

GOSPEL SERMONS

as

Sam P. Jones

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SERMON FOUR

FIGHTING THE DEVIL

“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16).

The preacher explained that by **“them”** was meant Silas and Timothy, co-workers with Paul, who were to follow and accompany him on his missionary tour, and said:

I believe Saul of Tarsus was the greatest man in this world’s history. When I measure his head I look and admire. When I measure his heart I am at a loss to know which is the greater, his head or his heart. It takes both head and heart to make a true man. If there was a leading characteristic in the life of this great man it was his sterling integrity, his downright honesty. There was never but one trouble in the mind of this great man, and that was touching the divinity of Christ. It took the biggest guns of Heaven to arouse and convince him, but when once convinced he was loyal forever. I believe I am ready to say here in my place that Paul being an honest man, God put him straight once, and he never gave God a moment’s trouble after that until God said: “It is enough; come up higher.” Paul was such a man as I would imitate. I admire his character, true, noble, courageous, honest. And now this man, waiting for his companions at Athens, sees the whole city given to idolatry.

The charge that God brought against his ancient people was this: **“My people will not consider.”** The etymological definition of that work is “to look at a thing until you see it.”

Here the speaker illustrated the words “glance” and “consider” by reference to the study of a landscape picture, a glance would take in the main features, such as the mountain scenery, the stream and the hamlet. A consideration, or careful examination, would show the foliage of the mountain trees, the road leading to the mansion, the cattle grazing on the hill slopes, and so on. There was quite a difference between glancing at an object and considering it Paul had considered the state of affairs in Athens and his spirit was stirred within him when he saw how the whole city was given to idolatry.

ONE OF TWO THINGS

Now, said Mr. Jones, I want to say: One of two things is true of St. Louis to-night. Either the eyes of Christian people are closed to the fact, or else the facts are falsehoods; one or the other.

You can take whichever horn of the dilemma you please. I can take the daily papers of St. Louis and read your local columns, and see, without getting at the Bible, that St. Louis is wrong; that there is something radically wrong about this city; there are too many debauched characters, too many suicides, too many murders, too many that are drifting daily to destruction and ruin.

The fact is, a man don't need a Bible to see this world is all wrong; all you need to do is just to read your morning and afternoon papers, and then walk this street with your eyes open, and if you do that it will not be one week from today until you look on with horror that is indescribable.

Now, let me ask each of you: Did you ever look at your heart until you saw it? I grant you that you have glanced at it a thousand times, but did you ever kneel down and pray for light and look and look and look until you saw your heart? My Bible teaches me that:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

My Bible teaches me:

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it comes the issues of life and death.”

My Bible teaches me:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

DIFFERENT KINDS OF HEARTS

I once saw a pictorial representation of the human heart. It represented the sinner's heart; full of all kinds of wild beasts, reptiles and unclean birds — a hideous sight to look upon. Then there was the heart under conviction of sin, with the heads of all these animals turned outward, as if they were getting ready to leave. Then I saw the heart converted, cleansed, and it was represented with a shining light and a cross. I saw also the backslider's heart, with the heads of all the beasts and reptiles as if they had turned backward, and I saw the apostate's heart — a Methodist heart — as it was filled to overflowing with all manner of horrid things, and the last state of that man was worse than the first.

Oh, the heart! The heart! This world reminds me, in some of its phases, of the man down in the spring branch trying to clear the water, so he could get a clear drink. He was doing all he could to filter and clear the water when some friend called out to him: “Stranger, come up a little higher and run that hog out of that spring, and it will clear itself.” No trouble then. And I declare to you to-night, the hardest job man ever undertook in this world is to lift up your life with an unclean heart.

There is no such thing as a clean life outside of a clean heart. I know we have what we call moral men, but I don't believe you can separate morals and Christianity. In fact, the morals of this world are the paraphernalia of Christianity.

The man who is moral in the sense that he will pay his debts and tell the truth, and that sort of thing may be a villain at heart Our Saviour looked at the most moral men this world ever saw, and said: "You white-washed rascals, you!" That is our version. His version was: "**Ye whited sepulchers!**" I had rather be called the former.

TO NON-PROFESSORS

And I want to say to you men that don't profess to be Christians, I don't bring a railing charge against you. In the life of Jesus Christ not a single harsh word ever escaped His lips toward a sinner. When Jesus would talk with a sinner, He would fetch up the parable of the lost sheep, where the man left the ninety and nine safe in the fold and followed the poor, wandering sheep, and when he found it he didn't take a club and beat it back home, but picked up the poor, tired, hungry sheep and laid it on his shoulder and brought it back to the fold. But I tell you one thing. The Lord Jesus himself never lost a chance to pour hot shot and grape and canister into the Scribes and Pharisees, and they are the gentlemen I am after, begging your pardon.

Now, if the sinners about this town want to go to theaters, and want to dance and want to play cards and want to curse and want to live licentious lives, I say, "Go it. Go it boys;" but if you members of the church want to do it, I will brand you as hypocrites until you renounce your faith in Christ and have your name taken off the church books.

I've got a right to say a few things along there, and neither this world, nor the flesh, nor the devil, will interpose any objection. Don't anybody say I interposed an objection to any man who don't profess to be a Christian, or placed any obstacle in the way of his doing just as he pleases. We will attend to your case later, but now I want to look in the faces of men who have made their vows and their promises to God, and who have sworn eternal allegiance to Jesus Christ, and their lives are a shame to the Gospel and a disgrace to the character they profess. That's it.

A STORY OF MOODY

Now, let us look at our hearts. I believe this incident, related of Mr. Moody, will illustrate the point I am on. On one occasion, when he had invited penitents to the altar, there came forward a great many, and he walked back two or three pews to where two Christian ladies were sitting, and he said, "My sisters, will you walk forward and talk to those penitents?"

They looked up at him and said, "No, sir, Mr. Moody; we are praying for you."

"Praying for me?" he said. "Am I not trying to live right and get to Heaven?"

"Yes, Mr. Moody; but we are praying that you may have a clean heart."

And he said conviction entered his spirit in a moment, and he dismissed the services later and went home and fell down on his knees and prayed, "Lord God, show me my heart. Let me see it as it is." And he said, "When the light of Heaven poured in upon my heart I saw it was full of Moody, and full of selfishness, and full of worldly pride; and then I said, 'Lord God, help me to:

“‘Cast every idol out
That dares to rival thee.’”

“And,” said he, “the Lord came and washed out all unrighteousness from my heart, and from that day until now I have never preached a sermon that didn’t win souls to Christ” And I declare to you, if Jesus had in this town an army of pure blood-washed hearts we could win St. Louis to Christ And never, never, never will we accomplish the work and bring the world to Christ until we, who profess Christ, arouse ourselves and wake up and shake the devil’s fleas off ourselves and get to be decent

HYPOCRITES AND HUMBUGS

I can stand anything better than I can a hypocrite. I always did have a hatred for shams and humbugs and cheats, and of all the humbugs that ever cursed the universe, I reckon the religious humbug is the humbuggest. You remember how the students played a joke once on the professor — at Princeton, I believe it was. He was one of these old bug-ologists, and I reckon he had specimens of all the bugs in the world in his frames and boxes. And the mischievous boys got the legs of one bug and the body of another and the head and wings of others and put them together like nature had formed them, and then they laid it on the old professor’s table, and walked in and ask him what kind of a bug that was, and he said, “Gentlemen that is a humbug.”

And I tell you when a fellow gets a little Methodism in him, and a little of theaters, and a little card playing, and a little of most everything, and is made up out of a hundred different sort of things, then he is a first-class humbug in every sense of the word. He is just good anywhere.

Oh, my heart! With the heart right, with the fountain clear, the stream will be clear. With a good tree the fruit will be good. And I declare to you to-night that the hardest work a man ever tried to do is to be a Christian without religion; to be a good man with a bad heart.

Why there are just scores sitting in front of me to-night that if it were literally true that we had wild beasts and serpents and other venomous things in bodily form in our hearts, as they are typically there, I would hate to be close round some of you, for fear I might get bit before I could get out of the way. Oh, God, give us clear hearts and clear hands.

CONCERNING TONGUES

And then I will say, to be practical all along the line, did you ever look at your tongue until you saw it? Oh, these tongues of ours! These tongues of ours! We Methodists pour the water on, and the Presbyterians sprinkle it on and the Baptists put us clean under, but I don’t care whether you sprinkle, or pour, or immerse, the tongue comes out as dry as powder. Did you ever see a baptized tongue! Say, did you? Did you ever see a tongue that belongs to the Church? You will generally find the tongue among man’s reserved rights. There come in some reservations, and always where there is a reservation the tongue is retained. The tongue! The tongue! The tongue! Pambus, one of the middle-age saints, went to his neighbor with a Bible in his hand and told him “I want you to read me a verse of Scripture every day. I can’t read, and I want you to read to me.” So the neighbor opened the Bible and read these words:

“I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue.”

Pambus took the book out of his hand and walked back home, and about a week after that the neighbor met him, and he said: “Pambus, I thought you were to come back and let me read you a passage of Scripture every day?” and Pambus said, “Do you recollect that verse you read to me the other day?”

“No,” said the neighbor. “Well,” said Pambus, “I will quote it:

“I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue.”

“And,” he said, “I never intend to learn another passage of Scripture until I learn to live that one.” Oh, me! If every man, woman and child in this house to-night would go away from here determined to live that passage of Scripture!

“I said, I will take heed to my ways that I sin not with my tongue. I will keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile.”

Oh, me! Shakespeare told a great truth when he said:

He that steals my purse steals trash,
But he that filcheth from me my good name
Takes that which not enricheth him,
But makes me poor indeed.

VIOLATORS OF CHARACTER

These violators of character — I will venture the assertion there are many, many, many here to-night — if every word you said about people in this house was posted up there in legible words, here to-night, you would immediately leave this house and never be seen in public again.

“We ain’t going anywhere where they put up everything we say for folks to look at.” Now, I look at my tongue until I see it. There is many a man that in other things may do well, that will at last lie down in Hell forever, and say: “I am conscious I am tongue-damned. I would have gone to Heaven if I hadn’t got a tongue.”

My tongue! And I say to you to-night the best thing we can do with our tongues is to speak well and to speak kindly of all men. I dare assert here in my place to-night, when you take me from this sacred stand that I occupy to-night, I defy you to put your finger on a word of mine against the character or reputation of anybody. But I am not talking for myself up here. Understand that Once in Jerusalem a great crowd — it was 1,800 years and more ago, as the legend goes, or the allegory — a great crowd was gathered in Jerusalem, and they were gathered around a dead dog, and they stood and looked, and one of them said: “That is the ugliest dog I ever saw.” Another said, “Oh, he is not only the ugliest dog I ever saw, but I don’t believe his old hide is worth taking off of him.” Another said, “Just look how crooked his legs are.”

And so they criticized the poor dog. And directly one spoke up and said, “Ain’t those the prettiest, pearly white teeth you ever looked at!”

And they walked off and said, “That must have been Jesus of Nazareth that could have found something good to say about a dead dog.” Oh, me! I like those people that always like to see something kind in people in their ways and walks of life.

And then, I ask you again, did you ever look at your feet until you see them? There is a good deal in that.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Oh, Lord God! I would follow in the footsteps of Him who led the way to Heaven. There is no circumspect Christian who does not see to it that his feet are kept in the narrow way that leads from earth to Heaven. A Methodist, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Catholic in a ball-room! Their feet that they have pledged should follow in the footsteps of Christ, are there cutting the pigeon-wing to music! Now what do you think of that?

And I hear this expression: They say, “Well, our church don’t object to it”

Now I would say a very strong thing here — and I hope you will take it in the very spirit in which I say it, for I never said a kinder thing or a harder thing than that — you never, you never shall hear a truer thing. Whenever a Presbyterian, or a Methodist, or a Baptist, or a Christian, or a Congregationalist, or a Catholic says that their church don’t object to dancing and theaters, and all such things as that, they could not tell a bigger lie if they would try in a hundred years! Thank God, there is not a church named after Christ on earth that has not thundered out after these things with all the power they have got.

“Our church don’t object!” Well, now, the Episcopal Church being a church in authority — how they did thunder against these worldly amusements. That little church you belong to may not. That rotten little thing! I would not stay in it long enough to get my hat if it didn’t.

A PLUCKY METHODIST LADY

I was sitting in a train some time ago and the train rolled up to the station, and just up on the platform, nearby, were three ladies. One of the ladies said to the other:

“Are you going to the ball to-night?”

The other lady said, “I ain’t going.”

“But,” she said, “I forgot; you are a Methodist, and you don’t go to such places. I would not be a Methodist I want to enjoy myself.”

The other said, “Yes, I am a Methodist, and, thank God! I don’t want to go to such places.”

“Oh,” said the other one, “I would not be a Methodist,” and the train rolled off, and I felt like jumping on the top of that train myself and hollering, “Hurrah for Methodism!” And whenever she goes into co-partnership with ball rooms and with all of the worldly amusements that embarrass the Christian and paralyze his power — whenever the Methodist Church goes into co-partnership with these things, I will sever my connection with her forever. And I love her and honor her to-day because she has stood like a bulwark against these things, and denounced them from first to last.

One of the honored preachers of this town, a man whose good opinion I value highly, one of the noblest, truest ministers of this town, said to me: “I declare to you, our churches are little more than a graveyard. We have been killed and almost buried by this tide of worldliness that has swept over our homes year after year.” And that is the truth. And I can read a ten-page letter that I got from a citizen of St. Louis to-day, and turn every face in this house as pale as death. That man wrote like he knew what he was talking about There is many a mother at 12 o’clock’ at night in this town that can sing with the blood trickling in her heart,

Oh, where is my wandering boy to-night?
He was once as pure as the driven snow.

REMOVING THE CARCASSES

And oh, why, why, why would I take this carcass, and that carcass, and the other carcass that are so offensive? Why would I bring them out before this congregation? Nothing, nothing, nothing would make me do it but to get you to take those carcasses that are despoiling the very odors of your city, and bury them out of sight forever. That is it. You all have spent two or three nights looking at me. God help you to look at yourselves awhile. And you will think I am a beauty before you get through.

I look at myself from head to foot — my hands, my heart, my feet, and my tongue. I look at my ways and walks and character in this community. Did you ever look at yourself as a member of the church? Did you ever wake up some morning and shut your eyes and lay there and say, “Well, suppose every member of the church in town was just like me, what sort of a church would we have in this town? Suppose every member of the church in town prayed as little as I pray, what sort of a church would we have? Suppose every member of the church in town paid as little as I pay, how long before the whole thing would be sold out by the sheriff?”

Oh, my brother! It is well enough, now and then, for a fellow to get a square, honest look at himself. What sort of a Methodist are you? There is a man that has promised to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil, and the vain pomp and the glory of this world, and he has promised on oath, before God and man, not to follow or be led by them. What is your life? There is that Presbyterian, consecrated to God by the most solemn ceremony that heaven ever listened at. Now, what is your character? There is the Episcopalian; with the imposing hands of the clergy laid upon his head, and with a ceremony as solemn as eternity, he was dedicated in the church to God last night, and to-night he is in the biggest ball in town, dancing his way to Hell.

SALVATION DURING LENT

And no longer than this very year, in one of the cities of the South, one gentleman told me — said he: “I saw the Episcopal clergyman lay his hand on the heads of a class of twenty one night, and,” he said, “the next night eighteen out of that twenty were at a magnificent ball.”

Now, you say: “I wouldn’t have done that; I would have waited a week.” Well, if a fellow is going to do it at all, better get right at it. Don’t you think that’s so? How long ought a fellow to wait after he joins the church before he goes to his devilment? Now, that’s it.

I wish I could get all the Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians in this city, and all other churches, to live just like they promised to live. I wish I could get all the Episcopalians in town to be as good out of Lent as they are in Lent. That would be good, wouldn’t it? And I never could see why a fellow ought not to be as good one time as another. Did you? I never could. And I’m going to be just as good the year round as any Episcopalian in this town is during Lent. I reckon they all hope to die in Lent. If a heap of them die out of Lent, the devil will get them in my judgment.

In a great many places they dance Lent in, and they dance it out. Like the Irishman talking about holidays in America— said he: “Instead of hanging our heads and sorrowing over the crucifixion of our Saviour, we Americans fire it in and fire it out.

FIGHTING THE DEVIL

Now, I don’t pick out any denominations, and say anything about one denomination that I would not say about another. There is no denominationalism in this. I have no purpose and no desire in my heart to say one thing about one denomination that I would not say against another. That is true. I am just talking true things, and any night you come here if you don’t like the way this is rattled off, you can rack out of here just the minute you please. For I propose, God being my helper, to speak of the truth as I see it, and I don’t care what man or devil or cities or earth or hell may say, I am going to preach, while I do preach, what I believe to be the truth.

And I will tell you, Christian people, if you think the devil is going to surrender any ground in this town until every inch is covered with blood, you do not know the devil as well as I do. I will tell you that I have been fighting His Majesty several years, and I declare to you that he is always ready for a fight. He has possessed nearly two thirds of this city for nearly forty years, and if you think he is going to make a voluntary surrender of his territory, you do not know him. He is going to fight and fight, and every child he has got is going to help him; you can put that down. And I tell you there is another thing; there is a heap of members of the church going to help him, too. They will that. Some places the devil goes to he never has anything to do himself. He puts his hands in his pockets and goes round and gets members of the church to run his devilment for him.

“They do his work cheaper for him than any other class. He don’t have to pay them, and they board themselves. In some towns the leading ball-room dude is a member of the church — the fellow that gets them all up and runs the thing.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

I look at myself as a member of the church. Oh me, brother! When you see yourself as a member of the church, as a professor of religion, it will do you good. I will ask you again, did you ever look at yourself as a father? Oh, me! How close you get to a man's heart when you talk to him of his family. Brother and sister, did you ever have your innocent child sit on your lap, put its little arms round your neck and imprint the kiss of innocence on your cheek?

Have you ever looked on your lovely children lying in their bed and said: "Of all children God ever gave, my children have the purest and best of fathers."

You can go home to-night and wake up your little Willie. Get him quite awake, and ask him:

"Who is the best man in St. Louis?" He will answer, "Why, you, papa."

Ask him, "who would you rather be most like?" and he will reply, "why, you, papa."

Ask him who is the best man in the world and he will say, "why, you, papa."

He ain't got no sense. And that is why we curse, and damn and ruin our children. They can see no harm in us and just as we do they will follow and imitate us. A single man may drink, as a single man and he may swear, as a single man he may lead a godless life, but as a married man you had better call a halt and ask where you are leading your children to day by day.

You may sit in the chairs of this hall night after night; you may simply have your curiosity excited; you may simply come here to laugh; but when you gather your children in your arms and see that your bad example is leading them to death and hell, there is no joke about that — no laugh about that! God pity me, and pity you in our relations toward those that lean upon us; and if there is any fact in my history I bless God for in my heart to-night, it is the fact that not a sweet child of mine ever looked in my face when I was not a Christian, trying to serve God and set it a good example.

Did you ever look at yourself as a mother? Of all beings that earth claims its blessings from, it looks as though a mother ought to be the best. Mother, what is your life before your children? Consider yourself. Did you ever look at your children till you saw them? Wife, did you ever look at your husband till you saw him? Husband, did you ever look at your wife until you saw her? If there is anybody in the world I would have get to Heaven, it is my wife; and there is a husband who never talked ten minutes to his wife on religion; and there is a wife who never opened her mouth to her husband about the way of life. Oh, me! When we think of a home that is Christless, what a sad thing!

SEEING ST. LOUIS

And then we ask you again, did you ever look at St. Louis until you saw it?

Did you ever take it by streets and blocks? Did you ever count the bar rooms in this town? Did you ever count the beer gardens in this town? Did you ever count the number of men that went in and out of the bar room and beer gardens? I bring this question square before you. Did you ever count the number of soiled doves that curse this city and curse themselves? Oh, my God, when we look at these pictures we have to shut our eyes and drop down upon our knees. We say, "God deliver us and God speed us." Did you ever count the billiard tables in this town? Did you ever count the gambling halls in this town? Oh, me! No wonder this one writes and that one writes, "Jones, God bless you! Turn loose your guns and do your best to wake up the Christian people and show them how this town by streets and blocks is drifting to Hell every day."

Now, I am going to stick to truth while I am here, and I say to every man and to every influence in this town unfriendly to Christ and unfriendly to the Bible to fight back. I do not look for anything else. I want to say right now that I like to see things moving up, and if you can say anything worse of me than I can of you, lamm in, and I will beat you to the tank in that line, maybe.

Pick every flaw you can in every sermon, and if I cannot pick more flaws in your life than you do in my sermons I will yield the feather to you. I say to you now we propose to get your eyes open so that you can see yourselves. That is the first sight you ought to look at. Then look at Paul. When he went to the city of Athens so wholly given up to idolatry it stirred his heart within him. I have heard Christian people say that they had no feeling, no enthusiasm, no religious fervor, but never since I joined Christ's church have I been devoid of religious fervor and enthusiasm. The man who goes about like a corpse, with no feeling, no enthusiasm, that man is either dead to all intents and purposes, or he has closed his eyes to what is going on about him.

When that great man visited the city of Athens, so wholly given up to idolatry, it stirred his heart within him. And he went over to Mars Hill, pointed to the inscription "**To the Unknown God**" and preached that grand sermon generated in his soul as he walked through the streets of the city and saw that it was wholly given up to idolatry; and I tell you to-night when we see ourselves and our city and our surroundings as they are, there is hope for us.

SEEING THE CROSS

There is just one thing more I want you to do — that is, to see the cross. It is the hope of the world. It is the Balm of Gilead. It has the power to save. It is the redemption of the race. Oh, my brother, fourteen years ago and a few days I, a poor, wretched, ruined, lost sinner, walked up to see my father die. Oh, how I loved that father and how I broke his heart. I have wished a thousand times that I had my father back just one hour that I might lean my head on his bosom and hear him speak the words of kindness and advice he has spoken to me in the past. As I stood by his dying couch he took my hand in his bony hand, and a heavenly smile rested on his face just before he passed out of this world. He did not die; he did not die. His faculties were as bright and his hope as buoyant in the very agonies of death as they ever had been. As I took his bony hand he said:

"My poor, wayward Godless boy! You have almost broken my heart, and you have given me so much trouble! Won't you tell your dying father, now, that you will meet him in the good world?"

I stood there for a moment convulsed from head to foot I said, "Yes, father, I will meet you in the good world." I turned away from that dying couch, and every step I have made from that time to this has been to the good world. And I mean, with the grace of God, to keep my promise. I left that bed a wretched sinner, and looked to God. Looked up there and:

I saw one hanging on the tree
In agonies of blood.
He fixed his languid eyes on me,
As near his cross I stood.

Sure, never, to my latest breath
Can I forget that look;
He seemed to charge me with his death,
Though not a word he spoke.

My conscience felt and owned the guilt
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins his blood had spilled
And helped to nail him there.

A second look he gave, which said:
"I freely all forgive,
My blood is shed to ransom thee,
I die that you may live."

Blessed Christ, live forever to save dying men.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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