

Be a Berean!

The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day. (Acts 17:11)
[“Be a Berean” will regularly cover topics that arise during Lockport Alliance Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil—liftedup@lockportalliance.org—with questions or comments.]

“all the Way from here to there”

‘Twas the afternoon of the day before “Vision Sunday.” I was writing--which is the only thing I’m ever doing on a winter Saturday afternoon--wrestling with the phrasing of a Biblical concept that I’d be teaching the next day. I don’t know how other people do it, but I wrestle when I write. Writing is not a day off for me. Half the time, I’d rather wrestle with frozen water pipes than write. On the day before Vision Sunday, I got to do both.

The phone rang. A few months ago, we switched phone companies. When we did, we entered into the brave newfangled world of caller I.D. and other such telephonic amenities. As I started to get the hang of these features, it dawned on me that caller I.D. might explain why I’d been talking to an awful lot of message machines lately. I’ve been depressed ever since.

The phone display identified the caller as ‘Kevin Robbins.’ “I’ll bet everybody picks up the phone when they see that,” I thought; “I’ll bet he gets to very few message machines.”

“Hello, Pastor Kevin,” I cheerily answered. “Sure thing. I’ll be there within half an hour.”

I don’t get too many calls a year from Senior Pastors of growing evangelical churches. In fact, this is the first such call of this decade, this century, and this millennium! So I washed the basement grime off my face and brushed the cobwebs out of my hair and eyebrows. Semi-presentable, I was knocking on the door to Pastor Kevin’s office in 15 minutes.

Writers are often too interested in just how the other writer manages to do it. So as Kevin was greeting me, I was taking in the situation. There on the desk was a pad of yellow paper. Three or four sheets had already been completely filled with longhand. I knew that Vision Sunday was tomorrow, and so deduced that the vision—foreground, horizon, and firmament—was right there, in longhand, on those lined yellow pages.

Amongst other things, we talked about John Maxwell, Pistol Pete Maravich, and Brian Curran. OK, Maxwell the Christian author and Maravich the basketball magician we’ve heard of. But *Brian Curran*?

Brian Curran and I worked together for three or four summers in the mid-70’s. Let’s just say that Brian Curran and I should have gone to jail for havin’ too much fun. Brian was the welterweight boxing champion of the U. S. Navy fleet he served in. When he was going on and on one day about how boxing was both a science and an art form, I told him it was just a brawl. Offended, he asked if I’d like to put on the gloves. Six scientific jabs to my solar plexus later, I was on the ground looking up at an artist!

The subject of Brian Curran had come up when Kevin and I were talking about how a person gets from *there* (wherever ‘there’ was in his life) to *here*. I mentioned that sometimes, when they cross my mind, I google names from years gone by to glimpse what they might be doing these days. Recently, when I googled ‘Brian Curran,’ dozens of results listed a Brian Curran as police chief of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I clicked on one listing, and there appeared a newspaper article with a picture of my long gone friend—the last person on earth I would ever imagine becoming the police chief of a prominent university town.

Kevin enjoyed the story about my friend. When it was time to go, he prayed for my family and for me. He even spoke to God in his prayer about how surprised Brian Curran would be to find out what had become of his long lost friend, Franklyn.

In Kevin’s Vision Sunday message the very next day, he told us about a man who started out as Levi, the *tax collector and sinner*, and went on to become Matthew--the apostle and gospel writer--who’d left his old ways behind in order to follow Jesus (1). His friends, conspicuous sinners like Levi had been, surely noted the changes, and wondered what had come over him. How had he gotten from here to *there*?

So Levi threw a party and invited them all. Then he invited Jesus. He wanted to show them the Way.

The Kingdom of Heaven is all the Way from here to there.

Don’t always think of the Kingdom of Heaven as a place. Think of it as a direction, a tendency of the heart. Following Jesus, we are on the Way (2). Heaven is wherever Jesus is. Thus Heaven is all the Way from here to there.

What Kevin taught us through the story of Levi the notorious sinner is that Jesus makes no distinction between sinners--or sins--of low or high degree. He stood in line to be baptized, just like you. He was *numbered with the transgressors* (3), just like you. He came out of Nazareth, and everyone knows that nothing good ever comes out of

there (4). On the night He was betrayed, Judas had to arrange a signal—a kiss—in order for His captors to identify Him (5). So much for the halo. Barely over thirty years old, someone guessed that he was “*not yet fifty*” (6). His face, it seems, was older than He was. God’s love had placed the world on His shoulders, and it was visibly wearing Him down.

He had no ties to organized religion. He was thrown out of His hometown church (7). He scorched the religious hierarchy. He blistered the proud and wilted the self-righteous. The religious experts didn’t think much of a prophet who would be seen with the likes of Levi--the likes of you, the likes of me. But He stood for you, he took your place. He doesn’t care about where you started. His only concern is the direction of your heart:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

In the middle of the vast night that was his life, Levi heard Jesus’ voice. *So he arose and followed Him.*

Then he threw a party and invited them all. Then he invited Jesus.

Sounds like “church” to me.

Scripture cited: (1) See Matthew 9:9-13 (2) John 14:6; cf. John 1:51 and Gen. 28:12 (3) Isaiah 53:12 (4) John 1:46 (5) Matthew 26:48 (6) John 8:57 (7) Luke 4:16-29

It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one of these Bible-based classes this week! —

"Cross Ties"--Sunday at 9:45

"Becoming A Woman of Purpose"--Sunday at 9:45

"A Detailed Study of Luke"--Sunday at 9:45