

James T. Jeremiah
The Providence of God in the College's History
January 22, 1990

Transcript

James T. Jeremiah:

I need to speak quickly because there is another part of the service that is most important that I'm sure all of us are concerned about. I spent a week, a couple of weeks ago, at one of our schools out on the West Coast in Salem, Oregon, Western Baptist College, and they bring greetings to all of you, these young people and Dr. Balyo and the staff. They are like you are, great young people. We've had a good time. They've gone through sorrows, too. And when they did, we prayed for them, and they have been praying for us in these days. And for the people involved in the sorrows we've been suffering. On the wall of the chapel are the pictures of three beautiful girls. Not very far from the campus, went out to meet the Lord in eternity in an accident. These things we don't understand, but when it comes to understanding how God works in our lives, it's difficult to put it all together. But as you live a while and look back, some of the things seem to have some meaning.

James T. Jeremiah:

President Dixon's asked me this morning to talk about the beginning of Cedarville College and its relationship to Baptist Bible Institute in Cleveland. That's a long story. So I'll try to abbreviate. I want to read three verses of scripture before we begin the study. I want to read them out of the NIV in Proverbs 16:9, Proverbs 19:21, Proverbs 20:24. They read like this, "in his heart or in his mind man plans his course, but the Lord determines or directs his steps." 19:21 reads, "many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." Proverbs 20:24, "a man's steps are directed by the Lord."

James T. Jeremiah:

How can anyone understand his own way? I think it's very obvious to all of us in Cedarville College, that the providence of God has been operating the history of our college. Providence has been defined as the foreseeing care and guardianship of God over his creatures, or God's activity through his unlimited power and knowledge to fulfill his purpose for the whole creation, including man. So we look back over the history and we think about the Baptist Bible Institute. Let me just give you a few facts about it so that you'll understand some interesting things about it. Classes began at BBI in Cleveland, September 15th, 1942. These classes then were held in Hough Avenue Baptist Church in Cleveland.

James T. Jeremiah:

The school actually was organized or started by nine different pastors. Some of them are still living. George Bates, for example, is living in Florida. Gerald Smelser, who's on our Board of Trustees also lives during the winter time in Florida. Others you may not remember, LT Merchant, Howard Kramer who worked among the Jewish people in Cleveland, JF. Cuthriell, George [inaudible 00:03:58] who was pastor of the Berean Baptist Church of Berea. Gordon Anderson, David Luttrell and William Ross.

James T. Jeremiah:

These men had a burden to start a Christian school to teach young people the word of God that they might be able to go out and tell the story to others. In September of 1942, there were 274 students enrolled for the first semester. You'd like this. Classes met on Tuesday and Friday nights. Reverend Kenneth Amsler became the dean and the director of promotion. The Lord blessed this school in some wonderful ways in recognition. In 1946, it was incorporated by the State of Ohio. 1946 also the day school began. 1949, the school was approved by our fellowship of Regular Baptist churches. 1951, in

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May the charter was granted to grant BRE and ThB degrees. All the classes were held in that church. There was one dormitory, a three-story old time mansion. The third floor was for men, the second floor for women. The first floor for the dining room. What a day it must have been in those two upper stories when they cooked fried onions, sauerkraut and liver.

James T. Jeremiah:

I have a feeling that all of those odors went straight up to where people were living. Well, the Lord provided that school. And as I just mentioned to Dr. Dixon a few minutes ago, as I look over the history of it and the history of Cedarville College in the latter days of its relationship to the Presbyterian Church, if it hadn't been for Baptist Bible Institute, there may not be any Cedarville College. And I want to try to bring that to you again as I present the story of how we came to acquire these buildings and properties, some of it existing when we came. As I look back over my life, I can think of many things that happened that God was doing that I could not understand.

James T. Jeremiah:

For example, I remember as a young pastor being accepted as a student at Wheaton College. And about the same time I received a call to pastor a church in the city of Toledo. I had a burden to preach. There are many other reasons why God made it very clear that that's what I ought to do. In Toledo, we had a ministry in Emmanuel Baptist Church. Then later on beyond anything that I wanted or anything that I aimed for, I was invited to become pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Dayton. The reason I bring that to your attention is not so much that God put me there other than to know that he did it for a reason, but he put a man in that church who was a Godly deacon. I have great respect for Bible-believing, God-honoring deacons. This man was one of the best.

James T. Jeremiah:

I went to a meeting one day, a deacons meeting. And he said to me, "pastor, I wonder if any of our schools in the association, Regular Baptist churches, are looking for property for a school?" Well, I happened to be on the board of BBI. I said, "yes, we're looking for a place." He said, "well, my father used to be a United Brethren preacher. He's retired. He lives in Cedarville." And he told me that this place is going to close or merge or do something. Maybe we ought to look into it. So I asked him to make arrangements so we could come to this place and talk with these men. We came to the campus and it was an exciting thing. We went in what is now a big room on the first floor of the Founders Hall, which was then a room that... Well, actually it was the chapel, I guess, it was one of the large classrooms anyway.

James T. Jeremiah:

And we had a meeting there. And as we sat there talking about the possibility of merger, I thought my this will never happen. A lot of things I don't know, but there's one thing I do know. I have a good idea of the convictions of Regular Baptists. They'll never make it. Finally this deacon said, as I whispered that to him, "why don't you wait and see what they mean by a merger." I thought that was good advice. And I took it and I waited. Finally, they said some of our trustees will resign. Some of yours will be elected. More of ours will resign. More of yours will be elected until all our trustees have resigned and all of yours will be elected. I reached over and touched Harold on the arm and said, "Harold, even a Regular Baptist can merge like that."

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James T. Jeremiah:

You say, "what did that have to do with the future of the school?" Well, Cedarville College pressed on for a long time with difficulties in financial income. They were about ready to come to the end of it. They had made appeals to the Missouri Lutherans that they would take it over. They talked to people from Wittenberg, from Muskingum, and they mentioned the possibility of merging with the Nazarenes, the Church of Christ in Christian Union and the Southern Baptists, and not a one of them met the criteria of their program or felt led of the Lord in any way to take over. Now, it is my opinion that God sovereignly ruled in closing the doors for everybody else except the Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland.

James T. Jeremiah:

When we had this meeting, it was my responsibility to call someone in Cleveland and tell them about the possibility of this college campus. I must admit that I think I made three calls before I ever got their attention. Can you imagine anybody living in Cleveland with a possibility of getting a school in that city and moving to a town they never heard of probably, Cedarville? But finally they decided to come. And the reason why? Every door was closed for Baptist Bible Institute to find any greater opportunities and property in the city of Cleveland. They had nowhere else to look. One of the amazing things to me is what happened that morning when these men who started driving from Cleveland. One of the great leaders in this school from the days that the school started in Cleveland was George Milner. George Milner was a businessman, a godly man, a man who from every pastor I knew that was ever his pastor these men would say he was loyal to the pastor, loyal to the work of the local church.

James T. Jeremiah:

And I like to bear testimony to the man whom I love very much, because he was loyal to me as a president of the college in every way anybody could be. Anyhow, these men started to make the trip down here. They included Mr. Milner, Allen Lewis, who was the president of BBI and former president of Baptist Mid-Missions. John G. Bennett, who if I remember correctly, is the father-in-law of Joseph Stowell who will be speaking here. Leonard Webster, who had been the dean of the college, and Earl Willetts, who was a long-time member of the trustees. They came here and I met them here for this meeting. As we think of this meeting, these men coming, God providentially put into the minds of these men scriptures because George Milner was a man who believed in prayer and reading the scriptures.

James T. Jeremiah:

And he and his wife had prayed that morning. And as they prayed, they read the scriptures out of the Daily Light and I can't take time to read all of these verses, but let me give you statements out of some of them. It says in one of the verses, "God's hand had been displayed in the selection". This is what he goes to prove it. The Lord, your God went in the way before you to show you. And then, he speaks about another verse that the eagle stirs up her nest, falling over her young spreading abroad her wings, taking them and bearing them on her wings so the Lord alone did lead them. It speaks about upholding people, about knowing the way of righteousness. All of these verses seemed to somehow come together to these men that day as they read it alongside of the road, stopped to pray and read this scripture that it seemed almost to them as though God were directing. And he certainly was.

James T. Jeremiah:

And as they came down here to the school and looked it over and found many of the opportunities that were available. There is a list of buildings that won't take you long to read. When they came here, there

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was Old Main, Post Office, the bookstore, the building now called the bookstore. Collins Hall was then the science laboratory. Harriman and Rife Halls. Rife Hall by the way was located near Bethel that had a fire and it was destroyed in the fire several years ago. And then Bethel Hall, the library, which is now the fine arts building and Alford Auditorium. And there were 19 acres of land. That was the sum total of it. God in his wisdom, in his way of doing things made it possible for this small Bible Institute to take over this campus and begin planning for the future.

James T. Jeremiah:

There were many discouraging times, many difficulties, which I bring to your attention to show you that you don't do much for God without having opposition. One of the things I learned as a pastor and as the president of this college, whenever God blessed, you wanted to be careful because there will be an enemy out there to shoot you down. Opposition. Some of the interesting things that we had to face. And here again, God's provision. Moving out of the place when we did. We moved in June from Cleveland to Cedarville. In July of that same year Hough Avenue Church burned. And if we'd been there, we would have been without a place to hold a college in the future. But we came. And those first few weeks and months were difficult times. I don't have time to go into the details, but God saw us through it.

James T. Jeremiah:

One of the things we needed more than anything else in addition to money, of course, was the recognition of people who would grant us some recognition in our courses. I'll give you an illustration of a couple of them. They're not exactly encouraging. So you might as well listen and see what it was like. We needed to have some approved or accredited schools who would accept our credits as though coming from an accredited institution. So one of the first places we went was a very well-known university in the city of Springfield. As I went into the president's office that day and told the story, he began to tell me how he had been the president of a school out in New Jersey many years ago that had the same problem and how it succeeded and how it went ahead and how it was going.

James T. Jeremiah:

When I asked him about the possibility of getting credits for our courses, he looked at me and said, "I know Cedarville and it's not going to work so why don't you quit?" Well, I said, "sir, you just got through telling me how you had a school like this and it went ahead and did big things. I was a young man then. I said, "I'm a young man now." Not now, but then. Went away. Not much hope.

James T. Jeremiah:

Then we wanted to get teacher training. It had been lost by the college. In fact when we took over the school, the announcement came out in the Dayton Daily News that Cedarville College had been taken over by the Baptists. Big headlines. Biggest headline we've ever had I think. And just about that time, I was asked to go and preach in some of the churches in our fellowship. We were having an emphasis on evangelism and Dr. Tom Younger, who was pastor in our town at the time went along with me. By the time we had reached Binghamton where there's another one of our schools in those days, one of the men met us at the door. The newspaper somehow had already been delivered. He said, "it'll never work. It's not going to go. You better quit." One of our own men.

James T. Jeremiah:

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He was sincere. And he was probably right, humanly speaking. I lived to see the day when that dear brother became one of our fine faculty members after it went after all. The providence of God. We talked about getting accreditation and certification. I went to see the big man over in Columbus. And I learned something interesting about what had happened in many of our Ohio colleges. Many of them were Catholic schools. We were supposed to have \$150,000 in endowment, which is not very much. It wouldn't pay many salaries. You've paid it from the interest. But it was a lot of money, and we didn't have it. But I learned that the Catholic schools were granted income in lieu of endowment by the contribution of the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, and all the rest of the family. So I went to this man and said, "I think it would be appropriate if we considered the possibility of taking the money that comes from our churches in lieu of endowment interest."

James T. Jeremiah:

I'll never forget this day. He looked at me and said, "you have no such tradition." And I was grateful for that. But I couldn't understand the attitude. But I want to tell you something, young people, that thrills my heart. They fought it. They wouldn't listen. But our people, our faculty members, our board members, our students kept on praying and persevering and working. And one day before I left the office of president, a man from the department of education called me. And I'll never forget his words. "I want you to know that many of us in this department today think and believe that Cedarville has one of the best education departments of any school in the state." How? Where did it come from? Who did it? Not the president, not the faculty. God did it.

James T. Jeremiah:

That's one reason among other reasons why some of us will fight to our death to make sure every way along the way, and I include Dr. Dixon who agrees with this, that we're going to maintain this kind of a school to honor God till the rapture of the saints. And after that whoever wants it can have it. Accreditation was another problem where God ruled and reigned. I want to close just a minute by telling you that there are people around here that can remember those days. Lee Hunt, a girl then by the name of Norma McQuinn, Bernice Mick, who graduated a long time ago and bookstore keeper for a long time. In case you want real good information, go to Raymond Bartholomew. He was a student then, too. The last verse, the last verse, in that reading from Dr. Milner was this one. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called by him."

James T. Jeremiah:

Young people, the providence of God brought us into existence. The power and the presence and providence of God will keep us on. It will see us through the times of sorrows and difficulties. And may I suggest as I think about the sorrows, they come too in the providence of God. But he sees us through. He's a God who cares and a God who loves and a God who provides. There are many other stories I could tell you that prove the same point. Father, thank you for today, for this school, for your providence, for your love, for our students. Bless today now the moments that remain, encourage and comfort and help us in Jesus name. Amen.