

## **A Preacher Named Harry**

Harry was quite a preacher! Toward the end of the Revolutionary War, he converted to Christianity and soon afterwards began to preach as a circuit riding Methodist minister. To say the least, he was a phenomenon. Harry could not read or write, but he had a rare intellect. He was able commit much of the Bible to memory and preach while quoting the Scriptures with great accuracy. Early in his ministry he became associated with Francis Asbury and often traveled with him in camp meetings. Keep in mind, Asbury, an Englishman was inspired by John Wesley to go to America to “spread the Word.” Asbury responded and starting in 1771 began to preach and kept preaching for four decades to pioneering young America. He preached 20,000 sermons and rode over a quarter of a million miles across America telling the good news. Looking back on our founding days, President Calvin Coolidge declared Asbury “one of the builders of America.” Lost in the records of some of our textbooks is a truth just now coming back to light, thanks to Fisk University history professor William Piersen and also David Barton, America’s premier Christian historian. The truth is that godly Francis Asbury said that our subject, Preacher Harry drew even larger crowds than he did when he preached. Rev. Henry Boehm (1775-1875) reported: “His voice was musical, and his tongue as the pen of a ready writer. He was unboundedly popular, and many would rather hear him than the bishops.” Harry also traveled and preached with other popular bishops of that era, including Evangelist Richard Whatcoat (1736-1806), Evangelist Freeborn Garretson (1752-1827), and the Evangelist Thomas Coke (1747-1814). Coke said, “I really believe he is one of the best preachers in the world. There is such an amazing power that attends his preaching...and he is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw.” One historian said Harry was “a renowned camp meeting exhorter, the most widely known preacher (of his kind) in this time, and arguably the greatest circuit rider of his day.” We can honestly say Harry was used of God in a powerful way to help usher in the “Second Great Awakening.”

Research further reveals that Harry was unpopular in the South for two reasons: first, frontier Methodists such as Harry tended to lean Arminian in their theology, which contrasted with the denominations of the South that were largely Calvinistic (e.g., Presbyterians, Reformed, Episcopalians, Baptists, etc. – yes, the Baptists of that day were largely Calvinistic!); second, Methodists were outspoken against slavery whereas the majority of the South supported slavery. Therefore, southern groups such as the Virginia Baptists came to use Harry’s last name as an insulting term of derision that they applied to Methodists like Harry meaning that they were anti-slavery in belief, Arminian in theology and uneducated and unrefined. Harry made a lasting impact on the American territory that later became the state of Indiana. Souls were saved and lives were changed under his ministry. Six years after Harry’s death, Indiana became the 19<sup>th</sup> state of the United States and these pioneering men who carved a state out of the wilderness had been so greatly influenced by the Gospel preached by a former slave, “Black Harry” Hoosier that they were called “Hoosiers.” What was intended as an insult became a badge of honor.

There have been several explanations as to why people from Indiana have been called Hoosiers, but this seems the best and most believable. God blessed the influence of a man named Harry Hoosier. Harry Hoosier teaches us:

### **1. There is room for all in the Body of Christ.**

How unlikely in the early history of our country that a black man would be used in the way God used Harry Hoosier. Do you remember the Day of Pentecost? *“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language”* (Acts 2:5,6). Soon after Christ died for our sins, rose again and ascended to Heaven, the Feast of Pentecost became a launching point of the Gospel and on this first great day of evangelism the message went to every corner of the earth through those assembled. This was and still is God’s plan. God wants to save and use us from every clime and culture. At the end of time God tells us in His Word: *“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Revelation 5:9).

### **2. God uses handicapped people.**

Harry Hoosier’s lack of formal training did not hinder him from being used of God. We are prone to tell God of the reasons we cannot be used of God. In all sincerity, not being able to read and write is about the greatest handicap a preacher can have, but it did not stop Harry Hoosier. He shook an entire area of our country for God whose influence lasts to this day!

Paul said, *“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong”* (II Corinthians 12:10). Instead of looking for ways and reasons God cannot use us, let’s look for the ways God is willing to use us.

### **3. God is in the business of setting people free.**

In Luke 4, the Lord Jesus took the prophecy of Isaiah and proclaimed His reason for being here. *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound”* (Isaiah 61:1). God, our Creator who created all men equal wants men and women to be free. Philemon, verses 15 and 16 says, *“For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?”* Here we see Paul making the case for slaves to be free.

Not only does God want men free from the human bondage of slavery, He also wants men free from the bondage of sin. Harry did a wonderful job as God’s conduit of blessing as he went from place to place as a circuit rider, preaching the liberating Gospel of Christ. Jesus said, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32).

I would be remiss to withhold the whole truth of Harry Hoosier. Years after he had been such a blessing to the American frontier, he got away from the Lord. In a severely backslidden state, our former hero Harry became a rag-picker in the streets of Philadelphia. But we will do not leave him there. One evening, Harry wrestled with God under a tree and was determined to remain there until his backslidings were healed. Sometime that night, God restored to him the joys of his salvation (Psalm 51:12). God set him free and blessed him once more. Like Samson he felt the pillars one more time (Judges 16: 28-31). About the year 1810, Harry finished his course. At his funeral an unusually large number of people, both white and black, followed his body to its last resting place, in a free burying ground in Kensington near Philadelphia.

-Pastor Pope-