

Seminar 1 — Steve Lawson  
March 5, 2014 — 1:30 p.m.

***THE GRAND ITINERANT:  
HOW THE PREACHING MINISTRY OF GEORGE WHITFIELD SPARKED THE GREAT AWAKENING***

We all need an IV hookup of George Whitfield. He was the greatest evangelist after the apostle Paul. Yet it has been said that Whitfield is the most neglected story...

He was an extraordinary man, preacher with an extraordinary message. George Whitfield was the greatest itinerant preacher God has ever given the church. Whitfield reached both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. There has never been an evangelistic preacher like GW.

The revival under Whitfield was the greatest movement of the Spirit of God on American soil. In his lifetime he preached some 18,000 sermons — many preached after he had just preached. He did this in 30 years — averaging 2-3 sermons a day for 30 years. He preached face-to-face to some 10 million people. 80% of all the colonists had seen GW face-to-face when he was preaching. He was the unifying force in the Colonies. More saw him than George Washington.

On one visit to Philadelphia he preached to 25,000 people — double the size of Phil. at the time.

Spurgeon: “Other men seem to be only half alive...” Spurgeon had only one mentor in the ministry — Whitfield. CHS called GW the chief of preachers. Ryle said GW stood alone as a preacher. M’Cheyne said, “Oh for one of Whitfield’s weeks in London.” MLJ spoke in awe of Whitfield — “GW is the unquestioned English preacher of all time.”

**WHITFIELD’S LIFE**

1714 born in Gloucester, England

1731 Entered Oxford

1735 Converted

1738 First trip to America (invited by the Wesleys — who were unconverted at the time)

1738 Begins open air preaching in England

1739-41 Second trip to America

By the time he was 23 years old his preaching electrified England. In one summer in London in 1739 he preached to an estimated 1 million people.

The preaching tour of 1740 is considered the greatest preaching ministry since the Apostle Paul. God began then to stir the hearts of the settlers in America. One-tenth of the population of the Colonies were converted (50,000), with 300 churches planted.

He made a total of 13 trips across the Atlantic in 1769. He wanted to die preaching the pulpit

and wanted to be buried under that pulpit. He *is* buried under the pulpit in Newburyport, MA at age 55 (1770).

## **WHAT WAS IT ABOUT WHITFIELD THAT CAUSED HIM TO BE SO EFFECTIVE?**

### **1. Whitfield had an uncommon piety**

His godliness exceeded his giftedness and his giftedness was unequalled.

Whitfield studied his Bible on his knees. He studied with a Greek NT and Matthew Henry. He prayed over every line and word of the Scripture and feast his mind upon the Word of God. He was rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

He was a man of prayer. “We can preach the gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced it in our hearts....Converse less with men and more with God.”

“Live near to Christ...hunger and thirst daily for the righteousness of Christ.” — GW

### **2. Whitfield had an uncompromising gospel**

JC Ryle — “few preachers have given his people so much wheat and so little chaff. He was perpetually telling you of your sins...and need of righteousness...”

He preached ruined by sin, redeemed by Christ, regenerated by the Spirit:

- ✓ Ruin — preaching that the whole human race was ruined by sin — the sin of our first parents and the fall of the whole human race in Adam. He preached that if you Christ is not glorified in your salvation He will be glorified in your damnation. He did not sugar-coat his message.
- ✓ Redemption — “I never preach better than when I stand at the foot of the cross.” He was a powerful evangelist who lifted high the cross of Christ.
- ✓ Regeneration — this was one of the distinguishing qualities of the Reformation. He emphasized that men must be born again. That was his uncompromising gospel — the sin-baring, substitutionary blood of Christ and the work of the Spirit to birth sinners in heaven.

### **3. Whitfield preached with an unquenchable passion**

Whitfield came exhorting and weeping and begging and summoning people to the gospel of Christ when many were simply reading cold manuscripts.

When he preached in Edwards’ church, JE wept on the front row because of the power of the preaching.

“As Whitfield preached his whole person came alive...” He preached with arms lifted and foot-stomping passion. In that day it was the bland leading the bland...we have a lot of that today and what we need is men on fire preaching the Word of God.

“Whitfield was a flame on fire.” MLJ — what set him apart was his passion. GW rescued preaching — a desperate plea to desperate people. And that passion came from a conviction about the importance/power/significance of the Word of God. “I have not come to you in my name, but I have come to you in the power of the Lord almighty!...I must and I will have an audience.”

When you are on fire, men will come to watch you burn!

#### **4. Whitfield had an unrivaled theology**

He was Reformed and Calvinistic. And he was a powerful evangelist. “I embrace Calvinistic scheme not because of Calvin but because Jesus Christ taught it to me...”

“Man has a free will to go to Hell, but none to Heaven.”

He preached the supreme authority of God in salvation. He believed God was the potter and the human race was the clay — some made for destruction and some for salvation.

#### **5. Whitfield possessed an unrelenting evangelism**

He has a transcendent theology and an unrelenting evangelism. He was always looking to catch sinners. He was always ready to go to preach the gospel — “Oh Lord, give me souls or take my soul.”

He did nothing to incite emotional excitement and gave no altar calls, yet he was a powerful evangelist and saw many come to salvation.

Read “The Conversion of Zaccheus” — this is what preaching looks, tastes, and feels like.

We are too proud to beg anymore; we must be more like GW and our Savior — “come unto me you who are weary and heavy-laden...”

#### **6. Whitfield had an unquenchable drive**

It is hard to find any figure in church history who was so spent in his preaching. He withstood threats when preaching. “I am never better than when I am on the full stretch (sprint) for God.”

“We are immortal until our labors are done.”

The pulpit was killing him physically, but it was also reviving him. “The best preparation for preaching on Sunday is to preach every day of the week.”

He was barraged with opposition in his ministry — assassination attempts, dead animals thrown at him, Indian raids, paid trumpeters during his preaching, etc. “May I die preaching.”

He was a man of imminent self-denial. He was an early riser (4 a.m.) and would retire early also (10 p.m.). He was constantly on the go for God, preaching the gospel of Christ.

Before he preached his last sermon, “I am weary in your work, but not weary of your work...let me go preach one more time for you in the fields and then call me home.”

## **7. Whitfield had an unleashed power**

How did he do this? There is only one way — through the unleashed power of the Spirit of God.

God endued him with supernatural power. God granted him a mighty infusion of the Holy Spirit and it was the divine power that was the secret of his success.

There is a difference between uttering orthodox truths and preaching. There were other orthodox men during his time, but they were utterly useless.

It was the hand of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that empowered and enabled Whitfield so he became the most powerful evangelist who ever lived.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Dallimore says of Whitfield — “we need men might in the Scriptures like Whitfield...men who are willing to be fools for Christ’s sake...” May the Lord raise up such men in our day...