

Texas Baptists reminded of local church centrality

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GALVESTON—Speakers at Texas Baptists' annual meeting in Galveston emphasized the central role of the local church in God's mission and testified to God's greatness.

"The local church is God's plan A, and there is no Plan B. ... In all its messiness and sinfulness, it's still God's plan," said Thom Rainer, CEO and founder of ChurchAnswers.

Rainer, former president of Lifeway Christian Resources, and Samuel Tolbert, president of the National Baptist Convention of America and pastor of the Greater Saint Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., addressed a Monday afternoon worship session at Texas Baptists' annual meeting.

Rainer referenced Acts 2:41-42 about the growth of the early church through preaching, prayer and regular gatherings. While today's society is ever-changing and this post-quarantine world brings many questions, he said, there is still much to learn from the church in Acts.

'Prayer is the pinnacle'

"The plan is to be totally consumed. They devoted themselves. They were consumed, passionate. The meals and teachings were important. But prayer is the pinnacle," he said. "If prayer is a 'P.S.' in your church and not the heartbeat of what your church is doing, it's time to get a blank slate and start all over."

Rainer recalled a time in his pastorate in Birmingham, Ala., when he was low and asked the church to lift him in prayer. One member named Francis took up the charge and enlisted others to help. Every day at noon, more than 100 members prayed for their pastor.

“Imagine if every church had people who were so consumed with prayer that they couldn’t help but be prayer warriors,” he said. “From the pastor who was ready to throw in the towel, I became a pastor who saw that church transformed. It did not begin with the giftings of Thom Rainer. It began with the power of prayer.”

Rainer noted the simplicity found in the example of the church in Acts 2.

“The local church is not to be minimalized or trivialized. It is Plan A,” he said. “The local church is worth saving and worth making a difference in our community. It’s where we should give our devotion unashamedly and expect it of others. God has used the church from Pentecost until now, and upon this rock he will build it. It’s time for a fresh perspective on God’s church.”

Testimony to God’s greatness

Tolbert used the final verses of the book of Jude to illustrate what he called “the testimony of the benediction.”

“God is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless,” he quoted from Jude verse 24.



Samuel Tolbert, president of the National Baptist Convention of America and pastor of the Greater Saint Mary Missionary Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., preached during a Monday afternoon worship session at Texas Baptists' annual meeting. (BGCT Photo by Robert Rogers)

“While we’re going through a test, we need to be writing our testimony. The God you trusted before this challenge is still the same God,” he said.

“Jude declares the ability of God in this benediction. God is able—not getting ready to become able and not having a strategic plan to be able but he is able.”

Tolbert noted Jude cited attributes of God in his benediction.

“He is a wise God, in a class all by himself,” Tolbert said. God is the Savior, and the only way to redemption is through Jesus, he emphasized.

Jude “talks about God’s greatness and majesty, dominion and control, his capacity to direct our lives. He declares the ability of God but closes with the alliance formed in the benediction, Tolbert concluded.

“God is constantly working in concert with creation to carry out his will,”

he said. "It's a partnership that has been forged—present and future."