

# Robert Murray Mccheyne 2

by Michael Haykin

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*Michael Haykin's sermon on Robert Murray McCheyne explores his life, ministry, and the lessons that can be drawn for contemporary believers.*

**Duration:** 47:21

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 16:14

**Topics:** "Faith And Works", "Christian Discipline"

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## Description

In this sermon, Shane emphasizes the importance of working for God and not relying solely on His grace. He discusses the theology of God's freeing work and how it relates to our own efforts. The sermon also mentions the upcoming topics of Adam's bar and Anaki. The speaker then transitions to discussing the life of Robert Murray McShane, a young preacher who died before the age of 30. The sermon concludes with lessons that can be learned from McShane's life and the importance of balancing work and recreation.

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## Transcript

Chosen is found in the book of Proverbs, and Proverbs 11, 25 to 30. Proverbs 11, 25 to 30. If we have time at the end, there'll be a reason why I've chosen this text, and we'll see.

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil.

He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage. He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

Well, I thought that I'd begin by doing a little, a very brief overview of what we looked at last week, and then I want to look at the latter years, or latter really, the days of Robert Murray McShane, focusing on a number of themes, and then bringing it to a conclusion with some application in terms of three or four lessons, I think, that we can learn from our day from his life. And I realize that maybe it might be helpful for some of you to see a picture of McShane. This is the most common one.

I'm going to pass this around. On the other side is the man who wrote his biography. McShane died before he was 30.

His very close friends, most of them lived into their 80s, but never forgot the life of their friends. This is Andrew Bonner, a photograph taken when he was much older. This one, on the other hand, is a drawing.

Now, last day we looked at the life of McShane and noted some of the characteristics of his life. His really privileged background. He grew up in a fairly well-to-do home outside of Edinburgh, had the opportunity of going to high school in Edinburgh, and then to university in Edinburgh.

These were privileges we might take them for granted today. High school is something that we expect everybody to go to. And university, well, I'm not sure of the percentage, but it's a fairly high percentage of people end up going to university.

But these were not to be taken for granted in the period that we're looking at. Though definitely university, and even high school was the privilege of those who had wealth and the means to sustain, obviously, the time of study. And it is in the context of his time in university that God laid hold of his life.

He came from a really a nominal Church of Scotland background. A day in which respectability was found by going to church, but the gospel was not being preached in many Church of Scotland parishes and pulpits. But it's in the context of his university days that God lays hold of his life.

He does so through the death of his older brother. And the first two years of his university life are, for him, a long round of parties and card playing and dancing. And he's really not there to study.

He's there to enjoy himself. And then his brother, though, becomes serious about things of God. And McShane would remember times when he was going out to a dance and he'd pass his brother's room and his brother would be on his knees praying for him and for others in the family.

And it didn't impact him at all at the time. But when his brother died, then God began to lay hold of his life. He talks about how he now began to be afraid of dying himself.

And God brought him to himself and he finished his other two years of university and went on to the Divinity School at Edinburgh with a main professor of systematic theology. Really, the kind of key figure in the school is a man named Thomas Chalmers, who was, in his own day, a remarkable man of God. A man who was able to stir deeply the students who came under his tutelage, his preaching, his personal example.

Horatius Bonner, who was Andrew Bonner's brother, would later say he had never met in his life as godly a man as Thomas Chalmers. And that's quite a remarkable statement to make because Horatius Bonner was moving in a circle of really remarkable individuals in so many ways. And one of the things that Chalmers impressed on McShane and all of the men who studied under him was the responsibility that when they were in a parish, that they were not simply responsible for the souls who actually turned up on a Sunday morning, but they were responsible for everybody within the geographical boundaries of that parish.

It's a very different kind of scenario than we would know today. It's a context in which the Church of Scotland is the state church. And going back, in fact it goes all the way back in the Middle Ages, in the time of the Roman Catholic Medieval Church in Scotland, and this would be true all over Europe, there had been staked out geographical boundaries for each local church.

And so, let's say this is Scotland at the time we're talking about. There would be boundaries, maybe five miles to the west and to the north and to the south and to the east, and everybody who lived within that boundaries was expected to come here. During the time of the Reformation and the 1600s, the state would have used various means of persuasion to encourage people to come.

If you didn't come, the minister could have recourse to fining people who didn't turn up. By the 19th century, all of that is falling apart. There is a significant wave, and has been numbers of them in the British Isles, of de-establishment, where there were those who were recognising there's something dreadfully wrong with using the arm of the state to compel belief, and likely so.

But the parish system still prevailed in the Church of Scotland, so that while Robert Merriman Shane would never have dreamt of going to the state to compel people to come to church, nonetheless, he still took seriously the fact that within that boundaries of the parish where he would eventually end up in St. Peter's, Dundee, that there were 7,000 people, all of them were his responsibility, spiritually. And while we would not agree with the parish system, we can nonetheless see something of the seriousness with which he took the care of planting a work, a gospel work, in a given geographical area. Dundee, where he eventually ended up as the minister, was a dreadful town in terms of its urban appearance.

It was a booming town. It had grown from around 4,000 or 5,000 people in the mid to late 1700s to 57,000 in the 1830s. And the reason for that was the Industrial Revolution.

And Scotland and England and Wales were in the throes of what is becoming the first industrialised nation of the Western world. And radical changes were taking place. In Scotland, what many of the aristocratic lords were doing were they were convinced that they needed to turn off many of the people of their lands where they had lived for eons, their families and so on, and turn their estates into huge game estates and game preserves and places where other royalty and wealthy individuals, aristocrats, could come and hunt and fish.

And many of the upper lower class in Scotland found themselves turfed out of their home. A large number of them came to North America. In fact, there was a dance called America in the early 1800s that the Scottish and some of the Irish were due on the dock as they were preparing to sail for the new world.

But for others, the idea of taking passage to the new world was not a possibility and they found themselves moving into these large urban settings for jobs. And instead of the fresh air of the farm, despite its heavy labour, they found themselves closeted in these horrific conditions of 12, 14 hours in factories. It's in this context that MacShane will have his ministry.

And we saw last day something of the seriousness with which he took that, the way in which there still exists today, all of the little notebooks that MacShane would keep, in which he'd write down every time he visited somebody, he'd write down their names, he'd write down, he'd give a little map on how to get to their house. Because some of these in central Dundee, it was a medieval town and the town had grown like most European towns, higgledy-piggledy. And there were back lanes and streets and it was very difficult sometimes to get around.

So he'd write down little maps on how to get to places. He'd always write down in red ink the scripture verse he read to them and prayer concerns he had prayed with them. And he kept this assiduously during his time as a minister.

Last day we actually read a section of his visits to a woman who was dying in 1837. Over a period of really a month, he visited her about, oh, it looked like about nine or ten times. And the way in which, as she's dying, her increasing resistance to the gospel.

And you see something though in this of MacShane's own recognition of the importance of evangelism. The other thing that marked MacShane was a hunger to be like Christ. And I think really one of the reasons why God owned his ministry and the others that were in his circle was their Christ-centeredness.

In John 16, Jesus says that when the Spirit comes, he will glorify me, John 16, 14. And these men, their focus, their eye was the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymn that we sang is typical of the piety or the spirituality of these men.

And that's the sort of piety that the Lord honours. And the sort of focus that the Lord honours. And not surprisingly, we will see that in his ministry.

By 1838 though, he was driving himself. And he was single and therefore able to give himself unreservedly in one sense to the ministry. But he did so without concern for his own physical health.

And by the fall of 1838, he was experiencing what we would describe today as heart palpitations or maybe a fall of the tachycardia. It probably wouldn't have been an arrhythmia there because that might have led to death. But he's having serious physical problems.

The doctor orders him to take complete rest from the ministry. And so it is, very reluctantly in the end of 1838, he leaves Dundee and he goes back to live for a while with his parents in Edinburgh. And we have some of the letters that he wrote.

Actually, there were 10 letters he wrote back. Pastel letters to the congregation, which I think give you some idea of, again, the heart of the man. Here's one letter, for instance, or one portion of a letter.

Ah, he's writing to his congregation. There's nothing like a calm look into the eternal world to teach us the emptiness of human praise, the simpleness of self-seeking, the preciousness of Christ. And as he began to think about... The Lord was beginning to work in the parish.

It's quite evident there were people becoming serious about the gospel and numbers slowly increasing at the church. Why would the Lord remove him? Well, he said, the main reason may be to teach me what Zechariah was taught in the vision of the golden candlestick and the two olive trees. Zechariah 4.6, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord, that is, the temple will be rebuilt.

And he says that it is not by might, nor by power, but by a spirit, obtained in believing, wrestling prayer, that the temple of God is to be built in our parishes. One gets, again, an idea of his Christ-centeredness in this portion of a letter. It comes from... This is the fifth letter he wrote to his congregation.

And he's asking them questions. He expected that the wardens of the church, or the elders of the church, would read these letters out publicly. Do you cleave to Christ as a sinner? 1 Timothy 1.15 Christ came into the world to save sinners.

Do you count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Him? Matthew 9.9 Do you feel the glory of His person? Revelation 1.17 Do you feel the glory of His finished work? Hebrews 9.26 Do you feel the glory of His offices? He's probably thinking here of His offices, priest, prophet, and king. 1 Corinthians

1.30 Does He shine like the sun into your soul? Malachi 4.2 Is your heart ravished with His beauty? Psalm 5.16 By 1839, he's still laid up at his parents' home. And a number of Church of Scotland ministers are planning a mission to Palestine.

And McShane's name was raised. And what he needed really was probably complete bed rest. But they suggest the possibility, why don't you go along with them and enjoy the time going to Palestine.

And the change of air, the change of scenery may give you the rest that you need. As I said, he probably needed the quiet and so on. But he would take this opportunity.

Andrew Bonner, when he heard of McShane being chosen to go, wrote to him, The Lord's cure for you is the fragrance of Lebanon and the balmy air of thy land, O Emmanuel. Namely, what many of the Victorians would have described as the Holy Land. One of the things that impelled McShane to go, and this actually is, I'm not going to develop this, but this has been very important for me personally, is McShane's premillennialism.

McShane was convinced that the Lord would do a great work in his people Israel and restore them to the land. And then come and establish an earthly millennium at the end of which will be Armageddon and so on. Now, I don't personally buy all the details of that view of the end times.

I do believe that Romans 11 is talking about an outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the physical people of Israel. And I do believe, and you can disagree with me, that's fine, I do believe that there will be a great turning to God of the Jewish people. I don't believe in an earthly millennium centered in Jerusalem.

I think the millennial age is the church age, but be that as it may. When I first became a Christian, the context in which I became a Christian was very much one in the 1970s in which there was a lot of discussion about prophecy. And pretty well everybody I knew was a dispensationalist.

Secret Rapture, the Left Behind series. And for about 20 years, to be honest, I didn't know what I believed about the end times in detail. And it was not until the 1990s I figured, well, I'd better figure out something of what I believe and began to study it in more detail.

But I knew what I didn't believe. I didn't buy the idea of some sort of secret rapture and that whole perspective that is characterised of the Left Behind series. Now, McShane was not of that ilk, but he was a premillennialist.

And to be honest, up until I really started to read McShane and the Bonners, who were also premillennialists, I'm not sure I had a proper... I can't think of the word I want... esteem of that position. But then I began to realise when I was in this, if these men, who I thought, I think very highly of, held that view, well, maybe that means you can hold that view and still be in your right mind. I won't say anything else.

There is a possibility that Spurgeon in his latter days was a premillennialist. And that's... I know there's an argument along those lines. I would be hesitant to affirm that because I've not looked into that.

But definitely McShane and the Bonners were. And the idea of going to Israel, the Holy Land or Palestine, in McShane's thinking, was just this fabulous opportunity because of what he hoped would eventually be. It did not turn out to be a raft.

McShane was an inveterate, incorrigible evangelist. And if you read the diary of the journey that Andrew Bonner would eventually publish, he went with Andrew Bonner. Along the way, he was witnessing to all kinds of people and speaking in every opportunity he got to speak at a church and sometimes in synagogues.

And he took them. And in fact, if you track it through, he must have been quite fluent in languages because he was speaking sometimes when he met... Because they went through France. They didn't go around by the sea.

They went across the English Channel, through France and then over land and then over to North Africa. And he speaks to... Now, he may have been doing a lot of this in one or two languages. But it seems to me, reading the account, he was speaking at times in French to French Jews he met.

One time he spoke in Latin to a Roman Catholic priest he met traveling from Dijon to Lyon. Italian, German, Yiddish and even Romanian. And I'm not sure if he knew all those languages or that's simply all the people he met and he conversed with them in French and English and maybe French and English and German.

It's not clear. But the long and the short of it is it wasn't a rest. And that's why McShane should have stayed in Edinburgh if he'd wanted that physical rest.

Instead, he's... Fabulous opportunity going through Europe, witnessing and especially to Jewish people. One of the long-term impacts of the mission would be when they come back, they come through Hungary and they have a number of opportunities to preach in Hungary. And two men are converted.

Alfred Edesheim, through this mission. Edesheim is the man who wrote probably the most important life of Jesus in the 19th century. And Adolf Safir, who again would have a remarkable ministry in the Church of Scotland.

He'd be... These are Hungarian Jews who are converted through his preaching. And they would come over to Scotland to study for the Church of Scotland ministry. Not only was he not resting, but there was also challenges along the way.

He was nearly robbed in Poland. They encountered the plague in Palestine and Egypt. And the two senior ministers they went with, there were four of them all together, they never even got there.

The trip was so arduous, they never got there. On the way back from Egypt, he would fall ill and be at death's door in Smyrna near Turkey. But I'll get to that in a minute.

One of the funny things was when Bonner, when McShane is travelling, one of the things weighing on his mind is the congregation in Dundee. One time, one occasion, he's at Capernaum and he's looking over Capernaum, which is pretty well ruined. And he writes a letter that day to his congregation.

And he says this, If you tread the glorious gospel of the grace of God under your feet, your souls will perish. I feared Dundee will one day be a howling wilderness like Capernaum. Ah, what my flock from thee might learn, this is now praying, how days of grace will flee, how all an offered crisis spurned shall mourn at last.

And so, instead of the rest and not only with the activity, but it's also weighing on his mind. He's far from his people and all that God would come and visit them. And it's disturbing.

If McShane were to come back to Dundee today, he'd see that his almost prophecy had come true. St. Peter's was up until very recently closed up. And the church attendance in the British Isles, the lowest part, the lowest percentage is in the Scottish lowland.

In that area from Glasgow to Edinburgh, south to the English border. It's hard to believe that only about three to four percent of people in that area go to church. Let's go to church.

It doesn't mean to go to an evangelical church. And how God can take away the lamp from congregations that aren't faithful. As I said, on the way home in July of 1839, he fell dangerously ill.

He's lying in Smyrna. And he's thinking that instead of ever getting home, he's going to go to glory from this place. But he could say, earnest prayer was for my dear flock.

Bonner would note that when he was together with him, that McShane was regularly crying out to the Lord to pour out His Spirit upon his congregation. Their pastor, Bonner would say, was at the gate of death in utter helplessness. But the Lord had done this on very purpose for He meant to show he needed not the help of any.

And while he's away, obviously, somebody's going to be filling his place. And they had a 24-year-old Church of Scotland student, a man named William Burns, who would become in his own lifetime a very well-known missionary to China. And it was under his menacing month.

McShane is lying near death in Smyrna. But in the same month as Burns is preaching, in that congregation, God brings revival. The truth of the Gospel, Bonner would later write in his Life of McShane, pierced the hearts of many in an overwhelming manner.

We read of people in the congregation weeping uncontrollably. Some people actually even falling to the ground because they were so overwhelmed by a sense of sin. Late nights for weeks.

Sometimes lasting late into the night. The whole town of Dundee was moved. And the fear of God began to fall upon many who had not given any interest in the things of God.

McShane is back in November. It takes him that long in Smyrna to travel back. When he gets back, I'm not sure if he had heard of what was taking place before he got back to Britain.

But he was absolutely overwhelmed by what he saw. Unforgettable scene. Tears.

Concern for being in Christ. And his whole ministry for the last four years of his life was quite different in some respects. Before it had been heart-slogging.

The sowing. The sowing in tears. But now, the weeping.

McShane on one occasion was preaching out in an open meadow just outside Dundee. And there was a large crowd of people around him. It began to pour rain.

A heavy downpour. One person moved. Sort of typical thing to do.

And again, one of the things when you look back at these periods of time, it's very important to recognize that these are not your kind of church growth scenes that we sometimes see in North America where you have a mega church and all kinds of people going to the church for a host of reasons. McShane was very reticent to take the profession of faith as a sign, necessarily, of conversion. He would say the gospel is a holy-making gospel.

Dear friends, you can have awakenings, enlightenings, experiences. But if you want holiness, you'll never see the Lord. A real desire to complete holiness is the truest mark of being born again.

Jesus is a holy Savior. He covers the soul with His white raiment. And He makes the soul glorious within.

He first restores the lost image of God. Then He fills the soul with pure heavenly holiness. Unregenerate men cannot bear this.

In other words, there is an equal passion. Remember, we spent a considerable amount of time looking at the holiness movement. You have the same emphasis here, but it's rooted in a biblical context.

It has a biblical foundation. McShane was not looking for some sort of second experience, which gave you freedom from sin in thought, word, or deed. What he is looking for is genuine conversion, is marked by a panting after a holy life.

As his ministry drew towards its close, he became increasingly conscious. He didn't know it was drawing to a close. That's one of the things, by the way, when you read the past, we know the way the stories end.

But they didn't. This is, we don't. As he drew towards a close, you find again and again in his writings a great sense of the brevity of time.

I do not expect to live long, he could write. Changes are coming. Every eye before me will soon be dim in death.

There's no believing, no repenting. In the last year of his ministry at St. Peter's, he did a number of things. And there is, in his preaching, an all maternally separated God in Christ.

Met Andrew Bonner, and Bonner told him he had preached on hell that Sunday. He preached with tears. Same time, unremitting labour.

There's no sense in McShane. Well, the Lord is doing a great work. He's bringing revival.

Sit back and put my feet up and the Lord will do it all. As I do, the Lord will work. Sense of a man who's, there's no place in this world for God's people to kick back and put their feet up.

In some senses, I think there's a lack of balance here. There does need to be, obviously, that time taken for recreation. On the other hand, certainly despite the fact that he is a strong Calvinist, no sense of a hyper-Calvinist view that we don't need to do the work as God works in us and through us.

On Tuesday, he took a wedding service and spoke to a group of children at the end of it on the passage in the Gospel of John of the Good Shepherd. It was the last time he was in public. There'd been type of fever in the parish.

Most likely, he contracted it on one of his visits. I should say at this point in time, the idea of arms was a foreign contact with those who are ill. Doctors, up until the mid part of the 19th century, sometimes go from autopsies to delivery of babies.

Any sort of washing their hands or wearing gloves. The apology rate was significant among women and children when they were in the realization, hey, you need to wear gloves to wash your hands. The mortality rate was very good, it was very clear.

We have very good statistics of those. The drop is quite significant. So probably, I think at this point in time, he was so conscious of coming in contact with somebody who had the disease.

Even if he did, I should say, he probably wouldn't have... Well, it might have shaken him a little, but there's still the need in his mind. He was in a fever, very high. Even when he was in a delirium, it's very interesting to hear, you can sense where your heart is.

At one point, he cried out, he's actually in a fever. You must be awakened in time, or you'll be awakened in everlasting confusion. He said that, he's very sick.

Well, then, at one point, he prayed, he heard him pray, this parish, Lord, this people, this whole place, they died on Saturday morning. When we look at Susan Bonner next week, we'll look at the impact it had on Bonner and his friends. Bonner never forgot it.

He was absolutely stupefied when he heard that McShane was dead. And he always remembered that day for the next 50 years. March the 25th, he always remembered the day.

It was also the day that his own father had died. So, there was a double reason for doing it. I'd like to do a few lessons, rather, from McShane's life.

First of all, at the heart of his ministry was a reformation understanding of conversion and salvation and renewal. Three key things, men and women are ruined by the fall. Secondly, what we need is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ to restore us to favor with God by the Spirit.

You know, we live today, now, we live in a very, I would say, a very challenging day. Evangelicalism, in terms of its theological emphasis, in the last 25 years, has emphasized on more changes than before. Worship, the methodology of evangelism, outreach, understanding of what we're about.

The changes have come upon us. And, in fact, I'm more and more convinced that maybe, I'm not by any means recognizing this is not by any chance an obstacle, but I'm more and more convinced that Evangelicalism is the center of Evangelicalism. Evangelicalism has, historically, agreed on a core of theological perspectives.

They've differed on a number of things. They've differed on aspects of worship. They've differed on religion.

He'd be able to preach, or in the Metropolitan, or in Anthropolis Church, leading figures of our day. The Magistrates of Carthage would have a personal address. Edward wouldn't allow him into the pulpit, somehow.

Spirituality would be a hard one. And you need to take a long... They're not reading me. And then the Greeks, the Greeks, the Hindus.

And the Hindus, I mean, they're a strong interest. It's hard. There's not one named son that hasn't been... I am not of the persuasion.

But my concern is, and that's why I think it's very important to see, that God owns the same truth. And the rule of sin has ruined man's mind. He has no will to be saved.

On the other hand, though, human responsibility. You'll only have yourself to blame for sin. On the other hand, the only power that can bring a child to safety than making God a God is... Some of us are more wicked than them.

If there are any here that think they've been chosen, then they're better known as... Secondly, a very important lesson, I think, for me. The salvation of the Lord. Remember Jesus Christ.

Jesus in us is all our sin in an all-godly world. He justifies sin throughout the world. And did with a heart.

Remember, He loves to be saved. And certainly, we sang last day about him. 789.

But I noted that when we sang... When this passing world is done, for the higher years, I'm wicked. When I stand before the throne, the rest of you be not my own. And then after this Christ... Chosen not for good indeed, wakened up from rapture, please.

Hidden in the Savior's arms. By my love. Let me stop here.

I've chosen to start with. The other thing that you might want to know... Let me ask if there are any questions. Yeah, the intensity of the two men.

The minute he died, he was... Well, it was a trip to the Vatican. And from a... Looking back from a God's point of view, there are these men who God poured almost like... 50 years of... 60 years of spiritual experience. I don't want to agree with you.

But the insight of God. What changed... What changed death. This is Jim Huggins.

Oh yeah, I know this. Pre-millennialism, this preacher. Yes.

Okay, next we have... We want to look at Ed's bar. And then Anaragi behind...

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