

GOSPEL SERMONS

as

Sam P. Jones

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SERMON SEVENTEEN

ALL THINGS WORKING TOGETHER FOR GOOD

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are called according to his purpose.”

We can say there is but one single exception in all the universe to the truth of this utterance, and God makes that exception all through his book. Everything in this universe works together for the good of those that love God, except sin. There is nothing in sin or of sin, or about sin or around sin or above it or beneath it, or connected with it in any way that can ever work to anybody's good. What you have done that is wrong, what you ought to have done that you did not do, God can never make work to your good. If you have stayed away from a prayer meeting, God can never make that work to your good. If you have neglected your duty, God can never make that neglect work for your good. There is no provision of grace to make up for anybody what they have lost from the neglect of duty.

“All things work together for good to them that love God.”

HARMONY OF SOUL

Now recollect, if you are a Christian and love God, everything you cannot help, everything you would have warded off if you could, everything you would have conquered if you could, everything in this life works together for good, except sin, and God himself cannot make sin work for anybody's good, because sin is the reversal, the throwing-out gear of the machinery of our nature. When we begin to go wrong we reverse the machinery of our nature and to run it backwards. You can no more work for God when you reverse the machinery of your nature than you can make your sewing-machine sew when you ran it backwards. One is as impossible as the other.

All things work for good when you are running in harmony with God and in a line with God; for, after all, religion is nothing more than harmony with God. When you walk up to your piano, and touch a key in that elegant instrument, and that key is out of tune, and of harmony; that key is out of harmony not only with the rest of the keys of the piano, but it is out of harmony with everything in the universe that is in harmony. But when the piano-tuner walks up to that piano and opens it, and takes out his instruments and works away at that particular string until he gets it in harmony, then that key is in harmony with everything in the universe.

And religion is getting in harmony with God. Then everything moves along harmoniously, adjusting and setting the Ten Commandments to music. Is it not so?

When God bids me do this or that he touches a chord in my nature in sympathy with his own divine heart, and then we are in harmony with all. God wills and wishes and he will make everything in this universe conduce to our present and eternal happiness.

And ye know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

THREE CLASSES OF PEOPLE

There is the text. There are three classes of people here this afternoon, and these three classes represent the whole world. The first class we mention are those that know they do love God. Thank God there are such persons on the face of the earth — persons who know they do love God. There is another class here, and those in that class do not love God, and about nine tenths of us make up the third class, persons who do not know whether they love God or not. Sometimes they think they love him. Sometimes they think they do not. Nine tenths of the world is made up of don't-know-what-to-thinks. Oh, how numerous they are! But what is the use of going on in that way? When I was a ten-year-old boy if you asked me, "Do you love your mother?" I should reply:

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Do you know why?"

"Because when I do what mother says for me to do I feel good about it, and when I go to do something mother told me not to do I feel bad about it."

"Well, what other reason?"

"I love her, and I love to hear her name reverently used and kindly used."

"Well, what other reason?"

"It makes me feel bad for anyone to speak unkindly and irreverently of my mother."

THE SAME REASONS FOR LOVING GOD

Now you ask me, "Are you a Christian?" "Yes."

"Do you love God?" "Yes."

"How do you know you do?"

"Because when I do like God tells me I feel so good about it."

“How else do you know it?” “Because when I do something he told me not to do, I feel as bad about it as I can.”

“How else do you know it?” “It does me good to hear people praise God and speak reverently of him, and it gives me a horror to hear any one blaspheme him.” I have as many reasons why I love God as I had why I loved my mother.

LOVE FOR GOD NOT ALWAYS EMOTIONAL

The love of God is not necessarily an emotional feeling. I hear people talk a heap about feeling that they love God. I never stop to see whether I have got feelings or not. I never inquire about that. Some people say they never want to do anything unless they feel like it. I have seen preachers that are always gadding about, and are extremely anxious that all the members of their congregations shall be visited. Then there are preachers whose minds and hearts are in their church, and they would rather be whipped than go and see anybody. This brother deserves a thousand times more credit than Brother Gadabout.

The Lord knows I feel sorry for one of those pitty-patty brothers who are always drumming all over their congregation, seeing old sister So-and-So, you know — always gadding about. If pastoral visiting would have saved this town, it would have been saved long ago. God never said that people should be saved by pastoral visiting. He said:

“The preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”

And I have a great deal more respect for the brother who would rather talk and preach than go and see anybody than I have for the brother who would rather be running around all the time. I tell you how I feel about it I do not care whether a minister ever puts a foot in my house all the year round or not; but I will say one thing: When my wife and children visit my pastor I want him to preach enough solid truth to keep them going the whole week, instead of running and gadding about, and getting in my wife’s way and keeping things disarranged all the week looking for the preacher.

VISITING THE PREACHER

I want my preacher to let my family visit him at the house of God. I never saw people that quarreled about the pastor not visiting them that amounted to much anyhow. If you treat a preacher right, and give him a good square meal every time he calls, he ain’t got any more sense than to come back again. If a preacher didn’t come to see you it is your own fault. Ain’t that so, Brother Lewis?

Christ told his disciples when they went to a place to go to one house and put up there and not to be running about all over creation. He knew what he was talking about. But if I could not preach much I would make it up in visiting. What I lost in dancing I would make up in turning round. You quit bothering your preacher about coming to see you, and help him in his work. If he has 1,000 members in his church, you make yourself useful and help him to look after the other 999.

I used to have some members of my church everlastingly at me to visit them. One family bothered me more than any of the others, and when I did make a call I made it a jumping, bouncing class-meeting, and they never bothered me anymore. If some of you pastors would do the same you would not be bothered as much as you are.

THE TEST FOR LOVE TO GOD

Now I branched off from the subject I was discussing. I say whether we feel like it or not, let us say: “I am going to do what I consider is right.” I am not inquiring this afternoon whether there is an emotional feeling toward God in my heart. What has Jesus Christ said?” Hereby ye know that ye love me because ye feel that ye do so”? No, ha never said that; he said:

“Hereby ye may know that ye love me because ye keep my commandments.”

God, love and loyalty are synonymous in this sense.

“Hereby ye may know that ye love me because ye keep my commandments.

Loyalty to the right — absolute eschewing of the wrong — is proof that ye love God, to them that love God; or in other words, this text might read this way:

“All things work together for good to them that keep the commandments of God.”

WORKING TOGETHER FOR “GOOD”

That is about the practical meaning of the text. Well, now, if I am loyal to God straight out, through and through, then the promise is:

“All things shall work together for good.”

Well, I might stop here, but I wonder what that word “good” means. Suppose we give it this interpretation:

“All things shall work together for the riches of God’s people.”

Temporal riches — temporal prosperity. Why, if it had read that way there would not have been a word of truth in it, because, generally speaking, God’s people are poor people. And yet I may say that the richest man this world ever saw, Abraham, was the best man the world ever saw. But, generally speaking, God’s people are a poor people.

A MILLIONAIRE’S EXPERIENCE

I met this summer a millionaire that went down in the fearful financial stringency this year, and he was a good, generous, noble man, and he had gone down and surrendered everything, even his house and lot.

When I was talking to him I said, “Oh, my brother, I do not understand how it is you were ruined. You were very liberal with your money. You have built churches and parsonages, and given to the church. You were very liberal. How is it you went down in this fearful financial wreck?”

“Well,” he said, “I will tell you. God knows I tried to do my duty with my money. I gave it as liberally as the gushing of a river. I am conscious of that.”

THE LAST CRUEL LETTER

And he said: “After the last dollar was swept away I got a cruel letter from a creditor — a cruel letter, and it almost literally broke my heart” And he said: “I went into my room and I knelt down on my knees with my Bible in my hand and I said:

“Oh, my gracious God, I am ruined financially, and my friends are pouncing on me and saying the bitterest words! Oh, my God! I will never get up off my knees until you explain this thing to me I do not understand.”

He said: “I prayed there with that Bible in my hand, and when I opened it the first line I saw was this:”

“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Said he: “I just jumped off my knees and clasped my hands together and said, ‘Glory be to God, that is reason enough.’ “And he said: “If I am poor I am going to do my duty.”

CAN'T STAND PROSPERITY

“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Then most people cannot stand prosperity. Now, if you are going to be rich and religious both at the same time and place, all right, and if ever you get to Heaven you will wear a bright crown there; no doubt about that. But I will say one thing to you, you had better look out along that line. Some folks think I have some spite against rich folks, like all poor white trash, but I have no spite against anybody. If there is anybody good to me it is the rich. If there is anybody kind to me it is the rich.

I think so much of the rich people of this country that I shall not let the devil get them if I can help it, and I am going to talk to them when I feel like it.

“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

How many genuinely scriptural pious rich women do you know in town? I do not mean how many belong to the church. I know the church will get them in, and it's glad to get them, religion or no religion.

I ain't talking about that. How many genuinely scriptural, devoted, pious rich women have you got in your city? How many pure, noble, consecrated, self-sacrificing, pious men who are millionaires have you got in your city? Now, I never said there were not any. I never said how many. I ask you how many.

THE "THIRTY" AT ST. JOE

When I was in St. Joseph preaching, there was a story in the morning papers to the following effect:

"Jones is not doing much with the Thirty."

The next morning I would see: *"The Thirty were pretty well represented at the meeting."*

I said to my friends: "What does this 'thirty' business mean?"

"Oh," they said, "there are in this city thirty millionaires, thirty men of the world, worth over \$1,000,000."

"These things were against them."

Some of those men I found to be true, noble, Christly and generous, but those who were not, we did not make much impression upon. One of the old millionaires who professed religion joined the church. Afterwards I said to him:

"Well, my brother, you have disposed of your soul, have given it to God, but you have a heap harder job left before you — what to do with your money. You had better begin to unload now. Shell out now, for if you are ever damned it will be by your money. Mark what I tell you."

If I had one tenth of the money some members of the church have in this town and I did not do any better with it than they do, the devil would get me as certain as my name is Sam Jones. And if you have got as much sense as I have and you don't get up from where you are the devil will get you, too; you can put that down.

GOD DOESN'T PROMISE PROSPERITY

Prosperity! God never said: "All things should work together for the prosperity of God's people." They could not stand it. Some folks could not go to Heaven out of a three-story house. That's a fact. I do not say I am one of those who could. I never tried it and never will, I reckon. Prosperity — I do not want anything to come between me and my loyalty to God. I like Hagar's prayer: "**Give me neither poverty nor riches.**"

Give me not poverty, lest I steal. Give me not riches, lest I be puffed up and say: "**Who is the Lord?**"

The medium is best Let me have “**sufficient unto the day,**” with the blessed assurance that I shall dwell in the land and shall be fed.

NEITHER DID HE PROMISE HEALTH

God never said “*all things shall work together for the health of God’s people.*”

I think some of the most afflicted people I ever met in this life have been the best people I ever met, and I think sometimes most of us would get along better if we were sick more. Take an ordinary Methodist, now backslider, and strike him down with a six weeks’ spell of typhoid fever, and you can do more to get him better spiritually than by preaching 500,000 sermons. Take and shake a sinner over a coffin and turn him loose, and he will hit the ground running every time.

David said: “**It was good for me that I was afflicted.**”

It is a mighty hard matter to keep a big, fat, sleek Methodist straight, but get us down for a day to where we are pretty near to death and eternity and it has a good effect. It is wholesome.

THE USES OF ADVERSITY

Just as was said of Jenny Lind. When Goldsmith first heard her sing as he walked out of the opera house somebody said: “Goldsmith, how did you like her singing?”

He said: “Well, there was a harshness about her voice that needs toning down. If I could marry that woman, break her heart and crush her feelings, then she could sing.”

And it is said that afterwards, when he did marry her and broke her heart and crushed her feelings, that Jenny Lind sang with the sweetest voice ever he listened to, so sweet that the angels of God would almost rush to the parapets of heaven to catch the streams of the sweetest voice earth ever possessed.

SHOULD SEEK SALVATION AT ANY COST

Sometimes violets send forth their sweetest odors when crushed beneath the foot. Some of the most religious people have been the most deeply afflicted; and if there is one prayer I have prayed from the depths of my heart it is, “Lord, if I am to save my soul at any cost; if I am to lie on a bed of pain for thirty years, if that is necessary, let me begin now and suffer till I draw my last breath rather than to be joyous and healthy in this life and then enter into the other world and into a life of interminable suffering. Lord, whatever is necessary to save my soul, let it come on me. Save my soul, good Lord, at any cost to me.”

That is the way we ought to pray.

God never said all things should work together for the health of God’s people.

He never said that I used to think when I first became religious that if I got sick or my wife got sick, "That's a sign God don't love me." But now I know that God loves me with all his great heart:

NEITHER DOES GOD PROMISE HONOR

Then he did not say:

"All things shall work together for the honors of God's people, tor the popularity of God's people."

I tell you, sometimes if you do your whole duty you will be very unpopular. Did you ever notice that if you want to be popular in society you must not be much of a Christian? You must, of course, belong to the church, and you must agree with everybody. Don't disagree with anything. If you visit the house of a friend, and they have cards, don't say a word against them but say, "Some people object to them, but I don't see any harm in them."

Oh! How much of that sort of nonsense there is in the church. And if they have dancing tell them "Our preachers don't like it, but to save my soul I have never seen any harm in it." And if they want to go to the theater, tell them, "Yes, I was a young girl once myself, and I used to go to the theater."

UNPOPULAR CHRISTIANS

It is not said, "*All things shall work together for the honor and popularity of God's people.*" No, sir, when the disciples preached the truth, but one of them died a natural death, it is said. Those that loved to preach the truth rotted to death in dungeons and were burned at the stake or stoned. It is not a very popular thing to be an earnest, zealous Christian. It is not God never said "*All things are working together for the popularity of God's people.*"

You take a popular preacher, a preacher whom everybody likes, whom the gamblers like, the liars like, the drunkards like, and I say that whenever liars and gamblers and hypocrites and backslidden members like me I'll tell the Lord: "I am wrong. I know I am. There is something wrong about this thing."

ANOTHER LITTLE THING

I have noticed another thing. You recollect the Pharisees and Sadducees had no use for one another. They hated each other, but when Christ came along they clubbed together and let in on him.

Here is a backsliding Baptist sister, and there is a backsliding Methodist sister. They have no use for each other under ordinary circumstances, but when a preacher comes along and knocks the bark off of them they join against him, and it is astonishing how thick they get. They meet at the theater or at the card table, and there are a great many places and a great many points on which they agree, and wherever they meet they join in the fight against this one or that one.

Now I believe in voting. This country is running a good deal on voting, and so on, and I want every lady in this house that enjoys religion, and has got cares at home, who goes to the theater, who shines at sociable parties and dances — just square dances, she has not cut the corners of the thing yet — I want every lady here that really enjoys religion, and goes to these places and plays cards and dances, to stand up. I want to set you. Stand up, every one of you! If I were one I would stand up and be laughed at and say: “Here is one.”

DON'T ENJOY RELIGION

But I will tell you what they will say now. They will say: “I don't enjoy religion. I will admit that I have got religion, but I don't enjoy it.” Now listen at me: There is but one reason why nobody enjoys religion, and that is because they have not got any to enjoy. It is the most enjoyable thing a fellow ever struck, and the question would be with me, how can I keep from enjoying it! Got religion, but don't enjoy it!

The popularity of God's people. He never said that “*All things shall work together for the worldly honors of God's people.*” He never said that. He never said that. I am glad the Lord's people don't take many honors in this world the way it goes now. I am glad they don't take any good Christian and run him for president the way they run them now. I am glad of that. I tell you if a man was all right and they ran him for president, wouldn't they smirch him? Take Blaine and Cleveland. Ten years of close application of warm water and soft soap would not wash off the smirching and vituperation that was thrown on those two men in their last race. If what was said against those two men was true, they ought both to be in the chain gang.

I am glad the Lord's people do not have to have things in that way. I don't want to be president if they put more mud on me before I get there than I can wash off while I am there.

WHAT IS THE “GOOD?”

Worldly honors! They are not for God's people. What does this mean?

“All things work for good.”

What is this “good?” It ain't health. It ain't happiness. It ain't prosperity. It ain't worldly honors. What is it the Lord means here? Now, let us come to the true text for a moment:

“All things work together for the salvation of them that love God.”

Salvation is the greatest good this earth ever heard of or could experience. Now, I can see into the text and see into a thousand things. “All things work together for the salvation.” For the persistent, eternal salvation of them that love God. A heap of strange things happen in this world, sister. You say, “Well, I cannot see to save my life how the loss of my husband could work for my good.”

“I cannot see how the loss of my sweet child can work for my good.”

“I cannot see how the loss of every dollar of our property can work for my good.”

Oh, how strange things have happened! Well, now, you see that clock on the mantel at home. You walk up and look at that clock. I take it down and look at the dial, and look at the works, which must be put together by a clock-maker. I took my clock to pieces once and after I had put it together again I had sufficient wheels left to make another clock. I could not get it together. It had been made by a clockmaker and only a clockmaker could put the wheels in their proper places again.

A DIVINE INTENT

When I look at the works of a clock I say, “Well, well, all those wheels cannot be necessary.” There is one big wheel turning slowly and another one fast. There is a great big one turning backward and a little one forward. I say a clock like that cannot keep time. I put the dial back and the clock ticks on and strikes the hours, and I say, “It does keep time. I do not care how it looks.” Now God sets up in Heaven the largest clock of all, and we cannot see the machinery. Here is health and peace in my family. Well, that is a little wheel moving forward. The last dollar of my property is swept away. Well, that’s a big wheel turning backward, but all things work for you and work harmoniously in one direction for your present good and eternal salvation.

When I was at Columbus, Ga., I walked through an immense cotton factory. I was shown all the machinery, that which cut the hoops to go round the raw cotton, that which picked the cotton, and I followed one machine after another, from one floor to another. I watched some machinery carding cotton, others pulling it onto reels.

At times I would say: “Look here, surely this is not the way to make cloth. If I did not want to make cloth, I would do just like you are doing.” But when we got to the last machine, on the fourth floor, there was a pile of cotton cloth bundled up, ready for the market I looked down the line of machines, and said, “Every machine in this factory works together for cloth; “and, sister, by and by, when you step into the heavenly gates, you will look back and say: “Everything in my life worked for good.”

Oh, how true these things are!

MORE ILLUSTRATIONS

My father used to say: “My son, if you do that I will correct you.” When I got off by myself I said: “Papa is so cruel to me. Sometimes he whips me for doing some things, and if ever I get grown up I am going to ask papa what made him do that. But I was not eighteen when I found that my father had corrected me for things that would have ruined me if I had been left alone. And when you get to Heaven you will say: “God brought me to salvation the only way he could have brought me safely this far.”

“All things work together for good.”

A man once gave me this illustration of the text. He said he was sitting out under a tree in a garden eating a biscuit, when he saw a little ant climbing upon the plank. He watched it, and said: "I reckon this little ant is in search of food." He had dropped a crumb, but the little ant was going in the opposite direction to it. He put his finger in the way of the ant to direct it to the crumb, and the little thing seemed to lose patience and want to quarrel with him, and it seemed to say: "Why do you stop me? I am hunting food for my young."

The ant started off in another direction, and he dropped his finger again in front of the little ant, which seemed to be madder than before, and it seemed to say: "Oh, you great intelligent creature, why do you stop me? I am hunting food for my young."

He dropped his finger in front of the ant again and again, and each time it seemed to say, "Why do you stop me? I am in earnest search of food for my young." He said he dropped his finger in front of the ant until he directed it to the crumb, and when it picked the crumb up it seemed to say, "I am so glad you put me in the way of finding this. Here is more food than I could have found in a month if you had left me alone."

THE FOLLY OF QUARRELING WITH GOD

In this world when we are moving in the wrong direction, down comes the providential finger of God, and you say, "I know I have the worst luck of anybody." And we stand and quarrel with God and ourselves. We start out in another direction, and just about the time we think we are about to succeed, down comes God's providential finger, and we say, "Just look at that!"

In this way God drives us right to the gate of Heaven, and when we walk in there we say: "Glory be to God. If we had been left alone we would have gone to perdition, but he has driven me right to the joys of everlasting life."

THE MATTER OF PROVIDENCE

Providence means going before. Providence. I believe in Providence as strongly as I believe in anything. Here is a wagon train moving westward. A horseman lopes ahead, picks out the camping place, buys the provender for the stock and arranges everything. That man was the providence of the wagon train. Providence to go on ahead, to arrange and plan everything. Now let us in God's providence from this time say, "I will go along and trust in God that everything will work together for good."

"Though befall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord uphold with his hand."

I hold a baby's hand as it walks. Its foot strikes something and it falls with a force that would crush its face. But I hold up the baby by the hand and I say, "Baby, I am so glad you had my hand. If you had not held it you would have ruined your little face on the rocks. I have sometimes gone along and fallen, and I have thought I was gone forever, but the Lord had my hand and held me up, and I say, "Bless the Lord! If he had not held my hand I should have fallen down into eternal despair."

THE LORD'S SUSTAINING HAND

One day my two little boys ran ahead of me on the sidewalk. Directly I noticed they were back again holding to me by my fingers. Well, I thought, "What does this meant?"

I looked ahead and saw a few steps in advance a lot of cattle on the sidewalk. Just as they saw the cattle they ran back and got hold of my fingers and continued to laugh and play, as much as to say: "We were afraid when we saw those cattle alone, but now we would laugh and play if all the cattle in the world were here, for we are with father."

Let me say to you, if you have got hold of God's hand you are safe. When dangers and disappointments beset you, you laugh and rejoice. Lord help and bless us, and save us.

(Penitents who had made up their mind to join some church on the morrow were invited to the altar, and after the benediction had been pronounced a number of the congregation signified their intention of beginning a new life forthwith).

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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