

SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK

Crossing over successfully

By PASTOR RICHARD
L. CURRY JR.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

—Joshua 1:8-9 (New Kings James Version)



As the year winds down to an end and if the Lord tarries, we as believers should take the time to prepare to cross

over into the year 2009.

We are commanded by God not only to cross over, but also to cross over successfully. Crossing over successfully entails courage and commitment. Not only that, crossing over successfully involves our willingness to press on in spite of the danger, disappointment and despair, because God desires to do some things in our lives.

We find the ingredients for a successful crossing through the story of Joshua. The main ingredient of a successful crossover is courage. Joshua would need courage because God was thrusting him into an important position to lead his people.

Joshua would no longer be in the backdrop, he would now have to stand in the forefront and this would take courage. Joshua would have to approach this task differently.

What is God assigning you to do for this upcoming year that will cause you to do things differently?

Why is courage so important as it relates to the assignments of God?

First of all, it is important to stress that Joshua had been commissioned by God for this assignment. He was handpicked for the job. Many of us have been handpicked by God to serve him in various capacities; however we fail in our mission because we lack courage.

For you see with courage, it allows us to operate and execute the assignments of God with conviction. Without courage, we will only do the things that are comfortable to us. The problem that plagues the believer in Christ is that we oftentimes desire the things that are comfortable to us.

What is in your life today that God is commissioning you to do for the upcoming year? Maybe, it is a job promotion, a fresh start to continue your education, or a new relationship. Maybe, God is just reminding you to become faithful in the assignment that you are currently in. Wherever our individual situations find us at or in, God has commanded us to possess courage.

As we prepare to crossover into the year 2009, we can possess courage because real courage couches itself in the Lord who has not only promised us success, but he has promised us his presence along our journey.

God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble!

Richard L. Curry Jr. is senior pastor of True Tried Missionary Baptist Church.

By BRANDON A. PERRY

Rev. Henry J. Lyons is staging what could become the greatest comeback in African-American church history.

For five years Lyons was one of the most powerful clergymen in the country as president of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc. (NBCUSA), which claims over 8 million members who attend its 41,000 churches. It is the largest African-American religious organization, and the second largest Baptist group in the world.

When Lyons, a Florida pastor, was elected president in 1994 he quickly began to address many of the convention's challenges. He established the Unified Program, added commissions, eliminated debt on the Sunday School Publishing Board and reduced debt on the Baptist World Center, the convention's headquarters in Nashville.

Under Lyons the NBCUSA also organized programs to promote education, reduce drug abuse and gang activity, and sent resources to families in danger overseas, including those devastated by the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Lyons' fortunes changed quickly in 1997 after his then-wife set fire to a waterfront home he allegedly purchased with another woman. That incident led to a state and federal investigation of his business dealings.

Lyons resigned the presidency in 1999 and was convicted on charges of racketeering and grand theft, mostly for misappropriating more than \$4 million donors had given to the NBCUSA. Lyons was ordered to serve five and a half years in prison and pay restitution.

Just hours after his release from a minimum security prison in 2003, Lyons was back in the pulpit, stating, "I have suffered God's rod of correction, and stand here today to say I truly repented of my sins."

Despite his past legal difficulties, Lyons' supporters have fond memories of his administrative accomplishments and urge a second chance. Lyons is currently campaigning to reclaim the presidency of the NBCUSA, which will select a new president during its annual session in Memphis next September.

Lyons made a stop in Indianapolis last week, preaching during a three-day revival at St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church. The visit was part of a national tour to win the support of pastors who will choose the next president.

In an exclusive interview with the Recorder, Dr. Lyons spoke candidly about his redemption and regaining the trust of the institution he loves:

How is your campaign coming along?

It is coming along nicely. I can definitely see some momentum swinging in our favor. We're picking up support in a lot of key states that we targeted. Of course, Indiana is definitely what we consider a key state, along with Illinois and Ohio. But I don't take anything for granted and I still regard this as an uphill journey. Unlike past campaigns, the candidates came out early. But right now we're definitely seeing some serious support in the states where we need to see it.

Given your past struggle, why would you want to be president again?

Well, I have not been able to get a release from the burden of leadership that I see is needed in our convention. That burden burns in my heart and drives me day by day. It is based on what I believe I should be doing, according to directions

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

HENRY J. LYONS A Journey of Restoration



Citywide revival and crusade

Dr. Henry J. Lyons, who is the pastor of New Salem Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla., delivers the message at a citywide revival and crusade held at St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church.

from my heavenly Father. I can't sit still and not run, based on what I see and the destitute condition of our convention. We have lost a great number of churches and pastors as well as momentum, and it just hurts me to see our great convention at a point of almost being on a spiritual respirator that needs constant oxygen. So I am seeking that office to bring back the excellence and greatness that our convention once enjoyed.

Were you simply set-up by enemies? If not and you really did make mistakes, how can you be trusted to run the convention again?

The state said they wanted some of my time, and I gave them my time, four years and eight months. I didn't accuse anybody else or try to drag anybody else down. I believe the real question is why is it that I still have so much credibility with the convention, with churches and with pastors. I'm not saying all of them, I'm saying a lot of them. So I'm not gonna say "the judge didn't do this," "the court didn't do that" or "the prosecutor got away with this." I've just been picking up the pieces, and I've repented before God and repented with my fellow man.

I've faced criticism and questions, but my relationship is good with God, and I'm mending fences everyday with mankind. I'm having a great time doing it.

What are your goals for the convention?

My campaign theme is "Restore the Love We Preach and Teach." That's what I'm after. I'm not being judgmental, but one of the greatest factors that our convention needs is just the love because we don't have it anymore. There's no fellowship, no camaraderie, no caring for each other, and so the love is gone. Well, if the love is gone, the

people are gone; if the people are gone the finances are gone and the momentum is gone. Church enrollment and registration are down. This campaign is about restoring, rebuilding, and recommitting ourselves to the cause of Christ.

First, the main thing for any church that is Christ driven and Bible centered is evangelism, which we don't even talk about anymore. So I am interested in refocusing our convention on evangelism.

Also, we had well over 10,000 young pastors in our convention at one time. Those pastors are now gone, they are not there. They were driven away from our convention and left because there was no place for them. I want to reclaim all of those young pastors, and then return to our national home in Nashville. It's basically closed up and locked down, with nothing going on there expect maybe three to five annual meetings. No staff, no activities, no ministry going on in our headquarters that we paid \$12 million for. I want to return to our home.

We also need a two-way system where the churches and the convention give back to each other. The convention doesn't give back anything but fellowship among pastors, and that kept us alive for over a hundred years. But now we're in a competitive market for churches. We have different denominations going after our pastors, and they're leaving because they're being offered a good diet of information, inspiration and they have no problem leaving our convention at this point. It's time to rebuild.

Do you think President-elect Barack Obama will help faith-based initiatives?

I assume that he will because there is a great need for it. I met his winning of the presidency with a lot of enthusiasm and praise for God. What I've been preaching, however, is that we don't get just caught up in the euphoria of his victory. This is our time to go in with him and get our race together and help our boys and girls and the families we



The Bethesda Missionary Baptist Choir was one of many guests at the event hosted by the finance committee for Lyons' campaign for the presidency of the National Baptist Convention USA Inc.



Rev. Fitzhugh L. Lyons Sr., pastor of Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, is a supporter of Lyons. They are not related. (Photos/C. Guynn)

have left. Not that we're looking for Obama to do any special favors for us. But just the momentum from him being elected is enough to redirect lives and behavior among African American people. He has the nation's attention now and we should seize that opportunity because we are losing our people. I have testimonies from pastors who can point to entire families that are dying out completely, either killed due to violence or dying because of preventable health problems. That's a form of genocide that concerns me. If we don't turn it around we will definitely be an extinct people in this country in 20 years maybe. We'll be so weak and anemic we won't even make a difference. That's the part that really motivates me to run again.

I understand that basically pastors choose the president. How can laity get involved?

Well, that's another thing I want to change; the process. It's really a tightly controlled election. Right now all the emphasis in our convention is on control and the masses cannot participate, and the people are basically locked out and disenfranchised. No church can have over three votes, and that's a low representation. So we just have to work with the system the best we can for now.

What kind of inspiration do you have for other people who made mistakes?

Well first, let me say that I don't excuse my behavior at all. As a matter of fact I step up to the plate, owning up to everything. But I also know this: That I learned more in defeat than I did in victory. I learned my lesson. I know my lesson and I am determined to never ever again make those kinds of mistakes. Because of that I feel that I can be a serious inspiration to most of humanity because most of us make big mistakes, and some of us make them over and over again. But I learned my lesson and all of us need to learn our lesson and move on. That's the kind of inspiration I want to provide to Black America, and America in general.