

Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones:

A Minister of the Gospel

The Only Authorized and Authentic Work

By his wife

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CHAPTER SEVEN

EARLY EVANGELISTIC WORK AND LAST PASTORATE

There were quite a number of towns with a population from one thousand to twenty-five hundred where Mr. Jones held meetings while on this circuit. He was at Madison, Crooked Creek, Central and other points. Perhaps the greatest one was at Eatonton. The pastor had been preaching faithfully against the saloons of the town, which had almost resulted in a division of the church.

Mr. Jones took up the fight, and one of the most marvelous results of the meeting was the closing up of the barrooms of Eatonton without an election. It was done with a petition to the county commissioners, largely signed by the citizens of Putnam County, requesting that the license for saloons be raised to three thousand dollars. This the commissioners did and closed all the saloons, except one.

At the end of seven months the owner of this saloon proposed to close at the end of the eighth month if the people would pay him the one thousand dollars back that he had paid license for four months. The subscription list was opened at once and the one thousand dollars would have been raised in a half day, but the word that the saloon would close if the money was restored reached the county commissioners, who promptly notified the owner of the saloon that if he would surrender his license they would pay the one thousand dollars he had paid. He surrendered his license, and the commissioners paid him the money. The commissioners then announced that the license would be raised to five thousand dollars, and if any one offered to take out a license it would be raised to ten thousand dollars. In other words, there was to be no more legal sales of liquor in Putnam County. On the last day of the eighth month the saloon was closed.

All the bells of the churches were rung and the citizens gathered in the court-house yard in a thanksgiving service, which, after song and prayer, addresses were made by Judge W. P. Jenkins, Rev. M. J. Cofer, and several others. It was a memorable meeting, and "All hail the power of Jesus' name" was never more heartily sung. Putnam County was thoroughly revolutionized. Since that day the question of saloons has never been discussed, and without ever voting on the question, the county has been dry, and is without saloons to-day. From the Newberne circuit Mr. Jones was sent to the Monticello circuit in Jasper County.

Here he spent the most successful year of his life as a pastor. The people of Monticello were among the noblest in Georgia. Mr. Jones spent his time in faithful pastoral work, going from home to home, visiting and praying with his people. Wherever he went, he carried sunshine and joy, and was a great comfort in times of grief and sorrow.

In the presence of sickness and death there never was a more gentle, tender and affectionate pastor. The way he would lift his heart to God in prayer for the sorrowing and bereaved always brought a blessing and a benediction to those in distress.

He had gone through the deep waters himself, and always suffered with those who had lost a dear one of the home. After he had entered the evangelistic field, and had preached to the thousands throughout the United States, he would return to his home, and would take pleasure and delight in visiting the poor, sick, and sorrowing of our town. There was scarcely a home where sorrow had come but what he went, not as the world's great evangelist, but as an humble, prayerful minister of God, to spend a few hours with those whose sorrows he shared.

He seemed to be hungry for the blessings and benedictions he would derive from these visits. There was something in them that he didn't find in addressing the great multitudes in his meetings.

In connection with his pastoral visits, he always thought of the Saviour's words: "**I was an hungered, and ye fed me; I was naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; inasmuch as ye did it unto, one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,**" and then he would say to me, "That's enough."

Mr. Jones said that when he began to preach that he was brought to see that to succeed as a preacher; he must either be a great thinker, or a great worker. Not appreciating his real ability as a thinker, he decided to give his time to earnest work. He had his doubts whether he could think above the plane where the masses stood, but he knew that under God he could mix and mingle with them, and by persistent work, influence them for good.

During the years of his pastorate, for weeks and weeks he would preach three and four times a day, averaging about four hundred sermons a year. His good friends would tell him that he was working himself to death, but he would laugh them off by saying that Whitfield said that when a physician told him he must stop working so much, that he must not preach more than four hours every day, and six hours on Sunday, that he said, "Doctor, do you want me to rust to death?"

No pastor ever did the same amount of preaching and visiting that he crowded into the eight years of pastoral work. He would remark to them, "Perhaps I would preach better sermons if I would preach fewer, but a square or an oblong bullet will do as much execution as a polished round one."

It is estimated that during his pastorates there were at least five thousand people converted. All of his meetings were successful, and the converts could be counted from fifty to five hundred at each place. While this looked like it might be enough to make a pastor proud of his success, Mr. Jones always felt, with the opportunities and modern appliances of the day, that a greater number of souls should have been won to Christ.

While he made a constant study of his people, and the Bible, he did not waste much time in studying the systematized treatises on theology. He so frequently said: "I despise theology and botany, but I love religion and flowers." Nor did he waste much time on creeds. He would say: "It is the skin of the truth, dried and stuffed with sand and sawdust. If I had a creed, I would sell it to a museum." Nor did he claim to be a metaphysician, but he would say, "I can see a hole through a ladder, if there is any light on the other side."

Perhaps Mr. Jones was more interested in the study of the natural sciences than any other branch of investigation. He was thoroughly familiar with those subjects, and some of his most striking illustrations were within the realm of natural science. He was a great lover and reader of natural history, especially that part which treats of the habits of animals, and what they feed upon. The knowledge that he derived from the study of natural history frequently helped him in understanding human nature.

He was also a great student of the history of our country, and many of his most notable illustrations were culled from the history of the world.

Men of prominence in the educational world would listen with wonder and amazement at many of the forceful illustrations gathered from history, and would exclaim, "Wonder when he read that, and where he found it?" With the great knowledge at his command; he would go before an audience, selecting the most appropriate text for the occasion, and concentrate his mind upon it, bringing before them all available and suitable knowledge, ever keeping his eye upon his congregation.

While no man ever preached with more concentration and conciseness, sometimes he would realize that there was a possibility of his crowd not following him closely, then he would leave his thread of argument, and stay with his crowd. This frequently led him to say, "I may not always stick to my text, but I'll stick to my crowd."

The story told him by brother Richardson illustrated the point rather forcefully.

"There is nothing like holding the gun all over the tree," he would say. "As with the old, palsied father who went out with his son squirrel hunting, the old man's part was to shake the bush, and he had but to take hold of the bush and it would shake without any effort. On one occasion when he was to shake the bush and turn the squirrel, after he had turned the squirrel for four or five different shots for his son, all of which failed of their mark, the old man said: 'Give me the gun, and you shake the bush.' The boy gave up the gun and shook the bush and turned the squirrel. The old man held up the gun in his palsied hands, and as it 'wobbled' all over the tree, 'bang' went the gun and down came the game, at which the old man remarked joyfully, 'I told you I'd git him.' The boy replied, 'Anybody could kill a squirrel up a tree who would hold a gun all over it, as you did.'"

The great truths of the Bible such as sin, repentance, faith, salvation, heaven and hell were preached by him as no sectarian, theologian or metaphysician has ever done. He preached those great truths with a clearness of mind and an unction of heart that has no parallel in history.

He never tried to show his congregation the difference between evangelical and legal repentance; he never discussed before them whether depravity was partial or total. He never tried to prove to them that there is a God, or that Christ is divine, or that there is a heaven or a hell. He took those great truths as a fact, because the Bible stated them, and started his message with those things in the background. The Bible was the basis for all that he preached, and the inspiration of all his hopes. He left the proof of these things to those who wished to speculate upon them.

His idea was that Christ meant just what he said, and he preached the gospel instead of defending it, proclaimed the word instead of trying to prove it. He never changed his belief about these truths, and preached them as firmly and powerfully the last meeting he conducted as in his early pastorate.

While on the Monticello work, Mr. Jones assisted more pastors in revival work than he had been able to do before. Some of the places visited were Barnesville, LaGrange, Griffin, and West Point.

At Barnesville about a hundred persons were received into the church, and the entire membership seemed to have received a fresh baptism of the Spirit. From the streets that had been so noted for profanity, profanity disappeared entirely. Two of the saloons closed their business, and their proprietors were among the converts. A deep feeling of solemnity rested upon every one, and the town was not the same.

At LaGrange another mighty work of grace followed his preaching. An intelligent observer said:

“It is difficult to criticize Mr. Jones’s preaching. It is different from that of any other man the writer ever heard. His methods are unprecedented, but always successful; his understanding of the human heart and his analysis of human motives and conduct are marvelous. His faith in God unbounded and his zeal never flags. His illustrations are without number. They are always sharply drawn, clear, and cutting. He uses satire the keenest, and brings the audience to involuntary laughter, then startles them with a declaration of astounding truth from God’s words, then makes an appeal so touching that tears rush unbidden to the eyes. He is, withal, a plain, honest preacher with but one motive — an all-consuming desire to save souls for his Master. The State of Georgia, with all its renowned ministers, does not present a more attractive preacher than he, not one that can draw a larger congregation, or interest them more after they are gathered. He and his preaching are the principal subjects of conversation in LaGrange.”

At West Point there was a great revival, which resulted in many accessions to the different churches in the town. There was a moral reformation wrought that changed the aspects of the place. When Mr. Jones went there, the people were so dead, religiously, that the attendance was quite small. It was a morning service in a weekday. It seemed the most hopeless outlook for a meeting. There were but four people to hear him preach his first sermon. After his sermon he said, “Now, I want us to have an altar service.”

Mr. Jones and the pastor and two noble women knelt for prayer. After they had reconsecrated themselves to God, Mr. Jones said:

“I want the pastor to go with me to every business house in this town, and we will say to the men as we meet them, just one thing, and that is, ‘You are going to hell,’ and then we will move on. I want you good women to go all over this town, ring the door bell, and when the women meet you, just look them squarely in the face and don’t say but one thing and that is, ‘You are going to hell.’”

They made him the promise, and that afternoon practically every woman in the town was so addressed, while Mr. Jones and the pastor met men and warned them in that startling way. Some of the women slammed the doors in the faces of the two good women, while others had their curiosity aroused. The men got very angry, and it was with much difficulty and shrewd reasoning that fights were avoided.

That night the whole town was out to church, and Mr. Jones preached one of his most scathing sermons. A great revival broke out which swept over the entire place, until finally the men who were notoriously opposed to religion were in constant attendance upon the services.

At the morning hours the stores were closed, and the church was always crowded. A writer declared that he was as striking and impressive in his speaking as Talmage; that he created sensation without making sensation his end. He preaches the truth unvarnished, straight and strong, and in such a way as to captivate the common sense of his hearers and go direct to their hearts. His denunciations of sin are withering, and yet truthful. His illustrations cut sometimes like a knife. He draws pictures as clear-cut as a fine cameo, and he has a pathos powerful at times enough to melt the hearts of his hearers. The Rev. S. P. Calloway, in speaking to me, said:

“He is a phenomenal man. I never saw such a king of congregations.”

In all those early meetings the lines were drawn. Mr. Jones worked on the principle that there could be no movement without friction; no battle without an issue; no issue without the drawing of lines. He believed that it was possible for a man to preach the gospel and live in peace with the devil with an armistice unbroken, but said: “Woe be to the preacher when all men speak well of him.” In all those years as a pastor he was the object of a great deal of criticism. If truth furnished the people with no material with which they could assault him, there was no falsehood that the wicked could conceive that they would not take and circulate against him.

The most remarkable conversion under the ministry of Mr. Jones at Monticello was that of Maj. John C. Key. Mr. Jones in speaking of him said: “I think he is the grandest hero living for God in America to-day. He is a lawyer with a splendid practice, and a thorough gentleman. I was conducting a meeting in his town, and on Sunday morning, the anniversary of his birth, and I think the anniversary of his marriage as well, he called to his wife after breakfast and had her to come and sit down by his side. She was the sweetest Christian woman, and the best housekeeper, I ever saw in my life. He called her ‘Mary and Martha,’ and she was both. He said to her that Sunday morning, ‘Wife, I am fifty years old to-day; we have been married exactly thirty years; you have been a Christian woman ever since we were married, and before that, too.

I have never cared for these things, but I wish to say I am going with you to church, and ask the preacher when he finishes the sermon to open the doors, and then I am going up to the altar and join the church, and spend the rest of my days with you in the Christian life.’

With great joy she said, ‘Husband, are you?’ and he answered, ‘That’s what I am going to do.’ ‘Oh,’ she exclaimed, ‘how I rejoice!’ He went to the church with his wife, and sat by her side during the service, and when the sermon had ended he arose and said: ‘Will the pastor please open the doors of the church?’ The doors were thrown open and that man walked up and joined. He turned to the congregation and said: ‘Fellow townsmen and neighbors, you all know me; I have lived among you from childhood. I am fifty years old to-day. I have been married thirty years. I have a good Christian wife, but I have not been a Christian. I said to her this morning, “Wife, I am fifty years old to-day. We have been married these thirty years; during all that time you have been a devoted Christian woman, but I have never cared about anything of the kind. Now, wife, I am going to join the church where you have been so many years.”

‘Brethren, I do not claim to have any religion, but I promise you this, there shall not be a man in this church who shall beat me living right, or beat me serving God, unless he has more sense than I have.’”

His statement moved the audience to sympathetic tears, and there were many hearty handshakes and shouts of God’s people.

As I was away from my circuit a great deal the latter part of the year, frequently it was impossible for me to return and fill my appointment on Sunday. I would write him, 'Dear Brother Key: I cannot return; will you preach for me Sunday?' and I always received this reply: 'Dear Brother Jones: I cannot preach much, but I will do the best I can. You go on bringing souls to God.' He taught in the Sabbath school, and did everything which a true Christian man could do. He was one of the finest Christian men that lived on the face of the earth, and a few years ago he died a triumphant death and went home happy.

Monticello and Jasper County were noted for their wickedness. The people were intelligent, well to do, worldly and wicked. There were seven hundred converted and joined the churches while Mr. Jones was there, and a revival was carried on by the converts which revolutionized the county. The saloons were soon voted out. The influence extended to adjoining counties, and the work abides to-day, and there are no more religious and spiritual people to be found anywhere, after a quarter of a century.

Another convert was Mr. J. B. Webb, who was a liquor-dealer. His little boy had become a Christian, and he and his wife were greatly convicted and happily converted, at the same time, in their home. He went with Mr. Jones to his different appointments, and did much to drive liquor from the town and county. He is to-day a most earnest and godly Christian.

The work on the Monticello circuit closed his labors as a pastor. The latter part of the year his presiding elder had given him permission to spend some of his time in assisting other pastors in revival work. His success while on the Monticello circuit and the great revivals that he conducted gave him prestige at the coming annual conference, and he was appointed to the agency of the North Georgia Orphanage.

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