

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program One

The Value of Reading and Considering Biblical and Historical Biographies

Introduction

Welcome to *Great Resolutions*. With this program, we begin a new series to consider the lives of the saints who have gone before us.

Brother Lee has shared with us in the past, in the Old Testament Life Studies, that among God's people there were always some who had great resolutions in their hearts. They had a great searching of their hearts (Judg. 5:15-16) to stand with the Lord for the fulfillment of His purpose on earth.

Throughout time, in the Old Testament age and also the New Testament age, there have been some chosen vessels of the Lord who have cooperated with Him in this way.

We sometimes say that we are standing upon the shoulders of those who have gone before us. These are the ones we want to consider in the coming days – saints who have gone before us, who lived with purpose and had great resolutions of heart after they had searching of their hearts. These were persons of aspiration whose hearts were turned to the Lord, and who cooperated with Him that His will would be done on the earth.

We plan to highlight some of the key persons from our heritage both in the Bible and in church history. We would like to consider how the Lord led them to live for Him at their time, and to study their contributions in the Lord's progressive recovery.

Some of those with great resolutions were used to recover the Lord's people back to the proper understanding of the truth. Others helped to recover the normal experience of Christ among God's people. Still others, like Zinzendorf, began to see and to practice the proper church life in oneness.

In this program we will not be able to cover all the best biographies, but we will try

to highlight particular ones that can render some spiritual help to us in the progressive recovery of light, truth, and revelation. Many of the matters recovered by these saints can be considered like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Often saints saw something, but not the whole picture. It was not until the last century through our brothers Nee and Lee, that many of these "puzzle pieces" were put together that we might see the whole picture. We are thankful to the Lord for the faithfulness of these two brothers in bringing us into the vision of God's New Testament economy. Now we are more able to realize the contributions of our predecessors in bringing us to this point in the Lord's present recovery.

We hope that in spending some time to consider the biographies of those who have gone before us, we will be inspired to walk in the same spirit to arrive at the Lord's goal of the building up of the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

Our prayer is that the Lord would give us all "great resolutions of heart" and "great searching of our hearts" regarding Himself and the accomplishment of His eternal purpose among us.

Three Reasons to Study Church History & to Read Biographies

Why should believers spend time to know church history, and Biblical and Christian biographies in particular?

To Receive Inspiration and Revelation

Many times the Lord chooses to speak to His people through chosen vessels. When we speak of the study of biographies, one of the most significant points is that God in His sovereignty chose to bring forth revelation in the lives, the human stories, of different

people.

In many cases, even the very names of people in the Bible are significant because they speak to us something of God, or reveal to us something that is upon the Lord's heart. For example, the name Enosh means frail, mortal man. At the time of his birth men began to call upon the name of Jehovah (Gen. 4:26). From this we can learn that if we consider ourselves as those who are so strong, then we may miss the salvation afforded to the weak ones. By calling on the Lord's name, we can enter into the riches and the strength of the One upon whom we are calling. This is a basic revelation from God given to us by simply considering the name of one of God's early chosen vessels.

God also speaks to us through the lives of these persons. To know God and His economy we need to study the lives, the stories, the histories of our forefathers. How can we know God's calling without knowing Abraham? How can we know God's desire to make us His heirs without knowing Isaac? How can we know God's way of transformation without knowing Jacob? How can we know God's goal for a dwelling place without knowing Moses or David? It is so valuable to receive God's speaking through these chosen vessels.

Regarding this matter and related to the book of Genesis, Brother Lee said,

As the first book in the Bible, Genesis is not a book of doctrine; it is a book of history. It is not a history in a human way but in a very divine way. Genesis uses the biographies of some ancient saints to tell us something that is so divine. The divine revelation is contained in the human lives, in the human stories, of the people in Genesis. (Life-study of Genesis, p. 551).

The book of Genesis, in which nearly all of the truths in the Bible are sown as seeds, may be considered a biography of eight great men: Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. (Life-study of Genesis, p. 1425).

Thank the Lord for all the divine revelation contained in the lives of the saints. The Lord speaks to us not only in direct words, but also through the lives of these persons. Praise Him!

To be Nourished & Fostered for Growth

We know that our Savior God's desire is that all men would be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). We also know that by feeding on the word and all the healthy teachings we are enabled to grow in life unto maturity (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Tim. 4:6; Heb. 6:1).

Of course there are many healthy practices – pray-reading, calling on the name of the Lord and singing – that help us to grow in life. But another excellent way to foster this growth is by observing the pattern of others. By taking note of these healthy patterns we can be watered, supplied, nourished and even cherished.

Especially at times when our experience is somewhat lacking, it is good to consider the biographies of different ones in the Bible and in church history. Regarding this Brother Lee said,

Feeding involves the presenting of patterns either from the Bible or from church history.

By reading the biographies of saints throughout the ages, we nourish ourselves and experience a kind of fostering.

The point here is that the best way to feed others and

foster them is to give them a proper pattern.

If there is no pattern, there can be no fostering. Only by having a pattern can we feed others. (Life-study of First Thessalonians, p. 113)

Many times while reading Christian biographies we are inspired, and we also have our hearts warmed to pursue the Lord afresh. For example, I found that reading about the first time Martin Luther was able to actually see, touch and read a Bible, to be awe inspiring. Another example that comes to mind is that of the missionaries to China. We may read of the Lord's great love in the Word of God, but we can also really see and appreciate it by seeing how different ones were captured by the Lord's love and how they responded to that great love in their

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living and service.

If you read the biography of James Hudson Taylor, you will take note of the first time our brother was leaving his family and home to go to China. Let me read a small portion of Hudson's account of this:

My beloved mother had come over to Liverpool to see me off. Never shall I forget that day, nor how she went with me into the cabin that was to be my home for nearly six long months. With a mother's loving hand she smoothed the little bed. She sat by my side and joined in the last hymn we should sing together before parting. We knelt down and she prayed – the last mother's prayer I was to hear before leaving for China. Then notice was given that we must separate, and we had to say good-bye, never expecting to meet on earth again.

For my sake she restrained her feelings as much as possible. We parted, and she went ashore giving me her blessing. I stood alone on deck, and she followed the ship as we moved toward the dock-gates. As we passed through the gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish wrung from that mother's heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully, until then, what "God so loved the world" meant. And I am quite sure my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing in that one hour than in all her life before.

Oh how it must grieve the heart of God when He sees His children indifferent to the needs of that wide world for which His beloved, His only Son, suffered and died. (J. Hudson Taylor, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, p. 53).

To Gain a Perspective As to Where We Are In the Lord's Move Today

It is true that we in the Lord's recovery are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. No doubt, there is also truth in the saying that if we do not learn from history, we may be destined to repeat it. We have much to learn from our heritage in church history. We can receive much from the contributions of our forefathers, and we can also learn much from the mistakes of

previous generations. Brother Lee said,

We stand on the shoulders of the great teachers of the Bible who have gone before us. We have learned much from the experiences of others. We have studied church history, biographies, and the most important writings of the great teachers from the early centuries until the present. All this has been very helpful to us. Of course, we have also studied the Bible for ourselves. Therefore, we surely know where we are, and we have the assurance regarding the accuracy of whatever the Lord has led us to say in the ministry. (Life-study of First John, p. 289)

Brother Lee also frequently acknowledged and was grateful for how much he had gained from being perfected by Watchman Nee. He said,

Brother Nee, an outstanding gift given by the Lord to perfect others, always used the time [that they spent together] to perfect me. He certainly knew what I needed. He gave me the proper understanding of church history from the first century until the present; he shared with me the biographies of nearly all the founders of the different denominations; and he perfected me with respect to the inner life, the church life, and the Lord's move. (Life-study of Genesis, p. 1137)

A Faithful Word

To be sure, reading biographies can be profitable and beneficial to our Christian life. We should be cautious, however, and exercise some spiritual discernment as we read. We should be exercised to receive the help and contributions of our predecessors, but we should not receive anything that is contrary to Christ or to the truth. For example, Madam Guyon has helped us immensely with her testimony of her intimate fellowship with the Lord, but we do not take her way of praying to Mary since we know that there is only one mediator between God and man – Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5).

Regarding the need of discernment in our reading of biographies, Brother Lee said, *I also would like to fellowship with you concerning the reading of spiritual biographies. The better Christian biographies are those concerning people like Hudson*

Taylor, George Müller, D. L. Moody, and Charles Spurgeon. All these biographies are profitable in a number of points concerning the individual Christian life. They are very helpful to some extent, and I personally have received much from these biographies. I read most of them in my youth. We must realize, however, that the Lord's recovery has brought us absolutely back to His

New Testament economy and the New Testament ministry. We must also realize that the twenty centuries of church history are a history of the deviation from these two points—the New Testament economy and the New Testament ministry (Elders' Training, Book 4, p. 22).

Another example of this would be the story of D. L. Moody. It is reported that in Moody's ministry he highlighted three R's: Ruined, Redeemed, and Regenerated. At that time, Moody did not see God's purpose to have the church life as the Body of Christ. Today, we might add a fourth R – Recovered.

Conclusion

May the "so great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) cause us to be encouraged and to press on at the present time. May we be open to the Lord to receive the speaking and impressions of the Spirit, and may we be nourished afresh and fostered for our experience and growth in life. Lord, grant us a healthy perspective as we review our history in the light of Your great work of recovery.

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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