



## **CHARLES SPURGEON 1834 – 1892**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1854, just four years after his conversion, Spurgeon, then only 20, became pastor of London's famed New Park Street Church (formerly pastored by the famous Baptist theologian John Gill). The congregation quickly outgrew their building, moved to Exeter Hall, then to Surrey Music Hall. In these venues Spurgeon frequently preached to audiences numbering more than 10,000—all in the days before electronic amplification. In 1861 the congregation moved permanently to the newly constructed Metropolitan Tabernacle. By the end of 1891, 14,460 souls had been baptized and added to the church with a standing membership of 5,311.

Many Christian leaders consider him to be the greatest preacher England ever produced. He is commonly hailed as the "Prince of Preachers." Over 63 volumes of published sermons, including his magnum opus, *The Treasury of David*, still bear witness to the richness and success of Spurgeon's ministry. Newspapers carried his sermons on a weekly and sometimes daily basis for many years. Well over 100 million of those weekly sermons were sold. If one took into account all of his publications they would fill 200 large books.

Though known as a great preacher, it was not just preaching that made Spurgeon great. Mr. Spurgeon repeatedly acknowledged his success as the direct result of his congregation's faithful prayers. "It has often been remarked that the whole church helped produce Spurgeon." When visitors would come to Spurgeon's church he would take them to the basement prayer-room where people were always on their knees interceding. Then Spurgeon would declare, "Here is the powerhouse of this church." Spurgeon regarded the prayer-meeting as the spiritual thermometer of a church. His church's Monday night prayer meeting had a worldwide testimony for many years. "He taught his people to pray, doing so far more by his example than by any preaching. People heard him pray with such reality that they became ashamed of their own mere repetition of words."

Charles was greatly influenced by his grandfather, James Spurgeon, who ministered to the church at Stambourne for 54 years. In 1855 Charles baptized a young woman by the name of Susannah Thompson and, almost exactly one year later, they were joined as soul-mates for life. Words cannot describe the bond between these two. Mrs. Spurgeon would be a semi-invalid and Rev. Spurgeon would suffer from gout and depression through most of their marriage. Yet they forged a wonderful marriage along with twin sons. Susannah became her husband's personal secretary. Once it's reported that she took notes while he talked in his sleep. When he awoke, Spurgeon found the sermon he had mumbled in his sleep. He had slept but Susannah had not. Even after his death, Mrs. Spurgeon kept the work alive, publishing Charles' sermons and distributing thousands of books to young ministers and others.

One could read of all this work and assume that Spurgeon knew nothing of enjoying himself. Such could be farther from the truth. His sense of humor was renowned. In one of his Friday lectures to his college students the pastor told his students, "When you preach on heaven, have a face that reflects the sweetness of God; when you preach on hell, your normal face will do quite well."

Above all, Spurgeon was a preacher of the Word. He was passionately tied to the whole counsel of God. That undying allegiance to God's Word brought great triumph in Spurgeon's life and also controversy. His faith and trust in the Word of God led him to warn the church of its downward slide toward liberalism. Spurgeon's warnings would prove true as the Baptist Union turned more and more to Higher Criticism and gradually abandoned its adherence to God's Word as the sole authority of life and faith.

Spurgeon had a photographic memory. Nothing escaped his mind and was catalogued away for later use at the proper time. Because of these gifts, Spurgeon would not even begin to write down his notes until Saturday night. His Sunday night sermons were prepared on Sunday afternoons. Actually, his sermons were always being prepared. His entire life was a sermon preparation. One could hardly recommend Spurgeon's method of sermon preparation unless you also have his spiritual and intellectual gifts. He was a voracious reader and immersed himself in the Puritans. Charles first discovered Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress* in his grandfather's library and would read it over 100 times before his death. He was well read in Calvin, Baxter, Owens, Gill, Fuller and many others. In his sermons Spurgeon quoted from the likes of Justin Martyr, Augustine, John Bunyan, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and John Newton. By the time of his death, Spurgeon held a personal library of around 12,000 volumes. The collection has been purchased by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

Preaching wasn't Spurgeon's only passion. He was involved in extensive social endeavors, especially in the orphanage work. Hundreds of children who otherwise would have roamed the streets as thieves and vagrants were housed, fed and trained in the Word of God. Spurgeon once said, "We are a large church and we must have a large heart for this city."

As mentioned earlier, Spurgeon suffered from severe gout. The pain brought on times of severe depression. When those times became too intense, Charles and Susannah would often vacation in Mentone, France. While there in January of 1892, he left this earth at the age of 57. One week after Spurgeon's home going, B.H. Carroll preached an entire sermon on his larger influence around the world ending with this statement: "How do you account for Spurgeon?" The answer is ... "God."