

75th Anniversary
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Celebrating the God of New Beginnings

Listen to the opening sentences of the oldest historical booklet I could find of FBC, from the 15th anniversary.

August 17, 1944

Following prayer by Rev. Michael Evan, the first business meeting of the First Baptist Church of Medford was called to order. The main requirements and duties of church membership were set forth. Elected as first church officers were: Abraham Reiersen, deacon; Philip Doolittle, clerk and financial secretary; Otto Arndt, treasurer; and Don Klarr, usher.

Meetings had been started several years previously by Rev. Michael Evan, with the cooperation of Mr. Frank Macik and members of the Goodrich Baptist Church. Both of these fields of work were a part of the missionary program of the Czechoslovak Baptist Conference. The first services were conducted in Pastor Evan's home on Sunday evenings. The group later moved to the American Legion Hall, where the first arrivals on Sunday morning found it necessary to remove the evidence of the night before... beer kegs, cigarette butts, etc. When the group moved into this hall, a Sunday School was begun with Mrs. Michael Evan in charge. Philip Doolittle was elected as first S.S. Supt. Among the first teachers and staff members of the S.S. were Mr. A. Reiersen, Mr. P. Doolittle, Mrs. P. Doolittle, Mrs. W. E. Hall, Audrey Doolittle, Mrs. Irene Russel, and Mrs. Marge Evan.

How did something so small grow to what FBC is today? We get the most important answer to that question from 1 Cor. 3; let's turn there. Paul planted the church in Corinth. He lived there for over 18 months. He grew to love these people and to care for them deeply. I'm sure Paul spent many evenings in their homes encouraging them over supper, laughing with them over inside jokes and funny stories. But after he left problems began. So Paul wrote letters to try and help them through their struggles and challenges. And with that help came reminders to them about their beginnings; he reminds them of how it all started. And just like for FBC, God used people to start the church in Corinth; people like himself, like a man Apollos, Crispus and Gaius. When we hear names like Reiersen, Arndt, Hall, and Doolittle, those are real people, just like us. Real people with names some of us are even familiar with. But as important as those names are; as important as those people are, someone else is more important (READ vs. 6-9).

I don't think it's too hard for you and I to see the point the Apostle Paul is trying to make. Apollos, a great teacher and servant of the church. Paul, the original church planter and

visionary. Pastor Evan, likewise, a servant willing to help start a new church in his own living room. The Arndts, Halls, Reiersons - faithful followers of Jesus willing to do pretty much whatever it took to get a church in Medford so they could worship Jesus and tell others about his grace. God uses people, friends. Some plant. Others water. And here's what's so cool about God and how he works: you don't have to be some superhero Christian. You don't need world-class talent bursting from your body or a money tree in your backyard. In fact, God delights in using the most ordinary, the most normal people out there. Our charter members were just that and so are we. And so when God moves it's pretty obvious who gets the glory - he does.

And that's the point of our passage from chapter 3. Some plant. Others water. But God causes the growth. In fact, this truth that God causes the growth is so important, it's so foundational that it renders the planters and waterers as insignificant. Paul says in vs. 7, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." Only God! What a striking statement.

Now look, God uses people. Most of God's work throughout history has been the seemingly invisible work of changing the hearts of people to do God-glorifying things. But at a deeper level, there's only one that counts; there's only one that matters. The one who brings the growth, and that's God. In fact, the only reason why we had charter members willing to sacrifice so much, the only reason why we've had 75 years of faithful members serving in Awana, music, SS, worship team, youth group, and the countless other ministries is because of the good work God has done in us. So, always and only, all praise be to the God of new beginnings.

Hearing this information should impact our thinking in a very important way. Look at vs. 9, "For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." Notice God's ownership of the church. The church is God's. He caused the growth. He changed the lives of the members who planted and watered. He did the critical work and so this church is his.

So, there's always a humility we need to have about our place here. This is our church. And I love that so many of you feel that way; the kids run around the gym and the foyer like it's their own house. We clean up our spilled coffee like we spilled it in our own kitchen. I love that. I love that you see this is your church. It is - it's yours in the sense that this is where God has called you to make your spiritual home. I think God wants us to feel that way about this community of people. But it's not ours in that we own it. No, God owns it. His church. His rules. His requirements and expectations. It is his. Jesus Christ is the head of this family.

So as we press on in our celebration of our 75th anniversary, let's remember who we are truly celebrating. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's all about him. As we keep singing; as we keep hearing the thoughts and memories over lunch time and in the videos, direct your joy and gratitude to God.

Here's a brief video of some FBCers talking about the early days and years of FBC. I hope they put a smile on your face for a variety of reasons, but most of all because God has been so good to all of us.

History of Reaching Out

Over 16 years ago, Korby and I were taking the typical tours you're given when you're interviewing for a pastoral position. We toured the youth center, the parsonage (we cared a lot about that one), the community, and of course, the church facilities. I remember walking up onto the stage and looking over the pews in the old church sanctuary wondering if this would be the place where I'd preach Sunday after Sunday. But something on the stage really stood out. The carpet on the stage had all kinds of burned spots on it; charred holes like little camp fires were started all over the place. The person giving me the tour saw where I was looking so he began to explain. He said, "Well, we had the PowerTeam here not too long ago and while they were breaking bricks and bending steel bars, they accidentally lit the stage on fire."

Now, if you don't know who the PowerTeam is, they were a ministry group (VID) that would go around and tell people about Jesus and their hook, their draw, were great feats of strength. Nothing says, "I love Jesus" than bending steel rods and breaking blocks that are on fire. I remember in the early 90's during my HS years going to the Sioux Falls Arena to watch the PowerTeam. We invited a few unchurched neighbors in hopes they would come to have saving faith in Christ. I knew who the PowerTeam was. And here I was in Medford, WI, interviewing in a church that just invited the PowerTeam to come and minister in their church. And this thought came to my mind: "Here this church doesn't have a pastor yet and they are coming up with evangelism ideas and executing outreach plans so this town can be introduced to the love of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins." It really impressed me. And coupled with FBC's history of reaching out to others through Awana, through the Cutting Edge Youth Center, it became pretty obvious to me: this church cares about telling others about Jesus.

My guess, friends, is that you want to carry on that legacy. Earlier, Tim read for us different outreach events and strategies FBC used in the early years to tell others about the good news. I'm encouraged by that. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be the generation that loses the evangelistic passion that's been a part of our church family for 75 years. I'm thinking you don't want that either. So, what does it take? We get some help from 1 Cor. 9:19-23 (READ).

Paul spells out the goal in the second half of vs. 22, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some." That's why I'm working so hard. That's why I'm making these sacrifices. So that some might be saved. So that some (I don't know who they might be; maybe my neighbors. Maybe Charlie's coworkers. I don't know who they might be!) might come to know the saving, forgiving, merciful love of Jesus Christ. And I see that evangelistic passion when I review the history of our church throughout the years.

So, what did Paul do to win as many as possible? Two things. First, he contextualized. Now, what does that mean? Well, he spells it out in the passage. He says in vs. 20, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win the Jews." I'm struck by the phrase *as a Jew*. He says that of the other demographics, too - as one outside the law, as one under the law. So contextualizing oneself is seeking to become as one you're trying to win. That's different than becoming the one you're trying to win - you really can't do that. Let's say I lived in Wausau and wanted to make a concerted effort to reach out to the large Hmong population. I can't become Hmong; that's impossible. I don't have their history, their heritage, their unique ethnic characteristics. But I can try and become as them. I can appreciate their customs, their culture. I can learn about their history and adapt myself and my efforts accordingly.

When we do this hard work of contextualizing ourselves and our efforts something happens. We are now better able to share the good news of Jesus with our new friends. With increased trust and transparency, with an increased awareness and sensitivity, we're more able to communicate who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

Now, let me throw out this important distinction: notice that Paul does not say he changes the message. He doesn't say, "I changed the message for the Jews to make the Jews happy. I changed the good news of Jesus for those under the law to make it more accommodating for those under the law." He adapted himself to those around him; he did not adapt the message of Jesus. He did not edit the good news. This is really important because some actually change the message of Jesus Christ as they try and reach out to others. Paul says in Galatians 1 that changing the message is a capital crime against the gospel. The message can not be changed. What about the message do some change to accommodate others? Here are a couple.

- You really don't need Jesus. There are a variety of different paths to God; Jesus is just one of them. This accommodation ignores Jesus words when he says "I am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father, but by me."
- You really don't need to repent. You can keep on sinning. This is going to make me sound like I'm a fan of the show *The Bachelor*, but I saw in a periodical how the most recent bachelorette defended her sexual adventures with her harem of men by saying, "Jesus still loves." Yes, he loves you so much that he's calling you to repent, to turn, to walk away from this path that's leading you straight to hell. The implication of her words were, "I don't need to repent. I don't need to turn." That's changing the message of the gospel.

Praise God our forefathers and mothers did not alter or change the message of Jesus to win their Taylor County neighbors. Friends, we can't do that either.

That leads us to Paul's second act to win as many as possible, and really, it's the most important factor. Look what he says in vs. 19, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them." I have made myself a servant. I have purposefully, intentionally given up my autonomy, my prerogative for the sake of others. He

doesn't say *I serve*, you know, serve when it fits my schedule, when I have the desire, when I have enough for myself first, and after I've saved the best for me... that kind of service. No, he has made himself a servant.

Do you know what a servant does? Whatever his master wants. Do you know when a servant works? Whenever his master says. Do you know who a servant serves? Whoever her master says she is to. Do you know how a servant labors? Happily. And do you know why a servant performs as he or she does? Because his or her master is worthy and the work is important. I really do believe we have to adjust our mindset from serving (as I remain autonomous and in control) to being a servant, who works at the pleasure and prerogative of the master.

If we want to make the kind of impact our forefathers and mothers made, we need to be ready to make the same kind of sacrifice; we have to be servants. We can't count our life as our own. We can't live for ourselves and live for God. It's one or the other. Friends, let's follow the example we find from scripture and the example that the early members of FBC gave us and be servants so we can win as many as possible. Watch this video and here how some of this has happened over the years through our ministry to kids and teens.

Hope for tomorrow

I want this last presentation of scripture to be an encouraging one to you. I'm wanting you to hear God's word along with the little snippets of our history earlier and say, "God's going to do it! He's going to keep us! By his strength and mercy we will make it, too!" To do that, I want to show you some passages from Phil. Let's read one verse from Phil 1 (READ vs. 6).

Let me highlight some things in bullet-form fashion.

- The big idea is this: the work begun in you will be completed. Think of it: The good work started in you, believing in Christ, walking with Christ, loving Christ by loving others in his name... that work that started will be finished or completed. That's good news.
- God is going to do that work. *He* who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The good work in you was started by God and he's going to finish it. Now, if you've been a follower of Jesus for any length of time you know how glorious that news is. Because if you're like me (and most of us) in your early spiritual fervor and immaturity, *you* tried to complete the work that God started in you. But you've learned, haven't you, that you have no power, no wisdom to finish the work that God started. If you're going to experience any sense of growth and completion, God alone is the one who is going to do it. Wow, he is so good to us!
- Finally, it's going to happen on the day of the Lord. That's a reference to the end of this age when we see Jesus face to face. That's when he will complete you. That means your whole life is a journey of being completed and perfected. Don't be discouraged, dear Christian, if you're not complete today or tomorrow; it's not going to happen that way. Over the entire course of our lives, we will see and experience growth towards that completion, but it won't be finished until the Day of the Lord.

So, that's what we can expect; Paul says, "I am sure of this." It's going to happen, my brothers and sisters. And we know because of our God. He started it; he's going to finish it.

But what does this mean exactly? What will happen to us when God completes his work? And even, what might it look like tomorrow and the next day to get closer to being perfected and completed by God? Look down just a few verses to vs. 9-11 (READ).

Notice what we just read is Paul's prayer for the Philippian church (and for us, I would say). That means this is what Paul wants for them (and us); it's his desire. And Paul desires two things. He desires them to do something and to be something. And I would even say it this way; what he wants them to do contributes or leads to them becoming something. Let's see if you can see those two desires.

- He says he's praying that their love would abound more and more. That's doing - love is action.
- He wants this love to be done with all discernment and knowledge - that will make love powerful and effective.
- So you may approve what is excellent. That's another action phrase. Having abounding love for God and for others with all discernment and knowledge will help you and me approve and assess things that are excellent and praiseworthy. That's pretty important in a dark and tempting world.
- And then he says, "And so be pure and blameless." Ah, now we see what Paul wants them to be. He wants them to be pure and blameless. And that's what they will be by God's grace as they live with more love for God and others with all discernment and knowledge discerning this world well.
- Now, look at the next phrase: *for the day of the Lord*. Where have you heard that before? Right, just a few verses earlier in vs. 6. This is what it means for God to complete his good work; you will be pure and blameless.

Friends, that should be a great desire for you if you love Jesus. To be blameless. It will happen to you and for you one day, but you can start practicing and living out that future reality right now. You do that by obeying God in faith. It means to live your life in honesty, holiness, purity, obedience to God's words so that there is nothing I could be blamed for; there's no wrong in me. Oh, it can happen only by God's grace.

How wrong we are to consider obedience an idealistic and optional aspiration. It's essential; it's the very aim or goal of God's perfecting and maturing work in us. So be blameless before him. And not as some legalistic effort to earn acceptance before God, but instead as a worshipful expression of love and devotion to him with undying gratitude. Those motivations make a world of difference.

Now, let me show you how this comes full circle; being blameless before God is the only way we can truly have evangelistic or outreach impact in our community. Remember the theme

of the last section; the legacy of outreach here at FBC? For us to carry on with that tradition, we need to be pure and blameless. Let me show you that from the text. Jump forward to 2:14-16 (READ).

Did you see the connection? Paul is giving this church commands to be blameless; to walk in this world with integrity. But notice what he hopes will happen when the church in Philippi live blamelessly before God and others: *that they might shine as lights to the world*. Outreach! Showcasing the glorious gospel of grace to others! Our commitment and practice of blameless behavior (like, being honest in difficult situations, not speaking poorly of people when they are not around, working hard when the boss is out of the office, resisting sexual immorality and temptation, having a clean mouth, being generous with our money) shows the difference God makes in the lives of people who follow him so the world might see the light of Christ. That's even more motivation for me to pursue Christ and Christ-like living.

God is going to do it in you, FBC. And as he does, you will grow in your outreach potential. And when he finally perfects and completes you, it will be to the praise of his glorious grace and it will also be for your eternal good. Keep going.