



"You will know them by their fruits." Mt. 7:16

BENJAMIN ABBOTT

(Methodist)

Benjamin Abbott was born on Long Island, N. Y., in the year 1732. But little is known in regard to his early life, as he did not embrace the religion of the Saviour, until he was forty years of age. His father dying while Benjamin was a lad, and having made provision in his will, that his sons should be put out to learn trades, Benjamin was indentured as an apprentice to a hatter, in Philadelphia, where he soon fell into bad company, and became addicted to card-playing, cock-fighting, and many other evil practices. Leaving his master before the expiration of his apprenticeship, he went to New Jersey, and labored on a farm with one of his brothers. Soon after this he married, but the domestic relation, instead of having the effect of drawing him into the paths of virtue, only seemed to rekindle the desire for vicious indulgence. So that he continued to live in rebellion against God, drinking, fighting, swearing, gambling, and attending fairs and other places of public resort, for the purpose of meeting with those of his own disposition, and sinful habits. In a word, he was what even the world would call, a very wicked man, and the only redeeming trait in his character at that time, appears to have been a disposition to treat his family kindly, and provide for them comfortably, a trait not often found in the case of the hardened drunk.

Yet during this wild career of wickedness and sin, Abbott was not without a respect for religion. He even attended church, and professed to be a Presbyterian in sentiment, and was often convicted of his sins and wickedness, by the Spirit of God which spoke in thunder tones to his guilty conscience, and alarmed him of his danger and his doom. Often did he make promises of amendment, and as often did he forget to fulfill them. When he was about thirty-three years of age, he had a dream of being carried to hell, where the devils put him into a vice, and tormented him till his body was all covered with blood: he was then hurried into another apartment, where he was pierced by the stings of scorpions, and as fast as he would pull one out, another would strike him; he was next introduced to a lake of fire, into which the devils were throwing the souls of men and women. Two regiments of devils were moving through the chambers of the damned, blowing up the flames, and when it came his turn to be thrown in, one devil took him by the head, another by the feet, and while in the act of throwing him in, he awoke, and found it was a dream. We make mention of this dream not because of its singularity, but as a specimen of the horrors which haunt the pillow of the wretched inebriate. The effect of such terrible and awful visions of the night, -- which appeared as realities to him, -- was such, that he would promise solemnly to amend his ways; but, alas, poor man, he had not as yet learned the necessity of seeking divine aid in so doing; thus he lived until he was forty years of age, a miserable sinner, being "without hope, and without God in the world," tormented by day and by night, and yet in his ignorance, not knowing precisely how to escape from his apparently hopeless condition.

One Sabbath-day his wife attended a Methodist meeting, a few miles distant from their place of residence, On her return, Abbott asked her how she liked the preacher. She, answered that he was as great a preacher as she ever heard in her life, and persuaded her husband to go and hear for himself. Accordingly, on the next Sabbath, Mr. Abbott went and heard a sermon from the text, "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Says Mr. Abbott in relation to the services, "The preacher was much engaged, and the people were crying all through the house; this

greatly surprised me, for I never had seen the like before. The sermon made no impression on me; but when he came to the application, he said, ‘ It may be, that some of you may think that there is neither God, nor devils, nor hell, only a guilty conscience; and indeed, my friends, that is bad enough. But I assure you that there is both heaven and hell, God and devils.’ “ Mr. Abbott now remembered his dreams, and his misspent life, and all his sins were brought vividly before his mind, and he returned home under the influence of deep convictions, but still was ignorant of the way of salvation.

Soon after this, the preacher went to preach in the neighborhood where Mr. Abbott resided, and as Methodist preaching was a new thing, many went out to hear him; he preached with power, and the word took such hold of Mr. Abbott, that it “shook every joint in his body,” and he cried aloud for mercy. When the sermon was ended, the people flocked around the preacher and began to dispute on doctrines; as for Abbott, they said he was going mad. He returned home in great distress of mind, and having been brought up under the teachings of Calvinism, and believing in the doctrines of election and reprobation, he concluded that he was a reprobate, and that he must be damned, do what he would. (The old Calvinism was quite grim. They believed God chose the saved and lost ahead of time, and there was nothing the soul could do to change his destiny....) From this time onward, his burden of sin increased, and he was tempted to commit suicide, and no doubt would have done so, had it not been for the reflection that the torment of the damned is still more insupportable than the scolding of a guilty conscience; at length, after suffering the most intense anguish of spirit, and having been properly instructed in relation to the way of salvation by faith, he risked his all on Jesus Christ, and found rest to his soul on the 12th day of October, 1772. “My heart,” he says, “felt as light as a bird, being relieved of that load of guilt which before had bowed down my spirits, and my body felt as active as when I was eighteen, so that the outward and inward man were both animated.” “I arose and called up the family, and took down the Testament, and the first place I opened to, was the ninth chapter of Acts, where Saul breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the Church or disciples of the Lord, and if I had had a congregation I could have preached, but having none but my own family, I expounded the chapter and exhorted them, and then sang and prayed. After breakfast, I told my wife that I must go and tell the neighbors what the Lord had done for my soul.

He accordingly commenced reading the different Confessions of Faith, Articles of Religion, &c., of the various Churches, and then read the Bible from beginning to end, with reference to the same subject. His natural feelings would have prompted him to join some other Church than the Methodists, but after delaying the matter for some six months after his conversion, and while one day meditating prayerfully upon the subject, he exclaimed, “I am a Methodist! I am a Methodist!” He then returned home resolving to be such, although he knew that persecution and reproach would be poured upon him from every quarter. In a few days after, he joined the Methodists, and his wife being happily converted to God, she united with them also, and in the course of three months after his wife’s conversion, six of their children were also converted to God; a small class was formed in the neighborhood, and Mr. Abbott was appointed Leader.

[Transcriber Note: I insert here the account of Benjamin Abbott’s sanctification, taken from a different source:]

He meets soon after with a Methodist preacher who talks with him about Wesley’s views of sanctification, and he resolves to seek that higher grace. “I was now,” he says, “engaged for the blessing more than ever. Soon after, Daniel Ruff came upon the circuit, and my house being a preaching place, he came and preached, and in the morning, in family prayer, he prayed that God would sanctify us soul and body. I repeated these words after him, ‘Come, Lord, and sanctify me, soul and body!’ That moment the Spirit of God came upon me in such a manner that I fell flat to the floor. I had not power to lift hand or foot, nor yet to speak one word; I believe I lay half an hour, and felt the power of God running through every part of my soul and body, like fire consuming the inward corruptions of

fallen, depraved nature. When I arose and walked out of the door, and stood pondering these things in my heart, it appeared to me that the whole creation was praising God; it also appeared as if I had got new eyes, for everything appeared new, and I felt a love for all the creatures that God had made, and an uninterrupted peace filled my breast. In three days God gave me a full assurance that he had sanctified me, soul and body.

Source for the data on Abbott's sanctification: "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. I, Book I, Chapter X, by Abel Stevens] [The Previous Account Continued]

"Next day we went to our appointment, where the congregation was chiefly Germans, and a well-behaved people. Here the Lord wrought wonders, various ones fell to the floor, and several found peace. I lost both the power of my body and use of my speech, and cried out in a strange manner.

The people also cried aloud; here I thought I should frighten them, being in a strange country and among a people of a strange language; but glory to God, it had a contrary effect, for they continued all night in prayer.

"Next morning, I set out with about twenty others for my appointment, where we found a large congregation. When I came to minister, the power of the Lord came in such a manner, that the people fell all about the house, and their cries might be heard afar off. This alarmed the wicked, who sprang for the doors in such haste, that they fell one over another in heaps. The cry of mourners was so great, I thought to give out a hymn to drown the noise, and desired one of our English friends to raise it, but as soon as he began to sing, the power of the Lord struck him and he pitched under the table, and there lay like a dead man. I gave it out again, and asked another to raise it: as soon as he attempted, he fell also. I then made the third attempt, and the power of God came upon me in such a manner, that I cried out, and was amazed. I then saw that I was fighting against God, and did not attempt to sing again. Mr. Boehm, the owner of the house, and a preacher among the Germans, cried out, 'I never saw God in this way before.' I replied, 'this is a Pentecost, father.' 'Yes, be sure,' said he, clapping his hands, 'a Pentecost, be sure!' Prayer was all through the house, up stairs and down.

"Next day, at my appointment, we had a crowded house, and the Lord laid to his helping hand; many fell to the floor, and several cried aloud for mercy. After preaching, an old Presbyterian gentleman attacked me, and told me it was all the work of the devil – that God was a God of order – and this was perfect confusion. Well, said I, if this be the work of the devil, the people, many of whom then lay on the floor as dead men, when they come to, they will curse and swear and rage like devils; but if it be of God, their notes will be changed. Soon after, one of them came to, and he began to praise God with a loud voice; and soon another, and so on, until divers of them bore testimony for Jesus. Hark! Hark! Said I to my old opponent – brother, do you hear them? This is not the language of hell, but the language of Canaan. I then appointed prayer-meeting at a friend's house, in the neighborhood. After the people had gathered, I saw my old opponent among them. I gave out a hymn, and brother S. went to prayer, and after him myself. I had spoken but a few words, before brother S. fell to the floor, and soon after him every soul in the house, except myself and my old Presbyterian opponent and two others. I arose, and gave an exhortation, and the two men fell – one as if he had been shot; and then there was every soul down in the house, except myself and my old opponent. He began immediately to dispute the point, telling me it was all delusion and the work of the devil. I told him to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. As they came to, they all praised God, and not one soul but what professed either to have received justification or sanctification, eight professed the latter.

After laboring as a local preacher for upward of sixteen years, he felt it his duty to join the traveling connection, which he did in 1789, at the Conference held in Trenton, New Jersey, in April of that year, and was appointed to Dutchess circuit, in the State of New York. The circuit was new, and he found but a few converted souls on it. He, however, began to preach the doctrine of Bible holiness, and although the people mostly belonged to other churches, yet the Lord graciously owned his word, and rendered

his labors a blessing to the people.

Mr. Abbott's last appointment was Cecil circuit, in the State of Maryland, where he proved himself to be the same holy man that he had been for the previous twenty years. On the 3d of February, 1795, he was seized with a violent shivering, which was followed by scorching fever, and pain in his side. The doctor being called, pronounced his case hopeless, and gave him up as a dead man. He, however, revived, and was able to walk and ride out, and even to attend Church, and visit his friends.

About the first of June, [1796] Mr. Abbott was able to attend another funeral, at which the officiating clergyman in the course of his remarks said, that, "Death is the king of terrors, and that he makes cowards of us all." After sermon, Mr. Abbott took occasion to converse with the minister, and dissent from the doctrine taught in the above quotation. "For," said he, "perfect love casteth out fear;" "and for my part," said he, "I can call God to witness that death is no terror to me I am ready to meet my God, if it were now!"

On the 12th of August, he being very feeble, said to a brother who came to see him, "Brother F. I am going to die, and tomorrow you must go to Philadelphia for Brother McCluskey, to come and preach my funeral sermon:" to which the brother replied, "Father Abbott, you may continue some time yet, as the time of your death is uncertain." "No," said Mr. Abbott, "I shall die before you would get back from Philadelphia, unless you travel in the night." The brother replied, "It will not do to go before your decease." "Why," rejoined Mr. Abbott, "I shall die, and I do not wish my body kept until it is offensive: you know the weather is warm, and the distance is considerable." "That is true," replied the brother, "but if I were to go to Philadelphia for brother McCluskey to preach your funeral sermon and you not dead, the friends would laugh at me, and he would not come." "Ah!" said he, "it may be so; I never thought of that; perhaps it will be best to stay till I am dead."

On the day but one, following the above conversation, this eminently useful servant of God breathed his last. The last sentence which he intelligibly articulated was, "Glory to God! I see heaven sweetly opened before me!" After this, he frequently repeated single words as "See! -- See! -- Glory! Glory!" &c., in the meanwhile clapping his emaciated hands together, until nature became exhausted, and he ceased at once to work and live. He died in Salem, New Jersey, on the 14th of August, 1796, in the sixty-fifth year of his age, and twenty-third of his ministry. He was buried according to his oft-repeated desire, in the Methodist burial-ground in Salem. His funeral being attended by a large concourse of his fellow-citizens, and by Christian ministers of different denominations.

Thus lived, and thus died, Benjamin Abbott, "a brand plucked from the burning – a man who had wasted forty years of his life in sin and vice, and yet, who, through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, became as eminent for piety and usefulness in the Church of God, as he before had been notorious for wickedness and folly. It is scarcely necessary to add many remarks in relation to the character of Mr. Abbott as a preacher of the Gospel, after having given the lengthy extracts which are found in this chapter. Suffice it to say that for burning zeal and power in the pulpit, he probably never had a superior in the Methodist Church. In regard to education, Mr. Abbott was probably behind the most of the preachers of that day, but what he lacked in knowledge he made up in power, and the influence he exerted over the minds of a congregation was truly wonderful, and the more so in view of his want of education. The great secret of his success, however, may be traced to his depth of piety; for being one of those persons to whom "the Lord had forgiven much," he felt it his duty to "love much" in return, and hence his burning desire for the salvation of souls. It is barely possible that Mr. Abbott was too much of a zealot – that he allowed things to be carried too far in some of his meetings, although we would by no means affirm this; for who can limit the power of God, or who place bounds to the operations of his grace? It is much easier to cry "confusion" and "disorder," than to define the precise limit at which confusion begins and order ends. Were our modern lovers of order to undertake the task of stating how far the apostles and disciples were orderly or otherwise on the day of Pentecost; they

would find it a more onerous task than simply to find fault with the exhibitions of God's power in latter days, especially under the labors of Abbott: "Peace to his ashes."

Source: "The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers" by P. Douglass Gorrie

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