

“De Sun Do Move and De Earth Am Flat” — Reverend John J. Jasper (*a Sermon*)



[Noel J. Hadley November 21, 2018](#)

IT IS CERTAINLY REMARKABLE TO CONSIDER THAT PREACHING was expressly prohibited among blacks during the first 25 years of Reverend Jasper’s ministry, and yet the Southern gentleman *preached*. For more than fifty years of his life, John J. Jasper was a slave. Regardless, in the decades leading up to the Civil War, the electrifying sermons which derived from the man who labored in tobacco factories and iron mills engaged *both* the black and white population of Richmond, the very city which would soon serve as the capitol of the Confederacy. None of his sermons however drew larger or more eager audiences than what you are about to read. First given to his Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in 1878, “De Sun Do Move” was received to a packed audience, including members of the Richmond press. It is said that the remarkable sermon resulted from a question Jasper received from a church parishioner regarding Joshua 10. Jasper responded the following Sunday. Word immediately spread, and further requests began pouring in. Jasper would repeat his celebrated sermon another 250 times to packed audiences. The Virginia House of Representatives was among them.

“LOW ME TO SAY DAT WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN and a slave, I knowed nothin’ worth talkin’ bout concernin’ books. Dey was sealed mysteries to me, but I tell you I longed to break

de seal. I thirsted for de bread of learnin'. When I seen books I ached to git in to 'em for I knowed dat dey had de stuff for me and I wanted to taste dere contents, but most of de time dey was barred against me.

By de mercy of de Lord a thing happened. I got a roomfeller – he was a slave, too, and he had learned to read. In de dead of de night he give me lessons outen de New York Spellin Book. It was hard pullin, I tell you; harder on him, for he know'd just a little and it made him sweat to try to beat somethin into my hard head. It was worse with me. Up de hill every step, but when I got de light of de lesson into my noodle I fairly shouted, but I know'd I was not a scholar. De consequence was I crept long mighty tedious, gittin a crumb here and dere until I could read de Bible by skippin de long words, tolerable well. Dat was de start of my education – dat is what little I got. I make mention of dat young man. De years have fled away since den but I ain't forgot my teacher and never shall. I thank my Lord for him and I carries him memory in my heart.

Bout seven months after my gittin to readin, God converted my soul and I reckon bout de first and main thing dat I begged de Lord to give me was de power to understand his word. I ain't bragging and I hates self-praise, but I bound to speak de thankful word. I believes in my heart dat my prayer to understand de scriptur was heard. Since dat time I ain't cared bout nothing 'cept to study and preach de word of God.

Not, my brethren, dat I's de fool to think I knows it all. Oh, my father, no! Far from it. I don't hardly understand myself nor half of de things round me and dere is millions of things in de Bible too deep for Jasper and some of 'em too deep for everybody. I don't carry de keys to de Lord's closet and he ain't tell me to peep in and if I did I'm so stupid I wouldn't know it when I see it. No, friends, I knows my place at de feet of my master and dere I stays.

But I can read de Bible and get de things what lay on de top of de soil. Outen de Bible I know nothin extry bout de sun. I seen its course as he rides up dere so gran and mighty in de sky, but dere is heaps bout dat flaming orb dat is too much for me. I know dat de sun shines powerfully and pours down its light in floods and yet dat is nothin compared with de light dat flashes in my mind from de pages of God's book. But you knows all dat. I knows dat de sun burns – oh, how it did burn in dem July days! I tell you he cooked de skin on my back many a day when I was hoein in de corn field. But you knows all dat – and yet dat is nothin to de divine fire dat burns in de souls of God's chillum. Can you feel it, brethren?

But bout de course of de sun, I have got dat. I have done ranged through de whole blessed book and scoured down de last thing de Bible has to say bout de movement of de sun. I got all dat pat and safe. And lemme say dat if I don't give it to you straight, if I gits one word crooked or wrong, you just holler out, "Hold on dere, Jasper, you ain't got dat straight," and I'll beg pardon. If I don't tell de truth, march up on dese steps here and tell me I's a liar and I'll take it. I fears I do lie sometimes – I'm so sinful, I find it hard to do right; but my God don't lie and he ain't put no lie in de book of eternal truth and if I give you what de Bible say, den I bound to tell de truth.

I got to take you all dis afternoon on an excursion to a great battlefield. Most folks like to see fight – some is mighty fond of gittin into fights and some is mighty quick to run down de back alley when dere is a battle goin on for de right. Dis time I'll 'scort you to a scene where you shall witness a curious battle. It took place soon after Israel got in de Promise Land. You 'member de people of Gideon make friends with God's people when dey first entered Canaan and dey was monstros smart to do it. But, just de same, it got 'em in to an awful fuss. De cities round bout dere flared up at dat and dey all joined dere forces and say dey gwine to mop de Bigyun people off de ground and dey bunched all dere armies together and went up for to do it. When dey come up so bold and brace de Gideonites was scared outen dere senses and dey sent word to Joshua dat dey was in trouble and was up dere directly. Dey had an awful fight, sharp and bitter but you might know dat General Joshua was not dere to get whipped. He prayed and he Fought and de hours got away too fast for him and so he asked de Lord to issue a special order dat de sun hold up awhile and dat de moon furnish plenty of moonshine down on de lowest part of de fightin grounds. As a fact, Joshua was so drunk with de battle, so thirsty for de blood of de enemies of de Lord and so wild with de victory dat he tell de sun to stand still till he could finish his job.

What did de sun do? Did he glare down in fiery wrath and say, "What you talking bout my stoppin for, Joshua? I ain't never started yet. Been here all de time and it would smash up everything if I was to start." No, he ain't say dat. But what de Bible say? Dat's what I ask to know. It say dat it was at de voice of Joshua dat it stopped. I don't say it stopped; tain't for Jasper to say dat, but de Bible, *de Book of God*, say so. But I say dis; nothin can stop until it has first started. So I knows what I'm talkin bout. De sun was travelin long dere through de sky when de order come. He hitched his red ponies and made quite a call on de land of Gideon. He perch up dere in de skies just as friendly as a neighbor what comes to borrow somethin and he stand up dere and he look like he enjoyed de way Joshua waxes dem wicked armies. And de moon, she wait down in de low grounds dere and pours out her light and look just as calm and happy as if she was waitin for her escort. Dey never budged, neither of 'em long as de Lord's army needed a light to carry on de battle.

I don't read when it was dat Joshua hitch up and drove on, but I suppose it was when de Lord told him to go. Anybody knows dat de sun didn't stay dere all de time. It stopped for business and went on when it got through. Dis is bout all dat I has to do with dis particular case. I done showed you dat dis part of de Lord's word teaches you dat de sun stopped which show dat he was movin before dat and dat he went on afterwards. I told you dat. I would prove dis and I's done it and I defied anybody to say dat my point ain't made.

I told you in de first part of dis discourse dat de Lord God is a man of war. I expect by now you begin to see it is so. Don't you admit it? When de Lord come to see Joshua in de day of his fears and warfare and actually make de sun stop stone still in de heavens so de fight can rage on till all de foes is slain, you're obliged to understand dat de God of peace is also de man of war. He can use both peace and war to heap de riches and to scatter de host of de aliens. A man talked to me last week bout de laws of nature and he say dey can't possibly be upset and I had to laugh right in his face. As if de laws of anything was greater dan my God who is de lawgiver for everything. My Lord is great! He rules in de heavens, in de earth, and down under de ground. He is great and greatly to be praised. Let all de people bow down and worship before

Him! Dere you are! Ain't dat de movement of de sun? Bless my soul! Hezekiah's case beat Joshua. Joshua stop de sun, but here de Lord make de sun walk back ten degrees; and yet dey say dat de sun stand stone still and never move a peg. It look to me he move round mighty brisk and is ready to go any way dat de Lord orders him to go. I wonder if any of dem philosophers is round here dis afternoon? I'd like to take a square look at one of dem and ask him to explain dis matter. He can't do it, my brothren. He knows a heap bout books, maps, figgers, and long distances, but I defy him to take up Hezekiah's case and explain it off. He can't do it, my brothren. De Word of de Lord is my defense and bulwark and I fears not what men say nor do – my God give my victory.

Low me, my friends, to put myself square bout dis movement of de sun. It ain't no business of mine whether de sun move or stan still, or whether it stop or go back or rise or set. All dat is out of my hand entirely and I got nothin to say. I got no the-o-ry on de subject. All I ask is dat we will take what de Lord say bout it and let His will be done bout everything. What dat will is I can't know except He whisper into my sould or write it in a book. Here's de Book. Dis is enough for me and with it to pilot me, I can't get far astray.

But I ain't done with you yet. And de song says, dere's more to follow. I invite you to hear de first verse in de seventh chapter of de Book of Revelations. What do John under de power of de Spirit say? He says he saw four angels standin on de four corners of de earth, holdin de four winds of de earth and so forth. Low me to ask if de earth is round where do it keep its corners? A flat square thing has corners, but tell me where is de corner of an apple or a marble or a cannon ball or a silver dollar. If dere is anyone of dem philosophers what's been takin so many cracks at my old head bout here, he is cordially invited to step forward and square up dis vexin business. I hear tell dat you can't square a circle but it looks like dese great scholars done learn how to circle a square. If dey can do it, let 'em step to de front and do de trick. But, my brothren, in my poor judgment, dey can't do it; tain't in 'em to do it. Dey is on de wrong side of de Bible – dat's on de outside of de Bible, and dere's where de trouble come in with 'em. Dey done got out of de breastworks of de truth and as long as dey stay dere de light of de Lord will not shine on dere path. I ain't care so much bout de sun, though it's mighty convenient to have it but my trust is in de Word of de Lord. Long as my feet is flat on de solid rock, no man can move men. I's gettin my orders from de God of my salvation.

The other day a man with a high collar and side whiskers come to my house. He was one nice Northern gentleman and think a heap of us colored people in de South. Dey are lovely folks and I honors 'em very much. He seem from de start kinder strict and cross with me and after a while he broke out furious and fretted and he says: "Allow me Mister Jasper to give you some plain advice. Dis nonsense bout de sun movin where you are gettin is disgracin your race all over de country and as a friend of your people I come to say it's got to stop." . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . Mars Sam Hargroven – ever hardly smash me dat way. It was equal to one of dem old overseers way back yonder. I tell him dat if he'll show me I's wrong, I give it all up. . . My! My! . . . Ha! Ha! . . . He sail in on me and such a storm bout science, new discoveries and de Lord only know what all, I never hear before and den he tel me my race is urgin me and poor old Jasper must shut up his fool mouth.

When he got through – it look like he never would – I tell him John Jasper ain't set up to be no scholar and don't know de philosophies and ain't trying to hurt his people but is workin day and night to lift 'em up but his foot is on de rock of eternal truth. Dere he stand and dere he is going to stand till Gabriel sounds de judgment note. So I say to de gentleman what scolded me up so dat I hear him make his remarks but I ain't hear where he get his Scripture from and that between him and de Word of de Lord, I take my stand by de Word of God every time. Jasper ain't mad; he ain't fighting nobody; he ain't been appointed janitor to run de sun; he nothin but de servant of God and a lover of de Everlasting Word. What I care bout de sun? De day comes on when de sun will be called from his race track and his light squinches out forever; de moon shall turn to blood and this earth be consumed with fire. Let 'em go; dat won't scare me nor trouble God's elected people, for de word of de Lord shall endure forever and on dat Solid Rock we stand and shall not be moved!

Is I got you satisfied yet? Has I proven my point? OH, yet whose hearts is full of unbelief! Is you still holding out? I reckon de reason you say de sun don't move is cause you are so hard to move yourself. You is a real trial to me, but, never mind, I ain't given you up yet and never will. Truth is mighty; it can break de heart of stone and I must fire another arrow of truth out of de quiver of de Lord. If you has a copy of God's Word bout your person, please turn to dat minor prophet, Malachi, what write de last book in de whole Bible and look at chapter one, verse eleven. What do it say? I better read it for I got a notion you critics don't carry any Bible in your pockets every day in de week. Here is what it says: "For from de rising of de sun even unto de goin down of de same, My name shall be great among de Gentiles. . . . My name shall be great among de heathen, says de Lord of hosts!" How do dat suit you? It looks like dat ought to fix it! Dis time it is de Lord of Hosts hisself dat is doin de talkin and He is talkin on a wonderful and glorious subject. He is tellin of de spreadin of His Gospel of de comin of His last victory over de Gentiles and de worldwide glories dat at de last He is to get. Oh, my brothren, what a time dat will be! My soul takes wing as I anticipate with joy dat millennium day! De glories as dey shine before my eyes blinds me and I forget de sun and moon and stars. I just remembers dat long bout dose last days dat de sun and moon will go out of business for dey won't be needed no more. Den will King Jesus come back to see His people and He will be de sufficient light of de world. Joshua's battles will be over. Hezekiah won't need no sun dial and de sun and moon will fade out before de glorious splendors of de New Jerusalem.

But what da matter with Jasper? I most forgot my business and most gone to shoutin over de far away glories of de second comin of my Lord, I beg pardon and will try to get back to my subject. I have to do as de sun in Hezekiah's case – fall back a few degrees. In dat part of de Word dat I'm given you from Malachi – dat de Lord hisself spoke – he declares dat His glory is gwine to spread. Spread? Where? From de rising of de sun to de goin down of de same. What? Don't say dat, does it? Dat's exactly what it says. Ain't dat clear enough for you? De Lord pity dese doubtin Thomases. Here is enough to settle it all and cure de worse cases. Wake up here, wise folks, and get your medicine. Where is dem high collared philosophers now? What dey skulkin round in de brush for? Why don't you get out in de broad afternoon light and fight for your collars? Ah, I understand it; you got no answer. De Bible is against you and in your consciences you are convicted.

But I hears you back dere. What you whisperin bout? I know! You say you sent me some papers and I never answer dem. . . Ha, ha, ha! . . . I got 'em. De difficulty bout dem papers you sent me is dat dey did not answer me. Dey never mention de Bible one time. You think so much of yourself and so little of de Lord God and thinks what you say is so smart dat you can't even speak of de Word of de Lord. When you ask me to stop believing in de Lord's Word and to pin my faith to your words, I ain't goin to do it. I take my stand by de Bible and rest my case on what it says. I take what de Lord says bout my sins, bout my Savior, bout life, bout death, bout de world to come and I take what de Lord say bout de sun and moon and I cares little what de haters of my God chooses to say. Think dat I will forsake de Bible? It is my only Book, my hope, de arsenal of my soul's supplies and I wants nothing else.

But I got another word for you yet. I done work over dem papers dat you sent me without date and without name. You deals in figures and thinks you are bigger dan de archangels. Lemme see what you done say. You set yourself up to tell me how far it is from here to de sun. You think you got it down to a nice point. You say it is 3,339,002 miles from de earth to de sun. Dat's what you say. Another one say dat de distance is 12,000,000; another got it to 27,000,000. I hears dat de great Isaac Newton worked it up to 28,000,000 and later on de philosophers gone another rippin rise to 50,000,000. De last one gets it bigger dan all de others, up to 90,000,000. Don't any of 'em agree and so dey runs a guess game and de last guess is always de biggest. Now, when dese guessers can have a convention in Richmond and all agree upon de same thing, I'd be glad to hear from you again and I does hope dat by dat time you won't be ashamed of your name.

Heaps of railroads has been built since I saw de first one when I was fifteen years old but I ain't hear tell of a railroad built yet to de sun. I don't see why if dey can measure de distance to de sun, dey might not get up a railroad or a telegraph and enable us to find something else bout it dan merely how far off de sun is. Dey tell me dat a cannon ball could make de trip to de sun in twelve years. Why don't dey send it? It might be rigged up with quarters for a few philosophers on de inside and fixed up for a comfortable ride. Dey would need twelve years' rations and a heap of changes of raiment – mighty thick clothes when dey start and mighty thin ones when dey git there.

Oh, my brethren, dese things make you laugh and I don't blame you for laughing except it's always sad to laugh at de follies of fools. If we could laugh 'em out of countenance we might well laugh day and night. What cuts into my soul is dat all dese men seem to me dat dey is hitting at de Bible. Dat's what stirs my soul and fills me with righteous wrath. Little cares I what dey says bout de sun, provided dey let de Word of de Lord alone. But never mind. Let de heathen rage and de people imagine a vain thing. Our King shall break 'em in pieces and dash 'em down. But blessed be de name of our God, de Word of de Lord endureth forever! Stars may fall, moons may turn to blood and de sun set to rise no more, but Thy kingdom, oh, Lord, is from everlastin to everlastin!

But I has a word dis afternoon for my own brethren. Dey is de people for whose sould I got to watch – for dem I got to stand and report at de last – dey is my sheep and I's dere shepherd and my soul is knit to dem forever. Ain't for me to be troublin you with dese questions bout dem heavenly bodies. Our eyes goes far beyond de smaller stars. Our home is clean out of sight of

dem twinkling orbs. De chariot dat will come to take us to our Father's mansion will sweep out by dem flickerin lights and never halt till it brings us in clear view of de throne of de Lamb. Don't hitch your hopes to no sun nor stars. Your home is got Jesus for its light and your hopes must travel up dat way. I preach dis sermon just for to settle the minds of my few brothren and I repeats it cause kind friends wish to hear it, and I hopes it will do honor to de Lord's Word. But nothin short of de Pearly Gates can satisfy me and I charge my people, fix your feet on de Solid Rock, your hearts on Calvary, and y our eyes on de throne of de Lamb. Dese strifes and griefs will soon get over; we shall see de King in His glory and be at ease. Go on, go on, ye ransomed of de Lord! Shout His praises as you go! And I shall meet you in de city of de New Jerusalem where ye shan't need de light of de sun – for de Lamb of de Lord is de light of de saints!"