

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813 - 1843)

by David F. Haslam

Introduction

When Phil Keymer approached me in June to explain his desire to hold the Summer School during August, to maintain the tradition started by Donald Allister, and asked if I'd be willing to do one of these talks, he knew only of my general interest in Church History, not realising that the subject of tonight's lecture has been my "*chosen specialist subject*" since January 1997. Yet I stand before you not as a Mastermind contestant sits before Magnus Magnusson or John Humphrys ready to answer a score of 'cleverly devised' questions, but as an ordinary church member in a secular profession with a sincere desire to share my interest in the life and works of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the young Scottish Presbyterian minister who died in 1843 before he reached his 30th birthday.

I first became interested in M'Cheyne as a student in the late 1960s when I picked up a second-hand copy of the book, "*The Memoir and Remains of the Reverend Robert Murray M'Cheyne*" in a Cambridge bookshop. I'd been a Christian then for less than 12 months, and found the book a real help to spiritual growth as a young man. This 600 page book, written and compiled by Andrew A Bonar, and first published in the year of M'Cheyne's death, became a classic of devotional literature during the nineteenth century. Like many such works, it dropped out of view to a large extent during the first half of the twentieth century, but became more widely known again after the Banner of Truth Trust published a 480 page reprint in 1973.

The earlier edition comprised a 6 part biographical *Memoir* written by Bonar which runs to 176 pages, supplemented by over 400 pages of M'Cheyne's letters (61), sermons (28), sermon outlines (7), lectures (2), some previously published items (11), his Songs of Zion (14) and concluding memorials. The six chapter *Memoir* came out earlier as a separate Banner paperback in 1960.

In recent years however, there has been a resurgence of interest in M'Cheyne, so much so that there is more in print by and about M'Cheyne at the present time than at any time during the Victorian era. Other books of his sermons have appeared, such as "*From the Preacher's Heart*" and "*The Passionate Preacher*", and a new biography came out in English in February this year, being a translation of the excellent 1993 Dutch biography "*Gedreven door Zijn Liefde*" written by Leen J van Valen, with the English title, "*Constrained by His Love*" (Christian Focus).

Who was M'Cheyne?

Donald Carson has cited M'Cheyne as one of the "*Overlooked Shapers of Evangelicalism*".

Robert M'Cheyne was the minister of St. Peter's Church of Scotland in Dundee from November 1836 until his death in March 1843 which occurred during a typhus epidemic in the town. These bare facts don't tell us why we should be interested in him at all. Despite his youth, he was one of the leaders of the growing Evangelical movement in the Scottish Kirk, ministers who wanted to stand against the tide of Moderatism which had been sapping the life out of vital religion in Scotland for several decades. He was a deeply godly man, for whom personal piety and the strong desire to grow in holiness was coupled with a passionate desire for the conversion of souls and the salvation of sinners. He was a gifted preacher, whom God blessed with success in remarkable ways.

"The true secret of his success in the pulpit was his combination of faithfulness to the word of God with tenderness for the souls of men. He went about his work with an air of reverence, which made men feel that the majesty of God was in

his heart. No man could exhort the guilty in more searching or tremendous terms; no man could address the troubled in more gentle or persuasive tones." [Loane]

In his book "*Sons of the Covenant*", a former Archbishop of Sydney, one of Peter Jensen's predecessors, Marcus L. Loane introduces M'Cheyne as the "*Saint of the Disruption*". The chapter title gives the clue to the historical setting of M'Cheyne's ministry. The great evangelical work of Reformation later known as the Disruption took place in May 1843 only two months after his death. His ministry coincided with the ten year struggle against "Intrusion", the Erastian practice of ungodly patrons placing ministers in churches against the wishes of the congregations. He took a keen interest in such Church affairs, though others were more prominent in the political fight. We can only speculate how his ministry would have developed in the Free Church of Scotland had he not been taken from this earth at the tender age of 29. The one thing in the world's religion which he hated above all else was *Erastianism*.

A timeline of M'Cheyne's life and times

- 1813 May 21 Born in Edinburgh, a son of Adam M'Cheyne and Lockhart Murray Dickson. His father was in the legal profession, a member of the *Writers to the Signet*. This body drafted charters and ordinances for the *Court of Session*, Scotland's highest judicial body. Adam's family came from the small town of *Thornhill* in Dumfriesshire in South West Scotland. Robert's mother came from the tiny village of *Ruthwell* near Annan in Dumfriesshire. She was the sixth out of eight siblings born between 1757 and 1777.
- Robert had two brothers, David Thomas and William Oswald Hunter, and one sister, Elizabeth Mary - known throughout her life as Eliza. William trained in medicine, and received an appointment from the East India Company as doctor of the 54th Regiment of the Native Infantry, and left in April 1831 for Bombay and Nasirabad. He never married.
- 1821 October Enrolled in the Old High School, Edinburgh.
- 1825 September *During his grammar school days, the Stockton and Darlington Railway is opened. I mention this historic milestone to focus on how this era differs from our own.*
- 1827 November Entered the University of Edinburgh to further his classical education.
- 1830 September 15 *While he is at University, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway is opened. A bit more contextualisation for you railway buffs on the front row.*
- 1831 July 8 Death of his elder brother David Thomas M'Cheyne (born 1804). He was a godly believer who sought his brother's spiritual good. His death wrought a profound change in Robert. A year after David died, M'Cheyne wrote, "On this morning last year came the first overwhelming blow to my worldliness; how blessed to me, Thou, O God, only knowest, who hast made it so." From this day forward his friends and family notice a change in him.
- On a later anniversary of this day he wrote, "This day eleven years ago, I lost my loved and loving brother, and began to seek a Brother who cannot die." Every year he marked the day as one to be remembered.
- 1831 November Enrolled as a student at the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh University. He studied under the great Thomas Chalmers, the once Moderate who turned Evangelical. He became fluent in Hebrew, the language of the OT.

- 1832 Reading *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, generally appended to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* brought him to a clear understanding of his way of acceptance with God.
- 1834 Nov 18 Writes the poem, *Jehovah Tsidekenu*, the 'Watchword of the Reformers', which begins, "I once was a stranger to grace and to God,...."
- 1835 February 16 Preached his first trial sermon before Professor David Welsh in Edinburgh.
- 1835 March 29 Last day at college in Edinburgh.
- 1835 April/May Preached three further probationary sermons before the Presbytery of Annan.
- 1835 July 1 Licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Annan. The following Sabbath, he preached twice in Ruthwell Church.
- 1835 November 7 Began as assistant to Rev. John Bonar in *Larbert & Dunipace*, near Stirling.
- 1836 November 24 Ordained as the minister of St. Peter's Church of Scotland, Dundee. His first sermon was on Isaiah 61:1-3, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath appointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives." This text was one he returned to on each anniversary of his induction.
- Dundee at this period was a growing industrial town with a modern harbour. Spinning and weaving were two of the main economic drivers. In 1836, it had a population of about 51,000. The steam engine had transformed old mills into new factories where *linen*, *rope* and above all, *jute* were manufactured. Many of the factories were unsafe and unhealthy. Women and children were employed as well as men.
- Robert's sister Eliza moves to Dundee as the housekeeper in St Peter's Manse. She lived until she was 88, outliving her brother by 43 years.
- 1837 May He pens his beautiful hymn, "*I am a debtor*", which begins, "When this passing world is done, When has sunk yon glaring sun, When we stand with Christ in glory, Looking o'er life's finished story, Then, Lord, shall I fully know - Not till then - how much I owe."
- 1838 December Became seriously ill with symptoms of violent heart palpitations. His doctor advised him to seek rest away from his labours in Dundee in order to recuperate and regain strength, so he moved temporarily back to his parents' home in Edinburgh.
- 1839 January 30 From Edinburgh, he wrote the first of ten *Pastoral Letters* to the flock at St Peter's, Dundee. The tenth such letter was written from Breslau in Prussia on 1839 October 16. [We shall shortly see how this came about.]
- 1839 March It is proposed that M'Cheyne be included in the party of ministers of the Church of Scotland to visit Palestine with a view to finding out the condition of the Jews and the opportunities for future Gospel mission to them. His doctors concur with this suggestion, deeming that the warmer climate of the Mediterranean would be conducive to his recovery to full health.

- 1839 April 11 Start of the Mission of Inquiry. Four Scottish ministers set out from London. They are Robert M'Cheyne, Andrew Bonar, Alexander Keith and Alexander Black. Two young men accompanied by two older men.
- Rev. William Chalmers Burns agrees to deputise for M'Cheyne during his lengthy absence from St Peter's. The Mission takes seven months in all.
- 1839 April 20 Lyons, France. During their overland journey through France they distribute French tracts.
- 1839 April 24 Genoa, Italy. Speaking the gospel to ordinary Genovese would have got them jailed, but they manage to speak to some Jews.
- 1839 May 5 Malta.
- 1839 May 15 Alexandria, Egypt. From there, they continue on camels to Palestine, accompanied by two Arab guides.
- 1839 June 7 Arrive in Jerusalem. Subsequently that month visit Bethlehem & Hebron and Bethany, then Gibeon, Sychem, Samaria, Carmel. The older ministers, A. Black and A. Keith later return to Britain separately due to ill-health, stopping en route at Budapest, Hungary.
- 1839 July 5 Arrive in Beyrout (modern Beirut, Lebanon). During July they visit SyroPhoenecia and Galilee. Visit several synagogues.
- 1839 July 29 Approach Cyprus, then on towards Constantinople.
- 1839 August 5 Bouja, near Smyrna (modern Izmir). M'Cheyne has suffered a high fever since they left Beyrout, and recuperates at the home of the English chaplain Rev Mr Lewis and his wife in Bouja, a small village in the hills.
- 1839 August 26 M'Cheyne arrives in Constantinople (modern Istanbul).
- 1839 Sept-Oct. Return journey via Wallachia, Moldavia, Austrian Poland, Prussia and Hamburg. There they hear the first news of the wonderful work of God that had lately taken place in Scotland. Newspapers have brief references to the revivals at Kilsyth and Dundee under the preaching of W. C. Burns.
- 1839 November 6 Sail up the Thames into London. They receive more details of the revival.
- 1839 November 22 M'Cheyne arrives back in Dundee and meets Burns the following day. They both go into the pulpit together.
- 1840 January-June The revival proceeds in Dundee. M'Cheyne's preaching also mightily blessed by God to many conversions. Burns travels through the Carse of Gowrie, the region West of Dundee, preaching before attentive crowds.
- 1840 June 11 The death of James Laing, the 11 year old boy whose conversion and holy death was subject of M'Cheyne's article, "*Another Lily Gathered*".
- 1841 December 1 *He writes a letter to the Alexander M'Neill, the advocate for directors of the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, objecting to their proposal for trains to run on the Sabbath.*
- 1841 December 18 In his sermon "*I love the Lord's Day*", M'Cheyne argues strongly for the

entire sanctification of the Lord's Day.

- 1842 May "Narrative of a Visit to the Holy Land and Mission of Inquiry to the Jews" by Andrew A. Bonar & Robert Murray M'Cheyne, is finally published on behalf of the Board of Mission of the Church of Scotland.
- 1842 December 30 For his flock at St. Peter's, M'Cheyne publishes "*Daily Bread*" a calendar for daily readings through the Bible, covering the OT once and the NT & Psalms twice in the whole year. This subsequently becomes a widely used scheme, highly recommended by ministers such as John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones.
- 1843 March 25 M'Cheyne's death in Dundee is followed by a Sabbath of mourning.
- 1843 March 30 Funeral at St Peter's. The preacher was Alexander Bonar. Burial in St. Peter's graveyard. All Scotland mourns the loss of such a minister.
- 1843 May 18 **The Disruption.** 451 ministers of the Church of Scotland leave its General Assembly in Edinburgh and solemnly cross the city centre to form the Free Church of Scotland.
- 1843 December "*The Memoir and Remains of the Reverend Robert Murray M'Cheyne*" is published in Dundee. Subsequent editions appear in Edinburgh, London and Philadelphia the following year.
- 1846 "*The Additional Remains of the late Rev. R.M. M'Cheyne*" is published.
- 1848 May Adam M'Cheyne publishes "*Familiar Letters*", a collection of 25 personal letters written during his son's travels during the Mission of Inquiry.
- 1879 December *36 years after his death, the Tay Bridge, the longest bridge in the world at the time, collapses in a storm, killing everyone aboard an afternoon train for Dundee. About 80 persons perished.*

M'Cheyne was a prodigious letter writer. Many of his letters were headed with his sketch of the setting sun above the words, "The night cometh, when no man can work." Jn ix. 4.

Mission of Discovery

The above timeline expands the dates during the Mission to Palestine. The report of their Mission of Inquiry was first published in 1842. Though several further editions appeared, it had been long out of print until a slightly abridged paperback edition was published by Christian Focus in 1996, under the title "*Mission of Discovery: The beginnings of Modern Jewish Evangelism - The journal of Bonar and McCheyne's Mission of Inquiry*". This 446 page work has detailed accounts of their visits to synagogues and conversations with the Jews they met during their journeys. The report subsequently led to the sending of the Daniel Edwards as a missionary to the Jews in Poland, followed by that of 'Rabbi' John Duncan to the Jews in Hungary. Two prominent Jews who came to a living faith in Jesus Christ were Alfred Edersheim and Adolph Sapphir in Budapest.

After his return to Scotland, M'Cheyne travelled extensively to not only preach the gospel as an evangelist, but also to make known the spiritual needs of the Jews and the importance of preaching the Gospel "*To the Jew first*". That is the theme of the sermon that he first preached on Nov. 17, 1839, after returning from the Mission to the Jews, under the title "*Our Duty to Israel*". It is based on Romans chapter 1 verse 16. As many of our neighbours here in Cheadle are Jews, I commend

this to you as an incentive for prayer. The circumstances may be different to when he preached it nearly 164 years ago, but the arguments from scripture have lost none of their persuasiveness.

M'Cheyne and Bonar both held to the view that the Scriptures contain unfulfilled prophecies which speak of a future salvation of the Jews. Whatever your own views may be on 'eschatology' - the study of the "end things", there is much we can learn from the way M'Cheyne approached what the Word of God has to teach on this matter. As St Paul says, "If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" Romans xi. 15.

Winsomeness

What was it about M'Cheyne that made such a deep impression on his hearers? What is it about the record of his life that even today can stir the reader's heart? One writer had this to say,

"M'Cheyne brought into the pulpit all the reverence for Scripture of the Reformation period ; all the honour for the headship of Christ of the Covenanter period ; all the freeness of the Gospel offer of the Marrow theology ; all the bright imagery of Samuel Rutherford, all the delight of the Erskines in the fulness of Christ. In M'Cheyne the effect of a cultured taste was apparent in the chastened beauty and simplicity of his style, if you can call it a style—in a sense he had no style, or rather it was the perfection of style, for it was as transparent as glass. The new element he brought into the pulpit, or rather which he revived and used so much that it appeared new, was winsomeness. It was an almost feminine quality. A pity that turned many of his sermons into elegaic poems, thrilled his heart, and by the power of the Spirit imparted the thrill to many souls. How precious his example and memory have been to Scotland is shown by the continued demand for his Life and Letters. And how invaluable the evangelistic labours begun by him and his brethren, and still continued and often blessed throughout our country, no Scotch audience needs to be told." [Blaikie: The Preachers of Scotland]

You see this in his sermons, and you read it in his letters. Some of the sayings from sermons and letters, and others taken from his journal entries illustrate how his spirituality was rooted in a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, a yearning for fellowship with God, coupled with a profound understanding of the depths of sin and deceit in the human heart. Some of his more memorable words may be already familiar as short quotations. Here are a few of these:

"A man is what he is on his knees before God, and nothing more."

"For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ."

"The Christian is a person who makes it easy for others to believe in God."

"Most of God's people are contented to be saved from the hell that is without; they are not so anxious to be saved from the hell that is within."

"It is a sure mark of grace to desire more."

"If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me."

"Lord make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be."

"Oh how sweet to work for God all day, and then lie down at night beneath His smile."

"The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness."

"A man who loves you the most is the man who tells you the most truth about yourself."

Some even of his lengthier quotations have found their way into modern evangelical sermon-craft. Here are a few of these:

"Study universal holiness of life. Your whole usefulness depends on this, for your sermons last but an hour or two; your life preaches all the week. If Satan can only make a covetous minister a lover of praise, of pleasure, of good eating, he has ruined your ministry. Give yourself to prayer, and get your texts, your thoughts, your

words from God. Luther spent his best three hours in prayer."

"I ought to pray before seeing any one. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. It is unscriptural. Christ arose before day and went into a solitary place. David says: 'Early will I seek thee'; 'Thou shalt early hear my voice.' Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness, and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then when in secret prayer the soul is often out of tune, I feel it is far better to begin with God—to see his face first, to get my soul near him before it is near another."

"Get your texts from God—your thoughts, your words, from God. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection's of the instrument, will be success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God. A word spoken by you when your conscience is clear, and your heart full of God's Spirit, is worth ten thousands words spoken in unbelief and sin."

"You will never find Jesus so precious as when the world is one vast howling wilderness. Then he is like a rose blooming in the midst of the desolation, a rock rising above the storm."

"I am tempted to think that I am now an established Christian,—that I have overcome this or that lust so long,—that I have got into the habit of the opposite grace,—so that there is no fear; I may venture very near the temptation—nearer than other men. This is a lie of Satan. One might as well speak of gunpowder getting by habit of resisting fire, so as not to catch spark. As long as powder is wet, it resists the spark; but when it becomes dry, it is ready to explode at the first touch. As long as the Spirit dwells in my heart, He deadens me to sin, so that, if lawfully called through temptation, I may reckon upon God carrying me through. But when the Spirit leaves me, I am like dry gunpowder. Oh for a sense of this!"

"Every wise workman takes his tools away from the work from time to time that they may be ground and sharpened; so does the only-wise Jehovah take his ministers oftentimes away into darkness and loneliness and trouble, that he may sharpen and prepare them for harder work in his service."

Holy affections

Some of these quotations already give a clue to M'Cheyne's character. He possessed an earnest desire to grow in personal holiness. He reads verses like those in Leviticus, where God says to his people, "Be ye holy, for I am holy", and he takes it to heart. Yet his quest for holiness is entirely rooted and grounded in a love for Christ. There is no hint of self-righteousness about him. The love of Christ constrained him, and made him seek after God, being conformed to the image of His Son. R.S. Candlish once wrote of him, "Assuredly he had more of the mind of his Master than almost any one I ever knew, and realized to me more of the likeness of the beloved disciple."

His affections extended to all those who sincerely followed Jesus Christ. One of his public letters (sent to the Editor of the "Dundee Warder") is entitled, "*On Communion with Brethren of other Denominations*". A.N. Groves wrote from India in 1845, "I trust M'Cheyne's life will refresh you: it is so deeply spiritual and free from all those questions of doubtful disputations, which wither the soul's sweetest affections, and make every man the curser of his brother, and in reality, if not in word, say, 'stand by, for I am holier than thou.'". When M'Cheyne and Bonar were in Palestine, they enjoyed taking the Lord's supper in an upper chamber together with members of other churches.

Self-examination

His progress in his close walk with God must surely be accounted in part to his habit of self-examination, and his keen consciousness of indwelling sin in the life of a believer. Much of this comes over in his journal, which he began early on as an informal day-book to record his experiences and inmost thoughts. He continued this practice right through his life. He was a keen advocate of personal reformation, and wrote a guide on this subject for his own benefit, which was published after his death with the title, "Personal Examinations and Reformation". In it he notes some of the steps he had resolved to take in order to live a more God-pleasing life.

“Of Common Lik”

This is the title of a guest essay on my web-site written by a student at the Toronto Baptist Seminary in 1998. The sub-title was, “*Spiritual Friendship as a Means of Grace in the lives of Robert Murray M'Cheyne and His Companions*”. In it Clint Humfrey explores the relationships Robert had with many of the like-minded young ministers who were his contemporaries - some who were friends from the time as Divinity students at Edinburgh, and others who became his friends subsequent to his ordination. These included the Bonar brothers, Andrew and Horatius, Alexander Somerville, and many others that Humfrey doesn't name. A list of M'Cheyne's friends appears on my web-site, and adds these names, some of whom were older ministers: William Chalmers Burns, Robert S. Candlish, Alexander Cumming, James Grierson, Thomas Guthrie, James Hamilton, Irving Hetherington, Robert MacDonald, Patrick Leslie Miller, and Alexander Moody-Stuart, who once wrote regarding M'Cheyne, “It was to me a golden day when I first became acquainted with a young man so full of Christ.”

Listing three qualities that constitute spiritual friendship, Humfrey has the following heads:

- Like *Devotion*
- Like *Theology*
- Like *Burden*

There's not time enough to expand on these now, but the headings are suggestive of the importance of cultivating genuine spiritual friendships, especially among those who are called as ministers of the Gospel. M'Cheyne's closest friend outside his own family was Andrew Alexander Bonar, who became his biographer. He outlived him by fifty years. His ministry in Collace not far from Dundee made them co-workers in the gospel in the same field of service and gave them many opportunities to preach in one another's pulpits. Later he was called to Finnieston in Glasgow, where was to he serve the Lord for over 30 years. On the subsequent anniversaries of Robert's death, he often noted the day in his diary and wished that he'd been even as half as useful to God as his friend had been.

Bonar completed the task of writing M'Cheyne's memoir in the three months September to November of 1843, the six months since his friend's death having been rather occupied with the events following the Disruption, and its consequences. The book, “*Annals of the Disruption*” records the severe hardships which members and ministers of the new denomination experienced in the years immediately following. They had to leave manses and churches behind. Many could not be even buried with their wives or husbands who had predeceased them before the Disruption. They met in the open air, in tents and barns, even in ships anchored off the shore. *It's tempting to think that there may be lessons from this period of Scottish history for the present crisis in the Anglican Communion. Have we evangelicals counted the cost of discipleship?*

Sermons

Most of M'Cheyne's own sermon notes are stored in the Library of New College, Edinburgh. Others have been reconstructed from notes made by hearers. The books now in print of compilations of his sermons should be an essential part of every minister's library. Several new compilations have appeared in recent years, and existing works have been translated into other modern languages. There are more of M'Cheyne's sermons published in Dutch than in any other language apart from English. At least two of his larger sermon collections have been translated into Chinese and published by China Reformation Ministries. These are available for free download from the Internet, and thus in this manner as well as the printed word, they are accessible in mainland China.

M'Cheyne read widely, and found great instruction and help from some great writers of the past, including Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, to name but four. The book by Edward Fisher, "*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*" especially influenced him.

In October 1834, after he had finished reading Richard Baxter's "*Call to the Unconverted*", Robert M'Cheyne penned this eight line poem:

Though Baxter's lips have long in silence hung,
And death long hush'd that sinner-wakening tongue
Yet still, though dead, he speaks aloud to all,
And from the grave still issues forth his "Call,"
Like some loud angel-voice from Zion Hill,
The mighty echo rolls and rumbles still,
O grant that we, when sleeping in the dust,
May thus speak forth the wisdom of the just.

Experiential Calvinism

M'Cheyne stands in a great line of preachers who avowed an experiential Calvinism, just another term for a truly Biblical Christianity. His preaching was rooted and grounded in the Word of God, and took for its great themes the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Catechisms, the historic standards of Presbyterianism. The theology that united M'Cheyne and his companions was both Calvinistic and experiential. There was no false division between theory and practice in their lives.

You might come to this through reading Martyn Lloyd-Jones, through Bishop J.C. Ryle's sermons, through John Bunyan's Pilgrim, through George Whitefield or Charles Haddon Spurgeon. On the great evangelical truths of the faith, M'Cheyne is at one with them. On the importance of prayer and personal holiness he says nothing different. And yet, there was something special about the way that he expressed it. It is this that has drawn me to him again and again over the years and especially why I began my web-site to promote a wider appreciation of his life and works.

Duncan Matheson, the Scottish Evangelist, an eye-witness of M'Cheyne's preaching, wrote the following: "He preached with eternity stamped on his brow. I think I yet can see his seraphic countenance, and hear his sweet and tender voice. I was spell-bound, and would not keep my eyes off him for a moment. He announced his text - Paul's thorn in the flesh. What a sermon! I trembled, and never felt God so near. His appeals went to my heart, and, as he spoke of the last great day in the darkening twilight, for once I began to pray." This illustrates that even though we have wonderful access to M'Cheyne's sermons in print, there was something about his preaching which the printed form cannot effectively reproduce or convey to us. "All his sermons reflect his awareness of the brevity of life, the preciousness of man's immortal soul, the reality of hell, the sole sufficiency of Christ to save the sinner and the absolute necessity of the new birth." [Maurice Roberts]

I can't let this occasion pass without reading to you a few paragraphs from one of his sermons. These words are extracts from his sermon on Hosea vi. 4: "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." This was published under the title, "*The impressions of natural men are fading*". (This is the first of his sermons that I posted on-line in 1997.)

In these words, God complains that He did not know what to do with Israel, their impressions were so fading. He says, verse 5, that he had hewed them by the prophets, and slain them by the words of His mouth: and their judgments were as the light that goeth forth. At one time He sent them severe awakening messages of coming wrath; then messages of love and grace, as bright, and as many as the beams of the sun. They were a little impressed by them; the cloud of distress began to gather on their brow—the dew of grief seemed to start on their cheek, but it soon dried up. It was like the morning cloud and early dew that goeth away. So it is with all the unconverted persons in this congregation, who will finally perish. God has sent them awakening messages—hewed them by the prophets - and slain them by the words of His mouth. He has sent them also

sweet encouraging messages; His judgments have been like the light that goeth forth. They think, and are impressed for a little, but it soon dies away. "O Ephraim, what shall I do," etc. The fact that the impressions of natural men fade away.

(1.) Prove the fact from Scripture.—The Scriptures abound with examples of it.

First, Lot's wife. She was a good deal awakened. The anxious faces of the two angelic men—their awful words, and merciful hands—made a deep impression on her. The anxiety of her husband, too, and his words to his sons-in-law, sunk into her heart. She fled with anxious steps; but as the morning brightened, her anxious thoughts began to wear away. She looked back, and became a pillar of salt.

Second, Israel at the Red Sea. When Israel had been led through the deep water in safety, and when they saw their enemies drowned, then they sang God's praise. Their hearts were much affected by this deliverance. They sang, "The Lord is my strength and song, He also is become my salvation." They sang his praises, but soon forgot His works. In three days they were murmuring against God because of the bitter waters.

Third, Once a young man came running to Jesus, and he kneeled down, saying, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" A flash of conviction had passed over his conscience; he was now kneeling at the feet of Christ, but he never kneeled there any more; he went away sorrowful. His goodness was like the morning cloud.

Fourth, Once Paul preached before Felix, the Roman governor; and as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. The preaching of the Gospel made the proud Roman tremble on his throne, but did it save his soul? Ah, no! "Go thy way for this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." His goodness was like the morning cloud.

Fifth, Again Paul preached before King Agrippa and his beautiful Bernice, with all the captains and chief men of the city. The word troubled Agrippa's heart—the tear started into his royal eye—for a moment he thought of leaving all for Christ. "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian." But ah, His goodness was like the morning cloud and early dew. In all these the cloud gathered over them—for a moment the dew glistened in their eye, but it soon passed away, and left the hard rocky heart behind.

(2.) Prove the fact from experience.—Most men under a preached Gospel have their times of awakening.

If the impressions of natural men were permanent, then most would be saved, but we know that this is not the case. Few there be that find it. Perhaps I would not go far wrong if I were to say, that there may not have been ten grown up men in this congregation who have never experienced any concern for their soul, and yet I fear that there may be hundreds who will finally perish.

1st, How many have had a time of awakening in childhood—when they were prayed over by a believing mother, or taught by a believing father, or taught by a faithful Sabbath-school teacher? How many have had deep impressions made at the Sabbath-school? But they have passed away like the morning cloud and the early dew.

2nd, At their first communion, when they first spoke to a minister about their soul, and heard his piercing questions and faithful warnings, when they got their token from his hand, when they first received the bread and wine, and sat at the table of the Lord—they trembled—the tear dimmed their eye—they went home to pray. But it soon wore away. The world—pleasure—cares—involved the mind, and all was gone like the cloud and the dew.

3rd, A first sickness. How many, laid down on a bed of sickness, and made to look over the verge of the grave? They tremble as they think how unprepared they are to die; and now they begin to vow and resolve, if the Lord spare me, I will avoid evil companions, I will pray and read my Bible, etc.; but no sooner are they better than the resolutions are forgotten, like the cloud and the dew.

4th, First death in a family. What a deep impression this makes on a feeling heart. That lovely circle is broken round the fire, and never will be whole again. Now they begin to pray—to turn to Him that smites. Perhaps, kneeling beside the cold body, they vow no longer to go back to sin and folly. Or, following the body to the grave, while the big tear stands in the eye, they promise to bury all their sins and follies in the grave of heir beloved one. But soon a change comes over them—the tears dry up—and the prayer is forgotten. The world takes its place again and reigns. Their goodness is as the morning cloud.

5th, In a time of awakening, many receive deep impressions. Some are alarmed to see others alarmed that are no worse than they. Many have their feelings stirred—their affections moved. Many are brought to desire conversion—to weep and to pray. Mr. Edwards mentions that there was scarcely an individual in the whole town unconcerned; there were tokens of God's presence in every house. So here; and yet, when the time is past, how soon they sink back into former indifference. Their goodness is as the morning cloud.

For those listening who are preachers, there are important lessons here. In the 1993 Evangelical Library lecture "*Robert Murray M'Cheyne - The making of a Man of God*", John J. Murray picks four lessons to learn from M'Cheyne about Christian ministry:

1. *Our first need as ministers is to be men of God.*
2. *We need to know what to preach.*
3. *We need to know the end of preaching.*
4. *We need to recover the right method of preaching.*

And he goes into more detail on each of these points. Under the third point he said this, "Never forget that the end of a sermon is the salvation of the people." "Here I would observe what to me appears to be a fault in the preaching in our beloved Scotland. Most ministers are accustomed to set Christ before the people. They lay down the Gospel clearly and beautifully, but they do not urge men to enter in." Well, from M'Cheyne you'll learn how a Calvinist preaches the free offer of the Gospel and urges all to enter in - men, women and children. You'll learn too how he preaches predestination and even reprobation, *evangelistically*.

Some closing observations

In a talk about M'Cheyne given at the 1997 Carey Ministers' Conference, Geoffrey Thomas of Aberystwyth makes the telling comment that one of the best books you can give to a reading Charismatic is Andrew Bonar's "*Robert Murray M'Cheyne*". This point illustrates that M'Cheyne is a worthy role model for Christians today. Living at a time well before the birth of Pentecostalism, his life exemplifies a deep spirituality that is far more rewarding of study than any of the peculiar leaders that have sprung out of that different stream.

In November 1834, M'Cheyne heard of the death of Edward Irving. In his journal he wrote,

"I look back upon him with awe, as on the saints and martyrs of old. A holy man, in spite of all his delusions and errors. He is now with his God and Saviour, whom he wronged so much, yet, I am persuaded, loved so sincerely. How we should lean for wisdom, not on ourselves, but on the God of all grace".

As Arnold Dallimore relates in his biography of Irving, subtitled "*Forerunner of the Charismatic Movement*", Edward Irving was a minister who began well, but who fell into all sorts of doctrinal errors and strange practices. Though Irving's emphasis on the interpretation of Bible prophecy certainly influenced the preachers of M'Cheyne and Bonar's generation, the contrast between Irving and M'Cheyne couldn't be stronger. The former is an historic example of a spirituality that finished up 'off the rails'; the latter of an evangelical spirituality with soundness of purpose that has an enduring appeal.

There's so much more I could say, if only we had the time this evening.

For further information, please visit my web-site <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/d.haslam/m-cheyne.htm>

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The above address was presented on 13 August 2003 at the Summer School of St. Mary's Church, Cheadle, Cheshire.

The hymn *JEHOVAH TSIDKENU* was sung at the end of the meeting.

2. JEHOVAH TSIDKENU.

"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"

(The watchword of the Reformers)

1. I once was a stranger to grace and to God,
I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.
2. I oft read with pleasure, to sooth or engage,
Isaiah's wild measure and John's simple page;
But e'en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled tree
Jehovah Tsidkenu seem'd nothing to me.
3. Like tears from the daughters of Zion that roll,
I wept when the waters went over His soul;
Yet thought not that my sins had nail'd to the tree
Jehovah Tsidkenu - 'twas nothing to me.
4. When free grace awoke me, by light from on high,
Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die;
No refuge, no safety in self could I see, -
Jehovah Tsidkenu my Saviour must be.
5. My terrors all vanished before the sweet name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free, -
Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.
6. *Jehovah Tsidkenu!* my treasure and boast,
Jehovah Tsidkenu! I ne'er can be lost;
In thee I shall conquer by flood and by field,
My cable, my anchor, my breast-plate and shield!
7. Even treading the valley, the shadow of death,
This "watchword" shall rally my faltering breath;
For while from life's fever my God sets me free,
Jehovah Tsidkenu, my death song shall be.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843)

November 18, 1884.

Notes:

A suitable tune is the accompaniment to William Featherston's hymn "*My Jesus I love Thee*".

The phrase "*Jehovah Tsidkenu*" is taken from the Anglicised Hebrew of the following two verses in the prophet Jeremiah.

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jer. 23:5-6) KJV

This is fulfilled in the New Testament in the doctrine of "Justification by Faith" whereby undeserving sinners are accounted righteous before God as a free gift on the basis of the redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. (See especially Romans chapter 3 verses 21-26.)