

Born to Win

You Are the Miracle

by Ronald L. Dart

Matthew 16

KJV

¹⁸ [...U]pon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

These are some of the most familiar words Jesus ever spoke—spoken far and wide, *misunderstood* far and wide. I really fear, sometimes, people don't really grasp what he's talking about and what that statement really meant. I see three important things that follow on this narrow part of his statement.

One: Jesus' church was not going to be "remodeled Judaism". It was not going to be a continuation—a revamping—of the Old Testament church. There's an assumption on some parts that the church is a continuum: Old Testament and New Testament. These are not the words that Jesus used to describe this. He says, "I *will* build"—future—and it's "my church". The language—the way he says this—leads me to believe that he's doing something that is entirely new. To do otherwise would have been to put new wine in old bottles.

Second: The word rendered "church" [ekklésia, ἐκκλησία, Strong's G1577] means "assembly". You can't have an assembly of one person. Not possible. You've got to have at least two, preferably three (and preferably more than that) before you actually can call the thing a "church".

Third: If the church is to be *built*, sooner or later someone is going to have to lay some bricks. That is unavoidable, and it's on this last point that I want us to reflect today. I think sometimes we look at the work of Jesus as being kind of like a form of magic. All we have to do is come to church; park our carcasses; sing hymns; listen to a sermon; have some cookies, coffee, sandwiches, or whatever afterward; and go home; and that *somehow* the church will, almost like magic, grow because of the miraculous work that Jesus Christ will do to build his church.

But there's something funny, also, about this statement: The expression about "the gates of hell" does not mean that a given church can't die. For example, the Corinthian church is no more. It didn't last a hundred years after the time that Paul wrote his letter. The church at Philippi disappeared. The church at Troas disappeared. The church at Ephesus, Smyrna, and the Galatians churches *all disappeared* from the scene—probably all within the first hundred years after they got their letters.

Now, do you think these churches died out because of a failure on Jesus' part? Of course not; that's an absurd thing to say. Well, who failed? Where did the failure come about that these churches ceased to exist. Oh, it's possible, of course, that something could come in and just overwhelm the church and kill them all off. But that's not really what happened. People migrate, people change, but the churches in those places did cease to exist. The church continued but, as I say, in different places.

Now, we are here today in this room because of the work of a great cloud of people who went on before us. They did works great and small, but all those works were in fact the work of Christ. They were Christ *working in* those people who did those things, and made those sacrifices, that eventually brought

this gaggle of people into this room, on this day, during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Apostle Paul... we all know we owe a debt to him, don't we? Our debt to Paul is *mammoth*—it's *huge*—because of the writings that he did, the *powerful* influence he had on the early church. We know that. Now Paul, though, wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians, chapter three, verse five. He said this:

1 Corinthians 3

AKJV

⁵ Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers [*servants*] by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

⁶ I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

⁷ So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase.

So Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was nothing. Now, I hope Paul is going to forgive me but, while I can accept that statement at a certain level, I would have to remind him of something he said later in the same letter. It's down in chapter nine, and I'm going to start reading to you from verse 19. I want you to listen carefully to what he said. First of all he says, "I'm nothing. Apollos is nothing. It's God that gives the increase." We all agree. We're happy with that. But listen to what he wrote later. He said, in verse 19 of chapter nine:

1 Corinthians 9

AKJV

¹⁹ For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might gain the more.

²⁰ And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

²¹ To them that are without law [*a bunch of outlaws*], as without law [*I became as an outlaw. Not really, but sort of*], (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

²² To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: [...]

And then he makes this astonishing statement.

1 Corinthians 9

AKJV

²² [...] I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Now, you better think that through. Because what Paul is sitting here and telling us is "I'm doing what I'm doing so that *I* could save somebody." Okay, now we begin to get a little bit broader picture of what he means in all of the things he says. Paul firmly believed that he could fail, and that if he failed people would die. He felt that what he did—his sacrifice, all the suffering, all the pain, all the loss—meant *nothing* because what he was after was the souls, the lives—the eternal lives—of people who would be in the Kingdom of God because of what he did, and who would *not* be in the Kingdom of God if he didn't do it.

So I think we can say safely Paul believed his work made a difference. It is also clear that he saw it, not as *his* work, but as Christ working *in and through him*. And this is the crucial thing to understand. It is not that we can do this on our own; we can't. But it is also not that Christ does it over here somewhere and we just, sort of, watch it happen. Christ *in us* does these things, and if we won't do them, he probably won't make us do it. Most of us are not like Jonah. So let's not be ungrateful at this stage and

at this pass in the history of the church, and let's give thanks to all the men and all the women of faith who have gone before us. They're bricklayers all, in the building of Christ.

We all know the contribution made by the apostles, and all those first-century Christians, and the sacrifices they made, but these are not the only bricklayers that have made a contribution to where we are today, what we know, what we understand, and what we are able to do and believe. Does the name "William Tyndale" mean anything to you? Have you ever heard that fellow's name? What did he do? What made him important in the history of things?

Well, William Tyndale was born about 1494 (they're not sure of the date). He died (they *are* sure of this date) on October 6th, 1536. He was a 16th-century Protestant reformer and a scholar who translated the Bible into the Early Modern English of his day. He brought it right into the vernacular. He wrote what I suppose would be comparable to *The Living Bible* (except that, really, his was a translation, not just a paraphrase. A number of partial and complete Old English translations had been made from the 7th century onward. You know, people started working in English, in the 7th century, making translations of the Bible into the English of their day. "Tyndale's was the first to take advantage of the new medium of print, which allowed for its wide distribution." In 1535, Tyndale was arrested, jailed in the castle of Vilvoorde (outside Brussels, Belgium) for more than a year. He was tried for heresy and treason, and then strangled and burnt at the stake in the castle's courtyard.

What do we owe this guy? Well, much of Tyndale's work eventually found its way into the *King James Version* of the Bible (which was published in 1611) and, while it was nominally the work of 54 independent scholars, it's based primarily on Tyndale's translation. Just out of curiosity, how many of you people are holding, right now, a King James Version of the Bible?

Do we know this guy anything? It's *plain* to me we do. I mean, when I first started reading the Bible, King James was the only guy in town. There were no other Bibles available to me for the *longest* period of time. And then when somebody did the *Revised Standard Version*, I remember some preacher saying, "Well, having the Revised Standard Version is like having a *snake* in your house." (But, you know, that's the thing with it [that is, translation disputes].)

What we have to understand is there was a period of time in which a number of dedicated men *believed* in the Bible who *gave* their lives—actually, *day by day*, gave their lives. All their time, their study, their whole heart was in bringing into the language of the people *that book* as clearly, as accurately, and as honestly as they possibly could. And I don't know that we, to this day, can tally up all of those who, like Tyndale, lost their lives because the powers that be were afraid of putting the Bible into the hands of *dolts like you*—fearing that you wouldn't know what to do with it, fearing you would go off in some terrible direction with it. (They meant well, I suppose, but, you know, what can I say?) Could you think this Protestant scholar might be considered a bricklayer in the house of the Lord? He certainly made a contribution for us.

Now, if we turn around, though, and start from the present day, and we begin to work our way backward over the path that led us to where we are here today, we're going to encounter a lot of names—some of them familiar, some of them not familiar at all. I want to introduce you today to a fellow named Horace Driver. Horace is Allie's brother. He's my brother-in-law. When I mustered out the Navy in 1956, Allie and I returned to Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. As it happened, Horace (who was single at the time) was working as a railroad telegrapher...it seems like it was about two hours away from us, down in West Texas there. He had been a Baptist at some time in the past. He had left the Baptist church to join this sect called the Radio Church of God. (Some of you may have heard of that; it later became the Worldwide Church of God.)

Well, I was planning on being a Baptist minister someday (that's why I had gone to Hardin-Simmons University) and I set out to *re-convert* Horace back to the faith. He would come up to visit us on a regular basis, and we would sit down and talk about the Bible, and I would ask questions, and I would

challenge his beliefs. And sometimes we were up until two and three o'clock in the morning talking about the Bible, and issues of doctrine, belief, and history, and prophecy, and all these things. Well, obviously, I was not successful at converting him back to the faith. I ended up going to Ambassador College and ended up in the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God (which was the renamed from the Radio Church of God).

Now, it wasn't that Horace knew the Bible any better than I did. What made the difference is...and it wasn't that he had the doctrines down pat. He certainly didn't. There were lots of times I *stumped* him and he said, "I'll have to get back to you on that", but he *always* did. Stubborn young man. What made the difference was that he was *right* in some important areas and I wasn't. That's what made the difference. But what *really* made the difference was his *perseverance*—the fact that he tried, he gave the answer, he stayed with it, he didn't get mad at me, he didn't give up. He threw up his hands more than once, but he never did really give up. He was ready, willing, and able to *talk* to me about it as long as I was willing to talk.

So I owe a debt to Horace Driver, who is a brick in the Church of God. And if you think CEM has been a blessing to you in some way, you owe Horace a debt, as well, because it is through this path that I have come to be standing here in this pulpit today. If it weren't for him, I might not be here. Now, I understand we could argue, "Well, God might have called you a different way." Maybe he would. Maybe he would not. How can we know? We really can't. We just know what has happened, and we know the path. Now, it's true that he wasn't the only contributor, but when you think about this type of thing you begin to realize that, while there are any number of people who make their contribution, there are *points*—little pivotal points—where, if something is missing, *the whole thing falls*.

And, for me, Horace Driver might have been the thing that, if he had been missing, the whole thing might never have taken place. We can't really know. We just, kind of, know what our responsibilities are. Now, don't worry. You don't owe him anything that you have to *pay*. You have to pay it forward. You have to take the responsibility that's come to you from the sacrifice that people before you have made (some are living, some are dead) and you have a responsibility to carry that forward. Horace is in a nursing home in Gladewater, Texas, suffering from Parkinson's disease now, kind of helpless, but he will be rewarded—big time—because he stayed faithful and he tried.

Now, let me digress for just a moment to point out something else that comes from this particular lesson that might not be obvious. When someone tries to proselyte you, do you get annoyed? Is it kind of aggravating when somebody...you're standing at a bus stop or you're sitting on a train or somewhere and somebody says, "Hey, do you know the Lord, brother?" Well, I've had it happen to me on numerous occasions. Of course, I say, "Yes, I certainly do." And people will do that. But what that person is actually doing is *opening the door* for you to talk to *him*. That's what happened to me with Horace. When I challenged him on his beliefs, I opened the door. And, you see, once you open the door, air can go in and out both ways, right? Well, it certainly did, in our case, and made a big difference.

What you need to do is to spend some time getting your story down pat, so that when your chance comes you won't drop the ball. I was listening to the radio the other day and I heard somebody talking about a sales deal. And his point was that you need to get your *spiel*—a two-minute *spiel*—down pat. You need to practice it. You need to be able to say it naturally. You need to be able to get it exactly right. Do it over and over again until you have it right, so that when you encounter a prospective customer you don't stumble over yourself. You just give them the statement, and off you go—two minutes. You ought to do that. You ought to have maybe one, two, three two-minute statements that you can make if someone opens the door to you, let's say, from the perspective of somebody who's out there soul-winning for Christ. He doesn't know whether you're a Christian or not. He wants to be sure...and one of the questions you will get from time to time is, "You born again, brother?" And that's a *beautiful* door. But you've got to know how to do it, see? And you need to have thought about it before you get there. 1 Peter, chapter three, and verse 13. Peter writes and says:

1 Peter 3

NIV '84

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”

¹⁵ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Now, that's a *real* tall order. I'll tell you what the scripture is so you can read it again and again: 1 Peter 3:13–16. You need to remember that. Not only that you need to be ready to give the answer, but that you should always do it with *gentleness and respect* to people. And you may be *amazed* at what comes of that. Because, if you're ready, God can send somebody right by you and cause *him* to open the door so that you don't even have to.

Well, what do you say, then, when someone says, “Do you know that the Lord, Brother?” What do you say when someone says, “Are you born again?” Work on it. Know what you're going to say. It can turn you into a bricklayer. And if God happens to send this person to you *deliberately*, don't let him down. Don't let him down. Jesus Christ *in you* will build his church out of those bricks that you encounter along the way.

Now, I know someone is thinking about how some of those bricks and bricklayers have been a disappointment to us in the past. Yeah, well, nobody's perfect are they? (Of course, some are more imperfect than others, it seems.) That's true, and yet they were all bricks and bricklayers in the house of God. When we bought our first house in Tyler, I was interested to learn that the brick veneer on the house was called Old Chicago Used Brick. I wonder how many of you know what that is. It's a particular kind of brick—Old Chicago Used Brick. It came from a time (I don't think necessarily altogether in Chicago) of tearing down old buildings. And because many of those old buildings were brick, and the brick was *painted*, a lot of the bricks that came down would be white, some would be black, some would be red. They would have different colors and all in them.

What happened was that, as those walls came down, they'd hire people to go in there with hammers and little chisels, and they would knock all the masonry off those bricks—one at a time—and stack them so they could then be used again. They gave a house a remarkable character. They're very attractive, actually. It kept it from being just that funny blank brick wall look that so many houses have got. Some bricks were black, some were white, some were brick-colored (amazingly). But all of them had that rough, weathered look. The edges were not sharp. They had been used before. So, when I look at that...they still made a very handsome house. I still prefer that brick, and the look of that house, to the one we're living in today. Now, the fact that some of our bricks were black doesn't mean they didn't fill their place in their time. We owe them a debt, and we should not trivialize that debt by chipping away at it. Let someone else do that if they feel they must. But for us, I think we should appreciate what has come to us from those old bricklayers.

Months ago, I came across an article in the journal *First Things* that caused me to rethink something. As I said earlier, I think we expect Jesus to act *magically* in our lives. You know, you go to your bedroom, you're praying that God will get you a job, and you get up from the prayer, and you expect maybe the phone will ring—somebody will call and offer you a job, even though you didn't go looking for one. In fact, far more often, God acts in real time and in the person—a real person—rather than by some mumbo-jumbo or some kind of magic. The article postulated (and I thought it was fascinating) that sometimes a prayer is not answered because the Christian who was sent to answer it failed the call.

Now, that's something that every one of us, when we go to God in prayer, really should take a moment or two to talk to God about—realizing that he uses us, that he sends us, that he calls us, that he has tasks to be done, and whenever he wants to send bread to a hungry person, well, how's he going to do it? Is he going to fly it in with a stork? Not likely. He's going to do it by someone who's a bricklayer in his house, someone who is a worker, someone who has said, "Lord, I will serve you. How can I help?" And then he opens a door for you to help.

Consider a man named Philip. Philip had a burgeoning evangelistic work going on up in Samaria. You may remember him; he's one of the original deacons that were ordained in the Jerusalem church [Acts 6]. Well, this particular one turned out to be a very powerful preacher, and he went off up in Samaria and was baptizing people all over the place. Well, all of a sudden one day, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip and said:

Acts 8

AKJV

²⁶ [...] Arise, and go toward the south to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert.

It is to Philip's eternal credit that he did not ask, "What for?" I don't think he had a clue. He said, "Go", and Philip says, "Okay, I'll go."

Acts 8

KJ2000

²⁷ And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship [*He believed in God.*],

²⁸ Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Isaiah the prophet.

²⁹ Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join yourself to this chariot.

And this is interesting. This was the *last thing* Philip had to be told. It didn't have to tell him how to do it, what to do, or anything else. He got close to the man and heard him reading out of the prophet Isaiah. And Philip asked the eternal question:

Acts 8

NIV '84

³⁰ [...] Do you understand what you are reading? [...]

I gave this in a sermon once on Personal Evangelism [*Personal Evangelism #1*], and a fellow wrote me later on. He said: "You know, the funniest thing happened. I was going into the bank the other day. (I had to get to my safe deposit box; I wanted to get something out of it.) And as they were taking me through the door to the safe deposit boxes, there's a woman sitting there reading her Bible. And I stopped, and I turned to her (because I had just heard it in your sermon) and I said, 'Do you understand what you're reading?' And she looked at him and said, 'Sometimes I do; sometimes I don't.'" And he sat down, and they must have talked for an hour and a half. He has *no idea* where that conversation went from there. Of course, Philip got to baptize the Ethiopian. But after that, *he* had to let go and had no knowledge of what came of it. But what's it worth to be able to sit down and talk about the Bible and the plan of God to a *perfect stranger* for an hour and a half, where God may have just put you where he wanted you for the purpose that he had at the time.

The Ethiopian merely wanted to understand his Bible. God did not turn some set screws in the man's mind to make him understand the Bible, did he? He sent a real, live person to explain it to him. This is

the way God works. And if you're sitting around thinking, "Well, I hope God will turn some screws in my mind and help me to understand that", you could easily *miss* when someone comes along who could actually tell you the answer the what it is that you're asking and want to know. Now, in my case, I didn't even know I *needed* to understand the Bible better. But God sent Horace Driver to talk to me, anyhow. And am I ever glad he did. And Horace *actively engaged* me in conversation. And that is what you and I are expected to do.

Jesus said, "I will build my Church", but I am looking at the bricklayers, the carpenters. I'm looking at the masons. I'm looking at the glaziers. I'm looking at the roofers, out here, right now—the people who will build his church, the people *through whom* he will build his church—whose hands and lips and tongue and eyes he will *use* to build that church, right there. Sometimes, I don't think we understand what's expected of us—that the job is as much *ours* as it is *his*.

Now, what Horace Driver did is not terribly unlike what a young married couple named Aquila and Priscilla did for Apollos. You'll find that story in Acts, the 18th chapter, verse 24.

Acts 18

AKJV

²⁴ And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

²⁵ This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Now, I look at back at that and I think, "You know, I knew a *lot* about the Bible before Horace ever showed up on the doorstep. I knew an awful lot about God. I'd given sermons. I'd preached from the Bible. I was a person who understood lots of stuff. But I really only understood the baptism of the Baptists. Well, Priscilla and Aquila, after:"

Acts 18

AKJV

²⁶ [...] he began to speak boldly in the synagogue [...], they took him to them, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly.

Just a couple of ordinary people. It's hard for us to imagine anybody who's named in the Bible as being ordinary, isn't it? But they were just as ordinary as you.

Acts 18

AKJV

²⁶ [...] they took him to them, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly.

²⁷ And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brothers wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

All of a sudden, just that immediate transformation, opened the man's mind to all kinds of things.

Acts 18

AKJV

²⁸ For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Now, the article I spoke of earlier opened a whole new line of thought for me. You imagine a poor widow with a couple of children she's struggling to clean to feed and clothe. Imagine she prays for help. In what form is that help most likely to come? You know, you saw this little display up here of the rescue mission here in Fort Walton Beach, or in Destin along the beach here. I think it's *fascinating* what is going on there. And the truth is that these people—who are down, who are out, who are in trouble—are looking for help, and may pray to God for help. But the help is going to come wearing size 12 shoes. It's going to be *people* who come down there and do that type of thing. But, you know, when we think about it, the Scriptures are pretty clear. Jesus said in Matthew 25, verse 34 (another well-worn scripture):

Matthew 25

KJ2000

³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in:

³⁶ Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me.

³⁷ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink?

³⁸ When saw we you a stranger, and took you in? or naked, and clothed you?

³⁹ Or when saw we you sick, or in prison, and came unto you?

⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Since you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

Now, whenever you see the pictures of people like this (who are in trouble and needing of help); if you can understand the fact that Christ says that he is with them, in them, and in that place; if you can just understand that Christ—when he gets ready to send food, clothing, or whatever he needs to send—is not going to do it himself...well, he *is* going to do it himself but he's going to do it *in you*, not by some magical miracle, somewhere, sometimes.

I think sometimes we fail because we don't think big enough. I think sometimes we fail because we don't think *small* enough. Because it is in the service to the *least* of Christ's brethren that we serve him best. There is no labor too small for Christ. And you just *don't know*—you have *no way* of knowing—what small thing you do here...what a huge difference it will make down the road. I don't think Horace Driver *had a clue* of the end result of all those hours we spent in Bible study until the wee, small hours of the morning. He did it because he loved it, because he enjoyed it. He was having a good time; so was I. But neither he nor I knew where it would go. You just have to understand, sometimes, that the right work at the right time can have a *huge* impact further on down the road. There is no labor too small for Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians, chapter three. He said:

1 Corinthians 3

NIV '84

¹ Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ.

² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

Jealousy, quarreling? Well, we don't have that.

1 Corinthians 3

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⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

But then he makes it clear enough, doesn't he, elsewhere: If it is your job to plant, you better plant. If it is your job to water, you better water. And, you know, in an awful lot of ways, I find Christian Educational Ministries' job to water. And we are watering *broad areas* of seed (and maybe even doing a little fertilization along the way, because it has to be done). But we can't make it happen. We have *our* job. You've got *your* job. And in it all, part of that job *is the building of Christ's church*. Then Paul says a little later, in verse 12:

1 Corinthians 3

NIV '84

¹² If any man builds on this foundation [...]

Which is, of course, Jesus Christ. There can be no other foundation.

1 Corinthians 3

NIV '84

¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

Now, apart from, let's say, scaring everybody by saying “the fire is going to test your work”, let's just stop a little short of that and realize that what he is saying here is: There is a distinct difference in the *quality* of our work depending on how we do it. And we're going to suffer *loss* if we do slipshod work for Jesus Christ. He expects our best. He's gotten it from an awful lot of people in the past—people who were...I have no idea how many people *died* trying to bring the Bible to us down through the generations. I don't know what they believed. I don't know all the ramifications of their doctrinal structure. But I will tell you this: *God will not forget any of their work*. They believed *so much* in his book they gave their lives to see to it that it was preserved and passed down through the generations.

Jesus said, “I will build my Church”, but *ours* are the hands that he builds with, and the quality and the energy of our work *matters*. *We are* Christ at work. We must understand that.

A couple of days ago we sang a lovely hymn. It's number 89 in your hymnal, *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*. As I was listening to us all sing, and singing along with you, I was touched *deeply* by the third stanza that hymn:

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me
And on his shoulder gently laid
And home rejoicing brought me.

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

Beautiful verse. But there's a strange thing about this. The first time it happened to me, that shoulder felt and smelled a lot like my dad. My dad sang to me when I was a kid. He taught me to sing, and we sang religious songs most all of the time, of one kind or another. And I came, initially, to know God and developed my first beginnings of theology from music, at the feet of my dad. Another time the shoulder was *soft*; smelled of perfume. I think it was my grandma's perfume. She had the *softest lap I ever sat on*. Marvelous old lady; wonderful person. There were other times the shoulder that carried me was hard; the hands were rough. And, you know, it just depends, as time goes by, how many people pick you up and carry you just a little distance, and sometimes hand you off to somebody else. But there is somebody there. And that somebody who is there is *there* because Christ *moved them* to be there for you. You're not going to actually be laid on Jesus' own personal shoulder, in this life. But you *can* be on someone's shoulder whom he is *using* to reach out and touch you.

The way that Jesus chose to place his hand on me was in the person of another man. You should realize it; but for somebody, somewhere, sometime, you may have been that shoulder. You never know. Sometimes, *you* are the miracle.

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You Are the Miracle

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