

Rev. Joan Pell
Sierra Pines United Methodist Church
Sermon: 04/29/2018
Series: Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It
Scripture: Romans 4:1-5, 5:1-5



A Crisis of Faith

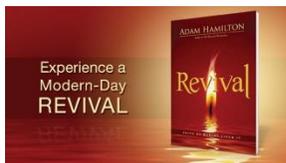
NOTE: This sermon is mainly a summary of the ideas in the book and DVD by Adam Hamilton called *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It*



<Romans 4:1-5, 5:1-5>

4:1 *What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?* ² *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* ³ *For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."* ⁴ **Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.** ⁵ **But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.**

5:1 *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* ² **through whom we have obtained access to this grace** in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ *And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* ⁴ *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* ⁵ *and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

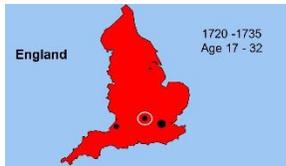


This sermon series is based on a book and video by Rev. Adam Hamilton, UM pastor of COR in KS. We are following the life of John Wesley, who sparked a revival in 18th Century England, and seeing what lessons there are for a modern-day revival for our own lives and church.



Two weeks ago we looked at the first 17 years of Wesley's life and the precursors to revival as we travelled to Epworth in the north of England. Wesley's father Samuel was an ordained priest in the Church of England and they lived in the parsonage which you can see here. Wesley's parents prayed for and spiritually mentored him. He had a humble, teachable spirit, learned as his extended family shared very different viewpoints. Through his family's dealings with hardship and opposition, he learned perseverance. And after being saved from death at a young age, he searched for his purpose in life.





Then last week we travelled to Oxford, looking at Wesley's life from age 17 to 32. Wesley studied at Christ Church College, at the University of Oxford, in an impressive building that is still standing! He got his bachelors and his masters and became a Fellow (faculty member) of Lincoln College and got ordained. For a while he was curate back at Epworth with his father before he returned to academia. Faced with a longing and dissatisfaction in his own faith life, as John Wesley mentored younger students, he developed a methodical way for them to pursue intentional faith practices to help them grow in their love for God: by praying together, reading and discussing the scriptures together, receiving Eucharist together, and serving the poor together; all in order to glorify God and live a holy life.



Today we are going to travel to Georgia in the US, then return to London, and then once more onto Oxford covering a period of 3 or 4 years with Wesley in his early thirties. This photo is of Aldersgate Street in London and the buildings that stand there now. The park that you will see Adam Hamilton standing in is here <red circle> and the plaque is here <red circle>. Today we are going to see Wesley struggling with his faith, wondering if he really is a Christian, whether he has done enough to please God, in other words whether his good works and spiritual actions have saved him. Eventually he comes to an understanding of God's grace that was reflected in the scriptures that we just read.



Let's take a look!

<Show Video – week3 - 00:20 to 14:32>

In this video Adam Hamilton recalls that in 1735, John Wesley and his brother Charles answered a call to be missionaries in Georgia, taking the good news to the colonies. John was having a faith crisis of his own, feeling that the more he pursued Christ and longed for holiness, the further away Christ seemed. He was terrified of the sea, and there were many storms on the four month trip and JW was certain they would die –his fear contributed to his sense of lacking faith. In Savannah, Georgia, he led the folk methodically and rigorously and also shared the gospel with the Native Americans. His time there was cut short when his heart was broken by a young woman Sophia Hopkey; in his hurt, he refused to serve her Eucharist, and was brought up on charges; he returned to London discouraged and thinking that he had never converted to God. On May 24, 1738 Wesley was at a meeting on Aldersgate Street studying the preface to Romans when he found his “heart strangely warmed” and believed himself saved. He later concluded that he was already a Christian, but this was a pivotal moment, and he realized that he didn't have to prove himself worthy. As Christians we have to trust that God loves us and then live our lives in response. He then proceeded to preach that message with enthusiasm everywhere. Adam Hamilton then takes us to Oxford and the University Church of St, Mary, where JW preached “salvation

by faith” to the University faculty; in subsequent years he would offend them so much talking about being “almost Christian” and an “altogether Christian” that he was told never to return. This led JW to the discovery that he could preach outside, and the revival was launched.



God works in the storms of life, the literal and the metaphorical storms. What the video didn't talk about was how on that ship during the numerous storms Wesley saw the faith of the Moravians who sung and prayed and were not at all concerned about the weather and the possibility of sinking. He saw their trust in God.

Wesley's mind/head knew that salvation is a gift from God but Wesley's heart had him constantly striving hard to seek God's acceptance. But God used those difficult times of struggle to point out to JW the inadequacies of his cerebral and works-oriented faith and that working harder and harder to earn love is not the way to salvation.

And then there was the embarrassment of his relationship with Sophia Hopkey and the resultant charges against him. There is great power in honestly assessing where we are and inviting God to teach us, shape us, and forgive us. Healing and grace come when we let go of the right to be angry, when we accept God's forgiveness for ourselves. God's aftermath is better than our plans. As the Apostle Paul said: (Romans 5:3-5) *suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts.*



God's love for us is like a parents love for their child. Our children get it wrong as they grow up and do things that disappoint us, but that doesn't remove our love for them. We love them and we bless them all the same. Similarly with God's love, we are accepted, as we are.



Through his faith crisis, that's what Wesley came to realize – God accepted him as he was. And then he wondered if he was truly a Christian before, and upset others in the process of his theological searching, but finally he realized that yes, he had been on the path all the time, this experience was another moment in a long chain of understanding on his journey of faith.

So how about you? **Have you accepted God's acceptance of you?** Are you living as an altogether Christian with a passionate faith in which you seek to love God with everything that is within you as a response to God's love for you? How do John Wesley's sermons speak to us today? They convict us too. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Resources

Hamilton, Adam. *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014. [Book and DVD].