

“Pursuing a Jesus Agenda”
Remarks from the President
Executive Board of BGCT
March 1, 2005

Good morning everyone! This is the first of three Executive Board meetings we have scheduled for 2005. These meetings are designed to conduct the business of the convention until we meet again in November for our annual meeting. You are charged to read and prepare for the agenda that has been sent to you so that you will be prepared to take action. I would like to speak to agenda setting for a moment and challenge this body to think about setting and pursuing a Jesus Agenda. Dr. Luke records that Jesus came into Nazareth, his home town to launch his ministry and set forth his agenda in Luke 4:14. Jesus walked into the synagogue for worship that day, was asked to do the reading. He found the place in Isaiah and began to read. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of our Lord’s favor.” He gave the scroll back to the attendant, sat down, and began teaching. He began by saying: Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

As we think about adopting a Jesus Agenda for our work this year, and I would hope we would all be interested in pursuing a Jesus Agenda, we need to ask ourselves if the agenda is marked by the Spirit of God. Would our agenda qualify for the anointing of God’s Spirit. Could we claim that the Spirit of the Lord is on us, on our agenda? This was certainly true of Jesus and the agenda he was pursuing. We may have lots of plans, lots of hopes, lots of dreams, and lots of sophistication but if we do not have the Spirit of the Lord on us, we are just busy Baptists not Spirit led Baptists. You see, a Jesus Agenda will be Spirit-Led.

And if the Spirit is leading us, He will always lead us to focus outward rather than inward. Our temptation during this year of transition and change is to focus inward. Now there is a certain amount of inward focus and reflection that is needed and essential. But to keep our focus inward would not reflect a Jesus Agenda. Jesus’ focus was outward on the Poor, the Prisoners, the Blind, and the Oppressed, those who waited for the Lord’s Favor. I wonder if we have forgotten the poor among us? Have we lost sight of the blind, physically and spiritually? Have we become blind in the process? Are we engaged with anyone who is oppressed by the powers that be? How do we create an environment in our communities to engage an

era of the Lord's favor for folks who need another chance at life? As long as we remain focused inward, these thoughts will remain remote possibilities.

The truth is that our missions and ministry heritage gives proof of our track record for maintaining an outward focus. One body of evidence for an outward focus is our passion for **Church Planting**. Everytime we plant a church we develop a new outpost for the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and those looking for hope. Church Planting is one of the most exciting ventures we have going as Texas Baptists. I remember the help and assistance I received as a church planter in El Paso, Texas in the 1990's. Pueblo Nuevo Church, while still a small church, is still leading folks to Christ, still helping to start new churches, and making a difference in its community.

Another evidence of our outward focus are the services we provide through our **ministries** to the abused, abandoned, and neglected children of our state, through family ministries, and elder care provided through our institutional ministries and supported through the Texas Cooperative Giving Plan. We have translated hope into tangible terms by establishing water purification systems in Mexico and meeting needs as part of the Tsunami relief.

Another evidence that demonstrates an outward focus is providing **student ministry** to thousands of students on college campuses all over Texas. The Baptist Student Ministry at Angelo State University, a state university, was a connecting place for me while I was in college. It was a place of refuge, hope, and encouragement.

These are just a few examples of how we have systems in place to keep our focus outward. A Jesus agenda that touches 10% of the Texas population is an example of how together we can do more than we could do alone. A Jesus Agenda will always be led by the Spirit, and a Spirit Led agenda will cause us to focus outward to those in need. The third natural expression of a Jesus Agenda is that it changes us. An outward focus that is sustained over a long period of time will eventually change us.

That Day that Jesus walked into the Synagogue was just another Sabbath and everything that Jesus did was business as usual, except for one word he said. He stood to read as was customary, he sat to teach as was the custom, But one word changed everything. One word changed the whole context and reaction to his teaching. Jesus said, Today! Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. If he would have said someday or maybe tomorrow, or we hope one day in the future, all things would have been fine but he said today. In other words, Jesus was changing himself and disclosing to his audience that he, in fact, was the Messiah that Isaiah spoke of. He was saying you are staring the Hope of Eternity, the hope you have

longed for right in the face. Jesus morphed; he transformed himself with one word, Today! He changed his identity; he transformed himself by interpreting the scripture that way.

You see, a spirit led agenda leads us to focus outward, and an outward focus leads us to change ourselves. My hope for Texas Baptists this year is that above everything else we will pursue a Jesus Agenda characterized by the Spirit's leadership. Our communities need that. Our cities, our families deserve a body of Christian people called Baptists who are motivated, activated, and energized by the spirit of God.

There are people in our communities who face eternity without Christ, without God, without hope in the world who wonder if anybody cares. There are children who need us, senior citizens who need caring for, college students who need someone to point the way, communities who need a new beach-head for the gospel. An outward focus will drive us there, to those people, to those who are waiting for a word of hope.

An in the process, we will be changed. My hope this year is that we work through the changes that are being proposed while keeping our focus on A Jesus Agenda. My goal this year is to remind us that the changes in Governance and Bylaws as well as the Reorganization of our Executive Board Staff are not the focus of change that makes a difference in eternity. These changes represent an effort to position the BGCT to become more effective, more accountable, and more sensitive to A Jesus Agenda that we can jointly pursue in our state in and in our world.

We will not be conformed to the pattern of this world but we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We will have bright minds that pursue the Agenda of Jesus, we will have willing hands to give a cup of water in Jesus' name, we will have warm hearts that lead us to those in need, and we will have ready feet to take us into places of darkness to shine the light of the gospel.

Steve Murdock says that between 2000 and 2040, the population of Texas will jump from 20 million to 50 million and that 96% of the change in population will be none Anglo. Our decisions today and in the coming months will prepare us to apply a Jesus Agenda for the sake of our grandchildren. The challenges are many but the same Jesus Agenda will keep us at the center of what God is doing in the world. Leo Tolstoy said everyone thinks of changing the world but nobody thinks of changing himself. Let's be the transformational people God has called us to be for Texas and for the World. Those in need are counting on us.