

John Wesley's Vision of Authentic Christianity

by Herbert McGonigle

Herbert McGonigle explores John Wesley's vision of authentic Christianity through his life, experiences, and the impact of the Evangelical Revival.

Duration: 1:04:03

Scripture: Matthew 22:37, John 1:12, Acts 26:18, Romans 14:17

Topics: "Authentic Christianity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the preaching of John Wesley, a prominent figure in the Methodist movement. Wesley preached to a crowd of about three thousand people in the open air, emphasizing the importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor. He believed that scriptural holiness was defined by these two principles. Wesley lived a life of simplicity and generosity, giving away all his wealth and focusing on serving the poor. The sermon also mentions the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery, highlighting the importance of historical accuracy in reporting.

Transcript

It's always a great joy to meet new brethren, those that love the Lord, and Conference, as you know, the years has invited a guest to come and join with us, somebody we don't know, but quite often by the end of the week we feel that we've known them all our lives as they've ministered among us, and it's our privilege to welcome the Rev. Dr. Herbert McGonigal this morning. He's a Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology, Church History and Wesley Studies at the Nazarene Theological College, that's in Manchester. So I'm not going to spend any more time, we'll just pray together and then I shall come and ask him to share with us.

Father, we do thank you for the joy of gathering together this morning. Lord, we come with open hearts as we have already been exhorted in our Bible study this morning to open up our hearts and receive the truth, and we pray this morning for our brother that as he opens up the truth that we may receive it into our hearts and be changed because we've heard it. And so we do commit him to you and the ministry this week in Jesus' name.

Amen. Terry, thank you for the warm welcome. I too asked one or two questions when I received a very kind invitation.

I have to admit that the term New Life Conference was one that I hadn't come across before. So I move fairly widely among the Lord's people. And then three things helped me to make a spontaneous, positive

response to your kind inquiry.

Number one, I knew Paul Evans. I mean, he's tolerably sound, so he's a good friend. I felt happy about that.

Then I looked at your program and I thought any conference that gives one session to John Wesley and one session to Charles Wesley, that's good. That must be all right. And then a long time ago, I picked up a copy, two copies of the Hymns of Eternal Truth.

I immediately recognized that it was all the hymns of Charles Wesley. Though I didn't know who had published the book, it simply said published in Bradford, but I liked the hymns. And you might like to know that down the years, when I have quite a bundle of them now, the bundle is getting smaller and smaller, when I have students in Wesley Studies, I recommend all my students to buy a copy for their private devotions.

Because I noticed these days, among those training for the work of God, there seems to be less and less acquaintance with the great classic hymns of the church. And that is a wonderful repository of, and so many of them with, we now take them out to say in Yorkshire, you know, with all the verses in. And so for those three reasons, of course, I felt very happy, very honored, very privileged to be here, speaking on behalf of my wife, Jean, and myself, the great joy.

I have already been among you and felt how people pray, and how Jesus is exalted. And I feel absolutely at home in a gathering like this. I've quite forgotten exactly how we arrived at the title, Spreading Scriptural Holiness Over the Land, John Wesley's vision of authentic Christianity.

But I think it is a good theme. Almost 500 years ago, our green and pleasant land was visited by God in the great 16th century Reformation, almost 500 years. From the Reformation until today, the greatest movement of the spirit that Britain ever witnessed was the 18th century Evangelical Revival.

I'm not forgetting the 19th century 59 Revival. It was much smaller. Its repercussions were much less.

The 18th century Revival was destined under God, not only to greatly impact our own land, but particularly wherever English speaking people were to live around the world. The Revival went across the Atlantic. Wesley's converts went to the New World.

They went to America. They went to Canada. They went to Australia.

They went to South Africa. They were to impact the whole world. The greatest move of the spirit of God in England since the 16th century Reformation was the Evangelical Revival.

And in the providence of God, three men were raised up, in particular, to head that Revival. George Whitefield, John Wesley, and his younger brother, Charles Wesley. And our interest this morning is in John and how in that Revival there was particular emphasis on what Wesley called throughout his life, scriptural holiness.

Now I'm sure that for most of the people here, it's probably unnecessary to remind you who John Wesley was. But I will take a moment. He was a son of the rectory.

Born into his Epworth rectory home. Epworth, for those of you who are visitors to our land, is about 150 miles due north of London in the lovely green county of Lincolnshire, about 12 miles from Doncaster. A

tiny little village that would never have been known in world history had not the Wesley family moved there.

They moved there in 1696. The Reverend Samuel Wesley was rector for 40 years. Of the children born, at least 17, possibly 18, maybe 19.

I say possibly because a couple of children were stillborn. It was a custom not to register stillborn children. At least 17 and probably 19.

John was number 15 and, if our counting is right, Charles was number 18. Brought up in a home of great devotion to the things of God. A home where Samuel and Susanna, according to the life they had, lived and worked and preached the gospel and brought their children up in the faith of the 39 Articles and the Church of England.

There is actually not too much wrong with the 39 Articles. John Wesley's problem was he found that they weren't being put into practice and they weren't being preached. From that rectory Epworth home, behind him the experience of the fire that burned the home down when he was 5 years old, he was not the most popular rector.

They didn't like Samuel Wesley for his politics. They didn't like him that he was so intense on collecting the tithes. And they didn't like him for the fact that usually in the pulpit he preached against sin and sinners by naming both.

That doesn't make you very popular. He preached against sin and men publicly. So his parishioners decided it was time to encourage the rector to move on and find another parish.

So they burned his crops. Not that he was much of a farmer anyway, but they burned his crops. And they stabbed his cattle to death in the field.

And when neither of those measures worked, almost certainly they were responsible for setting the rectory on fire. And only in the goodness of God did the family escape. John, aged 5 and a half, was the last to be rescued from the fire by a miraculous intervention.

And he grew up with his mother telling him that in the woods of Zachariah he was a brand plucked from the burning, saved from the fire in the destiny and the providence of God. Interestingly, years later, at the height of the Revival, when artists were wanting to come and paint portraits of John Wesley, there is one very rare portrait which has Wesley painted against a background of a burning house. And underneath the caption is not this a brand plucked from the fire.

So John Wesley grew up with his mother reminding him that God had spared his life for a purpose. From Epworth to Charterhouse School, then in London, now in Surrey, his elder brother, Sammy Junior, had gone to Westminster, where the younger brother, Charles, would go later. And old man Wesley could boast, I have given my three sons the best education that England can afford.

Which was probably not an idle boast. From Charterhouse to Christ Church Oxford, to be ordained into the Church of England at the age of 22, John Wesley took the vows of ordination very seriously, examined himself to see if he had a call from God. He wanted to be sure that he was not going into the ministry because his elder brother, Sammy, his father, Samuel, his grandfather, John, and his great grandfather, Bartholomew, had all gone to Oxford and had all ended up as ministers.

Four generations of Wesleys preached the Gospel. He wanted to be sure that he simply wasn't following family tradition. And he examined himself and he sought God.

And he dedicated his life to God as best he knew how. Then he went back home to Epworth for two years to be his father's curate. And by this time, Samuel Wesley was getting on in years and delighted that his son, John, who had the high academic honor of having been made a fellow of Lincoln College, had come home to help him.

And Samuel wanted John to inherit the rectory and carry on. John spent just over two years as his father's curate, visiting, preaching in that lovely part of the country. After two and a half years, he gave it up and went back to Oxford.

When he went back, he did a very Wesley thing. Pretty much like his mother, but like his father too. He wrote his father a letter.

See, his father wanted him to stay. His gifted son, ordained, an Oxford academic, the ideal man, the parishioners loved him. Why shouldn't he stay? John wrote a letter to his father in which he gave 24 reasons why it was better for him to go back to Oxford than to stay in Epworth.

He was a Methodist. As far as methodical things are concerned, he was a Methodist already. When he got back to Oxford, he discovered that a little group of three or four undergraduates were meeting together under the leadership of his younger brother, Charles, who had come up to Epworth, had come up to Oxford while he was at home.

Charles was leading this little group. They met regularly. They read the scriptures.

They prayed together. They looked into church history. They were intent on cultivating the holy and the devotional life.

And because John was the oldest of the group, because he was ordained, they made him the leader. And after a year or two, this group, which was now around about 10 or 15 at Oxford, began to be noticed. They were noticed because they were regularly going to the Lord's table as good Anglicans.

They met regularly for prayer, for Bible study. They observed all the fasts of the church, especially the early church. And they had begun visiting the prison and the workhouse in Oxford.

And they had opened a school for poor children. And some of their peers began to notice this group and began to give them names. They called them Bible moths, because they seemed to be always in the Bible.

They called them sacramentarians, because they were regularly at the Lord's table. They called them the Holy Club, just as someone might say, you know, he's a Holy Joe. Not exactly a complimentary term.

And then some unknown Oxford wag struck on the name Methodists, simply because their lifestyle was methodical. Every day was planned to give time for study, reading, walking, prayer, fasting, ministry, whatever. And the name given as a jest, the name given in a somewhat scornful way, was the name that stuck.

But you know, the world's first Methodist was not John Wesley. The world's first Methodist was Charles. He started the group.

John picked up the leadership, but the first to organize the group was his younger brother. He continued at Oxford until their father died in 1735. Both the brothers went home, walked, by the way, from Oxford to Epworth, to be there in time to see their father.

Almost 40 years of ministry Samuel had completed when he died in the April of 1735. Charles tells us, and I've been taking people to Epworth for 35 years. I know Epworth better than my hometown of Innisfil.

I've been taking three or four or five times a year, I take small groups and large groups, and of course the house was rebuilt after the fire, take them to the room where the Reverend Samuel Wesley died. Charles went in to speak to his father for the last time. And he tells us that his father said to him, he said, Charles, the Christian religion is going to revive in these islands.

I will not live to see it, but you will. Had the Reverend Samuel Wesley lived to see the part under God that both his sons would play in the revival, he would have been a very proud father in the best sense. Then John went in, and John said his father's voice was so weak, he had to bend over the bed to hear what his father was saying.

Samuel said to John, the inner witness Sam, the inner witness, that's the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity. The next day John wrote a letter to his elder brother, telling him that their father had died, repeating the words, the inward witness, and adding, but I didn't understand what our father was talking about. John Wesley did not know, he did not have, he was an ordained minister of the Church of England, he was an Oxford Don, he was fellow of Lincoln College, he'd been teaching New Testament for six or seven years, he would soon be a missionary to Georgia.

But he did not know the experience of the inner witness. They sailed later that year, in the October of 1735, a ten week journey from London, from Tilbury Docks, all the way to North America. Meeting on board a group of remarkable Christian evangelicals, German speaking Moravians, also bound for Georgia, which of course was a British colony.

After a couple of weeks, John Wesley was so impressed with the conduct, and the conversation, and the behaviour, and the worship of these Moravians, that he began to learn German, in order to converse with them. And all of you who love hymns, you will know that in most of our hymn books, are quite a number of John Wesley's translations, he translated a total of thirty hymns from German to English, so obviously he learned the language fairly well. When he arrived in Georgia, he moved house, to live near to these people.

Little after two years, disillusioned and disappointed, having in his own words, gone to America as much as anything to save his own soul, he quit Georgia and came home. He arrived in England on the first of February, 1738, Charles had come home much earlier. On the way back, he began writing a kind of journal memorandum, and he said, It is now two years and four months, since I left my native country, to teach the American Indians the way of Christianity.

But what have I myself learned in the meantime, why this, which surprised me most, that I who went to America to convert others, was never, myself, converted to Christ. Arriving back in London, he met another Moravian, Peter Buller. Peter Buller wanted to improve his English, so he was advised to take Charles Wesley as a tutor.

And in the providence of God, both the Wesley brothers, both ordained, now met Peter Buller. And as they instructed him in English grammar, he began to teach them the nature of true conversion, and justification, and saving faith. And from the first week in February, until the third week in May, the Whitson Pentecost weekend, both the brothers were under the direction of the Moravian Peter Buller.

You know friends, in the work and the providence of God, it is truly remarkable, the way God often works. Here were both the Wesley brothers, with an amazing heritage of faith. John Wesley could read the scriptures in the original languages, and he spoke three or four others as well.

He was well versed in Christian theology. But God used Peter Buller, person to person, to both the Wesley brothers. And on the Pentecost Sunday of that year, May the 21st, alone in a Moravian home, Charles Wesley found himself at peace with God.

He began to write a hymn about it, but that belonged to tomorrow. Three days later, on the Wednesday night, having gone to a Moravian meeting, unwillingly, where someone was reading Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans, about a quarter before nine he wrote, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart, remember, strangely warmed. Not his head, that had been well informed for a long time.

His heart. I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Almost three years earlier, he did not understand when his dying father said the inward witness, now he says, an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. You see, nothing can take the place of the warmed heart. No matter how well we think we know Scripture, no matter how orthodox we are, John Wesley was always orthodox, he drank in orthodoxy with his mother's milk.

The orthodoxy of the Bible and the Thirty-Nine Articles and the homilies of the church. It was not his orthodoxy that was the problem. It was a religion that was all in his head, but had never trickled down to touch his heart.

I felt my heart strangely warmed. And that Wednesday night of the 24th of May, 1738, not only brought to John Wesley the assurance of personal salvation, it drove him out to be an evangelist across the country. Immediately, he began preaching the new faith.

If any of you, I hope many of you have, have a collection of John Wesley sermons, one sermon in all his publications has always been number one. He always numbered it number one. The sermon, Salvation by Faith.

Seventeen days after the heartwarming, he had to take his turn preaching at St. Mary's, Oxford, the university church. He had preached there on at least seven or eight previous occasions. This was the first time he preached after the warmed heart.

I spent quite a while comparing the earlier eight sermons with this one. It's not the content that's really all that different. It's not so much that something has happened to the message, something has happened to the messenger.

There's a grip. His text, by the way, was Ephesians. By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

He had two more invitations to go back to Oxford, and after the third one, they told him he wouldn't be invited back anymore. They were a little unhappy with the direction, and the fire, and the evangelism, and the challenge of his preaching. But the country was opening up.

He kept preaching in Church of England churches until most of them had closed their doors. And by the way, the Church of England did not close its doors because John Wesley was preaching scriptural holiness. They closed their doors for two other reasons.

Because he was preaching the need that all men and women, even those baptized, need to be born again. And because when you are born again, you can have the witness of the Spirit that you are born again, that your sins are forgiven, that you're a child of God. In the 18th century, that was gross enthusiasm, it was called.

He would have a famous confrontation with Joseph Butler, the Bishop of Bristol, who said, Mr. Wesley, pretending to extraordinary revelations of the Spirit, sir, is a very horrid thing, a very horrid thing. I said, my Lord, I pretend to nothing more than what is offered to every believer in the New Testament. The assurance of sins forgiven.

It was an invitation from George Whitefield that took him to Bristol. Up until then, the ministry had been in the home counties. He rode to Bristol.

George Whitefield wisely only told him half the story. He said, John, the Lord is blessing us here in Bristol, and I think you are called of God to come and help us. But he left two points out.

And when John got there, he discovered that Whitefield was about to leave. John got there on the Saturday, and Whitefield left on the Monday to go to Georgia. But you see, before he left London, I don't know if you have ever met any Moravian Christians in your life.

Very fine people. The early Moravians believed in the scriptural practice of casting lots. So when John Wesley got the invitation to go to Bristol, he inquired from his Moravian friends, should I go? So what did they do? They cast lots.

I don't know if they spun a coin or what they did. But they cast lots. And the lot said, go.

So having been sent to Bristol by casting lots, John Wesley could hardly pull out. But he got a shock to discover that Whitefield was leaving. Then he got the second shock.

Whitefield was preaching, not inside consecrated walls, but out of doors. Open air preaching. Field preaching.

And John Wesley, who is in the journal, admits that he shrunk back in horror. A dignified Anglican minister, an Oxford don, a fellow of Lincoln College, preaching in the open air. Only Quakers or strange people like that preached out of doors.

Anglican vicars do their preaching inside consecrated walls. But the churches had closed in Bristol to Whitefield. And now Wesley found himself taking over the works.

And down beside that date for the heartwarming of the 24th of May, 1738, should be set the date for Monday, the 2nd of April, 1739. Four o'clock in the afternoon, John Wesley went to the appointed place where Whitefield had been preaching. If you know Bristol, anybody here from the West Country? Bristol? At the junction of Bradstreet and George Street and Nickness Street.

In those days it was a rough area. They made bricks there, now it's a car park. I saw the Netherers some years ago put a notice up to mark the spot.

Whitefield had been preaching there. Whitefield was gone. And the people turned up at four o'clock and they got John Wesley, all five feet four of him, wearing his hair long in the style of the day, dressed in his Anglican canonicals, you know, truly ecclesiastical dress, standing up in the open air.

He writes, I consent it to be more vile. You remember David dancing before the Ark and his wife said, You've made yourself vile? I consent it to be more vile. He estimated that the crowd was about 3,000.

Not bad for your first sermon in the open air. 3,000. And John Wesley preached from Luke 4. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. You know the great passage our Lord preached from in the synagogue in Nazareth. And as he preached, for the first time, he saw the Spirit of God come down upon the people.

He saw strong men moved by the Holy Spirit under conviction of sin. In a way, he knew that day, he had found his calling. That ministry that began in the brickyard in Bristol on the 2nd of April, 1739, ended 51 and a half years later.

Under an ash tree at Winchelsea, near Rye in Sussex. His final sermon out of doors. Not his final sermon.

He would preach for another five months. But the final sermon out of doors. Under the ash tree.

By the way, the ash tree grew until there was a big storm in 1927. And the ash tree blew down. But the Methodists down there were very enterprising people.

They cut the ash tree up and they sold bits of it all over the world. They said, you know, you can have a piece of the wood that came from the ash tree here in Winchelsea under which John Wesley preached his last sermon. You go there now, they planted another one, but it is not the original one.

There is another ash tree growing in the same. The point is, between the brickyard in Bristol and the ash tree in Winchelsea, there lies 51 and a half years of non-stop itinerant evangelism. I calculate that of the 45,000 times not 45,000 different sermons, but of the 45,000 times John Wesley preached, 80% of all the preaching was out of doors in all kinds of places, in all weathers, every week, of every month, of every year, non-stop for 51 and a half years.

What impelled him? Well, his own warmed heart. The warmed heart made him an evangelist. Not content to stay within the confines of consecrated walls, but to take the gospel to where the people were.

Anybody here from Scotland? 22 visits he made north of the border. Anybody here from Ireland? 21 times across the Irish Sea. Endless time to wail.

51 and a half years of non-stop itinerant evangelism. Gathering the converts together into societies, class meetings, band meetings, love feasts, and all the rest. Not merely content to bring people to saving faith, but to build them up in righteousness and in holiness.

He began to employ laymen full time. His famous traveling preachers. In his lifetime, he employed almost 400 of them.

He established a conference, which still meets, by the way, of course. Every year at the conference, Wesley told the preachers where they were going. He moved them every year.

He didn't want them to settle down and get too comfortable. So if you were one of Mr. Wesley's preachers, and say you were down here in Devon, the conference might send you to the north of Scotland, or send you to Ireland. And if you didn't like it, you either went or you quit.

Wesley just sent his men out. In the conference of 1763, by the way, the business was always conducted by question and answer. I suspect John Wesley framed the questions as well as framing the answers.

The 1763 conference, what may be reasonably believed to be God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists? And the answer? To reform the nation, and in particular, the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land. Reform the nation. That can only be done through holy people.

And reform the church. There was no intention to found another denomination. Methodism did not become a denomination until 42 years after John Wesley's death.

He wanted to reform the established church. He lived and died in what turned out to be a vain hope that the church of England would open her arms and embrace the revival. Of course, it didn't.

And so Methodism went its own way. But the purpose was to reform the nation. To call the nation back to God.

And to reform the church that had been set up in the Reformation. And to bring it back to biblical doctrine and evangelistic ministry. Interesting how John Wesley understood conversion.

Talking about the converts, he talked about the early decades of the 18th century. People falling away from the church. And by the way, in the year of Wesley's conversion, Joseph Butler, who went on to be Bishop of Durham, but was then the Bishop of Bristol, was offered the job of being Archbishop of Canterbury.

And he turned it down. Saying it is too late in the day to save a falling church. That was the bishop's estimate of his own church.

And Wesley says, just at this time when we wanted little of filling up the measure of our iniquities, two or three clergymen of the Church of England, himself, his brother and Whitfield, began vehemently to call sinners to repentance. In two or three years, they had sounded the alarm to the utmost borders of the land. Many thousands gathered to hear them.

And many of these were, in a short time, convinced of the number and heinousness of their sins. They sank deeper and deeper into that repentance which must ever precede faith in the Son of God. And from hence sprung fruits, meat for repentance.

Now listen to this. The drunkard commenced sober and temperate. The whoremonger abstained from adultery and fornication.

He that had been accustomed to curse and swear for many years now swore no more. The whole form of their life was changed. They left off doing evil and learned to do well.

But this was not all. Over and above this outward change, they began to experience inward religion. Now when you read Whitfield or Wesley or any of the 18th century Christians, they always use the word religion to mean the only religion, Christianity.

We can't say that any longer, but in 18th century England there was only one religion. So when Wesley says they began to experience inward religion, he means inward Christianity. The love of God was shed abroad in their hearts.

And this love constrained them to love all mankind, all the children of the Father of heaven and earth, and inspire them with a holy and heavenly temper the whole mind that was in Christ. What does Wesley say? He is saying that conversion is a transforming change. Men and women were not saved in their sins.

They were saved from their sins. And saved from sin, they began to live holy lives. But not only was their outward conduct altered from sin to holiness, the whole disposition of their spirit, they now in the great commandment began to love God with all their hearts and their neighbor as themselves.

Wesley says another thing. Such a work this has been as neither we nor our fathers have known. Not a few whose sins were of the most flagrant kind.

Drunkards, swearers, thieves, whoremongers, adulterers have been brought from darkness to light. And from the power of Satan unto God. Many of these were rooted in their wickedness, having gloried long in their sin.

But having heard the voice of Him that raises the dead, have been made partakers of an inward vital religion, even righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, meaning authentic Christianity. And for the rest of his life, John Wesley maintained that this side of heaven, there is nothing greater than the great commandment of Matthew 22. The whole law, said Jesus, all the law of God is summed up in these two.

You shall love the Lord your God with heart, mind, soul and spirit and your neighbor as yourself. And had it not been for controversy, had it not been for misunderstanding, had it not been for opposition, John Wesley would have been content to define Scripture of holiness as the love of God and the love of neighbor. Love filling the heart.

The love of God controlling the life. Six months before he died, he wrote, I am glad brother D has more light with regard to full scriptural holiness. This doctrine is the grand depository which God has lodged with the people called Methodists.

And for the sake of propagating this chiefly, he appears to have raised us up. To do what? To spread New Testament Christianity. To spread authentic Christianity.

To spread scriptural holiness which in its height and depth is no more and no less than the love of God and the love of neighbor. You see, Wesley always understood that as soon as we as sinners are sanctified, the work of sanctification has already begun. He talks over and over again of the danger of

separating what God has put together.

In the moment of regeneration, in the moment that a man or woman is born of God, they commence. They begin to be holy. And Wesley believed that the rest of our pilgrimage should be a growth, a growing in righteousness, a growing in holiness, a growing in the love of God and man.

To summarize, I suggest that across 50 years, John Wesley made five emphases about scriptural holiness. Number one, it is always salvation from sin. Salvation delivers us from sin and sinning.

Emphasis number two, it is begun in justification. Wesley took the great reformed New Testament Pauline doctrine of justification by faith and showed that it goes beyond forgiveness. It reaches out to transformation.

It means the indwelling spirit. It means the life being transformed by the indwelling power of the Spirit of God. Emphasis number three, it is characterized by the love of God and neighbor.

Emphasis number four, it should be sought by every Christian. And emphasis number five, it is capable of being developed all through our Christian pilgrimage. As Paul reminded us this morning in slightly different words, holiness is a highway.

It is not a cul-de-sac. It is not an arrival. It is a continuous journey.

And he quoted the closing words of 2 Peter, Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Growing in Christ's likeness all our days. And Wesley set up a whole network across the country of societies and band meetings and class meetings and love feasts in order that in fellowship, his famous words, the Bible knows of no holiness but social holiness, by which he did not mean helping your neighbor, though he did that, he meant being together.

He was having a crack at the mystics who emphasized the solitary life. Wesley joined his people. I believe that the greatest work of the Spirit in the revival was the establishment of the old-fashioned Methodist class meeting.

Some entered the class meeting before they were born again. There was only one condition, a desire to save your soul and flee from the wrath to come. And many who had been awakened by the preaching were born again in the class meeting.

Then they moved on into the band meeting as they grew in grace and understood the things of God and were led into the life of holiness and fullness and the life of the Spirit. I want to finish by drawing attention to the second part of the Great Commandment. It isn't only, said Wesley, the love of God.

Sometimes it's far easier to love God than love our neighbor, even some of our neighbors in the church maybe. Now, we're all agreed that it's loving God. But the Great Commandment enables us, by His Spirit, to love our neighbor.

And it's sometimes forgotten that in the revival, Wesley, the next time you read the journal, notice all the mentions of the poor. John Wesley had a lifelong love and concern for the poor. So in Bristol, he opened three schools, two of them for the children from poor homes that would not otherwise get an education.

Holiness is the love of neighbor. In Newcastle, the one in the Northeast, he opened his first orphanage. Why? Because when you love your neighbor, you care for the orphans in the street.

He organized a loan fund that some of his people could borrow a small amount of money in emergencies and not be charged any interest. You love your neighbor as yourself. In a particularly hard winter, he employed some of his Methodist women in London carding cotton that they could sell the produce to have enough money to buy meals for the family.

He opened England's first ever free dispensary. Did you know that? In London. He had a lifelong interest in medicine.

He thought that when he went to Georgia, that probably there would be no physicians there, so he did a crash course in medicine and had an interest in it. Have you ever seen his primitive physique? I've never tried any of the recipes, but the concern for poor people. Too poor to buy medicine, so he opens a free dispensary in London.

Why? Because scriptural holiness is the love of neighbor. You don't just talk about it, you do something. I love the poor, said Wesley, and if God allowed me, I would prefer to preach to the poor only and let others do the preaching to the rich and the gentile and all the others.

You see, scriptural holiness is loving God. It is also loving our neighbor. In 1743, John Wesley published *An Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*.

He said, When I die, if I leave behind me more than ten pounds, then England will know I've been a saint and a charlatan. He published more than 400 titles. Thousands of pounds rolled in and he gave it all away.

Do you know how much they found in his accounts when he died on the 3rd of March 1791? Ten guineas. Ten pounds and ten shillings. But he left a codicil to his will.

He said, I want no pomp or grandeur or ceremony at my funeral. Employ, use, four unemployed men. Concern for the poor.

Use four unemployed men to carry my coffin and pay them a guinea each. A guinea? You know, for carrying a coffin for twenty minutes. That's more than a month's wages for some people.

His concern for the poor. And then he said, What's left, divided among half a dozen of my poorest preachers. When they'd done that, there was nothing left at all.

Well, except about a hundred thousand converts, of course. But of worldly wealth. It all came in and he gave it all away.

Why? Because he lived what he preached. The great commandment. Loving God and loving our neighbour.

It's twenty-five past twelve and I'll be finished in two minutes. This year, 2007, not only the tercentenary of the birth of Charles Wesley, it is the bicentenary of, well, primitive Methodism, but actually there's another reminder. It's the bicentenary of the abolition, not of slavery.

Now, notice the BBC is getting it constantly wrong. Someone ought to do their homework at the BBC. The abolition of the slave trade.

The act that Wilberforce finally got through Parliament after eight attempts. On the 25th of March, 1807, was a bill that made it illegal for British ships to carry slaves on the high seas. It took another 26 years of

campaigning to April 1833 to finally bring slavery to an end in the British Empire.

And here we gather this morning as basically Wesleyan holiness people. Did you know that the first main voice raised in England against slavery was John Wesley's? When it was very unpopular to do so. When the leading men in church and state were arguing that if you abolish slavery, the British Empire will fall apart.

Wesley's answer, well let it fall apart because it's built on blood. And in 1774, he published his tract on slavery. And he's prompted by what? The love of neighbour.

He said, even if you close your Bible, common humanity tells you it is wrong before Almighty God for one man to be able to buy another, sell another, or own another. It is wrong. It has to stop.

He died on the 3rd of March, 1791. He'd written thousands of letters. Five days before he died, he was able to write just.

I've seen the original. It's quite a scrawl. Do you know to whom that letter was addressed? The Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, William Wilberforce.

Encouraging him to go on, he said, in your glorious campaign to put an end to that excremental villainy which is a disgrace of religion and a disgrace of England's slavery. John Wesley, whose heart was full of the love of God and neighbour, could not but speak out. Had he lived to see the act of 1807, he would certainly have rejoiced.

This man whose heart was warmed by the great grace of God discovered that New Testament, authentic Christianity, is what Jesus told us it was. It is the love of God and the love of our neighbours. And may we, who are part of his people in the 21st century, in our land now, so seek by the grace of God that we will live a Christian life like that, exhibiting not only the love of God, but also the love of neighbour.

Let's just pray to him. Father, we pray that you'll impact us with that truth and a message, Lord, as it's been woven, in the life of that man who loved you and loved his neighbour. And it's a practical application in our lives, Lord.

We pray that we shall not lose it, that it won't become something that we've just learned in our heads, but it will, as John Wesley experienced, warm our hearts. Work it deep in us, we pray. And now, Father, we do thank you for our lunch.

We thank you for our fellowship. We thank you for all those who have provided for us in the dining marquee. And we want to just thank you, Lord, for this morning.

Thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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