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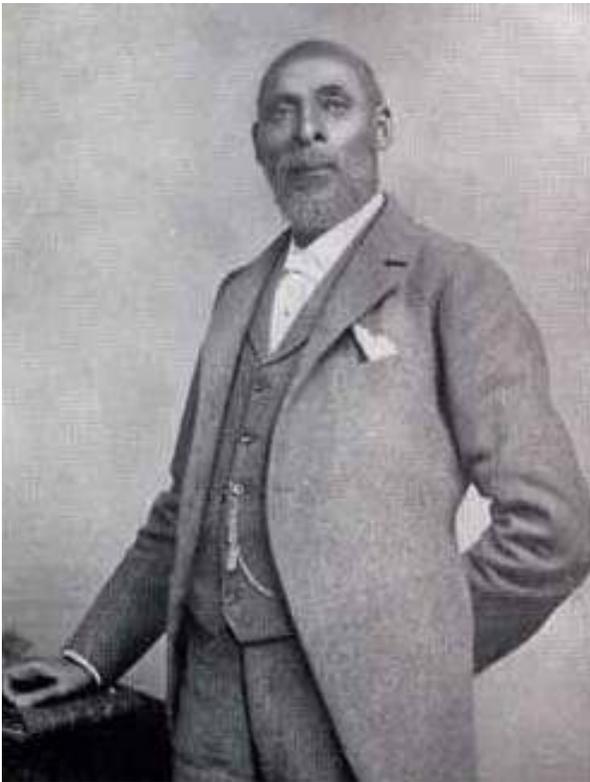
Sent: Tuesday, June 22, 2010 8:09 PM

Subject: John Jasper's conversion

I had the opportunity to witness to a man today and was led of the Lord to read to him John Jasper's account of his conversion. It brings tears of joy to my eyes every time I read it. Here is a short biography of John Jasper and following that the account of his conversion.
Bro. Buddy Smith

Jasper, John J. (1812-1901)

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Reverend John Jasper is arguably one of the most famous black ministers of nineteenth-century Richmond, Virginia, who gained popularity for his electrifying preaching style and his ability to spiritually move both black and white Baptists. He began his career in the

early 1840s, preaching at funerals of slave and free black parishioners and giving occasional sermons at the First African Baptist Church. His popularity grew quickly and not only among Richmonders; after giving a guest sermon to the Third African Baptist Church in the nearby city of Petersburg, Jasper was invited by that congregation to preach every Sunday. Jasper's accomplishments are even more remarkable given the fact that he was a slave in the tobacco factories and iron mills of Richmond during the first twenty-five years of his ministry work during a time when Virginia law expressly prohibited blacks from preaching.

Following the Civil War, Jasper became a full-time pastor and in 1867 organized the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, ministering to hundreds of local black Baptists, but many whites as well. His sermons continued to attract eager audiences, but none seem to draw more listeners than his famous discourse, "De Sun Do Move" given in 1878. Faithful followers, devoted fans, curious onlookers and even news reporters gathered at the church for a standing-room only lecture on the powers and mysteries of God. Though not all were convinced by Jasper's heliocentric theory, his orating skills mesmerized most; as one skeptic wrote "Jasper didn't convert me to this theory, nor did

he convert me to his religion, but he did convert me to himself."

Jasper's work extended far beyond preaching to the devoted and attempted to minister to all black Richmonders; the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church became active in providing community services including aid to the elderly and the destitute. Jasper continued in this capacity until 1901 at the age of eighty-eight, after half a century of serving God.

Sources:

Mary J. Bratton, "John Jasper of Richmond: From Slave Preacher to Community Leader," *Virginia Cavalcade* 29 (Summer 1979); William E. Hatcher, *John Jasper: The Unmatched Negro Philosopher and Preacher* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); John Jasper, "De Sun Do Move," <http://www.library.vcu.edu/jbc/speccoll/vbha/6th5.html>

The conversion of John Jasper in his own words.

" Mars Sam Hargrove called me to preach the gospel- he was my old marster, and he started me out wid my message.

"I was seekin' God six long weeks--jes' 'cause I was sich a fool I couldn't see de way. De Lord struck me fus' on Cap'tal Squar', an' I left thar badly crippled. One July mornin' somethin' happen'd. I was a tobarker-stemmer--dat is, I took de tobarker leaf, an' tor'd de stem out, an' dey won't no one in dat fac'ry could beat me at dat work. But dat mornin' de stems wouldn't come out to save me, an' I tor'd up tobarker by de poun' an' flung it under de table. Fac' is, bruthr'n, de darkness of death was in my soul dat mornin'. My sins was piled on me like mount'ns; my feet was sinkin' down to de reguns of despar, an' I felt dat of all sinners I was de wust. I tho't dat I would die right den, an' wid what I supposed was my lars breath I flung up to heav'n a cry for mercy. 'Fore I kno'd it, de light broke; I was light as a feather; my feet was on de mount'n; salvation rol'd like a flood thru my soul, an' I felt as if I could 'nock off de fact'ry roof wid my shouts.

"But I sez to mysef, I gwine to hol' still till dinner, an' so I cried, an' laffed, an' tore up de tobarker. Pres'ntly I looked up de table, an' dar was a old man--he luv me, an' tried hard to lead me out de darkness, an' I slip roun' to whar he was, an' I sez in his ear as low as I could: 'Hallelujah; my soul is redeemed!' Den I jump back quick to my work, but after I once open my mouf it was hard to keep it shet any mo'. 'Twan' long 'fore I looked up de line agin, an' dar was a good ol' woman dar dat knew all my sorrers, an' had been prayin' fur me all de time. Der was no use er talkin'; I had to tell her, an' so I skip along up quiet as a breeze, an' start'd to whisper in her ear, but just den de holin-back straps of Jasper's breachin' broke, an' what I tho't would be a whisper was loud enuf to be hearn clean 'cross Jeems River to Manchester. One man sed he tho't de factory was fallin' down; all I know'd I had raise my fust shout to de glory of my Redeemer.

"But for one thing thar would er been a jin'ral revival in de fact'ry dat mornin'. Dat one thing was de overseer. He bulg'd into de room, an' wid a voice dat sounded like he had his breakfus dat mornin' on rasps an' files, bellowed out: 'What's all dis row 'bout?' Somebody shouted out dat John Jasper dun got religun, but dat didn't wurk 'tall wid de boss. He tell me to git back to my table, an' as he had sumpthin' in his hand dat looked ugly, it was no time fur makin' fine pints, so I sed: 'Yes, sir, I will; I ain't meant no harm; de fus taste of salvation got de better un me, but I'll git back to my work.' An' I tell you I got back quick.

"Bout dat time Mars Sam he come out'n his orfis, an' he say: 'What's de matter out here?' An' I hear de overseer tellin' him: 'John Jasper kick up a fuss, an' say he dun got religun, but I dun fix him, an' he got back to his table.' De devil tol' me to hate de overseer dat mornin', but de luv of God was rollin' thru my soul, an' somehow I didn't mind what he sed.

"Little aft'r I hear Mars Sam tell de overseer he want to see Jasper. Mars Sam was a good man; he was a Baptis', an' one of de hed men of de old Fust Church down here, an' I was glad when I hear Mars Sam say he want to see me. When I git in his orfis, he say: 'John, what was de matter out dar jes' now?'--and his voice was sof' like, an' it seem'd to have a little song in it which play'd into my soul like an angel's harp. I sez to him: 'Mars Sam, ever sence de fourth of July I ben cryin' after de Lord,

six long weeks, an' jes' now out dar at de table God tuk my sins away, an' set my feet on a rock. I didn't mean to make no noise, Mars Sam, but 'fore I know'd it de fires broke out in my soul, an' I jes' let go one shout to de glory of my Saviour.'

"Mars Sam was settin' wid his eyes a little down to de flo', an' wid a pritty quiv'r in his voice he say very slo': 'John, I b'leve dat way myself. I luv de Saviour dat you have jes' foun', an' I wan' to tell you dat I do'n complain 'cause you made de noise jes' now as you did.' Den Mars Sam did er thing dat nearly made me drop to de flo'. He git out of his chair, an' walk over to me and giv' me his han', and he say: 'John, I wish you mighty well. Your Saviour is mine, an' we are bruthers in de Lord.' When he say dat, I turn 'round an' put my arm agin de wall, an' held my mouf to keep from shoutin'. Mars Sam well know de good he dun me.

"Art'r awhile he say: 'John, did you tell eny of 'em in thar 'bout your conversion?' And I say: 'Yes, Mars Sam, I tell 'em fore I kno'd it, an' I feel like tellin' eberybody in de worl' about it.' Den he say: 'John, you may tell it. Go back in dar an' go up an' down de tables, an' tell all of 'em. An' den if you wan' to, go up-stars an' tell 'em all 'bout it, an' den down-stars an' tell de hogshed men an' de drivers an' everybody what de Lord has dun for yor.'

"By dis time Mars Sam's face was rainin' tears, an' he say: 'John, you needn' work no mo' today. I giv' you holiday. Aft'r you git thru tellin' it here at de fact'ry, go up to de house, an' tell your folks; go roun' to your neighbours, an' tell dem; go anywhere you wan' to, an' tell de good news. It'll do you good, do dem good, an' help to hon'r your Lord an' Saviour.'

"Oh, dat happy day! Can I ever forgit it? Dat was my conversion mornin', an' dat day de Lord sent me out wid de good news of de kingdom. For mo' den forty years I've ben tellin' de story. My step is gittin' ruther slo', my voice breaks down, an' sometimes I am awful tired, but still I'm tellin' it. My lips shall proclaim de dyin' luv of de Lam' wid my las' expirin' breath.

"Ah, my dear ol' marster! He sleeps out yonder in de ol' cemetery, an' in dis worl' I shall see his face no mo', but I don't forgit him. He give me a holiday, an' sent me out to tell my friends what great things God had dun for my soul. Oft'n as I preach I feel that I'm doin' what my ol' marster tol' me to do. If he was here now, I think he would lif' up dem kin' black eyes of his, an' say: 'Dat's right, John; still tellin' it; fly like de angel, an' wherever you go carry de Gospel to de people.' Farewell, my ol' marster, when I lan' in de heav'nly city, I'll call at your mansion dat de Lord had ready for you when you got dar, an' I shall say: 'Mars Sam, I did what you tol' me, an' many of 'em is comin' up here wid da robes wash'd in de blood of de Lam' dat was led into de way by my preachin', an' as you started me I want you to shar' in de glory of da salvation. 'An' I tell you what I reek'n, dat when Mars Sam sees me, he'll say: 'John, call me marster no mo'; we're bruthers now, an' we'll live forever roun' de throne of God.' "

This is Jasper's story, but largely in his own broken words. When he told it, it swept over the great crowd like a celestial gale. The people seemed fascinated and transfigured. His homely way of putting the Gospel came home to them. Let me add that his allusions to his old master were in keeping with his kindly and conciliatory tone in all that he had to say about the white people after the emancipation of the slaves. He loved the white people, and among them his friends and lovers were counted by the thousand.

From John Jasper - The Unmatched Black Philosopher and Preacher

by William e. Hatcher

published by Sprinkle Publications

1985

Also available free online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/hatcher/hatcher.html>