



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

THOMAS HANSON

1733 – 1804

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I was born of honest parents, in Horbury near Wakefield, in the county of York, I think in May, 1733, the youngest of two sons at my birth: my parents having had six sons and two daughters. He that was born with me died in his childhood. My father died when I was near eleven years old. Six, out of the seven of us that lived, have found mercy and forgiveness through Christ. My truly pious mother had the happiness to see it before she died, though she has been dead about twenty years.

Two of my older brothers fell into sin, and turned back; but one is restored, I hope to favour, and to heaven. The other is not yet recovered: but O, may he be soon! We always lived in love and harmony. I never had, to my knowledge, twenty angry words with either brother or sister in my life. I do not remember to have heard an oath in all the family.

About thirty-four years ago my mother and three elder brothers were brought to God. I was then convinced, and a little awakened, by hearing Mr. Francis Scott; the very man (I think) by whom my ever dear mother had been awakened and brought to God. From that time my good desires did not quite leave me. I hope my mother's prayers, tears, and advice will never leave my mind and heart. I was a thoughtless, careless, Christless son before that time, and had no fear of God before my eyes.

I was placed, at about thirteen years of age, in the profession which my father and brothers had followed, viz., a clothier. I often went to hear the Methodist preachers, though we had some miles to go. Many of those that are now, I doubt not, singing in heaven, used to go and come with me in the evenings through the wood; often singing those sweet words:--

Break forth into singing, ye trees of the wood;
For Jesus is bringing lost sinners to God.

I used to pray inwardly in my way to the preaching, yea, and often turned aside to pray. I was afraid to be seen or known to pray alone: so I sought out every private place that I could. We had much persecution then, and a great deal of talk about false prophets in sheep's clothing. But the most common name for them was the damnation preachers, which I thought was far from sheep's clothing. So that did not hinder me much. But I was greatly troubled with horrid suggestions, and had many fears (no doubt from the wicked one) in private prayer: so that I was for quite laying it aside. I was afraid to go to it; and yet I durst not give it over. I was in a strait on another account; I was ashamed of the Gospel: I did not stand firm on God's side; and yet I durst not be on the devil's side. I was very fearful of being deceived, reasoning, a doubting for several years, whether the knowledge of pardon was attainable here. I thought God did forgive their sin; but that *none could know it for himself*.

But afterward I was clearly convinced by hearing my brother's experience, and weighing the scriptures that he urged for it. And I had then a comfortable hope of one day finding it; but for some years I was between hope and fear.

When I was about nineteen years old, in 1752, by my eldest brother's advice I went to Mr. Byrrie's, at the Deighn House, near Nether-Thong. Here I stayed for near four years. Divine Providence certainly

cast me here, where I had all the advantages I could wish for, having two schoolmasters near at hand. I worked seven or eight hours a day, with my book before me, and spent the rest of the day and part of the night in learning. This I did during the whole time I was here. Mr. Hinstiff taught me to write, and cast accounts, for above a year; and Mr. Wood, of Nether-Thong, the Latin master, taught me a little Latin and Greek.

I got what I could by heart in the day, and said it to him at night. But as soon as I left this place, I laid these studies aside, and resumed them no more to this day. I have since had far better work, and could not see any need of these for the understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

We had not Methodist preachers here. I did not hear ten sermons, except at church, for near four years. Here I was greatly beloved by those that had any seriousness, and greatly hated by those that had none. For I could not hold my tongue about religion: my conscience would seldom let me be quiet. I told them, we must know our sins forgiven, or perish forever. And frequently I wept with some of them about it. Several thereabouts came to me for advice concerning their souls: though I, poor creature, was ignorant enough, and well nigh lost in my books.

My conscience during these years often alarmed me. But now it would give me no rest for want of Christ and pardon. So I determined, notwithstanding many offered me favours in worldly things, to go home to my mother and brothers. Several wept and entreated me to stay. I told them, I cannot save my soul here. I have not the means suitable for it.

Home I came, in 1756, with a full resolution to seek Christ till I found him, or die in the seeking of him. Then I sold, or gave away, nearly all my books, and through grace began to be as diligent in the ways of God as I had been in study. I now added fasting to all the other means of grace. Soon after this the tempter told me, "Thou art good enough." But a sermon of honest brother Ash, on Gal. 2:21, and the words of my dear mother, who said, "Though I bore you, if you do not come to Christ, stripped of all, you will never be saved," tore away my self righteousness.

God now taught me to expect Christ's pardon every hour. My burden was too great to be expressed, when God had, by various means, (particularly by reading the Bible, and the extract of Ambrose on the new birth, on my knees,) brought me, for three weeks, to the brink of despair. Just before I found pardon, I was miserable beyond description.

On July the 16th, at night, 1757, under my brother Joseph's prayer, I yielded, I sunk, and, as it were, died away. My heart, with a kind, sweet struggle, melted into the hands of God. I was for some hours lost in wonder by the astonishing peace, love, and joy which flowed into my heart like a mighty torrent.

When I came to recollect myself. I asked, What hast thou done? It was sweetly, but deeply impressed, "I have made thee mine." No tongue can tell what peace, love, joy, and assurance I then felt. My willing heart and tongue replied, Hast thou thus loved me? Here I am, willing to spend and be spent for thee. God now gave me to see all creation, redemption, grace, and glory in a new light: and every thing led me to love and praise him. From this night, I could not hold my tongue from speaking of the things of God.

A few days after my happy conversion, I felt anger at one who persecuted us. Soon after my peace left me. Then the tempter said, "He that is born of God sinneth not. But thou hast sinned: therefore thou art not born of God. Thou hast deceived thyself." I was then in a great measure ignorant of his devices; so gave up my shield; and was in the depths of distress, ready to choose strangling, for near two hours. It then came to my mind, What if I have deceived myself? Pardon is free, and given in an instant. It is ready for needy, lost sinners. I will go as I am; cast myself on the ground, and on Christ at once. My former peace, love, and joy returned in a moment. This sore trial taught me more watchfulness.

After this I walked in great love and peace for near two years, buying up every opportunity for prayer,

hearing, and reading. I read the chief part of the Christian Library, with Mr. Wesley's works that were then published; and several other books, to my great help, instruction, and comfort.

Now the same spirit that witnessed my adoption cried in me, night and day, "Spend and be spent for God!" Yet never was any one more timorous: I thought the work so great, and my abilities so small. I cried, 'I am not fit'; I wept, and kept it to myself for months. Oh what a struggle had I between my unfitness and my love to God and souls!

After this the Osset people, by earnest entreaties, prevailed on me to pray in public: and it pleased God to make it the means of awakening some sinners. Then I was persuaded to exhort: God blessed this also to the conversion of several in the neighbouring towns. Now began my warfare with the various sects about us, who came, when I had preached at Osset, to dispute with me often till midnight. But I was soon heartily weary of dispute: for it caused a decay in my peace and love. My inbred corruptions now began to perplex me more than ever, and to be a heavy load indeed for some time.

But one day meeting with a few young men, as I often did, *God gave me such a deliverance and such a weight of love as I had not heretofore. I seemed too happy to live on earth, and thought God was going to take me home. My joy allowed me little sleep for weeks. I told it to none but my brother; and to him only when I could keep it no longer from him...*

I have been in most of the circuits in the kingdom. And I trust God has been pleased to use me, and those with me, during these twenty years, to unite thousands to the societies. But it is better to leave this to God and His people. They are our epistle, written by Christ to the rejoicing of our hearts. May their conversion be known and read by all that know them!

I have been in dangers by snow-drifts, by floods, by falls from my horse, and by persecution: I have been in sickness, cold, pain, weakness, and weariness often; in joyful comforts often; in daily love and peace, but not enough; in grief and heaviness through manifold temptations often...

All my design in preaching has been, and is, to bring sinners to Christ; and to build up saints in their most holy faith, hope, and love, to a perfect man.

To this end the chief matter of my preaching has been the essentials of religion; such as, the lost state of man, depraved, guilty, and miserable by nature; his justification through the lone merit of Christ by faith only, together with the witness and fruits of it; the new birth, the necessity, benefits, and fruits of it, in all inward and outward holiness. I have endeavoured to explain the new covenant in its benefits, condition, precepts, threats, and rewards. I have shown that perfect love is attainable here, by those that press for it with their whole heart...

I have from my beginning thought myself the poor man's preacher; having nothing of politeness in my language, address, or any thing else. O that in the day of Christ's judgment I may rejoice, not only in the sincerity of my labour, but in knowing that I have not preached, and laboured, and suffered, without fruit; but have been the instruments of gaining souls to, and of keeping them with, Christ! And O that he may present them to the Father without blame, in perfect love! This is the real desire of Thomas Hanson.

Source: "The EXPERIENCE of several eminent Methodist Preachers with an account of their Call to and Success in the Ministry in a series of letters written by themselves to the Rev. John Wesley" J. Collard, Printer, New York 1837