

(Remarks on the building program of Lithonia Baptist Church made by John Caylor, Jr. on Sunday night, May 15, 1966).

Those of you who know me very well, know that I am not much of a reminiscer in public. But tonight, bear with me as I reminisce a little about the building program at Lithonia Baptist Church that began in 1848 and will not end probably for another generation or two.

The Psalmist said, "Expect the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." I can confidently say, as Jacob said at Bethel, "This is none other but the house of God." I believe that God planned it, built it, and dwells in it. I believe this because you are God's people and because you seek God's will in your ministry through your church.

But God did not set this building here on this hill, at this busy crossroads, without using human hands. God uses men and their abilities and their skills to build churches. The last two lines of a poem by Edgar Guest are: "The humblest church demands its price; In human toil and sacrifice." It is that human toil and sacrifice over the 118 years history of the Lithonia Baptist Church that I would like to reminisce about for a few minutes.

You are now worshipping in the fifth meeting house of the Lithonia Baptist Church. The first meeting house was the old Lithonia School building where the church was constituted on February 18, 1848. It was a one-room log house with a dirt floor and was located across the street in front of the present Methodist Church. One week after the church was constituted, the members began talking about building a new building. They soon built a frame building which was used for a time jointly by the school and the church.

The school and the church soon built separate buildings, not because there was any difficulty about religion in the schools, but because both the school and the church had outgrown their building and both needed more space. A second frame building was constructed, that building being built on the same site as the present Methodist Church.

That third church building was used for only a few years by the congregation. The members of the church were looking for a larger and a more appropriate location for their church. Deacon John M. Born, who along with Pastor James R. George had come from Macedonia Church to start the Lithonia Baptist Church, saw the need for a new location and he donated property at the corner of Stone Mountain and Main Street.

On that large and, at that time, adequate piece of property there was constructed in 1861 that 40 ft. by 60 ft. building which was to serve so well for 105 years. That stone building was the fourth building used by the church, and the church was then only 13 years old. But soon that original stone building was to prove too small for the congregation. In 1895, they added a porch and a belfry. In 1913, they, and some of you, added more space in the auditorium and provided seven more Sunday School rooms. In the 1940's, 13 more rooms were added in an annex. In the early 1950's, 23 more rooms were added in an educational building. There were 40 rooms that could be used for Sunday School in the four buildings on the corner of Stone Mountain and Main Street, but these facilities were also outgrown and, by the end of 1959, plans were being made to provide more Sunday School and worship space.

Now all of the history of the buildings up until that time I learned about by reading, and by what people told me. But I have personal knowledge and involvement with all that transpired in those busy and useful years from 1959 to 1965.

In March 1960, architects Barker and Cunningham were engaged to study our building and to make suggestions for its future usefulness and expansion. Their report, made six years ago, recommended building a new building on a new site. In October 1960, the Lithonia Baptist Church turned down by majority vote a recommendation to remodel the old facilities. That was the milestone that really determined the future course of the building program. But, between October 1960 and July 1962, nothing concrete was done by the church in conference to further the building program.

In July 1962, the church authorized the Building Committee to negotiate for, with the purpose of buying, this seven acres on which your church building now stands. Remember now, that action was taken almost four years ago. At that time there was less than \$26,000 in the building fund. It took a lot of faith on the part of many church members to make the decision to try to purchase this property. It was to be one year and seven months before the purchase was completed, but on February 4, 1964, in an office in downtown Lithonia, these seven acres were purchased by the church.

In the meantime, in a business session of the church in January 1963--and I believe a newspaper account of that business conference called it a "stormy" session--at that conference in January 1963 it was voted to sell the old church property.

Now let me tell you some of my thoughts and sentiments about that old building. It was always a holy place for me. I stood every Sunday morning to preach in the same building where 31 other pastors had stood before me, not just in the same church, but in the very same room. You can imagine with what awe and reverence I approached my weekly preaching opportunities in that holy place. Continuous preaching services were held in that building for 105 years and I was a part of that continuity. Two weeks ago, I walked into that old building and they were tearing out the pulpit where I had stood more than 800 times. As I walked out, I said to the two college students with me, "You know, it's like losing an old friend."

There is another reason that I especially loved that old building. My two youngest children, Janet and Jane, were baptized in that auditorium, in that same old baptistry which was moved to this new building and which now serves so beautifully. The only two members of my family that I have had the privilege of baptizing, were these two little girls who were baptized in that old building. These, along with the other 141 people that I baptized in that baptistry, made the old church very meaningful to me.

But that old building was not adequate for the Lithonia Baptist Church, so on May 5, 1964, in the Mayor's office in Lithonia, that 116 year old property was sold. The next month, June 1964, the church voted unanimously to adopt the architects' plans for this magnificent new structure in which you are now worshipping. It was to be a year before construction actually began, but this present church building became a reality for Lithonia Baptist Church on that June night in 1964. It was the first unanimous vote on the building program that had been made in five years. The Lord was leading the members of Lithonia Baptist Church and events of these last two months, since March 20, have borne out the wisdom of the relocation of this church.

Now, you have moved into a new building, but you are not through. If a church grows spiritually, it will grow in size. As Lithonia Baptist Church grows, you will need more facilities. You are in the midst of a building program that began one week after the church was organized in 1848 and which will go on as long as the church lives and grows. My prayer is that as you continue your remarkable and solid growth in size and facilities, that you will continue to grow in grace, and in spirit, and in the knowledge of God, and in the service of Christ.



IT WAS ONLY TEMPORARY -- The sign on the house at 3038 Evans Mill Rd. declares, "temporary meeting place". The building is being torn down since completion of the new facilities. Dedication Day Services to be held March 3rd, will be announced in detail in forth-coming issue.

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