



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

THOMAS RANKIN

1??? -- 1810

(Methodist)

His Conversion

The time was now drawing near for the sacrament to be administered again; and when I thought of going to the table of the Lord, I was seized with extreme distress. After many painful reasonings, I thought, ‘Where can I go for ease to my wounded spirit but to Jesus the sinners’ Friend?’ I determined, ‘If I perish, I will perish crying out for mercy.’ On the Sunday morning I was early at church, waiting upon God in His public ordinances. The subject preached upon was Heb. Xii. 4; and the sermon was delivered with many tears and much power from on high. I had often heard Mr. Lindsay with much profit and pleasure, but never before felt what I did under this sermon. My heart was broken to pieces, and now it was that I had a strong hope that the Lord would reveal His love to my heart. I went to the table and received the bread with a broken, melting, and expectant heart. When the wine was delivered into my hand, the cup being full, a little was spilt on the floor; and that very moment Satan suggested that ‘Christ’s blood was spilt for me in vain!’ I scarcely knew how I got the cup to my lips, or how I delivered it to the next person, according to custom. The horror of mind that seized me was inexpressible, and the violence of the temptation continued for several hours. All my pleasing hopes of pardon and peace passed away as a dream. As soon as I got home, I wrestled with God in mighty prayer; but all was dark. Towards the evening a ray of light darted across the dreadful gloom; and hope, with its cheering rays, began to spring up in my soul. I then saw that the dreadful suggestion that Christ’s blood was spilt for me in vain was only a strong temptation from the powers of darkness. Hopes and fears alternately prevailed, and thus I went on for several weeks.

While I was in this state of mind, I was informed that Mr. Whitefield was expected to preach in the Orphan House yard next Lord’s day. I heard him every time he preached the ensuing week, both evening and morning. Oh, how precious was the word to my soul! It was sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb. My expectations of divine mercy rose superior to all my fears. I heard him at every opportunity, till he went to visit Glasgow, and other parts in the west of Scotland. I now saw as well as felt, that I had nothing to do but to come to God, through the Son of His love, and by faith to lay hold on the horns of the altar. I was now led to pray and expect every day and every hour, the moment would arrive when I might say, without a doubt, ‘My Beloved is mine, and I am His!’ ‘Oh, yes!’ ‘My soul broke forth in strong desires the perfect bliss to prove.’

Sometimes I thought I was not ready to lay hold on eternal life. At last I began to reason thus: Why are His chariot-wheels long in coming? ‘It then was suggested to me, ‘Probably you are not one of the elect; and you may seek and seek in vain.’ I tasted no pleasant food, my sleep departed from me, and my flesh wasted from my bones; till at last I sunk into despair.

One morning, after breakfast, I arose and went into the garden, and sat down in a retired place, to mourn over my sad condition. I began to wrestle with God in an agony of prayer. I called out, ‘Lord, I have wrestled long, and have not yet prevailed: Oh, let me now prevail!’ ‘The whole passage of Jacob’s wrestling with the Angel came into my mind; and I called out aloud, ‘I will not let Thee go, unless

Thou bless me! ‘ In a moment the cloud burst, and tears of love flowed from my eyes; when these words were applied to my soul, many times over, ‘ And he blessed him there.’ They came with the Holy Ghost, and with much assurance; and my whole soul was overwhelmed with the presence of God.

Every doubt of my acceptance was now gone, and all my fears fled away as the morning shades before the rising sun. I had the most distinct testimony that all my sins were forgiven through the blood of the covenant, and that I was a child of God, and an heir of eternal glory. What I now felt was very different from what I had experienced of the drawings of the love of God for several years past, and when I first partook of the sacrament. I had now no more doubt of my interest in the Lord Jesus Christ than of my own existence. I could declare that the Son of Man had still power on earth to forgive sins; and that He had pardoned my sins, even mine. Now it was that

Jesus all the day long
Was my joy and my song!

And the cry of my soul was,

Oh that all His salvation might see!
He has loved me, I cried,
He has suffered and died
To redeem such a rebel as me!

How many times before, when under the most painful distress of mind, I had wished I had never been born! But now I could bless God that I ever had a being, and fully believed that I should live with God while eternal ages roll.

His Entire Sanctification

As I had read all Mr. Wesley’s Works, and in particular his Journals, I had formed a very high opinion of him; and the moment I distinctly saw him, and heard his voice, such a crowd of ideas rushed upon my mind, as words cannot express. The union of soul I then felt with him was indescribable.

I had long considered Mr. John Wesley as the father of the Methodists, under God. If Mr. Whitefield was rendered such a blessing to my soul, in my first acquaintance with God, and the thins of eternity, I had since learned that Mr. Wesley had been a father to him and others, who afterwards had been burning and shining lights in their day and generation. I could not help saying in my mind, ‘ And is this the man who has braved the winter storm and summer’s sun, and run to and fro throughout Great Britain and Ireland, and has crossed the Atlantic Ocean, to bring poor wretched sinners to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ ? ‘ I looked at him with a degree of astonishment, and from my very soul could bless God that He had so highly favoured me as to let me see this eminent servant of the King of kings and Lord of lords! It was now that the foundation of that union was laid, which remained inviolate for thirty-one years, to the time he was called to his great and eternal reward! I have a thousand times over blessed the God of heaven that ever I saw his face or heard his voice; and I shall continue to do so while life remains, and I hope to spend a glorious eternity with him.

As soon as the singing and prayer were concluded, I went to the friend’s house where Mr. Wesley was to dine. We had the pleasure of his conversation for some little time, and after dinner rode on to Plessey: he preached there at five o’clock, and then rode on to Newcastle. Mr. Wesley’s company and conversation by the way made this one of the most pleasant rides that I ever had known. In the course of a few days, Mr. Wesley came to Sunderland, and I had the pleasure of hearing him, morning and evening, while he was there. His preaching was attended with a peculiar blessing to my soul, in giving me a more clear conception of purity of heart, and the way to obtain it, by faith alone; but when he read some letters in the society, giving an account of the great work of God in London, and some other place, I was so deeply affected with a sense of inbred sin that I was almost overwhelmed by it. For

several years I had seen, and at seasons deeply felt, the need of purity of heart; but now my soul was pierced with such keen convictions, as gave me no rest, night or day. In short, my heart was so laid open, and so completely dissected by the word and Spirit of God, that I was ready to cast away my confidence, seeing it so desperately wicked.

I wanted to open my mind to Mr. Wesley; but the power of temptation shut my mouth, so that I could neither inform him of what I intended respecting my call to preach, nor the present experience of my soul. The Lord in great mercy preserved me from casting away my shield, and sinking in the deep waters, which at times appeared ready to swallow me up. However, I was not suffered to sink under the pressure of this burden. There were a few that were earnestly seeking the great salvation, deliverance from inbred sin; and with them I associated. None of them appeared to me to labour under such deep distress, nor had such deep discoveries of the evils of their heart, as I laboured under. From what I heard of their experience, I was afraid to mention the whole of my feelings, lest I should stumble any of them. The Lord knew what He was preparing me for, and therefore He was pleased to give me to drink deeper of the painful cup, that I might know how to comfort and encourage others. I was also at this time strongly tempted to preach no more, till God had purified my heart, and brought me into this glorious liberty. When I gave way to this temptation, I was so much the more unhappy; and therefore I still continued to preach, and the Lord was pleased to bless my labours. It was about this time that I had an opportunity of conversing with one who professed to love the Lord with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength. Her conversation was much blessed to my soul, and I saw the way of deliverance more clearly than I had done before.

After labouring as in the fire, from the month of June to September, the Lord gave me such a discovery of His love as I never had known before. I was meeting with a few Christian friends, who were all athirst for entire holiness, and after several had prayed, I also called on the name of the ‘ Deliverer that came out of Zion, to turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’ While these words were pronounced with my heart and lips, ‘ Are we not, O Lord, the purchase of Thy blood ? let us then be redeemed from all iniquity,’ in a moment the power of God so descended upon my soul, that I could pray no more. It was

That speechless awe which dares not move,
And all the silent heaven of love!

I had many times experienced the power of redeeming love, and in such a manner as I scarce knew whether in the body or not. But this manifestation of the presence of my adorable Lord and Saviour was such as I never had witnessed before, and no words of mine can properly describe it. I can only say ‘ that my soul was filled with serene peace unutterable, and full of glory.’ It was such a heaven opened in my heart as I never expected to experience on this side eternity. The language of my heart every moment was, ‘ Oh, what has Jesus done for me! Oh, what has Jesus done for me! ‘

Soon after, some of the friends present asked if I had received the blessing of purity of heart. I replied, ‘ I cannot tell what the Lord hath done for me; but this I can say, I never felt such a change, through all the powers of my soul, as I now feel! ‘ When we parted, I left them all in tears; but most were tears of joy. Et, as I had no particular scripture applied, I durst not say that the blood of Christ had cleansed me from all sin. I longed to retire into private, and to pour out my whole heart and soul to my blessed Deliverer! Oh, what an evening did I experience! The windows of heaven were opened, and the skies poured down righteousness, and great was my glorying in God my Saviour.

When the overwhelming power of divine love began to subside a little, and I had no more such manifestations as I had had the first evening of my great deliverance, Satan began to suggest I had not received purity of heart. So far the tempter would allow, that I had received a very great blessing; but not deliverance from inbred sin. Having none to converse with who were established in that glorious liberty, and therefore a stranger to Satan’s devices, I was ready to conclude I might be indeed mistaken. B these subtle suggestions, I was led into hurtful reasonings, and this made way for doubts concerning

the glorious work which God had wrought in my soul.

However, I still enjoyed liberty, and I felt nothing contrary to love arise in my heart. When I opened my mind to one of the preachers, and told him a little of my experience, he asked me if I thought God had delivered me from the remains of the carnal mind. I replied, ‘ I cannot tell, only enjoy such a liberty as I never did enjoy since I have known the pardoning love of God.’ He encouraged me to go forward, and to expect the witness of what the Lord had done for me.

I saw my great business was to keep close to God, and continue my meetings with those few who wished to be all devoted to the Lord Jesus.

John Wesley’s Wise Advice To Rankin

In the beginning of October I wrote to Mr. Wesley, and informed him of what had passed in my soul; as also what I had gone through for near two years, concerning my call to preach. He soon answered my letter, and closed it with these words, ‘ You will never get free of all those evil reasonings till you give yourself wholly up to the work of God!’ Soon after this I went up to London, and embraced the first opportunity of waiting upon Mr. Wesley: he spoke to me as a father to a son, and advised me to decline all thoughts of temporal concerns, and to go into a circuit. The importance of the work appeared to be such as made me tremble. He desired me to consider the conversation, and call upon him again. In the meantime, I embraced every opportunity of meeting with those whom I observed were all in earnest for deliverance from inbred sin. The kind providence of God soon brought me acquainted with some of the most excellent of the earth, several of whom had been brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. With such I constantly associated, and their prayers and conversation were a great blessing to my soul. The Lord removed all my doubts and evil reasonings, and by His grace I knew I loved the Lord my God with all my soul, mind, and strength. In short, I was not ashamed to declare that I assuredly knew that the Lord Jesus had purified my heart by faith in His blood, and that I felt nothing contrary to the pure love of God.

What seasons of refreshment did I find in the select band, and other private meetings at this time! My soul was like a watered garden from day to day, and my cup was running over. I no longer felt reluctance to go out as a poor despised Methodist preacher; whereas, before this period, I really thought I could have chosen death as soon. I therefore embraced the opportunity of waiting upon Mr. Wesley again, and told him I was willing to labour where he thought proper. He told me ‘ that Mr. Murlin, who was then in the Sussex Circuit, was going down to Norwich, and that I should go and supply his place’; and I accordingly went.

Sevenoaks, in Kent, was the first place I preached at. I had paid a very particular attention to the manner of Mr. Wesley, as also of Mr. Maxfield, when preaching in London. I took notice of the pointed and close applications they made to the consciences of the people. As I had them for a pattern, I endeavoured to tread in their steps. I enforced, as well as I could, a free, full, and present salvation. The Lord soon set to His seal, so that some were stirred up to expect pardon, and others deliverance from the remains of the carnal mind. The goodness of God was manifested in a peculiar manner with respect to my own soul; for I had I not been a week in the circuit before I had such a discovery of my call to preach as confirmed all my former experience.

The preaching had not been above three years in this little circuit, and one preacher supplied the whole. I therefore attended I to the discipline of the societies, as well as preaching to them; and as all the societies were but small, I always met them) by speaking to every member after I had done preaching. This I did the first time I went round the circuit; and I soon saw the salutary effects thereof. I knew the state of every member; and this enabled me to address them in public and private accordingly. It pleased God first to visit some in Sevenoaks with a sense of pardon, as also of the virtue of the all-cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. When I mentioned this as I went round the circuit, the flame

broke out in such a manner as was never seen or felt among them before.

[Rankin was later sent by Wesley to America. Here, in 1776, he was blessed with some marvelous manifestations of the power of God, and He was a witness to some of the first actions in the American Revolutionary War. He returned to England in 1778.]

Wednesday, we set off early on our way for Philadelphia, and reached Newcastle, on the Delaware river, on Thursday afternoon. About ten o'clock that evening an express arrived that there had been a general engagement on Long Island, near New York, and that some thousands of the American troops were cut to pieces. After preaching by the way, I came in safety to Philadelphia on Saturday forenoon.

[In August, 1776, British General Howe defeated Washington at Brooklyn, and cleared Long Island. Rankin apparently refers to this in the paragraph above. Then, he goes on in the following paragraph to tell of later actions wherein the British, at that time, were routing the American Army.]

Sunday, December 1 [1776]. -- I preached at New Mills, to one of the most attentive, as well as the largest, congregations that I ever saw in that place. After spending a few days, I purposed returning to Philadelphia, in order to settle some matters respecting the books; and then to return to the Jerseys again, in my way to New York, on purpose to spend some time there, as they had been without a regular preacher for some months. But herein I was disappointed, as the noise and tumult occasioned by the British Army marching through this province, and the American Army retiring before them, threw everything into confusion, and made it unsafe for me to travel. I was therefore obliged to tarry, and spend my time among the different societies in that neighbourhood. This whole month was spent in battle and skirmishes between the British troops and the Americans. It is not my intention to give a detail, or my judgment, of these matters: suffice it to say, that the business belongs to the historian.

Source: Originally from "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," by Thomas Jackson --

[the Enter His Rest website](#)