

My Recollection of the Early Nazarenes

by Paul S. Rees

Dr. Paul S. Rees shares his recollections of the early days of the Church of the Nazarene and its notable leaders.

Duration: 13:05

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Nazarenes"

Description

In the sermon transcripts, the speaker discusses the presence of humanity in our actions and motives, even when we believe our intentions are pure. The speaker mentions Dr. H. Horton Wiley, who was a prominent figure in the Church of the Nazarene and had a strong passion for the message of full salvation. The speaker describes the atmosphere of the church services during that time, emphasizing the freedom and spontaneity in worship. Printed orders of service were seen as contrary to the new freedom experienced by members of the Church of the Nazarene.

Transcript

Dr. Paul S. Reese was known as a preacher's preacher and an elder statesman of the faith, especially in the Holiness movement. He was born in 1900 and preached for 73 years. His parents moved to Pasadena, California in 1908, where his dad was pastor of the University Church of the Nazarene until 1916.

Reese served one church in Minneapolis from 1938 to 1958. He served the larger community of faith as president of the National Association of Evangelicals, preached to ministers at various Billy Graham crusades, and served as editor-at-large for World Vision International. In 1979, I asked him to share his boyhood recollections of the early days of the Church of the Nazarene.

I started the interview with the question, Tell me of your recollections of Dr. P. F. Brzee, the first general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene. Our listeners will remember that Brzee started the first church in Los Angeles in 1895. Tell me about Dr. Brzee.

You must remember now that I'm going to be drawing on a memory bank that was formed when I was in the years from 10 to 16. My father and mother and the three children of our family moved to California in 1908, when Dr. Brzee was in the early years of the work of the Church of the Nazarene. I remember very well my father's response to an invitation to conduct a series of meetings in the old First Church, as the Nazarene friends called it, at Sixth and Wall in Los Angeles, which was really the cathedral of the

Nazarene movement for a good many years.

I recall, I suppose as the most striking thing that I remember about Dr. Brzee, his face. He made a tremendous impression upon me as a boy with those piercing expressive eyes of his, which alternately were just meltingly kind and severe, stern. Another recollection I have of him is that of, well, I would have called it as a boy that he was dead in earnest.

A more mature way of describing it would be the passion with which he communicated convictions that were his. A third recollection that I have is that not many preachers that I heard in those days held my attention as well as he did. I think that if I may add now to these distinctly personal reminiscences one other thing.

It would be that having read as much as I have about Dr. Brzee, I am grateful that he had the concern for the poor that he did in fact have and expressed again and again. Tell me about some of the other leaders who visited your home and shared ministry with your father. What about Dr. Walker? I believe he was elected a general superintendent in 1911 and served until his death in May 1918.

Dr. Walker lived for a good many years, just about 20 miles from where we did. We lived in Pasadena. He lived in Glendora.

His background was that of a Presbyterian. He was a preacher of the old school in that he could easily go on for an hour and a half with a sermon, sometimes even a little longer than that. But there's no question about Dr. Walker's being a remarkable preacher.

His sermons were carefully prepared. He was an expositor. He had theological insights that were less provincial than some in the Nazarene movement because there was the carryover of much of his Presbyterian training and rearing in the Presbyterian tradition into the newer and the freer, and if I may use a theological term, the more Arminian character of the Church of the Nazarene.

What do you remember about Dr. John W. Goodwin? I believe he served as general superintendent from 1916 until 1940, and then following retirement he taught homiletics at Pasadena College for several years. Dr. Goodwin I think of as a man with a vast amount of compassion, a man who loved people, loved his Lord supremely, of course, but he loved people, and he loved children. He was a very friendly man.

He and Dr. Wiley, I suppose, were more often in our home when I was growing up than most other of the early Nazarene leaders, and I, as a boy, I had a fondness for him that never left me as a matter of fact, and I regarded him as perhaps not as towering a preacher as either Dr. Brzee or Dr. Walker, but as a man with a great and fervent heart of love for people, for the message of full salvation, and for the ongoing of the Church of the Nazarene in loyalty to its original commitments. What would a typical service be like in those days? Very free. Some felt that in order to demonstrate the difference between what was often called the old-line churches, the dead denominations, that was a phrase I heard as a boy, the dead denominations, and this new fiery movement of the Spirit of God known as the Church of the Nazarene, anything like a printed order of service would be a terrible offense to the Holy Spirit, and would be a contradiction of the new freedom that had been found by those who had become members of congregations of the Church of the Nazarene.

So, there was a great deal of freedom, there was a lot of singing, a lot of praising the Lord, a lot of hallelujahs, sometimes even going much beyond that into fairly dramatic and rather violent physical

demonstrations. I almost forgot to ask you about Dr. H. Orton Wiley. He became the theological voice of the Church of the Nazarene.

He served as president of Pasadena College for three different terms, as I recall, and was editor of the Herald of Holiness for fourteen years. Now, Dr. Wiley and my father were very, very intimate, and our two families were very close together. I remember Dr. Wiley as a man whose strength was nearly always in repose.

By and large, one would have said, this is a quiet man, and a very thoughtful man, a very knowledgeable man, knowledgeable theologically and knowledgeable homiletically and expositionally. I think of Dr. Wiley, too, as a man with a very tender heart. I often saw tears rolling down his cheeks, sometimes when he was the preacher and sometimes when my father or somebody else was the preacher.

His tenderness of spirit impressed me very, very much, and to the end of my days, I will cherish very fond remembrances of Dr. Wiley and what he meant to our family. Of course, as an educator in what we used to call the outstanding. What kind of people were attracted to the Holiness movement in those early days? They varied.

There were many, admittedly, who came because of dissatisfaction with what they felt was a departure from the faith in their congregations or their denominations. Then there were those who just blossomed because they felt that in the Church of the Nazarene, their convictions about the Gospel, their convictions about Christian holiness, their convictions about even such things as the place of women in the ministry and in evangelism, that these were recognized in a way that they had not been recognized in the groups from which they came, and they grew in this kind of climate. Just before we close, tell me about the differences of opinion and perspective of those early leaders of the Church of the Nazarene.

I think they would have to say that there were very honest differences. There was, to use a word that's very popular today, there was a certain pluralism in the circles of Christian holiness in those days. There was a man by the name of McClurkin down in Tennessee whose influence was strong in the early days of the Nazarene Church in Tennessee, and there was a man by the name of Morrison, Dr. Henry Clay Morrison up in Kentucky.

They were both Southerners. They were both committed to the Wesleyan view of Christian holiness, but Dr. McClurkin was a man who very carefully safeguarded the interpretation of holiness from the point of view of temperamental differences, psychological differences in people, one person and another. Dr. Morrison was the orator and more the dogmatist, and sometimes in what we would call conferences or convocations where there was discussion of Christian holiness and the various problems arising out of it, these two men had very honest differences between them, and once I remember Dr. Morrison got rather annoyed with Dr. McClurkin, and Dr. McClurkin, when he had a chance to speak, he said, no, we've had an example of just what I mean, that there clings to our humanity something that has to be recognized even when we believe that God looks at our motives and sees they're pure.

Well, that's a very charming response. Do you have anything else you want to say on that? I probably said too much. Thank you very much.

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