



# TO THE ANGEL OF BAPTISTS TOGETHER

Ben Lucas was part of a team of intentional listeners at this year's Baptist Assembly, and presented what was heard in the form of a creative letter to Baptists Together.

The letter begins on page 13, and here Ben explains the thinking behind it:

So much was heard at the Baptist Assembly. We had listeners at home listening to everything being presented. Listeners in Bournemouth communicating with all and offering opportunities for people to share what God was saying. We had discussions online, conversations with friends; so much was heard in a myriad of ways.

How do we present back all that is heard?

Inspired by something I had done in a previous church, I decided to write a letter to the Angel of Baptists Together. Following the way John writes to the Angel of the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, I divided the letter into four categories.

Firstly, who the letter is from - who Jesus is. Secondly, affirmation of all that is pleasing to God across our beautiful Union. Thirdly, the difficulties we face and challenges we need to hear.

And finally, a word of hope for all who keep running the race.

The letter, though put together by me, actually contains words from those at the Assembly which illustrate the themes that were heard. I offer you a letter written by those who attended - and it is my prayer that we will hear the love and rise to the challenges expressed as together we continue to be Christ's church.

## To the Angel of Baptists Together.

These are some of the themes that have been heard at Baptist Assembly, gathered by the listening team.

More than that – I was there – I was with you as you sang, as you prayed, as you listened to talks, held conversations, and engaged with Pecha Kuchas. I was there when you ate, laughed, and wept together around dinner tables and over drinks in the evening. I was there when you put your opinions on Slido and social media. I was there in the Network Zone, listening and reading all the feedback and I was there with every individual and church online. I was there when the listening team discerned all that had been heard. I was there.

And who am I? I am the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands; I am the first the last, who was dead and came to life; I am the one who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are burnished bronze; I am the way, the truth and the life. And I am with you now as you read these words and find a way to move forward.

I know and I see all that you did at Assembly. While many of you remember the bits that you celebrated or had chaffed – I remember it all. You were and are one in so many ways. All of you were there because of me - your response to my love. All of you were one as you lifted your voices in worship to me – oh, how it blessed – oh, how the heavens joined in. You were one as you shouted Amens at the end of prayers. You are one in your worship to the one God, Father, Spirit, and Son. The song you sang sums it up well;

*WE were the beggars now WE are royalty; WE were prisoners now WE are running free, WE are forgiven, accepted, redeemed by his grace. You are one in your story and one in your worship.*

Not only are you one in worship but you are one in your mission. Your most liked Slido comment was about mission. There were so many discussions around stopping decline. Each one of you desperate for your community to know the good news of Jesus. You are one in your mission.

As you heard reports from Baptists Together and BMS – you wept as one as you heard about brokenness and division, anxiety and pain being felt across the world. You wept as one when challenged by our young leaders on racism and being asked: where is the Baptist voice? You all wanted to respond to the call to journey to equality, to love without judgement and to love uncomfortably. You were all uncomfortably but beautifully challenged to prioritise the 'others,' the different world views that exist in your communities – to learn their languages and to earn the right to share your stories of me which have the power to transform this world. You were scared but wanted to act courageously to the challenge, to not run away from

tough questions, to display vulnerability, to not worry about embarrassment, to deeply listen and to live transformative hospitality to the stranger and the other. You are one in your mission to see justice, you are one in wanting to see lives saved by me and you are one in your desire to be radical disciples.

Though you are one in these areas there are areas where you disagree – and in some ways this is proving extremely painful for many. Firstly, though you are one in mission, you are not one in how this should be done. Many pioneers feel unsupported by the inherited church and are aware of sceptics – despite having sacrificed much to follow their calling. Many inherited churches feel their tried and tested methods are now largely ignored or deemed unfashionable. If only you could learn from one another and see both as vitally important. I need you all to join in with me with the transformation of all things. Learn to listen to one another.

By far the most painful divisions amongst you are to do with issues of sexuality. My, how much upset, how much pain there is amongst you all. Alongside mission, the most talked about area was how are you going to move forward with such pain and such diverse opinions.



You have those among you who have come to a biblical view of same sex marriage and want to be fully inclusive, and those who have a biblical view opposing same sex marriage.

There are many more, desperately trying to keep both in fellowship while not knowing what their thoughts are – but how do you do it? That is for you to discern, but please know – how you do this, how you communicate, how you do relationships should be done as worship to me. The conversation is more important than the outcome. Be captivated by me, love one another and I will build my church.

Mission and division over sexuality were the most common things heard. In many ways they are linked. As you know, it is I who add to the church daily those who are being saved. As you heard many times during Assembly – the people you are trying to engage with are very much 'other' to those in the churches. How can I trust you with the 'other,' if you cannot 'one another' with those you agree with on most things? By being one you are answering my desperate prayer that you will be one like we - Father, Spirit and

Son - are one. By being one you are missional by its very nature – showing a broken and divided world how to live and love with difference. By being one, it is like the oil pouring down Aaron's beard – my presence with you in unity.

One other thing from Assembly you need to hear and take notice of. There are many feeling unheard and disaffected. I see this and see the wider picture. Some of these are people who had centre stage for so long and now need to share the stage with women, the young and those from minority backgrounds. Make sure their voices are still heard – they still have much to offer. It was great to see so many across the Baptists Together movement from diverse backgrounds, but there are still many whose voices are not being heard – keep learning to listen to the Baptist family. You can never communicate enough.

Finally, a key point of Assembly is that I am doing something new – but it is yet to be born. I am always doing something new, and it is always beautiful. Many of you want to listen until new strategies are revealed, or tough decisions are made. However, listening is the outcome I am

looking for. As you listen you will learn more about me; as you listen you will become closer; as you listen you will be more able to join in with my purposes; and as you listen I can reveal all that I am doing and how you as Baptists can join me in this. But listen well to me and to one another.

Let everyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to Baptists Together.



**Ben Lucas was the minister of a large Baptist church before moving to rural Dorset in 2017. He and his family are living incarnationally, engaged in missional listening.**

**Ben was part of a team engaged in listening at the 2022 Baptist Assembly**

