

Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones:

A Minister of the Gospel

The Only Authorized and Authentic Work

By his wife
Assisted by
Rev. Walt Holcomb, a
Co-worker of Mr. Jones

Copyright © 1907

CHAPTER NINE

HIS FAME SPREADING

Mr. Jones had preached throughout Georgia, and had already come into prominence as an evangelist. While he had not preached beyond the boundaries of his state, yet his reputation had gone before him, and he was becoming known in adjoining states.

In the great meeting held in Macon, Ga., 1881, in the Methodist church, with Rev. Jos. S. Key, D.D., as pastor, Mr. Jones became intimately acquainted with Rev. A. J. Lamar, pastor of one of the Baptist churches of that city. After this Dr. Lamar accepted a call to the Central Baptist church at Memphis, Tenn., and when he had gone there to his pastorate there was a meeting of the general pastors' conference of that city to consider the question of holding a great union revival, and after deciding to have the union revival there came the more important question of who would be a suitable leader. In former years they had had Earle, Hammond, Moody and other celebrities. There was no man at this time with a great reputation who was available, and the ministers were at their wits' end.

Finally Dr. Lamar arose and said: "Why not get Sam Jones?"

And immediately the question came up: "Who is Sam Jones?"

Dr. Lamar said: "I refer you to Dr. S. A. Steele, or Dr. R. H. Mahon. Probably they can tell you about him, as he is a Methodist, and a member of the North Georgia Conference."

Both of these ministers immediately spoke and said that they had never heard of Sam Jones.

"Well," said Dr. Lamar, "he is the most unique man I ever saw. He is a sensation within himself. He can come nearer turning the city upside down than any other man upon this continent. If you will get him and give him the middle of the road he will stir up things. The only trouble will be to get a place big enough to hold the audience."

After much discussion it was finally agreed by Drs. Steele and Mahon to correspond with Dr. A. G. Haygood and find out something more about the Georgia revivalist. Whereupon Dr. S. A. Steele, pastor of the First Methodist church of Memphis, wrote to Dr. Haygood (afterward Bishop Haygood), stating the circumstances, and asking if the preachers of Memphis could afford to “carry” Sam Jones. Dr. Haygood replied in this laconic manner:

“Sam Jones is a Methodist preacher
Good and true.
Give him a chance and he’ll
Carry you.”

The reply of Dr. Haygood was so satisfactory that the conference unanimously instructed Dr. Lamar to write and extend to Mr. Jones an invitation to visit Memphis.

Mr. Jones accepted the invitation; reported in Memphis on January 6, 1884. Dr. Lamar met him at the Peabody Hotel, and found Mr. Jones “joking” with some commercial travelers. He took him home with him, and after being greeted by Mrs. Lamar, Mr. Jones said: “Sister Lamar, I never felt so far from home in all my life; and aside from you and Brother Lamar, I don’t know a soul in this great city.”

Sunday morning he preached in the Central Baptist church on “Prayer,” and captured the hearts of Dr. Lamar’s people, which made the pastor very happy.

The place selected for the union meeting was the Court Street Cumberland Presbyterian church, that being the largest building in the city. The first union service was held Sunday afternoon, and the meetings continued for five weeks.

The first two weeks of the meeting was up-hill work, in spite of the immense crowds and growing interest. The lack of co-operation upon the part of the preachers discouraged Mr. Jones, and he felt that the meeting was not growing in power as it should have done.

Dr. Lamar, his faithful friend and helper, went to his room on Saturday night and found him — to use Mr. Jones’s own expression — “under the juniper tree.” Dr. Lamar was surprised and grieved to find Mr. Jones so discouraged, and after discussing the situation, they resolved to take Christ at his own word when he said, “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” And they went to prayer.

After that night Mr. Jones began preaching with renewed vigor and force; and on the next Sunday afternoon (the third Sunday of his stay in Memphis) his preaching produced a great awakening. His manner, style and use of the language of the common people began to make impression upon them. He gave full play to wit, humor and pathos; sometimes his audience was convulsed with laughter, at other times angry, then by his pathos he moved them all to tears. The people went away talking, wondering and criticizing for they had never heard the like.

The preachers were shocked by his plainness of speech and chagrined at his arraignment of them for their lack of power. While they winced under his reference to them they took it as good-naturedly as they could, and they, too, were becoming more and more convinced of his way of thinking.

The crowds had grown daily until the building ceased to be large enough to accommodate the audiences that gathered. Then Dr. Lamar and Mr. Jones discussed the propriety and advisability of a men's meeting, in order that they might have greater results. Such meetings were not known in the South at that time. Perhaps in the Western States and in some of the Northern States such meetings had been held. A great many prophesied that it would be a failure in attendance and results; but when the hour for services came the streets were crowded with men going to the Cumberland Presbyterian church. Soon the auditorium was filled and standing-room was at a premium. When Mr. Jones entered the building and saw the immense audience, he was inspired with the scene, and ready for the services. The flash of his wonderful eyes and the great spirit that imbued him with power made his words almost irresistible. He preached that powerful sermon, "*Escape for Thy Life*," his text being taken from the nineteenth chapter of Genesis and the seventeenth verse.

It is a strange coincidence that in his last great men's meeting in Oklahoma City, when there were from six to seven thousand men powerfully and tremendously moved, when thousands of men came forward and shook hands with him, pledging God a better life, that he should have used the same text that he used in his first great men's meeting in Memphis.

Mr. Jones spoke but a few words before he had the undivided attention and sympathy of all his hearers, and the interest grew deeper as he proceeded; and at times reached an intense degree of enthusiasm. We shall, perhaps, not exaggerate when we say that none present had ever heard the truth so fearlessly, so earnestly, so tenderly, so faithfully preached. The common sins of men were held up in all their wickedness and deformity, and strong men trembled as they listened to the fullest exposure of their wickedness. At times the audience roared with laughter. At times they burst out in applause, and when the speaker closed, under the power of his wonderful pathos, nine-tenths of all the men present were in tears. We doubt if any one present ever saw so many men brought to tears. As he concluded this wonderful sermon Mr. Jones said: "Every one here who feels that he needs God's mercy and desires a better life let him fall down and engage with us in this closing prayer."

Instantly the vast audience fell down upon their knees, and there were not twenty men out of the multitude who did not respond to this appeal. It was an inspiring scene.

This men's meeting was the turning point in the revival. The backbone of opposition had been broken. The whole town had been won by the evangelist, and the throngs that came to hear him hung upon his words.

The newspapers took up the meetings and gave much time and space to them. The services became the talk of the town. On the streets, in the stores, at the shops, in the homes, "Sam Jones" and the revival were the subjects of almost all conversations.

The churches in Memphis previous to this revival show that religion was at a rather low ebb. The *Commercial-Appeal* says: "The various churches in Memphis of late years seem too much disposed to act upon the supposition that their respective denominations were close corporations, intended for the worship of those already saved, instead of making new converts and adding new members to the churches.

"Recently a Memphis minister, zealous in his work, deplored that the ministers and the churches had not accomplished more in the past, and expressed the startling opinion that one hundred thousand dollars had been spent in Memphis by the various religious denominations, and that notwithstanding this vast expenditure of money all of the churches had not gained more than one hundred converts.

"But the minister of four weeks ago, who regretted that so little had been accomplished by the expenditure of so much money for church purposes, will find much consolation in the result of the union meetings in progress in this city. It showed that in union there is strength; for so soon as the various denominations united their forces they accomplished what they failed to do when divided. These meetings were a tribute to Christianity from the different denominations engaged in the work. Much good has been accomplished by their harmonious action."

While the weather was, perhaps, the most inclement ever known in that latitude, with the rain, hail, sleet and snow constantly falling; it did not prevent the people from coming out in great numbers. There was a constant stream of wet and shivering humanity pouring into the great auditorium day and night, until there wasn't standing-room. This unique preacher, "the Georgia evangelist," attracted and interested the people.

The *Commercial-Appeal* says: "The crowd increased as his reputation spread over the city, and if he should continue his labors, it would require the exposition building to hold the people anxious to hear him. His power over the people is a mystery. Peculiarity is said to be the primary quality of greatness that the property a man has in common with other men will never attract the world, and to be distinguished one must exhibit some rare peculiarity. Mr. Jones certainly has remarkable characteristics, but it would be difficult to define them. He is no sky-scraper, but wholly devoid of fustian and rant; never stands on tip-toe with hands stretched aloft as if he would pull down the stars.

"His language is transparent in its simplicity, but all his intellectual powers so admirably mixed and blended are brought into requisition in every sermon, and their action is delightfully harmonious. There is neither too much nor too little of any given quality. The judgment and the imagination are in perfect equipoise. As he speaks his soul seems to be a fountain of living water. Much of his success and popularity consists in understanding human nature, and the emotions of the heart, and in saying what his hearers have often thought but never before heard defined. It is this gift which enables him to reach and move the multitude.

"Mr. Jones has a vivid imagination, but his illustrations and metaphors are simple, pointed and applied with a directness and pungency which the most obtuse can understand.

“The imagination which this eminent minister developed in his discourses shows that if he were ambitious for fame as a popular orator he could go flaming through the land, distributing meteors and rainbows while striding from cloud to cloud, mountain to mountain, and star to star. His eloquence, however, is simple and pathetic, reaches every avenue of feeling and sympathy. The eloquent bubbles that float and dazzle have no longer life than the cadence of the singer, but the chords that Mr. Jones strikes continue to vibrate upon the soul.”

Mr. Jones also held a service especially for the women. The great auditorium was crowded to its utmost capacity, and the women of all walks of life were seen participating in the service. The *Commercial-Appeal* in speaking of this service, said: “Yesterday morning Court Street Church was literally packed with Memphis ladies — even the gallery was full, and there was not a vacant seat, many were heard to remark that ‘it was never so seen in Memphis,’ and there was probably no one present who had ever seen such a vast audience of women. Except the pastors and Mr. Jones, there were no men present. Although Mr. Jones was not feeling well, he spoke three-quarters of an hour, and held the undivided attention of the audience until the last word fell from his lips. He was listened to amid smiles and tears, and it could be easily seen that his simple, earnest, tender, original way of presenting things was taking deep hold on hundreds of hearts. He showed the auditors why they were not better wives, mothers and daughters; why they were not better Christians; and then showed how in all these things they could grow and expand till they should sweeten their homes, save their husbands and raise up children to call them blessed. Any child of ten summers could understand all he said. His illustrations were fresh, clear-cut, very impressive and long-to-be-remembered. There is no question that hundreds of mothers, wives and daughters went away from the meeting with a resolution deep down in their hearts to be and do better in all the relations of life.”

When the revival finally closed, it was the consensus of opinion that it was the greatest ever held in Memphis. Mr. Jones had established himself as an evangelist with marvelous gifts, and had won for himself almost national prominence in the religious world. The conversions and reclamations ran up into a thousand or more, while those who joined the different churches numbered more than six hundred. The city received a great moral uplifting, and was greatly stirred religiously. The people began to take more interest in the work of the church and religion seemed to be on the increase.

Dr. S. A. Steele, pastor of the First Methodist church, wrote an article to the *Texas Christian Advocate* giving some characterization of Mr. Jones’s preaching. Dr. R. H. Mahon, pastor of the Central church, wrote to the *Nashville Christian Advocate*, calling attention to his gifts and graces. His fame began to spread in every direction, and before he had left Memphis he had received a great many letters from various sources, asking him to conduct revival meetings.

He completely won the city before his five weeks had expired, and it was with great sorrow that the people bade him good-by. The *Memphis Avalanche* says: “It is not often that a strange minister can ingratiate himself at once into the good graces of a community; especially is this true of the class called evangelists. As a general thing the evangelist is a compound of piety and egotism; offensive in his mannerism, conceited with his prominence and affected in his preaching.

“Those who have been looking for any of these points in Mr. Jones are disappointed. His preaching is plain, earnest and true. He is every inch a preacher; he has a message to deliver and he does so in words that reach the understanding and consciences of his hearers.”

Cartersville had heard of his success away from home, and was proud of the reputation that he had made. The *Cartersville American* had the following tribute to pay Mr. Jones upon his arrival from Memphis:

“Sam Jones is the greatest revivalist the South has ever produced. I never saw his equal. There is something very wonderful about the man. He can jump on a dry goods box on the public square and commence preaching, and in five minutes every barkeeper and street loafer in town will be listening. He can go to the darkest corner of Pickens County and the most ignorant man in the congregation will understand and appreciate his sermon. He can stand up before the finest city church, before the most intelligent audience and hold them spellbound by his eloquence. He can appear before a mixed audience in a theater and silence the hissing tongues and the loud laugh by the simple story of the cross. I have known him since he was a wild, rude, dissipated boy on the streets of Cartersville. Before he professed religion and commenced to preach, he was as common as any boy I know. He has loomed into importance as an evangelist and revivalist until he stands now second only to Talmage and Moody. He is a pale-faced, spare-built, dark-skinned man, and would not attract the second glance from a casual observer. But when he speaks he catches the ear of everybody, and touches the heart of every listener.

“He is strikingly original, and his imagination is rich and fertile, his illustrations are forcible and pointed, his language is terse and strong, his appeals are touching and pathetic, and his powers of endurance beyond anything I ever saw. So talked a gentleman in the presence of the editor the other day, ‘Mr. Jones is a wonderful preacher. His recent visit to Memphis was attended with the most gracious results. Everywhere he met with a perfect religious ovation. We have read with much pleasure the press accounts of his preaching. We are proud of Sam Jones, not only because he is a Cartersville man, but because he is a true man, an earnest preacher and a friend to humanity. His mission on earth is a grand one, and grandly does he fill it.’”

Mr. Jones visited Memphis a great many times during his life. In all he conducted four or five great meetings in that city, and never lost his prestige nor power. He held another great meeting in 1893 at the First Methodist church. This is one of the largest and handsomest auditoriums in the South. It proved entirely too small to accommodate the great crowds that went to hear him daily. The doors had to be locked at an early hour, and there was always more people on the outside of the building than could be accommodated on the inside. They kicked down the doors once or twice trying to gain admittance. A great many of the prominent men who are now members of that church were converted or reclaimed during Mr. Jones’s meetings. The *Appeal-Avalanche* published this editorial in reference to his second visit:

“The Rev. Sam Jones during his sojourn in Memphis entertained large audiences, and has stimulated the religious sentiment of the community in Memphis. It is understood that he has made more than two thousand converts. He came among us and scolded the people of Memphis for their derelictions. He spared none. He told us of our sins of omission and commission.

“He spoke in plain terms, and there was no mistaking his meaning. Let us hope that Memphis will be all the better for his coming. Our faults have been revealed to us and the vices to which we are given have been proclaimed. This is Sam Jones’s way. Memphis has been handled without gloves, but the preacher has found a host of repentants to kneel at the altar. Mr. Jones has won great favor, as the crowd which flocked to the First Methodist church attested. His sermons have been as lightning purifying the atmosphere, though it may have been violent in its manifestations. Mr. Jones will go hence to spread the gospel. He will visit other cities. His language may be rude at times, but it will penetrate the hearts of men, and while the fastidious may complain as they have always complained, the fact that he brings the sinful to confess their sins is sufficient to justify his methods. Who shall dispute, then, when souls are saved. He reached men who care nothing for creeds. He does not indulge in doctrinal exposition. He does seek to persuade by argument so much that he actually moved the erring to acknowledgment of their moral obliquities, and forced them to their knees by revealing their moral deformities.

“Who shall say that he does not fill a legitimate sphere as a preacher? Other preachers may find success in other means for the form of humanity, but Mr. Jones attacks the citadel of sin in his own way. It is simply a question of results. If the two thousand converts or even a small proportion cling to the good resolves made by them under the spell of his eloquence the world is so much the better. Mr. Jones has had many hard things to say of Memphis. He has indulged in denunciation. He has attacked evil in the abstract and in the concrete. He has been general and he has been specific. He has wounded our spirit of local pride. He has pictured in vivid colors our wickedness. But he has done us good, and we may have the consolation that he assails other cities in similar fashion.

“We may not be quite so black as he has painted us, but no matter . He has caused the people to look to higher and better things, and though he shall depart, his visit will be remembered as having promoted and advanced the well-being of the community. He is in some respects the most extraordinary preacher the world has ever known. He has spoken three times a day almost for a decade and a half. He rarely repeats himself to the same audience. Therefore, as an orator he is without parallel, so far as sustained effort is concerned. It is to be hoped that Mr. Jones will keep his eye on Memphis, and that he may return whenever he finds that the city has begun to backslide. Memphis seems to need Mr. Jones’s preaching. This is come to be a general opinion both at home and abroad. The reformation that he has inaugurated should be permanent.”

He held meetings in the great Memphis auditorium which were truly marvelous in stirring up the consciences of the people and in bringing about a much-needed reformation. The immense gatherings could not be taken care of at any time during his ministry in Memphis. No building with seating capacity ever so large would hold the great crowds that assembled to hear him. His last meeting was held in the First Methodist church, just a few years ago, and perhaps for religious fervor and deep conviction and bringing people into the church that was as successful a meeting as any held by him in Memphis.

Several hundred joined the First church on Sunday after the meeting closed, while the other churches were strengthened by many accessions from the meeting.

In closing the chapter on the work in Memphis, we insert the testimony of the old sexton who commended Brother Jones's style of preaching, as it impressed him during his first meeting in the city.

We will give the account as Mr. Jones told it:

"A very laughable, yet forcible incident occurred during the revival at Memphis, Tenn., in Court Street Cumberland Presbyterian church one morning. The services had been going on for about three weeks with great power; hundreds had been converted and the churches awakened. The meeting was a union meeting, thirteen pastors and congregations, representing five different denominations were united in the fight; and on this occasion we had what we called a talking meeting. The pastor of the First Methodist church made a short, pointed talk, in which he told how the meeting had been a blessing to him. Other pastors followed, and when the pastor of the First Baptist told how he and all his church had been blessed, he continued by saying that he had learned something about how to preach also. He said that in three weeks' preaching of Mr. Jones in that city he had not heard a single attempt on the part of the preacher to prove that there was a God or that Christ was divine. There had been no hair-splitting on theology, or an effort to prove that heaven was real and hell existing, and so on.

"After he sat down, old Uncle Ben, the faithful old sexton of the First Methodist church, stood up in the rear of the church and said: 'Brethren, you all know me. I have been trying to serve God from my childhood, and I have been greatly exercised in the last few years for the salvation of the perishing souls of Memphis. On my knees I have begged God to send just such a preacher as this to Memphis, though I didn't know who he was or cared who he was. Now, he has come, thank God for him! He preaches the gospel so that everyone can hear it; he feeds me, he feeds the young and the old; the learned and the unlearned. Our pastors have been putting the fodder too high. I remember when Brother Mahon was our pastor last year, I looked into his study one morning and he had five books lying open around him on the table, and I said: "Brother Mahon, if you get one sermon out of five different books, you are going to put your fodder up Sunday morning where I can't reach it; for, I said 'I've gone to church hungry on Sunday morning and come away hungry; fodder too high for me.' But this man of God scatters the fodder on the ground and we all can reach it, and we also relish it." And so Uncle Ben went on in his rambling talk until he had made as fine an argument for homiletics, many said, as they had ever listened to."

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
