

~Other Speakers G-L: Greg Gordon:

An short account of the labors of george whitefield

JOY UNSPEAKABLE

The name George Whitefield brings some recognition but at that very little. No schools, churches, organizations are named after him. Yet in heaven this man is well known! For he was a humble servant amongst men but a giant with God. By the age of 21 he was the most well known preacher in all of England, but by the age of 22, He was the most hated. He truly is of those "of whom the world was not worthy" and he was treated thus by the world. George Whitefield was born in Gloucester in 1714. At eighteen he entered Pembroke College, Oxford, and soon became a member of a religious group that included John Wesley and Charles Wesley. The group became known as the Holy Club or the Oxford Methodists.

During this time of legalism and striving in a works based salvation he worked his body to ill health with fasting and was confined to this bed. Amazingly, it was during this time of rest and recuperation where he was finally changed. He kept simple devotions as his strength allowed. He began to pray simply, and dropped all of his own ideas and efforts and began to really listen to God. At one point he simply threw himself on the bed and cried out, "I thirst!" It was perhaps the first time he had called out to God in utter helplessness. And it was the first time in over a year that he felt happy. At this moment of total surrender to Almighty God a new thought now came to his heart, "George, you have what you asked! You ceased to struggle and simply believed and you are born again!" It was so simple, almost absurdly simple, to be saved by such a simple prayer that it made Whitefield laugh. And as soon as he laughed the floodgates of heaven burst and he felt "Joy, joy unspeakable, joy that's full of, big with glory!"

A NATION TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN

Whitefield's devotional practice as a youth would be to read a passage of the Bible in English, then in Greek, and then read Matthew Henry's commentary. He would pray over each line he read out of these three books until he received it and understood it and it became a part of him. He returned to Gloucester and during this one year of ministry at the age of 21 the nation of England was stirred and was in a uproar. News spread of his preaching and 1000's came to hear! "Ye must be born again." was the message that was being trumpeted. When Charles Wesley returned from the mission field he declared, "the whole nation is in an uproar." Another said, "All London and the whole nation ring of the great things of God done by his ministry." C.H. Spurgeon said: "It was a brave day for England when Whitefield began field preaching." With such preaching as this no wonder the nation was stirred: "You must be converted, or be damned, and that is plain English, but not plainer than my Master made us of, 'He that believeth not, shall be damned.' I did not speak that word strong enough that says, 'He that believeth not shall be damned'; that is the language of our Lord; and it is said of one of the primitive preachers, that used to speak the word damned so that it struck all his auditory."

Read this example of his imploring sinners to repent and trust in Christ for their salvation no wonder he had results: "I offer you salvation this day; the door of mercy is not yet shut, there does yet remain a sacrifice for sin, for all that will accept of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will embrace you in the arms of his love. O turn to him, turn in a sense of your own unworthiness; tell him how polluted you are, how vile, and be not faithless, but believing. Why fear ye that the Lord Jesus Christ will not accept of you? Your sins will be no hindrance, your unworthiness no hindrance; if your own corrupt hearts do not keep you back nothing will hinder Christ from receiving of you. He loves to see poor sinners coming to him, he is pleased to see them lie at his feet pleading his promises; and if you thus come to Christ, he will not send you away without his Spirit; no, but will receive and bless you. O do not put a slight on infinite love--he only wants you to believe on him, that you might be saved. This, this is all the dear Saviour desires, to make you happy, that you may leave your sins, to sit down eternally with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let me beseech you to come to Jesus Christ; I invite you all to come to him, and receive him as your Lord and Saviour; he is ready to receive you. I invite you to come to him, that you may find rest for your souls. He will rejoice and be glad. He calls you by his ministers; O come unto him--he is laboring to bring you back from sin and from Satan, unto himself: open the door of your hearts, and the King of glory shall enter in. My heart is full, it is quite full, and I must speak, or I shall burst. What, do you think your souls of no value? Do you esteem them as not worth saving? Are your pleasures worth more than your souls? Had you rather regard the diversions of this life, than the salvation of your souls? If so, you will never be partakers with him in glory; but if you come unto him, he will supply you with his grace here, and bring you to glory hereafter; and there you may sing praises and hallelujahs to the Lamb for ever. And may this

be the happy end of all who hear me!" Cornelius Winter said: "He seldom, if ever, got through a sermon without tears." Hear the passionate Whitefield share from his journal: "God strengthened me to speak, so as not only to be heard, but felt..." and "The Christian world is in a deep sleep! Nothing but a loud voice can awaken them out of it."

ANOTHER WHITEFIELD?

With the statement of "Oh for another Whitefield!" Jesse Morrell an open-air preacher himself responded: "First, let a man so hunger and thirst after righteousness, that he'd be willing to almost fast and pray himself to death, as Whitefield did. Then, let a man be willing to be thought of as a fool by his own household, and a legalist by his own peers, as Whitefield was. Then, let a man be willing to preach the true gospel, so clear and so forcefully, that the religious world will not be able to tolerate him, but will force him to preach in the streets instead of the Churches, as Whitefield was. Then, let a man be willing to endure spittings, stonings, beatings, and mobs, all with the love of Christ burning in his heart, as Whitefield did. Then, if a man is willing to preach 40 hours a week, until he often vomits blood, being up early praying, and up late traveling, ONLY THEN, will we have another Whitefield." Whitefield preached to Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Catholics, Quakers, and Moravians. He was the first man to so clearly cut across all denomination barriers by preaching the simple truth of the gospel. Whitefield preached more than 18,000 sermons between 1736 and 1770. That is more than 10 sermons a week over a period of 34 years.

Leonard Ravenhill remarks of Whitefield: From a lordly chamber heavy with the pungent aroma of costly perfumes, Whitefield would race off to a street meeting. Catch his joy as he says, 'There I was honored with having stones, dirt, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cats thrown at me.' What was the secret of Whitefield's success? I think three things: He preached a pure gospel; he preached a powerful gospel; he preached a passionate gospel." He preached to crowds of 30,000 to 78,000 and doing this with no voice amplification of any kind. Whitefield would preach until he literally coughed up blood and with the warnings of doctors he continued on! He lived in light of eternity continually and was used of God in this measure.

Another Whitefield? hear his stirring reprimand for those that would be preachers of the gospel: "Ministers that are unconverted, may talk and declaim of Christ, and prove from books that he is the Son of God; but they cannot preach with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power, unless they preach from experience, and have had a proof of his divinity, by a work of grace wrought upon their own souls." Could another commendation of a true minister of Jesus Christ be tears? "Would weeping, would tears prevail on you, I could wish my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep out every argument, and melt you into love. Would any thing I could do or suffer, influence your hearts, I think I could bear to pluck out my eyes, or even to lay down my life for your sakes."

WE SHALL ALL MEET AGAIN!

His last written letter was dated September 23, 1770. He told how he could not preach, although thousands were waiting to hear. On September 29, he went from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Newburyport, Massachusetts. He preached en route in the open at Exeter, New Hampshire. Looking up he prayed, Lord Jesus, I am weary in thy work, but not of thy work. If I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for thee once more in the fields, seal thy truth, and come home and die. He was given strength for this, his last sermon. The subject was Faith and Works. Although scarcely able to stand when he first came before the group, he preached for two hours to a crowd that no building then could have held. Arriving at the parsonage of the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, which church he had helped to found he had supper with his friend, Rev. Jonathan Parsons. He intended to go at once to bed. However, having heard of his arrival, a great number of friends gathered at the parsonage and begged him for just a short message. He paused a moment on the stairs, candle in hand, and spoke to the people as they stood listening until the candle went out. At 2 a.m., painting to breathe, he told his traveling companion Richard Smith, 'My asthma is returning; I must have two or three days' rest.' His last words were, 'I am dying,' and at 6 a.m. on Sunday morning he died September 30, 1770. The funeral was held on October 2 at the Old South First Presbyterian Church. Thousands of people were unable to even get near the door of the church. Whitefield had requested earlier to be buried beneath the pulpit if he died in that vicinity, which was done. Memorial services were held for him in many places. John Wesley said: "Oh, what has the church suffered in the setting of that bright star which shone so gloriously in our hemisphere. We have none left to succeed him; none of his gifts; none anything like him in usefulness."

Leonard Ravenhill once pleaded: "God of Whitefield, give us today men like Whitefield who can stand as giants in the pulpit, men with burdened hearts, burning lips, and brimming eyes. And, Lord, please do it soon!" If we

The Apostolic Whitefield!

do not have another Whitefield in America or England it is over! False prophets, false priests, peddling of the word of God, all of these are common place and only the trumpet call of prophetic magnitude of a Whitefield will have any avail! Many more things could be written of this man of God but we will end with the words of George Whitefield before a large open-air congregation: "At the day of Judgement we shall all meet again!"