

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 1-3-10 AM
 “THE STATE OF THE CHURCH”
 VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
 (Non-Series Message)

Every year in January (except in the years that a new President is inaugurated – then it is in February) the President of the United States stands before the congress and gives his state of the union address. The first state of the union address was given by George Washington on January 8, 1790 in New York City which was the provisional US capitol. Not many people realize that the State of the Union Address is required in the Constitution of the United States. Article II, Section 3 of the U. S. Constitution says of the President, “He shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” Today, I simply come to you, not as the President of FBC, but as one of the 7 Elders given the task of leading the church to give you a brief summary of the State of the Church. If you are a guest, let me say that this is not a typical message you will hear at FBC. Normally we are in a series (such as the one we begin next week on “A Biblical Worldview”) that is expository in nature (takes a passage of Scripture and expounds what it means and how it applies to our lives). Today we’re going to look at where God has brought us and where we believe that He is leading us in the coming year.

Over the last several years we have moved away from a “business approach” to planning to a more Biblical approach of seeing where God is at work, where He is opening doors, and then joining Him in His work. When I speak of a business approach, I am not saying that it is wrong for a church to have sound business practices in accountability and planning. What we have gone away from is long range strategy planning where we decide where we want the church to be in ten years and then develop a plan to get us there. Now, our approach is to focus on what the Bible says a church is to do (make disciples) and then be open to doors He opens as to the specific direction we take in making disciples. Our model church is not some current mega church in another state that we want to emulate; our model church is the Church at Philadelphia (in modern day Turkey) in Revelation 3:7-13. **Revelation 3:7-8 (NKJV)** ⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, *He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens:* ⁸ I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Here was a church that was evidently not large or well known and powerful in the world. In verse 8 we are told that they had little strength. But we are told in **2 Corinthians 12:9b (NKJV)** "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." One of the reasons that God has used First Baptist Church to make a global impact is that we know that we are weak and ignorant. We stay in over our head most of the time and that compels us to live in dependence on God. In Revelation 3:8 we are told that the church at Philadelphia was committed to keep the Word of God. The church is to be passionately committed to keep God’s word, to do church according to His word even if it is contrary to the world’s ways. Sometimes to keep His word is difficult and even painful. It is often the misunderstood way and the unpopular way. Practicing church discipline and teaching hard doctrines related to a God-centered vs. a self-centered mindset is often not popular in our “What’s in it for me culture”. Recognizing our weakness, fiercely committed to obeying His word, and always lifting high His name instead of denying it, we simply watch for the doors He opens to determine the exact direction we go in obeying His commission to make disciples of all nations. Of course, there is planning and strategy involved in going through those doors, but God is the initiator of the direction we are heading. We are not against strategy planning once we know the direction that God is leading us. Let me give you an example of this. Several years ago, I would never have believed that we would be a multi-campus church. We often say that we are “One church in two locations”, but technically we are one church in 8 locations (soon to be 10)! We have 5 mobile home park churches (with a 6th one to start back up with a different strategy this year), a church in Western Heights (Grace Community Church), the Fountain City Campus, and the Powell Campus. For those who are new in the church, let me focus in on how the

Fountain City Campus came about. We weren't seeking another campus, especially an established 100 year old church. We were open to God's leading (watching for open doors that put before us) and the Pastor of FBC Fountain City (FBCFC) approached us and asked for help. The kind of help he had in mind was training workers, slight remodeling of the facility, and other similar things. We tried to help in the requested areas and Mike Powell became the "point person" with fountain City. After a few months, the Pastor at FBCFC resigned and the church asked Mike to serve as their unpaid Interim Pastor. Eventually some of the leadership at Fountain City asked about the two churches merging together and both churches overwhelmingly affirmed that action. Approximately 12-15 families at Powell sensed a leading of God to go to the Fountain City campus. Most of these families became heavily involved in ministry there [here]. God has blessed this union way beyond what I believe anyone would ever have imagined. Fountain City is now a healthy, thriving church. That is an example of a church trusting in the lord to open doors, leaning not on its own understanding and in all its ways acknowledging Him and watching Him direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). We could detail similar accounts of the Grace Community Church at Western Heights, the mobile home park churches, multiple partnerships in the US and internationally in India, China, West Africa and other places. This concept of open doors was at the forefront of the Apostle Paul's strategy also. Listen to these passages: **1 Corinthians 16:9 (NKJV)** "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries." **2 Corinthians 2:12 (NKJV)** "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord". **Colossians 4:3 (NKJV)** "meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains".

With that background, let's look at what God has done and what by His grace and power we are trusting Him to do in the coming year.

I. To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Hath Done

There is so much going on through the ministries and people of FBC that I'm not sure anyone but the Lord is aware of all of it. Sometimes someone will say to me, "I think our church ought to be ..." and I'm thinking, "If you only knew. We already are ministering in this area." I could speak for two hours on what God has done in 2009, but I will resist because I want to spend the bulk of our time on what we believe He is going to do in 2010 and beyond. Let me just make a few statements that are designed to give glory to Him.

* We have experienced numerical growth. It has not been explosive, but steady. An example would be the Grace Community Church in Western Heights. On one recent Sunday they had 98 in attendance and are averaging about 65. As I stated earlier, the Fountain City Campus has experienced steady growth, but the exciting thing is the number of young families who are attending and many are joining and becoming active in ministry. The Powell Campus continues to send people out to the other ministries, but still we are growing here. Again, I am excited at all the young families God is sending us. We are not all about numerical growth, but healthy organisms usually grow.

* We have seen 74 people go through our intensive evangelism and discipleship training in 2009. This 12 week training called TELL involves a large amount of Scripture memorization, on the job training, and has as its goal developing a disciple making approach to life. During the year, the Gospel was presented to scores of people and a significant number of people who professed Christ were discipled. Those 74 people and those who led them through TELL are then encouraged to lead a team of 3 in the next semester of TELL. We've had people led to Christ through the mobile home park ministry and Grace Community Church at Western Heights and the Fountain City Campus going out on TELL teams this year – that is really exciting!

* In a struggling economy, we have seen God provide. At the beginning of the year, the finances were getting tight and except for missions, spending was drastically curtailed. As the year went on, you began to give more sacrificially and we finished up the year with about \$260,000 over expenses in the general account and that amount will be transferred to the Development fund to be used primarily for the Family Life Center and children's classroom space.

* The First Baptist Academy is healthy and is experiencing slow but steady growth. Even though tuition is based on income and is significantly supplemented, people have continued to give so that the school can continue to function without being a large drain on the general budget of the church. We are seeing the vision fulfilled of instilling a Biblical Worldview in children as they go out into the world to be salt and light.

* Missions participation has continued to grow. In 2009 we had about 500 people go on short term mission trips locally, in North America, and internationally. Our partnerships are being blessed by God and even though giving to Missions by Faith has been a little disappointing, God had provided some surplus funds going into 2009 that enabled us to not have to cancel a single trip because of a lack of funds.

* We have made tremendous inroads into becoming a more family friendly church. The Family Ministry Month in May was a tremendous success and we are doing it again this year. Parental participation in the youth and children's ministry has increased and we are well on the way to seeing the vision of our Family Ministry Team realized.

* God has redirected our hearts to a Biblical ministry to the poor. This will be reflected in the next point.

None of this is meant to be boasting. It is in the spirit of celebrating what God has done for and through His people. Some are no doubt disappointed because I didn't mention their ministry, but there are so many, I simply wanted to give you a sampling. To God be the glory , great things He hath done!

II. To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Will Do

Let me take just a few moments to share where we believe that God is leading us in 2010. We are certainly not aware of all the doors he will open for us, but we believe He will continue to direct us along the line of our mission statement. Our mission is the carrying out of our ultimate purpose which is to glorify God. Our mission statement is "First Baptist Church exists to glorify God by developing disciples who are connecting with God, growing together, serving others, and sharing the gospel". If our mission involves developing disciples, let's review what a developed disciple looks like. In other words, what is the end product (recognizing that we never "arrive" in our personal discipleship)? Two verses in the New Testament describe for us what a developed disciple looks like: **Luke 6:40 (NKJV)** "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." In other words a developed disciple is growing in Christ-likeness. The second verse that describes a developed disciple doesn't use the word disciple, but it is obvious that a disciple is being described. **Colossians 1:28 (ESV)** "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Our default mode for developing disciples is to focus on the four functions of our mission statement. Our focus is connecting people with God through worship, giving opportunities for growth through vibrant small groups, equipping members to serve others through various ministries, and to train and give opportunities for sharing the gospel through relationships, unplanned, and planned encounters in local, North American, and international missions. That is the track that we run on. We don't look for the newest program or emphasis coming down the tracks. We try to keep things real simple as we focus on excellence and effectiveness in connecting, growing, serving, and sharing. I'm not going to deal with the things that we are already doing except to say that we are continually seeking to improve and to be in tune with God's ways in accomplishing the mission He has given to us.

Let me share some areas that are new or changing in the coming year that we believe God is leading us to.

A. Focus on Developing a Biblical Worldview

John MacArthur says, "A worldview comprises one's collection of presuppositions, convictions, and values from which a person tries to understand and make sense out of the world and life" ["Think Biblically", Page 13]. A Biblical or Christian worldview is one in which those assumptions, presuppositions, beliefs, and convictions are boiled down to this: "The Bible is God's Word; it is infallible, inerrant, and our ultimate authority in every decision that it speaks to; it is sufficient to guide us in a way which pleases and glorifies God. The Bible is sufficient and authoritative in all of life. When we

put all of this together, we could say that a Biblical worldview is, “The assumption and presupposition that the Bible is our infallible guide in determining what we believe and how we behave in every area of our life. Beginning next Sunday, we are starting a 12 or 13 week series entitled, “A Biblical Worldview”. This will not be just another sermon series. This will influence our discipleship in a very significant way. It will be converted into a discipleship series that will be used in Lifegroups and in our work with the materially poor and perhaps even translated into other languages to be used with the unreached people we work with in West Africa, East Asia, and India. This study will focus on such things as a Biblical perspective of origins, purpose of life, family, vocation, education, economics, race, government, and many more. We may even have to do “A Biblical Worldview, Level One”, and “A Biblical Worldview, Level Two”. It may even consume all of 2010’s AM messages. This emphasis will help unify and simplify how we see all that we do as individuals and as a church.

B. Focus on the Poor

As a Church, we have not neglected the poor, but our approach has not been long-term nor has it been total-person oriented. We have sought to share the gospel with those we have tried to help, but we have not been involved enough as a whole church. I deeply appreciate those in our church family who have a deep compassion for the poor and have sacrificed to minister to them. To you I say that we want to come alongside you and get hundreds of people involved instead of the faithful few. Out of this Biblical Worldview series, we are going to mobilize a mighty army of FBC members who will go into the mobile home parks, the government subsidized housing projects in the inner-city and others in the vicinity of the church to minister to the whole person. The priority is to lead them to Christ, disciple them in the basics of the Christian life, but not to stop there. There will be tutoring, training on budgeting, parenting, nutrition, child-rearing, job training, and so much more. Eventually, we will address poverty internationally, but in 2010 we are focusing on the poor in our local area. We are praying for God to supernaturally open doors in some of the larger mobile home parks, and we are already in the process of starting a work in Lonsdale Homes. I’m just scratching the surface, but you will hear more about this week after week.

C. Focus on Stewardship

In late January or February, we will break ground on the family Life Center, education space for children’s Lifegroups and other activities, and FBA. We are once again trusting God to provide the funds and not to borrow money. We are not going to take valuable time away from ministry to have a big campaign. We are just going to keep it before you and trust God to move on His people’s hearts to give sacrificially. Our “campaign” will be entitled, “We need 2.5 million dollars, and so let’s be good stewards and sacrificially give so we can get the building we need to expand the base to reach the world”. That probably won’t be something we can package and give to other churches! As we are faithful stewards to give tithes to the regular budget and offerings to Missions by Faith, Expand the Base, and FBA, we will see God work in astounding ways and use us and keep giving us more open doors to walk through in complete dependence on Him. Our philosophy is to build as few buildings as possible. When we build, it is to simply expand our base so that we can equip more disciples to go out and impact the world. I know that it sounds like a lot to ask to ask every member to give 10% of their income to the general fund to pay for the everyday functioning of the church, give over and above the tithe to missions by faith, to the building, and also to FBA so that no one is turned away from a Christian education for their children because of a lack of funds. I am not apologizing. I am praying for God to raise up a people here who are radical in their giving, a people who live on just a small percentage of what they earn and say “no” to luxuries, so that they may give to see the mission accomplished.

CONCLUSION

That is a brief summary of where we believe that God is leading us in 2010 and beyond. Nothing is “set in concrete” and we want to always be open to the open doors that God may set before us. I am excited about seeing what God is going to do as we follow His leading, trust in Him for the financing and wisdom to accomplish all that He gives us to do, and become active in the army He is raising up at FBC to do the ministry He has ordained for us. (3336)

