

The Stonewall Built by a Carpenter

A Narrative of the Strong Faith of Stonewall Jackson

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The astounding faith of Stonewall Jackson surprises and inspires many who read his story. Jackson was not a war-loving rebel, but he believed in fighting for a righteous cause. He was fearless to everything around him and committed himself entirely to the will of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Even though his piety attracts much attention, he preferred to point others to the Cross.

Jackson's early life was full of hardships which no doubt strengthened him for the "hard-knock life" which was to follow him in his personal life and later in his military career. Thomas Jonathan Jackson was born to Jonathan and Julie Jackson of Virginia in 1824.¹ When Thomas was only three, his father and sister died only two weeks apart from the same disease.² When he was seven, his mother bore another son. Soon afterwards, her health foundered and she died just two months after the birth. While she was dying, she prayed with her dear children and set an unforgettable example for them of never ending faithfulness to the Lord. Even though Jackson's mother knew she would be leaving her new born baby, young children, and beloved husband without her care, her trust in God overrode all other fears. The "peace that surpasses all understanding" was with her to the end. So like the mother of Moses, she let go of her children without a fight, giving them up to God in hope that she might see them some fine morning in eternity. The step-father of Thomas, announcing the death of his wife, stated, "No Christian on earth, no matter what evidence he might have had of a happy hereafter could have died with more fortitude. Perfectly in her senses, calm and deliberate, she met her fate without a murmur or a struggle. Death for her had no sting; the grave could claim no victory. I have known few women of equal, none of superior merit."³ The "calm and deliberateness" she displayed, planted seeds within Thomas that would later come to full bloom. Eventually, "Stonewall" would ride through enemy fire with that same tranquility that passes onto the next generation of God's children who acknowledge the God who "governs in the affairs of men."

Now orphans, Thomas and his older brother, Warren, departed to live with their uncle Cummins Jackson. While living there, however, the elder began to feel as if he were treated inferior to Thomas. So, they both left their civil lifestyle to find independence where they supported themselves by chopping wood to run steam boats. Eventually, Thomas and his brother became ill from the wet climate of the woods in which they lived. They determined to make it back to the comforts of their relatives' hospitality, where Thomas soon recovered from his illness. However, his elder brother never recovered; he died at the young age of nineteen⁴ "in the hope of a bright immortality at the right hand of His Redeemer...", as Jackson wrote to his aunt in 1842.⁵

The hardships that confronted Jackson throughout his early years might have crushed another with a more inferior foundation. However, he was supported by something bigger than himself. The several deaths of his family members could no doubt have indicated to him how short life really is, and that he must live his life the best he could by following Biblical principles. To

better his character, he wrote *Maxims* which was a book of principles that he wanted to live by. He looked for the good in his troubles. Even when his first wife died, instead of being bitter, he looked inward to see if he could refine his character.⁶ He was very ethical and very familiar with his Bible. He believed in God, but he did not yet have an intimate relationship with Christ. While serving in the Mexican War, he was taught by a superior officer about salvation through Jesus Christ. He was fast becoming transformed into a great warrior for Him. It was in 1849, when stationed back in the U.S. at Fort Hamilton, that he professed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptized through obedience to Him.⁷ The Biblical principles he had thus far learned were now to be practiced to the glory of God. This was a prominent turning point in Jackson's life.

Jackson was a patient man who waited on the Lord's time. When the Southern War for Independence was brewing, Jackson prayed that peace would be restored to the country. He had been through the Mexican War, so he knew enough about war's evils to dread it, and he was angered how the government mentioned "war" so lightly. He knew that praying might restore peace. However, if the government would continue its aggression upon the South, there would certainly be a war, and he knew that he must fight for freedom from aggression.

After Jackson submitted his life to Christ, he was ready to fulfill his God-given duty, to "**Fear God**, and keep His commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man."⁸ When we fear God, we need not fear things of this world, for God is all powerful. Jackson demonstrated this "God-fearing fearlessness" throughout his life. The only fear that he had was to provoke the anger of the Lord by his sin. He took care to be holy, because God commands it: "be holy for I am holy."⁹ When Jackson rode into battle, he did not concern himself about the preservation of his body, but left that to the Lord. He knew God's will would prevail whether it was for him to live or to die.

When the general received a hand wound at the battle of 1st Manassas, his Captain was obliged to ask how he was so brave. The Captain asked, "General, how is it that you keep so cool and appear so utterly insensible to danger in such a storm of shell and bullets as rained about you when your hand was hit?" The general then replied, "Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about **that**, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me." After a short pause, General Jackson said, looking the Captain straight in the eyes, "Captain, that is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave."¹⁰

Acknowledging the verses "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and **glorify your father** which is in heaven"¹¹ and "...give unto the Lord glory...";¹² Jackson did not claim for himself the victory of the battles that he won, but gave the credit to the Almighty who controls the destiny of battles. After Jackson's great victory at Chancellorsville, General Lee sent a message to him expressing his sympathy for Jackson's wounds, but congratulating him for his victory "which is due to your skill and energy". Jackson replied to Lieutenant Smith, who had just read him the message, "General Lee is very kind, but he should give the praise to God."¹³

Even though Jackson was one of the greatest military geniuses of his time, he realized that the only work worthwhile was that of saving souls. He prayed at Manassas, “Oh God, let this horrible war quickly come to an end that we may all return home and engage in the only work worthwhile—and that is the salvation of men.”¹⁴ When an evangelist appealed to Jackson, asking to distribute Bibles and tracts throughout his camp, the general replied, “You are more than welcome to my camp, and it will give me great pleasure to help you in your work in every way in my power. I am more anxious than I can express that my men should be not only good soldiers of their country, but also good soldiers of the Cross.”¹⁵

Jackson’s life was a continuous reliving of the words Jesus prayed at the garden of Gethsemane, “...not my will, but thine, be done.”¹⁶ Stonewall built his life upon Jesus Christ, his Cornerstone, and submitted his life entirely to Him. It has been said that the verse “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”¹⁷ was such a “blessed reality” to Jackson and that “he preferred God’s will to his own.”¹⁸ When conversing with a friend, the latter asked if Jackson really believed the said verse. “Yes.” Jackson replied. The friend examined Jackson closer by asking if he still would believe it if he lost his health. Again Jackson replied “Yes, I think I should!” The friend determined to pry harder and asked if he would still believe it if, in addition to bad health, he would lose his sight and was forced to rely on charity to feed and clothe him. A moment passed before the devout Christian gave his reply, “If it were the will of God to place me there, He would enable me to lie there for a hundred years.”¹⁹

Little did Jackson know that he would be tested in the light of this conversation, and many would turn to God when they saw that he “walked the walk” and not just “talked the talk”. On his return to his camp one evening from scouting, he was mistaken as the enemy by his own troops and was fired upon with the most deadly accuracy. Even when he was wounded, he did not curse God; he even thought of his wounds as “blessings” that would work together for good in heaven, if not on earth.²⁰ He maintained his trust in God, even while dying.

Before Jackson’s death, his wife announced to him its coming, “Do you know the doctors say, you must very soon be in heaven? Do you not feel willing to acquiesce [submit] in God’s allotment, if he wills you to go today?” After repeating it several times, the general replied, “I prefer it.” “Well, before this day closes, you will be with the blessed Saviour in His glory.” The general replied, “I will be an infinite gainer to be translated.” General Jackson’s wish was to pass into glory on a Sabbath day. He got his wish on the Sunday of May 10, 1863 and uttered his last words, “Let us pass over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees.”²¹

In this day and age, seldom a warrior of Christ like Stonewall is found. We must model ourselves after the principles that Jackson portrayed and find the “Chief Cornerstone” to establish our wall upon. We must also remember that Jackson became such a virtuous role model, not because he was a *good* man, but because he feared God, and kept His commandments.

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Endnotes

1. Robert L. Dabney, Life and Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. T. J. Stonewall Jackson, pg. 8-9.
2. Ibid., pg. 9-10.
3. Ibid., pg. 11.
4. Ibid., pg. 15-16.
5. William J. Federer, America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations, pg. 314.
6. H. Rondel Rumburg, Stonewall Jackson's Verse, pg. 44.
7. Ibid., pg. 39-40.
8. Ecclesiastes 12:13.
9. Leviticus 11:44.
10. H. Rondel Rumburg, Stonewall Jackson's Verse, pg. 63-4.
11. Matthew 5:16.
12. Psalm 29:1.
13. Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, Tragic Years 1860-1865 Volume I, pg. 509.
14. William J. Federer, America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations, pg. 314.
15. H. Rondel Rumburg, Stonewall Jackson's Verse, pg. 47-8.
16. Luke 22:42.
17. Romans 8:28.
18. H. Rondel Rumburg, Stonewall Jackson's Verse, pg. 68-9.
19. Ibid., pg. 31-2.
20. Ibid., pg. 72.
21. Robert L. Dabney, Life and Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. T. J. Stonewall Jackson, pg. 722-23.