

Rev. John Thomas

Transcription of obituary published in the Primitive Methodist Magazine by J Barnes

JOHN THOMAS was born at Westfelton, Oswestry circuit, April 21st, 1824. His parents were then without religion, but in a few years after the birth of John, they were led by the providence of God to hear the Primitive Methodists preach the Gospel of Christ, which soon resulted in their conversion to God. Mrs. Thomas was a good woman, a light in the neighbourhood where she resided. Her house was a home for the preachers; and she taught her children the fear of God.

When John was about five or six years of age he was sent to the Independent Sunday-school, Grimpo. He says, "Here I first felt the influence of the Divine Spirit, and was often led to pray in secret for pardon, and that I might become a preacher like my uncles William and Edward Parry; and I often prayed that I might begin to preach at twenty years of age." But he continued to live without a change of heart. His conduct was always very moral, and he was kept from those sins into which many young people run. At sixteen years of age he united himself with the Primitive Methodist Sunday-school, Haughton, and was appointed to teach the Bible class. The Holy Spirit strove mightily with him at this time.

In November, 1843, a protracted meeting was held by our people at Haughton, when many souls were saved. Our late brother attended these services, and he soon became much impressed about his soul. One night as he was going to the chapel with two local preachers, he was told that four young men, companions of his, had got saved, and he must be the next. He says, "I smiled, but turned away to cover my tears." His mother spoke to him about eternal things at the same time, and he says, "I went from her to weep and pray in secret." 'This was on the Sunday, and on the following Monday he gave himself to Christ, and received the knowledge of pardon. The Divine change was soon seen by all who knew him. He had not been connected with the church long before he manifested powers for usefulness in the cause of Jesus.

In March, 1844, his name was put on the plan of the Oswestry circuit. He took his first appointment in the April immediately following. He says, "Then I remembered all the prayers of my childhood." He laboured as a local preacher with great acceptability and usefulness. The men who worked with him, and in fact all who knew him, respected him much. His trade was that of a builder; hence he was often exposed to great danger. Once or twice he experienced marvellous deliverances. He was engaged in building a house in Oswestry, when the scaffolding on which he was standing fell, and one man was killed, but he escaped unhurt. At another time, he fell from a building several yards in height, which Injured him much, but he escaped with his life.

in December, 1849, he received a call to enter the ministry of the Primitive Methodist connexion; and after much thought and prayer, he commenced his work as a travelling preacher in Dudley circuit January 26th, 1850. He did not continue in this station long, but he saw several seals brought to God under his preaching during the time he was there.

His next station was Stafford, where he laboured with great zeal and success. Dawley, Ludlow, Leominster and Weobley, Birmingham, Coventry, Ramsor, Minsterley, Kidderminster and Oswestry stations shared in his labours, and received good from him. In each of the above stations he was generally beloved by the people.

The Rev. N.W. Stafford says,—“I was indeed sorry to hear of the death of my old friend and colleague, John Thomas. We travelled at Coventry together; and, I am happy to say, in great peace, and with a moderate share of prosperity. Anything that was required to be done for the welfare of Sion was done by him, as if his

heart was fully set upon it. The reminiscences associated with the two years' sojourn I had with him upon that station, have always yielded pleasure to me. He was generally beloved and respected by the people, and his ministry was acceptable and successful. We had many sinners converted to God while together, and when we met each other at his house to talk about these matters, as we did about once every week, he rejoiced greatly at the turning of sinners to God."

"Brother Thomas was the subject of an illness while in Coventry station, which had well nigh proved fatal. I visited him often during the time of his affliction, and though his disease was calculated to make him fretful, I always found him, though human, still the Christian, and his hope firmly fixed on the Rock of Ages. His connexional attachment and his fervent adherence to its polity, especially in those days, was very great. We had one or two cases, in which one, if not two, chapels were well nigh lost to the connexion. I shall never forget the earnestness he evinced in defending the character of the people of his early choice, and the care and strictness with which he carried out those laws bearing on the case, to which he as a minister of the connexion must prove true. He was equally attached to the doctrines as to the discipline of the connexion. He never seemed sceptical respecting any one of them, but grasped them all with firmness, and explained them with an energy that at once declared his decided conviction as to their veracity. They were two happy years which we spent together; and I have no doubt of the final acceptance and salvation of my friend and brother."

The following lines are from the Rev. W. Rooke, who travelled with brother Thomas in the Ramsor circuit:—"I considered him to have been a very pious, God-fearing man, and very useful, very well received in the station at Ramsor, and considerably successful in bringing up the work of God. I consider the connexion has lost a useful minister, and his widow a kind and an affectionate husband. May she be supported by Divine help."

The Rev. R. Smith, brother Thomas's colleague in Kidderminster circuit, says:—"I ever found brother Thomas kind and faithful. During the two years I travelled with him I received a large amount of kindness from him, but especially during my illness. He was ever ready to render me every assistance I required, and which lay in his power. When we separated he and his family had a warm place in my affections. It is my conviction that the care of a chapel case in Stourport tended much to upset his health, and shorten his useful life."

The following extracts from a letter written by E. Morris, a local preacher at Stourport, will show the high esteem in which he was held by the friends in the Kidderminster circuit. Mr. Morris says:—"Brother Thomas was much respected in this circuit on account of his piety and zeal in the work of Christ. He was a faithful servant of his Divine Master. His holy life gave great weight to his public work. Some of his last sermons in this circuit were very powerful."

In July, 1866, he went to travel in his native circuit (Oswestry). Many of his old friends received him gladly. At this time he was not well, but a strong desire to do good led him on to work for God. He was generally respected in the circuit, and many looked forward with hope that general prosperity would soon be enjoyed throughout the station. But his work on earth was almost done.

On Sunday, January 6th, 1867, he preached his last sermon. At the close of the afternoon service he was taken very ill, and returned home. For some time hopes were cherished that he would recover. Early in March he was much better, and he said that he should soon be able to resume his work. But a great change soon after took place, and it was seen that his life on earth would shortly end.

His affliction was very painful. During the last five or six weeks of his illness he could not talk on any subject; his mind wandered much. But he did not complain. Grace was given him, and when he was asked if he felt the presence of Jesus, he nodded assent. On May 20th, 1867, he breathed his last, and went to his reward in heaven, in the forty-fourth year of his age.

“His feet through the valley of death have trod,
But he rests in glory now.”

He has left behind him a widow and five small children to mourn their loss. He was a member twenty-three years, and a travelling preacher seventeen years. His mortal remains rest in the Primitive Methodist chapel yard, Oswestry. He was a kind husband and a loving father. As a minister he was attentive to duty, and he laboured to promote the general good of the circuits in which he was stationed.

His preaching was generally acceptable, and often productive of great and lasting good. His work is done, the crown is gained, and he has entered into eternal rest.

References

Primitive Methodist Magazine 1867/484