

The Reverend H.W. Watson Story

Chapter 1 - The Roots Of Black Religion

James Weldon Johnson includes the following words in his timeless anthem, *Lift Every Voice And Sing*; “stony the road we trod, bitter the chast’ning rod, felt in the day that hope unborn had died...” In this simple couplet, he defines the nucleus of slavery in America. The primary means of social control on the southern plantation was the whip. A prosperous slaveholder might have hundreds of African chattel out in the hot fields stooped beneath the hot sun, toiling from sunrise to dark for no reward. Insuring their work ethic was a private Calvary of poor white roustabouts who served as overseers. On some plantations, slaves who failed to meet their quotas were stripped to the waist, hung from an iron spike and beaten until their blood dripped to the floor. In the darkness of those days, the slave learned to reach extended hands up toward the skies. They cried out to their God.

Religion on the slave plantation was a peculiar thing. Early on, the master understood the slave’s propensity for religious practice. He sought to suppress the spread of Islam or ancestor veneration among his captives. In their places, he picked select scriptures from the Bible and had them taught to his chattel on Sunday morning by a trusted white preacher. A favorite passage was Colossians 3:22 which reads: “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God.”

Eventually, Baptist and Methodist missionaries traveled south and began to hold meetings on the plantations. They taught a more open reading of the biblical texts. It was

the Bible stories and parables which struck home with the African-American captives. They found the story of Moses and the Egyptian exodus particularly interesting. Those sagas raised questions in the slave's mind. If God delivered the Israelites from the house of bondage, why not the African?

Eventually, one of the African captives would announce his or her call to ministry from God. Other community members would acknowledge the hand of the Divine on the individual. Soon African-American ministers of the gospel appeared all over the southern states. The black preacher rose to become the most revered and respected person of color on the plantation. Often, it seemed that the call to ministry ran concurrent to blood; so it would seem to be the case in the Watson family.

Chapter 2 - An African-American Family's Religious Roots

Like his father and his grandfather before him, R.W. Watson too felt called to preach the gospel. He was a country preacher who may have simultaneously served different churches in varied locations, preaching one Sunday here and another there. Reverend R.W. Watson was a strict man. He required each of his children to be present at church every Sunday. During the week, he worked as a master carpenter. He was gifted at that craft. His forte was the construction of houses.

Reverend R.W. Watson and his wife Mrs. Lorena Watson were parents of a large family. There may have been 10 children in a while. Some did not survive birth or childhood. Ethel Echols-Holmes was born in 1902. Isaac Watson came into the world in either 1905 or 1906.

In February 1907, Huey Willie Watson was born in Mar Rouge, Louisiana. He made a profession of faith in 1928 under the ministry of J.C. Rogers. Like his father, his grandfather and his great grandfather before him, Huey felt the call to the ministry. He entered the ministry in 1931 and was ordained in 1932. In that same year, Reverend Huey Willie Watson accepted a call to the Eudora Bach Church of Mar Rouge, Louisiana where he served as the under shepherd for six years. Ministering to the people that one came of age with must have been a unique experience. However, young H.W. Watson handled the task well. Many of his childhood friends came to faith in Christ through his teaching and preaching ministry.

Chapter 3 - Ministerial Training

The young Reverend H.W. Watson believed that a minister should gain the greatest level of theological education possible. However, when he finished grammar school there were no plans for more education. His father did not believe in formal education. R.W. Watson's vision for his children's future was limited to the fields. He desired that they become sharecroppers, picking cotton puffs from their thorny bolls. Huey had no taste for such mind deadening work. He showed some promise as a preacher, however. An elderly couple bore witness to his gifting and paid his tuition for two years at Bishop College.

Bishop was a highly regarded institution of higher learning founded in 1881 by the Baptist Home Mission Society. The school was named after Judge Nathan Bishop who

signed a \$25,000 pledge that funded a college for African-Americans in the eastern Texas City of Marshall.

Chapter 4- Pursuing the Call

As he progressed in years, Reverend Huey Willie Watson became known as Reverend H.W. Watson. He married Marie Barr Watson. There was one young child from the union. Huey Willie Watson, Jr. was born on November 15, 1930. (Reverend Watson first became a father prior to that marriage while still in his teen years.)

The reverend's thirst for education continued, though it was interrupted by the necessity of earning a living to support his family. Reverend Watson attended Coleman College in Shreveport, Louisiana during the week. He also matriculated at Leland College. On the weekends he served as an itinerant minister. Eventually he would go on to receive a Bachelor of Theology degree from Coleman College in 1943. (He later be awarded an honorary doctorate degree from that same college in 1957.)

Reverend Watson's hectic schedule caused him to be away from his wife and young son for long stretches of time. Sometimes, they might only see him in church on a Sunday morning. The young family often boarded with relatives because so that much of the limited funds that the minister made could go toward his tuition.

Mrs. Watson was a quiet, pious southern woman. She was a devoted wife and a wonderful mother. She passed away at the very young age of 29. Reverend Watson was now a single parent. Family members aided him in the care for is son.

Chapter 5 - Onward To Oakland, California

Reverend H.W. Watson left Eudora Baptist Church for Ludlen Chapel Baptist Church of Munroe, Louisiana. It was there that his life took a turn. Reverend Watson answered the call to to serve the St. James Baptist Church of Oakland, CA. Reverend Watson was a strong administrator. He organized the house of worship. Under his leadership the ministry grew.

By the early 1940s social and economic currents were swirling which would change the landscape of southern blacks forever. Originally, African slaves had been imported to work the fields. Cotton required a very man intensive labor pool. This is one of the reasons why southern whites did not support black educational aspirations after the Emancipation Proclamation was announced. They needed the free blacks to remain hostage to the land. If blacks became educated and left the southern parishes, who would pick the cotton?

The first event which changed everything for African-American people was the advent of World War II. The draft took able bodied white men away from the manufacturing plants which built the weapons of war. A new labor force was needed. Jobs that had been previously closed to people of color and women suddenly opened their doors. News of these high paying positions came to the poor laborers via a small African-American newspaper called the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Blacks from all over Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas began heading for California.

In that same time frame, the mechanical cotton picker was invented. Soon plantation owners had machines that could do the labor once produced by a huge, low wage labor force. Hunger caused a migration of blacks from the southern states to the north and west.

Life was no bed of roses for the newcomers to places like Oakland, California. Some families arrived at the West Oakland train station with their clothing packed in boxes. They had no money, no lodging plans and no family in town. Although the schools were integrated, public school educators would often try to shuttle black girls into home economics classes and black boys into manual labor training programs. The Oakland City Club and a number of public accommodations barred blacks. African-American people were segregated into small areas of the city which made it difficult for the new immigrants from the south to find housing. Where would they find a sense of community in such a sprawling place?

It was here that the church would often lend a hand. The African-American church was more than a place to sing and prayer. It was a village where children were nurtured and the elderly revered. It was a world beyond the world.

The former sharecroppers came west in droves looking for opportunities in factories and defense plants. Clergy followed the Great Migration, hoping to shepherd their flock in new pastures.

Beth Eden Baptist Church is the oldest African-American Baptist church in the city of Oakland. A series of meetings in 1889 gave birth to the church. It was organized in April 8, 1890 with 14 members. Beth Eden was an upscale church populated by people of standing within the African-American community. In August of 1925, Beth Eden purchased a beautiful edifice from the Swedish Baptist Church. The church hosted a Young Women's Progressive Club, a Christian center and a weekly newspaper. Beth Eden Baptist Church has also been referred to as the "mother church" because quite a number of local churches sprang from beneath its spiritual branches.

Chapter 6 - Pastoring In The Promised Land

St. James Baptist Church was founded by former members of Beth Eden. It was they who sent out the clarion call inviting Reverend Watson to come pastor their church in Oakland. Reverend Watson, a skilled administrator gave needed structure and order to St. James Baptist Church. When felt that his season there was finished, he placed G.W. Killians there as the senior pastor.

A number of members followed him as he left St. James to plant another church. This church met at the Boiler Maker's Hall on the corner of 5th and Henry Streets. The church eventually moved to 1315 Seventh Street in Oakland. Attendance averaged between 50 and 100 on a Sunday morning. The new pastor used his considerable organizational skills to reorganize the church. He even gave it a new name; Mount Calvary Baptist Church.

Reverend Watson was zealous concerning the word of God. If one of his associate pastors happened to stray from the true meaning of a text during a sermon, the pastor would interrupt him on the spot. Like many theologians he believed that God's word can never mean what it did not mean to the original hearers. Pastor Watson was a stickler for precise exegesis

One Sunday, a prominent Bay Area minister was invited to the pulpit as a guest preacher. He hollered and whooped his way through a rousing sermon. At the conclusion of his message, the offering was tallied. Apparently, there wasn't enough in the offering basket to suit him. He wanted the plate passed one more time. Pastor H.W. Watson told him that it wasn't going to happen. He said, "My people have already given

what they had.” The noted preacher never came back. However, Pastor Watson would not allow anyone to take advantage of his flock.

1945 was a tumultuous year on the world scene. Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese military. The United States armed forces dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Adolph Hitler married Eva Braun. *Spellbound* and *National Velvet* topped the movie box offices. In March of that year, Reverend Watson assumed the pastorate of yet another church. This time, he mounted the pulpit of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church.

Chapter 7 - The Call To New Hope Baptist Church

Reverend Watkins dynamic preaching brought people in by the droves. Over a thousand people joined New Hope. More than \$125,000 was raised toward the construction of a brand new building. The church purchased a lot on the corner of 36th and Market Streets. On January 19th, 1947, Reverend F.D. Haynes, pastor of First Baptist Church of San Francisco, CA. presided over the ground breaking ceremony.

Oakland, California had proven fertile ground for Reverend Watson’s ministry. Many were growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ under his leadership. He had found a hope in the west and yet there were times when he still felt drawn to visit his southern roots.

On one occasion, he answered the call to deliver a sermon as a guest preacher at a church in Louisiana. During the message he happened to mention the sweet taste of freedom that he enjoyed in the San Francisco Bay Area. He spoke about how it felt to

exercise his right to vote. It was an all-black church, comprised of rural southerners but somehow word got out. Not long after Pastor Watson returned to Oakland, a cross was burned on the lawn of the Louisiana church where he had delivered that sermon.

Chapter 8 - Mentoring The Ministers

Reverend Watson felt it was part of his calling to mentor other ministers. He provided guidance not only to the associate ministers of his church but to pastors in other fields of ministry. Often, when invited to a conference or gathering, he would invite local pastors to accompany him. Many times, they were ministers who would not have had the financial wherewithal to embark upon such a journey apart from Reverend Watson's generosity.

Mr. Huey Watson recalls a Reverend Thomas from San Francisco who accepted an invitation from Pastor Watson to go on on a cross country trip to the Baptist World Alliance in Cleveland Ohio. Mr. Watson said: "We got to Louisiana and Reverend Thomas said that he wanted to see his mother in Vicksburg, Mississippi who was far up years. Mississippi was not on the way. My dad and the other ministers in the car offered to pay for a Greyhound Bus ticket for him but he threw a fit. He said, 'Y'all are not treating me right!' So eventually they relented and we made a detour to Mississippi."

The Reverend Thomas was quite an unusual man as Huey Watson, Jr. recalls. As they traveled through the back roads of segregated Mississippi, Reverend Thomas had a habit of ogling white women in blue jean shorts. He might have found some humor in licking his lips and winking at young white women but his fellow clergy did not. Here in the swamplands and rural pastures, many a black man had found himself dangling from the business end of a rope for less. "Dad, he's going to get us killed," young Huey Watson, Jr. said to his father.

Finally, they made it to Mississippi. Reverend Thomas insisted that they stop to visit his brothers before the journey continued to his mother's house. Reverend Thomas' family was thrilled to see him. The next day they had a picnic to celebrate the arrival of their long lost brother. Mr. Huey Thomas did not find the dinner fare too appetizing. He said that they served barbecued ribs but the greens were swimming in grease. One of the brothers was assigned the chore of washing the dishes. He used cold water to perform this task because the family did not have gas or electric. This young fellow, who seemed to have some cognitive issues would alternate between washing the dishes and another task. He would go pick up dog droppings with his bare hands and then go back to washing dishes in the cold water. Needless to say, Huey Watson, Jr. passed on the picnic food. He said, "I wouldn't even drink the water."

Reverend Thomas never did go see his mother. So, the team ministers proceeded on to their destination, the Baptist World Alliance in Cleveland. Pastor Watson was a generous man. He realized that Reverend Thomas had embarked upon this journey with little more than pocket change. He was broke. So, when Pastor Watson was offered an opportunity to preach in Cleveland, he relinquished it to Reverend Thomas.

Reverend Thomas was ill prepared to meet the challenge. He gave a long, rambling sermon which was short on exegesis and long hollering. After the sermon began to stretch the time barrier, Reverend Watson sent cues for Reverend Thomas to wrap it up. The cues were ignored. Finally Reverend Watson said, "Thomas, you're thrown off and confused. Sit down now." Still the minister droned on. Finally Reverend Watson said, "Sit down and zip up your pants, Thomas!" And thus ended the marathon message.

The ministers who connected to Pastor Watson were an eclectic bunch. Huey Watson, Jr. recalls a Reverend Lacy whom they picked up in Yuma, Arizona on their way to a baptist convention in Atlantic City. Lacey was the loud, boisterous type who had a complaint for every occasion. Sandwiches were made for the traveling party at the outset of the trip because in those

times, many restaurants on the road did not serve African-American people. Well, Lacy raced through most of the sandwiches and then began to cry hunger even though he had no money. As they drove through a small southern town that summer, sick of his complaining the preachers said, "Alright Lacy, you pick out a restaurant and we'll stop." He did just that. The travelers walked into the restaurant and ordered their sandwiches. Just as they sat down to dine, the owner emerged from the back and hollered, "Hey, you guys can't eat here. It's white only." The preachers and Huey Watson, Jr. put the sandwiches down and walked out without paying. One of them had already taken a bite of his sandwich. That made no difference.

At the conclusion of the journey, that summer Reverend Lacy donned a thick, winter overcoat, a scarf and a cap. This would have been proper adornment for Alaska in January. However, they were in the Yuma desert in mid-summer. When they pulled into the gas station, the pump jockey looked at Lacy, scratched his head and said, "What's the matter with him? Is he cold?" It was 115 degrees outside.

Chapter 9 - Problems In The Pulpit

Over the years, problems arose for Pastor Watson in his push to fulfill what he felt was God's vision for New Hope Baptist Church. It is alleged that some of the members were more than non-cooperative. They were combative. In an effort to achieve unity in the local church body, the members that many felt were at the center of the discord were dis-fellowshipped. Those dismissed persons did not let the matter drop. They pursued court intervention. An arbitrator was sent from the court system to broker the peace. It didn't work. Things only got worse.

Reverend Watson's Son, Huey Watson recalls advising his father to step down from the pastorate of New Hope Baptist Church. That atmosphere there had become toxic.

There were moments when people would shout out their opinions in the middle of the

church service, even while the pastor was preaching Huey Watson recalls thinking that eventually something terrible would happen in that house of worship.

The situation was corrosive and explosive. It was just a matter of time before someone came into the church with a weapon and harmed another member. Such an act would have been seen as a reflection on the church's pastor.

One Sunday, Pastor H.W. Watson walked up to the pulpit of New Hope Baptist Church and preached a sermon entitled: "Shake The Dust Off Your Feet." At it's conclusion, he dismounted the pulpit and walked through the throng of worshippers that he had assembled as the founding pastor. Then, he walked through the doors to the building which he had constructed through blood, sweat and tears. He would never walk through them as a pastor again. Many of the older members practically begged him to stay but the hostility made that impossible. Pastor Watson, left the church that he had built from the ground up with nothing.

Reverend Watson left New Hope but he did not leave alone. A loyal contingent followed him, believing in his abilities to found another church home. In those tumultuous times, the embattled pastor was quoted as saying, "Perhaps some are worried about the building you left, but I want you to know that I am not wrapped up in a building. I am concerned with people. With God as my leader, I promise to stick a spade in another piece of ground in Oakland, and erect another building to be dedicated to God in which his people can worship.

Chapter 10 - Bethany Baptist Church is Born

On February 9, 1960, two hundred and twelve believers gathered in the Gladys Baker Memorial Chapel of Baker's Mortuary at the corner of 8th and Filbert Streets in Oakland. Bethany Baptist Church was born that night under the leadership of Reverend Huey Watson. When the invitation for membership was extended at the conclusion of church services on February 14, 1960, forty-two new members joined Bethany.

In August of 1960, Bethany Baptist Church member, Mother Ella Hunt discovered a parcel of land at the corner of 55th and Adeline Street which many felt would be the ideal location for a church building. Pastor Watson and the leadership body of the church agreed. However, it would take thousands of dollars to purchase the property and then construct a church building. The members were willing to make the sacrifice. Ground was broken and the work began.

On Sunday, October 18, 1964, a motorcade traveled from St George's Hall on Grove Street to the corner of 55th and Adeline. Shouts of ecstasy and jubilation filled the air as Bethany Church members in Sunday morning garments marched through the doors of their brand new worship center. Through Pastor Watson's faith leadership, incense rose heavenward from what had once seemed like the ashes of defeat.

Chapter 11 - Allen Temple Baptist Church's Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. Recalls A Giant

The Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., pastor emeritus of historic Allen Temple Baptist has fond recollections of the Reverend H.W. Watkins. Dr. Smith said: "Reverend Watkins' work was so outstanding that the whole community knew him. However, I got to know him to meet him so that he would know me personally when he had invited to the Bay Area, the late Dr. Garner C. Taylor from his own state Louisiana to preach at Bethany. I met

him through Pastor Taylor. They were both in Louisiana together as young men. When Dr. Gardner C. Taylor landed here in the Bay Area, he made the connection. Dr. Taylor knew me and he knew Pastor Watson. That is how I got to be acquainted. I had previously admired Reverend H.W. Watson from distance. Reverend Garner C. Taylor closed the gap.”

“The houses of worship that Pastor Watkins led attracted public school teachers. I knew some of them. They had New Hope Baptist Church under his leadership and then they went to Bethany when left to start that church. I know certain people because of their reputation. Reverend Watson was well known and respected in the city.

“What makes me a leader? A great pastor has to have the ability to draw people. If nobody is following you are you truly a leader? You have to people who believe in your leadership. You have to be an entrepreneur. When Reverend H.W. Watson walked away from New Hope, he had drawing power to build Bethany. In the Black community you have to have some people who believe in you and will stay with you.

“It’s one thing to go to a church that’s there and pastor it. It’s quite another matter entirely to found the church and build the leadership infrastructure from the ground up. Starting a building campaign is still another complex issue. You have to have amazing strength to put up a brand new building. You have to go the bank. The bank has to be sure they won’t lose their money. It’s a struggle to put up a building and meet bank notes. And then raise your salary. It takes pastor leadership. A pastor has to struggle to make sure that everyone else is paid before he or she gets their check. You have to

pay the musicians and then meet the lights and water bills. You have to pay the gas bill. You have to pay insurance for the building.

“The business side of ministry is often severely overlooked. The amazing thing about Reverend H.W. Watson is that he had both spiritual depth and strong business skills. Here is a black man from Louisiana who comes here with nothing and puts up one brand new church and then in the same city puts up another building. That is phenomenal.

“Both Pastor Watson and myself had become board members of the Progressive National Baptist Convention. In my very first year of service to that post, I had flown down to Los Angeles to preach for a convention gathering. While I was there I became ill. Dr. Watson found out about it and had them to bring me to his hotel room and they put me in his bed for several hours until I felt strong enough to preach. After I pronounced the benediction, they put me on a plane and flew me back to Oakland. Out of all the pastors at the convention, Reverend Watson was the one who reached out to me. I shall never forget it.”

Chapter 11 - Pastor Watson Anoints A Second Son

Reverend Dr. M.T. Thompson was called up to preach the afternoon service on the day that Bethany Baptist Church held its inaugural service in 1960. He first met Reverend Watson in 1956 when he was working as both a professional wrestler and a minister. Reverend H.W. Watson felt an immediate kinship for the younger preacher. He told him, “Something about you. I want you to be my other son. I want you to protect me. You are a bad n..... I want you to drive me to L.A.” Soon after the journey,

Reverend Dr. M.T. Thompson accepted the call to sonship.

Dr. Thompson recalled, "I drove him to L.A. We laughed and talked the entire way. He said, "You and Huey are brothers now."

"When the members of the Solomon Missionary Baptist Church called upon Reverend Thompson to be their pastor, he hesitated. One night, he received a phone call from Reverend Watson who told him that the Lord wanted him to accept that church.

Reverend Watson adhered to his mentor's counsel.

"Over the years, the two became great friends. Said Reverend Thompson, "People would send him to the Holy Land every 5 years. Eventually, he opened the door for me to have that opportunity.

"Reverend Watson was highly opinionated but he was a kind and humble man. He dressed immaculately. He drove a Cadillac. He was a complex fellow who tended to laugh when he was angry as well as when he was happy. He was so gifted! The great preachers of his day like Reverend T.M. Chambers, Reverend Sandy Ray and Reverend Gardner Taylor all admired him. They respected him because of the quality of his raw gift. He had instant recall. If he read it, he could say it like he had read it from a paper. He was never enslaved to the manuscript. He had the ability to mesmerize people with his words.

According to Dr. Thompson, people with light complexions and curly hair were admired and revered back in those times. Often, they were the elite of the African-American community. Reverend Watson did not adhere to this class barrier. Reverend Thompson recalled, "He could sit with the elite but he walk with the common people. As a preacher, he specialized in storytelling. He had an influence on other leading pastors. He

could have led the PNBC. He had a special love for this people. Reverend Watson told me, 'To reach people where they are, you have to reach them by being rather than just doing.' He was a father figure to not only to me, but too many preachers.

"Reverend H.W. Watson was a dynamic force in the Home and Foreign District Association. If he were here today he would have been the one to speak about Black Lives Matter. You see the Home and Foreign District Association was organized to address racial unrest and civil rights. It was formulated so that African-American church people could stick together to confront racial injustice. These people came up from the south. They knew what it meant to walk in the back door. They also knew that there was strength in numbers. Dr. Watson in the west/north Oakland area made a difference. He knew what it was to speak for the community at Oakland City Hall.

Reverend Thompson underscored Reverend Watson's love for books and thirst for theological education. He said, "There was a time when spirituality was described as being jubilant and ecstatic. It was not geared toward intellectual genius. This was the 50s and 60s, etc. Educational endeavors were charged to the Holy Spirit's revelation and indoctrination. Preachers quoted: 'Open your mouth and he will fill it.' If you could preach in a demonstrative fashion you were branded as having been with God. In the black community, education was not to be taught but brought. Reverend Watson believed that God worked through human intellect and study. He persuaded many in that direction.

"Chapter 12 - Race Man"

Dr. Watson was what many in his day would have called a “race man.” He was very much concerned with the uplift of black people in all spheres of public life. He abhorred segregation and believed in using all legal tools at his disposal to dismantle its ugly webs. As the Civil Rights Movement made changes on the national level, Dr. Watson led local Bay Area clergy to make a stand for all things just. Like his preaching forbears, he believed that true religion should be a tool in the emancipation of those on the margins.

Whereas many ministers pointed their followers solely to the next world, this dynamic clergy person told his members to stand for what was theirs in this life. He urged them to vote and to be model citizens in Oakland, the land of their sojourn. Many lives changed.

Reverend Watkins will long be remembered for the spiritual footprint that he left in Oakland but he was far from a perfect man. Reverend Dr. Thompson recalls comments made about beautiful women who would pass as they walked down the street. His son recalls that he “liked the ladies.” Eventually, a congregant named Rose, the age of his son Huey caught his eye. “She looked like a movie star,” recalls Reverend Dr. M.T. Thompson. He called her a “stallion.”

Reverend Watkins married Rose. They were a lovely couple who became the talk of the town. However, things did not go well and the marriage was strained. Huey Watkins, Jr., who had been away serving his country in the military was not particularly enthused by the fact that his dad had chosen a spouse who happened to be his age. However, he treated the First Lady with great respect.

For years, Reverend Watson complained about stomach pains. In hindsight, he might have been ill served by his personal physician. Anywhere, Reverend Watson said that he experienced pain, the doctor would give him a shot.

One day, the pastor took a prescription from the doctor to the pharmacist. The man gasped as he looked at the script. He said, "Reverend, they stopped issuing this medication in the thirties." He immediately referred Reverend Watson to another doctor.

As it turned out, Reverend H.W. Watson had cancer. It was not readily detected because it hid behind his intestines. (Today's magnetic imaging technology would have discovered it but this was back in the seventies.) The disease took its toll on the revered clergyman. He accepted chemotherapy which weakened him. He could still preach, though he had to learn how to do it sitting down. His son recalls that the Reverend delivered some of his most poignant messages during that stage in his ministry.

Dr. M.T. Thompson recalled, "In the latter days of the old man, he would not drive. He had several people who would drive him from place to place and I was honored to be in that number. He would love for me to take him to Los Angeles. He loved to travel down Highway 99. He would be formulating sermons from the time we left Oakland until we reached the Great Vine highway in L. A."

Baptist shaman that he was, Reverend Watson formed parabolic sayings using the trees and the deserts, the horses and the fields as prompts in his theological tapestry. According to the end of his life, Reverend Watson seemed to have a view into the spiritual realm that was invisible to his fellow clergy. Speaking of his impending passage,

he once told Reverend Dr. Thompson, "You see night. I see the light on the other side of darkness."

On a summer's day, August 18th, 1978, Reverend Huey Willie Watson passed away. That December, his beloved Bethany Baptist Church would make its final payment on the sanctuary that began with his vision. A scholarship was launched in his memory. Many, many ministers of the gospel left from beneath the comfort of his wings to spread the gospel all over the world.

The End