

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

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CHAPTER FOUR

HIS CONVERSION AND FIRST SERMON

This was the period of Mr. Jones's life when he temporarily reformed and was sober for eighteen months. Then he went with some of the citizens of our town on the first excursion that was run over the new railroad to Rockmart, and they persuaded him to drink wine with them. This caused him to return to his former habits, and for about six weeks he continued to drink, until he was brought face to face with his dying father.

His father was sick for several weeks, and it was the custom of the ministers to call and have prayers with him. Mr. Jones would attend these prayer services around his father's bedside. As the end came nearer, Captain Jones would tell of the presence of the Lord, and speak in such a way as to make everyone feel that God was really present. He would take his friends by the hand and in a cool, calm, delightful way say, "This little home that God has given me for my wife and children is filled with the glory of the Lord. I am physically very weak, but spiritually I am strong. When every other prop fails me, then Jesus Christ stands firm."

Just before the end came, he turned to each member of his family and spoke a parting word. Mr. Jones was standing at the foot of the bed, looking down into his father's face. When his father came to him for a moment he was speechless, while looking into his son's face. Finally he said:

"My poor, wicked, wayward, reckless boy. You have broken the heart of your sweet wife and brought me down in sorrow to my grave; promise me, my boy, to meet me in heaven."

Standing there, convulsed with emotion from head to foot, he stepped around to the side of the bed and took his father's bony hand in his and said:

"Father, I'll make you the promise, I'll quit! I'll quit! I'll quit!"

He said it in such a way that his dying father had every assurance that he meant it.

A change was seen in his father's countenance, and the pledge from his boy, he believed, meant the reformation of his life.

Then and there Mr. Jones burned the bridges behind him, and walked away from the dying couch determined to live for the right. In after years, including some of his last utterances in Oklahoma City, Mr. Jones said: "Thank God, I can say every willful step of my life, since that moment, has been towards the redemption of that promise."

When he turned from the bedside of his dying father he was groping in darkness and in search of Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners. While the promise he made his father was a step toward salvation, and helped to bring about a speedy reformation, he was not entirely assured of his acceptance with God.

After his father's death he went down to the home of his grandfather. Rev. Samuel G. Jones, on Saturday, and spent the Sabbath. That morning his grandfather preached at Moore's Chapel. Mr. Jones was under deepest conviction, and at the close of the sermon he walked forward and gave his grandfather his hand, asking for the prayers of God's people.

His conviction became deeper each day, and he saw his sins as never before. While under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he had a glimpse of the cross. As Paul said, "The cross was a stumbling block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Greek"; so it was with him until the light of the Holy Spirit flooded his soul. Mr. Jones has described his own experience in this illustration:

"I have walked out in the mountainous regions of my own state an hour before daybreak: I have stood on the porch of some country home and looked at the hills and valleys around me; they presented but the dim outline of something that I could not appreciate, I could not fully see. I go back into that dwelling, and in three hours more I walk out again on the front porch. The sun has risen on the scene and bathed the mountains and valleys in a sea of light, and now I look and beauties and splendors that never met my eye before face me on every side. The light of the sun shows me the beauties of the world and helps me to understand largely its mysteries. Brethren, I saw the cross erected, God's only begotten Son, the victim, suspended; he suffered; he died; and yet I saw but the dim outlines of something — I could not catch it in its fullness; I could not take it in in all its beauty; and then the Divine Spirit rose on the scene and bathed the cross in a sea of light.

"I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood.
Who fixed his languid eyes on me.
As near his cross I stood.

'Sure, never to my latest breath
Can I forget that look;
It 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 spilt.
And helped to nail him there.

‘A second look he gave, which said:
“I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou mayst live.”’

The revival in which Mr. Jones was converted was held at Felton’s Chapel. This was one of the regular appointments on his grandfather’s circuit. Sunday morning we went out to the service, and at the close of the sermon grandfather Jones opened the doors of the church and to my astonishment, Mr. Jones arose and walked up and joined the church. In speaking of that gracious hour, Mr. Jones says:

“I never shall forget the day when I walked up in the little old church in Bartow County, with the only fear in my heart that I would not be received into the church. That day the man of God, my grandfather, stood up and preached, and when he opened the doors of the church I sat back in the audience and listened, and fear again came to me that I would not be received, my condition was so apparently hopeless, my life and habits had been so dissolute and so well known. Again I soon had the impulse to go forward, and then an overpowering something said, ‘No, you are too weak and afraid;’ and so it was until they had sung one, two and three verses of the good old hymn, and it looked like I would fail, but directly I got a new strength, and I said to myself:

‘I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if I stay away I know
I must forever die.’

“And in that little country church, with my dear old grandfather preaching the sermon, I went and gave myself to God. I went forward and took his hand and looked up into his face and said: ‘Grandfather, I take this step to-day; I give myself, my heart and life, what is left of it, all to God and to His cause.’ He took me and pulled me up and laid my head on his bosom, and wept like a child, and said brokenly: ‘God bless you, my boy, and may you be faithful unto death.’ And they received me into the church. And I want to tell you, my neighbor, whatever else may be said, living or dying, I was a reformed and changed man from that hour.”

For a week or more he had been very sad and depressed. I did not understand his condition. However, on our way home he said: “I can’t tell you just how I’ve felt the past week; I have been seeking forgiveness for my sins. God has pardoned me. I shall not drink any more. I am done with it. I have told you many times that I have reformed my life, but you have a sober husband now. It is now true.”

As soon as the great change took place, he felt impressed that he should preach. He did not know whence this impression came. He sought the advice and counsel of several preachers, with this reply in substance from each: "You are called to preach; you can come willingly into it, or you can be whipped into it, or you will lose your religion, if you refuse."

The last point was always the most powerful argument to him. He said he felt as did Gideon Ouseley, when the voice said, "Gideon, go and preach the gospel."

"How can I preach, O Lord; I cannot speak, for I am a child."

But when his mind was fully satisfied that he should enter the ministry, he began immediately to tell how the Lord had saved him. He spoke as only a man can who knew the full saving power of his Lord and Saviour.

But, like Gideon Ouseley, again, he had discovered the disease and found the remedy, and this gives the physician complete control over the patient, so he took his Bible and went from his knees to the pulpit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon him, and with an earnest desire for the salvation of lost souls. While he had no theological training, he was prepared to preach to sinners, because of the anointing that God had given him. In after-years, in speaking of theological seminaries, he said, "that he wouldn't give a Georgia circuit, a pony and a Bible for all the 'theological cemeteries' in the world."

He preached his first sermon one week after his conversion at the old New Hope church, two miles from Cartersville, his home. In the afternoon grandfather Jones told him that he would have to preach that night. We rode out to the church in a wagon, the party consisting of Mr. Jones, myself and our little child. Mr. Jones had not been licensed to preach.

Grandfather said: "I will go your security until conference meets."

So Mr. Jones agreed to preach for him. He was encouraged further by his grandfather saying: "If God has called you to preach, you can preach; come into the pulpit."

The church was crowded with earnest Christians, who were in deepest sympathy with him and supported him with their prayers, while there were many of his old companions and others who were there through mere curiosity.

With much anxiety and fear, he took his place in the pulpit. After the singing and prayer he arose and announced his text from the first chapter of Romans and the sixteenth verse: "**For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**"

As he looked over the congregation, he realized that every one present knew him. They knew his past; they had seen him only as a wild, dissipated young man. He didn't assume any pulpit manner or attitude, nor did he attempt any analysis of his text, or give any attention to its unfolding, but began to tell his experience of the salvation that had come to him.

God had saved him, and he was not ashamed to proclaim it to the world. His deep earnestness and evident sincerity, and the power of the Holy Spirit upon him immediately got hold of the hearts and minds of the audience. As Mr. Jones said, before he proceeded far into the text, he adopted the plan of the good old Methodist preacher who got into the bushes and closed his Bible, saying: "Brethren, I cannot preach the text, but I can tell my experience in spite of the devil." Out of his heart full of love to God and to men, he told of the great things that God had done for him.

Mr. Jones said he remembered only two things of this his first sermon. One was "God is good," and the other, "I am happy."

The Holy Spirit was present to bear testimony and many were melted to tears and deeply moved to a better life.

At the close of his earnest exhortation, he extended an invitation to penitents, and many rushed to the altar and were happily converted to God.

At the close of the service his friends took him by the hand and assured him of their prayers and bade him God-speed in the great work that he had undertaken. His grandfather threw his arms around him, saying, "My boy, you are called to preach, God will be with you."

Mr. Jones occasionally went with his grandfather as he preached at the churches on his circuit. He had fully made up his mind to join the North Georgia Conference, which was to meet in Atlanta in about three months. At the quarterly conference at Moore's Chapel he was licensed to preach, and was recommended to the annual conference. His grandfather, in presenting him to the quarterly conference as a candidate for a local preacher's license and recommendation to the annual conference, said: "You have heard my grandson preach; you have seen the results that have followed his preaching; he wants to devote his life to the ministry; if you believe that he is called of God to this work, give him the authority of the church to preach." The conference unanimously voted to license and recommend him.

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