

Global Baptists challenged to live the gospel

July 14, 2025

BRISBANE—Featured speakers at the Baptist World Congress challenged global Baptists to live out the gospel by caring for neighbors, making disciples, pursuing justice, advocating for freedom, and bearing witness to the transforming power of Christ.

With “Living the Gospel” as their theme, more than 3,000 Baptists from about 130 nations gathered in Brisbane, Australia, for the 23rd Baptist World Congress.

Throughout the international event, speakers focused on different aspects of what it means to join in the “Acts 2 movement” as presented by Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

Brown urged Baptists around the world to mark the 2,000th anniversary of Jesus’ resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost by committing to follow principles demonstrated in Acts 2.

Disruptiveness of the gospel

John Kim, executive director of South Korea-based Good Steward, urged Baptists to embrace radical discipleship that transforms lives and disrupts the status quo.

“Jesus came to disrupt things,” Kim said, noting a life spent following Jesus is “not for the faint-hearted.”

Being a follower of Jesus and making other disciples requires making an investment in the lives of others, he noted.

“We invest in people because people matter to God,” Kim said.

Discipleship demands self-denial and challenges followers of Jesus to examine their lifestyles, he said.

“We are comfort-driven creatures,” Kim said. “We don’t want to let go of our stuff.”

Australian Baptist pastor Dale Stephenson rejected the notion that making disciples is a spiritual gift limited to only a few Christians.

“Disciple-making is everybody’s responsibility,” said Stephenson, pastor of Crossway Baptist Church in Melbourne.

“There is not a gift of disciple making. There is the command of disciple making.”

Christ gave his Great Commission—to “make disciples” of all nations—to “ordinary people” equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he noted.

“Listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit,” Stephenson said. “Do what God is prompting you to do.”

Pursuing freedom in a broken world

Christians should count the cost of pursuing freedom in a broken world, said Jennifer Lau, executive director of Canadian Baptist Ministries.

“The gift of freedom does not have a price, but it does have a cost,” Lau said.

While some view freedom in terms of individualistic, self-centered autonomy, true freedom in Christ is “meant to be experienced in community and in relationships,” she said.

And that connectedness carries an emotional cost, she acknowledged.

In a world “rife with injustice,” Christians cannot be emotionally detached “bystanders” to oppression, she continued. Instead, Christians are called to be people who “move toward the suffering.”



In a world “rife with injustice,” Christians cannot be emotionally detached “bystanders” to oppression, Jennifer Lau, executive director of Canadian Baptist Ministries, told the Baptist World Congress. Instead, Christians are called to be people who “move toward the suffering.” (Photo / Ken Camp)

“We don’t get to stand at a comfortable distance,” Lau said.

Rather, Christians should “emulate the character of Christ” and be willing to love deeply and without restraint,” she said.

“The freedom we have in Christ compels us to be neighbors to those on the margins,” Lau said.

Kay Warren, cofounder of Saddleback Church in Southern California, called on Baptists to offer care and support to individuals who wrestle with

mental health issues and to their families.

She and her husband Rick discovered the challenges families face when a loved one experiences mental illness. Their son Matthew battled mental health issues 20 years before eventually taking his life 12 years ago.

Families whose lives are touched by mental health struggles need the love of a caring community, she stressed, and churches can meet that need.

“Every church—no matter its size, location or financial status—can make an intentional, deliberate decision to become a caring and compassionate sanctuary for individuals living with mental illness and their families,” Warren said.

She urged churches to minister to families affected by mental illness by helping meet practical needs, training volunteers and putting them to work, removing the stigma attached to mental illness, collaborating with the community and offering hope.

Courageous truth-telling

“Perilous times” compel Baptists to be courageous truth-tellers, said Marsha Scipio, director of Baptist World Aid.

“Truth-telling can get you into trouble,” Scipio said. “It can have painful consequences. But truth-telling can lead to transformation.”

Sometimes, Christians must assume a prophetic posture and offer “frank speech” that challenges the status quo, she stressed.

“Prophetic speech names what is wrong that needs to be made right,” Scipio said.

While “frank speech” may produce sadness, it can become godly sorrow leading to repentance that produces transformation, she said.

“Be about the business of prophetic agitation,” she urged. “Take up the mantle of truth-telling.”

Kethoser Kevichusa of Nagaland, director of intercultural learning and collaboration with BMS World Mission, described the state of the world and Christ’s impact on it.

“We all know our world is in a mess,” he said.

The coming of Jesus did not bring an immediate end to violence, poverty, hunger and injustice, he acknowledged. However, it brought something far greater.

“Jesus brought God in the flesh,” he said. “We now have God with us.”

God has “staked his claim” on all of creation, and he has given his Holy Spirit to his people to guide, equip and empower them to proclaim the gospel, Kevichusa said.

The New Testament book of Acts emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of the church and the spread of the gospel, he noted.

“If the early church needed the Holy Spirit so much, how much more do we?” he asked.



Chicago pastor Charlie Dates challenged global Baptists to be bold proclaimers of the gospel.
(Photo / Ken Camp)

Charlie Dates, pastor of both Progressive Baptist Church in Chicago and Salem Baptist Church in Chicago, called on global Baptists to be “anointed proclaimers” who are “not ashamed of the gospel.”

“The gospel is the only message that cures what it diagnoses. The gospel has unlimited capacity. The gospel is the power of God,” Dates said.

Unfortunately, some churches go to the wrong source for power, he noted. In the United States, some Christians hope to gain power from political candidates and elected officials.

“We have moved from megachurches to MAGA churches,” Dates said.

Christians need to recognize the church does not need worldly power, because it already has been entrusted with a powerful gospel that has “incomparable rearranging power,” he observed.

The gospel has the power to transform lives, and that transforming power is available personally to all who will receive it, he emphasized.

“The gospel is for everybody,” Dates said. “It reveals the righteousness of God.”