

George Whitefield

by Michael Haykin

George Whitefield was a key figure in the 18th century revival, known for his open-air preaching, emphasis on the new birth, and justification by faith alone.

Duration: 1:21:42

Scripture: Matthew 3:7, Matthew 6:33, John 4:35, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 11:28, 2 Thessalonians 3:2, 1 Peter 3:15

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Evangelical Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the defining characteristics of evangelicalism. He emphasizes that evangelicals are people of the book, meaning they are committed to the authority of scripture in their lives. The speaker also highlights the powerful impact of preaching on individuals, with many experiencing a transformation in their thoughts, desires, and lives after hearing the message of Christ. Additionally, the sermon mentions the ability of the preacher to connect with people from different social classes, bridging the gap between the poor and the wealthy. The speaker concludes by sharing a personal experience of searching the Bible to understand what true Christianity is.

Transcript

theme over the next five lectures, including that this evening, making six in total. And it's the long 18th century. It's the 18th century that begins in the late, very late 1600s and runs into the 1830s.

And it's often a period that is described in survey histories of Western culture and Western civilization. It's often a period that is described as the age of reason, an age in which the contours and the shape of the modern world were laid. And the modern world view, which prevailed up until the 1960s, was hammered out.

And yet it was also, and this is the focus we want to look at, it was also an age of rapture. An age in which men and women were brought to a love for Christ, an adoration of him, and in which the church knew revival and expansion and blessing. And in our six weeks together, we want to think about a number of individuals and a number of themes that reflect those issues of revival and renewal and revival blessing and the growth of the church.

Tonight our theme is going to be George Whitefield, his ministry, and something of his spirituality. In two weeks, April the 17th, we'll be looking at Jonathan Edwards. And Edwards, in many, many respects, lays out for us the shape of what is genuine spirituality.

A man who knew revival personally and was one who wrote extensively on it and can be of great blessing and help to us in our day. And then in three weeks, we want to think about the hymns of Charles Wesley. Certainly one of the figures who has had the greatest effect on a long-term basis, and that, too, is hymns.

The writer of probably around 6,000 hymns, of which it's estimated somewhere between 450, maybe as many as 600, are still being sung today. It's an incredible, incredible number. And then as we move into May, we want to think about how did the church seek to respond to the age of reason through the Enlightenment.

Because it is in the 18th century that you start to find the supernatural aspects of biblical Christianity challenged. And we want to look at one man, Andrew Fuller, and his apologetic for Christianity in the face of a growing secularization. And then two other figures we need to touch on.

We need to look at the growth of modern missions, the way in which the missionary movement starts in the 18th century. And the appropriate figure is William Carey, the so-called father of modern missions. And then finally, we want to note how a revival also had profound social consequences.

There was a social reordering of society and culture that took place in the 18th century. And so our final session, which will be on May the 29th, will be looking at William Wilberforce and his lifelong fight, first against the slave trade and then against the institution of slavery. But tonight we want to think about the life and ministry of George Whitefield.

In 1835, 65 years after the death of Whitefield, two prominent English Baptists by the names of Francis Cox and James Hobbie were on a visit to the United States. They were actually in the New England area. And they made the decision to go off their route.

They had a number of meetings that they were attending and so on. But they made the decision to take a by-route over to a town called Newburyport, Massachusetts. For it was in Newburyport, in the first Presbyterian church there, a church known as Old South, that George Whitefield was buried.

He was buried under the center aisle of the church. And Hobbie and Cox made then this detour, got to the church. They were taken down.

There were steps. You can still go to the church and you can still go down into the sepulcher where Whitefield is buried. But one thing you cannot do, that you could do then, you could not, you cannot today open the coffin.

You could then. What is amazing is that for the bulk of the 19th century into the 20th century, the coffin of George Whitefield was open. And Cox and Hobbie remembered, they wrote about this later, they remembered the deep expectant emotions that went through their hearts as they went down.

And they watched as somebody opened the upper half of the lid of Whitefield's coffin to reveal the skeleton below. And they actually took out, this is getting more and more bizarre, they took out the skull of Whitefield and reminisced about what God had done through this man and how God had blessed the church. And they prayed.

What is even more bizarre is that not all of Whitefield's skeleton was there. About 15 years earlier, another Englishman had actually stolen part of his right forearm and had taken it back to England. And it was seen there by a man named Phillips, who wrote a biography of Whitefield, who urged this man, we never know,

we do not know the man who stole it, his name, urged this man to return the forearm across the channel.

He didn't do so until the late 1840s, where it had turned up in a little pine box at the church. In fact, if we could follow this further, in the 1860s, as Massachusetts soldiers were marching off to the Civil War, there were many who took a side trip like Cox and Hobbie and went to the coffin of Whitefield and cut off portions of his ministerial gown, he was buried in his gown, to pin into their regimental suits, hopefully to protect themselves in battle. Those sorts of stories, and they are true, those sorts of stories are a very powerful reminder to us that of all of the great figures whom God raised up in the revivals of the 18th century, there was none that gripped the public imagination more than George Whitefield.

Usually, it is John Wesley who is remembered, and that's because Wesley had a genius for organization and was able to bring many of those converts who were converted in the revival together in small groups and then eventually issuing in a denomination which we know as Methodism. And generally, it's Wesley who is the figure who is remembered, but at the time, in the 18th century, it was the name of Whitefield that was on many people's lips. Here are the ways that some people remembered him.

Joseph Williams could describe him as the father of all of those seeking revival in the 18th century. Or this man, this man is an unbeliever, a man named Henry Singem. He said after he heard Whitefield preach, he said he was the most extraordinary man of our times, the most commanding eloquence, unquenchable zeal, unquestionable piety.

Augustus Toplady, the author of Rock of Ages, Clap for Me, said he was the apostle of the British Empire. Or John Foster, writing from the next century, could say that with the doubtful exception of Wycliffe, no man probably ever excited in this island, the British Isles, so profound a sensation in the public mind on the subject. Well, such is some of the ways in which Whitefield was remembered and became almost a mythic figure in his own day and in later days.

He was born in fairly humble circumstances, born in Gloucester in 1714, the son of an inn owner, an owner of an inn called the Bell Inn. And in that period of time in Gloucester was a fairly prestigious establishment, one that was well known and hosted many public gatherings and affairs. But his father died soon after his birth and he was raised really by his mother, Elizabeth.

It initially appeared that George would spend his life running the inn. He was a servant during his early teen years for his older brother, who had taken over the running of the inn. But his mother had greater longings for her son.

She longed to see him go to university. And by scrimping and saving, and with the help of some friends, he eventually was able to go up to the University of Oxford in 1732. He went as what is called a servitor, S-E-R-V-I-T-O-R.

That is, he was a servant. He was a servant for the wealthier students at Oxford. Oxford and Cambridge, the two universities in England at the time, basically had two classes of students.

Those who were wealthy enough to go and had no problems financing their way. And those who were not, and who therefore worked as servants for the wealthier students. And so Whitefield went to the servitor.

He would be up three or so in the morning to prepare the breakfast for the man he was serving. Cleaning his clothes, etc. And then after breakfast, cleaning up, and if he had some spare time, going to classes.

And then doing the same all over again for lunch. Spare time maybe a bit in the afternoon, and then doing the same for dinner in the evening. Although in the England of that period of time, the main meal of the day would be what we call lunch, then called dinner.

And so he found himself certainly with very, very little free time. But some of that free time he used to frequent a group called the Holy Club. One of the things that characterizes Whitfield from a very early age is a desire for piety.

A desire to be for religion. And the Holy Club had been founded by Charles Wesley about three years earlier, in 1729. And by the time that George arrived, its main figure was John, Charles' older brother.

And it was a group of about a dozen men who were seeking to live godly lives. And they would spend time together praying. Both John and Charles were ordained clergymen, and so they had the Lord's Table together.

They would visit prisons. They would visit the sick in hospitals, and so on. And they were those who were seeking through works to win heaven.

Very sincere, very devout, but knew nothing of the pre-grace that had characterized the Reformation. Or that had characterized, say, the Puritans. They believed, like Martin Luther did prior to his own conversion, that by fasting, praying, attending public worship, their ardency, their devotion, that God would grant them heaven.

Of all those men, Whitefield was the last to join. He was the first to be converted. He was converted, or he set on the road to conversion, through a book.

And it's very interesting that although Whitefield would be the vehicle for the conversion of thousands in his preaching, his own conversion did not come about through the preached word. It came about through reading. Charles Wesley gave him a book called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

And this book was a book from the 1600s, written by a man named Henry Spoogle. S-C-O-U-G-A-L. It's still in print.

J. I. Packer has recently written the introduction for a recent edition of it. Whitefield would recall the book many years later this way, I must bear testimony to my old friend Mr. Charles Wesley. He put a book into my hands called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, whereby God showed me I must be born again or be damned.

I know the place where I read that book. It may be superstitious perhaps, but whenever I go to Oxford, I cannot help running to the place where Jesus Christ first revealed himself to me and gave me the new birth. As a good writer, Spoogle says, a man may go to church, say his prayers, receive the sacrament, the Lord's table, and yet, my brethren, not be a Christian.

How did my heart rise? How did my heart shudder like a poor man that's afraid to look into his count books, lest he should find himself a bankrupt. Yet, should I burn that book? Should I throw it down? Should I put it by? Or shall I search it? I did search it. And holding the book in my hand, I addressed the God of heaven and earth, Lord, if I am not a Christian, if I am not a real one for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned.

What the book did was it awakened him to the realization that Christianity was more than the adherence to a set of doctrines intellectually. That Christianity was far more than the embrace of a system of morality and a seeking to live that system in one's own energy and strength. That Christianity had as its foundation the new birth.

And it is this that sets Whitefield on the road to conversion. When the conversion took place, we don't know in detail, in terms of the day, but it's somewhere around Easter, 1735. It's not surprising that that issued in a significant, obviously, change in Whitefield.

He begins to be concerned about the new birth. He is training, by the way, for the Anglican ministry. He was ordained a deacon the year after his conversion, and then became a priest.

And began to preach, as he was given opportunity, on two key themes. And both of them are going to be what we want to look at in the next hour as we think about something of Whitefield's spirituality. He began to preach about the new birth, and he began to preach about justification by faith alone.

Now, these two themes were subjects that were rarely heard in the pulpits of Anglican churches in Whitefield's day. It would take us too far afield, and too long, to trace what had happened in the Church of England, and how it had come to be that by the 1730s, most of the sermons that were heard were sermons that dealt with morality. Sermons that dealt with Christian living.

Sermons that encouraged you, this is the way you should live, and so on. But it would be true that the emphasis on the new birth, and justification by faith, those key Reformation themes, had been lost. Part of it certainly would deal with the fact that in the 1660s, the Puritans, who had sought to maintain and emphasize these themes, had all been expelled from the Church of England, and it ended up forming a number of denominations, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists.

But whatever the case, those themes were not heard generally in the 1700s, in the first three decades. Not surprisingly, Whitefield found doors shut to him. He found pulpits closed to him.

Many of the bishops, if we look at the larger picture of the Church, many of the bishops were worldly men. Let me read to you the words of an English historian named J.H. Plumb, talking about the bishops in the Church of England. They were first and foremost politicians, not men of the spirit.

There is a worldliness, he writes, about 18th century bishops, which no amount of apologetics can conceal. One sees the worldliness in a variety of ways. Let me give you one example.

Joseph Trelawney, Bishop of Winchester, had a foul mouth, swore regularly, swore like a trooper. I'm not sure why the analogy there is troopers, but whatever. He regularly disgusted many of his hearers.

On one occasion he was rebuked for his swearing. How can you, as a bishop, utter such language? Well, he said in reply, because he was a lord, he swore as a lord and baronet, not as a bishop. Not surprisingly, such bishops had little time for Church renewal.

Their time was taken up with political matters. Many of them were sitting in the House of Lords. They were not taken up with Church renewal.

Not surprisingly, the example set by those in the upper echelon of the Church of England filtered down among many of the ministers. Among the ministers in the Church of England at the time, prior to the

revival, one finds a variety of categories. You find some who basically had joined, become ministers, because their fathers had encouraged them to do so, so that they would not split up the family inheritance.

Many of the wealthy in England during this period of time, if they were unfortunate enough, I put the word unfortunate in quotes, to have more than one son, one son that lived to adulthood, were faced with a difficult dilemma. The dilemma was, if they divided their inheritance among the two or three or four sons, none of them would be able to live in the manner like the fathers. And so what many fathers did, instead of dividing the inheritance, they gave all of the inheritance to the eldest son, and the other son had to, therefore, other occupations or professions had to be found for them.

You could always put one or two of them in the army or the navy, and then if they didn't have a liking to the military, put them into the Church. And so one finds a number of fairly wealthy individuals who became ministers simply because their elder brother had taken the inheritance, and something had to be found for them. And so many of these men found themselves interested in all kinds of things, but spiritual ministry.

You find many of them, as they came into the Church, realizing that their loss was not too bad, I'm thinking from their point of view, all they had to do was get together a little homily once a week, ten minutes, twelve minutes, rattle it off. If they were lucky, quote unquote, they didn't have any other demands on their time, there might be a burial, or a marriage, but beyond that, the rest of the week was theirs. I'm serious.

And so you find many of these ministers becoming experts in philosophy, biology, chemistry, literature, law, politics, fox hunting, drinking, anything but spiritual ministry. And please let me emphasize that the picture I'm painting is not overly gloomy. You can read it again and again and again.

Thomas Scott, one of the great evangelical preachers at the end of the 18th century, converted through the witness of John Newton. He had become a minister because it gave him oodles of free time. He couldn't figure out when he watched Newton, who was in the neighboring Paris, why on earth, Newton, do you go and visit people during the week? He couldn't figure it out, and Newton's response was this was part of his commitment as a minister of the gospel.

The spiritual welfare of the parish was his responsibility, and God one day would hold him accountable for it. That went home to Scott. William Grimshaw, and Grimshaw is one of my heroes, and up in Yorkshire, again joined the Church of England for worldly motives.

Spent most of his week, he was a minister in a place called Todmorden in Yorkshire, a little village. Spent most of the week drinking and carousing and playing cards. He tried to keep it hidden from the parish, most of his congregation, reckoning that they wouldn't be too impressed if they knew their minister was a bit of a... But that's what he did most of the time, until his wife suddenly died.

And not long after that, a couple in the congregation, their child died. And they came to him for help, for spiritual help. And all he could tell them was go out and have a good time and you'll soon forget about it.

And he began to think about it, and God converted him. That's typical of much of the clergy in the Church of England in the first three decades of the 18th century. The others who were serious about the ministry, and there were some, I don't want to give the impression that there were none, there were others who were serious about the ministry.

Unfortunately, their preaching dwelt primarily on morality. It lacked, very often, passion. It emphasized decency.

It lacked... This is one writer, a man named Horton Davies, talking about the preaching of the early 18th century in the Church of England. It lacked any holy excitement. It lacked passionate pleading.

It lacked heroic challenge. And it's in this context then that Whitefield begins his preaching and begins to preach on the new birth. Preaching that is regarded as enthusiasm or fanatical.

And if there's a theme that runs through much of the 18th century, it's that we need to be people of moderation and decorum and order. Not ardor, but order. It's well summed up by a tombstone of the period.

And the woman had written on her tombstone that she was pious without enthusiasm. But Whitefield was not to be deterred. He found a pulpit barred to him and eventually, on the advice of a Welsh Anglican minister, a man named Griffith Jones, Griffith Jones urged him, he said, if the pulpits are closed to you, go where the people are, go and preach out in the open air.

And so it is, in February of 1739, Whitefield took a step which was a radical, would produce a radical change in preaching. And it would be one of the key turning points in the history of evangelicalism. He went to Bristol, to an area called Kingswood.

Now, I've been in that area today. It doesn't look at all what it did then. There's a beautiful housing survey there.

But in those days, it was an area of colliers, coal miners. Men and women, the bulk of them had never been in the church. We talk today about the unchurched.

England in the 18th century was filled with them. How surprisingly, if you've got ministers who've got no interest in encouraging men and women to come and hear them preach. And there were thousands upon thousands of men and women in England who were unchurched.

And these men and women who Whitefield went to preach to had never, many of them, never darkened the door of a church. They had lived their lives in, almost totally in coal mines, as it were. Their spare time was spent in drinking, squalid violence, and degrading immorality.

And Whitefield went and stood on a little hill, and you can still go there, a place called Hannah Mount. There's a little pulpit set up and a plaque which says that on this spot in February 1739, George Whitefield and then later John and Charles Wesley began field preaching. And Whitefield stood on that mound and about 200 gathered to hear him preach.

Must have been a strange sight to see a church of England clergyman in his gown, which he wore, stood standing on the site and announcing and preaching the gospel. From this point on, I'm going to come back to that scene in a minute, from this point on, Whitefield would relish field preaching or open air preaching. He preached in fields and brickyards and ships on top of coffins.

A number of times he actually accompanied a condemned criminal to the gallows. The man would be hung and Whitefield would ask if he could stand on top of the coffin before they took it away and preach to the crowd because hangings were always a time for public gatherings and people would come out of curiosity to see. He preached in pubs, on top of horses, on walls, balconies, windmills, staircases.

Anywhere he got a hearing, he would preach. 1768, two years before his death, he could say, I love open, bracing air. What he meant was he loved to be preaching out in the open air.

The following year, the year before his death, it's good to go out into the highways and hedges. Field preaching forever. I should note, and I'm going to come back to that scene in 1739, I should note Whitefield felt constrained and I hope in my indicating this you don't feel that this binds you because I don't believe it should, but it gives you a sense of the man.

Whitefield felt constrained if he was with somebody for more than 15 minutes to speak to them about Christ. I don't think that necessarily is a model that we emulate. It can get you into bondage, I think, if you feel every time you're with somebody for 15 minutes you've never met, you have to talk to them about Christ.

But Whitefield felt that. There's a famous story as well along this line of one occasion when Whitefield was staying in a home in New England with people who were very wealthy, outwardly Christian, but as Whitefield saw their lives, very worldly, he didn't get an opportunity to speak to them verbally and so what he did, he wrote on one of the panes of the windows in the room in which he was staying. Apparently he had a diamond with him and to the shock of those people they came up after Whitefield had left that day and they found written with this diamond into the window pane one thing is needful.

Thinking about that story of Mary and Martha and Martha running around Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. One thing is needful. At that first open air service in 1739 there were about 200.

Within six weeks or so Whitefield was preaching to thousands. It's extraordinary. Men and women initially drawn from the lower classes of society coming to hear him preach and then the wealthy coming out from Bristol and Bath.

Not far away was Bath the famous seaside resort. Well, it's not really a seaside resort it's a famous spa where a lot of the wealthy in Britain used to go. And many of them heard about this young preacher whom thousands were going to hear and so they would come out they'd keep their distance they didn't mingle with the lower class but they'd stand back well on the edge of the circle or sit in their carriages and listen to Whitefield preach.

Here's Whitefield's description of one of those occasions where he describes the coal miners having no righteousness of their own to renounce they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend of publicans and came not to call to righteousness but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected was to see white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep conviction but as the event proved happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion.

Revival had come to England. It had come through quite extraordinary means it had come through a Church of England clergyman many of those who were the children of the Puritans who had been longing for revival who had been praying for revival who had found themselves thrust out of the Church of England going into the ranks of the Presbyterians and Baptists and Congregationalists found themselves forced into becoming second class citizens in England laws were put on the books that made anybody of the Church of England members basically second class citizens in every sense of the term. These men and women had prayed many of them for revival but it didn't come through their ranks it came through God raising up initially Whitefield and then the Wesley's and then Newton and Grimshaw and Henry Venn and

Samuel Walker and William Remain all of the first generation leaders in the revival between 1735 and the late 1760's were all Anglicans.

Between 1736 when Whitefield first began preaching and his death in 1770 and he was buried in Newburyport, Massachusetts it's calculated he preached 18,000 sermons in 36 years. You would speak sometimes a thousand times a year it's remarkable.

Now not all of them went to huge gatherings many of them were to small groups but many of them were to crowds 5,000 8,000 10,000 some of them 15,000 There is the story of when Whitefield came to Boston in 1740 and the town of Boston New England consisted of 8,000 people at the time it's population on that first Sunday there were 2,000-3,000 out to hear Whitefield the second Sunday there were 8,000 the third Sunday there were 15,000 we know there were that many because Benjamin Franklin was there one of the fathers of the American Republic a number of years later Franklin always went to hear Whitefield preach he didn't like the gospel but he loved Whitefield he never committed his life to Christ believed that Christ was a good man had a great system of morality but he was not God but he

loved to hear Whitefield preach and he went to hear Whitefield preach on that occasion he had heard that Whitefield had preached to such large crowds in England he didn't believe it so what he did was he paced out the crowd measured it and calculated the radius whatever else you do mathematics has never been my strong point he calculated whatever he did to calculate it figured out yes there were 15,000 or more there that Sunday Whitefield had an extraordinary extraordinary voice often after preaching to such large crowds it's not surprising he spat out blood scarring and ruining his lungs his ministry was an extraordinary one he made mistakes in the early years he was accused of fanaticism and sometimes yes he did err along those lines he argued for instance that one of the marks of

conversion was assurance of salvation he should have known better he did learn better assurance is not of the essence of conversion there are some Christians who wrestle with assurance all their lives one thinks of the man who is the bicentenary of his death we celebrate this year William Cooper if you know anything about the life of Cooper spelled Cowper but sounded Cooper you'll know he wrestled with deep depression much of his life tried to commit suicide at least two or three times felt that yes God would save his people but he wasn't going to save William it's a remarkable remarkable account I have no doubt well I could be wrong but I have no doubt that Cooper is a man who loved the Lord but felt that God would reject him and so there are people who wrestle with assurance all their

lives in his early years Whitfield thought that if you're converted you know you're converted and you know you're saved and you'll never lose that assurance people questioned him suggested that he was wrong in doing so and arguing that way and he rejected that but eventually learned when his son he had one son was born he predicted the man would be a great preacher he named him John after John the Baptist he buried him and he learned not to trust and he learned in some of those early years but by the time Whitfield reaches his thirties he has matured and some of the early foes he has put behind him again in those early years he didn't hesitate sometimes to publicly criticize men ministers whom he felt were unconverted he criticized the Archbishop of Canterbury once he said the man knows

no more about the Gospel than Muhammad did it didn't endear him to the hierarchy in the Church of England but again he learned Jonathan Edwards actually told him you shouldn't be criticizing men publicly from the pulpit in such a way Whitfield wouldn't listen to him so I don't want to give the impression that Whitfield did not have his faults in his early years but by his thirties he's put all of those major areas of

problems behind him and his preaching is very powerful let me read to you and the sheet was handed out a letter that Sarah Edwards wrote about Whitfield one page of the sheet should look like so and it's got there actually a little picture of Whitfield you probably can't see it well but Whitfield was a bit cross-eyed one of his eyes I'm not sure which one but it tended to

focus towards the center towards the bridge of his nose which occasioned some of his critics to call him Dr.

Squintum it's one of the rude names that was given to him but here's Sarah Edwards writing about Whitfield she's listened to Whitfield preach a number of times in Northampton and Whitfield was going over to New Haven where her brother James Pierpont lived and she says this I want to prepare you for a visit from the Reverend Mr.

Whitfield the famous preacher of England he's been sojourning with us a week or more and after visiting a few of the neighboring towns is going to New Haven and from then to New York he's truly a remarkable man and during his visit has I think verified all we have heard of him he makes less of the doctrines of grace than our American preachers generally do he aims more at affecting the heart he is a born orator you have already heard of his deep toned yet clear and melodious voice oh it is perfect music to listen to that alone and he speaks so easily without any apparent effort you remember that David Hume thought it worth going 20 miles to hear him speak and David Garrick said he could move men to tears and make them tremble by his simple intonations in pronouncing the word Mesopotamia

David Garrick well David Hume was an atheist he was a Scottish philosopher one of the leading critics of Christianity in the 18th century again it is remarkable he loved to go and hear Whitfield preach David Garrick was as famous in his day as say Lawrence Olivier or I hope I am not defending here Harrison Ford are in our days great actors but nobody remembers David Garrick today he was the greatest Shakespearean actor of his day and he did say on one occasion if only I could say the way Whitfield does the way he can move people by just saying that one word well this last Sarah says was a mere speech of a play actor but it is truly wonderful to see what a spell this preacher often casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible I have seen upward of a thousand

people hang on his words with breath of a silence broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob he impresses the ignorant in a lot less educated and refined it is reported you know that as the miners of England listened to him the tears made white furrows down their smucky cheeks and so here our mechanics shut up their shops and the day laborers throw down their tools to go and hear him preach and few go away unaffected a prejudiced person I know might say this is all theatrical artifice and display but not so will anyone think who has seen and known him he is a very devout and godly man and his only aim seems to be to reach and influence men the best way he speaks from a heart all aglow with love and pours out a torrent of eloquence which is almost irresistible many very many persons

in Northampton date the beginning of new thoughts new desires new purposes and a new life from the day in which they heard him preach of Christ and this salvation let me mention here four items and with this we'll conclude the first hour four items regarding his preaching that Sarah draws attention to first of all is the way in which Whitfield was able to speak across class distinctions the 18th century was a very class oriented culture especially Britain and as soon as you opened your mouth this is still true today in Great Britain it's not true over here thankfully but it's still true today in Great Britain as soon as you open your mouth and you speak people can tell what kind of background you come from by your accent it was even

more so in the 18th century but Whitfield was able to

speak to the poor to the to minors he was able to speak to the wealthy and the rich and the educated and they all heard him gladly we'll touch on something of that of his preaching to the wealthy in the next hour the second thing that she notes here is she notes how some people might say it was all theatrical and artifice Whitfield did have an ability of using his body in preaching in a way that many other preachers didn't do in the 18th century many of them simply read their sermons Whitfield was able to preach extemporaneously and he did throw his whole body into preaching and he was not sometimes below using a little theatrics there is a story a true story of one occasion when he was preaching on the second coming and he was preaching out in a place called Moorfield Kensington Common

where I have been and it's Central Park in London and there was a tree behind him and he had positioned up in the tree a guy with a trumpet and at a certain point he had the fellow blow the trumpet and Whitfield stopped and listened and he said Hart is that Gabriel's Trump I hear and so Whitfield was not above using a little theatrics from time to time but the point that Sarah is making there is much more to it than that the preaching of a genuine salvation setting forth of Christ and then Sarah also notes thirdly that he preached as one who loved those notice he says that he preaches there with a heart all aglow with love he speaks from a heart all aglow with love one of the things that many and I've read a number of conversion accounts of people who were converted through Whitfield's

preaching many of them felt in a crowd of a thousand or five thousand that Whitfield was speaking only to them and they felt the man loved them and he often wept and they weren't put on he often wept as these large crowds would be before him and he thought of the seriousness of the issues about which he would speak he was often moved to tears now people did men did more freely weep in the eighteenth century than they do in our day between our day and the eighteenth century is that great era called the victorian era when men were taught not to cry the victorians taught men in british culture men don't cry women can cry but no men don't cry in the eighteenth century men were a lot more emotional i grant that that might be a part of what's going on here but also it was very evident that

whitfield had a deep concern for the spiritual who came to hear him preach here is the way one woman remembered him a woman named phyllis whitfield who an african american poet probably the first african american poet she had been taken as a young girl of eight or nine from her native land of ghana taken as a captive and brought as a slave to the new world of boston and she had been converted through hearing whitfield as had her owners she became a very important poet and she wrote a poem for whitfield on his death that okay thank you four lines first of all spirituality recently in the last ten or twelve years a british author british historian by the name of david bevington has argued that evangelicalism is characterized by four distinguishing marks what does it mean to be an

evangelical and he argued that that question can be answered at least historically along the following four lines first of all evangelicals have been people of the book they have been committed to the authority of scripture scripture has been the bedrock of their life and thought and practice has been the authority to which they have turned for their thinking it has been the comfort that has given them strength in times of weakness in times of oppression in times of bereavement and it has been a light upon their path secondly he has emphasized that evangelicals have been people who have been focused on the cross the crucifixion has been very central in their thinking that passage in 1 corinthians 2 2 where paul comes to conscience and says i determined to know nothing but jesus christ and

him being crucified has been central in evangelical thinking and then thirdly he emphasizes the new birth has been central to evangelicals the emphasis upon the fact that men and women need to be born again they need to be converted they are not naturally the children of god and then finally he argues evangelicals have been people who have been committed to action both in mission and good work now that's looking at it historically and i think it's a very very good fourfold model of thinking about what evangelicals are like from a historical analysis and it's two of those things i want to think about tonight with whitfield the whole area of the new birth and the whole area of mission or evangelism because certainly whitfield lays down those lines for succeeding evangelicals it occurred to

me that the april the seventeenth lectures in the beginning of the holy week and that it would be maybe more appropriate to think about themes that relate to the crucifixion and resurrection that week than thinking about the marks of spirituality what i'm going to do actually is think a lecture on charles redley and some of his hymns that deal with the cross and the resurrection on the seventeenth of april and then lead edward lectures the april the twenty fourth and those lectures then will pick up the whole emphasis on the cross that has been part of evangelicalism but thinking about these two areas then the new birth and justification by faith alone i'm going to put those together and then secondly the whole area of missions the eighteenth century had problems in terms of the clergy

and we've already looked at that but there were larger problems when you look at the eighteenth century british society on both sides is atlantic here's one the way one historian john walsh still living very well known oxford historian describes the opening decades of the eighteenth century there was in them he says a noticeable decay of ministerial authority the authority of the church was increasingly under attack there was a growth of rationalism there was a massive intellectual assault on supernatural christianity there was a spread of material wealth and luxury there was the frivolity of the young and indifference on their parts of spiritual matters and there was a deep sense of spiritual powerlessness if you think that a lot of that sounds like today you're right there are many many

parallels here is another text this from a contemporary of Whitfield a man named benjamin keach writing about london and this sounds very contemporary was there a sodomy so common in a about this city of london is it not a wonder the patience of god has not consumed us in his wrath was there a swearing blasphemy whoring drunkenness gluttony and covetousness at such a height as at this time here now you might be thinking and some might think this well that's a preacher and that's the way preachers always talk things are always bad and things have never been as dark while that might have some truth in it if it were not the case that when you start to probe not only sermons but letters and diaries of men and women who are not noticeably or notably known for their christianity you start to

see the same emphasis and the same lines coming through George I for instance was a king for much of those early decades 1714 to 1727 his primary interests were food horses and women he was German in his origin he actually never learned to speak a word of English became king because he was a distant cousin to Queen Anne who died without any heirs and became king never learned to speak English left his wife back in Germany eventually divorced her turned up on the English shore with two mistresses in their whole household proceeded to build castles with them and set them up and he went back and forth between the two castles as well as having a number of other mistresses from time to time that's at the public level sort of goings on of the monarchy in recent days are nothing new in any

respect the prime minister of the day and probably the first prime minister in England because it's not until the 18th century you get a figure who occupies a position comparable to what we call the prime minister a

man named Robert Walpole lived in undisguised adultery with his mistress Maria O'Malley Skerritt thankfully he did marry her after his wife died J.H.

Plum again talking about aristocratic circles could say the following women and men hardly bothered with a pretense of virtue the possession of lovers and mistresses was regarded as a commonplace a matter for gossip never reproach it's a very different picture if you move into the 19th century there's been a massive change in the aristocracy by the time you get to the 19th century and the reason is the revivals in the 18th century men and women living for luxury living for pleasure it's not surprising other segments of society followed suit pornography multiplied almost unchecked the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1750s he said the flood of immorality flooding this nation is so deep we cannot stop it newspapers and newspapers were a commonplace of the day newspapers advertised gigolos

brothels cures for venereal disease and so on again a recent writer has put it well a woman named Selina Hastings she is the direct descendant of a woman also called Selina Hastings in the 18th century a great evangelical a woman who employed George Whitfield as her private chaplain which enabled Whitfield to preach wherever he wanted because it was illegal for a minister to preach in another minister's parish unless you were the chaplain of somebody like the Countess of Huntington who had about 30 homes around the country and she employed as many chaplains when it was criticized how she employed so many chaplains she basically said I've got this many homes I need that many chaplains for each house anyway Selina Hastings there is a contemporary Selina Hastings a direct descendant has

written a book review of a biography of her ancestor and in the book review she says this the 18th century was an age when atheism was fashionable sexual morals lax drinking and gambling at a pitch of profligacy that has never since been equal now what changed the situation what changes it is the revival and what changes it is the revival preaching of the new birth and justification by faith as Whitfield observed all of the moral sermons in the Church of England that were being trumpeted for were not changing the situation one iota there needed to be new foundations laid in men and women's lives and those foundations are found only in their being born again Whitfield thought about the new birth well seen in a letter he wrote to a woman called Louise von der Schulenburg the Countess of

Delos and the page is on the second page of your handout and this woman is an intriguing woman her dates are 1692 to 1773 she was the illegitimate daughter of George the first the monarch I just mentioned with his two mistresses she was the daughter of one of those mistresses born out of wedlock to her mother George the first did set all of the children he had out of wedlock he set them all up palaces and created titles for all of them and thus he created the title for the Countess of Delos but she was converted she was converted through the witness of Selina Hastings the Countess of Huntington Selina Hastings again came from obviously a wealthy background she married the Earl of Huntington he died very early in their married life she lived well into 1791 when she was well into her 80s

she had an enormous fortune when she was converted by the time she died she was virtually bankrupt she had poured her entire estate into the support of ministers like the Evangelical Churches and so on she also used to have house parties where she would invite many of her aristocratic friends and they would have a dinner or a lunch and then as they were breaking up for lunch she would suddenly pull out as it were George Whitfield from a closet or whatever and said we're going to have some spiritual food now and Whitfield would come out and lead a bible study or actually give some words of spiritual exhortation and there were a number of aristocratic men and women who were converted in those house parties as it were and the Countess of Delos was one.

But the square would be a thing in which you would have generally three ranks of soldiers, those who would be maybe lying down, those kneeling, those standing. You could continue to have a volley of fire going all the time. If anybody was wounded, they would place them in the center of the square.

If you ever read accounts of what it was like to fight in a battle in the 18th century, one of the greatest fears for many of the men was being left behind on the battlefield, or left when the regiment moved. And if they were in the square, they were safe, and then when the square moved, they could be helped along. It's that image that Whitfield uses.

He says, if we keep close in the square that is Christ, we are impregnable. Here only I find refuge. Refuge, garrisoned in this square, I can bid defiance to men.

And Whitfield knew, or had his times of deep trouble. There were times of spiritual anguish from time to time inwardly, but also outwardly, frequently mobbed and attacked, beaten up on one occasion in Ireland with sticks and stones. On another occasion preaching in England, again, he was near a tree, and a fellow clambered up the tree with a sword and tried to spear Whitfield with a sword from behind.

And numerous occasions violently and physically attacked. Or on occasions heckled as he preached. On one occasion, this gives you some idea of the resourcefulness of Whitfield, on one occasion a fellow clambered up a tree again.

I guess Whitfield liked preaching near a tree. On one occasion a fellow clambered up a tree and there was about three or four thousand out in front of Whitfield. And Whitfield noticed at a certain point in his sermon, a number in the front row starting to laugh.

And soon realized that there was somebody behind him in the tree, turned around to find this fellow who had pulled his pants down and was exposing himself. And Whitfield as quick as a whip said, now this is explicit proof of what I've been preaching of. Of the depravity of man and their inability to find holiness by themselves.

The other area of Whitfield's preaching that needs to be mentioned, or Whitfield's spirituality, is his passion for taking the gospel anywhere. He crossed the Atlantic in a day when a 20 mile journey was a major undertaking. He crossed the Atlantic 13 times, seven different trips to America.

Eventually he preached in every major town and village, probably most villages in America, up and down the Atlantic seaboard. So that by the time he died, there was probably no Englishman's name known as widely in America. He crossed to Ireland twice, 14 times in Scotland.

It's estimated he probably preached in every major and important town in England, everyone. It's just a remarkable, remarkable career. When he was criticized for so much traveling, he says, was not Paul filled with a holy, restless impatience, an insatiable thirst of traveling, and undertaking dangerous voyages for the conversion.

On one occasion, I think this gives you some idea of the way Whitfield took so seriously this calling. On one occasion he was invited to go and preach in Scotland by a couple of men known as Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. They were Presbyterians, but they had split with the Presbyterian church over whether or not the lords who owned the land on which some Presbyterian churches were built, whether these lords had the right to appoint ministers.

And a law being passed in the Presbyterian church of Scotland, the state church, that granted the right of the lords who, some of whom owned the lands on which churches were built, they could appoint the ministers. And the Erskine brothers regarded that as heinous. It meant that on Godly name were to be appointed often to the preaching pulpits.

And when things were not rectified, they eventually ended up splitting with the Presbyterian church. Then they formed their own small denomination. They invited Whitfield to come and preach for them.

Whitfield came, he preached for them, but then he got invitations to go and preach in a number of churches' Scotland pulpits, which he did. Not surprisingly, the Erskines and Whitfield quarrelled. They told him that he had no right going to those pulpits, those churches were ungodly churches because he hadn't come out with them.

And Whitfield's response was he was determined to preach anywhere. If the Pope himself gave me his pulpit, I'd go and preach the righteousness of Christ therein. And to give you an idea, I think an insight into Whitfield's desire to preach the gospel wherever he got a hearing.

The Erskines denounced him. They turned from him and denounced him as a devil. And they wrote pamphlets against him.

Thankfully, and the Erskines were godly men, thankfully before the Erskines both died, they reconciled with Whitfield. And Whitfield notes in his diary in 1752 that he had met with Ralph Erskine, one of the brothers, and he was determined, he said, writing again about this whole quarrel with the Erskines, he was determined to go wherever the kingdom of God could come with power. I want a thousand tongues.

Interesting, the language. Given Charles Wesley's hymn, O for a Thousand Tongues. I want a thousand tongues to set off the Redeemer's praise.

Again, talking about his ministry in America. Oh, that I was a flame of pure and holy fire and had a thousand lives to spend in the dear Redeemer's service. The sight of so many perishing souls every day affects me.

And makes me long to go, if possible, from pole to pole to proclaim redeeming love. Had I a thousand souls and bodies, he said on another occasion, they would all be itinerant preachers for Jesus Christ. And this is a theme, again and again, you read his letters, he comes in this passion to see men and women saved, wherever they are, to take the gospel wherever they might be.

And often he talks about how the word was running and God was blessing the word. Second Thessalonians chapter three, verse two, Paul talks about, he asks his readers, pray that the word may run and be glorified. And often you find Whitefield talking about that, how God was blessing the word.

How the fields are white unto harvest. And I want to finish by talking about two conversions, which I think illustrate Whitefield's ministry from the individual's vantage point. The first is a man named Thomas Olivers.

He was a Welshman. He was a hobo or a vagrant in the early 1740s. He knew nothing about church life.

He was, in many respects, a man whose life was vile. On a particular occasion, he was going through Bristol and he saw a huge crowd going into a church. And he thought, wonder what they're all going in

there for.

Thought he'd go in after them. Well, they were going in to hear Whitefield preach. He went in, an ungodly man.

He came out safe. Whitefield was preaching that night on Zechariah 3, 2. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? When Whitefield began his sermon, Olivers says this about his testimony. I was certainly a dreadful enemy to God and all that is good.

By the time it was ended, I was a new creature. In the first place, I was deeply convicted of God's goodness towards me all my life, particularly in that he had given his son to die for me. I had a clear view of all my sins and particularly my base ingratitude towards God.

These discoveries broke my heart and caused showers of tears to trickle down my cheeks. I was filled with an abhorrence of my evil ways. It was a shame that I had ever walked in them.

And as my heart was thus turned from evil, so it was powerfully inclined to all that is good. It is not easy to express what strong desires I had for God and his service, what resolutions I had to seek and serve him. In consequence, I broke off my evil practices and gave myself up to God with my whole heart.

Let's promise all of us, it goes on to write, the God of Abraham prays. You know that hymn. It's an absolutely fabulous hymn and becomes a Methodist preacher and one of John Wesley's closest friends.

The other man I want to note is Robert Robinson. He's also a hymn writer. Robert Robinson, like Thomas Oliver, has never been to church.

Well into his teens. And he's about 18 years old. One Sunday morning, he and a group of friends were looking for fun and they found a woman who was a fortune teller.

They proceeded to get her drunk on gin and she proceeded to tell them their fortunes. She came to Robert Robinson and said to him, I see that you're going to live to a ripe old age and you'll have grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Well, it started off as something of a lark.

Robinson began to think seriously. He thought to himself, well, if I'm going to be old, as she's predicted, and I'm going to have all those children around me, I'm going to have to have a way to keep them coming to hear me. It wasn't a day in which there were any sort of social services or welfare net as it were for the sucker and help of those who are elderly.

And so he thought, I want my family to keep coming to hear me and to help me in my old age. How am I going to ensure that they'll come to hear me? Well, I need a fund of stories. Where will I start to get a fund of stories? He'd seen a note that week that George Whitefield was preaching.

I'll go and hear Whitfield preach. Whitfield was very well known. He goes to hear Whitfield preach and as he's there, he's looking around the crowd.

He's watching people weeping. He's laughing inwardly. These fools.

And he's listening to some of Whitfield's preaching. Doesn't make much impact on him initially. Whitfield was preaching on that passage from Matthew 3 or 7. Oh, you generation of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come.

Whitfield was describing two types of character. He was describing the Sadducee and the Pharisee. And I guess when he was describing the Sadducee, Robinson was laughing and thinking, not me, they're having a bit of fun at the expense of those around him.

But then he went on to describe, Robinson said the Pharisee. He described their exterior decency, but inwardly the poison of the viper rankled in their hearts. This shook me.

At length in the course of his sermon, Whitfield abruptly broke off and paused for a few moments and then burst into a flood of tears. He lifted up his hands and explained, Oh, my heroes, the wrath is to come. The wrath is to come.

These are Robinson's own words. These words sank into my heart like lead in water. I wept.

And when the sermon was ended, I retired alone. For days and weeks, I could think of little else. Those awful words would follow me wherever I went.

The wrath is to come. The wrath is two years to find Christ. Wrestling in deep conviction.

But eventually in 1755, he found what he said was full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He went on to become a Baptist minister in Cambridge. And he also wrote a hymn, like Thomas Oliver's.

He wrote, Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. If you know that hymn, it's a great hymn. And I want to finish with the first stanza of that hymn, which I think depicts well what we've been talking about, the new birth and the burden of Whitefield's ministry.

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. Tune my heart to sing thy grace. Streams of mercy never ceasing.

Call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount.

I'm fixed upon it. Mount of God. Well, I will stop here.

There is a lot more that can be said. We've not touched on other aspects of Whitefield's ministry, his spirituality. But that, I hope, gives you a taste of the enormous influence this man had in both this world, this side of the Atlantic, and in the British Isles.

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