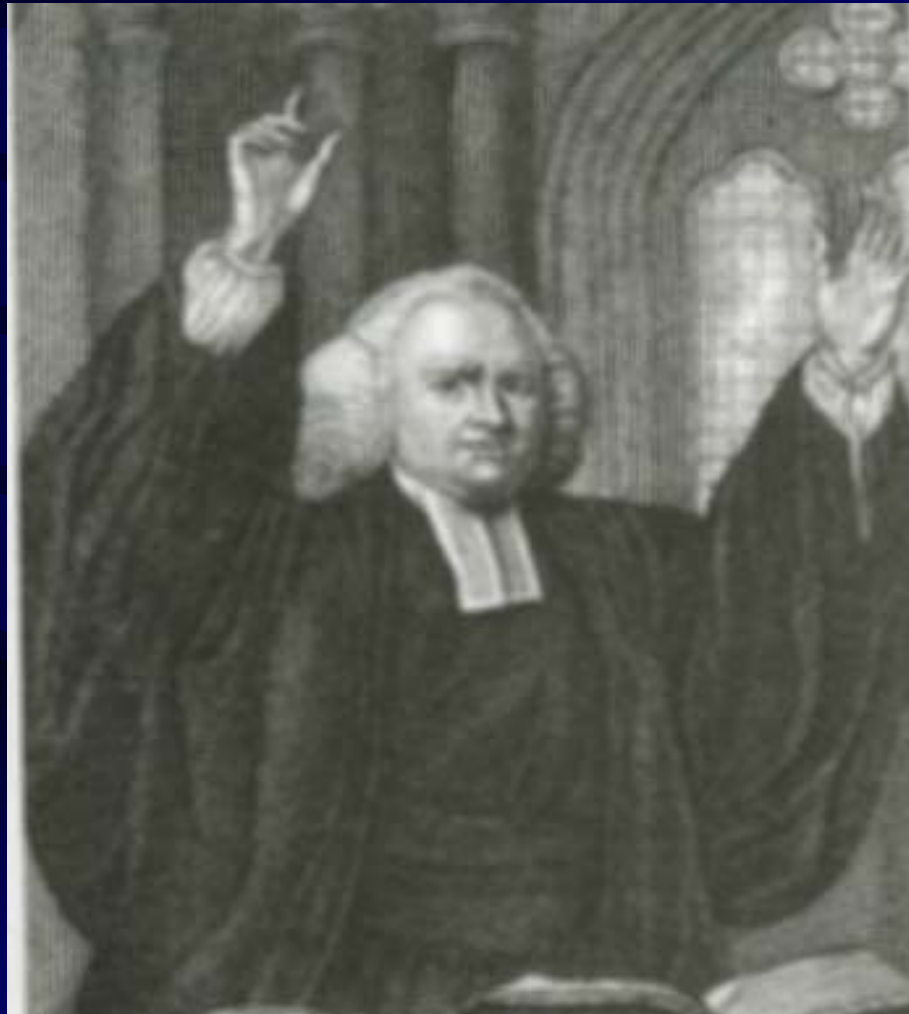


George Whitefield
(1714-1770)

Called to Awaken Souls

George Whitefield



Background

- Born in Gloucester on December 27, 1714
- Religious conditions in Britain were dismal at the time
- Rationalism, deism, and immorality were rampant
- The Whitefields were not particularly religious

Gloucestershire



Gloucester



Background

- His dad managed The Bell Inn
 - Family lived above the inn
- When George was 2, his dad died
- Mom remarried and her new husband continued to manage the inn
- George had a gift for oratory
 - He loved drama and reciting the classics

Oxford

- Attended Oxford in 1732 as a servitor
 - He did menial tasks for wealthy students



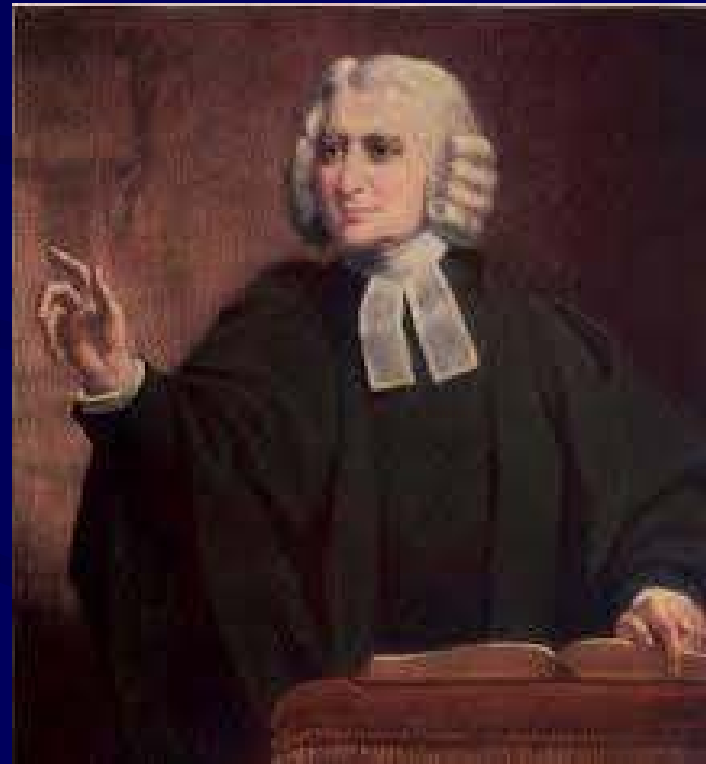
Oxford University



Oxford



John Wesley



Charles Wesley

Oxford

- Joined the Holy Club in 1733
 - Given this name by its enemies
 - Students under John Wesley's direction who were dedicated to pursuing holiness
- Extraordinary exertions
 - Lengthy Bible study and prayer
 - Fasting, prison visitation, care for the poor

Salvation

- Seriously ill – health broken by his exertions
- Read Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Life of Man*
- And Joseph Hall's *Contemplations on the New Testament*

Salvation

- “You, who not long before proclaimed in the Temple, ‘If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink; he that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,’ now are thirsty yourself!”
- Why was Jesus Christ thirsty?
- “I thirst!”
- Spring 1735 - 20 years old

Lesson 1

- Salvation is not what we can do for God, but what He has done for us. Whitefield's exertions had no spiritual value, but God satisfied his thirst.

“Boy Preacher”

- Returned home to witness to family and friends
- Ordained by the local bishop
- Preached in Gloucester and Bristol; drew large crowds
- Preached in Tower of London church; hailed by press as the “Boy Preacher”

“Boy Preacher”

- 1735-1737 Preached five times a week across southern and central England
- Drew huge crowds; saw numerous converts; friends began publishing his sermons
- Battled with pride - Proverbs 27:21

“Boy Preacher”

- “They grew quite extravagant in their applauses, and had it not been for my compassionate high priest, popularity would have destroyed me. I used to plead with him to take me by the hand and lead me unhurt through this fiery furnace. He heard my request and let me see the vanity of all commendations but his own.”

“Boy Preacher”

- “How often have I been kept from speaking and acting for God, by a sight of my own unworthiness; but now I see that the more unworthy I am, the more fit to work for Jesus, because he will get much glory in working by such mean instruments; and the more he has forgiven me, the more I ought to love and serve him.”

Lesson 2

- God uses those people most who are most willing for Him to get all the glory. That is, humility is the most essential prerequisite to usefulness in God's work.

America

- Sailed to America Feb-May 1738
- Revival aboard ship
 - The captain became a lifelong friend and associate
- Revival in southern colonies May-Sept
- Developed a burden for the many orphans in Georgia
 - Bethesda Orphanage

Bethesda Today



Lesson 3

- God uses a sold-out person
- “At times, I would be so overpowered with a sense of God’s infinite majesty that I would be constrained to throw myself on the ground and offer my soul as a blank in his hands, to write on it what he pleased”

Opposition

- Churches in England closed to him; no preaching without a license
- Burden for colliers in Kingswood, outside Bristol
- Preached in the open field
- Revival among the colliers

Opposition

- “The first discovery of their being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions, which, as the event proved, happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion.”

An Open Door

- Returning to London, he found the Anglican churches mostly closed to him
- Preached in the Moorfields outside London
- 30,000 people gathered to hear him

Great Awakening

- 2nd trip to America Oct 1739 – Jan 1741
- Tour of colonies - revival everywhere
- Met Jonathan and Sarah Edwards
- Huge crowds in Boston and Philadelphia
- Supernatural enabling

Great Awakening

- Typical Day
 - Rise at 4 AM to read and pray
 - Preach to breakfast crowd at 5 AM
 - Travel till noon
 - Preach to lunch crowd
 - Travel till evening service
 - Preach to supper crowd
 - Counsel and converse about spiritual things all evening
 - Preach to crowd at 11 PM
 - Retire at midnight

Lesson 4

- God will give us the power to do whatever He calls us to do. His resources are infinite; ours is but to obey.

Controversy

- Theological
 - Wesleys were Arminian; rejected election and eternal security and taught perfectionism
 - Whitefield was Calvinistic; believed in election, eternal security, and progressive sanctification
 - Unfortunate conflict

Controversy

- Letter to Wesley, Mar. 1740
 - “How glad would the enemies of the Lord be to see us divided? How many would rejoice, should I join and make a party against you? And in one word, how would the cause of our common master every way suffer by our raising disputes about particular points of doctrine? Honoured Sir, let us offer salvation freely to all by the blood of Jesus; and whatever light God has communicated to us, let us freely communicate to others.”

Controversy

- Conversation with British Commissary in Charleston, S.C.
 - “He then asked me wherein the clergy were so much to blame. I answered that they did not preach justification by faith alone; and upon talking with the Commissary I found he was as ignorant as the rest. ... in a great rage he told me if I preached in any public church in that province he would suspend me. I replied I should take as much notice of that as I would of a Pope’s bull.”

Lesson 5

- We should always defend God's honor, but never our own.
- In other words, we should acknowledge our own human frailty when differing over deep theological truths, but we should fight to the death for the gospel.

Odd Family Life

- Returned to England determined to find a wife
- Howell Harris recommended a godly widow, Elizabeth James
 - Unfortunately, Mrs. James was in love with Harris!
 - Nevertheless, she accepted Whitefield's proposal and they were married Nov. 14, 1741

Odd Family Life

- Whitefield never slowed down
 - Preached twice a day during first week of marriage
 - Left on month-long preaching tour after that
 - She bore him a son, but he died at 4 months of age
 - She then had four miscarriages

Odd Family Life

- Elizabeth accepted Whitefield's ministry
 - Unlike Molly Wesley
- They were married 27 years and seem to have been happy together

Powerful Preacher

- What made Whitefield's preaching so powerful?
 - Mastery of Scripture and solid theology
 - Use of vivid illustration
 - Amazing skill as communicator
 - Passionate desire to see souls saved

Powerful Preacher

- Sermon on Matthew 3:7

“At length, in the course of his sermon, he abruptly broke off; paused for a few moments; then burst into a flood of tears; lifted up his hands and eyes, and exclaimed, ‘O my hearers! The wrath’s to come, the wrath’s to come!’”

Powerful Preacher

“These words sunk into my heart, like lead in the waters. I wept, and when the sermon was ended, retired alone. For days and weeks I could think of little else. Those awful words would follow me, wherever I went, ‘The wrath’s to come, the wrath’s to come!’”

– Robert Robinson, author of “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

Life of Ministry

- Whitefield preached the Word throughout Great Britain and in America until 1770
- 18,000 sermons
- Scotland 14 times, Ireland twice, sailed to America on seven occasions
- Suffered debilitating illnesses for most of his final years

Life of Ministry

“Was weak in body, having taken cold. But preaching, I find, is a constant remedy against all indispositions.”

Life of Ministry

- Whitefield died in Newburyport, MA, on Sept. 30, 1770
 - He was only 55
- Buried under the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church, where he was to speak
- “I would rather wear out, than rust out.”

Burial Place



Lesson 6

- Keep on keeping on! God may not have called any of us to be a Whitefield, but, like him, we should passionately pursue whatever God has called us to do.

Summary of Lessons

1. Salvation is by grace alone
2. Humility is the prerequisite to effective service
3. We must be sold out as we serve God
4. God's power accomplishes everything
5. Separation is vital but requires discernment
6. Keep on keeping on!

