

Men of Revival: C. H. Spurgeon

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We are in our series on Revival Men and today our subject is Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was a man mightily used of God and a prince of preachers. His sermons are still being read today and his influence is still felt even though he died in 1892. When he died over 100,000 mourners filed by his casket as he lay in state at his beloved Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

We can learn much from the study of the life and ministry of C. H. Spurgeon for he was an instrument of revival in the hand of God. Spurgeon often preached to 10,000 at a time and God saved tens of thousands under Spurgeon's anointed preaching.

I would like to begin our study with the conversion story of young Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon was 16 years old and he went all over London seeking out the best known preachers of his day in the hopes of hearing how to come to Christ savingly. But he searched in vain, no one could help him. He said of these preachers, "These good men all preach truths suited to many in their congregations who are spiritually minded people. But what I wanted to know was how can I get my sins forgiven and they never told me that."

You see, Spurgeon needed to have that question "how" answered, how he could come to Christ. Well, he found out how one day while he was caught in a snowstorm in the town of Colchester, England. He sought shelter in the first church he found which was a primitive Methodist chapel. Once inside, he realized that the pastor of that small congregation was hindered by the storm and another man was in the pulpit. A plain, uneducated cobbler was doing his best to present the gospel that morning. His text was from Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

Spurgeon said of that day that, "It was the preach word that saved me." And as young Spurgeon sat listening to that uneducated man present the gospel, God did a work in his heart as he listened to the following sermon.

Listen to what Spurgeon said of this time, "The text says, 'Look unto me,' then the good man followed up his text in this way, 'Look unto me, I am sweating great drops of blood. Look unto me, I am hanging on the cross. Look unto me, I am dead and buried. Look unto me, I rise again. Look unto me, I ascend to heaven. Look unto me, I am sitting at the Father's right hand. Oh, poor sinner, look unto me. Look unto me.' Then the man pointed

to Spurgeon and shouted, ‘Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look. Look. Look. You have nothing to do but to look and live.’”

Then the great Spurgeon realized the “how” of how to come to Christ. He said, “I saw it once, the way of salvation, I was possessed with that one thought. Like as, when the brazen serpent was lifted up the people only looked and were healed. So it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things but when I heard that word, ‘Look,’ what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh, I looked until I almost had looked my eyes away. There and then, the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away. In that moment I saw the Son and I could have risen that instant and sung with the most enthusiastic of them of the precious blood of Christ and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, ‘Trust Christ and you shall be saved.’”

And that is how Spurgeon came to Christ, friends. The life of Spurgeon isn’t the life of study for his life and ministry is full of examples on how to live for Christ faithfully and be used of God mightily. Some of you may not know this but Spurgeon was never ordained to the ministry. He didn’t believe in ordination. He said that ordination, in his thinking, was empty hands being placed on empty heads. He always said that he was ordained by Christ and that was good enough for him.

A few years back, I went to London to the Metropolitan Tabernacle for Sunday service and after the service I was escorted by a minister of the church to the pastor’s study. There on the wall hangs the full length portrait of Spurgeon and there is also the very desk that he preached from.

Across the room on the opposite wall, hangs an old portrait of Spurgeon’s predecessor, Dr. John Gill. And the face of Gill is startling because he looks as if he’s just smelled something awful, he has the most disgusting look on his face. Well, the minister of the church told me the following amusing story. He said that Spurgeon would greet visitors to his study with the following comment as he pointed to the portrait of John Gill, “Here now, gentlemen, is dear Dr. Gill. See how the dear man looks. He looks as if an Arminian has just entered the room.”

Spurgeon was well-known for his facile wit. Some of his remarks are legendary. Once while he was vacationing in Menton, France, his favorite winter retreat, he stumbled and fell down a marble staircase, doing a double somersault, knocking out his front teeth and in the process the change from his trousers fell into his boot. As he regained consciousness at the bottom of the stairs and upon realizing what had befallen him, he remarked, “Painless dentistry. With money to boot.” He was a character.

Spurgeon had a college for training pastors and in his day it was called the Pastor’s College. Today it’s called Spurgeon’s College. But every Thursday afternoon he would host an impromptu preaching session for the students. He would make one of the students get up and preach before the class while he sat in attendance. One time, a very eloquent student was preaching on Ephesians chapter 6, on the armor of God, and his oratory was so great that as the student related about the Christian’s armor, you could almost hear the

click and the clank as each piece of armor was put on. Finally, he faced his audience with the shield of faith in one hand and the sword of the Spirit in the other and shouted, "Now, where is the devil!" In the back of the room sat the great Spurgeon who cupped a chubby hand to his mouth and shouted back, "He's inside the armor!"

While eating lunch with the congregation in the basement of that church, I was struck with the following story. In that very basement, it's the only part of the original church which survived a bombing from WWII, in that basement would be 300 of Spurgeon's choicest men who always missed his sermon because they would gather in the basement every time the good man preached and spent the entire time of the service on their knees crying out to God in prayer. Spurgeon had 300 deacons praying to God the whole time he preached. It's no wonder his preaching was so well attended with success. Spurgeon knew the importance of prayer in an anointed ministry.

Charles Spurgeon suffered from depression and poor health. He often referred to his depression as "the black dog." It is hard for us to imagine how much this great man suffered for God. I have a photo of Spurgeon where the great British preacher is sitting at his desk with quill pen in one hand and the other hand resting beneath his bearded chin. Spurgeon's eyes are framed by deep circles of wear and fatigue. The dark circles beneath his eyes are so prominent in this photograph that they look as though they were made by a black magic marker. Spurgeon's face reveals a great Atlas-like weight upon him. A weariness and burden is written all over his tired face. He sits there regally, like a tragic king whose kingdom is heavy upon his shoulders. He is marred by life and Christian service. His painfully sad eyes betray a deep, manic depression. He sits there absorbed in his work yet detached. Perhaps his mind is off in a more pleasant locale like Menton, France, his beloved winter retreat.

He sits there as an object of pity yet how can this be? He is the great Spurgeon but he looks like a worn-out old man, yet he is just 56. He carries the weight of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the Pastor's College, his orphanage and his theological battles with his peers. The burden and care of the ministry mark his once cheery countenance. He is not the jovial Spurgeon here, but one who is acquainted with grief.

But as you look at this photograph, Spurgeon's face reveals another visage staring out from behind the human form. The face of Christ peers out beautifully behind Spurgeon's sagging face. The Man of Sorrows is there with him, comforting him, encouraging him on in the work of the kingdom. For to be Christ-like is not to receive awards or accolades or applause, rather it is to be deeply familiar with great suffering. To be Christ-like is to know what it means to be misunderstood, an object of ridicule and a target for enemies. To be Christ-like is to experientially know reproach, rejection and even abandonment of close friends. Our Lord Jesus hung publicly in naked humility on a bloody tree. He was ridiculed, scorned, spat upon, rejected by his own people and nailed to an ignoble cross like a common criminal. He bore reproach. The great weight upon Christ on the cross would have been too unbearable for us. Where he bore the sins of the world and he suffered the turned face of the Father who cannot look upon sin.

The photo of Spurgeon reveals just how Christ-like he really was. Listen friends, when you study men who God has used there is often a common denominator between those rare individuals mightily used of God and that common denominator is that each person used greatly of God has greatly suffered for him. Spurgeon lived in a place of suffering and in this regard he was much like the great George Whitfield whom he admired so.

When we look at the lives of revival men it is easy to focus just on their successes and say to ourselves, "Oh, I wish I could be used of God just like that." But we miss the other side of the coin, the deeper aspect of their usefulness which is often great suffering. Are we willing to walk with God like that? Are we willing to be instruments of suffering for him? Are we willing to live in an atmosphere of suffering so that Christ can be made manifest in our lives?

God seems pleased to use men and women who's lives are broken alabaster boxes. The aroma of their lives of brokenness and prayer ascend to heaven with a sweet fragrance. Men like Spurgeon need to be studied as there is much to learn from their walk with God and their service to the kingdom. Spurgeon always remained a humble man who knew he was only as good as the time he spent on his knees in prayer.

There is a story about Spurgeon which I would like to close with. As he lay dying in a hotel in France, his aide and close friend, Joseph Harrold, related the following story. Joseph Harrold said that as Spurgeon lay dying Harrold was standing in the passage of the Hotel Beauvrievage at Menton. He looked out the window toward the hillside beyond and he was astonished at what he saw. To his dying day, he claimed that there beyond the window under a cloudless sky he saw a company of angels hovering outside looking as though they were waiting for someone. They did not have long to wait, Spurgeon died shortly thereafter.

The news of Spurgeon's death was telegraphed around the world and it was front page news in all the papers. He was one of the most famous men of his generation. The Prince of Preachers was laid to rest back in London in West Norwood Cemetery. In fact, the old gateway through which Spurgeon's casket passed is still in use today. And three years after his death, over 60 million copies of his weekly sermons were still being sold around the world. Many have been saved through the reading of one of his sermons. As he said, "It was the preached word which saved me."

Well friends, I hope the story of the great Charles Spurgeon has stirred your heart as it has mine. We can learn much from studying Men of Revival and by studying them, we can learn better how to pray to God for revival in our day.

The next message in our series will be Mordechai Ham, until then.