

Part 1

Interviewer: Edward Scott of the Black Archives of Mid-America interviewing Reverend Charles Briscoe of the Paseo Baptist Church. The date is November 19, 1975, and the time is 9:15. Revenue Briscoe, when were you born?

Respondent: I was born in June 1931 here in Kansas City. In fact, not too far from where we're sitting right now.

[0:00:31] I was born over at 2217 Wabash. I guess many of the babies at that time were born at home rather than hospitals, so I was born in our home.

Interviewer: At that time, was there a great midwife program?

Respondent: Well, no. Of course, I don't know. I couldn't say about how extensive the midwife program was.

[0:01:02] Dr. Frank [unintelligible], my mother's doctor when I was born, he was a longtime physician her in Kansas City and well known. He died I guess about four or five years ago. But he was a well-respected person in the community, and I thought quite a bit of him. And I believe he felt the same way about me.

Interviewer: So at that time, the babies were delivered by physicians in the homes, but not in the hospitals?

[0:01:29]

Respondent: Well, I could not say what percentage was delivered in the home and what percentage was delivered in the hospital. But I do know that I was born in the home. I have three brothers. I don't know just how many of them were born in the hospital, but I know I was born at home.

Interviewer: I see. What were the conditions around the time that you were born?

[0:02:04]

Respondent: As you recall, '31 is during the time of the Depression here. My father – he's dead now, but my father was a hard worker all of his life. I mean, the jobs that he had were not easy jobs at all. And I remember as a child, he told of times when men would just stand waiting for another man to fall out from the work so he could get a job.

[0:02:34] He told how hard the situation was. As I mentioned before, I came from a family where there were four boys. We had a baby sister who died of pneumonia in about 1936, I believe it was. I was just four years old. In fact, that was one of the very first recollections that I have, the police coming from the hospital to tell my mother that my baby sister had passed.

[0:03:04] We had it hard. I know what it is to have a hard time. I know what it is not to get some of the things that some children look for. I look at my children and I thank god for them. I can't give them what some parents are able to give their children, but yet there are some things that my children had before they were teenagers that I never did have in my life.

[0:03:37] But hard times in themselves never really hurt anyone. It's people's response and reaction to these times. But we knew what it was to face hard times. We knew what it was to be without food and be without some of the real necessities of life.

[0:04:01] And I look back to that, and as I look back to it, I'm grateful for what I have now, because I realize that what I have now is something that I have not always had.

Interviewer: Would it be a majority of the people in the same kind of situation that yourself and your family found themselves in, in 1931?

[0:04:29]

Respondent: Well, I would say most people were in that kind of a situation. There were a number of families that found it very hard. And as I talk with people who were growing up at that time, they too faced a hard condition and knew what it was to be confronted with problems that revolved itself around economics.

[0:05:03] There were some people who did have it well. I noticed when I went to school there were some people who dressed better and who fared better than most of them. But I would say that I was somewhere around the average, maybe just economically, just a little on the lower level than the average.

Interviewer: What about your educational background?

[0:05:31]

Respondent: I went to school here in Kansas City. I finished Attucks Elementary School. I went from Attucks to R.T. Coles, which was a vocational high school. It was a junior high and senior high. You could take a trade there. I took music as a vocation. I learned to play the saxophone mainly, saxophone, clarinet.

[0:05:56] I also played the baritone horn and the trumpet a little bit. But from Mr. Leo Davis, who was the music instructor there, I learned the fundamentals of harmony and also how to play a saxophone. In fact, before I committed myself to the ministry, I had planned to be a musician and had played a little. I had played at little places. Not much at all, but I played some.

[0:06:30]

Interviewer: Where were those schools located?

Respondent: R.T. Coles was located at 19<sup>th</sup> and Tracy. It took up a whole block. I went to school, as you know, before the Supreme Court made the decision about integration. I recall very vividly how I would pass by Manual High School on our way to our own high school.

[0:06:58] I had to walk right past it. And when I hear people holler about busing, I always reflect on the fact that many blacks had to walk by several sometimes white schools to get to their black schools. And sometimes, they were bused by several white schools to get to the black school. The difference in the technical training at R.T. Coles and what was then called Manual School – now, Manual is still in existence, and it's not a vocational school at all.

[0:07:33] It's just an academic school. But anyway, the difference was very apparent. You could walk by Manual and see parts of a plane where people could learn welding and other different types of trades. And what we had at Coles – it had good teachers. People who tried to help these students and did a good job. But we had trades like shoe repair, cooking, hairdressing, band, and other things like that.

[0:07:58] Auto repair. Electricity. But some of the trades that they were teaching the white kids they were not teaching the black kids. Of course, I believe they could have rationalized the situation by saying well, they won't be able to get the jobs anyway when they get out of school. But it was very obvious, and when the Supreme Court made the decision that separate schools are inherently unequal, well, then, we knew this by experience before the Supreme Court made that statement.

[0:08:30]

Interviewer: You said that you had quality teachers.

Respondent: Yes, we did. We had good teachers, teachers who really believed in the students. There's a vast difference from the schools when I went to school and schools now. There's a respect that we had then that we do not have now.

[0:08:57] There are certain things that the teachers could demand and command that they do not now. I'm not saying that we did not have problems. We had problems. We had fights in school. R.T. Coles, as I indicated, was located at 19<sup>th</sup> and Tracy, and I can remember some of the older kids going down on 18<sup>th</sup> Street and getting some drinks and coming back. But this was not extensive. I only remember that happening during the four years that I was at Coles just one or two times.

[0:09:29] There were drugs back then, but they were not as extensive as they are now. And all during my four years of school, I didn't know of one occasion where anyone would come to a school to try to sell drugs or deliver drugs. I came

into contact with drugs, but it was not at the school. It was away from the school. And I came in contact one time, and I think the person approached me because they felt that I had planned to be a musician and this was an image that some musicians had.

[0:10:02] There were fights in the school, but they were not like they are now. I mean, the fellas had fistfights, and when they fought, they were through. But now, it's knives and guns, you see? And there is a difference. There was a difference, it seems, also in the matter of motivation, that in many cases, the kids wanted to study when I was going to school.

[0:10:27] And now we're living in a time – and I'm not blaming kids, because I think the whole tenor of society comes to bear on this issue. But there is a lack of motivation in our kids, and there's a lack of accomplishment as far as their intellectual attainment is concerned in the schools.

Interviewer: Did your education end there at Coles?

[0:10:57]

Respondent: After I graduated from Coles, I went to the Grace Bible Institute of Omaha, Nebraska. The reason why I went there was because during my senior year in school, I committed myself to the Lord, that my life was going to be lived for him. As I indicated before, I had planned to be a musician, but in the senior year, in my senior year at Coles, I began to think very seriously as to what I should do with my life.

[0:11:30] Should I go as a musician, or should I take another direction in life? In my early teens, I accepted Christ as my savior. I heard in a very plain way the message of our Christ, of his love, of his death on the cross, of his resurrection, and I received him as my savior. And this brought about a real change in my life.

[0:11:58] And then in my senior year in high school, I at that point realized that my life was not mine but the Lord's. [interruption]

As I mentioned, during my senior year in high school, it was that time that I really thought seriously about my future, and I realized that the life that I had really belonged to the Lord, and I wanted to use it in a way that I believe that will bring honor to him and what I believe to be in keeping with his will.

[0:12:44] Now, there are some people who say that they have had some real traumatic experiences where they saw visions and things like that. That never happened to me. Rather, it was a growing conviction that this is what I should do. It was an inner urge that I had, that my life should be dedicated to Christian service. It was in my senior year in high school that I made that decision.

[0:13:14]

Interviewer: Did anything, say like perhaps a threat to your life or anything like that, cause you to make this kind of decision? Or just, like you said, it just grew?

Respondent: It was a growing urge. I had no threats to my life. In fact, I enjoyed music, enjoyed playing. I enjoyed the classes that I took under Mr. Davis. He was a good teacher and a good leader.

[0:13:50]

But there was a higher loyalty that I had. It was a loyalty to Jesus Christ. When I went off to school, I played my instruments at some occasions at school, Christian songs. When I came back from school, I sold my saxophone to get my wife our first anniversary present.

[0:14:14]

And for 20 years, I never did pick up a saxophone after that. And then one time, they asked a group of ministers to share some talents that they had, so after 20 years, I picked up the saxophone and played a couple songs, and they asked me to play here for the church. But I haven't played it much since that time.

Interviewer: Did you go on to graduate?

Respondent: Yes, I went through Grace. I attended Coles from 1944 to 1948.

[0:14:46]

I went, after I graduated from Coles, to the bible college. I attended there from '48 to '52, then I came back to Kansas City. I took some graduate work at Central Seminary, and later on, I finished up at the Missouri School of Religion, where I got my graduate degree in theology.

Interviewer: And since that time, have you been a pastor of an institution?

[0:15:21]

Respondent: Well, as far as pastoring, I pastored a church in Brunswick, Missouri. The First Baptist Church. And Brunswick is about 90 miles east of Kansas City, on 24 Highway. I pastored Brunswick for three years, and then after Brunswick, I was asked to pastor the church in Moberly, Missouri. This was the Second Baptist Church of Moberly.

[0:15:45]

I pastored that church for three years. It was while I was at Moberly that I commuted to Columbia, Missouri to take my graduate training at the School of Religion. After three years in Moberly, I was asked to come to Kansas City to direct the Kansas City Baptist Fellowship, which is a liaison program between black and white Baptists in Kansas City.

[0:16:15]

The Southern Baptists are predominantly white. Your National Baptists are predominantly black. And I was asked to serve as a liaison, a go-between,

between the two, to develop areas that we could work together and a way that people can be brought together in fellowship.

Interviewer: Why do you think that you were chosen to act as this liaison?

[0:16:41]

Respondent: Well, number one, the requirements for the position indicated that a person had to have a graduate degree in theology, had to have a BD. And a BD is almost like a bachelor's in law, see? You get a bachelor's in law, you have to have your BA first, and then you get your bachelor's in law. Well, that's the way it works for the BD. You go four years to get your BA, and then you go three years above that to get your bachelor of divinity.

[0:17:12] They have changed the name since I graduated. Now it's called a master's of divinity degree, because it is above a bachelor's. This was one reason. Another reason was that the person who was in charge of this work knew me and the person wrote and asked me if I would be interested in taking the work. But in this, there's things that just fall into place in a person's life.

[0:17:41] And this was one of those things that fell into place. I had finished my graduate work at the School of Religion at that time, and as a pastor and as a Christian, I believe in God's guidance in a person's life. And my wife and I began to seek his leadership in our lives, and somehow, there was an inner conviction before I knew this would open up, that something else was in store for me.

[0:18:11] And about a month after this conviction really crystalized in my thinking, I received a letter from Dr. [Bell], who directed the work, asking if I would consider this position, and I responded that I would. And to have those come together just made me have the conviction that this is God's leadership and will for me at that stage in my life.

[0:18:40]

Interviewer: Then on from there, how did this program work out?

Respondent: I thought the program worked well. I really did. There were some things that happened there that had not happened before. For one, and now this is in the early sixties, now. This is in the early sixties, the beginning of '63. This was during the height of the demonstrations and the time when there was tension between blacks and whites in the nation.

[0:19:13] So one of the things that we did was that we had a program where we took a white couple from a white church who spent six weeks in a black church, participating as a member, without moving their membership to that particular church. We picked out a black couple from a black church to attend a white

church. And really, it was a tremendous experience for all the churches that were involved.

[0:19:41] And I remember that as we got this started, that we had an initial meeting at St. Steven Church where the blacks and whites who were participating in the program just came together to kind of get acquainted. The first session that we had was, I did all the talking. I just went through some things with them, told them some things to expect. The second session we had was then the blacks and whites began to loosen up a little bit, and they began to talk with one another.

[0:20:11] And when we had the third session, this was before the program actually got started. These were preparatory sessions. Well, then we stood around and talked for a long time and I left the meeting because I had another engagement, and the blacks and whites were still there talking. So it took a little while for the ice to break down, but once it did, then I thought they had a very meaningful involvement. And I still have some letters in my file of people who wrote and told of the blessings that they received and realized that the church should be doing more in areas like that.

[0:20:46] Now, this was a line of work that we were doing. My involvement between black and white families in Kansas City helped me as I ran for the school board. Because as you know, in Kansas City, the black population, I think, represents about 20% to 25% of the population here in the city. Now, this means that if a black candidate is running for anything, well, then he's going to have to get white votes to win.

[0:21:22] And because of my affiliation and working between black and white Baptists, they got to know me. And for this reason, establishing a rapport like that, I was able to get some of their votes.

Interviewer: Now, some things about Paseo Baptist Church.

[0:21:46] We realize that Kansas City has a unique group of people, a unique community, is a unique community. And we'd like to look at some of the growth that has been affected by the church, and specifically by Paseo Baptist. Also, when you were saying that the children at the time, when you were in school, had a lot more motivation, and here we are today, in 1975, we're also in a kind of depression.

[0:22:27] Could you kind of relate those areas of time and how do you see the fact that we are in that kind of a situation and the reaction of the youth of today compared to the reaction then?

Respondent: All right, I think when you begin to look at the young people today, you have to realize that we are coming out of several wars. The Korean conflict, the

Vietnam conflict, and the inner tension that we have had as a nation, the conflict between black and white.

[0:23:05] I do not feel that any young person can grow up in a context like this without being affected by it. Now, when we grew up, even though the war got started in the late thirties and early forties, we went into it. And yet the type of background that we had was a little different from the background that they had.

[0:23:30] I mean, it's just a war complex. Many of the parents of these kids today grew up in a war economy, where some of them were earning more money than they'd ever earned in their lives. And it's just here of late that we have started back in the recession.

[0:24:01] But even in the recession, I know kids who are driving cars today, and we wouldn't have thought about having these cars back then. Well, I think there's a difference. I think the whole feel of the world, the world situation, is brought to bear upon these young people.

[0:24:29] And you see, today, you have to listen to a newscast almost every half an hour to keep up with things. It was not so back then. The world pressures. I mean, what happens in the Middle East affects us here. It is seen in the oil situation. And so the young people today are far more aware of world problems and other problems than what we are, because they see it right on their television screen.

[0:25:02] It's just brought right there into their homes. It's a living reality with them. And so what I'm saying is, we have just a different time today. I'm not saying that these kids are any worse than what we are, but it's just a completely different situation than what we had when we were growing up. And as I look at the situation, especially from a black perspective, I'm concerned about what is happening to black families and about the disintegration of the black home.

[0:25:39] And I would like to see us do something to kind of make a real massive attack on this problem, to really see that there is a solidarity of the black home, that kids have a security in growing up, of knowing that I have a mother that I can identify with and a father that I can identify with. Historically, as you know, we've had problems along this line.

[0:26:08] And it goes back even into slavery, and I think we feel the aftereffects of this. But I would like to see something done for the family. One of the things that I said as I began to bring my children up was that I wanted them at least to have a very solid home. [interruption]

[0:26:36] As I before indicated, I think the times in which we live have really worked against the family. And then again, there are some philosophies that are going about, ideas that people have, that the home is not necessary. I think

one of the negative impacts of the feminist movement is women refusing a role as a female.

[0:27:07] Now, this is not a wholesale condemnation of this movement, because I believe in the equality of the sexes, and I believe if a woman does a job that the man does, she should get the same pay for it. I accept that. But one of the negative impacts – and there are some negative impacts of this whole women's liberation movement – there's some very definitely negative impacts, and one of them has been kind of a rejection of the home.

[0:27:34] And this has brought about an insecurity on the part of the child. A woman feels that being a housewife and a mother is a role that's inferior, well, then I don't think there's any more noble thing that a person can do. And this is not to discount the fact that we have women out in society who play very significant roles there.

[0:27:58] Whereas I would agree to a woman's right to play these roles in society, I think it's very unfortunate that some have looked upon the role of being a mother and a housewife as a role of a slave. [interruption]

Interviewer: The church has always played an important role in the unifying of oneself in the family, and the growth of the community itself, spiritual growth, basically.

[0:28:31] How do you see the church having done this in the past, what their methods were and how can we relate them to now in order to maintain such [unintelligible [0:28:42]]?

Respondent: I think the black church – and I say black church, because it is a reality. The church itself, if it's true to its history, should not be either black or white.

[0:29:04] Because the church is the body of Jesus Christ that brings together all kinds of people. And if you look back into the history of the church, you discover that in spite of the faults that people have had, it has been the church has upheld the rights of children – especially when the church first got started. The early church.

[0:29:29] The rights of women were held by the church. It brought together slave and master. And sometimes, the slave was the minister that preached and served communion to the master who sat there. It was that body that says there's no difference between race, culture, class, sex, or denomination. We were all one in Christ.

[0:29:59] Now, this is the church in its ideal form. Within the black community, the church has played a very significant role. In fact, the preachers to begin with are the most educated people within the black community. They were the natural leaders. And when I hear people today condemning the church, I feel

that they're doing so forgetting, really, the contribution made by the black pastor and by the black church.

[0:30:30] The church was a school, the church was a town meeting place, the church was a social institution. The church was a place where they could come and find a sense of relief from the pressure and frustrations that people faced in that day. It was a place where people received a sense of dignity from the sneers and the name calling that many blacks had to face in that day, and the lynching and mobbing and all of this.

[0:30:57] It was a place where people could come together and sing and shout and drain themselves of these pent up feelings that had been gathering all week long, when they had to work for the white man. So the church has been a mother and a father in the black community and providing it with some things that I don't see how the black community really could have survived as it did without the element of the church.

[0:31:28] The church has gone through some changes. It really has. The church has been a spiritual place where people can receive spiritual guidance, but as it interpreted its spiritual role, it just didn't see it in terms of a person's relationship with god, but it saw it also in terms of a person's relationship with man and a person's relationship with his government and a person's relationship with the society.

[0:31:59] And you see, I believe it was Paul Dunbar who wrote the Antebellum Sermon, and in that, he was saying that every man that God put breath in, he intended that that man should be free. And this was based upon Moses delivering the people of Israel out of Egypt. So what I'm saying is that the church gave a sense of dignity to people, and it put within them that sense of freedom. And really, as I study the bible, and really study the bible, no one could really have a healthy understanding of the bible and be content to be second class.

[0:32:38] I mean, no one could do that.

Interviewer: That's right.

Respondent: So the church has done good work. Now, I'm not saying that all churches have been everything they should be, because the church is made up of people, and whenever you have anything made up of people, you're going to have failures and mistakes. You're going to have problems.

[0:32:59] Now, our church, we are trying in some way to help. Now, the people in our city who are faced with emergency needs – I mean, just this morning, we got a call from a mother of I believe at least three children, where they don't have lights. And right now, it's cold at night, and they need the heat in their home, and they don't have money to turn these lights on. She needs \$190-some to get it turned on.

- [0:33:34] Well, we received a number of calls like that. We have money set aside to help out in situations like that. And then we work with other agencies in providing help. And not only that, there are other areas that we are seeking to serve and have served. But I believe that the main purpose of the church is to provide the people with a type of spiritual background and fortification, a type of commitment of life where they can – really, when they get out in the community on their jobs, they can make a real significant contribution to it.
- [0:34:13] I feel this is the church's basic role, is to deal with people in preparing them and equipping them to be the person in the community and in their homes that they should be. And I think if the church does this, it will do a great job. Besides that, the church as a whole also can address itself to some problems that confront our community. We sign positions to get a black person to run for the school board, because we need blacks on the school board.
- [0:34:46] I mean, not just for the sake of having blacks, but in many cases, the whites just don't know all the problems that exist within the black community. I mean, this is not a word of condemnation, but it's just like there's some things about the white family I wouldn't know. There's some things about the black feeling, concerns, and problems that many of our white families just don't know as another black person would have, would know this.
- [0:35:18] So we've supported a black candidate. As you know, I ran for the board, and the only way that I could have served on the board is that I had a church that encouraged and to have the time, because it did take time to serve as a member of the board. It just meant a fuller day for me. I tried not to neglect the church in any way. But it took up my time to serve on the board.
- [0:35:51] So the church has played a very significant role, and especially within the Kansas City area. We have a very strong Baptist minister's union which has addressed itself to problems such as the trash problem that we had. I don't know if you recall that for some time, the city kind of wavered on getting a trash program here. And we saw trash mounting up within the black community who didn't get the services that we should. So the ministers went and several times asked them to find some way to get this trash hauled away from our community.
- [0:36:30] But they said we can't do anything. And then one time, a minister says, if you don't do it, we're going to, on 25<sup>th</sup> and Paseo just set up a big trash fire right out there. Well, they kind of shocked some people, and they said, oh, ministers shouldn't break the law or anything like that. But I found out that sometimes, whereas I don't agree with all the methods, there are some people that just won't listen until you really do something way out of the ordinary to get their attention.

[0:37:01] I remember one time some very influential whites called together some black leaders in the community, and they said in essence, you know, we're sorry we didn't listen to you. He says, we're being cussed out now by the radical element. We feel now that we should have listened to you all along. Sometimes it takes those cussings to make them aware that they should have listened to some saner voices to begin with.

[0:37:31] So when the ministers went down to the city hall in regard to the trash, they went several times, but nothing was done. And then, when there was a threat to say we're going to burn some trash at 25<sup>th</sup> and Paseo, well, then some movement was made. Some movement was made. And right now, in Kansas City, we do have a trash program. I'm not saying the ministers are the only persons who did anything about it, but they were one of those voices that spoke to encourage that this would happen.

[0:38:05]

Interviewer: On the founding of Paseo Baptist...?

Respondent: This church is an old church. It's 91 years old. And that's old. That's old as a church. This, however, is not the oldest black church. The other black church is older than Paseo Baptist Church, but this church was organized in 1884. And its name at that time was the Shiloh Baptist Mission.

[0:38:34] In fact, it was organized at 20<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore, which is the downtown area. Now, as I talked with my father and my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, I found out that blacks lived, in the early history of this city, around 18<sup>th</sup> and Grand, and all of this, which is prime property now, because at one time, blacks owned that property or at least lived there at that property.

[0:39:02] And this church was located at 20<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore. And the first pastor was Reverend G.A. Turner. These are men, of course, I would not know.  
[interruption]

Interviewer: Reverend Briscoe, you said the church was organized in 1884, and it was the Shiloh Baptist Mission, by Reverend G.A. Turner. Was he the founder of the church?

Respondent: He was the first pastor of the church.

[0:39:34] And I don't know just exactly how long he served as the pastor, but in the long history of this church, this church has not had many pastors, and some of the pastors have served a long time. I may have mentioned that Dr. Holmes, who succeeded me as pastor of this church, served here for 46 years.

Interviewer: Dr. D.A. Holmes?

[0:40:02]

Respondent: Dr. D.A. Holmes, yes.

Interviewer: Is that right? Could you tell us a little bit about his ministry?

Respondent: Well, Dr. Holmes followed a minister by the name of T.H. Ewing. Dr. Holmes came here in 1921, and he served here until 1967.

[0:40:34] And of course, as you would know, many things took place during that time. They went through the twenties into the Depression Era. In Kansas City, there was the Pendergast regime, which Dr. Holmes played a very vital part in speaking out effectively against the abuses and corruption of that particular party.

[0:41:02] Or, I should say political machinery. Dr. Holmes led this church from Vine Street, 1825 Vine, to its present location at 25<sup>th</sup> and Paseo. In fact, this church has had several names. As I mentioned before, it was first called the Shiloh Baptist Mission, and then it moved to 1322 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, where it was called the Mount Carmel Baptist Church. And then from there, it moved to 1825 Vine Street, and there it was called the Vine Street Baptist Church. [interruption]

[0:41:59] Then in 1931, there was a march made from the Vine Street Baptist Church up here to the Paseo Baptist Church, and this construction, I understand, began in 1927. It was not fully completed until 1942. So it was some 15 years or so in the building, and the final mortgage on the church was paid in July of 1949.

[0:42:34] So the church has a very interesting history, and a rich history. Dr. Holmes did an outstanding job. He built a great church. He said that when he first came, he added 500 people each year to the membership of this church. He was an outstanding orator, a great speaker, a great thinker.

[0:42:58] He was a man that stood about 6'4", six three or four, with a very heavy resonant voice, and he commanded respect wherever he went. He was a clear thinker, one who could think on his feet. He was a man who spoke with real authority, and he had the respect of people all over Kansas City. Not only Kansas City, but in other places as well.

[0:43:29] So Dr. Holmes did a great job here at the Paseo Baptist Church, and he was 90 years old when he retired. So he served 46 years and did very good work while he was here.

Interviewer: You say probably there were a few ministers. There were three. I think you named two before you named Dr. Holmes.

[0:44:04]

Respondent: All right, I mentioned that it started out with Reverend G.A. Turner as the first pastor, and then the second pastor was Reverend C. Shackleford. The next pastor was Reverend Dan Jones, and then he was followed by Reverend T.H. Ewing.

[0:44:30] And as I mentioned before, Reverend Holmes followed Reverend Ewing. And then in May of 1967, I became pastor here at Paseo Baptist Church.

Interviewer: How do you see the progress from the outset as far as the time that Dr. Holmes and yourself – you had quite a job coming into the church behind such a great person as Dr. Holmes and probably the other minister.

[0:45:06] It seems that the intention of the pastors who were initial founders were more serious than a lot of the pastors. I mean, this is kind of a stigma maybe, that exists. How do you feel about that?

Respondent: Now, let me get you clear.

[0:45:33] You said the pastors then were more serious than some you see today?

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Well, I guess a lot depends upon the pastors that you look at. My movement is among many pastors in the city, and of course pastors are people, but I have seen a real dedication on the part of many of them, that I know are real concerned about the community, are real concerned about reaching out and touching and helping other lives.

[0:46:08] Sometimes when men begin to look back, men look better from a distance than they do right up on them, and possibly when they begin to write the history about what is happening today, then I'm sure that many of those men, about whom they did write, will look better at that point than probably they did at this day.

[0:46:33] We did have some outstanding men. Dr. Holmes added to the leadership of the church. His wife was the minister of music for the church, and she did an excellent job in raising a high-quality caliber of music for the church and the influence is felt even to this day at Paseo.

[0:46:56] It does not have what I would term cheap music. It tries to have music of real worth here in the church. Dr. Holmes' contribution was in building this building and also providing some real serious leadership. Other churches in this city since I have served as pastor, they've had to make some adjustments for many things.

[0:47:30] Several things that we have tried to bring onto the church, one thing has been a real emphasis in evangelistic outreach. And by this, we mean that the membership of the church should be involved in the evangelistic thrust of the

church. And I feel that reaching out and touching people with the good news about Jesus Christ is not left simply to the pastor or to some hired staff, but that every believer has a responsibility of sharing his faith.

[0:48:04] This has been one of the emphases that we have made while we served here as pastor of the church. And then again, another emphasis that we've had is an emphasis on young people. We've tried to involve young people in the ministry of the church, and we have a well-attended youth choir. We have young people sharing in some of the things that we are doing here.

[0:48:34] When we get ready to go out into the neighborhood to reach the neighborhood for Christ, then many of those who go with us are young people. Another thing that we have was that we had a teen parent center here. And this was a center for unwed mothers where they could come and finish their high school training and also be taught the necessary health skills that they needed in bringing the baby into the world and also caring for the baby.

[0:49:10] They were able to get prenatal and also postnatal training in knowing how to care for the child when the child was delivered. And then also, they received counseling instruction, and there no doubt were some who wanted to give their child up for adoption because they realized that they did not have all that was necessary to provide a proper home for the child.

[0:49:41] So for at least a couple of years, we had the teen parent center here, and we provided a home for them. Well, there have been some other things that we've tried to do. We've built a library onto the church since we've been here.

[0:50:02] We've purchased property for parking facilities. We've purchased several lots around the church. We have a problem in terms of property here that the man who owns the property next door refuses to sell to the church. He would like for the church to agree to have a liquor store somewhere around here, and the church refuses to do that.

[0:50:32] In fact, we just could not compromise at that point. But we were able to buy the corner lots on 25<sup>th</sup> and Paseo and the corner lots on 25<sup>th</sup> and Vine, and we put parking lots there for the church. We have seen, especially recently, a growth in the church in attendance and also in the way that the people are sharing in the full support of the church.

[0:51:03] We've had a minister of Christian education. We do not have it at this point. He was able to get a better job after he served us for a while. He is now working for a publishing company. So some things have taken place during the time that we have been here. There's a young lady who is serving as a missionary to Liberia, West Africa.

[0:51:29] And most of her support comes from this church. We've developed a scholarship fund where we have given scholarship funds to young people. Of course, they have been young people of our church who have wanted to go to school and who needed some help in going to school. Our church is supporting Western Baptist Bible College to the tune of \$1,000 a year, as well as Martin Luther King Hospital.

[0:51:56] We're giving to that with the amount of \$1,000 a year. We're trying to reach out and be a part of the ministry of different Christian movements, not only in our city, but also elsewhere as well.

Interviewer: I think probably the founders had a job of just basically establishing something.

Respondent: That's right.

[0:52:27]

Interviewer: And in that time, which probably gave it that kind of a pioneer feeling that made it seem more attractive in that time. In this time, it seems that there's so much confusion in the world. Why do you say as some of the answers to the programs, such as hunger and ignorance, poverty, that are beginning to really come closer to home, and it seems to really be bringing more people to [unintelligible [0:53:06] the structure of the church?

[0:53:08]

Respondent: As far as hunger is concerned, I believe the answer to that – an answer to that problem is that the people who have the money and the resources should share with people who do not. I mean, there's no need for us to be overweight in America and people dying of starvation in other lands.

[0:53:30] Now, I belong to a group of Baptist ministers union, and we took up an offering that was given from our churches of \$2,500 to send over to the Sahara district or area of Africa. This was at the height of the famine, when the desert was moving, and there was no rain, and people could not grow crops. And the problem still exists to this day.

[0:54:00] About a month ago, we had an observance here at the church on a Sunday afternoon where people came by and were informed of the problem again and money was given towards this. We have several members of our church who are serving a Africare, where they are raising funds to relieve the hunger problem in Africa.

[0:54:30] So I believe one solution to the problem is that those of us who have should share with those who do not have. I feel that we should not only share our resources but also share our technical skills too, because I agree with that

person who says if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you give him a line and something to fish with and teach him how to fish, well, then you are making him a self-sustaining person.

[0:55:01] And I believe we should share our technical skills with them. As far as poverty is concerned, and as far as education is concerned, I believe some of these two are tied in together. In some ways, they're tied in together. I believe much of the problem here is in the matter of motivation and then also is in the matter of America being the just nation that it should be.

[0:55:33] After I finished college, I worked for 10 years at the post office, and after I became pastor here, they asked me to come and speak to a group of young people who were coming there for a training program during the summer. After I got through speaking, the postmaster had me come up to his office and introduced me to some men who were planning for the progress of that particular post office.

[0:56:05] And I was surprised when I looked around the room and I didn't see a black face among them. And some of the men who were there for the planning were men that I knew because I'd worked with them and I knew that there were well prepared, capable, educated black men there at the post office who had as much or more seniority than some of those men who were there.

[0:56:32] So I realized it reinforced the fact that, in spite of what our government says, our government is not always doing what it says. Its practice sometimes is inconsistent with its preachment. So one way of dealing with poverty is that there should be justice in jobs and promotion in hiring and also promoting in jobs.

[0:57:03] But then another problem along this line that ties in with the amount of education is the matter of motivation. People need to be motivated. Kids go to school, and they sometimes don't really try to learn. They don't give themselves to learn. And some way, we need to find a way to motivate these kids.

[0:57:28] And this is a concern that we as a church have. We want to learn effective ways of dealing with family structures. And one of the problems that I feel that we have in our community is a disintegration of the black family, and we want to find some ways that we can minister, really help and bring about a cohesiveness within the black family, because I feel that is something that we should address ourselves to as a church.

[0:58:02] I believe many of the problems that crop up in the school and in the classrooms have, as is writ, causes some problems that exist in the home. And I feel that if we can minister to the home, we will have also some effects on what happens in our public school system.

[0:58:30]

Interviewer: People are being indoctrinated to believe, through mass media, television, the different modes of dress and the different means of communication...

Part 2

Respondent: All the critical problems that they have, the crushing problems they had during slavery and during the aftermath of that, was a strong faith. And there are some people who have said that Christianity was the white man's way to keep the black man in his place. But when you really look into the matter, you discover that that was not at all so. That which breathed into the black man, or to any man, a sense that he should be free, was his Christian faith.

[0:00:33] And one thing that gives a strong, healthy self-image is for a person to know who he is and for the person to know who he is, I think he needs to have a strong spiritual faith, a Christian faith, as a background. I think he does not really become a real full, whole, complete man until the spiritual dimension of his life is taken care of.

[0:01:03] And this is the responsibility of the church. Really, the primary task of the church is to share the love of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation, with people. And when people really experience it, it is life changing. And I had a chance of going to New Guinea one time, and I was able to observe the difference between the New Guinean who had received Christ and were Christians and some of those who had not received Christ.

[0:01:38] And you could look at them – I mean, their very physical outward appearance of these people was different when they really came to know Jesus Christ. In fact, they impressed me deeply.

[0:01:56] I still recall one of the native ministers or national ministers who said that at one time, they thought that the whole world was just New Guinea, that there was not anything outside of New Guinea. And this man who five or six before years I got there was just a part of a group of New Guineans running around – and many of them involved themselves in cannibalism.

[0:02:31] In fact, when I was there in 1964, there were cannibals still there. So this man now had accepted Christ, he was a minister of the gospel, and then he said something like this. He said, we're learning that there are more people out in the world besides those of us here in New Guinea. And then he says, and we want to do something to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[0:03:00] What I'm saying is that when people are really reached with the gospel of Christ, there's a difference in their life. Things are changed in their life. And they do have a healthy identity. They begin to see themselves as someone of great worth and value. They begin to see other people also as people of worth and value. I feel that when the church has forgotten about its primary mission and doing this and reaching people with the lifechanging gospel that we have in Jesus Christ, and the church has tried to address itself to problems without taking care of its basic responsibility, I feel at this point, the church has failed.

[0:03:46] Because many of the problems that we see out here are symptoms of a deeper problem that man has. The bible calls this problem sin. And this is what Christ came to deal with, and the church's main responsibility and first responsibility is just to share the lifechanging gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are in need of it.

[0:04:13]

Interviewer: The faith that you mentioned earlier that has been the sustainment for us as a people, that faith seems to have been more deeply embedded in us as a people than anyone else, perhaps because of the kind of suffering that we had perhaps because of the natural desire or the natural link with our creator.

[0:04:50] And it has put us in a very unique position in this day and time. Do you see what I'm saying?

Respondent: I see what you're saying. Now, my travels have brought me into contact with people of different countries. In fact, just last year, in 1974, I had a chance of going to Lausanne, Switzerland, where 139 different nations were represented there in a congress on evangelism.

[0:05:29] And we saw people from Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe, and all over. We saw people there from the Pacific. So what we're saying here is that we saw people who had a commitment to Christ that was refreshing to see and that was deep and abiding and meaningful. Now, in America, the faith that the black man has had historically has been something that just took him through the fire.

[0:06:03] And he had to go through the fire. And sometimes when people are not faced with crises in their life, they take their faith somewhat for granted. But when they come up with a real crucial test, then they begin to see that they have a bedrock that they could fall on, something that really would sustain them in a crisis and that will come through in these tough times.

[0:06:31] Well, I believe what happened to us is that for a while, well, as that song says, god of our weary years and god of our silent tears, god who has brought us thus far on the way. Well, sometimes, during those weary years

and the times when the tears are to fall, we realize that we needed him. So then we got to the place that we had a little money in our pocket, we had some other things.

[0:07:03] Our old folks used to say, Jesus is bread when you're hungry, and they were hungry. Well, even though there are many people who are hungry today and we come in contact with them from time to time, just like there was a young lady who called me the other day and says, I haven't had any food for three days in my home. And that's something. It really is.

[0:07:27] Well, that is a rare occasion. It's not a common thing. And many of our people having two cars and are making a substantial amount of money, more so than what we've ever made, in spite of the injustice that exists in our society. But sometimes when that happens, people become affluent, they begin to kind of take their faith a little for granted, and they get a little at ease.

[0:07:57] But as I kind of look out historically at the black man in America, I realize that his faith was not something theoretical. It was something that we had to use in times of real crisis in his life.

Interviewer: It would seem that we have two sorts of people here. The kind of people that have been – the people when they came here to America.

[0:08:29] They seem to have had, the people themselves — the basic idea or the basic leadership may have had different purposes, but the people themselves seem to have been basically spiritual and religiously inclined. And they wore longer dresses, and they tried to be upright in a sense. And we have had to cling to that faith.

[0:09:01] Now, they became affluent, and they have gone all the way. You know, Jesus is no longer bread in their pocket, they have their own bread. But we have been able to get that kind of experience along the way, and that experience has caused us to be in a position now that we can help those people who have really seemed to have gone astray, which seems to make us a body that represents Christ.

[0:09:35]

Respondent: Well, I see your point. The oppression that black people have had has helped them to identify with other oppressed people in the world. And as you begin to meet with other people of the world, they too, being oppressed, identify with the blacks in America.

[0:10:07] Just like one Arab young man said to me. He said, you're a black American. And I said yes, I am. He says, well, I love you, but I hate white Americans. What it was, he felt himself oppressed and he felt that he could identify with a black American.

[0:10:29] And I believe other oppressed people are able to identify with black Americans as well, because they kind of see in them something of what they have gone through. Now, I think it should be said here also that just because a person goes through oppression, that in itself would not make that person spiritual or have a profound faith, because sometimes people can turn the other way.

[0:11:03] For example, there are some people today who have not experienced near the oppression that their fathers and grandfathers have experienced, but yet they're more bitter. Really, they are. They're more bitter than what their fathers and their grandfathers would be. And so often we say, let the young people solve the problem, but if you get around a number of young people, you'll discover that many of them have quite a bit of bitterness in them about some of the things that they see happening in America.

[0:11:38]

Interviewer: And would be destructive.

Respondent: And some of them have been, yes.

Interviewer: You referred to that area when we were talking about, if there's [a mixture], enough wisdom of the past and enough spirit of the pleasant, we would be able to go forward.

[0:12:09] Well, where do you see us going from here as a people and a church as far as the structure of the church and the growth of us or the growth [unintelligible] Christ?

Respondent: All right, now, as a people, I would say that there needs to be a unity and a cohesiveness. Now, by unity, I do not mean that everybody must think alike and must act alike.

[0:12:36] And one of the problems that I see is that within the black community, there are some people who say we want unity, let me do your thinking, you unite around what I think, and you conform to my will and my wish, and then we can have unity. Well, I don't feel we can have unity like that. We're not a monolithic people.

[0:12:59] We're a diverse people with many different varying backgrounds, and I think that is what enriches us. There's no such thing as just one black thinking. You know, what does the black man have to say? Well, the black man may have many different things to say. We have outstanding black Republicans and outstanding black Democrats, you know? And they stand on two sides of the spectrum.

- [0:13:29] So I feel that we need unity, but by that, I do not mean that we all have to think alike and we all have to say the same thing. We need to have a unity in our goals. I believe among us as a people that we need to come together for unity. And then again, we need to deal together with the amount of education, because many of our kids are getting shortchanged in education.
- [0:13:57] We need also to deal with the amount of crime, because that's a serious problem. And regardless of how we may curse what other people have done to us, well, then, we must recognize that much of this crime is black on black crime. My home has been broken into about five times, and each time, it was what we call a brother who did it. Well, we need to deal with problems like that. We need to deal with the problems of family solidarity.
- [0:14:32] I think this is something that we need to address ourselves to, to have some goals in bringing the family together. I believe that this can be done. I really do. Now, as a church, I believe that as far as the black church is concerned, I believe that we need to recognize what our historic roots are in this country.
- [0:15:01] But even more basic than that, we need to get back to see what the bible has to say to us in living it out today. Now, I've been studying the bible for a while, and one of the things I have discovered is that there is in the bible principles for dealing with every area of life. And I believe that the church needs to get back to the word of God, begin to teach the word of God, begin to preach the word of God.
- [0:15:30] And I'm not just saying as a theory, but the word of God is very practical. It deals with husband and wife relationships, it deals with citizen government relationships. It deals with different racial relationships. It deals with economic relationships. It deals with parent child relationships. So just every area of life. The word of God has some principles.
- [0:15:56] If we study it and glean it, we can get those from the word of God and apply them to concrete situations. So what I'm saying is that I feel that the church should be what the church was intended to be: that body that continues what Jesus Christ was doing when he was here on earth, by reaching people who are down and out and oppressed, reaching people who are oppressed by sin, who have conflicts and struggles within, and to bring wholeness.
- [0:16:26] And this wholeness, I believe, is brought about when people open their hearts and minds to Jesus Christ and receive him into the very center of their life and make him lord and master of their lives. And I have seen that whenever that is done, whenever that is done, lives are changed, homes are brought together, people get better jobs, their economic conditions improve, their educational conditions improve, their emotional and mental and physical conditions improve.

[0:17:01] I have actually seen it happen. So I'm saying that the church needs to be that which the church was intended to be to begin with: promoting, proclaiming, exalting Jesus Christ and doing what God has called us to do. And then also, this does not mean that the church should be unaware of these problems, and we should be very much aware of the problems.

[0:17:30] Here at Paseo, we give away things to help people when they're hungry. Each week, we get a number of calls from agencies for people who have no food, who need to have their utilities turned on and different things like that. So we're working in this area, and we need to be concerned about that.

[0:18:00] I think also, the church should be concerned about the housing problem. Of course, I believe the housing problem is a people's problem too. There are some human factors that cause a deterioration of homes, only you can see this happen. One of the concerns that I have is that black people do not own land like they should. In fact, I understand now that black people own less land than they did 25, 50 years ago.

[0:18:37] And we need to do something about that. I believe that when we see property becoming vacant in the inner city, it could be that a group would get together and just buy the land, just clear it off or something, and hold onto it.

[0:18:58] I'm an American, and I plan to stay here. I'm not planning to go any other place. And I feel that we should have a piece of real estate, something that we can call our own. So these are some things that I feel that the church should be doing. And I believe also that the church can motivate its members to really get out and involve themselves in the other things here.

[0:19:29] The matter of motivation of membership to involve themselves into political issues to these urban problems that we have, educational problems, is very important. I don't know if I mentioned before that here at this church we have around 57 school teachers and people who work for the school system here. The lady who is in charge of what Model Cities used to be is a member of this church.

[0:19:59] We have one person who served on the city council who's a member of the church who is now on the election board. What I'm saying is that the church should provide these people with the motivation to really go out and do an effective job in whatever area they find themselves.

Interviewer: There are other forms of religion that are availing themselves today to the people, and how do you see this as being part of the changes that are taking place?

[0:20:37]

Respondent: What do you mean by other forms of religion?

Interviewer: Among the young people, they seem to have been coming up with other forms, like Transcendental Meditation, Baha'i, the [Allah] religion, [Confucianism] and Buddhism.

Respondent: The Black Muslims, yes.

[0:21:05] Yes, of course. We call it the Black Muslims. They don't call themselves Black Muslims. And recently, they've opened up to other people as well. I respect the right of every person to believe what they choose to believe. I really do.

[0:21:28] They have the right to whatever form of worship that they choose to worship, and our mode of worship should not be imposed on anyone. In fact, the Christian faith cannot be pushed by force. Some have tried to do it, but it just can't be done. What we proclaim is a voluntary response of a person's will to Jesus Christ, that with his mind and emotion and will, he receives Christ as his savior and lord.

[0:22:04] But when anyone tries in some way to force this upon anyone, it just doesn't work. I mean, it just doesn't work. So I feel that each person should have the right to worship in the way that they would like to worship. I may not agree with what they do, but they have that right to do it.

[0:22:27] The reason why you do have a growth of these other forms of expression is because in some cases, the church hasn't done what it should have done, and so something comes in to take the place of that. And some of these groups, they have some things that are worthwhile. I mean, there's some emphasis that the Muslim would make as a worthwhile emphasis.

[0:22:57] You spoke of the Baha'i, where they speak of the oneness of the human race, which is a good emphasis. Now, fundamentally, I would disagree with these, because if a person is going to be one who believes in Jesus Christ and follows Jesus Christ, there are some things with these others that he just can't accept, because they're in direct opposition to what Jesus Christ has said.

[0:23:30] But as I stated at first, I believe that they have a right to worship and believe as they should. Now, having said that, I believe that that which offers man freedom and wholeness has been the right application of the Christian faith. Now, some people have tried to abuse the Christian faith and tried to turn it and twist it so to conform to their wishes, and there are some whites who have tried to make the Christian faith a segregated form of religion, just like the Ku Klux Klan, who call themselves Christian, but yet they're trying to twist the Christian faith to conform to what they believe.

[0:24:21] There are some people who try to use their churches to promote their type of lifestyle and their type of culture. The church was never intended to be that

way. And whenever the church becomes a servant to a person's culture, then it's no longer a church. It's just a little social clique. And we don't need things like that.

[0:24:47] So I feel that in reality, what the church was intended to be, it is that which can bring wholeness and health to people. And when you look back and see the reforms, the labor reforms that were made because people became Christians, what happened to women because of the movement of the Christian faith, what happened to children because of the movement of the Christian faith, then I see that we have here an answer to the problems that people have in the world.

[0:25:27] But then when men prostitute and just twist the Christian faith, like what is happening now between the Muslims and what people call Christians over in Beirut, Lebanon, well, Christian people don't kill people. I mean, this is not Christian at all. And when that started happening, I realized what Christ said. He says, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.

[0:25:55] But we don't fight. We don't destroy life. We're here to build up life. So these other groups have grown is one reason, the Christian faith has not been what it should have been.

Interviewer: Do you see that growth as an ongoing thing? Do you think the Christian faith itself is going to be able to regroup itself and stand up as it should?

[0:26:29]

Respondent: I see it happening. I really do. I mentioned before about the experience I had in Lausanne, Switzerland, where I believe 139 different nations came together at a congress on evangelism. And I saw some very sharp, dedicated people from different countries. I remember one young lady who was educated in America who is now principal of a high school in Bangladesh.

[0:26:57] A sharp person, very brilliant person. We met a number of people like that. Some people from Africa who have been educated in England. And these are sharp people. And when I saw that happening, I saw that God is at work in the world and is working through his people. I saw that happen. And I don't think we're going to see a demise of the Christian faith. Some people say, well, that's passe.

[0:27:27] But you see now a resurgence of a number of churches now. Churches are growing. And some black churches are growing. We experienced even here in our church a growth, a real growth, and we want to continue to experience that.

Interviewer: Okay, Reverend Briscoe, are there any other statements that you have?

Respondent: I can think of anything right now. Really, I've enjoyed this, and I hope that it's helpful.

[0:27:59] All of these answers, as you know, were just simply off the cuff. I didn't know what you were going to ask. And probably had I had a chance to think about it, I may have responded in a different way. And then again, I may not.

Interviewer: Right.