



Investiture Service: The Charge to the Pastor

Robert B. Thieme III

Berachah Church

Sunday, 28 March 2004

I am pleased to share the rostrum this morning with this august gathering of theologians. Each one has demonstrated through his ministry a loyalty to the systematic theology, the innovative system, and the orthodox message that has been so rigorously developed and consistently communicated from this pulpit for over 53 years. The impact the ministry of R. B. Thieme, Jr., has had on the lives of believers in this generation is immeasurable. The Colonel is a legend in his own time and we gather here today for a change of command ceremony during which the mantle of authority over this church will be transferred from him over to his successor and his son, Robert B. Thieme III.

This date will go down as historic in the annals of Berachah Church, for today marks the end of a glorious era of biblical exposition that is unparalleled since the Reformation. And it also marks the beginning of a new era that holds great promise to not only continue the traditions of the old but to advance upon it. Nevertheless, getting to this moment challenged the mettle, the integrity, and the staying power of all Berachans from the pew to Board.

One of the gentlemen on this dais and I are old friends from way back. Rick Hughes and I have known each other for well over 30 years. He and I attended the University of Alabama during the days of another legend in his own time, Paul “Bear” Bryant. Rick played for Coach Bryant; I cheered them on.

When Coach Bryant retired he was replaced by a man who was an All-America end for two of Alabama’s national championship teams. His name is Ray Perkins. He was an excellent coach but his job demanded more than winning football games. It also included the task of replacing a legend. He succeeded at the former but failed at the latter and resigned after four years for the more tranquil duties of coaching the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.



Right after the Pulpit Committee began its search, Rick asked me who I thought might succeed Colonel Thieme as pastor of Berachah Church. I didn't hesitate. I said, "The only man in America with any experience in this sort of thing is Ray Perkins." Rick later repeated this to someone who posed to him the very same question and to which the inquisitor responded, "Who is Ray Perkins?"

Well, Ray Perkins is the man who learned the principle that no matter how successful you are in your own right, you will often be measured by the success of your predecessor, especially if that person is a legend.

But the thing people forget is that those who *are* legends were *not* legends when they *began*. Their reputation was built over time and because of personal integrity, undivided loyalty, and an uncompromising devotion to the cause they engaged, they *became* legendary.

The problem with replacing a legend is that those who were his followers often wish to maintain the status quo by demanding that the present glory be continued without pause.

This is rarely possible, especially in those professions where public affinity is drawn to a dynamic leader. There are exceptions. And I contend that one of the most apparent is that of replacing the legendary pastor of a local church.

Colonel Thieme is a legend. "Who could ever replace him?" is a question I'm sure many of you have asked. This is a question best answered not by men but by the Holy Spirit. And the way for men to get out of the way and allow the Holy Spirit to do His job is to set up an objective system based on biblical principles, and then execute it with strict adherence to its process and procedure.

Such was the case with the efforts of this church's Board of Deacons. But as its Pulpit Committee began its search for a successor, the man God had chosen in eternity past was not aware that he would even become a candidate for Berachah's pulpit. He had prepared himself with seminary degrees with the intent of preserving his father's ministry in perpetuity through electronic and print media. He edited manuscripts which required intensive research into the Colonel's class notes and writings.

The end result is the popular publications that are distributed worldwide to those hungry for accurate teaching of the Word of God. Little did Bobby know that his intensive research was really preparing him to continue his father's ministry not as his editor but as his successor.



When the Colonel discontinued his regular teaching schedule, Bobby was asked by the Board to become the interim pastor until a successor could be found. As the pulpit committee moved forward, Bobby began to teach. And as he taught he slowly but surely discovered that the spiritual gift he intended to use in an academic environment was intended by God to be used in the office of pastor-teacher.

Consequently, he became one of several candidates the pulpit committee began to vet for this storied pulpit. Three men were eventually identified as finalists in what might be called Operation Ray Perkins. Each was immanently qualified. All made effective presentations to this congregation. But in the final analysis, being qualified for the job was not the real issue. The ultimate question which had to be answered was which of them was the man God decreed to shepherd *this* flock.

It became evident that, although each was qualified, one possessed a unique advantage. The one chosen is the one who can most effectively provide a seamless transition from one ministry to the next. His knowledge of the Colonel's teachings is unsurpassed. He is able to take up the message that has attracted millions to this ministry and resume without pause.

It is therefore apparent that the weighty task of replacing the Colonel was not too great for the grace of God. For He knew in eternity past that when his servant, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., sheathed his sword and struck the colors, that his son, Robert B. Thieme III, would be ready and prepared to raise them again and continue the advance.

The Colonel once related how Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer challenged him and his fellow classmates upon their being graduated by Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Chafer maintained that he had taught these men all that he had been privileged to learn from the Word of God during his career as pastor and professor. He encouraged them to use what they had learned from him as a foundation upon which they would build upon his teachings.

None came close to either matching or exceeding the efforts of the Colonel. He was a zealous student of the Word. His theological advances revolutionized the way two generations of pastors studied and taught the Bible. People flocked to Houston to study before the Colonel face-to-face. Many were amazed; others stood aghast. But none could deny that he was the preeminent communicator, par excellence, of twentieth-century Protestant theology.



Bobby, it is my solemn duty to confirm before God and those here gathered that you are the one chosen to seize the colors and carry on. Consequently, I commit into your charge, jurisdiction over the souls of those who worship in this place. I implore you not only to continue the ministry pioneered by your father but, through the mentorship and enabling power of the Holy Spirit, to pick up where your father left off and continue the advance.

It is customary for those who give the charge to the pastor to delve into passages of Scripture that define for you the authority and responsibilities with which you are invested as pastor, but you are fully aware of them all as well as the duties mandated by them. I will fulfill my duty by just briefly commenting upon one of them:

1 Peter 5:2 - Shepherd the flock of God assigned to you, performing due diligence, not from false motivation but voluntarily according to the grace of God; and not for ulterior gain but with eagerness;

v. 3 - neither as a despot over the allotted congregation but rather become a pattern to the flock.

These verses make it clear that those chosen by divine allotment are the ones who make up the flock assigned to you. All Berachah is not Berachah. Those who respond to your message, and as a result grow in grace, will exhibit a loyalty to the doctrine communicated here. These are the ones toward whom you owe due diligence. To properly shepherd them means they will need to be led to the spiritual nourishment found in the Word which you will consistently provide through the rigors of studying and teaching. This is to be voluntary service performed with eagerness through the grace of God, not from any false motivation or a desire to gain a temporary advantage by appeasement.

Neither are you to misuse your authority by becoming a despot, either administratively or by communication of legalism. Instead you are to execute the sophisticated spiritual life you are commissioned to teach and in doing so become an example to the flock.

Encouragement for compliance with these duties is found in the promise of a special escrow blessing to pastors in 1 Peter 5:

v. 4 - And when the Shepherd in Chief shall appear at the rapture of the church, you shall receive, at the evaluation tribunal of Christ, the crown of unfading glory.

And so I implore you this morning to pursue this reward by fulfilling the command of 2 Peter 5:2: "Shepherd the flock of God assigned to you."



If you dedicate yourself to the fulfillment of this mandate, along with the principles of authority, responsibility, and accountability associated with it, then when you appear before the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ you will be privileged to stand beside your father where you both will be honored to hear this acclamation from our Lord: “Well done, My good and faithful servants: I give to you the crown of unfading glory.”

Bobby, you are about to take the reins of this pulpit which I have often referred to as Red Boy. The Colonel has dismounted and it was one heck of a ride. On Tuesday night, when you mount Red Boy for the first time as his successor, the phenomenal ministry that your father began will become your great honor and privilege to continue. As you ride point your congregation stands ready and willing to follow the colors.

Congratulations and Happy Trails.