

Lecture 26 – “A Divine & Supernatural Light”: The Life & Theology of Jonathan Edwards

“Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Timothy 1:17

Prayer

In 1748 Jonathan Edwards wrote *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth*.

“A Divine & Supernatural Light”: The Life & Theology of Jonathan Edwards

“Puritanism reached its fullest bloom in the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Puritans*, 351).

“Jonathan Edwards, saint and metaphysician, revivalist and theologian, stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America. Born, bred, passing his whole life on the verge of civilization, he has made his voice heard wherever men have busied themselves with those two greatest topics which can engage human thought—God and the soul” (B. B. Warfield).

I. Life

- A. Childhood and youth
- B. Yale (graduation in 1720 and 1 Timothy 1:17) (“Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards”)
- C. Preacher and tutor
- D. Northampton (colleague and in 1729 successor to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard)
 - 1. Marriage in 1727 to Sarah Pierrepont
 - Jonathan Edwards (in 1723): “They say there is a young lady in [New Haven] who is beloved of that Great Being, who made and rules the world....”
 - 2. Difficulties in ministry
 - 3. Revival in 1734
 - a. Youth to adults: “A great and earnest concern about the great things of religion...”
 - b. Pastoral visitation
 - c. “Our public assemblies were then beautiful.”
 - 4. Church discipline
 - a. Halfway Covenant
 - 5. “Farewell Sermon” (July 2, 1750)
- E. Stockbridge
- F. College of New Jersey
- G. Death

II. Work

- A. Pastor
 - 1. Promoting and protecting revivals
 - a. The books—*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1736), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival in New England* (1742), *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746)
 - b. The main point—“No one could recognize more fully than Edwards the evil that mixes with the good in...seasons of religious excitement. He diligently sought to curb excesses, and earnestly endeavored to separate the chaff from the wheat. But no one could protest more strongly against casting out the wheat with the chaff” (B. B. Warfield).

“No man is more relevant to the present conditions of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards...He was a mighty theologian and a great evangelist at the same time. If you want to know anything about true revival, Edwards is the man to consult. My advice is, read Jonathan Edwards. Go back to something solid and deep and real” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

- B. Preaching (“Extracts from Two Sermons by Edwards”—“Safety, Fulness, and Sweet Refreshment, to be Found in Christ”)
1. The glory of God in all things
 - a. “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” (1731)
 2. Delight in God
 - a. “On a Divine and Supernatural Light” (1734)
 - b. “Christian Pilgrims”

“He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees....He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart.”
 3. The judgment of God
 - a. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741) (“Extracts from Two Sermons by Edwards”—“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”)

“God hath had it on his heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent his love is, and also how terrible his wrath is.”
- C. Theology
- “[Jonathan Edwards’s] doctrine is all application, and his application is all doctrine” (John Duncan).
1. Independent thinker
 2. The Theologians—Calvin, the great Puritan divines, Thomas Boston, Francis Turretin, and Van Mastricht (“much better” than even Turretin “or any other book in the world, excepting the Bible, in my opinion”)
 3. The books
 - a. *The Freedom of the Will*
 - b. *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*
 - c. *A History of the Work of Redemption*

“The movement against Calvinism which was overspreading the land was in a great measure checked, and the elimination of Calvinism as a determining factor in the thought of New England, which seemed to be imminent as [Jonathan Edwards] wrote, was postponed for more than a hundred years” (B. B. Warfield).

Questions from Class

1. How long did the revival of 1734 last?
2. What happened to the North Hampton church after Edwards left?
3. How does Edwards compare on Lloyd-Jones’ view of baptism of the Holy Spirit?
4. What would Edwards say about expressions/manifestations in revival?

For Further Study

*For Jonathan Edwards’s life, see *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (1987) by Iain H. Murray.

*For a short presentation of Edwards’s theology, see “Edwards and the New England Theology” by B. B. Warfield, in *Studies in Theology*.

A. Read “A Personal Account” by Sarah Pierrepont Edwards, from *Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster/John Knox, 1993),

277-79. Sarah Pierrepont Edwards, wife of Jonathan Edwards, was an earnest Christian from a prestigious New England family. Her life and marriage to Jonathan is interestingly told in *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* by Elisabeth S. Dodds.

While Jonathan Edwards was away on an extended preaching tour, a certain Mr. Buell was invited to occupy the Northampton pulpit in his absence. There he enjoyed even more success than had Edwards. When Edwards returned, he asked his wife to record her impressions and experiences and included her account in his *Thoughts on the Revival*. The following is a short portion of her recollections.

*What do you make of Sarah Edwards's religious experience as she describes it here? Is it more inward or outward?

*What is her response to the thought that God might choose to use "some other instrument than Mr. Edwards" in the revival in Northampton?

*What impressions of Sarah Edwards do you have from this short reading?

Jonathan Edwards is best known for his sermon on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." His many sermons are impressive—combining a calm and careful setting forth of biblical truth ("doctrine") and searching applications ("use"). "God Glorified in Man's Dependence" illustrates Edwards's sermon style as well as his main concerns and themes. See *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Frederic Ungar, 1970), 45-64.

*Is this sermon Christ-centered?

*Does it exalt grace?

*Does it humble the sinner?

*Does it provide comfort?

*Is there anything you miss in Edwards's sermon?