

DRY BONES

The day it stopped raining in Melbourne

God still intervenes in the affairs of men when we pray

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



Shortly after I had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, I received a call from the principal of the high school in the community where we lived, asking me to preach the sermon to the graduating class at baccalaureate. The high school had never had a baccalaureate service before, but since several of the graduating seniors attended our little church, they put pressure on the school administration who agreed. It was to be a big affair in the football stadium the first Sunday night in June.

I gave little thought to it for we were having our own problems in the church about that time. We lived in a transient community and a number of our people were either associated with the nearby space center or stationed at Patrick Air Force Base. As a result, people were constantly moving in and out of the community—more out than in. Our church had grown even smaller than the original 40 families we began with a year before and now my open declaration that I had been “baptized in the Holy Spirit” had everyone on edge, wondering what was going to happen next. They did take some comfort, however, that I had been asked to deliver the first baccalaureate sermon at the big high school and, realizing that 80 percent of the young people in the high school were “unchurched,” had been praying for me.

Three days before the scheduled Sunday evening service in the football stadium, the east coast of Florida was buffeted by a preseason hurricane which came roaring through the Caribbean and up the Atlantic seacoast until it reached the city of Melbourne. Mysteriously it remained stationary, about 10 miles off the coast, dumping tons of water on our city. It rained torrents for 48 hours straight. Sunday morning the high school principal called my house.

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“We have almost three inches of water on the grass turf at the stadium,” he said. “If it doesn't stop raining by four o'clock this afternoon, we're calling off the baccalaureate service.”

I went to church that morning in an anxious mood. Ordinarily I'm not too eager to speak at community functions, but this was different. For the first time in my life, I felt I had something to share with the people. I had met a God of miracles, and I was eager to introduce Him to the students and their parents. But I couldn't do a thing unless the rain stopped. With the eye of the hurricane directly off the coast, however, there was no way. Even if the hurricane began to move, it would not be far enough away by evening for the rain to cease.

That afternoon I called five or six of the men in the church and asked them to meet me at the Tabernacle at 3 p.m. to pray. They sensed my urgency and agreed to be there. We arrived in the pouring rain and dashed to the shelter of the building. We stood in a circle in the side of our little meeting room and held hands. The rain was falling so hard we could scarcely make ourselves heard. One by one the men prayed.

“Lord, you control the weather. Please make it stop raining.”

“Lord, you opened the Red Sea; now part the clouds so we can have the service tonight.”

“Lord, we believe you ordained Jamie to speak tonight, but he can't do it in the rain. Isn't there something you can do about it?”

“Lord, you created the sun and the rain, and we sure need the sun right now rather than the rain.”

They were all good, honest, sincere prayers. But nothing happened. In fact, I don't think we really expected anything to happen. We were just praying because we didn't know what else to do.

Then it was my time to pray. But when I opened my mouth, instead of the usual Baptist “sentence prayer,” I heard myself saying something that was so ridiculous I was shocked. But the words just poured forth. I was shouting.

“IN THE MIGHTY NAME OF JESUS, I COMMAND YOU CLOUDS TO GO AWAY! I COMMAND YOU RAIN TO STOP FALLING! I REBUKE YOU, EVIL HURRICANE, AND COMMAND YOU TO DEPART! OPEN, CLOUDS, AND LET THE SUN SHINE THROUGH!”

My word! Had that come out of me? I

had never spoken like that before. I looked around at the other men, still standing in our circle holding hands. They were all staring at me—and I could understand why. None of us, including me, seemed to want to hang around any longer. I choked out, “Let's go home.” We all picked up our rain coats and umbrellas and headed for the door.

But instead of walking out into the rain, we walked out into brilliant sunshine. Water was everywhere. The streets were flooded up over the curbs and sidewalks. Water was dripping from the trees and plants. But overhead the sky was blue and the summer sun was shining through, reflecting off the water below.

“Hallelujah!” one of the men shouted. Then, catching himself, he blushed. We dashed to our cars, but I knew something had happened in that room that would not only change my life forever, but change the lives of those men who were with me.

That night I preached the baccalaureate sermon to a group of kids who marched out on the field in caps and gowns, barefooted. All around us we could see the rain falling in sheets. But the football stadium was under clear skies. The Methodist pastor who gave the invocation asked me before I marched out on the field if I wasn't going to take my umbrella in case it rained. I'm sure he didn't understand my grin when I said, “Not after what I've just been through.”

I had never preached with such power. And authority. And when I shared about the reality of a miracle-working God, I knew I was speaking from personal experience—not from someone else's testimony. By the time we were back at the car after the service, it had started to rain again—and continued to rain for another 24 hours before the hurricane moved out to sea and dissipated.

The idea that God is speaking today—and that we are able to hear Him—is foreign to most of us. People who “hear voices” are considered strange. If you “act on that voice,” you are considered psychotic. Yet, when we stop and consider that God has not just set certain laws in motion by which the universe is run and then stepped back out of the way but still intervenes in the affairs of men through His Son Jesus Christ, and that we are the Body of Christ here on earth—well, how else will God speak unless it is through one of us? ⇨