

March 28th and 29th
AMERICA'S GREATEST THEOLOGIAN

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

1776. America's semiquincentennial. 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Our country is gearing up to celebrate in regions all over this country. Men will be celebrated for their impact that they made on our country. George Washington. Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson. One idea that can be missed is the influence of great Christian pastors and thinkers that God used to impact the United States. One of those pastors is named Jonathan Edwards. Most historians refer to Edwards as America's greatest theologian. He actually died from a smallpox inoculation before America was founded. He had just been elected thirty-five days earlier as president of the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton University). However, Edwards' legacy lives on in the resurgence of Reformed theology in the last thirty years.

You may not have ever heard of Jonathan Edwards, but you may have heard of a pastor named John Piper. Piper was a young scholar who encountered Edwards' writing, "The End for Which God Created the World." After Piper read the paper, his thinking was forever altered. God used Edwards' emphasis in his book to influence John Piper's book "Desiring God," which has spawned Desiring God Ministries. Hear this quote from John Piper, "God is most glorified when you are satisfied in Him." Another way to put it is to ask a question from the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Piper changes one word to answer this way: "the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever." Piper's fire was initiated and stoked by Jonathan Edwards' words on God's glory.

Have you ever considered researching America's First Great Awakening? Revival broke out across the colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. Edwards's church in Northampton was near the epicenter of the revival. Imagine having forty to fifty people coming to your house every day wondering about the condition of the soul! That was Edwards' reality. His most famous sermon was entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." It sounds like a harsh sermon, but I would suggest that you look it up and read it, since you can access it online for free. While you may envision a preacher yelling and raising his voice as he preached, this wasn't Edwards' style. He mostly read his full manuscript sermons and rarely looked up to the people. It's the vivid imagery that God used so powerfully: a spider held over the fire of hell that is only held up because of God's mercy.

What does Edwards have to do with us as men today? Even as Edwards was used by God to write extensively on the nature of true revival (his books are used today to help decipher true and false conversion), he was first a pastor...a pastor that preached God's Word weekly in the rural village of Northampton. He was a shepherd there for 23 years, before he was fired by his church by a vote of 230 to 23. The controversy had to do with communion. He had inherited a church that allowed unbelievers to participate. Edwards began to preach differently from the historic roots of his church. Here's the unbelievable thing: after being dismissed, Edwards continued to preach weekly for fifteen months while they searched for his replacement! Edwards was dismissed because he stood for truth above popularity. He was committed to God's truth that is found in God's Word. Here's a question that we must all face as men: are we committed more to God or to people's opinion? How you answer that question will dictate how you live your life today.

Spend some time thanking God for people that have taught you God's truth. Ask God to help you pass the baton to others.

For Further Reading: Deuteronomy 32