

How the Doctrine of Election Affected the Pastoral Ministry of John A. Broadus”

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Introduction

There is a vast amount of difference that exists between “the dreamer of dreams” and the “builder of dreams.” [1] My colleague Craig Christina observes that “John Albert Broadus was much more than a dreamer; he was a man who gave his life for the edification of the church, the Southern Baptist denomination, and her founding seminary. Yet it was the establishment and continuance of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that became his all-consuming passion later in life, and it is in the building of the Seminary that one finds the heartbeat of this dream builder.” [2]

“The seminary,” to which Broadus would give the major energies of his life, “opened its doors in Greenville, South Carolina, on October 1, 1859.” [3] In its beginnings it had an enrollment of 26 students. “The largest number of students in each of the first three sessions was from Virginia, in large part because of the efforts and influence of Broadus.” [4] But, “a disruption . . . waited on the horizon; one which would preclude all studies and threatened the [very] existence of the seminary itself” [5] and with it, Broadus’s dream. This “disruption” of course was the Civil War. This disruption will act as a case-study to consider how “the doctrine of election affected Broadus’s pastoral ministry.”

A Call for Chaplains

In an article that ran in the *Religious Herald* by Rev. J. Wm. Jones, Chaplain to the Thirteenth [13th] Virginia Infantry, there went out a call for military Chaplains. With poignancy, urgency, and passion—Jones begs for Southern preachers to see their duty:

“Send us the names of *good men*,” and I here repeat, we want *none others*—our object [is] not merely to fill up the regiments with nominal Chaplains, but to fill the vacancies with *efficient, working* men. We want *effective Gospel preachers*, whose burden shall be Christ and him crucified. . . . We want men who will *stick to their posts*. . . . The great business of the Chaplain is to *preach Christ* publicly, and from tent to tent, and the temporal welfare of the soldiers should be made subordinate to this. We want men *physically able as well as willing to endure hardships and privations*. If a Chaplain would live up to the full measure of his usefulness, he must be with his regiment on the weary march (frequently resigning his horse to some foot-sore soldier), lie with them around the bivouac-fire after evening prayers are over; be drenched on the outposts, or face the pelting snowstorm; divide with some hungry soldier his last hard cracker, and in a word, share with his regiment whatever hardships they may be called to endure. Now if a brother is physically unable to endure these hardships, he had best not enter the work, but there is no question that many a delicate brother would have his health permanently improved, if he would thus learn to “endure hardness as a good soldier.” [6]

Whether or not Broadus read or heard this from the *Religious Herald* is unknown. Nevertheless, Broadus felt compelled to answer the call!

Broadus's Response to the Call for Chaplains

For Broadus to respond to “The Call” and service as Chaplain was a natural thing for him as a Gospel minister. He had, since his conversion, always been “involved in seeking to bring other[s] to Christian belief.” [7] “This practice had begun a few months after his conversion and continued throughout his lifetime.” [8] His son-in-law, A.T. Robertson, relates an early experience that seems to set a pattern for Broadus being a life-long personal worker and “soul winner”:

In a meeting a few months after John's conversion, the preacher urged all Christians at the close of the service to move about and talk to the unconverted. John looked anxiously around to see if there was anybody present he could talk to about his soul's salvation. He had never done anything of the kind before. Finally he saw a man . . . named Sandy. He thought he might venture to speak to him . . . and Sandy was converted. [9]

Even after Broadus would go away to school and come home, “Sandy . . . would run across the street to meet him and say: ‘Howdy, John! thankee, John. Howdy, John, thankee, John.’” [10] Broadus would later retell the story and adds: “And if I ever reach the heavenly home and walk the golden streets, I know the first person to meet me will be Sandy, coming and saying again: ‘Howdy, John! thankee, John.’” [11]

Dr. Broadus possessed a true love and zeal for lost souls. This is clearly seen in his tract written for the soldiers in the field—“We Pray for You at Home.” Please consider an excerpt:

We pray for your soul. Ah! What shall it comfort us, and what shall it profit you, if you gain the noblest earthly triumphs, the most abiding earthly fame, yea, every good that earth can give, and lose your soul! If we continually beseech the Lord that your mortal life may be preserved and made happy, with what absorbing, agonizing earnestness must *we pray* for your immortal soul,

that it may be delivered from eternal degradation and wretchedness which are the wages of sin, and be brought to know the sweetness of God's service here, the rapture of his presence hereafter. We know it must be hard for you, amid the distractions of camp life, the alternative excitement and *ennui* [12][boredom], the absences of home influences and the associations of the sanctuary, to fix mind and heart on things above. . . . *We pray* that you may be inclined and enabled to commit your soul to the divine Saviour, who died to redeem us, and ever lives to intercede for us, and who with yearning love is ever saying, "Come unto me." *We pray* that the Holy Spirit may thoroughly change your heart, bringing you truly to hate sin, and love holiness, and may graciously strengthen you to withstand temptation, and give you more and more the mastery over yourself, and the victory over every enemy of your soul. Whether it be appointed [for] you to fall soon in battle, or years hence to die at home, may God in mercy forbid that you should live in impenitence and die in your sins. Whether we are to sit with you again around our own fireside, and "take sweet counsel together as we walk to the house of God in company," or are to meet you no more on earth, oh, may God in his mercy save us from eternal separation [emphasis added]! [13]

This entire tract sounds like an "Invitation" without an "Altar Call" to me!

Dr. Jones wrote to Broadus on March 30, 1863 from Camp Thirteenth [13th] Virginia Infantry located at Hamilton's Crossing to inquire;

By the way—what think you of the proposition I made in my last [letter] that you spend the summer as an army missionary? Or, if you would like it, I could get you a commission as Chaplain to labor in A. P. Hill's Division, where you would be very comfortably quartered with brethren Ned Hill and Jim Field, or in a good artillery regiment. I am very sure you would find it a wide field of usefulness and it may be that your health would be materially improved by it. Think about it and if you should decide to take the Chaplaincy write me to that effect at once. [14]

Later in the war a special invitation was extended to Broadus: "Stonewall Jackson urged Doctor Broadus" through their mutual friend—J. William Jones

saying; “Write to him by all means and beg him to come. Tell him that he never had a better opportunity of preaching the Gospel than he would have right now in these camps.” [15]

Jones related Broadus’s response of the personal invitation from Gen. Jackson:

[Broadus] . . . promptly replied that he would be glad to come; that he had seriously and prayerfully considered the question; and that he had only been prevented from entering the army before by a doubt as to whether his feeble health could stand the exposure of camp life; but that he would at least try it as soon as he could make his arrangements. When . . . [Jones] met General Jackson a few days after the reception of Doctor Broadus’s letter, and told him that he would come the great soldier said in his characteristic phrase: “That is good; very good, I am so glad of that. And when Doctor Broadus comes you must bring him to see me. I want him to preach at my headquarters, and I wish to help him in his work all I can.” [16]

This was just a few days before the Battle of Chancellorsville that would prove providentially untimely for General Jackson and the South. Before the great soldier could meet the great preacher he had already “crossed over the river to rest under the shade of the trees.” [17]

“July and August and half of September [1863] were spent in daily preaching to Lee’s Army, now in the churches at Winchester, now at the convalescent camp, now to Corse’s Brigade, [and at] the hospital at Charlottesville” [18] and to sundry of the Army of Northern Virginia’s foot soldiers, Calvary, and artillery battalions. Broadus reflected that, “For three months of that summer I preached as a missionary in General Lee’s army. It was the most interesting and thoroughly delightful preaching I was ever engaged in.” [19] And “Besides the preaching Doctor Broadus was [also a] war correspondent for the *Charleston News and Courier*.” [20]

Low Moments in Broadus’s Reflections

There were, however, some very low moments emotionally for Broadus. At one point he confessed, “What can I do preaching? I fear not much.” [21] At the

time he was assigned an out-of-the-way place where only twenty men were stationed, with “picket and provost” [22] duty. In a letter he seems to yearn to be “Five miles off, at Jordan’s Springs . . . [at] a hospital of a thousand sick and wounded” [23] who needed the Gospel.

One particularly poignant scene of Broadus is given us by Robertson. “I am to preach to-morrow morning at the Presbyterian church, and in the afternoon or evening at some other, and then to try an afternoon service next week and see if we can do anything.” [24] This was Saturday July 4th. As he reflected on the opportunity to preach in the Presbyterian Church and at the Lutheran Church on Ephesians 3:14 and Proverbs 3:17 respectively; he confesses to his wife Charlotte;

You perceive that I am taking my old sermons. It is very difficult here to think up an unfamiliar discourse. I haven’t got used to the tent, and am constantly making acquaintances. A good many soldiers [were] in attendance both times yesterday. The sermons are not particularly good or particularly bad. God grant that they may do some good. Oh, it is so hard to preach as one ought to do! I long for the opportunity, yet do not rise to meet it with the whole-souled earnestness and living faith, and afterwards I feel sad and ashamed. [25]

This is one moving insight into Broadus’s heart just after the Battle of Gettysburg—before all the awful results were known.

He continued to his dear Charlotte: “But I fear nothing can be done, as the whole community, citizens and soldiers, is astir about the late battle near Gettysburg, of which we have very conflicting and very exciting accounts, and there will probably be wounded men here to-day or tomorrow, requiring attention.” [26] In the aftermath of the battle Broadus was unable to evacuate the area because all the conveyances were employed for the wounded. He told Charlotte, “So I mean to wait, and meantime to do all I can in the hospitals.” He felt it his call and duty to stay. “I am very well satisfied, because it is so clear that I must remain” [27] and serve those wounded and dying. Closing his letter he confides; “The late battles were at first a success, and afterwards a reverse, nothing to boast of on either side, and dreadful losses on both.” [28]

Around July 24 Broadus tells us that he “worked awhile with [Rev.] Taylor this morning distributing newspapers and tracts in the hospitals, and afterwards rode to see the graveyard, where the graves of twelve hundred soldiers lie in long rows and squares, and ten or a dozen are regularly dug beforehand and kept waiting.” [29] This sight causes a deep groan in his spirit—“Oh, this dreadful war!” [30]

Glimpses of Broadus’s Personal Work

Jones again testifies concerning Broadus’s work; “We were exceedingly fortunate in having as preachers in our meetings and workers among the soldiers at Winchester, besides our Chaplains, such men as . . . J.A. Broadus.” [31] This was a wonderful time in Broadus’s mind because “He had never enjoyed the sense of God’s presence in preaching as here.” [32] Many were requesting prayer for their soul’s needs. He had been led to believe that the need for the Gospel was not so great. His retort was, “[I] had been deceived as to the preaching among the soldiers; for not half had been told to him. He had no idea of the state of religious feeling here, though he had had more opportunities than many out of the army to know the truth of the matter.” [33] He rejoiced that “*He had never enjoyed preaching so much!*” [34] One main reason he rejoiced in it so—“They come because they *choose* to come.” [35] During this time “Many were converted” [36] and the preachers, Chaplains, missionaries, and colporteurs were “never met with a repulse in presenting Christ.” [37] “A few days after . . . [Broadus’s] arrival in Winchester [Virginia, he] . . . wrote to Superintendent Dickinson” [38] saying:

I am very glad I came to Virginia and came to Winchester. Though there are not such opportunities for preaching as there were some months ago at Fredericksburg, yet I meet a hearty welcome and rejoice in the work. My heart warms towards the soldiers. How they do listen to preaching. The Lord be thanked for the privilege of telling them about Jesus; the Lord prosper all who labor to save them. [39]

But his opportunity to minister would soon change—providentially!

Jones relates a testimonial of Broadus's personal work. He queried one soldier in a field hospital about his soul's need.

In response to my inquiry, he said he was not a Christian, but wished he was. . . . I sought to explain to him the way of salvation, and he listened earnestly. . . . I gave him my hand to take leave. But he held my hand hard, and said: 'Stop a little, Pray for me won't you? I want to be a Christian. . . . I'm very wicked, and deserve God's wrath. You seem to care something for me—now pray for me, won't you?' . . . And when I arose, [after praying] he took my hand himself, and said, 'Now you have prayed for me once—won't you remember me and pray for me still?' [40]

Later he would reflect on his opportunity to minister: "The . . . [soldier] mentioned I simply happened . . . to pass by and notice. . . . There had been nothing remarkable in this man's appearance; he was a hale, hearty looking soldier; and I walked away thinking how many there doubtless are of these poor fellows whom one sees everywhere by hundreds, that would in like manner reveal to an enquirer an anxious concern for their salvation." The deep pathos of Broadus's heart is evident when he says that; "There is no mistake about it that a large portion of these soldiers are deeply interested in religion. Any experienced preacher would see it, from the way they listen to preaching; and in private, not only are all respectful, but many cordially welcome religious conversation, and avow, without the slightest hesitation, their desire to be Christians." [41]

Another time Broadus related to the superintendent one particular preaching appointment. There was "A camp, for convalescent soldiers on their way to the army . . . established near . . . [us] last week, and I went out to preach on Tuesday morning." "Some 200 men assembled under the trees in what was . . . [Senator] Mason's yard, and it was moving to see with what fixed attention . . . [the soldiers] listened." There were "Men . . . there from almost every State of the Confederacy, but we had common interest in God's worship and word." "At the close of the sermon, some twenty or twenty-five readily knelt for special prayer." [42]

Please give me leave again to relate how Broadus was also employed, much like Whitefield, as an open air preacher. Jones observed: "On fast day of that autumn

. . . Dr. . . . Broadus . . . preach[ed] *four times*, at different points; and while all of the services were of deep interest, I particularly recall the service at sundown, held at General Gordon's head-quarters." Before Broadus arrived "The general had conducted a prayer meeting himself in the morning, and made a stirring address to his brigade, had sent out the notices and exerted himself to have a congregation, and a large crowd, especially of officers, attend. . . ." I recall [Dr. Broadus's] text—"Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace"—. . . At times there was scarcely a dry eye in the vast throng, and the tears of generals, colonels and captains mingled freely with those of the rank and file, I never heard Dr. Broadus preach with more power, and I do not believe that he ever did." [43]

My assignment has been in this second address to demonstrate, "How the Doctrine of Election Affected the Pastoral Ministry of John A. Broadus"? But frankly, as I pondered my research and considered all the material, I could find no direct tie to the doctrine of election and Broadus's pastoral ministry. There is no "smoking gun" if you will—demonstrating this? This endeavor has been like many other research projects: It started off in one direction with an assumption and ended up in a completely different place where the facts lead. When he left the pastoral ministry of the Baptist Church at Charlottesville, Chaplain to the University of Virginia, work as a local evangelist, and a myriad of other pastoral ministries—he left the pastoral ministry proper. Upon arrival at this new vocation as seminary professor he poured his sweat, soul, money, energy—yea his very life blood into this endeavor, he even took supplements for having for energy that he once found at some Patriot Power Greens review online. There would be no long term pastoral ministry again—at least not like in Charlottesville! But we can draw some closing **observations** from instances of his work as a chaplain, preacher, and minister at-large during the War:

First, early on in his ministry, just after his conversion, he became involved in personal work. It would be safe to call him a "soul winner." Take the incident with "Sandee" that he left for us to consider. He always had an interest in the destination of the eternal souls of those under his charge. This no doubt was one of the primary motivating factors that drove him all his life and ministry.

Secondly, in his writing we have left for us the "We Pray for You at Home" Gospel tract mentioned earlier. This captures the quintessential ethos of Broadus to be useful in the Master's Kingdom work. Although during the War he was

not leading a particular congregation nor did he know what the state of Southern Seminary might be after the war, he was “always about his Father’s business.”

Third, many requested prayer for their “soul’s need.” The ordinary soldier was acutely aware that each day death stared him in the face and it could possibly be their last day on this earth. Time and again throughout the War there would be impromptu “prayer meetings,” “special prayer,” Gospel sermons at night, and Gospel sermons in the open air by the preachers, missionaries, pastors, and colporteurs. Regrettably the next day some of these dear souls would surely stand before their God. And Broadus never missed an opportunity to preach a Gospel sermon. It may have been what he considered to be “warmed over,” but he was up to the task.

Fourth, Broadus sensed a real urgency in the men who came to the open air Gospel preaching or prayer meetings. They came because they wanted to come. They did not come because of anyone was pressuring them. Because of this we can assume that it was a real movement of Revival sent by the Holy Spirit of our Lord Christ. J. William Jones reported in his *Christ in the Camp* that “Up to January, 1865, it was estimated that nearly one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers had been converted during the progress of the war, and it was believed that fully one-third of all the soldiers in the field were praying men, and members of some branch of the Christian church.” [44]

Fifth, we have another example of personal work done by Broadus. The soldier who took his hand and asked him to tarry for a while seemed to move Broadus. He stopped, prayed for him, and talked to him of the way of salvation. Then he recalled how so many were in spiritual need and that the need was so very, very great.

Contemporary Implications and Applications for Us as Ministers of the Gospel

First, Broadus was a “life-long learner.” He was a scholar par excellence. Even during the hard times of bivouac in the field he found time to work on his magnum opus *Commentary on Matthew*.

Secondly, Broadus was a “soul-winner!” He loved souls. He worked with individuals one-on-one to witness and explain the Gospel. He would “tarry a

while” with an inquirer. He made it his business to “be about the Master’s business” of preaching and teaching from “tent to tent” and in the open air.

Third, Broadus went to work—wherever he found himself, whatever the work was. It is easily seen by his lifestyle that he believed the Scriptural admonition, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do [it] with thy might” (Ecc 9:10) His focus, his drive, his energy, his compassion were all traits that moved him. But at the heart and motivation of all that Broadus did—HE WORKED!!

Fourth, to quote an old Baptist aphorism—HE BLOOMED WHERE HE WAS PLANTED! He did not wait for the war to come to him, but longed to be where he could do the most good preaching the Gospel to the most number of men. He even positioned himself to be used as much as possible. And this focus was not for the *laud of men* but for the *souls of men*.

Last, and in no way least, Broadus preached whether he felt up to it or not. In the different documents it can be seen that his health was not the best, his accommodations in the field were not the most comfortable, it was not the easiest place to study or prepare new sermons; but he always was up to the task. It even burdened him a great deal that he had to use sermons more than once.

Broadus at the End of His Life

It was stated earlier that there was no connection found in this inquiry as to Broadus’s pastoral ministry and election. But I did find an account where Broadus was doctrinally at the end of his life. As has been stated, he began the study of the “Doctrines of Grace” on his own and became a Stereological Calvinist by his personal conviction even to the point of signing The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s *Abstract of Principles*. His son-in-law A.T. Robertson rehearses an account of Broadus’s trip to Europe with a focus on Geneva. There he related how he had “singularly fine weather” for traveling and “giving the most varied and complete views of Mont Blanc.” [45] He used this vision of Mont Blanc as metaphor to make an application concerning the Doctrines of Grace and observed:

The people who sneer at what is called Calvinism might as well sneer at Mont Blanc. We are not in the least bound to defend all of Calvin’s opinions or

actions, but I do not see how any one (sic) who really understands the Greek of the Apostle Paul or the Latin of Calvin and Turretin can fail to see that these latter did but interpret and formulate substantially what the former teachers Whatever the inspired writers meant to teach is authoritative, the truth of God. [46]

A lifelong motto and fitting epitaph for our founding brother of The Southern Baptist Seminary could be heard in a personal and resounding rhetorical question to us [47]: “What is life for, but to fear God and work hard?” [48]

[1] Craig C. Christian, “Broadus and the Establishment of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” in David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke, eds., *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008), 122.

[2] Ibid., 122.

[3] Ibid., 136.

[4] See Barron, “The Contributions,” 63 as quoted in Craig C. Christian, “Broadus and the Establishment of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” in David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke, eds., *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008), 136.

[5] Ibid., 136.

[6] J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp; or Religion in the Confederate Army* (B. F. Johnson & Co., 1887; reprint Harrisburg, PA.; Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 229-230 (page citations are to the reprint edition). For an additional discussion see: Charles F. Pitts, *Chaplains in Gray* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1957; reprint Concord, VA.: R. M. J. C. Publications, 2003), 46-47 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[7] David S. Dockery, "The Broadus-Robertson Tradition," Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001) 93.

[8] Ibid.

[9] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1901), x; as quoted in David S. Dockery, "The Broadus-Robertson Tradition," Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001) 93.

[10] Dockery, 93.

[11] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1901), x; as quoted in David S. Dockery, "The Broadus-Robertson Tradition," Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001) 93.

[12] *Ennui*, a feeling of weariness, boredom, or dissatisfaction.

[13] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 190-191.

[14] Ibid., 196-197.

[15] Ibid., 197.

[16] J.W. Jones, (*The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Magazine*, April, 1895; quoted in A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 197-198.

[17] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 198.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 200.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 200.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 201.

[28] Ibid.

[29] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 203.

[30] Ibid.

[31] J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp; or Religion in the Confederate Army* (B. F. Johnson & Co., 1887; reprint Harrisburg, PA.; Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 312 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[32] Ibid., 326.

[33] J. William Jones, *Christ in the Camp; or Religion in the Confederate Army* (B. F. Johnson & Co., 1887; reprint Harrisburg, PA.; Sprinkle Publications, 1986), 326 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 313.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 314.

[41] Ibid., 314-315.

[42] Ibid., 315.

[43] Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 247-248.

[44] Jones, *Christ in the Camp*, 390

[45] A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John A. Broadus*, 396.

[46] Ibid., 397.

[47]

[48] Ibid., 396.