

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 THIRTY-TWO - (Memorial Services — Continued)

Memorial Services in Atlanta

The Atlanta people not fully satisfied with the honor they had conferred upon Mr. Jones, decided to have a special memorial service for him. As the Baptist Tabernacle was the largest auditorium in Atlanta, and where Mr. Jones had preached so many times of recent years, it was decided that the service should be held there. The building had already been decorated for the homecoming of Dr. Broughton, and while the decorations might have been out of place for memorial services to any other man, yet we believe that the brightness and cheerfulness of the decorations would have pleased Mr. Jones.

In the center of the rostrum was a vacant chair, just above it a life-sized picture of Mr. Jones. Just to the right of the pulpit was this inscription: "Sam P. Jones, Georgia's Beloved Dead." Aside from this there was no sign of mourning. There was an outpouring of the people. Early the building was full to overflowing, and thousands were turned away. Row after row of earnest faces, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, with a sense of the sacredness of the hour listened attentively amid smiles and tears, to the words of the speakers.

Mr. William D. Upshaw opened the exercises with a very beautiful tribute to Mr. Jones, and then turned the services over to ex-Governor Northen, who presided.

After prayer by Dr. C. E. Dowman of the First Methodist church. Governor Northen spoke briefly of Mr. Jones, saying he stood for three things: First, for a strong conviction of duty; second, for a great purpose in life; and third, for a remarkable individuality. He labored for God and humanity, said the Governor, and labored in his own individual way. He was always himself and never tried to be anything but himself. He was unique in the service of God and humanity.

There were brief addresses by Mr. Reuben Arnold, Mr. J. K. Orr, Dr. Chas. O. Jones, Chief Henry Jennings, Dr. C. E. Dowman, and Rev. Walt. Holcomb.

The service was interspersed with several beautiful gospel songs, which were some of Mr. Jones's favorites. Mr. Edwin R. Smoot sang "I Want to Go There"; Mr. Charlie Tillman sang, "Unanswered Yet"; and Messrs. Tillman and Smoot sang, "Saved by Grace."

The next speaker was Mr. Reuben R. Arnold, who spoke as follows:

"Lives of great men are the strongest lessons humanity can have. It is for this reason biographies are written. It is for this reason we scan with close scrutiny the birth, the environment, the growth, the characteristics, the successes and the failures which mark the careers of the illustrious dead. Well has it been said that the proper study of mankind is man. The history of the world, so far as it entertains or instructs us, is only the history of the human race.

"While it is said that no man's life can be truly chronicled until the impartial hand of the future historian lifts the veil, still it is a glorious sentiment which calls us together over the bier of a departed brother to discuss his virtues and glean from his life its teachings. In his life Sam Jones has been so recently a part of our country's history, that under the inspiration of these surroundings, under the spell of this music, I feel that he has burst the cerements of the tomb to be with us again.

"Sam Jones was a pioneer in his particular field of evangelistic work. No narrowness of creed held him in its grip. His soul was as broad as the universe. No denomination could claim that he belonged peculiarly to it. In death, as in life, he was the common property of us all, and before he was surrendered back to the earth, it was meet that his body should lie in state in the marble halls of Georgia's Capitol, where the people he loved so well could take a last look at his mortal remains.

"Mr. Jones's career shows the remarkable possibilities of American life. The opportunities afforded in our republic bring out all of merit that there is in every citizen. With no training for the ministry, Mr. Jones rose to heights that few men, bred to the cloth, can ever hope to attain. As I listen to the story of his life, it reads like some dream. And his was not a career that shot up suddenly, and as suddenly, like a rocket, shot down again. He became a fixed star in the firmament, and his luster grew brighter with the years.

"His career shows that strong traits of character will assert themselves and break through all environment. He began life as a lawyer, but that calling did not suit him. His life as a lawyer ended with a short period of dissipation. But though dissipated for a short season, Sam Jones never could have been anything but a good man. This straying away before taking his final step for good made him all the stronger when he turned his face towards the light. It was impossible for him to have wandered except for a brief season. The Arabian philosophers applied to those who were possessed of mental vagaries this test: 'If thou be such by the will of God, then remain as thou art; but if thou be such as the result of mere passing conjuration, then resume again thy former shape.' Sam Jones fairly rushed to his great work for which he was, above all men, fitted by nature.

"His methods were not artificial. He talked in simple language, as do all great men. He imitated nobody. He realized the great truth that if a man is to have force it is by being himself.

“He spoke great truths in a line which other men would take pages to cover. He reached men whom the more scholarly could not impress. There is no calculating the good he has done.

“He was absolutely fearless. Like Brutus, he was armed in his honesty that the threats of the vicious passed him by as the idle wind which he heeded not.

“And yet with all the force, with all his denunciation of crime and vice, there was not the slightest touch of bitterness in anything he said. Those who differed with him respected him. He exemplified the great truth that vice and sin are to be denounced, but the poor erring mortals who succumb to them are to be pitied and reformed — not hated and driven further from the path of right.

“He had wonderful balance, common sense and judgment. In reading his newspaper articles, I was struck with his knowledge of politics, economics and other material questions.

“But the crowning glory of Sam Jones’s method of discourse was his never-failing sense of humor. It was this power which attracted other men and first got their attention. He was then enabled to drive home his great truths.

“In conclusion, let us hope that long may the memory of this wonderful man live in our country; and I am thankful for the privilege of being able to say a word in praise of his virtues.”

Dr. Len G. Broughton, pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist church, made the closing address, which is as follows:

“Perhaps there is no man in Atlanta to-day who feels just the same kind of sorrow that I feel. Sam Jones and myself were very intimate in our relations. I do not know why he should have condescended to be such a close, personal friend to me, but he nevertheless was one of the best friends I ever had. Two years ago he stood on this very platform on the occasion of a welcome service arranged for me by my people upon my return from two months’ preaching engagements in London. Those of us who were present at that time will never forget his humorous and at the same time beautiful words welcoming me back to my place and to my people.

“It seems a bit strange that to-day being my first service after my return from another preaching engagement in London that I should be standing here speaking these words in a memorial service to him. It is one of the hardest tasks that I have ever had to perform. I first heard of his death off Sandy Hook, as my ship cast anchor, and the pilot came on board bringing the mail. The news was conveyed to me by my wife. She had just heard it, and hastened to write me. I shall never forget the feeling of my heart as I read the sad words: ‘Sam Jones is dead. He died on the train near Little Rock, Ark. Sad! Sad! Sad!’ I went immediately to my cabin, shut the door behind me, and cried like a child. As soon as I got ashore I hastened to a telegraph office and telegraphed his good wife, saying:

‘My heart is with you to-day. I leave on the next train for home. Can I serve you?’

“I had no idea at that time that this memorial service in our Tabernacle was being arranged, so I telegraphed my assistant, Mr. E. H. Peacock: ‘Arrange for Sam Jones’s memorial at the Tabernacle Sunday night.’

“As I came along down through the States I got the Atlanta papers, and they told me of this memorial service which was arranged to be held this afternoon, and that I was to be one of the speakers. I knew then, of course, that Mr. Peacock would not arrange for the service at night; that this would do for us all.

“In speaking of Sam Jones, I wish to do so under three different heads:

“First, Sam Jones as I first knew him; second, as I last knew him; and, third, as I shall know him.

“Sam Jones, as I first knew him, was a curiosity. I came in touch with him just after I entered the ministry. I was attending a convention in Goldsboro, N. C, and he lectured at the opera house. He gave his lecture, ‘Get There and Stay There.’ Well, to say I was impressed does not express it. To me, as I now remember him, he was the funniest man I ever saw; and then, too, he was the most pathetic man I ever saw. He made me laugh, and he made me cry. One thing I shall never forget, and that was a story that he told. He said when he was a circuit rider in the mountains of Georgia an old preacher came to him one day and said: ‘Sam, you know I can out-preach you any day, and yet the people of my circuit are leaving me every Sunday and coming over to hear you preach. I want you to tell me why it is, and, if you can, tell me how to prevent it; for it has come to pass that I never have more than a baker’s dozen to hear me.’

“Sam said: ‘My brother, if you will do what I tell you, it will not be so. You will have no trouble in keeping your crowd.’

“‘Well,’ said the old preacher, ‘I will try.’

‘No,’ said Sam, ‘you must promise to do exactly what I tell you.’

‘All right,’ said he, ‘anything to get a crowd.’

‘All right,’ said Sam; ‘next Sunday when you go to church begin promptly at 11 o’clock; announce your hymn, read your text, and then stop. You will probably see some of the old bench-warmers sitting on the front pews about half asleep. Double up your fist, strike the palm of your hand, and say: “Boo!” Say it just as loud as you can. If nobody moves, do so again, and again; and still if nobody moves, jump off the platform and grab the first one that you come to by the back of the neck and pitch him outdoors heels over head. Get back on the platform, look out over the house, and you will see the last man going out, and he will do what the last man always does, look back to see what is taking place. Just as he looks back, double up your fist, strike the palm of your hand again and say “Boo!” as loud as you can. He will then jump up twenty feet, and light on the ground. Then, you make for your old gray mare, say as you go through the yard, “Brethren, I will preach here again next Sunday morning at 11 o’clock.” If anyone starts to you, just say “Boo!” Go home and lock yourself up in your room.

“In a few hours’ time the reporters from Atlanta will be up. They never heard of you before, but they will be there to interview you and to see what has come over you. Do not let them into your room whatever you do. Finally they will begin to beg, and when they do, you put your mouth to the keyhole and whisper, “Boo!” Tell them all you have to say is you will preach again next Sunday morning at 11 o’clock at the same old stand.

“Those reporters will at once leave, and next morning in the Atlanta papers there will be great headlines — “Boo! Boo! Boo!” etc. Think of it! Two columns on the front page in the Atlanta papers all about you! They have never heard about you before. Next Sunday morning go to church, and when you get there you will find five thousand people. They will be from all sections round about, and at least half a dozen newspaper reporters will be in the crowd.’

“Oh, pshaw. Brother Jones,’ said the old preacher, ‘hush your foolishness. What on earth will they be there for?’

‘Yes,’ said Sam, ‘that is just exactly what I expected you to ask. That is just what I wanted you to ask. They will be there to see and hear a man who has done something. That’s what they will be there for.

The trouble with you, brother, is, you have said enough, but you have not done anything, and what this world wants is men who do things.’

“I say I shall never forget this story. I am sure no one else ever will after they have heard it. It made a great impression upon me, especially coming as it did at the very time I entered the ministry. I am sure I profited by it more than I will ever be able to tell, for from that day until this I have tried to do something. I have failed in many respects, indeed in most of them; but it has not been because my intentions have not been good. I thank God for that story and for the blessing that it brought into my life. This was Sam Jones as I first knew him, and through all the years that have intervened he has been the same practical, common-sense philosopher. I have never seen a day since then that I have not believed in him. I have preached with him many a time, and have held meetings with him. He has held meetings with me. This pulpit has always been open to him. He knew it. Whenever he wanted to come to Atlanta he felt perfectly free to write me and say: ‘Announce me for Sunday. I will be down to preach for you.’ One time I remember his calling me up over the ‘phone and saying: ‘Don’t you think your people need a little stiffening in their backbones? If so, announce me for Sunday. I will come down and do my best.’

“He was always my friend. By pen and by word he always spoke a good word for me. Sometimes I have felt that he did it under protest, for I did not see how any man could so completely ignore my mistakes to exalt my virtues; but he was always charitable enough not to criticize me for my mistakes. No man ever had a greater, braver and truer champion than I had in Sam Jones.

“I want now to say a word about him as I last knew him. It was just before I started on my recent trip to England. We met on the streets of Atlanta. We talked awhile, and then separated. He said to me:

‘Broughton, you are going to London. Preach old sermons while you are there. Take a rest as far as possible, for if you don’t mind you are going to kill your fool self. You know,’ continued he, ‘you haven’t got much sense, and you are working what you have got mighty hard trying to make up for what you “hain’t” got.’

“Everybody knows that this was just like him. He was always free with those he loved. They understood it, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I remember during that conversation another thing he said. We were talking about our work at the Tabernacle, and especially about our Tabernacle Infirmary. He said: ‘I know you are always in a strain to get money for your different institutions, and especially the hospital, but don’t worry about those things. If you get in a tight, call on me. Take it easy. I am going to be dead some day, and I want you to be here to fight when I am gone.’

“This is how he appeared to me when I last knew him, the same jolly, joking, optimistic character, full of wit as keen as the point of a needle, yet deep in sincerity and forceful in application.

“He went with the harness on, the same old harness that he had worn these years. Unlike many men, he had retained his individuality, the same individuality that characterized his early life. He seemed to have been cut out for a definite work, and God kept him straight at it until the day of his death.

“I wish now to say a word about him as I shall know him, for I truly expect some day to strike hands with him again. What a great meeting that will be! How interested we will be in each other’s story! He will be telling me how he has found it in heaven, and I will be telling him how things went on after he left us. It will be a great meeting time, for we shall not lose any of our friendship by reason of the separation. It was too true for that. True friendships are not interrupted by separation. They abide forever.

“But I find that I cannot trust myself to speak on this line. Only let me give you these words. They seem to suit just here, because they draw a contrast between the two worlds, earth and heaven:

“Down below, a sad mysterious music.
Wailing from the woods and on the shore;
Burdened with a grand, majestic secret.
Which keeps sweeping from us evermore.

“Up above, music that entwineth,
In eternal threads of golden sound,
The great poem of this strange existence.
All whose wondrous meaning hath been found.

“Down below, the grave within the churchyard,
And the anguish on the young face pale.
And the watcher, ever as it dusketh,
Rocking to and fro with long, sad wail.

“Up above, a crowned and happy spirit,
Like an infant in the eternal years.
Who shall grow in light and love forever,
Ordered in his place among his peers.

“Oh, the sobbing of the winds of autumn!
Oh, the sunset streak of stormy gold!
Oh, the poor heart, thinking in the churchyard,
Night is coming and the grave is cold!

“Oh, the rest forever, and the rapture!
Oh, the hand that wipes the tears away!
Oh, the golden homes beyond the sunset!
Oh, the God — that watches o’er the clay!”

~ end of chapter 32 ~

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