

Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God

Deuteronomy 32:35 - "Their Foot Shall Slide in Due Time"

Originally preached by Jonathan Edwards in Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741

re-preached by Mark Dever, October, 5, 2003, then again by Brad Brandt, October 4, 2009

It was 306 years ago tomorrow that Jonathan Edwards was born. Mark Dever gives the following background about Edwards...

After growing up in a pastor's home, Jonathan went to Yale to be educated further, and became the assistant to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, as the pastor of the church in Northampton, Mass. Upon Stoddard's death a couple of years later, in 1729, Jonathan Edwards became the sole pastor of the church. Under his preaching, the church there knew periods of what were called "awakenings." In fact, along with George Whitfield, Edwards' is the name usually associated with the Great Awakening that swept through the British colonies in America in the 1740's. One of the pivotal events in that awakening was the preaching of the sermon that I intend to deliver again...

On Wednesday, July 8, 1741, Edwards went with other ministers to help the church in Enfield (on the MASS-CT border). There he preached his famous (and in some circles "infamous") sermon "Sinners in the hands of an Angry God." He had preached it the month before in his own congregation and he would preach it again a number of times after the famous occasion at Enfield. As best we can tell, the response to Edwards' sermon was electrifying. The verbal expressions of conviction for sin became so loud, in fact, that it seems that Edwards was not able to complete the sermon. Why the response of wails and cries? It wasn't because of his verbal style-which was quite staid, and certainly far less dramatic than George Whitfield's. It was because of the content.

In this sermon, Edwards took a text from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, and he had just one point-his hearers were not in hell that very moment only because of God's grace. He meditated on the inevitability of the fall of the wicked, the suddenness of that fall-that is, it will be unexpected-and what they fall into-Hell. He talked at some length of people being held out of hell only by God's mere grace, or as Edwards put it, "pleasure". He assumed that motivating his hearers by fear was legitimate, if the fears were well-founded, and the motivation charitable.

What Edwards didn't talk about much is important for us to note: the biblical basis for such a picture of hell, and the good news of how sinners escape that. Isaac Watts, the great hymn-writer, and a contemporary of Edwards, penned on his copy of this sermon, "A most terrible [that is, terrifying] sermon, which should have had a word of Gospel at the end [of] it, though I think 'tis all true."