

THE
MOSBY
CHRECHES
CHRONICLES



Rev. Dr. Steven L. Frazier

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO



Wiggle Room...

John 20:19-31

Baptists are mighty fine people. Heck, I used to be one. So I'd be the last person to start badmouthing them. And if you ever go to Mossy Creek, I'd advise you to have something nice to say about them, too. In Mossy Creek everybody is a Baptist or married to a Baptist or used to be a Baptist. Lake Woebegone has Lutherans, and Mossy Creek has Baptists. That's just the way it is.

Here is something else you ought to know: You better keep still when Baptists start talking about things they say they've got figured out. You don't want to get them all riled up by disagreeing with them on things like revivals or evangelism. Baptists aren't

confused about those things. And they don't want you to be confused about them, either. If you disagree with them, they're going to straighten you out. They figure it's for your own good.

I've heard Miss Ethel Tiner say the road to heaven is paved and straight as an arrow for anybody who has the good sense to know that it starts at First Baptist Church. She says all the other Christians in the world are fine but slightly confused folks trying to make their way to heaven on gravel roads. She thinks that is a doggone shame.

Well, Presbyterians in Mossy Creek are used to being told that they're dead wrong on some important theological matters. So when Dave Johnson stops by Melvin's café in the morning to get some coffee, he knows that some Baptist is liable to give him a hard time about whatever they happen to be right about on that particular day. The fact that he is a lawyer with a diploma from the University of Virginia's law school hanging on his office wall doesn't change that one bit. He may be a bulldog in the courtroom, but at Melvin's, he is just another one of those fine, confused Presbyterians.

One morning Dave stopped for coffee and got to hear all about the revival the Baptists were fixin' to have in a week. Now, they're dead sure that when John the Baptist was preparing the way of the Lord, he was actually holding a revival down by the Jordan River. And that is what Charlie Atkins told Dave. Charlie wasn't always right, but he was never in doubt. And he wanted to make sure Dave was straight on revivals and evangelism, too.

Well, you don't know Dave like I do, so let me tell you a little bit about him. He is a calm, collected man who thinks twice before he speaks once. He also doesn't scrap

with Baptists. His momma told him pickin' a fight with Baptists was like taking a coon hound by the ears and giving 'em a good yank—you'll never hear the end of it. So sometimes Dave just imagined Charlie with floppy ears, nodded his head in agreement, and asked the waitress to refill his coffee cup.

Maybe Charlie finally figured that out. He knew better than to say Dave was scared to debate him on the indisputable importance of churches having a revival every year and a proven and successful program of evangelism. He knew Dave's great, great, great grandfather on his momma's side was one of the men who took part in George Pickett's famously unsuccessful charge at Gettysburg and lived to tell the tale. And he knew the Johnsons had told that tale until everyone knew there wasn't a speck of yellow in their family, no sir. Charlie knew all that about Dave, and he still questioned his courage. It wasn't long before Dave was yankin' on Charlie's ears for all he was worth.

It all started when Charlie said, "Evangelism ain't nothin' but gittin' your gumption up and givin' somebody your testimony. It's your witness. Dave, you oughta know a little 'bout witnesses. We have to testify for the Lord. Churches that ain't sending their members out to witness ain't right with the Lord. It looks to me like you Presbyterians ain't much at witnessin'. I sure hope it ain't 'cause you're scared."

Dave replied, "I'm not scared of anything or anybody. But I also have the good sense to know that you can't talk people into being Christians. If Christians could've talked the world into going to church, there would be a church on every street corner by now, and they'd all be full on Sunday mornings. Salvation is God's work. Charlie, if you

knew your Bible, you'd know that Jesus said, 'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them to Me. That's John 6:44, just so you know.'

Well, Charlie Atkins was a mulish man. So he was going to give as good as he got that morning. He shot back at Dave, "Well, what about the Great Commission? That's Matthew 28:16-20. What did Jesus say? Make disciples of all nations? Teach 'em everything I taught you? That sounds like witnessin' to me. And it sounds like our doin'. I don't know about you, but I try to live my life by what the Good Book says."

Dave said, "You know, Charlie, in my experience, simple answers are appealing, but they're usually wrong. Some folks would like to think they can do God's job for Him, but I'm not one of them. I believe the Lord is perfectly capable of doing what He wants with or without me. You must have a pretty low opinion of God if you think He can't carry out His plans without our help."

Charlie sneered, "That's about what I thought you'd say. Presbyterians are scared, I reckon. They can't hardly bring themselves to talk about evangelism let alone try to talk to somebody about the Lord. And when's the last time you had a revival? Y'all and your predestination mess... You need to confess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and git to work bringin' people to the Lord."

Well, sir, Dave might've been in Melvin's café, but it sure sounded like he was arguing a case in the courthouse. When Andrea, the waitress at Melvin's, asked him if he wanted more coffee, Dave shook his head and kept right on going. He said, "I'll tell you what, Charlie. How about John's version of Pentecost?" He paused a second and then said, "You have no earthly idea what I'm talking about, do you? On the first Easter, Jesus had to go looking for His disciples. John says they were hiding because they

were scared. Were *they* Presbyterians? And after He found them, Jesus didn't give them a hard time, did He? What He gave them was the Holy Spirit so they could continue His ministry. If they could've done that work on their own, what on earth did He give them the Holy Spirit for? Ever think about that? They needed some help if they were going to continue His ministry. They went to work after they got the Spirit. Evangelism starts with the Holy Spirit, not some guest preacher in a revival."

By then Charlie was spluttering like an old chainsaw, but Dave kept right on going. "And what is being born again but getting the Holy Spirit? That is exactly what that is. Anybody that has been baptized has the Holy Spirit. That includes Presbyterians. We're all born again. And the Spirit is changing us every day. It may end up working on some folks quicker than others, but it always works. Baptists believe that, don't they? Ya'll believe people get the Spirit in baptism, don't you?"

Melvin's breakfast crowd had left for work by that time, and Charlie's voice echoed in the café when he said, "The Lord's told us to make disciples. How're you gonna get out of that? Lawyer your way out of that!" he said triumphantly.

Dave replied, "I have no intention of getting out of that. How did God give Adam and Eve life? He breathed on them. That was the first creation. What Jesus did was the beginning of the second creation. And that new creation started with Him breathing on His disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit and then turning them into His church. Where you see Jesus giving orders to a bunch of individuals, I see Him creating the church and equipping it to continue His ministry. Once He did that, He sent the church to work. The Lord has saved us to do His bidding, no doubt about it, but we do that through the power of the Spirit. There is one Spirit and one church, but there are lots of

disciples with all kinds of gifts. It just stands to reason that all kinds of different gifts and different denominations mean that there are different ways of witnessing and making disciples. That is part of God's plan for the church. You're right; Jesus did tell His disciples what to do. But He didn't tell them how to do it. It all depends on the gifts the Spirit gives us. We can't follow Jesus' orders if we don't have the Spirit helping us."

Well sir, Charlie was in over his head, and he knew it. But like any good Southerner, he didn't have the good sense to quit once he was beat. He didn't want anybody to think he was scared. So he said, "In the Great Commission the Lord says make disciples. He's talking to His disciples. The word "church" ain't in that passage anywhere. There ain't no church involved. Now you explain that to me."

By this time, Andrea had cleared all of the tables, and Melvin's grill was clean. They were leaning over the counter listening to Charlie and Dave when Dave said, "That's Matthew. I'm talking about John. They're two different things. Matthew and John were written by two different men at two different times for two different groups of people. Charlie, has it ever occurred to you that God wants the church to do evangelism in a variety of ways? Did you ever stop to think there might be more than one way of making disciples? Jesus said, 'You did not choose Me but I chose you.' Then He said anybody who loved Him would obey Him. And He said we should love one another. It sounds like obeying Jesus means loving people. That is one way Jesus wants us to make disciples. Loving people is just another way of witnessing. I know we're supposed to make disciples. I'm just saying that Jesus has given us a little wiggle room on how to do that."

Charlie said, “The Apostle Paul says we should use the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. What’s love got to do with that? We need to be bringin’ people into the church so they can learn the word. They ain’t gonna come on their own. And they ain’t gonna git there if we don’t tell ‘em about the Lord. We all have a witness. You’re a lawyer. You oughta know that better than anybody. Jesus is the Judge, and we’re His witnesses. That’s a true fact.”

Dave replied, “When did I say we weren’t witnesses? I’m just saying the Holy Spirit helps us witness in our own way. I think the Spirit is helping us get better at loving each other. Where do we learn to do that? In the church. That’s where we get better at loving people who aren’t like us, people we might not like all that much. Helping people after a disaster is one way of witnessing. Our church sent some of our members to work in South Carolina after last summer’s hurricane. That was our witness. And what were we doing if we weren’t making disciples? It seems to me that was just another way of doing evangelism. Paul says there are various gifts but one Spirit. If the Lord wanted us all thinking and doing the same thing, there wouldn’t be any denominations, would there? We’d all be thinking and doing the same thing. Maybe the Lord made us to be different. If He did, who knows why? It isn’t our place to ask.”

Charlie shot back, “If the Lord leaves it to Presbyterians to make disciples, the church will be out of business in pretty short order. I’ll tell you what...” Dave cut him off. “No, you let me tell you what. Presbyterians were hard at work for the Lord before there were any Baptists. That’s a fact; look it up sometime. And this is, too: If the last Presbyterian disappears from the face of the earth tomorrow, the Lord will raise up

another people by a different name that will believe what we believe and do what we do. That's a true fact, too."

Well, Charlie was pretty near the end of anything he had to say. And that is when Andrea joined the conversation. "I grew up old school Mennonite. I don't know if I ever heard anybody talk about evangelism. We mostly stayed to ourselves. The way my folks explained it, people would learn about the Lord from watching us. They said the way we lived was our witness. I guess I kinda agree with Dave that there's lots of ways to do the same thing. I figure if somebody is interested in what I believe and why I do what I do, they'll ask me and I'll explain it to them. Sounds like that's what Dave is saying."

Charlie sounded tired when he said, "I don't know how to put it any different than I have. People need to come to the Lord. And we need to tell 'em so they will come. The Lord's told us to make disciples. It's as simple as that."

Dave said, "Charlie, tell me how your daddy made hay." Charlie looked at him suspiciously and said, "He used horses to cut it. He forked it up in the barn. What was left over he put up in hay stacks out in the fields." Dave went on, "OK, tell me how you make hay." Charlie sounded impatient when he said, "You know good and well I use a bailer." "What kind?" Dave asked. Charlie said, "A square bailer." Dave asked, "What did your daddy think about that?" Charlie replied, "He said the Lord gave us horses; we didn't need tractors." Then he chuckled and said, "He also said if the Lord meant for cows to eat bales, He woulda give 'em square mouths." Dave asked, "You ever thought about going back to getting up hay the way your daddy did?" Charlie replied, "No, sir. I'm not goin' back to those days. The way I see it, the Lord gave us horses and

tractors.” Dave asked, “Do the cows care one way or the other?” Charlie replied, “Not as long as they get fed. That’s the only thing they care about.”

Andrea laughed and said, “Charlie, you just made Dave’s case for him. There are different ways of doing the same thing. What difference does it make as long as the job gets done?” She laughed again and said, “Evangelism is just the Lord’s way of feeding His herd. Like you said, as long as they get fed, that’s all that matters.”

Dave said, “Charlie, Baptists are bailing, and we’re forking it in the barn. What difference does it make?” Charlie replied, “We’re takin’ it to the herd. Y’all are waiting for the herd to show up because you have a pretty barn. That’s a big difference.”

Dave said, “Maybe. But if Presbyterian churches do the best they can with the gifts the Lord has given them, I think He will be kind in judging our efforts. We have the Holy Spirit to help us, and we’re doing the best we can with what we have where we are. If people see us and are attracted to us, then that’s the Lord drawing them to Himself. Jesus has called us and equipped us to continue His ministry. I just think He’s given us a little wiggle room to get it done. The only way we can get in trouble is if we don’t do anything at all.”

Well, I know what you’re thinking. You’re thinking a good story always has a happy ending. But there is no happy ending to this story. That is for fairy tales, I guess. Charlie is a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist. He believes what he believes and thinks there is one way of doing things. And Dave is a Presbyterian who thinks God is helping us continue Jesus’ ministry, and we can give God our best effort and trust Him for the rest. Charlie and Dave did finally leave Melvin’s that morning. And when they did, Dave paid for Charlie’s breakfast. He told him it was just some good old fashioned Presbyterian

evangelism. Charlie said, "Huh. The next time I'm hungry, I'll come lookin' for you."

Dave smiled and said, "See? It does work."

