

William C. Burns

by David Smithers

The sermon highlights the life and ministry of William C. Burns, a Scottish evangelist who was driven by an all-consuming passion for the Lamb of God and was instrumental in several revivals, including the Kilsyth Revival.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 145:18, Ezekiel 22:30, Matthew 6:6, Luke 18:1, Acts 1:14, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 5:16

Topics: "Personal Holiness", "Revival Prayer"

Description

David Smithers preaches on the life of William C. Burns, emphasizing the importance of personal holiness, constant nearness to God, and fervent prayer for revival. Burns' ministry was marked by divine urgency, intense intercession, and extraordinary results, leading to powerful manifestations of God's glory during the Kilsyth Revival. Despite his impactful ministry in Scotland, Burns' passion for souls led him to China, where he continued to preach the gospel with zeal and selfless dedication, influencing missionaries like Hudson Taylor. Burns believed that true endurance in prayer and obedience was essential for spiritual victory and revival, urging believers to persevere in seeking God's presence and pouring out His Spirit.

Transcript

In September of 1840 Scotland's famous praying pastor, Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote a letter to William C. Burns. He writes, "I am deepened in my conviction, that if we are to be instruments in (A TRUE REVIVAL) we must be purified from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. Oh cry for personal holiness, constant nearness to God by the blood of the Lamb! Bask in His beams, - lie back in the arms of love, - be filled with the Spirit, or all success in the ministry will only be to your own everlasting confusion."

William C. Burns, like M'Cheyne, was not merely a man of hopeful theories and empty words. Through his fervent praying and preaching, literally thousands witnessed the tangible glory of God. From an early age, William C. Burns heart was broken for a lost and dying world. The story is told that when he was seventeen he was brought by his mother from the quiet town of Kilsyth to the bustling city of Glasgow. His mother was separated from her son while she was shopping. After retracing her steps she discovered him in an alley with tears streaming down his face. She could see he was suffering great agony and said, "Willie my boy, what ails you? Are you ill?" With broken cries he replied, "Oh, mother, mother - the thud of these Christless feet on the way to hell breaks my heart"

The spiritual eyes of young William Burns had caught a glimpse of the everlasting horrors of a Christless eternity. This vision no doubt help shape this young man who would later become one of the key instruments in the great Kilsyth Revival of 1839. He often found himself being driven to his knees in almost constant intercession. "He wept for hours in deep soul agony on behalf of a backslidden church and the lost souls going to hell." His ministry was consistently marked by a divine urgency and intensity. As a result, his preaching produced extraordinary results.

Mr. Burns recalls a time during the Kilsyth Revival when strong men fell powerless under the power of the Gospel hammer. "During the whole time that I was speaking, the people listened with the most solemn attention. At last their feelings became too strong and broke forth in weeping and wailing, tears and groans, intermingled with shouts of glory and praise from some of the people of God. The appearance of a great part of the people gave me a vivid picture of the state of the ungodly in the day of Christ's coming to judgement. Some were screaming out in agony. Strong men fell to the ground as if they were dead. Such was the general commotion even after repeating for some time the most free and urgent invitations of the Lord to sinners."

Later, William C. Burns learned that the night before this powerful meeting a group of believers had gathered to labor in prayer for the lost and ungodly. During those wonderful days of revival glory it was not uncommon for Mr. Burns and many others to fervently pray and travail throughout the night. As a result the glory of God fell day after day. Again, William C. Burns describes for us the miraculous affect of the Spirit of revival. He writes, "At the conclusion of a solemn address to some anxious souls suddenly the power of God seem to descend, and all were bathed in tears. It was like a pent-up flood breaking forth. Tears were streaming from the eyes of many and some fell on the ground crying for mercy... The whole town was moved. The ungodly raged but the word of God grew mightily and prevailed."

Even after being used of God to turn Scotland upside down, William C. Burns' passion for souls was still unsatisfied. He was soon off to China to preach the gospel to those who had never heard the precious name of JESUS! He was recognized as the premier revivalist of his day, and yet he joyfully surrendered himself to a life of obscurity and hardship on the neglected mission fields of China. No other episode in Burns' wonderful life reveals more about his sterling character than this one decision. In so doing he left popularity, prestige, wealth and loved ones all behind. When he was asked when he would be ready to leave for China, his answer was, "NOW". He boldly declared, "I am ready to burn out for God. I am ready to endure any hardship, if by any means I might save some. The longing of my heart is to make known my glorious Redeemer to those who have never heard." On another occasion Burns was heard to say, "The longing of my heart would be to go once around the world before I die, and preach one gospel invitation in the ear of every creature." His own mother likened him to a sharp knife that would be worn out by cutting, rather than by rusting; and the young Burns wished that it might be so!

In 1855, William C. Burns unexpectedly met a young missionary in China by the name of James Hudson Taylor. This seemingly random meeting resulted in a great blessing for both men. William Burns found in Hudson Taylor a man after his own heart, and for seven months they walked together as kindred souls and fellow-laborers. Mr. Burns also recognized the warm reception Hudson Taylor received by the Chinese, while ministering in the native Chinese dress. Burns was quick to learn from his new friend and soon adopted this practice for himself. The impact made upon the youthful Taylor by the experienced Scotsman is clearly seen in Hudson Taylor's journals and letters. "Never had I had such a spiritual father as Mr. Burns", wrote Hudson Taylor. The autobiographical work of Hudson Taylor, "A Retrospect" gives a further account of the deep impression that Burns had on him. He writes, "Those happy months were an

unspeakable joy and privilege to me. His love for the Word was delightful, and his holy, reverential life and constant communings with GOD made fellowship with him satisfying to the deep cravings of my heart. His accounts of revival work and of persecutions in Canada, and Dublin, and in Southern China were most instructive, as well as interesting; for with true spiritual insight he often pointed out GOD'S purposes in trial in a way that made all life assume quite a new aspect and value. His views especially about evangelism as the great work of the Church, and the order of lay evangelists as a lost order that Scripture required to be restored, were seed-thoughts which were to prove fruitful in the subsequent organization of the China Inland Mission"

"We were in the habit of leaving our boats, after prayer for blessing, at about nine o'clock in the morning, with a light bamboo stool in hand. Selecting a suitable station, one would mount the stool and speak for twenty minutes, while the other was pleading for blessing; and then changing places, the voice of the first speaker had a rest. After an hour or two thus occupied, we would move on to another point at some distance from the first, and speak again. Usually about midday we returned to our boats for dinner, fellowship, and prayer, and then resumed our out-door work until dusk. After tea and further rest, we would go with our native helpers to some tea-shop, where several hours might be spent in free conversation with the people. Not infrequently before leaving a town we had good reason to believe that much truth had been grasped; and we placed many Scriptures and books in the hands of those interested." Another missionary to China was once asked. "Do you know William Burns?" The missionary replied, "Know him? All China knows him to be the holiest man alive!"

William C. Burns was driven by an all-consuming passion for the Lamb of God. In Burns, God found a man who truly cared. He cared enough to listen, obey, and stay on his knees. William Burns recognized that shallow and superficial praying was one of the greatest hindrances to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. He believed that a lack of true endurance in the secret place of prayer gives the victory to Satan. Burns writes, "Many who do come into the secret place, and who are God's children, enter it and leave it just as they entered, without ever so much as realizing the presence of God. And there are some believers who, even when they do obtain a blessing, and get a little quickening of soul, leave the secret place without seeking more. They go to their chamber, and there get into the secret place, but then, as soon as they have got near to Him, they think they have been peculiarly blessed, and leave their chamber, and go back into the world... Oh, how is it that the Lord's own people have so little perseverance? How is it that when they do enter into their place of prayer to be alone, they are so easily persuaded to be turned away empty; instead of wrestling with God to pour out His Spirit, they retire from the secret place without the answer, and submit to it as being God's will."

In Ezekiel 22:30,31, the prophet warns us of what happens when God cannot find true men and women of broken-hearted prayer and obedience. - "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found no one. "Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads, says the Lord God." Whom among us will STAND In the gap and pray, and then pray again until heaven comes down to earth?

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