

# George Whitefield: A Spur to the Minister

by Ian Murray

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*George Whitefield's ministry is still important today because of his burning devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, which had a profound impact on his life and ministry.*

**Duration:** 1:05:12

**Topics:** "Christian Ministry", "Revival History"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the decline of the ministry and the loss of glory in the calling of the Christian minister. It emphasizes the importance of beholding the glory of the Lord in order to reflect His glory. The sermon also mentions the 18th century revival and how the focus was on Christ coming to His church rather than the idea of initiating a revival. The sermon concludes with a tribute to George Whitfield, highlighting his love for Christ and his dedication to preaching the gospel until his last sermon before his death.

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## Transcript

The title around which I want to speak is George Whitefield, a Spur to the Minister of the Gospel. The opportunity that we may have to commemorate the birth or the death of Whitefield is an opportunity that will only come to us probably once in our lives as ministers of the gospel. None of us here, I presume, was a minister when Whitefield's birth was commemorated, the bicentenary of his birth, in the year 1914.

And I don't suppose that many of us will be spared to the date in 45 years' time if his birth is commemorated again, as I have no doubt it will be if the Church of God is still militant upon earth. George Whitefield died at Newbury Court in Massachusetts on the 30th day of September in the year 1770, so that we have in this current year an opportunity in a special way to call attention to his memory and, more important, to the work that God did in him and through him. If we are to take this opportunity, we need first of all to be persuaded of its profit and of its importance.

Most of us live in parts of the country where Whitefield's voice was once heard, because Whitefield preached across the British Isles from Aberdeen in the north to Cornwall to Land's End in the south, and it is surprising the amount of local knowledge of Whitefield that might still even be recovered today. One of us was trying to find photographs of the new life of Whitefield by Dallimore, who was surprised to find that on Blackheath in southeast London there's still a part of the heath which is known as Whitefield's Mount. We have an Anglican friend in Lancashire who was exploring one of the old museums in Bolton and was astonished to find, hanging in a darkened gallery, a very large portrait of Whitefield preaching in Bolton in

1750, and even more surprised when he spoke to the curator of the museum about this portrait, which has never been printed in any of the books, more surprised to find that this same painting was hanging in no lesser place than the manager's office of the Bolton Evening News, the Bolton paper, and these are only two little examples of what others of us might be able to find even in terms of Whitefield's influence in our own locality, so that we have an opportunity to bring to the attention of our people the ministry of Whitefield and to do this perhaps in ways which will particularly interest them in the work that God gave him to do even in parts of the land where we are living, and yet of course we are conscious that Whitefield, in the general sense, is no longer remembered by evangelicals, that is to say not remembered in comparison with the way he was remembered for many years after his death.

I was surprised to read how in the last century at one commemoration meeting in Whitefield's memory it was held on the top of Stinchcombe Hill, which is 15 miles south of Gloucester, Whitefield's birthplace, and at this meeting on the top of Stinchcombe Hill there were 100 ministers and 20,000 people in a little rural area of Gloucestershire. Now by the time of Whitefield's bicentenary of his birth, of course, a great change had come. The Great War had just broken upon Europe at the time when that commemoration reoccurred, and one newspaper noted it in these words.

The fact that tomorrow marks the bicentenary of George Whitefield's birth has not been quite forgotten, but for the war the event was to have been generally celebrated. As it is, a few pulpit references have been made to the great evangelist, a handful of special services held to commemorate his life. Apart from these, the feeling has prevailed that this is no time for sentimental reminders of the past when the demands of the present are so stern and so insistent.

Now, as you know, in the last 15 years or thereabouts, there has been a marked recovery of interest in George Whitefield amongst those who are concerned for a return to historic Christianity as the great niece of the contemporary church, and we will not regard the remembrance of Whitefield as an indulgence in sentiment. And yet, although this is true of us, we may not be altogether persuaded in our minds of the degree of importance and profit which belongs to the study of Whitefield 200 years after his death. I would like in this address to deal with what, in my judgment, is the greatest lesson which Whitefield has left to us today who are in the work of the ministry.

I pointed it particularly in that direction if we are holding meetings to speak of Whitefield, as I hope a number of us will do in the coming months of this year, then we will obviously point the history in a somewhat different direction. But for ourselves, I am concerned today with the greatest lesson that Whitefield has left for ministers of the gospel. The story of Whitefield's ministry is, of course, a marvellous one, beginning soon after his conversion at the age of 20 and ending at the age of 56 when he died of asthma.

By the age of 27, that is in the year 1742, God's providence had thrust Whitefield into a position of leadership both in England and in the American colonies, in Wales and in Scotland. He had, by that date, a vast congregation at Moorfield's at the Tabernacle which was built there in 1741-42. He had also the oversight of the orphanage thousands of miles away at Savannah in Georgia, and from that time onwards until his death Whitefield was constantly preaching, travelling.

Henry then says he preached 40 hours, sometimes 60 hours a week. Generally carried a little pine wooden pulpit, certainly for the latter part of his ministry, and it was said that some 10 million people heard the gospel from that little pulpit. Certainly in the power and in the scope of his ministry, for you remember

how he crossed the Atlantic 13 times, 15 times he was in Scotland, many times in Wales.

In the scope of his ministry and in the power of the spirit which accompanied it, we are reminded at once of the great reformation of 200 years earlier, and yet Whitefield does not really have a parallel in the Reformation period, and the evangelical leaders of the 18th century who knew him tended nearly always to find their nearest comparison by going right back to the Apostolic Age. So the Dr Ebenezer Pemberton of New York wrote, perhaps no man since the Apostolic Age preached oftener or with greater success, and Henry then of Huddersfield wrote very similar words. Now I mention these few facts only to pass from them, because although they are impressive and the more they are expanded the more impressive they are, I still do not think that they are the most important thing for us to consider, and I don't intend to take any time in repeating Whitefield's biography.

I think we have to go further to find the great lesson which Whitefield has left for us, and now it might be said that Whitefield is a primary prophet as an example of the preaching and the teaching which is needed to restore the church. Whitefield as a model for the work of preaching, and that we should study his sermons and his evangelistic work as a guide to the recovery of biblical preaching today. Now I think of course there is a great deal of truth in that, but not that this is the main lesson to draw from Whitefield.

Indeed we can exaggerate Whitefield's importance as a preacher's model. He was, quite unashamedly, a man who, in terms of his doctrine, was repeating that which other men had said with greater accuracy, no doubt, and with greater precision. He was, in that sense, unashamedly second-hand in his work of teaching, and in regard to his exegesis of the scripture you will find, as you know, that there are in Whitefield's sermons a number of the limitations which belong to the biblical scholarship of the day of Matthew Henry, and of the period from which Whitefield drew his mainstream.

And I mention this only to say that if we want help by way of doctrine and of accurate exegesis, and these are foundational to all preaching, we would not, or we should not, go to George Whitefield in the first place. It is not in that area that he can be of the greatest help to us. What then is it about Whitefield's ministry which chiefly calls for our attention, and wherein can we as ministers derive the greatest profit, as we recall him today? I am persuaded that the answer is that Whitefield speaks to us of the kind of spiritual life a Christian ought to lead.

As one reads in the 75 sermons of Whitefield that still remain in print, or the 1500 letters which he also left, the impression we gain is not of an eloquent orator or of a successful preacher. It is much more convicting and humbling. In Whitefield we see a man who made it his consuming business to be a Christian.

That is to say, the things which mattered most to him lay in the realm of his personal experience, faith, love, humility, renunciation of the world, fellowship with God, and a holy ambition to please Him. Whitefield thought little of his work as a minister. Towards the end of his ministry you may have noticed how in his letters he nearly always finds himself less than the least of all George Whitefield.

His overriding concern was to be a thorough and earnest Christian, and what troubled him most was that he had attained so little in this direction. When I was a student at Durham and there was a library of an old nationalist minister's fold, and the local ministers were allowed the first pick, and then students gathered as they would, and all I could manage was one volume of Whitefield's works, and his works are printed in six volumes. One local minister had carried off five, and he had not noticed that one had been left, and I felt duty bound to carry this volume of Whitefield to him, but the expression on my face was such evidently that he did not think he could take it, and I procured this volume.

And the first thing that I remember reading in Whitefield was a letter that he wrote on his 52nd birthday, four years before his death. Now I was then a very young Christian, but I was surprised to read these words. Oh loving, ever loving, altogether lovely Jesus, how little, yea, how very little have I done and suffered for thee.

I am ashamed of myself. Now these were the words that caught my attention. Tomorrow, his birthday, God willing, I intend to take the sacrament upon it that I will begin to begin to be a Christian.

Whitefield at 52 was going to begin to begin to be a Christian. Our subject then is Whitefield as a Christian man, and the principal reason for considering him in this light is that it is here that he can help us most. On this point, there seems to be unanimity amongst Whitefield's biographers, certainly amongst his older biographers.

Luke Tyneman, who wrote those excellent two volumes on Whitefield in 1876, at the end of those volumes he says, preachers especially will do well to make Whitefield the subject of prayerful study, and he gives several reasons for that, and he concludes with this reason. He says, Whitefield was full of religious feelings, except when sleeping, he seemed to pray and praise always and everywhere. He was full of faith and the Holy Ghost.

A vivid spirituality inflamed his soul. His ideas of God and Christ, of sin and holiness, of faith and pardon, of heaven and hell, were not merely thoughts but sentiments. Without this, Whitefield's eloquence would have only been elocution, and his sermons, time and end, instead of being mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, would have been plot theatrical orations.

Now, in taking up this subject then, I want to seek to divide it as follows. First, to speak on the leading feature of Whitefield's life as a Christian minister, and secondly, to show the relation between the leading feature of his life, the relation between that, and several aspects of his work as a minister of the gospel. In the first place, the leading feature then, of the life of George Whitfield, and there can be no question what that leading feature was, he was marked by a burning devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the characteristic which appears in the man from the time of his ordination to the time of his death. Now, before we say a few more words on that, just a moment or two to remind ourselves of the conditions, the spiritual conditions, in which Whitefield grew up. It was an age in which there was an unmistakable absence of the power and the glory of Christ in his church, and amongst his people, and so far has the decline of Christianity preceded, that in the great majority of the churches, certainly of the Anglican churches, Christianity had been reduced to some kind of scheme of morality.

You may recall how Bishop Ryle mentioned in his Christian Leaders of the well-known lawyer Blackstone, who in the early days of the reign of King George III, took upon himself to visit the best known churches in London, and the most noted preachers, and Blackstone said, as the result of his visit to the hearing of these men, that there was no means of telling from their preachers whether they were followers of Confucius, or of Muhammad, or of Christ. That is to say, it was merely a kind of morality which they were preaching. And in the non-conformist churches, while in terms of orthodoxy the position was more favourable, it was all too often a case of representing the Christian as a person who accepted a certain set of principles or a belief.

While the person of Christ, and the glory of his person, was but little known, and still less felt in the churches of the land. God suffered these conditions to continue, as we know, until about the middle of the

1730s, and then almost simultaneously in different parts of the English-speaking world, the Holy Spirit began to work in the hearts of a number of students and of ministers. And we know from the scriptures how the effect of the outpouring of the Spirit is that they shall look upon me whom they have feared.

And the coming of the work of the Spirit in this new day of blessing had as its primary, and as its first effect, a recovery of faith, and knowledge of Christ, and of communion with him. So that as we read the journals of Whitefield at Oxford in 1735 and 1736, we seem to be reading over again what we have just heard read from the lips of the Apostle Paul. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

When God pours out the Spirit of grace and of understanding, of supplication, then they shall look upon me whom they have feared. And if we read, as I'm sure we do read, the history of the 18th century revival, we will notice how little these men even speak of the word revival. We will notice too how utterly foreign from their thoughts was the idea that they were used to inaugurate a revival.

It simply was not a thought that occurred to them. But the way in which they speak incessantly is this, that Christ has come to his church and people. George Whitefield used to like to use the parable of the foolish virgins in this way.

The church of God, the professing church, was large and it was midnight in the church. And the cry has been raised, Whitefield would say, the cry has been raised, behold the bridegroom cometh. Daniel Rowland, preaching in the early days of the awakening in Wales, was fond of preaching on that text in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, where the church, the bride is represented as sitting solitarily in that kiosk, that arbor in a garden.

It has been a time of winter and of rain, a time when there has been no song. Suddenly the bride is arrested with the sound of the approach of her beloved. And Daniel Rowland's text was, behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountain, skipping upon the hill.

It was said that as he preached that sermon once under the shadow of the Black Mountains in the south of Wales, the people even looked up to the hills. So intense was the reality of the conviction in Rowland's heart that Christ was coming and working for the revival and the upbuilding of this church. William Tennant Jr., one of these four Tennant brothers who were all used so greatly in America, speaking of the evidence of Christ's presence in the church in a new way, he says, I felt as the apostles when it was told them that the Lord was risen.

I felt as the apostles when it was told them that the Lord was risen. If you ever go to Howarth in Yorkshire, you will see there in the churchyard a flagstone commemorating the work of William Grimshaw. Grimshaw, a worldly parson for several years, converted to the gospel in 1739-40, and living ever after that in the light of that text in Philippians 121.

A text that was written on his coffin, and written on that flagstone, for me to live is Christ and to die is death. Now this was the way in which they understood a revival, as it was brought out to us last night, as an act of divine grace and of intervention, and an act which is specifically related to Christ as the head and king over his church. Let me give you one other illustration of the scripture, of this representation of what a revival is.

In the 59th chapter of the prophet Isaiah, that well-known text, When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And then the prophet goes on, And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to them that turn from iniquity and Jacob. So that the coming of the spirit, and the work of the spirit in raising up a standard, is identified with the coming of the Redeemer in grace and power.

You recall how the apostle Paul himself, when he wants to show us the nature of that great work which will take place when the veil is taken from the Jews, and when they turn to Christ, he represents it in terms of the language which he takes from Isaiah 59. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, in the outpouring of the spirit, and in the manifestation of his power and grace. Now it is against that background that we must understand the personal experience of George Whitby, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord.

I was reading recently for the first time a book by Professor A.T. Robertson, which was printed in the year 1911. And in this book he speaks of the decline of the ministry which was proceeding apace even in his day. And he has a chapter in the book, which I found a very searching chapter, entitled The Glory That Faded.

The faded glory of the Christian ministry. He says, the ministry today has lost its glory for many people. There was once a halo about the calling of the minister which to some is now lost.

He goes on to say what that halo ought to be. It is the highest crown of the minister that he is called so often into the closest fellowship with the eternal God. And this is what he concludes.

The only way to have permanent glory is to continue beholding the glory of the Lord. If we cease to look at him, we cease to reflect his glory. I think that explains what happened in the lives of many ministers and students in the late 1730s.

George Whitfield was ordained in June 1736 in Gloucester Cathedral. And speaking of that event many years later, he said, Thou, O God, knowest that when the bishop put his hand upon my head, I looked for no other preferment than publicly to suffer for the Lamb of God. A little later that week, we find him writing the time when he preached his first sermon.

The prayer, Glorious Jesus, unloose my stammering tongue to tell thy love immense and searchable. We preach Christ Jesus the Lord. And the answer to that prayer was really the 18th century revival.

A prayer that was being offered not only by Whitfield but by many others. And so I say that the great feature of Whitfield's life is his burning devotion and love to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it was out of this experience that he worked as a minister.

We hear him saying to the people, Christ is so good a master that I would have all men drawn after him. Oh for a thousand lives to spend for Jesus. God forbid, he said on another occasion, that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.

He preached his last sermon on the 29th of September in 1770. He was traveling on his way to Boston and he stopped or was passing through the village of Exeter and the people begged him to preach a day before his death. And Whitfield readily consented upon which one person with more discernment than others who was there said to Whitfield, he said, Sir you are more fit to go to bed than to preach.

True replied Whitfield. And then clasping his hands and looking up to heaven he added, Lord Jesus, I am weary in thy work but not of it. Let me go and speak for thee once more in the field.

We read how he went out with hoarse voice and with shaking body and preached there for the last time the sermon which ended with these words, I go to my everlasting rest. My sun has risen, shone and is setting. Nay, it is about to rise and shine forever.

I have not lived in vain and, this is coming back to Whitfield's heart, and though I could live to preach Christ a thousand years, I die to be with him which is far better. There are many testimonies from contemporaries who knew Whitfield to this feature in his life. One American minister of his funeral sermon, Whitfield's death, he spoke quote, of the ardent love he bore to the Lord Jesus.

He had, he the incomparable excellence of the person of Christ. And another declared, Mr. Whitfield's zeal for Christ was extraordinary. He recommended himself to his thousands of hearers by his engagedness for holiness and for souls.

What I find most convicting in Whitfield's love to Christ is the manner in which it was not only maintained but deepened as the years passed. Instead of being smothered by popularity and success, the candle of his Christian life flames the more brightly. He meant God helping him to burn with the same devotion to the end.

Professor Robertson, in the book I have mentioned, he speaks of the master passion of the apostle Paul as the ambition to be well-pleasing to his master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking from the verse in 2 Corinthians 5, whether present or absent we may be accepted of him. And speaking of this motive as the great motive of a gospel minister, Robertson made this comment.

He contrasts Paul with ourselves, and he judges that our greatest weakness is not the total absence of this ambition but our failure to persevere in it. He says, there are few preachers who do not have a sporadic ambition to please Christ. The trouble is to hold oneself to this high ideal year in and year out.

So many complications will arise, so many interruptions to one's work, so rapidly the time passes by. The sermon does not get the work that it ought to have. The visits are not made but are clamoring for attention.

The work does not get done. A fresh look at the unwearied Christ will spur one on to the best and to the highest. The end of Robertson's quote.

Now it is in this respect that Whitefield is so like the apostle Paul. There seems to be in Whitefield a singular absence of these periods of cold and declension. Perhaps you've read the beautiful tribute that the poet William Cowper wrote on Whitefield's memory.

And among the things that Cowper says were these lines. Paul's love of Christ and steadiness unbridled were a copied quote in him and well transcribed. He followed Paul, his zeal a kindred flame, his apostolic charity the same.

Yet we must not suppose that this was in some way natural to Whitefield. We find in his life and letters the constant recognition of his danger of being withdrawn from this this fellowship with his Lord. Let me give you one quotation.

There is nothing, he says, there is nothing I dread more than having my heart drawn away by earthly objects. When that time comes it will be over with me indeed. I must then bid farewell to zeal and fervency of spirit and in effect bid the Lord Jesus depart from my blood runs cold, he says, at the very thought thereof.

All that I may be enabled even to the end to evidence that nothing but a pure disinterested love to Christ and souls caused me to begin go on and hold out in pursuing the present work of God. I have seen so many who once bid exceeding fair and afterwards deem as like preferred the world to Christ that I cannot be too jealous over myself or others whom I profess to love. Before leaving this general comment on Whitefield's experience, his devotion, it might be well to guard against one misapprehension.

In our own day there is a real temptation for evangelicals to suppose that to counteract the deadness of our time the one thing needful is a return to religious feeling, and further it is often implied that the strength of a Christian's life is to be judged primarily by the degree of his emotional warmth. According to this view, sanctification is thought of primarily as maintaining our subjective happiness, and the more joy there is the more godliness is supposed to be present. That is a very rough summary of a view with which I'm sure you are familiar, and one which is often pressed on us, but I assure you that that was not the attitude or the view of George Whitefield.

It is true that in the early years of his ministry, he did not recognize sufficiently the danger of giving to emotion a place which it does not occupy in the New Testament. For instance, he intended, for instance, he tended to treat joy and zeal as being in themselves sure evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and he gave, as he later himself admitted on many occasions, he gave too much credit to subjective impulses as a means of knowing divine guidance. But he came to see that this stage of his experience, far from being the highest expression of the Christian life, had more to do with its infancy.

The further we go, he says, the further we go in the spiritual life, the more cool and rational shall we be, and yet more truly zealous. For again, it is not sudden flashes of joy, but having the humility of Christ that must denominate us Christians. Fellowship with Christ must involve feeling, but holiness is much more than feeling.

I say this lest anyone supposes that by speaking of Whitefield's devotion to Christ, it is only emotional warmth which is being considered. His piety was much more scripturally based, and I believe he would have agreed with the words which John Berridge wrote to the Countess of Huntingdon in 1770. Berridge says, I cannot wish for transports, these transports of ecstasy and joy, such as once we had, and which almost turned our heads, but I do long to see a spirit poured forth of triumphant faith, heavenly love, and steadfast cleaving to the Lord.

And these two things are not identical. Now, let me just say a little on the second head of the influence of this devotion to Christ in his work as a minister of the gospel. And the first thing that I would observe is that the strength which he gained from communion with Christ sustained him through all the heaviest trials of his ministry.

Now, a whole address could be given on the trials and the burden which Whitefield carried. He says in one place, poor ministers are set in the front of the battle, and in proportion to our success we shall behave. And that was indeed exemplified in his own life.

I have singled out, just for brief mention, three particular burdens which were possibly the heaviest that he bore. You may think of several others. The three are these.

First, persecution and physical suffering. Secondly, the burden of almost lifelong poverty and need. And thirdly, the burden of slander and misrepresentation.

Now, I can only say a few words on this. First, on the persecution and the suffering. John Richard Greene, in his short history of the English people, when he comes to Whitefield, whom he treats very briefly and altogether unsatisfactorily, at least he says this which is true.

He says their preacher, Whitefield and his colleagues, their preaching stirred a passionate hatred in their opponents. Their lives were often in danger. They were mobbed, they were they were ducked, they were stoned, they were smothered with filth.

William Cowper, in that poem I mentioned, speaks of Whitefield as one who stood pilloried on infamy's high stage and bore the pelting score of half an age. On more than one occasion, Whitefield was stoned, and these stonings were no mere act. William Seward, his great friend, was stoned to death at Hay-on-Wye in 1741, was it? Black Lion Greene, who was standing beside Harold Harris preaching, he'd already been blinded in one eye by a stone a few days earlier, and that day in Hay, he was killed.

Christian friend lifted his body and carried it over the border he's buried at Coothoft. Whitefield often went through very similar scenes. He was threatened with being thrown in a lime pit.

He was several times threatened with assassination. Once in Ireland, I think it was in Dublin, he was severely stoned. His services were interrupted.

He was frequently sent letters threatening his assassination, and I say that it was his communion with Christ that carried him victorious through this. There was a quotation I couldn't lay my hand on. It was a military quotation, and Whitefield loved to use it.

You know, in the 18th century, battles were generally fought in hollow squares, four-sided squares, and Whitefield would speak of Christ as the believer's hollow square. In the middle of that square, we stand. And in regard to the danger which he experienced, why to him it was just a possibility that he would be nearer to his Savior and Lord.

I want, he says, I want to leap my 70 years. I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ. I do not fear dying or being dispatched by a sword or a pistol to make a passage for my soul to flee to God.

A man cannot speak like that unless he has communion with his Savior. He stood erect in the greatest turmoil and the greatest of mobs, because he felt this in his heart. He knew he was immortal till his work was done, and he longed to be with Christ.

His second-rate burden was that of poverty, and this is a quite remarkable thing, because it might be said that no man in Britain collected more money in the 18th century than George Whitefield did. Money was continually flowing into his hands, but almost every second-rate burden was that of poverty, and this is a quite remarkable thing, because it might be said that no man in Britain collected more money in the 18th century than George Whitefield did. Money was continually flowing into his hands, but almost every penny that flowed in, it flowed out.

Andrews, one of Whitefield's biographers, had estimated that Whitefield collected as much as 14,000 pounds for the work of God in America. When he was in Scotland, he would be collecting. On one occasion, there were a number of poor highlanders in Edinburgh with no work, and Whitefield, at once after his speaking, took a collection for these men.

He collected money for all kinds of purposes, for the Christians on the continent of Europe, for refugees there, and so on. He was a man of immense gift in the way that he was able to exhort God's people to give of their substance to Christ's cause, but of those gifts, Whitefield himself received literally and practically nothing, and yet of course this was one of the slanders which he had to bear. He would say sometimes, if the world could look through my window and see Dr Swinton eating his cow heath, they would know how poor he was.

Poverty. In the beginning of the year 1744, he was so poor that he simply could not afford to keep his wife and their baby child, John, in London, so that the cost of living was too great, and so he arranged for her to come down to South Wales, to Abergavenny. They traveled down, beginning of February, it was the middle of winter, they stopped in Gloucester, and there his son John died at the age of four weeks.

It was their only child to live. This is only one detail of many, which illustrates the poverty that he bore. Now of course, part of that poverty, a great part, was due to the responsibility that he had for the orphanage in Geordie.

He established this orphanage in 1739, and all his life, like C.H. Spurgeon, he maintained that orphanage, and it required a great deal of money to do it. And I say it was communion with Christ that carried Whitfield through that. And the last great burden of his ministry, which I mentioned, was the burden of slander, and the strife of tongue.

And I think those engaged in the ministry would probably agree that this is the hardest burden which ministers have to bear. It was certainly harder for Whitfield than to face a mob, or to face stone. He was often cruel, bitter, jealous, just containing the spirit of the devil.

And it came from all directions, from the world, from all sections of the world, from the nobility who scorned him, from the playwrights who liked to write plays to mimic Whitfield, and to make money out of caricaturing the evangelist, and who wrote the most scurrilous and filthy things against his name. It came from the church, from the clergy, and it came unhappily even from Christian people. Whitfield says in one place that we have to endure not only the contradiction of sinning, but the contradiction of faith.

And it was his fellowship with Christ that carried him through that. First thing then, his devotion to Christ carried him through his trials. Secondly, I want to say a few words on the fact that it was his communion with Christ that preserved in him a truly Catholic spirit.

And the more one reads Whitfield, the more one admires him. He wanted, indeed he was determined, to maintain fellowship with all whom he believed belonged to Christ. And that was not an easy thing to do, even in days of revival.

In days of revival when feelings are strong, and many are being moved, and congregations are growing fast, there is a great danger of a, what shall we say, Whitfield would have called it a party-bigoted spirit. Let me read you a few words which he writes to a minister in Scotland. And this minister was concerned that Whitfield should be a little more exclusive in his communion.

And that he wasn't altogether happy with the extent of the friendships which Whitfield showed. Now Whitfield, in replying to this man, writes like this. Though I, dealing now of course with the Arminian question, though I am a strenuous defender of the righteousness of Christ, and utterly detest Arminian principles, yet I know that God gave me the Holy Ghost before I was clear in either as to head knowledge.

And therefore, dear sir, I am the more moderate to people who are not clear, supposing I see the divine image stamped upon their hearts. Mr., and he just gives initials, Mr. W, undoubtedly John Wesley, Mr. W, and Mr. L, I take to be holy men of God, though they think far widely from me. And from each other in some particular branches of doctrine.

Dear sir, be not offended at my plain speaking. I find but few of a truly Catholic spirit. Most are Catholic till they bring persons over to their own party, where they would fetter them.

I have not so learned Christ. I desire to act as God acts. I shall approve and join with all those who are good in every sense.

And cast a mantle of love over all that are bad, so far as is consistent with a good conscience. This I can do without temporizing. Nay, I should defile my conscience if I did otherwise.

Again he says, oh for a revival of true and undefiled religion in all sex, he's using the word of course in good sense, in all denominations whatsoever. I long to see a Catholic spirit overspread the world. May God vouchsafe to make me an instrument of promoting.

Now, that was Whitfield's general position. As far as other Christians were concerned, of whatever persuasion they were, whether Wesleyan or Moravian or even sometimes Quakers, if he believed they were the children of God, he believed there was a duty to show to them Christian love and affection. But there was a second area in which his Catholic spirit showed itself, and that was within the closer communion of those who were committed to the evangelical and Calvinistic position.

Now as far as Wesley was concerned, his position was quite clear. John Gillies, the Stretcher-Stotton minister, summarizes it like this, and it's a perfect summary. He loved his friend Wesley, but would not part with a grain of sacred truth for the brother of his heart.

And because Whitfield would not part with a grain of sacred truth, he recognized that it was necessary for those who were evangelical Calvinists to do their work together. Indeed, he believed there would be less disputing if that was the case. But he also recognized that there was a danger, even amongst those who were evangelical Calvinists, that they too could fall out.

That is to say, unless they lived near to Christ, they would very quickly bring issues that were secondary into such prominence that they would be divided. And he writes to one of the Welsh ministers in 1742 on this very subject. He is afraid of the peril of what he calls a sectarian zeal.

He says, I hope dear Mr. O will be kept free and not fall into disputing about baptism or other non-essentials, for I am persuaded that unless we all are content to preach Christ and to keep off from disputable things wherein we differ, God will not bless us long. If we act otherwise, however we may talk of a Catholic spirit, we shall only be bringing people over to our own party and there better then. Now remember that Whitfield is here speaking of the general unity of the work of God.

He is not saying that ministers in their own congregation, whether Baptists or Pride of Baptists, should not speak of this. But he is saying in terms of the ongoing of the work of God, it was essential that this should not be put in the category of essential, because God's work evidently was on this subject. He felt very deeply the need for a Catholicity of spirit there.

And that Catholicity could only be maintained by communion with Christ. If they live near to Christ, they would be kept from that evil spirit. Now my last point then, as time is running out, is to say a few words on the effect of Whitfield's devotion to Christ upon his preaching.

And of course here we are dealing with something that is the heart of the whole matter. It led to a concentration on the person of Christ in his preaching and ministry. Thomas Manson, the Puritan, has got a very good illustration which let me give it to you.

He's speaking of the need of ministers to concentrate their thoughts and affections to be effective in their work. And he says this, when the beams of the sun are contracted by a burning glass upon one spot, then they cause fire. So when our thoughts are concentrated on one object, they warm the heart and at last burn the truth into it.

Now that was Whitfield. Concentrated upon one object and at last they burn the truth into it. And that was through his preaching.

When he was in Scotland in 1741, he heard a story from one of the Scottish ministers which deeply moved him and he repeated it again himself. There was a Presbytery meeting of ministers and at the conclusion of the Presbytery one of the brethren preached. And in his sermon Whitfield said he made a supposition that the last judgment was come and that Jesus Christ was now upon the throne of judgment and calling his ministers to an account.

He asked one of them what did you preach for? Says he, Lord there was a patronage of 150 a year and therefore I took orders to get the presentation. Stand thou by, says he, verily thou hast thy reward. He asks another, what did you preach for? And he says, I preached that I might be reckoned a fine preacher and have applause of men.

Says he, stand thou by, verily thou hast thy reward. A third comes and he says unto him, and what did you preach for? Says he, Lord thou knowest my heart. I did not seek to please men and though many infirmities have passed in my ministry, I did with an upright design to promote thy glory.

Jesus Christ cries out make room angels for this my dear servant. Whitfield was always preaching Christ. Some of you no doubt have got this big volume of his sermons and I've been reading them again and this point comes through again and again.

He says, what will you laugh at the minister that cries out Lord help you to come? Come, he says, come. Do you think that we have nothing else to say and are at a loss for words when we cry come, come, come to fill up our sermons? He says, it is easy for you to come and to hear the gospel but you do not know what nights and days we have, what pangs we have in our hearts and how we travel in birth till Christ be formed in your souls. Men and brethren fathers parken, God help you save yourselves from this untoward generation.

And the last words he preached in London before he left Tottenham Court Chapel in 1769. He's taken his farewell of his people, they were his congregation. He says, when we come before the great judge of quick

and dead, when I stand before him, God grant you may not part with me then it will be a dreadful parting.

God forbid it, God forbid it. Oh remember he says that my last words were come, come to Christ. The Lord help you to come to Christ, come to Christ, come to Jacob's God, God give you Jacob's faith.

Oh remember my last words were thus he says. There was therefore in Whitfield's preaching an immense amount of peace. Let me just give you one illustration of it.

I think it's characteristic of many others that could be given. A man who later became himself a minister of the gospel heard Whitfield preaching at Norwich, never heard him before, went out of curiosity the sermon he says was on John's, John the Baptist's appeal to the Sadducees and Pharisees to flee from the wrath to come. Whitfield he said and described the Sadducean character but that did not touch him.

Then the pharisaic, that shook me a little. At length he abruptly broke off, then burst into a flood of tears, then lifting up his hands he cried with a loud voice oh my hearers the wrath is to come, the wrath is to come. These words sunk into my heart like lead in the water.

I wept, I went alone and these words followed me wherever I went. For days and weeks I could think of little else but the awful words the wrath is to come. Now that preaching was a man preaching who was in close communion with his Lord and Savior.

I had a third head but I won't expand on it until when the time is gone but I feel sure that if Whitfield could speak a word to us today that that word would be the need for this devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. You know when Gladstone wrote his Life of Whitfield 60 more years ago he said how that no one, he did not, Gladstone, he did not believe in Whitfield's doctrine and that no one really did anymore. And we have lived, how we should be thankful for it, we have lived to see a great change.

Nobody could write that now. There are ministers, not a few, who do believe what Whitfield believed. Now upon them, upon us, there lies this heaviest responsibility that having that proof we might be the same men as these men were in devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whitfield says this in one sermon in Scotland. He says, when shall we hear or see a day of power in Scotland? Not until we find a work of God stirring amongst ministers until then. We cannot find it among the people.

Pour out your prayers for your ministers and then he goes on. He says, I wish well to this poor kingdom but that can never be until the Spirit of God is poured out on the sons of the prophets. But when in a conference somewhat like this, much smaller, the English and the Welsh Calvinistic leaders met at Tarsili in 1743 in April.

Whitfield preached on the subject that God willing Dr. Dupree is to take tomorrow morning. He not walk with God. And that said Whitfield, that is the thought of blaming ministers.

Ministers who walk with communion with Christ. We will look forward indeed to that subject. I close then with this one quotation.

He's been preaching on the power of Christ's resurrection. And speaking of Paul's devotion to the Lord Jesus. How ardently he says he desired to know Christ.

Oh that we may all be like-minded and that we may feel the power of Christ's resurrection as they did. How, how he says should we then recover our primitive dignity. Tample the earth under our feet and with our souls be continually gasping after God.

And what hinders but we may be thus minded is Jesus Christ our great high priest altered from what he was. Though he is the same yesterday, today and forever. And though he be exalted to the right hand of God.

Yet he is not ashamed to call us brethren. The power of his resurrection is as great now as formerly. And the Holy Spirit which was assured to us by his resurrection as ready and able to quicken us who were dead in trespasses and sins.

As any saint that ever lived. Let us but cry and that instantly to him that is mighty and able to save. Let us in sincerity and truth without secretly keeping back the least part.

Renounce ourselves and the world then we shall be Christian indeed. And though the world may cast us out and separate us from their company. Yet Jesus Christ will walk with us and abide with us.

Amen.

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