

Frank's Personality. -- Selflessness.

by T. Mardy Rees

Frank Joshua was a faithful minister, a friend of the poor, and a great singer in Israel, who won souls and remained faithful unto death.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25, Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:10, Galatians 6:2, 1 Peter 4:10

Topics: "Selfless Service", "Holy Spirit"

Description

T. Mardy Rees preaches about the remarkable personality of Frank Joshua, known for his selflessness, charm of manner, and dedication to training others like Bob Jones. Frank's love for the poor, willingness to help, and good humor were evident in his interactions with the community. His emphasis on the Holy Spirit, original expositions, and joyful spirit made him a beloved figure in Neath. Despite facing threats and challenges, Frank's unwavering faith and commitment to serving others left a lasting impact on those around him.

Transcript

Frank's personality. -- Selflessness. -- Charm of manner. -- How he trained Bob Jones as conductor. -- Studied in Gnoll Woods. -- Huddersfield " a favourite tune. -- Care for the poor. -- Willing helpers. -- Testimony of Police Superintendent. -- Mrs. Penn Lewis bears witness. -- His good humour. -- "Count your blessings," an incident. -- Adam, where art thou? -- "Good at heart," his retort. -- Are you converted? -- A ruse that failed. -- A bribe offered but refused. -- The table loaned by a county policeman. -- A threat to shoot Frank -- A soldier fed.

"A faithful minister,

A friend of the poor,

A great singer in Israel,

And a winner of souls,

Faithful unto death."

THE above mural inscription at the Hall emphasizes the chief features of the Rev. Frank Joshua's character. The people of Neath on account of his radiant optimism called him "Happy Frank." Like Phillips-Brooks, he carried sunshine everywhere and although he came into contact with some of the most

tragic cases conceivable he remained happy. Such a heritage points to a source other than that of natural endowment. Temperament might account for much of "Happy Frank's" cheerfulness, but it was chiefly the gift of the Holy Spirit to him that he might do his difficult work. He always could draw a crowd, but his inspiration was not in the crowd but in the Gospel of good cheer. To him the spirit was paramount. Those who have sought to judge him by any other standard than that of the spirit have gone astray. In all his sermons and work he emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit. Self-seeking was unknown to him. To many his selflessness appeared weakness, but to-day it is, the secret of his greatness. His charm of manner can only be explained by the spirit he possessed. He was never weary at saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Breathe it freely, for it is your life and heritage." Frank might have been a poet for he had a playful fancy, and a good deal of invention and an ardent heart. The spirit of romance and poetry was in all he said and did. His life was one beautiful poem of joy and achievement. He lived his poems and therefore did not attempt to write them. He might have won fame as a singer, but he was content to use this moving gift to commend the gospel of grace. To him it was bliss indeed to sing for a whole evening: at his home to cheer a solitary wayfarer who had just repented and returned from the wilds of sin. "Gwynfa," the name of his residence, was peculiarly fitting. How many souls were delivered there from the bondage of iniquity by the melodies of jubilant faith and love and, made secure by the rapture of ecstatic joy. Those who came under the spell of his personality could not forget the experience. Mr. Bob Jones, the present conductor of praise at the Forward, Movement Hall, is a notable example. The singing robe of Frank seems to have fallen, upon his shoulders. Frank took great pains with Bob, believing that he was called of God to render conspicuous service. At the age of fifteen Bob and seven other young men went into the inquiry' room. " Young man, "said Frank, "God wants you. Will you do what He wants? " " Yes," was the answer. At the age of eighteen the young man was asked to sing in the open air. He selected the solo, " Behold me standing at the door," and broke down sadly in his first attempt. Frank believed that he would be a singer and trained him. On his return from the War, Bob visited his old pastor, who was then an invalid. " Take the choir till I return," said Frank, and there he remains since.

It cost Frank his all to cultivate personality. The affection and praise which the mere mention of his name evoke prove how potent and real was his personality. The poor in their sorrows turned to him for comfort. His ministrations at funerals were truly remarkable. On such occasions his sympathetic feelings found full play. Even in his most joyous moments there was a minor undertone, which was most pleasing.

The welfare of the mission was his all-in-all. He helped to create it and lived entirely for it. His expositions were original, interspersed with good humoured comments from history and personal experience. Frank took great pains with his sermons, and the toil they necessitated may be imagined easier than expressed. After every written sermon there is a prayer. We quote one example. His Tuesday evening service was a feast of good things, in praise, prayer and experience. Several times we discovered him seated on the banks of the gurgling brook in the beautiful Gnoll Woods committing to memory the notes of his week-evening address. He was a child of nature who loved to meditate in her sylvan glades. A visitor to Wordsworth's home in the Lake District expressed a wish to see the poet's study. " I can show you his library," said the housekeeper, " but (pointing to the hills) his study is yonder." Similarly Frank's study was outside, near to Nature's heart. To this unsophisticated lover of nature God was speaking in flowers, trees and rocks. The spots where I spoke to him in Gnoll Woods have become shrines of blessed memory. Their solitude, beauty, and worshipfulness seem to suggest so much of that which was so attractive in his own character. Oft times such a sidelight as this helps us to appraise a man better than the fullest records of his public duties. We know not of a more delightful realm than Gnoll Woods, where a minister may " steal from active duties and embrace obscurity and calm forgetfulness."

With Frank life was a series of wonders. He wondered at nature and the new creations of Christ's gospel. "Great God of wonders," to the tune "Huddersfield," a favourite hymn with him, expressed his habitual spirit of surprise. What might not a "renaissance of wonder" accomplish in this our own generation? He could never get over the wonder of his conversion. "The Lord had done great things for him, whereof he was glad," and he expressed surprising gladness at all times. "The joys of nature," he said once, "should be taken to Jesus that He may bless them. We need Jesus in nature, if nature is to unfold her charms to us." "Happy Frank" died a poor man, with just enough in his pocket to reach home. Money had no fascination for him for he freely gave it away. Such a generous nature was easily imposed upon by professional beggars, but he could never steel himself against appeals for help. Every gift was enhanced, for he gave cheerfully according to his means. Fortunately for him, the church treasurer paid his stipend weekly, but he never began any week with an over plus. The needy knew when he had been away for a week or a fortnight's mission and speedily relieved him of his rewards.

He constrained others also to give to the poor. If on his pastoral rounds he found a family without food he would walk into a grocer's shop and order provisions to be sent to the house at once; and it was his grateful boast that such a request was never refused. Not a few Neath grocers helped him in this way. One afternoon he called at a furnisher's place and said: "You must put a bed in such and such a house within half an hour." "It cannot be done, Mr. Joshua." "But it must be done. I am going for the nurse." And it was done.

On one occasion a large number of seats had to be removed at the Hall and workers were needed. Frank entered the working men's club and said: "I want twelve men to shift some seats. Who'll, come?" The number required volunteered gladly in order to assist him.

It is recorded of St. Francis of Assisi that when feasting one night with young princes of his own age he rose from the banqueting table and went out into the garden. When sought, he was found walking in the moonlight with the entranced gaze of a lover. Asked "Are you in love?" He answered, "Yes, I am plighted to Poverty. No one seems to have wooed Poverty for a bride since the Master Himself, so I will woo her." In a sense Frank did the same, and the wonderful manner in which he was sustained reminds one of primitive days. He never possessed more than one pair of boots at a time, and this he gave away one night to a poor man who, called at his house for help. The following day he was in a predicament for he had a funeral to attend and the shops were closed. Wearing the boots of Mr. Frank Williams he was enabled to attend the service but not in comfort, for they were several sizes too large.

In the opinion of some people Frank was vain, as regards his personal appearance, but we believe that what was called vanity was only a high estimate of his body, the "Temple of God," and a desire to hallow it. There was no pride in his spirit. The outward man was but a reflection of the artist in his soul, for Frank was an artist to his fingertips. Sin was the only ugly thing in the world to him and he hated ugliness. He had a most winsome presence. The pale countenance told of the preaching passion, which consumed the ruddy bloom of health. "Preaching is self-murder," said the late Dr. Joseph Parker. Frank spared not himself in his public ministrations, and if he did not preach with the abandon of his popular brother Seth, his intense and earnest passion burnt him to the socket.

Superintendent Jones stated that "Happy Frank" was better than three policemen to stop street brawls. Mrs. Penn Lewis, the founder of the Christian Association for young women in Neath visited the Rev. Frank Joshua in 1893 and spoke about the great work to be done. That night Frank and a Church Army Captain knelt down in the bedroom and prayed for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit. Between the two

stood a table with the candle and the Bible. After long agony the Bible was opened, when the following message flashed before their wondering eyes: "What are these two . . . upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? These are the two anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." (Zech. 4, 11-14). The following Sunday morning Mrs. Penn Lewis found the Mission Hall full of men and women at the early prayer meeting, led by 'Frank and the Church Army Captain. Thus the work now carried on by the Christian Association for Women and Girls was inaugurated. * Made Known for the first time by Mrs. Penn Lewis at the Annual Meeting of the C.A.W.G. at the Forward movement Hall, 15th November 1925.)

What a fund of good humour Frank possessed. With him good humour was a spirit. He never laughed at the weaknesses of other people; but the incongruities of human character and speech kept him bubbling with mirth. Humour helped him to drive home the words of soberness and truth. Never was the Gospel handled more reverently or earnestly than by Frank, yet his unfailing good humour could not be smothered. He knew how to influence his large congregations and how to surprise their feelings. In one sense humour is a surprise of the feeling even as wit is a surprise of the intellect. Laughter and tears were not far apart in his case. Even Bunyan tells us "that some things are of such a nature as to make one's fancy chuckle when the heart doth break." Frank as an evangelist knew the chuckle and the heartbreak of the true soul-winner. On one occasion he asked the writer to assist him at an after-meeting. I approached an old woman 'who was reputed to be very worldly and matter-of-fact.' Well, Mrs. F. how do you feel to night? (It should be explained that Frank had appealed powerfully that night for decision). "Quite well, thank you, Mr. Rees, and how do you feel?" "At the close I complained to him of the spiritual blindness of Mrs. F. "Cheer up, my boy," said Frank, "I have had all kinds of answers from people."

His good humour endeared him to all young people, and to the end he entered heartily into their joys. Their affection for him was touching. In the field on Whit-Monday, when his Sunday School and Church turned out in large numbers, no one entered more heartily into the games. Full of initiative and tact he kept things lively. He could entertain young people in social gatherings for hours, and well might he "thank God for the comical bone He had placed in his body." The need of relaxation was gladly admitted by him. Laughter renewed his spirit, and his laugh was contagious. He was not surprised to read that one of the Chancellors of the Exchequer had entered £1 to Jester for making mirth. He counted it well spent, for heavy responsibilities bring weariness and need a diet of sunshine.

Good humour with him was a wonderful asset. He could not help himself. It was like oil on troubled waters and a tonic to the downcast. Someone who had heard Rowland Hill for the first time was shocked because he made people laugh during the sermon.

"True," was the rejoinder of a friend, " but did you notice how the next moment he made them cry also." The late Spurgeon, the greatest humorist of his age, confessed that rather than let his hearers become drowsy, or inattentive, he would have recourse to that wicked thing called humour. Frank knew more than any other what the ministry of tears implied, but he preferred the ministry of smiles. Good humour saved him more than once but his sally never made an enemy. The congregation was singing heartily one Sunday evening at the Hall, "Count your blessings." From the pulpit he noticed a prominent tradesman silent (Listening to the volume of praise I was, to tell you the truth ") and said: "Bill, hasn't the Lord given you blessings? Sing up, Bill." The incident illustrates how familiar he was with his members, and how he could prompt them to do what he desired. "Let the people praise Thee, O God, let all the people praise Thee," was the motto at the Mission.

Good humour was one of the few articles of his creed. He had a creed, but it was wrapped up in one name, Jesus Christ. A harsh, unfeeling conception of God was revolting to Frank's nature. "God so loved the world," he would say, "and we cannot narrow the phrase if we would. We cannot change it and say God so loved the elect." This consciousness of eternal condescending love was never absent from his mind, subsequently he was over-flowing with good spirits.

When preaching a sermon on "Adam, where art thou?" He confessed that he had had a good foundation for his discourse in a humorous story narrated at a meeting of ministers. It was about a local preacher who had once taken the same text and began by saying: "According to custom I shall have three main divisions;

I, All men are somewhere, "Where art thou?"

II, Some men are where they should not be, "Adam, where?"

III, If they do not change soon they will find themselves where they will not care to be; "Where?"

How playfully he could "turn the tables" upon self-excusers. Once he was remonstrating with a man whose deal had been rather shady. In self-defence the guilty one said: "You know, I am good at heart." "No," added Frank, "that is just where you are not good; if you were good there you would be good all over."

One evening he turned suddenly to a brother-minister and asked seriously: "Have you been converted, Tom?" "Yes," was the reply after a little reflection. "Good, but I have never heard you say so; that, is why I asked."

Satan was defeated in his attempt to injure this enthusiastic soul-winner, and on one occasion a woman who was a great sinner warned Frank. Late at night she called to see him at his house. "You know who I am," she said, "there ain't no good in me; and let me tell you, Mr. Joshua, at once, that I've not come to see you about my soul but to give you warning. To-morrow night you will be called to a certain public house to see a sick woman. Don't go; remember my warning; don't go; for it is only a trick to ruin you. Good night, Mr. Joshua." "Good night, M-----," said Frank. He confided in a bosom friend and was advised to go with two or three other brethren. The following night the call came. How true still that "the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them."

Years ago a most unworthy character desired Frank to support his candidature for a seat on the Borough Council. "Why do you come to me for support? You know very well that my principles are opposed to your way of living altogether." "I hope you will work a little, Mr. Joshua, to get me on the Council. I will write you a cheque for £50 if you promise me." "How dare you offer me a bribe?" "Well, if you won't have it for yourself you can have it for your Mission." "I could never support you, and I am sure

I cannot after such an offer." That man before he went to his account with all his imperfections on his head was an offence in the nostrils of society.

When the Borough Police were ordered to prevent the evangelists holding open-air meetings in the street a table was loaned to them by a County Policeman, and in front of the County Police Station a huge congregation was addressed. That policeman afterward received rapid promotions and Frank smilingly used to tell him: "You are well paid for lending that table to the Lord."

On one occasion a constable was ordered by his Superintendent to prevent the brothers holding an open-air meeting at a particular spot. "Move them on," said the Superintendent. "Sir," answered the constable, "Here's my coat and you can have it, but I am not going to order those men away." Afterwards the Superintendent confessed that it would have been forever on his conscience if they had been moved away.

"The next time he holds a meeting in front of my house," said the landlord of the G-- public house, "I'll shoot him." Frank was informed, but he was not alarmed. The meeting was held as usual and fortunately there was no shooting. A short time before Frank's death an urgent request came from the Neath Workhouse to visit a dying man. "You do not remember me, Mr. Joshua," said the sick man. "Not I cannot bring you to mind, my friend.' "I am dying, and I want to ask your forgiveness. I am the man who threatened to shoot you many years ago if you held another service in front of the G--." "The Lord forgive you, my friend. I had forgotten the incident, and forgive you freely."

Publicans changed their attitude towards him when they realized what good work he was doing. It was a pathetic sight the first Sunday after his burial to see the wife of a publican laying a beautiful wreath on his grave and shedding tears like rain.

One day Frank saw a soldier from the local War Hospital in the Gardens who had lost both hands. Immediately he invited him to his house. We know not what powers he possessed as chef, but he managed to make a pudding for the soldier, and when discovered in his room by his niece he was feeding his visitor with a spoon, and afterwards giving him a lighted cigarette. He was all things to all men and won many.

Although Frank kept no diary except for engagements, nevertheless, we could write more about him were it not for the exigency of space. This brief record must suffice for the time, and we must resume our story of Seth and his tireless efforts in mission work.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-mardy-rees/franks-personality-selflessness/>

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