I am typing this in my hotel room in Nashville after a great day of praise and worship with the Pastor’s Conference of the Southern Baptist Convention. Even with all the possibility of a difficult convention, it was enough to encourage me and give me hope for healing. The theme for our Pastor’s Conference was “Together on Mission.” And that’s exactly what we need to focus on as a convention and as a church. We need to be together, unified, and headed in the same direction, and that direction must be the mission, or in biblical terms, the Great Commission. That is what it is all about: going into our world for the purpose of making disciples. All of this other stuff, while important, must not be allowed to interfere with what we have been called to do. I’ve often made the
statement that if you put a half dozen Southern Baptists in a room, you will have at least 10 differing opinions, but there is one thing we should all agree on. Jesus called us to take the gospel to the world and make disciples.

I don’t want you to misunderstand. The issues that we are facing are important, and they must be dealt with, but we must not take our eyes off of the goal. Because these things are so important, I feel that it is only fair to share those issues with you tonight so that you will be better equipped to pray.

First, the most divisive issue is on how we deal with victims of sexual abuse from within our churches. We hear a lot about this in the realm of the Catholic church, but we need to know that it affects every denomination. Even Southern Baptists. I cannot tell you the number of people who have been victimized by pastors and staff members or who have been victimized by lay leaders in the church, but even if that number is 1,
it is too many. For too long, the problem has been ignored or swept under the rug to the point that we even have a couple of churches who knowingly have sexual predators on their staffs. And too often, when someone makes an accusation, the pastors of the church and denominational leaders have refused to take action. Or the pastor is allowed to resign his church and move on to another church. Southern Baptists should be better than that, and my prayer is that those who are guilty will come to repentance and do the right things, and the leaders who are guilty of ignoring the issue or covering up the occurrences would admit their sin and resign their position. I am also praying that God will give wisdom so that we can figure out a way to make sure that these sexual predators just don’t leave one church to go to another. The difficulty is that Southern Baptist churches are free to call anyone they choose, and unfortunately, many of them do not do their due diligence and check each pastor out thoroughly. And sometimes, churches won’t tell the next
church the truth because they are afraid of being sued, and so the abuse continues.

Second, there is the possibility that our convention will revisit the Critical Race Theory resolution that was passed two years ago calling on churches to utilize this theory to help them understand the racial divide in our nation and in our churches. At that time, most pastors had never heard of CRT, but because we all want to break down the barriers that divide us, the resolution, which is nonbinding on our churches, was passed by the convention. Now that we understand the origin of CRT and its actual message (we can give you more information on this at a later date if you would like it), many pastors want to repeal that resolution – not because they are racist pastors but because CRT is thoroughly ungodly and has no place in God’s church. But there are still a substantial number of pastors who would see this move as racist and hurtful to our African American pastors and churches.
Third, we will probably be dealing with the biblical issue of whether women can serve as pastors. You would think that the biblical texts on that issue would be enough to settle the question, but too many professing Christians are allowing the culture and their personal opinions to interpret the Scripture rather than allowing the Scripture to guide their lives. The Bible is clear: the role of Pastor is restricted to men. Can women teach? Absolutely. Can they minister? Yes. Can they hold positions on church staffs? Yes. But the role of the New Testament church pastor is limited to a man. There are lots of things in the Bible that you may not like, and this could be one of them, but that doesn’t change anything. If we are going to call ourselves a Bible-believing church, then we have to affirm its teachings as set out by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament.

That may have been more than you wanted to know, but I thought I should put that out there. Keep in mind: no one can tell a Southern Baptist
Church what they have to do. The fact is, we are supposed to tell our Southern Baptist entities what we want them to do, and that is why we have this convention every year. We elect a president who we hope will place the right people on boards and committees so that they can guide each of these institutions in the way that they should go. We also listen to the amazing reports of what God has done in the past year through these institutions. That’s the best part – when we start talking about how many churches have been planted and how many people have been reached with the gospel. When we hear from people whose lives have been transformed by that gospel, we all remember what we were created for. At least this pastor does.

Pray for us as we meet tomorrow,

Bro. Ben