

Stonewall Jackson Day

January (date varies)

Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, mighty soldier, Christian warrior

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.
I Corinthians 15:58*

Introduction

Thomas Jackson was born in 1824 in Clarksburg, West Virginia. He was of Scottish and Irish descent and had a godly heritage. His father, an attorney, died when Jackson was very young, a few weeks after the loss of his sister Laura. Jackson’s mother was a godly woman and he loved her greatly. His later writings often referred to her. His mother remarried Mr. Woodson and they attempted to raise their three children—Elizabeth, Warren and Thomas. Sadly, the Woodson family was so poor that the children had to be sent away to be raised by relatives. Thomas, at the age of seven, was sent to an uncle. His mother died one year later. Biographers feel that the sadness of this period of his life made him mature very quickly. At age eight, he left his uncle and walked 17 miles to the home of another uncle, where he joined his brother Warren. He did this because of the excessive force used by the first uncle. His brother Warren died at age 19. Now Elizabeth was all that was left of his family; Thomas was very committed to his little sister and there was much love between the two.

Education

Jackson’s formal education began at the school of Robert P. Ray. He did not do well in any subject except for arithmetic, and was always behind in his lessons. However, he was very thorough and conscientious. It was said that if he did not know a lesson well he would not try to recite it. He refused to go on to the next lesson until he learned the previous one perfectly. Thomas was an excellent horseman and was known as a young man of great strength, courage, diligence and hard work. At this time of his life, he did not honor the ways of the Lord and consequently was very worldly.

In the year 1842, at the age of 18, he was accepted at West Point and became a pleb, a first year student. Not having great natural ability, he had to work twice as hard as his peers. His teachers judged his mind sound and strong, but not quick. After the fourth year at West Point he graduated 17th out of 70. Jackson kept a blank book in which he wrote principles—the rules for his life, which covered the subjects of morals, manners, dress, the choice of friends, and the aims of life, one of which was, “*Winners never quit. And quitters never win.*” Jackson at this time had lofty personal goals; he wanted to be a truly great person and excel in whatever he did. At this point, however, he was doing everything in his own power, for Christ did not yet rule him.

The Army

After graduation, Jackson took the rank of second lieutenant of artillery in the U.S. Army and was sent to the war against Mexico. Jackson was put in charge of the small cannon and fought so bravely and effectively that after his

first battle he was promoted to captain of artillery. After the Battle of Chapultepec, he was promoted to the rank of major. After this war, Jackson took a time of rest in Mexico City, where he learned Spanish and began to study the Bible and seek God. He was sent to Fort Hamilton, seven miles from New York City, where he was baptized.

Professor Jackson

At age 27, Jackson was chosen professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy and Artillery Tactics at the Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia. He served in this post for ten years. Here Jackson evidenced some of his major, outstanding character traits. It was said he was punctual to a minute. Because of the weakness of his eyes, he could not see to read at night, so in order to prepare his lessons for the next day, he had to practice great self-discipline. According to Williamson:

To do himself and his classes justice, each morning after class hours, he would carefully read over the class lessons for the next day, and, at night, after his simple supper, he would quietly sit with his face to the wall and study in his mind the lessons of the day. In this way, he made them his own, and was ready to teach the next day. This training was of great use to him in his life as a soldier. The power of his mind was such that while riding, in later years, at the head of his army, he could study the movements of the foe, and plan his own with as much care and skill as in the quiet of his study at home.¹

Spiritual Life

In 1851, Jackson connected himself with the Presbyterian Church in Lexington, under the leadership of Rev. S.W. White. He was made a deacon and became a Sunday school teacher of young men. He also gathered together the African slaves in the town every Sunday evening to teach them the truths of the Bible. He maintained a school of about 100 students and 12 teachers between 1855 and 1861, until the time he left Lexington to enter the Army. He was very concerned about the continued discipleship of his students and, up until the time of his death, he inquired about the spiritual progress of his Sabbath School students.

While serving as professor, Major Jackson married Miss Eleanor Junkin. She died after they were married only 14 months. Jackson was married again in 1857 to Mary Anna Morrison, a daughter of a Presbyterian minister.

Mrs. Williamson relates this story that gives a glimpse into Jackson's spiritual life at this time:

Mr. Dabney tells us that one day, when a friend said that he could not understand how one could "pray without ceasing," Jackson replied that he had, for some time, been in the habit of praying through the day. "When we take our meals," said he, "there is grace, and when I take a draught of water, I always pause to lift up my heart to God in thanks for the water of life; and when I go to my classroom and await the coming of the cadets, that is my time to pray for them, and so with every other act of the day."

We see that Jackson was truly a "praying man." His pastor, Rev. Dr. White, once said that Major Jackson was the happiest man he had ever known. This happiness came from his faith and the saving care of God. We are told that a friend once said to him, "Suppose you should lose your eyesight and then, too, be very ill, and have to depend on those bound to you by no tie, would this be too much for your faith? Do you think you could be happy then?" He thought a moment and then said, "If it be the will of God to place me on a sickbed, He would enable me to lie there in peace one hundred years."²

The Civil War Begins

When the Civil War began, Major Jackson was made colonel of the Virginia forces and ordered to command 4,500 men at Harper's Ferry. While traveling there, he wrote this to his wife:

I expect to leave here at 2:00 p.m. for Harper's Ferry. I'm thankful to say that an ever kind Providence, who causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him, has given me a post which I prefer above all others. To His Name be all the praise! You must not expect to hear from me very often, as I shall have more work than I have ever had in the same time before; but don't be troubled about me, as an ever kind heavenly Father will give me all needful aid.³

In 1861, the North had a plan to take four large armies and capture Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. Jackson and his men were part of the forces that were to repel this invasion, and so he found himself fighting by Manassas and Bull Run with a Confederate General Bee. During one battle, as was his habit, General Jackson rode back and forth between the artillery and his men lying on the ground, many of them greatly wounded, giving them and those still fighting much encouragement. Mrs. Williamson writes of this event:

At last, General Bee, seeing his thin ranks beginning to waiver, said, "General, they are beating us back." "Then," said Jackson, "we will give them the bayonet." Bee, catching the spirit of Jackson, galloped back to his men, saying, there is Jackson, standing like a stonewall! Rally behind the Virginians! A few score of the men rallied around the gallant Bee and charged upon the foe. In a few moments, the same Bee fell dead, with his face to the foe. "From that time," says Draper, a historian of the north, "the name which Jackson had received in the baptism of fire, displaced that which he had received in a baptism of water, and he was known ever after as Stonewall Jackson."⁴

Jackson was a brilliant military strategist who excelled in "secrecy and surprise." According to Dr. Catherine Millard, Christian History Author, "His expertise in the use of cavalry, the strategic arm before battle, were: scouting, screening, pursuing, charging, and perhaps raiding. Jackson made it his constant practice to study his opponent's character. He was well versed in the use of strategic positions in warfare, thereby gaining frequent advantage over his adversary."⁵ Accordingly, Jackson, the military genius, never lost a military battle.

A Man of Prayer

The year was 1862 and there were three large federal armies threatening Jackson. He was in Winchester, Virginia, with 10,000 men. Jackson decided to take on each of the large armies, one at a time, before they could unite and crush him. He was outnumbered in every battle (outnumbered three-to-one and even ten-to-one), and yet he won every battle. The name *Jackson* struck terror in the heart of the enemy! In June of that year, at the end of a forty-day campaign, General Jackson had brilliantly commanded his troops. They marched 400 miles, fought four great battles, and defeated four separate armies, sending to the rear over 3,000 prisoners and vast trains of stores and ammunitions. As his biographer wrote, from this time, Jackson stood forth as a leader of great genius; "the little orphan boy had indeed climbed the heights of fame amid a *blaze of glory*."⁶ Jackson was not concerned about his own glory but rather the glory of his Lord. Following the last battle, Jackson set apart a day of thanksgiving and prayer and the Lord's Supper was celebrated by all the Christian soldiers in the army.

While fighting, Stonewall Jackson never neglected prayer. Mrs. Williamson retells one incident involving Jackson's prayer life, before the Battle of Cedar Run:

Just before this battle, some officers inquired of Jim, the General's servant, if there were any signs of a battle. "Oh, yes sir", replied he, the General is a great man for praying night and morning; at all times; but when I see him get up in the night to go off to pray, then I know there is going to be an important battle: And I go right straight and pack his haversack, for I know he will call for it in the morning.⁷

"Jackson Has Lost His Left Arm, and I Have Lost My Right"

Stonewall Jackson was accidentally shot by his own troops at the Battle of Chancellorsville. As his life was beginning to wane, he spoke these last words:

Order AP Hill to prepare for action! Move the infantry to the front! Tell Major Hawks to send forward provisions for the men! And then he murmured his final words: Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.⁸

Upon hearing of his wounding, Robert E. Lee sadly said, “Jackson has lost his left arm, and I have lost my right.”

Conclusion

Colonel R. P. Chew, Chief of Horse Artillery, spoke of Jackson in an address delivered at V.M.I. in 1912:

He was a Christian without fanaticism, a Christian in the open; one who did not hesitate in the presence of assembled thousands to pause on the eve of some great enterprise and raise his hand aloft, invoking the blessing of divine Providence upon his efforts and those of his soldiers. He rose superior to human infirmity and was proof against the temptations of this life . . . While his strategy was as brilliant, his tactics as effective, he had achieved a victory that could be accorded to no one of these great commanders, (Caesar, Bonaparte, Marlborough, and Wellington), he had made himself a complete and absolute master of himself. Possessed of perfect poise of mind and temperament, his character adorned with every moral and manly attribute, and endowed with every Christian virtue.⁹

Celebrate Stonewall Jackson with Your Family!

- Watch the movie, *Gods and Generals*.
- Visit Jackson’s Civil War battlefields. (Ex. Chancellorsville, Virginia)
- Read a biography of Jackson; I recommend *The Life of General Stonewall Jackson* by Mrs. M. L. Williamson, published by Liberty Press.

Endnotes

1. Mrs. M.L. Williamson, *The Life of General Stonewall Jackson* (Arlington Heights, Il: Christian Liberty Press, 1989), 41
2. Ibid, 59–61
3. Ibid, 73
4. Ibid, 92
5. Catherine Millard, *The Rewriting of America’s History* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Horizon House Publishers, 1991), 191
6. Mrs. M.L. Williamson, *The Life of General Stonewall Jackson*, 155
7. Mrs. M.L. Williamson, *The Life of General Stonewall Jackson*, 170
8. Ibid, 206–207
9. Catherine Millard, *The Rewriting of America’s History*, 193