

Session 5:

Wesley Unleashed Onto the World

Wesley's "Fourth Day"

The Walk to Emmaus movement warns its attenders of a "Fourth Day," or the often disappointing return from the mountaintop to the real world. After Aldersgate, Wesley experienced a Fourth Day that lasted most of his lifetime. At Aldersgate he had found the assurance that had eluded him all his life. However, immediately afterward he wrote how some old demons still haunted him:

After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations, but I cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He "sent me help from his holy place." And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered; now, I was always conqueror.

Thursday, 25.—The moment I awakened, "Jesus, Master," was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him and my soul waiting on Him continually. Being again at St. Paul's in the afternoon, I could taste the good word of God in the anthem which began, "My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from on generation to another." Yet the enemy injected a fear, "If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change?" I answered (yet not I), "That I know not. But this I know, I have 'now peace with God.' And I sin not today, and Jesus my Master has forbidden me to take thought for the morrow."

John began eagerly telling his family and close friends of his conversion. They reacted with bewilderment. One of his mother's friends, Mrs. Hutton, replied, "If you were not a Christian ever since I knew you, you were a great hypocrite, for you made us all believe you were one." John's brother Samuel reacted with the typical skepticism of both an older brother and a high-churchman. John, Sam wisely diagnosed, was suffering from an acute attack of "enthusiasm," considered a deadly disease among dignified Anglican clergymen. Samuel wrote:

Falling into enthusiasm is being lost without a witness. I pleased myself with the expectation of seeing Jack, but now that is over, and I am afraid of it. I

heartily pray God to stop the progress of this lunacy... What Jack means by his not being a Christian till last month I understand not. Is baptism nothing? ...He must be either unbaptized or an apostate to make his words true.¹

...echoes of Nicodemus the hopelessly institutionalized Pharisee, as he struggled to understand being born again! (John 3:4) John tried to convince his older brother that his conversion was genuine. He pointed out the evidence in others who are converted:

Saw you him that was liar till then and is now a lamb; him that was a drunkard, but now exemplarily sober; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very lusts of the flesh?

But alas, Samuel was not convinced, and remained a staunch high churchman all his life, which ended soon after, on Nov. 6, 1739.

John 7:5 tells us of Jesus, “Even His own brothers did not believe in Him.” Why is it so difficult to share our faith with the people in our own families and our close circle of friends?

Pilgrimage to Germany

Wesley needed someone who would listen and understand. Three weeks after Aldersgate he traveled back to Germany to visit his Moravian friends.

Wednesday, June 7—I determined, if God should permit, to retire for a short time into Germany. I had fully proposed, before I left Georgia, so to do if it should please God to bring me back to Europe. And I now clearly saw the time was come. My weak mind could not bear to be thus sawn asunder. And I hoped the conversing with those holy men who were themselves living witnesses of the full power of faith, and yet able to bear with those that are weak, would be a means, under God, of so establishing my soul that I might go on from faith to faith, and from “strength to strength.”

He wanted to be with Christians who were concretely living out the Christianity he knew only in theory. He needed to study these disciples in detail. He spent the next three months there asking many questions. Here again was the stark contrast of the English Oxford scholar humbly sitting at the feet of German peasants, asking them to teach him, as Apollos learned from Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26). For three months Wesley lived with the simple Moravians. On August 12 he wrote, “I would gladly have spent my life here.” He considered these Christians living proof that the Gospel was true, for unlike the pompous, inert clergy and haughty laity in his own Church of England, they were living out their

faith. From Germany John wrote to his brother Samuel: "I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind that was in Christ, and who walk as He walked."² In Germany he met the head of the Moravian community, Count Zinzendorf, a man near Wesley's equal in social standing and education. However, he was more impressed with Peter Böhler, for he appeared humbler and more Christ-minded than Zinzendorf. John also studied the governmental structure of the Moravians, and what he learned would become the foundation for the organizational principles of his Methodist movement.

The Revival Begins...and the Resistance

Wesley returned to England from Germany highly inspired on Saturday, September 16th, 1738. He wrote, "I began again to declare in my own country the glad tidings of salvation." The day, Sunday, he preached four times. Monday he met with the London Moravian society. On Tuesday he visited the condemned felons at Newgate Prison and preached that evening at Aldersgate Street. The entire week was filled with work. People noticed a marked change in his voice. He was much more at peace. His messages and overall behavior radiated joy. Wesley's new countenance was much talked about. Suddenly he found himself with a brand-new set of friends. He wrote, "One who had long scoffed at spiritual religion" sent word he urgently wanted to talk:

He had all the signs of settled despair, both in his countenance and behaviour. He said he had been enslaved to sin many years, especially to drunkenness... I desired that we might join in prayer. After a short space he rose, and his countenance was no longer sad; he said, "Now I know God loveth me, and hath forgiven my sins, and sin shall not have dominion over me, for Christ hath set me free."³

He wrote again:

At St. Thomas's, a young woman raving mad, screaming and tormenting herself continually; I had a strong desire to speak to her. The moment I began to speak she was still. The tears ran down her cheeks all the time I was telling her 'Jesus of Nazareth is able and willing to deliver you.' ...I expounded...the great power of God with us, and one who had been in despair several years received the witness that she was a child of God.⁴

Mark says of Jesus' ministry, "And the great throng heard Him gladly." (12:37) Jesus knew generally not to go among the Pharisees and people of standing, for almost universally they rejected Him. Rather, He went among the poor and the needy, the nobodies of society. Wesley did the same. Why are these people more