



John Wesley

John Wesley is regarded as the ‘Father of Methodism’.

From the time that he was rescued from a devastating fire that destroyed Epworth Rectory in 1709, his mother, Susanna, resolved to be “more’ particularly careful with the soul of this child that thou [God] hast so mercifully provided for than ever I have been.” John later spoke of himself as a “brand plucked from the burning.”

Deeply influenced by a strict regime of study and devotion set by Susanna in his formative years, John Wesley was staunchly disciplined in his daily life. After being schooled at Charterhouse John attended Christ Church, Oxford. It was here that he decided to become a ‘serious’ Christian, and was ordained into the Church of England where, despite later controversy, he remained an Anglican Priest throughout his life.

In 1726 John became a fellow of Lincoln College and involved himself with a group of like-minded people, serious in their approach to Spirituality. They were known as the ‘Holy Club’, or ‘Methodists’ because of their methodical approach to life, which included the weekly taking of Holy Communion, prayer, bible study, fasting and social work.

Rev John Wesley



1703 - 1791

Although John lived a disciplined spiritual life he was unhappy with his faith because he could not testify to have a personal relationship with the God he laboured for. After the death of his father in 1735, John and his brother Charles travelled to Georgia with the intention of converting the Georgian Indians to Christianity. John’s faith was challenged further when, on their journey across the Atlantic to America, a group of Moravians (German pietist Christians) remained calm amidst a ferocious storm, singing a hymn of faith. This wasn’t a faith like John had ever experienced.

Their time in Georgia was unsuccessful and the Wesley brothers returned to England in February 1738. John preached in and around London but it was evident that he was now different from the conventional high-church clergyman and pulpits began to be closed to him. John grew depressed and became increasingly discontent. All his life he had been striving for salvation through good works and spiritual dedication, now he realised that faith as the absolute sense of assurance in God was the prerequisite that he lacked. How was he to achieve this?

On the evening of 24th May 1738 John Wesley reluctantly attended a religious society at Aldersgate Street. It was here that he found his answer. John himself wrote:

“About a quarter before nine, while he [the speaker] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

This episode marks a new period in John Wesley's life. Although he still suffered doubts, fears and uncertainties after the Aldersgate experience he now felt himself to have the “faith of a son” where as he previously had the “faith of a slave”.

John's transition into this new life was not in-keeping with his sensibilities and he sought to retain his High Church disciplines. He struggled a great deal when first encouraged by a friend from the 'Holy Club', George Whitefield who was himself a renowned religious speaker, to address an open air meeting among the colliers in Bristol. John's sense of decency and good order dictated that he “should have thought the saving of souls a sin if it had not been done in Church”.

However remembering the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus himself preached in the open, John Wesley “submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation...”. After his initial address in Bristol he spent much of the rest of his life travelling the country on horseback, preaching to crowds congregated in the fields and market places.

His success grew out of God's blessing upon his evangelical preaching coupled with the realisation that those converted through his preaching should not be left without support or the opportunity for spiritual growth. Classes were formed for the new converts and meetings were to be held at least once a week. Societies were not to be left in isolation but were linked together to form circuits who were visited and ministered to by travelling preachers. Thus begins the formation of the Methodist Church.

John Wesley never intended to form a separate church and always claimed to be a loyal son of the Church of England. His vision was to form an ‘order for the pursuit of holiness’. However some view John Wesley as a rower – someone who looks in one direction yet travels in the other – and it became evident after his death in 1791 that Methodism was a body separate to that of the Church of England.