

Welcome, Dr. Jimmy G. Tharpe!

Today we welcome Dr. Jimmy G. Tharpe. Recently I was with Dr. Tharpe when he was celebrating his 50th anniversary with Baptist Tabernacle in Shreveport, Louisiana. He is founder of Baptist Christian College and Louisiana Baptist University. In 1969 I began my first year of college and Dr. Tharpe, our president made a lasting impression on me. It was in the Fall Bible Conference that the Lord began to seriously deal with me about the ministry. By March, 1970 I had surrendered to preach. I announced my call at Baptist Tabernacle and my pastor, Dr. Tharpe, who along with my father (Missions Director and professor) proffered me the blessing of God. Immediately God began to use me in revival meetings, youth revivals, Bible and Mission Conferences. The last of my teen years and beginning of my 20s was an exciting time in my life. The blessings, to God be the glory, were nothing short of phenomenal. Although I went from there to serve the Lord in one of the largest churches in America, I shall never forget the formative years with Dr. Tharpe. God used Dr. Tharpe to influence so many young lives. Allow me to take a few minutes of your time to tell you how Dr. Jimmy Tharpe was used of God to influence me. He taught me to:

1. Preach with enthusiasm.

Dr. Tharpe entered the pulpit with knowledge, wisdom and dignity. Throughout his message he never lost his knowledge and wisdom, but before the message was over he had managed to lose his dignity. And I say this to compliment him. He usually wore a dark conservative suit, highly polished shoes, and every hair on his head in place. Before the sermon was over, however, his hair had often swayed onto his forehead, he had unbuttoned his top shirt button, and he had sweat through his suit. He would remind one of the kind of preacher President Lincoln said he enjoyed. Lincoln said, "He liked to see a preacher preach who looked as though he were fighting bees."

Every sermon was a masterpiece. I remember visiting him and seeing him pore over his Bible. He filled his heart with the Word and things from our world that illustrated his message. However, when he preached he had retained much to memory, so that he delivered his homily with eye contact and conviction. His sermon was so much more than a piece of paper that he read from - it was a message from his heart. He has exemplified the Bible verse that says, "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*" (II Timothy 4:2).

2. Love People.

Although health issues have taken much of that youthful vigor, he has not lost his exemplary love with a willingness to show it to people. Dr. Tharpe - or as he was most affectionately referred to by his congregates, "Brother Jimmy" - has always been willing to go the extra mile with anybody.

Will Rogers said, "I never met a man I didn't like." This could be said of Dr. Tharpe as well. There were never any little people to this man. I have seen him talk to children with utmost respect. I have seen him laugh with mentally retarded people. He treated every woman like a lady and every man like a gentleman. During the time of America's youth rebellion of the 1960s, I have seen this godly man look deep into the eyes of a teen to see where he was coming from while at the same time never losing their respect when he informed them where God was coming from! Like our Lord who "so loved the world," so does Brother Jimmy.

Like my father, Brother Jimmy was a dreamer. His greatest fulfillment is not seen as much in the physicality of massive buildings and sky-scrapers, but in the lives of the young men and young ladies that he pastored or served as president. Off the cuff, I am thinking of men who became great evangelists, pastors, missionaries and song writers. I am thinking of Evangelist Jim Brown, former president of Arkansas Bible Baptist Fellowship, who now preaches all over the world, Pastor Richard White (Atlanta, Georgia), former president of The Southwide Baptist Fellowship, and song-writer, Jim Riden. Have you ever heard these words: "I owed a debt I could not pay; He paid a debt He did not owe"? Jim wrote these

words and music when I was in my first year at BCC. All of these men that I have mentioned would say the same thing I am telling you today, i.e., Brother Jimmy loved me, believed in me, and encouraged me to live up to my God-called potential. Great is that man who sees greatness in other people and pulls it out of them! *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise..."* (Proverbs 13:20).

3. Hate Sin.

I don't know if I've ever met anybody that enjoyed a good laugh better than Dr. Tharpe. He looked for humor in everything and seemed to have a knack for finding it. Although he had a fantastic sense of humor, he took sinning against God very seriously. When it came to wrongdoing, he never compromised. We live in era that is almost bereft of preaching against sin. Like Israel in Isaiah's day many congregations in this age are saying, *"...Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits"* (Isaiah 30:10).

I have seen this man haul off and "knock sin for a loop" from the pulpit. I have also seen this man weep like a child over children of the Lord who embraced the very sin he preached against. He hated sin and at the same time loved the sinner. This pastor showed the Shepherd's heart in the days of his pastorate. Even as the Lord said of David, he was *"...a man after mine own heart..."* (Acts 13:22).

4. Live with Expectation.

Our guest today is the undying optimist. He is the man who sees the cup half full, not half empty. I have seen friends come against him, finances get tight, and some of those great dreams go up in smoke. But pretty soon Dr. Tharpe would get his second wind and - look out! - here he comes with a plan and another great dream!

No matter how dark the day, Brother Jimmy looked for the silver lining behind every cloud. And when events of the moment would not seem to lift others, he would often encourage others with his preaching of the return of the Lord. When he preaches about the rapture his countenance brightens, his voice becomes elated and the awareness of Christ presence is obvious. He taught all to know that things were gong to be "picking up" no matter what we go through. *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...Wherefore comfort one another with these words"* (I Thessalonians 4:16, 18).

We welcome one of my mentors and great friends of a lifetime, Dr. Jimmy G. Tharpe! *"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not..."* (Prov.27:9,10).

- Pastor Pope -

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