

Sam Jones' Last Sermon Sudden Death

Revival Institutes

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Sam Jones has been overlooked by historians but Sam Jones was used of God and his generation to shake entire towns with revival. His Nashville meetings in 1885 turned the entire city upside down as he preached to crowds of 10,000 at a time where he reached 1 out of every 5 citizens of Nashville. His meetings altered the very life of the city. Taverns closed. Crime decreased. Backsliders were reclaimed and thousands were ushered into God's kingdom as some of the biggest sinners in town were remarkably saved.

The Ryman Auditorium in Nashville was built for him to preach in by his most famous convert of that campaign, Tom "Steamboat" Ryman. In America at that time, he was as famous as D. L. Moody. He said more quotable things than any man of his generation, and when he died, memorials were held in 20 cities, and in Atlanta 30,000 people came to view his body as it lay in state at the Rotunda of the Capitol. His last sermon was preached to a men's meeting in Oklahoma City on October 13, 1906. Sam Jones died within 48 hours of preaching this message, dying suddenly while traveling on a train back to Georgia, and it was as if his own sudden death was an exclamation point to his very sermon.

This searching message is void of humor but full of God as the fiery evangelist brings his hearers to the very verge of eternity. Here now is Sam Jones' last sermon entitled "Sudden Death."

I shall talk tonight from the first verse of the 29th chapter of Proverbs. "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." There is enough in the bare announcement of this text to bring every man of us to our feet with a question; and that question should be this: "Who is the author of those fearful words?" And the answer comes back: The great God, the infinite God, who made us all, whose sleepless eye overlooks us all, the great God who will finally judge us all. Then if God be the Author of those words, each of us should propound another question: "To whom does he address himself in these fearful words?" And there are a thousand persons in this audience who could jump to their feet and say: "Surely God means me. I have been often reprov'd, often warn'd, often rebuk'd. Wagon-loads of sermons have been wasted upon my life and upon my ears. God has multiplied his calls to me and his warnings and rebukes from my cradle up to this hour." And I say to every man present here tonight: "Brother, if you ever weigh'd a verse of Scripture; if you ever took a verse of Scripture into your heart and conscience, take this one in tonight, "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

I but announce tonight a fact patent to every thoughtful reading man in this audience when I say to you that there have been more sudden deaths in the last twelve months of this world's history than any twelve months since the evening and the morning were the first day. I but state to you what you can prove to be facts, and I state to you that more men have been swept suddenly and awfully into eternity in the last twelve months than in any twelve months of this world's history by heart failure, by apoplexy, by paralysis, by shipwreck, by railroad disaster, by accidents, by cyclones, by earthquake, by hurricane on the sea, everywhere, and the columns of our papers daily come laden with the sudden and awful deaths that multiply year after year in the pages of human life. You can scarcely pick up one of your daily papers without reading from a dozen to three thousand sudden deaths recorded in its columns, and every sudden death in this line is but a fulfillment of the word of the Lord in this text. We may say what we please, and heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot nor tittle of the divine law. God hath spoken it, He hath said: "He- that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And God shall bring to pass the fulfillment of his word if he must sweep a nation into hell in the twinkling of an eye. God hath spoken today, and God will fulfill it.

And, brethren, this is a personal message to you. I am talking to hard-hearted, stiff-necked sinners here tonight, that have been preached to from your infancy up to this hour. I am talking to men and women here tonight, in the range of my voice, that have not heeded ten thousand calls, and are unheeding the reproofs and warnings that have been thrown about you all the days of your life. But God speaks to you in that message. Sudden deaths have multiplied and become so common that we scarcely notice them. We glance up and down the columns of our daily papers, and notice where this score here, and that hundred there, and this thousand there have been swept into eternity since the sun set the day before or rose this morning, until it is so common that it does not attract our attention at all. I say to you, my countrymen, that because it is common it is not noticed, but it is as fearful to die suddenly today as ever; it is as awful to be swept suddenly into eternity today as any day in the world's history. It is as tremendous a fact in heaven and earth for a man to be swept suddenly and awfully into eternity today as it was six thousand years ago. Awful fact! And I propose tonight, with your forbearance and prayers and patience, simply to run over some things that have come under my own observation, and I tell you that which I know, and I tell you another thing that you don't know. This man quit telling lies the day he joined the Church. Put that down! Some of you fellows can afford to lie, but I can't. If I tell a lie, they catch me in it, and prove it on me, and I am ruined and I know it. Some of you little fellows can tell a lie and it don't amount to anything, and nobody will notice it; but whenever I may say a thing you can put my immortality on the truth of what I say. You put that down! For twenty-three years I have never found it necessary to establish the fact that I am sticking to my integrity.

Now, understand that I don't care who doubts it, I don't care who says it is not true; I say it is true, and facts are facts and you can't dodge them. Now, understand that! And I want you to understand that I have no reference to anything said about me in this town. I am talking on general principles; and if you think I have told a lie, you come to my room, old fellow, and I will show you that my lie is the biggest truth you ever heard in your life.

Now do you hear that? You see what I mean? Thank God! I quit telling lies when I joined the Church; and if every fellow in this town had done the same thing, we would have been a heap better off in this world. We would that. I am sticking to facts.

Now hear me: I simply relate to you to-night the incidents which have occurred in my own life and under my own experience and observation. And I start in with this proposition, which I want you to take home with you: that this man who is preaching to you tonight has preached the gospel earnestly and faithfully to thousands and tens of thousands of men who, since my voice died in their ears, have been swept suddenly and awfully into the presence of God.

When I was preaching in the most memorable meeting in Nashville, Tennessee ten years ago, the most marvelous in grace I ever looked upon in my life, I believe more men were converted, and more people joined the Church from that memorable meeting, than any work of grace almost in this nineteenth century. It was marvelous to behold at that meeting that grand man, Capt. Tom Ryman, of Nashville, Tennessee, than whom there has been no grander convert to Christianity in this nineteenth century. He came to that meeting as others did; he came up to the altar, knelt down like a little child, and gave his heart to God. The day after his conversion he walked up to me and said: "Brother Jones, I want you to go to my home." I said: "Captain, I can't go before Friday." "Well," he said, "I will be glad to have you then; I want my wife and children to see you, who have won me to God, and will you give me that pledge?" I said: "Yes, Captain, on Friday after the preaching."

On that morning I went with him over to his home, and when we walked into his elegant home in Nashville he carried me into the parlor, and there were thirteen guests, his friends, gathered in the parlor. He invited them there on that occasion, and he introduced me to them one at a time. We sat down a few moments, and his noble wife came to the door and said, "Gentlemen, dinner is ready"; and we walked across the hall into his dining room and sat down at the long table. He put me at the head of the table, and said, "I want you to occupy that place, the post of honor, sir; take this place here"; and he put his friends to my right and left. Of the four men that sat next to me, two of them, steamboat captains, were immediately to my left; the one immediately to my right was the Mayor of the city, and the one immediately by his side was another one of his steamboat captains, for Capt. Ryman owned several boats plying up and down the Cumberland River.

Just as we crossed the hall going into the dining room he had said: "I have invited my friends to meet you, and whenever a question arises you can put in some word and you can press the question of surrender to God upon my friends as we eat; you might not have another chance to do personal work with them." And I sat there at the table, and as we ate I pressed the great question of eternity upon those men, and especially the four who sat next to me. Now listen: not one of those four men was ever, as I knew, moved at all in that meeting. Now results: I don't think it was three months after I left that town till Capt. Ryman wrote me: "Brother Jones, the steamboat captain who sat immediately to your left fell over on his boat the other day, and was dead when his friends got to him." It wasn't

many weeks till he wrote me again: "Another one of our steamboat captains came up the river, came into his home and died suddenly; and his wife and children gathered about him, but he was gone." And he said: "O what a fearful fact that those men wouldn't come to God in that meeting!" It wasn't many weeks until I saw where the Mayor of the city of Nashville was up in Wisconsin out hunting, and his friend's gun went off accidentally and put a great load of shot into his head, and he fell forward, and spoke not another word. It wasn't long after that till Capt. Ryman wrote me: "Brother Jones, the steamboat captain who sat next to the Mayor at the table has been swept suddenly and awfully into eternity "And those four men — whether they were prepared or not, I am not here to say — but those four men who sat next to me at the table all went suddenly into the presence of God. And these are but instances that have occurred all along the line. O, my countrymen, I say that this man who talks to you tonight has pressed the gospel with its weight and power upon hundreds of men who have died suddenly and awfully after the gospel had died out of their ears.

I preached in Charlotte, North Carolina at one of the men's meetings. I pleaded so earnestly; many came forward. Just before the invitation closed a young, bright-looking fellow in his mid-twenties, walked down the aisle. He came more than two-thirds of the way; he turned suddenly and went back. It may have been the scoff of a companion, or the jeer of a friend that turned him — I know not. The next morning he went down to the depot, for he was a conductor on the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line. He pulled the bell cord, and about eight o'clock he left. After he ran down the road a few miles he held his train in to meet another passenger train, and there was a freight box standing on the side track, and when the passenger backed against it he was standing behind it, and it knocked him down on the rail, and the wheels ran over him from head to foot, and mashed the very watch in his pocket till it was as thin as a piece of tin; and scarcely fifteen hours had passed from the time my voice had died out in his ears until he was suddenly and awfully called into the presence of God. O what a fact! O what a fact!

Brother Stuart, my coworker, was with me at Palestine, Texas. A man walked those streets with oaths and profanity, and said that Jones was a scourge on any community and a blight, and he said that I was doing more harm than could ever be corrected, and he cursed me upon the street. And when I was preaching the last sermon of that meeting that man fell dead there in that community, and people on their way home from the service found his dead body as it lay helpless upon the ground. And I speak the words of truth and soberness when I say to you that all along through this country where I have preached there have been instances enough to make the devil himself look in horror upon criminals like that. And if you will get the record of those who come to this meeting and hear the words that ought to win them to God, you will find in the history of this congregation instances enough to make your hearts stop beating and your blood curdle in your veins. "He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

I was preaching at High Bridge Camp Meeting, Kentucky, earnestly asking men to come to God. A young, stalwart fellow stood there. He had been listening for fifteen or twenty minutes, and a friend told me afterwards that he turned with an oath from his lips and said

that he had had enough of that, He walked right down to the depot and stood but a few moments there when a train ran along. He grabbed at a ladder at the side of the car, missed his balance, and the wheels crushed him, and he was in the presence of God in less than twenty minutes from the time he turned with an oath upon his lips. God have mercy upon men who despise truth, and then die suddenly and awfully! I tell you, my countrymen, you will listen to the word, and you heard what the Lord says. Men may speak things that they cannot bring to pass; but God hath uttered, and the millions that have been swept suddenly into eternity are but attestations to the truth that God will bring his word to pass. You may say what you please, but it is an awful thing to die. You may laugh and scoff at death; but I tell you, my countrymen, it is the most serious hour that ever crowded its issues in on human life. To die! A man leaves his place of business, his store, his shop, and walks up to his home and stands on the front porch of his home just a moment, and then thinks of some kind words he is going to say to his wife and to one of his children, and the first thing you know there is a dull thud on the floor, and the wife runs screaming, and he is gone suddenly

There is a good old superannuated preacher in my Conference. He is frequently at my home, and he is one of the best men I ever knew And when I am at home, frequently he leads the family devotion, and I scarcely remember the time when he was praying at night that he didn't make use of this expression: "O Lord God, save us this night from sudden death; let it not overtake any beneath this roof." And the old man scarcely ever went over the expression but what it impressed me profoundly. It is an awful thing to die, brother; to die anywhere and anywhen; but it is tremendously awful without a word of warning, a moment to pray or a second to repent. You are gone, and gone forever, into the great beyond.

I don't know where or when or how I will die. I may fall in the pulpit; I can't tell. I may die away from home; I can't tell, but I say this to you: If God will answer my prayer in this and give me the choice of my heart, I would come home some day worn out and tired, and lay quietly down diseased and sick, upon the bed in the family room, and there I would linger for a week or ten days under the kind ministration of my wife and children; I would look upon and enjoy their sympathy and ministrations, and as the days drew nigh and I should bid them good-bye I would talk to my wife and talk to each child; I would gather them about me daily, encourage them to love God and live for God, and get home to heaven, and on and on until the last evening came, I would take my children, beginning at the oldest, I would gather them about me and say my parting words; and then, when the doctors had turned their backs upon me and said that my case had swung beyond where materia medica reaches, I would spend my last moments talking to her who has been such a friend to me and who has helped me in all my life. And then, when the last moments came, I would wade down gently into the river of death, and when the river should come up to my shoulders I would reach back and kiss my wife and children good-bye, and go home to God as happy as any schoolboy ever went home from school. But to die suddenly! Without a good-bye, without a moment to commit my soul to God! To die suddenly! It is awful! And awful beyond my power to express it. "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

I know there are parties in this audience that will go away and say: "I can't be frightened into Christianity; I can't be scared into being religious." Now, brother, let me say this, then: If you are not afraid of death and the judgment bar of God and the awful hell that awaits sinners, you are braver than I have ever been or want to be in this world. If there is anything that ought to rouse a man and frighten him, it is the fact that he is exposed to death and hell, and all that there is between him and eternal wreck and ruin is the fact that his heart beats, and yet it may stop at any moment. "I am not to be frightened into Christianity." Brother, that is the whisper by the graveyard; that is the talk of a coward; for a man to say that he is not afraid of the coffin and the shroud and the grave and the judgment and eternity.

My brethren, let me give you an illustration that we have on that. Into the fated Valley at Johnstown the State sent its civil engineers to examine that dam that held back that lake of waters. They went up and examined the dam. They came back down the valley and said: "We warn the people that that dam is unsafe; some of these days it will break and turn the flood of waters loose upon you." They laughed at those engineers and scoffed at them, and said: "You scare us if you can. It is a trick of land sharks to buy our property at half price. It is not for sale." That fall those engineers went back up there. They examined that dam and said: "We warn you people again; that dam is unsafe and will turn that flood of waters loose upon you." They said: "Scare us if you can. We understand your project. Our property is not for sale." They went back up there in the spring and examined the dam, and came back down and faithfully warned the people and said to them: "That dam is cracked from base to top, and we warn you people it will turn the waters loose upon you." They looked at them and laughed and said: "That's an old chestnut, and it doesn't amount to anything; we have heard that so often." And it wasn't fifteen days till a man on a fleet horse came loping down that valley with the horse in a foam and sweat from the top of his ears to his hoofs, and as he rode down the valley he cried: "Flee for your lives; the dam is broken and the water is coming." And the people stood on the streets and on their porches and laughed at the horseman and said; "Fool us if you can." But the sound of the man's voice hadn't died out down the street when they heard coming the heaving, sweeping, pouring waters, and in fifteen minutes three thousand three hundred of those poor people were drowned and mangled and buried in the debris down at the bridge below the town. And it took almost six long weeks to dig their putrefying bodies from the fearful pile of debris at the bridge.

Now in my heart I pity a man who despises the warning and turns a deaf ear to the voice that would bring him to peace and to safety. And I am talking to men here tonight who will say: "I am not to be frightened by the cry over these things; I have heard that sort of gospel before." But my brother, mark my words perchance in less than ten days, maybe in less than ten hours, from this moment the heaving, pouring, and sweeping waters of God's judgment will rush upon you, and you will find yourself overwhelmed forever. O, my Lord, help men to heed the warning given them this night! If you ever intend to move your head and heart and repent and believe, God help you to do it tonight!

"He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." O what an experience! What an experience! " Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!" Remedy! O how we lean toward the faithful physician in the hour of sickness! How he leans upon the effective remedies that he has used so often! O brother, the time may come in your life when the very disease that has struck a vital spot will scoff at your doctor and despise the remedies that he gives. Mark what I tell you. Disease will touch your vital spot by and by, and all the compound remedies of doctors and of the pharmacists will never reach your case. You may have been sick and got well a dozen times, but Death hath an arrow in her quiver that will reach your vital spot at last. We must all die. "It is appointed unto men once to die." We will die once; God help us that we may never die the second death. Amen.

"Without remedy!" I think the saddest hour ever sent to my poor heart was after I had nursed and watched by the bedside with my wife for seven weeks; and on Christmas eve her physician, the one that stood by her almost day and night, took me on my front porch and said: "Jones, I break the saddest news that ever fell on a human heart. Your wife has swung out beyond the reach of human skill, and no remedy in the world now will reach her case." O what a moment that was to me! What a moment! What a moment! O, bless God! in that hour of despair I walked into my upper chamber and knelt down and said: "O God, thou the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and thou, blessed Christ, who didst heal the sick and raise the dead when thou wast among men; thou art the same today and forever. O God, intervene now; do for me what no human power can do." And, bless his holy name! she lives today to bless the children of my home and the heart that would have been broken if God had called her hence. Thank God! when human remedies fail we may fall back on the divine arm. O what a fact!

And listen, brother! God says: "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." And when that time comes in your case — and it will come, neighbor — hear me, when your disease will laugh at the doctor and scoff at his remedies, when wife can do nothing and mother can do nothing, and finally when the body is dissolving in death, and the death rattle is in your throat, and your eyes sink in your head, and your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth, and your pulseless heart is lying still, when the soul reaches out toward God, and God shall say to you: "No remedy!" In rejecting your salvation forever, you swung out where God himself can't reach you. It is the most tremendous hour that ever came to a human soul: the hour when God himself stands powerless to help and powerless to reach. And God has said it in these words that he who has been often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Without remedy here, without remedy at judgment, and in hell to meet its tortures forever! Without remedy! O brother, shall you experience that, just as others have? The hope of your life and heart is to heed the warnings now served out and fly for your life.

My soul is in danger I give you a picture at conclusion of this hour, which I would have you take home with you. Hear me, and let every Christian pray that this incident may go into the heart of every sinner. I think the most forcible illustration of the hopelessly wrecked was given to me by Brother Culpepper, an evangelist of my State — and I know

no better man who lived in it, or who ever preached the gospel. He said to me: this incident which he related occurred in Georgia, just out from the city where he lived, a little inland town off the railroad. He said to me: Brother Jones, one morning a man came riding into my little town on a beautiful little black pony. The little pony had a bridle and a saddle and all other trappings. The man stopped on the little town square, and began to walk the little animal about as if to emphasize his good qualities, and the people began to look at the pony and to gather about his owner. They wondered and admired the beauty of the animal, and all began to praise it. Presently a little boy about twelve years of age walked up into the circle. One of his friends said: 'Johnny, we're going to raffle for this pony. This man has put him up at fifty chances, two dollars a chance.' Johnny answered: 'No, I don't think it's right; I don't do that sort of thing. I have never done it.' But the other boys began to guy him, and said: 'You're afraid; you haven't the money.' And then, the boy's desire getting the better of him, he said, 'I have the money, and I'll take a chance,' and he pulled two silver dollars out of his pocket accordingly. Soon the tickets were all sold, and the raffle commenced. The dice were thrown amid some anxiety and excitement, and when it had ended the man pointed his finger at little Johnny and said: 'Son, it is your pony; you've thrown the lucky number, and you've won.' Little Johnny took hold of the bridle and threw the reins over the little pony's neck, and put his foot in the stirrup and mounted. And he was proud as he rode off so gracefully amid the applause of the crowd.

His father, a merchant of the little town, was sitting at the door, reading the morning newspaper, which had just arrived. And he read of an incident which told how a man had a beautiful little pony in the city in which the paper was published the day before. The paper described it as being the most beautiful, but at the same time the most vicious little animal the world had ever seen. It also said, in proof of the assertion, that it had killed no less than four men. And the father just then lifted his eyes from the paper, and, as he did so, he saw his boy on the pony's back. He hurriedly threw the paper on the street, and ran to where the boy was. And as soon as he got near him, he shouted: 'My precious boy, get down off that pony! Get down, as life is dear to you! He will kill you if you do not. He has killed four men. He will surely kill you.' But little Johnny lifted up his head, and said: 'O no, papa; he won't hurt me; he's all right now; he's my pony, and he won't hurt me.'

And again the father cried for him to get down. But little Johnny rode off. And presently he passed his own home. His mother and sister ran to the door and cried: 'Johnny, Johnny, get down; that pony has already killed four men; he will kill you; why don't you do as your father asks you, and as your mother and sister ask you?' But little Johnny again lifted his head, and said: 'O, don't fear, mamma! Don't fear, sister! He won't hurt me; he's my pony now, and he won't be vicious any more.'

And little Johnny rode on. And he rode beautifully for two miles, and then he said to himself: 'I will turn back now and let papa and mamma see how this little pony won't hurt me.' And he turned back. He tightened the reins as the animal began to quicken his pace. But it took the bit between its teeth, and plunged forward beyond all control. And they

came to the angle of a road which led to a precipice. And the pony took the road and jumped over the precipice. And when that little boy's parents and friends went to search for him, they found him and the pony crushed to atoms.

There is a young lady on the black horse of worldliness. God, the angels, and good men cry: "Get down! get down! That horse has damned millions." But she says: "O, don't fear; he won't hurt me; I want the pleasure and the enjoyment of the moment; he will not hurt me." Young lady, you will want some day to turn back to God and to heaven. And then, when you take the reins in your hand and tighten its grip, the black horse of fashion and worldliness will take the bit between his teeth, and will rush on and over the precipice of destruction.

There is that young man there. You are on the black horse of profanity. He has landed his millions in hell. God and his angels and good men call on you to get down; they warn you of the fate which others have met. But you say: "No, he won't hurt me. I know just how far to go." But some day when you tighten the reins, when you wish to turn back to God and to heaven, that horse will get the bit between his teeth and rush on to hell with you.

There is that man sitting on the black horse of intemperance. Neighbor, that black horse is leading you over the precipice of destruction into the river of death, which is lined from source to mouth with human wretches. Get down, young man! You say: "O no; I know just where to stop." Some day in the near future, blear-eyed and bloated wretch, as you'll be, you'll take the reins in your hand to turn back to sobriety and to God. But the black horse of intemperance will take the bit in his teeth and run to hell and death with you. Would to God that every man on the black horse of sin would take the lesson to heart!

A preacher in Alabama one night related this black horse illustration incident in his pulpit. And after service four boys rode off on horseback. One was detained a little. He rode rapidly after his companions. And on reaching them, he said: "Look out, boys! I'm on the black horse." They all rode along about two hundred yards, when suddenly the boy said: "Boys, I've a pain in my head; and, O boys, I've never had a pain like this before. What a horrible pain! It struck me just a moment ago." He rode on for half a mile with his companions, and just as they had reached a point where the road forked he said: "Boys, please let one of you ride home with me. I am bad. I do not know whether I'll get there or not." The preacher told me he adjourned the meeting the next day to bury that young man, and thanked God that he had a little time before dying.

God pity the man that is closer to the precipice than that young man! God pity the man that is closest to hell! Take him by the hand tonight, and bring him back to peace, to God, and to heaven.

My message is delivered. I have conscientiously preached the truth to you; may God make it a message of salvation! O take heed! God have mercy on you, and may you all be prepared for the day to come!

We are going to hold an after service. Do not go away from here tonight to harden your heart. But stay, you who have been often reprov'd, and let your heart be softened. Stay and come and surrender yourself to God. Get down off the black horse of worldliness and sin and give your hearts to Him who has died for your salvation. Now we will receive the benediction. May the blessing of Almighty God abide with us now and forever!
Amen.