

Funeral Sermon for General Stewart

(1908 Convention Report, page 61.)

(Pastor Russell was called to St. Louis to preach the funeral sermon of Bro. Alex. P. Stewart, who had just passed away. The funeral was held at the residence of the General's son, A. C. Stewart, Esq., St. Louis, Mo.)

He spoke as follows:

“Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.”

As the esteemed George Washington held a high place in public favor, in peace as well as in war, so did our esteemed friend and brother, Lieutenant General Alex. P. Stewart, to whose remains we pay our tribute of respect today. It is quite unnecessary for me to point out to you his “footprints on the sands of time” as a soldier who laid his all upon the altar of patriotism in the cause espoused by his State. Suffice it that I remind you that the soldiers under his command gave him the sobriquet “Old Straight,” because of his recognized honesty of purpose, on account of which they loved him and respected him.

Neither need I remind you of how he put his high talents to good use as an Educator of the young—as Chancellor of two prominent colleges of the South. I do remind you however, that these “footprints on the sands of time” took a very, a very different course from those of some of the great generals of the past; and that their trend is worthy of note and imitation in several respects from those who would make their lives sublime.

I will remind you also of the epigrammatic eulogy paid to the General by his fellow of the Chickamauga National Park Commission, when he styled him “First Gentleman of the Splendid South.” And I ask you to remember that his gentlemanliness proceeded from the heart, because he was first of all a true Christian.

We sometimes quote that “Charity begins at home,” and so, you will agree with me, all of our graces should begin under the home roof. And the fact that he was so deeply loved by his own family is to me one of the very best evidences that he strove to do his duty in his home.

But these matters are aside from my real topic. You desire that I shall tell you what I knew of General Stewart as a Christian, and what are our hopes for him. And this is your right and my privilege, for we are all agreed that to be a courageous general, a College

President, a splendid gentleman or a faithful father, one or all would not mean of necessity to be a Christian in the deeper and truer sense of that word—a follower of Christ. This, then, shall be my theme—to demonstrate that the same courageous qualities and honesty that gave him the title “Old Straight” applied to him also as a Christian.

Many years ago he gave his all to his Creator and his Redeemer, and sought light upon the path of life in the Bible. His soul cried out as yours and mine have done, “Lead kindly light amid encircling gloom.”

Of a generous heart, he loved his fellow-men, and while seeking their welfare was perplexed to know how the God of Love and Justice could have foreordained the eternal torture of all except the “Little Flock” who hear of Christ in the present life and become “saints” or followers. Such a plan implied that its author was less just and less loving than his fellow creatures. The General could not assent to this. The God of his worship must be greater than he, and not his inferior. The “encircling gloom” attached itself to every doctrine which had been taught him from infancy. He could not see the consistency of an “elect” class when all the non-elect were to be tortured. He could not see much “free grace” in what is popularly so called—a “free grace” in name only, since faith is a prerequisite to salvation, and the vast majority of our race die without the faintest knowledge of “the only name given whereby we must be saved.”

Another subject that troubled him was the doctrine of baptism—that only the baptized were freed from sin, and only they could be of the “elect” Church. The immersion idea was still more troublesome, because still fewer of mankind have been immersed. The “encircling gloom” deepened the more as he investigated, and so much the more he prayed, “Lead kindly Light.”

Finally his prayer was heard. All of his difficulties vanished, he saw the Bible in a new light, and beheld by its aid a Creator worthy to be worshiped—a God of Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power. To this One whom he had long sought to know, the General bowed his heart and consecrated his every talent and in this blessed faith and hope he died.

I believe, dear friends of his, that I shall fulfill the desire of his heart if I tell you briefly of the Bible interpretation which made the last ten years of General Stewart’s life the happiest and holiest of his experience. I will explain to you his hope for himself and all the “elect,” and his different hope for the non-elect.

The key to his blessing came through the discernment that the word “hell” has been misinterpreted—that “*sheol*” of the Old Testament, and “*hades*” of the New Testament never signify a place of fire and torture, but really the tomb—that indeed the same words are more frequently rendered “grave.” At the same time, his attention was drawn to the

fact that God pronounced a death sentence, and not an eternal torment sentence, upon father Adam. “In the day that thou eatest [the forbidden fruit] thou shalt surely die.”

These items of truth brought him great relief of heart, but still left some “encircling gloom.” But shortly the Lord let him see that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ paid the penalty of death for father Adam, and thus redeemed Adam and his race which shared his condemnation. Next came the Bible testimony that as all die by reason of Adam’s condemnation, even so all are to be made alive, given an opportunity of everlasting life through Christ. This threw a flood of light upon St. Peter’s declaration that “the times of refreshing” are coming, and “restitution of all things.” He could see that restitution is just what humanity needs—an uplift out of sin, out of imperfection, a helping hand back to the original image of God in which Adam was created, but from which all of his race have sadly fallen. As he continued his search and prayer for the Truth, through the leading of the Kindly Light his blessing continued, and he saw that the Bible taught two salvations. One of these, for mankind in general, a restoration to perfect manhood with the whole earth his Paradise restored, waits for the second coming of Christ and his Millennial Kingdom, for which all Christians have so long prayed in the Redeemer’s words, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, even as in heaven.”

The other salvation is of this Gospel Age—since Pentecost—and includes all of the “elect,” “even as many as the Lord shall call,” who by faithfulness will “make their calling and election sure.” Those who attain to this salvation are the “elect” who must now “walk by faith and not by sight” and in the “narrow way.” These are to experience the “First Resurrection” “to the divine nature,” and its “glory, honor and immortality.”

General Stewart’s strong nature laid hold of God’s promises and his faith took fresh root and bore an increase of love, joy and peace. His native courage and honesty helped him to take a firm stand for the true Gospel, of which the Apostle says,—“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” The General knew that he once had been ashamed of the creeds of the dark ages and its “encircling gloom,” and he now would confess the Gospel of which he needed not to be ashamed.

Further, I should remark that as he studied the Bible he perceived that not merely the living nations will be blest during the Millennium, but also the dead. Amongst the precious promises to the latter were our Lord’s words, “Marvel not, the hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth.” All will come forth to share in the glorious blessings of that glad time, but not to compulsory salvation—eternal life will not be forced upon any—and all who will not avail themselves of those precious privileges will be utterly destroyed in the “Second Death.” Acts 3:23.

Dear friends, let us note General Stewart's "footprints on the sands of time," particularly their trend toward Christ and the Truth and the Kingdom. I trust that he won in the election—that he "made his calling and election sure," and will hear the Master's Well Done!—that he fought a good fight and finished his course and received the crown of glory and that he will shortly be with the Lord in glory, blessing the world. We who have heard the same message, shall we not lay aside every weight and every besetting sin, and run faithfully for the great prize—the Kingdom?—Gal. 3:29.