

# GOSPEL SERMONS

as

Sam P. Jones

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## SERMON EIGHTEEN

### LECTURING CHURCH-MEMBERS

**“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2).**

“I will read the first verse,” said the evangelist.

**“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band.”**

The first century of the Christian era produced some of the most remarkable men in the world’s history, and one of these was Cornelius, the centurion. Character is that part of us which lives on after our body is in the grave, and goes on into another world. Reputation is quite different from character. Reputation is what men say of us, and character is what I am.

Reputation fits like a glove and may be put on and taken off and thrown aside. But when one discards character, it is discarded forever. Character is perfectly educated will or in other words, a perfectly educated will in complete union with God. When I draw the character of this man, this heathen, I am ashamed of myself. This good man I will represent in his true light and present his picture as tersely as possible.

*God says this man at first was a devout man.* This word devout is a very significant one. All the adjectives you throw in could not mean more. Cornelius had settled the question at some time in his life, by God’s grace, forever. No man ever was, ever will be, religious until he settles the question some day, regardless of sacrifice, and says by the grace of God I will be religious. A man weeping and agonizing at the altar was approached by a preacher, who asked him if he had calculated the cost of this, and he answered: “No, I care not what it costs to go to Heaven, I want to get there.”

And so, after you have resolved to go to Heaven, at whatever cost, all the means of grace rush under you like so many wheels and roll you on toward Heaven.

Religion really means choice, and when a man really desires to be religious, he will leave one thing to take up another. Desire has nothing to do with religion. A man may desire to be religious, and still drink, chew, play cards, etc.

I received this morning a long letter from Cairo. It started this way:

“Mr. Jones — I have been reading your sermons for several months, not because of the religious interest I took in them, but out of mere curiosity. They amused me very much, but I must deprecate the fanaticism you display in them. They object to a social game of cards and other innocent amusements.”

He calls me a dogmatic fanatic — just see how he piles words up — and trims me up pretty lively, and wound up by telling me to read Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason* and Voltaire. When I want to do anything like that I don’t go to Paine or Voltaire, or any of the other boys, but I go to the old man himself, His Majesty,

### **THE DEVIL**

I tell you religion means choice. You tell me that a Christian can go to the theater. I received the other day a letter from an infidel here, very much like that from Cairo, and the same day Sister Boyle came to me and said: “Brother Jones, you have spoken as if you could read my heart and the thoughts in my head.”

Which would you rather be? That infidel or good Sister Boyle?

Now you all think this world sees us, this world has an eye upon us. During this last war Southern men in Michigan were merchandising, Southern men in New York were merchandising, Southern men in Philadelphia were practicing law, but when the tocsin of war sounded they all laid down their work and joined the Southern army.

But some of them didn’t, but that was because they joined the other side. So, when the tocsin of the Christian war sounds all of us ought to rally around the flag of Jesus Christ, doing that at least for him. What I want to start with is, if there is any man in this church to-day who can say “I am what I am,” it is the man who is speaking to you. Since I have been preaching here I have received a dozen offers to go and preach in other places, but I can’t go because I am here to preach in St. Louis; and they ask, “What is he making?” and I say, “Well, I have made my:

### **BOARD AND CLOTHES**

so far.” And you will think that if Jones won’t leave St. Louis to make \$100 a night he must be the kind of a man to tie to, and yet there isn’t one of you who will leave his business to save the town from hell. The man who will condemn me for doing what I am and refuse to do it himself is a hypocrite of the blackest dye. You should either say, “Jones is a fool,” or you should turn in and help him.

### **A HARD RAP**

Brother Lewis here couldn’t count twenty members of his church who have rolled up their sleeves and helped to save souls a single day in the last twenty years.

Dr. Lewis — you are mistaken.

When I make assertions of this kind I am guessing, and I believe that nine tenths of the members of this congregation believe I have guessed right Now I want all of you who can conscientiously say that you have in the last ten years rolled up a sleeve and worked a week to save souls, to stand up.

One gray-haired man and four elderly ladies arose. “So you see I didn’t tell a thing that was not so.”

Dr. Lewis— that’s all right.

I am here at the instance of your pastor and the church, and if I fail it will be as much the fault of John’s Church as any other in the city. It is a grand church in some respects, but when it comes to rolling up your sleeves and pitching in to make Christians — why, they don’t do it.

*Cornelius, a devout man.* The test of my Christianity is not how many thousand miles have I ridden in a Pullman sleeper, but how many miles have I walked on the track; it is not how many books have I read, but how many books have I written.

Now, I suppose they called Cornelius, devout man, a crank. Any man who is especially religious is called

### **A CRANK**

I suppose it is the contrast that makes him look so. I suppose a rose-bush in full bloom at the North Pole would be called a crank — I suppose every icicle near there would point its fingers and call the bush a crank.

I don’t suppose that these three hundred members of Brother Lewis’ church are in danger of being called crazy Now, Brother Lewis, don’t you get excited; you just hold while I skin and it will be all right.

Now, Brother Lewis, in all kindness, which do you think — that you have more members at the prayer-meetings on Wednesday night or more staying at home and playing

### **PROGRESSIVE EUCHRE?**

Dr. Lewis — More at the prayer-meeting.

I am glad that Brother Lewis, viewing the situation, is still inclined to be hopeful. But it will do no harm to take a vote. I want all of you who attend the prayer-meeting to rise.

Twenty of the congregation rose.

Now, all of you who play progressive euchre. Oh, you needn't look around, nobody's going to get up.

The churches are thrown open three hours a week and thousands of saloons are open twenty hours every day, and the billiard saloons are filled, and still you come here and say, "We are fighting the devil"; you come here and sing "Hark from the tombs a doleful sound," some brother talks about his losses and crosses, you all look solemn, and you call that growing in grace. I would as soon expect to make a shade-tree out of this lamp-stand here as to grow in grace that way.

It is time to wake up. A devout man, a religious man!

That's the kind of piety we want every day in the week. I like to see a fellow have it all over. It would have been grand enough if they had stopped when they said Cornelius was a devout man, but they added, ". . . **and he feared the Lord.**"

Notice the copulative conjunction "**and.**" It's our habit to hit at a man with disjunctives. Brother A is a good man, "but" he don't attend prayer-meeting; Brother B attends prayer-meeting, "but" he don't pay his debts, and so on until they are butted off the bridge, and that's the last of them. Now, I don't want you ladies to get excited and think I'm going to:

### **SMASH THINGS**

I'm in the smashing business, and I've preached for years to just as sweet and pretty women as you are, and they all like me. I only wish I could smash your worldliness.

**"A devout man and feared God with all his heart."**

When a man gets religion it breaks out all over his household. His wife gets it and his children get it. I have said many a time that religion is like the small-pox. Varioloid religion isn't catching, but confluent religion is, and you can't come within ten feet of it. Confluent religion is what I like, not the kind of sanctification Sam Payne had. Sam was asked if he was sanctified, and he replied: "Waal, yes, I'm sorter sanctified!" Sorter sanctified! Think of that!

The hardest sinners I have found in St. Louis are the sons of members of the church. They will go home from here satisfied with attending church at 11 o'clock Sunday morning. If I had a lot of these 11 o'clock-Sunday-morning Christians that come racking out on dress parade, I'd sell them for three cents a dozen, and then beg pardon of the man I sold them to for swindling him.

I don't think I could have a child in this world who would ask me to let it go to the dance or to the ball. If any of you go to these places, you'll be put down as sorry members of the church. If I were to get an invitation of that kind, I would demand an explanation, and ask if they thought I had stolen anything, that they invited me to attend that kind of an affair.

Down in a certain town in Georgia I said that I hadn't as much respect for a man that goes to balls, plays cards, etc., as I have for a chain-gang con.

It caused a big hurrah, and they began to shell me. But I didn't mind that, as I had been there before myself. I waited, and then one day I proposed that they build to the church one wing for a card-room and another for a dance-hall, and have a cellar underneath for a wine-cellar, and then they saw that was a gray hone of another color.

"A church is not the proper place for these things," they said, and I replied that what I wouldn't do in the church I wouldn't do anywhere.

Thank God with all my heart that from the oldest child of mine, aged fifteen, down to the babe in the cradle, they never looked upon their father when he was otherwise than a consecrated Christian.

God help us to reform ourselves and never lead us into anything that will cause us to sin.

I have an infinite hatred for cards, and there is no more outrageous piece of gambling than progressive euchre. It is the most insidious piece of gambling that is played, and none but a child of the devil will play the game. I repeat in all earnestness, that no one but a child of the devil from hat to heel will play the game. Why don't you say amen, Brother Lewis!

Brother Lewis tells me he never saw the game. Now the other day there was played here in this city a game of progressive euchre among church people that was a shame and scandal, and I suppose some of you know what I mean. If I was going to gamble, I'd get me:

### **A BLACK BOTTLE**

and a deck of cards and get another old gambler, and I'd pike it down to seven-up or poker — that's what I'd do if I was to gamble. I suppose some of you mothers will say,

"Jones is a fool;" but I tell you that if we were to follow up your boy after he leaves home, you'd be willing to say you were the fools. Most gamblers come from Christian families, and there are no more gentlemanly and well-behaved men in the country then the gambler of St. Louis, and they began by playing cards at home.

I have talked about an hour and fifteen minutes, and would like to talk an hour longer, but I have a hard service this afternoon. I suppose many of you have about got all you want now, and if any of you want to leave you can do so. I will continue this subject where I left off to-morrow afternoon.

Walking then to the front of the platform the evangelist told the story of Samson, and drew a parallel between his condition in the lap of Delilah and that of the Christian church embraced by the arms of worldliness, ending with. "Now, I want to make a proposition to you. Young men and women in this audience who intend to devote themselves to God, and to bring a soul to Christ, stand up!"

About two-thirds of the audience rose to their feet.

Services for men only in the afternoon and a general service for the evening was announced; the hymn, "Take the name of Jesus with you," was sung, and the benediction dismissed the assemblage.

**~ end of chapter 18 ~**

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