

# WORD & DEED



**A JOURNAL OF SALVATION ARMY  
THEOLOGY & MINISTRY**

**Red Hot Preaching**

**How To Preach A  
Disturbing Gospel**

**Sample Sermon:  
Loaves & Fishes Moments**

**Out of Captivity**

**Shalom: The Biblical  
Vision in a Broken World**



**Salvation Army National Headquarters  
Alexandria, VA, USA**

**Word & Deed Mission Statement:**

The purpose of the journal is to encourage and disseminate the thinking of Salvationists and other Christian colleagues on matters broadly related to the theology and ministry of The Salvation Army. The journal provides a means to understand topics central to the mission of The Salvation Army, integrating the Army's theology and ministry in response to Christ's command to love God and our neighbor.

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The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.

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Contributions related to the mission of the journal will be encouraged, and at times there will be a general call for papers related to specific subjects. The Salvation Army is not responsible for every view which may be expressed in this journal. Manuscripts should be approximately 12-15 pages, including endnotes. Please submit the following: 1) three hard copies of the manuscript with the author's name (with rank and appointment if an officer) on the cover page only. This ensures objectivity during the evaluation process. Only manuscripts without the author's name will be evaluated. The title of the article should appear at the top of the first page of the text, and the manuscript should utilize *Word & Deed* endnote guidelines. All Bible references should be from the New International Version. If another version is used throughout the article, indicate the version in the first textual reference only. If multiple versions are used, please indicate the version each time it changes; 2) a copy on a disk or CD, using Microsoft Word format; 3) a 100-word abstract of the article to be used at the discretion of the editor (e.g., on The Salvation Army's web page or in advertisements pertaining to the journal). Please note that neither the hard copies nor the disk will be returned to the author and that all manuscripts are subject to editorial review. Once articles have been selected for inclusion, the deadlines for submitting final material for the journal are March 1 and September 1. A style sheet is available upon request.

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# WORD & DEED



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# Continuing Our Mission in Word and Deed

Word & Deed is the scholarly journal of theology and ministry of The Salvation Army, now in its fifteenth year of publication. Over the years we have leaned into publishing articles of theological interest, only touching from time to time on direct ministry. This issue intentionally leans the other way into the practice of preaching.

The Founders of The Salvation Army should be remembered primarily as preachers. Preaching the gospel message to the masses was the main task of both William and Catherine Booth throughout their lives. Their heroes in the Christian faith, whether living or dead, were preachers—John Wesley, James Caughey, Charles Grandison Finney, to name a few. It is little wonder that when the Booths founded The Christian Mission the buildings were called Preaching Stations. Christian Missioners were expected to preach the gospel relentlessly in the meeting places and on the streets, and their preaching resulted in the salvation of sinners and the raising up of saints. The preached Word was the fire that lit up The Christian Mission and later The Salvation Army.

The Booths, both nurtured in Wesleyan Methodism, knew that in the Protestant tradition the indispensable sign of the Christian Church is preaching, and all who had been faithful to that duty, from Martin Luther to Charles Spurgeon, called generations of listeners to the glorious gospel of Christ. The Booths were committed to that task and expected others around them to be likewise faithful.

The legacy of the Booths is their explicit recognition of the gospel as both good news and hard news in every context and culture, and preaching only one or the other does no justice to the whole written Word. Julie Slous strikes a graceful balance between the two, even for a contemporary generation that finds the words of the preacher out of touch with the present cultural discourse. She also faces the reality of a different contemporary world from the world of the Booths. The authority of the preacher in this age is not a given as it was in Victorian England. Every preacher will do well to understand this without being discouraged by it.

Julie Slous's writing ultimately reminds us that only the preacher who seeks truth rather than relevance will realize the power of the preached Word for every age. For that reason and many others, we are featuring two excerpts from her recent book, *Preaching a Disturbing Gospel*. The first is "Red Hot Preaching," Slous's introductory chapter looking at the central role of Scripture in preaching, the importance of cultural context, and the historical influences of American revivalism and Wesleyan theology. The second is "How to Preach a Disturbing Gospel," an overview of what is required to preach in the present day along with a sample sermon as a practical illustration.

We continue the emphasis on preaching by sharing the award-winning sermon from the USA Southern Territory's Brengle holiness sermon competition for 2012 by Cadet Jamie D. Leonard. Her sermon, entitled "Out of Captivity," is an exposition on Ezekiel 36:25-27 – "I will sprinkle clean water on you . . . I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you . . ."

Over the years, this journal has featured the annual General Frederick Coultts lecture from Australia. We are pleased to share the 2012 Coultts lecture "Shalom: the Biblical Vision of a Broken World" by Donald E. Burke. Here Don Burke articulates William Booth's biblical vision of a community of shalom and its implications for Salvation Army mission and ministry.

Finally, Roger Green gives the reader four short book notes on works helpful to the ongoing task of strengthening the foundations of our theological understanding. In this issue, then, we range from the praxis of preaching to the deepening exercise of reflection on our biblical and theological groundings for continuing our ministry and mission.

JSR

RJG

# RED HOT PREACHING

*Julie A. Slous*

His [William Booth's] gospel has been a wide one; it has covered the sins and sorrows and wounds of all mankind; he has preached of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost with the result that I have seen tears flow, heads bowed, lips quiver, hearts broken, rebels reconciled, prodigals come home, wanderers return, and sinners of all classes reconciled to God.<sup>1</sup>

... but within five minutes she [Catherine Booth] had captured the attention of all the group, and in five minutes more had made a way to their hearts.... Again and again, at the close of an address, I have heard men of widely differing classes exclaim with conviction, "O my God, I never thought I was like that—what shall I do? What shall I do?"<sup>2</sup>

Stepping back into the early days of The Salvation Army, we are confronted with a powerful and inspiring reality—Salvation Army preaching had impact! Evidence pours forth as to how Salvation Army preaching connected biblical truths with the desperate plight of suffering humanity and miraculously motivated a movement toward repentance and faith. Preaching aimed for results.

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*Major Julie Slous, D. Min. in biblical preaching, is the corps officer at the Cariboo Hill Temple in Vancouver, British Columbia.*

Preaching achieved results! Early testimonials overflow with Spirit-filled evidence of the powerful way in which the Word of God was reaching human hearts.

After preaching a short time the influence increased and the power of God came down on the people, and there was such shouting and weeping that I [Catherine Booth] was compelled to break it off and invite the wounded to come forward. Many responded and twenty six were converted. It was a glorious season. There must have been nearly forty seeking mercy at one time.<sup>3</sup>

So great was the number of penitents that Mr. Booth had the usual communion rails extended right across the entire breadth of the chapel, besides erecting barriers to keep off the crowds of onlookers, who pressed so closely to the front that it was found impossible to deal effectually with those who were seeking salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Such stories stir the human-spirit! They speak to the possibility that Pentecost could come, once again to the Church; that flames of living fire could fall upon us in fresh ways, inspiring renewed response and commitment to the Christian faith. If it happened in the past, surely it is possible again here in the present! We ask, practically, what contributed to these remarkable testimonials? What approach to preaching did the early Salvationist use to facilitate these incredible results? How does the strategy and methodology we observe contribute to our understanding of that which becomes a unique, and distinct Salvation Army homiletic?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to shine an investigative light into the past. The first form of a Salvation Army homiletic emerged in the ministry of William and Catherine Booth, and from them a model for biblical preaching was initially established. As a systematic inquiry is made of historical sources, we recognize this homiletic (or this form of preaching) was not shaped within a formal academic arena. William and Catherine did not have the benefit of seminary training or focused instruction that taught them how to be effective expositors of Holy Scripture, like many preachers today.<sup>5</sup> An understanding of early Salvation Army preaching therefore begins by extracting from history that which assisted in shaping the practice of biblical preaching for William and Catherine Booth.

## The Glory of a Personal Conversion Experience

In many respects, this is an obvious point of beginning. The words of the preacher cannot be formed in the mind, and articulated by the mouth, until there is an experience of Christ in the heart. Norman H. Murdoch in his work, *Origins of The Salvation Army*, suggests that both William and Catherine had difficulty citing their exact moment of conversion. Perhaps not all scholars would agree with this position,<sup>6</sup> yet we are able to see a picture of a progressive faith journey, as we piece together varying historical sources. Multiple events, circumstances and influences would seem to have contributed to the overall way in which God was working and moving in the lives of the Booths, preparing them for their life's calling.

The family background of both William and Catherine is a necessary and helpful backdrop to this discussion. Catherine's upbringing had been very religious, being raised under the puritanical rule of her mother, who required her to read from the Bible as early as age three. Consequently, she had actually read the Bible eight times in its entirety by age twelve.<sup>7</sup> What a notable accomplishment, given that many people today cannot boast of having read the Bible through even once!

William's story was different. His childhood had been very unhappy. He was born into a substantial middle class family that fell upon desperate times because of his father's materialistic preoccupations, which ultimately led to the family's financial ruin. William described his father as one who knew no greater gain or end than money.<sup>8</sup> In his own testimony regarding this period of his life, a window is opened to not only see the desperate nature of the times, but also the deep affection he carried for his mother. She was a woman, who in William's estimation could have died of a broken heart, yet she continually "upheld his father's spirit as crash after crash followed and one piece of property after another went overboard." Knowing this first hand experience of economic misfortune, William understood what it meant to live among the poorer classes; those who were being reduced to the verge of starvation.<sup>9</sup>

With this background established, both William and Catherine gave witness to a time of "spiritual crises" in their teenage years. This led to a deep awareness of sin and an intense yearning after God. Murdoch claims this turning point for

William was primarily due to his father's death; Catherine's resulted from her father's turning from a narrow path of Wesleyan temperance to alcoholism.<sup>10</sup> Elaborating upon this further, Roger Green in *Catherine Booth* offers a detailed description of William's spiritual pilgrimage, highlighting his initial religious learning, primarily due to the influence of his mother. Adding to this, William found his Wesleyan footing within services at the Broad Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. An elderly couple, who were friends of the family, ensured that he attended regularly. While William considered himself a nominal Christian in these earlier years, the records suggest in 1844, at age fifteen, he was fully converted under the influence of preacher Isaac Marsden.<sup>11</sup>

The preaching that William encountered contributed to a stirring of the spirit, which urged him toward a more public declaration of faith and commitment. His attendance at the Wesleyan Class Meetings intensified this state of conviction especially when he was called upon to represent the state of his soul. While such a tactic today might seem imposing, for William having to answer to his spiritual condition became a formative moment in his faith journey. This is where the famous story of the silver pencil case comes into the picture.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, during a boyish trading affair, William had made a profit while leading his friends to believe that he had done them a favor. As an expression of their appreciation, they gave him a silver pencil case. According to biographer Harold Begbie, William struggled with this unresolved sin and it ultimately inhibited an act of public surrender. In William's own words, we see the depth of struggle that was represented: "The inward Light revealed to me... that I must not only renounce everything I knew to be sinful, but make restitution, so far as I had the ability, for any wrong I had done to others before I could find peace with God."<sup>13</sup> Begbie suggests that this "silver pencil case burned like fire against flesh."<sup>14</sup> Restitution with his peers was necessary if William was going to have any sense of spiritual resolve. Finding the young fellow he had wronged, William returned the undeserved pencil case, and gave witness to "the instant rolling away from [his] heart of the guilty burden, the peace that came in its place, and the going forth to serve God and [his] generation from that hour."<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, Catherine reported being "truly and savingly converted at the age of sixteen."<sup>16</sup> What then can be made of the intensity of religious instruction that Catherine knew in her upbringing? Was this all without impact or effect? Given

Catherine's analytical disposition, it could be argued that her struggle was to resolve a tension between the rational and the experiential nature of her faith. How was one to know the true assurance of salvation and Christ's indwelling? Roger Green further represents this great controversy of Catherine's soul reflecting that she had lived a blameless life, as far as outward experience was concerned. She had a passionate zeal for the gospel and gladly used the means of grace provided by the Church. Yet she still found herself consumed with personal doubts and often struggled with an angry temper. How would she find the assurance that she truly was a child of God?<sup>17</sup>

Catherine's moment of spiritual breakthrough came early one morning as she lay in bed reflecting on these words from one of Charles Wesley's hymns: "My God I am Thine, What a comfort Divine, What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!" Roger Green further relates the account drawing from the historical perspective of W.T. Stead's *Mrs. Booth of The Salvation Army*:

Scores of times I had read and sung these words, but now they came to my inmost soul with a force and illumination they had never before possessed. It was as impossible for me to doubt as it have been before for me to exercise faith. Previously not all the promises in the Bible could induce me to believe: now not all the devils in Hell could persuade me to doubt. I no longer hoped that I was saved, I was certain of it. The assurances of my salvation seemed to flood and fill my soul. I jumped out of bed, and without waiting to dress, ran into my mother's room and told her what had happened.<sup>18</sup>

Now fully convinced of salvation and assured of personal victory from sin, the way was prepared for both William and Catherine to join their stories together for the ultimate purpose of doing the will of God.<sup>19</sup> Yet the way forward would not be without significant challenges and obstacles. Moments of doubt would still come but what remained constant was a clear understanding of a full experience of Christ. Theirs was a personal salvation. William and Catherine had experienced the transformation that came with the blessing of a clean heart. *This enabled the Booths to become first hand witnesses to the gospel they would later proclaim.* Such an example surfaces in the sampling of a sermon Catherine deliv-

ered in the summer of 1880, during a series of services in the West End of London:

We Christians profess to possess in the gospel of Christ a mighty lever which, rightly and universally applied, would lift the entire burden of sin and misery from the shoulders, that is, from the souls, of our fellow men—a panacea, we believe it to be, for all the moral and spiritual woes of humanity.<sup>20</sup>

Catherine could make this claim with such confidence because she knew it to be true within her own life. Similarly, the experiential convictions of William would find their way into his messages, as demonstrated in this excerpt from *The Officer Magazine* in 1893:<sup>21</sup>

For an officer to speak effectively of the things of God he must be soundly converted, and either have experienced the blessing of perfect love or be on full stretch to find it, and have been baptized after Pentecostal fashion with an all consuming love of God and souls. He should know these things, seeing that they must constitute the chief theme of his preaching, and officers should *mix up their own testimony* [emphasis mine] with their explanations and exhortations.<sup>22</sup>

Reinforcement of this theme finds a later expression within *The War Cry*, 1912, warning officer-preachers against overloading their speaking with doctrinal contentions. “The chief arsenal is experience. He never wearies in attesting in one form or another, ‘I know in whom I have believed’” (2 Tim. 1:12b).<sup>23</sup> Such becomes the strength and power of this early homiletic (or system of preaching), first defined by William and Catherine Booth. Experience could echo a resounding “AMEN” proclaiming that this gospel was true and trustworthy. Perhaps William expressed his most profound thoughts on this matter in his “Hints to a Preacher,” published in the *East London Christian Mission Magazine* in 1868:

Preach as a dying man to a dying man.... Many will chide you and say it’s

all excitement; but you who have partaken of the refreshing influence of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good things of God, will know the reality and blessedness of this work.<sup>24</sup>

What then defines this early homiletic of The Salvation Army, first represented by the Booths? Clearly, something was inspired from a spiritual banquet of which both William and Catherine had partaken. Having tasted of the truth and life-changing power of the gospel, they were being prepared to become authentic representatives of this experience to others.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> John Lawley, "The General on the Platform," *The Officer* 24, no. 1 (January 1916) 161.
- <sup>2</sup> Bramwell Booth, "Catherine Booth's Public Ministry," *The Staff Review* 7, no. 4 (October 1927) 380-81.
- <sup>3</sup> F. de L. Booth-Tucker, *The Life of Mrs. Booth*, vol. II (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1892) 50-51.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 65
- <sup>5</sup> Roger Green, *Catherine Booth: A Biography of the Cofounder of the Salvation Army* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 62-63. While seminary training was not an option for William, "it was customary for clergy outside of the established church to receive ministerial training by studying with an experienced minister, learning the trade, as it were under the watchful eye of a senior pastor. So William moved into the bouse of Dr. Cooke on February 14, 1854.... His apprenticeship began with a view toward ordination in New Connexion Methodism. William was still trying to develop the study habits recommended by Catherine but confessed that he found the academic side of his training difficult and, for him at least, perhaps actually uninspiring.... Into the speculations of philosophy he never entered, and for the laborious study of theology, it is quite certain that he never had any fruitful inclination.... However, he excelled in his preaching for which he had a natural talent and an obvious love."
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; See chapters one and two of Roger Green's book for a helpful treatment on this tension, 17-67.
- <sup>7</sup> Norman H. Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994) 22.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.
- <sup>9</sup> Bramwell Booth, *The Authoritative Life of General William Booth* (George H. Doran Company, 1912) 8, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13958> (accessed 22 January 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army*, 22.
- <sup>11</sup> Green, *Catherine Booth, a Biography of the Cofounder of the Salvation Army*, 40.
- <sup>12</sup> Murdoch, 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Begbie, *Life of William Booth*, 2 vols. (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1925), 31.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 32.

16 W.T. Stead, *Mrs. Booth of The Salvation Army* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1900) 35.

17 Green, *Catherine Booth*, 30.

18 *Ibid.*, 31.

19 *Ibid.*, See 44-67 for details relating to William and Catherine's first meeting, their subsequent courtship, much represented through long distance correspondence and their subsequent marriage. The primary struggle centers on William's need to determine denominational affiliation in order to engage in full time ministry.

20 Catherine Booth, *Aggressive Christianity* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd., 1880) 4.

21 Note: *The Officer* is a monthly publication of The Salvation Army; at the point of this quotation its primary audience was exclusively Salvation Army officers.

22 Allen Sattertee, *Notable Quotables* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army Supplies, 1985) 160.

23 "The Salvation Army Officer as Preacher," *The War Cry* (27 July, 1912). Note: The War Cry was identified historically as The Official Gazette of The Salvation Army; the first English issue in the United Kingdom was December 27, 1879. Subsequently it became a weekly publication.

24 William Booth, "Hints to a Preacher," *East London Christian Mission I* (1868).

# How To Preach A Disturbing Gospel

*Julie A. Slous*

## **Moving Listeners Beyond Kansas**

In one moment, Dorothy is a simple farm girl living in Kansas with her aunt, and three hired hands. She is convinced, "There is no place like home" and the certainty of this sentiment finds its definition through the close connection of family; the familiar landscape of the surrounding fields and the faithful following of a beloved dog named Toto. Then suddenly the familiar is disturbed. We know the story well. A raging tornado approaches and uproots everything in its path. While the rest of the family takes shelter in a locked storm cellar, young Dorothy dashes to safety inside the farmhouse. Subsequently, the force of the wind blows out a window frame and knocks Dorothy unconscious. With the stage now set for the 1939 American musical film, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy awakens to her new reality. To her shock and surprise, she discovers her farmhouse carried far away from that which is familiar. As she steps into a land steeped in the fantasy of witches and wizards, munchkins and talking scarecrows, it does not take Dorothy long to figure out, "I'm not in Kansas anymore."

This well-known film is an effective example of what dislocation looks like. In one defined moment, everything is comfortable and familiar. Then, suddenly

we find ourselves navigating a new course with no previously established GPS points of coordinate. Life as we know it has been disturbed. While tornados will not necessarily be our cause of disruption, the point is that some applied force “unsettles” the routine predictability of the “settled.” Preaching that is to arrest the attention of today’s postmodern/post-Christian listener must search for pressure points or confronting influences that will achieve this same unsettling effect. The goal is to cause those caught up in the frantic pace of life to come to a halt and dislocate from the familiar. It will involve a turning of direction; a tuning into a new station; an adjusting to a new divine frequency that will dislocate listeners from the “familiar sights of Kansas,” toward that which is life changing and new.

With this purpose in mind, when Jesus preached, he often spoke in parables. The goal was to shake up previously formed perspectives with the intent of first, getting listeners’ attention and then secondly, to open up new windows of understanding. We can only imagine the gasps in the crowd when Jesus spoke about a boss who paid one-hour workers the same salary as those who had put in a full twelve hour shift (Matthew 20:1-16). Surely, there were those who questioned the sensibility of a shepherd who would leave ninety-nine sheep unprotected out on the hillside, while he went off foolishly searching for the one that had run away (Luke 15:1-7). What kind of livelihood would he have left, if wild animals had attacked the majority of this flock while he was on his private search and rescue mission? Consider as well what the reaction would have been to a story about a farmer who goes out to sow his seed, absolutely indifferent to the lack of favorable soil conditions upon which some of the seed falls (Luke 8:1-15). Someone in the crowd had to be asking, “Is this person out of their mind? Smart farmers calculate how they can achieve their greatest yield. What is the sense in throwing seed in places you know will not achieve a return?”

While we could cite many other parabolic examples, we observe within each of these instances, how the normal, the routine and the predictable is upset. Listeners are compelled, naturally, to lean forward to figure out what is going on. Note here, textual tensions do not distract people from the text, but rather serve to draw them closer. Listeners want to figure out the mystery before them.

Using parabolic structure as a foundation for developing strategies to preach a disturbing gospel, we draw insight from French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). He contributes significantly to biblical interpretation by identifying the general pattern of a parable: firstly to *orientate* the listener to a new context, secondly to *disorientate* the listener through exposure to textual tensions, and then to finally *reorientate* with the intent of theologically gluing back together that which has been fragmented and disturbed.<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur argued how this particular model was instrumental in startling New Testament audiences toward the truths Jesus proclaimed.

The parables as stories take the reader to the point where the course of ordinary life is broken, an intensification of the everyday emerges. The unexpected happens; a strange world of meaning is projected which challenges, jars, disorients our everyday vision precisely by both showing us the limits to the everyday and projecting the limit of the character of the whole.<sup>2</sup>

As we place these insights alongside that which defines a Booth homiletic, we recognize the resource the parabolic model provides for assimilating past and present preaching approaches. Ricoeur assists us in seeing this possibility by emphasizing how the language of the parables is paradoxical and exaggerated (hyperbolic), while at the same time realistic. It is an instance of “extravagance which interrupts the superbly peaceful course of action and which constitutes the extraordinary within the ordinary.”<sup>3</sup> Drawing together the picture that is emerging, we realize how succinctly the purpose of the parable parallels that which we are trying to accomplish in the application of a new Salvationist homiletic. Our goal is to “interrupt the superbly peaceful course of things,” to “jar and disorientate” in order that the imagination and the human will might be opened to new possibilities. The benefit of Ricoeur’s approach to interpreting the parables is that it provides a framework for the preaching of all kinds of biblical texts. More specifically, it provides a structure through which today’s preacher can approach difficult and sensitive texts that will call the listener to leave behind the comforts of Kansas.

## Preaching to Orientate-Disorientate-Reorientate

### Strategy #1—Textual Orientation

Using as a sample text, Matthew 25:1-13, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, we move to unpack how a sermon is shaped, if Ricoeur's orientate-disorientate-reorientate model provides the structure upon which preaching ideas are hung.

Firstly, the preacher must identify what is generally going on in the story. What is the setting? Who are the characters? What action launches? What challenges are immediately obvious? Upon what general history and context is the text building? For example, is this in sequence with other stories Jesus is telling? Is it part of a larger narrative? Where does the parable fit in terms of the overall chronology of Jesus' life and ministry? Note that the goal in this first section of the sermon is to lead the listener systematically toward the strangeness of the biblical narrative. This section will require detailed thought and preparation with special attention to the background details that define the context in which the story was first heard. Simplicity of approach will be most important. This is not the place in the sermon to unpack complex theological ideas or to offer detailed word studies. Rather the goal is to launch the text and get the basic elements of the story airborne for preaching. Simply put, orientation works to align the listener to the basic gist of the story.

Secondly, in order to get the text launched for listeners, preachers must intentionally work to recreate an experience of the text. Note here a clear distinction we are making. Explanation is not our goal. Rather we are aiming toward a vibrant active experience of the text in which listeners might be caught up in the action that is unfolding. Preachers achieve this goal only as they aim to experience the text first hand for themselves. Diligent and thorough exegesis will be essential. While limited time constraints may tempt the preacher to take the fast drive-by tour, preachers who are serious about communicating a compelling word, will take the time to get off the bus and explore what is not so obvious from the text's roadside view.

This will require interaction with the biblical characters and a willingness to sit in different vantage points of the story. Specific questions will assist in

unpacking the depth of what lies buried in the text. For example:

1. What is it like to be one of the wise bridesmaids?
2. What conversation might we hear sitting alongside them?
3. What is the perceived attitude of the wise bridesmaids toward the foolish bridesmaids?
4. What emotions are present as lamps begin to flicker toward the midnight hour?
5. What advances the role of the foolish bridesmaids in the story?
6. How does the telling of the parable keep the tension alive?
7. What initial impact does the story have upon the preacher?
8. Whose side do we find ourselves leaning toward? To whom are we favorably disposed.
9. Who has the power?
10. What will be required for tensions to be resolved?
11. Where do we see our own reflection mirrored in the text?

To achieve effective engagement with the biblical text, preachers will need to do more than just knock on the text's front door. It will require a deliberate moving in where the true tensions of the text can be experienced first-hand.

Thirdly, to achieve an effective orientation to the biblical story, preachers are encouraged to look for contemporary images to enliven the text to a modern day perspective. For instance, if in our modern day context, we run out of batteries at the midnight hour, what are our options to solve our problem? Chances are we are going to go out and look for an all-night convenience store. When the guest of honor finally arrives, how would we respond, if suddenly the story took on a twenty-first century look? Think about how technology would respond and how we would instantly try to get the word out that the bridegroom had finally arrived. Surely there was a least one bridesmaid who felt a compelling urge to update her Facebook status. We can only imagine the hum in cyberspace as social media buzzed with the news that was finally breaking. While due care will be taken to not allow contemporary images to overtake the text, effective engagement will be achieved when the listener discovers how his or her own world finds parallel alongside the biblical narrative.

Fourthly, in seeking to orientate the listener to the biblical text, it is helpful

to consider re-telling the text's story in the active present tense voice. The goal is to achieve immediacy of perspective so the listener joins the preacher in becoming a first-hand witness to that which is transpiring. Note, in this regard it is not that the bridegroom arrived; but rather that the bridegroom is arriving. Listeners are caught in the electrifying energy of the moment as they become part of the crowd that waits to enter into the great wedding banquet. By the simple turning of verbs from the past to present tense voice, listeners have opportunity to be part of the on-site reporting team now delivering the texts' breaking news reports. For too long, preachers have held listeners at a distance to the text, without even realizing this has been the case. We have been required to view ancient words through antiquated theological telescopes. While we may have the ability to zoom in on certain truths, how much more effective our experience would be if we could walk the same road Jesus walked and stand in the crowd among those who first heard Jesus' teaching. Preaching that effectively seeks to orientate the listener to the text, aims to recreate active first hand engagement. In so doing, both preacher and listener alike are able to link their testimony together to say, "We have seen the Lord!"

### **Strategy #2—Textual Disorientation**

Within the second section of the sermon manuscript, the primary goal is to identify what is strange and unsettling about the text. What does not make sense? What speed bumps do we encounter? What seems out of place? In this space of sermonic development, preachers have opportunity to push the boundaries of the text to identify what actually pushes back at them.

In the case of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, there is a sense in which we readily see that this is not your average wedding story. We can imagine some poor wedding planner scrambling madly to redeem that, which is falling apart in terms of scheduling and planning. Pushing the boundaries of the text further, we notice other unsettling details. For instance, why is there so much attention given to a bridegroom and no reference by Matthew to a bride? Who starts a wedding reception at the midnight hour? What do we make of a bridegroom who so ruthlessly casts out the foolish bridesmaids, just because they ran a little short on oil for their lamps? When we link the bride-

groom's role in the story to be representative of Christ, how will we reconcile this picture of unrelenting judgment?

In working these tensions of the text, the goal is for the listener to experience the bodily weight of truth. Thomas Troeger in *Imagining a Sermon* gives emphasis to this when he speaks about how "truth that matters to us has a physical impact on our bodies...our stomachs knot, our fists clench, our shoulders bend under the burden. But whether joyful or saddening, truth...has a bodily weight, a physical force on our animal frames."<sup>4</sup> As *disorientation* evolves in the second part of the sermon, the preacher works to cultivate within the listener some form of physical response. Perhaps we will want to pound on the door with the foolish bridesmaids, crying out "This judgment is unfair. Give us more time! Give us a second chance." Maybe we will want to affirm the reaction of the bridegroom or shake the foolish girls for not figuring out their circumstances earlier. Whatever we work to accomplish in *disorientation*, the goal is that the listener would sit in the center of textual tensions and begin actively trying to navigate their way over the imposing speed bumps before them.

Preachers will be helped further in this section of the sermon to give some thought as to what an alternate screenplay might look like for the text. For instance, if the parable did not play out as it did what alternate scripts might we imagine? Imagine the bridegroom arriving. The foolish bridesmaids make their confession that they have run out of oil. The bridegroom says, "No problem, ladies. I know that you have been diligently waiting here all night. I know your intentions were good. We will not worry about this small oversight. Come on into the party and we will just pretend this did not happen." While the bridegroom could have made this response, Matthew says, he did not. By playing out this alternate screenplay in the sermon, listeners move deeper into the text's tension. Naturally, listeners begin to ask, "Why didn't the bridegroom make that response? Why was grace absent in this final moment of judgment? Why did the bridegroom not provide a second chance?"

Similarly, we might play an alternate screenplay with our focus turned toward the wise bridesmaids. As the foolish bridesmaids come to them asking for a loan of oil for their lamps, imagine if instead of rejecting the foolish girls' request that the wise girls accommodated. They say, "No problem, take some of our oil. It may mean we will not make it into the banquet because there may

not be enough for the both of us. But here, take some of what we have and let's hope we can stay our course." In the end, no one enters the banquet, because no one has enough oil. While a total blackout happens around this wedding feast, the bridegroom stands alone with no one to attend the banquet. Note in this scenario that; if we lift the faithful stewardship of the wise bridesmaids out of the story we lose a valuable teaching element. We need the witness of the wise bridesmaids to remind us how we are to cultivate a heart of preparation for the bridegroom's return. This alternate screenplay pushes us closer to seeing the valued role the wise bridesmaids actually play in pressing the parable's main point.

In all that takes place in this section of the sermon, the ultimate goal is to name that which is disturbing and unsettling to the listener. We do not particularly like the way this wedding story plays out. There does not seem to be the possibility of a "happily ever after ending," especially for the foolish bridesmaids. We will struggle to reconcile our perspective of God's grace and compassion, with a God who seems to slam the door in the face of those who in the moment are seeking their way into the kingdom. Naming these harsh realities will not only do much to enliven preaching, but it will assist listeners in opening their imagination to new possibilities. In so doing, our strategy in identifying what is disturbing and disorientating in the text, achieves a similar outcome of disturbing and disorientating the hearts and minds of those engaging the text. This opens an effective space for preaching a disturbing gospel because listeners have found their own way into the biblical story.

### **Strategy #3—Textual Reorientation**

In the third and final section of the sermon, the preacher makes an intentional move to glue the fragmented (disorientated) pieces of the text back together again. In this regard, the preacher works to define two important elements, the first being the theological tension that exists in the text. At this point the preacher asks such questions as: What picture of God is evolving? How does this sit in relationship with what we know to be true about the nature and will of the Holy One? Where do we see points of conflict? Where do we see the text pushing us to navigate new horizons of theological thought?

Secondly, the preacher will work to define what is true of the text's rhetorical impact. To do this, the preacher must ultimately answer, "What is the text doing?" What impact is the text having upon the listener? Thomas Long in *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* offers excellent insight into this element when he says that every genre of text has some kind of impact or effect upon a typical reader or hearer. For example, a joke is a genre designed to make us laugh. A riddle causes us to think in certain oblique ways. A ghost story can frighten us. Texts have the capacity to exercise a powerful guiding influence over the willing and careful reader.<sup>5</sup> After the preacher has grappled with the content and flow of the story by pushing and pulling at that which is unsettling, the preacher must then ask, what this text is working to accomplish. What impact did the text have on its first audience? What impact does it have today? Is the text inspiring faith; motivating commitment or engendering a longing to grow closer to Christ? Maybe the text creates a burden of guilt and pushes the listener toward a desire for mercy and forgiveness? Perhaps the text creates a restlessness to become more engaged in acts of service, or invites listeners to align themselves more deliberately with the values of the Kingdom. Whatever the intended outcome; in the reorientation stage of this sermon model, the preacher works diligently to name what the text is doing in its original context and then to align this with the purposes of the sermon.

In the case of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, the preacher leaves the text holding both the weight and the wonder of the gospel message. We feel the burden of those who have failed to find their way into the great wedding banquet. Our ears still reverberate with the sound of doors slamming and foolish young girls pounding at the entrance for a second chance. The weight of this message is pronounced. Yet also, a sense of wonder grips us as the text draws us toward its ultimate expression of testimony. We offer our thanksgiving for we see a picture of a God who is faithful to execute his judgment, in order that there might be fulfillment to his promises. The final shutting of the door marks the beginning of the eternal life God has promised. Therefore, let us trim our wicks and be ready for the arrival of the bridegroom, for the door is still open. All who desire access to this promise can still find the way.

#### **Strategy #4—Creating Focus and Function Statements**

After a succinct outline has been developed, incorporating the elements previously named, and before the preacher moves to final manuscript, it is critical for the preacher to review where he or she is heading with sermon development. What key statements will form the sermon's focus? In one sentence, can the preacher name what the sermon will be about? Too often, preachers rush toward their manuscripts with ideas overflowing, without establishing a clear road map as to where preaching ideas will land. To assist in formulating this plan, clear focus and function statements will need to be established. While these may evolve in earlier stages of exegesis, the point is that before sermon writing, these statements are well defined. Note: we highlight the need for these statements, not to further burden the preacher's sermon process, but to ensure that continuity of focus is achieved and that the sermon arrives at its intended destination. Thomas Long in *The Witness of Preaching* defines these terms and presses the importance of preachers articulating these points of reference before preaching.

*A focus statement* is a concise description of the central-controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon. In short, this is what the whole of the sermon will be "about."

*A function statement* is a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers. Sermons make demands upon the hearers, which is another way of saying that they provoke change in the hearers (even if the change is a deepening of something already present.) The function statement names the hoped-for-change.<sup>6</sup>

This will undoubtedly become the hardest part of the homiletical process, as preachers force themselves to grapple with the specifics of their language for preaching. Long emphasizes how important it is that these statements grow out of the experience of studying the biblical text and that both focus and function statements have relationship to each other. When these are fully achieved, preachers are ready to begin formalizing a manuscript for preaching. Preachers are encouraged, however, to remember the importance of using language inten-

tionally so that words will not be wasted but that every element included in the sermon will push toward the desired outcome.

## **Conclusion**

The parables of the New Testament provide an excellent framework from which contemporary preachers can work to proclaim the unsettling news of a disturbing gospel. Three primary strategies will guide this process as attention focuses toward orientation, disorientation and reorientation. Orientation will serve to open up a general way for the listeners to enter into the text where they can determine their location and begin to take in a detailed tour of what the text has to offer. Disorientation will work systematically to name what is disturbing or unsettling to the listeners' frame of reference as they enter the strangeness of the biblical text's world. By intentionally engaging textual speed bumps, listeners press naturally toward theological tensions and wrestle with these on their own terms. Reorientation systematically works to draw fragmented pieces back into a whole, with the intent of using rhetorical impact (what the text is doing) to shape the design and structure of the sermon. In short, the preacher works to mirror what the text is doing within the body of the sermon. If the text is inspiring faith, so should the sermon. If the text is confronting injustice, so should the sermon. If the text is enlivening hope, so should the sermon. Note: in these points of reference, the preacher works to use strong verbs to articulate the action of the text. It is not just that the text informs, explains, or enlightens, although these responses may all be representative of what is going on in a given text. Rather, it is recognizing that the Word of God is reaching out to listeners with holy energy and divine power. While biblical texts may impart information and explain complex doctrine, the bigger issue is how the text assimilates the response of both the head and the heart. In so doing, we ask what is enlivened or awakened within those sitting in the pews? Preachers who effectively navigate these elements press closer to effectively preaching what is both gripping and gloriously true of the disturbing gospel we proclaim.

Finally, preachers are encouraged to evaluate whether they have formulated concise focus and function statements to give the sermon a logical sense of for-

ward momentum and purpose. In so doing, preachers recognize that their words have the power to arrest the attention of hopeless sinners (to whom we are all kin) to bring a message that is life giving and new. How important it is then that when the sermon launches out of the gate it is moving forward toward the listener and has in clear view its final destination. To clarify further the details of this chapter, sample sermons follow so that readers might see how both parabolic and non-parabolic texts can effectively embrace the orientation-disorientation-reorientation model for preaching. Further reading resources are recommended in Appendix E for those who desire to take this study deeper.

## *Notes*

- <sup>1</sup> John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press) 1988.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975) 130.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990) 53.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989) 26.
- <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd Ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 108-109. For further discussion, see chapter 4.

## SAMPLE SERMON

# Loaves and Fishes Moments

**Text: Luke 9:10-17**  
**Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

*Julie A. Slous*

**Focus Statement:** Jesus invites us to place him continually in the center of all our problems.

**Function Statement:** The intent of this sermon is to move listeners to their own loaves and fishes moment where they might actively respond to lessons of faith.

**Homiletical Strategy:** This sermon was preached initially as part of a series entitled, "I-Witness News" which focused on varying New Testament miracle accounts. The introduction sets listeners up to think about moments in their lives where problem-solving strategies have been required. A second move within the introduction presses this toward the lived experiences of the intended audience. For it can be hard to remember the lessons of faith when faced with the hard realities of our lives.

Under **orientation**, the sermon moves to open up the biblical story with specific focus toward the disciples' struggle to know how to meet the physical needs of the five thousand people standing before them. Note: Specific emphasis is given in this section to drawing in contemporary ways in which any one of us might come at the problem. A second move is made in this section to intensify the identifica-

tion of our own struggle to call up the lessons of faith through the inclusion of the statement: sometimes it is hard to problem solve in remote places.

**Disorientation** begins as the sermon begins to unpack the significant speed bumps in the text that come primarily through the disciples' response: "Let's go buy them some food." Drawing in contemporary references and images, the goal is to give the listener the ability to see the complexity of the situation unfolding through the lens of human struggle.

The final **reorientation** section of the sermon glues the textual picture back together by calling listeners to see the lesson Jesus has had on the blackboard since the very first day of class: "Put me in the center of your problems and we will work things out together."

The sermon concludes with examples of loaves and fishes moments that would have been in the recent memory of the audience. This final move reminds the preacher of the importance of identifying God's active work in the midst of those to whom we preach. We are God's finest "I-Witness" reporters!

### **Introduction:**

I found myself in an interesting predicament a few weeks ago. It was about 10:00 p.m. in the evening. I am driving home from music rehearsals at the church. I pull in the driveway and push the button inside the van to open up the garage door, only to discover that it's not working like it normally does! So I hit the pad again, thinking maybe it just didn't connect. Still no response! So I try again...still no open door. After about five or six attempts, I start to register that something isn't quite right. So then I start working my options. I get out of the van and use my key to go in the side door of the garage. I hit the pad inside to see if that would open things up. Still nothing; but this time I hear the groaning sound of the door motor telling me that things aren't sounding so good! I don't know if I was in denial or what it was—but I give it another try. I press the button; I press it some more. I'm saying to myself—this door has to work! All of sudden, as if there had never been an issue; the door goes up with no problem. I give

a big sigh of relief. Thank you Lord—problem solved. I drive the van into its space; push the pad again and the door closes.

But as I'm walking out of the garage all of a sudden I hear these haunting voices; Julie, maybe you should just try that one more time to make sure it's going to open OK for the morning. So back I go. I put my hand to the push pad and... nothing! No winding motor sound; no lifting door. And now my van is a hostage to my garage with no possible means of escape! What to do? I have children who have to be driven to school early the next morning; I have appointments to keep; I need my vehicle on the street; not locked up in my garage. I have a problem. I need to solve this problem. I need a solution to this problem and I need it in a hurry, because the implications of this situation are feeling a little overwhelming in the moment.

As I share that story, I am conscious that trying to solve the problem of broken garage doors pales in comparison to some of the problems people in our world have to solve today. In the complexity and messiness of life, finding solutions to our problems can sometimes be very overwhelming. Sometimes when problems come, it's hard to think clearly! A teenage daughter comes and tells a parent she's pregnant; your boss tells you you're being laid off; a member of your family walks away from faith; they say they want nothing more to do with the church; your doctor gives you the tests results—it's not what you expected. It's not what you hoped for. Sometimes it's hard to work through life's problems, in both their simplest and most complex forms. Sometimes it's hard to remember the lessons of faith that are supposed to help us make sense of the moment and carry us through!

### **Orientation:**

I wonder if this was something of the disciples' experience in the passage we read earlier from Luke 9:10-17. As the disciples register the reality of their situation, it seems hard to remember the lessons of faith. Here they are in this remote place on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is not one of your more popular tourist destinations. Yet there they are doing ministry with Jesus; even though it was just supposed to be something of a retreat for Jesus and the disciples. Chances are, however, there had to have been good media coverage that day

or at least good communication via word of mouth. For on this occasion Jesus ends up attracting over five thousand people to hear his message. Jesus spends the day teaching about the Kingdom of God and healing the sick. It's been a good day in ministry. But now it's getting late. The afternoon light is almost gone. The disciples start to register the reality of their situation. Soon this crowd is going to be saying, "We're hungry; where can we get something to eat around here?" Soon they're going to need a place to sleep; all five thousand of them. And when was the last time any of us ever tried to make hotel reservations for over five thousand people? When was the last time any of us tried to rustle up a few leftovers to feed that kind of a crowd? We have no on-line connections to check out available accommodations in Bethsaida; the disciples register their reality... and they struggle to remember the lessons of faith.

Vs. 12: They finally go to Jesus and say, "Master; we've got a situation developing here. Here's what you need to do! You need to send this crowd away now so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place." We don't have a lot of options for problem solving here.

Last summer we found ourselves in a similar situation. We were driving the Trans-Canada Highway in southern Saskatchewan's remote prairie land. All along the way, we are taking careful note of where the next gas stations are. We pass a sign that says: Next service station 45 km. I look at my husband. He looks at me. No problem we'll make it! All of sudden about a half hour later, we have to register reality: we are not going to make the forty-five kilometers remaining. The gas gauge is getting very low, with all the head winds we had experienced. It is time to fuel up—but there's no service to be found, except maybe in one of these off-the-beaten-track prairie communities. So off the highway we go into this tiny prairie community.

There are two houses; and two elderly men sitting outside in their pickup truck talking. We pull up alongside. We roll down the window. "Anywhere around here to get gas?" we say. These fellows scratch their heads. "Hmmm," they say. "Mikey up the hill; he might keep some in his garage from when he used to fix lawn mowers! You could give him a try!" So we make our way up the hill. Needless to say, Mikey who used to fix lawnmowers didn't have the gas and we probably made it on fumes the rest of the way down the road. *When we have*

*to solve problems in remote places, sometimes, this can be a hard thing!* Sometimes “remote” comes through our feelings of loneliness, abandonment or just the strangeness of the unfamiliar road we are being forced to travel. When faced with the reality of our problems, sometimes it’s hard to see the possibilities and it’s hard to call up the lessons of faith.

### **Disorientation:**

Jesus has but one solution to offer to this reality that is presenting itself to the disciples. He looks them square in the eyes and he says: “Boys! You give them something to eat! You solve this problem!”

I can only imagine the look that must have flashed across their faces: “Us? Us—give them something to eat. Listen, Jesus, the best we can come up with here is five loaves of bread. Count them, Jesus: one, two, three, four, five. That’s—well, do the math; that’s roughly one loaf of bread for every thousand people! And over here, we’ve got no more than two fish! Not sure, Jesus, this is really going to fly here! Unless, well, here’s an idea...we could go out and buy something for this crowd!”

And it’s right there in that moment of Luke’s rendering of this story, we have firsthand evidence that these disciples don’t get it! While recognizing their reality, they are failing to call up the lessons of faith. They are not thinking too clearly in the moment. Here, Jesus has yet one more teaching opportunity with the Twelve. Yes, they have a problem; yes, they need a solution; yes, they need it in a hurry. But going out to buy food; how was that going to work? What corner store at the intersection of no-where and no-where is going to have enough provisions to feed more than five thousand people? What remote community is going to have even a pizza service that can deliver for this kind of crowd? Think about it. If, at best, an extra large pizza could feed six to eight people, we’d need approximately eight hundred and thirty three pizzas, and that’s only feeding the men in the crowd! We still have to add in the women and children! Or what desert remote place can instantly produce caterers to take on a meal for this multitude? Shall we just call out for a KFC buffet or maybe Chinese take out, anyone? Where might we reasonably think we could buy this food?

Then add into this story one other significant speed bump. Look back to what Luke tells us in vs. 3 of this chapter. Because here is another reality! Jesus has

commissioned these disciples to declare their complete solidarity with the poor and to place their total trust in Christ to provide for their needs. Vs. 3: these disciples aren't traveling with any money. Jesus says, "Take nothing for the journey; no staff, no bag, no bread, no money and no extra tunic." So whose budget is going to pay for this brainy idea to "buy food for the masses?" What fund are we going to take this out of, if we have one at all?

Now overwhelmed by the responsibility that is being thrust upon them, the disciples register their reality, but fail to apply the lesson of faith.

### **Reorientation:**

In this moment of the story, Jesus seeks to teach a lesson that has been on the blackboard from the very first day of classes! Jesus is saying trust me to provide what is needed. Put me in the center of this problem and let me work this out with you.

So the teaching moment unfolds. At Jesus' command, the disciples divide the crowd into groups of fifty. (Notice they do not argue with Jesus about this; they know Jesus' track record; they know something extraordinary is about to happen.) Vs. 16: taking the loaves and the two fish, looking up to Heaven, he gives thanks and breaks the bread. Then he gives the food to the disciples to pass out to the people. Everyone eats; everyone is satisfied; and there's more tuna fish sandwiches left over than any one of us could imagine! As Jesus is placed at the center of the problem, he pours out his power, and every need present that day is met in Christ and in Christ alone. Here again is the lesson of faith! *When we are faced with difficult realities, when we have to problem-solve in remote places, Jesus calls us to remember the lessons of faith and to put him at the center of our circumstances.*

We don't have to be in the remote region of Bethsaida following in the footsteps of the disciples to know that Jesus is alive and actively working in our world. Loaves and fishes moments still happen in the places where you and I live. It was true in Bathurst New Brunswick on Wednesday, January 16, 2008 when over five thousand people gathered to say farewell to seven young basketball players who were victims of a tragic road crash. As their names were called out in the service, the officiating clergy said, "Think of these young men with hope and faith; for they do not belong to death, they belong to Jesus Christ. For it is from the light of Jesus Christ we draw our strength and our vision to move forward when the darkness befalls us." You see, I think that was a kind of loaves

and fishes moment. Jesus is being brought into the center of the picture. Jesus is being brought into all that pain and heartache. Jesus Christ was ministering his grace to hurting broken people.

We saw it right here in Winnipeg last Tuesday. Lisa Klassen's SUV plunges over the guardrail of a North Perimeter Bridge and spirals into the Red River. Yet God is in the center of that reality. God sends his rescuers. And we've heard wonderful words of testimony from this family as they have spoken about their faith and the strength they draw from Christ. Again it's a loaves and fishes moment. God is being brought into the center of this reality and God's people trust him in the moment. What are some of the things in your life to which God is saying "trust me; just depend on me?"

Let us again today confirm and reaffirm the lesson of the loaves and the fishes. Let us throw ourselves into the wideness of God's mercy and the fullness of Christ's love where there will always be abundance for us all, and the table will never be empty; but with Christ, we will always be filled.

# OUT OF CAPTIVITY

*Jamie D. Leonard*

*"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." Ezekiel 36:25-27 (KJV)*

Holiness is in the Salvationist's DNA. It is, to take a few of our own lines, "the pathway of duty," it is the result of putting our "... all on the altar, waiting for the fire ..." and it is being "... filled with the Holy Ghost, saved to the uttermost." Holiness fills our thoughts, is the shout of our battle cries, and is the display of the fullness of our submission to Christ. Bramwell Booth, our second general, wrote colorfully in *Echoes and Memories* about the Holy Spirit invading a Salvationist prayer meeting:

At night Corbridge led the hallelujah meeting till 10 o'clock. Then we commenced an All-Night of Prayer. Two hundred and fifty people were present till 1am; two hundred or so after. A tremendous time. From the very first, Jehovah was passing by, searching, softening and subduing every

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heart. The power of the Holy Ghost fell on Robinson and prostrated him. He nearly fainted twice. The brother of the Blandys entered into full liberty and then he shouted, wept, clapped his hands, danced, amid a scene of the most glorious and heavenly enthusiasm. Others meanwhile were lying prostrate on the floor, some of them groaning for perfect deliverance . . .

What a beautiful image that I would love to see in our Corps again!

As we look at the text today from Ezekiel 36:25-27, we see that *Ezekiel prophesied to the Israelites that after release from captivity, God would purge their sin and make them holy. In the same way, God desires to rescue us from physical bondage and restore the soul places scarred by that captivity. It is my prayer that through this sermon, God will bring restoration through the cleansing and filling of His Spirit.*

### **Holiness begins with the removal of sin**

The Jews in this passage were living in Babylon. It's interesting to note that this wasn't all of the Jews, however. When they were taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, under the reign of Jehoiachin, King of Judah, only the leaders and the richest Jews were taken. Evidence of this is seen in Daniel 1, where we read of his capture along with his comrades, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Remember those names. While in Babylon, life was changed for them. The Jews were expected to give up their Hebrew ways of life. Everything became conformed to the Babylonian lifestyle – including their idol worship.

When Ezekiel prophesied to these captives, of whom he was a part from a previous exile, he was saying that they would be restored to the Jews remaining in Judah, but also that their restoration required cleansing—something they had long since forgotten about. During this exile, nearly every aspect of their Jewish heritage, including the celebration of festivals and ritual sacrifices, had been abolished. Because there was no sacrifice, there was no need for cleansing. In every sense of the word, these Jews were filthy, filthy with sin.

One of the first things Nebuchadnezzar did with this new crop of captives was to bring some of them into his service. A few names you would recognize are the ones I mentioned earlier—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

While the other Jews went gladly into submission to Nebuchadnezzar and became a part of the Babylonian way of life, these four men stood their ground. Daniel 1:8 says, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself . . ." For Ezekiel to say in verse 25, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" was a direct statement to those Babylonian Jews who did not possess the resolve Daniel did.

The point God was trying to make through Ezekiel was that in order for them to receive full restoration as His people, the Jews must be brought to their purest form. In order for the sacrifice that brings salvation to be made available, they had to be cleansed. I can imagine the nostalgia that may have erupted in the hearts of the elders as they remembered the days of journeying to the Tabernacle to worship God. As the high priest entered for sacrifice, he would wash himself in the basin of water, making himself clean enough to enter the Holy of Holies. God could not bring them to the point of being His holy people without the cleansing from sin, which meant renouncing their newfound Babylonian ways.

While we don't have a basin of water outside the front door, nor is this chapel a place where only the holiest men may enter, it is still a reality that we cannot possibly embark on the path to holiness without first being cleansed from our sins. Ezekiel mentioned being cleansed from impurities and from all idols. An integral step to holiness is humility—realization of our place in the sight of God, and the place of everything else in the world as well. To be clean is to be free and to be free is to have nothing placed between you and your Heavenly Father.

In 1818, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis was born into a world of dying women. The finest hospitals lost one out of six young mothers to the scourge of "childbed fever." A doctor's daily routine began in the dissecting room where he performed autopsies. From there he made his way to the hospital to examine expectant mothers without ever pausing to wash his hands. Dr. Semmelweis was the first man in history to associate such examinations with the resultant infection and death. His own practice was to wash with a chlorine solution, and after eleven years and the delivery of 8,537 babies, he lost only 184 mothers—about one in fifty.

He spent the vigor of his life lecturing and debating with his colleagues.

Once he argued, "Puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material, conveyed to a wound . . . I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said. But while we talk, talk, talk, gentlemen, women are dying. I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash . . . For God's sake, wash your hands." Semmelweis died insane at the age of 47, his wash basins discarded, his colleagues laughing in his face, and the death rattle of a thousand women ringing in his ears.

"Wash me!" was the anguished prayer of King David. "Wash!" was the message of John the Baptist. "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me," said the towel-draped Jesus to Peter. Without our being washed clean, we all die from the contamination of sin. For God's sake, wash.

Washing, however, is not enough for holiness; the act is more than skin-deep.

### **In order to be holy, you must be fully transformed**

The outer cleansing that was mentioned in verse 25 is elaborated on in verse 26, where the Lord says through Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." In the years that the Jews had been living in Babylon, with their rituals and ways of worship stripped from them, they had become hardened against God. They weren't living in the full walk of evil in the ways that the Babylonians were, but they were slowly but surely becoming immune to it. Daniel 3 tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar setting up the golden idol in Babylon, then commanding everyone to fall down and worship the image. Verse seven of that chapter tells us that, ". . . all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image . . ." All, of course, except for our friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. This shows how conformed the Jews had become to the Babylonian way of life. For many of the younger Jews, the idea of cleansing meant nothing. Knowing this, God went deeper when he spoke to their hearts. The Hebrew word for heart in this text is "b'l", and means a person's conscience and will. Basically, God was speaking to the very essence of a person's existence. In the way that we understand "heart," it's as the organ that produces life. If the Jews were living with hearts of stone, cold and dead, it was impossible for life to flow out of it, or for a new life to

flow into it, in the form of holiness.

Being that the heart is the seat of life for a human, one can presume that being clean yet made of stone makes you nothing more than just that: a shiny rock, completely lifeless and unable to dictate one's actions, motives and will. What good is it for a person to be clean yet devoid of life? God did not create humans with a heart of stone. He created us with the ability to live and breathe and find our existence in Him alone. When we walk through this world, we often become immune to the sin around us and fail to realize our slow fade into stone. Many of the things that hold us captive don't seem oppressive.

Drinking can be joyous for a moment, excessive spending habits can give you social status, and climbing the corporate ladder is a desirable career choice for most Americans. In .21 seconds, Google returns 1.3 million results for "How to control your emotions," most of which suggest developing immunity to the things around you that can have a negative effect on your psyche. Children are taught the phrase, "I'm rubber, you're glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you." Unfortunately, this way of thinking puts a big hold on your transformation from stone to flesh and holds off the process of holiness. Living in captivity is different from embracing captivity. Being in the world is different from being of the world. Altering our hearts to become like the world around us turns our hearts to stone and takes the life out of us. It takes a heavenly heart transplant to revive that life within us.

Jon Acuff, creator of the blog [StuffChristiansLike.net](http://StuffChristiansLike.net), writes often about the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15. In one of my favorite entries, he details the activities that lead up to the son's leaving home. Luke 15:13 says, "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living." Acuff suggests that the son's leaving, just like our sin, isn't an instantaneous action: It is a slow fade, a slow turning to embrace our captors. The Babylonian Jews did just that. Until we have clean hands and a full heart, our spirit is not free to be filled.

### **Full sanctification requires being filled with the Holy Spirit**

In verse 26, God said through the prophet, "I will put a new spirit in you . . ." but He doesn't touch that thought again until verse 27. There, He gets more

specific on this “spirit” that would be put into the Jews. He says, “I will put my Spirit in you . . .” In these verses, the word spirit is the same each time it’s used. It’s also the same word that is used in Genesis 1:2, which mentions the “Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Out of this Spirit which was hovering over a void, came all creation. Genesis 2:7 says, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Without the Spirit of God—the “ruach” of God—there is no life, no fullness and no definition to creation.

These were all things that the Jews would have understood well, being taught the account of creation from their childhood. However, considering their time in captivity and their disconnection from the worship of God, it could have been easy to forget about it. The accounts of the Babylonian captivity are filled with references to sorcerers and magicians who were kept close by to interpret dreams, signs and evil spirits. The concept of “spirit” wasn’t foreign to these people, but the idea of a Holy Spirit, directly from God was culturally incomprehensible. Until the Jews were cleansed of their sin and received new life, they could not receive the Spirit of God which would move them to remain in relationship with Him.

The progression of this Scripture has been from the outside in, seemingly opposite of our normal approach to salvation. In your initial salvation, you do tend to act from the inside out. First, you feel the conviction of Holy Spirit in your soul and gradually, the grace you’ve received begins to manifest itself as you turn from your sinful ways towards Christ in order to walk in His ways. Holiness, however, is the other way around. As one who is already a follower of Christ, you know what your former self used to be like.

You know of the sin you so lavishly frolicked in for years of your life. And hallelujah, that most of that has changed! Holiness is getting down to the nitty-gritty and cleaning out the in-betweens and cobwebbed corners of your soul. Holiness is not sinless perfection but rather a maturing, growing sanctification; it is an increased Christlikeness. The Hebrew word for “move” used here is “to create”. In essence, by being filled with the Spirit of God, you are restored to your original created intent to be one who was created for submissive relationship with and service to God.

Mark 7:31-37 chronicles the story of the healing of a man who was both deaf

and mute. The focus of this story is often the word "Ephphatha" which means, "be opened". However, I'm intrigued with a rather insignificant word here. Verse 34 says that Jesus sighed before He spoke to the man. This sigh, a deep groan, is connected to the same word in Romans 8:26 which refers to the act of the Holy Spirit interceding for us. While Jesus is in great pain over our broken state, the Holy Spirit is groaning and breathing over us to work holiness in us. In order to receive the Holy Spirit promised to the Jews in Ezekiel 36, and promised to us at Pentecost, we must heed the groans and be opened to receive Him. What is keeping closed the door to your spirit? If you have been cleansed by the washing of His blood and have been restored to your Creator's original design, then the next move should be to desire holiness in the inmost parts.

Samuel Logan Brengle says the following about receiving the Holy Spirit:

The next thing to do is to come to Jesus for the blessing, with a true heart, holding back nothing, but giving your all to Him for time and eternity, that He may give His all to you. At this point there must be no hypocrisy, no double-dealing, no half-heartedness, no holding back part of the price. The Lord offers us the biggest blessing this side of Heaven. He offers us perfect cleansing from sin, perfect victory over the devil, and the Holy Spirit to dwell in our clean hearts to teach and guide and comfort us; but in exchange He asks us to give Him our little all. How infinitely and hopelessly foolish shall we be if we are so selfish or tearful or unbelieving as to refuse! It is as though a king should offer a poor beggar garments of velvet and gold in exchange for rags, diamonds in exchange for dirt, and a glorious palace in place of a cellar or garret. How foolish would the beggar be who should insist on keeping a few of his rags, a little handful of his dirt, and the privilege of going back to his cellar now and again until the king finally withdrew all the splendid things he had offered! And yet so foolish, and more so, are they who try to get this blessing from God, while refusing to consecrate their all and obey Him fully.

Are you living a life of holiness or are you remaining in your captivity to the world, all the while resembling the beggar who rejected the gifts of the king? You must allow God to cleanse you from your sin through the blood of

His Son. Once you're clean, the Father can perform your spiritual heart transplant to put His source of life into you so that you can be as you were designed. Finally, the walk of holiness requires that you be filled with His Spirit and continuously pressing toward Christlikeness. Song number 522 in the Songbook is a beautiful hymn of repentance on the journey of holiness for the Salvationist heart. If our feet have faltered, as did the Jews in Babylon, if our purposes have altered, just like the Jews who abandoned their worship of God, and if we need to pass through a sterner cleansing, let us come to Jesus now to be brought to full submission to His Spirit. Verse three says,

I must love thee, love must rule me,  
 Springing up and flowing forth  
 From a childlike heart within me,  
 Or my work is nothing worth.  
 Love with passion and with patience,  
 Love with principle and fire,  
 Love with heart and mind and utterance,  
 Serving Christ my one desire.

Let that be your prayer as you kneel at the mercy seat offering a deeper surrender to Christ in order to be more like Him.

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# Shalom: The Biblical Vision in a Broken World

*Donald E. Burke*

## **Introduction**

During 1889 and 1890 William Booth underwent what Roger Green has termed a “second conversion experience,” as he moved The Salvation Army from a single-minded focus on the salvation of souls to a dual ministry of salvation for both worlds. Green argues that while prior to 1889 Booth had been focused upon the mission of saving the souls of those with whom he and The Salvation Army came into contact, after that time the Founder incorporated a new emphasis into his theology and ministry. William Booth’s 1889 article, “Salvation for Both Worlds,” provides Booth’s own explanation of this change:

“. . . as I came to look more closely into things, and gathered more experience of the ways of God to man, I discovered that the miseries from which I sought to save man in the next world were substantially the same as those from which I everywhere found him suffering in this, and that they proceeded from the same cause—that is, from his alienation from, and his rebellion against God, and then from his own disordered dispositions and

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appetites . . . But with this discovery there also came another, which has been growing and growing in clearness and intensity from that hour to this—which was that I had two gospels of deliverance to preach—one for each world, or rather, one gospel which applied alike to both. I saw that when the Bible said, ‘He that believeth shall be saved,’ it meant not only saved from the miseries of the future world, but from the miseries of this [world] also. That it came from the promise of salvation here and now, from hell and sin and vice and crime and idleness and extravagance, and consequently very largely from poverty and disease, and the majority of kindred woes.”’

In this remarkable statement, Booth asserts that the salvation proclaimed and mediated by the Army needs to embrace not only the world to come, but also this world. While Booth’s articulation of the two-pronged notion of salvation for both worlds at this time was an innovation in his core message, efforts to meet the temporal needs of people were not. There is ample evidence that prior to 1889 social ministries had sprung up within the Army. In a sense, then, Booth’s theological articulation was catching up with the developing ministry of The Salvation Army. But he went further by grounding this emerging work in the Gospel and speaking of salvation for both worlds.

His embrace of social ministries and the creation of the Social Reform Wing signaled an institutionalization and organization of what to that point had been spontaneous and rather haphazard efforts to alleviate the temporal suffering of the poor. Now Booth grounded these efforts in the Gospel. Fundamentally, Booth recast our theology of salvation to make it more inclusive than a single-minded focus on individuals and their salvation in the world to come. What was now at stake was the salvation of the world both in the age to come and in this age. In a dramatic way Booth moved the social mandate to the center of his Gospel message.

Since the time of Booth, the Army has struggled to hold together these two foci of its mission within an integrated theology. Just as Booth, in what sounds like a Freudian slip, referred to “two gospels—one for each world” and immediately corrected himself to speak of one gospel which applies to both this world and the next, the Army has struggled to hold together these two emphases within one mission and one theology. One could cite various efforts to articulate a theology that encompasses the breadth of the Army’s mission.

But there is, as yet, no compelling theology of salvation for both worlds that has gained widespread assent within the Army. We have either a theology of individual salvation or attempts to articulate a theology of social services. The result is that frequently we continue to conduct our social ministries with a rather vague conviction about the need to serve our neighbor while not really having unified our mission or our theology.

The emphasis in Booth's own thinking was that through its social mission The Salvation Army was seeking not simply to reduce the suffering of the poor, as laudable as that might be, but was seeking to reform the world. The goal was not the provision of a social service, but the salvation and the transformation of the "world." This larger vision included both the deliverance of the individual from bondage to sin with the promise of eternal salvation and the transformation of the world to resemble the Kingdom of God. As the postmillennial optimism of the 19th century receded, so too did our vision of the "world for God." While we may have attempted to retain a measure of this vision with a remnant of our passion for the salvation of individuals, we have for the most part abandoned our sense of the larger purpose toward which our social efforts are directed. This, I think, is what is lacking in recent Salvation Army thinking about its mission: a compelling vision of the goal toward which our efforts are dedicated. What we are left with is a shell of our mission without the theological foundation at which Booth hinted.

The argument that I wish to put forward in this lecture is that within the Scriptures there is a compelling vision of life in this world which can ground our integrated mission and inform a broader theology of salvation for both worlds. It is a vision for the wholeness and health of the whole creation, not simply in the world to come, but in this world. In the Old Testament, one word characterizes this vision of wholeness and its embodiment in community: *shalom*. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word that is translated into English frequently as "peace." But if, when we hear the word "peace" we think primarily of the absence of conflict or the opposite of war, we have missed the most compelling content of the biblical term *shalom*. Yes, *shalom* can be translated correctly as peace, but in a broader sense that includes "wholeness," "well-being" and "human flourishing."

In the Old Testament *shalom* is a word that is used to portray the wholeness or flourish-ing of life that was expected in Israel as a community and envisioned for all of creation. Walter Brueggemann describes *shalom* as "the sub-

stance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all creation.” In his effort to sketch out more fully its meaning, Perry Yoder suggests that there are three aspects to the biblical idea of *shalom*: first, there is physical and material well-being. According to Yoder, when referring to the physical and material state of affairs, *shalom* can refer to having an abundance, to being safe and sound. Second, there is the well-being of healthy relationships in a community. In the realm of social relationships, *shalom* refers to healthy, life-affirming relationships. Here *shalom* is closely related to justice, if justice is understood as foundational to strong, positive social relationships. Third, *shalom* refers to moral integrity and honesty. That is, there is a kind of personal *shalom* that is manifest in the quality of person. While Yoder’s description is helpful for understanding *shalom* within the context of human community, I would wish to expand its horizon to include all of creation, as does Brueggemann.

Therefore, in this lecture I want to sketch briefly the broad outlines of a biblical vision of a world community characterized by *shalom* which, I think, expresses Booth’s vision of the world for God or salvation for both worlds. I hope that it will begin to show how a return to our roots in the biblical narrative can ground our mission and our theology of salvation. It is my contention that a review of the biblical vision of a community of *shalom* may serve as a welcome reminder of the goal of our efforts to “serve suffering humanity” and the integrity of the mission of The Salvation Army.

### The *Shalom* Community in Creation

God’s quest to forge a faithful human community within a broader vision of a world of *shalom* stands at the center of the Scriptures from beginning to end. The simple observation that the Christian canon begins with the creation of an ideal world of peace (Genesis 1-2) and ends with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21) should alert us to the importance of this large stage on which God’s purposes in the world are worked out: Between these bookends in the canon, we find the world as experienced—a world mixed with intimacy and alienation, with sin and grace, and with death and life. In the light of this, we begin by reviewing both the world as created and the world as experienced in Genesis 1-11.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, with their depiction of a world fresh from the fingers of the Creator, we find described a world of harmony and

order. In Genesis 1, all of creation is designed with an order and integrity that prompts the divine judgment at each stage that it was "good." In Genesis 1:31, at the completion of six days of creative activity, God's assessment was that everything God had created was "very good." Within this world of *shalom* humanity is given a place at the center of the organized and harmonious creation. Created in the image and likeness of God, humankind is commissioned to tend and care for the creation as God's vice-regent (Genesis 1:26-31). In Genesis 2, with its emphasis on the character of humankind, God has created a world that is marked by intimate relationships between God and humanity, between humanity and the rest of the creation, and between the man and the woman in the garden (that is, within the human community). The overall impression created in the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 is that God created a world in which *shalom* flourishes.

The idyllic world of Genesis 1-2 is short-lived, however, since in Genesis 3 human disobedience brings the rupture of these three complexes of relationship. In the scene in the garden, after their disobedience, the fracture of the relationship between God and the human creatures is evident as the humans immediately hide in the bushes from God as the Creator takes an evening stroll. The relationship between humanity and the rest of creation is shattered as the serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly and is doomed to hostility between itself and the offspring of the man and the woman (Genesis 3:15).

Further, the ground is now cursed and will yield its produce only after burdensome human labor. Finally, within the human community, strife and hierarchy will characterize the relationship between male and female. Their first impulse after the disobedience was to hide from one another behind temporary clothing, and a few verses later the unhealthy patriarchal relationship between the man and the woman is instituted (Genesis 3:16). In other words, the *shalom* of Genesis 1-2 has been shattered as rivalry, strife and alienation replace the harmony and order of creation.

We only have to read through Genesis 4-11 to see the continued unraveling of the community of *shalom* that God had created. In Genesis 4, the conflict within the human community explodes with sibling rivalry and fratricide as Cain murders Abel. Near the end of chapter 4 we find the mounting violence reaching an apex in the declaration of Lamech that wantonly he will take the life of any who come into conflict with him. In Genesis 6 we find God lamenting that "the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every

inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). We could continue by rehearsing the story of the flood which is portrayed as an attempt by God to salvage creation, but which is followed only by the continued perversity of even the righteous Noah and his sons.

Genesis 11 draws the downfall of the world to a conclusion with the rebellion at the Tower of Babel and the notation near the end of the chapter that Sarai, the wife of Abram, was barren (Genesis 11:30). Thus, the shape of Genesis 1-11 moves from the blessing of humankind and creation in Genesis 1 to the infertility of Sarai and Abram at the end of chapter 11. To put it another way, the world moves from the *shalom* of creation to the conflict and strife of chaos. I rehearse this narrative of decline and fall because it is foundational for the rest of the biblical drama. But the downward spiral is not all that is encountered in these early chapters of Genesis. Alongside this sad story of decline there is another narrative thread which announces the determination of God to continue to work with this recalcitrant human community.

Thus in Genesis 3, after announcing the consequences of their disobedience, God nonetheless clothes the man and the woman (Genesis 3:21). In Genesis 4, after Cain has killed Abel, God protects Cain with a mark that sets him apart as out of bounds for all acts of violence (Genesis 4:15). In the flood story, God saves one family and at the conclusion of the flood commits never to destroy the earth again in this way (Genesis 8:22). Finally, in the face of the barrenness of Sarai and Abram, in Genesis 12, God pronounces a blessing upon them. To borrow a phrase from the Apostle Paul, “where sin abounds, grace abounds even more” (Romans 5:20). This is the key to understanding the entire biblical drama: God’s efforts to forge a world of *shalom*—God’s commitment to humanity and creation—compel God’s grace to outstrip humanity’s abounding sin.

Certainly in the Old Testament, and I think in the New Testament as well, this abounding grace is manifest in the possibility of a faithful human community. Yes, the *shalom* community of the garden has been lost, but there remain glimpses of what a faithful human community could and should look like. The first major step toward the articulation of that vision of a faithful human community of *shalom* emerges from the brutal experience of slavery in Egypt and the liberating action of Israel’s God.

### The Exodus Experience as the Foundation of Israel's Community of *Shalom*

It is almost impossible to overstate the significance of the events of the exodus in the faith and life of Israel. Here Israel's God acted decisively to free an oppressed people from the burden of a stratified and ruthless socio-political system. The God of the Hebrews overthrew the pretensions of the Pharaoh to permanence and absolute authority which had led on the one hand to the elevation of Pharaoh's self-interests and on the other hand to the marginalization and suffering of the Israelite slaves. In the exodus, God sided decisively *with* the slaves and decisively *against* the slave-drivers. Both their suffering and their deliverance were deeply ingrained in Israel's collective memory. These experiences taught Israel first of all about the character of its God, and second about the kind of community they were called to become. To help us understand Israel's confession about the LORD and its impact upon its life as a community, we are going to draw upon the work of Paul Hanson.

Hanson argues that Israel's distinctive vision of community is grounded in its encounter with the God of the exodus and is a response to that experience. Hanson characterizes Israel's understanding of the delivering God as a triangle, each corner of which represents one of the attributes of God that is manifested in the exodus. In the first corner, we find the divine righteousness as a norm which applies to all people and which orders a society dependably and securely. In its best sense this righteousness of God acts to maintain the well-being of the community, reflects a standard for the equitable distribution of resources and power, and acts against those systems and individuals who diminish the well-being of others. God's righteousness leads to God's deep investment in the right ordering of the community and his unwavering opposition to the unjust ordering of the community.

The second corner of the triangle is grounded in God's compassion as one who ". . . reaches out to redeem even those excluded from life's benefits and society's protection, a God who in that way provides the example for a community which was to extend its compassion to those otherwise vulnerable to abuse, like the widow and orphan, the indebted and alien." God's compassionate attentiveness to the weak and oppressed is coupled with divine righteousness when God both raises up the weak and tears down the mighty! This was Israel's experience in the exodus and it made a deep impression on their faith.

The third divine characteristic that is evident in the exodus is God's sover-

eignty over all the earth, even over the seemingly incontestable power of Pharaoh, his slave drivers and the system of oppression over which he presided. Alternatively, this can be described as God's holiness, that is, the essential character of God that sets the LORD apart qualitatively from all other claimants to sovereignty and worship. In Exodus 7-14 Pharaoh is reduced to a parody of power, as he is systematically stripped of his ability to claim sovereignty over the Hebrew slaves and is forced to acknowledge the sole sovereignty of Israel's God. The Song of Moses in Exodus 15 lauds the LORD as one whose holiness sets him above all others.

Israel's vocation, arising out of the exodus, was to establish a community that embodies these divine attributes. Thus, in its life together, Israel was not to go the way of Egypt; that is, it was not simply to recreate Egyptian power structures, the only difference being that now an Israelite sat in Pharaoh's stead. Rather, Israel was called to live as an alternative community grounded in the memory of its salvation in the exodus and in response to the threefold revelation of God's character. It is for this reason that the book of Deuteronomy repeatedly exhorts the Israelites to remember that they were slaves in Egypt. Thus, in its life as a community, Israel was to establish *righteousness* as the pattern of right order with the broad distribution of power and resources; *compassion* as its modus operandi in its dealings with the weakest members of its society, and *worship* of the Lord God as the anchor that leads to the recognition that human communities of *shalom* are not autonomous, but rather live in response and faithfulness to God.

Hanson observes that it is difficult to maintain righteousness and compassion in balance in the life of communities. They tend to fall out of balance as communities move along the axis from righteousness to compassion. An overemphasis on righteousness can lead to a rigidity and harshness that elevates the maintenance of law and order to a place of supreme importance. In this case, the weak often are sacrificed for the sake of order and to protect those who live at the center of power and wealth. On the other hand, an overemphasis on compassion can degenerate "...into a pampering or permissive form of compassion which fails to structure life, and which easily leads to rule by whimsy in which the poor and weak become victims of the powerful."

The balance between righteousness and compassion can be maintained only when joined with a third divine attribute anchored in the third corner of the triangle: God's sole and sovereign majesty. The recognition of divine rule over

all human life, including the social order and arrangements of power, prevents any particular arrangement from being elevated to a position of unquestioned authority. In the exodus, God acted against the Egyptian power structure, which was grounded in the ideology that Pharaoh and his policies were secured by Pharaoh's status as a god. Israel's God established sovereignty over even the divine claims of Pharaoh and every ordering of society that claims absolute status. Within Israel as a community, this third quality was lived out as worship, which cultivated an abiding awareness of divine sovereignty over all human power arrangements.

Hanson describes the dynamic interaction between righteousness, compassion and worship in the ongoing life of Israel in this way:

The righteousness of God represented a universal standard of justice that ordered life, defined the realm in which Yahweh's *s\*ālôm* could be received, and gave rise to ordinances and institutions that formed a protective wall around the people that sheltered it from life-threatening dangers. Compassion allowed righteousness in Israel to maintain its stringency as a clear and dependable standard by giving it a heart, and by wedding its just requirements with openness and concern for the salvation of all members of God's family. Finally, the two were able to work together as a life-enhancing polarity in maintaining an ordered but open society by finding their unity in worship of the one holy God, the Judge of the wicked and the Redeemer of the repentant and the innocent oppressed.

For Hanson, *shalom* is the best term to describe this vision of a community which is lived out in the dynamic intersection of righteousness, compassion and worship that are all grounded in the God of Israel.

### **Deuteronomy: The Vision Codified**

This vision of a world and of a human community characterized by *shalom* stands behind much of what we read both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the biblical story, Israel was called out of Egypt—out from under the burden of an oppressive socio-economic system of slavery and into the freedom of service to the LORD their God to create an alternative community. In this alternative community, power was to be distributed widely; resources

were to be shared broadly; the accumulation of great wealth was to be regulated; poverty was not to become entrenched; the concentration of power in the hands of a few was to be prevented; and when wrongs inevitably were committed, then the system of justice was to set things back in order. The urgency that is evident on these matters in the book of Deuteronomy confirms the reality that such a human community of *shalom* is, indeed, hard work. It is hard work because it flies in the face of basic human tendencies to set self-interest over the broader interest of a community of our neighbors.

The vision of Israel as a community of *shalom* grounds the legal materials of the book of Deuteronomy. Structured as an exposition of Israel's identity as a community of freed slaves, Deuteronomy repeatedly exhorts its readers to remember who they are (that is, a marginal people who have been delivered by the gracious actions of the LORD) and from where they have come (that is, out of Egypt, the land of slavery and oppression). This collective memory is to shape and inform their life together.

Two basic characteristics stand out. First of all, Deuteronomy has an unremitting emphasis upon Israel's acknowledgement of the sole sovereignty of the LORD their God. This is reinforced by the shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Lesser gods, whether they are found in the form of idols in wood, metal or stone or in the form of human pretenders to power, are to have no place in Israel. It is for this reason that the authority of those who will by virtue of their office hold great power, such as the king, and who inevitably will be tempted to claim even greater power, is circumscribed by the command to study the Torah incessantly (Deuteronomy 17). In fact, in its discussion of the role of the king in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the monarch is given only one positive task: to study the Torah. This will help the king to resist the temptation to claim sovereignty that belongs only to God.

Second, Deuteronomy includes specific provisions that are designed to prevent the development of unforgiving social, economic and political class distinctions in Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 15, 24). Rather than a hierarchical, pyramid-like social structure such as that found in Egypt, Deuteronomy calls for a more circular social organization in which power, resources and influence are widely distributed across the community. The result is that Deuteronomy codifies provisions which are intended to limit the practice of slavery, prevent the development of trans-generational poverty, deter the accumulation of land and

vast wealth by a few and correct injustices that would tend to threaten the very integrity of the community. Deuteronomy envisions a community in which the individual rights of the one do not outweigh the well-being of the many. Israel is to live with a deep-seated concern for one's neighbor. Israel's bitter experience of suffering in slavery in Egypt was to be memorialized to ensure that Israel itself did not institute a new pseudo-Egyptian oppression.

Having said all of this, Deuteronomy was profoundly realistic about the tendency to drift away from this vision of a community of *shalom*, for it runs counter to the human propensity to self-interest and self-assertion. This realism was vindicated by the fact that when Israel did establish a monarchy, its kings quickly adopted the royal patterns of their neighbors and abandoned the social vision that grew out of the exodus tradition. Solomon, although in places praised as a wise and discerning king, nevertheless is also recorded as one who accelerated the drift away from the Deuteronomic vision of a community of *shalom*. He taxed his people heavily, instituted forced labor to complete his building projects, and enriched his treasury at the expense of the most vulnerable in Israel. His successors, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and in the southern kingdom of Judah, continued along this same trajectory as the two kingdoms became fundamentally indistinguishable from Egypt and their other neighbors.

### **The Prophets: Critics and Visionaries**

With the rise of the monarchy in Israel and the social, economic, political and religious changes occurring, the prophets of Israel ranted against the injustices that were perpetrated in the Israelite community not simply because the actions of the wealthy and powerful were unfair, but because they represented a betrayal of Israel's vocation to be an alternative community in which *shalom* would flourish. As wealth, power and influence were concentrated in the king and those closest to him, there was a corresponding impoverishment and marginalization of the majority of Israelites. The subsistence economy of Israel, which required a delicate balance of resources and interests, collapsed.

From the prophets of the eighth century we learn that large tracts of land were being stripped from the peasant farmers and placed in the hands of absentee landowners. With the loss of their land, these now landless peasants lost their voice within the Israelite community. The legal system which had been

established to maintain the *shalom* of the community became an instrument of oppression. What was “legal” had little relation to what was “just.” As a result, prophets such as Amos could declare in God’s name, “The end has come upon my people Israel” (Amos 8:2).

One of the characteristic emphases of the Old Testament prophets is their call for the establishment of justice and righteousness. To understand this emphasis upon justice and righteousness, we have to place it in the context of the larger vision of Israel as a community of *shalom*. As individual acts of oppression, dishonesty and theft were left uncorrected in Israel, the quality of the community itself deteriorated in small, incremental ways over a long period of time. As power and resources increasingly were taken away from the weak and deposited in the hands of the power, injustice and the abuse of power became more common. For Israel, the legal system—and the justice it was intended to establish—was the means through which fractures in the *shalom* of the community could be healed.

Through action taken within the community legal processes, justice would serve to restore the wholeness of the community. Justice was the bridge between the brokenness of human community and the vision of a community of *shalom*. The much disparaged laws of the Old Testament, for the most part, are not aimed at retribution, but at the healing of a broken community. Israel’s legal system was not focused on revenge or deterrence, or law and order, but rather on the restoration of a shattered *shalom*. Old Testament justice is restorative rather than retributive. In the Old Testament, justice is not simply about getting even; it is about getting it right.

For this reason, the whole biblical tradition of justice, or of what we might call social justice, does not stand on its own, as though justice has an independent value or importance. In the Bible, justice always functions in the service of the health of the community. The prophetic call to establish justice and righteousness is a call to heal the community through the corrective and positive actions that would restore a measure of *shalom*.

Further, we misunderstand Israel’s prophets if we think that their critique of the injustices they confronted was borne simply out of human compassion and a sense of fairness. More fundamentally, the prophets understood Israel’s community life as it developed in the time of the monarchy to be a betrayal of the social vision that stood behind their identity as an alternative community. It is this betrayal that prompted the outrage and venom that is so characteristic of

the prophets—and which is so embarrassing for 21st century Christians. For many of the prophets, Israel was no longer the faithful human community they had been called to become; Israel was no longer the *shalom* community living in covenant with the LORD.

But while the prophets could be extremely harsh in their condemnation of Israel, for many of the prophets their blunt messages were coupled with dramatic visions of the kind of community Israel should have been and which God would someday establish. When their attention turns away from the failings of the people of God in the present toward the future, these same prophets reach rhetorical heights in their descriptions of wolves laying down with lambs (Isaiah 11:6), of swords being beaten into ploughshares (Micah 4:3; Isaiah 2:4), and of justice and righteousness rolling over the land like a mighty river (Amos 5:24). They are envisioning a future Israel as a community in which *shalom* flourishes. Prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel increasingly grounded these hopes not in Israel's ability to live faithfully, but in God's determination to have a faithful human community.

### **The Kingdom of God in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, the proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God, which was central to Jesus' earthly ministry, developed further this Old Testament vision of a community of *shalom*. In fact, it is founded on this Old Testament vision of Israel as a covenant community of *shalom*. As I have argued elsewhere, a focus on the the Kingdom of God as a vision for faithful human community has the ability to ground our efforts to serve others. In Jesus' proclamation of the dawning of the Kingdom and through his actions we see the contours of the community of *shalom* that is established with his advent.

Luke's gospel is especially powerful in its portrayal of Jesus' message of the Kingdom as good news for the poor. A careful reading of Luke shows that Jesus had a consistent and active ministry to those who were, for various reasons, marginalized in his society. In his declaration in the synagogue at Nazareth that, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*" (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus proclaims that with his ministry the long-awaited Kingdom of God has come. Throughout Luke, the marginal are brought to the center, and the poor are the recipients of God's grace, which extends beyond a spiritual blessing to bring wholeness in this world. This reversal of fortunes stands near the center of Jesus' Kingdom message. The Lukan beatitudes make this clear (Luke 6:20-26).

We miss the point, I think, if we conclude that Jesus' treatment of the out-cast is motivated primarily by an amorphous sense of brotherhood with his fellow human beings. Instead, it was driven by Jesus' profound commitment to the vision of the Kingdom of God come near, of a community in which *shalom* reigns over greed and injustice. Later in the New Testament, Paul's letters are permeated not simply with the desire to see individuals delivered from personal peril, but with a desire to see the Kingdom established in the churches he founded.

This vision of a community of *shalom* and the frequent failure of Paul's churches to embody that vision became a point of sharp conflict between the Apostle and his congregations. Further, in Romans 8:18-25 Paul links the entire drama of salvation and the gift of the Spirit with the groaning of the whole creation, as though it is giving birth to new life, which spills over beyond human communities to embrace all of creation. Of course, this echoes strongly with Revelation's new heaven and new earth.

The New Testament's emphasis upon the Kingdom of God and the establishment of new communities that not only acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ but also live out the implications of the Kingdom come near, thus stands in continuity with the Old Testament's vision of the covenant community as a harbinger of God's reign and the faithful human community that God works to establish.

So powerful are the biblical images of *shalom* and so deep-seated are the human aspirations for a better world in which *shalom* is embedded in its foundation, that communities seeking to live out this vision have sprung up through the centuries. The consistent biblical vision that drives our efforts to forge a faithful human community, to strive for greater human well-being and flourishing, is summarized in this one word: *shalom*. Yet at the same time, we acknowledge that the new creation is fundamentally God's will and God's work.

Having said this, we must acknowledge that while Jesus' proclamation was centered on the approach of the Kingdom of God, the reality is that the

Kingdom has not yet come in its fullness. We do not yet see the Kingdom or the community of *shalom* fully established. Through the millennia, individuals and groups have sought to establish the Kingdom or some approximation of it. In this tradition, even William Booth could write an article entitled, "The Millennium; or, the Ultimate Triumph of Salvation Army Principles." Despite the audacity of Booth's vision and ambition for the Kingdom; we do not yet see the Kingdom in its fullness; we do not yet see the community of *shalom* that is envisioned in the Bible.

For the reality is that *shalom* as this overarching wholeness and well-being of the human community, and indeed of all creation, is not part of our human experience as a realized dream. *Shalom* is never fully achieved; it is always found on the horizon of our experience and never at the center. For we live, not in an ideal world, but within the constraints of history with all of its ambiguities, compromises and injustices. The cruel reality of our communities is that *shalom* always remains a distant vision, a hope, something to which we aspire but never quite achieve; and in life in the midst of our communities there is too much brokenness, too much harm, too much violence, too much hopelessness and too much injustice.

But these harsh realities do not diminish the importance of the biblical vision of *shalom* or of a community in which human flourishing is the norm. Rather, I would contend, the vision of a community of *shalom* points us toward a goal, keeps us alive to the ways in which our best efforts fall short, and inspires us to do better. We are pulled forward toward the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, which will at last fulfill God's vision for a world of *shalom*.

### **Implications for Salvation Army Mission and Ministry**

In conclusion, I want to summarize some of the implications that I see arising from this reflection on the vision of a community of *shalom* as the foundation upon which our ministry is established. If William Booth could speak of "salvation for both worlds," then our holistic ministry should be guided by several considerations.

First, it is imperative to recognize that behind all of our efforts there stands a vision of a faithful human community in which a more equitable distribution of resources and power creates the conditions in which human and community

life can flourish. Our efforts are not motivated simply by a vague good will toward our fellow human beings. Rather, they are motivated by this vision of *shalom* that is embedded in the will of our Creator for creation and grounded in the proclamation and ministry of Jesus as he proclaimed the approach of the Kingdom of God.

Second, this vision of *shalom* itself is foundational to an understanding of the Scriptures. In the Old Testament it stands behind the legal tradition and the prophets; in the New Testament it is subsumed under the cipher of the Kingdom of God and stands at the center of the preaching of Jesus. Our fragmented reading of the Scriptures often obscures this fact. Its recovery is critical to our recovery of the coherence of our mission.

Third, while the alleviation of human suffering in specific situations is an important part of establishing *shalom*, unless it is coupled with the corresponding effort to transform our world, it falls short of the biblical mandate to strive for a better world.

Fourth, social justice is not an end in itself. Our efforts to establish justice are a means to a greater end: the creation of a community of *shalom*, the establishment of a better world. Keeping this insight in mind is critical if we are to resist the temptation to make social justice the goal of our efforts, rather than the means to a greater goal.

Fifth, despite our best efforts and God's blessing of those efforts, we never can establish fully the community of *shalom*. At best, we might achieve—and then only with God's blessing—approximations of *shalom*. Our efforts, our plans and our schemes never fully achieve their goal. The observation that *shalom* is always on the horizon of our world protects us from canonizing any particular arrangement of power and resources as though it is identical with the *shalom* of which the Scriptures speak. The fullness of the Kingdom awaits God's timing. Finally, *shalom* as a guiding and visionary principle of human life in community as God would have it, has the potential to inspire us on to greater efforts on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and the wounded—and even creation itself—with the essential acknowledgement that we await God's timing to bring them to fruition.

## Conclusion

William Booth's articulation of the mission of The Salvation Army as "sal-

vation for both worlds" resonates deeply with the experience of Salvationists, although we often have fallen short of the kind of integration of a message and mission of salvation for both worlds that Booth envisioned. In this lecture I have suggested that we are able to ground our work in this world in the biblical vision of a community of *shalom*. A fully developed theology of salvation that is worthy of Booth's vision has yet to be articulated. That will have to wait for another day.

# Book Notes

by Roger J. Green

Thorsen, Don and Keith H. Reeves, *What Christians Believe About the Bible: A Concise Guide for Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

This is an excellent text for basic biblical studies. It is invaluable, and as a heading at the back of the text states, it is helpful for “Introducing the History, Interpretation, and Theological Understandings of the Bible.” I was privileged to write one of the endorsements for this text, and so rather than repeat my comments I will quote directly from that endorsement: “This book will appeal to both the scholar and the lay reader as the writers are adept in achieving a broad appeal. They well combine a thorough knowledge of their subject, lucid prose, and a genuine desire to examine issues, including the authority, inspiration and trustworthiness of Scripture. The authors carefully define terms, use the biblical text to explain a range of issues, and faithfully reconstruct various interpretations of the Bible, always keeping the historical context of those interpretations in mind. This book is a great service to the Church, and all who read and apply it will be immeasurably enriched.”

Maddox, Randy L. and Jason E. Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

We have mentioned other books in this series, and this one will be especially interesting to our readers. Parts I and II contextualize Wesley’s theology with an overview of the eighteenth century and of the life and ministry of John Wesley. Part III develops various aspects of Wesley’s work, including a very interesting chapter on Wesley’s theological emphases, which are critical to an understanding of the theology of William and Catherine Booth and the forma-

tion of The Christian Mission and The Salvation Army. Part IV is a chapter on Wesley's legacy, and the select bibliography at the conclusion of this book will be invaluable for readers who want to follow up with a more detailed study of John Wesley and his life and ministry. Some of the leading Wesleyan scholars in the world have contributed to this book, and all who read this will be helped and will also understand something about Army history and theology.

Mahan, Asa, *Baptism of the Holy Spirit; Includes God's Provision of Power by Charles G. Finney*. Clinton, NY: Williams Publishers, n.d.

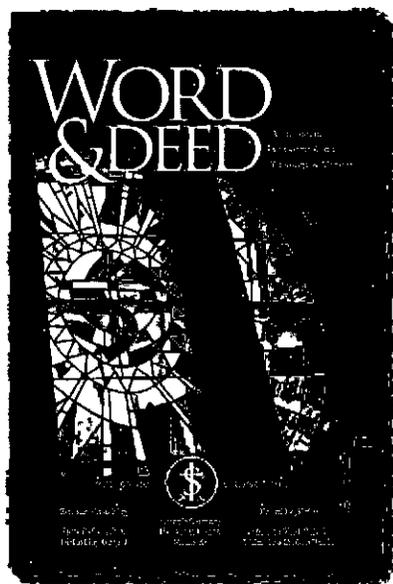
This is a reprint of two sermons on holiness. The first, written by Asa Mahan, who at the time was the president of Oberlin College and professor of theology, and the second, written by his colleague, the great evangelist Charles Grandison Finney, who was at the time also a professor of theology at Oberlin College. Reading these sermons will help the reader better to understand the great nineteenth century revival in America, as well as the renewal of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit at that time. These historical documents help us to understand our own history and theology in The Salvation Army, and remind readers why Catherine Booth was constantly advising people to read Charles Finney. But these are not sermons confined to history. The work of Christ and the Holy Spirit continue today in ways revealed in this book. This book is a means to stimulate the preaching of the doctrine of holiness in the twenty-first century.

Callen, Barry L. and Don Thorsen, eds., *Heart and Life: Rediscovering Holy Living*. Aldersgate Press, the Publications Arm of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium, in Collaboration with Emeth Press, 2012.

Here is a book giving new life to the doctrine of holiness. It is a book written for both the individual believer and the Church. There are four parts to the book: Part 1: Foundations of Holiness; Part 2: Experience of Holiness; Part 3: Applications of Holiness; and Part 4: Church Life and Holiness. Many authors from various holiness denominations contributed to this book, and as the bibliography above indicates, it was published by the publication arm of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium. Salvationists should be familiar with that consortium, of which the Army is an integral part. The web site for the Wesleyan

Holiness Consortium is [HolinessAndUnity.org](http://HolinessAndUnity.org). Readers will also find other works and conferences of the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium mentioned on that web site.

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