

The Thirty-Third Annual Bellview Lectures

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Preaching From The Major Prophets was the theme of the Thirty-Third Annual Bellview Lectures, which took place from June 7 through June 11, 2008, at the facility of the Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, Florida. This outstanding lectureship was directed by Bellview's sound and capable preacher, brother Michael Hatcher, and overseen by her faithful elders: brother Paul Brantley and brother Fred Stancliff.

These days we hear a lot about "balance," which is used by some brethren as justification for compromise. However, the 2008 Bellview Lectures were balanced, according to the Word of God and without compromise. Each message exemplified the truth spoken in love and boldness, as well as warning against wrong and upholding the right.

Listeners were challenged to stand unwaveringly for the truth and against evil, with modern applications, from such messages as: "Nonconformity" and "The Writing on the Wall" in Daniel, and "Inability to Blush" and "Peace When There Is No Peace" in Jeremiah. In like manner, words of hope and warning were presented in "The Good News of Salvation" from Isaiah, and in "Turn and Live; Ezekiel 33:10" and "The Glory of the Lord in Chebar," from Ezekiel. Moreover, God's work in justifying sinful man through the suffering Christ was expounded in a message on "The Suffering Servant; Isaiah 53," and the declaration of His new way was considered in a message on "The New Covenant; Jeremiah 31:31-34."

Many things were spoken which should be a great strength and example to Gospel preachers, elders, and all of God's faithful in these perilous times, such as: "The Man: Isaiah," "Strength from the Lord; Isaiah 40," "The Man: Jeremiah," "God's Commission to Jeremiah; Jeremiah 1:4-10," "The Man: Ezekiel," and "The Man: Daniel." Strength from God and for His Word in times of persecution was powerfully expounded in "Jeremiah's Gethsemane; Jeremiah 20:9."

The people of God were also challenged to rise up and stand against sin and error and for the truth by lectures from Ezekiel: "Will They Know There is a Prophet?; Ezekiel 2:5," "The False Prophets; Ezekiel 13," and "God's Watchmen; Ezekiel 33." Moreover, strong urging to stay with God and His Word and to shun from departing from it were presented from the lamenting prophet in "Jehoiakim's Penknife; Jeremiah 36" and "Broken Cisterns; Jeremiah 2:13."

Reminders of important prophecies and eternal truths were presented in: "A View Toward Pentecost; Isaiah 2:2-4," "The Virgin Birth; Isaiah 7:14," "The New Name; Isaiah 62:2," and "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream; Daniel 2, 7." Furthermore, the crucial theme of the sovereignty of God was emphasized in "God Rules; Daniel 4." An exhortation to greater courage and strength against opposition was given in "If...But...Will; Daniel 3." Moreover, specific and needed applications were also cited from Jeremiah in "Ask for the Old Paths; Jeremiah 6:16," and a perpetual problem among God's people was considered in "Perpetual Backsliding; Jeremiah 8."

In addition to the lecture presentations, there were three open forum sessions in which questions were dealt with. The moderators are to be commended for the excellent job they did, as well as the many fine comments which were made from the floor.

The Thirty-Third Annual Bellview Lectures were truly outstanding. For one thing, preaching from the prophets is always relevant, and in this case, the lessons were presented and written particularly well. Furthermore, the writers and speakers made many powerful and appropriate applications, which show that the human nature has not changed; neither has the nature of sin and its consequences. In addition, the love and grace of God was beautifully expressed in these studies, with powerful challenges to obedience and faithfulness.

The lectureship book is truly outstanding. It offers a wealth of material for preaching and Bible school material, and that which will be spiritually beneficial for all who enter into a reading and study thereof. In addition to chapters on the themes named above, a good foundation for the study of the Major Prophets is found in the lectureship book, titled: "Introduction to the Prophets." This volume will prove to be an asset to anyone's library. We would encourage everyone to order copies of the lectureship book through the office of the Bellview Church of Christ, or recordings of the lectures (which also may be seen in archive format on the Bellview website). Sister Denise Mowery, the church secretary, is also to be commended for her efficiency and tireless work in this and other areas of the Lord's work at Bellview.

The Bellview elders, preacher, deacons, their wives, as well as the entire congregation are to be highly commended. The meals and hospitality, the involvement of many members in various areas, and the overall cooperative effort displayed was truly an example of Christians working together for the cause of Christ. All who took an active part are appreciated.

It is noteworthy that in these perilous times when many once faithful elderships, preachers, lectureships, and congregations have turned aside into compromise and error, Bellview has not. The fact that this faithful congregation continues, after all these decades, to be sound in the faith, and to have held thirty-three sound lectureships is truly remarkable. In Bellview, we are reminded of Paul's words to the church at Rome: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8). Thanks and glory be to God for this, our prayer is that, with His help, this may continue on.

Another observation is in order and that is the fact that the men involved represent a wide age range. It is good to know that not only is the brotherhood blessed with a number of well-seasoned brethren, but that we also have a group of capable and godly young men who are dedicated to standing in the "old paths." Thankfully, we still have a number of men who are faithfully standing for the Word of God and that not all have: "bowed the knee to the image of Baal" (cf. Rom. 11:4; 1 Kin. 19:18).

The 2008 Bellview Lectureship was well attended. However, we were saddened that brother Ken Chumbley and brother Roelf Ruffner were unable to be present and to deliver their lectures. Brother Barney Ruffner, a faithful servant of the Lord and the father of Roelf, passed away just before the start of the lectures, and brother Chumbley had to travel to

England at the passing of brother Graham Moulton, who was a faithful servant and Gospel preacher in England.

The powerful messages and their many applications are proof positive that faithful brethren are not going to lay down and be silent regarding the new “unity in diversity” movement and current controversies in the brotherhood. Some who have a name for soundness have compromised the faith, but a name is all they have, even as the church in Sardis had only a reputation for being alive, as Jesus said: “thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (cf. Rev. 3:1). Faithful men of God will not sound retreat, nor go silently off into their respective corners. Indeed, the compromisers have failed in their efforts to silence faithful brethren by crying: “peace, peace, when there is no peace.” It continues to be our God-given duty to warn precious souls, as God commanded Isaiah: “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa. 58:1).

Through Him Who was “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities,” we may be justified, and enter into the house of the Lord. Yet, we must continue to walk in the old paths of God and not play the harlot. If we turn to God and from sin, we can live because it is not the will of God that we perish. For those who do so: “though our sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.” What a privilege it is to be in the kingdom which the God of heaven has set up and which shall stand forever. We need watchmen on the wall like Ezekiel, and men like Jeremiah who cannot hold back the Word of God because it is as a fire in their bones. We must be people of faith, courage, and prayer, like Daniel—who refused to bow down to men and their idols and men could not stop him from bowing to the Lord God Almighty. We must be people of truth like Isaiah, who said: “Hear the word of the Lord,” and “let us walk in the light of the Lord.” Surely, we can grow and be strengthened by the true prophets of God: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Mt. Pleasant, TN