

2016 Evangelistic Election Sermon

This Tuesday November 8th, our nation will once again go to the polls to choose our elected leaders, including the President of the United States. There are many who are excited about this election and many others who are excited it will soon be over. It is clear that our nation is more divided than at any other moment in modern times. I would like you to keep that in mind for this morning's lesson.

Richard Clark Conversion

The story I am about to tell you is true. It has been handed down in my family and my mother handed it down to me. I think you might find it interesting.

In 1826, don't know what month or day, my 2nd great grandfather Oliver Stanley was born on a plantation in Harris County Georgia. He was a slave and was born blind or nearly so. Somehow God's providence saw to it that he lived as during that time, a "defective" slave was subject to being unceremoniously killed. Anyway, he eventually married the woman who would be his wife named Lucinthia and they had 10 children.

Grandpa Oliver did not know Christ and obviously could not know for he was denied the freedom to learn. But the rebellious genes run deep in my family and though he never learned to read or write, he made sure his children did. The book that was used in their learning besides those that taught them the ABC's was the Bible. It seemed to be the only book for which they had some permanent access.

After a long, hard day's work with no pay, the kids would secretly read the bible to Grandpa Oliver. The girls Sophia, Charlotte and Betsey had learned first and taught the others as they had access to the big house. Some of the sons had been sold to neighboring plantations but Silas, Jacob, Isaac were still there.

There were a lot of churches around. Most either exclusively black or exclusively white. The Stanley's were given some limited opportunities to leave the plantation. They travelled the dusty backroads with their passes to perform some trades with other plantations on behalf of their slave master. These travels sometimes happened on Sunday.

If you've ever heard preachers from the south then you know how animated and convicted they can sound. You could hear the preachers yelling and preaching their message, the congregation singing and praising God for miles. Not all of them were the same. Nevertheless, Grandpa Oliver would listen to them as they rode by in the horse drawn cart and he could somehow tell if they were teaching truth. He was an excellent listener from what I'm told. One Sunday morning, they were on some local travels and grandpa heard a preacher. Like all the other times he listened intently on what they were saying unbeknownst to the kids traveling with him. He was a quiet man. This time though the preacher was different and the message unique. He told his son to stop the cart for a few minutes as he listened to what was being said and then he said, "That's the one". The kids not understanding what he was talking about asked him and he interrupted and said again, "that's the one". He then asked his boy to take the cart over to that church. After some time with the preacher, Grandpa Oliver was baptized into Christ as was everyone with him and eventually the rest of the family.

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And that is how the gospel was introduced into my family. From a political standpoint, my family at this time were staunch republicans although they could not vote.

Fast forward to September 14, 1964, a young boy was born in a small town just outside of Birmingham Alabama. He was a healthy 9 pounds, 6 ounces and the only boy born that day in that hospital. That little boy was me. As I grew up, it was clear how important the gospel was in my family. We were in service every Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night bible study. By the time I was 6-years old, I could recite the 23 Psalm from memory. I've lived in Alabama, Alaska, Illinois and mostly Ohio as I grew up. My parents were divorced by the time I was 10 so I grew up largely in a single mother home. I was baptized at the age of 14 at the Titusville church of Christ in Birmingham Alabama. I knew what I was doing and why even at this young age.

Now the way I grew up and the environment I grew up in is not unlike the way many minority kids in single-parent families grow up today though there were some differences. I was never taught to be racist but the undertones were certainly there. Either with some members of my family or within the community for which we lived. We were poor and lived in the hood. There was crime and we've had our homes broken into, burned down by arson and our lives destroyed a number of times.

I got plenty of whooping with belts, switches and all manner of domestic disciplinary resources. It depended upon how mad she was and what was immediately available. Strangely enough, the women did all the corporal punishments and the men just watched, sometimes with enthusiasm. In school we got paddling as well as detention and it wasn't unusual for teachers to scold you publicly when you acted out or said something foolish.

Proverbs 13:24, Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Proverbs 22:6, Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

So I did not have the benefit of a great education in a private school, I went to public school and was largely an average student. Even in all this I never got in trouble with the law or ran with the wrong crowd. **Proverbs 22:15, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”** My mother always told me if I get in trouble and go to jail because of something I actually did, don't call her and expect a beating when I got home. A healthy respect of authority was always in place and this is in part because of our religious convictions.

Something that I was always taught even in my youth and that I carried into my adulthood was to ask questions and to seek out the motives of others before making important decisions. This has served me well as an adult and in my career.

I graduated high school and went on military service in the Marine Corp. with the plan of completing college while I was in the service. That didn't work out but I went on to school after being honorably discharged and then pursued my career.

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One thing though that I consider was the absolute most important thing which I was taught was Jesus and the importance of the Holy Bible and it is this that makes me who I am today. So would I say that I came from a loving family, yes, for the most part, my environment not with standing. If I could roll back time and change some things, yes that would be true too. Do I have family today that represent the religious conviction and determination of my grandpa Oliver, well, yes...and that family is YOU!

Doug and I may be very different in how we grew up and in what we've learned in life but the one thing that we have in common is a family in Christ and a common father in heaven. I literally love him and all of you as my family and would not hesitate to put my life on the line for you.

Now let's hear from my beloved monochromatic brother in Christ his story and he will conclude this lesson with some important points and the invitation.

Doug Hamilton Conversion

I did not grow up in the church. I was pretty much raised only by my mother. She owned many bars and did the best she could to raise my brother, sister and me. Though I was not church-ed as a young child, my mother tried her best to impart certain values to us like hard work, honesty and consideration for others.

On Sunday mornings I would often spend time helping mom clean the bar and being able to keep the change which drunks would drop on the floor the night before. Another perk of having a mother who owned the bar was free billiards and foosball. By the time my brother and I were teenagers, we were winning some pool tournaments and mopping up on everyone in foosball contests.

David asked in Psalm 2:1, "*Why do the heathen rage, And the people imagine a vain thing?*" The answer is because they are heathen. By my early twenties I was living with my fiancé and had a son out of wedlock. I was working at a pork packing house to support them and she was a stay at home mother. When she wanted to move back up to her home place of Minneapolis, so I transferred to a processing plant at that location with the intent of moving them up in about six months. On many weekends I would make the four-hour trip back to Northwest Iowa to be with them.

All of this came to a crashing halt in April of 1987. The packing house permanently closed its doors because of a strike gone badly. I headed back to Iowa with my 1974 Chevy Luv truck to regroup. About a mile from home, my timing chain broke on the pickup and I had to be towed the rest of the way. Just when I thought it could not have gone any worse, I was greeted with an eviction note on the door because my fiancé was not paying the rent with the money that was being sent. She was using it to party and run around. When I came in the door and confronted her about it, she admitted that it was spent on booze and marijuana. She placed my ten-month old son in my hands and said that she was not ready to be a mother. She said, "Maybe in about five years we could get back together, but for now I want to be free to live my life."

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I was crushed. In a twenty-four hour period I had become jobless, without a vehicle, without a home and a single-parent. I had my sister take me to her place. I had bottomed out, hit the bottom of the pig-pen, broken and in tears. I borrowed my sister's car and drove to Milford, IA to visit a friend named Paul Kerr. He was a police officer and always seemed to have a good head on his shoulders. That night he gave me a pamphlet called Proverbs. I took it back to my sister's that night and read it. Because it was written in modern English, I did not know it was part of the Bible. I read it that night from cover to cover, being excited about the wisdom of the writer.

The next day I returned to Paul and asked him if he had any more of the pamphlets. He gave me a King James Version of the Bible and gave me the following advice: "Don't believe anything until you read it in here." It was some of the best advice ever given to me. The next week I was blessed with a job guarding an abandoned packing house. Each shift my duties were one detex clock key round and eleven hours of just sitting alone in the guard shack. My supervisor said I could read the Bible during that time. That summer I cruised through the Bible non-stop. I was a sponge, soaking it in and trying to understand what I was reading. That job ended a few months later, but by then I began to have a firm foundation in the scriptures.

I moved across the street from my mother in North Liberty, IA that fall. Continuing to read the Bible, I thought I was already a Christian. After all, I had "invited Jesus into my heart" like the Christian radio taught. The problem was that every time I went through the Book of Acts, it showed me that I needed to be baptized and belong to a body of like-minded believers. I was determined to find a church family that could rectify both of these shortfalls of my life.

There were 43 churches in the Iowa City phone book in 1987. I wanted to know which one best represented the first-century church. I made a checklist of thirty questions which I could ask each of them and ascertain which ones were the closest to the truth. I was able to reach people at 39 of them and the Church of Christ was not one of them. They did not have a functioning answering at the time and I was in haste to resolve the situation. At the time, the closest church I found in agreement was an independent Baptist church called Holiday Road Baptist. They received 26 out of 30 in the questions answered.

After attending there for about ten weeks, I asked to meet with the "pastor", Keith Carlson. He was surrounded by some of his deacons when I told him I was ready to be saved. He excitingly said, "Let us pray Jesus into your heart." I told him I had already done that about a year ago, but that I wanted to be baptized into Christ like the Bible said. Over the next half-hour I was showing him the many conversions in the Book of Acts and he was dismissing it with man-logic. Then he took the open Bible out of my hands, closed it, handed it back to me and said, "This is not how we do things here."

I was crushed, being rejected for wanting the truth in my life. I was terrified that there was no group of people representing the God of the Bible. I contemplated seeking out a group of like-minded people and start a new church, but decided to call the last four churches on the list before doing so. The first one I called was the Kirkwood Avenue church of Christ. A lady named Carol Presson picked up the phone. She was at the building with her husband Lindy. After answering the first five questions, she said, "My husband Lindy is here. He is and elder in the church and

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can better answer the questions.” Lindy came to the phone and I asked the thirty questions. To my surprise he answered all thirty in agreement with what I believed. I was excited because I believed I had found the Lord’s church.

I asked Lindy if I could meet the preacher. He said that Wayne Walling, the preacher, would not be back from travel until later that night. He left my number at the office and the next day Wayne was at my door for a meeting. For the next two hours he studied with me, confirming that I understood about entering covenant with Christ. By the end, he said, “Why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, washing away your sins and calling on his name.” I told him I could not be baptized that day because I would be late for work. Scheduling for baptism the next morning, I headed to work.

That night I would be getting off of work at 11:30. I thought to myself, “If this Wayne is serious about what he teaches, then I should be able to call him and be baptized right after work.” I called Wayne about 10:30 that night. He was reading in bed when picking up the phone. I told Wayne, “I would rather go to bed saved than wake up lost. Is there any reason that I could not be baptized this evening?” He said that would be no problem. I asked him where the church was and looked it up in the phone book.

Meeting him at 11:45 at the back of the building, he let me in at the baptismal. He handed me something to change into and stepped out. While changing I could hear beautiful acapella music being sung. When he came back in, I commented about the singing. He opened the door and told me that these were some of my future brothers and sisters who came out and welcomed me into the church family. The first two pews were filled with Christians, seeking to encourage me in my decision. I was baptized into Christ at 12:05 AM in June of 1988.

Summary:

Richard Clark is one of my best friends on earth. We are the same age, but from different cultures. He is black, but I am white. I can honestly say that I would lay down my life for him and believe he would do the same. We do not have division between us, unlike most of the country today.

We are told in Galatians 3:26-28, “*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*”

- As you march to the ballot in two days in search of a better future for our nation, remember what is truly important in the end.
- Consider the election we face every day, the decision we face as Christians to pull the lever for Jesus by sharing the gospel with the lost around us.
- True change for a nation is not through the election of its leaders, but through the intervention of the hearts of its citizens through the gospel.