



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

When I read the commission of Acts 1:8, I am convinced by these words of Jesus that he calls his disciples to reach their generation, not just a specific location. Though Jesus' words were given 21 centuries ago, they still remain in force for us today—we are to be witnesses of him in the world, from Jerusalem to the end of the earth! I have been greatly encouraged by reading Iain Murray's book on Jonathan Edwards. When Edwards was just 32 years of age, a spiritual revival overtook his church and town and then spread throughout New England. He recorded, "Conversions appear to have been at the rate of at least four persons a day, or near thirty a week for five or six weeks." He noted, "few houses in the town have not been affected." Mr. Edwards was "surprised by the Spirit's work" and called for others to pray for *this awakening*. This is my prayer today!



Joseph Feaster

MDiv, Class of 2019

This year's VBTS graduating class will include Joseph Feaster. Before Joseph enrolled as a student, he came on a memorable visit to VBTS with his father (a seasoned pastor in Richmond, VA) and mother. It was clear to his parents, and now clear to us all, that God's hand is upon this young man and his wife Lizzie. He graduated from Gettysburg College (2013) and enrolled in VBTS (2015) with the goal to pursue the ministry—whether as a Navy Chaplain or a local church pastor. Almost two years ago he was chosen by a select Williamsburg Committee to play the dynamic role of Rev. Gowan Pamphlet, America's first ordained African-American Baptist pastor. He has been heard by many visitors to Williamsburg and has been highlighted in the *Trend & Tradition* and *Legacy* magazines. Joseph is a humble man with an eloquent gift to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We rejoice today in God's good hand of blessing and grace upon Joseph and Lizzie!



Being Enslaved to the Gospel of Freedom

Guest Author: Joseph Feaster (*MDiv, Class of 2019*)

For the past year and a half, I have had the unique opportunity and privilege to work at Colonial Williamsburg. My job, being a Nation Builder, is to portray a significant historical figure of 18th century Williamsburg and educate the public on his contributions to the history of Virginia as well as the entire country. The figure I portray has impacted me more than I would have thought — in my ministry, life, and worldview. The *Reverend Gowan Pamphlet* was truly a slave of Christ.

Gowan Pamphlet (c.1748–1809) was born and raised in Virginia. Being the son of two enslaved parents, Gowan was born a slave by colonial law. He worked and lived at the King's Arms Tavern in Williamsburg, which was owned by the widow Jane Vobe. Like all enslaved Africans, he was considered property by the law but was still encouraged to be Christianized by the state church, the Church of England. However, Baptist doctrine got a hold of him first and he started to read the Scriptures on what it meant to be a "slave to Christ Jesus," as the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:1.

Given that Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other dissenting denominations were deemed illegal by the Church of England, it was not only unusual but dangerous for Gowan to become a Baptist. Being an enslaved, black Baptist was surely a death sentence. However, Gowan's owner Jane Vobe understood the risks and allowed Gowan not only to join the Baptists, but also to be ordained and have his own congregation. This only happened after Vobe heard the pure truth of the gospel, not the anemic words from her local parish church. Reading and hearing the sermons of the Presbyterian preacher Samuel Davies, Vobe became a dissenter herself. She knew that Gowan (as well as the other slaves she owned) was not "property" but a human being who was endowed with the image of God, just like her. Gowan would become the first ordained African-American Baptist preacher in the country, and providentially was set free in 1793.

Having the opportunity to portray Gowan is a ministry in itself. There is a lot of research that goes into this historic character, almost as much as my study at seminary. Actually, I study the same material most of the time! In my studies, I have been able to learn more about church history within the colonial period, as well as how it influenced every facet of the society. Slavery, education, politics, and military were all affected in some way by the doctrines of both the Church of England and the dissenting groups. But along with my research, I am able to go into the public eye and preach as Gowan would have — dynamic, exciting, but also convicting. While most people expect me to give a history lesson about the 18th century as Gowan, they are surprised (and happily mind you!) that I instead deliver a sermon. And these sermons are not necessarily ones from the period, but they are ones which I prepare myself with the 18th century as a backdrop. The last sermon I preached was from Romans 6:15-23 and I called it, "Who Are You Enslaved To?" After my sermons, many people have asked if I believe what I preach as Gowan, and out of character I say, "Yes!"

I have often been asked if it is difficult to portray a slave. It's not. The story of Gowan is not just a story about a slave; it is a story about a man who comes to faith in Christ and preaches the Good News. Gowan understood well his societal status; he was indeed a slave to an earthly master, but he knew the One who was his true Master. He knew that his identity was not what the law or society declared him to be, but his identity was in Christ. It is because of that conviction he was able to found the first Baptist church in Williamsburg. Personally, I have no excuse to not preach the gospel; Gowan had everything against him, but he heeded the call and followed Christ to his dying day. I hope and pray the Lord will give me a double portion of the spirit and conviction of this great man!