

Life of Robert L. Dabney

by Ian Murray

Robert L. Dabney was a courageous and heroic Christian leader who was known for his remarkable gifts as a theologian, preacher, and teacher, but was relatively unknown in his own day due to his unpopular theology and old orthodoxy.

Duration: 1:07:19

Scripture: Exodus 20:8, Matthew 9:37, Acts 2:41, Romans 12:10, James 1:27

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Holy Spirit"

Description

The sermon transcript discusses the degradation of the savior, comparing him to various objects like a life preserver or a fire extinguisher. It emphasizes the importance of having faith in Jesus in his three offices of prophet, priest, and king. The transcript also mentions the author's foresight of the changing structure of evangelism and the defense of observing the Sabbath day. It concludes with a mention of a rich outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the army, leading to conversions and growing piety.

Transcript

I have two reasons why I chose the subject of Robert Louis Dabney for this morning's session. The first is that his life gives us the most impressive example that I know of courage and heroism in the Christian ministry. I mean, of course, outside the pages of scripture, but outside the pages of scripture, I do not know a life which is more moving in terms of the quality of courage and endurance than the life of Robert Dabney.

And it has been my experience over the last year or so, as we look upon the situation in which we are found today, that these qualities of courage and true Christian heroism are very greatly needed. And, therefore, I was led to this subject with that in view. Dabney was truly a Caleb.

He wholly followed the Lord. Or, in the language of the New Testament, he was a man who endured hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. His biographer said he was at war with much in his age.

When he was 72 years of age, his friend C.R. Vaughan wrote to him a beautiful letter, but he, at the close of the letter, said, pray on, dear old soldier. This is how his friends thought of him, and this is what he was. The second reason, then, is that I wanted to say something which perhaps would encourage more reading of Dabney's theological writings.

And, to that end, we've brought with us from London quite a number of Dabney's discussions, but they are already sold. So, if you have not already bought them, you won't be able to do so, I'm afraid, after this morning's session. But, we've been selling them at a somewhat reduced price, and if you'd like to have a set of Dabney's discussions, and give us your name, we'll see that they're sent to you at the same turn.

Now, when one first comes to Dabney, and let me remind you at once that his dates 1820 to 1898, 1820 to 1898, when one first becomes acquainted with him, one is struck by two facts, and these facts are in contrast to one another. The first fact is the evidence which exists of the remarkable gifts which he had as a Christian leader. It was the opinion of Archibald Alexander of Princeton, which he often made known that Dr. Dabney is the best teacher of theology in the United States, if not in the world.

In 1860, when Joseph Addison Alexander of Princeton died, reputedly the most learned man on the American continent, when Alexander died in 1860, Charles Hodge wrote to Dabney and literally begged him and prayed him to accept the professorship of church history at Princeton. Dabney did not accept, as perhaps we'll mention a little later, but this was Hodge's view of the man's value. And he was not only a theologian and a teacher of theology, he was a great preacher.

In fact, it was said that next to J. H. Thornwell, who died in 1861, next to Thornwell, or rather after Thornwell, Dabney was the most powerful preacher to ministers in the United States. Let me just give you at the outset one illustration of his preaching when he was an old man. When he was in his late 60s, he was preaching in Baltimore, and the church in which he was preaching, a man had come as a visitor expecting to hear the local minister, and found Dabney in the pulpit.

Well, he did not know Dabney, that is to say he'd never seen him, although of course he knew his name, and of course he was unaware of who the preacher was. And this is what this visitor wrote. He says the stranger in the pulpit read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and his subject was vicarious atonement.

The method was to state and refute the false or incomplete theories of the atonement, and then to establish the truth. The discourse lasted an hour or more. I was soon listening with profound interest.

I abandoned my previous conjecture concerning the identity of the speaker. He thought he was some local man who had just been called in to supply. I abandoned, he said, that conjecture.

When he had been speaking perhaps half an hour, stating with the clearness of light false theories and crushing them to powder under logic, I came to the conclusion that he must be Dr. Dabney. I had never seen him or his picture, but had heard his students talk of his teaching, and was familiar with his writing. And I saw in the giant reasoner a flame with scorn of error and of subterfuge, yet bowing with meekness of the cross, one so like our great Dabney that Dabney it must be.

And so it turned out to be. Since that day I have understood his great influence upon his pupils. Such a teacher is a rare gift to any church.

Well, that is simply one of many testimonies that could be taken, and his biographer, speaking of Dabney as a spiritual Christian, comes to this conclusion. As a holy man he deserves to be ranked with Augustine and Calvin, Owens and Baxter and Edwards. Dr. Dabney was a great man.

We cannot tell just how great yet. One cannot see how great Mount Blanc is by standing at its foot. One hundred years from now men will be able to see him better.

Well, this then is the first fact that strikes one when one turns to Dabney. The amount of evidence that exists concerning his power and his greatness as a Christian leader and preacher. The second fact, in contrast, is how comparatively little Dabney was regarded, even in his own day, and how speedily he was forgotten after his death.

That is equally striking. Take an illustration of that. Dabney came over to Britain in 1880.

He was on a visit, really, for the sake of his health. He spent three weeks in London. Friends who he hoped to visit were absent from the city.

He worshipped at Spurgeon's Tabernacle. He went to Westminster Cathedral. He did not apparently meet one person who knew him or who recognized him.

He says how he left London a lonely man and determined that he would never again tour as an individual. And he was no better in Edinburgh. He went to Edinburgh looking forward to the Pre-Church General Assembly which was meeting.

It was in the month of May. When he got to the door he found that he was not able to be admitted without a ticket. Tickets were not to be had, and though the name that he bore should have admitted him to any church assembly in the world, he was not able to enter the Pre-Church General Assembly in Edinburgh.

These are little details, but they are indicative of something larger. Dabney's works have never been printed in this country. It's, I should think, practically impossible to buy any Dabney books in our second-hand bookshop for that reason.

So, you see, you have this extraordinary contrast between the opinion of men like Archibald Alexander and the fact that he was so little known, and then, after his death, so soon forgotten. And what was the reason, then, why he should not have been more widely known? In a nutshell, I think the reason was this. He was found, as it were, on the losing side.

I mentioned a little earlier how he declined a call to Princeton. He was conscious that if he went to Princeton, which had then 179 students, that his name would immediately come to the attention of the whole Christian world. But he didn't go to Princeton because, primarily, he was a Virginian.

That was the country of his birth, and it was in the South, and for the needs of the South, that Dabney was pre-eminently burdened. He felt the North was comparatively well-supplied with gospel ministry and with seminaries, but that he as a Southerner had been called to minister in the South, and especially in Virginia. Well, it was only one year after he had made that decision that the great Civil War of 1861 broke out, and Dabney was on the side of the South, and the whole world, it's true to say, was on the side of the North.

That was one losing cause with which Dabney was bound up. Secondly, and more important for our purposes, he was on, humanly speaking, the losing side in terms of his theology and his old orthodoxy. I do not know of any American theologian of the latter half of the last century, including any of the Princeton men, I do not know of one who was more discriminating and discerning with regard to the weakening of American evangelicalism by the new measures, by the influence of the Plymouth Brethren, by the influence of the new evangelism which Moody and with others were popularizing.

Dabney was the one, pre-eminently, who sounded a warning, who believed that that type of evangelism in the end would lead to desolation. For doing so, he was highly unpopular, and he lived, sadly, to see the ground being taken away from them, even in the South. That was another thing.

Then, or thirdly, in general, he was on the losing side with regard to the whole range of biblical principles which he upheld. If you read Dabney, I do not think you will find a single emphasis in him which remained an emphasis in this century. Every single belief which was supremely precious to him was well nigh obliterated by the earlier part of this century.

Indeed, at one time, Dabney said he felt like a man who was working and walking on the sand, and when the tide shortly came in, there would be no marks left in this world of the work he had done. As for eternity, he said he knew that fruit had been born, but as for what would come in this world, this was his temptation to feel that it was all to be blotted out. So, you see from these few words that he was a man in the eyes of so many of his contemporaries behind the times, and his name was associated with principles which were fast fading from the consciousness even of the Protestant churches.

That, I believe, is the greatest reason why Dabney soon passed out of sight. Now, I want to, in a formal way, informal way, go through Dabney's life, just some of its main salient features, and then perhaps to draw a few conclusions. He was born, as I said, in 1820, March the 5th, in Louisa County in Virginia.

His father was a local magistrate, farmer, colonel of the militia, a man who owned a farm where there were sweets and corn and tobacco, and in that environment, a country environment, Dabney grew up. It was, of course, a typical southern farm with Negroes in the family, with the structure of society that existed before the Civil War still in force, and in that setting, as I say, Dabney grew up. He went to a log college school nearby, and then, when he was 13, his father died.

He was the eldest son, so he had the primary responsibility for the family. He was a great all-rounder. He could use stones, he could build houses, he learned architecture, and he was a man of great ability.

Six foot in height, slender at first, and then later on more heavily built. A very strong man, and a man of very great breadth of interest. He went first to college at Hampden, Sydney, at Prince Edward in Virginia.

He was there for two years. He returned home to help his mother, who had fallen into debt. He helped her for a further two years, and then, about 1840, he went to the University of Virginia.

One of the remarkable things which happened while he was studying there was that one of the teachers, the professors in the university, was actually murdered by one of the students, and it seemed to be a portent of Dabney's future career that he was the one appointed to arrest the murderer. Well, so he did, and that is characteristic of the man. I don't want to dwell on this side of his life.

It's the earlier part, and it's the later part that we want to move on to. He was, while at college in Hampden, Sydney, one who experienced, as he says, a powerful and genuine awakening. There was a revival of religion in the college, and at that time he made first profession of his faith in Christ.

In 1844, then, following that profession, indeed several years later, he attended Union Theological Seminary, which was also at Hampden, Sydney, in order to prepare for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. He went there because Francis Sampson was the Professor of Oriental Languages, and a saintly man whose reputation as a preacher was so well known in the South. It is said that when Dabney preached his first class sermon, that Sampson made this criticism of it.

He said, it is true that we all see that Mr Dabney is animated himself, but he is unable to express that animation to his audience. He is animated himself, but he is unable to express that animation to his audience. And the whole emphasis in the school of preaching to which Sampson belonged, and to which Dabney came to belong, was this.

In Dabney's own words, he says, the business of the preacher is simply to make the people see and feel what is the word of God. In 1847, then, he went to his first pastorate at a little place called Tinkling Spring, in the valley of Virginia, the northern side of Virginia. His congregation was drawn over an area of about 50 square miles, and they were made up largely of Scotch Irish, and that didn't altogether ease his problem sometimes.

Before he had been there two years, there was a difference of opinion in the church about the building of a new church, and Dabney said, the Scotch Irish are the most inflexible people in the world when they are right, and the most vexatiously pig-headed and muleish when wrong. Well, he had only been there a year when he married Lavinia Morrison, the daughter of a minister who lived not far away. He tells us how it was love at first sight.

The very day that they met, they fell in love with each other, and this was a lifelong happiness to them. She outlived him by a few years, and one could speak at some length on the beauty and the love of the home that grew up. In 1850, when he had been there just three years, they were blessed with a true spiritual awakening.

About 33 persons were added from these muleish Scots and Irish. There was a glorious work of the Spirit of God. Just a little before it happened, he had a letter from his friend C. R. Vaughan about his preaching.

Dabney was concerned that his preaching was erring on the harsh side, and he was asking counsel from his friend about this, and he spoke to Vaughan also of his burden for revival in his church, and this is what Vaughan wrote back. He says, for months before there was an expression of interest in my church, my own heart was bursting with the burden of my people's welfare, and to gain relief I was obliged to pray, and the effect of that told upon my preaching with wonderful effect. And then speaking of his manner of preaching, he says cultivate a single- earnestness, and don't be concerned for anything else.

I assure you that the very best way I have ever tried to break into the conscience is to strike straight at it with a deep consuming feeling that all is at stake, and that there is no time to stop to calculate the degree of offense that may justly be taken as to mere manner. It's a very fine letter, I mustn't read more of it, but just a month or two after that letter came, the awakening was present in the church at Tinkling Spring. Well, he stayed there for six and a half years.

One summer's day he was working in the fields as he liked to do, and his wife called him from the house with the news that a new professor had been appointed, or rather called, to the theological seminary at Hampden-Sydney. He asked who it might be, and she told him it was himself. So, from 1853 Dabney began his very lifelong work of theological training.

He remained at the seminary, Union Seminary, for 30 years from the age of 36. Then to the age of 66 he gave to that work the best years of his life. Now there's a great deal that could be said about Dabney as a theological teacher, and I'm not able to do that this morning, but he was a man who believed that students needed to be inspired to study.

He believed that the prerequisite for all theological instructors was enthusiasm with regard to the subject, and preaching and biblical studies formed the great heart of the curriculum at Union Seminary. He had a long letter on the course of studies, and he gave this warning against the over-placing of polemics and apologetics. He says, when this is done, when there is an over-emphasis given to that side of training, it does not promote orthodoxy.

It produces a type of pastor dry, bitter, and barren in spirit. One of the most memorable experiences of his early days at Hampden-Sydney was the death of their two youngest sons, and there are in his letters many reflections upon this, and those who heard his teaching saw how it influenced him. There was a new tenderness and a new softness about Dabney's preaching from the death, the time of the death of his two children, a little time after he lost a third child, and I just read you one verse that he wrote.

Dabney wrote quite a good deal of verse, but I read you this. Oh, that poor one, mine ear might hear, that tiny voice, so high, so clear, singing Emmanuel's name among those loudest strains, that mightier throng. He says, with regard to his son's death, after one of them had died, he says, at any rate, it is in Christ's heavenly house, and under his guardian love, he says it, he means his son.

Now I feel, as never before, the blessedness of that redeeming grace and divine blood, which have ransomed my poor babe from all the sin and death which he inherited through me. And one of the student's writing of this period says, in a little while after this affliction, for the good of us all, he emerged from the gloom of this afflictive dispensation, and resumed his duties with quickened zeal and impressive unction. In his prayers thereafter in the classroom and chapel, his pupils felt and saw what is to be but rarely seen, how one of the most imperial of human wills may humbly bow, pass under the rod, and caress with filial affection the fatherly hand that chastises.

And he goes on to speak of Dabney's classroom prayers following this period. There is also in his biography a number of letters which Dabney wrote at this period, and they give you a tremendous impression of the earnestness of the man. He wrote to his brother, who had a family and children, and in the most moving terms exhorted him to make use of every opportunity to teach his children, and to lead them to Christ while they were still young.

Having, he says, having received such warnings of sin and death, and being brought so near to eternity, it is no time for me to be remiss in duty, or self-indulgent in the employment of my time. So, his earnestness increased. In 1856, he visited New York for the first time, and then two years later, in 58, he was asked to go back to preach the famous annual missionary sermon.

Dr. Broadus, one of the last century authorities on preaching, who has that book on homiletics that many of you will know, was present, and spoke of it as one of the most powerful sermons he ever heard. It's printed in the volumes of Discussions. The world, white for harvest, reap or it perishes.

This was in 1858, and it made him far more widely known in the North. Then, as I mentioned, in 1860, he was given the call to Princeton, which he declined. The shadow of the Civil War was now hanging across the whole land, and Dabney, in these years prior to the war, with many other ministers, worked as peacemakers, and this was their burden, that they had a duty to pacify the agitation which was growing in the country.

You perhaps remember how, when the 13 American colonies gained their independence in the 1780s, those 13 colonies were a separate entity. Then, by the constitution of 1788, they formed themselves into

an association, a union, but there existed, in the years that followed, considerable tension between their loyalty to their own identity as states, and their loyalty to the union, and this tension was at the heart of the troubles which led up to the Civil War in 1861. You, of course, do not expect me to enlarge upon that, but that is the the heart of the story.

There were those who believed that their first loyalty was to their state. There were others who believed that state loyalty had been superseded by loyalty to the union. The southerners adhered to the view that state loyalty was the primary loyalty, and Dabney was quick to point out that, by the constitution of 1788, Virginia had maintained her right to secede from a union, if she so willed.

However, this was at the center of things, and then there were many other aggravating factors. There was the growth of America westwards, the new territories, and then supremely, I say supremely as a cause of agitation, certainly the question of slavery. There was an abolition movement in the north which increased in strength and power, and by the 1850s the agitation in the north for the total abolition of slavery in the south was very strong.

You understand that slavery did not exist in the north, that is to say in the northern states, but in the southern states, in the 11, I think it was, southern states, slavery still existed. Not the slave trade, mind you, but slavery as an institution still existed in the south. Well, Dabney's version was to seek to pacify, and he wrote several moving pieces at this time, one of them called Christians Pray for Your Country.

He foresaw, as clearly as anyone did, the horrors which a civil war would bring. Let me just perhaps read you a word or two on that. He believed that there was a great deal of misunderstanding between the north and the south.

He says this miserable game goes on until at last blood breaks out, and the exhausted combatants are taught in the end that they are contending mainly for a misunderstanding of each other. There were at this time, according to Dabney's reckoning, about 28 million people in America, and of those, by his conservative estimate, there were at least four million Christians, and he took the view that if these four million in the north and south could maintain their unity, then the whole country could be preserved from war. But, as you know, that did not happen.

Then he speaks of what would come if war broke out. Is disunion, is civil war before us? A civil war whose atrocities may appall the world, the wiser tarts admit the fear. Let each man then place himself now, before it is too late, in the midst of the possible horrors of that fratricidal war.

Let him bring before his mind a country ravished, ravaged, its fields late, smiling with plenty, stained by blood, and the carnage of fellow citizens and brethren of a common Christianity, its cities sacked or deserted, its peaceful homes desolated, and its order displaced by fierce anarchy. And let him ask himself whether, as he stands amidst the ruins, he will be able to take heaven to witness that none of its guilt is in his skirt. Let each man remember that he must answer at the judgment seat of Christ for his conduct as a citizen, and see to it that when he meets there, the spirits of all that shall be slain, of all the wives that shall be widows, of the children that shall be consigned to orphanage and destitution, of all the hoary parents that shall be bereaved of their sons in this quarrel, and of all the ignorant damned through our neglect while we were waging the work of mutual destruction, he shall be able to appeal to the searcher of hearts that none of it was his doing.

Let us see, he says, that he must answer that question when that day comes. If brethren, we can do this, it will be well with you, however ill it may be with our miserable country, but if not, who can estimate that guilt? Well, the war at length came in the spring of 1861, the great civil war, certainly one of the most terrible wars that was ever fought. It continued through those long years until 1865.

It began, of course, partly through the possession of South Carolina, who Dabney spoke of as that little vixen, which is interesting because, you see, the South was not united originally. South Carolina was, as he believed, precipitate in their action, and they did not get the support of Virginia, but then it became apparent that the Northern states intended to coerce the South, and at length the war broke out. The South opened fire on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, the armies of the North began to march, and of course the South was thrown at once on the defensive, and the most bitter battles of the war were fought in Northern Virginia.

I don't know that you recall, but Virginia is divided in the North from Washington and Maryland by the Potomac, and it's quite a narrow strip of land. The distance between Richmond, the capital of Virginia, and Washington is a very short distance, and in that comparatively small area of land, thousands upon thousands were slain in the great battles which would have followed. Well, in the summer of 1861, Dabney acted as a chaplain to the Virginian army, and there are sermons that you will read in his discussions that he preached in the open air to the army at that time.

One of them is the Believers Born of Almighty Grace. Another one is Our Comfort in Dying. Then, in the autumn, he went back to Hampton-Sydney, and his opening lecture to his students was on the necessity of deep personal piety in the work of the ministry, and you see it anyway in Dabney's mind.

There was no conflict of loyalty between defending their country and the piety which they believed was so essential for the church. That was his judgment of the situation. In 1862, Dabney went back to the army, and he went back on the special plea of Thomas Jonathan Jackson, famous Stonewall Jackson.

Jackson was the commander of what became known as the Stonewall Brigade, the army of northern Virginia, probably the greatest general that the southern army had, and certainly one of the greatest generals in history. Jackson knew Dabney as a preacher and as a chaplain, but he pleaded with him to come and to join his staff as an officer, and Dabney did so. He did so on the grounds, he said, that he believed that the destruction of his country was so imminent that it behoved every Christian to stand to arms in her defense.

Interestingly enough, Dabney and Stonewall disagreed strongly with Merle Daubigny in Daubigny's assessment of Dwingley's death at Zurich. You remember how perhaps some of you have read Daubigny, and Daubigny speaks very movingly of Dwingley's mistake in going out to the battlefield. Well, Dabney and Stonewall certainly did not hold that view, and Dabney became the staff officer of Stonewall Jackson.

He was his senior staff officer, much to the surprise of the other officers, seeing this chaplain arrive in the camp in ordinary dress, carrying, I think he was, an umbrella, and they said, these men, of course, a number of whom were not Christians, they said, he's not afraid of Yankee bullets, and he preaches like hell, they said. Well, Dabney did become an extraordinary staff officer under Jackson. He was with Jackson in the Great Valley Campaign of 1862, when Jackson utterly demoralized the Army of the North.

You know the story, perhaps, of how the North had to keep putting up new commanders in the field, and each one in turn was defeated by Robert Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Jackson's tactics were along this

line. The Confederate Army of the South was always inferior in numbers to the Northern Army.

I don't think that was ever not the case. Often it would be something like 50,000 men fighting 120,000 men, and Jackson's tactics were generally, in the face of 120,000 men, he'd split his 50,000 into 25, and he'd take, he'd leave one 25,000 in the front of the battle, as it were, taking an enormous risk. The other 25,000 he'd take right round the flank.

They could march as no men ever marched, barefooted, often in rags. They would suddenly strike the Union Army of the North in one of their rear flanks, and he did this time and again. Well, I'm not here to speak about the battle.

It's a very interesting subject, and I don't really care to read it. Well, I must say something, however, on the Christianity of Stonewall Jackson. Robert Lee and Jackson were both outstanding Christians.

There's no, I think there's no one who questions that. Let me just give you this one quotation. A letter from Jackson to his wife, it was in 1862, after some of their great victories, and Jackson's name was being heralded abroad, and this is how he wrote to his wife.

He says, don't trouble yourself about these representations that are made of your husband. These things are earthly and transitory. There are real and glorious blessings I trust in reserve for us beyond this life.

It is best for us to keep our eyes fixed upon the throne of God, and the realities of a more glorious existence beyond the verge of time. It is gratifying to be beloved, and to have our conduct approved by our fellow men, but this is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is in reservation for us in the presence of our glorified Redeemer. I would not relinquish the slightest lessening of that glory for all that this world can give.

Then again, a little while later, he writes to his wife, speaking of one of the Sunday services in the camp. He says, Dr. Stiles' text was 1 Timothy 2, 5, and 6, who gave himself for all a ransom to be testified in due time. It was, he said, a powerful exposition of the word of God, and when he came to the word himself, he placed an emphasis upon it, and gave it a force which I never felt before.

And I realize that, truly, the sinner who does not, under gospel privileges, turn to God, deserves the agonies of perdition. It is a glorious thing to be a minister of the gospel of the Prince of Peace. There is no equal position in this world.

Well, Stonewall Jackson's many lies of him, one by Frank Vendiva, the mighty Stonewall, which was just published a few years ago. One other letter from Jackson to Dabney. Dabney was absent from the army at this time, and this is how Stonewall writes to him.

He says, I am very thankful to God for having permitted me to have the privilege of being blessed with your Christian and military labors as long as he did. Then he goes on to speak about what's been happening. While we were near Winchester, it pleased our ever merciful Heavenly Father to visit my command with the rich outpouring of his spirit.

There were probably more than a hundred inquiring the way of life in my old brigade. It appears to me that we may look for growing piety and many conversions in the army, for this is the subject of prayer. If so many prayers were offered for the blessing of God upon any other organization, would we not expect the answer of prayer to hear the petitions and send a blessing and so on? Well, it's a great thing, whatever

you think of the Civil War, that men in the agonies of that struggle, like Jackson, were preeminently concerned with the salvation of their men.

And you may read in Dabney and other biographies of the time that when battles were fought and the prisoners were taken and the wounded were dying, how, whether the men were northerners or southerners, how these Christians went amongst them, speaking to them of the gospel of Christ. There can be no doubt that hundreds, perhaps thousands, were brought to Christ on the verge of eternity and prior to their death. How, whether the men were northerners or southerners, how these Christians went amongst them, speaking to them of the gospel of Christ.

There can be no doubt that hundreds, perhaps thousands, were brought to Christ on the verge of eternity and prior to their death. I mention Jackson a little more because he figures largely in Dabney's life. Dabney was the biographer of Stonewall Jackson, the first biographer, and the two men were very close to each other.

The story of Jackson's death is a very tragic one. The battle was being fought in May of 1863 at Chancellorsville. Jackson was doing his usual tactic.

He was way out on one of the flanks himself. He was ahead of his own troops and having made a reconnaissance, he returned to his own lines in the evening twilight and returning to his own lines, he was shot by his own men. He was very severely wounded.

His arm was amputated. He was carried to a little house in Guinea and there he hovered between life and death for a number of days. His wife brought their little child to see him.

The account of Stonewall Jackson's death is a very moving one. How they sang the praise of Christ on his deathbed and then at last collapsed into delirium. He ordered up AP Hill to the front.

He was imagining he was back in the conflict and then his last words were, he said, let us cross the river and rest under the shade of the trees. And just a few weeks ago, Ernie Riesinger and I were at the spot where that happened. We visited this little house in Guinea where Stonewall Jackson died and to me and to Mr. Riesinger it was a very moving experience.

Jackson is certainly a glorified saint now. Well, after the death of Jackson, the Battle of Gettysburg followed. In July, the fortunes of the South began to turn.

The mass of men and equipment against them was overwhelming and at last the South was reduced and utterly exhausted, surrendered in 1865. It was a tremendous conflict and certainly one of the greatest tragedies that had ever taken place. Before I leave it and I'm afraid time is beating me all together.

I had wanted to say something on the attitude of these men to the Negro question and the slavery question because of course it was the great propaganda of the North and propaganda that was accepted by the world that the Civil War was fought simply for the abolition of slavery. I think I can give you sufficient evidence to show that that simply cannot be true. For these reasons, men like Dabney in the course of the war, they were advocating the emancipation of slaves and yet they believed that the war was just.

They were not fighting to preserve slavery. They were willing before the end of the war certainly to give up slavery and then before the war had even scarcely begun, Robert E. Lee, who was the commander-in-chief of the Southern Army, he held no slaves at all. A man such as Lee had no axe to

grind in the slightest in regard to slavery.

Then one must bear in mind of course that there were great differences and discrepancies in the way that slaves were treated in the South. Slaves in Christian homes were almost always as much as it were a part of the family as anyone else. They were born in the home, they lived there, they were nursed there, they were cared for, they died there.

One of Dabney's reasons why he could not go to Princeton was that it would break up his family and by his family of course he included the slaves. Some of you are aware that Dabney, like us all, sometimes spoke ill-advisedly with his lips and there are on record certain words spoken on the color issue by Dabney which had better not have been spoken. Nevertheless, I am quite convinced that in the heart of these Christians in the South, I say Christians in the South, there was very great regard and love to their colored slaves and servants.

You see this in many ways. There was an architect who wanted to rebuild Dabney's church. I didn't tell you that when Dabney was Professor of Theology he was also a preacher, a co-pastor in the college church at Hampden-Sydney.

This architect wanted to rebuild the church but numbers were growing and he said well the only way to do this properly, to build a pleasant comfortable church, is to exclude the Negroes from the church. Dabney simply would not hear of it. Stonewall Jackson, before the war began, sent all his Christian service amongst the Negroes.

He had a Negro class of a hundred. This was his Christian work before the Civil War and one of the very greatest of the Southern preachers, Gerardo, whose life I have here, he preached in a congregation with about 500 Negroes and 100 whites. And when some less spiritually minded whites asked him why he didn't go to a white congregation where he could earn much more money and so on, he had only one reason.

That is that God had called him to serve his colored brethren. And there are beautiful things in the life of Gerardo, of his work amongst the Negroes before the Civil War. I mustn't give you one but let me just mention two instances he gives us of Negroes that were dying.

I'm missing out the longer quote. He said he went into the house of this man who was a servant of a distinguished judge. He was dying.

As I entered his room he rubbed his hands together, chuckled with hilarious delight like that of a boy going home on Christmas Eve and exclaimed, I am going home. Oh how glad I am. So he passed away.

This was one of his colored members. The other was a woman, a mother, and when she died Gerardo was away as a chaplain in the war but she was delirious and she kept calling for him. She kept calling for me till the time that she expired.

Tell me, he says, that there was no true deep affection of masters to slaves and slaves to masters. It was often like that between near relatives. Well, the end of the war.

I must hasten on. More. Well Dabney went back to his work at the Theological College.

He had these very moving descriptions of how this work that had been building up so well, how it was as it were reduced to nothing. Some of the students came back, many of them never did. Those who came back often had an empty sleeve hanging where their arm had been or they were without a leg.

They had no proper clothes. They had their old army uniforms with the buttons covered because the rebel confederate buttons were not allowed to be seen and you can imagine these men gathering again to begin where they had left off five years before. Dabney went on teaching then at Hampden-Sydney till 1883.

And by that time there was this growing movement in Virginia with which or yes with which Dabney was not really in sympathy. He was already being regarded by a number of the ministers as an old fogey and a pessimist and so on. He opposed closer connections with the northern Presbyterian Church.

The church had split at the time of the Civil War in 1861. There was a move to bring the churches closer together but Dabney opposed that move on two grounds. I mention only one of them.

This one ground was that the northern church had accepted in large measure the invitation system theology, the new measures of sinning and so on and Dabney stood out against unions because of that. That did not make him popular even in the south at that time. So really he was isolated increasingly.

He was not wanted even in the seminary where he had spent 30 years. So he took up a new appointment at the age of 66 at Austin in Texas. He had incredible endurance and strength.

He took up this position in the chair of philosophy in Texas at the same time with his own money and his own time he started a theological school in Texas. He went on teaching there and preaching until 1894. The last 15 years of his life were spent in great pain.

He had a urinary infection a cystitis. Yes that's right which was operated on and instead of improving it got worse and he was in daily pain and suffering. Then not long after that his eyesight began to fail.

In 1886 it was becoming very dim he couldn't tell whether the sun was out or not. He went north to be examined by a doctor. He was told that there was no hope for his eyes.

The last 11 years of his life were spent in complete blindness. Before he lost his sight he had great struggles. Struggles to as we were hearing yesterday to bear the will of God.

A man with such energy and life to be reduced to such a condition. Nevertheless he went on with his work. You know on the very day that he died he was still working and writing to a secretary.

But the last 11 years were very hard years. There's a fine description how in the last General Assembly that he attended in 1897 I should really read it to you how when Dabney came up on the platform he had to be taken by the hand and led forward to pray at this meeting which he did. The most interesting and touching feature of the service was the presence on the platform and the introductory prayer of Dr Dabney.

As he was led forward in his blindness to the moderator's table feeling with trembling hands for its support it was a sight pathetic in the extreme. It may seem hardly proper to comment on such a prayer but this was so full and fitting and carried us in such humble gratitude to the splendid past and in such hopefulness and trust to the future and so voiced the present feelings and longings of the great audience that we could not help noticing it. And a little later one of them one of these men records something of the content of that

prayer how he prayed that they would be given a martyr's suit.

Then at that time he gave an address on the Westminster Confession of Faith speaking of course without any note and one of his colleagues also spoke at the same time and this is how he referred to Dabney. I think it's very beautiful. Speaking of his old companions this man Moses Hodge.

One of these he says one of these old companions now sits on this platform in view of this great audience unseen by him my classmate and lifelong friend. I am comforted by the assurance that the darkness which envelops him is but the shadow of God's wing beneath which he is all the nearer to his father's side and heart and he may say in words ascribed to another dear lord upon my bended knee I recognize thy purpose clearly shown my vision thou hast dimmed that I might see thyself thyself alone. Just before he died Dabney wrote a last letter to his sons and to his daughters.

My dear sons and daughters and their children I desire before I leave the world as my best legacy to my family my serious solemn advice to make choice of God for their God. He has been my father's God and the God of your mother's predecessor. I solemnly charge you to make it your first care to seek after peace with God and being reconciled to make it your study to please God in all things.

Then a letter follows I can't read it wait upon the means of grace beware of mere form after duty cry to the Lord for communion with him so you worship him in spirit follow God fully without turning aside and then he then the sum of the gospel is Christ crucified I commit my body to the dust hoping and expecting the spirit will in due time quicken my mortal body my spirit I commit to my Lord Jesus Christ to him I have entrusted it long ago your devoted father R.L. Dabney then appears two verses of scripture be kindly affectionate one to another remember a Sabbath day to keep it holy. Well I had promised to make some general comment and I don't really think we have time to do that let me just give you the outline if you can bear a few more minutes. There are two great emphases in Dabney's writings I take these.

The first is that he is very strong against a false anti-biblical secularism a philanthropy which was not Christian. This comes in his writings a great deal. He was concerned at the whole influence of the French Jacobin school Rousseau who and Benjamin Franklin who was influenced by them the kind of ultra-democracy which was being moved in the north.

Now Dabney says very clearly that it's not the business of the church to be engaged in politics. The church has no commission to advocate or to oppose any political doctrines logical or illogical Jacobinical Republican or Royalist as such. It is only when they are so advanced as to taint the integrity of her divine rule of faith that they concern her and then her concern is only to defend the testimony of her Lord committed to her.

This she must do. Now if you read Dabney you will find a great say great deal a good deal on the question of secular rights on women's rights on education on philosophy and so on but it all comes back to this that he believed that there was a movement on foot in the 19th century a movement which was contrary uh in various respects to a word of God. If you read him on women's rights for example you will find a most uh heart-stirring appeal.

He believed that it was not only woman's duty to be in the home but that was her highest privilege and the movement for the uh the vote to be given to woman and for woman's place in society to be equal to man that movement he saw as one of the greatest perils to the United States and I haven't time to read from him but you'll feel that if you read him that is a whole area of Dabney which is very relevant for the present

time. There's an anti-biblical theory of rights and it is that which he is concerned to oppose whether he always does it exactly and vividly I do not say but he certainly is speaking very relevantly to our times at that point. Then secondly and lastly his great warning near the end or indeed for many years towards the end was against the motive of using self-advantage and self-interest in evangelism and in the whole Christian life.

This quotation will make it clear to you just what I mean. Speaking of those who are doing this he says redemption is presented to the soul not as a moral good but simply as an advantage. The cross is to be prized and sought not for any purpose or desire of holiness but for its utility to an endangered selfishness.

The savior is degraded to subserve a function precisely similar to a life preserver or a lifeboat or a fire extinguisher or a dentist's faucet or an anodyne or a dose of other medicine. There is no real faith no real coming to Christ except that which embraces him in his three offices of prophet priest and king. Hence there is no real coming to Christ until the soul is so enlightened and renewed as truly to view not only its danger but its ignorance and pollution as intolerable evil.

So this is a tremendous emphasis in Dabney and when he writes on the decision sort of structure of evangelism that was coming in and the Arminianism which lay behind it his words really burn. But he foresaw what was coming as I believe perhaps nobody else did and you find that very fully in his work. So take his defense of the fourth commandment the Sabbath day.

The idea that we should preach the necessity of observing the seventh day in terms of its benefit to man. You've heard that of course said and of course it is true that a day of rest is a benefit to man but that is not the ground upon which the commandment is to be preached to men's consciences. It is that God has commanded and that loyalty to God then is the overriding duty.

This quotation I think will summarize Dabney's whole life and work. He says if the question is raised why the church does not grow faster we are persuaded that the real answer which most needs looking to is the one which our author that he's reviewing dismisses most hastily. The fault he says is not ecclesiastical but spiritual.

The real need is not new methods but fidelity to the old. A true revival in the hearts of ministers and Christians themselves. A faith that feels the power of the world to come.

A solemn and deep love for souls. What we most need is repentance and not innovation. That is Dabney's life's message.

A message not heeded in his day but he believed as his biographer said that a day would come when the old Calvinism would be re-vindicated. Though Calvinism, pure and simple, had been on the wane in his day he knew that Augustinianism once waned, died and was buried for a thousand years but was resurrected at the reformation because it was largely God's truth. He expected confidently in God's own time the re-vindication of Calvinism and then he would say therefore that the hope of the church was in the Holy Ghost and though he collided as he did and fought such a fight and died in comparative obscurity, in blindness physically but with the eye of faith illuminated so powerfully by the scripture he died in hope and in assurance that this truth would live again in the earth.

Let me then commend these precious volumes to you. Two volumes and if you have got sons you should buy copies so that they'll have them too and another generation will not forget this man as our fathers

forgot him.

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