

# ***Fort Payne church of Christ***



## **The Weekly Moment**

*A Weekly Motivational Message*

Wednesday, August 8, 2018

### **James Alexander Harding 1848-1922**



Who Was **James A. Harding**? Imagine growing up in a home where regular visitors included men like Alexander Campbell, Moses E. Lard, “Raccoon” John Smith, John T. Johnson, and John Rogers. The subject of this sketch spent much of his childhood in the presence of these great Restoration Leaders, and many more. His father was the successful preacher and church planter, James W. Harding of Winchester, Kentucky. If anyone was groomed for the polemic platform it would be James A. Harding.

Born in Winchester, Kentucky, March 16, 1848, the first of fourteen children, Jimmy Harding was, from his youth, set for great things in the kingdom of God. It was in his thirteenth year that the burden of sin was lifted. He was attending a meeting held by Moses E. Lard, and his father, when he responded to the invitation, and was baptized into Christ. It was the same year that the country had become embroiled

in civil war. His conscience being moved to defend “states rights,” led him to seek enlistment in the Confederate Army; however, he was turned away due to being too young.

When he was sixteen, his father desired to be certain that his son had better educational opportunities than he, so he sent him to study under a teacher named, John William Fox. For the next two years he was tutored in English, Latin, Mathematics, and the sciences. In the fall of 1866, he entered Bethany College in West Virginia. This was an institution started by Alexander Campbell twenty-six years before, but the old sage of Bethany had passed away the previous March. Campbell's son-in-law, W.K. Pendleton, was president when Jimmy attended. He graduated in 1869, with a teaching degree.

His roommate in college was Charles Knight, from Hopkinsville, Kentucky. On holidays he traveled home with him, staying with his family. Charles had a younger sister named Carrie that caught Jimmy's eye. Upon graduation, the two went back to Hopkinsville to open a school, calling it, “School for Boys and Young Men.” Jimmy was principal, and Charles assisted. Within a couple of years a board of trustees was assembled, including his father-in-law to be, John B. Knight, and it became a full academy. It was about that time when Jimmy and Carrie were married.

Up until this time, Harding had done very little preaching. Occasionally he would speak when called upon. In the spring of 1875, a brother named John Adams, asked if he would be willing to come and preach a protracted meeting. He responded that he did not have any evangelistic sermons. The man said, "Why, you have been brought up in the church all your life. You have also attended Bethany College and have your degree. You have been preaching since you were nineteen. If you can't hold a meeting, you ought to be shot. Now, shut your mouth, get your horse, and come on out and hold that meeting!" This marked the beginning of a most successful evangelistic career.

For seventeen years, between 1876 and 1893, James A. Harding averaged preaching two times every day, and three times on Sunday in different locations. His travels took him from Canada to Florida, and from New York to New Mexico. He held over 300 protracted meetings, that being evangelistic meetings lasting three to ten weeks, with great response. In 1889, he preached one eight-week meeting at Foster St. in Nashville. There were 123 additions. The previous year, he held a meeting at the South Nashville congregation, and had 300 additions. He held 17 meetings in Nashville, Tennessee and 13 meetings in Detroit, Michigan.

During his evangelistic efforts he was often called upon to debate Biblical issues with denominational preachers. It is estimated that he was engaged in over fifty. His largest battle for truth was a sixteen nights discussion on baptism, beginning May 27, 1889. In it, he faced the great Baptist debater, J.B. Moody, at the Central Baptist church in Nashville, Tennessee. There were over 2000 in attendance each night. The transcripts of the debate were printed in a 566 page volume. Other printed debates include a six-day discussion held with T.L. Wilkinson, a Methodist, beginning December 15, 1884 in Meaford, Ontario, Canada. It was published under the title, "Debate on Baptism." Then there was the "Harding-Nichols Debate," held in Lynnville, Tennessee, January 24-27, 1888. The last was the "Harding-Nichols" Debate in Murray, Kentucky, March 24-27, 1890. A fifth debate, this time written, appeared in the pages of The Christian Leader And Way between Harding and L.S. White of Dallas, Texas. It was published in a volume by F.L. Rowe in 1910. The subject was, "Special Providence."

Harding began writing for the Gospel Advocate as early as 1882, but for some time, it was his dream to edit his own paper. The dream became a reality in January 1889. His paper, The Way, continued a number of years, and enjoyed a wide area of readership. After three years of circulation, it grew into a sixteen page weekly. It continued until 1903, when Harding's duties to school work led him to merge The Way with another paper, The Christian Leader, of Cincinnati, Ohio. It became The Christian Leader And Way.

In 1891, a change of direction took place in the life of James A. Harding. David Lipscomb had long desired to open a school in Nashville. He approached Harding about it, and offered him the position of president. His decision to leave the evangelistic stage was not easily accepted by the brethren. For the first two years, he stayed very busy trying to fulfill meeting obligations made before he accepted his new role. For ten years he carried the responsibilities of leadership in the Nashville Bible School, later known as Lipscomb University.

While on a preaching trip in Bowling Green, Kentucky, he was approached by a wealthy family who desired to begin a college in their city. C.C. Potter and his wife promised \$60,000 and 140 acres of land to the building of the school. So, in October 1901, classes began at Potter Bible College with Harding as president.

When he left Nashville Bible School, he took with him, one of best teachers in the school, John N. Armstrong. Besides being a great assistant in founding a new school, it also helped that the young man happened to be married to his daughter, Woodson. Armstrong would later become a great college president of four different colleges. The last was a school that began in Morrilton, Arkansas but later moved to Searcy, and today bears the name of Harding University. It was given the name in 1924 in honor of James A. Harding. An outgrowth graduate school began bearing his name in 1958, and is now called Harding School of Theology in Memphis, Tennessee.

In the course of his life, James A. Harding was married twice. His wife Carrie passed away in their fifth year, due to suffering with tuberculosis. Together, they had given birth to three children, two of whom had died very young. Within two years he married Pattie Cobb of Waco, Kentucky. Together they had five children, two of whom preceded their father in death.

In the summer of 1912, Harding resigned his presidency at Potter. He had begun to show signs of forgetfulness, and had even suffered some blackouts that summer. The following year, his daughter Sue, had married a young man named Charlie Paine. He was a young doctor, and the two settled in Atlanta, Georgia in 1914. Sue's parents moved to Atlanta, where they spent the remainder of their lives. He spent his last years preaching at the Pryor Street church, and occasionally at the West End congregation. He traveled some, preaching on lecture programs.

His grandson-in-law, and biographer, L.C. Sears wrote, *“As he had so often wished, he did fall asleep. After lingering in a coma for three or four days, on a beautiful Sunday evening, May 28, 1922, he died peacefully in the Paine home . . .”* Thus ended the life of a man who had been two college presidents, and had successfully preached, and baptized thousands into Christ.

Think about it.

Here's hoping you'll make the *“most of your minutes”* this week.

Hope to see you at Bible Study tonight.

In Christian Love,

*Bob Strickland*