

## Who Will Take the Gospel to Samaria?

### [Acts 1:6-8](#)

Rev. Dr. Dolphus Weary, President, Mission Mississippi

Sunday, August 20, 2006

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

To Pastor Gareth Icenogle in his absence, to Pastor Doug Learned, to Pastor Hunter, to the elders and deacons of National Presbyterian Church, and to all of you that have come to worship our Savior today – we're excited to be here. I'm not alone; my wife, Rosie, and my son Ryan are with me. Rosie, Ryan, stand up please. My wife of 36 years.

My book title says, "I ain't coming back." But it's good to be back at National. My wife and I have three children. Our daughter, Danita, is a pediatrician in Natchez, Mississippi. She was able to chase her dream. I told my wife when she graduated from medical school to fill up her purse with as many tissues as possible, and then pass them on to me when my daughter walked across the stage. And I was going to be crying not because it was my daughter, but I was going to be crying because she was able to chase her dream. Let me say it again. You might not understand it, you might not get it. Growing up in Mississippi, every black person 20, 30, and 40 years ago was not able to chase their dream. So tears flowed as I watched her walk across the platform.

Our second child, Reginald Weary, was killed in a car accident in June of 2004, and so we still mourn his passing. Two months after he was killed, his son was born; and they named him Reggie. They had agreed to name him Reggie; and we get the privilege of keeping little Reggie every weekend. We almost brought him with us here. We decided that maybe that two-year-old is not ready; and maybe we were not ready to travel with a two-year-old.

I get the wonderful privilege of serving on the board of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. I get the wonderful privilege of serving on the board of ECFA – Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability. And I also serve on the board of World Vision. That's where I met the pastor's wife, Vida, as a member of the board of World Vision. Then I had the privilege of mentoring Lynne Faris Blessing; and she today is doing wonderful things in Seattle, Washington.

As I was sitting here listening to the song that the choir sung right before I got up, I thought: that is deep. What children see – wow. If we don't mess them up, it's what children see. It's amazing, that what children see is different from what we see. And what we as adults do is mess them up. Because if we just allow children to see Jesus as he is, in the color that they want to see him in, and we don't try to mess them up, what a greater place the church would be.

We sang the song: "In Christ there is no East or West, in him no North or South, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth." Verse three is the one that we shout on: "Join hands, then, brothers of the faith, whatever your race may be, who serves my Father as a son is surely kin to me." Guess what, I'm sorry to tell you this, but we're kinfolk. We're kinfolk. And listen to this – there's some kinfolk you might not like, but you can't trade them in. And you can't trade me in. You know why? I've been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus, and you had nothing to do with it. Isn't it something? Isn't it great news, that God just chooses to save just any old body? Ain't that good news? Listen to it. He doesn't ask you or me who can be saved. It is wonderful news that God don't have to ask you. The person sitting next to you this morning—you might think they didn't deserve to be saved. But the good news of the Gospel is God didn't ask you— because we might come up with some reason why they ought not to be saved.

I get the wonderful privilege of working with Mission Mississippi and traveling throughout the state of Mississippi. This year we had this big, hairy, audacious goal, and that is: to preach in 20 black churches and 20 white churches throughout the state of Mississippi. Thus far we've been in 35 different churches. We've been in five Presbyterian churches, eleven black Baptist churches, nine white Baptist churches, four United Methodist churches, three independent churches; and a couple weeks ago I had the privilege of speaking at an Episcopal church. Last Sunday I spoke at an Anglican church in Jackson, Mississippi. God is doing a new thing. And God wants to break down walls and barriers. God wants to say to the body of Jesus Christ, it's time for us to practice allowing the Holy Spirit to do what the Holy Spirit does best. As we look at the passage of scripture today, God is saying: it's time for us to get out of the way and let the Holy Spirit do what he does best in us. Wow.

It says in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18-20: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me; therefore go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

Jesus established his authority. The good news about our Christian life is that we did not make ourselves Christians—we're Christians because of the precious blood of Jesus Christ. His authority is: he's able to take anybody and change them by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the joy of it all—he says we are to take this message to the ends of the earth. His authority is that he gives the authority. He gives the power. In verse 19, Jesus established the mission, the commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." And he does NOT say to Christians: you are to go out and pick and choose which nation you are to deal with... you are to pick and choose which group of people you want to deal with... you are to pick and choose which door you're going to go to and which door you're going to skip.

The good news is that God has said to us that we need to take this precious Gospel and Good News to the ends of the earth. He says to the disciples: it's time for you to move out of your comfort zone. It's time for you to move out of where you are. It's time for the church to move out of its comfort zone. It's time for the church to begin to see the world as a place that the Gospel can penetrate, rather than the Gospel can only penetrate this group and that group, and we don't deal with that group or this group. Our Gospel can penetrate, and why? Because in Acts it says: "When they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom

to Israel?" He said to them in verse 7: "It is not for you to know the time or the dates that the Father set by his own authority. But you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit. And when it comes upon you, you will be my witnesses."

He just says to us: Go witness! He just says to us: Take this Good News out. He just says to me, "It's time for you to take this Good News to the people that need to hear the Good News." And guess what? There are some people that need to hear the Good News. We need to stop letting it stop with us. We ought to quit bottling-in the Gospel. We need to let the Gospel, the Good News out. You know how you spread good news, don't you? Let somebody give you something wonderful and good. Now I know we like to spread bad news, too; I know that we do that. Now I'm sorry, you may not do that at National, but some places where people hear bad news—they spread it fast; they spread it fast.

We've got the greatest, the most marvelous, and most wonderful news to share because we're a part of God's family. Yet we let it box in. He says: listen, let the Holy Spirit flow in you, and let the Holy Spirit guide you. Because guess what? In the first part of Acts you saw the disciples—they were weak. They were fearful; they were running; they were scared. But then they began to become powerful people. When Peter stood up and preached, there was power. When Paul went out, there was power. And who would take the Gospel out?

Number one, who would take the Gospel to Jerusalem? Jesus said in verse 8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes up on you and you shall be my witnesses;" start in Jerusalem. Back then, this was not good news, because guess what happened? They just crucified Jesus. Now he's telling the disciples, take the Good News out to the people that just crucified Jesus. And guess what? If they crucified Jesus, they're going to get you, too.

So it wasn't a good thing when he says, 'you must take the Gospel out there to Jerusalem.' Now for us today, Jerusalem has become a comfort zone. Jerusalem is the place that we take the Gospel. It feels good to take it to Jerusalem because Jerusalem is the place that feels good. Jerusalem is the place that meets my needs. Jerusalem is the place, and the people I know. Jerusalem sometimes is the place where people look just like me. I'm sorry—the world is not just like you. But you know the Good News. The good news is: the Gospel breaks across all that. You know, it just breaks across it. And the Gospel is so powerful, that anybody can be saved.

Now some of us know that Presbyterians believe in predestination. That's O.K.—just hold that for one minute. Hold it one minute. But you know about predestination—you don't know who God has predestined! So you keep on doing what you're doing. Now, if I was in a black church I'd say, "Amen," but don't worry about it!

But we don't know who God wants to be saved; therefore we are not to spend a lot of time trying to worry about it. The only thing we've got to do is share the Good News. God has called for us to be seed sowers. It's not our goal to change the soil. The Word would change the soil; we are to be the seed sowers. So sow it in Jerusalem. Sow it among friends and neighbors and people that look like you... people that speak the same language that you speak... people who live in the same neighborhood that you live in.

You can share the Gospel in Jerusalem, but don't stop there. The Bible says: listen, we need to share this Good News in Judea. Judea is right outside. The relationship between Jerusalem and Judea is like the urban center, to province...a city, to a state. While you shine the light in Jerusalem, let your light also shine in Judea. You can venture out a little bit more. You can now go to a neighbor that's in the next community. You can now reach out to somebody that you've been wanting to, but you've been a little afraid. So you've started reaching out—moving beyond your neighborhood to the neighborhood farther away. It's still fairly safe, but take the Gospel to Judea.

And then, number three: Who will take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This Gospel must not just end up in Jerusalem and Judea; but this Gospel must go to the ends of the earth. And there have been people who travel around the country and around the world. And the common denominator around the world is: when Jesus comes in, other stuff disappears—that's a common denominator. When Jesus comes in, hate disappears. When Jesus comes in, love for one another began to take over. When Jesus appears... that's the reason we carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth—not because we want to make people Americans in some other place. I'm sorry to say that here in the capital, but listen: our goal is not to go out and make people Americans. Our goal is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world to every nation, and allow that Gospel to permeate that nation; to people in those nations, across language and culture. Jesus breaks across it.

I just want to tell you that the evangelical church in America has done a good job of going and taking the Gospel around the world. As I've traveled around the United States over the last 30 years, I would go to churches and find out that 80 and 95 percent of their church mission budget was overseas. And I'm not saying, don't go overseas. What I am saying is: we should not go overseas and ignore our own backyard. The Gospel must also permeate our own backyard. I think it's hypocritical for us to talk about solving poverty issues around the world (maybe I shouldn't say that here) when we're not dealing with poverty issues in our own backyard, as a Christian church.

And so I say, who will take it to the ends of the earth? And some of us say, 'Yes, I'll go to Africa for two weeks; I'll go to India for two weeks; I'll go to Russia for two weeks. But who's going to dare take the Gospel to Samaria? I know that taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth is working, because in Africa right now one of the greatest Christian movements in the world is taking place. And the reason is because missionaries went there years ago. God is using that mission work to raise up a leadership in Africa right now that's reaching people in Africa for the glory of God. So I tell you, let's continue to go around the world. But I just have to raise the question: would good, conservative, American Christians – now I don't know how I said that, but that's OK, don't worry about it – how do we begin to think about how...and who...will dare take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Samaria?

Samaria! Jesus was careful to link Judea to Samaria, its cousin to the north. The two regions endured a bitter conflict; and when intermarriage took place, you had a group of people called Samaria that the Gentiles did not want to deal with, and the Jews did not want to deal with. They were just 'out there.' In John, chapter 4, it talks about Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at the well and asking her for a drink of water. And as soon as he did that, he crossed all kind of racial and cultural barriers. She even said, "No, I

cannot do this for you." And we have people now who are locked in, saying: 'Let black folk go reach black folk; and let Asians go reach Asians; let white people reach white people.' People always ask me, as white people, somebody will come to me and say, "Can I be used effectively by God to reach black folk?" Yes, you can. Because it's not about your race—it's about your message. And the message: "Is it powerful enough for me to carry the message?" Yes. We have to jump through more hoops when we do it, because we've created a racial culture in this country; and the racial culture we've created is in the church.

Let a black person go to a white church, and black Christians will criticize that black person for going to a white church. Let a white person choose to go sit under black leadership, and you would have white Christians criticizing them for doing it. We need to get rid of that kind of stuff in the church. The church ought to be the place where the people of God can go. The church ought to be the place where the message of God goes out and no doors are skipped. In evangelism, you skip no doors, because you want to be able to say: whatever my Samaria is, I want to be able to take the Gospel to Samaria. Your Samaria might be the white community. Your Samaria might be the black, African-American, the Negro community. Your Samaria might be Latino, Mexican, illegal immigrants, the Hispanic community. Your Samaria might be Asia, Native America. Your Samaria just might be poor people. And the only things we can say to poor people is: they deserve what they get. That's why it's easier to go some other place and witness—because we blame poor people of America. And I'm saying, for some of us, poor people is our Samaria—we don't want to have nothing to do with them. Well, let me confess to you that I feel the same way.

I grew up in Mendenhall, Mississippi, a small rural town in Mississippi. I grew up in a family of eight children. My father deserted the family when I was four years old. As I grew up there, I learned how to hate the fact that I was black. I learned how to hate the fact that I was a second-class citizen. I learned how to hate the fact that I lived in a three-room shack. I learned how to hate that. And all my life, I began to dream. And my dream was: how in the world can I break free? How can I break free from poverty? How can I break free from racism? How can I break free from injustice? And finally when I graduated from high school and went to Piney Woods Junior College, I got a basketball scholarship to go to school in California. And the only thing I could think about when I boarded the bus in Jackson, Mississippi, and went across the Mississippi River bridge in Vicksburg... the only thing I could think about was, "Bye, Mississippi. I'm gone. I ain't never coming back. I ain't never coming back to Mississippi." Guess what? If God would have left me alone I could have worked my plan. My plan was never go back to Mississippi. I didn't want to go back to Samaria. I did not want to deal with Samaria.

I'm so glad that God took me back to Samaria. My wife and I moved back to Mendenhall, Mississippi. And over 27 years God enabled us to take the Gospel to Samaria, so that God ended up helping us to develop a Christian health clinic, a recreation center, a radio ministry, a thrift store, a Christian elementary school, a farm, an adult-education ministry, a housing ministry, a Christian community law office, and a youth-development ministry. So much so that in 1991, former President George Bush named that ministry one of his "Points of Light." There were six organizations in the state of Mississippi that were named a Point of Light. Mendenhall Ministries was named a Point of Light because we dared to say this Gospel must go to the poor community in Mendenhall, Mississippi—the light needs to be there.

God used that in a powerful way. You see, Samaria needs those who are willing to dream impossible dreams for Samaria. But Samaria also needs to have those who are willing to connect with the dream. I remember when I came to National Presbyterian Church many years ago, you connected with the dream in Mendenhall, Mississippi, and you started to help with that dream. I'm glad that you are now connected with World Vision, or at least there's some movements going on to connect you with World Vision. Because World Vision is a work that's designed to try to eliminate pain and suffering for children who are trapped in Samaria. And that's all over the world—reaching out to do that.

Rose and I are committed to Samaria. We're committed to the Good News of the Gospel permeating Samaria. And our Samaria is called rural Mississippi. I grew up in rural Mississippi. Rosie grew up in rural Mississippi. She grew up in a family of ten children but she had a father and a mother in her home. We have a commitment to rural Mississippi. In addition to our commitment to racial reconciliation, we have a commitment to the poor in rural Mississippi. Of the ten poorest counties in America, four of them are in Mississippi: Holmes County, Jefferson Davis County, Issaquena County, and Sharkey County—all in rural Mississippi. We believe that God has called us to choose them to be our Samaria. And what we want to do is to create a foundation to reach out to the needs of Samaria. Eight years ago we started out selling my book; we took the proceeds of my book, and isolated it to build a foundation to support rural Christian ministries in Mississippi. It was only a little dream then, but we're still dreaming. We ain't got no better sense than to dream.

You know poor people who are trapped in Samaria, they're still dreaming. They're hoping that one day – and in the black culture we sing the songs all the time, on 'one day.' One day my circumstance will change. You cannot think of a single Negro spiritual that does not have a "one day" mentality to it. "Swing low, sweet chariot"—one day a chariot will swing down and take me out of my problems. "Steal away home, I ain't got long to stay here." "Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world. Going home to be with Jesus." Or, "I've got shoes, you've got shoes, all of God's children got shoes." I don't have any shoes now, but in my holy sanctified imagination, I can imagine that when I get to heaven, I'm going to pick up my shoes, and I'm going to walk all over God's heaven.

We encourage you today to join the dream of us reaching out to Samaria. One way to join the dream is to buy a copy of my book. There are four reasons why you need to buy: 1. because the book does a good job of dealing with racism and reconciliation. Listen believers, let's quit putting our heads in the sand and think the problem's going to go away without us intentionally doing something about it. And the first place we need to start is with our own thought patterns. How many books do you have in your library by black Christian authors? When is the last time you saw your children or grandchildren reading a book by a black Christian author? If we're going to change the way we think, we need to intentionally do something different than what we've ever done before. 2. And then the proceeds from the book go to help us build the foundation. 3. And if you've already bought the book, buy it for somebody else. Give it to somebody you want to encourage. Give it to somebody you want to help. Give it to somebody else, because by buying it you invest in the foundation. 4. We're trusting that God will enable us to continue to build a connection between those who have—and those who have not—in rural Mississippi, because you can't draw a circle around Mendenhall and find the resources necessary to do everything you want to do.

Well, who would take the Gospel to Samaria? Some of you would do it directly. And I'm so glad that you as a church decided to do it directly, in inner-city or urban Washington, D.C. You've decided to do it right around you, and I'm glad that you're doing that. Secondly, some of you began to partner with World Vision, to support World Vision. And some of you today will hear this message and say, 'We want to partner with Rosie and Dolphus Weary to take this Gospel to rural Mississippi'—their Samaria, in terms of rural America. One of the reasons I serve on the board of World Vision is that I want World Vision to have a vision for the poor around the world. But I want them to have a vision, too, for the poor in America. Because it's so easy for us to ignore the poor in America. As Christians, we pretend that the government is going to take care of it. It's time for believers to step up and do it.

Let me close with a poem, it's entitled "Hungry, Lonely, and Cold": When I was lonely, you left me alone. When I was homeless, you preached to me about the shelter of God's love. When I was hungry, you formed a humanitarian club and you discussed my hunger. When I was naked, you debated the morality of my nakedness. When I was in prison, you guiltily crept into your cellar and prayed for my release. When I was sick, you fell down on your knees and you thanked God for your health. You seem so holy, so close to God, but I'm still hungry, I'm still lonely, and I'm still cold.

May we have a heart for taking the Gospel to Jerusalem. May we have a heart for taking the Gospel to Judea. And may we never forget taking the Gospel to the remotest parts of the world. But may our eyes be open more to taking this Good News to the poor... the oppressed...the races we don't want to deal with...in our own backyard. It is called our own 'Samaria.'

Father, we pray that the power of your Holy Spirit will take these truths and apply them to the hearts of your people. And Lord, if we said some things that didn't come out right, we ask the power of your Holy Spirit to make it right. In Jesus' name, Amen.