

# Two Successful Soul-Winners.

by T. Mardy Rees

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*The sermon explores the family background and early life of Seth and Frank Joshua, two successful soul-winners, and how their upbringing influenced their later ministry.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 1:6, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "Faith Development"

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## Description

T. Mardy Rees preaches about the remarkable journey of the late brothers, the Revs. Seth and Frank Joshua, two successful soul-winners from Pontypool, Monmouthshire. Despite lacking academic training, their direct calling from God led them to gloriously succeed in their mission to reach the neglected and outcast. Raised in a Baptist family with a rich religious heritage, their early environment and upbringing played a significant role in shaping their characters and deepening their faith. From their humble beginnings, Seth and Frank Joshua's transformation into renowned evangelists was a testament to the boundless grace of the Gospel and the enduring impact of their grandmother's strong influence and teachings.

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## Transcript

Two successful soul-winners. --Family, origin and credentials. -- Of Baptist stock. --Reformers of Monmouthshire. -- Pontypool. -- Early environment. -- Parents. --Granny Walden. -- Rev. David Roberts. -- Seth's exploits as boy. -- British School -- First occupation. -- Runner, wrestler and boxer. -- Frank kept at school.

WHEN two such successful soul-winners as the late brothers, the Revs. Seth and Frank Joshua, appear, how natural the question: Whence came these men? What is their history? What were their credentials? They came from Pontypool, Monmouthshire, a town famed for its religious pioneers. Their family history is enshrouded in obscurity, but it is believed that the first Joshua settled at Pontypool many generations ago, and was a craftsman, either at Allgood's Japan works or Hanbury's iron works. The suggestion of a Semitic strain is quite in keeping with the passionate earnestness of the brothers in their religious consciousness, Constructive skill has marked the several branches of the family, and many mechanics, engineers, and carpenters have borne the name of Joshua.

The credentials of the renowned evangelists came from no earthly authority, but direct from God. It seems almost incredible that two brothers without any previous academic training could have so gloriously succeeded. However, their mission was not to the privileged, but to the neglected and outcast. Constant

service produced in them a marvellous soul-culture. Endowed with splendid physique and endurance, and a voice which was in itself a fortune, they improved their gifts by entire consecration. Their tone of voice implied a rich spiritual nature. If Whitefield could sway an audience with "Mesopotamia," the Joshuas could do the same with the " Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." To hear their reverent, throbbing, convincing, joyful rendering of that phrase was unforgettable. The secret of their great personal charm was the boundless grace of that full and free Gospel.

In our attempt to estimate their character we must needs glance at their early surroundings. They came of a sturdy Baptist stock, and were brought up in the atmosphere of religion and the traditions of the Puritan fathers. Monmouthshire has given illustrious religious reformers to the world since the fourteenth century, and not least among them stand the names of the Revs. Seth and Frank Joshua. John of Gaunt, the loyal supporter of John Wiclif, was a Monmouthshire man. His favourite residence was Grosmont Castle. Walter Brute, an Oxford graduate, and Lord Cobham (Sir John Oldcastle, martyred in 1418) were also natives of the county, and faithful followers of Wiclif. Walter Brute served nobly the cause of Free Religion. He became a farmer and preacher of the Gospel. He was perhaps the first man in Wales to protest against the Papacy, false doctrines, and transubstantiation. The habit of conducting services in farmhouses long survived his day, and although persecution drove the religion of the Lollards under ground, the family altar and secret meetings kept it alive until the days of Oliver Cromwell, when the Puritan religion had free scope. No historian can afford to overlook this background even when dealing with modern religion in the county. Monmouthshire has glorious traditions in the realm of Free Religion, and the enthusiasm which one meets in certain districts is a heritage descended from generations of holy men and women who resisted and triumphed over adverse conditions. The spirit of William Tindale, who was born on the borders of Monmouthshire (if not in the county) pervades the territory of Upper Gwent. The ideals of these heroic pioneers were in the air breathed by Seth and Frank Joshua; and what shall we say of Pontypool, the town which gave the brothers birth? Valiant ministers laboured there assiduously for freedom of conscience, speech and the press. The Rev. Miles Edwards prepared the soil at Pontypool for a rich harvest. The spirit of the Chartists also helped to create the environment of the Evangelists. Trosnant had a tradition of art, for Thomas Barker, R.A. (Bath), and Benjamin, his brother, both eminent painters were born there, when their father was painter of figures and animal subjects at the Japan works. Considering all these things we see that the early surroundings of Seth and Frank were well chosen, and that down deep in their hearts abiding impressions were made.

Seth and Frank Joshua were the sons of George and Mary Walden Joshua, who lived at the chapel house of the Welsh Baptist Chapel, Upper Trosnant, Pontypool. There were six children, George, John, Caleb, Annie, Seth, and Francis James (Frank)! The last three Sons became ministers of the Gospel. Seth was born on 10 April 1858, and Frank on 15 December, 1861. Their grandmother, known as " Granny Walden," was caretaker of the above Welsh Baptist Chapel. She was a Puritan of the Puritans, well versed in Scripture and a strong character. Preachers loved to discuss Biblical texts with her, for she had an intelligent grasp of the Scripture, and of fundamental doctrines. Her grandchildren were regularly taught verses by her in their childhood. Seth seems to have been her despair on account of his mischievousness. He was "a broth of a boy." She often remarked that unless he altered his ways he would end his days on the gallows. The thought of such a tragic fate coloured the young boy's dreams, and robbed him of many a night's rest. Seth Joshua always warned people not to frighten children in such a manner.

The Rev. David Roberts, minister of the Baptist Chapel, was a powerful preacher, and exercised a wonderful influence over the brothers. Caleb entered the Baptist ministry, as we shall record later. Young Seth was fascinated by Dafydd Roberts's hwyl and mighty voice. He vowed that on a calm evening the preacher could be heard on a hill a mile off. Despite his boyish pranks he desired secretly to be a preacher like Roberts, his grandmother's favourite theologian. Usually on a Monday morning Seth would crawl through the vestry window, enter the old fashioned pulpit, and before an imaginary congregation preach a rousing sermon, imitating the hwyl of David Roberts and his Bible-thumping. Alas, his grandmother caught him in the act of preaching one morning; and believing that he was doing it in mockery threatened condign punishment. With her broom she intended to chastize him, but he escaped. In her impotent fury she hurled the broom at him, but fortunately just missed his head. "Thank heaven," exclaimed Seth, "that old broom missed the mark; and I have been in many meetings, where if dear old Granny could only be present to see the sight she would have shouted in her old Welsh way "Gogoniant."

The brothers attended a British School and paid one penny per week. "Come or stop away, which you liked," said Seth, "and I stopped away." How often he regretted his folly and wished that he might go back to school. He was conscious of a great handicap due to his truancy. The parents somehow allowed their impetuous son, Seth, to go his own-way without the needful direction in life. He was permitted to choose his own occupation; and anxious to earn an honest shilling he started himself. For three and a half years he drove a donkey. This was his first job, and he never regretted it. "I had more out of that donkey than I could get out of any College in the land. If I put his head one way he would put it the other; so I used to put his tail always toward the direction I wanted him to go. I bear many marks of his back kicks on my lower extremities. He was a great donkey to object. I maintain that if a man knows how to handle a donkey for three and a half years he is qualified to handle anything awkward."

His brother John was a driver on the Great Western Railway, therefore Seth asked for work at the Pontypool sheds. "What do you want to do, my lad?" Asked the official. "Drive an engine." "You must first go into the sheds and become a cleaner, and then fireman, and then a driver." "Very well, sir," said Seth, and he began work on the Monday morning as cleaner. Immediately he became a leader among the boys at the sheds as thrower of balls of waste at targets. Sometimes the target would be a man's pipe and sometimes a ganger's lamp. It was well for him that he had winged feet to escape from the clutches of those he tormented as "mucky shotter." His swiftness as runner was noticed and he was encouraged to compete at sports meetings in the county. He won prizes at Pontypool, Newport, Abergavenny, and other places, and was regarded as the champion quarter-mile runner of Monmouthshire. Eventually he joined the Pontypool football team as a three-quarter. In those days it was the three-quarter line and Seth was the three-quarter. The fourth man has since been added. It came to Seth's lot often to make the last sprint and touch the ball on the line. He played for the team for many years.

Between training times he fell in with a gambling and drinking crowd. Whilst in training for a race he was abstemious, but after the race was run gambling and drink claimed him. He became an expert in the art of self-defence, for he was speedy on foot and in all his actions. Then matches followed, and when no boxing match was arranged a contest would be improvised in a back lane or long room or some other place. The first to "bring claret" from the nose, or somewhere else, was the victor. "And now when I look back upon it, I think of the grace that stooped so low to pick me up. Do not ask me whether I ever saw a tear in mother's eye? I saw hundreds. I was going headlong over mother's tears and the billows of father's prayers. How glad I am that mam and dad lived long enough to see my return home."

Frank his brother, the youngest of the family, never left school, and was altogether different in temperament.

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