

Theological Equipping Class

Jonathan Edwards

August 15, 2021

The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards

- "I bought Jonathan Edwards' works. How feeble does my spark of Christianity appear beside such a sun. But, even his was a borrowed light and the same source is still open to me." (Robert M McCheyne)
- "that great man" (John Wesley)
- "never was there a happier combination of great power with great piety" (Thomas Chalmers)
- "Jonathan Edwards, saint and metaphysician, revivalist and theologian, stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America." (BB Warfield)

Life and Death

- Context: puritans and the Mayflower (1620)
- Born in 1703

- Grandfather: Solomon Stoddard - minister at Northampton, MA



- Ministry: a family affair
- College: Yale

- Conversion: 1721
 - "Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent."
 - "I was brought to a new sense of things, to an inward sweet delight in God and divine things, quite different from anything I had ever experienced before. I began to have a new kind of apprehension and idea of Christ and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by him."

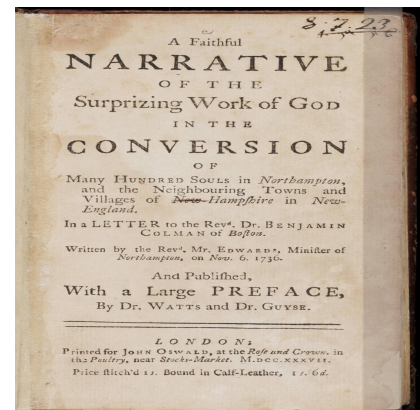
- 1726 move to Northampton
 - Northampton at the time
- 1727 marriage to Sarah Pierpont
- Studying 13-14 hours per day
 - Hospitality
- 1728: first child
 - He will eventually have 8 daughters and 3 sons
 - Influential descendants
- 1729: death of Stoddard
- Concern about spiritual lethargy



- "They come to meeting from one Sabbath to another and hear God's Word, but all that can be said to them won't awaken them, won't persuade them to take pains that they may be saved." (Edwards)

Prelude to Revival (1734)

- Sudden conversions
 - "Then it was in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us: and there were, very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons, who to all appearances savingly converted..."



were

- Return to "normalcy"
 - "In addition to the saving work of the Spirit of God and by which many are truly converted, there is always what the Puritans called a common work. That is to say, people get a taste of eternal things. They become serious. Their lives change. But they have never fundamentally become Christians. And, after a while, this common work of the Spirit doesn't remain with them. They go back to the world or back to formal religion." (Edwards)

The Great Awakening

- 1740ish
 - *The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider; or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet, it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell. O sinner! consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment...* (excerpt from Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God)
- Spread of the revival (more next week)
- Criticism of the revival
 - Emotionalism
 - "He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion... The holy Scriptures do everywhere places religion very much in the affections: such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal." (excerpt from "Religious Affections")
 - New style of preaching
 - "They ought indeed to be thorough in preaching the word of God, without mincing the matter at all; in handling the sword of the Spirit, as the ministers of the Lord of hosts, they ought not to be mild and gentle; they are not to be gentle and moderate in searching and awakening the conscience, but should be sons of thunder."
 - Calvinistic

- Jealousy

David Brainerd

- May 1747
 - "Do not be discouraged because you see your elder brothers in the ministry die early, one after another. I declare, now I am dying, I would not have spent my life otherwise for the whole world." (Brainerd)
- Death of Brainerd and Jerusha Edwards
- Influence of Brainerd's visit: modern missions!



The Communion Controversy

- Solomon Stoddard: everyone in the community could take communion, even if someone didn't profess faith in Christ
- Edwards changing convictions
- December 1748: a test case
- Attempt at compromise
- Book: "An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God concerning the Qualifications requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church."
- Edwards fired (230-23)

Missions in Stockbridge

- Stockbridge (about 40 miles from Northampton) on the edge of the wilderness
- 6 years ministry

Princeton

- 1757 Aaron Burr Sr. dies

- January 1758: Edwards leaves for Princeton (200 miles away)
- February: smallpox outbreak

Death of Edwards

- "It seems to be the will of God that I must shortly leave you. Therefore, give my kindest love to my dear wife. And as to my children you are now like to be left fatherless, which I hope will be an inducement to you to seek a father that will never fail you."
- "What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had him so long. But my God lives; and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband, and your father, has left us! We are all given to God; and there I am, and love to be." (Sarah)

A Few Humble Critiques

- Slavery
 - Titus, Venus & Leah (but that might just be the Christian name of Venus).
 - Here are a few facts to keep in mind about Jonathan Edwards as it relates to slavery:
 - 1. He was an outspoken critic of the slave trade and an outspoken critic of cruelty toward slaves.
 - 2. He argued for the spiritual equality of whites and blacks
 - 3. As an implication of the above, his was one of the first churches in the area to receive both blacks and Indians into full membership. In fact, his slave Leah was baptized in the church and her name is included in early membership rolls.
 - 4. Many of his personal disciples became ardent abolitionists a generation later. That says something I think about his beliefs and influence.
 - 5. There is no record of him mistreating or abusing any of his slaves. In fact, the opposite is true. And this final point is really important.
 - "The issue is not whether we think slavery as an institution was a good thing. It was not. It is not whether the slave trade was wicked and cruel. Of course it was. The issue is not whether there were numerous masters who mistreated their slaves. Of course there were. The issue is whether or not Edwards followed the teaching of the New Testament for men in his position."
 - The need for nuance and the glory and sufficiency of God's word
- Legalism
 - Resolutions

- *Resolved*, Never to utter anything that is sportive, or matter of laughter, on a Lord's day.
 - *Resolved*, To maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.
 - The need for nuance
- So absorbed in what should be primary, he could sometimes neglect what was secondary
 - The primary role of preaching/teaching
 - Secondary responsibilities

Benefits of Reading Jonathan Edwards

- A reminder of the depravity of man
 - "It had become assumed that men could be savingly related to Christ without any prior conviction about the sin which made their salvation necessary." (Iain Murray)
 - "Man is a leaf, a leaf driven by the wind, poor dust, a shadow, a nothing. And of himself he says he was an empty helpless creature of small account and needing God's help in everything."
- A call to the necessity of regeneration
 - "Jonathan Edwards changed what I may call the center of thought in American theological thinking. No one but a man of genius could have made this change of emphasis so potent a fact in American church history. And what was the change? More than to any other man, to Edwards is due the importance which in American Christianity is attributed to the conscious experience of the penitent sinner as he passes into the membership of the invisible Church. The doctrine of conversion was brought back into the center."
- A reliance upon the sovereignty of God
 - "The Freedom of the Will"
 - "The End for Which God Created the World"
- A merging of the head and heart
 - "He who would set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ must himself burn with love." (Edwards)
- The pursuit of holiness
 - *Resolved*, Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
 - *Resolved*, To endeavour to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigour, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.
 - *Resolved*, To examine carefully and constantly, what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God; and so direct all my forces against it.

- *Resolved*, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive, myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.
- *Resolved*, To inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent,—what sin I have committed,—and wherein I have denied myself;—also, at the end of every week, month, and year.
- I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: *Resolved*, That I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.
- *Resolved*, After afflictions, to inquire, what I am the better for them; what good I have got by them; and, what I might have got by them.
- *Resolved*, Never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.