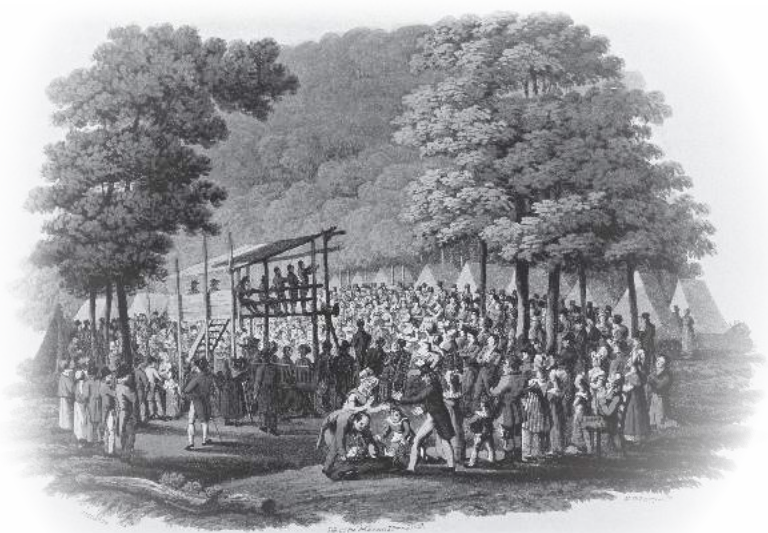


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The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee



A HISTORY *of*
EVANGELISM
in NORTH AMERICA

Thomas P. Johnston

EDITOR



KREGEL
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A History of Evangelism in North America

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CONTENTS

Introduction 9

1. Jonathan Edwards: Preaching for an Awakening 11
William D. Henard
2. David Brainerd: Evangelism of the Native American Indians 31
J. D. Payne
3. John Wesley: Itinerant Preaching and Preachers' Conferences 49
Jeff Brown
4. George Whitefield: Methods for Effective Evangelizing 67
Jake Roudkovsky
5. Shubal Stearns and the Sandy Creek Association 81
Larry Steven McDonald
6. Francis Asbury and the Circuit Riders 97
Timothy K. Beougher
7. Cane Ridge and the Camp Meeting Revival Movement 111
D. Scott Hildreth
8. Bible Societies in America and Bible Distribution Evangelism 125
Thomas P. Johnston
9. The Revival of 1800 on the American Frontier 141
Robert Matz
10. J. Wilbur Chapman: Evangelist and Pastor 153
Jeff Farmer
11. John Mason Peck and Rock Springs Seminary 171
Doug Munton

12. Henrietta Mears and Sunday School Evangelism 183
Kristen Ferguson
13. Dawson Trotman: The Navigators, and the Discipleship Movement 197
Allan Karr
14. Shadrach Meshach (S. M.) Lockridge: Pastor and Evangelist 219
Carl J. Bradford
15. Billy Graham: Youth for Christ and Crusade Evangelism 231
Thomas P. Johnston
16. Bill Bright: Campus Crusade and University Evangelism 245
Greg Mathias
17. D. James Kennedy: Training the Laity in Personal Evangelism 257
Eddie Pate
18. The Jesus Movement and Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel 273
Preston L. Nix
19. Donald McGavran, C. Peter Wagner, and Church Growth Evangelism 291
Chuck Lawless
20. John Piper: Desiring God and the Young-Restless-and-Reformed 303
Bo Rice
21. Southern Baptist Personal Evangelism Methodologies, 1970–2020 313
Matt Queen
22. Twenty-First-Century Developments in Evangelism 335
Paul Akin

INTRODUCTION

Few volumes have covered the history of evangelism as a focal point since the mid-1940s. Hence this present volume promises to fill a seventy-year void in concerted consideration. Evangelism in early America is discussed in helpful detail. Edwards, Brainerd, Wesley, Whitefield, Stearns, and Asbury all left their mark in the formation of the United States. The second half of this book prepares the reader for evangelism in the twenty-first century. Evangelistic movers and shakers in North America are considered: Henrietta Mears, Dawson Trotman, S. M. Lockridge, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, D. James Kennedy, the Jesus Movement, Donald McGavran, and John Piper. The goal was to offer a breadth of concurrent evangelism methodologies, which in some cases includes considerable interactions between the subjects. The result portrays God's oversight of evangelism as North American Christians sought to obey Christ's Great Commission in their generation.

In wonderfully cooperative spirit, twenty-one professors have contributed to this volume on the history of evangelism in North America. The overarching goal was to provide a biographical approach to evangelism, along with a focus on varieties of evangelism methodologies. Hence, when possible, each author combined the human and biographical side of their topic while also considering practical approaches to evangelism methodology.

Editing this volume has been exhilarating. I would like to thank the contributors for their time and effort. It has been a great blessing to work with the editors at Kregel. Thanks be to God for his grace in this venture, and a very hearty thank-you to all Southern Baptists for your Cooperative Program gifts that support all of our teaching efforts!

CHAPTER 1

JONATHAN EDWARDS: PREACHING *for an* AWAKENING

William D. Henard

In a poem written by Phyllis McGinley, one finds a critical caricature of Jonathan Edwards. In it, she introduces Edwards as one who preached only of the fear of God, even to the point that children would fear standing before him. At the close of her limerick, she pens:

Abraham's God, the Wrathful One,
Intolerant of error—
Not God the Father or the Son,
But God the Holy Terror!¹

McGinley offers a typical response to the preaching of Jonathan Edwards. In many literary and theological circles, people closely associate Edwards with one sermon. While being recognized as a literary masterpiece and a giant among American sermons by some,² there

1 Quoted in Michael D. McMullen, "Introduction to the Preaching of Jonathan Edwards," in *The Glory and Honor of God*, vol. 2 of *The Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Michael D. McMullen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 4.

2 The editors of *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742* interject that "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," as a sermon, "surely stands as the most famous of all of Jonathan Edwards' writings, and possibly the most famous American sermon." Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley, "Editors' Introduction: Sinners in the Hands of

remains much more to Edwards than just “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” His preaching possessed a higher motivation than simply wanting to cause people to fall into terror.³ Seeing people saved provided the passion and the motivation for him, and even when he preached terror and fear, his thoughts focused on conversion.⁴ In a sermon preached early in his ministry, Edwards asserted:

However great your aversion is to Jesus Christ, yet hell—one would think—should be enough [to] overcome it. . . . The consideration of hell commonly is the first thing that rouses sleeping sinners. By this means their sins are set in order before them and their conscience stares them in the face, and they begin to see their need of a priest and sacrifice to satisfy for them. . . . Consider how earnestly Jesus Christ invites you to come to him and trust in him.⁵

an Angry God,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742*, vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 400.

- 3 Edwards himself criticized preachers who used terror just for the sake of frightening people. He declared, “Another thing that some ministers have been greatly blamed for, and I think is unjustly, is speaking *terror* to them who are already under great terrors, instead of comforting them. Indeed, if ministers in such a case go about to terrify persons with that which is not true, or to affright them by representing their case worse than it is, or in any respect otherwise than it is, they are to be condemned.” Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England, and the Way in Which It Ought to be Acknowledged and Promoted; Humbly Offered to the Public, in a Treatise on that Subject,” in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 392.
- 4 The term “saved” was not foreign to Edwards. He used the word in the titles of several sermons. See Jonathan Edwards, “There Are Some Christians Who, Though They Are Saved, Yet It Is as It Were by Fire (1742)” (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT).
- 5 Jonathan Edwards, “Christ’s Sacrifice,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 603. Edwards first preached the sermon in early 1723. Manuscript evidence, however, indicates that he preached it at later times: namely, the addition of a few numbered subheadings in a different ink and the crossing out of a ten-line passage. See Wilson H. Kimnach, “Editor’s Introduction: Christ’s Sacrifice,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 593.

Edwards believed that preaching on eternal punishment served the purpose of awakening unregenerate persons to their lost condition. He proclaimed such truth out of a love for the lost, not a masochistic ire.

EDWARDS'S PERSPECTIVE ON PREACHING

John E. Smith writes:

We must not allow our interest in Edwards as a theologian and philosopher to overshadow his importance as a preacher and interpreter of Scripture. . . . In addition to his major treatises, Edwards wrote and delivered a great many sermons through his career as pastor. . . . Some 1,200 sermon manuscripts have survived, and it is estimated that these amount to no more than four-fifths of Edwards's actual output."⁶

Conrad Cherry concurs, elucidating how preaching connected to Edwards's conversion theology:

Those sermons of Edwards which elicited strong emotions from the members of the congregation and had them crying to God for deliverance were carefully reasoned, doctrinally exacting pieces of work. . . . The sermon, therefore, was to instruct the mind, and as instruction it could become a means of grace.⁷

For Edwards, the proclamation of the Bible became the primary means through which God brought people to a converting experience. Edwards taught that "God has ordained that his Word be opened,

6 John E. Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1992), 138.

7 Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1966), 50–51.

applied and set home upon men, in *preaching*.”⁸ He determined that preaching allowed him the opportunity to reason with people’s minds so that they might be awakened to their need for Christ. Drawing this perspective from his study of the New Testament, he wrote, “How often have we an account in the Acts of the Apostles, reasoning and disputing with men to bring them to believing, and of many being brought to believe through that means. How often did they use that argument, especially of the resurrection of Christ.”⁹ Edwards thus believed that preaching provided an effective way to speak to the hearts and minds of the unregenerate.

HIS PASSION FOR PREACHING

Richard Bailey related that an often-neglected understanding of Edwards was his passion for preaching. He wrote, “Although scholars portray Jonathan Edwards in a variety of ways—as a theologian, a philosopher, an exponent of revival, and America’s greatest sensationalist—few focus on his passion. . . . Edwards expressed fervor in one place where it is most often judged absent—in his preaching.”¹⁰ Bailey pointed out three areas that demonstrate Edwards’s passion for preaching. He explained:

First, he understood the relationship between divine revelation and human reason differently than many proponents of the Enlightenment. Second, Edwards desired both to encourage the onset of the millennium and to fulfill his divine commission. As a result, he not only used contemporary models to frame his preaching but also modified the prevailing preaching pattern. Third, prompted by his affective

8 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 242, emphasis original.

9 Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies 501–832*, vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Ava Chamberlain (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 163.

10 Richard A. Bailey, “Driven by Passion: Jonathan Edwards and the Art of Preaching,” in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 64.

theology, Edwards passionately prepared and proclaimed his message in order to guide his flock to their eternal home.¹¹

Two mistaken assumptions continue to circulate that call into question Edwards's passion for preaching. First, the idea exists that he always read his sermons word for word from a manuscript. Second, some scholars believe that he lacked any emotion in his delivery. For example, Edward M. Collins Jr. says of Edwards that "in middle life he appeared emaciated by intense study and hard labour; hence his voice was a little low for a large assembly, but much helped by proper emphasis . . . and great distinctness in pronunciation. He did not use gestures, and a heavy dependence on his manuscript prevented any rapport with his congregation."¹²

While it is true that he carried extensive notes into the pulpit, even ones that could be called a manuscript, his actual handwritten notes assuredly demonstrate that he progressed to be more extemporaneous in his preaching. Early in his ministry, he wrote manuscripts in a neat and orderly fashion. Wilson H. Kimnach substantiates this idea in his "Preface to the New York Period," footnoting:

Given the preference of JE's father and grandfather Stoddard for *extempore* or *memoriter* preaching, one must assume the JE made an initial effort to preach without relying upon his manuscripts, at least for some months. There are in fact a number of formal or stylistic devices in these early sermons (discussed in the appropriate places) which might have functioned as mnemonic aids also. On the other hand, there is no record that JE ever preached without his manuscript.¹³

11 Bailey, "Driven by Passion," 64–65.

12 Edward M. Collins Jr. "The Rhetoric of Sensation Challenges the Rhetoric of the Intellect: An Eighteenth Century Controversy," in *Preaching in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630–1967*, ed. Dewitt Holland (New York: Abingdon, 1969), 102.

13 Wilson H. Kimnach, "Preface to the New York Period," in *Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723*, vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 282, emphasis original.

Upon assuming the Northampton pastorate, however, Edwards moved to an abbreviated form of outlining his sermons. This new preparation style allowed Edwards more freedom in his delivery.¹⁴ Kenneth Minkema elucidates:

Contrary to time-honored descriptions of Edwards as a statue-like, inflectionless speaker, his sermon manuscripts indicated that he varied his delivery, sought eye contact with his listeners, and extemporized on occasion. Having succeeded the master preacher Stoddard, who had condemned the common practice of reading sermons from the pulpit, Edwards experimented with ways to free himself from total reliance on his manuscripts. Increasingly he employed special marks or cues, which allowed him to look up from his notes and then easily locate where he had left off. . . . He even began to compose portions of his sermons in outline, undeveloped introductory statements, and fragmentary phrases for extemporaneous delivery. Switching from octavo-sized booklets to duodecimo leaves meant more frugal use of paper, but the smaller format may also have been Edwards' way of forcing himself to memorize his sermons since they were less easily read.¹⁵

Along with the influences of two excellent and passionate preachers in the likes of his father Timothy Edwards¹⁶ and his grandfather Solomon Stoddard,¹⁷ Malcolm McDow and Alvin Reid add that George Whitefield heavily influenced the preaching passion of

14 Kenneth P. Minkema, "Preface to the Period," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1723–1729*, vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 12.

15 Minkema, "Preface to the Period," 12–13.

16 George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 33–34.

17 Bailey, "Driven by Passion," 69.

Edwards.¹⁸ Speaking of Edwards, they write, “Early in his ministry, sermon manuscripts were read; after Whitefield visited Northampton, Edwards began using outlines instead.”¹⁹

HIS AIM IN PREACHING

While Edwards had many specific objectives in his preaching, his essential goals or aims can be divided into three categories. J. I. Packer elaborates, “Like his seventeenth-century predecessors, he preached with a threefold aim: to make men understand, feel, and respond to gospel truth.”²⁰ Edwards expressed himself this way:

God hath appointed a particular and lively application of his word, in the preaching of it, as a fit means to affect sinners with the importance of religion, their own misery, the necessity of a remedy, and the glory and sufficiency of a remedy provided: to stir up the pure minds of the saints, quicken their affections by often bringing the great things of religion to their remembrance, and setting them in their

18 In at least one sermon, Edwards made reference to Whitefield. Preached in a private meeting in December 1739, with no reference that it was ever used again, Edwards spoke of the revival occurring in England and how “God has raised up in England a number of young ministers. . . . I have heard of the news of several, particularly Mr. Wesley, and Mr. Whitefield, and Mr. Harris, a young minister that has preached in Wales.” See Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley, “Editors’ Introduction: God’s Grace Carried on in Other Places,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742*, vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 104. See also Jonathan Edwards, “God’s Grace Carried On in Other Places,” in *Sermons and Discourses 1739–1742*, vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. Harry S. Stout, Nathan O. Hatch, and Kyle P. Farley (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 108.

19 Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Shaped History through Revivals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 213. McDow and Reid offer an obvious disagreement with some of the other scholars as to when Edwards began using sermon outlines. Minkema and Ehrhard supply the most critical proof of the timetable of Edwards’s move from manuscript to outline. McDow and Reid provide an important look at the influence of Whitefield, and thus their conclusion proves helpful.

20 J. I. Packer, “Jonathan Edwards and the Theology of Revival,” in vol. 2 of *Puritan Papers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001), 26.

proper colours, though they know them, and have been fully instructed in them already.²¹

Edwards conveyed a perspective that moved beyond just the communication of biblical truth. He desired to speak to people's hearts. Though distinctly Puritan in his approach,²² Edwards offered a fresh means by which people could experience God through the preaching of the Bible.

Understanding the Supremacy of God

John Piper relates that Edwards's first goal in preaching was to bring people to an understanding of God's supremacy.²³ As he spoke of the coming judgment of God, Edwards declared:

Now how congruous is it that God, in the winding up of things, when the present state of mankind shall come to a conclusion, should manifest in the most public and open manner his dominion over the inhabitants of the earth, by bringing of them all—both high and low, rich and poor, both kings and subjects—together before him to be judged with respect to all that they ever did in the world; that he should thus openly discover his dominion in this world, where his authority has been so much questioned, denied, and proudly opposed. . . . Yet at the conclusion of the world he should thus make his dominion visible to all, and with respect to all mankind: so that every eye shall see him, even they which have denied him, and shall find that *God is supreme Lord of them and of the whole world.*²⁴

21 Jonathan Edwards, *The Treatise on Religious Affections* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), 30–31. This particular edition probably dates c. 1850.

22 Packer, "Jonathan Edwards and the Theology of Revival," 26.

23 John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 31.

24 Jonathan Edwards, "The Day of Judgment," in *Sermons and Discourses 1723–1729*, vol. 14 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 515, emphasis added. This sermon dates 1729, with the

It became the goal of Edwards for people to see God's majesty. When confronted with God's supremacy, people discover that "the majesty of God is exceedingly great and awful, but according to his awfulness, so is his wrath; this is the meaning of the words; and therefore we must conclude that the wrath of God is indeed beyond all expression and signification terrible. How great and awful is his majesty."²⁵ In his preaching, Edwards focused his congregation's mind on God's supremacy in order to prove humanity's absolute need for Christ.

Touching People's Affections

Edwards desired not just to impact the mind of his hearers for understanding but also to touch their hearts through his preaching. In his treatise *Religious Affections*, Edwards spoke of this goal of reaching people's affections by instructing them in the Scriptures:

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual understanding. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ, and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel. . . . Hence it also appears, that affections arising from texts of Scripture coming to the mind, are vain, when *no instruction* received in the understanding from those texts, or any thing taught in them, is the ground of the affection, but the *manner* of their coming to the mind. When Christ makes the Scripture a means of the

great possibility that it was re-preached at least once. See Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb Maskell, eds., "A Chronological List of Jonathan Edwards's Sermons and Discourses," The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, accessed December 3, 2005, <http://www.edwards.yale.edu>.

25 Jonathan Edwards, "The Portion of the Wicked," in vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 884.

heart's pruning with gracious affection, it is *by opening the Scriptures to their understandings*.²⁶

Piper concludes that Edwards believed that the aim of preaching was to bring about “high affections rooted in, and proportioned by, the truth.”²⁷ Edwards himself wrote, “The main benefit obtained by preaching is by impression made upon the mind at the time.”²⁸ In other words, “Preaching . . . must first of all touch the affections.”²⁹

Evangelizing the Lost

Finally, Edwards established as his goal in preaching the salvation of the lost. Preaching served as his primary method for reaching those who were unbelievers, with evangelism providing an essential theme in his pastoral preaching. In a sermon preached two months prior to his delivering “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” to his Northampton congregation in June of 1741, Edwards proposed that one can discover God’s concern for lost sinners through the fact of his undertaking to subdue the impenitent. Speaking of the unregenerate and God’s concern for them, Edwards reasoned:

Now they are always doubting of the truth of the Scriptures, questioning whether they be the word of God, and whether the threatenings of Scripture be true, but God hath undertaken to convince them that those threatenings are true, and he will make them to know that they are true, so that they will never doubt any more for ever. . . . Now ministers often tell sinners of the great importance of an interest in Christ, and that that is the

26 Jonathan Edwards, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,” in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 281–82, emphasis original.

27 Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 40.

28 Jonathan Edwards, “Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England,” in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 394.

29 Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 282.

one thing needful. They are also told the folly of delaying the care of their souls, and how much it concerns them to improve their opportunity. But the instructions of ministers do not convince them, therefore *God will undertake to convince them*.³⁰

Even when Edwards preached a more doctrinal sermon or one directed at the church, he would often make application to those who were not believers. His sermon titled “The Excellency of Christ,” preached in 1738, provides an illustration of this tactic. With Revelation 5:5–6 serving as his text, Edwards essentially presented the various reasons for the supremacy of Christ:

There do meet in Jesus Christ, infinite highness, and infinite condescension. Christ, he is God, is infinitely great and high above all. . . . And yet he is one of infinite condescension. None are so low, or inferior, but Christ’s condescension is sufficient to take a gracious notice of them. . . . There meet in Jesus Christ, infinite justice, and infinite grace. As Christ is a divine person he is infinitely holy and just. . . . And yet he is one that is infinitely gracious and merciful. . . . In the person of Christ do meet together, infinite glory, and lowest humility. . . . In the person of Christ do meet together, infinite majesty, and transcendent meekness.³¹

In the same sermon, Edwards then applied the message to nonbelievers, proclaiming, “Let the consideration of this wonderful meeting of diverse excellencies in Christ induce you to accept of him, and close

30 Jonathan Edwards, “The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable,” in *Seeking God: Jonathan Edwards’ Evangelism Contrasted with Modern Methodologies*, ed. William C. Nichols (Ames, IA: International Outreach, Inc., 2001), 128, emphasis added.

31 Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, eds. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 164–67.

with him as your Savior. As all manner of excellencies meet in him, so there are concurring in him all manner of arguments and motives, to move you to choose him for your Savior.”³²

One of the clearest evangelistic sermons of Edwards, which includes a call to accept Christ, was one preached in 1733 titled, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous: The Torments of the Wicked in Hell, No Occasion of Grief to the Saints in Heaven.” In the message, Edwards offered a very clear understanding of a sinner’s need for conversion, asserting:

God the Father hath sent his Son, who hath made way for your salvation, and removed all difficulties, except those which are with your own heart. And he is waiting to be gracious to you; the door of mercy stands open to you; he hath set a fountain open for you to wash in from sin and uncleanness. Christ is calling, inviting, and wooing you; and the Holy Ghost is striving with you by his internal motions and influences.³³

Edwards did not shy away from his belief in the sovereignty of God. God is absolutely sovereign in matters of salvation. In his sovereignty, he chooses to call people to seek him and he seeks the unregenerate. While “the saints will know, that it is the will of God the wicked should be miserable to all eternity,”³⁴ it is also true that “Christ is now seeking your salvation; such an opportunity have you now in your hands.”³⁵ One thus sees the evangelistic thrust and theological foundation of Jonathan Edwards’s preaching.

³² Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” 184.

³³ Jonathan Edwards, “The End of the Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous: The Torments of the Wicked in Hell, No Occasion of Grief to the Saints in Heaven,” in vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 212.

³⁴ Edwards, “End of the Wicked,” 210.

³⁵ Edwards, “End of the Wicked,” 212.

SELECTED EXAMPLES OF EDWARDS'S EVANGELISTIC SERMONS

An excellent beginning point for analyzing Edwards' evangelistic preaching comes from the sermons that helped spark the Great Awakening. Five years after assuming the pastorate in Northampton, Edwards preached four sermons that led to the first wave of the Revival.³⁶ He published these sermons as *Five Discourses on Important Subjects, Nearly Concerning the Great Affair of the Soul's Eternal Salvation*.³⁷ The sermons offer an enlightening look into his soteriology and his specific connections between seeking God and conversion. Delivering these sermons during the years 1734 and 1735, they represent his philosophy about the importance of theology in bringing about the Revival. According to Edwards, the Revival began as he preached doctrinal answers for the rising problem of Arminianism.³⁸ Edwards explained:

About this time began the great *noise*, in this part of the country, about *Arminianism*, which seemed to appear with a very *threatening* aspect upon the interest of religion here.

36 Edwards mentioned in his preface to these sermons that a fifth sermon titled "The Excellency of Christ" was actually "added on my own motion, thinking that a discourse on such an evangelical subject, would properly follow others that were chiefly legal and awakening, and that something of the excellency of the Savior, was proper to succeed those things that were to show the necessity of salvation." M. X. Lesser, "Editor's Introduction: The Excellency of Christ," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 560.

37 Jonathan Edwards, "Preface to Five Discourses on Important Subjects, Nearly Concerning the Great Affair of the Soul's Eternal Salvation," in vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 620.

38 Unfortunately, this same controversy over Arminianism led to a decline in the revival fever. In recording his recollections of the Revival in a letter to Benjamin Colman, Edwards requested prayer for Hampshire County and Northampton because "in its present melancholy circumstances into which it is brought by the Springfield quarrel, which doubtless above all things that have happened, has tended to put a stop to the glorious work here, and to prejudice this country against it, and hinder the propagation of it." Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 211.

The friends of vital piety trembled for fear of the issue; but it seemed, contrary to their fear, strongly to be *overruled* for the promoting of religion. Many who looked on themselves as in a *Christless* condition, seemed to be awakened by it, with fear that God was about to withdraw from the land, and that we should be given up to *heterodoxy* and corrupt principles; and that then their *opportunity* for obtaining salvation would be past.³⁹

Thus, as Edwards proclaimed messages which explained God's sovereignty and the means by which a person sought salvation, the initial stirrings of the Awakening began. While his intentions originated more out of correction and instruction than revival, the results of the sermons proved astounding.⁴⁰

“Justification by Faith Alone”

Edwards used the text Romans 4:5, which states, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”⁴¹ He proposed through this sermon to show how, in regard to humanity, “We are justified only by faith in Christ, and not by any manner of virtue or goodness of our own.”⁴² Edwards set the standard declaring the means by which one

39 Jonathan Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 11, emphasis original.

40 Edwards recounted, “This dispensation has also appeared very extraordinary in the *numbers* of those on whom we have reason to hope it has had a saving effect. We have about *six hundred and twenty communicants*, which include almost all our adult persons. The church was very *large* before; but persons never *thronged* into it as they did in the late extraordinary time. Our *sacraments* are eight weeks asunder, and I received into our communion about a *hundred* before one sacrament, *fourscore* of them at one time, whose appearance, when they presented themselves together to make an open explicit *profession* of Christianity, was very affecting to the congregation. I took in near *sixty* before the next sacrament day.” Edwards, “A Narrative of Surprising Conversions,” 19, emphasis original.

41 All Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the 1611 Authorized Version, unless otherwise noted.

42 Jonathan Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 149.

was converted. Salvation came as an act of God, not as the result of the individual's goodness. This concept espousing God's sovereignty in the provision of eternal life serves as a foundational premise within Edwards's conversion theology.

From this sermon, Edwards offered some initial understanding into his steps to conversion. In Edwards's mind, one might ask, "How does a person become a Christian?" Edwards provided an answer, explaining:

Here, if I may humbly express what seems evident to me, though faith be indeed the condition of justification so as nothing else is . . . in one sense, Christ alone performs the condition of our justification and salvation; in another sense, faith is the condition of justification; in another sense, other qualifications and acts are conditions of salvation and justification too.⁴³

One final important aspect of the sermon arises out of Edwards's use of the terms "coming to Christ" and "receiving Christ." In relating these terms to justification and faith, he explained:

I don't now pretend to define justifying faith, or to determine precisely how much is contained in it, but only to determine thus much concerning it, viz. That it is that by which the soul, that before was separate, and alienated from Christ, unites itself to him, or ceases to be any longer in that state of alienation, and comes into that forementioned union or relation to him, or to use the Scripture phrase, that 'tis that by which the soul COMES to Christ, and RECEIVES him: and this is evident by the Scriptures using these very expressions to signify faith.⁴⁴

⁴³ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," 152.

⁴⁴ Edwards, "Justification by Faith Alone," 157, emphasis original.

“Pressing into the Kingdom of God”

One of the most distinct sermons Edwards preached that reflects his understanding of the doctrine of seeking is this sermon, the second in his series on *Five Discourses on Various Important Subjects*. Lesser notes that Edwards preached this sermon in February 1735, “Some ten weeks after the November lecture on justification and within five weeks of the onset of ‘the present season of the pouring out of the Spirit of God on this town’ and the many ‘instances of sudden conversions.’”⁴⁵

Luke 16:16 provided the text, which reads, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” In introducing this topic, Edwards proclaimed, “In discoursing on this subject, I would, first, show what is that way of seeking salvation that seems to be pointed forth, in the expressing of ‘pressing into the kingdom of God’; second, give the reasons why it concerns everyone that would obtain the kingdom of God, to seek it in this way; and then make application.”⁴⁶

An important part of the sermon comes from the application section where Edwards offered possible objections from people concerning the act of seeking, and then provided an answer to that objection. Edwards recognized that there existed a proper way in which a person should seek salvation, admonishing, “There are many that in time past have sought salvation, but not in this manner, and so they have never obtained. . . . Be exhorted therefore not to seek salvation as they did.”⁴⁷ He then concluded with this exhortation, “Therefore as you regard the interest of your soul, don’t run yourself into a like difficulty, by unsteadiness, intermission, and backsliding; but press right forward, from henceforth, and make but one work of seeking converting and pardoning grace, however great, and difficult, and long a work that may be.”⁴⁸

45 M. X. Lesser, “Editor’s Introduction: Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 272.

46 Jonathan Edwards, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 276.

47 Edwards, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” 282–83.

48 Edwards, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” 304.

“Ruth’s Resolution”

This sermon not only typifies Edwards’s conversion preaching, but it also represents his love for typology in his messages. Edwards saw Ruth as “a type of the Gentile church, and also of every sincere convert. . . . Ruth forsook all her natural relations, and her own country, the land of her nativity, and all her former possessions there, for the sake of the God of Israel; as every true Christian forsakes all for Christ.”⁴⁹

His intention appears to be to emphasize the importance of watching what other Christians do with the purpose of imitating their resolve to follow Christ. Edwards preached, “Unless you follow them, in their turning to God, their conversion will be a foundation of an eternal separation between you and them.”⁵⁰ Conversion, therefore, finds a portion of its motivation in relationships. People should desire heaven because family and friends who are converted will be there. Edwards concluded his message by asking a question and offering a challenge. He offered this appeal, “Shall everyone take heaven, while you remain, with no other portion but his world? Now take up that resolution, that if it be possible you will cleave to them that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.”⁵¹

“The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners”

The title for this sermon provides a foundational understanding in Edwards’s mind concerning God’s sovereignty in all areas of salvation. The sermon also points to humanity’s depravity and consequences associated with sin. In the message, Edwards continued his theological understanding of “the free grace of God, in the salvation of men by Jesus Christ; especially as it appears in the doctrine of justification by faith alone.”⁵²

49 Jonathan Edwards, “Ruth’s Resolution,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 307.

50 Edwards, “Ruth’s Resolution,” 316.

51 Edwards, “Ruth’s Resolution,” 320.

52 Jonathan Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738*, vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. M. X. Lesser (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 339.

Edwards's imprecations served the purpose of alarming his listeners with the dreadfulness of eternal damnation. He warned, "This is what you are in danger of: you that are a Christless sinner; are a poor condemned creature: God's wrath still abides upon you; and the sentence of condemnation lies upon you: you are in God's hands, and 'tis uncertain what he will do with you."⁵³ Coupled with this alarm came a call to respond to Christ. If individuals recognized their own lostness, then those persons needed to demonstrate a willingness to receive Christ. In a very important statement in which Edwards connected conversion, God seeking humanity, and people receiving Christ, he asserted:

There is certainly a great deal of difference between a forced compliance, and a free willingness. Force and freedom can't consist together. Now that willingness that you tell of, whereby you think you are willing to have Christ for a Savior, is merely a forced thing. Your heart does not go out after Christ of itself; but you are forced and driven to seek an interest in him. Christ has no share at all in your heart; there is no manner of closing of the heart with him. This forced compliance is not what Christ seeks of you; he seeks a free and willing acceptance, Ps. 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." He seeks not that you should receive him against your will, but with a free will: he seeks entertainment in your heart and choice. And,

If you refuse thus to receive Christ, how just is it that Christ should refuse to receive you! How reasonable are Christ's terms, who offers to save all those that willingly, or with good will, accept of him for their Savior!⁵⁴

⁵³ Edwards, "Justice of God," 348.

⁵⁴ Edwards, "Justice of God," 361. The context of this quote stemmed from Edwards's belief that some people had a willingness to receive Christ, but on their own terms. He considered selfish motives to equal a forced compliance rather than a free willingness. Edwards stated that these motives for this forced compliance came from the fact that "you are willing not to be miserable. . . . And surely it would be very dishonorable for Christ to offer himself upon lower terms." Edwards, "Justice of God," 361–62. In other words, individuals must receive Christ in the manner demanded by Jesus. Though

Edwards concluded the sermon with a plea for persons, in spite of their sinfulness, to seek God. He implored:

He will show mercy only on Christ's account, and that according to his sovereign pleasure, on whom he pleases, when he pleases, and in what manner he pleases: you can't bring him under obligation by your works, do what you will, he will not look on himself obliged. But if it be his pleasure, he can honorably show mercy through Christ, to any sinner of you all, not one in this congregation excepted. Therefore, here is encouragement for you still to seek and wait, notwithstanding all your wickedness.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

Jonathan Edwards represents the best in a theological evangelist. He understood the distinguishing marks of human nature. Sinners were bound for an eternal hell without Christ. He also stood unwavering on God's sovereignty. God chooses, draws, and convicts people about their need for salvation. God then does the converting.

Yet in the midst of Edwards's theology came an overwhelming burden for the salvation of people. The means God used to awaken sinners was the preaching of the gospel. When an individual experienced awakening, it was then that seeking could begin. And preach Edwards did. Throughout his ministry he preached hundreds of sermons and stood in the pulpit many days a week exhorting, evangelizing, and counseling his congregation. Edwards opened God's Word to people who would listen.

In his sermons, Edwards taught people about God's sovereignty, humanity's depravity, and the need for people to seek salvation. Even when he came under the greatest attacks from his own church members, he did not give up. God would do all in his power to change

they may desire salvation, anything outside of Christ's demands deemed nothing but a forced compliance through selfish motivation. Thus, the person decided to comply in order to avoid hell, not in order to trust in Christ.

55 Edwards, "Justice of God," 375.

the fallen individual. A person, therefore, needed to do all within that individual's ability to be saved, namely, seek God.

When one examines Jonathan Edwards's theology, especially as seen through his Northampton sermons and treatises, an awareness quickly emerges concerning this man's passion for those who are not believers. Edwards preached God's Word. Gerstner comments:

He preached every doctrine he found in the Bible. His texts range over both Testaments and all the books of each. He preached about sovereignty and he preached about responsibility; he preached about hell and about heaven; he preached about grace and about law; he preached about individual piety and about social obligations; he preached about principles and about persons; he preached about terror and he preached about comfort."⁵⁶

Edwards, though unashamedly Calvinistic, provided a provocative yet balanced perspective in his theology. He believed in God's absolute sovereignty, but he also taught of humanity's responsibility. His ability to harmonize the two doctrines allows for a greater understanding in reference to how one can attest to God's sovereignty and maintain a passionate interest in evangelism. The two ideas appear to be at odds with one another. Edwards demonstrated how one can hold intensely to both ideals without conflict.

Edwards, additionally, did not profess an easy religion. His call for spiritual evidence in salvation gives proof of his belief in perseverance and persistence. His desire, though, always remained to see individuals converted to Christ.

⁵⁶ John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards, Evangelist* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 190.