

March 18, 1805 • George Washington Bethune Came on Stage

by D.L. Moody

The sermon honors the life and legacy of George Washington Bethune, a notable Dutch Reformed pastor who prioritized preaching the Gospel over leadership positions.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Grace", "Preaching The Gospel"

Description

D.L. Moody reflects on the life of George Washington Bethune, a notable Dutch Reformed pastor of Huguenot descent, who dedicated his life to preaching the Gospel despite opportunities for academic leadership. Bethune emphasized the importance of growing in grace and urged his family to share the message of salvation. He authored several works and composed hymns, including 'There Is No Name So Sweet on Earth,' which encapsulates his devotion to Christ. His sudden death at 56 came after he preached in Florence, leaving a legacy of faith and literary contributions. At his funeral, his hymn 'It is not death to die' was sung, celebrating his belief in eternal life with God.

Transcript

When France suppressed its Protestant Huguenots, they scattered around the world. Many wound up in the young United States. Several presidents, the first chief justice of the United States (John Jay) and many other famous men boasted Huguenot blood. George Washington Bethune, born on this day, March 18, 1805 in New York City, was also of Huguenot descent. He became a notable Dutch Reformed pastor.

Apart from a brief stint in South Carolina as a missionary to seamen while he was still associated with the Presbyterian church, George spent all of his pastoral life in Dutch Reform churches in New York and Pennsylvania until illness forced his retirement in 1859. He authored several books, including a study of British female writers, a collection of his own poems, and five editions of Izaak Walton's Complete Angler.

Because of his extraordinary literary background, he was offered high leadership positions at New York University and the University of Pennsylvania. However, he declined both because he preferred to be a preacher of the Gospel. In fact, he once urged his sons and sons-in-law: "My sons, preach the Gospel. Tell dying sinners of a Savior. All the rest is folly."

It was as a preacher and orator that he shone. In one of his sermons, he gave this advice: "While, therefore, we grow in the Christian life by divine grace, it is our duty to grow in grace. Besides, the quality of grace is such that, though it is strength from God, we must use it. Grace gives no new faculty, but strengthens the faculties which we have . . . "

Bethune penned the words to the hymn, "There Is No Name So Sweet on Earth."

There is no name so sweet on earth,

No name so sweet in Heaven,

The Name, before His wondrous birth

To Christ the Savior given.

And when He hung upon the tree,

They wrote this Name above Him;

That all might see the reason we

Forevermore must love Him.

He died suddenly of a stroke in April 1862. The morning of his death, he preached in the Scottish church in Florence. He had gone to sunny Italy that year for his health and his wife's. George Bethune was just 56. At his funeral, the congregation sang one of his hymns:

It is not death to die,

To leave this weary road,

And, midst the brotherhood on high,

To be at home with God.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/dl-moody/march-18-1805-george-washington-bethune-came-on-stage/>

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