

## **Interview with Pastor Eddie Smith**

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Interviewers: Stephen Antalis, Sterling Hill, Larry Howard, and Sharpe Sablon

Larry: How long have you been the pastor at Macedonia Baptist Church?

Pastor Smith: This coming July will be thirty eight years, since I was extended an invitation to pastor this church.

Larry: What was Macedonia's stance during the Civil Rights movement? And did you agree, and if so, how so?

Pastor Smith: I was not a part of Macedonia during that era. Pastor E.S. Evans pastored here, and I succeeded him here. Macedonia was led by Pastor Evans, and they were quite involved during the height of the struggle. The fact of the matter is that Pastor Evans was one of several ministers' local ministers who were jailed during bust at barcard. Pastor H.R. Ransofore, Pastor Ben J. Mallone, there was another one—he pastured at Tremont Temple, I can't think of his name now. I guess my response to did I agree with it, my answer is yes and no. My yes is that there needed to be some involvement but I never did march during that time or never did I picket. My sisters did, because I'm not nonviolent.

Larry: What were your involvements during the Civil Rights Movement?

Pastor Smith: During the Civil Rights movement. Were you talking about the sixties? The early to mid sixties I was in school. Upon graduation in 1964, I went to Fort Valley State. I was not as smart as you guys. I had I fathered my first child before I finished high school. The next year, 65, I had another baby coming, so I married her as that baby was coming, and so I was working like throwing papers and driving some riders with me to college cause I had to commute. but I did not march because at that time Dr. King taught if you were to march and you were attacked and basically the attacks would be from white people, you were not to fight back. You were not to say anything, you were to assume a fetal position. Downtown, my older sister was picketing in front of Civils down on Third Street, and a white man approached her, and she went down and turned around. And he spat in her face. Now, when I say I'm not nonviolent, don't get me wrong, I'm not going to attack you. But if it looks like you are going to attack me, I'm going to knock the hell out of you. Did that answer your question?

Larry: Yes sir. From that time to now, what are some of the changes that you have seen?

Pastor Smith: There have been some changes. As I would go to town, often my mom would send me down to do errands. Downtown Macon had more business than it does now. I had to ride on the back of the bus, that's a change. If we went to a doctors office, not a private doctor, we had to go to the clinic. It was the Macon hospital then not the—

what's the name of it now? the Medical Center of Central Georgia—it was the Macon Hospital, and they had what they called a colored place and a white place totally separated. That is no longer. If I went to town for my mom or with my mom and my biological urge was calling, and I started to saying “mama I got to pee I got,” she said. “no.” I go to get in the store to use the toilet right here. “No, you cant use that,” so I would have to go to the back the very back. If I wanted to buy a hot dog and I wanted a Woolworth or Silvers or H.L. Greene or something like that the counters would be up close to the front door. I couldn't get me a hot dog over there, I had to go straight to the back, or I could also access it from the alley, but it cost the same at this front counter as it did in the back. I never did like that. I never did like that. And you had to sit in certain waiting rooms, colored. Somebody told me that they still have a sign down at the terminal colored or black, so you might look down there. But that sort of thing has changed. Travelers couldn't use hotels. I went to a totally segregated school, elementary and high school, college. Could not attend Mercer. Could not attend UGA because of my skin. If you're gonna talk about some changes, those are some changes.

Larry: Do you think there still changes that need to be made?

Pastor Smith: No ifs, ands, butts about it. In fact, the fact of the matter is, Jim Crow racism were sullen over the last few years, and I think they both were trying to find some way to raise our heads. When Barack was apparently going to become President, a whole lot of stuff started creeping back up. The socialism carries with it somewhat of an under racial tone. And as of right now, we have groups growing up like the Tea Party. The question is what are they drinking in their tea? Is it hay rade or is it Lipton, what kind of tea, how often do they drink tea? It's more a slap against President Obama. If you were to ask men who are participating, they would say, no we don't want to be taxed, we don't want to be taxed. Just observe some of the people talking and see how many more... See, United States is a racially diverse culture, but see who is at those tea parties. How many Hispanics do you see, how many Indians do you see, how many Americans of African descent do you see at those tea parties? Things like that should make you start to wonder, what is the real motivation behind it? And when you're talking about socialism, we have programs that have been taking care of people. When you start talking about Medicare, medicaid, a lot of those programs, social programs go out to help those who are less fortunate. I just feel the brunt of the movement is to be sure that two things, that the President is not reelected and to be sure that his policies fail. Even the one that they didn't approve what yesterday or today trying to do something about revamping Wall street money wise and couldn't get the sixty votes. Its more like a... In fact I don't remember who you guys have been more up under than I, one of the representatives said we do what we can to make sure his policies don't pass, so when you do that what do you expect?

Larry: How was the Civil Rights movement coordinated in this particular area?

Pastor Smith: Mr. William B. Randal was the main person who was leading that. He was well respected, and often he would lead out and organizing in what they called mass meetings, and they were trying to strategize and do some things. In fact, Dr. King spoke to him on two occasions, spoke at First Baptist and also down at New Zion when New Zion was on Edgewood. But basically with the minister with the pastor was, Mr. Randal, they coordinated it.

Larry: As pastor of Macedonia, do you think it's hard to get the young kids to understand the Civil Rights Movement and the effort that the older people gave?

Pastor Smith: I would say, yes, it's difficult. One reason is that we are having more drop outs now than we had then, and the people were struggling then, so as the new day when the new day dawn, that their offspring would have better opportunities so as to be more productive in society than they were. And it has almost reversed itself. Some of them cannot fathom, you guys cannot fathom, what it means to not be able to drink water when you are thirsty out of a certain fountain because of the color of your skin. I don't know if college students still do it like on spring breaks, they go out right and decide to go to Daytona Beach. But you couldn't do that in my day, you would never be in school with him. Now you understood.

One of the guys who admitted he murdered, assassinated, Malcolm X is getting out today. Did you hear? After forty four years he got out today. But anyway Malcolm called whites, blue-eyed devils. But later on when he and Dr. King got close, he changed that. That's part of the reason Malcolm was assassinated. He remained a Muslim, but he was no longer a member of the Nation of Islam. By the way, he's one of my favorite characters, because of how he was transformed, his social outlook, his spiritual outlook, he prayed next to a white person. So you see we are in this thing together. And Malcolm would call him a blue-eyed devil, and he would call Malcolm a black nigger. Things like that. Now, you a friend, and he discovered you just fine as a fellow, and if you don't experience some things, it's hard for people to tell you.

I'm trained as an elementary teacher, I went back to school, I graduated from B.S. Ingram. There were no blacks or whites mixing in school, we got old books, books were off that had been in the white schools. That's how we went to school. But in 1970, February I was teaching at B.S. Ingram, and they did the transfer. It was strategic: they sent some of the best teachers to the white schools and some of the slum teachers to the black community. That's the way it worked. Long story short, I was assigned to [Barden] out on Bloomfield, I don't know if you know where that is. It was an all white school. I went there and some parents were picketing. They didn't want niggers teaching their children. I was teaching fifth grade, and I had been there maybe a year and a half. I will never forget a name, Tracy Strong. She came up to me, she said, "Mr. Smith," I said, "Yes, Tracy?," "My momma say all niggers stink, but you don't stink." That had been planted in her mind: if you were black, you stink. Her momma told her that. You are going to believe what mamma tells you. So her momma came up that way, and

her mamma came up that way. Never experiencing what I see here now. You're going to believe what your mamma say. So one of the good things, one of the good things about desegregation is that you get an opportunity to see somebody who is not from where you are.

And now perhaps... You were in church one Sunday. You saw the way we have church. We have church the way we have church, and I didn't change the way we have church cause you were there. Now, I didn't say we got this fine young white man in here, I aint gonna be doing that. You're coming to worship, but we don't change who we are. That's the way—now hold on a minute. What does it mean to y'all for black and white just to be together? What does it mean to y'all?

Larry: Honestly, it means a lot to me. Like you said, I never went through the stuff, but my grandparents did.

[Gap in recording]

Pastor Smith: Workers in the field, hewers of wood, that that's a curse on black people because Ham is cursed. And so they pulled that text out of its context so that there were pastors just not rightly advised, correctly advised, in context it's a pretext, but they was made to believe that black peoples were cursed, and it was perpetuated by the white church. And adults and many young blacks said, "I don't want that kind of religion, it's a white man's religion." And said "slaves obey your master." Never could they say even the supervisor has a supervisor who is God in the context in which Paul spoke. So that made them say, "Naw, I don't want that kind of stuff. I don't want that kind of stuff." And then when you look at the Nation of Islam, they give him the name X because that name was taken from them by, when the blacks, and you say African Americans, I say Americans of African descent because I am no African. So I'm an American of African descent because I've never been there. My mother went there twice, and my older sister's been there several times. But that's my, I'm an African, but I'm first an American and I am of African descent. But they were saying, all of the young blacks say, "That aint for us; that aint for us." Because all of your theology, most of your trained clergy, even in the black community, had this Eurocentric bent, and we had to acquiesce as a culture. People tore that with all up. In fact there was a time, you've been to our churches and you may know it, that was, you was supposed to be what they called it. You know when they something about Africa everybody be jumping around, looking wild, you know sticks in their minds that so you can't be intelligent, you can't be intelligent. Even as today, even as today in Macon, Georgia, where you have a good racial mixing of the congregation. Watch the pastor of that church. You will have more blacks under a white pastor in a mixed church. What I call a racially-mixed church, and we have two or three around this town. One in Warner Robins, one in Macon where you have at least forty percent blacks in those churches. Tell me how many black pastors do you have anywhere in middle Georgia where you have ten percent white people? And there are some pretty good preachers in this time. I'm one of them.

Sharpe: Why do you think this is?

Pastor Smith: Racism! That they, a lot of people, not some people, would be uncomfortable in Macedonia because we make a lot of noise right? Were you uncomfortable? [No] But some people would be uncomfortable. Second of all, they propose that a black man can't lead me. Same as the President. Some people have said, "I'll be damned." In fact, they say, "No, he's not my President." They think about not being American citizens back up. Now he's President of the United States, been vetted. You can't get by racism. Aint no better preacher in this town than I am. Am I right or wrong? [You right.] Now he's saying that cause he's in my church. [laughs] But just notice it, and then you've got your well meaning people saying, "We're gonna break these racial walls down. I have seven hundred seventy members. Ya I say that cause if you don't come here often, you aint no member as far as I'm concerned. You don't have to support it. But anyway, I have two, you've seen her, she's playing in the band and choir and Billy Avenue who retired forty-three years and some Baptist congregation. So I have two. I have two. [Two white people?] Yes.

Stephen: How do you think you would change that?

Pastor Smith: I can't change it. Their hearts would have to be changed. Some people's hearts will never be changed. Some people not gonna be satisfied until President Obama gets assassinated. Some are saying right now, "I'll be damned if he's my President." But the truth of the matter is that he's the President of the United States of America. Do I always agree with him? No sir. But I respect him. And perhaps I was more happy when he was elected than all of you because I went through some stuff, and I saw some stuff. Because there was a time I hated white people.

The Lord worked on my heart. And much of it came from my grandmother who lived with a white man on a plantation. She did something or didn't do something sometime. My great grandmother, they put tar in her hair and set it afire. And she was telling me a lot of stuff. What do you think that does to a child? Knowing that somebody beat your grandmother, your great grandmother, we called her grandmother, we all lived together, my grandmother and my great grandmother. Tar in her hair and set it afire. She never really could grow hair.

One thing that propelled me to go to school, my mother would catch a bus in Macon going to Warner Robins, and she cleaned a dentist's office. She went once per week, on Thursday. No, I have to come clean. She cleaned the health department, doctor's office. He had wasted some paint on the floor like the day after she left, and she didn't go back the whole week. My momma was down on her knees with a razor blade trying to get this paint up after a whole week. He was saying, "Mattie get right there, Mattie get right there." Wouldn't it have been easier on him if he got some paper towels and gotten that thing up? No. A lot of things that you don't see, a lot of assault, made a lot of us bitter.

So when you say it's going to take a change, your heart has to change. The Lord worked on me and I found out that all white people aint like that. Just like your parents Sterling. Just because that child is black doesn't mean that he's stupid, can't learn. You bicker with him not because he's black, but because he's your brother. Brothers bicker. So it has to be a heart thing cause nobody can make you do it. I mean if the Constitution is really the Constitution of the United States of America, a non citizen can never even qualify to be President. I know that I didn't really answer your question, but that's the best way I can describe it to you.

[Gap in recording]

Pastor: Talk down, he would speak to a white man, he would do this, he would never look you in the eye. "Yas sir, yas sir, yes sir." He would do that to survive. If you were a plantation worker, cause you not on the level with him. So you got to be like docile. "Yas sir, yas sir." Stories that you never read in books like when the black man lived in the white man's back in the little chicken coop. And he had an attraction to that black man's wife. He could go get her. Stuff y'all never hear of. And when he's satisfied his biological urges, he take her back. Some things y'all never heard of and aint in books. Come down through oral history from our foreparents. That's what's missing in the black community now. We don't have enough interaction with our grandparents and our great grandparents. They like been put up. But they lived the history.

See a lot of them, and I was not apart, but I lived it. Like I said, I didn't march. That's why I don't like marching now because it's almost like hypocritical. I didn't march then and now marching on Dr. King's birthday is symbolic. It was meaningful then, so if I didn't march then what am I going to be out in the streets now for? You could learn a lot, like you talking to me, talk to some people who lived then. And those who will be blunt with you like I am. Lot of them will because you're a student they going to be prancing in. They gonna say something nice like, "Jesus wept." No, tell me the truth now.

Stephen: Have you ever regretted not marching?

Pastor Smith: No, because I told you, I'm not non-violent. And that would mess up. That's what happened over in Memphis right before Dr. King was assassinated. You have a lot of rabbles in that, they started looting. They were angry. And you know the black power thing started. Have you read *Where We Go from Here* by Dr. King? Stokely Carmichael? You need to go ahead and read it. Ok that black power stuff, go back and read it. *Where We Go from Here, Community or Chaos*, go back and read it. That's your assignment. I'm going to go tell your teacher if you don't read it, you going to get an F. All ya'll gonna get Fs. But listen, but it in your mind and read that. *Where We Go from Here*, by Dr. King, *Community or Chaos*? And you going to thank me for having you to read that. *Where We go from Here, Community or Chaos*, by Dr. MLK Jr. See things like that, as future leaders in the world you are, you need more than a one side training.

How many black authors this year were you required to study? Anywhere, in any class, tell me which class. How many were you required to study?

Sharpe: Three.

Stephen: I had a couple in other classes, but I am not really sure.

Larry: Three.

Sharpe: Three in this class.

Pastor Smith: In many classes, how are you going to become a well rounded citizen? Well since y'all not going to answer, I cannot make you answer. [laughs]

Stephen: It sounded like you were asking a rhetorical question.

Pastor Smith: [laughs] Just think about it. Think about it. If indeed we got to live together, wouldn't it be better if we could get some good direction on how to do that? And it's sad.

[Gap in recording]

Pastor Smith: Are you aware, he's reported to be the best preacher that America ever produced, lived around. Never marched with Dr. King? Are y'all aware of that? [No] See, y'all had a half-assed education.

Sharpe: Why was that?

Pastor Smith: That was his choice. You didn't have many white clergy even say anything about it aint right. That Sunday morning I woke up and that church was bombed. I was a little boy. I knew the feel I had going into church every Sunday. And we knew that black people didn't bomb it. And nobody was ever prosecuted for it. A church! A church! That's why they stopped calling it one time Birmingham, started calling it Bombingham. Shouldn't the church at least be against that? The white church? Write on your pamphlet right now, Southern Baptist, and I'm affiliated with it because Haygood, Ben Haygood, pastor of the Vineville Church, then good friends. So they started bombing churches some years ago, probably ten years ago, or maybe twelve years ago. He called me one day and said somebody needs to do something to make a statement. So we kind of got together, Vineville and here [Macedonia]. He and I would have breakfast every Thursday morning, got to be real good friends. In fact, he performed my wedding ceremony in 2000. Ben Haygood, I know you know him, then started building Vineville Church North out there on Zebulon Road. But I told Ben it wasn't going to work, but he was pastor of both those congregations. And we had some things over there on Avenue Road. His church came, came by to get some things, did some meals together over at his

church. Old Vineville I remember I spoke one thanksgiving over there at a breakfast. Kind of pulling things together.

But you won't find any white clergy who spoke against desegregation, bombing, burning, lynching. Enough to make you think isn't it? The church? The church of Jesus Christ? And you're going to get strong? One reason some of them couldn't do it. Some of the pastors were Klu Klux. There were several in this town reported when I was a boy, were members of the Klu Klux. Some of the most respected in this town, white pastors. I grew up down on Pelpus Street about a mile down here. Pelpus Street, I don't know if you know it. Go on about a mile and you see Pelpus Street come in there. I used to throw newspapers around here, sales papers for Tom Ivory, Ivory's groceries down on 2<sup>nd</sup>. We couldn't walk on this side of the street. No, that was the white side. Black boys could not walk on this side of the street. The church. Oh, I got a whole lot I can tell you. [laughs] That sounds like, y'all know I like to have fun, but that sounds like I made that up, doesn't it?

Sharpe: That side of the street? No, I believe it.

Larry: I believe it, too.

Pastor Smith: It's true. So we're to survive. I made seventy-five cents a week before I noticed. Threw them every Thursday at Tom Ivory's Groceries. That's over in south Macon over there. Threw, back then that had two, Macon *Telegraph* and Macon *News*. *Telegraph* was the morning paper and the *News* was the evening paper. I threw two paper routes. I did that, got me to college. I didn't throw the evening, I threw the morning paper. Even when I was in college I got up at about 4:30 and had two paper routes. Then, I got pick up my riders before I go to school. A lot of people brag about Macon doing this that and the other, but Ronnie Thompson had the machine gun. That tank going through the community. Shoot to kill. Shoot to kill. Have y'all heard about that? Ronnie Thompson, the mayor? See y'all, I told y'all you had a half-assed education. [laughs] Shoot to kill now. Have you ever heard of Ronnie Thompson? Go to the library tomorrow, please. [laughs] Mayor Ronnie Thompson in Macon, issued a shoot to kill order. It was all over national news on TV. Walter Cronkite was like the 6:30 news back then. Ed Defore, on the city council now, had this pen up that Ronnie Thompson put out about the riots. [laughs] Shoot to kill. Ask your parents about how—how old is your dad?

Larry: He's almost fifty.

Pastor Smith: Ask him about Mayor Ronnie Thompson. Ask him to tell you the story. Y'all read about it. All of that in this town. Boys grew up right down there on Pelpus Street. We couldn't even go on the field to play softball. Couldn't go in the swimming pool. They would let us put our hands on the fence and look at it. So we played in the street. We longed to want to play softball with those boys. Jonny "Blue Moon" Odem

ever heard of him? [No sir] Came from Macon, signed a fifty thousand dollar contract with Kansas City Royals, became Kansas City Athletics. How's the pitcher, John "Blue Moon" Odem, came to school with me, 1964, Oakland athletics. He was a star pitcher. Ever heard of Hunter, what was his name, Catfish Hunter? He was on the same team with him. But he never could play at that boys club. He had to play in the streets. John "Blue Moon" Odem. Son, back then, fifty thousand dollars was a lot of money then. That's what he signed for. Went to the World Series, I think they won the World Series. If they didn't win, they went. He was one of the main pitchers. Catfish Hunter, Vita Blue, ever heard of Vita Blue? All over, the athletics was strong, they were strong. John "Blue Moon" Odem grew up right out there. In fact, he had opened up a package store up here on Pio Nono. There's a Blue Moon package store, that package store, it's still up there now. He was the one, he put it there. John "Blue Moon" Odem, now don't go up there now because I said that. [laughs] He played with Oakland Athletics, but first with Kansas City. See Kansas City moved out there, Kansas City Royals, got to Oakland Athletics. Catfish Hunter, Vita Blue, all them were on the same team. Man, they were great. Segregated school, Valanelson High School. In fact, they have recently built another school on Anthony Road that one came to be the middle school now guess in the last couple years Valid Huston Middle School. That's where the old high school was. This middle school is about two years old now. That's where we go to school. Now ya'll didn't ask me all that. [laughs]

Larry: It's good to know though, really good.