

Church History, Lesson #26

Jonathan Edwards – 1703 – 1758... INTELLECTUAL PIETY

- Edwards entered Yale at age 14. He earned his Master's Degree at age 19.
- In 1727 (age 24) he began serving as the assistant to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, and a couple of years later he became the sole pastor of the Congregational Church of Northampton, MA.
- In 1734 there was a "mini-awakening" in his church. As he was preaching on justification by faith, people began coming under serious conviction. In December 1734 there 6 sudden conversions. By the spring of 1735 there were as many as 30 per week!
- Edwards recorded his observations and defense of this revival in A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (1737). And some of his sermons in this series were published in the title, Justification by Faith (1738).
- These works were widely read in America and they contributed to the religious fervor of the "Great Awakening" from 1739-1741.
- George Whitfield read these books and made a point to visit Jonathan Edwards while in America. During this visit, Edwards had the younger man preach at his church and Whitefield recorded that Edwards and most of the congregation were "melted in tears" during most of the message.
- During this "Great Awakening" Edwards preached the most famous sermon in American history, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God".
- In 1746, Edwards published Treatise on Religious Affections in which he teaches that the heart of Christian experience is the affections, not reason.
- Part of Edwards' theology especially emphasized the necessity of personal conversion. Because of this, he reversed the "halfway covenant" policy of his grandfather. This was part of what alienated his congregation and caused his removal from his position as pastor in 1750.
 - One interesting thing about the brief time between his dismissal as pastor and his family settling in Stockbridge, MA...
Sometimes the church couldn't find pulpit supply, so they would ask HIM, and he would preach for the congregation that had dismissed him.
- From 1751 to 1758 Edwards served as pastor and missionary to the Indians in Stockbridge, MA. This was some of his most productive writing time.
- In 1758 Edwards became the president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). However, he died of a smallpox inoculation on March 22. Here are his dying words to his wife:
... the uncommon union, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue forever: and I hope she will be supported under so great a trial, and submit cheerfully to the will of God.

George Whitfield – 1714 – 1770 – America's First Celebrity

- Whitfield's parents were inn keeper's in Gloucester, England.
- He had a natural talent for acting and theater in his childhood. He spent hours upon hours reading plays. This theatrical element had a significant impact on his preaching style.
- Because of the financial limitations of his parents, he worked his way through Pembroke College at Oxford as a "servitor". This meant that he served fellow students by carrying books, doing errands, and cleaning rooms.

- While at Oxford, he became a part of the Holy Club run by John and Charles Wesley. Before his conversion, he tried to please God by his own efforts:
I always chose the worst sort of food. . . . I fasted twice a week. My apparel was mean. . . . I wore woolen gloves, a patched gown, and dirty shoes. . . . I constantly walked out in the cold mornings till part of one of my hands was quite black. . . . I could scarce creep upstairs, I was obliged to inform my kind tutor . . . who immediately sent for a physician to me.
Then he was converted through reading The Life of God in the Soul of Man by Henry Scougal. He immediately became passionate about preaching the Gospel and was ordained by the bishop of Gloucester. He preached his first sermon one week later.
- Whitefield's first trip to the colonies was in 1738. Everywhere Whitefield went in the colonies crowds flocked to hear him. Benjamin Franklin estimated that 30,000 people could hear his voice. Although Whitefield was not an abolitionist, he preached to slaves.
- When he returned to England the churches couldn't hold the crowds. At the suggestion of friends, he preached in the fields to the miners in Bristol, England and a mighty revival resulted. This is the work that he turned over to John Wesley. Whitefield organized and presided over the first "Methodist Conference" but he turned this work over to Wesley so that he could focus on evangelistic preaching tours.
- During Whitefield's second visit to the colonies he started an orphanage in Savannah, Georgia called Bethesda. For the rest of his life he struggled to raise money to support this orphanage. There is a famous story in Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography about how Franklin went to hear Whitefield knowing that he was going to take an offering for the orphanage. He was determined not to give anything. However, after listening a bit he decided to give some money, but by the time the appeal was complete, Franklin had emptied his pockets!
- Whitefield preached 18,000 sermons in his lifetime. He visited North America 7 times. In fact, he died in Newburyport, MA, having preached just the previous day in a field, standing on a barrel. He visited Scotland 15 times, Ireland twice, and one trip each to Bermuda, Gibraltar, and the Netherlands. He preached in every county of England and Wales.
- One anecdote tells how an American farmer was anxious to hear Whitefield preach. He heard that he would be preaching soon in a nearby town. He saddled the horse, called his wife and they set off. The farmer alternated riding double with his wife and running alongside so as not to tire the horse. Then, as they approached there was so much dust in the air because of the wagons and horses approaching the place of preaching that it rose up into the sky and could be seen for miles around.
- One estimate is that 80% of the population of the American colonies heard Whitefield preach! He was the first unifying factor in colonial history.

The Great Awakening – 1730's and 40's

The **Great Awakening** or **First Great Awakening** was an evangelical and revitalization movement that swept Protestant Europe and British America, especially the American colonies, in the 1730s and 1740s, leaving a permanent impact on American Protestantism. It resulted from powerful preaching that gave listeners a sense of deep personal revelation of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ. The Great Awakening pulled away from ritual, ceremony, sacramentalism, and hierarchy, and made Christianity intensely personal to the average person by fostering a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption, and by encouraging introspection and a commitment to a new standard of personal morality. (Thomas S. Kidd in The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America, 2009)