

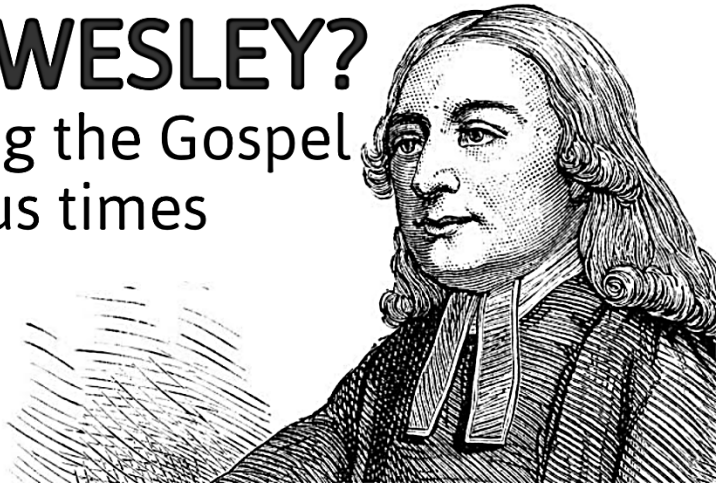


Trinity Methodist Church

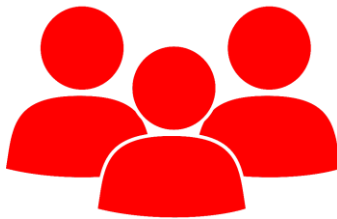
Sermon Series

WHY WESLEY?

Preaching the Gospel
in Anxious times



**Sermon Based Curriculum
for**



Small Groups

General Introduction and Series Framework

1. Throughout the ages, both in biblical times and beyond, there have been men and women who have taken their encounter with God seriously and have observed the command to 'go and disciple the nations'.
2. John Wesley and his associates did just that. Like many others their faithfulness brought the experience of the Kingdom of God to earth.
3. Such was the influence of John Wesley and the resulting Methodist Movement, social commentators, both complimentary (Lecky 1878) and critical (EP Thompson, 1966), acknowledge that the Methodist Movement altered the fabric of British Society.
4. For example: *“Until the advent of the Sunday School movement towards the end of the [18th] Century, little or no provision was made for the free education of the poor, except the church system of Charity Schools. They were invariably a farce, most teachers being half illiterate. Millions of English people at this time had never set foot in any kind of school, but those of school-leaving age were usually apprenticed, often sold to masters and frequently viciously treated”* (Donald Drew).
5. John Wesley was not a 'saint' in any form different from you and me. However, he and the movement's teachings are an exemplar of what it means to be a 'follower' of Jesus.
6. What does Methodism or Wesleyan 'ethics and emphases' mean for us today?
7. John Wesley was an 'innovator', in pursuit of personal salvation, social holiness and transformation, but it was all based on the fundamentals of the Christian Message.
Wesley wrote a pamphlet in which he declared that 'It is the plain old Christianity that I teach'.

8. Wesley had 3 Emphases or innovations, which were instrumental in the changes the Movement wrought. These were:
 - a. Itinerant Preaching – taking the message of the Gospel to all who had need to hear it and not just those who came to hear it (i.e. preaching outside of the church).
 - b. Weekly Classes – small groups that served to instruct and to hold members accountable for their spiritual growth and a means of social support (regular small groups and accountable relationships).
 - c. Upliftment of the Poor – If the Good News was for the poor then it must include actions that provide material support for the poor (Poor Fund and Reach Out).
9. John Wesley also formulated the 'Four Alls', amongst other devices for remembering the core message of the Gospel:
 - a. All *need* to be saved
 - b. All *can* be saved
 - c. All can *know* that they are saved
 - d. All can be saved to the *uttermost*
10. We have chosen 3 sermons that represent the core of Wesley's preaching to a society that was unjust, violent, stained with poverty and corruption. The sermons are a 'fresh delivery' of the following classics (found in *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons*):
 - a. The New Birth (Sermon 39)
 - b. The Witness of the Spirit (sermon 10)
 - c. Christian Perfection (sermon 35)
11. These represent the Christian journey: from the rudiments of 'all must be saved' and 'all can be saved', to the work of the indwelling Spirit ('all can know they are saved'), to the promise of maturity in Christ Jesus ('all can be saved to the uttermost').

12 July

Born Again

Welcome (10 minutes)

Catch up on the past week. Perhaps chat briefly about the new series. How much do people know about the life and times of John Wesley?

Worship (10 minutes)

Psalm 51:1-12. Prayer: Thank God for his steadfast love and mercy.

Word (50 minutes)

Read John 3: 1- 15 And discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think Nicodemus came to speak to Jesus, what did he want to know?
2. From Jesus' answer, what did Jesus believe that Nicodemus needed to know?
3. Do you think that the analogy of being born again is useful or confusing and why?
4. Why does a person need to be born again?

Some Notes for further discussion and questions:

1. Wesley's first question is: Why must we be born again? – What is the basis for this doctrine? He then refers to the original creation story. We live in a world that is at once beautiful and broken, full of earthly provision, but also corruption and decay. And whether it be crime or environmental disaster, humans are at the centre of the problem. The root of the dilemma is found in the very story of the Creation.
What is the relevance of the original creation story? In what sense does Jesus bring about a 'new creation' (See 2 Cor 5:16-21)? What happens to the 'old creation'?
2. Wesley's second question is: How must we be born again? – What is the nature of this new birth? Just like Nicodemus, we must ask: 'How is it that a person can be born again? Surely one cannot re-enter the womb?' We might add, 'Surely you are not talking about

reincarnation, again and again until by some means we make ourselves perfect and whole?' Does it mean we mentally assent to the proposition that we are separated from God by our sin and that if we say sorry and try harder to live a good life that we will be born again? Or does it mean that we must come to a point of decision, acceptance that 'whosever believes in the Son of Man may have eternal life?' (See John 3:14-18). What keeps salvation from being mere mental assent to a doctrine, but ensures that one is born again?

3. Wesley's third and final question is: For what purpose are we born again? – to what end is it necessary? All life begins with a birth! Therefore, it should not surprise us (like it did Nicodemus) that our spiritual life must begin with a birth. One cannot exaggerate the importance of the newness of our life in Christ. The Apostle Paul put it this way: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old [person] has passed away [died]; behold, the new [person] has come [born]. All of this is from God...' (2 Cor 5:17-18). Peter put it this way, we are 'born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed, through the living and abiding word of God' (1 Peter 1:23 ESV). How have you experienced the newness of life in Christ? What does this newness of life mean for your whole life: your relationships with family members? With friends and colleagues? With how you treat the environment? And how you tend to your physical body, your mental and emotional well-being? Are you experiencing newness of life? How can you live more 'differently' in the newness of life?

Work (10 minutes)

Describe when you were born again and how it happened. This is your testimony! Share it with a friend or family member. OR

Draw up a list of specific areas where you need to 'start living anew'. Pray over the list.

19 July

The Witness of the Spirit

Welcome (10 minutes)

Time of fellowship. Catch up with each other. Share aspects of last week's journey. Follow up on concerns mentioned for prayer last week. Share testimonies.

Worship (10 minutes)

Read Psalm 139:1-17 and consider the pervasive presence of the Holy Spirit. Prayer: Thank the LORD for the Holy Spirit and His work in the earth.

Word (50 minutes)

Read Romans 8: 12- 17 and answer the following questions:

1. Part of the context for the above is Romans 8:10, how is it that Christ can be in us?
2. What does it mean to live 'according to the flesh' as opposed to 'according to the Spirit'?
3. Have you experienced the difference between living according to the flesh as opposed to the Spirit, what does it feel like?
4. Generally, what is the role of a witness? How is it that the Spirit is a witness to us (in us)?

Some Notes for further discussion and questions:

1. Wesley's first line of enquiry is: What is this joint witness between the Holy Spirit and my spirit? There are several parts to the verse in question. There is the question of (i) our own spirit, then (ii) the Holy Spirit and then (iii) the witness between the two. First question is where does the process start? Does it start with my spirit? OR does it start or proceed from the Spirit of God? Consider the following scripture 'If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in

himself... and this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son.' (1 John 5:9-11)

2. Wesley's second line of enquiry is: How can this joint witness be distinguished from the presumptions of the natural mind? Jesus once advised that many may say "'But Lord, Lord, we did this and that in your name", but I will say "I never knew you".' (Matt 7:21-23). What was Jesus talking about? Can we presumptuously claim to be right with God, when in reality we are not? Wesley called this the 'presumption of a natural mind' as opposed to the 'witness of the Holy Spirit'. Wesley then suggests several 'tests':
 1. Humility and repentance (See Philippians 2: 3-11).
 2. Joy of our salvation, and other fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23).
 3. Loving God and keeping His commandments (See John 14:21).How do you feel about the efficacy of these tests?

Work (10 minutes)

Ask yourself the following questions quietly before God:

- Have you the witness within yourself?
- Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?
- Do you know Jesus Christ?
- Do you know that he has saved you?

Can I answer these questions unequivocally and without reservation before God?

Address the Holy Spirit perhaps using words similar to this:

Holy Spirit, I acknowledge that you are the Promised Gift from Father God. I have received you because I have believed that Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost, which included me. Jesus died for me and you raised him to life everlasting. Lead me daily as I live out my new life in Christ to the Glory of God the Father. Be my strength, my comfort and my guide. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen.

26 July

Christian Perfection

Welcome (10 minutes)

Time of fellowship. Catch up with each other. Share aspects of last week's journey. Follow up on concerns mentioned for prayer last week. Share testimonies.

Worship (10 minutes)

Read 2 Cor 4:7-12. Prayer: Thank God that we have the internal gift of eternal life, like a treasure in a jar of clay!

Word (50 minutes)

Read Philippians 3: 4-16 and discuss the following questions:

1. What is the difference between 'confidence in the flesh' and 'the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus as my Lord'? (see 3:4,8)
2. What is Paul seeking to attain? How does Paul define 'perfection'? (See 3:10)
3. How does Paul propose to reach perfection (see 3:12-14)
4. What is the relationship between maturity and perfection? (see 3:15)

Some Notes for further discussion and questions:

1. The first question that Wesley asks is: In what sense are we Christians not perfect?
 - a. We are not perfect in knowledge.
 - b. We are not free from making honest mistakes.
 - c. We do not have a perfect understanding of scripture.
 - d. Neither are we perfect in personal attributes and dispositions (infirmities of body or mind)
 - e. Neither are we free of temptation, of impure thoughts and inclinations

What are your thoughts on these observations? Are they accurate, are they useful?

2. The second question that Wesley asks is : In what sense are we Christians perfect?

Firstly, one needs to acknowledge that Christians progress through stages. The reality of the new birth carries with it the connotation that believers progresses from being a born-again 'babe in Christ', progressing to a young child, moving to a young man/woman and then on to a father/mother. (see 1 John 2: 12-14). Furthermore, there are significant differences between righteousness under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant, particularly in the manner in which it is attained (See 2 Cor 3:7-18).

- a. We are free from unbelief and have received grace. (See Heb 11:1-2, 11:6, 39-40)
- b. We cease from all outward sin (wilful disobedience to the word of God) (see Rom 6:11-14 and 1 John 3:4-6).
- c. We are free from inward sin (evil thoughts and evil tempers). (See Heb 4:14-16).
- d. We have the power to know the perfect will of God (See Rom 12:1-2)
- e. We have the power to do the will of God (see Rom 8:2-4 and 2Peter 1:2-4).
- f. We receive gifts and power to minister from His Holy Spirit (see 1Cor 12:4-11).
- g. We pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. (see 1Cor 14:1-4, 12)

Do you think the above is within reach? How can you attain these things?

Work (10 minutes)

Give consideration to the Methodist Rule of Life: Do Good, Do no harm, Love God!

Take a pen and paper and write up in what ways you can address the above: 1 Doing Good (to yourself, to others and to the environment); 2. Doing no harm (to yourself, to others and the environment); 3. Worship God more faithfully (in thought, word and deed)!

We can renew afresh our faith in these matters, drawing strength and hope from God's Spirit. After all, he has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through his divine power and his call to glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3).