

HISTORY SPEAKS

History helps us to know that one event happened before another event. We build upon the foundation laid before us. This way we can examine the relationship between the events and determine what road will be destructive to our cause and what role will be beneficial to our cause and follow it. In so doing, we discover our place in time through stories of freedom and inequality, justice and struggle, loss and achievement, courage and triumph. The stories of faith from the past offer people direction and vindicate their values and ideals.

Moreover, history is integral to preserve freedom and liberty, for we owe much of it to the people before us. If a preceding moral event was followed by another moral event, freedom and liberty advances. If a preceding moral event was followed by an evil event, we take a step backward. Perhaps, for this reason it is written, “...*the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him use him...*” (2 Chr. 16:9). If there is only one person with a love for the truth in his heart, he can plant seeds for the next generation, and by the testimony of his faith in God, leave the world in a better place. In this way history plays a role in inspiring leaders with genuine role models from the past as they navigate their way through the maze into the future with its ever-changing complexities.

But when there is dearth of witnesses, it leaves succeeding generations bereft of the truths that can make them free because there were precious few to live it. But all is not lost. If in their hunger for knowledge they pull back the pages of history, they will find testimonies of people armed with moral courage doing great things, whose report might be the very impetus they need to go higher. Lincoln was one such person. He sought to make a difference in the world, and with little means except an insatiable hunger for knowledge, he taught himself. Later he would say reading “...*is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems. And not only so. It gives a relish, and facility, for successfully pursuing the [yet] unsolved ones.*”¹ He found a place in the history books, and left a veritable record of his faith in God.

Over 150 years, Lincoln’s life and words have inspired countless generations. Where did he get such wisdom? Lincoln studied many world leaders, but the one leader whose knowledge he buried in his heart and applied to his life, and particularly so in times of hardship, was Jesus Christ. It was His wisdom that prospered him. G. Frederick Owen, writing in *Abraham Lincoln-The Man & His Faith*, states that Lincoln first heard the “sublime Bible stories and verses” from his mother’s lips. “And with her encouragement, he began to commit to memory short Bible verses laid down in the Bible. Later he could repeat from memory whole Psalms and other chapters.” Having developed a deep respect for the rights of others, he became a voice of those who had none. “*It is not my nature, when I see a people born down by the weight of their shackles—the oppression of tyranny—to make their life more bitter by heaping upon them greater burden; but rather would I do all in my power to raise the yoke, then to add anything that would tend to crush them.*”²

Thus, he became an inspiration to me. At a time when there is so much incivility and hatred, he shows us that we do not have to be mean spirited to make a difference in the

¹ Address before Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, 9/30/1859

² G. Frederick Owen, *Abraham Lincoln-The Man & His Faith*, p. 119

world. We can follow the teaching of Jesus Christ and change the world, but we must read and study to engraft it in our heart before we can be transformed by it. The Pilgrims followed the teachings of Christ and created a nation; Lincoln followed the teachings of Christ and saved it—all because of a seminal event that occurred over 2,000 years ago. This was when Jesus Christ took the world on Himself and overcame it for us.

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