



Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

Baptist work began late in Florida and moved slowly for 75 years. Early preachers were primarily from Georgia and South Carolina. The Florida Baptist Convention was not organized until 1854 and it was 75 years before we had as many preachers as we did churches. Most early preachers had at least three churches and it has been recorded that a few had as many as seven churches where they served as pastor.

Baptist practicality, spiritual need and Holy Spirit leadership brought about a phenomenon in 1920 that brought surprise, excitement and successful results. In July, 1920, the Osprey Church near Sarasota, had a two week revival meeting they classified as "unique." The unusual thing about the meeting was that it was led by five boys, all under the age of 20. The *Florida Baptist Witness* reported that the boys were led by Joe McLeod and "They came—they saw—they conquered. For two weeks they preached, they prayed, they sang, they shouted and the visible results were eleven baptized and admitted into the church."

Boy Evangelist

This 1920 revival led by boys was part of a work that went through the state of Florida. The front page of the *Florida Baptist Witness* on February 19, 1920, has a picture of Charlie Taylor, "The Boy Evangelist." He was a widely used preacher in revival meetings and was only 20 years of age.



Charles Forbes Taylor



Charlie with his father, Charles Sr.

Charles Forbes Taylor (1899-1994) was born in Staffordshire, England. His father was an evangelist and Charlie starting singing in revival services when he was three years of age. He was nicknamed "Happy Charlie" by the English Press due to his happy disposition. As a child he would sing in his fathers meetings and then promptly go to sleep in the service. He had no formal college or theological training but received from his father a "firm grounding in the Word of God" (*The Life Story of the English Boy Preacher*, p. 6).

Evangelist Work

Some say Charlie started preaching at age nine (Norman Nygaard, *The Crusading Taylors*, p. 4) and at age eleven he preached to over 2,000 people in an audience in Luton, England. Charlie would preach and lead the singing and one book on his life is subtitled, *The Boy Moody and Sankey*.

Charlie would whistle while the congregation sang. He would lead the singing by whistling. He said he did this for two reasons: people could hear him above the singing and he saved his voice. He preached and led the singing in over 350 services a year and this unique "whistle" style was a voice saver for him.

After age 15 Charlie's father became his advance man. He conducted early services, trained ushers, met with prayer groups, gave short courses in personal work and introduced Charlie in the first few services of each crusade.

Charlie was blond and had "crisp, crinkly hair." He was a dynamo of emotion and fervor. His younger brother Laurie was a gifted pianist and joined Charlie on the evangelism circuit. The young boys looked like girls with their long hair but no skepticism or criticism swayed them from their work. Laurie was three years younger than Charlie but was a tremendous addition to the Taylor team. Charlie said Laurie would "warm up" the audience before he preached and the talented pianist was so good that Steinway always provided a grand piano for him wherever they traveled (Nygaard, p. 3).



"The Boy Preacher" when he was eleven years old

Charlie came to the United States on the *Lusitania*, just four days before World War I was declared. He and his father came in 1914, and at age 15 Charlie had a “snappy” Overland convertible that would go 55 miles per hour (Nygaard, p. 3). Charlie met Olive May Simmons in 1917, and married her in 1922.

The Florida Connection

The Taylor team came to Miami, Orlando, Daytona Beach, St. Petersburg and Jacksonville to aid Florida Baptists in revival efforts. W. A. Hobson of First Baptist, Jacksonville said, “a new star has arisen in the field of evangelism.” (*FBW*, Feb. 19, 1920, p. 10). However, it was at First Baptist Church, Miami, that the boy evangelist had his greatest success. Dr. J. L. White was pastor of FBC, Miami, in May, 1919, when the Taylor team came to town. There were 159 additions during the church revival meeting as reported by the *Miami Baptist Associational Minutes* (1919, p.9).



Laurie, four; Charlie, seven and Ethel, three.

The Taylor Team

Although the Taylor family was never financially secure, they served Christ faithfully through Baptist churches all across the land. Charlie published books of sermons and Laurie published music throughout their careers. Charlie received his D. D., at age 30, and in 1946 received his Doctor of Laws Degree from Baylor University the same day Harry Truman was to receive his. Charlie preached in all 50 states and was offered numerous pulpits in the land. He flew with Charles A. Lindberg and was personal friends with John D. Rockefeller. When his life successes were mentioned Charlie would humbly reply, “I am just an evangelist.”

In 1920, Florida Baptists learned that God could use boy preachers. In 2012, he still can when boys listen. May the uniqueness of Holy Spirit calling break out among us.

Honoring those who honor Christ,

Jerry M. Windsor
Secretary-Treasurer
Matthew 6:33



L to R Mrs. Charles Taylor, Charlie, Charles Jr., Congressman-Ted Johnson of Oklahoma, Charles Lindbergh, and Mrs. Johnson.