

Edwards was Extraordinary

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“Edwards was extraordinary.”¹ That is how George Marsden begins the introduction to his recent monumental biography of Jonathan Edwards, and I have tried to outline some of the ways I also believe that to be true in articles that I have written for previous volumes of this journal. But Marsden also wrote these words as the opening sentence to his preface of that same volume: “A number of people of common sense have asked me something like, ‘Isn’t there a good bit written on Jonathan Edwards already?’”² Believing that also to be as true as Marsden’s previous statement, and having been one of those who has been guilty of writing “a good bit on Jonathan Edwards” both in issues of this journal and in my two published volumes on Edwards, *The Blessing of God*, and *The Honor and Glory of God*,³ I offer this additional previously unpublished sermon with very little by way of introduction, except that I have included a brief chronology, that might help to give some appreciation by way of a glimpse, of what Edwards achieved and why he really was extraordinary.

Edwards preached this sermon within months of the First Great Awakening having broken out, and only a matter of weeks before he preached his infamous “Sinners” sermon.⁴ There is no evidence Edwards reworked this sermon for reproaching and the length of this sermon is very typical of many of Edwards’ sermons. As for its themes, there are three to which I would particularly draw your attention. The first is the question of which sinners are called by Christ and how one might know whether one is called or not. The second theme is that of the value of praying as a sinner, when God has told us he will not hear the prayers of

¹ George M Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

² *Ibid.*, xvii.

³ Michael D. McMullen, *The Blessing of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), and *The Glory and Honor of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004).

⁴ Edwards’ sermon is largely transcribed just as it was written in his manuscript. That is to say, only some minimum punctuation was added, but no considerable effort was made to make sentences out of sentence fragments, nor to add words to make his notes or statements read smoother, etc.

the wicked. And the last, is that even though Christ calls all sinners to him, he is not in any way obliged to save any.

Chronology (Adapted from various sources, including Marsden's biography, *Jonathan Edwards* by M. X. Lesser,⁵ and my own additional research.)

- 1703 Born 5 October, in East Windsor, Connecticut, the only son among ten daughters of Timothy Edwards, Pastor, and Esther Stoddard
- 1716 Enters Yale College
- 1719 Writes *Of Insects, Of Atoms*, and other scientific and philosophical papers
- 1720 Graduates first in his class from Yale; stays for M.A. in theology
- 1721 Experiences conversion, "a new sense of things"
- 1722 August, accepts call to a New York City Presbyterian Church; begins his *Resolutions* and *Diary*
- 1723 April, leaves New York Church; November, offered tutorship at Yale; rejects settlement of Bolton Congregational Church, Connecticut
- 1724 May 21, appointed tutor at Yale
- 1726 November 21, invited to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, at First Church, Northampton, Massachusetts
- 1727 February 15, ordained; July 28, marries Sarah Pierrepont
- 1728 August 25, daughter Sarah born, first of eleven children
- 1729 February 11, Solomon Stoddard dies; Edwards installed as full pastor
- 1731 *God Glorified*
- 1734 *A Divine and Supernatural Light*; Northampton and Connecticut Valley Awakening
- 1737 *A Faithful Narrative*
- 1738 *Discourses on Various Important Subjects*; preaches on charity and its fruits
- 1739 Begins his *Personal Narrative*; preaches on the history of redemption
- 1740 The Great Awakening.
- 1741 July 8, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*; September 10, *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God*
- 1742 Preaches on religious affections

⁵ M. X. Lesser, *Jonathan Edwards* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988).

- 1743 *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England; Great Concern*
- 1744 *True Excellency*
- 1746 *Religious Affections; The Church's Marriage*
- 1747 *True Saints; An Humble Attempt*
- 1748 *A Strong Rod; death of daughter Jerusha*
- 1749 *Life of David Brainerd; Humble Inquiry; Christ the Great Example*
- 1750 June 22, dismissed by his congregation; July 2, preaches farewell sermon; writes the preface for *True Religion Delineated* by Joseph Bellamy
- 1751 *A Farewell Sermon; August 8, installed as pastor and missionary to the Housatonic Indians at Stockbridge, Massachusetts*
- 1752 *Misrepresentations Corrected*
- 1753 *True Grace*
- 1754 *Freedom of the Will*
- 1757 Completes manuscript on original sin; chosen as President of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University)
- 1758 February 16, inducted as president; March 22, dies of smallpox inoculation complications; *Original Sin*
- 1765 *Personal Narrative; Two Dissertations*
- 1774 *A History of the Work of Redemption*
- 1852 *Charity and Its Fruits*

**What Induces Christ to Pity and Help Sinners
Is Not That They Deserve It But That They Need It**

Mark 2:17

When Jesus heard it he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

We often find the Pharisees and other Jews that were had an high esteem of themselves for their religion and piety, murmuring against Christ for taking so much notice of them that were accounted great sinners. So when he so graciously received Mary Magdalene when she washed his feet with her tears, Simon the Pharisee, at whose house he was entertained, murmured and said within himself, This man if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner, Luke 7:39. And so when Christ went to be guest with Zacchaeus, there was a great murmuring of it amongst the Jews saying, he is gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner, Luke 19:7. And particularly it was a great offence to them that he should so

often be conversant with the publicans that were a sort of men that were very odious in their eyes and accounted some of the worst of men.

Though we are told in the beginning of Luke 15, then drew near to him all the Publicans and sinners for to hear him, and the Pharisees and Scribes murmured saying, this man ruineth sinners and eateth with them. And so in the context there is the like complaint as in the two verses next preceding the text. The Pharisees thus esteemed themselves and were esteemed by others the most righteous and holy sort of men of any in the land, had the least honor and respect shown them by Christ, and were more than any others sharply reproved by him from time to time, and the publicans that on the contrary were accounted the worst sort of men of any among them, were often treated with great mercy and tenderness by Christ, and many more of this sort men were gained and became Christ's disciples and followers than of the Pharisees, Matthew 21:31, Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

In the text Christ gives the reason of this his conduct.

1. In the former part of the verse we have it represented in a similitude of a physician, and,
2. In the latter part of the verse the similitude is explained, I came not to call.

The Pharisees looked upon themselves to be righteous, and if it was so they stood in no need of a savior. But they looked upon the publicans to be greater sinners, and if it was so, they stood in so much greater need of a savior, and therefore there was so much more reason that he should take notice of them. The Pharisees looked on themselves to be whole, and if they were so, they did not need the physician, and certainly the physician was not to be blamed for neglecting, nor was he to be blamed for taking notice of those that were sick and stood in great need of him, and were sensible of it.

Doctrine. What induces Christ to pity and help sinners is not that they deserve it but that they need it.

- I. Christ is never induced in any wise to pity or afford any help to any sinners whatsoever because they deserve it.

1. He did not come into the world and die for sinners because any of them had deserved any pity or help at his hands. When he undertook for them with the Father before the foundation of the world, he beheld them as altogether undeserving of anything but eternal destruction. When he saw them undone and fallen and standing in great need of a savior, he beheld them as enemies both to his Father and him that hated him and deserved to be hated of him.

He knew they did not deserve any love or pity at all but to be destroyed without mercy, all that he died for were undeserving. Though there is a great deal of difference in the sinners that he shed his blood for, some are much more wicked than others. Some of them are comparatively beastly sort of men, and some of them have a good moral temper and many natural endowments that recommend them to the esteem of the world, and do many acts of moral righteousness, and yet there is not one of them all but what is a viper in his heart, and deserves to be cast away into the same eternal fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels.

2. He never bestows converting grace on any because they deserve any good at his hands. Sinners that are seeking converting grace are want to hope for success in this ground because they imagine they deserve some pity or help from Christ. They will retain this conceit. They are taught otherwise and will be free to say that they deserve nothing at the hands of God, but when they say so 'tis contrary to the inward thought of their hearts. They do really think they do deserve something. They will acknowledge that they are great sinners, but yet they think they are not so great sinners as many others and they imagine that they deserve some pity upon that account.

God has pitied and helped many that are worse than they, and they imagine therefore that it will not be just for him not to save them, and utterly refuse to have any pity upon them. They think they deserve pity because they pray earnestly for it. It seems to them it will sit hard if God's heart won't be at all moved by all their earnest cries. They have asked a great many times and they have pleaded very importunately and if God rejects them, it seems to them he will be hard. If one man in misery cries for relief of another that can help them if he will, and he won't help them, this is accounted very hard, and so it seems to them it is hard if God won't be moved by all that they can say.

Sinners often think they deserve pity because they have reformed their lives. 'Tis true they did live wickedly but now they have reformed and have forsaken their old ways of sin, and it may be that they have denied themselves very much so to do, and it seems to them very hard if God will always remember their former miscarriages against them now

they have forsaken them. They think they deserve God's help because they do what they can. They attend all means, they neglect no known duty. They take as much pains as they can and would God have more of them. It seems to them that if he casts them into hell, when they have done as well as they could and taken all the pains they could it will not be just.

But Christ never yet bestowed converting grace on any one sinner because they deserved any pity or help at all. If they that have lived moral lives are converted it is not because their morality recommended them to it. If God hears the importunate and earnest prayers of sinners when they cry for mercy, 'tis not because their importunate prayers deserve it any more than the yellings of the devils in hell. He never bestowed converting grace on any person for his reforming his life, his denying himself and resisting his sinful inclinations, or because he is anymore deserving of his pity now since he is reformed than he was when he was going on in a career in sin and gave themselves their full serving in wickedness.

And if they do what they can, if they take never so much pains, do never so much and suffer never so much, never any yet obtained converting grace of God by any the least obligation that those things lend God under to bestow any influence that they had inclines him to it. But,

II. When Christ pities and relieves sinners 'tis out of their respect to their need of it. Every creature is in himself empty. The holy angels have fullness of their own, God is their fullness. And therefore in some sense they may be said to stand in need. God stands in no need of them but they stand in need of him. They are utterly insufficient for themselves. But man is needy in a very different sense. He has not only no fullness of his own but he has lost the Divine fullness that once he had and is left empty of all good and is become miserably poor, an empty, destitute, lost creature. Sinners stand in need of happiness. They have natures that crave it. The nature of man thirsts insatiably after happiness and it is impossible that it should be at rest till happiness be obtained. But sinners are destitute of it. They are separated from the fountain of happiness and vainly endeavor to substitute other things in the room of it. They wander about from one thing to another seeking happiness, seeking something to satisfy the carvings of their souls, Psalms 4:6, There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.

They are not happy but miserable. Christ sees them to be wretched and miserable, that they are in a state of bondage and captivity. He sees that they are in a lost state. He sees that they are ensnared and imprisoned. He sees that they are in a state of darkness and death. He

sees that they are condemned and in extreme danger of dreadful, everlasting destruction and that they cannot help themselves. He knows that all their endeavors to help themselves will be utterly in vain and to no purpose. He sees if he doesn't pity them and help them they are gone and must perish. And 'tis from respect to this state they are in and not anything at all in them to recommend them or to render them acceptable to him. He sees that the poor, lost creature can have no help if he doesn't reach forth the arm of his power and grace and help him.

Application.

I. Use of Instruction. First Inference from the Doctrine: Hence we may learn the reason why God sometimes hears and answers the prayers of natural men when they cry to God for converting grace. The Scripture teaches us that the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, which is doubtless true not only of those that are naturally wicked or those that live in vicious practices but of the most moral, strict and religious natural person upon earth. The Scriptures don't make such a distinction between what men call some of them that are openly, vicious, wicked men, but others of them by some softer name. They are all revealed together. There is not so great a difference between them in the sight of God as there is in the sight of men.

They must all dwell together as companions of devils hereafter being cast into the same pit of darkness and furnace of fire. And they are all, even the best and most exact of them, wicked and abominable dogs and vipers, and the children of hell in the sight of God. And 'tis true though the best religious performances of the best and most shining of them are an abomination to him. Thus natural men often make an objection against praying to God so they say, If this be the case why should I pray? God hates to hear me. And how can I then expect I shall be as answered. I am taught there is nothing in my prayers to incline God to hear me, there is nothing to win his heart, but on the contrary to provoke him more, to bring more guilt and I do only make him more angry with me than he was before. And if my prayers be not heard why should I pray? To what purpose should I pray if I know beforehand that God won't hear my prayers?

But the doctrine affords an answer to the objection, for though God never answers the prayers of natural men for the worthiness or any goodness of their prayers, yet he sometimes is pleased to hear their prayers as it is the voice of their misery or necessity. Let all natural persons be sensible that there is no goodness in their prayers. No respect to God. No love, no honor. No more goodness than in the cry of devils. No acceptableness to God. All the behavior of an enemy than in the

exercise of enmity. All that you do is loathsome because you are a viper in God's eyes.

All the acts of so loathsome a creature as a viper that we have a great detestation of appear hateful to us. The prayers of natural men are called howlings, Hosea 7:14, And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me. There is nothing pleasing or amiable in their most earnest, most affectionate cries, anymore than in the yellings of the doomed in hell. And therefore 'tis never upon the account of any goodness or acceptableness in any of your prayers that God will ever hear them.

But yet God may hear them and answer and oftentimes is pleased, as 'tis the voice of their misery and necessity as we are taught in the doctrine that he has no respect to sinners' worthiness but he has respect to their necessity. So but as a sense their necessity and misery is expressed in their prayers, so God is pleased sometimes to hear them and answer them in the bestowment of saving blessings upon them and delivering them out of this miserable state and condition that they are in. He is pleased of his sovereign mercy to hear the cry of a miserable viper, one that has no love and no honor in his heart to him and one that at the very moment when he cries and howls is full of enmity.

Though his crying expresses no honor or respect in the world to him yet it does express his misery, it expresses the need he stands in of God's help. And God hears it no other way than as the voice of their misery and necessity and not at all as the voice of love or honor to him or dependence upon him. And the reason why God will sometimes hear the voice of wicked men in the world and not in hell, is not because they have any more goodness. Therefore remember this you that are naked persons that are now seeking. Remember always when you go before God that you are in his sight a viper and that God knows that your prayers, your seeming respect and honor is mere hypocrisy, and that if it was not for fear of hell you would never so go, and that God never will answer those prayers from any acceptableness to him.

But yet you ought to pray for you are miserable and necessitous and nature itself teaches a poor creature in great misery to cry. If you don't cry for help when there is a possibility of help for such wretched creatures as you, you will sin even against nature itself. And God may hear your prayers as 'tis the voice of nature, the voice of misery though not as the voice of respect to him. And when you pray to God, don't expect that God will hear you any other way. Cry as the publican did, as a sinner, a viper, an enemy.

And remember that though God sometimes hears the cry of poor sinners for converting grace from respect to their misery and necessity,

yet that necessity lays no obligation upon him to hear you. If God heard you for your worthiness, your worthiness would lay God under some obligation, but God sees no worthiness to have respect to but only the creature's necessity, that misery lays God under no obligation. He may hear your cry or he may refuse it as it pleases him. He sometimes is pleased to hear the cry of his enemies from respect to their necessity, but he has made no promise that he will. He has respect to the necessity of some sinners and pities and relieves them but 'tis not all that are in necessity that he relieves. Some that are in as great necessity as any person whatsoever are left to perish without mercy.

God is not obliged to have regard to the necessities that sinners have brought themselves into by their own folly and rebellion against him and after they have foolishly been bringing themselves into more and more necessitous circumstances by going on in willfully striving against him against all his commands and warnings. God is not obliged to have respect to the necessities of those that have had no respect to his honor and glory that is a thing of much greater importance than their necessities. He is not obliged to have regard to their necessity of interest that have had no regard to their necessity of duty.

Therefore in all your prayers remember these things and let them not only be in your mind but in your mouth when you go before God. But this brings me to the

Second Inference from the Doctrine: If it be so that Christ pities and helps sinners it is not out of respect to their worthiness but their necessity. Then hence we may learn that 'tis much more proper and prudent for sinners to go to God in prayer with their sins than with their righteousness. That is the course that sinners commonly take. But that commonly is a very improper and imprudent course for 'tis certain that God never will bestow mercy upon them out of respect to their righteousness or any of their duties.

But if they instead of going to God with their sins would go with all their sins and wickedness and spread that before God those are the things that show their misery and necessity and that doctrine teaches that God sometimes is pleased to bestow from respect to that. Therein lies your sickness on the account of which you need a physician up to your good qualifications. Those things are those with which you make yourself whole. For a person to go to God in prayer hoping to be heard for his own righteousness is just as if man should go to a physician and cry of him to pity him and help him and at the same time make use of this as an agreement induce him to it that he is well in health and doesn't need him.

Certainly it becomes a man under a desperate disease that pleads with a physician to help them, to plead the greatness and malignity of his

disease and to lay open his wounds before him. Your sins and wickedness of heart and life in your words that you should lay open. Those God may have respect to as they then your necessity but to go and say at the same time in your heart that you are whole, have a righteousness of your own.

II. Use of Exhortation. Labor to be sensible of your own disease and your necessity of the physician. The misery of many is the same with that of the Pharisees who imagined themselves to be whole. This is the case of all that are deceived and think themselves converted when they are not. That is the case of all that rest in their morality and it is the case of all unwashed sinners that they don't see that desperate disease they are consuming away with. 1 Kings 8:38, What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house. That you may see your disease you must be sensible of the dreadful nature of sin the guilt that it brings.

And if you see something of your disease you must also see that you can't be your own physician and that there is no other physician to be found but Christ. Innumerable are the ways that sinners take in vain for healing. Like the woman that had an issue, Luke 8:43, And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any. So it was with Israel of old, Hosea 5:13, When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.

III. Use of Encouragement. This last use may be to encourage such as see their misery and necessity to come to Christ though their sins are very great. You are not the less invited to come to Christ because you are a great sinner for Christ says in the text, I come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Sinners commonly go the wrong way to work to determine whether they are invited to come to Christ. They enquire whether they are righteous.

They think that if they could find such and such good things in them they should take encouragement; they should hope that they were invited to come to Christ. If they were so and so innocent and as good as other persons be they should hope that Christ meant them. Whereas on the contrary to know whether Christ invites them they should not enquire whether they are righteous or innocent, but whether they are sinners. And if they find upon examination that they are great sinners, and so standing in very great need of a savior, then they may know that they are invited, for Christ came to call to sinners, he came to call those that need a

mediator to stand between them and an angry God. He came to call those that stand in need of a great sacrifice to be offered for their sins, a greater sacrifice than either men or angels can offer. He came to call those that do very much need his precious blood to cleanse them from great guilt.

If you upon examination find that you are a very great sinner with great aggravations, quenching the Spirit, then you be sure that character of those belongs to you that Christ came to call, for he tells us he came to call sinners, the greater your sins are so much the more evidently are you of this sort. The Great Physician invites not the whole but the sick. Therefore you that are very sick, you that are sick with a very mortal disease, you that have a disease that none other can cure but Christ. Do you go to him if you see your disease is very desperate, has seized your vitals, even your whole body? Then you need a very skillful physician therefore, such a one as Christ. And Christ calls such in a spiritual manner. Therefore don't be discouraged.

If you have been terrified with the thunder of God's anger as the children of Israel were, yet consider what the prophet says to them, 1 Samuel 12:16-17, Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. The greatness of your sins need not discourage you going to Christ for pardon. You may make use of the greatness of your sins as an argument with him to pardon you, as the Psalmist says in 25:11, For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.

I would now therefore renew the invitation of the Great Physician to all you that are great sinners, young people that have been very vile sinners, come all wretched, poor, old, and blind sinners.

June 1741