

## Heroes of the Faith - Catherine Booth

### I. Introduction: What is a 'hero'?

- **Recap:** Manuel - Richard Baxter; Josh - Reinhard Bonke; Mum - Amy Carmichael; today - Catherine Booth
- Something that all of these people have in common is that they loved Jesus and devoted their lives to him.
- World's definition of **'Hero':** *a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements or noble qualities*
- Whilst it is good to admire people for their courage, what they have achieved or their qualities, I wonder if God's definition of 'hero' or a 'successful life' may be different?
- What if God's measurement is our obedience to his unique call for our lives?
- **John 14:15 (NLT)**  
*'If you love me, obey my commandments'*
- Dare to suggest that all these people that we have looked at so far, and will continue to look at today, are just ordinary people, like me and you, who chose to live their life in obedient surrender to God.
- In fact, I'm sure that many, if not all of them, would cringe at the label 'hero' and would point to the goodness of God.

### • Example of Reinhard Bonke:

- Grew up thinking of himself as the 'nil boy' — youngest child in the family, his mother wanted him to be a girl and constantly reminded him of that fact, his mischievous personality as a child got him into trouble, he didn't achieve well in school, he failed as a carpenter despite trying desperately to succeed at it, after completing a theology degree in Wales, he was told it wasn't recognised for qualifying as a minister in Germany, the mission board said they wouldn't send him to South Africa, even when in Africa, he spent the first few months rejected by his missionary mentor and saw very little fruit in his first few weeks where he spent his time out on the streets singing with his guitar. But he continued to obey the call of God and even before he saw the millions coming to know Christ, I believe the Father looked and said 'hero'

### • Why do I challenge the idea of a hero at all?

- Perhaps you are listening today and are tempted to disqualify yourself
- Perhaps you have heard about some of these men and women of God (and others who we haven't had time to look at in the series) and somehow feel as though they are in a different category to yourself; that there are 'heroes of the faith' and there's just us "normal people".
- I want us to have hope this morning, that God uses ordinary people who simply say yes to him. **We can all be heroes of the faith** (whether that is saying yes to travelling across the world to be a missionary, or yes to travelling across the road and knocking

the door of your neighbour, or perhaps saying yes to writing that book that has been burdening your heart, maybe it is a yes to writing a birthday card for that elderly neighbour who lives on their own, perhaps its a yes to starting an orphanage, perhaps a yes to adoption, a yes to quitting your job, a yes to sticking at your job though it feels impossibly difficult)

- Each of these heroes, I would suggest, are heroes, not so much for their qualities or achievements, but for their obedience and surrender and we can all do that in our contexts.

## II. Who was Catherine Booth?

- Famously known for being married to William Booth, and co-founding the 'Salvation Army' — sometimes referred to as the '*Mother of the Salvation Army*'.

### Childhood

- Born in Derby, England in 1829; died in 1890
- Parents were both methodists, and her father was an occasional lay preacher
- Growing up she had read the Bible 8 times by the age of 12
- Reputation for caring deeply about animals and the poor

### Adult life

- Married William Booth in 1855; and together they had 8 children
- **Catherine was an advocate for women's rights.** She wrote a pamphlet in 1859 called '*Female Ministry: Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel*'. This was controversial as women preachers were not widely accepted by the Church. But as well as writing about why she felt it was justified in scripture, she also began preaching in different settings and got many invitations to do so.
- As well as defending women's rights to preach, she was an advocate for vulnerable women in society and particularly young girls in prostitution.
- At the time, girls as young as 13 were in prostitution as the age of consent in England was deemed to be 13. Families in poverty would sell their daughters and she felt this was not right. She wrote to Queen Victoria about this and also organised a petition that contributed to the raising of the age of consent from 13 to 16. **She influenced the law**
- In her early years of marriage, her husband William was an evangelist preacher as part of the Methodist movement however in 1865 they left their life of formal ministry and moved to East London. William had felt his role was constrictive and his heart was to be a travelling evangelist amongst the most needy and broken.
- **Context of East London at time:** very poor, high rates of crime, thousands of children in prostitution; high rates of disease. "Worst place in England" at the time. As many as 100,000 unemployed, uneducated children became petty thieves. Lack of sanitation bred Cholera. Small pox common, matchbox makers suffered from fussy jaw.
- Wasn't an easy invitation to accept or a comfortable place to go; they were willing to obey

- Their ministry together started with open air meetings and evangelism meetings in tents
- Eventually, this evolved into the 'Christian Mission' and began to spread outside of London
- Preaching the gospel and seeing salvation was the main focus of their ministry but they had several social justice ministries as well: providing shelter for the homeless, running soup kitchens, helping women and young girls escape prostitution and abuse.
- **In 1878:** name was changed to 'Salvation Army' with William Booth as its General-superintendent "*Go straight for souls and go for the worst*" - William Booth
- This very much continued the work of the Christian mission with a clear evangelistic limb accompanied by a social justice work: "soup, soap and salvation".
- Today, nearly 200 years on, the Salvation Army is still going strong and is in 126 countries around the world. Though we often look at William as being the founder of this movement, one biography actually credits Catherine as being the founder. Either way, they both served together and gave their lives to serve the poor and see the lost come to know Jesus.

### III. What can we learn from Catherine? How can we apply these things today?

- Already touched on the fact that her life was lived in obedience to the call of God; there are 3 other key lessons that I want to focus on today.

#### (1) Sometimes God uses *new methods* to fulfil old commissions

- The Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 is to '*go and make disciples of all nations*' — both Catherine and William were passionate about seeing the lost come to know Jesus.
- Catherine, alongside her husband William, were willing to think outside of the box when it came to obeying this.
- They together agreed to leave the security of traditional church structures when William resigned from his role as a methodist evangelist. William had been frustrated that he had been given local pastorates and refused the permission from the Board to travel as an evangelist and so he resigned with Catherine fully supporting this decision.
- They decided together, that the traditional way of doing Church at that time, wasn't the best way of reaching the poorest and most broken.
- When William resigned, they didn't know what their lives would look like. In fact the Salvation Army only came about 17 years later.

#### **Our context:**

- As a Church family, we have been on a journey of letting go of Church structures as we know them to be in order to embrace the Great Commission.
- Like the Booths in the 1800's, we have felt frustrated and restricted by our "Sunday Christianity" and are therefore stepping out, not knowing what it will look like, but saying yes to Jesus anyway.

- We're not called to set up another Salvation Army, but to be obedient in our context to promptings and ideas of the Holy Spirit.
- We can ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware of the needs on our doorstep that we might reach the lost.

- **Isaiah 43:19**

*"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"*

- **Message translation:**

*"Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it?"*

- Do you perceive the new today?
- We can be so quick to want to replicate and copy and yet when we look at the life of Jesus, he rarely did a miracle the same way twice (he might say a word, spit in the mud, touch a person, a person touch him). He didn't speak to all people in the same way (*come follow me, stay here and tell the people what God has done, don't say a word to anyone*)
- We have to be willing to see the new methods for obeying the old Commission
- The Holy Spirit is always doing a new thing
- We cannot hold on to tradition for traditions sake and especially if there are better and more creative ways of reaching the lost — social media, entertainment

(2) **Obedience is often demanded in the face of opposition**

- In the early days, the work of the Salvation Army faced much opposition; not only by the world but also the Church
- The Church of England in particular was extremely hostile to the activities of the Booth's and sceptical of the way that they integrated their lives with the broken.
- Catherine and William went to places that others weren't prepared to go (Public houses, brothels). They adapted hymns to the popular secular tunes of the day (equivalent to singing worship songs to the tunes of Beyoncé and Beiber). They had a militant approach using military terminology and labels, members would wear uniforms and they conducted marches. They were controversial in the Church for advocating the rights of women to preach.
- Outside of the Church, they faced opposition from alcohol companies because they advocated total abstinence from alcohol. Pubs and bars were angry to be losing their customers and owners of brothels were losing prostitutes and therefore their business.
- The press often misinterpreted the methods of the Booths and the Salvation Army and accused them of only being out to make money for themselves.

- **Matthew 5:10-12**

*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"*

- Persecution is to be expected for us as believers and especially when we step out in obedience
- Catherine and William modelled what it was to keep going despite people misunderstanding them and their intentions
- And in later years, attitudes had begun to change. The Booths had audiences with Kings, Emperors and Presidents. In 2002, long after his death, William Booth was named among the 100 Greatest Britons in a BBC poll.
- Ultimately, the opinions of man are blowing in the wind. The same crowd that cheered 'Hosanna to the King' were shouting for his crucifixion just days later.
- If only God's opinion matters on *that* day, then only his opinion matters now. Whether we receive recognition and accolade on this side of eternity or not, it doesn't matter. Are we willing to endure persecution? Because it is coming to the church in the West and to those who hold to the radical teachings of Jesus.

(3) **Faith looks like something: saving souls may start with serving soup**

- **James 2:26**

*'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead'*

- The Salvation Army have a motto: 'Soup, soap and salvation'
- Both William and Catherine recognised that they needed to meet the physical needs of people as well as their spiritual needs. They did this by feeding the poor, offering homes to the homeless.
- Catherine also acted on her faith by campaigning against issues of injustice and she saw change.

- **Proverbs 31:8**

*'Let us speak up for those who can't speak for themselves, defending the rights of the widows and orphans'*

- In the year of her death William published a book, which Catherine had influenced, called 'In Darkest England and the Way Out'.
- This documented extreme poverty and proposed various welfare and employment schemes, many of which have since been adopted. These included homes for orphans, alcohol rehabilitation centres and refuges for women and girls escaping prostitution and sex trafficking.
- Ministering to physical needs is connected to ministering to spiritual needs

- **Ephesians 2:10**

*'For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'*

- God has created us to do good things. We don't earn our salvation by our works (the verse before in Ephesians 2:9 addresses this *'by grace you have been saved... not by works'*)
- What can *you* do with the skills *you* have been given to act on your faith?
  - Perhaps making disciples starts with mowing your neighbours garden

- Perhaps reaching the lost starts by clearing litter off the streets of your neighbourhood
- Perhaps saving souls starts by inviting somebody over for dinner and cooking them a meal?
- Heidi Baker, who is a missionary out in Mozambique, has a saying 'love looks like something'
- Few years ago we heard a great message at All Nations, people have these noisy headphones on (all the chaos of life) when we start to meet their physical needs, we turn down the noise so that they are able to hear the Good news.

#### IV. Conclusion

- What are the key takeaways this morning?
- **We can all be heroes of the faith** because we can all say yes to Jesus; if obedience is success in God's eyes, we don't need to have special talents and gifting
- Lessons we can learn from the life of Catherine Booth:
  1. Sometimes God uses new methods to fulfil old commissions — are we able to perceive the new? Are we willing to embrace it?
  2. Obedience is often demanded in the face of opposition — there is no guarantee that people will like us or even understand us. Are we willing to live for the opinion of one?
  3. Faith looks like something; saving souls may start with serving soup — encourage you to think about the ways you can act on your faith this week.