

Lecture 25 – “Let the Winds Blow & Thunders Roar”: The Great Awakening in America

“There is nothing more important for preaching than the reading of church history and biographies.”
Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 3:2

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 24, pp. 228-31

Prayer

From George Whitefield

“My life, my blood, I here present,
If for Thy cause they may be spent,
Fulfil Thy sovereign counsel, Lord,
Thy will be done, Thy name adored.
Give me Thy strength, O God of power;
Then let winds blow, or thunders roar,
Thy faithful witness will I be;
‘Tis fixed: I can do all for Thee!” Amen.

“Let the Winds Blow & Thunders Roar”: The Great Awakening in America

I. The American Scene

A. Spiritual deadness

Increase Mather: “The body of the rising generation is a poor, perishing, unconverted, and (except the Lord pour down his Spirit) an undone generation” (1678).

B. The Half-Way Covenant (1662)

C. The threat of liberalism

1. Response to liberalism

II. The Beginnings of the Awakening

A. Theodore Frelinghuysen (1691-1747)

B. Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764)

C. Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)

III. The Coming of George Whitefield

A. Bethesda in Georgia

B. “Gospel-Ranging”

1. Nathan Cole’s narrative

2. “The Divine Dramatist” (“Come, Poor, Lost, Undone Sinner”)

“Up and down the world he went, a John the Baptist crying—Repent!” (John Greenleaf Whittier in his poem, “The Preacher”)

C. “I go, I go to a rest prepared...”

Whitefield’s last sermon: “I go, I go to a rest prepared; my sun has arisen, and by aid from heaven has given light to many. It is now about to set—no, it is about to rise to the zenith of immortal glory. Many may outlive me on earth, but they cannot outlive me in heaven.”

D. The impact of Whitefield

“He prayed that grace in ev’ry heart might dwell,
He longed to see America excell;
He charged its youth that ev’ry grace divine
Should with full lustre in their conduct shine;

That Savior, which his soul did first receive,
 A greater gift not God himself can give:
 He urged the need of him to every one;
 It was no less than God's co-equal Son
 He freely offered to the num'rous throng,
 That on his lips with list'ning pleasure hung:
 'Take him, ye wretched, for your only good,
 Take him, ye starving sinners, for your food;
 Ye thirsty, come to this life-giving stream,
 Ye preachers, take him for your joyful theme;
 Take him, my dear Americans,' he said,
 'Be your complaints on his kind bosom laid;
 Take him, ye Africans, he longs for you,
 "Impartial Savior" is his title due;
 Washed in the fountain of redeeming blood,
 You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God.'"

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

IV. The Results of the Great Awakening

A. Conversions

1. Calvinism
2. The new alliance—evangelicalism

B. Debate and controversy

1. Debate over the place and nature of revivals

C. Social effects ("A spiritual democracy")

1. Benjamin Franklin

Stout: "...despite his failures (institutional and personal), [Whitefield's] voice of compassion for the slaves continued to ring out and win their enduring adoration" (*The Divine Dramatist*, 108).

D. Schools founded

1. Princeton (College of New Jersey)
2. Dartmouth (Eleazar Wheelock)
3. Rutgers
4. Brown

E. Calvinism Preserved

For Further Study

**George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, 2 vols. (1980) by Arnold A. Dallimore

Thorough study of Whitefield's life, ministry, and theology.

**The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (1991) by Harry S. Stout
 Whitefield as preacher, promoter, and creator of a new approach to evangelism.

I. Read the following selections from *George Whitefield's Journals* (Banner of Truth, 1965), 329-38, 341-46, 354-55, 468-77. The first selection from Whitefield's *Journals* chronicles the twenty-four-year-old preacher's second journey across the Atlantic to America in 1739. (On his first visit to America the previous year Whitefield had founded the orphanage in Savannah, which remained his great concern the rest of his life.) Whitefield's time on board ship was not wasted but spent in prayer, writing, witnessing to his ship mates, and conducting services. What was his response to the Quaker's criticism of the Church of England ministry? Notice his reading of Francke and his use of Luther. Also notice his theological convictions stated in his entry for September 29. Also his criticism of the Quaker's sermon.

The second selection reports Whitefield's visit to Philadelphia in November. What does Whitefield mean by God's "particular providence"? Notice Whitefield's "ecumenical" spirit. What difference did Whitefield experience between English and American tastes in sermons? Notice his comments concerning William Tennent. The third selection concerns another meeting with Tennent, this time at Neshaminy, the site of the "Log College."

In the fall of 1740 Whitefield was in New England. The fourth selection from his *Journal* describes his activities around Boston in October. Notice his touching reference to little children (October 8). Whitefield's attack on "unconverted ministers" (October 9) was not unusual early in his career, but later he learned to be much more restrained in his criticisms. What did Whitefield dislike about Boston funerals? What did he find to be the best remedy for "all indispositions"? What great illustration did he experience of "God's electing love"? What did he dislike about the baptism of infants in Boston churches? Notice especially Whitefield's description of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards ("A sweeter couple I have not yet seen").

B. Read the letters by George Whitefield found in *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Eerdmans, 1987), 311-13

When Whitefield could not preach, he wrote letters. These three letters—to seminarians in England, students in America, and to an orphan—show his concern to help and encourage those studying for the ministry, to promote "the good old divinity," and to set forth clearly the way of salvation.

C. Read "Nathan Cole's Testimony." Nathan Cole was a twenty-nine-year-old Connecticut farmer who was determined to hear Whitefield preach at Middletown on October 23, 1740. He has left us an exciting account of how he and his wife reached the place where Whitefield was preaching (they had to ride twelve miles double in little more than an hour). Two years after Whitefield's sermon planted the seed, Nathan Cole had "the joyous experience of conversion." Whitefield refers to the occasion of his preaching at Middletown in his journal, October 23, 1740, with the brief entry: "Preached to about four thousand people at eleven o'clock, and, again, in the afternoon at Wallingford, fourteen miles from Middletown."