

Swan Song
by Lester Roloff

On March 13, 1956, Lester stood in Waco Hall, Waco Texas, and spoke to more than two thousand people:

Twenty-three years ago, I entered this hall for the first time as a freshman in Baylor University. . . .For over two years my cow Marie and I put four gallons of milk on the boarding house table for my board and room while attending Baylor.

Those were wonderful days, and I am thankful for every revelation of truth that the Lord gave and for every contribution that the teachers made during those four years. . . .

In spite of the fact that no church in Waco would sponsor this meeting, there are over two thousand people present tonight [the auditorium seated twenty-five hundred]. My heart is encouraged and my soul is strengthened by your response to the truth. I'm grateful to the program committee that after all of the water that has run under the bridge and, of course, much that's run over the bridge, that you'd charge me with the responsibility of preaching this message in this hall tonight.

Here is the condition as I see it.

Ecclesiasticism and denominational hierarchy have regimented and enslaved the people with the ultimatum you either bow or burn, and since most folks' faith is not fireproof, they acquiesce to the program. With love, and yet boldness, I have to say that the average preacher is afraid of his own shadow. . . . The preacher is afraid that he will not have any place to preach. When John Wesley had no place to preach, he stood on his father's tombstone in a cemetery and in the face of being called sensational, undignified, and irregular, preached a gospel that saved souls from sin. He also rode saddle ponies to death with saddlebags filled with Bibles and tracts. And now people have memorialized him by naming many churches after him.

Truth is never memorialized in the generation in which it lives Truth must serve a stretch on the scaffold before it enters the throne room. Paul was called a pestilent fellow. . . . And now the preacher stands on Sunday morning with great dignity and reads with a pious voice, "Saint Paul said . . ." And yet, if that old war horse were to come back to this old crooked world, so saturated with modernism, his ministry would have to be done outside the average church

Old hot-tongued, leather-lunged, sun-scorched, desert-bred John the Baptist didn't worry about a place to preach. With a "preamp" in his left lung, the volume control in his right lung, and an all-weather speaker in his head he came bounding from the wilderness as Jesus' bulldozer, leveling the hills of Judaism

and jerking up the stumps of formalism, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Dear old Brother Amos did not sit on a sycamore limb waiting for a pulpit committee or a district missionary to recommend him to some nice pastorate; but with his preaching Bible in his hand, he headed for the city and began to make trouble. He charged that they'd given the Nazarites wine to drink, and he commanded the prophets not to prophesy, saying that two cannot walk together except they be agreed. He announced to them that God had cut off the rain and demanded that they prepare to meet God. Oh, what a parallel was his ministry to the need of this hour! He lifted his voice and cried, "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live . . ." (Amos 5:6)

The inevitable did happen when hatred arose and Amos announced that, "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly" (Amos 5:10) Isaiah said the same thing, ". . . truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter" (Isa. 59:14). Solomon said, "Wisdom crieth without . . ." (Prov. 1:10) Paul said, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16) Jesus, in Revelation 3:20, said, "I stand at the door, and knock."

Amos preached a negative gospel when he said, "Hate the evil and love the good . . ." (Amos 5:15). This old preacher with a brow of brass and nose of steel said, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. . . . Woe to them that are at ease in Zion . . ." (Amos 5:21). And he pulled the plumbline on that wicked city. Sure, he stirred up trouble. Now, as I preach this message, don't waste any time trying to think up new anathema's to heap upon me. Some people look at me strangely and raise the question among their friends. "Well, what kind of Baptist is he?"

Well, I'll confess to you, dear friend, that I'm Jehovah's witness, a member of two churches of Christ - the church of Christ and a church of Christ. I'm a fundamentalist, a catholic priest, a member of the assembly of the first-born, a latter-day saint, a member of the Nazarene's church and a Bible methodist. I believe in holiness apart from which no man can see the Lord, and I'm a seven-day adventists - I'm looking for him every day. And as far as a lot of Baptists are concerned, I guess I'm just a knothole Baptist; I'm on the outside but still seeing and saying what the Lord wants me to say which, when summed up, makes me a premillennial Southern Baptist, especially since I live in Corpus Christi with love for all and malice toward none.

I received an anonymous note in the mail saying that I reminded the writer of the appendix of a flea. After thinking it over I said, "Well, praise God, I'd rather be a live flea than a dead elephant." Besides, with the right kind of a bite, I believe one flea could wake up a pretty big dog. I read just this morning 1 Samuel 26:20 where King David called himself a flea. Just pray for me

that I'll hop when and where God tells me to hop. Sometimes this denominational flea powder gets pretty strong!

In 1933 when we came to Baylor, we certainly were as green as grass, and the first thing we heard about the coming of the Lord from the Bible professor was, "I'm a 'Pro, "which means I'm for His coming," But when I came through Baylor and through the seminary in Fort Worth, I was taught actually the postmillennial theory, which means that this world will be converted, and by our preaching and missionary efforts we will usher in the golden age after which Jesus will come back to this old earth.

So I mounted the old gray horse of postmillennial preaching, and the longer I rode her, the weaker she got. She'd stumble every time I'd ride her very far into the Word of God, but when she would, I'd feed her a little more "professor hay" or a few more shucks of better-world building. When she'd try to balk, I'd just kick her with my spurs of denominational loyalty and exercise more faith in what I'd been taught - I'd preach a little louder. When I'd ride down Bible roads into Ezekiel, Daniel, or Matthew 13 and 14 or 24 and 25, the old gray mare would just shy away or completely stop. When I approached 1 and 2 Thessalonians and 1 and 2 Timothy, which have to do with the last days and the rapture, this old horse just ran away. As I saw sin on the increase and civilization shattered by vice and crime and violence, I determined in my soul that I'd get a running start against the wishes and advice of most of the preachers and professors and ride off into the book of Revelation with all the speed that I could get up. And when I finally got into chapter 19, verse 11, this old horse stumbled and fell; and I realized for the first time that I'd been riding the wrong horse anyhow. I looked up and saw the beautiful white horse and Jesus, the wonderful Word, in the saddle. So I left bridle, saddle, horse, and all.

It's been a real joy to ride the beautiful white horse of Revelation and speak boldly about the wonderful rapture and revelation of Jesus Christ. . . Now you may ask me why I became a premillennial preacher. I give you two reasons. In the first place, the Word of God concerning Enoch, a man who walked with God and before this translation had this testimony - that he pleased God. In the Book of Jude, verse 14, he pleased God by talking about the coming of the Lord with ten thousand of His saints. When I compare the experiences of Noah with Matthew 24; when I study the life of David; when I look at Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew 13, Mark, Luke, and John; when I study Peter and Paul - I'm convinced that this old world will be saturated with sin when Jesus comes, and the only hope of the world is and always has been the coming of Jesus. What shall we do about it?

There's only one thing we can do and that's to go back to the old landmarks, namely the sovereignty of the local church, the independence of the pulpit, the authority of the Word of God, the centrality of the Cross, the necessity of the new birth, separation and purity through the blessed hope - the return of the

Lord, and Bible and personal evangelism - knocking on doors, praying in people's homes, witnessing and winning the lost to Christ.

Then we need to make some vows, and keep them. It may cost us to make and keep a real vow, but God will honor it, and victory will be ours through Christ Jesus.

I do not base my fellowship on just premillennial preaching or truth, but neither would I be willing to base it on organization or a brand. After all, brethren, the rapture is going to bring about a mighty split one of these days.

I do not believe in a split rapture, but I do believe a split before the rapture would help. Now, if this is my swan song, let me sing the amen too. With all my heart I believe I've preached the truth. May God bless it as he sees fit.