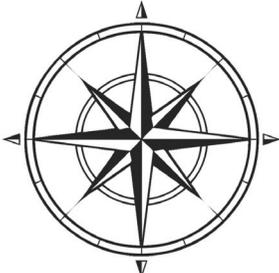


Journey 
With Me

Redemptive Threads
Woven Through
the Bible

W. RANDALL LOLLEY

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EDITOR'S NOTE: As indicated in the Introduction, this book is a compilation of sermons intended for a specific setting in a specific time. Therefore, references are made to persons and events familiar to listeners at that time, and there is a lack of footnoting of sources since there was no expectation of the sermons being published two decades later.

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FOREWORD



It was seminary convocation in the fall of 1978, and as a new student I was a real sucker. We had gathered in the stately Olin T. Binkley Chapel amid the magnolias on the old Wake Forest campus.

President Randall Lolley took to the pulpit to welcome us and to get us started on our journey of theological education. He began in a self-deprecating manner, assuring us he was just a good ol' boy from L.A. (Lower Alabama).

Then he delivered a powerful message of faith, hope, and love that was theologically brilliant and deeply motivating. By the time he finished, I'd made a mental note to myself: Never fall for that good ol' boy notion again.

In my experience there has never been a campus setting where the institution's president was more beloved than in the glory years of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary when Randall Lolley led the way. And he continued to shape many of us long after he handed us our diplomas.

We heard him speak prophetically and watched him act courageously when the rise of fundamentalism threatened his job as well as our theological home and denominational identity. He was never for sale.

The essence of the Christian faith and the Baptist identity that he and others at Old Southeastern had taught us was more than book learning. Dr. Lolley lived out before us a faith that was consistently sacrificial, inclusive, and hopeful even amid trials.

In 2011, the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today* news journal presented its annual Judson-Rice Award to Dr. Lolley for his remarkable impact on congregations and those who lead them. Director Mike Queen, my seminary classmate who served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, North Carolina, paid tribute.

Mike spoke of the impact Dr. Lolley had made on his life after he left a family business to attend seminary as well as in the years that followed. Then Mike asked all of those in attendance who had attended Southeastern Seminary during the Lolley years to stand.

We did—and there were many of us gathered that evening at the First Baptist Church of Raleigh. In the midst of the continuing applause, Mike smiled and said to Randall: “We are your fault.”

Dr. Lolley quickly responded: “I accept responsibility.”

Former students, parishioners, friends, and colleagues—now spread far and wide—are better Christians and better Baptists because of Randall Lolley. May his inspired words that flow from this book continue to shape us and many others.

John D. Pierce, Executive Editor/Publisher
Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith Publishing

FOREWORD



I first met Randall Lolley in late August 1984. I was an entering Master of Divinity student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. In the opening convocation service, held in Owen T. Binkley Chapel, Dr. Lolley preached the convocation sermon. Its title: “Last at the Cross, First at the Tomb.” It was perhaps the most moving sermon I had ever heard in my life and made a strong case for women as proclaimers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This experience was only the first of many in which I heard Randall Lolley preach the gospel with eloquence, creativity, conviction, passion, and biblical fidelity. My own life, ministry, and spiritual journey have continued to be nurtured by Randall Lolley in the three decades since.

Randall is a wordsmith. He uses words the way an artist uses color—but not just any words . . . gospel words . . . Word of God words. His preaching enables listeners to hear with new ears and see with new eyes. He has an uncanny ability to articulate what we average disciples and preachers think and feel but can’t seem to put into words. He speaks what we would speak if we could.

As important as words are to Randall’s ministry, they would be less powerful without a life to back them up. Throughout his life Randall has “walked the talk.” From his courageous witness to truth and freedom at Southeastern, to his exemplary pastorates at several leading North Carolina churches (including the First Baptist churches of Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and Greensboro), to his leadership in Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (both nationally and in North Carolina), Randall Lolley has served as a vivid example of the best of what “free and faithful Baptists” have to offer to the world.

When he was moderator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina in its early days, Randall was famous for saying, “There is a Christian way to be human, a Baptist way to be Christian, a CBF way to be Baptist, and a North Carolina way to be CBF.” I would add: There is a Randall Lolley way of following Jesus, and all of us who know him, personally or through his preaching, are blessed to learn of the Savior through his life and words.

Larry Hovis, Executive Coordinator
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina

PREFACE



Journey with me . . .

I undertook this preaching journey through the Bible from January 8, 1995 to September 29, 1996. It was a “preach/teach” series that climaxed my pastoral career as well as my seven years at the First Baptist Church of Greensboro, North Carolina.

The purpose of these sermons was to review the entire biblical landscape, and to discern once more the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of the Holy Scriptures.

Hopefully, the redemptive threads woven from Genesis to Revelation have come to light in these sermons. Perhaps, also, Bible study teachers and other lay leaders will find them a ready reference through the years.

The sermons have been printed as they were preached over a period of one and a half years. I acknowledge a large debt to Jo Covert, my able administrative assistant, for her help in producing the manuscripts from my handwritten notes.

Journey on . . .

On a wintry-springy, sunny-damp, cold-warm day (Tax Day, April 15, 2015), Charles (Chuck) Rice and his wife, Leslie—two of our finest friends over the years—came to have lunch with Lou and me where we live at the Cypress of Raleigh.

There and then Chuck dropped the idea of this book on me. Since Chuck had built our house in Raleigh, and it had not fallen in, I thought the idea of this series of sermons might have oxygen in it to help some student, pastor, counselor, or teacher seeking to see the Holy Bible as a whole story.

Thus the title: *Journey with Me*.

One will discover that these messages, sermonic in form, have both a preaching and teaching component. I want to inspire and instruct my readers.

I am grateful to Chuck Rice, Johnny Pierce, Larry Hovis, and many others who have inspired the thoughts contained in this book. The goals of the entire project are to inspire ministers, especially young ministers, and to build the foundation that will provide scholarships for them to receive their education.

W. Randall Lolley

INTRODUCTION

The Primacy of Scripture

Psalm 19:7-11, 2 Timothy 3:16



Except for sin, allegiance to the Scriptures is about the only thing Baptists have in common. Baptists around the world differ almost as much as they are similar. We differ in our worship styles, in our hymn books and hymns, in the doctrines we espouse, in the way we do just about everything.

But on one thing we are gladly, and a bit glibly, agreed: We are “people of the Book.” Our preachers even buy their Bibles for their floppiness, so that when they hold them in their hands, they give the impression that they really are preaching the Word.

Now when we say we are people of the Book, what do we mean by that? Well, it depends. It depends on who says it, and it depends upon why who says it says it.

Surely we do not mean by being people of the Book what one church marquee I read recently suggested. That marquee read, “The Bible is God in print.” No, that is paper papacy.

In our best moments when we say that we are people of the Book, we are not saying that we are people of the print in the Book. Rather, what we mean is that we are people of the Word in the Book. The Word alive! The Word of the Lord!

We hold no allegiance, then, to mere print on paper pages. Those are just words for us trapped in their cold, impersonal incapacity to give us their message.

Our allegiance is beyond the print. Our allegiance is to the Word: the living spirit that speaks to us through, and over, and under, and around, and above, and below, and between the words that are in the Bible.

We are people, then, of the Word behind the words, in the Word, through the words. Our loyalty lies beyond the words about the Word. Our loyalty lies with the the Word.

With such a primary, foundational allegiance like that we ought to agree both on what the Bible says and on what the Bible means by what it says, shouldn't we? The fact is, we Baptists agree on neither.

The way Baptists read the Bible raises lots of questions. Is the Bible democratic or republican or independent or even interested in government very much at all?

Does the Bible teach capitalism, socialism, or communism, or any other “ism” that one might espouse or loathe? Is it on the side of the owners, the workers, the managers? Does its teaching about prayer extend to touchdowns and home runs and basketball goals? Does it encourage a reader to fly into the teeth of physical laws by which this moral universe is governed?

The Bible is Earth's number-one best seller—still is. Around the world the Bible is the best seller year in, year out—not really a book at all. The binders have done us a disservice. What we hold in our hand when we hold a Bible is not a book as much as it is a library written by many different persons over many hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is a swirling composite of tremendous and frequently obscure messages—a virtual literary stew of poetry and prose, law and music, history and apocalyptic.

But for us, the people of the Book, the Bible is a word about us—about our lives, about the way you and I engage God, about our believing and unbelieving, our innocence and our guilt, our crusaders and our crooks, our hope and our despair. In short, the Bible is about us. It was written for us by persons very much like us. But preeminently, beyond all that, the Bible is about God. It is about God, who is easier to believe about than to believe in.

We Baptists use many words to describe the Word. Over the months and over the years Baptists have had lots of problems about the Bible. Some have even called ours a battle for the Bible. Not really: the Bible has never really been battled over among Baptists. Interpretations have, opinions have, words to describe it have flown between us and caused a lot of pain among us, but basically, foundationally, and fundamentally Baptists believe the Bible. There is simply no other place where we can go to hear God speak.

I determined a long time ago that the best way to describe the Bible is to let the Bible describe itself, and then use those very words in talking about it in our witness to others. Let me illustrate the Bible's own glossary regarding itself.

The Old Testament is the only Bible the New Testament Christians had—the only Bible Jesus knew—and the only Bible that Paul and Peter and James and John knew was the Old Testament because they actually produced the New Testament during their lifetime.

The Old Testament is replete with references to the Word of the Lord. The Psalms, for example, are a treasury, a glossary, celebrating God's powerful Word. In just three verses in the 19th Psalm there are seven words the Psalmist uses to describe the Word of God for him. Listen to verses 7-9: The Word of the Lord is *perfect*. That means it does exactly what it has been designed to do without exception. It is perfect.

The Word of the Lord is *sure*, certain, dependable, reliable. The Word of the Lord is *right*—not wrong, not maybe, not erroneous by design. The Word of the Lord is not polluted, not poisoned, not impure. The Word of the Lord is *clean*—more than the absence of dirt, but the positive presence of cleanliness and substance. The Word of the Lord is *truth*—not half-truth, untruth, or anti-truth. The Word of the Lord is *righteous*. God's kind of rightness is demonstrated, illustrated, and proclaimed from this Word. What a glossary!

But add to that the Bible's clearest, cleanest, noblest, most climactic word about itself. That word is found in 2 Tim. 3:16. Paul was trying to help Timothy, who was a Gentile more than a Jew in his rearing, to understand something of the significance of what he held in his hands when he held a scroll of scripture. Paul was trying to train

young Timothy in the very rudiments of his mission and of his ministry as a servant of God. Paul said to Timothy, "All Scripture, the entire Old Testament that you know, is inspired by God."

The word Paul uses is *theopneustis-theos*, "God," and *pneustis*, meaning "to breathe." Put the word together and Paul is saying "Timothy, Scripture is God-breathed; it is inspired by the very Spirit, the very breath, the very wind of the Lord." That is to say, "Timothy, and Christians in Greensboro, take note: the same Holy Spirit who indwelt the persons, who wrote the Scriptures, now indwells the words of Scripture that they wrote so as to indwell you, the reader, you, the interpreter, when you humbly search the Bible for a word from the Lord."

The entire matrix of origination, transmission, translation, canonization, interpretation, and proclamation of the Scriptures is caught up in that amazing word: that all Scripture is *inspired*, God-breathed by the Lord.

The primacy of Scripture, we are all for it. But what exactly does it mean? How do we read the Bible? How do we live the Bible? What difference does the Bible make in our lives? Does the Bible really underpin the following happening in the Georgia town of Euharlee?

I have never been to Euharlee, Georgia, and probably never will go. Not too long ago *Time* magazine related an actual happening that occurred in Euharlee, Georgia.

Reverend George Miller stood up to preach. Beside him was a box. He quoted Mark 16:16, KJV: "They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." Rev. Miller plunged his hand into the box and brought out two giant rattlesnakes.

Presently, also, he brought out a salvation cocktail, as he called it, and called on one of the worshipers, saying, "Brother Davis, do you believe in the power of the Lord enough to drink what is in this bottle?"

Ernest Davis, a 34-year-old farmer, father of five, grabbed the glass, took several gulps, and four days later was dead of strychnine poisoning. A charge of manslaughter was brought against the preacher, but the charge was thrown out of court on the grounds that there is really no law in Georgia to prevent an individual from carrying poison. It was established in testimony, in court, that Rev. Miller told Ernest Davis: "I warn you, do not take this unless the Lord leads you to do it."

When the charge was dismissed, Rev. Miller clapped his hands, shouted that he would lead a big Holy Ghost celebration at his church the very next Saturday night, and he told the people, right there, in advance to be ready: He would handle snakes and drink poison himself.

Primacy of Scripture: What exactly does it mean for us? Does the Bible being so powerful, potent, and primary in our lives mean that we have to read it exactly like that? How do you read the Bible? How do you live out the Bible?

On her deathbed Gertrude Stein asked, "What is the answer?" But a few moments later, just before she died, she asked, "What is the question?" She affords a clue for the primacy of Scripture in practice. We had best not rely on the Bible just for the answers it gives, and it does give a lot of good answers. We must rely on the Bible, also, for the

questions it asks. So many of our questions are here today and gone tomorrow. So many of the questions we are asking in January 1995 are not the questions we asked in 1985 or will ask in 2005.

The questions the Bible asks endure. They are ultimate. They are life-and-death questions for all the ages. Listen: "What has a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" That is a Bible question. Listen: "Am I my brother's keeper?" "If God is for us, who can be against us?" "What is truth?" "If a man dies, will he live again?" "What must we do to inherit eternal life?" Look and listen. You will hear these Bible questions becoming your ultimate questions. That is why Scripture is so primary for us.

There are some who advise that we ought to read the Bible just as literature—just as we read any other book. It has good stories. It has good history. Simply read it like we read anything else. The trouble with that counsel is the Bible is not like anything else. There is no other book God-breathed, no other library God-breathed in the same sense as the Scriptures. To read the Bible as mere literature is like reading *Moby Dick* as a manual for whaling or the Gettysburg Address for its punctuation.

Consider this: If I look *at* the window in the room where I study, I see on that window fly specks, handprints, dust, even the crack where someone hit it, apparently, with a rock. If I look *through* even that soiled window pane, I see the gorgeous world outside. Something like this is the difference between those who look at the Bible and see it as a nice, neat, little book and those who look through the Bible into the unfathomable depths of humankind's nature and God's great grace adventure.

You remember once a lawyer came to Jesus asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" You remember that Jesus referred that lawyer to the Scriptures. He said, "What is written?" Then Jesus added in Luke 10:25 a very interesting question. He said, "How do you read it?" Now the usual rabbinic formula for introducing a scriptural quote was, "What do you read?" But here Jesus gave a dramatic new twist to the question. He asked, "How do you read it?"

Jesus Christ saw that the *how* is as important as the *what* when it comes to reading the Bible. So he questions his questioner, not only about the content of his Scripture reading, but also about the impact of that word on his life. That is you see, after all, in the final analysis, the test of the primacy of Scripture for us. If the Bible does not make any difference in our lives once we have read it, then it doesn't have primacy, doesn't have ultimacy, doesn't have potency, doesn't have inspiration, doesn't have revelation—not for us.

In order to be primary for us, the Bible must make a difference when we read it. So the question comes as we launch this series of surveying the entire Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation: What difference do these Scriptures make in who we are and the way we behave once we have read them?

In one man's life the Scriptures made a dangerous and a daring difference. His name was William Tyndale. He belonged to the age of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. During his lifetime the church, the state, and the culture were all in ferment.

The times when Tyndale lived were marked by Erasmus, Luther, Cromwell, and Henry VIII. But the biggest bombshell of all came not from England in Tyndale's lifetime, but from Germany. In Germany, Gutenberg set up the first movable-type printing press and produced the first book printed in Europe, the Gutenberg Bible. He printed it 28 years before William Tyndale was born.

William Tyndale went to Oxford and then to Cambridge and became a very well-educated man. He was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. He early developed two passions.

First, he wanted to embrace the reforming opinions of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and other protesters who were perceived by the authorities as being heretical. Tyndale dared to be heretical because he believed what the Protestants were believing.

Second, he wanted to provide with all his soul a translation of the Bible into the common tongue of the English-speaking people. The Bible had never been translated into English. He was driven by a desire to provide an English translation from the Hebrew, the Greek, and other cognate languages so that, as he put it, the boy who drives the plow could know the Scriptures as well as the man who preaches the sermon. He set upon this, his life's dream.

William Tyndale first went to London and then to Hamburg and Wittenburg and Cologne and Worms. Then finally at Antwerp in Belgium he finished his task. William Tyndale translated the New Testament from the tongues that no one in England could read—except just a very, very special few people—into an English New Testament. It was first printed by Gutenberg's printing press technique in the year 1526. It was the only English Bible ever published up until that time.

Christianity was more than 1,500 years old before an English-speaking/reading person could take this library in his or her own hand and read it in his or her own tongue. Tyndale wanted to translate the Old Testament as well. He turned to the task. He completed part of the Old Testament translation, but he was delivered—betrayed, actually—into the hands of the authorities, both sacred and secular, who considered his work a heresy. He never finished translating the Old Testament.

He was in prison for a year and a half near Brussels, and he finally came to trial. He knew that his fate was already sealed. William Tyndale acted as his own lawyer. In his defense, during his trial he maintained that the Christian conscience was free in Christ Jesus; that faith alone justifies a person before God; and that the common people deserved to have a Bible they could read in their own language. He was condemned a heretic. On the morning of October 6, 1536, just a little more than 458 years ago, William Tyndale was strangled until he died, and then his body was burned. His last words before his death were: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

The deed was done. The costly biblical ethic of salt and light had won its way. But Tyndale's English Bible was loose in the world. Today, you and I safely and freely can open it and read it. Never again will the Scriptures be locked into Latin and Hebrew and Greek. Now it is available to the English-speaking/reading people around the world.

The Bible: How do you read it? Read it with me this year and a half or so ahead as we journey through its pages. But read it remembering that one man found it so primary that he gave his life that we might have it in our own tongue. For Tyndale, Scripture made a difference! Amen.

January 8, 1995