

NEWS

These Black Conservative Pastors Are Men Of Action, And Soul

Part 1 of 2 - This article was originally published in the July/August 2020 issue of The American Conservative. John A. Burtka IV is the executive director and acting editor of The American Conservative.

In the Middle Ages, they might have been called “fools for Christ.” The Sermon on the Mount assured that such men were storing up “treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Equal part pastors, diplomats, and prophets, they are men of action who have turned the conventional narrative about race and poverty on its head in order to strengthen black America. Some might even call them saints.

Pastor Corey Brooks stood at the altar of New Beginnings Church on the South Side of Chicago. The sanctuary sits at 6620 S. King Drive, just south of “O-Block,” known as the most dangerous neighborhood in Chicago. It was the summer of 2011, and Brooks was tasked with burying yet another victim of gang violence—the city averages over 2,000 shootings per year. This time, Brooks had had enough.

As he surveyed the congregation, he decided to do something that many pastors do all the time, an altar call. But this time, instead of asking people to bend a knee, he sensed that some were carrying illegal firearms in the sanctuary. He pleaded with his congregation to lay down their weapons. The room fell silent. For a moment, he feared for his life. But then, the silence was broken when a young man came forward and placed his gun on the altar. After the memorial, he discovered several other guns left beneath the pews by men who had been too ashamed to stand up before the community, yet clearly wanted to amend their lives.

As he left the church, he looked down the street towards a motel whose presence weighed heavily upon the members of his congregation. The Super Motel was an epicenter for sex trafficking, drug use, and prostitution. For the past 18 months, he had led protests with over 100 people on Friday and Saturday evenings, calling on law enforcement to shut down the den of iniquity. Eventually, Chicago police heeded his request, but the abandoned property still attracted illicit behavior even after its closing.

That’s when Brooks felt another nudge on his heart similar to the one he felt at the funeral. The situation required action, and he felt that God was knocking on the door. He responded by taking to the rooftop of the motel in prayer and protest. For the next 94 days, during a blisteringly cold Chicago winter, Brooks camped out and refused to come down until he raised \$450,000 to purchase and demolish the structure. His efforts attracted national attention, and he was successful in accomplishing his goal.

Fast forward to 2020: Brooks now oversees both his church and a vibrant community center on the site of the old



Pastor Jasper Williams

motel, Project H.O.O.D., whose mission is to empower community members with the “tools necessary to become peace-makers, problem solvers, leaders, and entrepreneurs.” Serving over 2,000 people, his team has helped to launch countless start-ups, provide job training for certified construction workers, start a violence prevention and conflict mediation program, offer financial coaching to thousands, and countless other programs from summer camps to providing a safe place for teens to gather on Friday evenings.

O-Block is safer on account of his efforts, and he’s developed street cred with gang members who respect the investments he’s made in the community. When asked what drives his seemingly endless ambition, Brooks responded with two things: “I really believe in God and I really do believe that one day I’ll have to stand before him and give an account for my time on earth...And then secondly...I want people to see that you can be conservative, and you can be black, and you can be in the hood, and make these principles still work.”

Pastor Jasper Williams took the podium at Greater Grace Temple in Detroit and ignited a powder keg. It was August of 2018 and the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, was being laid to rest. The marathon, eight-hour service was attended by an A-list of celebrities and politicians including Ariana Grande, Jennifer Hudson, Whoopi Goldberg, Stevie Wonder, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Eric Holder, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton. They did not know what Williams had in store.

Williams was a longtime friend of the family, having eulogized Aretha’s father, Rev. C. L. Franklin, a civil rights leader and organizer for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A family tradition, Williams was invited back to pay his respects to Aretha, which he did with aplomb. What they didn’t anticipate, however, was that he’d take the occasion—in front of a national audience—to issue a stirring wake up call to black America.

“Black America has lost its soul,” he declared. It was time for the community to “come back home to God.” Now Williams



Pastor Corey Brooks

is an eloquent orator—and an even better singer—so he seasoned his fiery sermon with sweetness and fatherly affection to build support from his audience, at least up to the point when he revealed his core concerns.

There was a time, he said, when black Americans had their own booming economy. Segregation was a grave injustice and positive evil, yet it forced the community to depend on each other. Black Americans owned their own grocery stores, barber shops, banks, and hotels. The community was thick. While integration was the chief accomplishment of the civil rights movement, Williams lamented that it was accompanied by “the loss of the black economy and the loss of the black man’s soul.”

Williams went on to lament that there are no fathers left in black homes and no men around “to raise a black boy to be a black man.” A revival of the family, specifically the home, said Williams, would mean more to the black community than any house that “Big Government” or “Big Business” wants to give them. In one of his most celebrated and often repeated lines, he proclaimed, “As the home goes, so goes the street. As the street goes, so goes the neighborhood. As the neighborhood goes, so goes the city. As the city goes, so goes the county. As the county goes, so goes the state. As the state goes, so goes the nation. As the nation goes, so goes the world.”

At the pinnacle of his sermon, Williams pushed the boundaries further by grabbing another third rail of American politics: black-on-black crime. He lamented that nearly 6,000 black people are killed by each other every year, according to a study from the Tuskegee Institute. “Do black lives matter?” he asked. “No, black lives do not, will not, ought not, should not, must not matter until black people start respecting black lives.” We can hear Aretha’s voice speaking to us today, he concluded, “It’s time now that my race turns around and comes back to God.”

The backlash was fierce. “Aretha Franklin’s family slams pastor’s ‘very, very distasteful’ funeral eulogy” read a

IN THE HUDDLE

with Coach Jennings

Your Comfort is The Lord

TODAY’S SCRIPTURE
(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

TODAY’S WORD

Don’t worry about the challenges you face. Just endure them and learn the lessons the Lord wants you learn through the trial. We are stronger than we think and smarter than we realize if we slow down long enough to pray for the Spirit of God to comfort and strengthen us for life’s journey.

PRAYER FOR TODAY

Dear Heavenly Father, You know my needs. Forgive me when I doubt Your presence and power. Comfort my mind, spirit, and soul to trust you completely. Thank you, Lord, for your time and attention to my prayer in Jesus’ Mighty Name. Amen

Lurone “Coach” Jennings
Mary Walker Foundation
Executive Director



headline at USA Today. NBC wrote that he “stirs controversy.” NewsOne called his sermon “a disgrace.” And Essence said, “Many were not happy with the eulogy.” According to AP News, “Williams was blasted on social media for misogyny, bigotry and the perpetuation of false science on race.” Unflinching, Williams stood behind his remarks.

Were these the words of a madman or a prophet? Had Williams himself lost touch with the soul of black America? Outsiders might ponder these questions, but his actions tell a different story. Known as “a man with a heart for the people,” and “Son of Thunder” for his service to the local black community and magnetic preaching, Williams and his son pastor a congregation of approximately 10,000 people at two locations in Atlanta. When his flight got back from Detroit, Williams told me that he was heralded as a hero by his congregation.

(Editor’s Note: READ Part 2 & con-

Tennessee Has the 10th Lowest Tax Rates in the Country – WalletHub Study

With Tax Day looming and 74% of people disapproving of how the government has used tax dollars during the COVID-19 pandemic, WalletHub this week released its 2021 Taxpayer Survey, as well as its yearly report on the States with the Highest & Lowest Tax Rates (accompanying videos included) in order to help people better understand this confusing time of year.

Tax Rates in Tennessee (1=Lowest; 25=Avg.):

- 10th – Overall Effective State & Local Tax Rate
- 7th – Income Tax
- 15th – Real-Estate Tax
- 1st – Vehicle Property Tax
- 45th – Sales & Excise Taxes

2021 Taxpayer Survey

- 74% of people say the government has not handled their tax dollars wisely during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 30% of people say making a math mistake is their biggest Tax Day fear, edging out not having enough money (29%) and identity theft (21%) at the top of the list.
- 38% of people would move to a different country for a tax-free future. 27% would get an “IRS” tattoo and 19% would stop talking for 6 months.
- 32% of people think charities would make the best use of their tax dollars, outnumbering by nearly 2.5 times people who trust the federal government the most with their taxes.
- 222 million Americans think the government does not spend taxes wisely.

WalletHub’s 2021 Taxpayer Resources

1. What to Do if You Can’t Pay
2. Pros & Cons of Paying with Credit
3. Tax Scams & Tips for Avoiding Them
4. Last-Minute Tax Tips
5. Property Taxes by State

WalletHub Q&A

Why do so many Americans feel the government does not spend their taxes wisely?

“There are plenty of reasons why around 222 million Americans believe the government does not spend their tax dollars wisely, according to a new WalletHub survey, but some of the biggest factors are a general distrust of politicians, the truthful perception that the private sector invests more efficiently than the government, and a mismatch between the amount we pay and the benefits we get in return,” said Jill Gonzalez, WalletHub analyst. “It hurts to part with our hard-earned money, and that’s especially true when every time an election rolls around we hear about billions of dollars in waste, fraud and abuse. When that’s the message we hear over and over, it’s easy to believe that the government isn’t handling our taxes wisely.”

Where would people prefer to divert their tax dollars?

“The largest share of people, at around 32%, would rather their tax dollars go to charities than any level of government. When it comes to paying taxes to the government, people have more faith in local levels,” said Jill Gonzalez, WalletHub analyst. “Americans would rather pay taxes to their local government than their state, and to their state rather than the federal government, which reflects people’s distrust of the federal government and special interests.”

What should taxpayers be worried about on Tax Day?

“The biggest things that Americans fear on Tax Day are making a math mistake and not having enough money, each of which gets close to 30% of the vote,” said Jill Gonzalez, WalletHub analyst. “What people should be most concerned about is having enough money to pay what they owe, as trying to find more money on short notice could be difficult for many people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Avoiding math errors is easier if you start completing your tax return early and take time to check it for errors. There are plenty of

free tax-prep resources that can help make sure the math checks out, too.”

What should people do if they can’t pay their taxes?

“If you can’t afford to pay your tax bill, the first thing you should do is still file a return, because that can help you avoid penalties while you figure out how you’re going to pay. If your money issues

are temporary, you may want to consider just waiting for a bill or asking for a 120-day extension,” said Jill Gonzalez, WalletHub analyst. “People who need a longer amount of time to pay have several other options, such as setting up an installment agreement with the IRS, paying with a credit card or getting a personal loan.”



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