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Dr. Zeno Wall's Pastorate

Zeno Wall

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written

Dr. Zeno Wall's Pastorate

of

First Baptist Church, Shelby, N. C.

From October 1, 1925 to January 27, 1948

X In selecting Hubbard Hamrick to write the history of our church you have, in my judgment, made a wise choice as he has a long and vital connection with our church, and he remembers dates and events with amazing accuracy, and will do careful and patient research. And since I have had a pastorate covering over twenty-two years - four times longer than any other pastor, save our present pastor Rev. John Lawrence who is doing an outstanding work - Hubbard then asked me to write about our long and fruitful years with this great church.

// In the spring of 1925 the Hon. O. Max Gardner called on me in Goldsboro, where I was serving as pastor of the First Baptist Church, and told me about your church and its golden opportunities, saying: "It is a sleeping giant, and we believe you could wake it up and lead it forward to great things." He then asked if I would be willing to visit this field and see the people and let them see and hear me. I told him that I had never preached a sample sermon but that I would visit the church on August 30, 1925, as I would be on my vacation at my father's home then. I came that Sunday morning and preached from Luke 14:23 on "The Compulsion of Love." You gave my message a good hearing and one of the deacons came and asked me to go out with him. Brother J. H. Quinn called the church into conference, and in a short time some of the brethren came and said: "Our church gave you a

hearty and a unanimous call at a salary of \$4,500.00 and a new and attractive home, and we hope and pray that you will accept.

I told them that I deeply appreciated the call and that I had not thought of leaving my pastorate in Goldsboro as I had only been there three years, but that I would give their call earnest and prayerful consideration. While I was asking the Lord what I should do, and talking to my friends about it, an unsigned letter was mailed to me saying some ugly things about this church and several other pastors had been asked to resign and leave, closing with these words: "they run other good men off, and they will run you off, too. Take my advice - don't come." This letter, at first, stunned me and put doubts in my mind about coming here, but when I remember the words of an experienced professor when he said: "Don't take counsel of your fears but of your faith, and don't be influenced by the content of an unsigned letter" I was ready to consider the will of the Lord.

After a few days, therefore, I felt definitely the call of the Lord, and wrote you that we hoped to come to you by the first Sunday in October, 1925. We moved to Shelby on Friday, Sept. 28, 1925 - my wife, Zeno, Jr., Abbie Jane, Yates, Woodrow and Ada Ramsey; all children graduated from high school, all went away to college, and all married during this pastorate.

I preached our first sermon Sunday, October 4, 1925 on Esther 4:14: "Coming to the Kingdom for such a time as this." We had an inspiring congregation and God gave me both freedom and power. I felt the presence of the Lord and felt it every time I went into this pulpit. Soon thereafter I preached on John 13:34: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have

loved you." This was the key text of my entire ministry here: preached at the beginning and at the close of my ministry on Sunday, January 25, 1948, and a very deep snow on the ground. On Tuesday morning, Jan. 27, 1948 we left you for Thomasville, N. C. to become general superintendant of the Baptist Orphanage. We left in a heavy snow, and I with a very heavy heart. We often say: "It hurts like pulling eye teeth," but "pulling heart strings is far more painful." All too soon we reached the age of retirement on Aug. 20, 1950, and moved into our little home on 853 W. Marion St. where I now live - a home you helped us to build. On March 11, 1959 my wife "went home to be with the Lord." I have therefore been living alone, and supplying churches, from time to time, as the Lord opens doors to me. My wife was a wonderful mother, a true wife, and a faithful and useful member of this church.

|| On August 5, 1928 Mr. and Mrs. Horace Easom united with our church, they coming from the First Baptist Church of Asheville, N. C. where he had been Director of Music and Education, to a like position here. He worked with us for nearly twenty years as Director of Music and Education, supplying our pulpit and visiting the sick. No church ever had a better man, and his wife was the capable Supt. of the Beginners Department.

May I call your attention to a few of the outstanding events of our years with you: Entrance into our new education building and our enlarged auditorium, the depression, the dedication of our building, and our centennial.

The Entrance Into Our New Building

On Wednesday night, March 13, 1929 we had our first prayer meeting in the Young People's Dept. and this room was filled. I spoke on John 17 dwelling on two phases of this prayer: (1) Christ reporting to his Father, and (2) His requests from his Father. It was an inspiring hour. On Sunday, March 31, 1929 we entered the educational building at ten o'clock. Judge B. T. Falls was our capable Supt. and his consecrated wife was Supt. of the Intermediate Department. The week before this important day she made 94 visits inviting prospects to Sunday School, and many other workers did their best too. We set a goal of 1,000 but we went beyond it to 1,083 which is a big increase from 394 we had present on Feb. 3, 1929. At the eleven o'clock hour our spacious and beautiful auditorium was packed and many turned away. It was Easter and the large chorus choir - under the direction of Mr. Eason with Mrs. Plaster at the organ - thrilled us with appropriate and uplifting music. I preached on "Christ's Resurrection," and the power of God was upon me and the large congregation, and many united with our church.

The Depression

In 1930 - 31 we had a very distressing depression when our banks and mills were closed and thousands were walking the streets saying: "We want work and we sorely need food for our families." My heart ached. On Christmas, 1930 we observed "White Christmas" when we brought clothing, and all kinds of food and money to our church. It was a touching sight to see the different departments

and classes march by the large and circular platform and place thereon: flour, meat, meal, sugar, coffee, beans, peas, and clothing. And for many months ^{the} our pastor and Mr. Easom literally "fed the hungry and clothed the naked;" and that year we had the greatest revival our church had ever seen up to that time from the standpoint of additions. We held 154 prayer meetings in 154 homes before the revival came, and then I preached for one week and Mr. Easom led the singing. Scores and scores confessed faith in Christ and were baptized. In that depression year we baptized 119 and received 135 by letter, making a total of 254."

When the appeal of the poor is heard and people hear and heed that appeal; when people begin to pray and the Lord answers those prayers something begins to happen. History reveals that we make our greatest spiritual gains in the lean years instead of the fat ones - the prosperous ones - because the people feel - very keenly - their need of the Lord, and his help.

New Churches

"On Sunday afternoon, July 10, 1932 we [X] Mr. Easom and many of you - organized a Sunday School in West Graham school building with 91 pupils. H. L. Toms was elected Supt. Sunday afternoon Nov. 10, 1935, ^{this group was organized into} Calvary Baptist Church ~~was organized~~ with 30 charter members. [Rev. Lowell Barnette preached on "Home-sick for God," from Psalm 84:2. This church has over 1,000 members now and Rev. W. C. Hill is doing a splendid work as pastor.]

"In 1940 we saw an opportunity to organize another Sunday School in an old unused potato house on Highland Avenue, [X] and we [the good people there, and Mr. Easom] organized one. It was

heartening to see the interested people clean out the old building, wash the walls, scrub the floor, provide benches, chairs, a pulpit, song books; and by and by, ^{this group was} organized ^{into} Highland Baptist Church. [X] We held their first revival - a good one - and baptized 38 over a period of many months using the baptistry of the First Baptist Church until they were able to build their own and we rendered all of these services free of charge. Today they have an attractive church building, a trained and gifted pastor, Rev. Leonard Thomas, with a membership of about 300, a Sunday School enrollment of 280 and about 100 in Training Union; and they are moving forward in a sane and constructive way.]

Dedication of our Church

[X] Nearly everyone at times has to go in debt, and debts to honest people make them anxious to retire these debts.] "In building our new educational building and enlarging and beautifying our auditorium we had to borrow \$50,000.00. For nearly five years we paid on it. Finally we paid it off, and on June 13, 1943 we entered our church with thankful and rejoicing hearts [X] for the purpose of dedication "to the glory of God." [X] Our large auditorium was again filled - chairs in the aisles - and [X] Dr. Charles H. Durham of the First Baptist Church, Lumberton, N. C., brought two appropriate and uplifting messages. He is one of the "preacher boys" of this church [X] and one of the princely preachers of our state, and one time president of our North Carolina Baptist State Convention. He was a well educated man graduating from Wake Forest College with Judge E. Y. Webb,

Dr. E. B. Lattimore and Mr. George Blanton, Sr. What a quartette of trained, gifted and useful men! They were all present at our dedication to hear Dr. Durham. Mr. Easom and his large chorus choir - with Mrs. Plaster at the organ - brought wonderful music. It is a day that will linger and lift as long as we live. We thanked God and "fresh courage took."

Our Centennial Celebration - 1847 to 1947

We felt that since this was the one hundredth anniversary of our church we should bring some more of the outstanding personalities to our church and have a week's celebration:

Sunday, June 15, 1947 at 10:00 a. m. Judge E. Y. Webb spoke.

Sunday, June 15, 1947 at 11:00 a. m. Dr. Ellis Fuller preached.

Sunday, June 15, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Mrs. J. M. Dawson of Washington, D. C. spoke. We ^{held a} baptized ^{service.}

Monday, June 16, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. M. T. Rankin spoke.

Tuesday, June 17, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. J. B. Lawrence preached.

Wednesday, June 18, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. W. F. Powell preached.

Thursday, June 19, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. Louie Newton preached.

Friday, June 20, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. Duke McCall preached.

Sunday, June 22, 1947 at 11:00 a. m. Dr. Charles H. Durham preached.

Sunday, June 22, 1947 at 8:00 p. m. Dr. Sankey Blanton spoke.

We again baptized. The following Sunday I preached on "Inspired by a great Crowd of Witnesses," and the next Sunday on "Our Great Heritage." Our souls feasted on the vision and inspiration of these heroes of the faith as seen in the 11th and 12th chapters of Hebrews. They had lived long and useful lives, and are encircling us above, and calling unto us to join them. We thank God for them and shall try to be better workers because they "have fought a good

fight, finished their course and kept the faith" and gone home to be with the Lord.

It has been - as you well know - the practice of your pastor to bring you his best messages as a preacher, and to bring to this pulpit some of the great preachers of the South: Dr. G. W. Truett, Dr. Lee R. Scarborough, Dr. Roland Q. Leavell, Dr. Finley Gibson, Dr. Chas. E. Maddry, Dr. W. R. Pettigrew, Dr. J. W. Middleton, Dr. J. E. Dillard, Dr. R. C. Campbell, Dr. Phil Elliott, Dr. Arthur Gillespie, Dr. M. E. Dodd, Dr. J. W. Provine, Dr. L. M. Bratcher (of Brazil) and those named in the Centennial Celebration and others not named.

A Remarkable Growth

We saw this church grow from 763 members to over 2,500, and gifts increase from \$28,000.00 our first year to \$131,225.57 our last year. We received into our church 1484 by baptism and 2095 by letter, making a total of 3579; and gave to all causes \$1,135,785.00 and established two missions which grew into churches.

Honors which Came to our Pastor and Church

Our pastor was elected President of the Baptist State Convention in Charlotte in November, 1932 and for three succeeding years making four terms. He presided over the Convention:

In 1933 First Baptist Church, Greensboro

In 1934 First Baptist Church, New Bern

In 1935 First Baptist Church, Asheville

In 1936 First Baptist Church, Durham

He is found in the 1948-49 edition of "Who's Who in America" Vol. 25.

The Broadman Press of the Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn. published three "books of merit" from his pen which have had a wide circulation: "Heartening Messages"

"Verities of the Gospel"

"A Day for God-Called Men".

(Your secretary Miss Beverly Clark [Mrs. O. V. Hamrick, Jr.]

typed the first two, and our Miss Mary Sue Thompson typed the third, and their work was excellent.) ^{Beverly} and ^{she} typed my part in this history

Your ^{pastor} delivered the commencement sermon at Wake Forest College and held revival meetings at Mars Hill College and Campbell College, and spoke for a week at Meredith College; ~~he~~ made chapel talks at Wingate College and many talks at Gardner-Webb. For two years ~~he~~ served as president of Gardner-Webb College, ^{though} with the depression still on, and the heavy responsibilities of their fast growing church and the big relief program, he could spend but little time over at the college. He held on - without pay - until he felt the strain on his body was too great. He at a later date strongly recommended Dr. Phil Elliott when President A. C. Lovelace gave up the work, and he came and did an outstanding job. Dr. Elliott died suddenly on April 14, 1961. The trustees turned to one of our "preacher boys" Dr. Eugene Poston and elected him. He is leading wisely and well. We are very proud of him and his lovely family, and pray often and earnestly for him, his family and the college.

In my long ministry covering over fifty-six years I have preached in hundreds of churches in Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Virginia, and Washington, D. C. I have

seen hundreds and hundreds and hundreds confess Christ and join the churches, and God has used us in "calling out the called." Scores and scores have responded to the call to preach, sing, do educational and secretarial work. Seven of our preacher boys - here and elsewhere - have made college presidents.

We, too, had the pleasure of speaking to the faculty, student body and visitors of our oldest theological seminaries at Louisville, Kentucky, New Orleans and Fort Worth, Texas and to meet some of our preacher boys. At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, our own son, Woodrow was on the faculty.

[But our longest pastorate was here.] One of the saddest days of my life was, the day we moved away. I had a hard time to keep back the tears, for there is no more poignant suffering than that of pulling heart strings. [When you have baptized 1484 and received a total of 2095 into the fellowship of one church by letter, preached the funeral of so many of your loved ones and married many of your children and grandchildren, the leaving is very painful. But, of course, the time of parting comes to all who have children, and the time of saying goodbye to all who teach and all who employ workers. Our years with you were years to be sure of ups and downs, of sickness and health, of trials and of triumphs, and of failure and success. We, like you, had our good days and bad days; our weeping and our rejoicing and we had far more rejoicing than of weeping. God, in the beginning, spoke the days of creation, saying: "The evening and the morning were the first day;" "the evening and the morning were the second day;" and "the evening and the morning were the third day;" and so throughout the creative days.

He, therefore, began with the night and closed with the light and held out before his children an abiding city whose architect and builder is God. "On August 20, 1962 we reach^{ed} the 80th milestone on the road to our eternal home. Our race will soon be run, and the crown of victory won. We thank God for you, and are deeply appreciative of all you have done for us, and we urge you to go on - with courage and faith - to the end of life's journey, and to hear the Lord say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. 25:21) Brethren, pray for us.