

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD

(This message is condensed from the book *Great Sermons by Great Preachers*, compiled by Peter F. Gunther - Moody Press, 1960)

Jonathan Edwards was born Oct. 5, 1703 in E. Windsor, Conn. He was the only son of 11 children. He entered Yale University in Sept. 1716 at 13, and graduated in 1720. He is still considered one of the most brilliant theological minds ever produced in N. America. He later became the president of the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton).

Edwards was invited to speak in Enfield, Connecticut on the afternoon of July 8, 1741. Revival fires had been started in the New England area by George Whitefield, but the city of Enfield had not been moved. It had the reputation of being the most wicked community of them all. Ministers were shocked by the levity of the congregation there. The people appeared thoughtless and vain and hardly conducted themselves with common decency.

As Edwards spoke he used no gestures, but stood motionless with his notes in his left hand and his left elbow on the pulpit. His text was: **“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste”** (Deut. 32:25). This is a passage about divine judgement. It promised that though wicked and proud men may prosper for a season, God would cause their foot to slip in due time. The same thought is expressed in Psalm 73:18: **“Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction”**.

In 1854 Edwards would author his work on *“Freedom of Will”*. He believed that people were free to do as they pleased, but that their freedom to choose meant that they were morally responsible for their actions. The text from Deuteronomy was especially meaningful at a time when walking was the primary mode of travel. It was easy for the audience to relate to slippery places and falling. The thought that God would hold them accountable for their sins and orchestrate their fall had an overwhelming impact. When the rebels of Enfield considered the doom of sinners in the hands of an angry God they were overcome with emotion. Many spontaneously cried out for mercy. Others fell to the floor in repentance. Some were said to have laid hold on the pillars of the church building fearing that at that very moment they would slip and fall headlong into Hell. The house reverberated with cries of repentance and tearful voices pleading for mercy from God.

While it was a lengthy message, here are some of the salient points that Edwards pointed out: (1) They were always exposed to destruction. (2) That this destruction would be sudden and unexpected. (3) That the wicked were liable to fall of themselves. (4) That the reason they had not already fallen was that God's appointed time had not yet come.

He continued to buttress these truths with the following considerations: (1) God has the power to cast men into Hell at any moment. (2) Sinners deserve punishment. (3) They are already under a sentence of condemnation. (4) They are already the objects of that very same anger. (5) When God permits, the Devil stands ready to seize them as his own. (6) It is only the restraining power of God that holds back the force of evil within man. (7) Wicked men have no way of avoiding the judgement of God. (8) Natural man's prudence and care cannot preserve them. (9) There is no effort or contrivance that can protect men who reject Christ. (10) God is under no obligation to keep natural man out of Hell.

Edwards concluded by saying: *“And you children that are unconverted, do you not know that you are going down to Hell to bear the dreadful wrath of that God that is now angry with you every and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the Devil, when so many other children in the land are converted and are become the holy and happy children of the King of kings? . . . Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ now awake and flee from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over every unregenerate sinner. Let everyone flee out of Sodom. ‘Escape for thy life; look not behind thee . . . escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed”* (Gen. 19:17).

REMEMBER! UNLESS YOU REPENT, GOD CAN MAKE YOUR FOOT SLIP IN DUE TIME!