The Future of Our Country

The Lost Speech by Bishop Matthew Simpson

Restored by Clarence True Wilson

Before a massive audience in the Academy of Music, New York, November 3, 1864, Bishop Simpson delivered for the sixtieth time in the cities of the Republic his great war speech. It was only a few days before the election and the people were filled with interest and patriotic fervor. With every available bit of space taken, even to the standing room, the Bishop said:

“Ladies and Gentlemen;

“In ordinary times before such an audience you would expect the discussion of some topic of science or literature, but these are not ordinary times. The heart of the nation is stirred by the scenes of the great conflict through which we are passing; a conflict fearful in its dimensions and terrible in its results. The period is a conflict in ideas as well as of swords, and everywhere amid all classes of society the question arises in every heart, either uttered or silently thought, “What shall come of it all?”

“First, let me assure my audience that I am not here making a partisan campaign speech, but that I shall stand far above all party and treat this subject fairly. One great thought now occupies every mind and one feeling moves every heart. All eyes are turned toward the front and the ears of anxious men listen for the latest tidings. Loving wives wait for husbands and mothers long to see their sons who are now on the battlefield. Many weep and mourn and all are asking: ‘When shall the end of these things be?’

God has given us the world’s history as a slight guide by which to obtain some insight into that futurity. I have no gift of prophecy, but in history we learn of the rise and fall of nations and the one lesson of history is that God reigns, that he rules for the good of mankind, for their ruin never, except when they combine to plot against the Lord and against his anointed. There is a Providence that shapes our ends. I will ask the audience, therefore, to go with me while I point out some of the indications of what the future of our nation will be.

“There is a God who rules among nations and orders all things, and we must view the indications of his providence and his designs in regard to the destiny of our nation. I will stand far above all party dialect; I have no epithets for any of my fellow citizens. We are sailing in the great ship of State, and we are to be led by the Ship Constitution our fathers formed, and I believe the old ship will yet ride among the breakers and by and by in spite of all dangers, shall be safely moored in the harbor of peace and prosperity. (Great applause erupts).

“There are four possible issues in this conflict. First, it is a possible result of the conflict in which this great nation is engaged that we may become prey to some foreign powers and be reduced under the control of some foreign nations. Second, there is again the possible issue as
the result of this conflict that the nation shall be divided into two or more separate confederacies. There is a third possible issue that the South might win and the nation shall remain together, but with its present institutions overthrown and the Southern institutions and principles established throughout the country instead of those that now control our nation. The fourth and last issue is that our nation, having passed through the fiery ordeal, shall emerge from the conflict purer, more glorious, and more useful than ever before. (Applause).

At this point I will simply say that I believe it is the design of providence to secure this last result. (renewed thunderous applause).

Taking them up in their general order and viewing them in the light of God’s history I can find no record of a great nation living and dying in a single century. We have only to look at the history of ancient Phoenicia, Egypt, Assyria, Israel, Greece or Rome, to see these facts. These all outlived centuries. In modern history note the strength of France, Germany, Russia, England, each of which has stood up against the weather and storms of time. If this nation is to go down in so short a time, it will be because we have disregarded the indications of God’s Providence, and disobeyed his laws more than any other nation. There are indications to show that this country is destined to be a great nation in the world. Why was it kept so long hidden, as it were, reserved for an age of civilization, tenanted only by savages until Columbus, impressed with the idea, set forth in search of a new land? After special entreaty he procured ships by the aid of Queen Isabella—for over three hundred years ago, when ladies undertook anything they generally had their way. (Laughter and applause). Even then look at the indication of providence. The prow of Columbus’ ships are turned toward the West Indies and those were secured by Spain, while this continent was reserved for civilized England to settle. And how was it settled? By men seeking a place to worship God—settled differently than any other nation in all history—settled by men of all creeds, as if God had intended this nation to work out greater destinies than any other nation. We were of different sects, but formed a government of universal tolerance. Our nation has done more than any land in history to deserve a great destiny. (Applause)

“Then again in our revolution there are indications of God’s intention toward the nation. Men of skeptical tendency asked that we seek advice and council from prayer to God, and so our constitution was made, which under God will be our great charter of liberties for ages to come. (Applause). But has this nation fulfilled its great work? One great thing accomplished is the separation of church and state. I think I can say this nation has done more than any other nation to fulfill its great destiny. Our system of education is superior to that of any other nation, especially in female education. We take mothers of this coming generation and educate them as they should be, and fit them to educate a grand race of sovereigns. (applause). Another thing this nation has done toward the fulfillment of its great work is the education of the masses. In this land, all may rise to the highest offices. The humblest cabin-boy may lead our armies, and the poor hostler may sit in the senate. Who has not heard of Henry Clay, the mill boy of the Slasheds, and Jackson the child of poor Irish parents. And some may have heard that even a rail-
splitter may become President. (tremendous applause). Again this nation is an asylum for the oppressed of all the nations of the Earth. There is no immigration to any other nation but they come here from all parts of the earth, and I would have no patience with anyone who shall seek to exclude from free entrance all who may come to us from any nation on the face of the globe. (applause). We have broad acres for them to cultivate, school for their children, and churches for themselves; and a constitution broad enough, thank God, and strong enough for all the world to stand upon it. (great applause).

Is it reasonable that the Creator will deal more harshly with us than any other nation that he ever created? Why was this great Western world reserved for so long a time from the eyes of the older nations? It was reserved for an age of Literature, and science; for an age when men could worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. It was reserved for the age when this great country could become the theatre of great men. Look at the discovery of the land, its origin in a religious idea fomented by Columbus and impressed upon the heart of a pious queen. The men who found this country were men who came here from civilized England to form a nation which would be preeminently free. The early settlements are traced to freedom loving, God fearing puritans and Pilgrims, Quakers—religious all. All this was done and joined together by the hand of God. In all these incidents we see that God has planned for us a great mission. Has that mission been fulfilled? Is the work finished? If not then the end is not yet come. We have excelled all other nations in out work thus far. Our severance of church and state, out educational systems, elevation of the masses, extinction of titles; prevention of monopolies on wealth or talents, so that all can aspire to the highest places of the nation, gives us the sympathy of the common people.

We are the greatest emigrant depot of the world. Do the people of other nations go elsewhere? No they come here until we have Irishmen enough to make us all Irish; Germans enough to hear the language of the fatherland in every street. They are coming from Italy and Hungary, and over on the other side of our broad land they are coming from out of the mists of the Pacific, having travelled from far off China and Japan. What nation could take its place? If the world is to be elevated to its proper place I say God cannot afford to do without America.

“Shall the country be divided?

“It is a matter of history that virtue unites and vice divides nations. Civilization speaks out against division. The spirit of the age is averse to it. This has been demonstrated in the history of babylonia, of the North American Indians and of the Africans. The first had their language confused. The Indians had at least a thousand distinct and separate tribes; and Africa was cut up into numberless kingdoms, the monarchs of each sat in a state of nudity at the summit of earth-mounds. But the country went to pieces. Humanity can gain nothing by division. You must remember the fate of old Israel, and of the Grecian states. How Athens fell and even Sparta succumbed. Shall this country divide? Where could we divide? We have no mountain chains or great natural landmarks to separate us into two. If we divide it would be into several
confederacies. When was it we first began to hear about this division? I seem to have waked up to a new state of things/ a few years ago we could hear nothing but Manifest Destiny. This country was not large enough for us; we were destined to spread over all Central America; we must have Cuba and the other islands, and eventually the very men who were then talking about Manifest Destiny are talking about a peaceable division of our land. Where shall we divide? If we allow the south to separate the northwest will plan a separate confederacy, and when the northwest undertakes that, the whole Pacific Coast will set up for themselves, and we will lose all the gold bearing country; and I tell you here today, I would not give one cent on the dollar for your national liabilities if you allow one single division line to be run through your nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific. (loud applause)

“I deprecate war; it is a terrible thing. Much of the best blood of our nation has flowed and more possibly will moisten the earth, but if you hall divide this land into petty sections there will be great strife which will waste the blood of your children and grand-children, and there shall be sorrow and wailing throughout all the generations to come. When I look at this dark picture, much as I dislike war, I want no hollow peace that will last but a year, with war to be renewed, swallowing in its maw not only this but the next generation. I hate war, yet I say better to fight twenty years and make the country safe for future generations that to stop where we are. (tremendous applause). Even Jeff Davis does not believe in the existence of separate nationalities, we are told. If any peace come I want a peace that will be lasting so that I can leave my wife and my children safe when I die; and that can only be by our maintaining a united nation.

“We have glorious boundaries from the north to the south, and from the east to the west; and when I look at those boundaries I can say ‘palsied be the hand which will seek to wrest from our nation one foot of this great territory’. (loud applause) When I look at those boundaries I am reminded of an answer made by a Kentuckian to a John Bull, who tauntingly asked him “What are your boundaries?” The Kentuckian, drawing himself up about six feet, “We are bounded on the east by the rising sun, on the north by the Aurora Borealis, on the west by the procession of the equinoxes and on the south by the day of judgment”.

“Then the question comes ‘Shall our form of Government be changed?’ This is what Mr. Davis expects; he can hardly suppose the south will live in separation. They at the south hope for a changed form of government; they expect the great city of New York to declare itself and independent city; but this great city has a heart which throbs in sympathy with the nation and stands out as it ought to as the metropolis of the nation. The south hopes for a monarchy, but this nation never would suffer a monarchy. Its great heart never would submit. It will tolerate no monarchy on this soil of freedom. Those who are desirous of monarchial form of government have all of Europe to choose from. (laughter and applause).

If the first three will not work then must the fourth occur. We are passing through a purifying fire and our nation will come out a brighter, purer, and stronger people, and more
glorious than ever before. (loud applause). The nation must be purified as by fire, and for that we are going through this war. This is no new thing. The South has been preparing for war for nearly thirty years. At the same time a series of Providences sprang up. First the Coast Survey was established and our harbors were mapped and surveyed, and thus we were enabled to retake our harbors by the knowledge thus obtained of their locality. Then a passion for ship-building sprang up, until the Government, when this struggle broke out, could extemporize a navy to blockade the whole coast, and out clipper ships are the pride of the seas. Again the iron track of railroads were stretched all over the country as if by a sort of mania, and when the war broke out we could transport the grain of the northwest to all parts of the country although the mouth of the Mississippi was closed… Thousands of miles of railroads had just been built in the niche of time. Again within twenty years the electric telegraph was discovered. Why have these happening so come? This nation was to need the telegraph and it was given to us and today we are almost fighting the war by telegraph. Then just before this war broke out the inventive genius of the country was turned toward Agricultural implements, and when the war commenced, the mowing and reaping machines came forward to take the place of our young men where were called to defend our land. When the poor of England were starving we sent forth food to save them, although they were sympathizing with the rebellion; and never was the scripture more beautifully fulfilled “if thine enemy hunger, feed him”. God’s Providence seems to have been showing forth from all quarters.

Again, immense amounts of money were to be needed for the great war. The capitalists of old monarchies prophesied bankruptcy, and determined we should be exhausted and ruined. But God has been preparing a purse which European Capitalists knew nothing of. He had a great purpose over which they had no control. He was preparing for us great fields of gold and silver in the mountains of California, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon and Utah. And go back to the time of the Mexican war, only four days before the papers were to be signed by Mexico which would have conveyed away all this gold and silver; Fremont hearing that war had broken out raised the stars and stripes and saved to the country this great treasure. (immense applause) From 1848-61, or just before the war $600,000,000 in gold had been taken out—a nice little capital to start upon! Gold and silver enough to meet all the expenses of this war. Then when more money was wanting, God took off the curtain from the hills and mountains of Nevada and untold treasures of Gold and silver are revealed to the light of day. If necessary to the welfare of this country I believe God will uncover solid rocks of Gold and Silver. There is enough wealth in these mines of ours to pay off all the debts, give every soldier a silver musket, plate their iron clads with beds of gold and silver, and have enough left to give a fortune to every man, woman, and child. With respect to bankruptcy we can bid defiance to every nation in this hemisphere, and in the eastern hemisphere as well. We are independently rich. Out in the mines of Nevada the deeper they go the richer are the diggings; and they hope if they can get down far enough to find the solid rock of gold and silver. We don’t know when they will get down to that, but if necessary for the salvation of this nation, I believe this rock shall be found, for God has taken care of us. If we dig all the gold in those mines we shall have enough to give every soldier adequate wages or his
widow and orphan support and (indistinguishable word, scribble). When I think of all this great amount of gold and hear capitalists talk of ruin, I feel as though this nation could stand forth and bid defiance to all the world in finance as well as in everything else. (great applause)

Again we have had many indications of God’s providence during the war, prominent among which it the defeat of foreign intervention. I am one of those who believe this war was brought about partly by foreign powers hostile to this country. They had their agents here; they wish to divide us, and seize on Mexico or Central America; and thus weaken the nation. We were too large and they feared our greatness. In the early part of the conflict we heard a great deal about the intervention of France and England, but more than twenty years ago a young engineer came to this country with strange notions in his head about iron vessels with hot air engines, and about iron clad monitors; and here he struggled on, expending his means. When early in the war the Merrimac came out and destroyed our ships, the gallant Cumberland going down with her flag flying; but the second day when the Merrimac came out boldly in her strength the little Monitor came out like David going to meet Goliath; and there is a collision and a shot comes out from the mouth of the iron Monitor and the Merrimac hastens back disabled to her port, and her own crew blew her up. The echo of that shot went across the waters and shook the hearts of England and France, and this day you owe the safety of your shipping in the harbor of New York to the strange train of circumstances that sent that young Sweed (Swede) to this country. Foreign nations have not dared to intervene since. Let them send their wooden vessels over here, and we will batter them to pieces with our iron clad vessels. (loud applause). Then among the train of providences just as it seemed that France was about to intervene there came a trouble in Poland and France dared not intervene; England dared not risk a war with any foreign nation for fear that other Alabamas would be built in this land that might find out where here commerce was.

Then there are indications that it is God’s purpose that this war shall be successfully terminated. The Rebel means are wasted and the finances sunk below zero—even in summer time. Rebel currency is low, southern soldiers are deserting by the thousands, the south gives their prisoners poor treatment, because they have nothing else to give them. Either from exhaustion or savage rage the south is desperate. I have no disposition to underrate southern men—they are brave men and out brothers, and when we are again united woe to the nation that dares to attack us. But our men are not exhausted. We have soldiers and gallant generals, that fight upon the plains and even climb the mountains to fight the enemy, and who would dare to fear for the result of the war when our soldiers, dare to fight above the clouds with Hooker to lead them. (tremendous applause)

As we turn to destroy the signs of the times, I think I can see the light dawning over the mountain-tops. Our resources seem un-diminished, while the resources of the South are becoming fast exhausted. Its borders are being pushed farther and farther to the southward, while with us new fields of boundless wealth from Arizona, from Montana, from California, from
Colorado are being unveiled and are waiting only for the miners’ toil. The golden evening sun nestles at the close of day amid mountain that are also golden.

We have resources also in brave men. ‘Tis true that many of them now sleep silently in the dust, trod down by the misdirected rebels. There is Lyon, and Baker and Sedgwick, and Wadsworth, and others, resting in their glory after brave battles well fought. But we have heroes still living. Sherman has shown, from his gallant career, that he is a Northern man with Southern proclivities. We have a Thomas who never doubts. We have a Hooker, who pushes his forces amid the clouds and from his vantage point at lofty heights sends the enemy scurrying before him. New England has given us her Howard, who, one armed, is still within himself a host. Pennsylvania has in her Hancock, a tower of strength, and near the heart she bears her Meade of honor. While the giant West, from the shores of her broad Mississippi, sends us Grant of unconditional victory! (tremendous applause) Nor are the seamen less brave. A gallant Foote has ended his labors and peace be to his memory. But Porter, Dupont, and Farragut still marshal our fleet. Our Monitors have written another page into the history of naval warfare, and have taught the world the value of hearts of Oak in breasts of Iron.

Sticking to the land, where we are a little more at home, we have an example of what I said about the lives of the masses in Phil Sheridan; he has sense enough to keep off the sacred soil of Virginia, but he also knows enough to make the rebels take an early flight for their own quarters. (renewed cheers) And now when I look around me it seems that at last we have the man to lead out armies. I used to pray for an Andrew Jackson or a Stonewall Jackson, and I heard others praying for the same. I heard them often say: “Oh! For a man of independent prupose such as Old Hickory was when he fought the battle of New Orleans or sat in the White House. But I have ceased to say so. When the enemy came down the Shenandoah Valley, they were trying to make a man let go, who had his bull-dog hold on Petersburg, and the throat of rebellion. He was told to “let go or we will take Washington and sack Baltimore and raze Philadelphia and burn New York.” Grant replied, “I have the rebellion by the throat, and I will hold it until it does” (great applause) This is the man of iron will. I tell you my friends, I have ceased to pray for a Jackson, for I believe God in his mercy has at last GRANTED us one. (tremendous cheers)

While much of the credit is due to the brave men of the land, yet we must not forget to acknowledge that much belongs to the women. Who here will deny that woman is foremost in every good work? It is of the very nature of woman to be kind. A touch of her hand or a gentle word from her lips has a soothing effect on the poor and the suffering. She moves silently among the couches of the sick and dying, giving them a smile of cheer, a word of comfort and hope, making them eager once more to take up the struggle for the preservation of their homes, and the salvation of their country. She is an angel of mercy, a worthy sister of the beloved Mary whom the angels hailed. (hearty applause) When the history of the war is written, there will not only be heroes, but heroines.
In spite of the numerous men who have been called from every plain, from every valley, and every mountain to form an army of a million men, our crops have been sown and harvested; our factories have not ceased their busy din; out wharves are laden with goods; a network of rails connects every part of our land and passengers from one section to the other are never wanting; our cities are expanding so that what was once the suburban sections is now the heart of things. Money has been called for and whenever the government has needed a hundred million its loans have all been eagerly taken. The citizens have been taxed and they have paid them without a remonstrance. In addition to this, other millions have been gladly laid upon the country’s altar that the wounded and dying might receive the tenderest care. Nor are these sums merely the offerings of the wealthy. The poorest vie with the richest in their devotion to the cause they love. The laboring man, the factory girl, the teachers, the artists—all have given freely. The old grandmother with failing eyes, rocks to and fro in her little chair late into the long wintry nights, with her fingers moving swiftly as she busily knits for the soldier boy at the front. The housewife hurries to finish her work that she may go out into the fields and tend the crops lest the harvest furnish no new store of food for her little prattler. All have given, for all have felt. All have friends who have suffered or who may suffer, and the image of loved ones cheers them on. God in his infinite mercy touches every heart. He has written a lesson that the ages must read that great wrongs will ultimately terminate in great catastrophes, and the people have resolved that no matter how great the sacrifice, the system of society which cannot live within the Constitution must die beyond it. (Whole audience arose, shouted, cheered, wept.)

You ask me for the results of the war? I cannot mention them all. I believe this nation is to be a nation lifted among the nations as never a nation was before. We shall have such a stream of emigration as was never seen before. They will come from all nations, because men love heroes and the heroic. All the nations of the old world have professed we could not conquer the south, and the London Times has kept up the cry for months. Now if we conquer them, they will have to admit we have accomplished the most heroic feats. The nation shall stand forth prominent for civil liberty and a glorious civilization.

I have one more impression, that if the war lasts much longer slavery will be considerably damaged. (laughter and cheers) It is somewhat damaged already and I hope and desire it may pass away quickly and let us see the last of it. (great applause) Do you say, what has been accomplished? The District of Columbia has been made free and this week—on last Tuesday morning—the sun as it rose shone for the first time on the glorious free state of Maryland. (great applause) West Virginia from her rocky home echoes back the shouts of freedom on her mountain sides. But this war ought not to be carried on for the purpose of destroying slavery or for any other purpose but for the simple purpose of restoring the authority of our government. This is the only object for which this war should be waged. But, if while we are striking blows at rebellion, slavery will come and stick its black head between us and the rebels, then let it perish along with them! It has seemed to me that the concussion of mind resembles somewhat the electrical fluid, for it seems to increase by contact; and as the poles of the battery come together,
melting what comes between, I see a large pile of manacles melting away, until at length on the first of January the manacles shall fall from 3,000,000 slaves. (enthusiastic applause) And what shall be done with these three millions? Perhaps the best is to do as Jeff Davis wants should be done to him—let them alone. The hopes for the regeneration of Africa and raising it to civilization and liberty lies in this race, or it they must stay in this country, as Texas declared slavery should never be abolished, it would be a just judgment for them to have Texas, and if it must be so that Maximillian shall sit on the throne of Mexico, I want our French cousins to have the Africans for their near neighbors!

But history shows that no nation can arrive at freedom without being baptized in blood, then these men may not now be fighting to regenerate our nation. Our children can look back at the battles of the Revolution and feel that their fathers were worthy of freedom. Let the children read of these poor slaves have the chance to look back not only to Fort Pillow, but to the battles fought and won in front of Petersburg and Richmond; and they will feel that they too are worthy of freedom. It has been demonstrated in this war that a blue coat can make a hero even of a sable skin. The black men have long ago learned to follow the stars; they have followed the North Star successfully and now it is shown that they can follow as well as any others, the stars that are set in our glorious flag. (Loud applause)

(The Bishop then concluded with a soul-stirring climax on the Stars and Stripes. Picking up a shot-riddled flag, he said):

“Your fifty-fifth Regiment carried this flag; it has been at Newbern, and at South Mountain, and at Antietam. The blood of our brave boys is upon it; the bullets of rebels have gone through and through it; yet it is the same old flag. (Audience rose and applauded and shouted) Our fathers followed that flag; we expect that our children and our children’s children will follow it. There is nothing on earth like that old flag for beauty. My mother taught me to love it. Long may these stars shine! We came by them honestly. It seems like a small patch of azure filled with stars that an angel had snatched from the heavenly canopy, with its field of blue set in stripes of blood. Just now there are clouds upon it and mists are gathering round it. Though amid the smoke and carnage of battle some of the stars have been dimmed, and some of the stripes have been torn, yet the star spangled banner still waves, and the millions rally round the flag! (Long and deafening applause)

Now the stars are coming out again and others are joining them; and they grow brighter and brighter, and so may they shine till the last star in the heavens shall fall, and the great angel stands with one foot on the sea and the other on the land, and swears by him that liveth forever that time shall be no longer. (Entire audience on its feet, weeping, shouting, applauding.)
Endnote: The address was given without notes. Only such extracts as the reporters of several papers took down are preserved. It took two hours and twenty minutes to deliver it, and the effect upon the people was like the winning of a great battle. Whole cities turned from wavering to loyalty upon its delivery; and it was given in sixty cities during the war.

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Dane Register

Class of 2009

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