

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON – THE EARLY DAYS

Charles Spurgeon was born June 19, 1834, in the Essex County town of Kelvedon. (The picture below is of that Kelvedon house). When he was 14 months old, he was taken to the home of his father's parents, in the out-of-the-way village of Stambourne. There he spent the following five years. His mother was only



19 when he was born, and the arrival of another baby within the next year was probably the reason for the change. James Spurgeon, his grandfather, was the minister of Stambourne's Congregational church, a position he had filled for 25 years. He possessed a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and the Puritan writings. His voice was strong, and his preaching was both earnest and powerful.

Spurgeon's grandfather kept Charles at his side when he answered the questions of inquirers and during Bible discussions with other preachers. Charles was thus introduced to the importance of the Scriptures at a very young age. Life in the James Spurgeon home was built around the Bible. It was read, revered, and recognized as inerrant. The

importance of prayer was also very clear to young Charles as he observed the life of his grandparents.

Young as he was, this little boy, who would become such a prolific author, was drawn to books. He was probably no more than three when he began pulling volumes out of his grandfather's library and looking at the illustrations. During those early days he was fascinated by the illustrations in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (a book he later said he read 100 times). *"When I first saw in it the woodcut of Christian carrying the burden on his back I felt so interested in the poor fellow that I thought I should jump for joy when, after he had carried it so long, he at last got rid of it."* He also became acquainted with Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, gazing long at its pictures of the burning of the several believers during the reign of Bloody Queen Mary. The sufferings those men endured made a lasting impression on him.

On one occasion, learning that his grandfather was grieved over the behavior of one of his church members who had begun to frequent the tavern, the precocious young boy marched boldly into the place and confronted him. The man, Thomas Roads, said of the event, *"To think an old man like me should be took to task... by a bit of a child like that! Well, he points at me, with his finger just so, and says, 'What doest thou here, Elijah? Sitting with the ungodly; and you a member of a church, and breaking your pastor's heart. I'm ashamed of you! I wouldn't break my pastor's heart, I'm sure.' And then he walks away."* Thomas was so smitten by the words that he said they led to his repentance.

A mother's prayers ...

After five years at Stambourne, Charles was taken back to his parents, who now lived in Colchester. Charles always spoke of his mother with deep affection and gratitude, and he tells of her reading the Scriptures to her children and pleading with them to be concerned about their souls. *"I cannot tell how much I owe the solemn words of my good mother. I remember on one occasion her praying thus, 'Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ.' That thought of my mother's bearing a swift witness against me pierced my conscience... how can I ever forget when she bowed her knee, and with her arms about my neck, prayed, 'Oh, that my son may live before Thee!'"*

When Charles was still a child, during one summer at Stambourne, he had an unforgettable experience. Richard Knill, a former missionary, was having special meetings and took an interest in Charles, quickly recognizing his unusual abilities. Day by day he spoke to Charles about his soul and prayed with him. He

believed the boy would assuredly become a preacher, and when he was about to leave the home, with the family standing around, he set him on his knee and said, *"This child will one day preach the gospel, and will preach it to great multitudes, and I am persuaded he will preach it in the chapel of Rowland Hill."* Rowland Hill's Chapel was one of the largest in England at the time. He then made Charles promise that when he preached for the first time in the chapel he would use William Cowper's great hymn, "God Moves in A Mysterious Way." Charles felt the effect of this and said, *"I looked forward to the time when I should preach the word; I felt very powerfully that no unconverted person might dare to enter the ministry; this made me... all the more intent upon seeking salvation."* Years later Charles did preach there and, remembering Richard Knill's words, chose that very hymn.

When he was 10, Charles was transferred to the Stockwell House School and was an excellent student. His brother James knew him better perhaps than anyone. He said, *"Charles never did anything else but study. I kept rabbits, chickens, and pigs and a horse; he kept to books. While I was busy here and there, meddling with anything and everything that a boy could touch, he kept to books and could not be kept away from study. But though he had nothing to do with other things, he could have told you all about them, because he used to read about everything, with a memory as tenacious as a vice and as copious as a barn."*

"You have nothin' to do but to look and live"

His conversion was preceded by a long and bitter conviction of sin and a longing for salvation. He wrote, *"I had rather pass through seven years of the most languishing sickness, than I would ever again pass through the terrible discovery of the evil of sin."* He was assailed by severe temptations to deny the very existence of God, and those in turn led to an effort to tell himself he had become a Free Thinker and virtually an atheist. He even endeavored to doubt his own existence, but all attempts were useless. Finally he told himself, *"I must feel something: I must do something."* He wished he might give his back to be scourged or that he might make some difficult pilgrimage, if by such efforts he might be saved. Yet he admitted, *"That simplest of all matters -- believing in Christ crucified, accepting His finished salvation, being nothing and letting Him be everything, doing nothing, but trusting to what He has done -- I could not get hold of it."* In later years, as he looked back on this terrible time, he said, *"I thought I would rather have been a frog or a toad than have been made a man. I reckoned that the most defiled creature ... was a better thing than myself, for I had sinned against Almighty God."*

That is what preceded the glorious snowy day when he took his seat in a small Gospel meeting. Little more than a dozen people were present. The storm raged outside and the scheduled speaker had been unable to make it to the meeting. Spurgeon said: *"At last a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach ... He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says Look. Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just Look. Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, Look unto Me. Ay,' said he, in broad Essex, 'many of ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it is no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, Look unto Me. Some of ye say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's working.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, Look unto Me.' Then the good man followed up his text in this way: 'Look unto Me, I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto*



Me! When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, 'Young man, you look very miserable.' Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made on my personal appearance from the pulpit before. However, it was a good blow struck. He continued: 'And you will always be miserable — miserable in life and miserable in death — if you do not obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.' Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, 'Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live.' I saw at once the way of salvation ... Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things. But when I heard that word Look what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant and sung, with the most enthusiastic of them, of the Precious Blood of Christ and the simple faith which looks alone to Him."

Although he was only 15 his gratitude and desire to serve the Lord were evident. He wrote: *"Oh great and unsearchable God, who knowest my heart, and triest all my ways; with a humble dependence upon the support of Thy Holy Spirit, I yield myself up to Thee; as Thine own reasonable sacrifice, I return to Thee Thine own. I would be forever, unreservedly, perpetually Thine; whilst I am on earth, I would serve Thee; and may I enjoy Thee and praise Thee forever! Amen. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, February 1, 1850.*

When Charles became convinced that believer's baptism was scriptural he wrote his parents asking for permission. His parents gave him their permission but his mother wrote, *"Ah, Charles, I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist."* He replied, not without some good-natured humor, *"Ah, mother, the Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty, and has given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought."*

Describing that day, Charles wrote, *"The wind blew down the river with a cutting blast as my turn came to wade into the flood, but after I had walked a few steps, and noted the people on the ferry boat, and in boats and on either shore, I felt as if Heaven, and earth, and hell, might all gaze upon me, for I was not ashamed, there and then, to own myself a follower of the Lamb. My timidity was washed away... I have never felt anything of the kind since. Baptism also loosed my tongue... I lost 1000 fears in that River Lark, and found that 'in keeping His commandments there is great reward.'"*

Some time later, Spurgeon was asked to address a Sunday school. An older preacher immediately



recognized his ability and wanted to encourage him. Feeling a direct request might be refused, he asked Spurgeon to go to Teversham the following Sunday evening, explaining that *"a young man was to preach there who was not much used to services and very likely would be glad of company."* Spurgeon agreed to go and, with the young man whom he assumed was to do the preaching, he set out on the Sunday evening for Teversham. As they walked he remarked to the companion that he hoped his preaching would be blessed by God. The companion was startled and said, *"I have never done such a*

thing in my life! You are the one who is to preach! I'm here to keep you company!" Spurgeon was equally surprised and stated he was both inexperienced and unprepared for such a task. But the other countered that Spurgeon was accustomed to addressing the Sunday school and could easily repeat one of the talks he had given there. Amazed by this turn of events, but also attracted by the opportunity, Spurgeon said, *"I walked along quietly, lifting up my soul to God, and it seemed to me I could surely tell a*

few poor cottagers of the sweetness and love of Jesus, for I felt them in my own soul." The meeting was in a thatched-roof cottage; the audience was a few farm-laborers and their wives. Spurgeon took as his text the Scripture, **"Unto you therefore which believe He is precious,"** and he spoke of Christ's glory and grace -- that which he had himself received and which Christ offered to all who would come to Him. The moment he finished preaching an elderly woman cried out, "Bless your heart, how old are you?" Spurgeon replied that there should be no interruption in the service. But as soon as the last hymn was sung she burst forth again with her question, and this time he replied, "I am under 60." "Yes, and under 16!" she declared. Her enthusiasm was felt by the rest of the congregation, and they virtually demanded that he return and preach to them again as soon as possible.

In 1852, aged 17, he was called to be the pastor of the small Baptist church at Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire. The village was notorious for profanity and drunkenness. But Spurgeon later wrote, *"In a short time, the little thatched chapel was crammed. The biggest vagabonds of the village were weeping floods of tears. And those who had been the curse of the parish became its blessing. I can say with joy and happiness that from one end of the village to the other, at the hour of Eventide, one might have heard the voice of song coming from every roof and echoing from every heart."* It was here that he won his first convert to Christ. She was a laborer's wife. *"If one had said to me, 'Someone has left you 20,000 pounds,' I should not have given a tuppence for it compared with the joy I felt when I was told God had saved a soul through my ministry... I felt like a diver who had gone down to the depths of the sea and brought up a great pearl."* Although he was just a teenager at this point he was preaching three times each Sunday and five times during the week. Spurgeon's pastorate at Waterbeach continued until he was 19.



THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON.
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And so it had begun – a life of service that would result in millions hearing the Gospel and countless souls trusting Christ. In 40 years of preaching, without the use of radio, television, the Internet, or even a microphone, Spurgeon preached to 10 million people. His sermons, printed in the newspapers and sent all over the world, reached many more. Through his writings he continued to speak to and help multitudes even after his death, at the age of 57. This is what he wrote of his life, *"My life seems to me like a fairy dream. I am often both amazed and dazed with its mercies and its love. How good God has been to me! I used to think that I should sing among the Saints above as loudly as*



any for I owe so much to the grace of God. And I said so once in a sermon long ago:

*'Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
While heavens resounding mansions ring
With shouts of sovereign grace.'*"

"Coming one Thursday in the late autumn, from an engagement beyond Dulwich, my way lay up the top of the Herne Hill ridge. I came along the level out of which rises the steep hill I had to ascend. While I was on the lower ground, riding in a Hansom cab, I saw a light before me, and when I came near the hill, I marked that light gradually go up the hill, leaving a train of stars behind it. This line of newborn stars remained in the form of one lamp, and then another, and another. It reached from the foot of the hill to its summit. I did not see the lamplighter. I do not know his name, nor his age, nor his residence; but I saw the lights, which he had kindled, and these remained when he himself had gone his way. As I rode along, I thought to myself, 'How earnestly do I wish that my life may be spent in lighting one soul after another, with the sacred flame of eternal life!' I would myself be as much as possible unseen while at my work and would vanish when my work is done."