Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology



https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for the *The Evangelical Magazine* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical-magazine.php

THE

Evangelical Magazine,

FOR NOVEMBER, 1796.

BIOGRAPHY.

LIFE OF THE LATE REV. DAVID BRAINERD, OF NEW-ENGLAND,

MISSIONARY TO THE AMERICAN INDIANS.

[*From his Conversion to his entrance on the Ministry.*]

FEW lives are more interesting than that of Mr. Brainerd, whether we consider the depth of his *experience*, or the singularity of his *labours*. A brief account of each, we trust, will be peculiarly acceptable to our readers, especially at a time when so much concern is manifested for the salvation of the heathen. In him they will perceive how easily God can provide instruments for his work; and by the success which accompanied his labours, in circumstances the most discouraging, they will have the clearest demonstration that those difficulties which, to us, appear insuperable, instantly vanish at the presence of the Almighty.

This extraordinary man was born April 20, 1718, at Connecticut, New-England. His parents, who had lived in great reputation, died while he was young. From his childhood he experienced strong religious impressions. Being naturally of a melancholy disposition, and having some concern for his soul, when he was about seven or eight years of age, he was so terrified at the thoughts of death, that he relinquished his childish play, and was urged by his fears to the performance of religious duties. This concern soon abated, and though he sometimes attended secret prayer, yet he lived at ease in Sion, till he was thirteen; when a prevailing mortal sickness in the town, where he resided, rouzed him again from his security. He became so fervent in his devotions, and took such delight in the performance of them, that he sometimes began to hope he was savingly

converted to God. But another relapse soon manifested the deceitfulness of his heart, and the necessity of trusting to something better than those good frames, which, at different times, had yielded him much pleasure.

When he was about nineteen, he removed from Haddam, the place of his nativity, to Durham, where he worked on his farm for a twelvemonth; frequently longing for a liberal education, with a desire to devote himself to the ministry. With this view he placed himself under the care of Mr. Fiske, pastor of the church of Haddam, applied himself to study, and became very strict and watchful over his thoughts, words, and actions. At the advice of Mr. Fiske, he totally abandoned the company of young people, and associated himself with the grave and elderly. His manner of life was now exceeding regular---he read his Bible more than twice through in less than a year---daily spent much time in prayer and other secret duties---was very attentive to the word preached, endeavouring, as much as possible, to retain it in his memory. He spent the sabbath evenings privately, with some other young persons, in religious exercises; and after their meeting ended, he used to retire, and repeat to himself as much as he could recollect of the discourses of the day; which sometimes deprived him of his rest till the night was far advanced. His outward conduct being blameless, he rested entirely on his duties, though he was not sensible of it; and sometimes, feeling his affections moved in the exercises of religion, he had thoughts of uniting himself to the Church.

The death of Mr. Fiske soon deprived him of the advantages he might have derived from the wisdom and piety of so good a man. He prosecuted his learning with his own brother, and still continued in the conscientious discharge of religious duties; often wondering at the levity of professors, and grieved to see them so careless and inconsistent. "Thus," says he, "I proceeded, a considerable length, on a self-righteous foundation, and should have been utterly lost and undone, had not the mere mercy of God prevented."

In the beginning of the winter, 1738, as he was walking, on a sabbath morning, in a retired situation, for the purposes of meditation and prayer, it pleased God, on a sudden, so to impress his mind with a sense of his danger, and the wrath he had deserved, that he was struck with astonishment; and the pleasure arising from all his former good frames instantly vanished. He became so dejected from the view of his sin and vileness, that he kept much alone, envying the birds and beasts their happiness, because they were not

not exposed to eternal misery, as he evidently perceived himself to be. Mountains of difficulties obstructed his hopes of mercy. The work of conversion appeared so great, that though he almost despaired of being the happy subject of it, yet he prayed to God, and performed his religious duties with more earnestness than ever; hoping, by some means or other, to make the case better. Hundreds of times he renounced all pretences of any *worth* in his duties, confessing that he deserved nothing for the very best of them, but eternal condemnation; yet still he cherished a latent hope of recommending himself to God by the performance of them; for when he prayed affectionately, and his heart seemed, in some measure, to melt, he hoped, God would hear such *sincere cries*, and be moved to pity him: And when he *mourned* for sin, he thought he could, in some measure, venture on the mercy of God in Christ; concluding, when he felt any enlargement in duty, that he had advanced a considerable step towards heaven. Whatever qualifications he supposed others possessed, before their reception of Christ, these he strove to obtain, in order to recommend himself to the divine favour. Whilst he imagined there was some appearance of *goodness* in his prayer and repentance, he was greatly encouraged, and thought he should soon be reconciled to God; but when he perceived the vileness of his nature, and his inability to deliver himself from the justice of a sovereign God, his distress revived, the discovery being too painful for him to endure.

When the fervour of his devotion became languid for any considerable time together, convictions of sin generally seized him with greater violence. One night particularly, when he was walking solitarily abroad, he had such a view of his sins, that he was apprehensive the ground would suddenly cleave asunder under his feet, and his soul quickly go down into hell. Though such distress was not uncommon when he had a lively sense of his own depravity, yet he greatly dreaded the loss of convictions, lest he should return to a state of carnal security and insensibility of impending wrath; which made him exceeding cautious not to stifle the motions of the Spirit of God. But so deceitful is the human heart, that when at any time he thought the degree of his convictions was considerable, it begat such confident hope that he should soon make some notable advances towards deliverance, as eased his mind, and soon generated that languor and insensibility he so much dreaded.

Frequently

Frequently he imagined himself humbled, and prepared for saving mercy, and no less frequently did his fancied hopes disappear. At length, repeatedly disappointed in his expectation, his corrupt heart was irritated; the frame of his mind became horrible; he entered into a contest with the Almighty, disapproving of his dealings with mankind, and quarreling with his holy law, that took cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart, as unreasonably rigid and severe. He found great fault with the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity; and often wished there had been some other way of salvation than by Jesus Christ, or that God would have permitted men to obtain the blessings of it by sincere prayers and endeavours, which he thought they could perform, and not by faith alone, which he perceived was beyond the power of man to exercise, it being the gift of God, and which he only could bestow.

To the sovereignty of God he felt much opposition. Some passages in the ninth chapter to the Romans were a constant vexation to him. If they occurred to his mind, when he was in a comfortable frame, his pleasure vanished; and even when he thought he was almost humbled, and resigned to God's disposal, if he happened to read, or reflect on them, his enmity against the divine sovereignty was immediately excited.

The blasphemy that arose upon these occasions made him the more afraid of God, and drove him farther from all hope of reconciliation. At the same time, the Spirit of God was so powerfully at work with his soul, that the conviction of his lost estate was sometimes so clear and manifest, as if it had been declared to him, in so many words, *It is done, it is done, it is for ever impossible to deliver yourself!* The greatest distress immediately followed. At the sight of his lost condition his soul recoiled: Yet he dared not venture himself, as a helpless sinner, into the hands of God, to be at the disposal of his sovereign pleasure. He trembled to contemplate this important truth, that he was *dead in trespasses and sins*: But when he had thrust away these views of himself, he was unhappy, and desired to have the same discoveries renewed; fearing greatly lest God should give him over to final stupidity.

After a considerable time spent in such painful exercises of mind, while he was walking, one morning, as usual, in a solitary place, he at once perceived that all his endeavours to procure deliverance were utterly in vain; and was now fully convinced that he was totally lost. Instead of blaming himself that

that he had not done more, while he had opportunity, he saw, that let him have done what he would, all would have been ineffectual. The former tumult of his mind was now quieted, and he was eased of the distress he felt while struggling in opposition to the divine sovereignty. He had the greatest certainty that his state was for ever miserable, for all that he could do; and wondered that he had never been sensible of it before. His notions respecting his religious duties were quite altered. Instead of thinking that the more he did, the greater claim he had to God's favour; or, at least, that it would be more hard if he should finally reject him, he now saw that there was no necessary connexion between his prayers and divine mercy; that God was under no obligation to bestow grace upon him, because he asked it, self-interest being the motive which induced him to pray, and not any respect to *his* glory.

A few days after, he went, pensive and sorrowful, to the same solitary place, and attempted to pray, but found no heart to engage in that, or any other duty; being disconsolate from an apprehension that the Spirit of God had quite forsaken him, yet not the subject, as heretofore, of painful distress. Having, in vain, endeavoured to pray, for near half an hour, as he was walking in a dark, thick grove, his soul was favoured with a view of *unspeakable glory*, not accompanied with any external brightness or splendour, but an inward apprehension of the nature and perfections of God, such as he had never before experienced. His mind was not directed to the contemplation of any one particular person in the Trinity; it was the glory of the Godhead he then beheld, and his soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable; being inwardly pleased and satisfied that he should be *God over all* for ever and ever. So captivated and delighted was he with his excellency, loveliness, greatness, and other perfections, that his thoughts were quite absorbed; at least, to such a degree, that he lost all concern about his own salvation, and scarcely reflected there was such a creature as himself in existence.

Such was the wonderful and unexpected manner in which he was cordially disposed to exalt God, and set him on the throne; aiming principally and ultimately at his honour and glory as King of the universe. His mind was sweetly composed. He felt himself in a new world, every thing appearing with a different aspect. In the way of salvation he discovered such infinite wisdom, suitableness, and excellency, that he was surprised how he could ever have thought of any other, or adhered to his own performances in preference to it.

Could he be saved by his own duties, or in any other way he had formerly contrived, his soul would reject the offer; and he wondered that all the world did not embrace salvation through the righteousness of Christ. The sweet relish of what he then enjoyed continued with him several days; so that he rejoiced in God when rising up and lying down. But the most eminent saints must not, in the present life, expect that the sun, which shines in the day of their espousals, will not go down: For not long after, his mind was again involved in thick darkness, and exceedingly oppressed with a sense of guilt. And though this gloominess was graciously removed, it quickly returned, to such a degree, that he feared the presence of God was clean gone for ever.

In the beginning of September, 1739, he entered himself at Yale College, in New-Haven; but not without reluctance, fearful lest, amidst the many temptations to which he might be exposed, he should not be able to lead a life of strict religion. During the vacation, before he went to reside at college, he was spending some time in prayer and self-examination; when it pleased the Lord to visit him with such bright manifestations of himself and his grace, that his soul was unspeakably refreshed with heavenly enjoyments. Sundry passages of Scripture were opened to his mind with such divine clearness and power, as produced full conviction of its being the word of God.

Through the whole of the following winter he enjoyed considerable pleasure in religion. Having caught the measles, a disorder which spread much at college, he returned, in the month of January, to Haddam. A few days before he was taken ill, he exceedingly mourned the absence of the Comforter; and though he cried earnestly to God for help, he found no present relief. But while he was walking alone, in a very retired spot, engaged in meditation and prayer, he was indulged with such a season of refreshment from the presence of the Lord, as raised him far above the fear of death, and filled his soul with greater delight than all the enjoyments that earth can afford. And though, in his illness, life was despaired of, death was disarmed of its sting.

When, through the divine goodness, he recovered, he prosecuted his studies with such close attention as proved injurious to his health. Feeling his weakness, and perceiving that he began to spit blood, he took the advice of his tutor, and retired from academical pursuits, from August to November; spending much of the interval in prayer and self-examination, sometimes mourning bitterly over his exceeding sinfulness

sinfulness and vileness, and, at other times, rejoicing in a lively sense of the divine favour, feeling his heart unusually drawn forth in grateful returns of affection and praise.

Once, in particular, while he was looking on the sacramental elements, and considering that Christ would soon be set forth crucified before him, he was so filled with light and love, that he was almost in an ecstasy, which his weak body could scarcely sustain. At the same time, he felt exceeding great tenderness and fervent love towards all mankind; his soul and all the powers of it seeming, as it were, to dissolve in softness and compassion. Such love and joy cast out fear; and he longed for the perfection of grace and glory.

Persuaded that a college-life had proved hurtful to his spiritual interest the year preceding, his recovery afforded him little comfort. On the contrary, could his desire have been granted, he would rather have died, in the frame of mind he then possessed, than return to a place where he feared his communion with God would be interrupted. This holy jealousy proved beneficial. It made him watchful, lest he should fall into his old temptation, and suffer his heart to be drawn away from the ardent pursuit of heavenly objects, by his ambition to excel in learning. For the space of six weeks, after his return, he experienced, almost daily, the power of religion and walked in the light of God's reconciled countenance. About the latter end of January, however, he grew more cold and dull, through attention to study; but a general awakening beginning to spread itself over the college the following month, his soul was abundantly quickened.

While thus, with his progress in the spiritual life, he was making considerable advances in literature, a circumstance occurred, painful in its nature, but very important in its consequences. Being in the hall, with two or three of the religious students, who usually associated for mutual conversation and improvement, one of them having asked his opinion of Mr. Whittelsey, one of the tutors, who had been uncommonly pathetic in prayer, he, leaning upon his chair, replied, "He has no more grace than this chair." A junior student, who was near the door, over-hearing the words, and suspecting that they were spoken of one of the tutors, mentioned it to a woman belonging to the town; who immediately went and informed the rector of the college. Mr. Brainerd's friends were sent for, and interrogated, and compelled by menaces to declare the name of the person to whom the words were applied. The governors insisted on his humbling himself before

the whole college; making confession in the same public manner as was required of those who had been guilty of some notorious crime. With this demand he refused to comply; but readily acknowledged the impropriety of the expression, and asked pardon of Mr. Whittelsey for the liberty he had taken with his character, though it was only in a private conversation with his most intimate friends. For this wonderful offence, discovered by means so unjustifiable, together with his having once attended the preaching of Mr. Tennent, a lively and zealous minister of Christ, though the rector had refused to give him leave, he was, in the beginning of the year 1742, expelled the college.

Such violent proceeding against so good a man gave great offence to many. His own mind was much affected with it, fearing that the academical censure would prove injurious to his future ministry; but he conducted himself, on the trying occasion in the most Christian manner, and was ever after more ready to blame himself than to condemn others; though so long as he lived, he considered himself, as to the management of the affair, much abused. But for this painful event, he would have taken his degree on the next commencement-day with his classmates, and appeared at the head of them; and would, probably, have proceeded to the highest academical honours. Mortifying as the disappointment was, it rather increased than diminished his desire for the ministry. He therefore immediately placed himself under the Rev. Mr. Mills, of Ripton, that he might pursue his studies, and qualify himself for the work.

About this time he first appears to have cherished a hope that he should one day be employed, as an instrument, in the conversion of the heathen. Previous to his expulsion, he makes no mention in his writings of such a design; but ever afterwards his views seem to be principally directed to that object. He now began to wrestle earnestly with God for the salvation of the heathen, and for the extension of the kingdom of Christ in the world. He became more fervent than ever in his private devotions, and set apart whole days for fasting and prayer; beseeching the Lord to prepare him for the work of the ministry, and in due time to send him into his harvest; earnestly interceding for the salvation of immortal souls, and particularly pleading for the illumination and conversion of the poor heathen. On these occasions, he was frequently enabled to agonize with God in prayer, to such a degree, that his body was covered with a profuse sweat, even when the air was cool, and his worship performed in the shade; and of abundant

abundant was his compassion towards the souls of others, that he felt greater pleasure when interceding for them, than in any other part of prayer.

But amidst these heavenly exercises of mind, he complains of the operations of spiritual pride; and had such discoveries of his own vileness, that he humbled himself in the dust before God, wondering that he would suffer any of his creatures to feed and sustain him; or that he should dispose the hearts of any of his people to notice him, and shew him kindness.

Viewing the boundless mercy of God, in pardoning all his iniquities, and clearing him from his exceeding filthiness, and overwhelmed with a sense of his infinite condescension in favouring such a worm with his presence; he was willing, if God should so order it, to be banished from his native land among the heathen, and endure sufferings of any kind, or even death itself, provided he might be instrumental in doing good to their souls.

The time was now fast approaching, when God, who had endowed him with special grace, was about to employ him in special services. Among other advantages which he derived from his present situation, he had frequent opportunities of visiting several eminent ministers. They, perceiving his great wisdom and piety, gave him all possible encouragement, and on the 29th of July, 1742, he was examined by the association assembled at Danbury; who were so perfectly satisfied with his learning, knowledge, and religious experience, that he received from them a licence to preach the everlasting Gospel of the Redeemer.

N. B. *That we may neither weary our readers, nor exceed our limits, we were obliged to postpone the narrative of Mr. Brainerd's* LABOURS *to a subsequent number.*

AN INQUIRY INTO THE TRUE AND SCRIPTURAL IDEA OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

THE Apostle Peter, towards the close of his first epistle, states, that the *prime object* of his writing that part of the sacred Scriptures was, that he might exhort the persons whom he addressed, and testify to them that the doctrine, which they had received from him and his brethren, and in which they then stood fast, and, he trusted, would continue to stand, was *the true grace of God*.

The