

Heroes of the Faith #06: George Whitefield

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Today we want to talk about an associate of John Wesley, actually, in many ways, a teacher of John Wesley namely George Whitefield. We have moved into the 18th century nearly right up to the minute, up to the 18th century and we have been looking, up to this point, primarily at the 16th century with Luther and Calvin and Jeanne d'Albret. And we have been looking at the wonderful, powerful, remarkable things that God did in that 16th century. And God also did remarkable things in the 17th century through the vigorous work of the Puritans. And we might find ourselves then surprised to realize that at the beginning of the 18th century the Church was in rather sorry state in England.

It illustrates that old expression: God has no grandchildren. God only has children.

Every generation must learn to have God as its Father and every generation must seek to teach the next generation to have that vital living personal relationship with God.

And so at the opening of the 18th century we find the churches in England in a rather sad state. And into that state God gave a great gift, the gift of George Whitefield.

George Whitefield was one of the greatest preachers in the history of the Church. Some would argue that George Whitefield was the greatest preacher the Church ever produced. Certainly he is in a very small company of men who might vie for that claim as the greatest preacher in the history of the Church.

The great Shakespearean actor of the 18th century David Garrick remarked that had Whitefield been an actor he probably would have been the greatest actor the stage had ever seen. And by that he didn't mean to say there was anything artificial about Whitefield's preaching, but simply that he was a powerful communicator.

It was Garrick who said that Whitefield could reduce an audience to tears simply by saying the word "Mesopotamia," so powerful was he.

Another testimony to the power of Whitefield as a preacher came in relation to one of his projects. He opened an orphan house in Georgia in the 18th century and in the 18th century there was almost nobody in Georgia. It was a very small colony and when Whitefield would go around raising money some people felt it was a waste of money to try to have

an orphanage in Georgia because it cost too much to send food to Georgia and building materials to Georgia. It even cost a lot to send the orphans to Georgia. It was a silly place and a lot of people weren't going to give money to an orphanage in Georgia.

And one of those was Benjamin Franklin, not a man noted for his piety. But nonetheless, a man who greatly respected George Whitefield and he heard one day that Whitefield was going to be preaching in Philadelphia and that one of the aims of Whitefield in this meeting would be to raise money for the orphanage.

And Franklin said, "You know, that Whitefield is such a preacher that if I have any money I am going to be in trouble."

But nonetheless he went. And as Whitefield began to preach Franklin felt himself forced to give the coppers in his pocket. And Whitefield preached on. And Franklin found himself forced to give the silver in his pockets. And by the end of the sermon he was glad at giving all the gold he had in his pockets, all the silver, all the copper, everything into the offering for the orphanage. He felt real foolish having told everybody he wasn't going to give a cent.

But then he saw a friend who also knew how powerful a preacher Whitefield was and the friend thought he was a lot smarter. The friend left all of his money at home. But Franklin felt better than his friend because his friend was running around through the crowd seeing who he could borrow money from.

But in spite of the fact that Whitefield even down to our day has something still of a reputation as a great preacher, his work is not well known. We can be very thankful that in the last few years Arnold Dallimore has produced a great biography of Whitefield, two huge volumes.

The danger of even a good biography that comes out in two huge volumes is that it may leave the subject of the biography still unknown because there may be many who won't wade through that whole biography. And so I am drawing largely on that biography, but summarizing it. This won't be two huge volumes worth of material.

And the place to start, I think is with a realization of the world in which Whitefield labored and into which he was born in 1714 and in which he was raised. It was a world of great wickedness. It was a world of real world degeneracy. The failure of the great Puritan efforts in England had left a country that had sort of gone wild in excess. There was great sexual immorality often paraded on the stage, in the theater, in all sorts of licentious plays. And that sexual immorality was manifested in private life as well.

There was an invitation to a masked ball in which the invitation itself promised those who came champagne, dice, music or your neighbor's spouse. It was a wanton, open defiance of the standards of God's Word. It was a society given over to gambling. It was a society that was fascinated by cruel sports like bear bating and cock fighting that were not only cruel in themselves, but also involved gambling.

It was a society that was so lawless, so criminal in its character that there were 160 crimes that were punishable by death in England in the 18th century.

Dr. Johnson literally remarked that he was afraid that so many people were being hanged that England would run out of rope for the navy.

It was a society given over to drunkenness. In 1689 the parliament had passed a law forbidding the importing of liquor to England and the result was only to intensify the desire for liquor and the only liquor available was gin, sort of bathtub gin. And what hit England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was what came to be known as the gin craze. And it was said that one out of six houses in London became a gin house, selling gin to the people. One house out of six made itself into a mini bar selling gin and promoting public drunkenness.

Gin was the opiate of the people and drunkenness was to be found everywhere.

Part of the reason that Wesley took such a strong stand against drinking because of the extent of public drunkenness.

Bishop Benson of the Church of England remarked, "Gin has made the English people what they never were before, cruel and inhuman."

One notable lady at the time made a joke of all of this immorality. She said, "Parliament is taking the not out of the 10 Commandments and putting it into the Apostles' Creed."

This was funny, you see. Ha, ha, ha. We are taking all of the nots out of the 10 Commandments, "Thou shalt not..." and we are putting it into the Apostles' Creed. "I do not believe..."

This is the kind of world that Whitefield faced.

Now when you think about it, sexual immorality, gambling, cruel sports, drunkenness, lawlessness, hard to even imagine a society like that, isn't it?

And into that society then of such degeneracy we have to reckon also with the fact that the churches had become remarkably weak. A wicked world and weak churches.

There was growing unbelief. Unitarianism was spreading, denying that Jesus was the true Son of God. Deism was the movement capturing the attention of many of the intellectual leaders of the time saying, "Oh, yes, there is a God who brought this world into existence and planted natural laws to sort of guide and direct us, but that God far away and uninterested in us. We are on our own."

The Deists, you will remember, often said that God was like a watchmaker. He made this world like a watch and he wound it up and now he has sort of set it on a shelf to run on its own. God wasn't a present, living reality.

And, of course, there was a growing Rationalism that was utterly man centered and had no real interest in God at all. And that was affecting and undermining something of the strength of the churches inevitably.

In addition to explicit unbelief, even for those who were in the Church there was a lot of cynicism. Oh, they would go through the forms, but they didn't really believe much.

The famous story of Queen Carolyn who lay dying in 1737 and the prime minister of England Robert Walpole looked around and he saw that there was no ministers in attendance at the queen on her death bed. And so he said to one of the princesses to go and get the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Potter. And his words were, "Pray, madam, let this farce be played out. The Archbishop will act it very well. You may bid him be as short as you will, it will do the queen no hurt no more than any good and it will satisfy all the good and wise fools who will call us Atheists if we don't profess to be as great fools as they are."

Cynicism, you see, going through the motions in the Church, but not really believing anything.

And even where there was still some sincere belief in the church, even where there were some who still believed the teachings of the Scripture and of the Church, that belief had become sort of encased in a rigid formalism.

The 17th century had been a century of so much religious vitality and enthusiasm it was as if people were worn out and all the religion they could tolerate was religion that was simply almost mummified in its rigidity.

People wanted the service simply read without any emotion, without much comment, read out of the prayer book, read out in churches where the actions remained absolutely the same week by week without variation.

One observer of the scene remarked that sermons in the early 18th century were like a winter's day, short and cold. And that described the religion of an awful lot of people.

Even those, you see, who were sincere had found themselves kind of trapped in this formalism. And the churches revealed their weakness because they had given in really to class distinctions in the Church. Religion was something that tended to be where the upper class or the middle class people went and lower class people, particularly people who were being drawn into the cities by the industrial revolution felt themselves somehow excluded from the churches. The churches seemed to be the places where very well dressed and proper people went. And the growing lower classes in the cities felt they didn't really belong there. They didn't feel comfortable there.

And, indeed, as the cities began to grow with the growing industrialization, the Church didn't keep pace with the population growth and so increasingly there were large sections of the cities with new populations of lower class working people where there were no churches at all. And still there were churches in the rural areas where the people had moved out where no one was attending, but there the ministers would go and read the service with almost nobody in the church.

And so there was real dislocation in the life of the Church. The Church wasn't ministering to these lower class people. The Church wasn't there for them. The Church wasn't acceptable to them.

And in spite of these problems it remained true that the worst thing you could say about a preacher was that he was an enthusiast. That meant he as a fanatic. That meant that he was gone off the deep end. Religion had to be serious, sober, unchanging, straight laced, formal, formal, formal.

And it certainly reminds one of the words of Paul that they have the form of religion, but not the power thereof, because the form of the Church of England was really very good in a lot of ways. The words of the book of common prayer were largely commendable. But it didn't seem to penetrate into the hearts of people.

Now in a sense we can say, "Well, we are not very much like that, by and large, in 20th century America."

We may identify with some of the wickedness, a lot of the wickedness more than the wickedness of the 18th century, but surely we are not cold and formal like that.

Well, maybe we have a warmth that is so superficial today that it still leaves hearts cold. But in any case we have to think as the situation in the 18th century challenged George Whitefield. Is the Church really ministering to people? Are we really going where people are? Are we reaching out?

George Whitefield grew up, then, in this kind of environment and he went through various sorts of wanderings on his own as he sought to move towards usefulness in God's hands. He was born and raised in the city of Gloucester, the youngest of seven children. His family were relatively prosperous, but when George was still quite young his father died and from that time on the family had some pretty serious financial struggles to get along.

Nonetheless the family recognized that George was a talented young man and made provision for him to go off to school to Oxford in 1732.

He wasn't able to go as a gentleman's son and to enjoy the sort of good life at Oxford. He had to go as what was known as a servitor. Servitors were, in effect, young men who worked their way through university by being servants of the sons of gentlemen. And

even though they were able to get a good education and even though that meant that their future would probably be relatively good, they were thoroughly despised by those who were not servitors. It was another very rigid class distinction. Servitors couldn't even go up and talk to non servitors in universities. They were a segregated servant class.

But Whitefield made the best of that opportunity. He studied, very, very seriously and he was very serious about religion. He took his religion seriously although it, too, had a kind of formality to it that reflected that character of the Church in general.

He wrote about those years at the university and about his seriousness in religion. He said, "I began to fast twice a week for 36 hours, prayed many times a day and received the sacrament every Lord's Day. I fasted myself almost to death all the 40 days of Lent during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides seven times a day to my private prayers. Yet I knew no more that I was to be born a new creature in Christ Jesus than if I had never been born at all."

Here you see the most rigorous kind of religious formalism, going through all the right motions, maybe going through more than the right motions, fasting, praying, going to church regularly and yet he said he didn't really know Jesus Christ. It was an external kind of religion. Oh, he was serious about it. It wasn't that he just went through the motions and his mind wasn't engaged, but there was no real life to it, he said. There was a form of godliness, but no power of godliness in his experience.

Now this serious young man George Whitefield, going so faithfully to church and fasting came to the attention of some other very serious religious young men, some young men who were better off economically and, therefore, were not servitors at the university. He came to attention, especially of a young man named Charles Wesley who was the member of a group known as the holy club at Oxford.

And that holy club was composed of several serious minded young men including Charles Wesley's brother John. It had been formed in 1728 to promote piety, to promote serious religion, a seriousness about religion just like that of George Whitefield.

And so they invited George Whitefield to join them. Great honor for a servitor. Whitefield couldn't even have attended the meetings of the holy club unless he had been invited, because he was cut off in a separate class. But he was invited.

And he began to share with them an intense kind of religiosity, discipline, daily devotions of an intense lengthy nature, the keeping of a diary, regularly attendance at Church of England services, weekly discussions of the New Testament, of course, using only your Greek New Testament, seriousness about morality.

Do you know what they were like? They were exactly like Martin Luther in the monastery praying, fasting, studying, but not really drawing closer to God for all of their works, works, works.

You notice Whitefield says, “Seven times in the day I went to my private prayers.”

That is taken from the psalms. “Seven times in the day will I praise thee.” That was a verse that guided monastic life in the Middle Ages. The monks went seven times a day to their prayers in literal fulfillment of the words of the psalmist. This was a monastic pre Protestant kind of piety that was being manifested here and Whitefield, just like the Wesleys later confessed there was no fundamental knowledge of God here, no vital living relationship to God.

And Whitefield confessed he had no sense of real peace with God. He recognized that he needed a living relationship to God.

He found that after reading a book, a book by Henry Scougal called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* when he read something about a living relationship to God. And yet even having read about it he went through months of struggle finally coming to it.

He was to write later, “God was pleased to remove the heavy load from me, to enable me to lay hold of his dear Son by a living faith and by giving me the Spirit of adoption to seal me even to the day of everlasting redemption. Oh, with what joy, joy unspeakable even joy that was full of and [?] with glory was my [?] filled when the weight of sin went off and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God and a full assurance of faith broke in upon my disconsolate soul.”

You see, he broke through to the gospel, to the good news of the forgiveness of sins and new life in Jesus Christ. And he said suddenly a great weight of dead religiosity fell off from him.

Now that didn't mean that he gave up his pious activities. Indeed, he continued to be very methodical in his religious life.

George Whitefield was called, really, the first Methodist because of his methodical life. he had a method to his religion. He continued his intense prayer. He continued his intense study of the Bible which, indeed, was to serve him so very well later in his life. He would study the Bible and, he said, pray over every line and sometimes over every word that he read and with a tremendous memory committed great sections of Scripture to his own mind and memory.

But he went at all of these exercises now not with a burdensome sense of duty as if he would earn his relationship by God by going through these activities. But now he said he was able to pray and to study the Scripture with a whole new sense of joy. It was not a burden, but it was a joyful relationship with his God.

And he said he came to understand now that salvation was by the free grace of God. He said he came to understand that he was justified by faith alone.

It is interesting. When you go through the history of the great men used by God, how

frequently this theme reemerges that it is when people really get a hold of the doctrine of justification by faith alone that they come on fire of God, that they have a new sense of the glories of the gospel and they become the most effective servants of God. That was the testimony of George Whitefield. It was the testimony of John Wesley. It was the testimony of many through the history of the Church.

Sometimes we are tempted to think, well, if we really think we are justified by grace and by faith alone, won't we become dead in the service of God and presumptuous? Never the experience of those who really understand God's wonderful, gracious justification. And that is what happened to George Whitefield.

And with all of that then happening in his life he was able to enter into a real life's work. He was loyal to the Church of England. He was ordained a deacon there in 1736. He became a minister in 1739 and he decided that what he really wanted to do with his life was to be a missionary. And where he wanted to go as a missionary was to Georgia.

John Wesley was also to go to Georgia as a missionary. They wanted to live with American Indians there.

And Whitefield as a young man knew that he wasn't quite ready to go to Georgia yet and he took a year to do some preaching in England. And he was sort of an overnight phenomenon as a preacher. He hit the pulpits of London in a phenomenal way. People suddenly began to talk about this young preacher only 22 years of age who preached with such power, with such passion, not in any kind of shallow theatrical or artificial way, but people sensed some burning commitment to Jesus Christ and to the gospel in George Whitefield.

And so people began to flock to the pulpits of London where Whitefield was preaching. Some of the most famous people in England, the leaders of the nobility were caught up with his phenomenon and rushed to hear him. And Whitefield at the tender age of 22 became one of the most famous people in England and remained famous in that way till his death many years later.

They introduced him to a life of preaching

On the average, Whitefield preached nine to 14 times a week, not every time a new sermon, but nonetheless, putting himself in preaching.

He had not only tremendous powers of communication as a preacher and tremendous zeal as a preacher, and tremendous biblical content as a preacher, but he was gifted with great natural, physical abilities as a preacher. Because, you remember, they didn't have microphones in the 18th century. You had to make yourself heard. Whitefield would come and scoff that we would need a microphone in a room like this.

Whitefield at one point in his life was estimated to have preached out of doors. You know how hard it is to get sound to carry out of doors. And they planned carefully. They would

find areas that were kind of almost like a natural amphitheater so that the sound was projected well, but it is estimated that Whitefield was able to make himself heard out of doors to a crowd of 40,000 people just by the natural resonance and projections of his voice.

Experiment. Go outside with the family. Just stand across the field and try to make yourself heard just across the field. He had tremendous power of projection to make himself heard across vast distances and he was able to do that so that it is estimated that he preached by unaided voice to more people than any other single individual in the history of the Church, a remarkable accomplishment.

And his preaching was simple. It was biblical. It was doctrinal. He usually had three points. He was one of those who influenced all later preachers to have three point sermons. But he was doctrinal. He was full of content. There was nothing shallowly emotional about it. And although he preached with great zeal and sincerity and later in his life he looked back and was afraid that maybe he did it too zealous, there was nothing artificial. There was nothing phony. There was nothing ever manipulative about the preaching of George Whitefield. He preached from his heart. And he preached the Word of God and he preached with power that was understood by those who heard him and he preached as a man who was himself and remained throughout his life humble, self sacrificing, hard working.

He did say of his own preaching once and those of others, "I love those that thunder out the Word." The Christian world is in a deep sleep. Nothing but a loud voice can waken them out of it."

And he manifested that self in his own life.

After that year of phenomenally successful preaching in London he set off to America for the wilds. He wasn't going to try to follow. He wasn't self serving. He didn't want to follow up his successes in London just to serve himself. He followed on what he thought God wanted him to do and he made then the first of seven trips to America. No jetliners to go on in the 18th century, a hard journey by ship across the Atlantic and he began his orphan house there in that first trip.

He returned after about a year of ministry in America, returned to find that all of those pulpits that had been so open to him and had accommodated such crowds in the churches were now gradually closing down to him. The word as out. This Whitefield is a fanatic. He is not restrained enough. He is not formal enough. He is... he gets carried away. We can't have that kind of thing in our churches. Goodness gracious, the fellow probably raises his arms and raises his voice and no, no, no, no. We have to keep things nice and formal here. We can't have that fellow around. Why, we will be accused of being fanatics if we have him in our churches.

And he began to be dismayed to find that there just weren't pulpits where he could preach.

And then somebody said to him, “You know there is a fellow over in Wales. Well, you know those Welsh, they are most likely to do anything but there is a fellow over in Wales who started to preach out of doors.”

You mean not in a church? How can you preach not in a church? Surely God is only in churches. This was an idea that was most unsettling to Whitefield. Preach out of doors? Then they will know I am a fanatic for sure. Ministers don’t preach anywhere except in pulpits.

But people say, “You know, there are people who don’t go to churches. There are people who won’t go to churches. There are people who can’t go to churches. They need God, too.”

And so Whitefield tried this lunatic experiment to preach out of doors.

He went to an area of Bristol where there were no churches. He thought he might protect himself a little bit that way. They can’t complain that I didn’t preach in the church because there wasn’t any churches there.

In an area where mainly coal miners lived and they came in hundreds to hear him. And he described in his diary in a powerful way his experience there of preaching to the coal miners. He said, “Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of that Jesus who was a friend of publicans and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of mine that they were being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks as they came out of the coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep conviction which as the event proved, happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion.”

That was all Whitefield needed to convince him of the value of open air preaching, the wonderful response about from those who heard him gladly because they had never heard the Word of the gospel before. And so he began his practice of preaching in the open air to those who had never heard.

Do you notice the way he expresses this? He said, “I preached to bring them under conviction of sin and I rejoiced to see that they were thoroughly converted.”

He knew he couldn’t convert anybody. He knew he couldn’t manipulate anybody into the kingdom of God. He knew that ultimately only that fruit of his preaching which abided counted for anything and so he waited to see if that emotion of the moment turned into anything lasting and he could rejoice to say that it did.

He began preaching all over England then in amazing power with tremendous response. But then again he felt the call to go back to America. He felt this continuing burden for

what was going on religiously in America. And he said, “Now, I need someone who can continue my work here, continue this open air preaching.”

And he remembered one of his old friends from the holy club, still a rather obscure preacher. And he went to that friend, John Wesley and said, “John, would you continue this open air preaching for me?”

Well, Wesley was much more formal a fellow than Whitefield and it was even a greater struggle for him to agree to go into the open air, but he did and he began, then to preach where Whitefield had preached and he continued to work with those crowds of throe who came and Whitefield set off for America, a most amazing trip, his trip to America in 1739-1740 because it was that trip to America which God used in George Whitefield’s life to set off the Great Awakening in America.

That event for which Puritan pastors had been earnestly praying for decades that God might send his Spirit to do a great work of reviving the churches and it was through George Whitefield, really, that that work began as Whitefield began preaching in Georgia and then on up the coast reaching eventually to Philadelphia and even up into Boston and Massachusetts. It was on that trip that Whitefield met Jonathan Edwards who was one of those Puritan preachers praying for revival. And Edwards sat and simply wept as he heard Whitefield with such power and such fruit proclaim the gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And Whitefield then seemed to unleash the powers of the Spirit and other men were also raised up, the Tenants amongst others to continue the preaching, Edwards as well. And that preaching had such power. It had such fire. It had a most dramatic effect on the American churches, turning things around with new life and new power.

Again, Whitefield felt the need to go back to England to continue his work there and that return home turned out to be most difficult. When he got home he found that John Wesley wanted to cut him out of any cooperative work.

George Whitefield in his years of ministry in America, but even before had been moving more and more in a consistently reformed direction, understanding more and more clearly that the work of the Spirit was sovereign according to God’s eternal electing plan. And he preached that with gladness and clarity. But when he got back to England he found that John Wesley had been moving in quite a different direction, becoming more and more militantly Arminian and perfectionist in his teaching.

And when Whitefield returned home he found that Wesley was telling those crowds that Whitefield had originally awakened that they ought not to go and hear Whitefield preach at all because he was dangerous. He would lead them astray.

And Whitefield bore that with amazing Christian grace and virtue. Never really wanting to be alienated from John Wesley, always seeking reconciliation from Wesley, never

attacking Wesley in public or really much even in private and simply felt, well, then I will go and find new people to preach to to share the gospel.

It is an amazing story, the grace with which George Whitefield faced that great difficulty in his life. And there was a measure of reconciliation personally between the two of them later in their lives.

But Whitefield went on to preach with amazing power both in England and in America and he preached, above all, the great message, "You must be born again."

John three was a favorite text. No one who is not born again can see the kingdom of God. You need a new life. You need a new power from the Spirit. And he began to preach that with all the clarity and power that he was able.

Somebody once asked him, "What is really wrong in America? What is the problem over there?"

He said, "The problem is you have dead ministers preaching to dead people. And it is not surprising they can't bring about life."

So he wanted to minister to the clergy. He said, "The clergy need to be awakened. The clergy need to have a living relationship to God. The clergy need to be opened up to God."

And, again, this is not simply emotional fanaticism on his part. It is a call to a deep, sincere, genuine relationship with God.

Now when he preached in America and even more some of the other preachers of the Great Awakening there was sometimes very emotional response. Sometimes people wept at the meetings. Sometimes people cried out. Sometimes they fainted. And a lot of critics said, "You see, this is nothing but fanaticism, too much emotion."

Whitefield experienced much less emotional response in his meetings than others, but Whitefield said, "You know, all these critics. Do they criticize someone for weeping when there is a death in the family? Then why should they criticize people who weep over the lost state of their souls? Do they criticize someone for fainting when a death sentence is handed out in a civil court to a loved one? Why should they criticize people who faint before the specter of a final judgment?"

And he said, "You know, our religion must never be emotion, but we can't just rule out emotion either. Sometimes God affects people with a profound emotional sense of their lostness."

Above all, though, Whitefield always insisted there must never be manipulation. If there is an emotional response it must be because the gospel has made an impact, not because the preacher has made an impact.

It is interesting. Neither Whitefield nor Wesley ever had an altar call. That is a later development in the history of revivalism in the 19th century. And they had a reason for that. They had if God has really done a work in the heart, then these people will themselves be led by the Spirit to seek out Christian fellowship.

Wesley and Whitefield, of course, both organized small group meetings and invited people to grow in grace through the fellowship of these meetings. But they said, "We don't want anything manipulative like an immediate altar call. There is no particular usefulness to that. If the Spirit is really doing a work in the heart, they will persevere in the commitment that they make in their heart."

But he did preach immediate conversion. And in this regard he stood against many of the Puritans who had come before him. Many of the Puritans preached by saying first there must be a law work which crushes you with a sense of your lostness and your sinfulness. And for some of the Puritans, at least, that law work ought to go on for days, perhaps for months, for some for years, a sense of utter despair and lostness before God.

And some of the Puritans said only when that law work is thoroughly done is one ready for the gospel and for conversion and for salvation.

Whitefield rejected that notion. Whitefield said the gospel is to be preached and people are to be called for an immediate response. There is no need for waiting. You can come to the Savior now. You can be converted now. You can have faith now.

And in that I think Whitefield was closer to Calvin than he was to the Puritans, because Calvin, too, said, "Really, the ultimate law work has to be done after you have faith, after you have faith then the law can begin to work to direct you to new paths of obedience and righteousness. But there is no reason not to come to the Savior now and find forgiveness of sins."

And that preaching had a dramatic impact as he stressed, you see, salvation and as he stressed grace I hope you noticed in reading over John three this morning how Calvinistic John three is. It is sort of embarrassing almost, you know, how much the sovereignty of the Spirit is stressed there. The Spirit blows where he wills.

You know, Whitefield never found his Calvinism an impediment to evangelism. In fact, he found his Calvinism the real source and joy and glory of his evangelism. He preached as an instrument in the hands of a sovereign God who by his sovereign power saves people from their sins.

We Calvinists sometimes get a little embarrassed about our doctrine and think, well, just maybe it is our Calvinism that keeps us from evangelism.

If you are ever tempted to that thought banish it immediately away from your mind. If

there is anything about your theology that keeps you from evangelism it is a sign that that part of your theology is not genuinely Calvinistic at all.

George Whitefield is the greatest example we could have of one who because of his knowledge and sense of the grace and sovereignty of the Spirit of God preached and was used of God to lead people to Christ.

He said about this at one point in his life, "The doctrines of our election and free justification in Christ Jesus are daily more and more pressed on my heart. They fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Savior. I hope we shall catch fire from each other. Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformation can do this. All others leave free will in man and makes him in part, at least, a Savior himself. I know Christ is all in all. Man is nothing. Oh, the excellency of the doctrine of election and of the saints' final perseverance. I am persuaded till a man comes to believe and feel these important truths he cannot come out of himself. But when convinced of these and assured of their application to his own heart, then he walks by faith indeed."

And that was George Whitefield's own experience and God used him mightily.

Whitefield said, "Love, not fear constrains us to obedience."

And God used him so wonderfully to work for his people.

And we as we live in a world that we sometimes are defeated by as we look at the wickedness that surrounds us, as we look at the weakness of good, Bible preaching churches, as we see the apparent impotence often of the reformed churches in our day. Whitefield should serve as something of an encouragement to us.

The experience of the early 18th century says to us, first of all, if we want to see a revival then the first thing we ought to be doing is praying for it because revival comes from God who sends his Spirit where he wills. And then we need to be studying the Word and the doctrines of grace and assured that they have touched our hearts so that we are really fit instruments in the hands of God for his blessing and growth.

Most of all we must never be defeated and think, well, nothing can be done. The world is going from bad to worse.

You know, a lot of Christians sort of say the world is going from bad to worse, ha, ha. You don't seem to be driven to tears by the fact that the world is going from bad to worse. We need to mourn for the world as we see it around about us and pray that God would do a great work among us.

God, in the darkest periods of human history has done great works bringing people to himself. George Whitefield shows us that. And let's all of us be sure that we are born again and that we are open to being used by the Spirit of God to see a real revival in our world.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are thankful that you so loved the world that you sent your only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. We pray that every one of us here might know with certainty that we have everlasting life in Jesus Christ. We pray for our troubled land and for our troubled world that you above and beyond all that we could think or imagine might send a revival to your people, a revival to our world that will see, once again, the doctrines of salvation in Jesus Christ preached with power and received with gladness and that there might be a great testimony raised up in our time by the vitality of your people to a living Savior who takes away our sin and gives us joy in our obedience. Use us, oh Lord, to that great end.