

God wants 'deep-water disciples,' Welch tells convention_62705

June 26, 2005

Posted: 6/24/05

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By David Winfrey

Kentucky Western Recorder

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Southern Baptists can win and baptize 1 million people if they will be “deep-water disciples,” leaving the safety of the shore to take risks and share Jesus with others, SBC President Bobby Welch told messengers at the convention's annual meeting.

During a presidential address that featured dead frogs and history lessons, Welch spoke from Luke 5, in which Jesus asks his soon-to-be disciples to cast out into the deep water to catch fish.

God “expresses an urgent call to go out into deep water and do great things,” said Welch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Daytona, Fla.



Bobby
Welch of
Daytona,
Fla.,
delivers the
SBC
president's
message,
calling
Southern
Baptists to
be "deep-
water
disciples."
(Photo by
Matt
Miller/BP)

Welch, who has challenged Southern Baptists to baptize 1 million people in the next year, said too many Christians are choosing the safety of the shore over the willingness to follow God out into the deep.

“In fact, this shore fishing we've caught into is what is going to kill evangelism in this convention, in this nation.”

Too many Christians employ a “facility-based” evangelism strategy, he said, that encourages Christians to stay warm and comfortable in the church and requires non-Christians to visit a church before they hear about Jesus.

“That's not New Testament evangelism, and that's not what you see in the model of Jesus,” he said. “That's too close to the shore. You're not out in the deep.”

Welch said the text in Luke outlines “Jesus' personalized simplified systematic theology for soul winning.” The Father must catch the followers; the followers have to catch the faith; and the faithful catch the fish, he said.

Recalling LifeWay President Jimmy Draper's analogy last year to the convention becoming a “frog in the kettle,” slowly dying and not realizing it, Welch produced one of the more memorable sermon props in recent history when he displayed a dead frog from the pulpit.

“You know how that flat dead frog got this way? A concrete truck ran over it, just down from my house,” he said.

“This frog's cause of death was not that concrete truck. This frog's cause of death was confusion. This frog belonged in the deep, but he hopped in the street. And that's' where his end came,” he said. “You see, if you're destined for deep water, you better go that way. The consequences can be dangerous.”

He then produced several more smaller dead, flat frogs. “You know where I found all these little dead frogs? Following this big dead frog. ... Just because that frog's a big croaker and a high hopper doesn't mean he's going in the right direction.”

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Welch said he regularly sees dead flat frogs when he leaves his home. “And you know what? Just about every day I go around and in the countryside I see a flat dead church and a flat dead bunch of Christians because they got confused and they left the deep.”

Welch urged Southern Baptists to realize they come from a rich spiritual heritage filled with people willing to follow God's call.

“They had enough spiritual guts to get out of the bank and go out into the deep,” he said. “That's how you got the International Mission Board. Some people said, 'We've got to go deeper. ... We've got to go everywhere.' And they did.”

Welch recalled the “Million More in '54” campaign when Southern Baptists sought to reach a million people. “We are bigger and better by the power of God, Southern Baptists, than we are remembering and acting like it.”

“We're deep-water doers. We're disciples of deep-water doers. We've got that kind of blood running in our bodies,” he said, raising his voice. “Bless God, why would a crowd like this want to lie down and roll over? When the world's in the shape it's in and we've got the best deal ever, looks to me like all of you'd be up and ready to attack hell with a squirt gun and go to the deep.”

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