

A a Short Account of the Origin of Methodism in England

by Nathan Bangs

Nathan Bangs' sermon outlines the origins of Methodism in England, highlighting John Wesley's pivotal role in its development and expansion.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 2:8, Philippians 3:14, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Church History", "Methodist Origins"

Description

Nathan Bangs preaches about the origin of Methodism in England, focusing on the life and labors of the great man of God, John Wesley, who was instrumental in starting and advancing the revival of true religion. John Wesley, born in 1703, was raised by his pious parents and received his early education under his mother's guidance. After being ordained as a deacon and later as a priest in the Church of England, Wesley's journey to America led to a profound spiritual experience that transformed his preaching and led to the formation of Methodist societies. Despite facing persecution and opposition, Wesley's dedication to spreading the gospel and revival of Christianity led to the establishment of Methodism as a distinct denomination known for its emphasis on faith, grace, and practical godliness.

Transcript

A a short account of the origin of Methodism in England -- Of the Rev. John Wesley --

His parentage, and first labor in the ministry.

Twenty-seven years had elapsed from the time Mr. Wesley formed the first Methodist society in London, when a few Methodist emigrants from Ireland formed themselves into a society in the city of New York. But before we proceed to detail the circumstances under which this society was formed, and the subsequent events in the history of Methodism in this country, it seems proper that we should trace its origin in England, and more especially notice some particulars in the life and labors of that great man of God, the Rev. John Wesley, who was the chief instrument in beginning and carrying forward this extensive revival of true religion. Without this, any history of Methodism would be incomplete.

The Rev. John Wesley was the second son of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, and was born at Epworth, in Lincolnshire, June 17th, 1703, O. S. He received his first lessons of instruction from his mother, a woman

admirably qualified for the right education and training of her children. His father was a learned and pious minister of the establishment, and his mother was not less strenuously attached than he to the doctrines, usages, and formularies of that church. In these principles the son was educated, and the impressions made upon his mind under the management of the skillful teachings of such a mother, and the guidance and example of such a father, were never wholly erased, but became the guiding principles, with some few deviations from strict conformity to the establishment, of his subsequent life.

At the age of eleven, in the year 1714, he was dismissed from the immediate care of his mother, and placed at the Charter House, under the able tuition of Dr. Walker, with whom, on account of his sobriety and diligence in his studies, he became a great favorite.

At the age of sixteen he entered college at Oxford, and soon gave evidence, by his progress in his studies, of that acuteness of intellect, and sternness of virtue, by which he was afterward so eminently distinguished. When about twenty years of age he began to think seriously of entering into holy orders; and accordingly, after consulting his father and mother, turned his attention to those books and studies which were best adapted to give him the needful information.

In September, 1725, he was ordained a deacon, and the following year elected fellow of Lincoln College. He took his degree in February, 1727, and in 1728 was ordained a priest or presbyter in the Church of England. In 1729 he attended the meetings of a small society which had been formed at Oxford, in which were included his brother Charles and Mr. Morgan, for the purpose of assisting each other in their studies, and of consulting how they might employ their time to the best advantage. The same year he became a tutor in the college, received pupils, and presided as moderator in the disputations six times a week.

It was about this time, the society above named having attracted some attention from the regularity of their lives, and their efforts to do good to others, that some of the wits at Oxford applied to the members the name of Methodists, a name by which John Wesley and his followers have ever since been distinguished. Whatever might have suggested this name to those who first used it in this application, whether in reference to an ancient sect of physicians, or to some Christians so called in the early days of the Reformation, it is no small recommendation of those who were thus designated at this time, that it was applied to them as descriptive of the rigidity with which they adhered to method in their studies, the regularity of their deportment, and their diligence in visiting the sick and the poor, with a view to relieve their wants, and impart to them religious instruction. Happy will it be for those who are still designated by the same descriptive appellation, if they shall continue to exemplify the same virtues, and the same pursuit after intellectual and spiritual improvement. It was not long after that the holiness of their lives gained for them a still more worthy epithet, namely, The Holy Club, and finally, on account of the frequency with which they commemorated the sufferings of their divine Master, that of Sacramentarians. These things, however, were so far from damping the ardor of their zeal, that they served only to reanimate them, with renewed courage, and stimulate them to perseverance in the discharge of their duties. In all these works John Wesley was the distinguished leader.

Passing over the events of his life which occurred during the remainder of the days he spent at Oxford, in which he continued to be characterized by his wisdom in counsel, his attachment to the Church, and his charity to the poor and the ignorant, I come to notice his missionary voyage to America. In the latter part of the year 1735; through the solicitation of General Oglethorpe, and the trustees for the new colony of Georgia, he consented to deny himself of the many advantages he enjoyed in the seclusion of Oxford, and to embark, in company with his brother Charles, on a missionary enterprise for that colony. Here they

landed on the 6th of February, 1736. Of his fidelity in the cause of his Master here, the privations he suffered, and the good he was instrumental in doing, I need not speak in this sketch, as a full detail of them may be seen in his biography, by Mr. Moore and others. After remaining about one year and a half, baffled in his pious design of preaching the gospel to the heathen, misrepresented and persecuted by those who ought to have been his friends and defenders, and seeing no prospect of succeeding in his main design, which was to convert the Indians, he took leave of the Georgians, and arrived in London February 3, 1738.

This voyage had its benefits. On his passage over to America, there being several Moravians on board, he had frequent opportunities of conversing with them, by which he learned "the way of God," particularly the way of justification through faith in Jesus Christ, and the necessity and privilege of the witness and fruits of the Holy Spirit "more perfectly." On his return to England he renewed his acquaintance with some of the Moravian ministers; and after much conversation, in which his objections to the above doctrines were fully obviated by appeals to Scripture and the experience of God's children, he says, "About a quarter before nine," (in the evening,) "while one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, where he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, 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." About the same time his brother Charles was made a partaker of the like blessing.

Mr. Wesley had, from the time he had been convinced of the necessity of justification by faith in Christ, preached the doctrine to the people; but now since he was made a partaker of this great blessing, he began more earnestly and understandingly to proclaim aloud to sinners the "things he had seen and felt." As he had been much edified by the conversation of the Moravians, with a view to strengthen himself in the faith, he made a journey to Germany, visited Hernhuth, their principle settlement, attended their meetings, and had free and full conversations with their most eminent men on the subject of experimental and practical godliness, by which his mind was much enlightened, and his heart established in the doctrine of justification by faith, and in the enjoyment of the witness and fruit of the Holy Spirit. After thus holding communion with these saints for some time, he returned to London in September, 1738.

Having no other plan of operations than simply to get and communicate all the good in his power, after his return from Germany, he began preaching more powerfully than ever the grand doctrines of Jesus Christ; and so pointed were his appeals to the consciences of the unregenerate, and earnest his exhortations to repentance, that the "offence of the cross" soon began to manifest itself, and he was given to understand that he could no longer preach in this, and then in another church. He then, in imitation of his brother Whitefield, went into the open fields, and Kensington Commons, and other places, were made to echo with the joyful sound of salvation by faith in the name of Jesus. Success crowned his efforts. Those who were awakened under his searching appeals to a sense of their danger came to him for advice; and as their number continually increased, he found it expedient to form them into a society; and in 1743 he drew up those rules which have continued to be the general rules of the societies, both in Europe and America, to this day, with one small exception.

This was the first regular organization of societies by Mr. Wesley, and the formation of classes soon followed. Among those who were converted under his ministry, and joined his societies, were some young men "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," to whom it became manifest a "dispensation of the gospel was committed;" and though in consequence of his strong attachment to the established order of things in his church, he submitted with great reluctance to employ them, yet being convinced they were called of God

to this work, he dare not refuse the help thus afforded him by the Head of the church. Hence originated the employment of lay-preachers, an irregularity for which Mr. Wesley suffered much persecution. As the work increased under his, his brother's, and the labors of those preachers, to avoid confusion it became necessary to have a more digested plan of proceeding: this gave rise to calling the preachers together for conference, the first of which was held in London in June, 1744. From this time the work went on more rapidly than ever, and it soon spread throughout different parts of England and Wales.

It is by no means necessary, in this sketch of the rise and progress of Methodism in Great Britain, to enter into farther details; and even thus much has been given that the reader might see the root of that tree, the branches of which have since extended over this western hemisphere, and become a shelter for so many of the weary sons of apostate Adam, "who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." Suffice it therefore to say, that Mr. Wesley continued his evangelical labors, assisted occasionally by a few pious clergymen of the establishment, among whom the most efficient was his brother Charles, and afterward Mr. Fletcher, and those whom God raised up from among his sons in the gospel, extending their labors to Ireland and Scotland, until, in 1766, a way opened for the introduction of this same gospel into America. At this time Methodism, under the skilful hand of the Wesleys, had received a regular shape, was known as a distinct denomination, though still adhering to the Church of England, and had adopted such a method of carrying forward its operations as to become a compact system, every part of which moved in obedience to him who, under God, had brought it into existence. I shall conclude this chapter with a few reflections.

It appears that the founder of Methodism was fully qualified for, and regularly called to his work.

That the work was eminently the work of God.

That Mr. Wesley was led into it without any previously digested plan of his own, but was conducted forward by the indications of divine Providence and grace, in the adoption of those measures, and the selection of those means, which arose out of the circumstances in which he was placed, and, which were evidently sanctioned of God for the spiritual good of mankind.

That he was so far from setting out in his career with a view of putting himself at the head of a sect, that his only object was to do good, to revive primitive Christianity in the church of which he was a minister, in conformity to the letter and spirit of its own articles of faith and formuleries of devotion. But that being opposed and persecuted by the carnal clergy of the establishment, as well as by Catholics and dissenters, he was forced either to disobey God by relinquishing his work, or to become the leader of a distinct sect. He wisely chose the latter, for which thousands will bless God in time and eternity.

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