

# *Do Something!*

## The Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon

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October 25, 2015

### **Hebrews 13:7**

**Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**

Now as we found out last week- the verse that Brother Andy just read to you is where the writer of **Hebrews** instructs the people of the Christian Church to “**remember**”. And we are to remember people who have two characteristics:

1. Those who led you.
2. Those who spoke the Word of God to you.

And then the writer goes on to say that we are to “do” two things with those who led us and who spoke the Word of God to us:

1. Consider the result of their conduct.
2. Imitate their faith.

Now, the way this is written in the original Greek tells me that the people we are to “remember” are dead- because the writer doesn’t say that we are to merely consider their conduct- but we are to consider the *result* of their conduct, and you simply cannot do that until the life of that person is over and there is no more conduct to consider. You see, because we are fallen creatures- as long as somebody is alive- they are able to destroy a lifetime of service and faithfulness. But after a person is dead and with the Lord- the result of his entire life can be considered and his faith imitated.

So the Holy Bible teaches us that we are to have heroes of the Faith who are now dead, men who led the Church and men who preached and taught the Word of God during their lives, and we are told to consider the end result of their conduct, and we are to then imitate or copy or emulate their faith. In fact, the writer of **Hebrews** thought this

was so important that he included in his Epistle- his own brief biographical sketch of several of the OT heroes of the Faith- which is what we call today the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter of **Hebrews**.

And so we began something last week that I pray will not only be a blessing to you- but will be something that we will engage in from now on in this Church- that the last two weeks of October- in celebration of the many people who came before us and lived lives of godliness and faithfulness to Jesus Christ- we will *obey* this portion of Scripture and we will *remember* some of the heroes of the Christian Faith. So we began last week and will conclude today- in humbling ourselves to the Authority of the Word of God and look at Christian biographies.

Now as I told you last week- anytime you do something like this- there is a danger. And the danger is *not* that we might get some historical facts wrong or get some dates mixed up- but that we will- even slightly- *replace* inerrant and infallible Scripture with the weak and frail experiences of other human beings- no matter how important they may be.

And yet we see that the writer of **Hebrews** tells us right here to risk that danger and to go ahead and remember these men. And so in my effort to be Biblical- let us obey this verse and remember these people. And the way I would like to do this is that we took an *ancient* example last week and today we will look at a more *contemporary* example. And by "ancient"- I mean someone who followed Jesus faithfully who lived over a thousand years ago, and by "contemporary"- I mean someone who lived and remained true to Scripture within the last 500 years or so.

And last week we remembered Athanasius- the man that God used to almost single-handedly rescue the Church from the heresy of Arianism- some 1700 years ago. And we saw that through his efforts to keep the Doctrine of the Church Biblical- Athanasius is called today "The Father of Biblical Orthodoxy".

And today I would like for us to remember a man by the name of Charles Haddon Spurgeon- who is known to us today as "The Prince of Preachers."

Now there are very personal reasons why I chose Spurgeon as the biographical study of a contemporary hero. And it was exactly what the writer of **Hebrews** told us to do. The writer told us to remember people who led us and who spoke the Word of God to us, and then to consider

the result or the end of their life- long conduct, and to imitate their faith. And along with his amazing successes- Charles Spurgeon was a man who endured great and powerful adversity.

Now *everyone* faces adversity and must find ways to persevere through the oppressing moments of life. *Everyone* must get up and make breakfast, and wash clothes, and go to work, and pay bills, and discipline children, and generally keep life going when the heart is breaking.

But it's different with Pastors- not totally different- but different. The heart is the instrument of our vocation. Spurgeon said:

"Ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul"<sup>1</sup>

So when our heart is breaking- Pastors must labor with a broken instrument. You see, preaching is our main work. And preaching is "heart work"- *not* just mental work. So the question for us is not just, "How you keep on *living* when the marriage is blank, and a child has run away, and the finances don't reach, and the pews are bare, and friends have forsaken you?" The question for us is more than, "How do you keep on *living*?" It's, "How do you keep on *preaching*?" You see, it's one thing to *survive* adversity, but it is something very different to keep on preaching, Sunday after Sunday, month after month, when the heart is overwhelmed.

Spurgeon said to the students of his Pastors' College,

"One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor ... Ten years of toil do not take so much life out of us as we lose in a few hours by Ahithophel the traitor, or Demas the apostate"<sup>2</sup>

So the question for us is not, "How do you *live* through unremitting criticism and distrust and accusation and abandonment?" For Pastors- the question is also, "How do you *preach* through it?" How do you engage in "heart work" when the heart is under siege and ready to fall?

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 161.

Recently I spent a half-hour on the phone with the wife of a Pastor in California who is in the FIRE Organization who told me that she and her husband would love to be here in this Church. He is under so much criticism and accusation from the people he has been called to shepherd- that she found it hard to even go to Church at all, and she told me that she marveled that her husband could even stand to preach the Sunday before our conversation.

Preaching great and glorious Truth in an atmosphere that is *not* great and glorious is an immense difficulty. To be reminded week in and week out that many people regard your preaching of the Glory of the Grace of God as hypocrisy- pushes a preacher not just into the hills of introspection, but sometimes to the precipice of self-extinction. And I don't mean suicide- I mean something more complex. I mean the deranging inability to know any longer who you are. What begins as a searching introspection for the sake of holiness, and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors in your soul: you look in one and you're short and fat; you look in another and you're tall and skinny; you look in another and you're upside down. And the horrible feeling begins to break over you that you don't know who you are any more. And at that point- the center is not holding. And if the center doesn't hold—if there is no fixed and solid "I" able to relate to the fixed and solid "Thou," namely, God, then who will preach next Sunday?

When the Apostle Paul said in **1Corinthians 15:10a**,

**By the grace of God, I am what I am...**

... he was saying something utterly essential for the survival of Preachers in adversity. If, by Grace, the identity of the "I"—the "I" created by Christ and united to Christ, but still a human "I"—if *that* center doesn't hold- there will be no more authentic preaching, because there will be no more authentic preacher, but a mere collection of echoes.

But, Oh, how fortunate we are, that we are not the first group to face these things! I thank God for the healing history of the Power of God in the lives of the saints that came before me. And I urge you for the sake of your own survival, live in other centuries and live with other saints.

I have turned to Charles Spurgeon in these days, and I have been helped. And that's what I want to share with you this morning. And my goal today is to be used by God- as we examine the life and ministry of Charles Spurgeon- to encourage you and give you hope to continue to persevere through whatever adversity you face in your lives.

But let me give you just one *Biblical* warrant for remembering the life of this man and allowing his life to help us to see Jesus clearer and better. And you might think I'm going to go to **Hebrews 11**- which is a great Biblical warrant for loving Christian biography. But I am going to cite a single verse- **Philippians 3:17**, that says:

**Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.**

Here, the inspired and inerrant Word of the living God tells us that we are *not* to only keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. And we are *not* to only keep our eyes on Paul- who according to **1 Corinthians 11:1**- *imitated* Christ (**1 Corinthians 11:1**). But the inspired Scriptures teach us here that we are to keep our eyes on and **“observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us [the Apostles].”**

In other words- we are to “mark out” those men who believe and preach and teach and live like the Apostles.

So, first there is Christ, then Paul and the other Apostles, then those who follow *their* example, and then there is *us*- as we are inspired and guided and encouraged and edified by those who came before us.

Now certainly this verse does not encourage idolatry or worship or even what some would call “veneration”. But it does not only *suggest* but *commands* that we **“observe”** the lives of those who came before us- those who are worthy subjects of our observation for the sake of Biblical accuracy and personal piety and holiness as well as those who made serious and tragic errors from which we may learn. And, surely, there is no reason to think that this process of appropriate imitation and inspiration should stop after the third generation of those who followed Christ.

So, I would say, *wherever* you see a life lived through the Blood of Christ, according to the Word of Christ, in the Power of Christ, and for the Glory of Christ, you should:

**“observe”** that life.

... and Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of those lives. And that's why it is important for us to look at this man who followed Jesus Christ. So let's examine this amazing man together.

Charles Spurgeon was born June 19, 1834 at Kelvedon, Essex, in England- the first of 17 children. He was converted at the age of 15, remarkably in a snow storm through a lay-Methodist preacher. Spurgeon preached his first sermon at 16 and a year later- at the ripe old age of 17- became the Pastor at Waterbeach Chapel in Cambridge- although he never had any formal theological education. Yet during his life- it is not an overstatement to suggest that Spurgeon was the most well-read and the most studious and the most theologically diligent and precise Pastor in all of England- perhaps spurred on by the fact that he knew full well that he had *not* been formally trained. And that fact should give those of us who have not been so blessed to be formally trained- great hope that God can use us as well.

About three years later in 1854, at the age of 19, he began his ministry at New Park Street Church, London, with about 200 people. Two years later, 1856, he married Susannah Thompson who bore him twin sons, Charles and Thomas (who followed his father as Pastor after his father's death). He preached at this Church, later re-named the Metropolitan Tabernacle, for 38 years and died at the age of 57 in 1892 (six years before my grandfather was born).

So let's get to know this man by examining his life.

## **1. Spurgeon was a Student**

And to give you an idea of his study habits- Spurgeon's own personal library contained 5,103 volumes- which he labored over by the hour. It is said that he read an average of 6 substantial books every week for his entire adult life- (age 17 and up)- not counting the Bible- which he read from cover to cover several times every year for 40 consecutive years. And that library was purchased in 1906 by William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, for \$2,500, and then in 2006 by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, for \$400,000. Its estimated value today is well over \$1 million dollars.

## 2. Spurgeon was a Preacher

Charles Spurgeon is considered by many to be one of the greatest preachers since the days of the Apostles. He had preached over 600 times before he was 20 years old- which works out to be two sermons every three days for the first three years of his Ministry. During his ministry- kings, Presidents, and paupers would travel long distances to hear him preach.

In those pre-radio, pre-television, pre-Internet days, his sermons sold about 20,000 copies a week being translated into 20 languages. The collected sermons of Charles Spurgeon fill 63 volumes equivalent to the 27 volume ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and "stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity."<sup>3</sup> There were no microphones back then- but he projected his voice so that 5,000 people could hear him week in and week out.

Now you might think that his son would be a biased witness, but on the other hand, sons of preachers are just as often critical of their fathers. So it's not a lopsided judgment when his son, Charles, Jr. said:

"There was no one who could preach like my father. In inexhaustible variety, witty wisdom, vigorous proclamation, loving entreaty, and lucid teaching, with a multitude of other qualities, he must, at least in my opinion, ever be regarded as 'the prince of preachers.'"<sup>4</sup>

## 3. Spurgeon loved Divine Truth

I have absolutely no interest at all in how Preachers deal with adversity if they are not first and foremost guardians and givers of unchanging Biblical Truth. If they find their way through adversity by any other means than faithfulness to Truth- I turn away.

Spurgeon defined the work of the Preacher like this:

"To know truth as it should be known, to love it as it should be loved, and then to proclaim it in the right spirit, and in its proper proportions."<sup>5</sup>

He said to his students:

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<sup>3</sup>Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?" in *Christian History*, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>*Autobiography*, vol. 2, p. 278.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), p. 8.

"To be effective preachers you must be sound theologians."<sup>6</sup>

He warned that:

"...those who do away with Christian doctrine are, whether they are aware of it or not, the worst enemies of Christian living ... [because] the coals of orthodoxy are necessary to the fire of piety."<sup>7</sup>

Two years before he died he said:

"Some excellent brethren seem to think more of the *life* than of the *truth*; for when I warn them that the enemy has poisoned the children's bread, they answer 'Dear brother, we are sorry to hear it; and, to counteract the evil, we will open the window, and give the children fresh air.' Yes, open the window, and give them fresh air, by all means ... But, at the same time, this ought you to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Arrest the poisoners, and open the windows, too. While men go on preaching false doctrine, you may talk as much as you will about deepening their spiritual life, but you will fail in it."<sup>8</sup>

And I can testify that God has been good to make this true here in The Covenant of Peace Church as the most common expression of thankfulness I hear is from those people who say that the storms of suffering have *not* overturned the boat of their faith because of the ballast of God-centered Truth—God-centered Doctrine—laid down in the bottom of their boat through the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

But it is absolutely crucial that we take all three admonitions of Spurgeon seriously:

1. To know Truth as it should be known.
2. To love Truth as it should be loved.
3. To proclaim Truth in the right spirit and in its proper proportions.

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<sup>6</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Erroll Hulse and David Kingdon, eds., *A Marvelous Ministry: How the All-round Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon Speaks to us Today*, (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 374.



The Apostle Paul said this in **2Thessalonians 2:10**:

**... those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.**

So when we begin to realize, as Spurgeon did, that people perish for not *loving* the Truth- then they will *abandon* themselves to study so they may *know* the Truth, *and* they will cry out to God so He may grant that they would *love* the Truth, and they will beg the Holy Spirit to empower them so they may faithfully *proclaim* the Truth rightly and fully in the beauty of Biblical proportions.

Doctrinal Truth was at the foundation and superstructure of all Spurgeon's labors.

#### **4. Spurgeon believed the Bible was the Word of God**

The Truth that drove Spurgeon's preaching ministry was Biblical Truth, which he believed to be God's Truth. He held up his Bible and said:

"These words are God's ... Thou book of vast authority, thou art a proclamation from the Emperor of Heaven; far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee ... This is the book untainted by any error; but it is pure unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it."<sup>9</sup>

What a difference where this allegiance holds sway in the hearts of preachers and people. I had lunch with a man recently who bemoaned the atmosphere of his Sunday school class. He characterized it like this: if a person raises a question to discuss, and another reads a relevant Bible verse, the class communicates, "*Now we have heard what Jesus thinks, what do you think?*" And when *that* atmosphere begins to take over the pulpit and the church- defection from Truth and weakness in holiness are not far behind.

But Spurgeon was not just a Bible-*based* preacher, but a Bible-*saturated* preacher. My passion for younger preachers today is that they not preach sermons that hover just *above* the Text- constantly making points that people do not see inherent *in* the text- but that they

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<sup>9</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 47.

will go ahead and lose their timidity and explain what is in the text clearly and then exult over what is in the text passionately, and that they do it in such a way that the people can see exactly where they got it—the very phrases, the very logic of Scripture!

And Spurgeon had a famous passage where he pleads for preachers to be Bible-saturated and not just Bible-based:

“Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat it into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord; Not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the word . . . but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord. I would quote John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim’s Progress*—that sweetest of all prose poems,—without continually making us feel and say, ‘Why, the man is a living Bible!’ Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.”<sup>10</sup>

Spurgeon is a great example of loving the whole of Biblical Truth and exulting over it in the pulpit.

## 5. Spurgeon was a soul-winner

There was not a single week that went by in Spurgeon’s mature ministry that word would get back to him in some way that either in the Church or out in the larger community that souls were being saved through his written sermons.<sup>11</sup> He and the Elders that served with him—(yes, Spurgeon taught that Churches should have Elders) were always on the “watch for souls” in the great congregation. *“One brother,”*

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<sup>10</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. 3, p. 268.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 198.

Spurgeon said, *"has earned for himself the title of my hunting dog, for he is always ready to pick up the wounded birds."*<sup>12</sup>

Spurgeon let us see his heart for people's eternal Good when he said:

"I remember, when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over men, every nerve of my body has been strained and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls."<sup>13</sup>

Spurgeon's entire life and Ministry embodies Paul's words in two verses:

**2Corinthians 12:15a.**

**I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls...**

**1Corinthians 9:22**

**To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.**

Truly Charles Spurgeon was consumed with both the Glory of God and the Salvation of souls.

## **6. Spurgeon was a Calvinist**

Much to the chagrin of most Baptists today- their greatest hero fully embraced and promoted The Doctrines of Grace. And like William Carey- Spurgeon was *my* kind of Calvinist. There was in Spurgeon's life and preaching such a robust, joyful, serious, Christ-exalting, Atonement-cherishing, God-centeredness that he felt a kinship with *anyone* who had these same instincts- *regardless* of their denomination. Here's how Spurgeon described his own Calvinism that drew 5,000 people a week *to* his Church rather than drive them away. He said,

"To me, Calvinism means the placing of the eternal God at the head of all things. I look at everything through its relation to God's glory. I see God

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<sup>12</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. 2, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, pp. 49-50

first, and man far down in the list ... Brethren, if we live in sympathy with God, we delight to hear Him say, 'I am God, and there is none else.'"<sup>14</sup>

Spurgeon said that Puritanism, Protestantism, and Calvinism were simply ...

"... poor names which the world has given to our great and glorious faith,—the doctrine of Paul the apostle, the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>

And that's why he was unashamed to preach the whole counsel of God- even if it was called "Calvinism". To Spurgeon- it was the Biblical Gospel.

"People come to me for one thing. . . I preach to them a Calvinist creed and a Puritan morality. That is what they want and that is what they get. If they want anything else they must go elsewhere."<sup>16</sup>

Charles Spurgeon believed that "The Doctrines of Grace" or "Reformed Theology" or "Calvinism", or what I call "Biblical Christianity", honored Jesus Christ most fully because it was most true. And so he preached it explicitly, and tried to work it into the minds of his people, because he said:

"Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to vital Truth."<sup>17</sup>

## **7. Spurgeon was hard-working**

Spurgeon said:

"I do not look to soft and leisurely men to instruct me how to endure adversity. If the main answer is, 'Take it easy,' I look for another teacher."

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<sup>14</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 337.

<sup>15</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 121

And I want to take a quick glimpse of this man's capacity for work. Spurgeon said:

"No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear ... I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with four thousand members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revised, *The Sword and the Trowel* to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of five hundred letters to be answered. This, however, is only half my duty, for there are innumerable churches established by friends, with the affairs of which I am closely connected, to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me."<sup>18</sup>

At his 50th birthday a list of 66 organizations was read that he founded and conducted. Lord Shaftesbury was there and said,

"This list of associations, instituted by his genius, and superintended by his care, were more than enough to occupy the minds and hearts of fifty ordinary men."<sup>19</sup>

As I told you earlier- Spurgeon typically read six substantial books every single week. But what I didn't tell you was that he could remember what he read and where to find it.<sup>20</sup> He produced more than 140 books of his own—books like *The Treasury of David*, which was twenty years in the making, and *Morning and Evening*, and *Commenting on Commentaries*, and *John Ploughman's Talk*, and *Our Own Hymnbook*.<sup>21</sup>

He often worked 18 hours a day. The great African missionary, David Livingstone, asked him once, "*How do you manage to do two men's work in a single day?*" and Spurgeon replied:

"You have forgotten there are two of us."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Autobiography*, vol. 2, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup> Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> "Did You Know?", p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> "Did You Know?", p. 3.

And what Spurgeon meant by this was the Presence of Christ's energizing Power that we read about in **Colossians 1:29** where Paul said,

**For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

... that's what Spurgeon meant when he said, "*There are two of us.*"

Spurgeon's attitude toward sacrificial labor would not be acceptable today where the primacy of "physical wellness" seems to hold sway. He said,

"If by excessive labour, we die before reaching the average age of man, worn out in the Master's Service, then glory be to God, we shall have so much less of earth and so much more of Heaven!"<sup>23</sup>

And:

"It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living *sacrifices*, whose lot is to be consumed."<sup>24</sup>

Behind this radical viewpoint were some deep Biblical convictions that come through his study of the Apostle Paul's Teaching. One of these convictions Spurgeon expressed like this:

"We can only produce life in others by the wear and tear of our own being. This is a natural and spiritual law—that fruit can only come to the seed by its spending and be spent even to self-exhaustion."<sup>25</sup>

The Apostle Paul said:

**2Corinthians 1:6a**

**... if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation...**

**2Corinthians 4:12**

**So death works in us, but life in you.**

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<sup>23</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 177.

And he said that his own sufferings were:

**Colossians 1:24b**

**... filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

Another Biblical conviction behind Spurgeon's radical view of pastoral zeal is expressed like this:

"Satisfaction with results will be the [death] knell of progress. No man is good who thinks that he cannot be better. He has no holiness who thinks that he is holy enough"<sup>26</sup>

... in other words he was driven with a passion to never to be satisfied with the measure of his own holiness or the extent of his own service or the depth of his own love or Jesus. (cf. Phil. 3:12). The year he turned 40- Spurgeon delivered a message to his Pastors' Conference with the one-word title, "Forward!" And in that sermon, he said,

"In every minister's life there should be traces of stern labour. Brethren, do something; do something; DO SOMETHING! While Committees waste their time over resolutions, do something. While Societies and Unions are making constitutions, let us win souls. Too often we discuss, and discuss, and discuss, while Satan only laughs in his sleeve ... Get to work and quit yourselves like men."<sup>27</sup>

I think the word "undefeatable" was created for people like Charles Spurgeon.

## **8. Spurgeon was maligned and suffered greatly**

Like every single person that God calls and uses- Charles Spurgeon knew the whole range of adversity that most Preachers suffer- plus a whole lot more. For example, Spurgeon knew the everyday, homegrown variety of frustration and disappointment from lukewarm members. He said,

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<sup>26</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 352.

<sup>27</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 55.

“You know what one coldhearted man can do, if he gets at you on Sunday morning with a lump of ice, and freezes you with the information that Mrs. Smith and all her family are offended, and their pew is vacant. You did not want to know of that Lady's protest just before entering the pulpit, and it does not help you.”<sup>28</sup>

“Or perhaps even worse, after the service it can happen. What terrible blankets some professors are! Their remarks after a sermon are enough to stagger you ... You have been pleading as for life or death and they have been calculating how many seconds the sermon occupied, and grudging you the odd five minutes beyond the usual hour.”<sup>29</sup>

“It's even worse he says if the calculating observer is one of your deacons. Thou shalt not yoke the ox and the ass together was a merciful precept: but when a laborious, ox-like minister comes to be yoked to a deacon who is not another ox, it becomes hard work to plough.”<sup>30</sup>

Spurgeon also knew the extraordinary calamities that befall us once in a lifetime. For example, on October 19, 1856, he preached for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own Church would not hold the people. The 10,000 seating capacity was far exceeded as the crowds pressed in. Suddenly, someone in the crowd shouted, “*Fire!*” and there was great panic in parts of the building. Seven people were killed in the stampede and scores were injured.

Spurgeon was only 22 years old and was overcome by this calamity. The specter of this tragedy stayed with him for years, and one close friend and biographer said,

“I cannot but think, from what I saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night.”<sup>31</sup>

Charles Spurgeon also knew the adversity of family pain. He had married Susannah Thomson January 8 in the same year of the calamity

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<sup>28</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 358.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 310.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 311.

<sup>31</sup> Darrel W. Amundsen, “The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon,” in: *Christian History*, Issue 29, Volume X, No. 1, p. 23.



at Surrey Gardens. His only two children, twin sons, were born the day after the calamity on October 20. But Susannah was never able to have more children. In 1865 (nine years later), when she was 33 years old she became a virtual invalid and seldom heard her husband preach for the next 27 years till his death. Some kind of rare cervical operation was attempted in 1869 by James Simpson, the father of modern gynecology, but to no avail<sup>32</sup>. So to Spurgeon's other burdens was added a sickly wife and the inability to have more children, though his own mother had given birth to seventeen children.

Spurgeon also fellowshiped unbelievable physical suffering. He suffered from gout, rheumatism, and Bright's disease- which is an inflammation of the kidneys. His first attack of gout came in 1869 at the age of 35. It became progressively worse so that "approximately one third of the last twenty-two years of his ministry was spent out of the Tabernacle pulpit, either suffering, or convalescing, or taking precautions against the return of illness".<sup>33</sup>

In a letter to a friend he wrote;

"I thought a cobra had bitten me, and filled my veins with poison; but it was worse- it was gout."<sup>34</sup>

So for over half his ministry Spurgeon dealt with ever increasingly recurrent pain [such as in] his joints that cut him down from the pulpit and from his labors again and again, until the diseases eventually took his life at age 57.

On top of his own physical suffering, Spurgeon had to endure a lifetime of public ridicule and slander, sometimes of the most vicious kind. In April, 1855 the *Essex Standard* carried an article with these words:

"His style is that of the vulgar colloquial, varied by rant ... All the most solemn mysteries of our holy religion are by him rudely, roughly and impiously handled. Common sense is outraged and decency disgusted. His rantings are interspersed with coarse anecdotes".<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>33</sup> Iain H. Murray, ed., *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 166, note 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, p. 165.

<sup>35</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 35.

The Sheffield and Rotherham *Independent* said:

“He is a nine days' wonder—a comet that has suddenly shot across the religious atmosphere. He has gone up like a rocket and ere long will come down like a stick”.<sup>36</sup>

His wife kept a bulging scrapbook of such criticisms from the years 1855-1856. Some of it was easy to brush off. Most of it wasn't. In 1857 he wrote:

"Down on my knees have I often fallen, with the hot sweat rising from my brow under some fresh slander poured upon me; in an agony of grief my heart has been well-nigh broken".<sup>37</sup>

His fellow ministers criticized him from both the right and the left. Across town from the left- Joseph Parker wrote,

"Mr. Spurgeon was absolutely destitute of intellectual benevolence. If men saw as he did they were orthodox; if they saw things in some other way they were heterodox, pestilent and unfit to lead the minds of students or inquirers. Mr. Spurgeon's was a superlative egotism; not the shilly-shallying, timid, half-disguised egotism that cuts off its own head, but the full-grown, overpowering, sublime egotism that takes the chief seat as if by right. The only colors which Mr. Spurgeon recognized were black and white".<sup>38</sup>

And from the right- James Wells, the hyper-Calvinist, wrote:

"I have—most solemnly have—my doubts as the Divine reality of his conversion".<sup>39</sup>

All the embattlements of his life came to climax in "The Downgrade Controversy" as Spurgeon fought unsuccessfully for the doctrinal integrity of the Baptist Union. In October 1887 he withdrew from the Union. And the following January he was officially and

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<sup>36</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 35.

publicly censured by a vote of the Union for his manner of protest (see note 44). Eight years earlier he had said:

"Men cannot say anything worse of me than they have said. I have been belied from head to foot, and misrepresented to the last degree. My good looks are gone, and none can damage me much now".<sup>40</sup>

Spurgeon gives an example of the kinds of distortions and misrepresentations that were typical in the Downgrade controversy:

"The doctrine of eternal punishment has been scarcely raised by me in this controversy; but the 'modern thought' advocates continue to hold it up on all occasions, all the while turning the wrong side of it outwards".<sup>41</sup>

But even though he usually sounded rough and ready, the pain was overwhelming and deadly. In May of 1891 eight months before he died he said to a friend,

"Good-bye; you will never see me again. This fight is killing me".<sup>42</sup>

The final adversity I mention is the result of the others – Spurgeon's recurrent battles with depression. It is not easy to imagine the omni-competent, eloquent, brilliant, full-of-energy Spurgeon weeping like a baby for no reason that he could think of. In 1858, at age 24 it happened for the first time. He said:

"My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for".<sup>43</sup>

Spurgeon said,

"Causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discourses. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness ... The iron bolt

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<sup>40</sup> *A Marvelous Ministry*, p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 288.

<sup>43</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25.

which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back".<sup>44</sup>

Spurgeon saw his depression as his "worst feature."

"Despondency," he said, "is not a virtue; I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God".<sup>45</sup>

But what comes through again and again is Spurgeon's unwavering belief in the Sovereignty of God in all his afflictions. More than anything else it seems, this kept him from caving in to the adversities of his life. He said,

"It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity".<sup>46</sup>

This is exactly the opposite strategy of modern thought, even much evangelical thought, that recoils from the implications of infinity. If God is God- then He not only knows what is coming, but He knows it because He designs it. For Spurgeon this view of God was not first argument for debate, it was a means of survival.

Spurgeon would have us to know that the afflictions that our great and loving God allows to come our way are the health regimen of an infinitely wise Physician. He told his students:

"I dare say the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, *with the exception of sickness* ... If some men, that I know of could only be favoured with a month of rheumatism, it would, by God's grace mellow them marvelously".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, p. 384.

And he meant this mainly for himself. Though he dreaded suffering and would willingly avoid it, he said,

“I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable ... Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library”.<sup>48</sup>

Spurgeon saw three specific purposes of God in his struggle with depression. The first is that it functioned like the apostle Paul's thorn to keep him humble lest he be lifted up in himself. He said the Lord's work is summed up in these words:

"Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' Instruments shall be used, but their intrinsic weakness shall be clearly manifested; there shall be no division of the glory, no diminishing of the honor due to the Great Worker ... Those who are honoured of their Lord in public have usually to endure a secret chastening, or to carry a peculiar cross, lest by any means they exalt themselves, and fall into the snare of the devil".<sup>49</sup>

The second purpose of God in his despondency was the unexpected power it gave to his ministry:

"One Sabbath morning, I preached from the text, 'My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?' and though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience. I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow-prisoners in the dark; but I could not tell why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness, for which I condemned myself. On the following Monday evening, a man came to see me who bore all the marks of despair upon his countenance. His hair seemed to stand up right, and his eyes were ready to start from their sockets. He said to me, after a little parleying, 'I never before, in my life, heard any man speak who seemed to know my heart. Mine is a terrible case; but on Sunday morning you painted me to the life, and preached as if you had been inside my soul.' By God's grace I saved that man from suicide, and led him into gospel light and

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<sup>48</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," pp. 163-164.

liberty; but I know I could not have done it if I had not myself been confined in the dungeon in which he lay. I tell you the story, brethren, because you sometimes may not understand your own experience, and the perfect people may condemn you for having it; but what know they of God's servants? You and I have to suffer much for the sake of the people of our charge ... You may be in Egyptian darkness, and you may wonder why such a horror chills your marrow; but you may be altogether in the pursuit of your calling, and be led of the Spirit to a position of sympathy with desponding minds".<sup>50</sup>

The third design of his depression was what he called a prophetic signal for the future. And this has given me much encouragement in my *own* situation. Spurgeon said:

"This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist, heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's richer benison".<sup>51</sup>

I would say with Spurgeon that in the darkest hours it is the sovereign goodness of God that has given me the strength to go on—the granite promise that the God Who loves me and Who gave Himself for me—rules omnipotently over all my circumstances and designs all of them for His Own Glory and my eventual “Good” no matter what anyone else means.

Perhaps his most devastating blow came during a time that Spurgeon himself dubbed “The Down-Grade Controversy”, which was a time when the Prince of Preachers cried out against compromise and unbiblical teaching and practice within his own denomination. In March of 1887- Spurgeon printed the following in his newsletter, “The Sword and Trowel”:

“[At the end of the Puritan age] by some means or other, first the ministers, then the Churches, got on “the down grade,” and in some cases, the descent was rapid, and in all, very disastrous. In proportion as the ministers seceded from the old Puritan godliness of life, and the old Calvinistic form of

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<sup>50</sup> *An All Round Ministry*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 160.

doctrine, they commonly became less earnest and less simple in their preaching, more speculative and less spiritual in the matter of their discourses, and dwelt more on the moral teachings of the New Testament, than on the great central truths of revelation. Natural theology frequently took the place which the great truths of the gospel ought to have held, and the sermons became more and more Christless. Corresponding results in the character and life, first of the preachers and then of the people, were only too plainly apparent.”

The controversy consumed Spurgeon's thoughts and emotions as he deliberated whether to withdraw from the Baptist Union. But Spurgeon felt he was left no choice. Severing ties with the enemies of the gospel was no option as far as he was concerned and he said:

"Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin.”<sup>52</sup>

And the force of his rhetoric is an insight into Spurgeon's heart:

"To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions, they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil. Before the face of God we fear that they wear no other aspect. To our inmost heart this is a sad truth from which we cannot break away.”<sup>53</sup>

Spurgeon saw absolutely no reason that true Christians should accommodate those who doubted the either Authority or the Sufficiency of Scripture and he said.

"If these men believe such things, let them teach them, and construct churches, unions, and brotherhoods for themselves! Why must they come among us?"<sup>54</sup>

Spurgeon left the Baptist Union and initially received great support. But as time went on- more and more people thought that public unity was more important than Doctrinal Purity and- just like they did with Athanasius- the Church eventually turned against Charles Spurgeon. And on April 23, 1888- the greatest Gospel preacher

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<sup>52</sup> "A Fragment upon the Down-Grade Controversy," *The Sword and the Trowel* (November 1887), 559.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* p. 558

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid* p. 559-560

since the Apostle Paul was formally and publicly censured by the Baptist Union on a vote of 2,000 to 7- with Spurgeon's own natural brother, James, seconding the motion to silence his own brother. And Spurgeon said:

"My brother thinks he has gained a victory, but I believe we are hopelessly sold. I feel heart-broken. Certainly he has done the very opposite of what I should have done. Yet he is not to be blamed, for he followed his best judgment. Pray for me, that my faith fail not."<sup>55</sup>

In spite of all these sufferings and persecutions Spurgeon endured to the end, and was able to preach mightily until his last sermon at the Tabernacle on June 7, 1891. And on January 31, 1892- the "Prince of Preachers" fell silent and entered his eternal reward in Heaven.

But Robert Shindler, author of those original "Down Grade" articles in *The Sword and the Trowel*, wrote a biography of Spurgeon which was published the year of the great preacher's death. Recalling a scene in those final, tumultuous years when Spurgeon was invited to address the Evangelical Alliance, Shindler wrote:

"The reception given by the audience to Mr. Spurgeon when he rose to speak was almost overpowering in its fervor and heartiness. We occupied a seat on the platform near enough to witness the powerful emotions that agitated his soul, and the tears that streamed down his cheeks as he listened to previous speakers; and though only a very few of his Baptist brethren were present, there was not wanting such a display of hearty sympathy as must have been cheering to his heart, and comforting to his soul. Since then time has revealed much; and following months and years will, no doubt, make more and more evident how needful was the protest which fidelity to God and to the gospel would not allow him to withhold.

"The Lord graciously purge His Church of all false doctrine, all false teachers, and all who are traitors in the camp of Israel! And may the Spirit from on high be poured out upon all flesh, that all the ends of the earth may see, and own, and rejoice in, the salvation of our God!"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cited in Murray, p. 148

<sup>56</sup> *From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1892), 274.



Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.