

Moderator's Annual Address
Dr. W. Edward Jenkins

**“The Glory Is Not Gone (Is the Traditional
Black Baptist Church on Life Support?)”**

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THE GLORY IS NOT GONE
(IS THE TRADITIONAL BLACK BAPTIST CHURCH ON LIFE SUPPORT?)

1 Sam 4:16-22

16 He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day." Eli asked, "What happened, my son?" 17 The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." 18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years. 19 His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains.

20As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not respond or pay any attention. 21 She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"-because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

I do not recall a time in the modern age that there has been a falling away from the church, as it is today, as a result laity and clergy, in many circles, have concluded that the, "Glory has departed," from church in general and the Black Baptist Church in particular. There is anxiety among religious leaders as they ponder the question, where do we go from here?" Senior pastors are in hopes that their congregation can survive as long as they do. Some say the Baptist church is on life support, while extreme pessimist describes the condition of the church as on hospice care. One preacher mused, "I have lost so many members, that the business meetings are actually a pleasant experience."

Many have been drawn to the conclusion, that the Glory of the Church is gone. The Glory of the Church is gone. Things are not like they used to be, the glory is gone. The problem is exacerbated by the myth that the measure of a ministries success is based on the number of people in the pews and money in the bank. This feeling of inadequacy takes a life of its own and tends to sap the vitality of the spiritual leader. When one feels hopeless it is difficult to have the mindset or wherewithal to cross the Reed Sea of deliverance, not to mention the Promise Land of a new beginning.

It seems yesteryear that church interest and participation was more consistent. The congregational church was more popular than Maverick’s Flat, 5-4 Ballroom, Studio 82 or the Jack Jackson Room in the Dunbar Hotel. (Popular social venues in LA in the 1950’s to 70’s) We ask the question, what did those preachers do in the 19th and 20th Century that we are not doing today? Ministerial ranks are busting loose with experts in theology, hermeneutics, homiletics, missiology, and hoop- ology. Yet in the 21st century leaders struggle to discover a remedy to this socio-spiritual phenomenon. Historically, the church has been a fortress for African Americans, a shelter in time of storm, a rock in a weary land, so to speak. Historically the church has been a place, “sought out,” by the community. The church of the 21st Century now must, “Seek out the nominal Christian and the unsaved.” The Baptist church for too long has been fishing with a pole, one catch at a time, and if the “fish,” did not fit our expectations we would toss it back into the water. During Jesus time fishing was done by net, with a net you are subject to catch a menagerie of fish. Be careful what you toss back in the water.

The following illustration may help in understanding. Twelve years ago my wife and I decided to purchase a lot to build a cabin on in the Smokey Mountains in Tennessee. Business was booming at that time and builders were busy, the most difficult task was to find a realtor that

had the time to meet with you. Realtors were sought after, all one needed to do was put up a sign and business would come to them. About six years later banks and loan companies made it difficult for individuals to get finance for investment property. As a result, realtors found themselves in a dilemma. Those who did not know how to solicit business went out of business. The idea of reaching out to the consumer was an unusual pursuit. The unsuccessful realtors that did know how to shift gears, so to speak, sought employment elsewhere.

When World War I began, poor whites, blacks, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans from other parts of the country took an extended, “powder break,” from the South and came to the West Coast in search of a better life. The Southern Pacific Railroad was one of the preferred employers for blacks because the salaries were good and they offered employee benefits. “African American porters or, ‘redcaps,’ played an important role in recruiting African Americans to Los Angeles. They distributed newspapers about the opportunities of Southern California.

During World War II, Los Angeles became one of the centers of defense and aerospace industries, therefore creating a need for more workers. As job opportunities became available, migration from the South continued to increase. Many African-American families became two-income families because women entered the work force as jobs were available in the defense industry and other jobs vacated by men drafted in the military. (Karin L. Stanford)

The great migration of African Americans from the South created a need for camaraderie and community. The fellowship of the saints became a priority. The church became the spiritual and cultural and political center for African Americans. Racial Restrictive Covenants contributed to the traffic jam of people of color in South Los Angeles, churches had a captive

audience, so to speak. The church growth plan was simple. “Hi, you from my hometown, come visit. Hi, girl you to come hear my choir. Hi, my preacher can sho-nuff preach. Hi, my church is fighting for civil rights. Hi, we are on TV tonight, get there early, you might be on TV. Hi, the pulpit in my church goes up and up” pretty elementary evangelism, do you think? The 21st century requires a more polished evangelistic plan, although the spirit of grass root invitation and pride in the church should remain.

There are those who feel that the church should not market itself because, “God will add to his church as he sees fit.” Without a proper exegete of this adage, our leadership must ask the question why does it appear that God is adding people to other churches and not theirs? In my attempt to respond to the issue of congregational growth I said, “There are too many churches, and the Baptist autonomy allows for a new church to start at any location for any reason.” Generally speaking, black Baptist churches tend to *supplant* more so than *plant* churches.

President Jerry Young, of National Baptist Convention said, “Recently I read that 300 million people in American do not go to church. And more than 90 percent of those who do attend church have never shared the gospel with anyone.” Therefore in reality, there are not too many churches per se; there are too many churches that are impuissant or ineffectual in church growth and discipleship.

An excellent article, *Vision: The Second Key to Consistent Congregational Growth*, by Geoffrey V. Guns, appeared in the December/January 2016 issue of *The Christian Education Informer*, published by the Sunday School Publishing Board (SSPB), of NBC, Inc. *The Informer* consistently features helpful articles and list several resources available through the Sunday School Publishing. The critics, who say the NBC, Inc. has no resources to help churches and

pastors, need to cease from complaining. SSPB has great resources that can benefit your ministries. The journalistic branch of NBC, Inc. literally has something for everybody. If you do not subscribe to the *Informer* or visit the NBC, Inc., web site, you do not know what is offered or what is not. You speak as one with minimal knowledge, Grasshopper.

G. Guns said, “Great movements are begun with a vision and are achieved through leaders who are willing to take risk and step out on faith. Leaders must be able to see the future and anticipate where the organization needs to go if it intends to grow and prosper. Vision sets direction and clarifies the agenda; it defines the allocation of resources and identifies who needs to be involved in order to achieve its purpose.” He further stated, “Vision comes from God. It is not just the product of the intellect and shrewdness of the leader: rather, it is the divine design that God has proposed for that congregation or ministry.”

As we inquire of God for a vision for the congregation and due diligence in study on how to share the vision we must be open to a change in our traditional way of doing things. Just as the Apostle Paul had to distinguish between laws that make you Jewish and laws that were ethical and moral, we may have to distinguish from some practices and policies that may be outdated from biblical principles that are good for all generations.

Dallas Willard said it best: “there is a Great Omission to the Great Commission in our churches today.” A church vision is good, but it must be grounded in the promotion of a Christian life empowered by the Holy Spirit. Matt 28:19, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (NIV)* Willard suggest, “The Great Commission is discipleship, apprenticeship, to him.” Once we understand the difference between discipleship and church membership our churches can be used

by the Holy Spirit in a more powerful way. As we study the Word and the Word of God begins to sauté or soul by the power of the Holy Spirit we become approved by God.

Evangelism/discipleship will be a natural emanation of obedience to God. Matt 28:20, Jesus said, *and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" No the glory has not departed from the church!

The Ark of the Covenant, a rectangular boxlike structure of acacia wood, about 4' x 2' x 2', with a lining and an external sheathing of pure beaten gold. It was covered by a lid of solid gold, to which was affixed a carved golden cherub at each end. These celestial beings looked down upon the lid, and their wings covered the ark the gold lid to which the cherubim were fastened was called the "mercy seat" and it was from between the cherubim that God communed with his people. The ark was the only item of furniture in the most holy place of the tabernacle and contained duplicate tablets of the law, a pot of manna and Aaron's rod.

The present of the invisible almighty God was present with ark. When Israel went into battle they took the ark with them. On this occasion the Philistines won the battle and took the ark to their own territory and placed it in their temple alongside their god, Dagon. Dagon bowed all night long to the presence of the God. The next morning they found Dagon on the floor in the temple. They put Dagon back in place only to find the next morning Dagon on the floor with his hands and his head broken from his body.

The people of Ashdod decided to move the Ark, but the Lord's *hand* was against that city and the citizens suffered from hemorrhoids. Then they decided to send the ark to Ekron, and the people cried out to the heavens because of pain full hemorrhoids and some died. After seven months they decided to send the Ark back to Israel. So they found to yoked cows that recently

had calves, took the calves away, and placed the Ark on a cart. *If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the Lord has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance.*"

(1Samuel 6:9)

It would be natural for the cows to continue to nurse the calves, but they turned their heads towards Israel, looking neither to the right or the left. There was no doubt in the minds of the Philistines that Israel was still in the Lord's hand. Dagon had no but God's people are never too far from His hands. No, the glory is not gone; just hold on to God's unchanging hands.

Storms may come, winds may blow but hold to God's unchanging hand...time is filled with quick transition, naught of earth unmoved can stand. Build your hopes on things eternal, hold to God's unchanging hand. Hold on.....

Dr. W. Edward Jenkins received his B.A. in Sociology from the University of California, Riverside. He holds a Masters of Theology & Biblical Studies and a Doctorate degree of Ministry from Fuller Theology Seminary in Pasadena, CA. A longstanding educator, Dr. Jenkins taught Government/Law for the Riverside Unified School District and received his Lifetime Secondary Teaching Credential. Dr. Jenkins was the Coordinator of the Drug & Alcohol Intervention Program, as well as the Work Experience Program for the Riverside School District. Dr. Jenkins has also taught Biblical Greek at the California State Convention. In the late 80s, Dr. Jenkins pastored the Bibleway Baptist Church of Woodcrest, CA. He is currently the Pastor of Victory Baptist Church of Los Angeles, a position that he has held for 20 years. Dr. Jenkins is a board member of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. and a faculty member of the National Congress of Christian Education. In addition to his work in the National Baptist Convention, Inc., he has held the positions of Vice-Moderator and Dean of the Ministers' Conference in the Los Angeles District Association of the Western Baptist State Convention and he is presently the Moderator of the LADA. Dr. Jenkins is married to Kimberley and they have one son, Jahi.



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