

Cropwell Baptist Church

By Joe Whitten

In February 2019, Jon Glass accepted the call to pastor Cropwell Baptist, a church that has ministered to the Coosa Valley since 1888-89. Jon, wife Matthea, and their five children have been welcomed by the congregation. Jon and Matthea are parents of six children; a son was still-born—a grief he shared with me over lunch one day. Jon commented that his and Matthea's dealing with their own grief and experiencing God's grace in the process has given them a greater compassion for others suffering separation caused by death.

How Jon came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior is a testimony of God's sovereign providence in someone's life. It happened in his dorm room, March 15, 1997, a Saturday night. Jon says, "I remember it like it was yesterday. I was sitting in my dorm room at Radford University.... Everyone else was out doing what college students do on a Saturday night. For me, I'd had enough of that. In fact I'd had enough of everything. I had tried everything and nothing helped. Life was hopeless."

But not really, for a good friend had suggested something Jon hadn't tried yet—that he read the Bible. And alone that Saturday night, Jon said, "I thought I'd give it a shot—after all, I'd tried everything else."

The dorm room radiator worked overtime that February night, so Jon opened a window to help regulate the temperature, he began reading Matthew. "In the midst of the hot and cold air," Jon said, "I found I had read to chapter 16 in Matthew. In that chapter, Jesus said the following words, 'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet lose his own soul?' I couldn't read any further. I couldn't get beyond those words. I had to stop and answer this question."

God's providence used Jon's major, business, to help him find the answer. "Jesus was speaking my language—profit and loss.... Jesus wasn't really asking a question. He knew the answer....[for] in God's economy, there is no profit when you have the whole world but lose your soul. ... To God—the Creator of all things—my soul is of more value than EVERYTHING in the world. It finally made sense. I had always believed that Jesus Christ died on a cross and rose from the

grave. Now, it made sense.” Jon had come to understand that an immortal soul has more value than anything in the created universe—wealth, fame, prestige, or possessions. “The trouble was,” he recalls, “I didn’t think my soul had any value.”

That night, alone in a quiet dormitory room, Jon came to understand for the first time that God loved him, that He sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross to redeem him, and that if God had given him what he deserved, he would have slain him on the spot and sent him to an eternity in hell. But God, who is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4-5), had shown great mercy and grace to him. Jon prayed that night for God to forgive him of his sins. “Every day of life that He gave me is an expression of His grace and mercy to me,” Jon said. “I told Him that I wanted to live every day for Him. It made sense. He gave me my life, so it really belongs to Him.” He recalled that he stayed up late that night reading and praying. When Sunday morning came, he wanted to find a church; he wanted to be around others who understood the truths about God and about themselves.

At that point, Jon began to want to know God’s will for his life. God moved him from a career in business to serving Christ in the ministry of the Gospel. He transferred to Liberty University, earning his undergraduate degree, and from there to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where he earned his *Master of Divinity with Biblical Languages* in 2004.

Cropwell Baptist Church was organized around 1888, we believe, although no minutes survive of the organizing presbytery of this church. However, the Coosa Valley Baptist Association minutes do survive, and the 1888 minutes of that association record that “messengers came from Cropwell Church” and give a charter membership of thirty. Then in 1889, the associational minutes record that Lealis Law, N. Willingham, and J. K. Jones attended and petitioned for Cropwell Baptist to be admitted to the Coosa Valley Baptist Association. The petition was accepted and membership affirmed. Washington Wilkes attended as pastor and is the first pastor of record for Cropwell Baptist Church.

In his book, *A History of Cropwell Baptist Church 1889-1999*, William Baxter McDanal writes that in the spring of 1929 a tornado “...completely destroyed Cropwell Baptist Church and [the] Coosa Valley Baptist Church.” The Sunday

after the tornado, both congregations had joint Sunday school "...at the Cropwell High School Auditorium, March 17, 1929. There were 71 present."

There was talk of the two churches coming together to form one Baptist church, but this did not come to fruition. Then, at Cropwell's August 18, 1929, business meeting the church appointed "...a finance committee to raise funds to help defray the expense of building the church building." The work on the sanctuary moved at a steady pace, and the first worship service in it was December 1, 1929. McDanal records that Dr. J. M. Thomas of Talladage preached the dedication sermon.

The 1929 building remained as the sanctuary until increased membership required more space and the current sanctuary was constructed in 1991. For lovers of historic architecture such as I, it was a sad day when it became necessary to remove the lovely old structure when renovations were made to the 1991 building, around 2016.

When asked about his vision for Cropwell Baptist, Pastor Jon Glass responded, "My vision for Cropwell is that we impact this community and the world for Jesus Christ. We want to see lives changed by the Gospel of Jesus. He is the only hope for this life and the life to come. We want to share that message with every person, young and old."

I like to think that the first pastor of Cropwell, Washington Wilkes, long-since in the presence of Christ, knows that the church he pastored in 1889 still faithfully ministers to Coosa Valley and surrounding areas 130 years later. If you're looking for a church home, come visit Cropwell Baptist. They will make you welcomed.

(Information for this article came from W. B. McDanal's *A History of Cropwell Baptist Church 1889-1989*, and interview with Pastor Jon Glass and from his on-line blog.)