

Session 3:

America

On October 14, 1735, Wesley boarded the ship *Simmonds* bound for Georgia. He was 33 years old. Accompanying him were Charles and two other members of the Holy Club, Benjamin Ingham and Charles Delamotte. Two more cancelled out at the last minute. One was Mr. Hall, Wesley's brother-in-law. He had packed his bags, but at the eleventh hour was granted an Anglican parish and backed out. The other was a Mr. Salmon, who was blocked by friends almost by force.

The Moravians

On the trip over, John not only led worship services on the ship, but also formed a mini Holy Club, a strict regimen of prayer and disciplines like his Oxford group. Also on this voyage he met a group of 26 German Christians, the Moravians, whose influence would change his life forever. They had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1467. After much persecution, in 1715 a Moravian revival broke out at Herrnhut (*The Lord's Watch*) in Saxony under a new leader, Count Nicholas Zinzendorf, and in 1727 they joined the Lutheran Church. Now, on the *Simmonds*, a group of Moravian missionaries traveled from Saxony to their outpost in Georgia. A group of them was already established in Georgia, and had experienced success converting some of the Creek Indians to Christ. So, this second missionary team was crossing over to join them.

The Moravian Church was organized by the followers of the martyr John Hus, as *The Unity of Brethren*. The denomination came to be known as the Moravian Church many years later, in the 18th Century, because most of its members came from the province of Moravia, now the Czech Republic. The denomination was among the first to publish the Bible in everyday language, and easy-to-sing hymnals. They were early in their emphasis on educating women as well as men, and were pioneers of the Protestant missions movement.

The Moravians emphasized the necessity of personal salvation and the authority of the Bible. They focused on Jesus' death on the cross and the sacrificial atonement, and were preoccupied with reestablishing the early church's values and practices. Wesley immediately began learning German so he could converse with them.

Before arriving, the Wesleys and their comrades drew up and signed the following resolutions:

In the name of God, Amen! We, whose names are underwritten, being fully convinced that it is impossible either to promote the work of God among the heathen without an entire union among ourselves, or that such a union should subsist unless each one will give up his single judgment to that of the majority, do agree, by the help of God:—First, that none of us will undertake anything of importance without first proposing it to the other three; secondly, that whenever our judgments differ, any one shall give up his single judgment or inclination to the others; thirdly, that in case of an equality, after begging God's direction, the matter shall be decided by lot. John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Benjamin Ingham, Charles Delamotte.



During the voyage a fierce storm broke and threatened to sink the ship. Wesley was afraid he might die, and marveled at how calmly the Moravians behaved:

At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behavior. Of their humility they had given continued proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were punished, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was not an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die."¹

The Moravians seemed to possess something, spiritually, for which he had struggled all his life yet had not grasped. They influenced his thinking powerfully, as seen in his later writings, and his doctrine of assurance.

Wesley realized he had not mastered fear over death. "I have a sin of fear," he confessed. He saw death as the acid test of faith, a test he failed because he dreaded it. He had put under control many spiritual tyrants, such as the needs for food and sleep, but he was still afraid to die. His religion had failed him. Certainly he was no trembling coward in the face of death. He simply had not mastered it as the Moravians had. So, he sought out the head of the Moravian community, August Spangenberg, and poured out his inner struggles.

Why is it that we can see the faults of others clearly, but cannot see our own? Do you believe in the authority of the Bible as the Moravians did? Does one have to believe in it to be Christian?

After surviving the storm, Wesley became increasingly aware of how he was religious on the outside but spiritually empty in his heart. These Germans lived plain, uncomplicated lives and were constantly joyful. Still, he was not changed. With a sweet spirit and in simple words they tried to explain to him the concept of personal assurance of salvation, through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Later he reflected:

I understood it not: I was too learned and too wise, so that it seemed foolishness unto me; and I continued preaching, and following after, and trusting in that righteousness whereby no flesh can be justified."²



Can a person be "too learned, too wise" to believe in Jesus?

He would not change for two more torturous years. Sometimes we must be utterly humbled before we can hear God's instructions clearly.

The voyage lasted nearly four months, departing England on October 14, 1735 and arriving in America February 6, 1736. He would remain there a few days short of two years.

America!

After a four-month voyage, the ship docked on Peeper (now Cockspur) Island, and John Wesley led the pilgrims in a prayer of thanksgiving. The monument pictured here marks the spot where he landed. His first act was to break open and destroy some rum barrels brought in