

No Place Like This Place; This Must Be the Place!

Today we welcome Dr. Harold Clayton, our friend of a lifetime. I began preaching for Dr. Clayton as a teen-age college student in the early seventies. At that time Dr. Clayton was pastor of the Greenwood Village Baptist Church of Houston, Texas. The first service I preached for Dr. Clayton was the New Years' Eve Service, 1971. I would often be invited back to preach Beulah Land Camp Meeting, Youth Camp and the Annual Bible Conference. Those were great days when some of the world's finest pulpiteers preached for Dr. Clayton such as Dr. Robert G. Lee, Dr. J. Harold Smith, Evangelist Freddie Gage and Dr. Harold B. Sightler.

After I had been preaching over ten years in evangelism and college teaching, Dr. Clayton called, asking me to consider pastoring a mission work that was started in Northwest Harris County. I fondly remember Dr. Clayton explaining to me that it wasn't his idea to call me, but rather his wife (now with the Lord), Mary Ellen Clayton that kept bugging him to call me. He said, "She has been having this dream that you are supposed to be here." I remember it was like yesterday, although it was November of 1980. We fasted and prayed and received confirmation in our hearts that this was going to be our home. My wife, Barbara and I prayed that God would move us to a place where we would spend the better part of our life together. And God has marvelously answered that prayer.

On a beautiful winter Sunday morning in Houston, 43 years ago (January 18, 1981), I preached my first sermon as pastor of Northwest Greenwood Village Baptist Church. I was 29 years old; my wife Barbara was 27. Our eldest child, Heather Dawn was a bubbly, bouncy 3-year-old, our second child Juliana Marie had just turned one. Jonathan Paul and Sean Patrick were yet to be born. We were meeting on what was then State Road 149 in Northwest Harris County, 22 miles from downtown Houston. It was a small rented old church house with limited parking. On the following Tuesday, January 20, 1981, after our first Sunday, we moved into our first house. It was rented and simple, but it was home. And we were glad to be there. I was no longer working for the world's largest Sunday School in the Indiana suburbs of Chicago. I was now employed by God, shipwrecked on the shores of Providence with the promises of the Word of God and a hand full of youngsters in our home and in our pews. But we had dreams! Big dreams! As we began to move our furniture in, we plugged our 19-inch black and white television set into the electrical outlet and raised our small antenna. The first thing that appeared on the set was the face of Ronald Reagan giving his first inaugural address as President of the United States. Perhaps this is one reason I have always felt a kindred spirit with President Reagan, because we shared a new beginning together. Although we definitely did not receive the fanfare of a president, we could not have been happier. We knew God had orchestrated the whole thing. On that day President Reagan said, "It is time for us to realize that we're too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams.... We have every right to dream heroic dreams." On January 18, 1981, I started dreaming with Northwest Greenwood Village Baptist Church and I am thanking

God for the answers to big prayers. In August of 1982 we moved to our own property in Prestonwood Forest, changing our name to Prestonwood Baptist Church. We built two buildings that we soon outgrew. Then December 5, 1999 we moved to our present facility and took the name Christchurch Baptist Fellowship striving to walk in His Love, His Grace, and to be His Church. We are still believing God for the answers to even greater prayers and fulfillment of our grandest dreams. Above all, I long to bring glory to God and exalt the majesty of Christ who died, was buried, lives forevermore and who will soon return.

Today we welcome Dr. Clayton back to Houston and are thankful for his part in being used of God to bring me to this place. As we have said before, "There is no place like this place, anywhere near this place. This must be The Place!" With that in mind, I consider Christchurch:

I. THE BELOVED PLACE OF WORSHIP

Psalm 84:1, 2: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

The word amiable comes to us from a Hebrew word meaning "well-beloved." Too many people come to the house of God simply out of habit. When David was referring to the tabernacles he was talking about the tents making up the Outer Court, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. This was not the exotic and outwardly beautiful Temple that Solomon later built. As you approached the ancient Tabernacle, you saw the rough skins of covering and what appeared to be a very modest structure. Ah! But the beauty was on the inside.

II. THE BLESSED PLACE FOR FAMILY

Psalm 84:3, 4: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah." Here we observe David almost with envy, reminiscing seeing the birds who made their nests in the eaves of God's house. On another occasion David said in Psalm 55:6, "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." It's as though David is saying, I would like to fly back to Zion, back to the house of God. But I see a tender longing for another chance with his children. He moves into metaphor, longing to have his family, like a nest, back at the altars of God.

I agree with Spurgeon who said that Psalm 84 "exhales Davidic perfume." The time is David's exile in the wilderness. Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Israel; David has vacated the throne, his house and (even more sadly for him) the nearness to the Tabernacle, the place of God's abode on the earth. II Samuel 15:30, shows us the heartbreak of it all: "And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

III. THE BURDEN-LIFTING PLACE

Psalm 84:5-8: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah."

David is longing to make the pilgrimage home to the house of God. David is aware that he shall be weeping the tears of longing. *Baca* means "weeping." God will allow our tears to form a well. But even in the tears and trials we can say with Isaiah, "...I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:2b, 3). The heart breaks, but God supplies strength. It breaks again and He supplies strength again.

IV. THE BEST PLACE FOR ALL TO BE

Psalm 84:9-12: "Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."

There can be no better place than in the presence of God. One day with Him is better than one thousand without Him. David even goes so far as to say, I would rather be with the sons of Korah and keep the door. Easton's Bible Dictionary says this word signifies properly "sitting at the threshold in the house of God." The Psalmist means that he would rather stand at the door of God's house and merely look in, than dwell in houses where iniquity prevailed.

F. B. Meyer commented about God being our Sun and Shield: "A Sun in dark hours and a Shade in scorching ones. Grace is the bud of glory. Glory is the flower of grace. If God has given the first, He will give the second. If He withholds aught on which you have set your heart, believe it is not really good and still trust Him. We stand in grace and look for glory."

Nothing that is best for us will be deprived if we look to Him! Psalm 34:5: "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed." God's will, God's house, God's place is the best place to be!

-Pastor Pope-