



THE PROVIDENCE BAPTIST CHURCH OF GREENSBORO

Darryl W. Aaron, D. Min., Pastor

A Shaft of Light

It was the second funeral in three days. Pastor Jones delivered a eulogy, and I prayed for the family. Anyone who has heard Pastor Jones preach knows that all he does in the pulpit—be it a dose of humor, an unusually long pause, or a hand gesture—is proclamation. The Pastor scanned the audience and then spoke: "My son's commitment informs me; Christendom is in good hands." Yes, it was the second day I had traveled miles to do ministry, and still, the comment was a bit hyperbolic. Yet all his sons and daughters in ministry have heard the mantra for successful ministry: be faithful. The challenge to be faithful from Pastor Jones has always been a shaft of light for me. In forty years as the Pastor of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, Pastor Jones has constantly been throwing shafts of light to those whose conditions have been flooded with darkness. Without a doubt, to pastor a Negro Black Baptist church for forty years, one must be faithful to the calling of trusting God with dark people.

I never will forget that conversation he and I had on a cloudy, damp day while the pandemic was seizing the world. I called, declaring that I was checking on him. The truth is that I needed to hear his refrain to be faithful because I was asking, "Where is God?" He and I both agreed that we had not experienced anything like the moment and the church would never be the same. Before the call ended, as always, he delivered with piercing love: "Remain faithful, son." Why? Because God is faithful. I was reminded of this even on that day as I sat in my office, which I call the cave because it lacks a window to view directly outdoors. Pastor Jones's challenge lingered as I heard children laughing on their field trip from daycare through the parking lot and the roaring lawnmower drowning out the sweet sound of the birds. Although I did not have a direct view of the outdoors, I was captured by a **shaft of light** that could be seen down the hall. The flowing ray of sun through a window told me the cloudy day had been displaced. There was no direct view from a window, yet I could witness outdoor activity.

When Pastor Jones challenges me to be faithful, Rabbi Kushner's assertion is shorthand: "We can't pray that God makes our lives free of problems.....We can't ask Him to weave a magic spell around us so that bad things will only happen to other people and never to us. People who pray for miracles usually don't get miracles...But people who pray for courage, strength to bear the unbearable, for the grace to remember what they have left instead of what they have lost very often find their prayer answered."

With newly minted good hands for Christendom, as I headed off for a writing retreat where the great saints of Christendom have walked (because Pastor Jones knows the art of pilgrimage), I telephoned him, and of course, he told me to listen to a lot and to "Be faithful, son." The first day of the retreat was grueling; walking over 20,000 steps after a nine-hour flight was a bit much. As the sun began to tug on the sheet cover, eight other weary travelers and I climbed the Aventine Hill of Rome to visit the Santa Sabina Basilica, and I could feel the

sour question on the edge of my tongue: "What did I do to deserve this?" Exhausted, I could barely hear one of our leaders describe the structure and varied purposes of the basilica over my exhaling. Yet, I could listen to Pastor Jones's echoing challenge to be faithful. As Professor Bradley passionately explained that the intricate design of the basilica's windows allowed natural light to reveal the transcendent nature of God, my eyes leaked tears of joy. When the shaft of light beamed the plaster of saints through the windows, I knew what to look for the rest of the retreat. But not only on this retreat shall I look for the shaft of light. For the entirety of my ministry, when there is not a direct view of God, Pastor Jones's challenge to be faithful will be my shaft of light. When events mute the sweetness of life and the clouds hang low, his challenge informs me that the activity of the divine is unceasing.

Pastor Jones is celebrating forty years as Pastor of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. His list of accolades and accomplishments is indeed long. Becoming the president of both Lott Carey and General Baptist State Convention or Vice President of Baptist World Alliance would be the peak of anyone's ministry. And yet, after forty years of faithful ministry, his greatest gift to Christendom is his courage to cast shafts of light faithfully to dark people.

I know for sure that Friendship has been in good hands for forty years. Congratulations, Pastor, on your fortieth anniversary.

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