

## **The Ordination of Edith Hill**

*In 1882, May C. Jones was ordained in Washington.*

*In 1885, Frances E. Townsley was ordained in Nebraska.*

*In 1894, Edith Hill became the first American Baptist woman to be ordained in Kansas.*

### **Minutes of the meeting convened for the ordination of the pastor-elect — Miss Edith Hill.**

Meeting Friday, April 13, 1894, 8:00 p.m. in the Christian church. The invited filled the church to its full capacity. There were present in the council Rev. W. F. Webb, A. H. Scott, Thomas Martin, and J. M. Smith and Deacon G. P. Cole of Girard. The meeting opened with singing and prayer. Miss Hill recited from memory eighty-five scripture verses indorsing women in public work. Rev. Scott preached the sermon from the text Psalms 68:11 and Galatians 3:28, which was an able and clear proof that there is a place in the gospel ministry for women. Brother Webb was then chosen moderator. The council was organized and proceeded to the examination of the candidate. She was asked to relate her Christian experience which was as follows:

“Twelve years ago I became a Christian. I was then thirteen years of age. The first time that I understood that there is a plan of salvation and that I must come to Jesus to receive pardon for my sins, I at once responded to the invitation to manifest a decision to be saved and arose in the meeting to be prayed for. I was in much sorrow on account of my lost condition and sought for about two weeks for the peace that I expected. Then I simply gave my life over to Jesus and received Him as my saviour and went to sleep. The next morning, I knew that all was true and offered myself for baptism and membership in the First Baptist Church of Emporia, Kan.”

This experience being satisfactory to the council, the moderator asked the candidate to state her call to the ministry. “To this I would have everyone in the house give close attention,” he said. “For upon the call depends the right to preach. My call meant so much to me that I wish all could appreciate the feelings of one who speaks such secret things to others.” Miss Hill then began to relate the following experience amidst the almost breathless stillness of the assembly.

“I believe that God began immediately after my conversion to speak to me about public service for Him, but my head and heart were so filled with other things that I did not listen. From a child eight years old, I had cherished the ambition to be one of America’s great readers. Choice compliments from choice people, as well as the approving voice of all, encouraged and strengthened this inherent passion of my soul. I never had to learn to read. The printed page was life to me. The characters lived in me by turn and spoke through my voice. My plans for the future took the form of a course in dramatic art from the New England Conservatory of Music. After I had studied in the west what I could, to this end I labored. Finishing the high school course at sixteen, I taught school and studied. I had an intimate girlfriend whose ambition was to do with the piano what I

would do with expression, and together we planned and dreamed. But often would I say, "Neva, you know I am Christian, and I love my Saviour more than all; and if He should disapprove or put my life in another channel I shall be willing to obey Him."

"I wish I could tell how desperately I clung to my pet scheme, and through all the strength of my nature into the self-confident, obdurate I can and I will."

"It was on the prairie roads to and from my country school, when human voices and influences were shut out and nature's heart was beating close to my own that God the Holy Ghost had access to my inter-consciousness and talked to me with wonderful distinctness persistency, "I have given thee this talent to use for me and wilt thou send it to win attention to thy self?" "But Lord, I will be using it for thee indirectly. I will spend the money I earn, in thy cause..." But said the loving patient voice, "Have ye left all to follow me? Souls are perishing, go tell them of my love." "Lord, there are plenty of men to do that. I will keep people from low places by providing elevating entertainment for them." "Wilt thou feed them husk while I have given thee bread? Wilt thou be happy to spend thy life in making men laugh while the world is rushing toward destruction?" "But Lord, thou hast many good people who are doing such, and thou troublest not them with personal responsibility." "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." And so, little by little, I yielded to the divine will, and little by little ... buried the cherished ambitions; and finally, after a few years of struggling, was ready to say, "Lord, I will go if you will send me to school and give me the proper training" having in mind a course in a Theological training school so that the world would recognize me as a properly fitted worker. Little did I know what I was asking. He put me in college, the college of a wide experience with mankind, with suffering, with waiting. He sat me at the feet of a great theological teacher — it was Jesus. Lesson after lesson followed in strained succession. Years were crowded into months. Bodily pain became my companion — housework, sewing, teaching, allocution, stenography, travel my occupations. And every month I looked and prayed for the opened door to usefulness in my Masters service, yet cherishing every new experience and laying it up in store against that day. I was holding my changed ideas as to my future so close a secret that it would rent the heart-strings to tell it to my closest friend. It was in Chicago that I was impelled to write to my pastor in Emporia for advice. With trembling hand and swimming eyes, I gave first expression to the secret, precious awful conviction that I must preach the Gospel. And when the message was finished and sealed, I could almost as easily have thrust my hand in the fire as to drop that letter into the mail. But I did it, and to show you, my kind hearers, that this position that I am taking is not a mere impulse of a untried young life, I will read the letter that I received in answer to my bold confession. The writer, Rev. A. L. Vail stands high in our denomination; and I now think this to be a kind message which then wounded my sensitive spirit truly. (It is under the date of February 14, 1888, six years and two months ago.)

"My dear Sister, your letter is received and carefully read. I may not be able to help you much, but let me assure you of my respect and sympathy for you in the experience through which you are passing. I say "through" because you will get through in due time if you are patient and faithful; whatever the Lord wants you to do, you will find a way to

do. It may not be your way, but it will be the right way. I do not think you are a “worldly” or a “silly girl.” I know you are neither. I think I understand what it cost you to write to me as you did, because for a man, I have much of the same difficulty that you have. But I do think from what I know of you, which is not very much, and from my own experience, that you are an ambitious and liable to be a hasty girl! To decide some things too soon and not so wisely as you would by waiting a little longer. I am very susceptible to such impressions which seem to come to you from the Lord. I believe fully that God walks and talks with His people, and that those that yield themselves to his guidance will not go astray. Many impressions of this sort in my life have “come through” but others have not. We need to remember that we are in a very deceptive world, and that faith and fantasm lie very closely together. We also need to remember that selfishness assumes very subtle forms, especially in our spiritual exercises ...

If you were a man instead of a woman, of course, part of your perplexity would disappear. It has not been customary for Baptists, or Christians generally, to think favorable of lady preachers. But great changes have come into the thinking of all parties recently about what women should and many do. So far as I know there is only one woman Baptist preacher in the world. She is in Nebraska, is successful and gets along comfortably in all her relations with the denomination. You are doubtlessly aware that each Baptist church is independent and does in all matter as it pleases. No one interferes to prevent it from electing a sister to any office they choose ...

You asked about going to school. Certainly you ought, if you carry out such purposes as you revealed to me. It is expected that young men who intend to preach qualify themselves generally and specifically for the work, and young women should do so.

May the Lord bless you and guide you, raise up friends for you, gratify all the right desires of your heart, and make you very useful — and I think He will.

*I remain respectfully*

For five more long years, He put me through the crucible. From Chicago, I went to California, returned, taught two years in the Emporia schools and there my health gave way entirely. I was taken for more special treatment to the sanitarium in Chicago, and returned home weary in spirit and reduced in body to die. This was the result of a long, overwrought nervous system giving way, which result I have been trying to evade by following the treatment of the most skilled physician.

I will never forget how glad the thought made me. I was so tired. I had lived twenty years in the past eight. It seemed all a mistake, my looking for the Lord’s call. The problem of life was too hard to grapple with longer, and with delight I thought when earth is clothed with new green again, I shall be sitting under the tree of life and resting by the living water that flows from the throne. And God spoke again. “Are you wholly resigned to my will, you are willing to die – are you willing to live again and take up the cross for me, and obey all my will?” “Yea, Lord, if you will give the souls of my family for my heir.” I exercised a living faith in the great physician. He took hold of my case,

and I began to take my place again among the active and the strong. And now with an earnest expectancy, I expected the door so long shut to open. I was already to go to the training school and was about to enter when providence shut the door, and I was baffled again. This was the time that the bitterest of all temptation came. Said I, "I have made a grave mistake. I have flattered myself that God cared for me, that He notices me among so many. I, fool that I am, have even thought that He had some particular use for me, that He talked particularly with me. I have wasted seven years, precious useful years vainly expecting to be used of the Lord. Now I will begin where I left off and accomplish my early dreams."

I plunged into elocution, gave entertainments for a month or two, when all at once the door so long closed stood open and mine ears heard the divine command that the Marys at the time heard, Go tell! But oh how weak human nature shrank before what the soul had longed for many years. A call came from the state superintendent of evangelistic work, Mrs. Alice Henderson of the Kansas W.C.T.U. for consecrated women to go into the field as evangelists, and I had received a communication from her beseeching me to go forth in the name of the Lord. Would I go? I believe that was the decisive battle of my life, and Satan did not forget to send his ministers to win my life for his services. Oh, how the temptations came! Some of them as angels of light, some of them with voices of reason that seemed to overwhelm the reasons why I should go out for the Lord. My father was bitterly opposed to it, saying that a month or two of such work would reduce me to ruined health again. I could have no money, in claim on the home folks if I went. Many bright prospects were opening up to me. A remunerative position here, love and rest and home there, my own parents home welcoming to me to its rest and shelter if I cared to do no special work — and poverty, heartache, risk of physical helplessness and what not on the other hand.

When the hour grew near for the decisive answer, I withdrew to my room for another talk with Jesus. How I besought Him who had known my every heartbeat, whom had bore my sickness and carried my sorrows, to tell me unmistakably the best way. Looking to the Bible for a special answer had never been a successful plan for me, but this time I was directed to do so. Praying that I might indeed be directed by the Spirit and promising to accept the message as from Him, I opened the word and my eyes fell upon the word (Isaiah 61:1). "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound!" Almost staggered at the illuminated passage, I prayed, the mercy of the Lord bear with me and speak again that there might be no mistake in that which involves so much. Many more minutes were spent in agonizing prayer, and again I was directed to open the word.

Fearing that my worn Bible might open of its own accord to the same place, I took in my hands a small new copy of the Holy Book and opening it, my eyes fell upon the words, "The Spirit of the Lord, God, is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach glad tidings to the meek — etc. Then, like Gideon, I asked a third sign which in a very different manner, though as unmistakably, was given to me in a half an hour from that time, by a circumstance that then settled the entire question forever. The rock beneath

my feet became also the word whose promises and commands would bare the weight of even a woman who proclaimed them. The Everlasting Arms pressed around me and became a shelter from arrows of criticism that have been aimed at me but caught by God. His wings canopied my life with the shade from the feared heat of scorn and prejudice, and his feathers covered my head when I prophesized. Praise ye the Lord, all His creatures, in all places of His dominion!

I at once began work with Miss Mary Jaquith who did the preaching. I cannot take time to describe the joy and fears of our first work. It took some time to introduce the work, and we were often idol; but after a year and a half, the results visible were one hundred and sixty souls saved, and Christians awakened and blessed.

The first January, 1894, my friend and I separated to go our different ways claiming the Gospel of peace. It was in my own home church that I took charge of my first meeting in which about thirty (30) were saved. Then, in the mysterious ways of providence, I was led here, and you know the rest. More than one-hundred (100) have confessed conversion here, and the work goes on. Only after repeated entreaties of the church and much praying have I concluded to remain until the work can be established in the needy, wicked city.

Let me remind you that three-fourth (3/4) of our church members are women, and the men, missing in our churches, are found at home, or at lodge or in prison. The majority in our congregations have been men, and consequently the majority of conversions have been men. If 1800 years of men's preaching has made such a disparity of members between men and women Christians, may we not equalize the conditions by letting women preach?

The statement was so complete that there was no response to the moderators request for questions, and all seemed to agree with him when he said, "It seems there can be nothing to question in such a remarkable experience. Surely after listening to this relation, no one will deny our sister right to preach the Gospel."

The next step in order was the examination of the candidate upon Bible doctrine. Question: "All scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. For the prophecy came not in the time passed by the will of man, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

The candidate then said, "Shall I give a statement of what I believe to be the doctrine of the Word of God?" Consent.

"I believe in the great God manifest in three persons Father, Son and Holy Ghost. This is the all glorious, almighty and holy trinity, and incomprehensible union of three in the God head." In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost! I believe in the total depravity of the human heart, and no treatment by separation, culture, training or living can make the human soul fit for company of heaven. "All we, like sheep, have gone

astray!” “There is none that doeth good.” “They are all gone out of the way. They have all together become filthy.” “Our righteousness are as filthy rags in his sight.”

I believe in sovereign eternal personal election and effectual calling of sinners to salvation by the Holy Spirit. “Who hath called us with a holy calling not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” “Moreover whom He did predestine and He also called!”

I believe in salvation by grace to the atonement of Jesus and in God’s will to have all men to be saved, “By grace are we saved by faith he who believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. Whosoever will let him come and take the water of life freely. I believe that Jesus can save from sins and the consequences of sin and that he is the physician of body and soul. I believe in the perseverance of the saints. I give unto them eternal life. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one shall snatch them out of my hand. I believe in the personality of the Holy Spirit, and that the messages of power in the life of an individual or church is according as he is honored and his presence sought.

I believe that Jesus Christ is the true and divine Son of God. “It is pleased, that in Him should all fullness dwell.” I believe that the church is a volunteer body of baptized believers whose only head and law giver is Jesus Christ.

I believe that the two ordinances set for an observance in the church are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. That it is the divine order that baptism by immersion should follow conversion and ... Lord’s Supper. The latter ordinance should be observed from time to time till He comes.

“I believe in an eternal heaven of joy and rest righteous and an eternal punishment for the wicked and unbelieving.”

The members of the council expressed themselves as fully satisfied with this statement which was spoken confidently and backed up by scripture quoted from memory; and the candidate took her seat. The council conferred and then submitted the following report.

“In view of the very satisfactory result of the examination of Sister Edith Hill and also in view of the opposition would provoke, we recommend to the First Baptist Church of Pittsburg, that they delegate her to do the work of an evangelist; and in the absence of desirable ordained help, that she be authorized by the church to administer the ordinances.

It was moved and seconded to accept the report when Miss Hill addressed the chair and said, “I hope the church will remember that the condition under which I except the pastorate is that I shall be regularly ordained as a minister of the Gospel.” This was said quietly and distinctly amid the profound and sympathetic silence of the congregation.

The mover of the motion of acceptance explained that he misunderstood and withdrew his motion. Seeing that the unanimous feeling of the church was opposed to any

compromise, the council again conferred, this time advising the church to proceed with the ordination.

Rev. Scott made the ordaining prayer. Brother Martin gave the charge to the candidate and Brother Webb the charge to the church, all of which were fittingly expressed...

Rev. Edith Hill pronounced the benediction. Hundreds of friends crowded about for congratulations to the candidate, and the council and church were happy in the consciousness of being in the order of the Lord.

NOTE: Rev. Edith Hill spent three years as pastor of Eden [First] Baptist Church, Pittsburg, Kan., where she immersed 170 men and women.

— Rev. Anna Howard Shaw, “Women in Ministry” *The Chautauqua*, April 1898

## **SIDE BAR:**

The regular Baptist Church has but three ordained women: May C. Jones, state of Washington, 1882; Frances E. Townsley, Nebraska, 1885; Edith Hill Booker, Kansas, 1894.

... Mrs. Booker, then Miss Hill, spent three years as pastor of the First Baptist Church at Pittsburg, Kan., services being held in the Opera House until 1897, when an \$8,000 church was dedicated. She has immersed one hundred and seventy men and women.

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