

William Jay (1769-1853)

by Cyril Aston

Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (EFCC), UK

How long has your pastor been at your church? 5, 10, 20, 30 years? I can pretty well guarantee that there is no pastor within EFCC who has been in his church for 60 years. Amazingly, William Jay of Bath, was the pastor of the same church for almost 62 years! Even more astonishingly, he maintained a fresh and effective ministry all the way through, witnessed a steady stream of conversions and additions to the church, and knew a remarkable sense of unity and oneness in the congregation.

Jay was born on May 6th, 1769, in Wiltshire, the fourth of five children. He lived at Tisbury during his boyhood. His parents were ordinary humble folk, and young William had a basic education, struggling to learn to read. He loved solitude, often wandering in the fields and lanes, and his shyness stayed with him all his life.

Called to preach

He was greatly influenced by the Methodists early on, and was converted as a boy. Although apprenticed as a stonemason at 14, William soon felt God's call upon him to preach and prepare for the Christian ministry. He began preaching in local chapels when just 16 and in 1785, began attending Rev. Cornelius Winter's Academy at Marlborough, studying there for three years. Following these studies, at the age of 21, he began his first and only pastorate at Argyle Chapel, Bath, in 1791.

The young pastor soon began drawing many people to the chapel. Preaching was always his priority. His preparation was thorough, systematic and deeply prayerful. He always read widely around his text, spending hours walking in the woods meditating on it.

His sermons were plain, simple, straightforward and practical – he aimed “low,” never pandering to those “high and mighty” who attended the chapel. Unusually for his time, his sermons were never longer than 45 minutes, and often shorter. He always preached without notes. By 1804, the chapel had to be enlarged, and again in 1821.

Catholic spirit

The church enjoyed years of great unity. “The dipped and sprinkled have dwelt in peace”, he once remarked. He had a large and generous catholic spirit towards all his fellow evangelicals. “Our regiments retain their own colours and officers, but fight against a common foe and for the same King of glory.” Although a convinced Calvinist, he believed Calvinism “should leaven the whole character of the pastor and preacher, but not be urged dogmatically.” Wise stuff!

The shy William married Anne Davies in 1791 and they had six children. It was a happy home, with its inevitable share of sadness too. Anne died in 1845, after 54 years of marriage.

Sought after

Outside of his preaching and pastoral work Jay was a popular and much sought after speaker, and he travelled widely to minister. He helped form the London Missionary Society in 1794 and produced several editions of sermons, writings and daily readings that were well received in England and the USA. He knew scores of fellow evangelical ministers in the country, corresponded widely and welcomed a stream of influential visitors to the manse. He was a

close friend of William Wilberforce, who greatly admired his preaching. At the Jubilee celebrations of his ministry in 1841 the hymns for the occasion were specially composed by James Montgomery.

The aged servant of the Lord preached his last sermon at the chapel on July 25th 1852 (Psalm 53:1-2), for after that he was taken ill. Resigning from the pastorate in October 1852, he died at the end of 1853 at the age of 84 years.

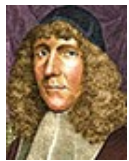
The memorial tablet erected in his honour admirably sums up his remarkable life: “The wise and good and holy William Jay, the great and useful preacher of the Gospel of our salvation.” The text underneath it says it all: “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24).

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John Owen (1616-1683)

by Bryan Jones

Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (EFCC), UK



I start by recommending a new book by John Piper: **Contending for Our All: Defending and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen and J. Gresham Machen** (IVP). The introduction is worth the purchase price: its theme is that the truth has to be held, proclaimed and contended for by every generation, which calls for us to be engaged in sacred controversy (Jude 3). The title of the essay on Owen indicates its theme: “How John Owen killed his own sin while contending for truth.”

Owen, born in 1616, was a son of the manse. He states of his father, a pastor in a village near Oxford, “I was bred up from my infancy under the care of my father, who was a nonconformist all his days, and a painful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord.” At the age of 10 he went to the grammar school in Oxford, prepared for university life and entered Queen’s College at the age of 12. At 16, he took his BA, and at 19, his MA. Peter Toon, in **God’s Statesman** says of young Owen: “He often allowed himself only four hours of sleep each night. His health was affected, and in later life, when he was often on a sick-bed, he regretted these hours of rest that he had missed as a youth.”

Born in the middle of the Puritan movement, Owen became its greatest advocate. John Piper speaks of five events which shaped his life.

First: the Civil War beginning in 1642 – the next four years would not only determine the outcome of the conflict, but events in Owen’s life impressed the rest of that life. One Lord’s Day in 1642 he and his cousin went to hear Edmund Calamy, but he was incapacitated and his place taken by a country preacher. His text was Matt. 8:26. “Why are ye faithful, O ye of little faith?” It was the enactment of God’s word and time to bring peace to Owen’s soul with the assurance that he was born again by the Holy Spirit.

Second: in 1644 Owen married Mary Rooke and their marriage lasted for 31 years until her death in 1675. Ten of their eleven children died in infancy, with only one daughter surviving and living into young adulthood. Owen buried his whole family.

Third: in April 1643, his first book was published, **A Display of Arminianism**, in which he saw how crucial it was to combat the English High Church's repudiation of predestination.

Fourth: in July 1643, he became pastor of Fordham in Essex. Although he was not long in the post it did confirm the direction of his life, so that in everything he maintained a pastoral heart.

Fifth: in 1646, Owen received an invitation to preach before Parliament. For the next 14 years he was engaged in the religious and political life of our nation.

Coming to the notice of Oliver Cromwell, he became his chaplain, and then in 1651, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and a year later Vice-Chancellor of the University, posts he held until the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. He also pastored a Congregational fellowship within the Cathedral, having moved from a Presbyterian view after reading John Cotton's **Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven**. During this period he studied and wrote prolifically. After 1660 until his death in 1683, he lived an almost nomadic existence, as did most of the Puritans.

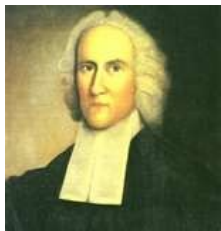
He was an advocate of toleration at a time of heavy handedness by the state, including trying unsuccessfully to have Bunyan released from prison and encouraging those nonconformists who had been forced out of the Church of England in 1662. He strove for personal holiness in himself and others, especially the political establishment. He and Bunyan are buried together in Bunhill fields. In his funeral address, David Clarkson said: "A great light has fallen; one of eminency for holiness, learning, parts and abilities; a pastor, a scholar, a divine of the first magnitude; holiness gave a divine lustre to his other accomplishments, it shined in his whole course, and was diffused through his whole conversation."

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Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

by Robert E. Davis

Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches (EFCC), UK



The greatest American Congregationalist was actually a British citizen. Jonathan Edwards lived his entire life in the North American colonies. One of 11 children born to pastor Timothy Edwards of East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards and his 10 sisters grew up under the faithful ministry of the Word and diligent training in the classics. At the age of 13, he entered Yale, graduating with a BA in 1720 and an MA in 1722. After a brief stint as pastor of a Presbyterian church in New York City he returned to Yale as tutor. He was then called to aid his aging grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had spent decades leading the faithful Congregational flock at Northampton, Massachusetts, then a small frontier town. Upon Stoddard's death in 1729, Edwards assumed full pastoral responsibilities at Northampton.

Revival

This is the vital background for what we generally think about Edwards, for, in 1734, God sent revival to Northampton and the surrounding communities. At the centre of this great movement of God was the young man Edwards. Already noted as fine preacher by the clergy

of Massachusetts, Edwards now became a student of revival. His **Faithful Narrative**, published in 1737 was more than a mere reporting of the surprising revival events, but it laid the groundwork for a diligent study of the means and methods of God. And yet this was just the beginning. In 1740, revival swept the colonies. In the autumn of that year, a visit by George Whitefield to New England, including Northampton and surrounding towns, further fanned the flame. By this time, Edwards was an apt student of the human soul and the process of conversion, having witnessed hundreds of men, women and children come under the influence of the Holy Spirit as he worked the Word into human hearts. Edwards' **Distinguishing Marks** (1741), **Some Thoughts Concerning Revival** (1743) and **Religious Affections** (1746) further defined and sharpened our understanding of the nature of conversion.

One might think that any church would be blessed to have as their pastor such an effective preacher and student of the scriptures. But in 1750 Edwards was dismissed from the Northampton ministry. Several issues arose that Edwards could have handled more pastorally. Yet, on one point, he clearly held biblical ground. He refused to see the Lord's Supper as means of conversion. This led him to restrict communion to the professed believers, a departure from his grandfather's position.

Further Ministry

So, at the age of 47, with a growing family and no ministry, Edwards moved from the relative security and comfort of Northampton to the tiny settlement of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. There he served as an apostle to the Indians and minister to the small congregations of English speaking settlers. The seclusion of this work enabled him to produce the profound treatises, **Freedom of the Will** (1754) and **Original Sin** (1758).



In 1758, Edwards was called out of his seclusion to be the president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton). Soon after his arrival he was given a smallpox inoculation which led to his death on March 22nd, 1758. His family had not yet moved to be with him.

Edwards possessed one of the greatest minds America has ever seen. Such was the depth and power of his intellect that annually new books and articles on his work come into print. But we should be attracted to him for more than his intellect. He was supremely a man who loved and served the Lord Jesus Christ. His friends and even those who contended against him knew him as a godly man and respected both his scholarship and his piety. Amidst all the difficulties of ministry on the frontier he possessed a wonderful confidence in God's sovereignty and purpose for man. His writings, particularly his sermons, bring to us a great sense of calm and faith in a loving, righteous God who above all, is worthy of praise and service. This is the legacy of Edwards.

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