

Church History (65): Charles Haddon Spurgeon: World-wide Ministry

Having seen Spurgeon's early years (early life, conversion, ministry at Waterbeach, and move to London), we come this week to consider his world-wide ministry (the Metropolitan Tabernacle, sermons and books, pastor's college, and orphanage).

I. Charles Haddon Spurgeon: World-wide Ministry

1. *Metropolitan Tabernacle*. After months of relocating to London, the church building became too small. "Expansion of the facilities led to a few months of meetings in Exeter Hall which held 5,000, but it proved too small as well; sometimes it was so bloated with people that thousands had to remain outside" (Nettles).¹ "For three years Spurgeon used the Surrey Gardens Music Hall as the site of his morning service (1858-1861), and the evening congregation continued to meet, though terribly overcrowded, in the New Park Street Chapel. These were years of tremendous labor and also of great blessing" (Dallimore).² "Eventually it was seen that the only solution was a completely new structure. This was finished in 1861 and called at Spurgeon's request, The Metropolitan Tabernacle" (Nettles).³ "In 1855 Spurgeon reprinted the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, and when the Metropolitan Tabernacle was being built in 1859, he had a copy placed under the foundation stone" (Murray).⁴ "I have thought it right to reprint in a cheap form this excellent list of doctrines, which were subscribed to by the Baptist Ministers in the year 1689. We need a banner because of the truth; it may be that this small volume may aid the cause of the glorious gospel by testifying plainly what are its leading doctrines. May the Lord soon restore unto His Zion a pure language, and may her watchmen see eye to eye" (CHS).⁵ The first Sunday service in the Metropolitan Tabernacle was held on Sunday, March 31, 1861. "The meetings celebrating the opening of the Tabernacle lasted for two weeks. Several other ministers joined Spurgeon and his people throughout those grand weeks. One day was given over to the exposition of The Five Points of Calvinism. Spurgeon's first words in the new building clearly declared his doctrinal position and his overall purpose: 'I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist; I do not hesitate to take the name Baptist; but if I am asked what is my creed, I reply, It is Jesus Christ...Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the Gospel, who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth and the life'" (Dallimore).⁶

When Spurgeon first came to London, he usually preached "three times on the Lord's-day, and five nights every week." "Within two or three years, it was considerably exceeded, for it was no uncommon experience for me to preach twelve or thirteen times a week, and to travel hundreds of miles by road or rail" (CHS).⁷ In "after years, when weakness and pain prevented" him from such a burden, he ordinarily preached twice on Sunday and once on Thursday. From the beginning of his London ministry, Spurgeon edited his Sunday morning sermons on Monday, which were published as a "Penny Pulpit." "A sermon was published each week and was circulated among subscribers throughout the British Isles, in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and translations were being made into German, Dutch, French, Italian, and Swedish. There was also a very large circulation in America. Moreover, at the end of each year a volume containing fifty-two sermons was produced, and for that there was a similar international

¹ Tom Nettles, *The Baptists*, 3:35

² Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 75

³ Tom Nettles, *The Baptists*, 3:35

⁴ Iain Murray, *Spurgeon Vs Hyper-Calvinism*, 14

⁵ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 314-315

⁶ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 99

⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:81

demand" (Dallimore).⁸ In speaking of God's blessings upon these printed sermons, Spurgeon said: "Seldom does a day pass, and certainly never a week, without letters from all sorts of places, even at the utmost ends of the earth, bringing the glad tidings of the salvation of souls, by means of one or other of the printed sermons."⁹

At the end of 1854, New Park Street membership numbered only 313. By the end of 1860, the membership had more than quadrupled to reach almost 1500. The net increase in membership during the New Park Street days grew at the average rate of 197 persons per year. The next ten years saw outstanding growth. Between 1861 and 1870, the average church additions increased some 448 persons per year. That netted 267 persons for each year of the decade. By 1861, the membership stood at 1,875. At the end of that particular decade, 1870, the membership had more than doubled again and had risen to 4,165. Over the next ten years, 1871-1880, the additions to the church reflected something of the same rate. On the average, 446 persons per year joined the Tabernacle congregation. Over this period of time, however, the church only netted 111 persons per year. The largest number of people to come into the Metropolitan Tabernacle in any given year occurred in 1872 when 571 persons were added to the church. In 1871, the membership numbered 4,165; in the next ten years, the church reached 5,284 to become the largest evangelical church in the world.¹⁰

2. *Sermons and books.* The fruits of Spurgeon's preaching labors are bound mostly in the *New Park Street Pulpit* (six volumes) and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (fifty-five volumes). The combined sixty-three volumes total 3,563 sermons. In addition to his sermons, he published *Lectures to My Students*, *A Treasury of David* (a seven-volume commentary on the book of Psalms), *A Commentary on Matthew*, and more than 100 additional books on various topics, including several daily devotionals such as *Morning and Evening*, *Faith's Checkbook*, and *Words of Wisdom*. Some of Spurgeon's lesser-known books would be *John Ploughman's Talk; or, Plain Advice for Plain People*, *Come, Ye Children: A Book for Parents and Teachers on the Christian Training of Children*, *Around the Wicket Gate; or, A friendly Talk with Seekers Concerning Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*, and *Counsel for Christian Workers; or, How to Lead Sinners to the Savior*. One of his earliest and most popular books was *All of Grace*. "The object of this book is the salvation of the reader. He who spoke and wrote it will be greatly disappointed if it does not lead many to the Lord Jesus." From 1862 to his death, he published a monthly magazine, *The Sword and Trowel*, which contained "news of the religious world in general, with his comments upon it, but especially of the Tabernacle and its associated organizations. There were also biblical expositions and warm spiritual articles and exhortations to Christian zeal. One of its most remarkable features was the series of book reviews. These were virtually all written by Spurgeon himself, and they manifest something of the vast extent of his reading and of his ability to express an all-covering opinion in a few words" (Dallimore).¹¹

While Spurgeon rarely preached consecutively through books (or passages), his sermons could rightly be called textual exposition. "For Spurgeon, true exposition meant, in Puritan fashion, using the whole Bible and all its doctrines in the unfolding of any one portion of Scripture. His preaching, virtually without fail, found a verse within its context that provided a window into the rich doctrinal content of the whole Bible. His message developed as an extended exposition of some aspect of theology

⁸ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 95-96

⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:323

¹⁰ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 284-285

¹¹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 195

hammered out for the benefit of saints and sinners in his congregation" (Nettles).¹² "Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant. We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree, and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. Our range of subjects is all but boundless, and we cannot, therefore, be excused if our discourses are threadbare and devoid of substance. If we speak as ambassadors for God, we need never complain of want of matter, for our message is full to overflowing. The entire gospel must be presented from the pulpit; the whole faith once delivered to the saints must be proclaimed by us" (CHS).¹³

Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Savior, and of the way to reach Him. Justification by faith should be far more than it is the daily testimony of Protestant pulpits; and if with this master-truth there should be more generally associated the other great doctrines of grace, the better for our churches and our age. If with the zeal of Methodists, we can preach the doctrine of Puritans a great future is before us. The fire of Wesley, and the fuel of Whitfield, will cause a burning which shall set the forests of error on fire, and warm the very soul of this cold earth. More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. Salvation is a theme for which I would fain enlist every holy tongue. I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of men of God. To have faithfully unveiled the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ will be in the final judgment accounted worthier service than to have solved the problems of the religious Sphinx, or to have cut the Gordian knot of apocalyptic difficulty. Blessed is that ministry of which CHRIST IS ALL.¹⁴

"Probably never in the history of Christendom, at least up to Spurgeon's point in time, has one man's messages touched more people. And all that happened before the days of mass communication where a preacher can now preach to millions of people through the electronic media. The sheer magnitude of Spurgeon's ministry in his writing and preaching was unparalleled in his day, and in many respects, in ours" (Drummond).¹⁵ Above all else, Spurgeon was an evangelist. While applying the gospel to the saints, he always had an eye to the sinner. Spurgeon once said, he mirrored his ministry after that of George Whitefield. Such an open and free proclamation of the gospel, often brought Spurgeon in conflict with other Baptist ministers who were higher (hyper) in their Calvinism. Spurgeon referred to this conflict as "the first serious attack" on his ministry.¹⁶ "Spurgeon's congregation was one of about 1,370 Baptist congregations in England, all of which were Calvinistic or Particular. Perhaps the most known Baptist in London was James Wells (1803-1872). Prior to Spurgeon, his Surrey Tabernacle was the largest Baptist church in England. Thus, no sooner did Spurgeon begin to publish his weekly sermons, Wells published a scathing critique of Spurgeon in the *Earthen Vessel* (a monthly Baptist magazine). "Wells believed that the newcomer's preaching was dangerous, superficial and deceptive. Spurgeon's natural gifts were indeed indisputable but Wells had doubts whether he was converted and warned, 'A man cannot preach with any success what he does not know'" (Murray).¹⁷ Iain Murray argues, that it

¹² Tom Nettles, *The Baptists*, 3:38-39

¹³ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:72

¹⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 1:82-83

¹⁵ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 331

¹⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:35

¹⁷ Iain Murray, *Spurgeon Vs Hyper-Calvinism*, 46

wasn't that Wells was jealous of Spurgeon, but that he genuinely believed his Calvinism was defective. "Wells sincerely believed that the Calvinistic witness which he had sought to maintain in London for over a quarter of a century was the only genuine Calvinism. For him the idea that all men should be called to faith in Christ, as Spurgeon preached, was 'Fullerism,' that is to say, the 'error' introduced among the Baptist by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and his 'mongrel Calvinist' friends towards the end of the previous century. Christ is only the Savior of the elect and therefore it cannot be the duty of the non-elect to believe in Him for a salvation not provided for them. To assert the opposite was stigmatized as 'duty-faith' error" (Murray).¹⁸

I do not think I differ from any of my Hyper-Calvinistic brethren in what I do believe; but I differ from them in what they do not believe. I do not hold any less than they do, but I hold a little more, and, I think, a little more of the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Not only are there a few cardinal doctrines, by which we can steer our ship North, South, East, or West; but as we study the Word, we shall begin to learn something about the North-west and North-east, and all else that lies between the four cardinal points. The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one Book of the Bible, 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired Word, that 'it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.' I see, in one place, God in providence presiding over all; and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases. That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. The fault is in our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is fore-ordained, *that is true*; and if I find, in another Scripture, that man is responsible for all his actions, *that is true*; and it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring.¹⁹

3. *Pastor's College*. Of all his additional ministries, Spurgeon referred to this as "his first-born and best beloved."²⁰ In his first year in London, Spurgeon met a young man named Thomas Medhurst. He has been converted under Spurgeon's ministry and began preaching "in some of London's roughest districts." Once a week Medhurst visited Spurgeon for an afternoon of instruction in theology and ministerial work. "In no time, other young men, moved by the spiritual fervor of Spurgeon's preaching, expressed their desire to have the same training. They too were zealous for God and were busy preaching in mission halls or on the street corners, but they were sorely in need of education" (Dallimore).²¹ In 1861 when the Tabernacle was opened, classes were moved to the basement, and in 1873 a separate building was built. "The course at the college lasted merely two years, and except in the case of a few who could afford to pay, the tuition and board were free, and clothing, books, and even pocket money were provided. There were no examinations, no graduation exercises, and no degrees" (Dallimore).²²

¹⁸ Iain Murray, *Spurgeon Vs Hyper-Calvinism*, 48

¹⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:176

²⁰ Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 405

²¹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biograph*, 103-104

²² Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biograph*, 105

"By 1891, 845 men had been trained. Of these many broke up fresh ground and formed new churches in England, but others carried the Gospel to the ends of the earth, Morocco, The Falkland Islands, Tasmania, South Africa, the United States being among the many countries profited by their labors" (Murray).²³ In reflecting on the College, Spurgeon himself said: "The Pastor's College (commenced in 1856) has unceasingly been remembered of the God of Heaven, to whom all engaged in it offer reverent thanksgiving. When it was commenced, I had not even a remote idea of whereunto it would grow. There were springing up around me, as my own spiritual children, many earnest young men who felt an irresistible impulse to preach the gospel; and yet, with half an eye, it could be seen that their want of education would be a sad hinderance to them. It was not in my heart to bid them cease their peaching; and, had I done so, they would, in all probability, have ignored my recommendation. As it seemed that they would preach, though their attainments were very slender, no other course was open but to give them an opportunity to educate themselves for the work."²⁴

From 1861 (with the opening of the Tabernacle), Spurgeon gave a weekly lecture every Friday afternoon. Many of these were eventually published in three parts as *Lectures to My Students*. Some of the topics covered were: The Minister's Self-watch, The Call to the Ministry, The Preacher's Private Prayer, Our Public Prayer, Sermons—their Matter, On the Choice of a Text, On Spiritualizing, On the Voice, The Minister's Ordinary Conversation, The Holy Spirit in Connection with our Ministry, Earnestness, On Conversion as our Aim, and Illustrations in Preaching. As the students had been instructed through the week by other professors in "classics, mathematics, and divinity," Spurgeon viewed his Friday afternoon lectures as "the sharpening of the pin." "The fashioning of the head, the straightening, the laying on of the metal and the polishing have been done during the week, and then the process concludes with an effort to give point and sharpness" (CHS).²⁵ In his Apology to the first set of published lectures, Spurgeon said: "I am as much at home with my young brethren as in the bosom of my family, and therefore speak without restraint. Generous minds will take this into account in reading these lectures, and I shall hope that all who favor me with their criticisms will be of that noble order."²⁶

Friday afternoon came at last. The old, familiar clock pointed to three; the door opened on the stroke of the hour, the beloved President appeared, and walked up to the desk—Dr Gill's pulpit—while hands clapped, feet stamped, and voices cheered, till he had to hold up his hand, and say, 'Now, gentlemen, do you not think that is enough? The floor is weak, the ceiling is not very high, and, I am sure, you need all the strength you have for your labors.' In those days, the President was in his prime. His step was firm, his eyes bright, his hair dark and abundant, his voice full of sweetest music and sacred merriment. Before him were gathered a hundred men from all parts of the United Kingdom, and not a few from beyond the seas. Many sitting before him were his own sons in the faith. Among his students he was at his ease, as a father in the midst of his own family. The brethren loved him, and he loved them. Soon, the floods of his pent-up wisdom poured forth; the flashes of his matchless wit lit up every face, and his pathos brought tears to all eyes. What weighty and wise discourse he gave us on the subject of peaching! How gently he corrected faults, and encouraged genuine diffidence! What withering sarcasm for all fops and pretenders! After this, came the wise counsel, so kind, so grave, so gracious, so fatherly; then the prayer that lifted us to the mercy-seat, where we caught glimpses of glory, and talked face to face with the Master Himself. Afterwards, the fiving out of the appointments for the next Lord's-day place; the class was

²³ Iain Murry, *An All-Round Ministry*, iv

²⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:137

²⁵ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, v

²⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, v

dismissed for tea, and then came the men who wanted advice. Some were in trouble, others in joy; and the President listened patiently to all their tales; soon he would laugh, and then we would weep. At last, he is through, 'weary in the work, but not weary of it.' His cheery voice gradually dies away as he ascends the stairs to his 'sanctum.' We did not grieve as we parted from him; for we knew that, God willing, on the next Friday afternoon, we should once more see his bright, pleasant face, and hear his wit and wisdom again.²⁷

4. *Almshouses and Orphanage.* Almshouses were houses where widows cared for. "This work was in operation when Spurgeon came to London. He rejoiced to continue it, but after the Tabernacle was opened it became necessary to move these senior citizens to a location closer and more up-to-date. There, he launched the construction of a new building for them. The new structure consisted of seventeen small homes, which, in the manner of the times, were joined together in an unbroken row. The women who filled them—all of them elderly—were provided not only with this housing but also with food and clothing and other necessities" (Dallimore).²⁸ In addition to this, Spurgeon built an orphanage for boys in 1867 and girls in 1879. In total they housed 200 orphans (250 boys and 250 girls). "Everyone at all acquainted with the inner workings of the Orphanage knows with what affection, mingled with reverence, the children at Stockwell always regarded Mr. Spurgeon. He was indeed a father to the fatherless. There was no mistaking the ringing cheer which greeted his arrival; everybody on the premises instantly knew what that shout meant, and passed round the cheering message, 'Mr. Spurgeon has come.'"²⁹ "Whenever Spurgeon visited the orphanage, the children thronged around him. he knew virtually all of them by name, and he always had a penny—a coin of some value in those days—for each of them. He made it a particular point to call on any children who might be in the infirmary, to pray for them and show whatever special kindness he could. From time to time some of the youngsters were converted and asked for baptism, and there were boys who, upon growing up, experienced the call of God, attended the Pastors' College, and went on into a life in the ministry" (Dallimore).³⁰

The orphanage was a lasting demonstration of the fact that Spurgeon's faith was not mere theory but that it produced good works. It was the kind of project that was widely regarded with strong good will, and many were moved both to pray for it and to give toward its support. The Almshouses and the orphanage were, of course, the fruit of Christianity and they stood out in sharp contrast to the lack of such institutions among the unbelievers. England had then its Free Thinkers' Societies and its Agnostic Associations, but those organizations did nothing to help the poor and the suffering. They labored to denounce Christianity but they knew nothing of self-sacrifice for the sake of the needy. Like the Levite in the parable, they 'passed by the other side.' But evangelical Christians had long been associated with the building of homes for the aged and for orphaned children. To an agnostic who one day accosted him and challenged his Christian beliefs, Spurgeon pointed out the failure of the unbelievers' organizations to take on any definite and sustained program of help to the thousands of needy around them. In contrast he pointed to the works that sprang from evangelical Christianity, and he closed the conversation by paraphrasing the triumphant cry of Elijah, vigorously asserting, as well he might, 'The God who answereth by Orphanages, LET HIM BE GOD!'³¹

²⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:140-143

²⁸ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 125

²⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:178-179

³⁰ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 129

³¹ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography*, 129-130