

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Eight

Heritage, Salvation and Learnings of A. B. Simpson

Introduction

When students of the Bible study the life of Christ, there is much consideration of His person as well as His work. It is usually the same when we look at the life of one of the Lord's servants: we want to know the person, as well as what the person did. What life experiences shaped him, and what vision motivated his work?

A. B. Simpson (1843-1919) was one of the most important Christian workers of his day. He was an ardent soul-winner and was active in raising up new believers and in training Christian workers. He began his service as a Presbyterian minister, but later resigned after realizing the inherent frustrations in trying to serve the Lord within a denominational framework. He wrote over 70 books on the Bible and the Christian life. His many hymns and poems are full of inspiration and truth. He is known for preaching the "fourfold gospel," referring to Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and coming King. He was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

This sketch outlines some of the details of the life and work of this notable servant of the Lord.

Heritage and Upbringing

Albert Benjamin Simpson was born on December 15, 1843, in Bayview, Prince Edward Island, Canada. His birth was an answer to the prayer of his mother. She had lost her firstborn son when he was just a toddler. Albert's sister said, "Like little Samuel, he [Albert] was given to the Lord from his birth. My mother told me that she gave him to the Lord to use him in life or death; to be a minister and a foreign missionary, if the Lord so willed, and he lived to grow up, and was so inclined." Shortly after his birth a missionary christened Albert

and solemnly dedicated him to the ministry.

Albert's ancestors were from Scotland and had emigrated to Canada over 60 years earlier. His Christian heritage was from the line of the persecuted Covenanters. Albert's parents, James and Jane Simpson, eventually settled in Western Ontario. His mother, of a sensitive and poetic temperament, cultivated in him a love for books. His father was industrious, religious, and a strict disciplinarian. He was an elder of the Presbyterian Church. He drilled his children weekly on the shorter catechism and did not allow playing or even laughing on the Sabbath. Although Albert was not always happy in his strict surroundings, he later expressed gratitude for the "stern mold in which my early life was shaped." The law preserved him and conducted him unto Christ (Gal. 3:24). He said the law "often safeguarded me afterwards when thrown as a young man amid the temptations of the world," and it gave him a "wholesome discipline" and a "horror for evil things." Later in life, while reflecting on his upbringing, he commented that a healthy family was with "a blending of thorough discipline with true Christian liberty and love."

Simpson's mother taught her children to bring whatever concerned them to the Lord in prayer. One of Albert's earliest memories was of kneeling down to ask the Lord to help him find his lost jackknife. To his joy he found it and later remarked, "The incident made a profound impression upon my young heart and gave me a life-long conviction, which has since borne fruit innumerable times, that it is our privilege to take everything to God in prayer."

The Lord's keeping hand was upon young Albert as he grew up. He was miraculously saved from death several times in his youth.

Once he fell from a high scaffold, another time he almost drowned, and he was in two serious accidents involving horses.

Early Struggles

Albert had planned from a young age to study for the ministry. His father, however, chose his older brother for future schooling, considering him to be of more promise than Albert. There was not enough money in the Simpson household to send two sons to college. With much trepidation, Albert asked his father if he also could continue his education if he did not require any funds from the family. To this his father agreed.

It was considered a high honor in those days for a family to have a son called to be a minister. Many families at that time dedicated their firstborn to God, as the children of Israel did of old. In the Simpson family, both Albert and his older brother were inclined to enter the ministry. Simpson's parents realized that they must play a role in helping to develop these young men if they were to become useful vessels for the Master. Albert's parents were willing to allow their sons to be set apart to be educated and trained for their eventual service. This involved a price - giving them up from work on the family farm.

Coming to Christ in Simplicity

At the age of fourteen Albert encountered a spiritual and physical crisis. At this time he was considering his future and was torn between his dutiful feelings for the ministry and his pursuits and delights in the world. He tried to grope his way to God, knowing that he needed salvation. However, the God he knew up to that point was awesome and severe. He said, "My whole religious training had left me without any conception of the sweet and simple Gospel of Jesus Christ." In doctrine he knew that "only God could give in some mysterious way a wonderful change called the new birth or regeneration."

Albert's sensitive nature was weighed down by his inward conflict. That, coupled with his frail health, brought him to a physical and emotional breakdown. At one point Albert feared he was dying. At the

height of his distress, he cried out to his father to pray for him, which he did in love and tenderness. But his father, for all his religion, may not have known clearly the way of peace himself. "No one," Simpson said, "shared with me the simple way of believing in the promises and accepting the salvation fully provided and freely offered."

After he recovered to a certain extent, he was up and about, though still in distress concerning his soul. One day he came across an old book, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* by Walter Marshall. In it he read: "The first good work you will ever perform is to believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ. Until you do this, all your works, prayers, tears, and good resolutions are vain. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe that He saves you according to His word, that He receives and saves you here and now, for He has said: 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" This was food for Simpson's hungry soul. He knelt in prayer and restfully accepted the forgiveness of his sins and realized the sweeping away of all his fears. God had delivered him; he was regenerated. Albert described his experience: "To my bewildered soul this was like the light from heaven that fell upon Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus. I immediately fell upon my knees, and looking up to the Lord, I said, Lord Jesus, Thou hast said, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' Thou knowest how long and earnestly I have tried to come, but I did not know how. Now I come the best

I can, and dare to believe that Thou dost receive me and save me, and that I am now Thy child, forgiven and saved simply because I have taken Thee



Simpson at the time of his conversion.

Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.
John 6:37

at Thy word. Abba Father, Thou art mine, and I am Thine.”

Initial Growth and Equipping

His new birth was accompanied by an early joy of salvation and followed by a time of rapid spiritual growth. He became hungry for the Scriptures and took them into his soul with “unspeakable ecstasy.” He marveled that the former “empty words” became “divine revelations.” “The promises of God,” he said, “burst upon my soul with a new and marvelous light.”

He was also moved to give himself to the Lord. At the age of seventeen, he spent a whole day in fasting and prayer and wrote a covenant with God, which he solemnly signed. This covenant was mingled with the word and with hymns he had previously learned. The seeds of his life and service were contained in this covenant. In it he asked the Lord to give him a double portion of the Spirit to proclaim Him to transgressors. He asked the Lord to sanctify him, and declared that he was now a soldier of the cross. As he put it, “I have one King, even Jesus.” He concluded his covenant with the following prayer: “Now

give me Thy Spirit and Thy protection in my heart at all times, and then I shall drink of the rivers of salvation, lie down by still waters, and be infinitely happy in the favor of

“Now give me Thy Spirit and Thy protection in my heart at all times, and then I shall drink of the rivers of salvation, lie down by still waters, and be infinitely happy in the favor of God.”

God.” He renewed this covenant at the age of 19, after a period of backsliding and subsequent restoration, and once again when he was 34.

Albert continued on in his education. He supported himself by teaching in a public school. Years later Simpson said he was grateful for the struggle of working for his education. “Nothing under God has been a greater blessing to me than the hard places that began with me more than half a century ago and have not yet ended.” Teaching,

studying, and making vows – this was how this purposeful young man was being prepared for the Master’s use. Before his eighteenth birthday the Presbyterian board in London, Ontario, approved Albert for admission to Knox College in Toronto. There he studied Hebrew, Greek, theology, and church history and government. He was also perfected in his speaking. He learned during his college years to trust in the Lord to meet his needs. There were times when he was in sore straits. Years later he related these experiences to a group of young students: “Many a time I found myself without a penny. I have thrown myself down on the college lawn, in the darkness of night and deeper darkness of soul, crying to God for money to pay my board bill. And, fellow students, He did not fail me then, nor has He failed me yet. Neither will He fail you if you will dare to trust Him.”



Simpson during college years

However, Even with the blessings of a faithful God who answered prayer, all was not glorious, in those college years. Simpson said, “I did not cease to pray or walk in some measure with God, but the sweetness and preciousness of my early piety withered. I am sorry to say that I did not fully recover my lost blessing until I had been a minister of the gospel for more than ten years. My religious life was chiefly that of duty, with little joy or fellowship. In a word, my heart was unsanctified, and I had not yet learned the secret of the indwelling Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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