

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 TWENTY-SIX

A SUMMARY

I — The Fiftieth Anniversary

“Cartersville, Ga., October 16, 1897

“To the Atlanta Journal:

“You have requested me to give you something apropos to this, my fiftieth anniversary jubilee. I have written upon almost all conceivable subjects except scientific subjects, and unless I was a scientist to the manor born and educated to the clan, I know I shall not be able to say just what ought to be said, and leave unsaid just what ought not to be said.

“I tell you it is no small thing to be fifty years old. The world is not much interested in babyhood, though the child is father to the man; and then the world is not much interested in young manhood, though character reaches from the cradle to the coffin. There is not a day in human life but that character is being builded, associations being fixed and destinies being settled.

“I was born of religious parents, taught in the ways of virtue and manhood, and escaped the evil that curses so many human lives up to the beginning of the war between the States. My father joining the ranks of the Southern Confederacy, I joined the ranks of the devil. How I pity a boy of the tender age of fourteen years in times like those! I believe the war wrecked more young men than it killed old men.

“From that period of age between fourteen and twenty-four I learned the lesson that the way of the transgressor is hard. But marvelous facts in a human life, I have been from the age of twenty-four to the age of fifty as honest and faithful a champion for manhood, truth and virtue, integrity, honor and right as I ever missed the mark along that line in former years. It was not only a revolution in my life, but regeneration in my soul that transformed me from the practice of wrong to the championship of right.

“In 1872 I began my ministerial life as pastor. From the first I wanted to get the juice out of a text. How will I get the juice out of my text was the supreme question. And the juice is all I ever wanted out of the text. Others may deal in bones and hoofs and horns, and that which is dry and tasteless, but I always wanted the juice, and always wanted to give juice to others. I never attended a theological ‘cemetery.’ Till this blessed day I know nothing of systematic theology as a science. I never studied ‘hermaletics,’ or ‘exegetics’ or ‘polemics.’ I never studied nor taught oratory or rhetoric. I have always believed that there were three essentials to an effective speaker: First, clearness; second, concentration; third, directness. The average speaker cannot be clear unless he bathes the subject in a flood of light by illustration. Let an audience see what you are talking about. Second, concentration; Put a whole lead mine into one bullet. Then, thirdly, directness; aim where you want to hit and something will be lying dead around in that neck of the woods.

“I have made the Word of God the limit and boundary line of truth. I have considered myself free to think within that boundary line. I have never been hampered by rule or schools. God’s Word has been the circle and God himself the orbit around which my mind has moved. I have been called a crank, mountebank, clown, fanatic and fool; and I have gathered all these titles up and am willing to wear them as honors and cast them down at my Saviour’s feet at last, emblems of my loyalty to Him and my fidelity to my convictions.

“Men have criticized me everywhere. If I had preached as the schools teach and systematic theology directs, and logic and grammar demand, I would have been criticized as little as other men, preached to as few people as other men, and moved in as small circles as other men. A thousand times I have preferred mental training to mental culture. The preacher who reads and studies all the week and stands on the Sabbath day and vomits intellectually that which he has taken in during the week, may please the fancy, but will never move the conscience of an audience. It is in the mental world as it is in the world of physics. A man who has studied forestry until he knows all the trees and all about trees and writes fluently on their nature and quality don’t amount to much in the practical world. The mineralogist who knows the weights and names and kinds of ores and writes fluently upon that subject, may have his place in the world. But the man who sees an axe handle in a tree, and an axe in an ore bank, has the genius to put the two together and thus furnish an implement that every farmer needs, he it is the world applauds. So in the world, the man who gathers the nuggets of thought here and yonder and puts them together until he has an idea that moves consciences, builds character and fixes destiny, he it is in the mental world that is doing good, and not the mental glutton who feeds and fills his mind simply to vomit it back, because he has not the power of assimilation.

The mental training that harnesses every faculty of the mind, perception, conception, memory, judgment, reason and imagination, and drives them like so many horses in a team, tapping the one that drags back, is the kind we need.

“I would no more carry a manuscript in the pulpit to help my memory than I would carry a bundle of fodder to urge along a lazy horse in my team. Treat the faculties of the mind as the teamster does a lazy horse; lambast them, and if memory or perception or imagination does not come to time, pound the life out of them and make them come to time.

“This is the way a man fifty years old feels and thinks. I was once much wiser than I am to-day. When I was twenty-one years old I looked upon Daniel Webster as an idiot, and if Solomon had come around I would have sent him forthwith to the asylum. But I am now at that period of life when I am only able to see what a fool I was then.

“This much on that line.

“This anniversary is a unique one to me. It is the first jubilee anniversary I have ever had. What a royal time it is to have fifty friends and brethren to sit at the table in my own home — men from perhaps twenty different States, men whom I honor, and men who have honored me with their presence at my home. It’s an honor to any man when fifty busy business men will quit their homes and business and come afar to be present on an occasion like this. It is an honor I do not deserve and an honor which I profoundly acknowledge. Wife is the author of this unique program for the jubilee.

When she first suggested it I thought she would perchance invite the friends from a distance, they would send their excuses and we would have simply a jubilee with our home friends at Cartersville, Ga. But such the friends willed should not be, and we had a jubilee anniversary with forty-nine friends sitting at our table at dinner, and all our Cartersville and vicinity friends gathered with us in the evening at an informal reception.

The very thought of it makes me think more of my wife’s husband and my children’s father. I tell you, a swallow-tail coat, plug hat, tooth-pick shoes and red cravat fit into this occasion better perhaps than any occasion of my life. Who wouldn’t don all these things on an occasion like this? As I have said before at my silver wedding, when I donned this full-dress attire and my friends laughed at me in my swallow-tail coat, I told them I never had one before, and they could see that I had it on mostly behind.

“I notice my wife showing me a little more honor than usual and my children tip their hats and bow more reverently to the patriarch *and pater familias*. My horse seems to move with a quicker step and the servants on the place eye me as I pass by and then look at each other as much as to say: ‘He don’t look like it’s in him, but sho’ he is a big man in his way.’

“After the trials and hardships of twenty years’ constant labor this forms an oasis, pleasant occasion that makes me feel grateful to God and love my fellow man more. To the friends here and yonder who do not participate personally in this occasion, I send words of greeting and cheer, and above all things say to them that the richest reward God has given me on earth is the faithful men and women of America, who have, through criticisms and sometimes misrepresentations, ever been faithful in their prayers and good will towards me.

I have not lived in vain, thank God, and while life shall last with me I shall count myself happy for the honors done me on this our jubilee occasion.

“Sam P. Jones.”

II — Testimonials to His Work.

Just a year before the day Mr. Jones's body lay in state at the Capitol of Georgia, President Roosevelt was in Atlanta, and learning that Mr. Jones was in the audience, asked to be presented to him.

Mr. Jones was conducted to the platform, and was introduced to the President in the presence of fifty thousand people at Piedmont Park. Upon meeting Mr. Jones, Mr. Roosevelt expressed great pleasure, and said: "Mr. Jones, you, in your way, are doing for this country and the people what I am trying to accomplish in mine. I heartily endorse your good work, and hope that success will continue to crown your efforts. The next time you visit Washington, I want you to telegraph me in advance, and I want you to be my guest during your stay in the Capitol City."

After Mr. Jones acknowledged the introduction, the President asked for Mrs. Jones, saying he would like to meet her. Mrs. Jones came forward, and was introduced to the chief magistrate. As Mrs. Jones shook hands with him, she said: "President Roosevelt, I am glad to meet you, and I think you are the second greatest man in America. There is the greatest," she said, pointing to her husband, as he stood with his arm linked in the President's. The President good-naturedly replied, "Ah, you don't think Sam's, great."

Rev. Russell H. Conwell, LL.D., president of Temple College, and pastor of the Baptist Temple, Philadelphia, writing of him after his death, said:

"Rev. Sam Jones always reminded me of a great cedar tree standing on the side of Monte Viso, on the northern boundary of Italy. It had been broken down by an avalanche when it was small, but had recovered itself, assuming in its growth very curious shape and immense strength. It is now so large that it holds back the avalanche which used to scour the side of the mountain and make traveling very dangerous below."

The late lamented Bishop Beckwith, of the Episcopal diocese of Georgia, and one of the most eloquent pulpit orators this country has ever produced, was never a man of extravagant speech or sensational ideas in public utterance or private talk. Praise from him was praise indeed. Bishop Beckwith said: "Sam Jones has done more good in Georgia than any man I know. I would be happy if I could go into the presence of my Maker with Sam Jones's record."

These three testimonials, one from the President of the nation, another from one of the most distinguished ministers of the United States, who says that he got his inspiration from Mr. Jones, and the other from a distinguished churchman and bishop, with a thousand more which might be given in summing up the influence and work of his life, but we prefer to let Mr. Jones's own words close the chapter, covering his work as a preacher, evangelist and lecturer.

"Like Saul of Tarsus, I was turned right about, and now for thirty-four years, I have been obedient to the heavenly call. I spent eight years of my life as a pastor upon different circuits in the North Georgia Conference.

“Then I took the agency of the Orphans’ Home, and fed and clothed and cared for the orphan children during my evangelistic work for more than twelve years. I have been out of the pastorate for seventeen years, and my life has been given almost wholly to evangelistic work, covering almost every State in the Union and most of the principal cities and towns. I do not affirm with absolute correctness, but I estimate that I have seen five hundred thousand people turned from the error of their ways into a better life under my ministry. I have preached, perhaps, to more than a million of people a year for the past twenty-five years. I have known as many as twenty-seven hundred people to join the churches in a series of meetings, and frequently as many as a thousand. I have been but a humble instrument in the hands of God in this work. His has been the power, so to Him shall be the glory. Reckoning outside of the grace and power of God, I do not understand my own work. But God tells us that with Him all things are possible, and that he has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the wise, and that this treasure is in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of man.

“While my life has been one of continued toil, carrying me away from home perhaps eleven months in each year for more than twenty-five years, yet looking back over these years, I can but say if I had a thousand lives I’d consecrate them all to this work, for the highest post of honor and the grandest work mortal man can do is to be in a position where God will help him, and then do faithfully the work God would have him do. Profoundly convinced from the start till now that the grace of God had wrought a mighty change in my own heart and life, and with an ever-growing faith in the power of Christ to save all men, I have gone unflinchingly on with my work proclaiming what I believed to be the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. I have been criticized much — sometimes justly, but always criticized. It is part of the penalty awarded to success, and as I have frequently said, the train that raises no dust, makes no noise and kills no stock must have run very slow or been side-tracked along the way.

“Amid it all I have borne nothing but the kindly spirit toward all mankind. I have never stickled for creeds, nor been an expounder of dogma. I have simply championed that which I knew was right and denounced that which I knew was wrong. In this work God has given me a thousand friends for every enemy that I have found and a freedom of liberty which few men have enjoyed. In all these years I have gone where I pleased, staid as long as I pleased, said what I pleased while there, and left when I pleased. Sometimes they have threatened to drum me out of town, but I have always answered back, saying: ‘Boys, I’ve got the drums; I won’t lend them to you. I am going to drum you out before this thing is over.’

“I am profoundly grateful to God that at this moment of my life I can lay my hand on my heart and turn my eyes into the faces of the millions of people who live to-day and say that I do not cherish an unkind feeling toward any man alive. Looking over these years I can see the mistakes of my life have been many. I can see where, in a thousand ways, I might have improved lost opportunities and shunned breakers upon which I well-nigh foundered. But with the years behind me and whatever God may allot to me in the days and years to come in this world, I have no disposition to go back and pull the same hills and fight over the battles again. I have no disposition to ask for an armistice; I have no desire to compromise.

I shall never change my methods or alter my plans until better methods and truer plans shall be given me of God.

The myriads of approving faces and warm handshakes and kindly God-bless-yous which I have received all along the way make up the sweetest memories that I carry with me to-day. I wish for humanity all peace and happiness here and a crown of everlasting life hereafter.

“My faith in God and my faith in humanity grows as the years go by. I believe in God with all my heart, and never had more faith in humanity than I have to-day.”

~ end of chapter 26 ~

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