
Take time and read the following article to help prepare your hearts & minds for communion on October 12, 2025:

The Spirit of Glory & of God

by Burk Parsons

Persecution and martyrdom are perennial features of the church's existence in this world, a fact borne out by numerous New Testament passages (for example, John 15:18-21; Acts 14:19-22). Between 1660 and 1688, the Puritans knew well the reality of Jesus' words and shared the early church's experience as they felt what it was like to be a community under the cross of persecution. In that time, the English government passed the Clarendon Code, a series of acts designed to destroy the viability of the major Puritan bodies in England and Wales, namely, the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists.

Consider, for example, William Mitchel (1662-1705). Mitchel was a tireless Calvinistic Baptist evangelist in the Pennines, from the Rossendale Valley in Lancashire to Rawdon in neighboring West Yorkshire. He was born at Heptonstall, not far from Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, but nothing is really known about Mitchel's upbringing. His conversion came at the age of nineteen, after the death of a brother. Within four years of his conversion, he had begun to preach as an itinerant

evangelist with the aim to "chiefly set forth the exceeding rich and free grace of the gospel, which toward him had been made so exceeding[ly] abundant." Mitchel preached anywhere he could get an audience, including the Pennine mountains, in fields, or in woods. Though he was not a polished speaker, crowds thronged to hear him. Many came out of mere curiosity, while others came to scoff. But later, when their hearts had been impacted by Mitchel's gospel preaching, they confessed, "The Lord is with him of a truth."

However, according to the Second Conventicle Act (1670), part of the Clarendon Code, Mitchel's preaching was illegal. The act forbade anyone over the age of sixteen, apart from ministers sanctioned by the Church of England, from taking part in a religious assembly of more than five people. Local magistrates and judges were given wide powers to suppress such meetings and arrest whomever they saw fit. Mitchel was twice arrested during the 1685-1688 reign of James II. On the first occasion, he was treated with deliberate roughness and spent three months in jail. On the second occasion, he was arrested near Bradford and imprisoned for six months in York Castle.

The enemies of the gospel who imprisoned Mitchel thought they were shutting him up in

a dismal dungeon. To Mitchel, though, as he told his friends in a letter written from York in 1687, the dungeon was a veritable “paradise, because the glorious presence of God is with me, & the Spirit of glory & of God rests on me.” This quote echoes 1 Peter 4:12-14, where Peter encourages readers to stand firm in the midst of a “fiery trial,” the sharing of “Christ’s sufferings,” and being insulted for the very name of the One they love. Mitchel knew all these things first-hand – and even as God the Holy Spirit was with His people in their trials in the first century, so He was with Mitchel.

Mitchel later wrote that the Holy Spirit sustained him by giving him such a “glorious sight of [God’s] countenance, [and] bright splendor of his love” that he was quite willing to “suffer afflictions with the people of God, & for his glorious Truth.” Having been sweetly drawn to a biblical understanding of who God is and to the “glorious Truth” of His Word, Mitchel was enabled to stand firm for the gospel.

In a letter to Daniel Moore during this same imprisonment, Mitchel wrote that he had heard that James II had issued a Declaration of Indulgence, which pardoned all who had been imprisoned under the penal laws of the Clarendon Code. Whether this was true or

not, he told Moore: “The Lord’s will be done, let him order things as may stand with his glory.” This sentence speaks volumes about the frame of mind in which Mitchel had approached his time of imprisonment. He was God’s servant. God would do with him as He sovereignly thought best. Mitchel was quite content with that, for in his heart he longed above all else for his life to shine forth for God’s glory.

Mitchel was also deeply driven by a love for perishing sinners. After release from his second imprisonment in 1687, Mitchel immediately resumed preaching throughout the valleys and towns of the Pennines. Why did he do this? As he told Richard Core, a fellow gospel minister, it was because the conversion of one poor soul is of “more worth than the whole world, yea than all the riches, honours, profits and pleasure of it, in which the whole world glories.”

Mitchel died in 1705, leaving behind a great testimony to the work of the Spirit of God, who in a time of persecution, had given him a passion for the glory of God and a love for the souls of men and women.

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