

Interview with Ruth Powell

When did you first become associated with the IPHC?

I was born into it. My mother attended it from before I was born. So I grew up in it.

How old were you when you were first saved?

Thirteen. At a youth camp here in Lake City, across town, near a graveyard. They had a big old tabernacle there. I got saved there.

How old were you when you were called to preach?

I don't have a specific date, but from then on I was interested, and our pastor, Pastor Robinson, the pastor encouraged the young people in so many ways. And I just began to feel a desire and he felt everyone should be involved in some ways. I am thankful to this church. I don't know about other churches, but they weren't as open as this church—we were a kind of oddity I think, back in the late 40s and early 50s.

And when did you start preaching?

Probably some in the some in the summers of 51 and 52. They were at local churches.

Did they invite you to preach?

Yes, Mrs. Player, she was kind of my mentor and she gave me many opportunities to preach. The first revival I ever conducted was for her in Ellerbe. In North Carolina.

Were you ordained? Licensed?

I was licensed in 1952 and ordained in 1959 or 60.

What was your first experience when bhs?

It was just a...it was at a college prayer meeting in our home. There were about twenty young people there at that prayer meeting. It was a glorious experience. I was out of it for ten or fifteen minutes. That's when I really felt that I would have to do something full time in the ministry.

How old were you?

16 or 17.

A lot of people don't understand what we're talking about when we say preachers need to be annointed. How do you prepare for a sermon?

First of all, there should be a lot of prayer. And you should seek the Lord for his will and his guidance. And then when I get the idea or maybe a scripture or maybe a title, I read all the scripture I can think of

on it and just continue in prayer and study and things seem to fall in place. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord reveals things to us. Thoughts.

Do you write it all down?

Very wordy outline. (Laughs). I guess that's the way to describe it. I used to not have to do that so much as I do now.

So you are still preaching?

Occasionally.

Were you married?

I was married in 1955. My husband entered the ministry in 1960 and I was already preaching then and we pastored a church—I pastored a church after we married and before he was licensed to preach.

Where was that?

A small church down by Charleston called Red Oak. It was the Red Oak Community. It was a country church, but in those days a good, thriving church. I don't know how it's doing now, but we had twenty or thirty young people. We just had a successful ministry there.

After you became licensed, you stayed there?

We pastored...the first church probably was here in Lake City. We were there four years. We took turns preaching. Whichever one felt he or she had the anointing, for who had the message at that time.

As you think back, is there anything that stands out to you?

I think the revival we held at Cades (?) with Sister Woodcox, from Florence Chapel, it went on for more than thirty days. The only reason we closed it was because camp meeting was started. We baptized about thirty in that revival. That was kind of the highlight of our ministry there.

How many came?

This may not sound like many, but we averaged about a hundred. It was a small church. It was a lot for that church. The Lord moved, it was great conviction. One couple left the church, got under conviction, turned around, came back to the church and got saved.

What was church like back then?

A lot of people got saved. Healings. Not many choruses. I guess that's why I have such a love for the hymns. There's a lot of gospel in the hymns.

And there are a lot of gospel choruses today and I like them, but there's just something about the old hymns. There was a lot of emotion, the Lord moved, people were hungry for the Lord. It was easier to

reach people back then—it seemed easier. A lot of people, like Sister Player, they would shout all over the church. There was a lot of that.

What is your preaching style like?

Well, I quoted a lot of scripture. Back in the early days I did not have that many experiences, maybe I did, growing up in a church with a great move of God. I quoted a lot of scripture. I had a mother who taught us a lot of scripture. I had to learn a Bible verse every day before going to school. And I attended Holmes Bible College and I had a pretty good knowledge of the scripture, and I just used the scripture.

What kinds of challenges have you had?

I had to overcome, well I guess even today, prejudice against women preachers, but that was a hindrance to me, I was timid by nature anyway, knowing that people thought I shouldn't be preaching made it difficult, but knowing the Lord blessed my ministry. It was people that didn't know I was at a certain place or people who didn't know I was a woman preacher. The Lord just kept me and encouraged me. Like David. I just tried to encourage myself in the Lord.

What kinds of subjects have you preached on?

The first sermon I ever preached was on the choice of Moses. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he chose to cast his lot with God's people. I've preached on divine healing, the Lord's prayer, the need of prayer, then the salvation and the love of God. God loves us when we are right and when we are wrong. The love of God. And the second coming. I guess what just about any preacher preaches about.

What are some of your favorite memories?

There was such interesting experiences in the Rockingham church and pastor Robinson, he made such an impact on my life. I can remember to this day sermons that he preached. I remember John Swales, he taught thirty-some years at Emmanuel College and he and Paget used to do team preaching at revivals. There were holding a tent revival and they would spend the night in the tent. And they didn't have access to washing machines and he said Pastor Robinson reached in his pocket and pulled out—it was hot in that tent—what he thought was a handkerchief, but it was a sock.

And we had a PHYS—Pentecostal Holiness Youth Society—and every Sunday we would meet before church and we had some of the most interesting and unusual programs. I remember we once had the funeral of Ima Gossip. We even got a coffin, or a casket, anyway, they had a pillow and on that pillow they had a mirror and they talked about Ima Gossip and said, there, this is gossip. We all walked around to view the “remains” of Ima Gossip, and it was a mirror.

We had youth camps. They were always a blessing to me as a young person growing up.

I wouldn't take anything for those memories and for the people I've met. I've met a lot of interesting people and friendships. We are still friends with so many of them, so many people.

Have you mentored any women?

Back in the days, there were not many women getting into the ministry.

What kind of advice would you offer to women called to preach?

Be sure. Be sure that the call is of God. Be true to that calling. Just be kind to all people, regardless. And you will meet criticism. But it doesn't matter because they criticized Jesus. And they criticized Paul. Stand true. You'll be discouraged, but don't give up for the first fifty years. (Laughs). If you can make it through the first fifty years, just don't give up. Because the gifts and the call of God is without repentance.

Where do you see the church going in the 21st century?

I want to think that the greatest days are just ahead for the church. That there are more opportunities, more ways of getting the gospel out. These are exciting days and we have lots of young people involved in ministry. I like the fact that there are a lot of mission trips. Just regular lay people in churches are going to a lot of different countries for a couple weeks and helping them with churches or with vacation Bible schools or with crusades. They go to a lot of countries like this. It's a lot of encouragement to missionaries.

And I see the church, sometimes I'm discouraged, but I try to be upbeat and encouraged because he says he will build his church and the gates of Hell will not prevail. A lot of it to me, is the anti-church, especially in the media. I don't know what to think this society would be like if this society had no churches. You can get by without a lot of things, but you need the church.

I see the church making great strides. I feel such a burden to pray for the church. We need revivals like we have had. I see the need for revival. We've had great evangelists. Billy Graham has left the scene of action and a lot of evangelists. And it's maybe the church will be shown a lot by television, but nothing will take the place of the church. I see it becoming in one sense more vital, more necessary, and fulfilling a great role.

Anything else?

I wouldn't take nothing for the journey now. It's been a good journey. The Lord has been good to me. There's been times of discouragement, times of loss, we went to Mexico as missionaries. We were robbed four times and everything, but in spite of all of that, we had a large church in Mexico City with hundreds of people...and we've had a lot of successes...God has been good to me. I have a good family. They've been supportive of us and my husband has been fantastic in his support. And God has been faithful. He has never failed me. This past fifty years, I have given it to him.