and who will rule and dominate in the field of international trade, finance and politics. The balance of power among the nations is yet to be settled, and it will be one of the thorniest problems ever faced by mortal men.

In every country the forces of revolution will be at work, and let no one think they will not be formidable.

In our own country, we will face problems in agriculture, industry and government that will baffle the wisest and confound the keenest intellects. Labor, which has strengthened its position during the war oftentimes at the expense of public welfare, will be firmly entrenched and swaggeringly dictatorial. Knowing what has been done in their absence, it is no wonder that American soldiers are everywhere voicing their bitter opposition to labor racketeers and warning that, when they get back from the war, they intend to free the American workingman from the slimy toils of both corrupt labor bosses and conscienceless employers. Undoubtedly, there is trouble in the offing.

We naturally view with anxious fears the growing debt that threatens to crush us. An unwise approach to the solution of this one problem could wreck the nation over-night.

And what could we not say about the threat of bureaucratic government; government by executive fiat and decree with total disregard for the elected representatives of the people?

Why have I drawn for you this picture? Why have I made references to world trends and movements? Those are fair questions that deserve an intelligent answer.

Back of all that is going on today is the sinister hand of Satan. All of our troubles, I repeat, are due to our committing the same sin that was committed by Eve in the garden of Eden: we have substituted the plausible schemes of men for the plans and program of God. We have trampled under our feet God's Word and God's Son. We refuse to humble ourselves before Him in penitence and seek His forgiveness. Our wills are yet unbroken; our hearts are still hard; our consciences are still stultified<sup>10</sup>.

What more will it take to awaken and arouse our nation? Will it take the broken bodies of our young men brought home from foreign battlefields to walk our streets as constant and gruesome reminders of our folly and unbelief? Will it take further economic troubles that may lead to worldwide collapse?

Thank God for that growing multitude of men and women who have seen the error of their way and who have returned to God and His Word. Thank God for that host of young people who are standing true to Christ in the furnace of temptation and witnessing faithfully to His power to keep and save and satisfy.

Thank God that, like Harry Lauder in the time of sorrow and trial, many are turning to God for consolation and courage. It is sadly true that many are turning to drink and dope and carnal indulgence to forget; but many are finding God a stronger tower of refuge; many are finding Him a fortress of safety in this hour of universal trial and affliction.

I could wish for nothing better for those of you listening to me this morning, who know not Christ, than that God will use this broadcast to arouse you to your need of Him, and enable you to put your trust in Him as your Saviour. Through the Apostle Paul, God tells us that Christ is our peace, our hope, our wisdom, our righteousness, our redemption, our sanctification. He is all we need. It is not Christ plus anything, but Christ alone, without whom all things are vain and futile and meaningless.

Oh, may God speak to your heart today. May He impress you with your need of Him. May He enable you right now to receive Him as your Savior and crown Him as your Lord.

Notes:

- 1 John's mother passed away Dec., 1945 and was laid to rest beside her late husband and her preacher son.
- 2 Cranking a vehicle in the early 1900's involved rapidly rotating the engine with a handle, by hand, at the front bumper. Often the engine could back-fire and if the person did not get his hand out of the way quickly, the wrist or arm was easily broken.
- 3 The phrase "bridge whist" means a card game while a "progressive euchre party" is similar to playing the game of Rook in a tournament.
- 4 Rougeing - wearing too much makeup, particularly rouge.
- 5 The Chautauqua Center offers courses in art, music, dance, theater, writing skills and a wide variety of special interests.
- 6 Twitting - to tease or taunt someone in a good way.
- 7 In John Bunyan's work "The Holy War" he refers (allegorically) to "The Citadel of Mansoul." For those who are unfamiliar with his work, the Citadel is the heart of man.
- 8 "Carrie Nation" (act) Carrie Amelia Moore Nation was an woman who was a radical member of the temperance movement, which opposed alcohol before the advent of Prohibition. She is particularly noteworthy for attacking alcohol-serving establishments (most often taverns) with a hatchet.
- 9 Barbituric Acid is a strong medication used to put one into deep sleep.
- 10 Stultified - to cause to lose enthusiasm and initiative, especially as a result of a tedious or restrictive routine.