

THE FIRST EPISTLE

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Designed by God, Living in a Designer World... Can We Overcome the World?

by Ashley Hall, Women's Ministry Associate Director

In the last article, we reflected on the fact that we were designed for holiness and that the world in which we live, is not the way it was supposed to be. And the realities of living in this world, even as redeemed sinners, is that it is all too easy for us to grow weary of fighting an uphill battle. The pace and preoccupations of our lives do not aid us in the uphill battle, but rather, conspire against deep thinking, reflection, and time with the Lord—all of which are required to evaluate the culture and world around us. The designer world preoccupies us with the trivial so that we never get around to the profound and permanent. But, you might protest, "I am already so busy, I'm already tired, I already feel like I fail in so many other areas and the area of worldliness is huge...unless I purge my house of all electronic devices, how can I really make a difference in this area?"

Let's turn for a moment to Scripture – how does the Gospel speak to our hearts as we are confronted with the designer world? John 16:25-33 (I encourage you to go and read the passage in its entirety!) reveals a conversation between Jesus and His disciples, just before the events of passion week, that deals with "the world." Verse 27: "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God." Here, Jesus lavishes love and encouragement on these disciples who, in only a matter of hours, will follow the path of the world...they will forsake Him and flee. Do we realize that this is what the world does – it mocks, scorns, and crucifies the Truth? You watch it happen when your children are mocked for standing up for the right thing, when scorn is the response to godly decisions made for the right reasons. But

consider Jesus' response. Yet knowing that His disciples will abandon Him, knowing that their faith is weak, knowing that the decisions that they make will not be steady unto the Lord always—knowing this, He makes much of the little grace that they have. As weak as their graces and faith were, they were real and true and genuine. What encouragement for us, that the Savior of sinners will not cast off those that believe—even those who are weak in faith, even we who are weak in faith and knowledge. He knows our hearts, He sees our realities, and when He sees godly faith and grace, even in small quantity, He is greatly pleased. That ought to encourage us. We—you and I—are going to fall off of the straight and narrow path and make poor decisions and follow the way of the world...it will happen in our speech, our choices, our attitudes, our material goods, and in our piety and devotion and worship of God. And He knows these realities, yet He is pleased when our weak faith, strengthened by Christ, enables us to make godly decisions and live for Him.

Notice the disciples' response: "Ah, now You are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech...that is why we believe" (v. 29-30). It's a bold assertion—"now we are sure, Lord, we really believe." And yet, they did not know their own hearts. They honestly meant those words and yet the realities were, they would fall into unbelief in the next hours and betray Jesus. They had not rightly estimated the weakness of their own faith, the power of sin, and the feebleness of their own resolutions. And every bit of it, they had to learn through painful experience. They had to profess belief, forsake the very Son of God, and seek repentance before they could realize

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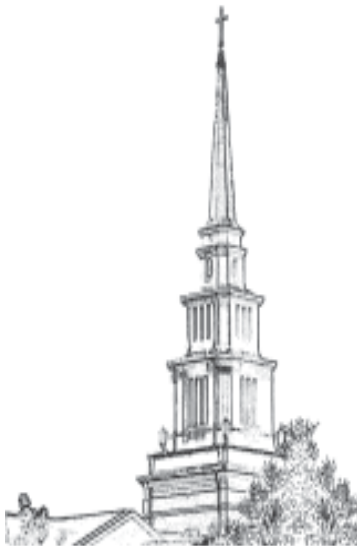
Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III PREACHING SCHEDULE

Sunday, May 3
8:30 & 11:00 a.m.

Dr. Derek Thomas
"Can a Christian Fall Into
Serious Sin?"
2 Samuel 11

6:00 p.m.
Dr. Ligon Duncan
"A Preacher with Power"
Luke 4:31-44

Wednesday, May 6
6:30 p.m.
Rev. Jeremy Smith
What is a Healthy Church
Member?
6. "A Healthy Church Member
is Committed to the Work/
Worship of the Local Church"



The Jackson State University Chorale, under the direction of Professor Cortez Castilla, will be singing for the morning May 3 worship services.

Nathan Bingham, over at the Cal.vini.st blog interviewed me on the occasion of my visit to Australia. Today, we continue with the final installment. Here it is:

NB - (9) You will be speaking at this year's Gospel Coalition National Conference. Joining together to proclaim the essentials of the gospel is an important endeavor; however, given the recent surge in more cross-denominational gospel events, do you think there is a chance the denominational distinctives, which each denomination believes to be Biblically based, are at risk of fading into the background and/or being replaced by the doctrinal distinctives of the loudest or most 'popular' speaker/s at such events? If you agree; what suggestions do you have to ensure this doesn't occur?

LD - Yes, I think that there is a very real risk right now of denominational distinctives being downplayed, or fading, or being replaced. Partly, this is because evangelicalism is increasingly "post-denominational" especially at the level of the local church. One thing this means is that members do not feel especially tied to denominations or denominational distinctives, and this in turn tempts ministers and church leaders to be indifferent to those distinctives in the name of church growth.

I think this indifference is a huge mistake. One of the things we have tried to say loudly through the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and Together for the Gospel is that our unity is in the truth, even on points where we differ. What we mean by that is that we all care deeply about the truth, we are united about the central truths of the Gospel, and we think our distinctives are important, even and especially where we differ from one another in our views.

In other words, we are united around, not "mission plus a doctrinal minimalism" but rather around doctrinal maximalism (within which we will rigorously and respectfully both agree and disagree, all the while promoting a

robust confessionalism) and the Gospel message and biblical means

NB - (10) Following on from the previous question: when you're at such events as the Gospel Coalition National Conference and you consider such things as Presbyterianism's historic longevity, is there anything you consider unique to Presbyterianism that can to some degree account for its longevity, and/or makes you thankful that you are Presbyterian?

LD - Presbyterianism is now half a millennium old and there are more non-English speaking presbyterians than there are English-speaking presbyterians. Conservative, Bible-believing presbyterian churches are growing, even in parts of the world and culture where other churches are declining and dying.

The leadership of world presbyterianism is more conservative theologically and more evangelical than it was fifty years ago. All of the credit for this goes to God. He alone is responsible for the continuing existence of evangelical presbyterianism.

What factors have contributed to the longevity of presbyterianism? One, its commitment to both biblical theology and biblical polity. Presbyterianism began as a renewal movement focused on seeing the church rooted in biblical doctrine, worship, discipline and government. Two, presbyterianism has simultaneously fostered a deep biblical piety and a love for learning, so that education and devotion go hand in hand. Third, presbyterianism, through its adherents, has always been deeply and extensively engaged in the communities in which it existed, and thus provided cultural leadership. I am thankful for all these things, and trust the Lord will be pleased to use them for his own glory.

NB - (11) A common and insightful question that is often asked of Ministers is how they prepare for their Lord's Day sermon each week. Here is a slight twist on that question. Given the historic nature of your time in Australia, and given

that the messages you deliver will be remembered and documented for many years to come, how did you go about preparing for what you would share at the Thanksgiving Service and the Ministry Conference?

LD - Dr. Allan Harman (a long-time friend and colleague) and I began talking many months ago about what topics I should address and what themes I ought to emphasize. I relied on Dr. Harman's knowledge of the Australian scene to inform me of the context into which I would be preaching and then simply asked the question: "How can I best serve these brethren?" What could I bring to them that would be most helpful and encouraging, given their context and challenges and opportunities? Allan and I looked over some topics that I've covered at ministerial conferences over the last several years and we landed on several specific ideas that we thought would be timely and edifying for those gathered at these special meetings. I then began reading Australian history and Australian Presbyterian history to give me even more perspective on the situation here.

So, I ended up addressing ministers about prayer, the atonement and Old Testament narrative. I addressed the 150th service on "The Goal of Our Ministry: Big Grace and Deep Truth for Strong Love," from 1 Timothy 1:1-5. Then I preached on "repentance" and the significance of Jesus' baptism for us (from Luke 3) on Sunday in the churches, morning and evening.

Thank you for edifying the Body of Christ in Australia, and thank you for your time in taking part in this interview. Soli Deo Gloria, Nathan W. Bingham.

TWIN LAKES SUMMER CAMP is looking for a medical doctor to serve as the camp doctor July 5-11. If interested, please contact Matthew Nasekos by email: Matthew@twinlakescamp.org or phone 601-813-4799.

Designed by God, Living in a Designer World...Retreat Reflections
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the weakness of their faith and the inability of their own resolutions. Do you see a correlation to your life? Do you see that He wants you to believe and He wants you to make those resolutions to follow Him and serve Him and abandon the fear and pressure of the designer world—and yet, you will not be able to do it? Your faith is too weak, the temptations are too great, you are going to fail. Yet, this is not the end of the story. We cannot do it, but Christ has already overcome for us. Verse 33 – “I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” Christ has walked this path ahead of us and has overcome the world. At every point at which we fail and succumb to temptation, He stood strong and did not sin.

Can we overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil? Absolutely not. But, there is One who already has overcome it all, and we need Him at work in our lives, strengthening our weak faith so that we can make small steps towards looking a little bit more like Christ and a little bit less like the world. Only the one who HAS already overcome it can help us to overcome it this side of Heaven. So to us, ladies of FPC, though we may be tried and troubled and worried with things on this earth, we can be of good cheer, able to look beyond the trials to the joy that comes in the morning or maybe not until the next world because of what Jesus has accomplished for us. Do we take our souls to these words and find courage, that “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-38). So let us remember that He who has overcome the world already is the only One who can give us strength to do likewise...and He gladly makes His power perfect in our weakness. All we have to do is ask.

Men of the Covenant
Thursday, May 7, 11:45-1:00 p.m.
Speaker: Bill Stone

Men, plan to come for lunch on Thursday, May 7, at 11:45 a.m. in Miller Hall. This will be our last luncheon until the fall. Please invite a friend to come with you. Our speaker will be Bill Stone, a Ruling Elder at FPC. Reservations are not required and the cost of lunch is \$5.00. If you need further information, please contact Shannon Craft, at 601-326-9243 or shannonc@fpcjackson.org.

“Join Us On a Walk Through History”

Our Pastoral Care Committee is sponsoring a trip, October 19-23, 2009, to Cincinnati, Ohio, to tour the **Creation Museum**—a state-of-the-art 65,000 square foot museum presenting *a walk through history as it brings the pages of the Bible to life*. Enroute to-and-from we will make stops at Fort Knox, KY, and tour the General George Patton’s Museum, and PCAs Covenant College near Chattanooga, TN. Included will be a tour of Cincinnati and an evening riverboat cruise on the Ohio River. Transportation will be on a chartered fifty-five passenger coach.

For more information and a detailed itinerary, please call Janet Quayle at 601-973-9120 or (email: jquayle@fpcjackson.org).

Because I Said SEW.....

Registration for Summer Sewing Camps!

Sew and Sow will again be offering sewing camps this summer! Last summer proved to be an excellent opportunity for girls and ladies of all ages to learn to sew. The fellowship shared and the skills learned were profitable in so many ways. So back by popular demand, we will offer the beginner sewing camp the week of June 22 – June 26 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in Patterson Hall. Basic Sewing Camp Phase 2 (for those who have taken the first class) will be the week of July 27 – July 31 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Deadline for signing up is May 31 in order to get all materials ordered. Space is limited. For more information, please call Cindi Alexander at 601-992-5243.

On Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage—Guidelines for First Presbyterian Church

The Session has recently adopted a statement that attempts to summarize the Bible’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Here is how it begins.

God’s intention in bringing a man and a woman together is to join two individuals into one union, a status which is to last as long as both members remain alive. An excellent wife is far more precious than jewels (Proverbs 31:10), and a godly marriage is among the richest blessings enjoyed in this life.

Marriage is a union of two sinners, and as such, no marriage fully experiences God’s original intention for the institution. Marriages between sinners can and should be God-honoring, loving, faithful, and joyful, but not all are. Some marriages are more characterized by pain and disappointment than by satisfaction and joy. Couples sin against one another, sometimes grievously, and some sins can result in serious consequences. Marriages do end, and the Bible has something to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

What follows are the Bible’s teaching about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The guidelines are written with the glory of God and the good of the church in mind, and are to be used as a guide to elders and pastors, an encouragement to couples, and as an aid to troubled marriages. As such, these guidelines are intended to help show the way, but are not a final arbiter of right and wrong in specific instances of marital discord. These guidelines are for pastoral counsel, and should be used as such.

If you would like to receive a copy of the statement, you can do so by contacting Marie Phillips in the church office at (601) 973-9101, and the policy should be available via the website soon.