

2023 Miss. Baptist State Evangelism Conference refreshes, inspires

The 2023 Mississippi Baptist State Evangelism Conference was held Jan. 29-30 at Brandon Church, Brandon. The theme was "Revive Us, O Lord!" from Psalm 85:6.

"The Evangelism Conference each year gives Mississippi Baptists a chance to get together for nothing but worship and fellowship," said Don Lum, director of evangelism at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson.

"Everyone got to see friends, eat together, hear speakers that God used to challenge them, and have their lives refreshed," said Lum, who estimated combined sessions attendance at about 1,200 people. Conference speakers included:

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Kevin Hamm

- Steve Gaines, senior pastor of Bellevue Church, Cordova, Tenn.
- Shane Pruitt, national next gen director at Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga.
- Herb Reavis, senior pastor of North Jacksonville Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

- Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Seminary, New Orleans.
- Don Wilton, senior pastor of First Church, Spartanburg, S.C.

“Mississippi Baptists have always been built on God’s Word, and part of what makes us who we are is the opportunity to fellowship together, create friendships, and then engage in those friendships,” Lum said.

Dinner for attendees was served on Jan. 30, provided by the host church. There were also 15 exhibitors available to attendees.

Hamm, who spoke at the Jan. 29 evening session and the morning session on Jan. 30, emphasized prayers that get answered from the Book of Luke, chapter 11. He described effective prayer as specific, bold, persistent, and confident.

Gaines chose the Book of Exodus, chapter 40 as his text. “It’s not my job to get people to come to church,” he said. “It’s my job to get God to come to church. When God comes to church, people come back to church.”

Pruitt tapped into an important aspect of what he has learned in his role at NAMB. “Young people aren’t looking for ‘cool’ leaders,” he said. “They’re looking for authenticity. Self-help doesn’t help solve spiritual problems.

“God didn’t create you to believe in yourself,” Pruitt said. “He created you to believe in something bigger than yourself.”

Reavis based his message on the Book of Matthew, chapter 11. “Why miracles?” he asked. To establish credentials, give a foretaste of what’s to come, share His compassion, and share the power of the Gospel, he said.

“God hasn’t called us to curse the darkness,” Reavis pointed out. “He’s called us to push back the darkness with light.”

Dew asked, “What would it take for God to actively stir among

us? We can't go through the motions of our ministries like we always have. Just once in this life I'd love to see what we've heard and read ...political victories do not equal kingdom gains."

Wilton chose as his topic, "The Unchangeable Gospel," using the Book of Acts 3:1-20 and 4:1-4 as his text. He stated there are three unchangeable challenges:

- The challenge of personal treasure. What do I treasure in my life most of all?
- The challenge of personal conviction. What do I believe?
- The challenge of personal engagement. What am I supposed to do?

"In these days, Jesus wants us to look up," Wilton said.

Worship through music was provided by the Brandon Church music ministry, directed by Michael Gibson; vocalist Jared Vardaman, member of Springfield Church, Morton; and Curtis Carter, minister of music at Grandview Church, Pearl.

Lum had high praise for Brandon Church senior pastor Clarence Cooper and all the church volunteers who served conference attendees. "They've been praying for this conference for months," he said.

"I also want to thank Linda Burris, ministry assistant in the MBCB Evangelism Department; Lisa Leavell, ministry assistant in the MBCB Stewardship and Prayer Ministry Department; and the Mississippi Baptist Foundation, which provided refreshments," he said.

"This was once thought of as a 'pastors' event,'" Lum recalled. "It still is to some extent, but really it is for all Mississippi Baptists. We love for pastors to bring their church members with them. It helps the church and the pastors, as people are revived."

The 2024 Mississippi Baptist State Evangelism Conference is scheduled for Jan. 28-29 at Northcrest Church, Meridian.

Lum may be contacted at dlum@mbcb.org. The ministries of the MBCB Evangelism Department are supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program.