

Jonathan Edwards and His Famous Sermon

Editor's note: In the first issue of Charisma (August/September 1975) this article appeared as part of an editorial package written by Founding Editor Steve Strang. Because of the power of the excerpt from his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

Historians record that Jonathon Edwards was a small, frail man who preached in a quiet monotone, without gestures. He was also one of the greatest intellectuals American society has produced.

Edwards pastured in Northhampton, Mass., when the Great Awakening broke out. Like other preachers during this period, he began traveling to nearby churches. The reason—there were so few converted ministers that those who were saved were in great demand as the revival spread.

It was on the road that Edwards preached a sermon that historians say is the most famous in American history—"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." It is said he preached it as a last-minute substitute for another preacher at Enfield, Conn., on July 8, 1741.

Historian Monroe Stearns credits Edward's sermon with ending the superstitions of the Middle Ages and initiating the concept that man is responsible for his own happiness through coming to God.

The sermon had a great impact the day it was preached. The congregation shrieked and groaned and cried out "Oh, what shall I do to be saved." It got so bad, Edwards stopped his sermon to ask the people to be more quiet.

The 7,600-word sermon is still studied by seminary and Bible

college students. An excerpt follows:

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Deuteronomy 32:35

"Their foot shall slide in due time"

In this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God's visible people, and who lived under the means of grace; but who, notwithstanding all God's wonderful works towards them, remained (as verse 28) voice of counsel, having no understanding in them. The expression I have chosen for my text, "their foot shall slide in due time," seems to imply the following things, relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were exposed.

1. That they were always exposed to destruction; as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to a fall. This is implied in the manner of their destruction coming upon them, being represented by their foot sliding.
2. It implies that they were always exposed to sudden unexpected destruction. As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning.
3. Another thing implied is, that they are liable to fall of themselves, without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down.
4. That the reason why they are not fallen already, and do not fall now, is only that God's appointed time is not come. For it is said, that when that due time, or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide.

APPLICATION

The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation. This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open and you have nothing to stand upon, not anything to take hold of; there is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have not more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment, for you are burden to it. The creation groans with you; the creature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, not willingly.

The sun does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts, nor is it willing a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon. The air does not willingly serve you for breathe to maintain the flame of life in your vitals, while you spend your life in the service of God's enemies.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. This wrath towards you burns like fire. He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight. You are 10,000 times more abominable in his

eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful, wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into that God's hand has held you up.

God seems not to be hastily gathering in his elect in all parts of the land; and probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved, will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great outpouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostle's days; the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded.

Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is not undoubtedly handing over a great part of this congregation.

Let everyone fly out of Sodom. "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."