

Robert Murray Mccheyne (1813-1843)

by Paul Martin

Paul Martin's sermon on Robert Murray McShane highlights the profound impact of his brief life and ministry on Christian faith and practice.

Duration: 34:25

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 10:14, John 3:16, Romans 8:28, 1 Timothy 4:16, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Biography"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the life of Robert Murray McShane, a man who pursued God with all his strength and found Him. McShane was born in 1813 and grew up in a religious upper middle-class family. He was not only a poet but also an athlete who enjoyed gymnastics. The speaker highlights five lessons we can learn from McShane's life, including the importance of pursuing God wholeheartedly, recognizing the reality of grace through a sense of sin, and loving and sharing the gospel with non-believers. The sermon concludes with a reminder from Hebrews 12:1 to lay aside every weight and sin and run the race set before us, finding encouragement from the faithful lives of those who have gone before us.

Transcript

Isn't it great to sing about what Jesus has done for us and to remind ourselves again and again and again of the extent and consistency of the application of his work? What we've just sung there is just glorious truth that we can count entirely on Jesus Christ and on his saving work. It's great truth to sing. First of all, I did not ask Steve to tell you that story to embarrass Steve.

The fact that Steve didn't send the checks to the Wood Roast was my fault. I ought to have directed him, so he tried to take the mea culpa there, but that's not fair. We should have given him greater instruction there.

But it is, in my mind, just a great story of so many different things. First of all, God's great provision in matching dollar for dollar exactly what Charles Mead was, and also of how God can take oversights, mistakes, failings, even sin, and work them together for good, which he did in that case. I hope that is great encouragement to you as you consider the Lord and what he's able to do with your life and all your mistakes and all your oversights and all the rest.

He's able to work these things together for good. That's a good God, as we saw this morning. Let me read for you from Hebrews chapter 12.

I'm just going to read a verse if you want to listen to it. First verse. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

What we've been trying to do this summer is remind one another of those who have been faithful in front of us that have finished their course and by their lives find some encouragement. So it is not the normal fare of our church on Sunday nights to look at people. We like to look at the Bible to unpack the scripture.

But what we're trying to do over these Sunday nights is look at the lives of people and see how God changed their lives and then use that for our own encouragement. And that's what we've done so far with Samuel Pierce and Jonathan Edwards. And tonight we hope to do with Robert Murray McShane.

So before we do that, let me pray and ask the Lord to give us grace. Father, we thank you for all that you've done for us in Jesus. And now we pray do much more for us through the life of McShane.

We ask for your instruction, your help, your blessing. His life would be used to encourage us to see what can be done with a man who is close to God. Have mercy on us, we pray in the Savior's name.

Amen. Well, you ought to have a handout if you don't raise your hand. Julian's at the back and he'd love to bring you a copy of that.

McShane's life. Maybe there's none left. So you lose.

Okay. But you don't lose if somebody shares who's around you. So we got some people that will share.

Anyone been camping this summer? Anybody intend to go camping this summer? Foolish, foolish people. But if you have been camping, I'll give my annual tirade against camping. I won't do that now.

If you've been camping, you've perhaps enjoyed a camp fire or a bonfire. And if you've done a number of these fires, you will know that some of them take a little while to get going. Maybe your wood's a little wet, your tinder isn't quite good enough, and the conditions aren't.

Or maybe you just don't know how to build a fire. But it takes a while to get that fire going. And it seems to finally start burning.

And then it burns for a while and then it slowly dissipates. Other times you start a fire and if you've got the right fuel there, you just light that thing and it takes off and it burns and it's done. Both fires create heat and light.

But oftentimes it's the fire that burns fast and furious that draws our attention. We start wondering things like this. Is the whole forest going to come down? And such was the life of Robert Murray McShane.

He was one of those people who burned fast and furious. He died in his 30th year. He was 29 years old.

He had not yet reached his 30th birthday. And in the eight years of his public ministry, God used him in remarkable ways in his day. And he has continued to use him for the 150 years, 160 years since.

Andrew Bonner, who was a good friend of McShane, collected some of McShane's writings, his sermons, booklets and tracts that he'd written. And then he wrote a biographical sketch. And since 1844, that, to my knowledge, has never fallen out of print.

It has been republished again and again and again. Men like David Martin Lloyd-Jones, men like Charles Spurgeon would attribute this biographical work on McShane as one of the most influential things in their lives. Shaped how they thought about God, shaped how they thought about Christian ministry, shaped how they thought it was to live as a Christian.

Twenty-nine years old and he died. And my hope is that. Does anybody else find this when you watch the Olympics, you go out for a jog? You ever seen that correlation? I mean, you see what somebody can do with all this training and you think, oh, I could do that or something in it.

You feel inspired. You watch Wimbledon, you play tennis, you watch the Stanley Cup finals, you go out and play ball hockey for the first time in 20 years, whatever it is, it just seems to draw it out of you. And the same thing ought to be true when we're surrounded by godly people.

You get around them and you start to think, I want to be like that. And hopefully not in fits and starts, but your life is really changed. So let me give you an overview of his life.

You will see there a timeline of his life. It's a short life, 30 years. It's summarized there for you.

Eighteen thirteen McShane was born, grew up in a very religious upper middle class family. He was a poet. He was an athlete.

He liked gymnastics. In fact, one time he was on a somebody put a bar across two limbs of a tree and he and he was walking through his little parish and he saw these guys doing tricks and he said, watch me. And he got up there and he was doing spins and stuff.

And then it broke and he fell on his head, which might have actually contributed to his early death. But he was an athlete. He was fun loving.

He was winsome. He's kind of one of those guys that walks in a room and draws everyone's attention. He's just that outgoing, effervescent personality.

And such was Robert's life until he was 18. And when he turned 18, his brother died. His brother is eight years older than him.

Twenty six years old. And his twenty six year old brother had faithfully evangelized him. But McShane Robert had not really spent a lot of time listening to his brother.

But when his when his brother died, it rocked his world. And not so much the fact that his brother died as much as the way in which his brother died. For his brother died with great confidence in God, a sober reality settled in in his deathbed.

And Robert looked at his brother and he said, I don't have that. And so from that moment on, he would mark that time period of his life as the time in which God saved him. He didn't know exactly the day or the hour, but he could point to that time as the event that rocked his world and showed him Christ.

And so he began to pursue the Lord. That same year, 1830 or rather 1831, he started seminary at the University of Edinburgh under Thomas Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers or Chalmers.

I'm not sure how you pronounce it exactly. The great thing about him is his emphasis on real heart religion. None of this scholastic nonsense.

He wanted the men under his charge to know Christ and to love Christ. And not only that, he wanted them to be evangelists. So he would take him out and he would say, here's your block.

Go evangelize the block. And these guys would go out weekly and just call on people and cold call evangelism. And that's the ethos in which McShane was trained.

After his graduation, he's licensed to preach under John Bonner, who's the brother of Andrew Bonner, his best friend. And then he has that 10 month trial and he's called the St. Peter's Dundee. That's where he'll spend his entire ministry.

It's a new church building, seats about 1100 people. Within a few years, it is full and packed, people crowding to get in because this man's ministry was, for lack of a better term, anointed of God. In 1839, when he's 25, 26 years old, he gets heart palpitations, meaning his heart starts to beat.

I can make a sound. His heart beats really quickly. And it's uncontrollable.

There's no medication. Doctors say the only way to treat that is get out of ministry. And so he goes and imagine this just when things start to really seem to be taking off.

He's removed. He goes and he lives with mom and dad again. And then he is approached by some older pastors who are going to Palestine to inquire after the state of Jewish people, whether they know Christ, whether there's a Christian church in Palestine.

So he travels for a year. And while he's gone, revival breaks out in his church. I want you to think about that.

You're 25, 26 years old. You've been preaching, praying for revival. You are laid aside because of your health.

And then you go off to a foreign land. And while you're there, revival comes. Hundreds and hundreds of people that had no Christian background are converted, come into the church.

He's not there for any of it. He returns a little bit better, not completely healed. And the revival seems to be coming to an end.

And he is the pastor. Now, all these new Christians within the next three, four years, he dies. Typhoid.

He's visiting a Christian and he's preaching the gospel to them. They have typhus fever is raging through the area. Sure enough, he contracts it.

He's already in a weakened state because of his heart. And he dies. Here's what Andrew Bonner said.

And the quotation is there at the end of that timeline. This afternoon, March 25, 1843, about five o'clock, a message has just come to tell me of Robert McShane's death. Never, never yet in all my life have I felt anything like this.

It is a blow to myself, to his people, to the Church of Christ in Scotland. Oh, Lord, work for thine own glory's sake. Arise, oh Lord.

The godly seeth and the faithful fail. My heart is sore. It makes me feel near death myself.

Now, there was no friend whom I loved like him for the next forty nine years. Andrew Bonner would live another forty nine years. He was an old, old man when he died.

Eighty three, I think, which is old for the day. Some of you are going to stop that old, but it was old for the day. For the next forty nine years, Andrew Bonner would mark the date in his journal, the anniversary of McShane's death, and almost every single entry over those forty nine years said something like this.

Oh, when will I have the godliness of McShane? Now, you have forty nine years to find it. Now, just a little bit of context and then some lessons from this short life. No telephone.

No internet. No electricity. No computer.

No DVDs, Blu-ray, whatever. In other words, not a lot of distractions in McShane's life. He also had a sister who lived with him and cared for him.

She did all the cleaning, all the cooking, and would entertain guests when people would call on him. So when you hear what McShane did in his life, you need to understand he's a single man. He never married.

He was likely in love with a young woman. He never quite fessed up to that in his journals, but he sure wrote a lot about her, which is often a good sign. On the flip side, he didn't have a car, but you know what? He did have kids.

Anybody want to take a guess what this pastor rode around in? Well, not a car. Like a horse. Not a buggy.

No, a donkey. Not a donkey. A mule.

No. What is what's the ones that like they don't breed? A mule. Yeah, he had a mule.

Want to know his name? Want to take a guess? No, not mule. Lazer? Oh, Cleezer. His name was Tully.

Good. Do you want to just stand up for a minute? It's so hot in here. I realize it's oppressive.

Do you need to just stand up and breathe for a second? You can just like, here, just stretch and let the blood flow for a second. Really? It's so hot. Okay, now sit down.

Okay, let me tell you four or five things we can learn from McShane's life. Number one, pursue God with all your strength and you will find him. The great thing about men like McShane is they model for us a man who found God when he pursued God with all of his heart.

He wrote this, Who's Brainerd? I want a grown-up to tell me who's Brainerd. Nice and loud. David Brainerd.

When did we just hear about David Brainerd? Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards that we saw last Sunday when John was telling us about Jonathan Edwards. John Bell was telling us about Jonathan Edwards.

And he put together the Journal of David Brainerd, which is still in publication, still used of God in many, many people's lives. And John said, we all need to read it. So McShane read Brainerd.

Oh, to have Brainerd's heart for perfect holiness, to be holy as God is holy, pure as Christ is pure, perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. That's just a journal entry. Or rather, I think that's in a letter he wrote to another pastor.

In his journal, he would say, I often pray, Lord, make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made. That's a great prayer. Do you see the theology of that prayer? Is that your intention of your heart? Make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made.

In other words, don't make me just over the cusp of acceptability. Make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made. Pursue God in that way and you will find Him.

He was convinced of his own inability, so he would say, I must first see the face of God before I can take on any duty. In another place, do everything in earnest. If it's worth doing, then do it with all your might.

Above all, keep much in the presence of God. Never see the face of man till you have seen his face, who is our life, our all. It's not in Bonner's account, but I believe it was McShane who one day they were waiting for him to preach in a certain place.

I think it was at Dundee, St. Peter's. And he didn't show up. He didn't show up.

They're singing. They're praying. He didn't show up.

Finally, they send some of the elders to find him. They knock on the door and they said, Mr. McCain, it's time to preach. And he says, I can't come.

Anybody know the rest? No, not because he was sick. I can't come until the Lord comes with me. He was unwilling to enter the pulpit till he was sure that God was with him, that he had met with God in prayer, that he had found God and was able to now come and bring God to the people.

It's a reflection of a man whose heart was intent on the Lord. He wrote this, rose early to seek God and found him whom my soul loves, who would not rise early to meet such company? Me? Sometimes. He knew the way to find God was through reading the word of God.

So seeing such a value in the word of God, he probably heard of McShane's reading calendar he put together. It was kind of the first guy that we know to do this, a calendar in order to read through the New Testament and Book of Psalms twice and all of the Old Testament once in the course of a year. And with every day came particular readings morning and evening.

And the idea was that if we as a whole church are all reading the same thing, we're able to fellowship around the word together, which is why we do the same here. We just kind of made it easier for you. He would write this in general.

It is best to have at least one hour alone with God before engaging in anything else. At the same time, he's writing this not for anyone else, by the way. This is just his personal conviction.

So just hear the man's conviction. It's not saying this to anyone else in a journal that would have at least one hour alone with God before engaging in anything else. At the same time, I must be careful not to

reckon communion with God by minutes or hours or by solitude.

I poured over my Bible and on my knees for hours with little or no communion. And my times of solitude have often been times of greatest temptation. But he's saying in practice, I need to seek to have this hour alone with God every day.

He also practiced prayer. He wrote, No person can be a child of God without living in secret prayer. And no community of Christians can be in a lively or alive condition without unity in prayer.

We know that to be true, don't we? By our own experience, if we're not praying individually and then coming together to pray corporately, there is a liveliness that decreases in church life. But when Christians are in the closet and then they come out of the closet to pray with one another, there's an electricity in the fellowship because they've been with their God. I love this next quote where he says, Pray to be taught to pray.

What does that mean? Pray to be taught to pray. We don't know how to pray unless God teaches us how to pray, right? So he says, Pray to be taught to pray. Don't assume you know how to pray.

He goes on. Do not be content with old forms that flow from the lips only. We get that sometimes with the little children, right? It's like the Grace Kids night.

You know, dear Lord, thank you for the food. It's the grace prayer. It's the meal prayer.

It's just it's an old form. But, you know, we might we can do the same kind of things, just have the same language in prayer. He says, Don't be content with old forms that flow from the lips only.

Most Christians have need to cast their formal prayers away to be taught to cry Abba. He said at one time, If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million of enemies. Yet the distance makes no difference.

He is praying for me. So pursue God with all your strength. And as McShane models, you will find him.

Number two, apply the gospel to your sin. Again, writing simply to himself in his journal, he said, I am persuaded that I shall obtain the highest amount of present happiness. I shall do the most for God's glory and the good of man, and I shall have the fullest reward in eternity by maintaining a conscience always washed in Christ's blood.

He then goes on in that same sort of section to describe how there is a tendency in his heart to carry a burdened conscience rather than confess a sin. Kind of what we were talking about this morning, not believing in the goodness of God, rather believing that I've got to do some things to earn God's favor back. So he wrote this.

I feel follow this closely. I feel when I have sinned and immediate reluctance to go to Christ, I am ashamed to go. I feel as if it would do no good to go.

Anyone ever feel this way? I'm asking anybody ever feel this way? You sin and it feels like no good to go to Christ. He goes on as if it were making Christ a minister of sin to go straight from the swine trough to the best road. Ever feel that way? You're angry at your husband and you say all kinds of things that you that fill you with regret and it feels wrong to go to Jesus.

You feel filthy because of your sin and a thousand other excuses. But I am persuaded they are all lies direct from hell. John argues the opposite way.

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the father. Jeremiah 3 once and a thousand other scriptures are against it. I am sure there is neither peace nor safety from deeper sin, but in going directly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is God's way of peace and holiness. It is folly to the world and the clouded heart. But it is the way.

If that if you can take any takeaway value from McShane's life, I want it to be this that you begin to see in your life that when sin comes, go immediately to Christ. Be always confessing sin. Be always seeking grace and find there a welcome reception.

Apply the gospel to your sin. Number three from McShane's life over the page. Do all you can to crack, chisel, expose, kill and ruin pride in your life.

I told you about this event where he goes off to a foreign land, is sick. In fact, before he went, this is what he wrote. I think this quote is in your.

Yeah, here it is. He's writing to another pastor before his trip to Palestine. He's sick at his parents' house.

And this is what he writes. I sometimes think that a great blessing may come to my people in my absence. Often God does not bless us when we are in the midst of our labors, lest we shall say my hand and my eloquence have done it.

He removes us into silence and then pours down a blessing so that there is no room to receive it, so that all that see it cry out, it is the Lord. This was the way in the South Sea Islands. May it really be so with my dear people.

It's like this man had a prophetic gift because that's exactly what happened. In fact, he was in Buzha, which memory is failing me. It's either Greece or Iran or Turkey.

How's that for helpful? I think it's Greece. No, I think it's Iran. Anyway, it doesn't matter.

It's an antiquated place name, but this is what he wrote to Dr. Gibson later on. I really believe that my master had called me home and that I would sleep beneath the dark green cypresses of Buzha till the Lord called and Lord shall come. And my most earnest prayer was for my dear flock that God would give them a pastor after his own heart.

And it was on that very night when the revival began back in Dundee, Scotland. He's lying at death's door and all he can think to pray of is for his church. And as he's laboring in prayer alone, Andrew Bonner wasn't with him.

He'd gone on ahead and he's alone. He's in the heat. He thinks he's going to die.

And he's praying that God would send revival, that God would be gracious, that God would send a pastor to his flock. And that's exactly what the Lord did. There is no hint of him ever looking at God and going, why didn't I get to see the revival? No hint of envy.

W. C. Burns was the pastor taking his place while he was gone. He was four or five years younger, inexperienced. And God brings the great work through the inexperienced young pastor.

Never does he grow bitter. Number four, love children and call on them to turn from sin and put their sole hope in Jesus. McShane was always addressing the children in his preaching, in a sermon on the revenge, the sword of God's revenge.

In the application, he turned to the children. This is what he said. Think this, little children, you are the pride of your mother's heart, but have gone astray from the womb speaking lies.

Little children who are fond of your plays, but are not fond of coming to Jesus Christ, who is the savior of little children. The sword will come on you also in a gospel tract entitled Reasons Why Children Should Fly to Christ Without Delay. He writes this.

It is high time you seek the Lord. The longest lifetime is short enough. Oh, if you had to stand as often as I have beside the dying bed of little children to see their wild looks and outstretched hands and to hear their dying cries, you would see how dreadful it is to fly to Christ and how needful it is rather to fly to Christ.

Now it may be your turn next. Are you prepared to die? Have you fled for refuge to Jesus? Have you found forgiveness? This is not a man just manipulating children. He he was I mean, typhus was running rampant.

There were there were other fevers and diseases that were going on. He was regularly burying children. When he says what he says here, he's speaking the truth.

He would often be at the bedside of dying children. And so he was burdened for those children to come to Christ. Children, you need to come to Christ.

You need to look to Jesus and ask him to forgive forgive you for all of your sins, all the times that you were mean to brother or sister, all the times that you were thinking bad thoughts towards mommy and daddy or times when you were even hitting people and screaming and angry. All of those sins, they need to be forgiven. And God will forgive you if you turn away from your sins and believe on Jesus Christ.

He would write of James Lang, who was converted when he was about 12 years old, died when he was 14. And he wrote a tract about James. He was so impressed by this young man's life.

And I put it on my blog recently. I would encourage that you read it. It's long, but it's remarkable what this little boy did from his sick bed.

He would call in his friends and preach the gospel to them. And this is what he said. The greatest what the greatest lack in the religion of children is generally sense of sin.

Artless simplicity, meaning kind of a gullibility and confidence in what is told are in some respects natural to children. Kids believe what you tell them. And this is the reason why we are so often deceived by promising appearances in childhood.

Parents take note. Your children are growing up in your home. You're the biggest influence in their lives.

They long to please you. You tell them of God. You tell them of Jesus.

There is an artless simplicity. They are not well nuanced. They have not been exposed to everything in the world yet.

And so they seem to receive it. They seem to accept it. They seem to believe it.

They can parrot the words of the gospel, the vocabulary of the gospel. But then McShane says this, the reality of grace in a child is best known by his sense of sin. Just being able to talk about Jesus isn't necessarily the evidence of true conversion.

But true conversion is much better seen when a child is able to articulate his sinfulness, her brokenness, her neediness before God. I urge you, parents, to take that thought and ponder it really quickly. Number five, love people who are not Christians yet and tell them about their lostness and all about the wonderful solution, Jesus.

McShane said, Do not be satisfied without conversions. Are you satisfied with people not coming to Christ? Don't be. Have a holy dissatisfaction with lack of conversions.

He would write to a pastor, never forget that the end of a sermon, the goal of a sermon is the salvation of the people. Writing to a young man who was awakened but not yet converted, this is what he wrote a letter and said this. What has the world done for you that you love it so much? Did the world die for you? Will the world blot out your sins or change your heart? Will the world carry you to heaven? No, no.

You may go back to the world if you please, but it, the world, can only destroy your poor soul. Have you not lived long enough in pleasure? Come and try the pleasures of Christ, forgiveness and a new heart. I have not been at a dance or any worldly amusement for many years, and yet I believe I have had more pleasure in a single day than you have had all your life.

In what, you will say? In feeling that God loves me, that Christ has washed me, and feeling that I shall be in heaven when the wicked are cast into hell. A day in your court is better than a thousand elsewhere, Psalm 84:10. If you die without Christ, you cannot come back to be converted and die a Christian, a believer.

You have but once to die. Oh, pray that you may find Christ before death finds you. In one of his six evangelistic letters to a young woman, McShane wrote, The world will say you are an innocent and harmless girl.

Do not believe them. The world is a liar. Pray to see yourself exactly as God sees you.

More and more of those quotes are there. Look at the very last one, where he says this. Now, do not look so long and so harassingly at your own heart and feelings.

What will you find there but the bite of the serpent? Look to Christ. Look to Him and live. You need no preparation.

You need no endeavors. You need no duties. You need no strivings.

You only need to look and live. Do not take up your time so much with studying your own heart as with studying Christ's heart. For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.

And finally, I leave you with a personal word. McShane's life has changed in my life. Reading his biography, reading his letters in particular, all of these things have exposed my own lack of godliness and have encouraged me to more greatly value God over everything else.

And so, if you look at your life and say, man, when I just look at my life, I seem to be taken up with work. I seem to be taken up with ministry. I seem to be taken up with parenting.

I seem to be taken up with this and with that. I'm not taken up with God. Then I would urge you, get a copy of the full volume Banner of Truth edition of Robert Murray McShane's Memoirs and Remains and start reading his letters.

And if you can't afford that, you can read it on Google Books online. The thing is there, the title is there. You can read it right online.

You can print it off if you want. It's free. It's past copyright.

But read those letters and let them stir your affections for Christ. I will leave you with what is perhaps the best known McShane quote. It is not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus.

A holy minister is an awful, meaning powerful, weapon in the hand of God.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21689.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/paul-martin/robert-murray-mccheyne-1813-1843/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net