



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

TIM PAULEY

BIOGRAPHY / INTRODUCTION

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Many who serve in our state government, whether as legislators, elected officials, lobbyists, or staff are often driven in their work by a particular belief or issue. Those who seek to follow God should ultimately be driven by one issue, or rather by one person – Jesus Christ. This can be difficult to do in the challenging environment of the statehouse. For this reason our Bible studies during the upcoming regular session will be “Fixing our Eyes on Jesus – A Study of the Life and Ministry of Christ”. Hebrews 12:1-2 exhorts us to “fix our eyes on Jesus” so that we might “run with endurance the race that is set before us”. It is our prayer that such a study will help us to love and treasure Christ more so that we might serve Him more faithfully. Before we begin our study of Jesus Christ, let us find some encouragement and direction from an important figure in our nation’s history.

We often look back to our founding fathers in admiration for the influence they had (and continue to have) on our nation. We recently celebrated the sesquicentennial of West Virginia and honored some of those who had a part in the founding of our state. It is certainly important for us to honor and study the lives of those who had great political influence on our nation and our state. It is even more important to remember and study those who had great spiritual impact on our nation as well.

One of the men who had the greatest spiritual impact on our nation was a New England pastor from the 1700s by the name of Jonathan Edwards. Unfortunately, most of us only know of Edwards by a single sermon, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*”. However he is considered even by secular historians to be the greatest religious thinker to ever come from America. He was a pastor for 23 years who preached many wonderful sermons in addition to “Sinners”. He was a theologian who wrote books that are still influencing people over 200 years later. He was the kindling for the Great Awakening – the spiritual revival that spread over New England and into the South and which greatly influenced the founding of our nation. He was a missionary to Native

Americans and he influenced the missionary movement in his own time and for years to come with his biography of David Brainerd, also a missionary to the Native Americans. John Piper writes of Edwards:

Does any of us know what an incredible thing it is that this man, who was a small-town pastor for 23 years in a church of 600 people, a missionary to Indians for 7 years, who reared 11 faithful children, who worked without the help of electric light, or word processors or quick correspondence, or even sufficient paper to write on, who lived only until he was 54, and who died with a library of 300 books – that this man led one of the greatest awakenings of modern times, wrote theological books that have ministered for 200 years and did more for the modern missionary movement than anyone of his generation?!

HIGHLIGHTS OF JONATHAN EDWARD’S LIFE

Edwards was born in 1703. He had 10 sisters (no brothers). He received extensive religious training from his father and could read Latin by the age of six and Greek and Hebrew by age 12. He began studying at Yale College at the age of 16. He graduated and received his masters degree from Yale (which at the time existed to prepare men for the ministry). He was married to Sarah Pierpont and together they raised 11 children. In 1726 he became an assistant to His grandfather, Samuel Stoddard, who was pastor of Northampton Church in Massachusetts. In 1729 Stoddard died and Edwards became pastor of the church, where he served for the next 21 years. All during this ministry we was preaching sermons and writing books that would have a great impact both then and now. In 1750 he was voted out of his church after 23 years of ministry. This was due to a number of reasons, primarily of which was his requirement of a credible profession of faith before members were allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper. He ended up settling in Stockbridge, Mass., a frontier mission station where he served as a pastor and missionary to the Native Americans for seven years. In 1758 he became president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) though he died just a short time later the same year.

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: **TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON**, TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDIES: **THURSDAYS NOON** TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

Jonathan Edwards certainly lived an eventful and influential life. I hope this brief sketch might encourage you to read more about him and more of his sermons and books. There are three items in particular which can help us make our study of Christ more effective.

RESOLUTIONS

As a young man Jonathan Edwards wrote a series of 70 resolutions to which it said he referred every day until he died. These give us great insight into what motivated Edwards and can be a great encouragement to us in our own pursuit to know Jesus and serve Him better. Here are just a few examples:

7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

17. Resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS

One of Edwards's most influential works was published in 1746 and entitled *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. In this work Edwards teaches us that to truly see the glory, majesty, and holiness of God and of Jesus Christ will necessarily stir our affections. He differentiates between mere emotionalism that comes and goes and a genuine working of God in our hearts that changes our lives. When we truly see Christ, we will rejoice in Him. We will treasure Him. We will want to forsake sin and pursue Him. Consider Edwards words:

"Will any say that the saints in heaven, in beholding the face of their Father, and the glory of their Redeemer, and contemplating his wonderful works, and particularly his laying down his life for them, have their hearts nothing moved and affected, by all which they behold or consider?"

If all we know of Edwards comes from our opinion of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" then we may see him as a gloomy, morose, "hell-fire and brimstone" preacher. To the contrary, he was a man who had a "God-entranced vision of all things" who loved Christ supremely and sought to share Him with others. Indeed may our own affections be moved in our study of Christ and what He has done for us.

DIVERSE EXCELLENCIES OF JESUS CHRIST

One of Edwards's best known sermons was entitled "*The Admirable Conjunction of Diverse Excellencies in Christ Jesus*". It is taken from Revelation 5:5-6 where Jesus is referred to as both a lion and a lamb. Edwards notes and wonders at how such diverse or different qualities are both present in the person of Jesus Christ. He goes on to note other diverse qualities found in Christ such as His glory and humility and His justice and grace. It is this framework of the diverse qualities found in Christ that will guide our studies this session. It is my prayer that this will capture our attention, our hearts, and our affections as we consider those excellencies shown in who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us.

CONCLUSION

In Hebrews 12 the author writes:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

He is writing to group of people who have professed faith in Christ or are at least seriously considering it. They are now facing great difficulties and persecution and are tempted to turn their backs on Christ. In the first eleven chapters he shows them that Christ is better than anything else they might pursue. Now he urges them to "fix their eyes on Jesus".

We live in days when it can be difficult to faithfully follow Christ as well. It can be challenging to wholeheartedly pursue Christ in the environment of politics in the statehouse. Let us "fix our eyes on Jesus" as we study His life and work. Let us resolve with Jonathan Edwards to have our hearts and affections captured by who He is and all that He has done for us!

¹ Piper, John. The Pastor as Theologian: Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards. <http://www.desiringgod.org>.