

## Lives Worth Imitating Series – Charles Haddon Spurgeon July 28, 2019

This morning we're going to look at the life of a man who God used powerfully and yet also broke him deeply. For much of his life he struggled with deep depression and I want to spend some time looking at that aspect of his life this morning, because many of us go through dark times in our lives as well. Times when we might indeed ask God that all important question – "Why?" I won't ask for a show of hands this morning – but I would guess that's not an uncommon question to many of us this morning. And my hope is that you might find some helpful instruction from the life of this individual.

The person we're looking at this morning is Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who has often been nicknamed, "The Prince of Preachers" or "The People's Preacher".

- Charles Spurgeon was born June 19, 1834 in Kelvedon, Essex – the first of 17 children. His mother gave birth to 17 children, 9 of them died in infancy.
- Both his father and grandfather were preachers.
- At 18 months old, he was sent to live with his grandfather, returned home at 6 years old.
- While living with his grandfather, he developed a passion for reading, mostly Puritan books (at first just enjoying the pictures). Throughout his lifetime he was a voracious reader (average 6 books a week) and remembered pretty much everything he read. One of his favorite books, was John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* which talks about a Christian's tremendous struggle to overcome his sins and get to Heaven. He read this book over 100 times during his life. Which may explain the next point.
- Around age 10 he became tremendously burdened with a strong sense of guilt over his sins. He wrote later, "What I wanted to know was, *"How can I get my sins forgiven? I panted and longed to understand how I might be saved."* (Autobiography 1:105)
- When he was 15 years old, in the midst of a blizzard, he stumbled into a small Methodist chapel. The preacher was preaching on the text **Isaiah 45:22 (KJV)** *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.* At one point the minister looked directly at Charles and said, *"Young man, you look very miserable. Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."* After this encounter, Spurgeon wrote: *"I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said, I did not take much notice of it, - I was so possessed with that one thought."*
- Shortly after that, encounter, Spurgeon left the church he was raised in and **joined the Baptist church** so that he could be baptized by immersion. Through his study of the Scriptures, he came to the conclusion that his infant baptism that his grandfather performed on him was not what the Scriptures described baptism to be. And so he became convicted that he needed to be baptized and down to the local river he went and was baptized.
- Shortly after that he preached his first sermon at a small local church and began teaching Sunday School. The church quickly grew as word spread of this young preachers ability to communicate the deep truths of God in a simple understandable and yet very powerful way.
- **At age 17** he became the pastor at a Congregational church in Waterbeach. This city had a reputation from being a very sinful city – but within months of Charles beginning to preach here, people began to give up their drinking and sinful living and flocked to hear this young man preach. Now, remember he didn't have any Bible College training for the ministry. He just had his intense study of the Bible and reading Puritan theology.

- On one occasion of preaching at this little church, an elder from the **New Park Street Chapel**, (at one time the largest Baptist church in London but had decreased in attendance significantly), was in attendance and he went back to his home church and strongly recommend they interview Charles for the preaching vacancy position they currently had.
- They sent a letter inviting Charles to try out and so he did. After several months of “trial” preaching they officially hired him at age 20. He ended up serving as their **pastor for 38 years**, until his death in 1892, During that time they went through **two massive remodels** because they kept running out of room for all the people that came to hear him preach.
- Two years after beginning this ministry, at age 22, **he married Susannah Thompson** and the next year they welcomed two twin sons into the world.
- He typically preached to 6,000 people on the Lord’s Day. And at the peak of his preaching, he preached 13 times a week.
- He once preached to an **indoor crowd of 23,654 people** without electronic amplification. His style of preaching was very dramatic and often he would shout and run back and forth across the stage.
- Early on they began publishing his sermons and they would sell **25,000 copies a week** and eventually were translated into 20 languages.
- He wrote more than **140 books**
- He was involved in **planting 187 churches**
- He established and oversaw a host of ministries including a pastor’s college (that trained nearly 900 students during his lifetime), an orphanage that still operates today, 17 houses for poor and elderly women and a day school for children.
- At Spurgeon’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party they listed **66 organizations that he founded and conducted**.
- Spurgeon died on January 31, 1892. The streets were lined with thousands of people as his casket passed. On top of the casket was a large pulpit Bible opened to **Isaiah 45:22** *“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”*
- During his lifetime, Spurgeon is estimated to have **preached to 10 million people**.
- He often worked **18 hours a day**.

### **Spurgeon’s Struggle with Depression:**

Charles’ life long struggles with depression is well documented from his own preaching and writings. Many factors contributed to this.

- Struggle with his own sin from age 10-15. He wrote about this experience: *“The justice of God, like a ploughshare, tore my spirit. I was condemned, undone, destroyed – lost, helpless, hopeless – I though hell was before me...I prayed but found no answer of peace. It was long with me thus.”*
- During the early years of his preaching ministry he received intense criticism and slander from other ministers who disagreed with his style of preaching, (they thought he was over dramatic, too simplistic and too crude). Early on in their marriage, his wife Susannah framed **Matthew 5:11-12** and displayed it in their bedroom to see at the beginning and close of every day. *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

- 2 years into his ministry in London, he was preaching to a packed auditorium in Surrey Hall. It held 12,000 people with 10,000 more in the gardens outside. The service was underway and Spurgeon was in the midst of praying, prior to speaking, when several people (many suspect critics of Spurgeon) shouted “Fire! Fire! The Galleries are giving way!” That created a mass stampede of people trying to get out. In the confusion, 7 people died and 28 were hospitalized with serious injuries. Spurgeon was totally undone by this and was carried from the pulpit and taken to a friend’s house where he remained for several days in deep depression. He didn’t return to the pulpit for several months. His wife, Susannah, and many others didn’t think he’d ever recover from this devastation.
- 9 years into their marriage, his wife, Susannah, became a invalid and seldom was able to hear her husband preach after that.
- The depression that hit Spurgeon so hard after the “Fire” incident continued to plague him throughout the remainder of his life. Plus, he kept a very demanding schedule. Typically working 18 hour days. At one point he wrote: *“No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear. I ask for no sympathy but ask indulgence if I sometimes forget something. I have to look after the Orphanage, have charge of a church with 4, 000 members, sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken, there is the weekly sermon to be revise, the weekly magazine, The Sword and the Trowel, to be edited, and besides all that, a weekly average of 500 letters to be answered.”* He also wrote that *“the ministry is a matter which sears the brain and strains the heart, and drains out the life of a man if he attends to it as he should.”*
- When he was 35 years old, Spurgeon began to suffer extreme pain from several physical conditions: *gout, a burning kidney disease (Bright’s disease), rheumatism and neuritis.* The pain from these conditions became so intense that it kept him from preaching 1/3 of the time.

### Spurgeon’s Approach to Suffering:

1. **He maintained that since God is sovereign there is no such thing as “accidents” in life.** Everything is either orchestrated or allowed by God. He wrote *“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, not sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity.”* He compared his ongoing sufferings to a river and its waterfall. He says, *“If you drink of the river of affliction nears its outfall it is brackish and offensive to the taste, but if you will trace it to its source, where it rises at the foot of the throne of God, you will find its waters to be sweet and health-giving.”*

Let me ask you two questions:

- Do you find comfort in the belief that all suffering and pain you experience is caused or allowed by God?
- Does it give you greater comfort to believe that the deepest suffering you’ve experienced was outside of God’s hands or power – or in other words, an accident?

The writers of the Bible clearly believed that God was the cause of both good and bad things that happen on the earth. Job, directly blamed God for his situation. Many of the Psalmists call out to God in the midst of their pain asking that painful question: Why God? Why? **Psalm 73**, Asaph calls out to God complaining that the wicked seem to have a much better life than the righteous do. They seem to have fewer problems and pain and suffering. Why God? In **verse 13** he says, *“Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning.”* And yet he concludes the psalm with *“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever”* Psalms 73:26 (NIV)

2. **Spurgeon maintained that God never leaves us in our sufferings but walks with us in them.** Therefore, he kept his sights on Jesus, who himself experienced suffering.

3. **Jesus is acquainted with our sufferings.**

**Isaiah 53:3-4 (NIV)** *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.*

Jesus intentionally entered into this world and allowed himself to be brutally treated in order that we might experience the grace and kindness and love of God, both now and forever.

4. **Spurgeon constantly reminded himself that this life is merely a preparation for eternity, where there will no longer be any pain or suffering.**

5. **God uses our pain and sufferings to prepare us for ministry**

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, **so that** we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

Tomorrow night at Life Group we're going to delve more deeply into this whole topic of suffering and depression and see what the Scriptures have to say about it. There's two psalms in particular (**Psalm 39 & 88**) that can seem pretty discouraging and brutally honest. We'll look deeper into how to respond to pain while actually deepening your faith in God.

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- At age 10 he became burdened with \_\_\_\_\_
- He found salvation at age \_\_\_\_\_
- At 17 he became a \_\_\_\_\_
- At age 20 he became pastor at \_\_\_\_\_
- At 22 he married Susannah Thompson
- He typically preached to a crowd of \_\_\_\_\_

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