

The Familiar Path Home

“O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works.” (Psalm 71:17). *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”* (II Timothy 3:15). *“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...”* (Jeremiah 6:16).

Recently while our oldest daughter Heather and her family were visiting us, we followed the ritual of a precious family tradition. We took the trip up to Brenham and Washington-on-the Brazos to see the bluebonnets. We had a good time. We enjoyed going through the Blue Bell factory to see where some of the best ice cream on earth is made. Then we were off to see the museum in Washington. After viewing the museum we took the long walk to the field of flowers. We kept telling our Missouri (Show-me-state) born and bred son-in-law of the sheer beauty of the bluebonnets and Indian paint Brush. As we began the walk, he was skeptical of what we might see. I knew once he saw the bluebonnets lay on the prairie like the bluest water you’ve ever seen, he would say every step of the rather long walk was worth it! But alas, the bluebonnet had gone to seed and taken its flight to other fields.

Rather than taking the old path home through Chappell Hill, we plugged in our address on the GPS to find the shortest way home. We were sure no matter what path we would take, we would see fields of flowers. But on our “short-cut” home we saw spattering few. A couple of days later I received a phone call from one of our old church members, Cliff Greene. A few years ago, he and his dear wife retired to Washington and he faithfully keeps in touch. Toward the end of our conversation, I said, “We were up at the museum and park in Washington, but we didn’t see the bluebonnets.” He replied, “Brother Pope, had you taken a left and come four miles you would have been at my place. We have acres full of bluebonnets, as far as you can see.” By my estimation, it was the path toward Chappell Hill, commonly called “Bluebonnet Trail.” Had we taken the old path home, we would have seen God’s great display of wild flowers. So our modern technology got us the shortest way, but we missed the flowers.

My forty-year anniversary in the ministry of our Lord and Savior lands close to another anniversary - my father’s passing into glory. There is great solace knowing that I am standing in his steps, preaching the same love and grace of God. I’ll never forget that Sunday night in 1970 when I left the church pew, walked down the aisle and gave Dad my right hand. He firmly gripped my hand and I made my call to preach public. That night Dad preached from Jude, the third verse: *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* His message was *The Faith Once Delivered*. As a rule, Dad was a much calmer preacher than his youngest son, but that night, he was on fire. He preached with power, liberty and bedrock conviction. We had already talked; he knew I was surrendering that night. Like a relay runner in an Olympic race, he was rounding his last curve in the track; I stepped in the corridor and began to run the same direction and that night, he was handing me the baton. My stride stepped into a fast pace, he slowed down and twenty-one years ago went out of sight. In all these years since, I have visualized him cheering me on to finish well.

These days as I look into the audience of the congregation I pastor, I see my mom, my father-in-law and mother-in-law and I am ever mindful of the responsibility to walk in the faith once delivered the saints. It is a precious faith! It has withstood the storms of persecution, denominational hierarchies and man-made traditions. Because we followed the ancient and true method of preaching justification by faith followed by immersion of the believer in water, we were called by our enemies “Baptist.” Because we take the Bible literally true we were called fanatics. Because we believe and preach in an eternity called Heaven for the believer and Hell for the unbeliever we are accused of being archaic. The Bible calls it “The faith once delivered.” It’s a familiar path; it’s the path our fathers and mothers walked before us. It is the path my wife

and I have chosen like our parents and forefathers to walk in as well. It's the familiar path - the path home.

1. The path home is a well-worn path.

We stand on the shoulders of giants. I did not blaze this trail; it was well worn when I got here. In 1525-26, William Tyndale translated the first New Testament into English. clergyman hopelessly entrenched in Roman Catholic dogma once taunted Tyndale with the statement, "are better to be without God's laws than the Pope's". Tyndale denounced such Roman Catholic heresies, and he replied, "defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you!" He an inspiration to freedom-loving Englishmen who drew courage from the 11 years that he was hunted. Books and Bibles flowed into England in bales of cotton and sacks of wheat. In the end, Tyndale was caught - betrayed by an Englishman that he had befriended. Tyndale was incarcerated for 500 days before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. His last words were, "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England." Time would fail to talk of Latimer, Ridley, Lady Jane and all martyrs for the faith once delivered and received. Dad often quoted to us the dying words of Hugh Latimer, "We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." Jesus said, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*"(Matthew 5:16). We travel a road that others have traveled; we take the same light that the King of England finally saw in direct answer to Latimer's prayer. God help us to "Play the man!"

2. The path home is a well-lit path.

We are soon to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the first printing of the Authorized Version, also know as the King James Version of the Bible. Many of the Pilgrims used the Geneva Bible, but it did not take long until the Authorized Version became the one and only Bible used among Protestants and Baptists. This is the Bible America was founded upon! This is still by far the masterpiece of the English-speaking world. Greater than the Parliament building, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, the Capitol, or the White House are the citizens of the countries these institutions hold. And the great citizens, like their ancestors before, were made and molded by the Bible, the only book God ever wrote! "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*"(Psalm 119:105).

3. The path home is taken by choice.

Jeremiah 6: 16 closes out very sadly, "*Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.*" God does not force you down His righteous path. Do not wait for the "right time" to decide - today is the right time - decide now to follow God with all your heart. Instead of rebelling against the old path by saying, "we will not walk therein," say, "By God's grace, I will walk this well worn, well lit and God honoring path for my life." You will be blessed!

- Pastor Pope

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