



**IN SEARCH
OF
SOULS**

**THE STORY OF
JONATHAN EDWARDS
AND
DAVID BRAINERD**

J.R. BROOME

In Search of Souls

New England
in
the Eighteenth Century

JONATHAN EDWARDS

&

DAVID BRAINERD

J.R.Broome

2002

GOSPEL STANDARD TRUST PUBLICATIONS

12(b) Roundwood Lane, Harpenden, Herts.

AL5 3DD, England.

© J.R.Broome 2002

ISBN: 1 897837 36 4

Published by:
Gospel Standard Trust Publications

Cover picture: Autumn Scene, River Jackson,
New Hampshire, U.S.A.

*Printed and bound in Great Britain by
The Cromwell Press
Aintree Avenue, White Horse Business Park,
Trowbridge, Wiltshire. BA14 0XB*

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
---------	------

Preface

Jonathan Edwards

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|----|
| 1. | A New Life Given | 7 |
| 2. | Early Years | 18 |
| 3. | In Search of Souls | 27 |
| 4. | The Path of Sorrows | 43 |

David Brainerd

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 5. | Youth and Conversion | 52 |
| 6. | Steps in Providence | 63 |
| 7. | Among the Indians | 72 |
| 8. | Cast the Net on the Right | 81 |
| 9. | Extracts from Brainerd's <i>Journal</i> | 90 |

Bibliography

PREFACE

When the Pilgrim Fathers left Leyden in the Netherlands for America in July 1620, William Bradford, their chronicler, records that one of their motives in moving across the Atlantic was to be the means of propagating the gospel among the heathen. Another of their desires was that the Lord would open the eyes of the Jews to the Messiah, take away the veil from their eyes and graft them into the natural olive tree. [2 Corinthians 12. 14-16. Romans 11.24].

Both Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd were direct descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers and were used of the Lord as instruments in His hand in the outpouring of the Spirit in revival power in New England in the early eighteenth century. Northampton, where Edwards was minister from 1729 - 1750, was the scene of great revival in 1735 and 1741. These events were recorded in Jonathan Edwards' books *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* published in 1736 and *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* published in 1741.

The effects of these blessings in New England were felt in England, in the home country, at the same time. David Brainerd, who eventually was led among the Indians, witnessed revival under his own ministry in 1745. This is recorded in his *Life and Diary* published after his death in 1747 by his friend Jonathan Edwards.

In this way the prayer of the Pilgrim Fathers was answered. The heathen were blessed; even Jonathan Edwards himself, when forced to give up his pastorate

at Northampton, went to Stockbridge, an out post to the west, and preached among the Indians. Similarly, as the United States has stood by present-day Israel, we wait to see the second answer to the prayer of the Pilgrim Fathers, in the outpouring of the Spirit on Israel.

CHAPTER 1

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703 - 1758)

A New Life Given

Birth and Childhood

Jonathan Edwards was born on 5th October 1703 at Windsor, New England, on the banks of the River Connecticut. His ancestors were exiles from England in the great Puritan exodus. His father was minister at Windsor for about sixty years. He died in 1758 at the age of eighty-nine only two months before his son Jonathan. Jonathan's parents had married in 1694 and lived in partnership for over sixty-three years. His mother was Esther Stoddard, daughter of Solomon Stoddard, minister of Northampton, the place where, in later years, Jonathan himself became minister. His mother lived to be ninety. She had ten daughters and one son. Four were older than Jonathan and six younger.

Jonathan was educated with care. He had godly parents and it was their desire that from a child he might know the Holy Scriptures. He was a sober and quiet boy, yet a strong and highly intelligent character.

The blessing which attended his father's ministry did not pass him unnoticed. His earliest extant letter is written to one of his sisters away from home, dated Windsor 10th May 1716. He writes, "Through the wonderful mercy and goodness of God there hath been in this place a very remarkable stirring and pouring out of the Spirit of God, and likewise now is, but I think I have reason to think it is in some measure diminished but I hope not much. About thirteen have been joined to the Church in a state of full communion... I think there come commonly on Mondays about thirty persons to speak with father about the condition of their souls. It is a time of general health in this place."

The loving concern of Mr. Edwards for his family is seen in a letter he wrote home, while a military chaplain in 1711. He wrote to his wife, "Remember my love to each of the children, to Esther, Elizabeth, Anne, Mary, Jonathan, Eunice, and Abigail. The Lord have mercy on and eternally save them all, with our dear little Jerusha. The Lord bind up their souls with thine and mine in the bundle of life. Tell the children, that I would have them, if they desire to see their father again, to pray daily for me in secret; and above all things to seek the favour of God in Christ Jesus, and that while they are young".

Adolescence

In his youth Jonathan was the subject of various religious impressions, especially as a result of the blessing which visibly rested on his father's ministry

at Windsor. About twenty years later he wrote of how the Lord had worked in his heart in the years from about 1713 to 1723. In those years he was at home under his father's tuition until he entered Yale College at New Haven in 1716, where he studied for six years. He was licensed to preach the gospel at the age of nineteen and went to his first church in New York in August 1722, where he stayed for eight months and then returned to Windsor at the end of April 1723. In September 1723 he went to Yale to receive his M.A. and stayed there studying and preaching occasionally until June 1724 when he was made a tutor at the college. It is to this period of his life that the following account of the Lord's dealings with him belongs. As many regard him as a divine in America of comparable stature to John Owen in England, it is of interest to know that his knowledge of the truth was through the revealing of the Holy Spirit.

His Own Account of his Conversion

He writes, "I had a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul from my childhood; but I had two most remarkable seasons of awakening, before I met with that change by which I was brought to those new dispositions, and that new sense of things, that I have since had. The first time was when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of awakening in my father's congregation. I was then very much affected for many months and concerned about my soul's salvation, and was abundant in

religious duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret and to spend much time in religious conversation with other boys, and used to meet with them to pray together ... I with some of my school mates joined together and built a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot for a place of prayer. And besides I had particular places of my own in the woods, where I used to retire by myself, and was from time to time much affected ... I seemed to be much in my element when engaged in religious duties. I am ready to think many are deceived with such affections and such a kind of delight as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.

But in progress of time my convictions and affections wore off and I entirely lost all these affections and delights and left off secret prayer, at least as to any constant preference for it, and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in the ways of sin. Indeed I was at times very uneasy, especially towards the latter part of my time at College, when it pleased God to seize me with pleurisy; in which He brought me nigh to the grave and shook me over the pit of hell. And yet it was not long after my recovery before I fell again into my old ways of sin. But God would not suffer me to go on with any quietness. I had great and violent inward struggles, till after many conflicts with wicked inclinations, repeated resolutions and bonds, that I laid myself under by vows to God, I was brought wholly to break off all former wicked ways and all ways of known outward sin, and to apply myself to

In Search of Souls

seek salvation and practise many religious duties, but without that kind of affection and delight I had formerly experienced.

My concern now wrought more by inward struggles and conflicts and self reflection. I made seeking my salvation the main business of my life. But yet it seems to me, I sought it after a miserable manner, which has made me sometimes since question whether ever it issued in that which was saving, being ready to doubt whether such miserable seeking ever succeeded. I was indeed brought to seek salvation in a manner that I never was before; I felt a spirit to part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ. My concern continued and prevailed with many exercises, thoughts and inward struggles, but it yet never seemed to be proper to express that concern by the name of terror.

From my childhood my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty in choosing whom He would to eternal life, and rejecting whom He pleased, leaving them eternally to perish and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced and fully satisfied as to this sovereignty of God, but I never could give an account how or by what means I was thus convinced, not in the least imagining at the time, nor a long time after, that there was any extraordinary influence of God's Spirit in it. However my mind rested in it and it put an end to all those cavils and objections. There has been a wonderful change in my

mind with respect to this doctrine from that day to this...

But I have often since that first conviction had quite another sense of God's sovereignty. I have often had since not only a conviction but a delightful conviction. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have much lived in since was on reading those words, 1 Timothy 1.17, 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen'. As I read those words, there came into my soul a sense of the glory of God. ... Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. ... How happy should I be, I thought, if I might enjoy that God and be rapt up in Him in Heaven and be as it were swallowed up in Him for ever. I kept saying those words of Scripture to myself and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do, with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was anything spiritual or of a saving nature in this.

Christ Revealed in his Heart

From about this time I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by Him. An inward sweet sense of these things at times came into my heart, and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. My mind was

greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of His person and the way of salvation by free grace in Him. Those words in the Song of Solomon 2. 1. used to be abundantly with me, 'I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys.' The words seemed to me to represent the loveliness and beauty of Christ. The whole book of the Canticles used to be pleasant to me and I used to read it much.

His Account of it to his Father

Not long after I first began to experience these things I gave an account to my father of some of the things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together; and when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone in a solitary place in my father's pasture for contemplation. And as I walked there and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, as I know not how to express; I seemed to see them both in sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was a sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness, an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.

New York

My sense of divine things seemed gradually to increase till I went to preach at New York, which was about a year and a half after they began, and while I

was there I felt them very sensibly in a much higher degree than I had done before. My longings after God and holiness were much increased. Pure and humble, holy and heavenly, Christianity appeared to me exceedingly amiable. I felt a burning desire to be, in everything, a complete Christian, and conformed to the blessed image of Christ, and that I might live, in all things, according to the pure, sweet and blessed rules of the gospel. I had an eager thirsting after progress in these things; which put me upon pursuing and pressing after them.

It was my continual strife, day and night, and constant inquiry, how I should be more holy, and more becoming a child of God and a disciple of Christ. I now sought an increase of grace and holiness, with much more earnestness than ever I had sought grace before I had it ... but yet with too great a dependence on my own strength; which afterwards proved a great damage to me. My experience had not then taught me, as it has done since, my extreme feebleness and impotence, every manner of way, and the bottomless depths of secret corruption and deceit there was in my heart. However, I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness and conformity to Christ. ...

There was no part of creature-holiness that I had so great a sense of its loveliness, as humility of heart and poverty of spirit; and there was nothing that I so earnestly longed for. My heart panted after this - to lie low before God, as in the dust, that I might be nothing, and that God might be all, that I might become as a

In Search of Souls

little child. I had the abundance of sweet religious conversation in the family where I lived, with Mr John Smith and his pious mother. My heart was knit in affection to those in whom was the appearance of true piety; and I could bear the thought of no other companions, but the disciples of the blessed Jesus. I had great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world; and my secret prayers used to be in great part taken up in praying for it. ...

I frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the banks of the River Hudson, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things and secret converse with God and had many sweet hours there. Sometimes Mr Smith and I walked there together, to converse on the things of God and our conversation used to turn much on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world, and the glorious things that God would accomplish for His church in the latter days. I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the Holy Scriptures of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet and powerful words. I often seemed to see so much light exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading, often dwelling long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it. Almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders.

Returns Home to Windsor

I came away from New York in the month of April 1723 and had a most bitter parting with Mrs Smith and her son. My heart seemed to sink within me at leaving the family and city, where I had enjoyed so many sweet and pleasant days. I went from New York to Wethersfield by water; and as I sailed away I kept sight of the city as long as I could. However, that night after this sorrowful parting I was greatly comforted in God at West Chester, where we went ashore to lodge, and had a pleasant time of it all the way to Saybrook. It was sweet to me to think of meeting dear Christians in heaven, where we should never part more. At Saybrook we went ashore to lodge on Saturday and there kept the Sabbath, where I had a refreshing season walking alone in the fields.

After I came home to Windsor I remained much in a like frame of mind as when at New York, only sometimes I felt my heart ready to sink with the thoughts of my friends at New York. My support was in contemplations on the heavenly state. It was a comfort to think of that state where there is fullness of joy, where there reigns heavenly calm and delightful love without alloy, where there are continually the dearest expressions of this love, where is the enjoyment of the persons loved, without ever parting. And how will the mutual lovers join together to sing the praises of God and the Lamb. How will it fill us with joy to think that this enjoyment, these sweet exercises will never cease, but will last to all eternity.”

In Search of Souls

Here Jonathan Edwards' account of the Lord's work in his soul ends. In it can be seen how he was struggling in his own strength to be holy, and also how as he looked back on it when he wrote much later in his life, he understood his youthful ignorance of his own weakness and the plague of his own heart. Nevertheless as it stands it shows clearly the Lord's beginning with him.

CHAPTER 2

Early Years

Early Resolutions

Besides the writings already quoted, Jonathan Edwards left two other documents relating to his early years. One is a set of resolutions written between the years of his college days and the end of 1723, and the other a *Diary* written mainly in the years 1722-1725.

There are seventy resolutions in all and they begin with the words, "Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ's sake." While there is no scriptural warrant for making such resolutions and there appears to be a certain legality about many of them, yet there is about them much that is good.

"*Resolved*, to act in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove otherwise."

"*Resolved*, never to do anything out of revenge."

In Search of Souls

“*Resolved*, never to speak evil of anyone, so that it shall tend to his dishonour, more or less, upon no account except for some real good.”

“*Resolved*, in narrations, never to speak anything but the pure and simple truth.”

“*Resolved*, never to allow the least measure of any fretting or uneasiness at my father or mother.”

“*Resolved*, after afflictions, to inquire what I am the better for them; what good I have got by them.” It would seem that in his youthful zeal his desires were good, while he later learnt much of his own weakness and inability to keep these resolutions.

In his *Diary* these resolutions come in for comment, which is of interest. For **Wed., Jan 2nd 1722**, he wrote, “Dull. I find by experience, that let me make resolutions, and do what I will, with never so many inventions, it is all nothing, and to no purpose at all, without the motions of the Spirit of God; for if the Spirit of God should be as much withdrawn from me always, as for the past week, notwithstanding all I do, I should not grow but should languish and miserably fade away. I perceive, if God should withdraw his Spirit a little more, I should not hesitate to break my resolutions and should soon arrive at my old state. There is no dependence on myself. Our resolutions may be at the highest one day, and yet, the next day, we may be in a miserable dead condition, not at all like the same person who resolved. So that it is to no purpose to resolve, except we depend on the grace of God. For if it were not for His mere grace, one might

be a very good man one day, and a very wicked one the next.

I find also by experience that there is no guessing out the ends of Providence, in particular dispensations towards me - any otherwise than as afflictions come as corrections for sin, and God intends when we meet with them, to desire us to look back on our ways, and see wherein we have done amiss, and lament that particular sin, and all our sin before him - knowing this also that all things shall work together for our good, not knowing in what way, indeed, but trusting in God.”

His *Diary* December 1722 - June 1725

The *Diary*, to which we have referred begins in December 1722 and ends, except for a few entries, in June 1725. It covers most of his time in New York, a period of five months at his home at Windsor, April-Sept. 1723, and a period of study at Yale College beginning in Sept. 1723, until he was appointed a tutor in June 1724. He stayed at Yale, until he became co-pastor of the church at Northampton in February 1727, at the age of twenty-three, assisting his grandfather, Mr Stoddard. The *Diary* therefore covers the period of his life between the ages of nineteen until twenty-two. It shows how he sought to lead a holy life and miserably failed in all his efforts, only to be brought to a realisation that he could do nothing without the Lord's help, which it took him many lessons to learn fully. It was never intended for publication and was kept by him to be a reminder of

his own weakness and the Lord's goodness.

On **January 10th 1723** he wrote, "It is a great dishonour to Christ, in whom I hope I have an interest, to be uneasy at my worldly state and condition; or when I see prosperity in others and all things go easy with them, the world is smooth to them, and they are very happy in many respects, and very prosperous, or are advanced much in honour; to grudge them their prosperity, or envy them on account of it, or to be in the least uneasy at it, to wish and to long for the same, and to desire that it should be ever so with me. Wherefore concluded always to rejoice in every one's prosperity, and not to pretend to expect or desire it for myself; and to expect no happiness of that nature as long as I live; but to depend on afflictions, and to betake myself entirely to another happiness."

On **January 12th** in considering the subject of mortification of the deeds of the body (Romans 8.13.) he wrote, "It is suggested to me that too constant a mortification and too vigorous application to religion, may be prejudicial to health." This type of seeking the Lord bears some resemblance to Luther in his monastery at Erfurt.

But it is interesting by **January 15th** to find him writing, "Alas! how soon do I decay. O how weak, how infirm, how unable to do anything of myself! What a poor inconsistent being! What a miserable

Early Years

wretch without the assistance of the Spirit of God! While I stand, I am ready to think that I stand by my own strength, and upon my own legs; and I am ready to triumph over my spiritual enemies, as if it were I myself that caused them to flee: when alas! I am but a poor infant, upheld by Jesus Christ, who holds me up, and gives me the liberty to smile to see my enemies flee, when he drives them before me. And so I laugh, as though I myself did it, when it is only Jesus Christ leads me along, and fights Himself against my enemies. And now the Lord has a little left me, how weak do I find myself! O let it teach me to depend less on myself to be more humble, and to give more of the praise of my ability to Jesus Christ! The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

It is clear from other entries in the *Diary* that follow about this time, that the lesson regarding his own impotency was one he found very hard to learn and that he needed much teaching to bring him to Toplady's experience,

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, fly to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

On March 2nd 1723 he wrote, "O how much

In Search of Souls

pleasanter is humility than pride! O that God would fill me with exceeding great humility, and that He would evermore keep me from all pride! The pleasures of humility are really the most refined, inward and exquisite delights in the world. How hateful is a proud man! How hateful is a worm that lifts up itself with pride! What a foolish, silly, miserable, blind, deceived worm am I, when pride works.”

On **Saturday, April 7th** he was in a low place and wrote, “This week I found myself so far gone, that it seemed to me I should never recover more. Let God of His mercy return to me, and no more leave me thus to sink and decay! I know, O Lord, that without Thy help I shall fall innumerable times, notwithstanding all my resolutions, how often soever repeated.”

In **May 1723** the Lord granted him a sight of the great value of godly parents and he sweetly writes, “I now plainly perceive, what great obligations I am under to love and honour my parents. I have great reason to believe; that their counsel and education have been my making; though in the time of it, it seemed to do me so little good. I have good reason to hope, that their prayers for me have been, in many things, very powerful and prevalent, that God has, in many things, taken me under his care and guidance, provision and direction, in answer to their prayers for me. I was never made so sensible of it as now.” When Jonathan Edwards wrote this he was living at home

Early Years

after some months in New York. It is a great mercy when we are brought to such a sense of gratitude in the lifetime of our parents, though often such a realisation comes after they are taken.

Besides such considerations as parental indebtedness, young Edwards thought about his end and wrote **July 5th 1723**, “Last night, when thinking what I should wish I had done, that I had not done, if I was then to die; I thought I should wish, that I had been more importunate with God to fit me for death, and lead me into all truth, and that I might not be deceived about the state of my soul.”

Regarding that state of his soul he wrote on **August 12th** “The chief thing that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate, is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps, wherein the people of New England and formerly the dissenters of Old England, used to experience it. Wherefore, now resolved, never to leave searching, till I have satisfyingly found out the very bottom and foundation, the real reason, why they used to be converted in those steps.” His own beginning had been gradual, like Nicodemus, and he was looking at the cases of those whose beginnings had been marked, like the Apostle Paul, with a sudden deep conviction of sin. It would have been a blessing if the result of his search was to show him that the Lord is sovereign in how he works in the souls of each of his dear people.

Yale College September 1723

In September 1723 Jonathan left home and went to Yale College at New Haven to study and receive his degree of Master of Arts. His *Diary* for the following year contains such remarks as, "Who can understand his errors? O that I might be kept from secret faults!" Regarding a tendency to exaggeration he writes, "I must be contented where I have anything strange or remarkable to tell, not to make it appear so remarkable as it is indeed, lest through fear of this, and the desire of making a thing appear very remarkable I should exceed the bounds of simple truth."

Tutor at Yale June 1724

When he was appointed a tutor at Yale, he wrote on **June 6th 1724** in his *Diary*, "This week has been a very remarkable week with me, with respect to despondencies, fears, perplexities, multitudes of cares and distraction of mind; it being the week I came hither to New Haven in order to entrance upon the office of tutor of the College. I have now abundant reason to be convinced of the troublesomeness and vexation of the world, and that it will never be another kind of world." He was leaving the quiet world of his studies and entering upon his life's work of teaching and preaching. Life, he was already finding, was a battle. Speaking of this period in his writings he says, "I continued much in the same frame in the general as when at New York, till I went to New Haven as tutor of the College. ... After I went to New Haven, I sunk

in religion, my mind being diverted from my eager pursuits after holiness, by some affairs that greatly perplexed and distracted my thoughts.

Taken Ill at New Haven

In September 1725, I was taken ill at New Haven, and while endeavouring to go home to Windsor, was so ill at the North Village, that I could go no further; where I lay sick for about a quarter of a year. In this sickness God was pleased to visit me again with the sweet influences of his Spirit. My mind was greatly engaged there in divine and pleasant contemplations and longings of soul. I observed that those who watched with me would often be looking out wishfully for the morning; which brought to my mind those words of the Psalmist, and which my soul with delight made its own language, ‘My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning.’ When the light of day came in at the window, it refreshed my soul from one morning to another. It seemed to be some image of the light of God’s glory. I remember, about that time, I used greatly to long for the conversion of some that I was concerned with. ... But some time after this I was again diverted with some temporal matters, that exceedingly took up my thoughts, greatly to the wounding of my soul, and went on, through various exercises, that it would be tedious to relate, which gave me much more experience of my own heart than I had before.”