

Pepperdine University

From the Selected Works of Jerry Rushford

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Tennesseans Buried in California Soil

Jerry Rushford, *Pepperdine University*

Tennesseans Buried in California Soil (1)

JERRY RUSHFORD

California during the gold rush was an El Dorado for fortune-hunters. But by 1852, there was an increasing number of men and women who thought of making a living in California rather than of taking a fortune out of it. Consequently, these permanent settlers had a keen interest in the moral and cultural development of their new home.

By 1854, these wage earners had all but replaced the fortune-hunters of 1849-50. Typical of this new breed of California immigrant was a pioneer mechanic and preacher named Joshua Lawson, who, along with his wife and children, had migrated to the state in the fall of 1852. The Lawsons would have a significant impact on the moral and cultural development of one California town; and their labors would result in a large congregation of the Church of Christ and a fine Christian college.



Joshua and Mary Lawson arrived in California in 1852.

Joshua Lawson was born in Jackson County, Tennessee, on April 4, 1804. This was just eight years after Tennessee had achieved statehood. His future wife, Mary Chapin, was born in the same area on January 7, 1807. Joshua and Mary were married on November 29, 1829, and to this union nine children were born.

During these Tennessee years, Joshua

and Mary Lawson became acquainted with the principles of a back-to-the-Bible movement that sought to restore the essentials of New Testament Christianity. They embraced the goals of this vibrant young movement, were baptized into Christ, and became active members of a Church of Christ in their community. According to one record, Joshua and Mary "raised a large family which was devoted to the church."

Vocationally, Joshua was a builder of wagons and carriages, and he also served as the community blacksmith and gunsmith. He began preaching in 1835. One account says: "He was a fine mechanic, and like most of the pioneer preachers of his day, he toiled with his own hands to make a living."

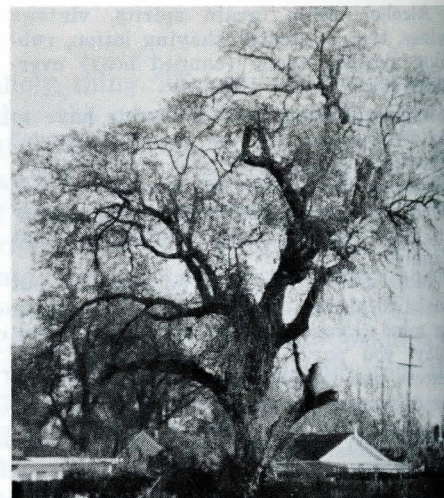
The Lawsons left Tennessee and moved to Missouri in 1840. Here they lived on the edge of the American frontier for twelve years. In the spring of 1852, when Joshua was celebrating his 48th birthday, they left the security of their Missouri home and joined the hazardous westward trek to California.

They started across the plains in a caravan of "prairie schooners" each drawn by five yoke of oxen. The perilous journey was successfully completed when their wagon train arrived at Gold Hill in Sierra County, California, in September of 1852.

After living in the mining country for over a year, Joshua and Mary moved their family to Yolo County in December of 1853. They settled on a ranch near the present city of Woodland, eighteen miles northwest of Sacramento. At the time of their arrival, this area was covered with oak groves and inhabited with elk, antelope and bear. But a little community, known variously as Cache Creek, Cacheville, and Yolo City, was already emerging from the forest. It would be given the name of Woodland in 1859.

When the Lawsons moved to Yolo County at the close of 1853, the Restoration Movement was almost unheard of in California. Thomas Thompson's letter to Alexander Campbell on December 25, 1853, gave information on just three congregations of the Church of Christ. Stockton and Santa Clara with 60 members each, and Napa County with 20 or 30 members, were the only congregations that Thompson was aware of.

However, the information Thompson forwarded to Campbell was slightly in error. He was not aware of the ministry of Dr. James Madison Case in Santa Rosa or of the small congregation that Nathan



Under this oak tree, in the fall of 1854, Joshua Lawson preached his first sermon in Woodland. This photo was taken in 1980.

Porter was preaching for at Brown's Valley. Moreover, he was not yet aware of the presence of Joshua Lawson in Yolo County.

In the fall of 1854, under an oak tree that is still standing in Woodland near the present corner of Cleveland and Clanton, Joshua Lawson preached his first sermon in the Sacramento Valley. This event took place on the ranch of Usual Shellhammer, a pioneer resident of Woodland and a son-in-law of the Lawsons. A history of Yolo County describes this historic occasion:

The Church of Christ is the spiritual organization upon which the people of early Woodland depended. It can safely be said that from the strength of this church the culture of Woodland and of Yolo County took shape. It was founded in the Fall of 1854 when notices and placards throughout the vicinity urged the populace to congregate at the Usual Shellhammer Ranch near Brown's Corner, where a wandering preacher would deliver his message. A huge crowd assembled, many out of curiosity, others to worship. Restless after some time of waiting, the congregation was in the end greeted by a square-shouldered little man who stepped from their midst to the platform. It proved, after he had removed wig and makeup to be Joshua Lawson, an elder of the Church of Christ. He became organizer and the first minister of the church . . . Services were continued in Shellhammer's grove for a brief period. Then the congregation moved to the little school house on what was later the Beamer property. In the Fall of 1855 the organization moved to the Union Church building in the Woodland Cemetery.

From the perspective of the Restoration Movement, the Church of Christ in Woodland would soon become "the most influential church in California." In our next article we will focus on the influence of this congregation and note the early beginnings of Hesperian College in Woodland.

Pepperdine University, Malibu, California 90265

Tennesseans Buried in California Soil (2)

JERRY RUSHFORD

The Church of Christ in Woodland, California had its genesis in the fall of 1854 when Joshua Lawson preached a sermon before "a huge crowd" on the Shallhammer Ranch. According to one source: "He continued to preach in groves and from place to place until a school house was built by the little community, and in this they held their services."

That same fall, Lawson received word that a preacher in the Church of Christ, J. N. Pendegast of Kentucky, had recently arrived in the California mining country. He wrote to Pendegast urging him to come to Woodland and hold a protracted meeting.

When Joshua Lawson and J. N. Pendegast met in Woodland in the late fall of 1854 it was the beginning of an eight year partnership that would make a lasting impression on the growth and direction of the Restoration Movement in California. Together they sent for that veteran organizer of churches, Thomas Thompson, who assisted them in organizing a congregation of "about 27" charter members.

Pendegast was so encouraged by the prospects in Woodland that he moved his family there in the spring of 1855. Lawson was just reaching his 51st birthday when the 43 year old Pendegast arrived that spring. They became partners in the gospel. One record says: "They labored together throughout the Sacramento Valley." The Church of Christ in Woodland became a radiating center in Yolo County and from it a number of churches sprang up including Buckeye Flat, Knights Landing, Madison, Capay, Winters, Dunnigan and Sacramento.

During these years, Joshua Lawson earned the distinctive appellation of "The Peace-Maker." One historian says: "This title was given him because of his disposition and his ability to reconcile neighbors and brethren. He was frequently called upon by neighboring churches to intervene in the interest of peace. He seldom failed on his heavenly mission."

The Churches of Christ in California gathered statistics for the first time in 1860. At that time there were 27 congregations with a combined membership of 1,223. The three largest congregations were located at Woodland, Santa Rosa and Vacaville. Led by Joshua Lawson and J. N. Pendegast, the Woodland church was now "the most influential church in California."

In the spring of 1860, the question of starting a Christian college in Woodland was first considered. A five-member Board of Trustees was selected to guide the destiny of this ambitious project, and Joshua Lawson was named Chairman of the Board. An attractive three-story building was constructed on ten acres of land, and the name of Hesperian College was agreed upon. The inspiration for this name was derived from the Latin word "hesperia" which meant "the western land."

On March 4, 1861, the same day Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as the sixteenth President of the United States, Hesperian College enrolled its first students. The Board of Trustees was eager to commence instruction on that historic occasion, although the building was not yet completed. Professor Oscar L. Matthews, a graduate of Alexander Campbell's Bethany College, was the board's choice to be the founding president of the college.

It was not surprising to see an open Holy Bible in the center of the official college seal. The college was founded by people who were committed to restoring the authority of the Bible in every sphere of life, and from the first day of instruction the Bible was the central text in the college curriculum. Prospective students read the following words in the college catalog:

Believing that knowledge is power, and that all power misdirected is dangerous, the Faculty give their constant attention to the moral training of the pupils. The exercises of each day are introduced by reading the Sacred Scriptures, singing and prayers, together with remarks and questions upon chronology, evidences of Christianity, and the sublime morality of the Bible.



The monument over the graves of Joshua and Mary Lawson is located near the entrance to the Woodland Cemetery.

We offer no apology for introducing the Bible into our school. We believe it to be the great fountain of moral purity and of both civil and religious liberty. It teaches that which no human science ever taught, or can teach, and that, too, which is of infinite value to the human race. It reveals God to man, and man to himself.

Hesperian College which came to be known as "The Bethany of California," flourished as a co-educational institution for nearly forty years before closing its doors in 1897. The college catalogs of 1867-1869 reveal an average attendance of more than two hundred students annually, which was a commendable achievement for a Christian college located in a small town.

Unfortunately, Joshua Lawson did not live to see the growth and expansion of his beloved Hesperian College. When he died on December 21, 1862, at the age of 58, the college was not quite two years old.

Although the venerated "Peace-Maker" had lived and labored in Woodland for only nine years before his death the church and college which he helped call into existence continued to bless countless lives for many years after his departure. His faithful partner in the gospel, J. N. Pendegast, succeeded him as both the preacher for the church and the Chairman of the Board of the college until his own death in 1879.

Bail Lawson, one of Joshua's sons, followed in his father's footsteps and became one of the finest preachers in the state. Mary Lawson outlived her husband by nearly thirty years. When

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Faith or Works?

LARRY ARNOLD

It was an ideal opportunity; now Jesus could unlock the mystery of God's expectations of man. Jesus has been asked by the multitude, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Would Jesus insist on keeping the Sabbath, following the ten commandments, circumcision, or ceremonial cleansing? What would he say? Truly it was an ideal opportunity and Jesus used it to say, "This is the *work* of God, that you *believe* in him whom he has sent" (Jn. 6:28-29). The simplicity of his reply confounded his audience then as it continues to confound people today. Faith is not one of many works, but is the work of God."

The problem of "faith or works" did not begin with the Protestant Reformation or even with the development of Roman Catholicism. It was a problem with which the early church wrestled. The Jews faced this dilemma; even Cain and Abel dealt with it. In studying this subject it is important not to cling to preconceived ideas but to make an exhaustive study, being very careful to let the Bible lead us to the truth instead of twisting the scriptures to fit our prejudices.

Saved By Faith, Not By Works

No subject is more clearly stated in God's word than the simple truth that we cannot earn, merit, or work our way to heaven. Our salvation is not based upon what we do, but upon what Jesus did for us. Paul writes repeatedly concerning this subject: "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who *does not work, but believes* in him who justifies the ungodly, his *faith is reckoned as righteousness*. Just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom *God reckons righteousness apart from works*" (Rom. 4). Questions frequently arise about repentance and baptism, and it is vital to understand that they do not constitute a work, but the acceptance of the finished work of Jesus. Concerning baptism, "there is no more propriety in calling baptism the work of the man baptized than there is calling a burial the work of the person buried" (David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*, Romans, page 82).

Sometimes Acts 10:35 is used to prove that although we are not saved by "works of the law" we are saved by "works of righteousness." This verse speaks of Cornelius when he was not yet a Christian; if applied to prove salvation by works, then this verse can also be applied to prove that men be saved prior to obeying the Gospel based upon their righteousness! Obviously this is not the point Peter is making, but instead he is saying that any sincere, honest, seeker of truth is welcome to come to God and to enter into a saved relationship. The Bible teaches that we are not saved by our works of righteousness: "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life*" (Titus 3:5-7). He "has saved us . . . *not according to our works*" (II Tim. 1:8). The truth could not be more clearly stated.

What Kind Of Faith?

Because we are saved by faith and not by works, it is imperative to understand what is the true biblical concept of a saving faith. In Romans 4, Paul teaches us that we are saved by faith, not by works; in James 2, the author teaches what kind of faith saves us. These two passages combine beautifully to give a full understanding of God's definition of faith. James explains that a saving faith is a faith "with works," one that is living, active, and working. Salvation is not so much a matter of faith or works, or faith and works, but a true biblical faith which is a faith *which* works. So it is that Paul encourages a "faith

working through love" (Gal. 5:6). If we properly understand that when the Bible is discussing faith it usually assumes the faith is living and active, we can do much to stop the confusion and false doctrine surrounding this important subject.

Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches: "For by *grace* you have been *saved through faith*; and that *not of yourselves*, it is the *gift* of God; *not as a result of works*, that no one should boast. For we are *his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God saves us on the basis of grace through faith, not works; being saved, we are created in Jesus to do good works. Here the Bible clearly shows us that we are not saved by works, but are saved to work; and there is a difference! Our faith must be in, and only in, Jesus for salvation; faith *in* our works is of no avail.

What About Obedience?

It is interesting to note that, despite popular usage, the Bible does not talk about "works of obedience," but the "obedience of the faith" (Rom. 1:5:16:26). Instead of obedience being a work which might imply merit, obedience is an act of faith. Let's not separate obedience from faith, but at the same time let's not make the same mistake as did the Jews with the Law and turn obedience into a legal works system. As beautifully illustrated in Hebrews 11, a saving faith is a faith that obeys and responds to God's extended grace.

Jesus is our prime example of obedience, "although he was a son, he *learned obedience* from the things he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became to all those who *obey* him the source of salvation" (Heb. 5:8-9). Jesus put his complete faith and trust in God, and as a result, obeyed him to the point of going to the cross. If we look to Jesus as our Lord we realize that we too must obey. Faith does not negate the necessity of obedience, but establishes the "obedience to the faith" (Acts 6:5); our faith in Jesus makes us copy the perfect obedience of Jesus.

Conclusion

If you were to ask many church attenders, "Why should God let you into heaven?" the response would be, "I'm a good person; I go to church; I love my family; I am a preacher, elder, deacon; etc." Such answers show that in reality our faith is not *in Jesus*, but *in our works and our human efforts* which will never be good enough! On the other hand, through a true faith in Christ we can claim heaven as our home. It is sad but true, that the only faith many people have is faith in their terribly insufficient works. As one further studies this subject, it becomes clear that God is not nearly so interested in the work we do for him, as he is in the work he does in and through us. "For it is *God* who is *at work in you*, but to will and to work for *his* good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). It is when God is "*working in us*" (Hebrews 13:21) that we give him glory.

11626 Wurzbach, San Antonio, TX 78230

TENNESSEANS BURIED IN CALIFORNIA SOIL (2)

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she died in November of 1891, she was laid to rest next to Joshua at the front of the Woodland cemetery. Several of their children are buried around them.

A generation of Christians has grown up in California who never heard of Joshua and Mary Lawson. But we are all in debt to these Tennesseans who are buried in our California soil. It was men and women like them who first laid the foundation upon which we now build.

Pepperdine University, Malibu, California 90265