

Seventy-Five Years in Old Dundalk

October of 1930 was just about one year after the great stock market crash of 1929. Within two years after the founding of our church, one in every four American workers would be unemployed. The Great Depression would be in full force. Then would come World War II, then the Cold War, and another war, this time in Korea. The Civil Rights movement took place, then the Space Race and flower power. There was a war on poverty, a war in Vietnam, and a war on drugs, to boot. American courts made it legal to kill unborn Americans, and American citizens were taken and held hostage in Iran. Americans became the world's greatest benefactors or the world's greatest villains (depending on who was talking). Meanwhile, America won the Cold War and became the world's one undisputed superpower. September 11, 2001 ushered in a new war, a war on terror.

In Dundalk, mighty industries flourished and perished, while common people and long-established communities struggled to make do and get along with life. Dundalk has tried to be an all-American town, living the American dream, but more than a few folks around here have found that that dream is at least two-thirds make-believe. Yet we all, to this day, beneath all the disappointments and disillusionment, still believe in America, and still believe in Dundalk.

Members of Dundalk's original Baptist church have watched it all. This preacher has only been here for five years of it, but we still have a couple members who've been here for almost all seventy-five. We've rejoiced at births and wept at deaths. We've cheered as we've watched people come to Christ and puzzled as we've seen them turn away. We've all struggled against that slow, relentless tide that pulls us to drift away from him. Yet we're still here, and we're still seeing God work in us and among us – and work through us to touch others. We still believe in this church because we know that something real has happened in our hearts. We still believe in conversion.

Far more than that, we still believe in this church because we still believe in God. Although all of us have found ourselves faithless from time to time, God has proved himself faithful. He keeps his promises, and he keeps his people. As of October in 2005, he has kept us for seventy-five years.

We don't know what's going to happen in Dundalk. If there is a significant revitalization in our town, it might be a marvelous benefit to everybody – or it may hurt as many of us as it helps. We don't know. We just know we plan to be here either way.

We can't say for sure what will happen in this congregation, either. We do know that we'll strive with all our might to be a church that lives for God's greater glory in Dundalk's deeper delight in all that he is, spreading from our hearts to our homes to our neighborhoods to the nations. We'll continue to hold to the Bible as our sole and absolute authority for what we believe and how we live. We're almost certain to maintain our fellowship with the local, state, and national Southern Baptist groups, of course. Like them, we'll have to learn and grow, in order to continue to touch a changing world with the unchanging gospel. And we'll fail from time to time, and repent when we realize that we've done so. When we do, we know our Father will be faithful to forgive.

There's a word in the Old Testament that's hard to translate, but full of sweetness and hope. It's "*chesed*". It's translated "steadfast love" in the English Standard Version, or "lovingkindness" or "mercy" or "love" in other translations. It refers to God's covenant love, his pure faithfulness, his unswerving commitment to get glory for himself by keeping and blessing his people. Monica and I had one little girl who never made it to birth or breath. We named that daughter "*Chesed*," because although the miscarriage was grievous, God was faithful through it. He always is.

"*Chesed*" is exactly the word to say how God has been for FBCD throughout our past, and how we know he will be throughout our future. He loves his children, and will never leave us or fail us.