

Vanderbilt Pierpont Black

(1918-2007)

It was in June of 1989. My family was living in Haleyville, Alabama, preparing to depart for mission work in New Zealand that rapidly-approaching August. My grandfather, an elder at the South Haleyville church, said one day, "Let's go down to Crossroads tonight and hear V.P. Black."

So, on that sticky, hot summer night, we went down in the country to hear one of the 20th Century's greatest gospel preachers. When we entered the little country church building, I saw this small framed man, with curly black hair combed straight back. He had black-rimmed glasses. He was wearing a white suit, with white shoes. Not a wrinkle could be found in his polished appearance.

When the service began, the building was packed with people. The songs were sung, the prayers were prayed, and the invitation song was announced, then the man in white took to the podium. He began his sermon as many do, soft-toned, kind and gentle. Not a time did he look at a note, but with exactness and clarity, he proceeded to preach the gospel of Jesus. It was not long before his passion for the message was felt by all in the attendance. His voice got louder, and more convicting with every quotation of passage upon passage of Scripture. That man of God preached on the level of such intensity, that at times his face turned blood red. Contrasted with the white suit he wore, the awe-inspired audience in that little country church in North Alabama, sat without so much as a blink of the eye for over an hour. What a preacher! What passion! What a Savior he proclaimed!

V.P. Black was born in Lamar County, Alabama, December 15, 1918. He passed from this life February 4, 2007 in Montgomery, Alabama. He was eight-eight years old. He is survived by his wife Lourine Tennison Black, two children, four grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

He was an educated man. He attended Freed-Hardeman University for two years. He received his B.A. from Faulkner University. He held two honorary doctorate degrees, the LL. D. degree from F-HU, and the other from Southeastern University. Though honorary degrees, one could never argue that they were not earned, as for seventy years he faithfully preached the gospel of Christ. No man worked harder for Christian education than did V.P. Black. He served more than 20 years as the Vice-President of Faulkner University (formerly, Alabama Christian College.) He set up a \$100,000 ministerial fund at F-HU to help prepare gospel preachers. He gave over \$100,000 to Faulkner University from the sales of his books. He served on the Board of Directors of Faulkner University and the board of Namwianga Christian School in Zambia, Africa. He personally gave thousands of dollars to this African school to underwrite the educations of hundreds of Gospel Preachers.

As a preacher, none surpassed his dedication. He served in local work for over 25 years in the city of Mobile, Alabama, and in gospel meeting work he preached over 45 years. His greatest contribution to churches of Christ was in the area of teaching on stewardship. His teaching was challenging, and Biblical, often

receiving strong criticism from weak brethren. But, no one lived his preaching any more evidently than did V.P. Black. Only the Lord knows of the thousands and thousands of dollars that he and sister Black have given to the Lord's work, especially in the area of training Christian preachers and teachers.

The greatest sermon I ever heard from any preacher, was at the Freed-Hardeman University Lectures on February 9, 1993. Each year the Lectureship is dedicated to the life-work of great church leaders. That year V.P. Black was honored. After attending the Appreciation Dinner for brother Black, which in itself was an event of honor equivalent to that of kings, this humble giant of a preacher stood before thousands that night and preached a sermon entitled, "Behold, The Christ." For 42 minutes we sat entranced and enthralled as that, then seventy-four year old, man proclaimed with spectacular acumen, the beauty of the Christ we serve! You can download and hear that sermon at <http://www.therestorationmovement.com/audio.htm>.

I shall never forget this great man who touched my life, and that of my family through personal friendship and love. He was a dear friend to others in our church family here at Buford, especially to David and Carolyn Wheeler. For years David traveled with Brother Black for gospel meeting work, when David served as his personal song leader. Others have had Brother Black into their homes, and for years held him in highest esteem. He will be greatly missed.

A great man has fallen in Israel!

—Scott Harp