

Birth, Ancestry and Early Formative Influences

by Martin Knapp

The sermon is a biographical account of Joseph H. Weber's early life, highlighting his birth, ancestry, and the negative influences that shaped him, but also his potential for greatness and his eventual conversion to Christianity.

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Psalm 107:20, Proverbs 22:6, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 5:18, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Personal Testimony"

Description

Martin Knapp preaches about the life of Joseph H. Weber, highlighting his journey from a life of sin and vice to becoming a soul winner for Christ. Despite early influences of Roman Catholicism, indulgence, strong drink, dancing, alcoholism, and theatricals, Weber's life was transformed by God's grace. His early perils and near-death experiences served as warnings and opportunities for God to work in his life, preparing him for a great life-work of leading others to Christ.

Transcript

Soon will come the close of time, the dissolution of worlds, the final judgment, and afterthat the unfoldings of eternity.

As our eyes shall then behold the countless constellations of the redeemed, and view the different degrees of glory with which they shine, an index of their deeds below, not faintest among the many that glow with surpassing splendor we, doubtless, shall behold a spirit, who, when here below, was known by the name of Joseph H. Weber.

When the question shall be asked by saints of other ages and beings from other worlds, "Whence came he?" thousands saved through his agency will make ready answer, "From old Earth, where he found us lost souls and led us to the Saviour."

While it is true that the revelations of the judgment will reveal all the details of his marvelous life, yet there are many who do not wish to wait until then to learn them. Many to whom his life has been a benediction, and many others who have heard of his great and continuous success as a soul winner, are anxious to know all about him, his methods, his works, and the secret of his power with God and man. Nor is it idle curiosity that prompts them to seek this knowledge, but a desire to thus be better fitted for their especial work. It is also humbly hoped that many who have never met the evangelist may be, in this way, blessed.

BIRTH AND ANCESTRY

Of the eleven children given to his parents, Louis and Elizabeth Weber, Joseph Hulse Weber was the second. He was born Oct. 12, 1855, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The state so prolific of Presidents, and others famed in the annals of political renown, has the honor of being his birthplace.

If souls won for Christ is in a great degree to determine man's glory at the judgment and through eternity, then, doubtless, of Ohio's sons this consecrated worker will appear most illustrious of them all.

His father was born in Alsace, and was a German. His grandfather was a brave soldier under the first Napoleon, and an educated man. His mother, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Oatman, was born on Blennerhasset Island, situated in the Ohio river. Her father was born in New York State and her mother in Virginia.

With the Wesleys, Moody, Bishop Taylor, and the Booths of Salvation Army fame, he had the honor to spring from a large family, having five brothers and five sisters with whom to share his sorrows and his joys.

He loves homes in which the happy voices of many children mingle, and sometimes gives sharp thrusts at those false standards of society that have led her votaries to resort to criminality to keep their families small.

With the worthies mentioned above, Lincoln, Grant, Garfield, John Bunyan, Bishop Simpson, Spurgeon and hosts of others who have reached the topmost round of earthly fame, he also was privileged with being born in the vale of poverty and in a humble home.

His father was a cooper in the earlier part of his life, and is now a farmer. He, himself, in his boyhood and youth, was first a bartender in a saloon and then a laborer in a paper factory.

Hence Mr. Weber adds another to the long list of worthies that have sprung not only from homes of poverty but from the haunts of vice and have by God's help risen to be a boon to their fellow-men and thus a blessing to His kingdom.

The names of such will shine on the pages of history, and many of them in the annals of eternity, when the memory of myriads of the children of luxury and ease shall have dissolved like the morning mist. Such examples ought to nerve every child of poverty and toil, yea, of ignorance and vice, with an impulse to follow in their footsteps.

They ought to rebuke every proud and haughty Pharisee, who, with averted face and tighter grasp of his robe, passes such persons "on the farther side," and also stimulate the Christian worker to everywhere be looking for these "diamonds in the rough," that, polished by saving grace, shall shine in the new Jerusalem when the names of the proud and haughty of earth, however exalted here, shall have rotted in oblivion.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH -- EARLY FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

"Heredity and early environments determine the currents of the after-life," "As the twig is bent the tree is inclined," are in a sense very wise and truthful sayings, but the hero of this book is a marked exception to the sentiments therein expressed. Herein is one of the many mysteries that shroud his eventful life.

Among his ancestry, as nearly as we can learn, prior to his own conversion, there had not been one really spiritual person. Therefore, whatever may be found in him as a Christian must be traced not to his first birth but to his second. On the advent of a soul into this world two forces seek to mold its character, right and wrong. Two beings, Christ and Satan, seek to place around it influences that will so impress it in its earliest years as to determine its destiny. In Mr. Weber's life wrong and Satan seemed from his earliest moments to possess great vantage ground, and early deprived the boy of safeguards such as Christ seeks to throw around the young, and swept him, well-nigh defenseless, into a current of subtle and mighty influences which, if not counteracted, would secure his certain ruin for time and for eternity. These were:

1. The example of unconverted parents. His father was a slave to strong drink. His mother religions in her way, but that way was the way of Catholicism.

2. Roman Catholicism. His ancestry on his father's side for centuries had been staunch Roman Catholics. His mother on her marriage espoused her husband's faith and became one of the most ultra of the adherents of the Roman Church. Hence the children were reared at the feet of priest and pope and baptized into that faith. Thus by the minions of popery in the susceptible days of childhood he was bound with influences which proved chains such as only the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" would be able to break, not to Jesus, but to the icy altars of Ritualism and Formality. Lest he should early see his sad condition his eyes were blinded by a bandage rightly named "Popish Error," and thus from his earliest impressions he was in darkness, error, and superstition. Satan laughed and felt his victim sure. Rome said triumphantly, "I've got the first ten years of the child's life, I now defy Protestantism to win him back." The challenge was afterwards taken up, and with what results the coming pages will declare.

3. Indulgence. The parents, through false views of training children, perhaps thinking that indulgence was an index of parental love, allowed the boy to usually do as he pleased, and so the poisonous plants of disobedience and kindred vices grew almost unchecked in his young life. Oh, when will parents learn that such indulgence is keenest cruelty to the child, and that prompt obedience to the father and mother is to be the foundation, in after-life, of obedience to the Government and to God, and of a life of purity, happiness and usefulness, both in this world and the world to come

4. Strong drink. In his very early boyhood it was regularly given him by the hands of his own parents, and a love for it, doubtless in part inherited, soon took possession of him. What a marvel it will be if any power in the universe shall rescue and save from this demon, who has ruined millions in his murderous career.

5. Dancing. Under this deceptive siren he soon learned to love society and the indulgences connected with such gatherings, and all the baser elements of his nature being thus appealed to through circumstances entirely beyond his control, what wonder if, as one has written of him, "he naturally became very wild and hard; he was, like Bunyan, a 'ringleader' in all kinds of wickedness and sin," and knowing as he does all of the seductive wiles that this enchantress uses, first to charm and then to ruin the young, no wonder that at times he exposes them in tones that startle her defenders, and cause hundreds of the young to flee from her murderous thralldom. He was a great lover of music and became owner of a violin. He then was invited to play for the dances. He took great delight in this and went from bad to worse. Thoughts of these scenes of revelry, and the dissipations connected with them as he grew older, have never ceased to cause him pain. No wonder that he shudders, for thousands at the dance-house have left virtue behind, and arm in arm with lust have followed swiftly in the steps of her whose "house is the way to hell." Some one whispers, "But I know church members who uphold dances." The church member who upholds them in a the light of the way they have led and are leading thousands, is either a fool or a farce, or both, and is preparing an

awful reckoning for the judgment.

6. Alcoholism. Twin brother to the ballroom is the saloon. Each have blighted thousands and sent them reeling under the cruel lashes of black despair to the grave and an agonizing eternity. Both are paid servants of Satan, and well do they work for him. Both are greedy whirlpools, whose outer currents at first amuse, then excite, then startle, then, as they near the gurgling center, affright and then engulf. On their fatal currents is borne modesty, virtue, honor, industry, innocence, hope, love and life itself. Both are fiends who seek to lure with cunning wiles their victims, until they have slain their guardian, Self-control, and then they bind them with huge chains in the dungeon of despair, from which none but Christ can deliver. This agent of the enemy sought the boy who, as we have seen, though but a lad, was already terribly tangled in the meshes of sin. It is said that, "One day, while selling brooms, he went into a saloon to 'drive a bargain,' when he was accosted by the proprietor with, 'I don't want a broom but I want to buy you, at first the boy was somewhat startled, but upon explanation, and further conversation, a bargain was made that he should attend bar. He was done with brooms, matches, slice-strings, and fans, for he would actually be a salesman, which struck him as being something rather elevating. He returned home in high glee, and informed his parents of his project. They were both unfavorable to the move, but he prevailed on his father to go down to the saloon and see the man. The father's better nature and judgment prevailed, and Joe was informed that he must attend school rather than tend bar. He was not to be so easily frustrated in his coveted honors. When the following Monday came, his mother said, 'You must go to school,' but he desired to become a rich man, and so went to the saloon and began work as a bar tender. He was so small that the proprietor had to erect a rack behind the bar so that he could stand to deal out 'hell and destruction,' as he now terms it. He was with this saloon-keeper for five months." Here his love for liquor was further strengthened, and as if all of these influences were not sufficient to secure both the present and future ruin of the boy, another agency was brought to aid those already doing all too well their work in insuring the permanent downfall of the youth.

7. Theatricals. It would seem as if enough agencies were already devoted to his ruin without the last mentioned. Well did Satan understand, however, that, unless captured and kept, that his kingdom would be a tremendous loser, and so he plied all of his most cunning arts. Theatricals appeared to him as to many others in the stolen robes of innocence, and so like many others he thus was easily led astray. At her suggestion an amateur minstrel troupe was organized, of which he soon became the leading spirit, and with him, as with many others, this was a steppingstone to that which was even worse.

The dance-house, the rink, the saloon, the circus, and the theater are Satan's churches, in which he seeks to ripen spirits in their alienation from God and in their fitness for the penalty beyond the grave. Their associations chime with the chords of an unregenerate heart, whether it beat in the breast of the openly profligate or of the false professor. As men in poisoning rats hide the poison in much meal, so Satan mingles the poison with which he seeks to ruin, through these agencies, with the meal of music and much else that is easing and in other relations would be unobjectionable.

"The Sabbath to him was a day of evil and high carnivals. His associates were all evil, as bad as he, and together they broke all of the commands of the Decalogue." Such was Joseph H. Weber in his early life. Young in years, but old in vice. Quaffing iniquity as if it were some delicious nectar, and loving the deadly draught. Manacled by evil habits, yet caressing the very irons that bound him! Chained to evil companions, which, as Satan's sheriffs, stand ready to bear his spirit to the cells of hopeless doom, yet reveling in such associations. Like Bunyan, he was a master-piece of what sin could do. Evidently Satan has done his work so well that it never can be undone, unless a miracle shall interpose. By these seductive influences "Joe,"

as he was then called, was pushed out into the Niagara of sin and dissipation, and yet there were many traits in the boy that, if redeemed from sin's service, would be of more value than gold or precious gems.

He was born to be a leader. At home, at school, in sports, at his work, and wherever he moved among the youth of his acquaintances, he was the center. This trait, consecrated to God in after life, has done much to help him lead on to spiritual victories.

He easily made friends. One has said of him, "He was not without friends, for he always won them wherever he went. His warm heart could only invite; he was himself friendly."

He had mental grip. He could apply himself to his studies, quickly master them, and then have plenty of leisure time in which to play the rogue.

He was possessed of an iron will. Whatever he undertook he persisted in. Doubtless this element was one thing that led his parents to oppose him as little as possible. His will was like an engine under high pressure upon a down grade with no brakes, everything had to get out of his way or suffer. Referring to this, a former biographer writes, "We notice here an element of firmness cropping out, which is a requisite of success in his present work; this is seen prominently in all his meetings. He has a will, and that must govern."

He was benevolent. By nature, he knew not what it was to be stingy. He loved to make money, and had, even when a child, unusual faculties to succeed in business, but it was not that "gold fever," which loves to hoard, but a desire to get for the pleasure he might have in its using. It is said of him, that he would share the last farthing, and always delighted in giving to the needy. It may be that we shall finally find that the Master's teaching, "Give, and it shall be given unto you," found verification in his life.

These, and other traits, characterized his early life and, like gold dust on the surface, speak of what may yet prove a rich mine underneath. If it be there, it is bedded so deeply beneath the adamant of sin, that no one with less than Almighty power will ever be able to reach it. Perhaps he yet may come in contact with such an One. Be patient.

EARLY PERILS

Not only was the soul of the youth, by such agencies as have been described in constant jeopardy, but sickness and accident both conspired to deliver his body into the hands of greedy Death, and thus shut him forever from the great life-work that God was finally to fit him for.

Jesus in Childhood had his Herod; Moses his Pharaoh; Wesley, the fire fiend. Some way it seems as if all the destructive forces of both the moral and material world are permitted to spend their fury upon many whom God is fitting for great usefulness.

Weber was to be no exception. This part of his experience is thus related by another: When between two and three years of age, he was taken very sick; no one expected him to recover. Before he was six, he had fallen into the canal twice, and once came very near drowning, but was rescued by a gentleman who happened to be passing by at the time. These warnings were not accepted, but his parents allowed him to go on in the way of sin, either without questioning the propriety of their course, or else feeling, with many foolish parents, that they were unable to control their son, and hence not responsible. When eight years old, he was again taken sick, and for long days his parents and friends despaired of his life. It was the dreaded scarlet fever, but careful nursing and proper medical attention enabled him so completely to

recover that his parents were again hopeful. But immediately the dropsy set in, and for five long months he was at death's door, gyrating between life and death; most of the time the symptoms were decidedly unfavorable. One day the anxious mother went to market to purchase the necessaries for the table. She was naturally in a great hurry, as her boy was "sick nigh unto death." The old lady who was selling vegetables asked her why she was in such a big hurry. Her reply was, "I have a very sick boy at home." The market woman's sympathy was at once elicited, and upon inquiry found the disease to be dropsy. Like most "old ladies," she had her remedy, and said, "Oh, I can give you a cure for that." The mother, all the more credulous by her vigils and anxiety, was eager to learn the remedy in which the market woman had so much confidence. The remedy was "carrot seed and juniper berries," from which a tea was made of equal parts. These were immediately tried, and to the astonishment of all, proved to be the remedy, for he commenced at once to improve, and in two weeks' time the dropsy had all disappeared. For a few weeks, Joe improved, he became more like himself, and all were rejoicing that the boy was out of danger. But the way of the transgressor is hard. Before convalescence was complete, he was taken with intermittent fever, and again the death angel seemed to demand his prey. He grew worse rapidly, and at one time so near gone that the family and friends gathered around the bedside, weeping and expecting that each moment would be his last. While thus watching, their hearts beating wildly and their faces suffused with scalding tears, the dying child began to sing a song of rare sweetness. To the sad listeners it seemed as if the gates of heaven were ajar, and the angelic choirs were chanting his requiem. It seemed more the music of heaven than of earth. Amid the sobbing the grandfather said, "Now he is gone." They thought of the dying swan, "who chants a doleful hymn to his own death," and the song became the portent of his dissolution.

But his time had not yet come, for the God who rules in all the affairs of men had a work for him yet to do. He rallied, he gradually grew better, but his convalescence was slow and tedious. For nearly a year he was sick, confined for the most part of the time to his bed or the house. Though slowly, yet surely, he recovered, and in time was able to start again to school; but as is the case with many who are older, the impressions thus made, wore away or were drowned in the whirl of sinful pleasures, and so the young life sped on, a perfect "tornado" of frivolity and sinfulness. What a transformation, if, by some unseen power, it should yet become a tornado of frighteousness and vehement zeal to save a lost world!

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