

C.H. Spurgeon – The Prince of Preachers

“Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Savior. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honor of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed.”

C.H. Spurgeon

His Early Years & Conversion:

1) C.H. Spurgeon was born in a little cottage in Kelvedon, in Essex County, England on June 19, 1834; ten days after William Carey had died in India. His father’s name was John Spurgeon who was employed as a clerk in a coal merchant’s office during the week and served as pastor of a Congregational church in Tollersbury, a village about nine miles away from their home to which they journeyed by horse and carriage each Sunday. His mother Eliza was nineteen years old when Charles was born. His brother James Archer said of their mother that she was the “starting point of all greatness and goodness that any of us by the grace of God have enjoyed.”

2) At the age of fourteen months he was taken to the home of his grandparents, James and Sarah Spurgeon who lived in the village of Stambourne, where he would spent the next five years of his life. His grandfather was the minister of Stambourne’s Congregational Church a position that he had held for twenty five years prior to the arrival of Charles. Their youngest daughter Ann, who was eighteen years old, still lived with her parents. She was delighted to have Charles come and live with them and he became the special object of her care and affection. In addition to attending to his needs as a child, she also sought to promote his spiritual welfare.

3) Spurgeon’s home life was one which was built around the Scriptures. It was not only read, but unquestionably believed and its precepts were put into practice. As a child, Spurgeon loved books. It was said of Spurgeon that “he was a lad of deep sensitivity but was by no means reticent and had never feared any man. He was a thoroughly good boy, entirely upright and honest; his imagination was lively and his memory unusually retentive. The extent of his reading was utterly amazing for one so young, and in the works of his favorite authors – the Puritan theologians – he was especially versed.” Two of the works that deeply impacted him in these early years and always held in high regard throughout his life were Bunyan’s “The Pilgrims Progress” and John Foxe’s “Book of Martyrs.” It was said of Charles when he was only six years old, “When some children have advanced no further in spelling than words of one syllable, he could read out with a point and emphasis really marvelous in one so young.”

4) While yet a boy, Charles displayed among other things, a strong moral courage. On one occasion, after learning that his grandfather was grieved over the fact that one of the members of his church had begun to frequent the tavern, Spurgeon boldly entered the tavern and confronted the man. This man later said of that confrontation, “To think an old man like me should be taken to task by a bit of a child like that! Well, he points at me, with his finger just so, and says, “What doest thou here, Elijah? sitting with the ungodly; and you a member of a church, and breaking your pastor’s heart. I am ashamed of you! I wouldn’t break my pastor’s heart, I’m sure.” And then he walked away. I knew it was all true, and I was guilty; so I put down my pipe, and did not touch my beer, but hurried away to a lonely spot, and cast myself down before the Lord, confessing my sin and begging for forgiveness.”

5) Spurgeon’s conversion was preceded by a long and bitter conviction of sin and longing for salvation. He said of this time in his life that “I had rather pass through seven years of the most languishing sickness, than I would ever pass again through the terrible discovery of the evil of sin.” And it was while he was in this state of darkness and despair at the age of fifteen that God in his mercy saved him. One Sunday morning in December of 1849 during a snow storm, when he was on his way to a certain place of worship, he turned into a little Primitive Methodist Church. There were only 12 to 15 people in attendance and the minister was not able to make it to the meeting because of the snow. And so a very thin looking man stood up and began to speak, and his text was “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” He said, “This is a very simple text indeed. It says “Look.” Now lookin’ don’t involve a great deal of pain. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just “Look.” Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to look. Any one can look; even a child can look.” He continued by saying, “Look unto me; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. Look unto me; I am hangin’ 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. O poor sinner, look unto me! Look unto me!” After about ten minutes of

preaching, he looked at the young Spurgeon sitting under the gallery and said to him, “Young man, you look very miserable, and you will always be miserable – miserable in life and miserable in death – if you don’t obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved. Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live.” Spurgeon said, “I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said – I did not take much notice of it – I was so possessed with that one thought. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, “Look”, what a charming sound it seemed to me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. That happy day when I found the Savior, and learned to cling to his dear feet, was a day never to be forgotten by me.”

His Life’s Ministry:

- 1) Within a year of his conversion, Spurgeon preached his first sermon in a little cottage in the village of Teversham. He was invited to go at the request of a pastor who told him that a young man would be preaching who did not have much experience and would be glad if he were present. On his way to the meeting, Spurgeon was informed that he was the one who was to be the preacher. His text was from 1 Peter 2:7, “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.” He said, “I walked along quietly, lifting up my soul to God, and it seemed to me that I could surely tell a few poor cottagers of the sweetness and love of Jesus, for I felt them in my own soul.”
- 2) When Spurgeon was 17 years old, he became the pastor of a small Baptist chapel in Waterbeach near Cambridge. It was said of his ministry here that, “There went into that village a lad, who had no great scholarship, but who was earnest in seeking the souls of men. He began to preach there, and it pleased God to turn the whole place upside down. In a short time, the little thatched chapel was crammed, the biggest vagabonds of the village were weeping floods of tears, and those who had been the curse of the parish became its blessing. Where there had been robberies and villainies of every kind, all around the neighborhood there were none, because the men who used to do mischief, were themselves in the house of God, rejoicing to hear of Jesus crucified.”
- 3) News concerning the “boy preacher from the Fens” reached the church officers from the New Park Street Chapel in London who were themselves at that time searching for a pastor. The church invited Spurgeon to fill the pulpit on Sunday, December 18, 1853 and then was invited back to preach three Sunday’s in January. The Sunday school superintendent wrote a letter to Spurgeon expressing “I never saw such a desire toward a minister as there is at the present time toward you. You will find a great many faithful friends: and should the Holy Spirit lead you to decide for New Park Street, I hope and pray that you will be a blessing to thousands.” And so, Spurgeon accepted the call to London where his ministry began in February 1854 and would last until his death nearly forty years later.
- 4) Within a month of his arrival, the New Park Street Chapel, was filled to capacity with the seats filled, the aisles packed, people sitting in the windows and standing shoulder to shoulder in the Sunday school area. Reports of his ministry quickly spread across London and men and women flocked to hear Spurgeon preach. They sought to solve the overcrowding problem by enlarging the building to seat 1500 with room for another 500 in the Sunday school hall but that expansion proved to be inadequate as many had to be turned away because there was no room. Thus they held their evening services in Exeter Hall in 1855 and 1856, a large auditorium in the heart of London, which seated 4000 and had standing room for an additional 1000. Even here, the place was filled to capacity and hundreds had to be turned away. Then from 1856 to 1859, while a new building was being erected, the services of New Park Street were held in a music hall in the Royal Surrey Gardens which had three galleries and each Sunday was filled to capacity with over ten thousand people.
- 5) Such success brought with it at the same time much opposition from those who hated the gospel. On the evening of October 19, 1856, just after Spurgeon had begun to open the meeting in prayer, someone from the balcony shouted “Fire” and that was followed by a cry from the ground floor “The galleries are falling!” Then a third voice was heard “The whole place is collapsing!” Immediately the whole place panicked, and people rushed for the stairs and pressed to get out of the building. Some jumped from the galleries and stairways and others were trampled in the chaos that erupted. In all seven people lost their lives and twenty eight were seriously injured. Spurgeon was devastated over what had happened that night. The deacons of the church removed him from his home and took him to a peaceful place in the suburbs where he continued in a broken condition for seven or eight days. Then, as he was walking in the garden, the verse “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name,” came into his mind and as he meditated upon the truth of those words, he began to improve. His burden gradually lifted and he returned home. The

following Sunday he returned to the pulpit. Although he resumed his labors, this terrible event would remain with him the rest of his life.

6) For 38 years, Spurgeon preached in London and saw the conversion of thousands of souls. He was the author of many books relating to the Christian life and service. He established a school to prepare men for the ministry and an orphanage as well. In 1865 he began to publish a monthly magazine entitled "The Sword and Trowel" and his sermons were published weekly until 1917. He promoted and guided the work of the Colporteur's Association whose purpose was to distribute Christian literature among all classes of people, and Susannah Spurgeon's Book Fund (whom he married on January 8, 1856), which supplied Christian literature to needy pastors. During his pastorate 14, 692 souls had been baptized and joined the Tabernacle. Spurgeon was known and has continued to be referred to as a contender for the faith and whose stated purpose in life was to point men to the Savior. At the close of his sermon on December 27, 1874 he said, "In a little while there will be a concourse of persons in the streets. Methinks I hear someone enquiring, 'What are all these people waiting for?' 'Do you know? He is to be buried today.' 'And who is that?' 'It is Spurgeon.' 'What! The man that preached at the Tabernacle?' 'Yes; he is to be buried today.' That will happen very soon; and when you see my coffin carried to the silent grave, I should like every one of you, whether converted or not, to be constrained to say, 'He did earnestly urge us, in plain and simple language, not to put off the consideration of eternal things. He did entreat us to look to Christ. Now he is gone, our blood is not at his door if we perish.'"

7) On the evening of January 31, 1892, Spurgeon's earthly journey came to an end in Mentone, France where he often visited because of chronic health problems. His secretary J.W. Harrald immediately telegraphed a message to the Tabernacle in London, "Our beloved pastor entered heaven 11.5 Sunday night." Mrs. Spurgeon said as she stood by his bed and watched him pass over to the other side, "Like his namesake, Mr. Valiant-for-truth, he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side." She then fell to her knees and declared, "Blessed Lord Jesus, I thank thee for the precious treasure so long lent me; now, be pleased to give me strength and guidance for all the future."

8) Spurgeon used to declare that when he reached heaven he "would stand at the corner at one of the streets and proclaim to the angels the old, old story of Jesus and his love."

9) He was buried in the Norwood Cemetery on February 11, 1892. On the vault that contains his coffin is a portrait of Spurgeon with a Bible opened to Isaiah 45:22 which says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."