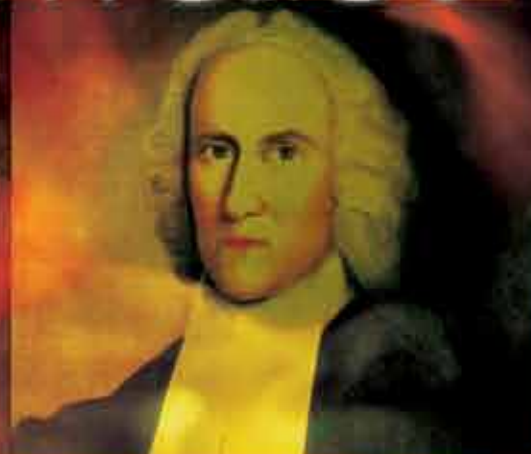


THE FOURTH IN A SERIES ON REVIVAL

Jonathan Edwards — Unlikely revivalist

BY KEN HORN



A shy figure steps meekly to the front of a dimly lit church. He carries his sermon manuscript with him — several pages that will be read word for word. Nearsighted, the preacher’s eyes strain at the candlelit document. He delivers his message in a dull monotone that is at times barely audible, especially to those farthest from the pulpit. There is no emotion in his voice, and little eye contact with the congregation, as he plods through his reading. Surely revival could not spring from preaching such as this.

And yet, that is exactly what happened. On July 8, 1741, in Enfield, Conn., Jonathan Edwards delivered just such a message. It shook its hearers and, by extension, the world. It is probably the best-known sermon in the English language — “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” This message was delivered at the high tide of a remarkable time in Colonial America. And while it lacked a high-energy, charismatic delivery, it did have one element far more important than that — it was anointed by God.

This is one of the most important lessons of the movement history now knows as The First Great Awakening. Revival does not depend on eloquent and entertaining messages by superstar speakers. No ministry can lead to revival without the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

When Edwards preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” that anointing was present. Listeners cried out and clutched the pillars of the church for fear of plunging into hell before they could get right with God. It is in vogue today to criticize “hellfire” preaching. But no genuine revival has ever ignored it. Since the Bible makes it clear that hell is the fate of those who ignore the claims of Christ, it must be preached. The key is to

preach it with love ... and with anointing.

This first revival in the American colonies is often dated from 1734¹, when Edwards, pastoring in Northampton, Mass., noted the beginning of “a surprising work of God.” Edwards said, “The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work amongst us.” This is an excellent early definition of revival.

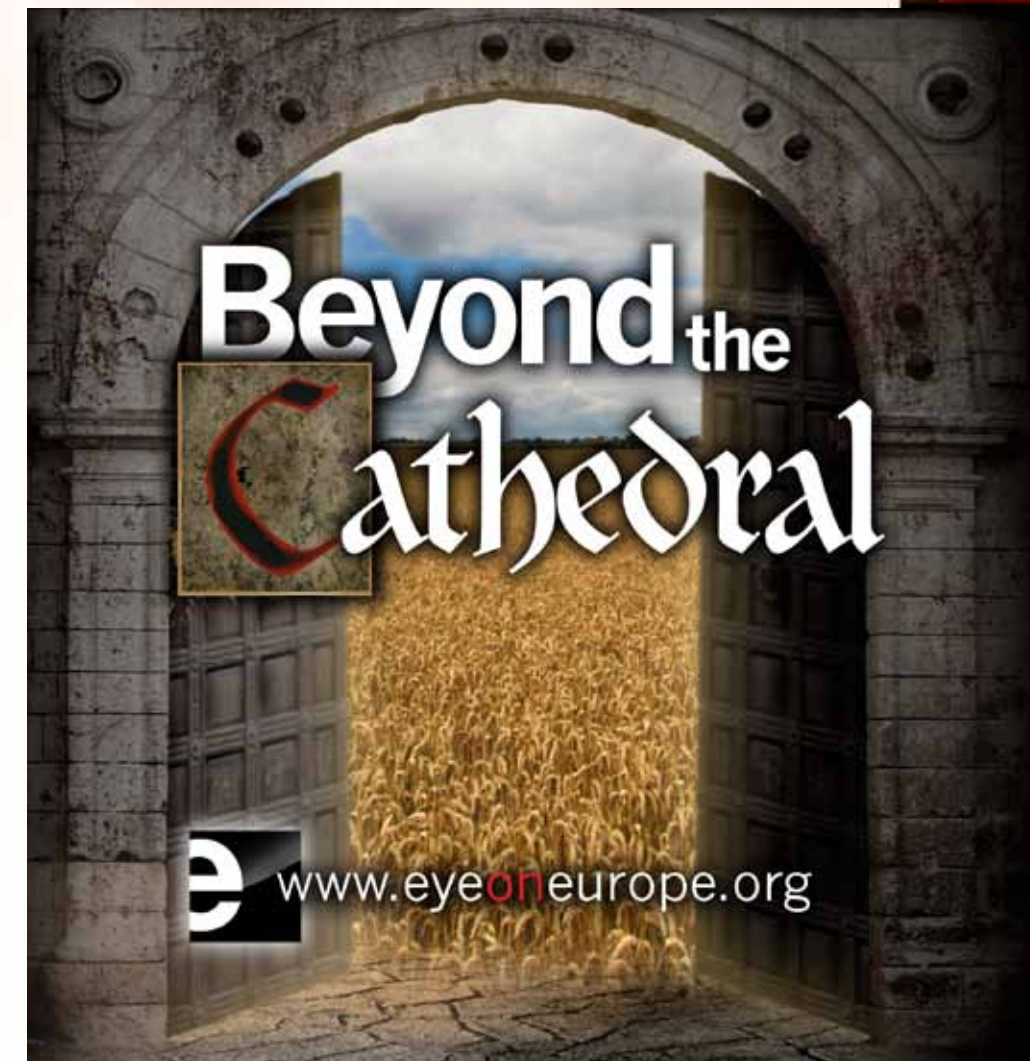
Edwards was an unlikely revivalist. He was a shy, bookish man who was socially awkward and spent more than 10 hours a day in his study. Yet it was in that study that God prompted him to begin a series of messages pressing for conversion to Christ. Yes, many of his parishioners were unsaved.

Edwards inherited this problem from his grandfather, Solomon

Stoddard, who had pastored the church before him. Stoddard practiced a radically open Communion that did not even require a salvation experience to participate. An upright, moral life was considered enough, and Stoddard thought the sacrament itself could work “savingly” on an unbeliever who received it. Stoddard was trying to keep unbelievers from leaving the church, but he diluted God’s standard of holiness and endangered those who partook of Communion “unworthily.” (See 1 Corinthians 11:27,29,30.)

When Edwards assumed the pastorate upon Stoddard’s death, things changed. He would not tolerate unbelievers at the Lord’s table. He saw it as bad for the church — and bad for the unbeliever.

Edwards’ stand, coupled with



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his God-driven sermon series on salvation, ignited the revival, beginning among the youth of his parish then spreading to all ages. He knew the importance of prayer in sustaining such a work and reinstated home prayer meetings. But Edwards did not begin this revival single-handedly. For years many ministers in New

vival meetings, but he couldn't complain too much — his wife, Sarah, was one of the most expressive at times. And the “cryings out in the meeting house” that sometimes punctuated his sermons he understood to be conviction, a necessary step if souls were to come to Christ. Clergymen James Davenport

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England had been praying fervently for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring the Colonies back to spiritual life. Edwards was the catalyst God chose.

But, despite being the catalyst for a great move of God throughout New England, Edwards was eventually dismissed from his congregation over the Communion issue. A number of influential people trained under more permissive standards would not sit still for the biblical standards required by an uncompromising pastor. Revival does not come without a price.

And it does not come without controversy. While God moved in Northampton, revival caught fire in other New England locales. Not all were well tended. There are usually extremes in revival; it was no different in Edwards' day. He was never comfortable with some of the more demonstrative emotional responses that attended the re-

and Charles Chauncy typified two opposing extremes.

Davenport was a hothead who preached that many ministers were unconverted and bound for hell. He was probably right about this, but there were definite excesses in Davenport's ministry. Sometimes he named names. He burned religious books that didn't meet his standards.

On the other side was the elite Bostonian Charles Chauncy, for whom dignity and ritual were more important than souls.

When the revival as a whole was criticized, Edwards rightly responded, “We should distinguish the good from the bad, and not judge of the whole by a part.”

He also pointed to one undeniable fruit of the awakening — changed lives. Those who came to Christ had definite and lasting transformations. Society as a whole changed for the better. This remains one of the most important measures of true spiri-

tual success in any ministry — are lives being changed?

Edwards was frank about hell, but “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” was not typical of his preaching. He did not scare all of his converts into professing Christ. He preached doctrine ... and he also preached that coming to Christ would lead to a life of joy.

In a message on Isaiah 32:2, he implored, “Come to Him who is ‘as rivers of water in a dry place.’ There are plenty and fullness in Him; He is like a river that is always flowing. You may live by it forever and never be in want.”

Edwards left voluminous writings on theology and philosophy, and is still considered one of North America's greatest minds. But the thrust of Edwards' ministry that made him a revivalist can be boiled down to two very important themes: (1) You need to know Jesus; (2) There is joy in serving Jesus.

When it comes right down to it, those are the two things we need to be emphasizing over and over if we want to see revival come to our nation today. **tpe**

1. *The First Great Awakening is often dated c.1734-58, to account for Edwards' influence. But it should probably be dated to include a few years earlier and a decade or so later.*

KEN HORN is the editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* and blogs at Snapshots (khorn.agblogger.org).

This is the fourth in a series on revival. Part 1, “Stirred Up,” appeared in the Jan. 11, 2009, issue. Part 2, “Uncomfortable,” appeared Feb. 8. Part 3, “How to Stop a Revival,” appeared March 29.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

TPE Kids Growing with God

Money grew in flowerbeds



Spring is here, and everything is coming to life. Trees are budding. Baby birds are hatching. And chances are, flowers are growing somewhere in your neighborhood. Some of them may even be tulips.

Did you know tulips were once as valuable as gold? In Holland in the 1630s, some of the prettiest tulips were also the hardest to find. As people heard about these flowers, everyone wanted them. Bulbs were soon selling for more than many people made in an entire year. Houses, horses and carriages were traded for a single bulb!

Today, you can buy a tulip bulb for around 50 cents. Spring flowers may no longer be worth their weight in gold, but they are a great reminder of God's care for His creation. Their colorful blooms are signs of new life at winter's end.

You can experience new life on the inside, too. That's what Easter is all about. Jesus died and rose from the grave to give you the most valuable treasure of all: life that never ends. When you invite Him into your heart, He will help you grow into the person He wants you to be.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NIV).

Did you know?

- Scientists are researching ways to grow plants in outer space using artificial sunlight. Someday, astronauts may tend vegetable gardens in space stations or moon greenhouses!
- The world's tallest flower is the titan arum, an Indonesian plant that can reach 12 feet in height. But don't get too close to this blooming giant. It's also the world's smelliest flower, producing an odor like rotten meat!

Write us!

Do you have a question about God? Send it to TPE Kids, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*, 1445 N. Boonville Avenue, Springfield, Mo., 65802. If we print it in an upcoming edition, we'll send you a free kids' book. For complete details, see the story on page 6.



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Try this!

Grow grass hair

Place a tablespoon of grass seed in the toe of an old pantyhose stocking. Top it with a cup of potting soil. Tightly gather the stocking around the soil, and tie it off with a knot directly above the lump of soil. Turn the stocking so the knot is on the bottom and the seeds are on top. Use paint or pieces of felt to create a face. Place your creation atop a container of water, with the tail dangling in the water. Keep the container filled as you wait for grass “hair” to sprout.

JUST FOR laughs

Why did the gardener refuse to share her vegetables with the neighbors?

They wouldn't say, “Pretty peas.”

What do a bubble and a flower have in common?

Both have Bs (bees) in them.

