



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

JAMES O. MCCLURKAN

1861 – 1914

(Former Presbyterian, Founder of Trevecca Nazarene College)

Rev. J. O. McClurkan was born November 13, 1861, in the Yellow Creek Community of Houston County, about sixty miles northwest of Nashville, Tennessee, between Dixon and Erin, Tennessee. Eight months before Bro. McClurkan’s birth, Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated president of the United States on March 4, 1861; and five weeks later, on April 19, 1861, guns in the Charleston, South Carolina harbor boomed the opening of the great American Civil War. Bro. McClurkan was reared on a farm in this Yellow Creek Community in a simple farmhouse built of logs overlaid with clapboard.

His grandfather, Hugh McClurkan, came direct from Scotland to America and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Hugh McClurkan, being a full-blooded Scotchman, spoke with a Scotch brogue. Bro. McClurkan’s father, John McClurkan, while a resident of the Yellow Creek Community, was a schoolteacher and an itinerant preacher in the pioneer days of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Tennessee.

Bro. McClurkan was one of thirteen children. All of the children were brought up around a family altar and a good home library. Out of this family came four preacher sons, one of whom was Rev. J. O. McClurkan. The other preacher sons were Will, Christopher, and Newton. Bro. McClurkan, being a frail child, spent many hours helping his mother in the kitchen, binding straw into brooms, and sweeping yards...

Bro. McClurkan’s conversion at the age of thirteen is very interestingly told by one of his daughters, Merle, in her book, “A Man Sent of God”. Her story is as follows:

Father’s conversion at the age of thirteen should be the voice of encouragement to any discouraged Sunday school teacher. It was like this. The revival season was on, following as it always did in that community, wheat threshing time. Those were busy days for the ladies of old Bethany Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Hams cooking, stacked apple pies, pound cake, corn meal, light bread baking, filled the kitchens with a sweet aroma in preparation for the dinner, which would be spread on the ground out under the trees in the churchyard. The log church was swept and clean. Sweet-smelling hay from the wheat fields had been scattered semi-circled in front of the pulpit on which penitent sinners might kneel and seek pardoning grace. Old Bro. Jim Parrish, the man of God who for long years had been pastor of Bethany Church, had seen great things happen in that pile of straw. So he had reason to expect the workings of God in the hearts of the people at the revival season. The fresh new hay was the outward expression of his faith as well as an unspoken invitation to sinners.

Father was a constant seeker during this revival meeting on that hay-carpeted floor, riding horseback behind his mother day after day to attend. He was a timid child. He had longed to become a Christian, yet he had never sought God openly because he shrank from doing those things which brought him into public notice.

The last service of the meeting had been dismissed. You could hear, above the restless feet of horses in the road and the grind of steel-rimmed wheels on gravel, the happy voices of friends and neighbor’s as

they reluctantly drove away to their widely separated homes.

But the revival was not over for God and a boy who still knelt in the straw. Nor for the pastor and the boy's Sunday school teacher, who lingered prayerfully with him, encouraging him, instructing him. They were faithful to him in his youth and obscurity, little dreaming that a great soul winner was then being born into the family of God, one whose pen and influence were to reach across the seas. His conversion came as quietly as the breaking of the day with all the beauty and freshness and wonder of the dawn. When he walked out of that almost deserted church, he said that he walked into a new world, a world bathed in the glory of God.

"The stars," he said, "shone with a new luster. I have never seen the moon so brilliant. The atmosphere seemed charged with a fragrant aroma. The darkness was light. 'Behold, all things had become new.'"

Even before Bro. McClurkan's conversion he felt the call to preach. He described the call as an inner urge, a conviction – the voice of God in his heart which never left him.

After his conversion he lived a consistent Christian life in his home, at school, and among his companions; until, at the age of seventeen he came into the noontide splendor of his call. It became a familiar sight to see the two preachers – father and son – mount the gray horses on Saturdays and ride off down the country roads to Sunday appointments. One day while the horses were resting in the shade of the sycamore trees, father McClurkan said to his son, J. O. McClurkan, "Jim, I will preach at the morning service; you will preach at night." Simple and quietly spoken words, but at the sound of them a door swung open as if hinges had been anointed with oil. Jim stood upon the threshold of his life's work, young, timid, and awed, but looking into the face of a world's need, its sin, its sorrow – the field to which he gave his life and his all in sublime dedication. Thus at the youthful age of seventeen was begun the active ministry of Rev. J. O. McClurkan, one of the Lord's great but very humble and modest men. He joined the Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church before he was twenty.

Following a strong desire to further his education, Bro. McClurkan, at the age of nineteen, enrolled for a year in Cloverdale College at Cloverdale, Tennessee. The next year, at the age of twenty, he enrolled in Tucuna College, a Presbyterian institution, for his theological training. Tucuna College was located in Tucuna, Texas.

As a country boy, inexperienced in train travel, he told this story on himself: that when taking this first faraway trip to Texas, he carried his black tin trunk on his shoulder and deposited it safely in the baggage car, so afraid was he that it would not get on the train.

Before his second year in Tucuna he married a Yellow Creek Community girl, the only girl he had ever loved, the girl who was to be a congenial companion and a great source of strength to him the rest of his earthly journey and labor in this world. On November 15, 1882, he married Martha Frances Rye in her father's home, known as the Old Nesbitt Place to the Yellow Creek Community.

Frances' father said to her before her marriage, "I'm tellin' you, Frances, Jim McClurkan won't live a year. Then you will be bringing home a young'un for me and your ma to raise." But this did not discourage Frances, for she said within, "I'll show him. If anything happens to Jimmie, I'll paddle my own canoe."

Bro. McClurkan taught school some in Tennessee and in Texas. At the age of twenty-five he accepted his first pastorate in Decatur, Texas, as minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church where he served for two years. Then, following the leading of the Lord, he moved to California to pastor churches in Visalia and Selma. Following these pastorates his synod elected him Synodical Evangelist. Later he was called to pastor the Presbyterian church in San Jose, California. This church, which at one time had been a thriving center of religious life, was deserted and locked up. While pastoring the church in San Jose, the church was revived. Brother and Sister McClurkan were sanctified in San Jose

around 1895 in a revival meeting conducted by the great sanctified Methodist evangelist, Dr. C. B. Carradine. (Dr. Carradine's book on the carnal mind helped me more doctrinally than any other as a young sanctified Christian.)

Receiving the experience of Entire Sanctification was the turning point in Bro. McClurkan's great career. He was a chosen vessel and destined to be one of the great holiness leaders of modern times.

The story of Brother and Sister McClurkan's sanctification is so beautifully told by Merle in her book, "A Man Sent of God". She relates the story as follows:

San Jose was pivotal in Father's career. He not only did an outstanding piece of work there, but it was the threshold to a new world. The "upper room" was awaiting him. The door was already ajar.

Often it is the little everyday happenings that lead our feet to an unexpected summit where we catch a panoramic view of the greatness and beauty of our universe and something of the vast power that is behind and in it. In just this everyday way Mother was leaving the church one day when a friend detained her on the steps long enough to inquire if she had attended the meeting which was being held at the Methodist church. Mother, whose life was already filled to the brim with her family and her own church program, had not so much as heard of this meeting.

"I wish you could find time to attend, Mrs. McClurkan. Dr. Carradine's sermons are different, and the experience he is preaching about I find so deeply satisfying."

Here the woman's hands fluttered and lay on her breast motionless in symbol of an inner "peace that passeth all understanding."

Mother often told us that as she stood there listening to this woman she felt as if she was looking into a pool of clear, cool water. Then she was thirsty, thirsty for something she did not have, thirsty for something she knew not what. All at once she realized that her one desire was to attend this meeting. She and Father made plans to go that night. There was so much for Mother to do to accomplish this, as she had four children, two of them twins at that, to be provided for. At last everything was in readiness and she happily awaited Father's arrival. The time for the service approached and passed! When Father did arrive at the manse at a late hour he found Mother in tears. The fact that a man had come to his office in great trouble and had pushed all remembrance of the meeting out of his mind was little comfort to her in her disappointment. They arrived on time the next night, Father saw to that, and they were never the same people again.

The woman was right. The sermon was different, different from anything they had heard before. The evangelist preached about an experience that awaits the believing Christian, an experience of cleansing that deals with the root of sin in the heart, which he called the carnal nature. He identified it as that disturbing element in the Christian life which he likened to a thread or a cordlike connection between the soul and the world, although the two have drifted far apart.

"This carnal nature," Dr. Carradine went on to explain, "is a middle ground, a strange medium upon which Satan can and does operate, to the inward distress of the child of God whose heart, at the same time, is loyal to his Savior."

"This work," he went on to say, "is wrought in the heart of the Christian by the mighty working power of the Holy Spirit in his cleansing, baptizing, and infilling power."

The language of the preacher here consists of words connoting fire – cleansing! purifying! Consuming! Illuminating! Empowering! Strong words which drove the minds of the listeners back down the centuries to a day in Jerusalem when with the sound of a mighty rushing wind tongues of fire rested upon the disciples in an experience called Pentecost.

Dr. Carradine named this experience “sanctification,” and said that it is obtainable now, not at death; instantaneously, through consecration and faith. He laid his foundation deep in the Scriptures, quoting from both the Old and New Testaments. He drew the people’s attention especially to the last commanding promise of Jesus as He spoke His parting words to a group of perplexed and fearful disciples only moments before His ascension.

“Wait ...” were His words, “for the promise of the Father ... and ye shall receive power.”

“For,” quoting from Peter, who a few days later had come into the electrifying experience of which Jesus spoke, “the promise is unto you and to your children, and to as many as are afar off.”

Father was interested. Mother was quick to discern that. She knew Father. How deeply spiritual he was, that the hart that panted after the waterbrooks was indeed he. Suddenly her fears were aroused. Could this thing be fanaticism? Would it hinder Father’s already useful ministry? With these thoughts pounding in her mind she seized upon an invitation, which came in the nick of time, for the family to visit a close friend who lived in a neighboring town.

Father would enjoy that, she persuaded herself. The rest! The fellowship of kindred minds! And, too, he would be removed from this threatened danger.

Mother scuttled us off so quickly that we scarcely knew what was happening. But nobody was happy. Least of all, Mother. She understood the faraway look in Father’s eyes, and felt responsible for the fleeting glimpses of unhappiness she saw there.

Father was restless. He stood it as long as he could. Then he arose abruptly, and to the consternation of his hostess, good friend that she was, he announced quietly but firmly that he was catching an afternoon train which would get him into San Jose in time for the night service at the Methodist church. At the sound of Father’s words a mountain of guilt slipped off Mother’s heart and she was almost gay as she answered hastily, “I’ll go with you, Jimmie. We will all go.”

Father was at the altar that night. The fact that he was a successful pastor at one of the city’s churches did not hold him back.

“If there is anything more that God has in store for me, I want it.”

So he sought the experience of sanctification earnestly and prayerfully. Then one night he arose from the altar and made the brief and simple statement that he accepted the blessing of sanctification for himself by faith.

“There is no feeling” he told my mother, “but I believe the doctrine is Scriptural, and I am standing right there on naked faith.”

He stood there for days, never doubting the promises of God.

“I believe it is true,” he kept saying to every doubt that presented itself.

“I believe ...” then it happened. The Holy Spirit sealed his faith with such an outpouring of himself that he could scarcely contain the glory. Mother saw him coming. There was an unusual bounce in his naturally quick step. As he came into the house he was praising God in an audible whisper, in a way Mother had not heard before.

“All night long,” she said, “he remained in a state of spiritual ecstasy, rejoicing in the blessed witness of the Holy Spirit.

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” The nearest Mother ever heard him come to shouting.

“He seemed to be aglow,” Mother said, “with a radiance that made me feel as black as a ball of pitch.”

Mother came into the experience a few days later. Unlike Father, she swept into Canaan on billows of joy, and to this good day the gladness of the experience bubbles up and overflows her ripened soul.

Source: "A New Look At J. O. McClurkan" by S. W. Strickland

**After his entire sanctification J. O. McClurkan left the Presbyterian Church, and he founded the Pentecostal Mission in Nashville, Tennessee which, sixteen years after its founding, united with the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. McClurkan died before this union took place, but had been in favor of it. -- DVM*

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