

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

Intro: That Jefferson Davis was a great American is undeniable. John Quincy Adams, ex-President and later member of the U.S. House of Representatives, after hearing one of Jefferson Davis' early speeches said, "That young man, gentlemen, is no ordinary man. Mind me, he will make his mark yet" (Frey 24).

Jefferson Davis made his mark in many ways. It will do us good to review just a few of these military and political marks before we enter into a study of the spiritual life of Davis that directed him in the above mentioned area.

Jefferson Davis made his mark:

1. He served with distinction in the Black Hawk and Mexican Wars. He introduced the now famous "V" or wedge formation at the Battle of Buena Vista, leading his men The Mississippi Rifles, with valor though wounded himself. Two weeks after the Battle of Monterey, Joseph Howell, Col. Davis's brother-in-law wrote, "There is not a man in his Regiment who would not sacrifice his life to obey him" (146 Davis). Davis was the hero of the Mexican War.
2. Jefferson Davis was responsible for many firsts during his time of political and military service. He was first to propose a transcontinental railroad connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific, a railroad from sea to shining sea. He was first to propose the buying of the Panama Canal Zone as well as the purchase of Cuba.
3. He set forth plans for fair trade with China and Japan.
4. He enlarged the Army by several regiments and introduced the rifle system of tactics. He founded the Army Medical Corps.
5. Appointed Robert E. Lee as Superintendent of West Point.
6. He strengthened the Western frontier forts. Introduced a military pension program.
7. He served as a U.S. Senator from Mississippi. Supporter the founding of the Smithsonian Institute.
8. He served as Secretary of War in the Cabinet of President Franklin Pierce. George McClellan during the

War Between the States said of Davis, "Colonel Davis was a man of extraordinary ability...He was the best Secretary of War -and I use the word best in its widest sense-I have ever had anything to do with."

9. Was nominated for President of the U.S. in 1860 by men from Massachusetts.
10. Was one of the most gifted of all orators, his farewell address to the Senate bringing many to tears.

Jefferson Davis was a truly a great American. The Honorable Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts characterized him as "Eloquent among the most eloquent, wise among the wisest in council, and brave among the bravest in battle" (255 Lee).

What is it that made this man the great man that he was? A man of conviction, courage, valor and conservatism.

I. JEFFERSON DAVIS BELIEVED THE BIBLE TO BE THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

- A. While serving on the frontier in the 1830's Davis met Reverend Cutting Marsh, a Congregational Missionary to the Stockbridge Indians. Marsh records a letter that he had written to Lieut. Davis on July 25, 1831. In this letter he mentions a Bill of the Bibles, which I take to be a Bible order. At the close of the letter Marsh writes, "God has without doubt something for you to do in thus bringing you as you hope to the knowledge and to the acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Jesus." God had begun a work that He would, according to scripture, finish. Philippians 1:6, says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."
- B. In a speech given on January 8, 1844 Davis made reference to Luke 16:18-31 and Genesis 8:8-11. As we know the passage in Luke 16 is not about heaven, but about the fires of eternal torment and the need to believe the Bible and be born again. Luke 16:23-24 says concerning the rich man who died unconverted, "And in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." I do not see a man who did not believe in eternal rest for the converted and

eternal damnation for the damned using this passage. In verse 31, a reference to the Word of God in the Old Testament, Abraham says, "If they [the lost] hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." If men will not believe the Bible they are in trouble.

- C. On June 28, 1845, Davis gave the eulogy in Vicksburg for the recently passed Andrew Jackson. In his eulogy Davis spoke of Jackson as one who had retired to the Hermitage involving himself in "the more agreeable pursuit , the destiny of man, the tillage of the earth." Davis who had known Jackson for many years, said that the life of Jackson had become, "tempered by the calm separation from worldly strife, and illuminated by the light of a pure Christianity." From this period of time on Davis spoke of Biblical themes and cited the Bible often. Felicity Allen says, "Surely. with his Baptist upbringing, he had read the Bible all along..." (102)
- D. Davis, in a speech in 1851 said that there was just "one book in the world" that he could "endorse wholesale, everything in it...and that was the Bible." Winnie Davis, who sat upon her father's knee as child listening to him read the Bible said, "His knowledge of the divine book was not exceeded by that of any clergyman I ever met." Jefferson Davis read and studied the scriptures.
- E. That Jefferson Davis referenced the Bible is seen in his actions at his swearing in as President of the Provisional Government at Montgomery, Alabama in 1861 and at his swearing in as President of the Confederate States of America in Richmond, Virginia.
 - 1. At Montgomery a newspaper report says, "President Davis kissed the Bible, and then, turning to the assemblage, said with deep and solemn emphasis, 'So help me God'." This Bible, purchased in 1853 is still in use by the State of Alabama for inaugurations.
 - 2. For the inauguration at Richmond, where Davis was sworn in as the President of the Confederate States of America, February 22, George Washington's birthday, 1862. Davis placed his hand upon the first Bible printed south of the Mason-Dixon line. The Bible was published by The Southwestern Publishing House of Nashville, Tennessee founded by the great Landmark Baptist

preacher, James R. Graves in 1855 and was a gift to Davis. Prior to the War for Southern Independence Bibles were published in the North. The supply of these Bibles were soon depleted with the onset of hostilities and the refusal of the North to ship Bibles South. Graves declared, "The North has no monopoly on the Word of God." In August of 1861 the Southwestern Publishing House began printing Bibles on stereotype plates smuggled from the North with the help of Northerners sympathetic to the South. Davis said of this Bible, "The Bible is a beautiful specimen of Southern workmanship, and if I live to be inaugurated the first President of the Confederacy, on 22nd, of February, my lips shall press the sacred volume which your kindness has bestowed upon me." Jefferson Davis believe in the infallibility of scripture. Listed among the devotional materials at Fortress Monroe were the King James Bibles that Davis read and studied.

II. JEFFERSON DAVIS A MAN OF PRAYER

- A. That Jefferson Davis was a man who believed in fervent prayer is attested to over and over in the life practice of this saint of God.
- B. On the morning of Davis's inauguration as President of the Confederate States of America, he was, as his wife Varina records, "on his knees in earnest prayer." She heard him praying, "for the support I need so sorely." At the end of his speech that day he lifted his eyes to heaven in the manner that Psalm 121 instructs us to, "I will lift mine eyes unto the hill, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth," and prayed, "To thee, O God, I trustingly commit myself, and prayerfully invoke thy blessings on my country and its cause."
- C. In May of 1862, President Davis summoned his country to ten days, "of humble supplication to Almighty God that He will vouchsafe His blessings on our beloved country ; that He will strengthen and protect our armies; that he watch over and protect our people from the machinations of their enemies; and that He will, in His good time, restore to us our blessing of peace and security under His sheltering care. " This was not

the first nor would it be the last call for prayer by the President. Not only did he call for prayer but he practiced what he proclaimed attending prayer services at St. Paul's on a regular basis.

III. JEFFERSON DAVIS A REGULAR CHURCH GOER

- A. Not only did Davis attend prayer services, he attended church services after the manner of Hebrews 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting on another: and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." In his life Davis was known to do some exhorting concerning those who did not attend church services.
- B. While at the Confederate White House in Montgomery, the Davis's walked to church as St. John's Episcopal was only a few blocks away. "The people of Montgomery remarked how they were in their pew every Sunday, near the back on the right side, and how the President walked in 'with magnificent military bearing' carrying 'his high silk hat in his hand.' He was very devout in devotions" (Allen 277).
- C. The practice of the Confederate President at Montgomery was his practice at Richmond. Dr. Minnigerode could count on the Davis family to be in their place on Sunday. The good pastor said of Davis, "[He] never failed to be there" unless he was "sick or away from town.."
- D. Davis loved to be with the men in the field, though the strain of office and the many duties in Richmond did not allow him this privilege as often as he would have like. Charlie Minnigerode's son and aide-de-camp to Fitz Lee, wrote to his father Dr. Minnigerode in November of 1863; concerning one of the Chief executive's visit to the troops. "They are making a big fuss over the President. He attended Mr. Hansborough's church at Orange C.H. [Court House] yesterday. He & Genl. Lee, the two greatest men in the Confederacy were side by side. Genl. Pendleton preached a very fine sermon."
- E. After the war when President Davis moved to Beauvoir in Biloxi, Mississippi, he was regular attender at The Church of the Redeemer. In years past I have often sat in the pew that our great and noble President sat in. Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Church and the pew is gone forever.

IV. JEFFERSON DAVIS WAS A FIRM BELIEVER IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

A. Jefferson Davis truly loved the Word of God and many passages were precious to this Godly man. One of the passages that President Davis often turned to in time of need was Psalm 16. I want to share a few verses from this marvelous Psalm, *“Preserve me, oh God. For in thee do I put my trust...The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot...I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand. I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth : my flesh also shall rest in hope...Thou shalt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures evermore.”* (Vss. 1,5,8-9,11)

B. In the closing remarks of his inaugural address as president of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis with his eyes and hands lifted up to God said, “With humble gratitude and adoration, acknowledging the Providence which has so visibly protected the Confederacy during its brief but eventful career, to thee O God, I trustingly commit myself and prayerfully invoke Thy blessing on my country and its cause.”

1. What a great blessing it was for the Confederate States to have a leader who believed that Himself God was the supreme Commander-in-Chief. Friends, there would not have been a Great Revival in the Southern Armies had the armies of the South not existed. Many of our ancestors were touched by the messages preached in the camps by compassionate Chaplains who cared for the souls of the men in Grey. None could say as the Psalmist did, *“...No man cared for my soul.”*
2. Many of the greatest men who ever preached the Gospel of, “How Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), did so in the Southern Armies. These men poured out their hearts for the men who faced death day after day fighting for independence. Many great men of faith served as Chaplains, military aides and even as officers. One minister who served spiritually and politically was The Rev. Dr. Moses D. Hoge. According to Henry Lee Curry III, “No other southern minister

became so involved as Hogue in delicate ecclesiastical and political transactions in England.” (31) The great need of Bibles and religious tracts was foremost in the minds of the Chaplains, and the President supported their efforts to get the Word of God into the hands of the men in uniform. On December 27, 1862, Hoge sailed for England, “authorized to procure thirty-five thousand Bibles and Testaments.” This authorization came from the Virginia Bible Society and was backed by President Davis and his cabinet. Hogue was also commissioned by the Southern Presbyterian Committee of publication to procure thousands of tracts for the troops while in England. Thank God for the spiritual ammunition given to our southern armies by faithful ministers of the Gospel, men who were supported by and encouraged by President Davis.

- C. When tragedy struck the Davis home in 1864, President Davis did not run from God nor did he curse God as so many unbelievers do today. When Little Joe, his son fell from the back gallery of the Confederate White House to the brick pavement below crushing his skull and breaking both legs, Davis after watching his “little man” slip away in death was heard to say over and over as he paced the floor in the drawing room, “Not mine, O Lord, but thine: not mine, O Lord but thine...” In reality he was surrendering his will to God the Father, believing that the Sovereign God of the universe knew best and His providence was to be trusted.
- D. While imprisoned at Fortress Monroe he wrote many things that proved his love for Jehovah God and his firm believe in the providence of the Almighty. In a letter to Varina, who was of course troubled by his imprisonment, he said, “Be not downcast. We must meet cheerfully whatever afflictions it may be God’s will we should bear. Misfortune should not depress us, as it is only crime which can degrade [an obvious reference to his unlawful incarceration]. Beyond this world there is a sure retreat for the oppressed...to deny that every... event tends to what is right, is to question the wisdom of providence...ever trusting in the mercy of God, I prayerfully hope that we shall be reunited in this world, but humbly strive with becoming resignation to say, Father thy will be done...Let us trust in Him

whose wisdom cannot err and whose power cannot fail to effect His will.”

V. JEFFERSON DAVIS AND HIS BELIEF IN AN ETERNAL HOME CALLED HEAVEN

- A. John 14:1-4 says, *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”* While in prison Jefferson Davis turned his heart toward his heavenly home. He knew that Henry Wirz had been executed and he did not put it past his capturers to do the same to him. He says in a letter to Varina, saying that General Grant had said, “Everyone supposed he would be tried for treason if captured, and that he would be executed.”
- B. In a letter to his beloved wife Varina during December 1865 Davis looks heavenward talking of “...the mansion prepared for the blessed believers of the Son.” “The peace that lifts above the troubles of this world and opens the view of the world to come attend you: and may our merciful Father restore us to each other that we may gather our children around us and calmly prepare for the final summons, aiding and sustaining each other in the works both for time and Eternity until that last call shall be given.” These are not words given in a political speech to win votes, these are the heart cry of a man of faith, a man, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

VI. THE FAVORITE HYMN OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

- A. The favorite hymn of President Jefferson Davis was “How Firm a Foundation” as we recall the words of this great hymn of the faith we can see why it was the favorite of not only Jefferson Davis but of Robert E. Lee as well. When trials and troubles bore heavy upon the President of the Confederacy he would often quote with fervency the words of his favorite hymn
- B. HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

How Firm a Foundation

1. *How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent word; What more can he say, than to you He hath said, Who unto the Saviour for refuge have fled?*

2. *Fear not, I am with thee, oh be not dismayed! For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, Up held by my righteous, omnipotent hand.*

3. *When through the deep waters I call thee to go, The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow; For I will be with thee thy trials to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

4. *When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply; The flame shall not hurt thee: I only design Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

5. *Even down to old age all my people shall prove, My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love; And then, when gray hairs shall their temples adorn, Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.*

6. *The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes; That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake!*

VII. PRESIDENT DAVIS A FIRM BELIEVER IN SALVATION THROUGH THE SACRIFICE OF GOD'S SON

- A. In prison Davis had been placed in irons and a light was continuously lit making sleep difficult. It is from his prison letters that we learn so much about the spiritual heart of Jefferson Finis Davis. In April of 1866 Davis wrote to Varina, "Blessed hope that we are to be judged by Him who bore our every human affliction for our salvation, and having felt all the emotions of human affection, can sympathize with those who suffer, and pardon the errors of our better nature. Who that reflects on man's judgment can fail to look our from its corruption and weakness, with desire to meet the judge who cannot err? Often has it occurred in the world's history that fidelity has been treated as a crime and true faith punished as treason. So it cannot be before the Judge to

whom all hearts are open from no secrets hid.” These words of Mr. Davis remind of the scripture found in Hebrews 4:15, “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are yet, without sin.*”

- B. What a great example we have in our Saviour, “*Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye are healed.*” (1 Peter 2:22-24).