

## Acadiana Reunion!

Tonight I will be speaking in New Iberia, Louisiana. My wife is with me and as I write these words. We were married in 1973 and soon afterwards in the summer of 1974 we began to travel in evangelism. Throughout the first few years of our marriage we were periodically in south Louisiana. So last night and today I find myself engulfed in nostalgia. We are seeing old friends such as Otis and Beverly Marinoni. Beverly reminded me of a visit Pastor Gott and I made to their house 33 years ago and Otis got saved! He didn't miss a service this week. I miss my old friend, Pastor Harlan Gott, who is now with the Lord. However, it is encouraging seeing one of his preacher boys, Travis Brice picking up the mantle and preaching the same message.

God schooled me in my youth when I was often with these dear people. The unique heritage of the people of this area of America is unlike anywhere in our country, but their history is so much a part of what makes this country so compelling. The American Indian would be the first people to roam these parts. Then along came the European influence of Germany and Spain. In what is known as the Great Expulsion (*le Grand Dérangement*) of 1755-1763, during the Seven Years' War between England and France, more than 14,000 Acadians (three-quarters of the Acadian population in Nova Scotia) were expelled, their homes burned and their lands confiscated. Families were split up, and the Acadians were dispersed throughout the British lands in North America; thousands were transported to France. Gradually, some managed to make their way to Louisiana, creating the Cajun population and culture after mixing with others. One of the most intriguing aspects of this culture, often overlooked, revolves around the French revolution (1789-1799). There were reasons this was called the "reign of terror." Under the cruel and unusual punishment of the atheistic and attempted enlightened revolution, many of the people of the aristocratic descent were arbitrarily beheaded and properties stolen by the "citizenry mob." During this time, many of the aristocrats from France found a place where they could speak their native tongue and have some semblance of the culture in which they were reared. In the overall aspect, this area of the country represents a composite of those Emma Lazarus referred to in her poem as "...your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." These words were inscribed at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, which as a matter of interest, was a gift from France. On a personal and spiritual quest, I would like to talk about things I've learned in Cajun Country.

### 1. God's will is for all people to be included in evangelism.

A few years ago, I was going door-to-door soul winning with a local pastor outside of Lafayette, Louisiana and as we knocked on doors, the residents said, "Bonjour!" When the pastor heard this, he commenced speaking French to the person. It was fascinating to be in America and walking through communities where English is not spoken. I could see the illumination come to their eyes when they heard "the old, old story" in their tongue. I was reminded of the response of the recipients on the Day of Pentecost, "*And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*" (Acts 2:8).

I experienced an attitude of the need of missionaries to go everywhere preaching the Gospel; the Bible says, "*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Philippians 2:10,11). God's delight is having every nationality in Heaven with Him. The Word of God prophesies, "*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*" (Revelation 5:9).

### 2. People are people everywhere.

When I first preached down here, I was saddened by the number of folks whose marriages had fallen apart. Just today at dinner with the pastor and family and Mrs. Gott, there was lamentation that many of the candidates for “Reformer’s Unanimous” (a biblically based program for recovering addicts) had difficulties here because many of the folk in these parts live for “the party life,” which is inclusive of imbibing in alcohol. The catchword is, “Laissez les bons temps roulez” which translated means: “Let the good times roll.” Yet out of this environment in the 1970s came a young lady by the name of Angie with a beautiful little daughter who “lit up” every room she entered, named Kelsey. When I preached a revival there, it was the first time this brand new convert had ever been in a Baptist church. Well over 30 years later, this lady said she remembered everything about her introduction to Christianity. She loved revival and thought we Baptists met together, sang and preached every night! Well, her little girl grew up in a fundamental, independent Baptist Church and married the preacher’s son, Cason.

Last night was a heart-wrenching service, for you see, Cason’s precious wife, Kelsea just passed into glory at the “ripe old” age of 34. She was expecting their fourth child when it was discovered she had cancer. At 20 months, she lost her baby, and then two weeks after her child’s passing, she joined him. They re-interred her baby with his mother. Last night after the service, Cason came up to Barbara and me and gave us a picture of their family. He is now left with three sons, 6, 4 and 2 years old. The grandmothers are now substitute teachers for their home-schooling mom. My heart went out to this young widower who misses his happy, virtuous wife. What if Pastor Gott, who went to Bible college in South Carolina, had not returned with his wife (affectionately known as Mrs. Pete) to their home area and started Temple Baptist Church? Well, Angie probably would have never been introduced to the Gospel and little Kelsey would not have been reared up in a Bible believing church. Although she lived only 34 years, it was an abundant, Christ-centered life. People are people everywhere, they can be saved, they can live, they can laugh, they can hurt and they can die – but oh, what a better life and definitely a better death, all because of Jesus.

### **3. Make the Word understandable.**

In the first revival I preached here, there was a young man named John for whom everyone had been praying. He had been reared up staunch Roman Catholic and was living a wicked life. He was the town bully in New Iberia and people feared him. The church was all in a buzz the night he came to the services; they couldn’t believe it. I preached the Gospel and then gave the invitation. During the invitation, I kept saying, “Come to Jesus.” I couldn’t help it; my eyes kept going over to him. As I gave the stanzas of invitation, he would look up at the front. As I would extend the invitation again he would look around in bewilderment. He had raised his hand that he wanted to know Christ, so I didn’t think I was out of line to go back while heads were bowed and eyes were closed and ask him if he would like to come forward and become a Christian. He answered, “Yes, and I was looking for Jesus, but couldn’t see Him and didn’t know where to go. Sure, if you can show me, I’m ready!” To those of us reared up in evangelical churches, that may sound crazy, but John’s only remembrance of church was a cathedral looking building with pictures of saints and a statue of Jesus. He was just looking for the statue so he could go to it and find help. What we gave Him through the Word of God was so much more than a statue; we introduced him to the person of Christ. I learned a never-to-be-forgotten lesson that evening. I learned to never take for granted everybody knows what we are saying when we preach and witness. I am thankful for these Cajuns who have taught me to make it plain and keep it understandable. Oh, by the way, John did come to Jesus that night and is still serving Him in Acadiana.

- Pastor Pope -

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