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The Diverse Excellencies of Jesus Christ

In the world of government and politics, we often have “heroes” - people we admire and look up to. This is demonstrated as we walk through offices in the capitol and see portraits of John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan hanging in offices. We highly esteem our country’s founding fathers and the great knowledge and wisdom they displayed in setting up our system of government. We may admire the stands they took on various issues, or the character qualities they exhibited in their lives and public service. We may try to emulate them in our own work in the statehouse. They are leaders who have greatly influenced and motivated us.

It is certainly important to admire, study, and emulate the lives and work of government leaders from the past. In these challenging days of the special session, it may be inspiring for us to consider the life and work of one of the “heroes” from our nation’s Christian history. Jonathan Edwards was certainly such a hero. His life, ministry, and writings can be a great encouragement to us as he points us to our one and only true hero – our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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?¹

Unfortunately, most only know Edwards from his most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. From that sermon, he is usually stereotyped as the puritanical, fundamentalist, hell-fire and brimstone preacher. This does not accurately describe Edward’s work and ministry at all. He preached many other sermons and wrote many books about Christ, His work, and the Christian life.

He is well known for his *“Resolutions”*, a collection of 70 statements written as a young man regarding his commitment to Christ.

Jonathan Edwards’ greatest written work was a book published in 1746 called *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. In this work, Edwards teaches us that to truly see the glory, majesty, and holiness of God and all that Jesus Christ has done for us will necessarily stir our affections – it will increase our love for Him.

What makes Jonathan Edwards one of my heroes is a series of events that took place in 1750. Edwards was pastor of a historic, well-known church outside of Boston. He was quite famous as a both a pastor and a writer. After 23 years of faithful, fruitful ministry, he was voted out of his church. He was fired! Many of those involved were part of his extended family. The primary reason for dismissal was his requirement of a credible profession of faith before members could participate in the Lord’s Supper. So, what did this brilliant pastor, theologian, and author do? He preached an encouraging, compassionate farewell message to his church. He continued, at the congregation’s request, to continue preaching for them for the next 15 months while they found his replacement. He then spent the next seven years at a frontier mission station serving as a pastor and missionary to native Americans. How could Edwards serve so faithfully in the face of such “failure” and disappointment? It was because of his deep understanding of the glory of God and of all that Christ had done for him.

Though usually only remembered for his *“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”* message, many consider another to be Jonathan Edwards greatest sermon. In 1738, he preached a message titled, *The Admirable Conjunction of Diverse Excellencies in Christ Jesus*. In it Edwards shared about the “diverse excellencies” – the contrasting qualities or characteristics that are found in the person and work of

Christ. He began with the striking passage in Revelation 5:5-6:

5 ... And one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

These amazing verses are describing Jesus Christ. John is told it is the "**Lion of Judah**" who is worthy to open the scroll. As he is looking for the lion, what does he see – "**a Lamb standing as if slain**". The two contrasting descriptions of Jesus Christ are stunning – a lion and a lamb. The lion excels in strength and in majesty of appearance and voice. The lamb excels in meekness and patience and is sacrificed for food. Christ is compared to both in the text. Edwards goes on to describe several of these contrasting qualities that are found in our Savior, Jesus Christ. I believe his understanding of Who Christ is and all that He has done for us are what motivated him to such faithful ministry. If we also can get a clearer vision of the glory of Christ, it can be a great encouragement to us as well.

Infinite Highness and Infinite Condescension.

Jesus Christ is God and is infinitely great and high above all. He is "King of kings and Lord of lords". Yet from His infinite highness, He condescended to come to earth to serve, suffer, and die for us. Though God He "took the form of a servant" and "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Infinite Majesty and Transcendent Meekness.

As God, Christ is a person of infinite majesty. He is the LORD who has heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool, and is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and of whose dominion there is no end. Yet we see His marvelous example of meekness and quietness of spirit as He was silent as He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

Deepest Reverence Towards God and Equality with God.

Though God – equal with God in holiness and glory, Christ demonstrated reverence as He prayed to and worshipped His Heavenly Father.

Infinite Worthiness of Good, and the Greatest Patience under Sufferings of Evil.

Jesus was completely innocent and holy. He deserved only the infinite love of His Father and the worship of all people. Yet He endured that greatest of sufferings on our behalf.

An Exceeding Spirit of Obedience, with Supreme Dominion over Heaven and Earth.

Christ is the Lord over all things. Yet He perfectly obeyed His Father in all things as He lived here on earth. He was obedient even to the point of dying on the cross for us.

Absolute Sovereignty and Perfect Resignation.

Though as God, Christ is completely sovereign over all things, He demonstrated a wonderful resignation to His Father's

will. This is nowhere better demonstrated than when He suffered in the garden and prayed, "**Not as I will, but as You will**", and "**Your will be done**" (Matt. 26:39, 42).

Infinite justice and infinite grace.

As God, Christ is holy and just and hates sin. As sinners, each one of us are under His judgment. Yet He is infinitely gracious and merciful. He suffered and died to take the punishment we deserved upon Himself that we might be forgiven. These "diverse excellencies" of justice and grace are nowhere more vividly demonstrated at the cross. Christ satisfied justice when He by His grace took that punishment for us as He suffered and died. When we turn from our sin and put our faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven. No wonder we sing, "Amazing grace"!

Edwards concludes that such "diverse excellencies", such contrasting qualities could only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. He was truly God became man. This is certainly beyond our ability to fully understand or explain. But joining with Jonathan Edwards in contemplating these qualities can bring us to a knowledge of the salvation God has provided for us through Christ.

It can also bring us great encouragement as we seek to – like Edwards – faithfully serve the Lord in difficult times. The writer of Hebrews reminded those who were facing great persecution and trials of this very thing:

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

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

Resources

The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards.

<https://www.monergism.com/resolutions-jonathan-edwards-1722-1723>

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.

https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/edwards_angry.pdf

A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections.

<http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/ReligiousAffections.pdf>

SPECIAL SESSION BIBLE STUDY

FRIDAY, MAY 5

12:00 McManus Conference Room (252 near House Minority Offices)