

African-American Baptists urged to be living testimony in languishing world

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HOUSTON—Preachers at the annual African American Fellowship Conference challenged their peers to be a “living testimony in a languishing world” by accepting the challenge to share the hope of Christ with people who are spiritually lost without it.

Participants at the African American Fellowship Conference in Houston worship during one of the event’s plenary sessions. (PHOTOS/John Hall/Texas Baptist Communications)

Fellowship President Michael Bell, pastor of [Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church](#) in Fort Worth, said many Christians have settled for living a faith that is comfortable instead of a life passionately following God.

“The problem with being comfortable in our world is it might keep us from realizing the destiny, the life God has for us,” Bell said as he preached from Deuteronomy 1:5.

“Our God is not a stagnant God. Life is not meant to continue the way it has always been. Life is meant to become the way it was meant to be.”

Comparing them to the Israelites who were content to settle east of the Jordan River, Bell urged complacent Christians to “break camp” and embark on a journey with God.

“As long as we stay there, we will never enter the promised land,” he said.

Pastors—and the congregations in which they minister—need to face the reality that ministers are more like Spider-Man than Superman, said Kevin Cosby, pastor of [St. Stephen Baptist Church](#) in Louisville, Ky.

Cosby preached from Acts 14. It describes how Paul healed a crippled man, and a crowd of pagans treated him as if he and his fellow apostle Barnabas were gods. Paul protested, telling them, “We, too, are only men, human like you.”

“Every preacher ought to profess the Pauline confession,” Cosby said. “It identifies who the pastor is: We are men who have struggles—the same struggles as you, ... the same frailties as you, ... the same human condition as you.”

“Paul says, ‘Don’t venerate us. We are the channel of the miracle, not the source of the miracle.’”

Unlike Superman, a being from another planet, Cosby insisted pastors are more like Spider-Man, who acquired his powers from an outside source. Effective ministers gain their power from the Holy Spirit.

“Superman is from another planet, Krypton,” Cosby said. “Like Spider-Man, the pastor is from here. Superman is alien and has supernatural power. Spider-Man is human, but he acquired power.”

Following God’s call and living a life empowered by the Holy Spirit requires persistence and perseverance, said Jerry Dailey, pastor of [Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church](#) in San Antonio.

Essential steps in the journey, Dailey said, are to believe the gospel of Christ, admit the need for him, relentlessly pursue him, expect Christ to

hear pleas for help, tell Jesus what is desired and commit to follow Christ.

Trying times force people to come face to face with God, Frank Thomas, pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, Tenn., told the African American Fellowship Conference in Houston. (PHOTOS/John Hall/Texas Baptist Communications)

If individuals will follow this rubric, Dailey said, they will see God's faithfulness and direction. It recently helped carry the pastor through a dark period when his 2-year-old nephew drowned in a pool, as did Dailey's sister-in-law who jumped in the water in an attempt to save her son.

"Everybody needs somebody," Dailey said. "And all of us need the Lord."

Frank Thomas, pastor of [Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church](#) in Memphis, Tenn., said times of trial force people to come face to face with God. Simple answers and clichés no longer suffice.

In front of God, people wrestle for true answers like Jacob grappled with an angel. The things of the world—technology, medicine, psychology and manmade religion—cannot provide help, but God can.

"We behold the face of God when the answers are stripped away," Thomas said, preaching from Genesis 32:22-30.

Thomas echoed Dailey, encouraging Christians to hold steadfast to the fact that Jesus is God, and he can and will make a difference in lives.

"You can ask God for a blessing and trust that it's on the way," he said. "That's hope."

When God proves himself faithful, that encourages his followers to testify about him more readily, said H.K. Thomas, pastor of New Mount Olive Baptist Church in Littlefield.

Societal pressures seek to squelch a person's willingness to share about God, God is so good, Christians are compelled to tell others about him, he insisted.

"If God has been good to you, you'll tell somebody," he said. "If God has blessed you, you need to tell someone."

In business matters, the fellowship elected: Bell, president; Michael Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield, vice president; Joseph Parker, pastor of David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Austin, secretary; Byron Stevenson, pastor The Bend Church in Sugar Land, assistant secretary; Marvin Delaney, pastor of South Park Baptist Church in Houston, treasurer; and Elmo Johnson, pastor of Rose of Sharon Missionary Baptist Church in Houston, assistant treasurer.

With additional reporting by Editor Marv Knox