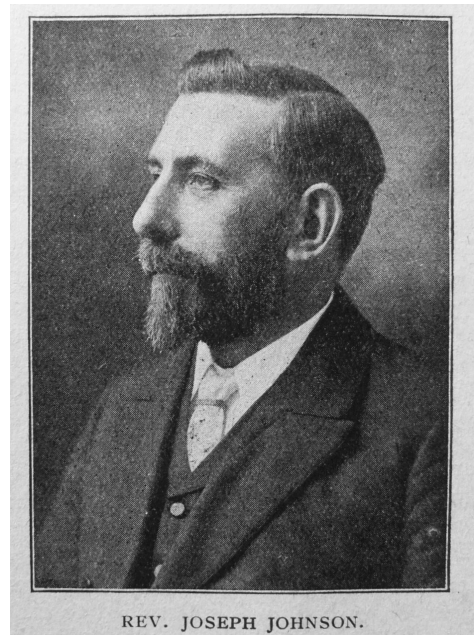


## My Testimony

### Transcription of article published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by Rev. Joseph Johnson

MY testimony to the saving grace of Jesus Christ dates back forty-two years last January. The occasion, the influences that warmed and stirred me, the men and women present who eagerly and anxiously encouraged the yearnings of my young heart, the consciousness of the sacredness of the place and the sanctity of the hour, I remember as distinctly as if the occurrence was only a month ago. I was in my sixteenth year when this great experience came to me, and as I look back to it, I recall with gratitude the impulses that throbbed and swayed my soul. It was as if I had been initiated into an absolutely new life, and yet, strange to say, I do not remember a time in those early days when, I was not under spiritual influences.



It was my good fortune to be born into a truly Christian home—a home into which our most honoured visitors were Primitive Methodist Ministers and local preachers, men who took life seriously, whose character and prayers were a benediction. What hallowed days those were when the circuit minister used to pay his fortnightly visit to our village and preach, and then stay the night! How carefully my dear mother used to prepare the best room she had at her disposal for these godly men! Nothing was too good to provide for their hospitality! These were wonderful occasions to my boyish mind, and, when once or twice during the quarter the minister came for the Sunday and spent the week-end in my village home, it seemed as if heaven could not be a more hallowed place. I can never forget the delight with which I used to anticipate these events. The very atmosphere seemed to vibrate with sacred influences which made a deep and an abiding impression on my mind, and it is no surprise to me now, that the events of those days are so outstanding in my memory. Some of the conversations, the prayers, the counsels and the gracious influences of those days linger with me still, and my soul is ever glad in their memory.

It was in this atmosphere and into these surroundings I was born fifty-eight years ago, and there is not a time in my life when I do not remember being the subject of good impressions. My birthplace was a district in Derbyshire where Jeremiah Gilbert, one of the pioneers of our Church, had exercised his powerful ministry and had stamped it with his evangelistic zeal. It was one of the delights of my boyhood to listen to the oft-repeated story of this wonderful man's courage and daring in preaching the gospel of the Cross in the villages and towns of this county. Again and again, as I heard the story of this pioneer's work and achievements, my young soul was thrilled to its depths.

My parents were of the sturdy type one would expect to find in the industrial areas of Derbyshire. In the quiet Cambridgeshire village of Over, my father, as a boy, had gained some knowledge of Primitive Methodism, but it was not until he had migrated to Derbyshire that he came into living relationship with it. Here he had removed from the agricultural life of East Anglia and taken up mining in Derbyshire. In these new conditions and surroundings, he was again brought into touch

with Primitive Methodism. From different localities men gathered daily to work at the same mine from whose lips he frequently heard stories of what Primitive Methodist preachers were achieving in the redemption of human life and character, and this naturally intensified his interest. Eventually, he married, and during the first year of their married life, my father and mother were converted and joined a little band of Primitive Methodists in the small village of Marsden Moor, situated on the main turnpike road from Chesterfield to Worksop. What their conversion meant to them and to their children can never be adequately described! Their conversion was so genuine, and their knowledge of saving grace so real, that they immediately identified themselves with that village society and remained so for upwards of half a century, until God called them home to Himself.

One of my earliest memories is that of accompanying my father to the early Sunday morning class-meeting, which met before the Sunday school. I can never forget the wonder I experienced in listening to the testimonies borne in that class-meeting to the saving and keeping grace of God! One after another, converted miners would testify to what God had done for them, how they had been led to give up drinking, gambling, dog-racing and other evils, and what joy and satisfaction they found in loving and serving Jesus Christ. I used to listen to those godly men until I was struck with awe and wonder at the joy they felt and the transformation they had experienced. How they used to sing! What certainty and assurance expressed itself in their countenance and attitude as they frequently sang:

"I know that my Redeemer lives  
What joy the blest assurance gives! "

This made a great impression on my young mind. It produced the conviction that if there was anything real in this world it was the religion of Jesus Christ.

This was the normal atmosphere I breathed in my early life, and when I think of it, as I often do, I feel such a sense of indebtedness to those persons and influences that swayed and dominated my early life, that I should lose my self-respect did I not seize this opportunity of recording my gratitude to God that such gracious ministries shaped and moulded my early life. It seemed inevitable that sooner or later these ministries should bear fruit in my personal life and character. My final decision, however, was not made until my sixteenth year, at a Sunday evening service conducted by a converted collier, who preached a convincing sermon on "God is love." I knew this collier, worked with him in the same mine, a man of strict integrity, whose life was a daily exposition of the gospel of the Cross, and under his ministry on the last Sunday night in January 1876, I gave myself definitely to Jesus Christ. It was so decisive and so blessed an experience that from that hour life seemed to me to have a new meaning and a wider purpose. I realised as never before what a reality Jesus Christ was, how He entered into my own personal life and gave me a satisfaction so strangely different from anything I had ever before experienced, that I could conceive of nothing better nor nobler than being whole-heartedly given up to Jesus Christ. I shall never forget the thrill of those early days of my Christian life, how in the coal-mine at dinner-hour and on other occasions a few kindred spirits used to gather together for spiritual intercourse and prayer. They were wonderful days to my youthful mind, and as my vision enlarged and expanded, my yearning for a still fuller life grew deeper and stronger. The memory of those early experiences will always be fragrant to me.

After the lapse of a few weeks I was authorised by the circuit quarterly meeting to take preaching appointments and to prepare for the preachers' plan. God graciously owned my efforts in this direction, and put His seal on my work to such an extent that the circuit, after two years as a fully

accredited local preacher, desired me to prepare for the ministry. This, however, at first did not appeal to me. My ambition was to become a mining engineer and my secular studies for several years had all been in that direction. I saw great possibilities of achievement in that sphere for the future, and being deeply interested in mining, the call of my Church placed me in a great difficulty. For twelve months my decision was in the balance, and all the while I was trying to convince myself that the ministry was not to be my vocation, but that another sphere, in which I had commenced my training at eleven and a half years of age, and on which I had set my youthful ambitions, was to be my future life's work. As the months went by, however, I began to feel that after all I should have to surrender my own preferences to the call of God, so eventually, at the March quarterly meeting of the Staveley Circuit, 1881, I was officially recommended for the ministry. Meanwhile, as opportunities offered, I spent leisure hours in the coal-mine studying Petty's Theology and other suitable books with a view to my equipment, and some of those books I still possess. Though the pages of those books are greatly soiled, yet they are precious reminders of those days of hard grind and severe struggle which, however, I never regret. During the winter months I seldom saw daylight from Monday to Saturday, yet my evenings were devoted to mental culture, and all unconsciously I was preparing myself for my life's work.

My parents though humble working-people centred their faith in the Divine realities, in the possibilities of Divine grace in human character, and their trust in Divine providence and guidance has been to me a better heritage than any amount of earthly possessions could ever have been. It has inspired and encouraged me all through the years, and I here record my conviction that there is nothing in this world more certain to me than is a Divine providence over-ruling and guiding those who put their trust in God, and that there is nothing more assured to the Christian believer than that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world and the salvation of all those who surrender themselves to Him.

We need no new gospel for the woes of men and the evils of society. It is still unalterably true that Jesus Christ is the best friend humanity has ever known, or can know, and that He does still transform and transfigure those who give themselves to Him in love, obedience, loyalty and service. After a ministry of thirty-six years, thirty of which have been spent consecutively in London—the worst and best city in the world—I deliberately testify that nothing I have ever read, observed, or experienced, has disturbed my faith in the atoning grace of Jesus Christ. If I had the opportunity to re-live those years, and to exercise those ministries over again, I should lay the emphasis, if anything, more strongly on the great and glorious truth that “Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man,” at the same time not losing sight of the need of adapting its interpretation and application to the demands and requirements of these new, modern days.

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#### References

*Primitive Methodist Magazine* 1918/775