

**Bicentennial Message for South Apalachin Baptist Church
by Pastor James Walter on November 6, 2016**

I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18
Jesus the Christ during His sojourn upon the earth.

*The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
She is His New Creation, by water and The Word;
From heaven He came and sought her to be His Holy Bride;
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life he died.
Elect from every nation, yet one ore all the earth;
Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
One Holy name she blesses, partakes one Holy food;
And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.*

The Churches One Foundation by Samuel Stone and Samuel Wesley

History – World History
Church History – Baptist Church History
Free Will Baptist Church of South Apalachin
Owego Free Baptist Church
South Apalachin Baptist Church

When I was first asked to speak on the subject of History, which I assumed to be South Apalachin Baptist Church history, my thoughts were to start with our Lord's announcement that He was going to build HIS CHURCH and trace that church through the Book of Acts, from those disciples in the upper room waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower them for the work of building His Church doing the same thing today.

So I began to read the Book of Acts again, and got out a book Stan Roberts gave to me forty years ago entitled *History of the Baptists*. It's a book of 1000 pages and very fine print which traces the history of Baptist Churches from their beginnings in the early centuries of Christianity up until the time it was printed in 1848.

I then called Paul Wilkinson to get access to some of the information he had gleaned from his exhausting search over the many months (years) since it was decided to have this 200th year celebration. What I mainly wanted to know is some of the details of how our church started and whether we started as a local church made up of those God's

Word calls *His Redeemed Saints* and His sheep who follow Him or by several people who just wanted a community church for the good of the community.

It was at that time I found out that I had 25 minutes to present the history I had begun gathering together from all these sources. NOT POSSIBLE!!! What was I to do? Say a little about everything which is really saying nothing, or saying a lot about one or two incidents in South Apalachin Baptist Church's history. That would be better, but what I decided to do after reading the list of pastors the church has had over the first 140 years of its 200 year history is to tell a few things I know about four of them. To me those four on that list stood out above all the rest. Not because those four men are any better or greater than the others, but rather because when I read those four names I saw faces and recalled many past interactions with them. I knew those four men personally and three of those four each made an impact on my life and ministry, those four are:

Dr. M.L. Lowe	1918-1919
Rev. Charles Young	1932-1935
Rev. Leroy Westbrook	1940-1943
Rev. Gordon Hay	1953-1960

Dr. Lowe was my English Bible and Old Testament and New Testament Interpretation teacher the three years (1951-1954) I was a student at Practical Bible Training School. But he was so much more than that to me along with many of his students. He was our mentor and discipler. I was not in his classes very long until I knew he was not teaching the Bible juts to impart the knowledge he had of the Scriptures to us. When he spoke of The Lovely Lord Jesus it was evident by his demeanor and tone of voice, he not only believed in Him but, like my parents, loved Him, and wanted others to love and obey Him as well.

Rather than continuing to recall my past relationship with Dr. Lowe I will just quote the dedication to my book, *Fifty Years A Country Pastor*:

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr. M. L. Lowe who was my professor of English Bible, Old and New Testament Interpretation at the Practical Bible Training School in the early 1950s which is now Davis College near Binghamton, New York. I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay to the Lovely Lord Jesus, the Heavenly Shepherd (two of Dr. Lowe's favorite names of Our Lord) for the privilege to sit under his teaching for three years and also have him for weekend Bible conferences three times in those early years in the pastorate. It was under his teaching God taught me what an awesome privilege and responsibility it was to be called of Him to tend a flock of His sheep. His words to us young men who were to be "called" shepherds have been a source of encouragement and strength many times throughout those next forty two years in the pastorate. Expressions such as "in God's work, faithfulness is success," "when the wolf comes, hirelings flee while the faithful undershepherd continues to lead, feed, and protect his shepherd's flock." "This world has never heard of many of its great men. Many have spent their lives faithfully caring for one of God's small flocks up 'Chipmunk Run' or down 'Skunk Hollow' where few have ever heard of them. Probably some of you are God's products of one of those faithful shepherds."

I have never heard any Bible preacher or teacher make the "Lovely Lord Jesus" more real or more close. In his book Christ In All the Scriptures he says, "The object of all Bible study is first, to find Christ and then that the beauty of Jesus be found in the believer."

Lastly are his words concerning religious experiences. "There is no experience, religious or otherwise, that can be compared with a daily walk with God in the light of His Word."

To this moment I can hear his closing prayer after our weekend Bible Conference on the subject "Christ in all the scriptures." His prayer was short and to the point: "Father, forgive us for so often making your beloved Son merely a fire escape from hell. We really don't mean to do this. Let us just love Him and serve Him faithfully until we see Him face to face." I can still see the tears of love and joy in his eyes as he sang (off tune) our closing song, "My Jesus, I Love Thee." I have heard him more than once saying in class that he just could not wait for the redemption of his body when he would get redeemed vocal chords and be able to sing his Redeemer's praises "on tune" with the Heavenly Chorus.

To this day I can see Dr. Lowe as he stood in the driveway into the new parsonage. Looking all around, his first words to me were: *Are you sure this is South Apalachin?* I am sure in His mind he was comparing South Apalachin then to what it looked like in those early years (1918-1919) when he, as a student at Practical Bible School, would ride the train from Binghamton to Apalachin and someone would pick him up with a Model T. Ford and haul him up Pennsylvania Avenue to South Apalachin for Sunday Services. He had told us (Gordon Hay and I) about those times in days gone by. He was the one who recommended Gordon Hay to the South Apalachin Church as a fill in speaker between candidates after Pastor Chaffee died several months earlier. That was in 1953. Gordon Hay ended up becoming not only a fill in speaker between candidates but the church's pastor for the next seven years.

I can say this without any reservation, next to my parents, Dr. Lowe had a greater impact upon my life ministry than any other person, learning institution, or school of thought. His teaching on the subjects of soul winning, discipleship, and church growth can be summed up in one or two sentences spoken to his class of young men who would be going into the pastorate. Here are his words as near as I can recall them.

Young men, faithfully and prayerfully preach the Word, always holding The Lovely Lord Jesus and the Old Rugged Cross in preeminence trusting Him to draw sinners unto Himself and build them up in Him. In God's work faithfulness is success and transformed lives are growth and progress.

Another man who is on that long list of pastors and leaders of South Apalachin Church is Rev. Leroy Westbrook (1940-1943). Eight years later he was my instructor (mentor and discipler as was Dr. Lowe). I will never forget my first class with Rev. Westbrook. Two things stand out in my mind, first the test he gave us before we had any lessons and second that long canvas Bible Chart that hung in that rear lecture hall all the years I was a student at Practical.

The question: ***Who is God?*** We had the rest of that class period to write down our answers. I had no idea at that time why Re. Westbrook would ask that question. We would know by the end of that semester after we studied the sovereign attributes of the God of the Bible, the one and only verbal Revelation of the One and only True God. Incidentally, in my book *God is Busy Fixing Things*, I begin the book with the same question, and ask another basic question on the next page. The question: Who are we? John Peterson answers that question in his great hymn *In The Image of God*.

There is so much more I learned from Rev. Westbrook that had an effect on my life and ministry and I am sure those who were in South Apalachin Church in 1940-1943 were

affected as well through his teaching and life but let's go on to that Bible Chart. I was totally intrigued by it from that day I first saw it. It would form my world view and my preaching and teaching of the Word of God for the rest of my life. The chart began with The Eternal Living God creating the heavens and the earth and all things therein, including His crowning creation, man (Genesis 1 and 2). Everything was wonderful and beautiful. Then the chart pictures an old serpent coming down making chaos of God's beautiful creation, especially His crowning creation man, whom He had created in His Image and Likeness for His fellowship and pleasure (Genesis 3). This we call *THE FALL, DEATH, SIN, SEPARATION*.

But that was not the end of God's crowning creation (man). Looking to the right end of the chart were new heavens and new earth and a most beautiful city called The Lamb's Wife (Revelation 21:9. This is the home of the bride, the Church that was planned by God The Father in eternity past, purchased by God The Son at Calvary, and is being populated by God The Holy Spirit in this Age of Grace which is fastly coming to a close. How is it possible that out of these sinful, dead, separated children of Adam's fallen race could become those that He is going to present to Himself a Glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27)?

The answer is in the center of the chart. All time points to that day. There was the Cross on which *The Prince of Glory* died. That day God was in Christ reconciling the world (that fallen world of mankind of Genesis 3) unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. *There God the Father made God the Son to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.* In Rev. Westbrook's class we looked at so many Scriptures that were life transforming. Not only that Christ died for us but we died with Him (Romans 6:1-13, Galatians 2:20). And as Dr. Lowe so enthusiastically added when I asked him if he believed we were crucified with Christ his answer: ***And raised up, ascended and seated together in Heavenly places*** (Ephesians 2:1-7)!

But Rev. Westbrook's class I remember the best was the day he told us he would not be back the next semester. He then told this story to the class. I am paraphrasing: *Not long ago I preached a message on **The Blood of Jesus Christ**. I described Christ's death on the cross in pretty vivid terms, trying to get the point across that the crucifixion was an ugly bloody spectacle, but it was necessary for the forgiveness of our sins. After the service a lady met me at the door very upset with my sermon. She said she did not believe in my bloody religion, she just followed the teachings of Jesus. I then told her my story, hoping she would see her need of the Blood of Christ for the remission of her sins*

(Hebrews 9:22). I told her how God said, The Life of the flesh (these bodies in which we live) is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). Take the blood out of our bodies, we die. Now I have a blood disease that requires blood transfusions regularly to stay alive. This problem I have has given me a great appreciation for the blood of others I need regularly to live. In a much deeper sense we all need the redeeming blood that provides forgiveness for all our sins past, present, and future. Following the teachings of Jesus is good, but only through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus can we have forgiveness and life.

I have used that illustration from Rev. Westbrook's personal experiences many times over the last 63 years since I first heard him tell it to us all those years ago. Then he told us his reason for not being back the next semester. Because of his health he was moving to a different climate. He had a sale of many of the books and furniture in his office. I bought his big Bible and wrought iron stand that my daughter now has in what I call her *antique room*. Each time I see it I think of Rev. Westbrook, one of my mentors at Practical Bible School and a pastor at South Apalachin years before that time (1940-1943).

A third man I knew personally was Charley Young who was South Apalachin's pastor (1932-1935). I said personally, meaning I had met him on several occasions, but never had a personal relationship with him. He was on Practical Bible School's Trustee Board the years I was a student there. I heard him speak at the school and several times in Evangelistic services. When I came to South Apalachin as pastor I talked to many people who had known him during those years he was South Apalachin's pastor or as an evangelist throughout the 30's, 40's, and 50s. Dale Linebaugh and Gordon Hay knew him much better than I, and several people still this side of Glory in the church remember him.

This much I can say about him from those who remembered him as South Apalachin's pastor. He was a Shepherd Pastor who spent much time among the flock in the whole South Apalachin, Apalachin, and Little Meadows area and was greatly loved.

Now we come to the fourth man I knew who was South Apalachin's pastor, Gordon Hay (1953-1960), who was Gordon Hay?

I know what I am going to say may sound like I am exalting him above measure. I am not comparing him to any or all the other forty pastors South Apalachin has had over the past 200 years. To me Gordon was far more than a manager of local church and the two local churches he pastored were more than members of a church organization to him. He was my best friend for 60 years, and he saw the local churches he pastored as

flocks of the Heavenly Shepherd's sheep he was called by God to tend for Him as described in Acts 20:28. He was as Dr. Lowe taught us so many years ago: *An Ephesian Elder*. He was a *Man of Prayer*. He was a humble man. He was a godly man. Two expressions from his obituary written by his sons will tell you who he was. *He loved the people God gave him to shepherd, and he was tireless ministering to them*. They saw his death as *his promotion to the presence of the Savior whom he loved so much*. Those two expressions tell us who Gordon Hay was *He loved Jesus Christ and he loved His people*.

Rather than writing more about Pastor Gordon Hay's life and ministry I am enclosing two articles I wrote in the past. One entitled *Edify One Another* and the other that I wrote to be read at His memorial service.

“EDIFY ONE ANOTHER”

By Pastor Jim Walter

He loved and died for me that I might love and live FOR HIM

It was a Monday morning. Gorden Hay and I were enjoying our day off, building a railroad tie wall for a Cornell University professor. A great way for two of Gods Undershepherds to relax after their big day Sunday. I looked at Gorden at the other end of the three hundred pound switch tie we were carrying, and said, “You know Gorden I’ve been thinking about the sermon I preached yesterday.” He laughed and said, “It’s a little late for that isn’t it?” Don’t you think maybe it would have been better to have done your thinking before you preached it?” I laughed.

With both of us huffing and puffing we laid that 16ft tie on the wall. “Well, are you going to tell me what you preached yesterday? Gordon asked.

“Yeah, I am. The Title of my sermon was “He Loved and Died for Me That I Might Love and live for Him” What I was thinking about was what the elderly lady said to you as she went out the door after the first sermon you ever preached at South Apalachin.” Again Gorden laughed as he recalled Mrs. Yates words. “She shook her finger under my nose and said, “That was great preaching young man, but you better live it.” Again we both laughed.

My next question, “Gorden does the Holy Spirit ever cause you to feel guilty because you are not being or doing something you’ve preached to others? Take the message I preached yesterday, I know I love Him but so often I feel like the man who said to Jesus, “Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.” Instead of faith, I have to cry out to Him, “Lord I love you, help thou my lack of love. Have you ever felt that way?”

With that question Gorden responded, “Jim I’ve come up here to work with you building this tie wall, not to get under conviction. Now let’s get back to work.” We both laughed again but by now there was real seriousness in our laugh.

We both knew we were to love Him above all else and that our calling as two of His undershepherds was to lead a flock of His Sheep to do the same.

Two other conclusions we came to that day were:

First that we not only needed to preach the WORD but to live what we preach.

Mrs. Yates was right that day so many years ago when she shook her finger under Gordens nose and made that point very clear to him. He never forgot that incident, nor did I. It was good advice for all of us who are Preachers of Gods Word.

Secondly we both knew this kind of love comes only by the way of the cross where He not only died for us, but where we died to sin and self and rose to New Life in Him.

Building that railroad tie wall surely made two tired bodies that day but the real building was being done by the Holy Spirit using two of His undershepherds to EDIFY EACH OTHER that they might be better able to lead and mature the respective flocks God had entrusted to them to tend FOR HIM.

“He loved and died for me that I might love and live FOR HIM.” “We love Him, because He first loved us” I Jn. 4:19

Read at Gordon Hay's Memorial Service

MY BEST FRIEND

GORDEN HAY – BY PASTOR JIM WALTER

“I’m Gordon Hay. You don’t know me, but I’ve been praying for you.. Tonight God has answered our prayers.”

Those were the first words Gordon spoke to me. He was so excited to get over to us (Doris, my girlfriend then, my wife now for more than 60 years and myself) that he almost ran across the front of the church to get to us as we went to our seats after publicly confessing our faith in Jesus Christ. That was nearly 61 years ago.

That night two bonds were formed between Gordon and myself. One is an eternal bond. We are, and eternally will be brothers in Christ. The other is, we became **best friends**, a bond that became stronger as the years have gone by.

During the past 61 years Gordon and I shared un-numbered times together. We prayed together, we praised our Lord together, we worked together, we cried together, and yes laughed together. We bore each others burdens, encouraged each other, comforted each other, and even criticized each other. Some thing only two people can do if they love each other unconditionally.

Now **my best friend** has gone home to be with Jesus, his Lord and his God whom he not only believed in and trusted, but dearly loved and faithfully served.

Gorden genuinely loved God and manifested that love as a husband for his wife, as a father for his children, and as an under shepherd for the flocks God had called him tend and disciple for Him.

There was nothing he loved to do more than preach and teach Gods Word: always expecting God, through His Word to save and transform others as God had saved and continued to transform him. The plaque on the book shelf in his study revealed his humble attitude. (**Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet**). He was truly an under shepherd who led by example as well as by the Word he faithfully studied and preached.

Gorden was a praying man. He spent untold hours in the prayer closet praying that Gods Word which he daily read, re-read and studied would go forth in power and change lives. He interceded for the flock God had given him to tend. He prayed for Gods servants around the world. He prayed for everyone that God brought to his mind. As I said, his first words to me were “I’ve been praying for you.”

The last time we saw him before coming to Florida sitting there in that wheel chair, we, **my best friend**, my wife and I prayed together.

He is now home with the Lord he loved. We are still here. We, and I trust all of us here today, are waiting for that reunion in the air when our Lord will come back with **MY BEST FRIEND** and all those who have gone on before. It is at that time we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together to meet THE LORD in the air. “What a Day, Glorious Day That Will Be”