

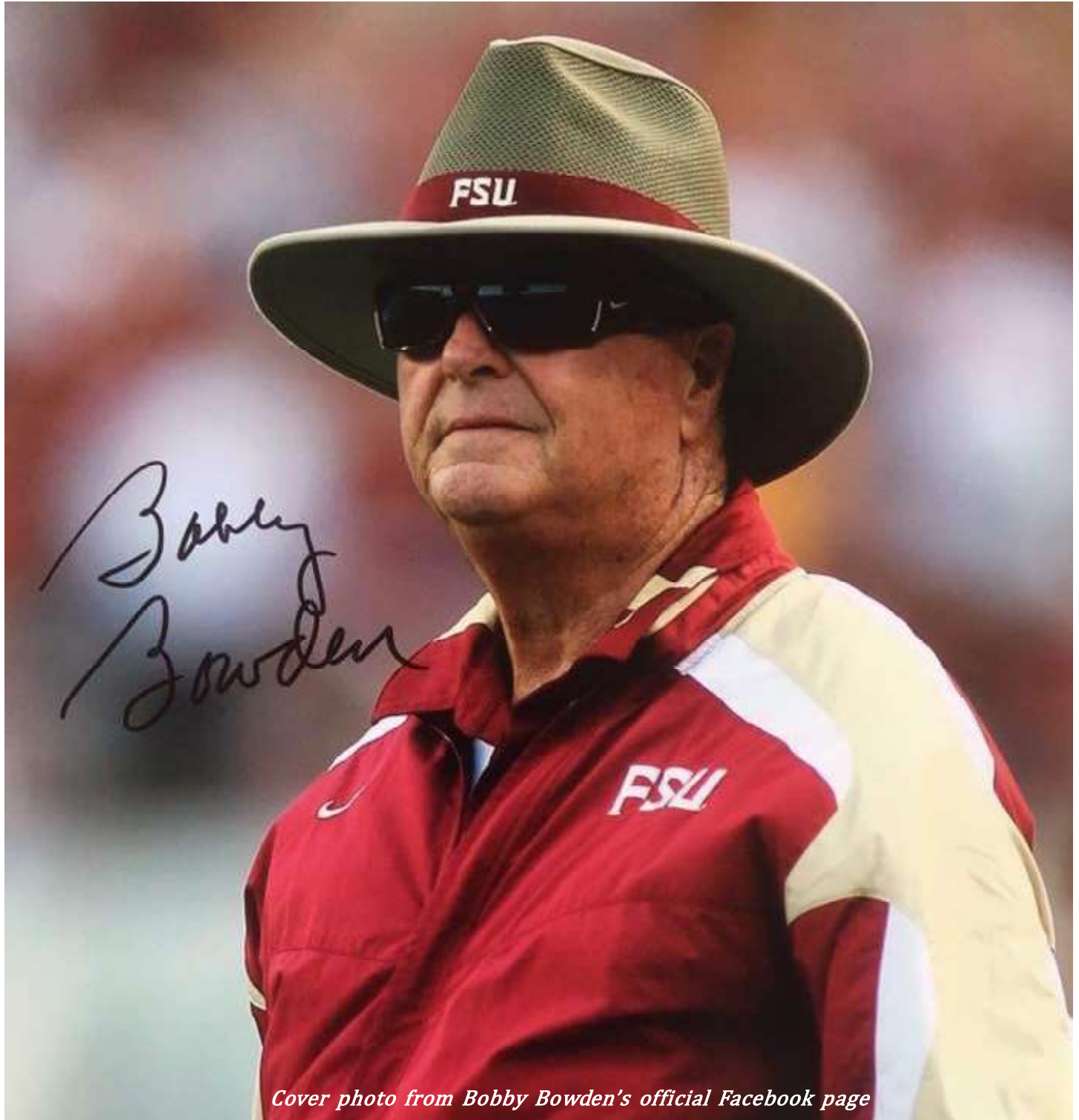
The Christian View magazine

Matthew 5:16

Shining the Light of Christ



Special Issue In Memory of Coach Bobby Bowden



Cover photo from Bobby Bowden's official Facebook page

Reflections

Karen Brewer, Publisher & Editor

This special issue is dedicated in memory of Bobby Bowden, legendary Head Football Coach of the Seminoles of Florida State University and, most importantly, a child of God.

On August 8, the day he entered heaven, I wrote, “He has a powerful legacy in the sport of football, yet the most important legacy of all is a legacy of a Godly life that honors and emulates Jesus Christ, and that is his legacy that has been passed down in his family and that has been passed down to others through his life and to others through the lives of his family.

The Celebration of Life service for Coach Bobby Bowden -- with every word spoken, and every song sung and played, and every photograph shared -- was a perfect tribute to honor his life and legacy. The entire service can be viewed online at <https://seminoles.com/live-stream-bobby-bowden-a-celebration-of-life/>. I promise that you will be blessed by hearing every person who had a part. In this issue of *The Christian View* magazine, I will share from the service as a tribute to him and to his family, and as a testimony to his Christian faith that he shared and that he lived -- and that his family shares and lives.

In this Reflections column, I would like to share parts from two stories I had written and published in previous issues of *The Christian View* magazine, from two of the several times I was fortunate and blessed to hear Coach Tommy Bowden and his father, Coach Bobby Bowden, speak together.

Here first, from one of the stories, entitled ‘Faith, Family, and Football’ from the Spring, 2005 issue of *The Christian View* magazine, is the message of salvation explained in the words of Bobby Bowden:

“Jesus said, ‘I’m going to prepare a place for you, and I’m coming back. I’m going to come back like a thief in the night, and you won’t know when I’m coming.’ We’ve got to be ready. How do you get ready? Confess your sins. I sin, like everybody else. I’ve sinned, but I’m saved, because I believe in Jesus. I confessed my sins to Him. I asked Him to forgive me. I trust Him. It is through Christ that I’m saved. I don’t deserve it. I’m no better than any man, but I’m saved.”

Bowden used an illustration, not from football, but from

baseball, as he told his favorite story, an incident that happened his senior year of college. He was the only member of the baseball team who had never hit a home run. In a home game against Auburn, Bowden hit the ball hard, and, although it didn’t get high, it was a line drive between shortstop and second base.

“It gets through,” he said. “I flip that bat and take off for first base. All I want to do is hit the inside of the bag and get to second, so I sort of slide my foot against that bag as I’m going to second.

“I can see the ball. It got through the centerfielder and the leftfielder, too. It’s rolling, and they’re running and chasing the ball. I hit second base. I can’t see the ball anymore, and I look at the third base coach. He’s waving me home. I hit third base, and I start for home, and he says, ‘But hurry!’ Boy, I start running to home plate. Meanwhile, the centerfielder gets the ball and fires it to the shortstop. The shortstop takes it and fires that thing home.

“Their catcher is squatted down and blocking the bag. I’m running as hard as I can. All of a sudden, his eyes start getting big, and I think ‘Oh, that ball is about here.’ I hit him as hard as I can hit him. I try to run right through him. About the time the ball hits his mitt, I hit him, and that ball jumps up in the air. We scramble around. I reach over the top and hit home plate. The ump says, ‘You’re safe!’ It’s a home run. I’ve never had one. I’m so excited and get up to brush the red mud off me. The players come off the bench and start shaking my hand. We didn’t have high fives back in those days.

“Then, the first baseman yells to the catcher, ‘Hey, John, throw me the ball!’ The catcher gets the ball and throws that thing to the first baseman. He touches first base. The first base ump says, ‘You’re out! You missed first base!’

“I distinctly remember getting second. What had happened was, when I came inside first base and tried to hit it with the side of my foot, I didn’t quite get it. I missed it. I was out. I never got a home run in college.

“Here is the significance of that story. If you remember anything I say, remember this, as you go through life: First base is Jesus Christ. If you do everything else you could think of, to get to heaven, it won’t work. You must touch

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first base.

“Those sins that you did, those sins that you did today, He has forgiven you for that. His blood has already paid for that. The only thing you can do wrong is reject Him. The good news is that God rejects no man. The bad news is that man rejects God. It’s in your hands, so don’t let it slip. Don’t let it slip.

“Don’t gamble on it, folks. I can gamble in football. If it won’t work, I’ve got another game next week. There’s always another chance. But you can’t gamble with your life. There are no exits in hell. There is no way out of hell. I hope to see every one of you in heaven one of these days.”

Here is a selection from another story published in *The Christian View* magazine, another time he spoke, in which he explained about heaven and life after death.

“I’ve always believed in life after death. I’ve always believed that life after death is going to be so much greater than it is here on this earth. They’re a lot happier there. People have a hard time understanding that. They think that it’s so good here, they don’t want to leave, but there is not one of us who’s not going to go. The main thing is to be ready. You and I are here on earth not very long. I’ve already spent 76

years here. How much longer have I got? But, when I die, eternity goes on forever and ever and ever and ever. This is nothing. This is nothing. This is a little trial. We’re told how perfect heaven is, with no pain, no sorrow, and I believe it. How are we going to get there? By believing that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected.”

He related a story, which, he said, is “a great illustration of how important life after death is, compared to life here.

“A kid is having a good time playing with a beach ball, but, then, it gets away from him, hits a thorn bush, and bursts. An adult comes up to him and says, ‘Hey, son, you’ve just won \$100 million.’ But he’s still crying about the ball. \$100 million means nothing to him. He says, ‘I want the ball.’ The man says, ‘You can buy a million balls with this.’ ‘No, I don’t want that. I want my ball.’ That’s kind of the way it is with us. While we’re here on earth, we like the ball, but that’s not the most important thing. God gave His Son, who died on the cross, so that you and I can live forever. We had better pay attention to that, hadn’t we, instead of that busted ball? Life doesn’t last long, and then you have forever. That’s what I believe. I’m positive. The older I get, the closer I get, and the readier I am to go.”



Photograph by Karen Brewer, Publisher, The Christian View magazine

Coach Tommy Bowden and Coach Bobby Bowden are pictured with the Rev. Dr. David Gallamore.

Celebrating the Life of Coach Bobby Bowden And His Legacy of Faith, Family, and Football

By KAREN BREWER, Publisher & Editor



Bobby and Ann Bowden were married on April 1, 1949 and were blessed with a large and loving family. At the August 14, 2021 service to celebrate Coach Bowden's life, photographs of them and their family through the years were shown as the song "Wind Beneath My Wings" was sung.

Coach Bobby Bowden's legacy of a Christ-centered life was the focus of his public funeral service, a Celebration of Life service, held at the Donald L. Tucker Civic Center at Florida State University in Tallahassee on August 14, 2021.

His wife, Ann, and sons and daughters, Robyn, Steve, Tommy, Terry, Jeff, and Ginger, and their families were joined by Coach Bowden's former players and former assistant coaches, as well as members of the public who came to pay their respects.

Opening the Celebration of Life service was Hope Ward, daughter of Charlie and Tonja Ward, who played "My Way," on the viola.

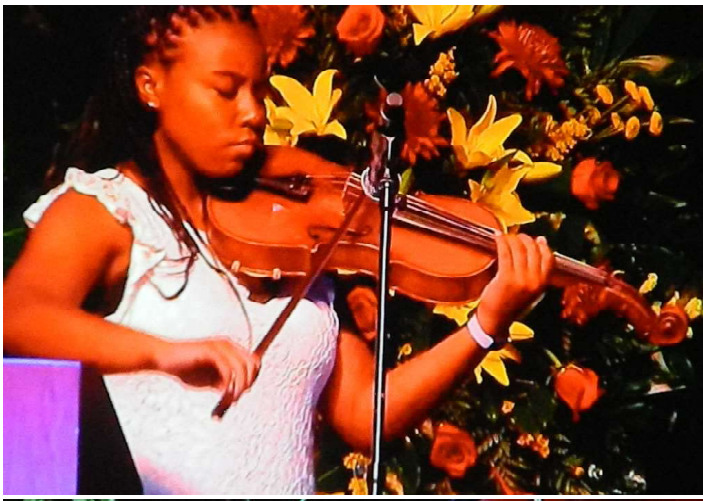
Rev. Dr. Bobby Butler, who played football at Florida State from 1977 to 1980, welcomed everyone to the service. "Welcome. My name is Bobby Butler, and I'm here to help officiate this service today, along with Rev. Dr. Ronny Raines, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Clarksville, Tennessee.

"We want to honor the Lord God, who, over 2,000 years ago, sent His perfect gift for mankind. He sent His son, Jesus, to lay on the cross, that we may be redeemed

and reconciled back to Him. And we thank Jesus for coming and dying unto death to save our souls, that we may be whole. And we thank the Holy Spirit for coming to lead us, direct us, and comfort us. We honor them.

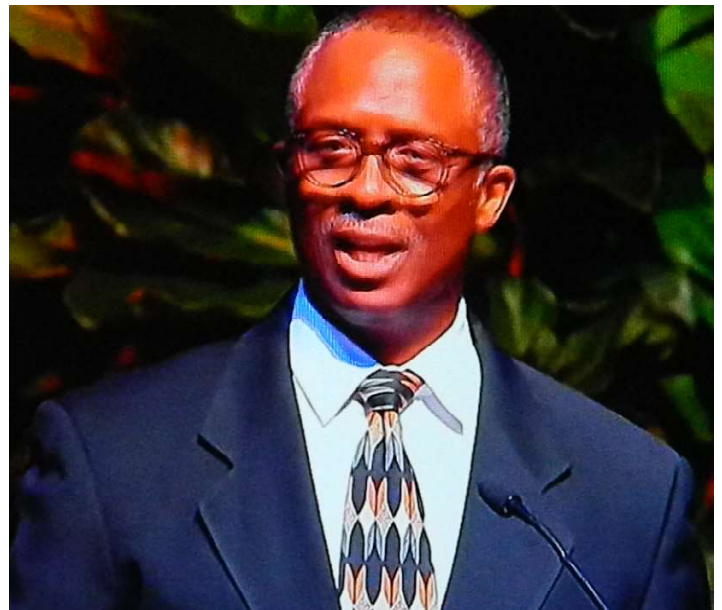
"We'd like to take this time, also, to honor the Bowden family. Mrs. Ann, I just want to say to you, first of all, thank you so much for being Coach Bowden's helpmate. He couldn't have done anything he did without you." Referring to a verse in Proverbs, he added, "The Bible says a man who finds a wife findeth a good thing. Praise God. And, so, we thank you for your marriage of 72 years, such an example to all of us." He added that he wanted to honor the sons and daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren, the whole Bowden family. "I had the privilege of being with you yesterday at the house, and ... there's nothing like a Bowden family get-together. I just want to honor you at this time.

"Let me open with a word of prayer. Father, I thank you that we have a high priest that understands our weaknesses and our infirmities. And, Father, we thank you that we do not sorrow, because we understand that Jesus died, and He



Hope Ward plays “My Way” on her viola.

rose again. You also said in your word that you will comfort us, and, so, Lord, we just ask for you to be with us today. Be with us, Father God, comfort us, because you said those who mourn shall be comforted. And, so, Father, we just thank you. Jesus, you have come to heal the brokenhearted. And, so, we thank you, Father God, for healing our hurt and all of our pain. You promised us in your word that you won't leave us nor forsake us, and, so, Father, we trust in you with all our heart and will lean not to our own understanding. We thank you that you're the lifter of our head. And, so, Father, we just ask you today to be with us, those of us who are mourning, those of us who are sorrowed, but we also come today to celebrate a life that's worth celebrating. And I know him. He would be so happy right now, looking down on us and seeing everybody here, seeing all of his former players, his former coaches, his family here. And you know this man had an extended family. I think everybody he touched is part of his family. And, so, Father, we just thank you in the name of Jesus. We know that this is a day that you have made, and we will rejoice and be glad in it. So, we will celebrate this life today and have a good time. In Jesus' name, we pray.' And, if you agree with that, say amen. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Bobby Butler

“I want to read this scripture, II Timothy fourth chapter sixth through eighth verse, and it reads, ‘For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day—and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing.’ The reading of the Word of God. Amen? Amen.

“I met Coach Bowden a long time ago. Back in 1976, I was a 17-year-old kid on an unofficial visit with my parents. I went into that little office. You've got to remember Florida State was not the Florida State we see now. It was a different place. Doak Campbell Stadium ... looked like a glorified high school stadium. I think we sat about 40,000. But it was just one side on the right and one side on the left, nothing special. The scoreboard was like a Coca-Cola scoreboard, back in the day. We didn't have all that Megatron and all that stuff going on back then.” An assistant coach had told him to leave his jacket on, and not take it off, when he went to meet Coach Bowden. “I'd always been a kid that did the right thing. I did what my parents told me. I did what all of the authorities told me to do. And, so, I kept my jacket on. But, when I went in that meeting, and I talked with Coach, I was sold. I was sold on Florida State in less than an hour. He had that kind of magnetism about him. And I told my mama, ‘Mom, I'm going to play for this man.’ My mom said, ‘Son, you can't make that decision now. You've got to take your visits.’”

Nevertheless, he was determined to play for Coach Bowden. Butler had played quarterback in high school, and he had an opportunity to be a wishbone quarterback at Ala-

bama, but he told his mother, "I'm not going to Alabama. I'm going to play with Coach Bowden." She made him take a visiting trip to East Lansing, Michigan. "I flew on a plane for the first time. I saw snow for the first time, and I had on that same letterman jacket, and it was 20 below zero, and snow was everywhere." When he returned home, he told his mother he was through with making visits. He said, "I'm going to Florida State."

He told about when he came to Florida State, in the hot month of August. "I think Coach Bowden didn't know anything about me other than my film," he said. "He saw that I was a pretty decent football player, but he didn't know anything about me, 'cause, on tape, I looked like I was about 6'2". I looked like I was about 185 pounds. But, in college, before practice, you have to weigh in, and I weighed in at 145... So, you can imagine, after practice in Tallahassee, the Tallahassee heat, how much I weighed after practice. I think he gave the coaches fits. And I'm so glad that first week I made a couple of plays, and he forgot all about that 145, 135 pounds.

"Coach Bowden means so much to so many of us, for different reasons. I'm not going to talk about the football stuff, because you can read about all that. I want to talk about what he means to me from a spiritual standpoint. Because, when I met him for the first time in that meeting room, I couldn't put my finger on what was it that drew me to him. Why did I 'fall in love' with this guy the first meeting? And that was special, because, the first time I saw my wife, I fell in love, too. We just celebrated 40 years. That's been a good thing, right? So, I 'fell in love' with this guy. What was it? I couldn't put my finger on it till years later. He reminded me so much of my own father. My father was a little guy, a pastor in South Florida. He loved the Lord. He raised us up in the way that we should go. The Bible says to train up a child in the way he should go, and, when he is old, it won't depart from him.

"I was a 'pk'. I had to be in church every time the church doors were open, and, when I was a teenager, I didn't like that so much all the time. I wanted to go hang out with my buddies. So, when I came to Tallahassee, I said to myself, 'I'm on my own, now. I ain't got to go to church no more. I'm good.' And so, we get to that first week of camp, and we come to Saturday, and Coach Bowden huddled the whole team up, and he said, 'Listen guys, we're not going to practice tomorrow.' And I was like, 'Yes.' But, he said, 'What we're going to do, I want you to put on your Sunday best, and I'm going to take y'all to church tomorrow.' I go, 'Are you kidding me?' And, so, he took us to church, First Baptist Tallahassee. And I was mad, and I had my eye on Coach. And Coach was over there writing stuff down on paper.

And, so, I'm thinking, 'He's over there writing plays in church. What is he doing?' But he wasn't writing plays. He was taking notes of the sermon.

"And, so, he means so much to me and is going to always mean that much to me. And I'm not going to use it in a past tense form, because he is always going to live in my heart. And I'm quite sure he will live in your heart, as well.

"When I was here, I made sure that I did the right things. I was taught to be a mannerable kid, respect authority. I did anything my coaches asked me to do. And, so, from the outside, looking in, you would think that, Bobby, man, his Dad is a preacher, and he's serving God. Keith Jones invited me to FCA. Coach Bowden had FCA on campus, which was a great thing. Keith Jones invited me. He's my buddy. Going to those meetings, the Word of God was still being planted in my life. The Lord has been planting that seed from the time I was a little kid and, then, when I came to Tallahassee, that seed was being watered here. I still wasn't ready to serve God. I had never had a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

"After I left Florida State, I played in the Atlanta Falcons. The Holy Spirit is dealing with me. My life is not what I thought it would be. I've made it to the high level. I'm an NFL player. I've got money and things I never had. Things I dreamed of all came true, my prayers. And I was empty inside.

"And I was home in Delray Beach, and I heard Coach Bowden was coming to speak at an FCA function in West Palm Beach at the Palm Beach Auditorium, and I went. And I saw him beforehand. He hugged me, greeted me, and he introduced me. All of those people, just like this auditorium, all those people were there. And he had me to stand up, and I stood up, and he acknowledged me, and he said what a fine Christian young man that I was. And I had no relationship with Christ. I didn't have a personal relationship with Christ. And so, after that meeting, tears running out my eyes, I said to myself, 'When I go back to Atlanta, when I go to church on Sunday, I'm going to walk down that aisle, and I'm going to surrender my life to God.' I didn't know that I had accepted Christ that night, because I had surrendered my will, and I was willing to serve the Lord the rest of my days.

"And, so, that's what he meant to me. He led me to the Lord in a different kind of a way. But he always planted those seeds. The Bible says, some plant, some water, but it is God who gives the increase.

"And, so, I pray today it's going to be a great celebration today. I pray that you have your heart open today, because I know what Coach would say. I saw him last February in Atlanta at an FCA event. And they interviewed him,

and he had a ‘million’ stories he could share and make an impact on people. And they gave him one last thing to say. They said, ‘Coach, what would you say to these people?’ He said, ‘I’m going to tell you this. If y’all are here, and you’re not saved, dadgum it, get saved today. Get saved today.’ And, so, I’m going to challenge you today, as you listen to the testimonies here today, that you keep your heart open, because, if Coach was here today, he wouldn’t be talking about his record on the football field. He wouldn’t be talking about the national titles. He would be talking about getting your life right with Him right now.”

ever, we know he is in a better place, but his legacy will live on through all of us that he has touched while here on earth.

“His ‘why’ in life was to be an ambassador for Christ. And I would say that he succeeded at doing that, along with being a great husband, father, great granddad, and granddad, and football coach that taught young men how to live with a purpose. He was a difference maker for the Jesus Christ team. Thank you for sharing your husband and your dad with us. I was blessed to have two loving parents that taught me the value of unconditional love, being prepared, pushing through adversity, and being patient for what God has for



Winnie Heggins sings “How Great Thou Art’ and “It Is Well With My Soul”

Winnie Heggins said, “My ex-husband and I joined the Bowden family back in 1986, and Coach Bowden and Mrs. Ann took us from the field house to the White House. Coach, you rest well in God’s House.” Accompanied by Josh Shelton on the piano, Heggins sang “How Great Thou Art” and “It Is Well With My Soul.”

Charlie Ward, a Florida State football player from 1989 to 1993, offered remembrances of Coach Bowden. “It’s great to see so many familiar faces as we celebrate the life of a man that we loved and left us with a lot of great memories,” he said. “Thank you, Bowden family, for allowing Hope to honor Coach Bowden through her gift of music and for me to share a few memories from my time with Coach ‘B’. On behalf of the Charlie Ward family, I would like to send our condolences to Mrs. Ann and the Bowden family as you mourn the transitioning of Coach Bowden. I know Coach had prepared everyone for this time, but it is never easy to see them transition from earth to heaven. How-

you. We’ve heard it said before that it takes a village to raise a child, and Coach Bowden was a village Dad for me. I’m grateful that Coach Bowden listened to Coach McDuffie while he stood on the top of the table to convince Coach to give me a chance to play quarterback at Florida State. Coach ‘B’ continued to teach me the life lessons of the value of Christian love, being prepared, pushing through adversity, and being patient for what God has for you. Those lessons have stuck with me and also helped shape me into the man I am today.

“I would like to share three p’s that made an impact on me. The first one is preparation. Coach Bowden prepared me to be bold in my faith by making Jesus Christ a priority in his own life and letting everyone know that Jesus wants them to be on His team. He made it his business to surround his players with men that had the same mindset that he had and allowed them to make their own impact for Jesus Christ on the young men they coached. All of his coaches embodied



Charlie Ward

his spirit to serve Christ and prepared us for the future by the way they lived their lives on a daily basis. However, there were a few coaches that he had to call into his office to let them know that their words weren't pleasing to the Lord. He prepared me through my experience as a freshman punter that everything we do has a purpose and to be ready to make adjustments to your plan. He didn't tell me that I was going to compete for the punting job, because I was recruited to be a quarterback, but that taught me a valuable lesson to be prepared for anything. Winning the punting job prepared me to know that being a team player comes in different ways, and being selfless wins in the end. He prepared us for the game of life."

Ward said that Bible-based devotions were held every Friday night, and he added, "He prepared me to be bold in my faith as he took us to two churches, as Bobby mentioned earlier, during the preseason each and every summer, which only Coach 'B' could do because he was open and bold in his faith.

"He prepared me to see what humility looks like as a leader. My junior year, he gave up the play-calling duties to Coach Richt and Coach Scott, which took some humility, because he had been very successful with the offense I had been groomed to run for three years, but his willingness to do what is best for the team was always on display with his selfless acts. That showed me that he trusted his coaches to put our offense in the best situations so that we could use our talent differently. I am grateful for his Christ-like attitude.

"The second 'p' is perseverance. Coach Bowden showed me how to persevere through adversity. He was about to 'kill' me if I threw one more interception in that Clemson game. Adversity was something he helped me to

overcome, because he supported me when I was throwing the football to the wrong team a lot my junior season. Yes, he had his doubts during that time, but I'm grateful he allowed me to fail and come back to redeem myself. He had the faith in me to keep pushing me forward but reminded me in that Clemson game that we were wearing white, not orange. Coach Bowden gave us lifelong friendships. He encouraged me to room with Warrick Dunn, after he tragically lost his mother during his senior year of high school. I learned a lot from Warrick. My faith grew stronger as I watched and listened to him talk about his family and what his mom meant to him. Warrick taught me not to give up when things got tough and it was okay to lean on others. Whenever you needed someone to talk to, Coach Bowden was always there.

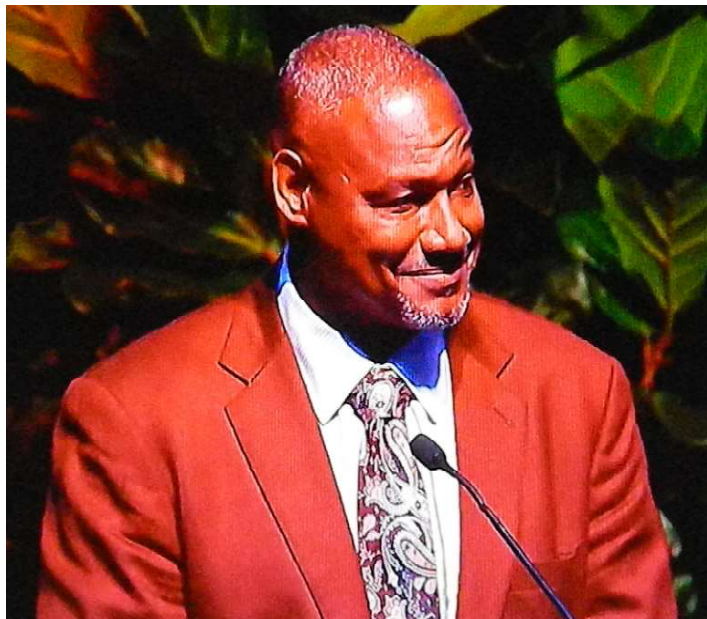
"The third 'p' is patience. Coach Bowden taught me to be patient while I waited for my chance to play quarterback. He made this statement during my recruitment to FSU. I'm sure Bobby, Deion, Tracy Sanders heard this, as well. 'If you want to play quarterback, then you will have to wait your turn.' How many of us like to wait on stuff that we want? He said, 'Wait your turn.' That's what he told me. I was like, 'All right, Coach, I'll wait my time.' Those words were shared with my parents and me during my recruitment to FSU. I was a little concerned, though, after I won the punting job my freshman year, that I was going to have to wait my time. He taught me that waiting for what you want doesn't mean you can't get better while you wait. I was grateful he gave me a chance to play basketball while I was waiting, which helped me to gain some valuable experience while I was waiting my turn to play qb. I am grateful for Coach Bowden, because he held to his word of allowing me to play football and basketball while getting my degree.

"I will forever remember the life lessons that Coach 'B' taught me during my time as a student athlete and a high school coach. He may be dancing in heaven, but his legacy will carry on through everyone he touched.

"As I conclude, Coach Bowden, thanks for all the memories you and I shared while you were living. I love you, and I will see you one day in heaven. Rejoice in heaven.

"I'd like to leave you with this scripture. It's my life scripture. It's found in Colossians 3:23-24: 'Whatever you do, whatever your task may be, work from the soul' — that is, put in your very best effort, which he taught us to do— 'as something done for the Lord and not for men. Knowing with all certainty that it is from the Lord, not from men, that you will receive the inheritance, which is your greatest reward. It is the Lord Christ whom you actually serve.'

"Coach 'B' has gotten his inheritance. May God continue to bless you, and condolences to the Bowden family."



Derrick Brooks

Derrick Brooks, a Florida State football player from 1991 to 1994, spoke in the stead of Deion Sanders. “First of all, my condolences from my family to Mrs. Ann, all of the coaches in the family, our condolences go out to you guys, and I stand here today to honor Coach the best I can. But, before I get to the things that I want to say, I was definitely sent instructions by my good friend, Mr. Sanders. If he was standing here today, he just simply wanted to share with you guys and everybody how Coach Bowden came into his life. He needed a man in his life, a Godly man. He said Coach Bowden came into his life as, he called, a celebrity, because he was one of the very few coaches he saw on tv, and he didn’t understand how a celebrity would come to his little high school in Fort Myers, Florida to recruit him. And he said Coach Bowden gave him belief when he got here to Florida State — belief in working hard, belief to believe in himself, that he could accomplish anything. And, as I talked with Deion, he said Coach Bowden gave him a Godly man, that he saw how you could live through Christ every single day and be the best at what you do. And he said through that hard work and through that belief, as he was building our program, that they had the confidence to go into anyone’s ‘house’ and not only win a game but win it convincingly. So, he said he looks forward to spending time with you guys tomorrow, but he definitely wanted to share those few words. So, Deion, if you’re watching, I did my job.

“Now, what Coach Bowden means to me. I think about the three f’s. He said, ‘The only time I ever made three f’s in life and had a passing grade is faith, family, and football, in that order.’ As I reflect on my relationship with Coach Bowden since 1990, that’s what it stands for, for me. As you heard from Bobby, as well as Charlie, Coach Bowden

outwardly lived his faith. Whether it was taking our team to churches through the pre-season, through Friday night chapel services, when he would take one element of the game, and talk to just us players, he was setting a foundation in our life to be men of character.

“I must tell you that faith was tested. It’s probably one of my favorite Coach Bowden stories. My freshman year, I was called into his office, during bowl practice, and I had never been called into Coach Bowden’s office before. So, I was a little nervous. Mr. Callaway never knew your name. He just called you by your number. He said, ‘Number 10, Coach Bowden wants to see you. Don’t get dressed. You go right on up there and see him right now.’ I said, ‘I don’t know what I did.’ He said, ‘I don’t know, either, but you’d better get up those stairs.’ So, I go up, and I’m really nervous.” Brooks saw Coach Bowden’s Administrative Assistant, Mrs. Sue Hall, and, when he said, “Mrs. Sue, I don’t know what I did,” she reassured him that everything would be all right, but he was nervous and was convinced he was in trouble.

“Coach sits back,” Brooks recalled, “and he says, ‘Derrick, I’m disappointed in you.’ He said, ‘You’re not living up to your potential.’ He said, ‘You’re better than what you’re showing, and I’m not going to stand for that.’” Brooks did not think he had done anything wrong, because he had not heard anything from the assistant coaches. “So, I said, ‘Coach, excuse me.’ I said, ‘I’m Derrick Brooks, number 10. You sure you got the right one?’ Coach looked, and he said, ‘Absolutely.’ And he hands me my transcript for my first semester. And there’s a big circle around the grade C. And I made a C in a biology class. And Coach looks and said, ‘Derrick, you’ve never made a C in your life - elementary to middle school to high school - and you get here, and you weren’t here four months and you’ve made a C. I’m not going to stand for that.’

“And, all of a sudden, I hear this voice. She says, ‘Coach, he made what?’ She said, ‘Derrick, you better bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep. I’m gonna come up there and whoop your bleep bleep bleep and put my foot in your bleep bleep bleep.’ Little did I know Coach Bowden had my mom on the speaker phone. But little did he know that he was going to hear that type of language. So, Coach Bowden sits up, and he says, ‘Mrs. Brooks, I got it from here. I got it from here.’ He hung that phone up, and he said, ‘Derrick, you’d better get it together.’” He did not want Derrick’s mother coming to campus and whipping them both. “So, you’d better figure this out,” he told him.

“So, from that moment there, it just made me ‘fall in love’ with him, because he made that commitment to my parents, that he would not let me do anything below my

potential. It had nothing to do about what I was doing on the football field. It was all about what I was doing in the classroom, and he wanted me to be the best.” He added that he was glad to tell everyone that his mother came to Tallahassee only to watch the games. “She did not have to come down here for any academic reasons,” he said.

“So, when I think of faith, family, football, it’s the faith that he lived throughout us every single day. When I think of family, it’s how he showed us how he loved on his family. He showed us how he did that with the coaches. Whether it was the Thursday night dinners, when the coaches’ families came and ate with our team, and we had a chance to tell all the coaches’ wives how ‘bad’ they were treating us. But it was the love of having our family around after the games and being there for us and then the football part. Yes, we worked hard on the field, and he showed us how we competed in practice. That’s the best competition possible. If we did those three things, we’d never fail in life.

“And it went on to my post career, and I had the pleasure of staying here in the state of Florida and staying connected to Coach Bowden all these years.” Brooks said that Coach Bowden challenged him to keep changing lives and to be a man of character.

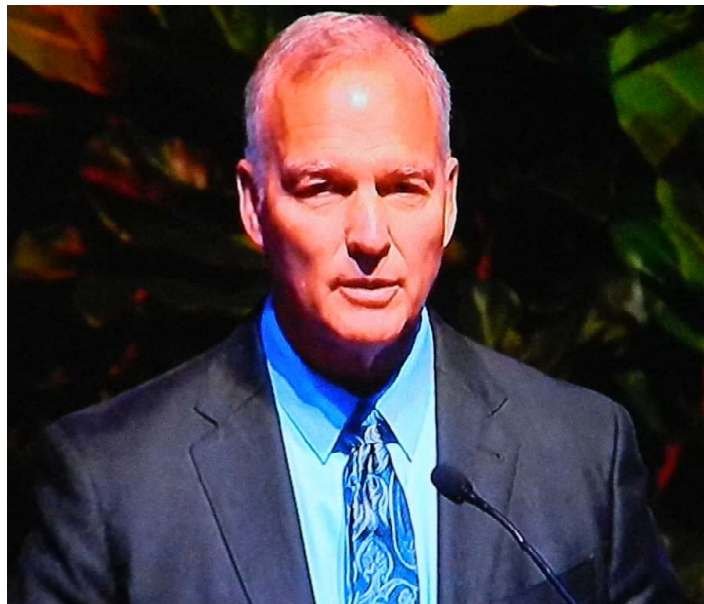
“And, as I close today, I just want to say we all could do that. We all could honor Coach Bowden as the legend he is, but, more importantly, build into the legacy of how we live our lives.”

Brooks recalled Coach Bowden’s last words to him shortly before his passing. “I was fortunate that he had the strength to talk to me, and he said these words that I want to share with you. He simply said, ‘Derrick, if God gives me 10 minutes or 10 years, I’m at peace.’ He said, ‘But, more importantly, I want you to continue changing lives in the community, and, dadgum it, make sure you keep hugging your babies.’ And that’s what I’m gonna do. So, thank you, and, Coach, I love you. Rest in peace. Go ‘Noles.’”

Mark Richt, who was an assistant football coach at Florida State from 1990 to 2000, and a graduate assistant from 1985 to 1988, spoke about his relationship with Coach Bowden.

“It’s an honor for me to be here today and have a chance to speak -- I want to thank Mrs. Ann and the Bowden family for allowing me to do that -- and also very much an honor to coach under Coach Bowden for 15 seasons,” Richt said.

“It was an honor to coach for him, and I know that we hear some of the players’ point of view. I want to give a little bit of a point of view from a coach. He cared very much about us. He cared very much about our faith. And one of the things he would do for us is, every morning, when we



Mark Richt

had our staff meeting, we’d have a daily devotion. And every man in the room had a chance to say something, hopefully inspirational, but we always ended in prayer, and, if a coach didn’t want to pray, then Coach would pray for us. He knew that, as smart as we thought we were, and as good coaches as we claimed to be, that we needed God’s help. He knew that our wisdom would give out. He knew our strength would give out. And he knew that we needed to be connected to God, to take care of us in those times.

“He cared about our families. I remember he used to say, ‘When are you going to see your kids?’ He was talking to the staff. And he didn’t mean like Thursday afternoon after practice, family night meal. He was talking about every single day. ‘When are you going to see your kids?’ He wanted to make sure we stayed connected to our wives and our children. I had a chance to wake up every morning during the season, have breakfast with my kids, have a family devotion. I drove my kids to school every day until they could drive, because of Coach Bowden — not only at Florida State, but, when I took over at Georgia, I did the same thing, following his leadership. The other thing about our kids—there are a lot of places that don’t want kids in the office, they don’t want your kids on the practice field, but our children were always welcomed. And Coach made that available for us, because he knew how important it was.

“And, of course, he cared about us in football. He coached the coaches. He’d be up in that tower, and he’d be making those notes. He had that little steno pad. He’d be making notes all during practice. He’d be making notes during the game.

“I can’t remember one time him correcting a coach publicly. I never saw him correct a coach in front of his players,

because he knew that might hurt the credibility of that coach with his boys. So, he would never do that. Now, he would correct you in private. It might be in the staffroom. He would read his notes, after the devotion, of the practice before, and he would ask questions to each one of us about things that he saw that weren't quite up to par. And he wanted to make sure we got things straight. So, he wouldn't do it publicly in front of your players. He would do it in the staffroom, or, every once in awhile, he'd do it in total privacy in his office. He'd call you in the office, too. When a coach got called into the office, it was like Derrick Brooks — what did I do? I'll never forget one time he called me in the office during that '92 season, Charlie's first year as quarterback, and Charlie mentioned that he was throwing to the other team quite often. And Coach Bowden called me in his office. He said, 'Mark, Charlie's been throwing a lot of interceptions this season, and I'd like to know, is that his fault, is that my fault, or is that your fault?' So, I said, 'I'll get that straight, Coach, it's my fault.' So, Charlie and I had a nice meeting, and he began to throw to our team."

Richt added about Ward, "Everybody remembers that '93 season won the national championship, and he became the most decorated player in the history of college football. But, even that first year, when he started out slow, he finished as the most valuable offensive (player) 'mvp' for the league, so he did a lot of great things that first year, too, once it got going.

"You know, some coaches motivate by fear, motivate by intimidation, and you could get some results that way. If a kid wants to play bad enough, if the coach says, 'You do this or else', he'll probably try to do it. But Coach didn't motivate that way. He motivated out of compassion and love. He loved us as coaches, and he loved the players, and we knew it, and we loved him for that. And, when it came to winning games, we wanted to win for him as much as we wanted to win for us, because we loved him so much. But he was the kind of guy that didn't have to prove he was the boss every day. Everybody knew it. And everybody wanted to do good, because we loved him so much. So, we wanted to coach for him, and we wanted to play for him.

"There was a time in his career at Florida State when people kept saying he couldn't win the big one, or we couldn't win the big one, as a staff. And everybody was talking about the national championship. Won a lot of games, but he couldn't win the big one. Couldn't win the big one. Well, finally, in '93, we win the national championship. So, we win the national championship and go through all that, and then go right to recruiting, and then you got your signing date in February, and then you might have a little time off before we get back to work in the spring, getting ready for spring ball,

mat drills and all of the off-season work that we were going to do. So, it was kind of the first meeting of the new football year, and, because of that, it was Coach Bowden's turn to do the devotional that morning. So, in his devotional, he said, 'Men, they said we couldn't win the big one, and we finally won the big one,' and he went around the room, and he started asking everybody, 'Do you feel different, now that we've won the big one?' I remember him asking Coach Andrews and Coach Gladden and Coach Sexton and everybody else in the room, and he asked me, 'Do you feel any different?' And, by then, it had kind of worn off, and we were like, 'Not really, Coach, we don't feel that different. They just want us to do it all over again.' And he said, 'Do you know why you don't feel different?' He said, 'Because that's not the big one.' He said, 'The big one is when you pray to receive Christ as your Lord and Saviour.' Another reason why I love him."

Richt recalled what happened after the death of Florida State football player Pablo Lopez, age 21, in September of 1986. "Coach loved his team so much," Richt said. "In a team meeting, when he looked out to the players, I'm standing in the back of the room. There was an empty chair where Pablo sat, and Coach said he didn't know where Pablo would spend eternity, because he didn't know where he was in his faith. You could tell Coach was hurting, just like everybody else. 'Men,' he said, 'Pablo used to sit in that seat right there, and now he's gone. You're 18 to 22 years old. You think you're going to live forever, just like Pablo thought he was going to live forever. And, now, he's gone.' He said, 'If that was you last night, instead of Pablo, do you know where you would spend eternity?'"

"Well, the Holy Spirit was speaking to me as Coach Bowden said it. It was like an arrow pierced my heart. And I said, 'I know where I'm going, and it's not a good place.'

"And, so, that next day, I knocked on the door. He said, 'Come on in, buddy.' And I said, 'Coach, I know you were talking to those players, but I need Jesus.' And, so, I prayed to receive Christ right there in his office, and I'm eternally grateful for that.

"I don't think God asked Coach Bowden how many championships he won. I think God asked Coach Bowden, 'What did you do with those I put you in authority over? What did you do with them?'"

"And you know what God said after that? 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

"Thank you."

Rev. Dr. Bobby Butler then introduced the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) Gospel Choir (directed by Darien Bolden), who sang, "I Can Only Imagine."



Florida A&M University (FAMU) Gospel Choir sings “I Can Only Imagine”

Warrick Dunn, a Florida State football player from 1993 to 1996, spoke about Coach Bowden. “Coach Bowden came into my life when I had just turned 18 years old,” he said. “I had just lost my mom, and, seven months later, I was in Tallahassee. I was struggling, being away and trying to raise my five brothers and sisters back home in Baton Rouge. I chose Florida State, because Coach Bowden took a chance on me. Being 5’9” (but, really, I was 5’7”), 150 pounds, everyone recruited me to play defensive back, but I wanted to play running back. Every coach at every school told me no – except for Coach Bowden. We actually made a deal. I said, ‘Coach, I’ll come to Florida State if you allow me to play running back. If it doesn’t work out, I’ll move to defensive back.’ He paused a little bit, and he said, ‘Deal. But, Warrick, if it doesn’t work out, you’re going to play defensive back.’ Coach Bowden saw something in me that no one else saw. He believed in me, and that’s a powerful thing for an 18 year old who’s just trying to figure out life. Coach

was the kind of man that used his faith and wisdom to shape boys into men. His football legacy is like no other, but did you know he produced three Walter Payton award winners? The Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award recognizes an NFL player for his excellence on and off the field. Coach shaped the lives of three winners: Derrick Brooks, Anquan Boldin, and myself.

“But what’s special about Coach Bowden is he’s always looking out for his players. Every weekend I was free during my four years in Tallahassee, I drove back to Baton Rouge to check on my brothers and sisters. The drive was like clockwork. I knew exactly how long it would take me in each state. But, one Sunday, I left Baton Rouge way later than I wanted to. I had class early the next morning, and I thought I could shave a couple of minutes off the drive. I was driving pretty fast on I-10 with both hands on the steering wheel. But, I was a little bit past Pensacola, when I saw a cop car in the median with no lights on. I checked my



Warrick Dunn

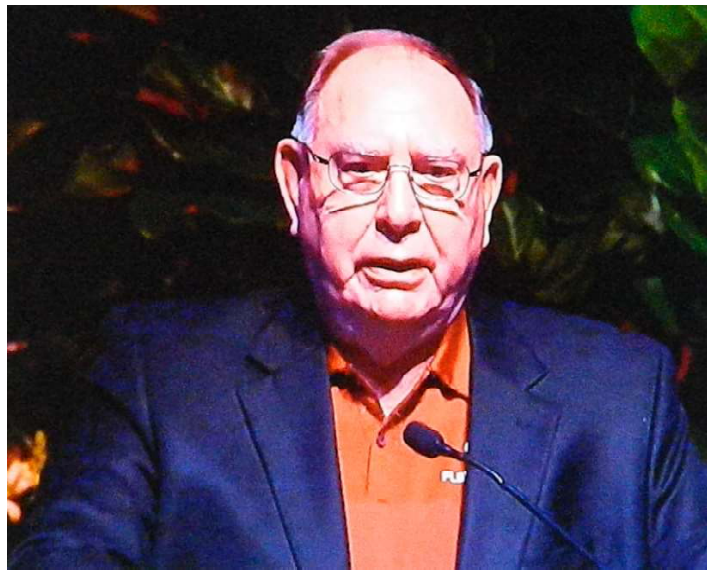
rearview mirror. I just knew they were going to be coming after me, but they never did. I ended up shaving more like an hour off the drive and made it back safely, though. But, a few days later, I had forgotten about what happened, until I felt a hand on my shoulder and a voice in my ear. It was Coach Van, our strength and conditioning coach. He leaned over and said, ‘Slow down on the highway.’ Then, he just walked away. I was just like, ‘What? Huh? How did he know? What happened?’ It wasn’t until years later I found out that Coach had received a call about my need for speed off the field. So, that’s how I know that nothing gets past Coach – ever.

“I first heard the news about Coach’s health from Mrs. Sue. For four years in Tallahassee, she watched me come to his office all of the time. It wasn’t to watch game film or talk football. It was to get his advice on what to do about my family back home in Baton Rouge. That’s what I remember most about Coach Bowden. His door was always open to me.

“To Ann and the entire Bowden family, I want you to know what Coach meant to me and to everyone here today. He showed up for me for the most difficult times in my life. I’m forever grateful for that. But I wouldn’t be here today without Coach. And I’m thankful for the role that he played in my life, and I’m sure many others can say the same. Dadgum it, rest in peace, Coach.”

Mickey Andrews, Florida State football coach from 1984 to 2009, asked all in the audience who coached for Coach Bowden to stand. Then, he asked for all of Coach Bowden’s former players who were there to stand. Many stood.

“First of all, let me thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this celebration,” he said. “As you see, that’s exactly what it’s been.



Mickey Andrews

“I was with Coach when he got his last reward here on earth, when he was given that lifetime achievement award by the Governor. I got up to talk, and my throat was ‘in my heart’ or something, and I prayed, and I prayed, Lord let me get through this.

“Mrs. Ann, and the Bowden family, I appreciate you asking me to be a part of this for some of those guys back there, and it’s truly an honor to be able to do that, to say, ‘thank you, my friend.’

“I was really blessed in my life, in my coaching profession and other parts of my life.” Referring to his late wife, he added, “and I didn’t get to finish it with Diane, and I’m going to tell you, when Coach walked in that pearly gate, Diane was right there, giving him the chop” (referring to the Seminole tomahawk chop).

“As a player, I got to go to the University of Alabama and learn from one of the greatest of all time,” he said. “And, as a coach, I had the opportunity to coach with Coach Bryant. I only stayed four and a half years with Coach Bryant, but I was 26 years here with Coach. And I want to tell you, I always thought the way to learn how to coach is take the good things and build on them, find the bad things and eliminate them. And I got to eliminate a lot of things with Coach Bowden. But Coach Bryant taught me how to win. Coach Bowden taught me how to care. And I needed that. I found out you could still coach tough. You could demand great effort if the players trusted you and you cared about them. And Coach had me do that. And I really believe that that was one of the things that separated Coach Bowden from the other coaches. He cared. There was not a single player on the team he didn’t care about. I don’t care if it was a star, I don’t care if it was a backup, I don’t care if it was walk-on. He made you know that you were important.

“He didn’t limit it to just football. It was about everything. You heard some of them talk about family, Mark talking about family and the importance. I thought so many times how important time is. Coach was an early riser. He didn’t hang around much after practice was over. He got home. And I think one of the things about coaching, and that’s not unique, that’s true in other professions, too. It’s not about how much time you got. It’s about how important the quality of that time is. And Coach knew how to do that, too.”

Andrews said that, in thinking about Coach Bowden, he remembered a time when Bowden addressed the team after an early morning workout. The mat program began at 5:45 a.m. “It was tough,” he said. “It was meant to be tough, because that was really the foundation that Coach started his football team on. And it was more developing mental toughness than anything. If you’re not going to be mentally tough, you ain’t going to be very physically tough, either.

“He was talking to the team that morning after the workout, and he had gotten word that a few of them were belly-aching about it. One thing he didn’t like, if you weren’t going to do your best, you’d better not talk bad about it, because you’re going to get to do it some more. And, so, he told them this: ‘Guys, don’t pray for a lighter load. Pray for a stronger back.’ That was Coach Bowden. It was all about perspective. It was about a mindset. And he lived it. He stood for doing your best. And he was going to hold you accountable to it. But that speech that he gave them that day in the off-season program — that helped that defense, that helped that offense, it helped that team become national champions, because it started in that off-season program.

“He always had a reason, and he had a purpose.

“Coach was our leader. He was our buddy. And, now, he’s our saint.

“He’ll be missed. We won’t forget him. But try remembering the great things that he stood for and laid the groundwork for this program.

“And one other thing — you know he didn’t have his biggest win on a Saturday. You think about all those wins he had. It wasn’t in ’93. It wasn’t in ’99. It wasn’t in those other days to try to get to that point to compete. But it was on Sunday morning, when he walked in, and Jesus said, ‘Great job, buddy.’

“Thank you, Coach.”

Ginger Bowden Madden beautifully shared the love story between her parents, who were married for 72 years, including love letters her father wrote to the love of his life.

“After my Dad graduated from high school, in January, 1949, he went to Tuscaloosa to play football at the University of Alabama,” she said. “And, when he left for Tuscaloosa, he left behind his best girl, Ann Estock, in Birmingham. But



Ginger Bowden Madden

he promised her that he would write her every other day, and he did.” As she held a letter, she said, “This is the last letter that he wrote her from Tuscaloosa. It’s dated March 10, 1949. I found it amongst a box of letters that Mom and Dad exchanged for those three months. This last letter, on March 10, was three weeks before they got married. He was never able to return to Tuscaloosa, because, at the time, you could not play scholarship ball at the University of Alabama if you were married. So, he transferred to Howard College to be with my mother, who was the love of his life.

“Anyone who knows or has spent any time with my mom and dad knows that Bobby Bowden loved and adored Ann Bowden, his wife — not because he told you that he did, but, because, if you were with them, for just minutes, you experienced it. The way that he looked at her, the way that he spoke to her, the way that he treated her, the way that he touched her. She was his love. She was his comfort, his inspiration. She was his muse. She supported him. She encouraged him. She strengthened him. She pushed him. She made him believe that he could do anything, and he did things he never thought that he could. A young coach, early 30’s, a father of six children under the age of 10, he would have never been able to achieve the success that he achieved in his profession, a profession that demanded so much of his time, so much of his time away from his family, he would have never had the ability of becoming the greatest college football coach of all time. But Mother assured Daddy, when all of us were young, that she would take care of this, and he needed to go take care of that, and she did, and he did, for 72 years. I love you, Mom.”

She then read the ending from her father’s last letter to Ann he wrote from Tuscaloosa: “Dearest Ann, I will see you later. Forever yours, Bobby Bowden.”



Todd Queen sings “Wind Beneath My Wings”

While Todd Queen, Dean of Music at Florida State University, sang “Wind Beneath My Wings,” accompanied on the piano by Bill Peterson, photographs were shown of Ann and Bobby Bowden and their family through the years. They were blessed with six children, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.



Bobby and Ann Bowden



Bobby and Ann Bowden with their first four children



Bobby and Ann Bowden with their first three children



Bobby and Ann Bowden with their two daughters and four sons

Tommy Bowden shared reflections about his father.

“When I got through coaching, and my father got through coaching,” he said, “we would go out speaking a lot at Christian events, and we’d be off in the back, in the green room or off to the side, before we would go out to speak, and he would always look at me and say, ‘Hey, if you say something good about me, I’ll say something good about you.’”

“When the doctor told my father he had pancreatic cancer, it was going to be terminal, he had a few months to live, I remember going to the house one time, and he and I were talking, and I said, ‘Now, Dad, when you get to heaven, and you see God, and you’re talking to Him, don’t forget, you say something good about me, and I’ll say something good about you.’”

“He was a simple man,” he said of his father. “He was not a real ‘mushy speaking’, ‘touchy feely’, ‘I love you’ type of guy. I’d really never seen him cry. I can’t remember him saying, ‘I love you.’ I knew he loved me. He just never said it. I really wanted to be with him and have that moment that you see on the soap operas, that you see on tv, with the father and son together, and he says, ‘I love you’, and ‘I love you, son’ and all that. So, I wanted to be with him and have that moment. And I can remember maybe 10 or 12 days ago, being over at the house. And the all-night home care service had left, and the morning session had not gotten there yet. My mother was in the bedroom. My sister Robyn was upstairs. And I was in the room with my father, and he was laying back in the reclining chair that was laid down like a bed, and he had a blanket over him, resting kind of uncomfortably, and it was just me and him in the room. The room was dimly lit. The door was shut. It was just he and I. I said, ‘I’m going to tell him. I’ve never told him. I’m going to finally tell

him I love him.’ And I’m in the room, and you could tell he was kind of resting uncomfortably, but his eyes would pop open, and he’d flinch just a little bit, and his eyes would pop open. I said, ‘I’m going to tell him. The next time, I’m going to tell him.’ I’m having a debate with God. I said, ‘Well, God, why is this so hard? I mean, God is love — that’s what you are. Why should I have this much trouble saying this to my father?’ Hospice had set up what’s called a hand-holding chair, where you sit there and hold his hand. And I had never held a man’s hand, much less tell him I love him. But, anyway, I’m sitting in the chair. His eyes pop open. I said, ‘Dad, I love you.’ And he looked over at me, and he said, ‘Thanks, I appreciate that.’ I said, ‘Dadgum, I’ve waited 67 years, and this is it? I’ve waited for this moment.’

“And there’s one other thing I wanted to see from him. As I said, I had done a lot of Christian speaking with my father once we both got out of coaching. He would always make this statement. He said, ‘I know I’m going to heaven. I know I’m going. But I’m not homesick. I don’t want to go tomorrow.’

“So, I knew that, when he passed away, I wanted to be there for his final breath. I knew he was going to have a smile on his face, because he was going to heaven. He was convinced he was going to heaven, and I wanted to be there, taking the last breath, so I could see that smile on his face. And I had read all the books and seen the movies where somebody had passed away for a few minutes, and they see the big light, a tunnel of light, and Jesus meets them, and His hand is there, and you see heaven in the background, and I just knew my father was going to be smiling when he had that moment. I didn’t know when he was going to pass away, but I wanted to be there. That same morning, I was sitting in the room, and I was holding his hand, and he would shake just a little bit, and his eyes would pop open. So, they popped open one time, and I said, ‘Dad, can you see heaven?’ He said, ‘What?’ I said, ‘Can you see heaven?’ He said, ‘What, the movie?’ I said, ‘No, not the movie.’ I said, ‘Heaven, with God there.’ He said, ‘No, I haven’t seen Him.’ I took all the books I had and threw them away, ‘cause I said, ‘Well, that’s not true.’

“My father left a great legacy,” he said. And, as he shared a photograph, which he had taken several years ago, of his father studying the Bible, he said, “That’s how I remember my father.” He said that his father studied the Bible for about an hour every morning.

“Thirty years ago, I started doing the same thing. I’d always read my Bible, but I didn’t study it. He studied it. So, I started studying the Bible. In the last 30 years, I’ve probably read it through six times. It takes me about five years at a time.”



Tommy Bowden

He said that, after he began studying the Bible, he thought he would quiz his father and find out what he had learned from his study books. “I said, ‘Dad, I’ve been reading this Bible, like you, and the Bible’s got some pretty big words in it - sanctification, supplication, justification, appropriation. Do you know what those words mean?’ He said, ‘No.’ I said, ‘They’re in the Bible. Don’t you think you ought to know what they mean?’ And he looked over, and he took the reading glasses, and he slung them back over his nose, and he said, ‘Son, all I know is John 3:16.’ And that was him. He didn’t care about the big words. John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’” He said that his father was a simple guy, and he got from the Bible the most important thing.

He said that, when being interviewed, his father would often say that he felt that God called him into coaching, that it was God’s will and that God led him into coaching. “One thing I learned from my father, from that picture, is that, if you’re ever indecisive and you want to know the will of God, I learned from my father that you’d better know the Word of God. You’d better study it, and you’ll find out the direction He wants in your life.”

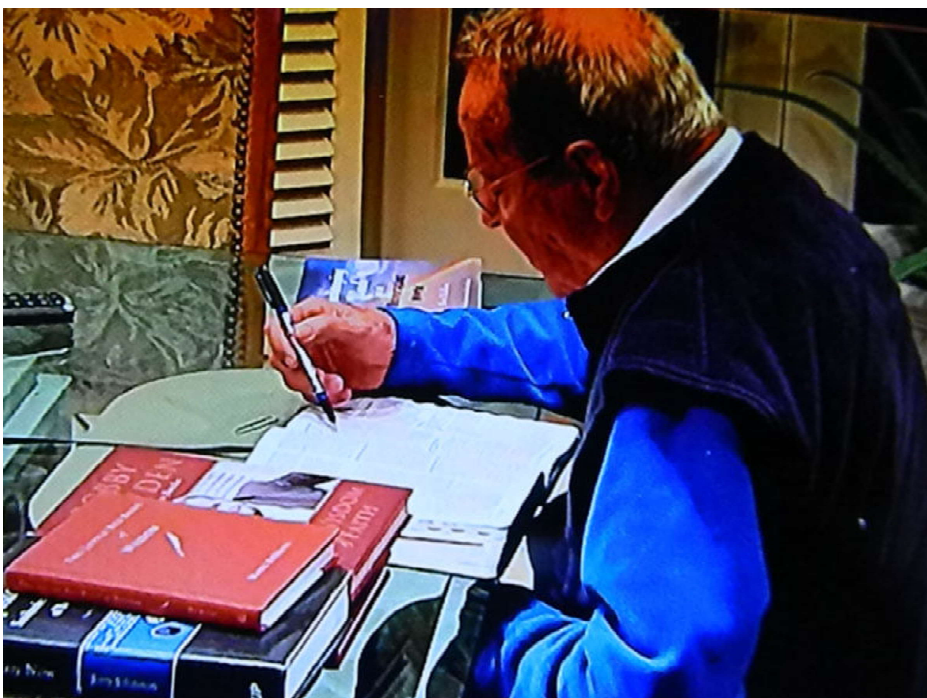
He said that, when the family moved to West Virginia when he was 12, in 1966, his father built a bookshelf for the den in their home in Morgantown. “I’ll never forget the first thing he put up on that bookshelf. He took a little piece of paper, and he hand wrote it, at that particular time, he wrote this verse, Joshua 24:15: ‘Choose you this day whom ye will serve....but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’” Then, he shared another photograph he had taken, of that verse framed and matted: “The Bowdens, Choose

you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15”, which 55 years later, is on a bookshelf in his father’s den in his Tallahassee, Florida home.

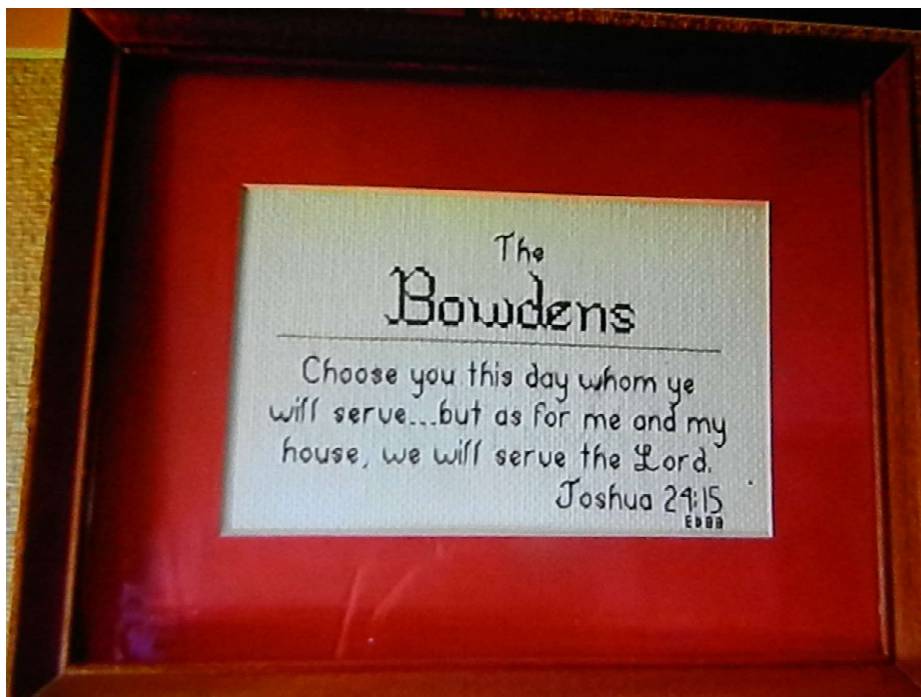
“That’s the legacy that he left me,” he said. “That’s the legacy he left for my children. As he read about Jesus Christ, he passed that legacy to me. Because of that, I know Jesus Christ. My wife knows Jesus Christ. My son knows Jesus Christ. My daughter knows Jesus Christ, her husband, my son’s wife. We’ve met Him. You talk about a legacy to leave your children, a legacy of influence, that’s what my father left me.” He added that, because of that legacy, his four grandsons will have a chance to meet Jesus. “So, for that, I say, Thanks, Dad, and I love you.”

Terry Bowden said of his father, “I think about what my father has meant to so many people. He cared for everybody. That was the one thing—the compassion and love that my father has had for everybody. We love the story in the Bible, the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ fed 5,000. But we need to go back and remember He fed 1,000 one at a time. And that was kind of the way Dad did it. He shared his faith and his love for everybody one at a time.”

He told the story about when he and his siblings were young, and the family was visiting his grandparents and were visiting Ruhama Baptist Church in Birmingham. “That’s where my mother and father grew up,” he said. “She was 14 years old in the choir when she moved into town. He was 17, sat on the back row, not paying a whole lot of attention, except to that 14 year old up in the choir. That’s where they went to church, years ago. We went back, as a family, years later, visiting my grandparents. We sat down on the front row, mother and father on each end, six of us children in between.” A guest preacher, speaking about faith, looked



Bobby Bowden studied his Bible early every morning.



When Coach Bobby Bowden moved his family to Morgantown, West Virginia in 1966, he built a bookshelf for their den, and he hand wrote, on a piece of paper, a verse of scripture, Joshua 24:15: “Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” It was the first thing he placed on the bookshelf. Fifty five years later, on a bookshelf in his den in his Tallahassee, Florida home, is that same verse framed and matted: “The Bowdens, Choose you this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15”

at Coach Bowden and his family sitting on the front row and asked him if he had faith to walk across a balance beam, from one tall building to another, if he held one of his children at the other end. “My dad looked at all of us kids and looked back and said, ‘Which one?’”

Speaking of his father, he said, “He was inspirational. He was tough. We saw him coaching when he was young, my brothers and I who played for him and coached with him, when he was a lot more fiery than you may remember him being on that sideline as an older coach. He was fierce. He was inspirational. He was motivational.”

He added that he remembers his father for his kindness. “I remember him being kind. I remember him being kind and being thoughtful, and, when you walked into his office, he looked you in your eyes, and he cared about you. He cared about you. Ephesians 4:1-2 says, ‘Live a life worthy of your calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing one another in love.’ Christ only described himself one time in the Bible—not as a revolutionary, not as a martyr. He described himself one time in the Bible. He said, ‘For I am gentle and humble in heart.’ And I think my father, and his desire all of his life to be Christ-like, was to be kind, gentle, humble, and loving. And, to be quite honest with you, all of you out there who knew him personally, isn’t that the Bobby Bowden you knew? Isn’t that the Bobby Bowden who made an impact on you? He tried every day to be the best he could to be like Jesus. And that’s what Jesus was all about. Sometimes, we say, ‘I wish I knew what God was like.’ Dad always said, ‘We know exactly what He’s like. He’s like Jesus.’

“He used to love to tell the story about sharing his faith and what it was like to know God -- about, when he was young, after practice, he was so thirsty, and he wanted to get some orange juice to drink. He would come in the line at the cafeteria, and he would want that whole big vat of orange juice. He wanted to drink the whole amount and have it all, but all he could get was that one little glass. He’d pour that glass. He’d drink that little glass of orange juice, and he’d say, ‘Man, that’s so good.’ And he couldn’t have that whole vat, but he could drink that one glass of orange juice and know it was exactly what was in that vat. And that’s how he felt about Jesus, about Christ. He knew God, and he knew how to act like God. He was kind and gentle. That’s what he wanted to be.”

He added that his father loved football, and football was a priority of his father’s life, but it was not the priority of his life. “We love the verse, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.’ Don’t we love that verse? It’s one of our favorites, Philippians 4:13. “But Dad always felt it came right after, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righ-



Terry Bowden

teousness, and all these things will be added unto you.’ A priority but not the priority. He understood that.”

He referred to ‘faith, family, and football’, and added, “He taught me to put education right before football --faith, family, education, and football, for a young man who wants to get ahead.

“That’s what Dad always talked about. That’s what he did. And that’s what he lived. And that’s what I remember so much about my father. He made football a priority of his life. He never got too far away from football.

“We all enjoyed being able to be with him in his final days. And we enjoyed getting a time to go back and spend time with my father, knowing from our doctor that these days were getting shorter, and the end was coming quicker. And we enjoyed our time with him in so many ways — one last comment, one last hand squeeze, one last look, as we came together.

“But he always loved football, and his heart was never very far away from FSU football, I promise you. It was always a priority of his life.” He thanked his sister Robyn for caring for their parents, and he told how, one day, when Robyn and their mother returned home after being gone for a short while, their father, dressed in his khaki pants and garnet shirt and with his hat in his lap, was sitting by the door. “And Robyn said, ‘Where are you going?’ He said, ‘I’ve got to get to the game.’ He said, ‘I’ve got to get to the game.’ Even in those final days, football was a priority of his life, and it was FSU football that he loved so much. Football — a priority, but not the priority.

“I want to leave y’all with this final thought. As a family, God has been so much a part of our life, through the blessings of having a mother and father that raised us, as Christian parents. All of us asked each other, and especially my sister Ginger, if we could read a letter that he wrote to us as a family. It was September of 2004, and we never had had a real tragedy in our family. We’d never had something we

could go through that was devastating or tough, that we couldn't handle, but that was a tragic day in September, because my sister Ginger's son Bowden and his father were killed in a car accident. Billy Smith came to the door to let us know. And we found out that week before the Miami game of 2004 that we had lost a family member for the first time ever. But it was something we didn't know how to handle and didn't know how to respond to. But we got a letter from my father, and he wrote it to all of us children. I want to read that to you, and I know he would want me to. This is a letter he penned to us."

He then read the letter, which was also published in Bobby Bowden's 2010 book *Called to Coach: Reflections on Life, Faith, and Football*.

"My Dear Children,

"When the tragedy occurred last week, I saw again the bond of love our family has for each other. I witnessed the inner strength of Ginger in a time of mortal crisis and love of her mother, brothers, sister, spouses, nephews, nieces, children, as well as in-laws and friends. Oh, how I love all of you!

"This brought back the memory of when you were just children and your mother would stay up half the night each Saturday ironing and polishing your shoes. She would lay your clothes out systematically and we would go to church each Sunday morning. Now is a good time to reflect on where you came from. Ann and my number one goal was that we raise you in the same environment we were raised. I remember vividly the day you accepted the Lord and were baptized.

"The good news of the tragedy is that John and Bowden were saved and today live again in the presence of God in their new Heavenly home. It has been said that when we die we can take nothing of ours with us, except . . . our children! Great job, Ginger!

"Keep in mind, at this time, our family will be together forever if we all trust in Jesus and surrender our lives to Him. I don't mean change jobs or schools, etc., but just make your life available to Christ as your grandparents did and Ann and I have tried to do.

"When I die and go to heaven (I know I will) if all of you and your family are not there with me, when your time comes, I will consider myself to have failed in life. All the statues, trophies, championships, etc., will be in vain. Somewhere along the line I failed you, if you are not there.

"Now is the time to recommit our lives to Christ, just as you did as a child. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' I choose Jesus as my Savior and commit to Him.

"Each night, this is my fervent prayer.

"Love, Dad"

Rev. Dr. Ronny Raines, former Pastor of Bradfordville First Baptist Church in Tallahassee and Coach Bowden's Pastor, and now Pastor of First Baptist Church in Clarksville, Tennessee, gave the message of hope.

"Serving as a Senior Pastor is a high calling, and serving as Coach Bowden's Pastor was an honor," he said. "Let me say this afternoon about Coach Bowden. In serving as his Pastor and the times that we were able to spend together, I will say this. He was the real deal. He was the real deal. He was a Pastor's friend. He was an encourager. And he finished his assignment well.

"As I think about being in this room, in this stadium again, we used to be here a lot for basketball games," he continued, and, pointing, he said, "and we would sit right up here, about half-court line. As I think about today as a celebration, there was always a dunk or there was a final shot to win the game, and there was a great celebration here in the Civic Center. But, as I think about I Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 13, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, 'But we don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.'

"And so, to the Bowden family and to players and coaches and friends and people in this area, and even throughout many other areas, as well, I want to make a statement. There is something for you and me to celebrate, and here it is. We have hope today, because Coach Bobby Bowden is with Jesus. We have hope. Praise the Lord for his relationship with Christ.

"As I think about Coach Bowden and times we had time together, football was a platform, but the Gospel was his mission.

"As I think about conversations we had, I remember one day we were doing an interview together, and he was going to share the Gospel with kids about Vacation Bible School. We were going to tape it, because they were going to Louisiana to a funeral, and, so, he could not be there live, and so we were taping it one afternoon. So, I asked him about Vacation Bible School, growing up as a kid, for him, and I said, 'Coach, when you went to Vacation Bible School, what did you eat and drink?' He said, 'Well, we had sweet tea and cookies.' I said, 'Well, that sounds appetizing.' Then, I said, 'Coach, we've got a lot of kids who are going to be at Vacation Bible School, and kids love animals.' I said, 'Coach, could you share with the kids today your least favorite animal in the world.' Without hesitation, he said, 'A gator.' I said, 'Hey, I would expect that. I'm not surprised at all.' And, then, I said, 'Well, Coach, what is your second least favorite animal in the world?' Without hesitation, he said, 'Another gator.'



Rev. Dr. Ronny Raines

“But he was so articulate with those kids, and he shared the Gospel. His life was about the Gospel. When I say the Gospel, we’ve heard John 3:16 today, that God loves you and me. We understand this — we’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God. That’s Romans 3:23. We know that the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, left heaven and came to this earth — what we celebrate Christmas. He lived a perfect, sinless life. He died on an old rugged cross for your sin and my sin, shed His blood that we could be forgiven and have eternal life. He was buried in a tomb, but, praise God, on Easter morning, Resurrection Day, the stone was rolled away, the tomb is empty. Jesus Christ is alive. And, one day, he’s coming again. And, so, when I would hear Coach Bowden speak, and I would be with him, he would always articulate the Gospel so clearly. He wanted to make sure, whether it was a child, a student, or an adult, that they heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“There was another event that we were doing right here on campus. We were at a Baptist college ministry here, a campus ministry.” About 200 18- to 22-year-old students were in the room that Tuesday night, he said, and he asked Coach Bowden to tell the students about how he came to Christ. “Again, he was so clear about his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ,” he said. That night, he asked Coach Bowden about how he made decisions about his coaching career. “And then he shared with those 18 to 22 year olds wisdom about how you make decisions in life.” Then, he asked him to speak to the students about how Coach Bowden and his wife, Ann, had been married for, at that time, 71 years. “And I sat there, so moved that night, because 18 to 22 year olds, with a pad and a pen, (were) taking notes, listening to every word that Coach Bowden said about knowing Christ, about making wise decisions,

and about staying married for life.” As he was driving Coach Bowden home that night, he told him, “Coach, the Lord used you in incredible ways tonight. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with other people.”

Raines said that, in thinking of Bowden, he thought of scripture from John chapter 13, where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. “Jesus was a servant leader,” he said. “As I think about Coach Bowden, there are a lot of titles I could give him,” he said, “but one of the titles I would give him would be a servant leader. We heard so much today about his care for players and coaches and families, but, also, I would say this. He knew how to serve other people. He came into my office one afternoon. And he would do that periodically, and we would spend some time together. He came in one afternoon, and he sat down. Here’s what he called me that day: ‘Preacher.’ I said, ‘Coach, I love it. What an honor to serve as your Pastor. You are such a blessing to me.’ And he said, ‘I’ve got a request of you.’ And I thought, ‘I don’t know what that’s going to be. One of the most legendary coaches in the world — what is he going to say?’ And he said, ‘I don’t know how much more time I have in life, but I want to make a commitment to you. I want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ with every day that I have left.’ And Coach Bowden said, ‘If you want me to go speak somewhere, and my calendar is free, I’m going to go do it, because I want to serve Christ and help you in ministry.’

“One Sunday morning, we launched him out, and he goes out to a church that had 75 people on a Sunday morning. Here’s the good news. Four people got saved that morning.

“And I remember hosting some pastors. We’d have about 40 pastors together, and Coach would come periodically to those, and he would just speak wisdom and invest in those other pastors — so moving.

“And, then, back in June, maybe one of his last public appearances, I had contacted him about speaking at the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

“And, so, one Sunday morning with a church of 75, a group of 40 pastors, and that day, on that Monday, at the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, he spoke to 10,000 people in that congregation. He was a servant.

“Here’s what we know today about Coach Bowden. He’s in heaven today, not because he’s a legendary football coach. He’s in heaven today, because he gave his life to Jesus Christ and trusted him as his Saviour.

“And here’s the good news about heaven, as well. We know the Bible says heaven is a real place. Jesus said, ‘I’m preparing a place for you’ — mansions, He says. We know heaven is a peaceful place. Aren’t you grateful in heaven

there's no more pancreatic cancer again. Praise the Lord for that. Heaven is a worshipful place. I imagine Coach Bowden today is worshipping almighty God –nonstop, forever and forever.” He added, “He is worshipping almighty God and seeing the very face of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He said that he talked to Coach Bowden not long after Bowden was diagnosed with his terminal illness and that Bowden told him that he was at peace and was ready to go home. “He was talking about home in heaven,” Raines said.

“As you think about Coach Bowden's life,” he said, “he's got all sorts of trophies and rings and medals from leaders from literally all over the world. But, because of his relationship and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible says, in the Book of Revelation, that he got a crown. And the good news about that crown is it's not to be worn, it's not to be displayed. It's to be cast in worship at the feet of Jesus. He's worshipping the Lord Jesus.

“Now, I would say this to Coach Bowden: Coach Bowden, thank you for letting me serve as your Pastor. It was an honor to walk beside you, serve with you, make much of Jesus, and communicate and keep the Gospel front and center. But I would say to you now: Welcome home, Coach Bowden, welcome home. You're home.”

Then, he asked everyone to bow their heads. “You have heard the Gospel over and over again,” he said of the service for Coach Bowden. “If Coach Bowden was standing here, he would want to make sure you had an opportunity to give your life to Christ. And, so, I want to encourage you today just to pray for the Bowden family. They need comfort. They need safety as they travel. They need strength. One of the most gracious families. Angie and I have enjoyed the last couple of days with them at the house. It's just wonderful to see family members loving each other and spending time together. I just encourage you to pray for them. And, then, as I think about the 23rd Psalm, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’, Coach Bowden could say that. Let me ask you, here in the Civic Center, can you say that? Can you say, ‘The Lord is my shepherd’? Not that He might be or could be. He is my shepherd. And, then, the psalmist said, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we have nothing to fear, for you are with us. And, to the Bowden family, He's walking with you. He's there with you through this season of your life and the days to come, as well. And, then, the psalmist said at the end, Psalm 23 verse 6, ‘and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’ Do you know today that you're going to spend eternity in heaven when you breathe your last breath?

“If there's one thing to honor Coach Bowden, his legacy and his life, if you're here today in the Civic Center, or you're watching, and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, it would

be to turn from your sin and give your heart and life to Jesus Christ — not because you're a good person or religious deeds or even church affiliation, but you surrender your life to Jesus and say yes to him as your Saviour and Lord. What a great celebration that would be.

“So, I'm going to pray for us, and, then, Pastor Bobby is going to come back, and he is going to lead us here, something the Lord laid on his heart. We want to honor that today, as well.

“Let's bow together as we pray. God, what a moving service today. Thank you for the celebration. Thank you for Coach Bowden's life. Thank you for his faith in Christ and his walk with you. And, Father, today, from those in the Civic Center or someone who's watching, I pray we'll hear something today to say, ‘I gave my life to Jesus today as a result of the Gospel and the witness of Coach Bobby Bowden.’ And the glory will go to you. Thank you, Lord Jesus. And I pray this in your name. Amen.”

“Amen,” said Butler. “What a service. Amen? What a celebration of life. What a great man. We were all blessed and fortunate to be a part of his life.”

He asked everyone to stand. “I know what Coach would want,” he said. “Just like you heard all of the testimonies today. He wanted you to have a relationship with Christ. We can see him again if we have a relationship with Christ. And that relationship is one where we prioritize our life. Terry said it very well. If you seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all those things will be added unto you. But it's God first. It's loving Him first.”

He asked everyone to bow their heads, and he prayed a prayer for anyone wanting to give their life to Christ: “Dear Father, I thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to die on the cross for my sins. Lord, I open the door of my heart. I ask you to come in. Holy Spirit, lead me, direct me, sup with me, in Jesus' name. I turn from my wicked ways. I sin no more. I give it all to you, Lord, and, when I fail, Lord, I ask for forgiveness. And you are just to forgive me. I thank you, Lord, for your plan of salvation for my life. In Jesus' name.”

He said if anyone prayed that prayer, to go to someone who is born again or go to a church and talk to someone about their decision to accept Christ. “If you made that decision for the first time, and you mean it from the bottom of your heart, do that, do that. Take your Bible and read the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and find out about the life of Jesus, because our Coach would want you to do that. If he could have one last word with you, that is what he would share with you – give your life to God. Thank you.”

The FAMU Gospel choir then sang, “Oh Happy Day.” “Amen, amen, amen,” said Butler. “Oh happy day. Praise the Lord.”



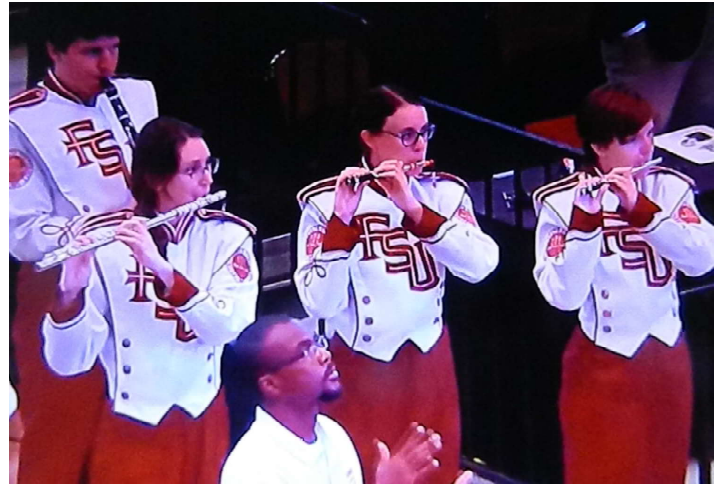
The FAMU Gospel Choir sings “Oh Happy Day”

Then, he asked everyone to stand as he delivered the benediction from Jude 1:24-25. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and for ever. Amen.”

Concluding the service was the postlude by the Florida State University Marching Chiefs (the official marching band) and the cheerleaders, and then everyone in the Civic Center gesturing the Tomahawk Chop, during the Seminoles’ ‘war chant’, as a tribute to their beloved Coach.



The Florida State University Marching Chiefs





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Romans 10:13



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