

BAPTIST UNION CONFERENCE
JULY 2015

I do certainly thank you so much, Nelson Abraham, and your incoming President Salwyn Coetzee for the invitation to come and share in such a distinguished group as we have here tonight.

At one level I am surprised that you have asked an Anglican to come and be with you like this. At another level I am not so surprised as it is a scarcely concealed secret around South Africa that Carol and I are half Baptist as we go 50 percent to a Baptist Church and 50 percent to an Anglican! We love the Anglican liturgy and we love the preaching of the Baptists. So it's a slightly eccentric ecclesiology but it's one we live with and I can say that I do admire almost all things Baptist and lots of Baptists, and especially some of the Baptist heroes like Rex Mathie, Brian Jardine, Charles Spurgeon. And I'm quite keen on John the Baptist as well.

I was very proud to be invited to speak at Spurgeon's College in UK, a little while back, and loved having a photograph taken standing next to the statue of Charles Spurgeon preaching the Gospel. It reminded me of a 19th century Anglican preacher in London who wrote a limerick as follows:

*"There was an old Baptist called Spurgie
Who could not abide our liturgy
But his sermons are fine
And I use them as mine
And so do the rest of clergy."*

I remember when I was a student at Fuller Seminary, a good many years ago now, my Professor of Homiletics gave me a book called *Encounter with Spurgeon*. I don't know if any of you know it. It's a collection of his lectures, assembled by the great German theologian, Helmut Thielicke who gave as his advice to readers of this book, "Throw away all your books on theology and buy Spurgeon." If you don't have that book *Encounter with Spurgeon* or if you are not familiar with Spurgeon's essays, I encourage you to go to amazon.com and to secure that volume. It will mightily, mightily bless you.

If you are a leader, lead

Anyway, I am much challenged by the topic I have been given of *Unashamed to Lead*. What I want to say first of all in those terms is that if you are called to lead, then lead. In Romans 12:6 the apostle says: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." Then he mentions in verse 8: "The one who takes the *lead*, let him do it with all zeal." So if you take the lead, and if you are a leader, do it with all zeal. I can say as one who has led an organisation for over 50 years now, I know that African Enterprise has thrived most and best when I have given myself most fully and completely to the task of leading. And it has floundered and got into trouble when I have not given adequate leadership. When I have defaulted, the ministry has defaulted. In fact just this morning in my devotions I read in the book of Judges (5:1-2) how Deborah and Barak sang "that the leaders took the lead, and the people offered themselves willingly." So here were these two prophetic voices rejoicing that the leaders took the lead. Leaders need to take the lead. And it says that when the leaders take the lead, the people follow willingly. That is a tremendously important principle.

So I say that if you are a leader, or placed in a leadership position, then lead, unashamedly, boldly, capably and giving your whole self to it. Because your people will suffer if you don't take the lead and give a good strong lead if that is what the Lord wants you to do. If some here feel in that regard a measure of reluctance, then I would also want to say that you are in a good biblical tradition, and it's a good biblical emotion. Moses was reluctant to lead, he wasn't grabbing the position. He was shying from it in many ways. Jeremiah said "Ah, but I am young, I am but a child, how can I go and do this?" And he shrunk from this. Isaiah, after he had had a fresh vision from the Lord in Isaiah chapter six and he sees the Lord high and lifted up and a king on the throne, he says: "Woe is me."

If you look at Isaiah Chapter Five, you will find that he spends the whole chapter saying "Woe is you" to a mass of different people out here. Comes Chapter Six when he sees the Lord, he then says "Woe is me", and he has a sense of reluctance, of unworthiness about leading. We always need to have that. But after we have said "Woe is me", and if after we have confessed our sins and allowed the Lord to come and touch us at our place of need and guilt, then the beautiful thing is that the leader will hear the voice. Isaiah said: "I heard the voice." That's the thing I have to ask you, and ask myself, "When did I last hear the voice?" That usually comes when we finally reach the place of saying "Woe is me", the place of inadequacy, and not thinking of grabbing after the job. But once we have received that forgiveness from the Lord, and heard the voice, then you may well hear the voice saying: "Who will go for us? Who can I send?"

What an opportunity then to say: "Well, I am a sinner, I am frail, I am inadequate, I do fall short, and all of that, but here am I, send me."

You never know, of course, what task you are going to get. It may be a difficult one. Isaiah certainly got a difficult one.

Some reluctance important

So I think that some reluctance sometimes is important, even if I have said, "lead if you are a leader", but I think it is a healthy emotion to feel some reluctance, and that you are not after some kind of big-time position. This often means that a person, who is Number One, is willing to say, "Lord, I am also willing to be Number Two, or I am willing to be not necessarily the top dog, but the bottom dog, if that's what you want, Lord."

I believe that we have to be careful to surrender our promotional destiny to the Lord. You only go where He puts you. So the Psalmist can say in Psalm 75:6: "Promotion comes neither from the east nor from the west, but God lifts up one and puts down another." We have to have our promotional destinies surrendered to the Lord so that you are in the place where He puts you and you are comfortable with that place.

One pastor I was talking to, a very, very fine pastor, and a highly capable one, said: "I am called to be an Assistant Pastor." I thought that was rather wonderful. He didn't have to be the speaker; he didn't have to be the top dog. He was happy to be the assistant and to help the major leader with his leadership so that the two of them in tandem were giving good leadership.

So let's carry this theme forward a little bit more.

Leadership and character

What I want to say is that nations, churches, congregations, organisations fail when leadership fails. We ought to know that as a country. Because as a country we have had many capable leaders but they led us in the wrong direction. And we produced the paradox of a religious country producing the most awful political segregational system ever devised by man. But it wasn't put in place by fools, by people who weren't smart, but by people who were capable. They were effective leaders in many ways, highly capable. If you think of DF Malan, Hendrik Verwoerd, John Vorster, PW Botha, all of them were very powerful and effective leaders, but didn't lead us in the right direction and in the ways of justice and peace for our country. Hitler was in many ways a powerful, brilliant and effective leader. So was Stalin. So was Mussolini.

So what I am really saying is that leadership is not just about effectiveness or capability, it's about character, it's about motive, it's about spirituality, and it's about morality.

Defining leadership

So let's ask ourselves a little more what then is leadership?

Then famous Lord Montgomery who was made famous for the Battle of El Alamein against Rommel, and said: "Leadership is the capacity and the will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence."

As we think of leadership, let's put the word character hand and glove with it. John R Mott, one of the great missionary leaders in the early part of the twentieth century said: "A leader is a person who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who can pull others to follow." So the leader knows where he or she is going.

Some wag once said that leadership is explained out of three kinds of people in the world; those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what on earth is happening. There are quite a few of those!

The Bible's take on leadership

What then does the Bible say about leadership? 1 Timothy 3:1 (New English Bible): "To aspire to leadership is a noble thing." Or put differently: "To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition." It's not a wrong ambition to aspire to leadership. It's an honourable and noble ambition.

I remember many years ago reading a biography which told of a conversation which took place between General Eisenhower, after he had been made the Supreme Allied Commander instead of Montgomery. Eisenhower was talking to King George VI about this. He said: "You know, Your Majesty, I am a bit concerned about something. I feel Monty wants my job." And King George said: "Oh, I am so relieved, I thought he wanted mine!"

I told that story in the Speaker's Lounge in the House of Commons in London when I had the privilege of speaking there and a lady came up to me afterwards and she said: "Well I'm Lord Montgomery's daughter-in-law." So I said: "Don't get me wrong, he was a fantastic guy." She was a great admirer of him. And so indeed am I.

But what I am saying though is that it wasn't a bad thing for Monty to covet that position. Without being disrespectful to Eisenhower, Monty was probably a better qualified general. At the end of the war if Monty's strategy had been followed for the advance on Berlin, the war would have ended about six months sooner. And the whole shape of eastern and Western Europe would have been different. So Monty felt he was qualified for the job, and he wanted it. It's not a bad thing. It's not a wicked thing. It's not a terrible thing.

So to aspire to leadership is a noble ambition. But you see it's only safe if the next biblical word is heeded, and I give you Jeremiah 45:5: "Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not." So the best leader or potential leader is one who surrenders personal ambition to the Lord. Just now I gave you Psalm 75:6 "Promotion comes neither from the east nor from the west but God puts up one and puts down another." So we need to say: "Lord I do aspire to lead, I believe I have the gifts to do so, but I surrender this to you and I am not seeking great things for myself. Jeremiah says 'seek them not.'"

Carol and I have just had the privilege of being in Italy. When you are in Italy you see lots of interesting things about lots of ancient people, including Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar said one time: "I would rather be first in Brundisium than second in Rome." So he would rather be first in the smaller city of Brundisium than second at Rome. In other words, he was an overwhelmingly ambitious man. Scripture doesn't make place for that. What this does is raise the whole question of *motive* in terms of our desire for leadership. Is it about recognition, privilege, power, or what?

When we step into the New Testament, we find our Lord meeting with his disciples when a dispute arose amongst them (Luke 22:24). Which of them was to be regarded as the greatest? And He said to them: "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them, (and that's how many people like to lead, by exercising lordship over others) and those in authority over them are called benefactors, but not so with you. Rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, the one who sits at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at the table? But I am among you, as one who serves." That was the posture of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So here from these two scriptures we see several things about leadership. We see leadership as service and servanthood under God. We see leadership as something to be done in full humility. We see leadership as sacrificial selflessness, with no concern for great things for oneself. Here is leadership as a noble thing. Here is leadership as incredibly important. And here is leadership as a task to be embraced eagerly and unashamedly.

You know, it is a bit of challenge that in some ways the kind of leadership the Lord is after seems to be so rare in the Bible. So in Ezekiel 22:30 the Lord says: "I sought for a person who would stand in the gap for me and there was none." What a thing when God is looking among all these people for

the kind of person He was after and there was none. Surely there were strong, capable, fine, brilliant, intellectual even spiritual people around, but he said “I couldn’t find one.” 1 Samuel 13:14 it says: “He sought for himself a person after His own heart.”

What a challenge, what a challenge for you and me to try and become a person after God’s own heart. Remember Isaiah 6:8: “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” And Isaiah replies: “Here am I, send me.” But that’s after the “Woe is me.” When he stopped saying “Woe is you”, he started saying “Woe is me.” But if we come to the Lord, dear ones, in a surrendered way, terrific things can happen. If we are willing to be instruments.

Carol and I have been privileged recently of being taken to Assisi in Italy which is famous for the name of St Francis of Assisi. St Francis said: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.” “Make me an instrument”, that is a really powerful challenge, to be an instrument. Can you in your congregation, you and your spouse together, you and your families together be instruments of His peace?

I have had the privilege of getting to know Billy Graham quite well over a great many years and I’ve also got to know his major biographer, John Pollock. John Pollock wrote several biographies on Billy Graham. One day I said to John over a meal with him in Los Angeles: “John, what do you think is Billy’s Graham’s greatest quality?” He said to me: “Billy Graham has the deepest sense of instrumentality of anyone I have ever met.” He also said: “He is integrity personified.” So can you go back to your congregation with just the desire to be an instrument for whatever God wants you to do? He wants you to keep the instrument sharp. Like the axe needs to be sharp to cut trees down. But just to be an instrument. And yes, if it’s an instrument to lead, then to lead, in the Jesus way.

So what a terrific challenge this is for all of us!

Some other things I want to say.

Other qualities needed in Christian leadership

First of all I believe that the Christian leader needs to be *theologically biblical and evangelical*. You have had earlier in your conference a session on *Unashamed to be Evangelical*. I am unashamed to be evangelical. I believe this is where the most ancient truths and traditions of the Bible and the Gospel are held, within evangelicalism. It might not be recognised much but I believe it is true. In African Enterprise our enshrined statement of faith, constitutionally enshrined, is the Lausanne Covenant. Quite possibly the most comprehensive statement of faith ever brought out in the history of the Christian church. And if you aren’t familiar with the Lausanne Covenant, I want to encourage you to become so. And you need also to become familiar with the Cape Town Commitment which came out of the Lausanne III Conference in Cape Town in 2010. As convinced evangelicals, we limit authority in religious matters to the Bible. Liberal protestantism takes its authority from the Bible, reason and tradition. Roman Catholicism takes its authority from the Bible, the teaching tradition of the authority of the church, and the Pope. But the reformers said, “No, it’s the Bible.” *Sola scriptura*,

only the Bible. We could talk about the implications of that, but because we have already had a session on that, I am not going to do so.

Evangelistically motivated

Then I believe Christian leaders need to be *evangelistically motivated*. If you are talking about leading, and being unashamed of doing so, I want to encourage you as a denomination, to lead in evangelism. I believe in the apartheid years, the Baptist church gave a phenomenal lead in evangelism. To be honest, I don't think you were so strong on social justice, if I may be allowed to say so. But evangelism you were always strong on and you need to be stronger than ever now. Why? Because the church all over the place is losing its nerve about evangelism and saying we don't really need it. But our first and foremost aim needs to be to evangelise. Our Lord says at the end of each of the four gospels and in the book of Acts: "Go out into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." So His last words need to be our first concern, to go out and proclaim. Unless people hear the gospel, as Paul says in Romans 10, how will they be saved? So there are people all round you, and around me, who will not be saved unless they hear the gospel from us.

The great Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, once said: "The church is the only society which exists primarily for the benefit of non-members." We exist primarily for the benefit of non-members, to reach them with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We all know and we love John 3:16: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

There are three reasons here why you and I need to go out as leaders in evangelism.

The imperative reason of the love of God. "God so loved..." The love of Christ has constrained you and constrained me. God so loved. We need to show love as we tell others. That's the imperative reason.

The second reason is the negative reason. So that people "should not perish." I am not going to try and exegete for you what perishing means. Because I don't believe I really know. But whatever it is, it's awful, and our Lord Jesus went to the cross to prevent people from perishing. Thessalonians describes this as "eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord." Luke 13:3 says: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." These are fearful things. Imagine – to be cut off from the presence of the Lord. So there is that negative in there.

One of the things I learnt from Billy Graham is that whenever you heard him preaching you were listening to a man who believed that people outside of Jesus Christ were lost. We need to be leaders who help people understand lostness outside of Christ. So don't be ashamed, embarrassed or frightened to say that.

Then there is a positive reason; to have everlasting life. How amazing, how marvellous. Jesus said in John 17:3: "This is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

On 23 October 1955 someone asked me if I knew Jesus Christ. Someone of you younger ones will realise that an authentic dinosaur is standing in front of you. This October, Lord willing I am going to celebrate 60 years of walking with Jesus Christ. I want to say I have failed, I have let Him down, I have sinned and done all kinds of things I am embarrassed or ashamed of and I have thought things, done things and said wrong things. But I want to tell you that He has been a faithful friend of 60 years and the joy of it has been knowing Him. That's what the world needs. So you need to be leaders, going out with this message of the imperative reason of the love of God. The negative reason so that people should not perish. And the positive reason that they find eternal life.

Oh I urge you to move out in that regard.

Social and political involvement

Then I want to say you and I in our churches need to be leaders, unashamed, in being socially, politically and compassionately concerned for society and the people around us. I mean to be really honest, I don't think the average white person in South Africa has any grasp at all of the hurt, damage and pain inflicted on black and brown people through the whole apartheid devastation. We don't grasp that the pain is still there. And a lot of anger is still there and still comes through among many. We need to understand it is not all irrational. The young are also finding out what it was all about. And they are holding many of us who are whites to account. They too of course must beware of inverted racism where blacks become hostile to whites. That's equally unacceptable. And our churches and the denomination of the Baptist Church need to take an unashamed lead in saying we need to be socially and politically active.

When I look around South Africa, I must be honest, I have poured 52 years of blood, sweat and tears into South Africa, I am worried about what I see around me. I see many wonderful things. I see many wonderful people. But I see folly, stupidity, and sexual promiscuity like it's completely gone out of fashion. As to the violence, I don't think there is anywhere in the world doing anything like what we do here. This is worrying. The answer does not lie in the ANC. It doesn't lie in the DA. It doesn't lie with Mr Zuma. It doesn't lie with Mr Maimane. The answer lies in the church of Jesus Christ. That's where the answer is. It really is. Our Lord said we must go out and be light to dispel the darkness and salt. The church is to be salt and light. In the ancient world salt was used to prevent decay. And so if the society decays, it's because the church has decayed as the salt and gospel saviour. If the country gets dark, it's because the light of the church has gone out.

So if we are not leading in a way that brings light into all the dark places, then we are failing – because we are not dispelling darkness and not arresting decay.

One of the things I have come to believe after over 50 years of ministry and of going around Africa and many other places is that every church gets the country it deserves. And if the church's light has gone out, you are surrounded with darkness and decay. What is required is for us to stand up and be counted. The Baptist Union of South Africa could be that group, because of your strong Bible convictions, your strong commitment to a holistic gospel. You could stand up and make the difference. You can make all the difference in the world in this country.

I have spoken in Baptist Union conferences back in the time of the French Revolution, long ago in South Africa, when you didn't look like you look today. When it was so boring, all the white people. So boring. The Lord doesn't want us to be boring; He wants white, black and brown, green and yellow and the whole lot together. And we really look like South Africa is meant to be here tonight. A multi-coloured alternative society. You go out and replicate that in South Africa by the lead that you give. You don't have to wait for the Anglicans or Presbyterians, you can do it. You can do it. Some look quite confused. I'm an Anglican so I'm quite confused.

I was a bit confused in the States once with a Roman Catholic Priest who said: "Ah, so you are an Anglican. We Catholics divide you Anglicans into three categories: the high and hazy, the broad and crazy, and the low and lazy."

But I don't think this of the Baptist church; this is a wonderful, wonderful, evangelical, Holy Spirit filled denomination around South Africa. But often we are sleepy. And for some of you maybe your congregations are sleepy, I don't know. But don't go to sleep.

Martin Luther King said one time that the church in America was sleeping through a revolution. You don't want that to happen. South Africa is in trouble. It needs the Church of Christ to stand up and be counted at this time in a new and very special way.

Be a listener

A few other little things I want to say before I close.

I want to say that each of you who is a leader needs to *be a listener*. You need to be a listener because you aren't your own boss. Our Lord Jesus Christ is your boss. The Old Testament prophet said: "Morning by morning you awaken my ear to understand your ways." We need to say "Lord, awaken our ears to understand your will." It's necessary if you are going to lead, especially to lead unashamedly; you need to get the will of God. You need to listen, you need to be plugged in, you need to find His wisdom, and you need to find His power. That means your devotional life is key. So I ask you, how is your devotional life? Are you reading the Bible? Are you praying? Sometimes everyone in the congregation does except the minister and his wife.

In 1962 John Stott introduced me to a Bible reading system developed by Robert Murray M'Cheyne. Some of you may know it. Robert Murray M'Cheyne developed this system of reading four chapters a day, starting at the four great beginnings of scripture: Genesis 1, the beginning of everything, Ezra 1, the beginning of restoration after the exile, Matthew 1, the beginning of the Gospels, Acts 1, the beginning of the church. So you read four chapters a day. Some of you say this is a bit much. My wife Carol is a slow reader and says that is too much for her, and uses Scripture Union notes instead. But using the M'Cheyne daily Bible reading plan you go through the Old Testament once a year and through the Psalms and gospels twice a year. But you are tuning in all the time to the Word of God. I wouldn't normally bother to go and read through Judges Chapter 5 like I read this morning. I would want to read about justification by faith in Romans and so forth. But this system takes you into Judges etc and keeps you reading across the whole span of the Bible. So it's Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Light Along the Way*. It's fantastic. It keeps you in the Bible. Then there is the need to

pray for people, to pray for yourselves, to pray for the needs of the church. So your devotional life is really key.

Get solitude

Then I want to ask you very specially that from time to time to get solitude. I try each year at the beginning of the year, to have a four day retreat in solitude. I go up a river in the Eastern Cape to a little cabin in the bush, nothing fancy, in the bush, I am alone up a river for four days. It's fantastic. Just to be alone with the Lord. This last week I had some quite major decisions to be made in my own life. So I went away for a couple of days, just to be alone and on retreat. Then Carol joined me and we talked and walked and she said: "Well, what did the Lord tell you?" The Lord gave me some things. In fact once I was alone, basic certain issues and struggles in my own personal life, it wasn't 10 minutes or quarter of an hour before I began to get stuff in, and I began to write it down in my journal. So, beloved, I'm not a saint, and you are not either. But you need to be a leader led by God. That means you get alone with Him.

Carol and I were on sabbatical many years ago in Canada and there was a psychologist there and I said to her we are going back to Africa and there are a lot of strains and stresses there, have you got any counsel for me? And she said yes, get solitude. Get solitude. Especially you pastors, you cannot go through a year without having some significant times of solitude. That means being alone. You are not alone, because you are with the Lord, and you start hearing from Him. And if you hear from Him, you can go back and give the lead.

When I got back to my little teamlet after the time away, they said: "What did God tell you about the issues in your life?" And I said: "This is what He said and I shared it. So I felt I could go and give some unashamed leadership because I felt I had heard from the Lord.

Take the leadership challenge seriously

Dear ones, I want to encourage you with all my heart to take seriously this challenge of leadership. I want to encourage you husbands and wives, pastors and their wives, you need to be together in this. You need to be together. I could never, never have gone 52 years of ministry unless I had Carol at my side. We haven't been married 52 years, but we have been married 47 years, so that is quite good going! I could never have done my work, never, never, never, I confess this quite publicly, apart from that woman of God which He gave me. She has been with me in team, and she has made huge sacrifices, looking after the kids and house and home, family, tanks, plumbing, electricity, carpentry and everything else!! And if you have issues with each other, pray them through, work them through, come out the other side so that you can move forward.

So may the Lord bless you. May you be able to move on from this place on from this conference and this gathering with a deep sense of being unashamed to give a lead because you know indeed that it has been given to you by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: "Our Lord and Heavenly Father we thank you that you are there as our Leader. Thank you that the Lord is our Shepherd. Where would we be but for you being our Shepherd? Like little

sheep we get so lost, constantly, all the time losing our way, getting it wrong, and you are our Shepherd. Thank you Lord that we can come to you, that we can be led by you, and that we can also know that your goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our lives and that we will dwell in the House of the Lord forever. May the Lord bless you, beloved, and may the Lord Jesus come down upon you and do a mighty new thing in your hearts and minds and families this day. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen."