

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Thursday Morning Bible Study
Week Six: From 1609-1749
May 11, 2017

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

I. The Puritans

- The Puritans emerge during Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603)
- Elizabeth compromised by steering the Church of England to be mainly Protestant in doctrine but as close to Roman Catholic in practice and worship as her people would tolerate.
- There were people in England influenced especially by Calvin and Zwingli in Switzerland who wanted a more thoroughgoing reform. They saw Scripture as the sole authority and wanted to purge from the church anything they saw as Roman influence like clergy vestments and dress; kneeling at communion; use of wedding rings in marriage and using the sign of the cross at baptism. Because of their desire to purify the church they became known as Puritans.
- Many rejected the episcopal government of bishops and championed a Presbyterian form of government with elders.
- There were two main schools: One who worked to reform the Church of England from within and the more radical group who came to be called the Separatists who saw a break from the state church as necessary to establish a true church in England. The Separatists developed a congregational form of church polity, each congregation independent from the others free to elect their own elders and pastors.
- Puritans came under increased persecution by James I (1603-1625), who championed the episcopal form of church government in England and coupled it with the divine right of the king to rule over his subjects. Disobedience to the king became disobedience to God!
- The one concession King James gave to the Puritans is he authorized a new English translation of the Bible in 1611 based on the best scholarship available at the time which became known as the King James Version.

II. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648)

- On the Continent a long conflict broke out between Protestants and Catholics and their supporters that lasted for thirty years and raged across Europe in the fragmented remains of the Holy Roman Empire.

- It had religious roots but also political ones and involved several phases of conflict in Germany, Bohemia (Czech Republic), France, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and even Switzerland. It was one of the bloodiest European conflicts in history and resulted in some 8 million casualties. It left Germany in shambles and saw the end of the Holy Roman Empire.

III. Plymouth Colony founded by the Puritans (1620)

- Many of the Separatists, mostly congregational in polity, had fled to Holland during James' persecution. The King had demanded that everyone worship in the Anglican way and many Puritan clergy were forbidden to minister because of his edict.
- In 1620 a group of Puritan Separatists led by William Brewster and William Bradford sailed in a ship named The Mayflower for America landing near present day Boston on December 21st. They founded the Plymouth Colony or New England.
- By 1628 many Puritans had also fled England to America to seek out a place where they could freely worship and live as their conscience dictated. They received a royal charter for the Massachusetts Colony in 1629.
- The Connecticut Colony was founded in 1636 under Thomas Hooker's leadership. Many of the new immigrants to New England were not Separatists but were still staunch Puritans. They believed the Bible to be the sole authority for church life and wanted to form a Congregational Church in America under the laws of the state as the sole established church.

IV. Roger Williams founds Rhode Island Colony

- Williams was a Separatist Puritan pastor who emigrated to America and Massachusetts Bay in 1631.
- He advocated separatism between the civil authorities and the church which earned the enmity of the colonial authorities.
- In 1635 he was tried for sedition and banished. A year later he founded Providence on land purchased from the Indians and made it a haven for those with more unorthodox or radical religious views. His colony was called Rhode Island.
- Williams became a Baptist in doctrine and advocated for the separation of church and state. He opposed any establishment of one religion or denomination as being the state church.

V. The Westminster Divines and the Westminster Confession of Faith & Catechism

- Back in England the situation after the death of James I was deteriorating. He was succeeded by his son Charles I (1625-1649) who tried to assert his divine authority as king with the help of the new Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud.

- Laud opposed Calvinism and its Presbyterian government along with all Puritans. He said there is no true church without bishops. He tried with the backing of the king to enforce uniformity in clergy dress, worship and ceremony. It backfired, especially in Scotland!
- Charles dissolved Parliament in 1629 and levied taxes on his own authority. War broke out in Scotland in 1640. The king had to recall Parliament that year which had not met for 11 years to raise taxes to finance the war. Grievances against the king dominated the session and when Charles tried to stop it full scale civil war broke out in England between the supporters of the king (Anglicans) and the supporters of Parliament (Puritans).
- Parliament dissolved the episcopacy in 1643 and in order to provide for worship, government and a creed for the churches of England and Scotland it called an assembly of 121 clergy and 30 lay scholars to meet at Westminster in July of 1643.
- The Westminster Assembly produced a Directory for Worship, a Form of Government (Presbyterian) and in 1646 the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Longer Catechisms. They were immediately adopted in Scotland but not all in England. The English Puritans refused to adopt the Form of Government. The Shorter Catechism is famous for its first question and answer: *"What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."*
- The Westminster Confession became the standard confession used by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and was the sole confession of the Presbyterian Church in the US until 1967.

VI. Harvard University founded to train pastors (1636)

- Harvard was the first of many universities in the American colonies founded to train pastors. Yale was founded in 1701 and the other Ivy League colleges followed. All began as seminaries to train educated clergy!

VII. James II, King of England (Catholic) overthrown by William of Orange (Protestant) (1688)

- While the Westminster Assembly was working the civil war in England was being won by the Puritan forces led by Oliver Cromwell who became Lord Protector of England. At this time there was no king in England.
- Following Cromwell's death Charles II restored the monarchy with the support of the populace. He declared religious freedom in England. But Charles also forced the Puritans out of the Church of England and they became called Dissenters. This formed the foundation of the later free churches in England.
- Charles sympathized with the Roman Catholic faith and had his son baptized a Catholic. Upon his death he was succeeded by James II who was openly Catholic and who purposed to re-establish England under Catholic control.
- The Protestants of England appealed to William Duke of Orange in Holland who had married Mary, James' daughter, to depose the king. On November 5, 1688

William landed with an army in England and William and Mary were proclaimed joint sovereigns on February 13, 1689. England would remain Protestant.

VIII. Salem witch trials (1692-1693)

- 20 people ended up executed for witchcraft.
- The trials are a classic example of mass hysteria and were fed by superstition and the failure of due process under the law.
- Their excesses contributed to the downfall of the Puritan experiment in America of a united church and state.

IX. The Methodist Movement in England founded by John Wesley (1703-1791)

- John Wesley was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1728. He was the 15th of 18 children. His younger brother Charles became his co-worker in ministry.
- While at Oxford teaching he became part of a group of scholars who were seeking a deeper experience of faith. They focused on study, fasting, the Sacrament, visiting the sick and trying to do these activities on a regular and ongoing basis. They became known as Methodists.
- In 1735 both Charles and John sailed for America where they were to work as missionaries with the Indians. While on shipboard he met and befriended Peter Boehler a Moravian pastor who led him to his conversion experience.
- On Wednesday, May 24, 1738 in Aldersgate in London, Wesley felt *"his heart was strangely warmed"* during a reading of Luther's Commentary on Romans.
- In 1739 Wesley founded his United Societies that practiced his Methodist principles in small groups for spiritual growth. This became the pattern for the later Methodist Church.
- His friend George Whitfield convinced him to begin evangelistic preaching to the working class in England. He became one of the greatest evangelistic preachers in English history. He traveled all over the British Isles giving sermons. Some estimates put the number of miles traveled at 208,000 total and the number of sermons given at 40,000!
- Wesley never wanted to leave the Anglican Church but to reform it. That did not work out. His theology was Arminian in nature in that he believed the gospel was for all people not just the elect. He emphasized accepting Christ and seeking a holy life in response to conversion. He is the founder of the Methodist Church in England and America and was instrumental in the First Great Awakening.

X. The First Great Awakening in England and America (1720-1749)

- Conditions in the early 18th century in England and America were ripe for a new experience of faith and devotion. Two generations after the Puritans in England saw their once vibrant faith reduced to a stale scholastic faith concerned more about right doctrine than real faith. Outside the church rationalism was beginning to critique Christianity which would give rise finally to Deism. Morality was lax and church attendance was low. Finally the beginnings of the Industrial

Revolution were taking place in England and it was a time of great change and turmoil. The stale Christian experience of many had no answers!

- In 1720 Theodore Frelinghuysen became pastor of four Dutch Reformed Churches in New Jersey. He began to preach about the need for a true conversion to Christ, a vibrant devotional life, and lay activity in the church. Revival began to break out in Frelinghuysen's churches.
- He in turn influenced a Presbyterian pastor in New Jersey named Gilbert Tenant who brought revival to his own church and began to teach young pastoral candidates in a log house he built and called the "Log College." This was in contrast to schools like Harvard, Yale and Princeton.
- Soon the church authorities began to question the revival. Two parties emerged in the Congregational, Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Churches: The New School and the Old School.
- The revival began to spread. A Massachusetts preacher and scholar named Jonathan Edwards began to preach for conversion and revival broke out in his church in Northhampton, Massachusetts. Edwards' most famous evangelistic sermon was titled, *"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God!"* Supposedly he read the entire sermon from a manuscript rarely looking up at his congregation but the words were so powerful that weeping and wailing broke out as people were overpowered by their own sinfulness and their need for repentance!
- In 1740 George Whitfield, a friend and co-worker with the Wesleys came to America and began to hold outdoor meetings just like those he and Wesley had done in England. Thousands attended.
- Some estimates put the number of converts during the Awakening as high as 50,000 people. Church attendance and membership swelled as people responded to the power of God. The rationalist critics tried to explain away the conversions as emotional enthusiasm. Those who supported the revival had only one explanation: the power of God!
- The Awakening also spurred new expressions of worship. Chief among these were the new hymns based on poetry and the chief writer of those hymns was Charles Wesley. The Old School Calvinists objected to the new hymns because church singing should be based on the Psalter and the words of Scripture and not free verse! He gave us some of the greatest of the classical hymns: *"And Can It Be That I Should Gain?"*; *"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"*; *"Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"*; *"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"*; *"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"*; *"O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"*; *"Rejoice, the Lord is King"*; and *"Ye Servants of God"*.
- The Awakening stirred a new spirit of humanitarian efforts in America and a new interest in mission to the Native American peoples. It spread a new vital Christian faith all over the Thirteen Colonies and brought many people into the churches. It created divisions within the major denominations but paradoxically also spread a unity of faith and cooperation across those same denominational lines.

XI. Jonathan Edwards – America's greatest theologian (1703-1758)

- Edwards was a New England Presbyterian pastor in the Puritan mold. He graduated from Yale University in 1727 and had one of the keenest minds in the American church at the time. His most famous work is probably: *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* which defended the experiences of those in the Great Awakening.
- Edwards was a great supporter of the revival but also wanted to take the new rationalism and science of men like Isaac Newton and fuse it with the deep Christian experience of the revival. He saw the weeping and other evidences of the revival as testimony to the reality of God.
- He had deeply held Calvinist beliefs and was a life-long opponent of Arminianism. He was named President of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1757 but only held the post for one year before he died of smallpox in 1758. Edwards influenced generations of Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational pastors and theologians in America.