

May 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>

## **18,000 SERMONS TO RESCUE SOULS**

*“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” I TIMOTHY 1:15-17*

Actors and preachers have always been compared to each other. It was no different in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, before the birth of the United States. Harry Stout describes a conversation from that time: “We actors on stage speak of things imaginary, as if they were real and you in the pulpit speak of things real as if they were imaginary.” This statement marked a preacher by the name of George Whitefield, the greatest evangelist in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Stout records how Whitefield responded to this quip: “Therefore,” added Whitefield, ‘I will shout loudly. will not be a velvet-mouthed preacher.” So began God’s calling on one of the greatest preachers in American and European history. It’s been recorded in history that from the time of his conversion in 1739 to his death in 1770, Whitefield was always preaching. Historical record places his sermon count at 18,000 and religious encouragement talks to 12,000. Legend follows him as you read accounts of his preaching ministry. One tale that is not legend is his ability to preach to over 30,000 people at one time. Benjamin Franklin was a contemporary that published much of Whitefield’s sermons and did the scientific calculation for the number of people that could hear Whitefield at one time.

As you might imagine, Whitefield wasn’t accepted by the traditional churches in the UK. Instead, he took a different approach. Instead of preaching within a chapel, he focused on open air preaching. Whitefield would approach a coal mine in England and preach to those who had never heard the gospel. Thousands came to Christ through his ministry. In addition, he believed that his calling was to the orphans in Georgia. He used his preaching ministry to fund the building of an orphanage in Georgia. Here is where many people’s appreciation for Whitefield ends and criticism begins. He was a person of his time. While he did not believe that black people were less than white people, he did encourage the owning of slaves to help with his orphanage operating costs. One thing is distinct in his message of the gospel: he preached to all shades of skin color, which was uncommon during his day. Nevertheless, you only need to research to see that the University of Penn took down a statue of Whitefield in 2020 because of his position on the institution of slavery.

Men, what does Whitefield’s story have to do with us today? We don’t have the gifts that God gave Whitefield, so why bother discussing him? What can we offer to God? Well, that’s exactly the point isn’t it? Whitefield saw himself with the truth of the gospel, just like we need to see ourselves. We are all sinners that have been saved by grace. We tell a story not of ourselves, our achievements, and our failures. We tell a story of our gracious God who saved us. Michael Haykin quotes Whitefield: “I know no other reason...why Jesus has put me into the ministry, than because I am the chief of sinners, and therefore fittest to preach free grace to a world lying in the wicked one.” The preacher’s story is our story. We are all the chief of all sinners, so God can show His immeasurable patience towards a dying world. Never forget God’s grace for you. His grace shows His great love and goodness. What a God we serve!

***Spend some time praising God for His amazing grace towards you. Ask Him for His strength to show and tell others how great He is.***

**For Further Reading: Acts 9:1-31**

