

Report of The Mulberry, Arkansas Meetings October 10-11, 2009

There was a steady drizzle of rain falling as I drove back in the dark from Mulberry, Arkansas early Monday morning, October 12th. I drove to my home in Joplin, Missouri with much to think about.

Pastor David Garner, of God's House of Hope, had originally found me through my website, www.brothermel.com. The message of Reformation in which we separate the Snake Oil from sound doctrine had spoken to him and he wanted me to come minister to his congregation. This turned into a memorable experience for me, and I believe also for others.

Driving to Mulberry, I drove south out of Joplin on the Interstate highway encountering little traffic until I drew close to Bella Vista, Arkansas. I had heard of Bella Vista for all of my life. It is well known as a retirement community, lush with scenic golf courses. The Interstate skirted the edge of Bella Vista, giving me the opportunity to look out my car window at the beautiful golf courses and natural scenery as I drove by. I had to laugh when I thought about "going down to Arkansas." That phrase was literally true. The highway from Joplin to Mulberry was downhill the entire way. I took notice of this only after my ears had popped several times.

The Interstate wound through the Ozark National Forest. For several miles all I saw on either side of the highway were gigantic hills covered with trees. It is beautiful in the Ozark region of Missouri and Arkansas when the trees begin to turn their fall colors. The trees are just beginning to turn now. There were a few yellows, but no oranges or reds yet. Before long the forest gave way to the corridor between the cities of Bentonville, Fayetteville, Springdale, and Rogers Arkansas. The commercial development in and around these cities was impressive. It was far more than I expected. Buildings that appeared to me to be eight to ten stories tall seemed to be everywhere. Bentonville, of course, is the headquarters city for Wal-Mart. Arkansas was always known as a poor state. Well honey, Arkansas ain't po' no mo'. They even have a major regional airport nearby. The whole area cries out M-O-N-E-Y.

After a little over two hours of driving, I arrived in Mulberry, found the hotel, and called the church contact numbers. The Saturday night service wasn't

until 6 pm. So I had time to rest before the service. Assistant Pastor Dewey picked me up about 30 minutes before the service. Dewey is a man in his 70's with a bald head, a conspicuous white goatee, and a love in his heart for God and for God's people. In addition to his role as Assistant Pastor, he also serves as a Chaplain to a regional motorcycle association. I was wearing a suit and tie, with the coat hanging on a hanger in the backseat. As we pulled up in front of the church, Brother Dewey said of my suit coat, "You may as well leave that out here. We are pretty much a jeans and short-sleeved shirts crowd." I found this to be true.

There are a surprising number of churches for a town the size of Mulberry with a population of about 500 or so. David's church, less than a year old, is clearly thriving in spite of the plethora of churches. They are in their own building. Sound equipment, chairs, and musical instruments have all been donated, thus indicating that God is behind their endeavors.

David Garner, a former drug addict, came from a rough background, and has a testimony about which you can't help but chuckle. It starts out tough. Never knowing his father, losing his mother to a heroin overdose, he was adopted by a man and brought to Arkansas from California. David fought against this move, running away several times, and being basically on his own from his mid-teen years. He somehow ended up back in Arkansas, out of money, out of drugs, with his motel bill due. He met a couple of Christians, whom he admits he hooked up with in order to try to con them out of some money or a place to stay, and they invited him to a church service. Well, David had no idea what he was in for.

You see, this was a service held by Joe Jordan. Those of you who know Joe, can already imagine the scene, but for those of you who aren't familiar with Joe—he ministers a lot in Laughing and Falling in the Spirit. He was doing so long before Rodney Howard-Brown became known for this. David saw the people Laughing and Falling, and thought, "These people are crazy!" Invited to come to the altar, David thought, "I'm going to ride this for all it is worth." Once at the altar, Joe asked David, "What do you want prayer for?" Conviction fell on David. Weeping, he replied, "I just want to be happy like these people are!"

That night, David became a new creature in Christ Jesus, was delivered from drugs, and filled with the Spirit. The church paid his hotel bill, found him a job, and he began building a new life. As the years passed, David went through Bible School, and served for a couple of years under the oversight of my friends

the Rev. Jim and Linda Thompson of Many, Louisiana. But his exposure to Joe Jordan did not end with that first service. David told me, "Whenever Joe would hold services nearby, he always took time to meet with me and encourage me. That meant a lot to me."

Married now, with three sons, rather than recycling saints from other churches, he built God's House of Hope one person at a time, getting them saved, filled with the Spirit, and delivered from drugs. He has allowed numerous people to live in his home as he helped them get back on their feet. There is a great affection for him in his congregation for his willingness to help those that others have given up on. His church consists mostly of ex-cons, ex-drug addicts, and those that love them. In his remarks to the congregation as he introduced me, Pastor David said, "You know, we don't lose many people due to church splits, or people getting mad at the pastor and leaving. But WE DO lose some due to their paroles being revoked!" Heads nodded all around, and chuckles were heard.

While yet in his introductory remarks, as he talked about someone in the congregation he had ministered to, bringing them up out of very difficult situations, the Spirit of Prophecy fell on me, and I stood up and gave a message in tongues and the interpretation was along the lines of, "This is just a demonstration to you of the Scripture that says, 'with God all things are possible!'" And the message continued on. Yes, indeed. Our God is the God of the impossible.

In the days leading up to this service, the Lord began emphasizing a particular truth to me, and I felt it was a message that I was to preach to this congregation. It was from John 1:14:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,
(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the
only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and
truth.

Beginning at that scripture, I proceeded to preach to the congregation that if they ever want to know what the will of God is, to just look at Jesus because he was the physical embodiment of the will of God and the Word of God. *Man, I preached my heart out to those people!* (Since my experience with the Lord on September 14th, I feel much more like preaching and proclaiming, rather than teaching and explaining). I told them that Jesus forgave, so it is God's

will to forgive. Jesus broke the power of the Devil off of people, so it is God's will for all to be free. And Jesus healed the sick, so it is God's will to heal today also.

We ended my part of the service by praying for people who desired prayer. Afterwards, the Presence of God still remained. So I took a chair from the front row, turned it around to face the congregation, sat down in it, and said, "We are just going to wait on God and enjoy His Presence." After several minutes when the Lord seemed to be through with His portion of the service, we ended by singing "Victory in Jesus!" Yes, there is victory for all in Jesus Christ.

I returned to my motel room both exhilarated and drained. I felt we had accomplished in the service what the Lord had desired. Yet I was also very tired. However, as I tried to drift off to sleep that night, I found that sleep was hard to come by. I kept thinking of the congregation, and how much so many of them had come through. As I tossed and turned for most of the night, an idea began to form in my mind. I was considering changing the message I had planned to preach the next day. I had planned to preach on "The Audacity of Faith," drawing from the example of Joshua and Caleb and how they believed God, against impossible odds, to enable them to enter the Promised Land.

While I believed that this message would minister to the congregation members, I began to feel like I was being unfair to them. Several of them had been transparent with me, sharing heartbreaking challenges they had endured, and I was standing up there, looking like I had never had a problem. I felt like I was cheating them. I began to believe that the best way I could help these people was to return their transparency with my own transparency, and talk with them about some painful things the Lord had helped me overcome.

I got up early the following morning. (I may as well have gotten up; I couldn't get any sleep anyway). I drove over to nearby Fort Smith, Arkansas, had breakfast at a Denny's, looked the town over a bit, and then drove back to Mulberry. I did this partly to have time to think this sermon through, but also to give the motel staff time to clean and replenish the room so I wouldn't be disturbed once I began working on the sermon. I really didn't want to prepare and preach this sermon, talking about my own pain. The reason was not that it stirred up painful memories. Goodness, the Lord healed me of that long ago. But that part of my life is so far behind me, that I really don't relate to it much any more. Another reason I had pause about preaching it was that I knew that the service was being videotaped. Telling a room full of people about painful experiences is one thing. But having it put on DVD and shared with the world

requires some additional thought. However, I chose to obey the Lord. (I'll upload the videos of both services to the website once I receive them from the video engineer).

I prepared the sermon, drawing from the Parable of the Prodigal Son, that there is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. The father forgave the son who had disowned him, and who no longer wanted the father-son relationship, but he did not go chasing after the son. He had to wait for the son to "come to himself" and desire the father-son relationship. The son was already forgiven, but when he returned to the father, they were reconciled with each other. From this example we need to learn that we cannot make someone love us. We cannot have a family relationship with someone who does not want that relationship with us. Consequently, when we are rejected or abandoned, we have to turn the situation over to God. Sometimes, God will bring about reconciliation. However, sometimes reconciliation does not come, and you have to be prepared to move on with God, and to sometimes even make a new life for yourself.

I told the story of the strained relations with my brother. I described some of the painful aspects of it, and how I had reached a point where I just quit communicating with my brother and turned the matter over to the Lord. Several months later, I received a kind letter from my brother, and we were reconciled. I am happy this occurred, because he went to be with the Lord just a few months after this. I'm glad he did not die with this breach between us.

I told also the story of my father. I didn't go into extensive detail about it all. But I told enough of the lies, the cruelty, and the damage he did to our family—damage from which our family to this day has never recovered. Thus, everyone had a general outline of the situation. In the Parable, the son did not want the father-son relationship. In my case, my father did not want it. I chased him for 35 years, and then finally gave up. Eventually I changed my last name to Montgomery, left the matter in the hands of the Lord, and made a new life for myself. As I told the congregation, "Jesus said 'turn the other cheek.' However, he did not say that we were to just stand there and allow ourselves to be slapped round the clock, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for the rest of our lives." You have the right to be treated like a human being.

The crowd was mostly silent as I ministered along this line. I wasn't sure whether they were accepting and understanding what I was saying or not. Then I looked back over the congregation and I noticed two women, in different parts of the room, weeping through nearly the whole message. After the service, one of

them went to Pastor David and asked, "Did you tell him all about me? He described my life exactly!" David replied, "No, I didn't tell him anything. That was the Holy Ghost." She then came up to me, tears streaming down her face, and said, "Thank you for that message." I embraced this sister's rail-thin body, her hard life written all over her face, and I said to her, "Thank you . . . God bless you, Sister!" Although others were affected by the message, and commented on it, it may have been that I was sent to Mulberry just to give that message to that one woman. Jesus is like that sometimes. He will arrange a whole series of events just to minister to one person. He is a wonderful Savior, isn't He?

David, his wife Dana, and the pastoral staff took me to dinner, and we had the opportunity to talk privately for the first time. We talked about the things that ministers talk about when given those kinds of opportunities. Of course, that all will remain confidential. But in the course of the conversations with various individuals, I was asked if there is anyone on Christian TV that I would recommend watching. I paused for a moment, running various names through my mind, and replied, "I'm sorry, I can't comfortably recommend anyone. Maybe, Andrew Wommack. He has some good material. At least he preaches something other than, 'send me a big check and all your problems will be solved.' Right now, just about everything I hear preached on Christian TV is motivational speaking, self-help, Christian Science, psychobabble, or just plain old heresy." What a sad statement to have to make.

Upon hearing my statement, David then related to me the story of how when he came into the Charismatic experience, he admired and quoted, [several well-known names]. The church he was attending called one of them. The TV preacher said that he required a \$10,000.00 guarantee be deposited in his bank account before he would come preach for them. So they scraped together \$10,000.00. The well-known TV preacher showed up, preached an hour and a half on giving, took up a big offering, and left. He told me that several individuals stumbled in their faith and walked away from the Lord for a season upon seeing this naked grab for money. Yes, I believe there will be some weeping on the Believer's Judgment Day when some preachers are shown the little good, and great damage, done by their "ministries."

The events of the previous two days played through my mind as I drove home in the early morning darkness and rain. I continue to think on the wonderful things God did in these meetings. I felt the experience was not complete until I could find the time to sit down and share the story with you.

I want to thank you, my ministry partners, for supporting us with your finances and prayers. Your support makes it possible for us to minister in person to individuals in local church meetings, and to multitudes around the world through the website. If all the Lord sent me to Mulberry to accomplish was to minister to that one shattered woman, then by helping to send me there, this is fruit that abounds to your spiritual account also. And I believe that with fruit like this, the Lord is well pleased.

In closing, I want to ask anyone in NW Arkansas, such as those who are in the cities of Fayetteville, Rogers, Bentonville, Springdale, and Fort Smith, if you are not otherwise committed to a church, to drive over to Mulberry to meet Pastor David Garner of God's House of Hope. If you want to invest your time, your finances, and your heart in a place that is actually making a visible difference in the lives of people, then hook up with this church. To find out service times, call the leadership at 479-997-8682 or 479-209-1681.

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