

The GoodNews

Newsletter — Summer 2021

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

University Baptist Church exists to live out the gospel of Jesus and be an affirming example of God's light to all. We experience God in new and creative ways. We grow together in community. We strive to be a living example of God's kingdom on earth—embodying love, inclusivity, and justice. In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Golden Nuggets from the Dog Pen Church

God is not looking for the most intelligent people, nor the most well-dressed people, nor the most good looking people, nor the most popular people to woo crowds. What God is looking for is people in general who are willing to be broken for Christ's sake. (Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 61:1-3)

God has commissioned all those who call themselves people of faith to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He has sent us to the lost as beacons of light to the gospel, as carriers of the living bread to those who are hungry, and as vessels to take His power to the sick, the helpless, the broken-hearted. (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 4:18-19)

We are living in the midst of a generation that doesn't know the Holy Spirit nor the operation of His power. It is high time for true believers to stand up, to step out, and to demonstrate God's power, not just a knowledge of His word.

God wants us to take His power and go out boldly and defeat the power of the enemy. He wants us to carry the message of faith, of deliverance, and of salvation to a hurting and suffering world. (1Timothy 4:11-16, 2Timothy4:1-5)

Are you willing to step out of your comfort zone and be what God has called you to be? Or are you going to continue to hold back and be complacent? If you are reading this piece, then you know that the Dog Pen Church in Christ has chosen to rise up and touch our generation with the mighty power of God. (Matthew 5:14-16, John 15:8-17)

God Bless!

His Favor Through a Stranger

My name is Devin Bennett. Some of you reading this may be familiar with my circumstances but for those who are not, here's some background for the testimony I'm about to share. In 2003 I was convicted of Capital Murder and sentenced to death. In 2008 I was granted an evidentiary hearing by the Mississippi Supreme Court based on ineffective assistance of counsel in the sentencing phase of my trial. Well, on March 25, 2021, I finally had my evidentiary hearing. However as it was not time for me to begin the next chapter in God's story, the judge denied my petition for a new sentencing hearing. To everyone that has been praying and showing support for me, know that I am eternally thankful for you. Please continue to pray for God's will and strength in my life. Remember: a delay is not a denial.

The days following the judge's denial were very difficult for me. It was like a darkness came over me. I found myself in unfamiliar surroundings, not knowing anyone and not being able to call anyone I did know. What was familiar to me, however, was my trial in 2003 and all that entailed —the loss of my dad and mom in the months following my trial and the fear, guilt, pain, and torment that came with it. All of these things came upon me. I was hurting and afraid, and I was all alone.

For the next 24 hours or so, I experienced fear, pain, anxiety, guilt, shame, regret, and torment to a degree I have not experienced since the days leading up to my conversion in 2013. These thoughts and feelings were so heavy and overwhelming that I found myself turning from side to side while laying on my mat trying, hoping, to get away from them. It wasn't long after this that I had what I was told was a panic attack.

I need to pause here for a moment. Before I continue, it is important to know that in the months leading up to my evidentiary hearing, I was not doing well. I was struggling mentally, emotionally, and above all, spiritually. I am not attempting to make excuses for my sins, but I would like to share this. The circumstances of my case are very sensitive. In addition to my case, I experienced some trauma as a child, and as I mentioned earlier, I lost both parents shortly after my trial in 2003. I was 22 years old. You're probably wondering what all this has to do with my evidentiary hearing. Well, as the hearing deals with mitigation evidence, there had to be an investigation, psychological evaluations, and a lot of discussions about all of these matters. All of this, as you can imagine, was mentally and emotionally draining. Needless to say, I did not deal with it well — well or right for that matter— and as a result my fellowship with the Lord was not good. So when I went back to Rankin County in March, I was not doing well mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. Now, let's continue.

After the panic attack, I slept for what seemed like days. When I finally did wake up, I still felt depleted, depressed, and dismayed. I tried talking to God, and although I know He heard me, I was still feeling like I was in the cell all alone. Still, by faith, I continued to cry out to Him, seeking His love and forgiveness, pleading for His favor. Like Jonah, I had been cast out of His sight,

yet I would still look to Him. Jonah 2:2-4. Then something very unexpected happened. Another inmate was placed in the cell with me.

Now, having lived alone for the last 18 years, you can imagine some of the thoughts that ran through my head as this stranger in a red and white jumpsuit walks into the cell. One of the thoughts I had was: the officers put this guy in here to attack me in my sleep. You see, I wasn't supposed to be housed with other inmates because my charge policy stated that I was to be isolated. They knew this, and so, if they put him in here, it can't be good. Now, I want you to couple all this with what you know about my mental state prior to this stranger being placed in the cell with me. You are correct, dear reader, I was on edge.

So, this stranger is in my cell, and I don't really know what to think. Not long after he put his mat down, he turned and said, "my name's Justin." It's amazing the comfort familiarity can bring. Many of you reading this know of Justin Underwood. What many of you don't know, is that he is one of, if not the closest brother and friend I have. He is someone I'm very close to. He is someone very familiar to me, someone I love, trust, and care about very much. Out of all the names this stranger could have had, it had to be the name of my closest brother and friend of the last 18 years. But it was more than this. I have heard people say that there is power in a name, and although I'm fairly certain that what I'm about to tell you is not what they mean, I'm telling you, there was power in this stranger's name. When he introduced himself, there was a calm that came over me, a trust if you will, that told me this stranger, this man, was alright.

After a few hours of chit chat, he started opening up to me about his circumstances. While we were talking, he starts crying, just breaking down. This stranger, like me, was depleted, depressed, and dismayed. And like me, he too needed someone to come alongside and help him bear the burdens. So that is exactly what I did. He and I, two strangers, sat there for hours talking and sharing one another's burdens. As we sat there together talking, crying, praying, and eventually laughing, it became clear that this stranger was the answer to my prayer. That day God poured out His favor on both of us, and we each experienced His love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. We each received what we so desperately needed.

God sent me a stranger in answer to my prayer, in answer to my need. God sent me a stranger, who I learned was also a brother— a brother who needed me as much as I needed him. Yes, God sent me a stranger, dear friend, and His favor came with him.

If it is not already apparent, God's hand was all over this. But for those still not sure, here's more evidence. As I said earlier, because of my charge, I was not supposed to be housed with another inmate. But in addition to the policy in Rankin County Jail, later learned from Sgt. Dimetri that the Captain gave specific orders that I was to be kept isolated during my stay there. I also learned that there were almost 9 other cells on the zone they could have put him in, several of which were completely empty. Sgt. Dimetri told me that the officers made a big mistake putting him in the cell with me. When he told me this I couldn't help but smile and reply, "it wasn't a mistake,

sir. God wanted Justin in the cell, and so that is what happened.” What may be a big mistake by the hands of man may just be a big miracle in the hands of God. God allowed Justin to be put in my cell because that is where God needed him to be. I am a child of the most High God. I believe in His sovereignty, not luck and chance. My God is an “on time God.” Jehovah Jireh, my Provider!

In closing, I want to pray for Justin W, the officers at Rankin County Jail, and all the inmates I was blessed to meet. I pray God’s hand over each of your lives, I pray that God increases your measure of faith and desire for Him, that He overflow you with His love, peace, hope and joy, my dear friends. I pray God’s protection and prosperity over your lives, may He richly bless you and your families in all the ways He knows you need. I thank you Lord for the work You continue to do through the hearts and lives of these men and women. It is in Your precious name I pray Lord Jesus, amen.

Song of the quarter: “Sparrow” by Cary Asbury

1Corinthians 16:23-24

Kingdom Kid, DPC

My Love For You

My love for you is stronger than the waves beating upon the ocean’s floor.

One that’s strong enough to move mountains, and even unlock doors.

My love for you is like the love a mother has for her new born child.

Or one the father has for His precious sheep that’s lost out in the wild.

My love for you is one that can’t even be described.

And when you feel me in your heart, you will know that I surely am alive.

My love for you is always endless and pure.

So accept My salvation today, and make your eternity in heaven sure. (John 3:16)

— Jonathan Jinks, Rankin County Jail

Be Sober, Be Vigilant by Justin Underwood

1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour...whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”

Christians need to acquire a genuinely humble spirit. We are called to “be sober and be vigilant,” and therefore we need stout hearts to face formidable and unrelenting opposition. It should come as no surprise to Christians to suffer in any manner for Christ’s sake and it should be a cause for joy and not disappointment. Jesus gave up His life—enduring death on a Roman cross—to secure spiritual freedom for all people. In Jesus, we experience freedom not only from sin and its hold on us, but also from guilt, from shame, from worry, from eternal death, and especially from Satan’s lies. Satan can take no place but what we give him so we must be mindful of who we open the doors for and who we invite in.

Each one of us are houses, but we become homes—the very temples of God—when we surrender to God’s rule, when we take a realistic approach to life, and when we allow Him to add whatever furniture is needed. When our home becomes harmonious and blessed, Satan will try to attack it. He is like an unruly tenant playing loud and obnoxious music every night of the week, throwing trash around everywhere, and knocking holes in all the walls. He becomes an absolute trespasser and a squatter who refuses to leave and does nothing but desecrate our property.

Satan wants to be the third party in our relationship with God, to agitate and disappoint, using our every weakness. He tries to inspire unrealistic expectations just like he did with Adam and Eve, and he will direct our focus from servanthood to self-absorption. He changed Adam and Eve’s focus from being God’s helper dressing and keeping the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) to becoming as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5). Satan fuels our imagination through the unhealthy things of this world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — and he will do that until God’s presence ceases to be the object of our faith, When God is no longer the object of our faith, the prevailing atmosphere in our home is left in chaos and conflict. Satan is smart enough to know that thoughts have presence with the Word of God (Ephesians 4:21-24).

We must acknowledge and understand that our human effort is inadequate and that God’s power is invincible. If we allow Satan to find an unclean place in the heart of our home, he will build a stronghold there and then use it to war against God and against the work of God. That is why we must fight every day in God’s strength and we must depend on the Word and on God through prayer (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Habitually reading the Word and referring everything to our Heavenly Father in our daily routine keeps us in touch with Him so that His peace can keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). God longs for us to make time for Him so that He can be our one and only

priority each day and then He will be our shield and buckler for an eternity. He promises His faithful love and abiding care to all who seek Him, to all who turn to Him for forgiveness, to all who listen to His instruction in scripture and in prayer, and to all who put their trust in Him (Psalm 91).

In closing, when we are no longer hostages to Satan's nonsense, but rather sober and vigilant, we have freedom to show love to our enemies, to walk in kindness, to live with hope, and to love our neighbors. It is then that our brothers and sisters in Christ and the world around us see and know that Christ lives in us (Romans 8:28-30, 2Peter 1:3-8, Romans 12: 9-21).

Be Sober, Be Vigilant

Called to "be sober and be vigilant," Christians need to acquire a genuinely humble spirit,

When our home becomes harmonious and blessed, our adversary the devil will try to attack it.

He wants to be the third party in our relationship with God to agitate and to disappoint, and he uses our every weakness. Displaced love leads to quarrels, to tensions, and to wars if we cater to our own selfishness.

When God is no longer the object of our faith, the prevailing atmosphere reeks of chaos and conflict, the sinful mind creates hostility toward God and to God it will not submit.

We were created to love God and others, and to pray for our enemies when they suffer misfortune, Satan can take no place except what we give him and so we must be mindful of who we invite in.

He is an absolute trespasser and he comes like a snake seeking to lure people into moral corruption, there must be constant vigilance and a preparedness to meet every attack of the wicked one.

During this age in which grace rules an inner transformation frees us to operate from His righteousness, If we are to bear the family resemblance as children of God, we must express love, patience, and kindness.

Jesus gave up His life enduring death on a Roman cross to secure spiritual freedom for all people throughout eternity, As our love communicates from His love, we become partners in God's radical solution to hatred and hostility.

God longs for us to make time for Him so that He can be our shield and buckler, and our one and only priority, Be sober and be vigilant—we have freedom not live with hope and to show love to our neighbors and our enemies.

The Imago Dei

“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:27

It would do us all well to reflect on what this verse reveals about human beings. Regardless of color, gender, religion, or economic status, we all bear the image of God, the imago Dei. (James 3:9).

This truth has around implications, not just in how we see ourselves and others, but ultimately in how we are to treat one another.

We have to recognize that we are all created in the image of God, and that each of us has intrinsic worth endowed by our Creator. Like a work of art, our worth comes from our Creator. (Psalm 8:5).

In Jesus Christ we see human likeness to God as it was intended to be, as it was before the fall. As we gaze into the mirror of God’s Word, the Imago Dei, our worth and purpose becomes clearer. (Colossians 3:10).

Therefore let us look to the mirror of God’s Word (John 1:1, 14), whose image we bear, that we may see what He sees, the Imago Dei. Then we can begin to love as He loves. (John 13:34, 15:12).

God bless you, dear friend.

Kingdom Kid, Dog Pen Church

A Dog Pen Church in Christ Prayer

Heavenly Father, our guide and protector, we thank you so much for bringing us through whatever situations we live in, and for leading us each day to call on your glorious name. For we know that nothing is too hard for you and that nothing is unknown to you.

We thank you for giving your only begotten Son to die for us on the cross and for His willingness to pour out His life for us in order that we could find healing and new life with you. We are in awe of Your amazing love and grace and we thank you immensely for helping us to grow in faith and in trust in you,

Please continue to stir in our hearts and help us to confess from our mouths the rich spirit of joyful praise we have for you. Give us the grace to strengthen and to encourage our companions in Christ as His abounding love binds us together through good times and especially in the darkest seasons of life.

May we also be a blessing to the people around us, serving as Your faithful witnesses wherever we may be. Please empower us through Your Spirit to live a life that is pure, that is faithful to your promises, and that is full of integrity.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray, Amen!