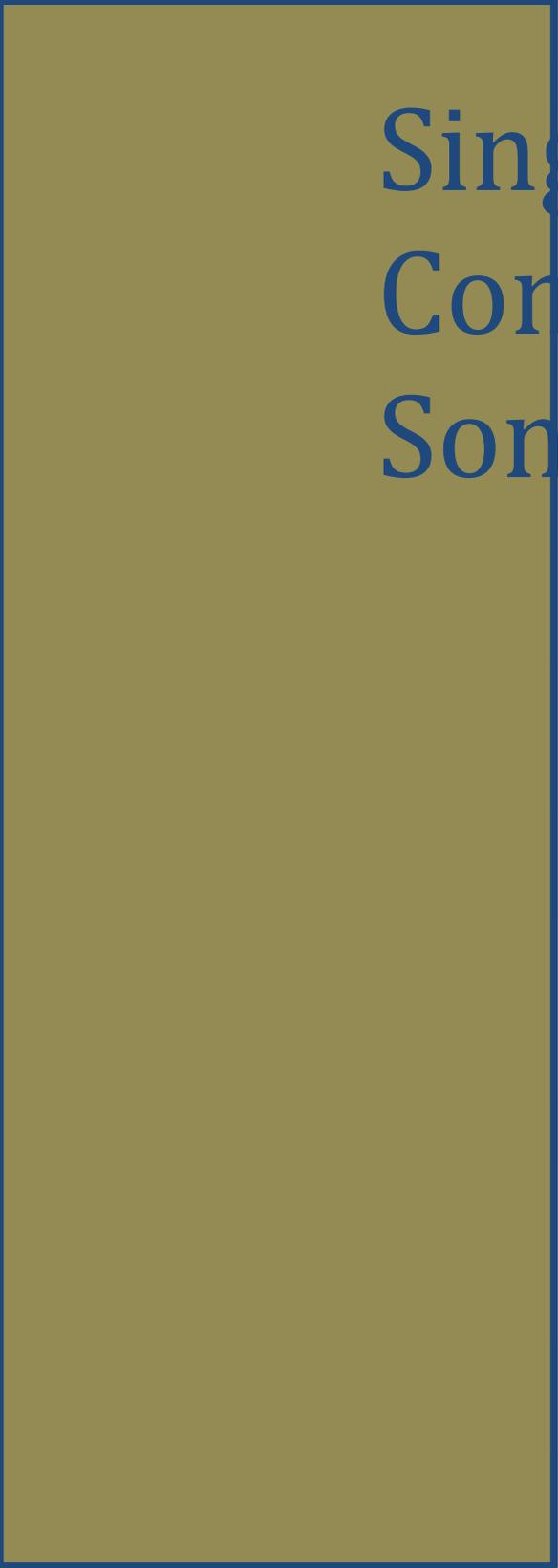


Singing the Conqueror's Song



A missionary biography of
the 18th century Particular
Baptist pastor and
missionary promoter,
Samuel Pearce.
One of the unsung heroes
of the Modern Missionary
Movement.

by Jason C. Montgomery



Singing the Conqueror's Song

SAMUEL PEARCE:

SINGING THE CONQUEROR'S SONG

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Introduction

In *The Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian and Hopeful approach the celestial city, Bunyan relates that

a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them: to whom it was said by two shining ones, These are the men that have loved our Lord when they were in the world, and that have left all for his holy name; and he hath sent us to fetch them, and we have brought them thus far on their desired journey, that they may go in and look their Redeemer in the face with joy...There came out also at this time to meet them several of the King's trumpeters, clothed in white and shining raiment, who, with melodious noises and loud, made even the heavens to echo with their sound. These trumpeters saluted Christian and his fellow with ten thousand welcomes from the world; and this they did with shouting and sound of trumpet.¹

What joys await the faithful servants of Christ in the entrance and dwelling that will be theirs when this dark path gives way to the brightness and glory of their heavenly home. It was with these joys and thoughts of glory that Samuel Pearce came to the end of his brief journey in this world and was ushered into his eternal journey in the presence of his Savior, October 10, 1799. Faith Cook records in her work, *The Sound of Trumpets*, that Pearce “seemed to be given an unusual joyfulness of spirit that day.”² It was then that Sarah, his wife, reminded him of the words from Newton’s hymn “Begone Unbelief,” which in the final stanza provides the following precious assurance for the believer:

*Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
the bitter is sweet, the med'cine is food;
though painful at present, 'twill cease before long;
and then, O how pleasant the conqueror's song!*³

These were the thoughts that filled Samuel Pearce's mind and heart as he passed from this world to the next on a fall day, leaving behind his sorrows and entering into the joy of his Master with trumpet sound and glory. He had been given in this world the same number of years his Lord had been appointed, thirty-three.

Though this is the way his story ends, it is certainly not the whole of the story. The rest remains to be told, for as the writer of Hebrews declares, leaders - grace gifts given by Christ to the church - must not be forgotten. In fact, on the occasion of hearing of Pearce's death, his beloved friend and co-laborer in the gospel, Andrew Fuller, declared in a letter to Pearce's beloved wife: “ ‘Oh, Jonathan, thou wast slain upon thy high places! I am distressed for thee my brother Jonathan.’ Oh that we all may emulate him!

Try while your heart is warm to draw his character. Write all you can remember of him. Memoirs of his life must be published: he is another Brainerd!”⁴

The Scripture commands the church with these words: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”⁵ Leaders who have gone before the saints that remain, who have spoken to them the word of God, who have faithfully walked the course marked out for them and have stayed the course, are to be remembered, considered and imitated. In these pages is held before the reader the life and legacy of one such leader. This leader was Samuel Pearce, a Particular Baptist brother from the 18th century. He came into this world a rebellious lover of self, born of the flesh in Adam, and left this world a righteous lover of the Savior, born anew in Christ. His life had an outcome worthy of consideration, and his faith is worthy of imitation.

Samuel Pearce is one of the unsung heroes of the rise of modern missions, who though himself never having stepped one foot on the mission field, proved to be, by the grace of God, an indispensable force in the rise, promotion, funding and unceasing prayerful support that sped the work of God ever forward in reaching the nations. This paper will attempt to set forth evidence to substantiate the claim of the distinguishing contributions of Pearce in the field of missions. Surely the work of reaching the nations that are lost in darkness is, in the end, the work of a God who sovereignly “works all things according to the counsel of his will.”⁶ Yet, this sovereign God has graciously chosen to work through weak human means. One of these means, in the latter part of the 18th century, was surely Samuel Pearce.

To see this truth the reader will be led to retrace the steps of Pearce and follow the all too brief story of his life. One must walk where he walked and

live where he lived. The trip through the life and ministry of Samuel Pearce will take the reader from his childhood and conversion to his call by Christ to shepherd his church. Furthermore, the reader will be presented with the growing passion in Pearce's heart for the greater cause of Christ in the world, and complete his journey taking note of the final days of Pearce's life in this world considering his indefatigable willingness to be spent for the gospel. In Pearce, one is found

in whom were united...the contemplative and the active; holy zeal, and genuine candor; spirituality, and rationality; talents which attracted almost universal applause, and the most unaffected modesty; fortitude that would encounter any difficulty that stood in the way of duty, and gentleness that would not break a bruised reed; faithfulness in bearing testimony against evil, and compassion to the soul of the evil-doer; deep seriousness, and habitual cheerfulness; finally, a constant aim to promote the highest degree of piety in himself and others, and, at the same time, a readiness to hope the best of the lowest.⁷

1

The Early Years



The journey begins by taking a trip through history, to the latter part of the 18th century to the Southern coastlands of England. Here one comes to a small town in Devonshire, Plymouth.

The year is 1766. It is the summer - July to be specific - the 20th of the month. William Pearce, a respected deacon of the Plymouth Particular Baptist Church, and his wife, Lydia, have just brought into the world the second of two sons - Samuel. Samuel was born into a family of Dissenters,

people who pursued “religious liberty” in England stretching back to the 16th century in the days of the English Reformation. There were many “dissenting” groups, or “nonconformists” as they were often called, in that they refused to conform to the dictates of the established Church of England. These churches were made up of men and women who were “sufferers for conscience,” and to them the Baptists belonged.⁸

Gospel-Saturated Childhood

The congregation to which Samuel's family covenanted as faithful members had a rich history of nonconforming dissent and of strong standing for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church, the origins of which are somewhat sketchy, was pastored in its early years by Abraham Cheare, 150 years before Samuel came into the world. Cheare, a faithful and devoted pastor, had been imprisoned on numerous occasions for “encouraging religious assemblies” after the Restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II.⁹ Cheare eventually died in 1668, under a fourth imprisonment, this one on Drake's Island in Plymouth Sound right off the coast of Plymouth, just months before the passing of the Act of Toleration on May 24, 1689.¹⁰ In Cheare's final hours in this world, he was reported to have possessed the following assurance: “Though many have greater marks of faith than I have, yet I am assured I shall be received into fellowship with the Father, Son, Spirit and all the Saints.”¹¹ Jeff Robinson writes that even in Cheare's suffering, isolation and the giving of his life for the gospel, he “never seemed to doubt that God was ruling over his anguish for mysterious, but altogether good purposes.”¹²

This was, in the words of Robert Oliver, the “spiritual heritage” into which Samuel Pearce was born.¹³ Though he was faithfully raised in his early years by his grandparents, about five miles north of the town of

Plymouth, in the small village of Tamerton Foliot, following the death of his mother in infancy, Samuel soon returned to his father's care around the age of eight. At that point young Samuel entered grammar school and subsequently started the process of learning his father's respectable trade as a silversmith.

While with his father, they were under the pastoral care of the long-time pastor of the Particular Baptist church in Plymouth, Philip Gibbs. Gibbs had been the pastor of the church for twenty-five years since 1749 and would remain at his post another twenty-five years before passing from this world in 1800. Gibbs, converted under the powerful preaching of none other than George Whitefield himself, had faithfully protected the church from the dangerous doctrinal waters of hyper-Calvinism and had exhorted his people and those who came to hear him with the faithful and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ. Gibbs had fully proclaimed it to be the duty of all men to repent of sin, and that all men should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

A historical comment at this point is necessary regarding the doctrinal error that plagued many Baptist churches in the 18th century known as hyper-Calvinism. The theological structure of hyper-Calvinism is much too involved to detail in a paper such as this. But in brief, hyper-Calvinism is the belief that (1) the church of Christ has not been given the obligation of proclaiming the gospel to all the nations; and (2) that all those who hear the gospel do not have the duty (or Scriptural warrant) to believe in that preached good news. It should be noted that it is not that those who held to this teaching did not love sinners or were not concerned with their plight. Their principle desire was to ever protect and emphasize the glory of God in salvation. The problem arose, as is often the case, that in seeking to protect one doctrine (the glorious sovereignty of God in salvation), another doctrine (the responsibility of man to respond to the truth about Christ) was minimized

or obscured. Tom Nettles states that Peter Toon gets to the “crux of the issue”¹⁴ when Toon writes that hyper-Calvinism is a system that in seeking to uphold the glory of God in salvation does so “at the expense of minimizing the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners to God.”¹⁵

Gibbs and many others of the 18th century stood against this very prevalent and strong aberration of truth. It was a doctrine that Andrew Fuller rightly labeled a “false Calvinism.”¹⁶ This aberration of gospel truth plagued many churches in the 18th century, hindering the gospel hopes of many of our Baptists forefathers of the 17th century. Those hopes were pointedly expressed in the writing of one of the key leaders of the 17th century Particular Baptists cause - Benjamin Keach. Keach had written during the time of the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689, which happened to also be the year of the publication of the standard Particular Baptist confession, *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*. In his work, *The Gospel Minister's Maintenance Vindicated*, full of encouragement, Keach wrote that God in their day had “opened a great door for the gospel and sent us blessed harvest weather.”¹⁷ Yet in only a few years the “harvest weather” took a cold chill with the promulgation of the heresy of hyper-Calvinism! This caused the Calvinistic Baptist cause to begin “to decline.”¹⁸ Yet in the gracious providence of Christ, the chill of hyper-Calvinism was not to last. The warmer and sweeter weather of an “Evangelical Calvinism” was on the move! It was providentially into this air of “Evangelical Calvinism” that the young Samuel Pearce found himself under the preaching of Philip Gibbs.

Life-Changing Conversion

Growing up under the gospel-saturated preaching of men like Gibbs,

however, was no cure-all. The heart, according to the prophet, “is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”¹⁹ The deep problems of the heart will not be cured by preaching alone, but must be accompanied with power by the working of the Spirit of Christ. Thus, during Pearce’s teen years, according to Andrew Fuller, in spite of his rich gospel-saturated upbringing, Pearce found friendships with “vicious school fellows” and had a heart that was “at this time set to do evil.”²⁰ The conviction of his soul was intermittent at best. Fuller records the following account of his heart condition:

At times he was under strong convictions, which rendered him miserable; but at other times they subsided; and then he would return with eagerness to his sinful pursuits. When about fifteen years old he was sent by his father to enquire after the welfare of a person in the neighborhood, in dying circumstances, who (though before his departure he was in a happy state of mind) at that time was sinking into deep despair. While in the room of the dying man, he heard him cry out with inexpressible agony of spirit, “I am damned forever!” These awful words pierced his soul; and he felt a resolution at the time to serve the Lord; but the impression soon wore off, and he again returned to folly.²¹

The “gospel remedy” came a few years later when Pearce was sixteen years of age under the preaching of Isaiah Birt, a young man only two years his senior.²² Birt was currently a student at the Baptist Academy in Bristol - the hub and focal point of training ministers of the gospel in the theological paths of Evangelical Calvinism. He would later, early in 1784, be called to serve as co-pastor alongside Philip Gibbs in the Plymouth church.²³ At present, when Pearce was sixteen, Birt came to the church in Plymouth on probation to preach for a few weeks and work with Gibbs. It was during this period that Birt was used mightily by the Lord to turn the heart of Pearce to the Savior. John Birt, the son of Isaiah, writes in his father’s memoirs that

this event of Pearce's conversion was for his father ever "cherished as one of the brightest and happiest of his life."²⁴ Having been graciously converted under the preaching of Birt, Pearce was baptized a year later at the age of seventeen into the membership of the church at Plymouth.

2

A Ministry Begins



In Pearce's personal estimation of his conversion, he believed that "few conversions were more joyful. The change produced in my views, feelings and conduct was so evident to myself, that I could no more doubt of its being from God than of my existence. I had the witness in myself, and was filled with peace and joy unspeakable."²⁵ This change was not only noticeable to Pearce. Over the course of the next few years, the congregation in Plymouth began to notice the evidence in young Pearce as

well. It was not only though evidence of developing godly character and a transformed life, but perhaps also of giftedness for ministry.

Training in Evangelical Calvinism

In his twentieth year, in 1786, the church in Plymouth, officially recognizing his giftedness, set him apart for the labors of the gospel and encouraged him to enroll as a student in the Baptist Academy in Bristol. While enrolled, he was under the direction of the very evangelically-minded Caleb Evans, son of the principal of the Academy, “the truly reverend Hugh Evans,” a leading Particular Baptist of the 18th century from Wales, who also served as the pastor of the Broadmead Baptist church.²⁶ There were indeed many “academies” where young men received ministerial training in the 18th century in England, from London in the East with the likes of Samuel Stennett at the London Baptist Education Society for Assisting Students, to Wainsgate, Hebden Bridge with John Fawcett in the North.²⁷ But there were “none” according to Raymond Brown, that

were as influential as Bristol. There, under the leadership of Bernard Foskett, Hugh Evans and his son Caleb, men were trained for the ministry who were committed to serious study as well as to an evangelistic concern which was the natural expression of their moderate Calvinism. Many of these Bristol students brought an outstanding contribution to the life of the churches in the second half of the eighteenth century...Their devotional hymnology, passion for associating, and evangelistic initiatives helped to divert many churches from high Calvinism and introduced them to those influences which were powerfully at work in the Evangelical Revival.²⁸

Jim Renihan writing of the influence of the Bristol men states that

“Evangelical Calvinism, wedded with genuine piety was reproduced at a distance, as men took the lessons they learned in Bristol and carried them elsewhere.”²⁹ This would certainly prove true in the case of Samuel Pearce.

For the next three years Pearce trained for what would become his life-labor, the pastorate of a local congregation. Under the tutelage of men the likes of Philip Gibbs and Isaiah Birt (in Plymouth), and Caleb Evans (in Bristol) along with many others, he had a powerful combination of pastoral passion and gospel understanding inseparably wedded in his heart. After his training at the Bristol Academy, Pearce found himself not only sought after for the pastorate, but sought after by two separate congregations! Seeking his assistance for laboring in Christ's vineyard were his home church in Plymouth, and a second work slightly over two hundred miles to the northeast of Plymouth in Birmingham, known as the Cannon Street Baptist Church. It was none other than Robert Hall, Jr. of Bristol, Pearce's tutor at the academy, soon to be known as one of “the most powerful of the early nineteenth century English preachers,” who had recommended Pearce to Cannon Street.³⁰ This was no small word of affirmation.

Humbling Ordination

His deliberations were not long and Pearce's passion moved in the direction of the brethren of the Birmingham fellowship. He came to the church after the completion of his studies in 1789. For the next year he served the church in a probationary capacity. This “probationary period,” was common practice in those days among the Particular Baptist churches. Following this period Pearce came to be ordained and installed as the pastor of the Birmingham congregation on August 18, 1790.³¹

As evidence of the respect many held for such a young man, and indicative of the role many thought he might play in the future of the Baptist cause in England, one should note the presence and participation at his ordination of certain men of great stature in the 18th century Baptist story. Pastors the likes of Robert Hall Sr. of Arnesby (“one of the most eloquent preachers of Great Britain”³²); Caleb Evans, the principal at the Bristol Baptist Academy (“among the greatest preachers of the time in Wales”³³); John Ryland, of the highly respected Broadmead church in Bristol (“a key leader among the Calvinistic Baptist community in Britain”³⁴); and the “leading eighteenth-century Baptist exponent of evangelical Calvinism,” Andrew Fuller of Kettering.³⁵ Their presence, Robert Oliver writes, “indicates something of the esteem with which the new pastor was viewed.”³⁶

How humbling it must have truly been to have had hands laid upon him by such eminent and godly men. The reason for their presence is expressed well by Caleb Evans in his address at the ordination stating “that it is highly proper for such pastors to be publically set apart to their important work, in order particularly, among other uses, to prevent the intrusion of unworthy and disorderly men into the sacred office.”³⁷ How Samuel Pearce longed to be a man worthy of that sacred office. Just prior to his ordination, in his acceptance letter written to the congregation on July 18, 1790, he stated his desire that his labors at Cannon Street would “be for God’s glory, for the good of precious souls, for your prosperity as a Church, and for my prosperity as your minister.”³⁸ This statement captures well the humility of the heart of Pearce and his desire to be found worthy of the calling of an under-shepherd of the Lord Jesus.

Appointment to a Fruitful Pastorate

In Birmingham, Samuel Pearce would give the rest of his days for the cause of Christ, laboring faithfully in his Master's Vineyard. Coming to the church at the age of twenty-three and departing from this world at the age of thirty-three, in that time Pearce accomplished by the grace of Christ what many in the ministry would rejoice to see in fifty years of service. Michael Haykin has written that

His ministry at Cannon Street occupied ten all-too-brief years; yet they were ones of great fruitfulness. No less than 335 individuals were baptized during his ministry and received into the membership of Cannon Street. This figure does not include those converted under his preaching who, for one reason or another, did not join themselves to the Birmingham cause. A Sunday school was started in 1795 and soon grew to the point that some 1200 scholars were enrolled in it.³⁹

There is an interesting historical footnote regarding the church at Cannon Street that should not be forgotten. The church at Cannon Street was founded in the year 1737, and the first years of the church's life were, to say the least, difficult. They were by their own estimation, circumstances that would rightly be described on August 20, 1745 as "destitute."⁴⁰ But "destitute" it would not remain. John Angell James writing almost one hundred years later relates that their despairing thoughts were premature. He writes that:

Could the veil of futurity at that moment have been lifted up to them, and

all the churches that have sprung from the one they talked of dissolving have been seen in the vista, how would they have blushed over their distrust, and have exchanged their tears, of all but despair, for songs of praise.⁴¹

This fruitfulness of ministry for the congregation at Cannon Street would manifest itself at various points along the way, but none more fully than in the ministry of Samuel Pearce. Growth continued throughout his years in the pastorate. Truly it was a ministry as he had hoped “for the good of precious souls!” It is not that his labor was free of trouble. Indeed he battled “antinomian poison,”⁴² the staleness of hyper-Calvinists, who “thought their young preacher far too free in his offer of gospel mercies,”⁴³ the stinging critique of those who claimed that he did not preach the gospel of Christ, and many in the church who felt his expectations for “vigilance and spiritual zeal”⁴⁴ in the Christian life were far too demanding. Nevertheless, in all he remained faithful - faithful to Christ, faithful to Christ's church, and faithful to Christ's gospel.

3

A Passion for the World



Yet in all the “faithfulness” Pearce demonstrated to Christ in his love for the church, there was always a growing passion he had for another love. Not what one might see as a competing love, but a complementary one. It was a love, though, that ever remained providentially just outside of his reach. It was a love for none other than the nations.

These nations in the eyes of Pearce were filled with the heathen that knew not the gospel of the triumphant Christ trumpeted by the gospel. Pearce longed for the day when the banner of Christ as King would be raised over all the nations. He wrote to his dear friend William Summers of London on the 8th of October, 1792

O when will the time, the longed-for time arrive, when the Messiah's ensign shall be lifted high, and Jews and Gentiles, Pagans and Mahomedans, Africans and Indians, be gathered unto it?

*Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel,
Win and conquer, never cease;
Spread from eastern coast to western,
Multiply and still increase:
Hasten, Lord, this glorious day.*⁴⁵

This deep desire had been forming within Pearce for many years. Since early in the days following his conversion, Pearce had an affection building within him that would soon put him “at the center of the English Baptist” cause of world missions.⁴⁶ Like a dam ready to burst, Samuel’s heart was full of Christ and the gospel to him was something for the good of precious souls. Samuel Pearce Carey in his biographical work on the “Baptist Brainerd” Samuel Pearce, writes that “from the very first week when Pearce ‘knew the grace of God in truth,’ he says he found himself yearning for the salvation of others. The Christian heart burned within him. He soon engaged himself in Christian work.”⁴⁷

Two stories of note will suffice to give an account of the building passion within the heart of Pearce. The first account takes place in 1783, the year Samuel Pearce came to faith in Christ; but it was also the year of another birth - the birth of a nation. In 1783, the American Revolution came to a

close, with which, in the establishment of the United States as its own sovereign nation, came the end of a relationship between on the one hand the American colonies, and on the other hand England for the shipping out of criminals to American plantations. Faith Cook writes that “a fresh dumping ground for such unwanted citizens must be found, and Australia’s Botany Bay, newly discovered by Captain Cook, seemed an ideal location where trouble makers could conveniently be taken and forsaken. In May of 1786, the first shipload of 750 men and women was due to set sail.”⁴⁸ In the words of Samuel Pearce Carey, Samuel Pearce “would fain have sacrificed all, that he might go.”⁴⁹ The following is Samuel Pearce’s own recollection of the event from his memoirs by Fuller:

It is very common for young converts to feel strong desires for the conversion of others. These desires immediately followed the evidences of my own religion; and I remembered well they were particularly fixed upon the poor heathens. I believe the first week that I knew the grace of God in truth, I put up many fervent cries to heaven in their behalf; and at the same time felt a strong desire to be employed in promoting their salvation. It was not long after that the first settlers sailed for Botany Bay. I longed to go with them, although in company with the convicts, in hopes of making known the blessings of the great salvation in New Zealand. I actually had thought of making an effort to go out unknown to my friends; but, ignorant how to proceed, I abandoned my purpose. Nevertheless I could not help talking about it; and at one time a report was circulated that I was really going, and a neighboring minister very seriously conversed with me upon the subject.⁵⁰

Another account in the life of Pearce (and there are many from which to choose) comes from a time some years later after he had been called to the pastorate of the Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Though this passes over several years, it does serve the purpose of demonstrating the

development in his singular passion for the nations. This will be best heard in Pearce's own words:

The Lord...brought me to Birmingham; and here, amongst the novelties, cares, and duties of my station, I do not remember any wish for Foreign Service, till after a residence of some months I heard Dr. Coke preach at one of Mr. Wesley's Chapels from Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Then it was that in Mr. Horne's phrase, "I felt a passion for missions." Then I felt an interest in the state of the heathen world far more deep and permanent than before, and seriously thought how I could best promote their obtaining the knowledge of the crucified Jesus.⁵¹

More will be said of this event in hearing of Dr. Coke later, but suffice it to say at this point that this passion or strong God-ward affection for the nations would never leave Pearce. He would indeed long to be used by God amongst the heathen nations of the world to his dying day. But how is it that this young man was so mightily used by God in the cause and advancement of foreign missions - never going himself? What were the steps of Providence in his life that took him from the south shores of England in Plymouth, moved him into the inner circles of the rising Baptist missionary enterprise, and put him in a position that - according to one, whom he considered a "beloved brother" and "father in the ministry" - was a post that "must not be given up!"⁵² To the development of these providential paths attention must be turned.

4

The Tracing Providential Paths



Seeing to trace the development of this deep and Christ-centered affection in Pearce is a walk through the paths of providence that is nothing short of wondrous. Samuel Pearce heartily affirmed the words of *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (which he referred to as “the Baptist Confession of Faith” written by “our venerable forefathers” and sympathetically as “our confession”⁵³) when it states in chapter five, paragraph one that

God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the

greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.⁵⁴

Tracing these providential paths in the origins and development of Pearce's love for missions could literally take one back to the eternal counsels of God where he has indeed decreed "freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass."⁵⁵ But one should start, as they say, "a little closer to home."

Providential Roots in America

This journey along the path of providence begins a generation before Pearce was born in Plymouth, across the Atlantic on the shores of Boston, MA, where arriving, one must then travel inland about a hundred miles to the town of Northampton. There will be found the man of God, Jonathan Edwards, hard at work in his study in the later months of 1747, working to publish in October of that year a work entitled *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer*. This work is described more fully by its forty-three word subtitle: *An Humble Attempt to Promote an Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People through the World, in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time*.⁵⁶ This work, originating from a sermon of Edwards on the same subject, based on the text of Zechariah 8:20-22, focuses on the connections between God calling his people to pray and his utilization of that prayer as the means by which he will accomplish his promised plan for the reaching of the nations with the glorious gospel of Christ. This would be toward the

providential end of so expanding Christ's Kingdom that "the earth (might be) filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."⁵⁷

Iain Murray in his biography of Edwards, referring to Edwards' work, notes that "it is arguable that no such tract on the hidden source of all true evangelistic success, namely, prayer for the Spirit of God, has ever been so widely used as this one."⁵⁸ This wide use was at least as wide as the Atlantic Ocean over which it travelled on a path designed by Providence intersecting with the life of one Samuel Pearce.

The Influence across the Atlantic

The roots richly nourished in the gospel soil of the preaching and writing ministry of men the likes of Edwards, take on a noticeable growth as one moves from the eastern shores of North America to the northern shores of Great Britain - the world of the Scots. There, in the West Central Lowlands of Scotland, near the town of Glasgow, would be found the Scotch Presbyterian minister, John Erskine. Erskine was "a leading divine in the Church of Scotland from 1744 until his death in 1803."⁵⁹ Furthermore, and more to the point of tracing the continuing paths of providence, Erskine was "one of Edwards' most important correspondents."⁶⁰ Michael Haykin notes that

Erskine was in his mid-twenties (when) he had entered into regular correspondence with Edwards, and had become part of a close-knit, letter writing network of Scottish, English and American ministers committed to the promotion of the Evangelical Revival. Long after Edwards' death in 1758 Erskine had continued to uphold the theological perspectives of this network of ministers and to recommend heartily books that they had written.⁶¹

Moreover, not only did Erskine give hearty recommendations regarding books, he was well known as one who “relished...giving away books.”⁶² Indeed, many of the books he gave away were written by Edwards!

This frequent correspondence with Edwards and this passion for giving away reading material, soon come together in an event which will forever link the mission impassioned writing of Edwards and the community of Baptists in the realm of England to the south. John Ryland, a leading pastor within the particular Baptist movement of the latter half of the 18th century, on April 23, 1784, while pastoring in Northampton, receives in the mail a book written by Edwards from none other than John Erskine. The book? None other than Edward's *A Call to United, Extraordinary Prayer!* What a blessed providence indeed!

Ryland at this point wastes no time, upon reading Edwards' work, he quickly sends it to two of his closest friends, Andrew Fuller and John Sutcliff. Fuller, pastor of the Particular Baptist church in Kettering, who though “raised in a (hyper)-Calvinistic context...having studied his Bible carefully...changed his position...(and) later wrote a work advocating indiscriminate gospel preaching.”⁶³ That work, one mightily used by God, was entitled *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, first published in 1785. In this work, Fuller set forth a strong advocacy of the Biblical teaching that the gospel in truth should be preached to all nations and believed upon by all who hear. The other recipient of the Edwards' book, John Sutcliffe, was the pastor of the Particular Baptist church about twenty miles to the south of Kettering, in the town of Olney. Sutcliff would soon prove to be “the key figure by whom the Concert of Prayer came down from Scotland.”⁶⁴ This reading quickly spurred a bimonthly meeting for prayer between Ryland, Fuller, Sutcliff, who all lived within twenty miles of one another, and various

other ministers to “seek the revival of real religion, and the extension of Christ’s kingdom in the world.”⁶⁵

Concerning their devotion to such a day the following extract is taken from the diary of Andrew Fuller, dated May 11, 1784:

Devoted this day to fasting and prayer, in conjunction with several other ministers, who have agreed thus to spend the second Tuesday in every other month, to seek the revival of real religion, and the extension of Christ's kingdom in the world. Feel very unhappy, to think that my heart should be no more in it. But very little of the true spirit of prayer, throughout the whole day.⁶⁶

Also on 11 July of the same year he wrote:

Spent this day in fasting and prayer, in conjunction with several of my brethren in the ministry, for the revival of our churches and the spread of the gospel. Found some tenderness and earnestness in prayer, several times in the day. Wrote a few thoughts on the desirableness of the coming of Christ’s kingdom.⁶⁷

These diary entries by Fuller are but a sampling of his own thoughts that would surely also have been shared by the whole of the group of ministers longing for revival and the expansion of Christ’s glorious Kingdom.

Momentum Building in the Midlands

If one was to put his finger on the pulse of the building desire for the growth of the Kingdom of Christ through the reaching of the heathen lands in the 18th century in England, his finger would surely press upon the area known as the Midlands. The Midlands is a “rural...and agricultural...region of central England, commonly subdivided into the East and the West.”⁶⁸ The

aforementioned thoughts of Fuller, are indicative of the affections that were building, especially in the minds of the Midlands' pastors and churches among which Samuel Pearce would soon find himself, and one might add, finding himself among them, he would find himself, at home.

Furthermore, writes Iain Murray, "It was Edwards' theology which was used to shape the vision of the Midland Baptists who led the way in the era of modern missionaries."⁶⁹ Establishing the connection even more pointedly between the mission-minded theology of Edwards and that mission mindedness of the Midland pastors is the following taken from Fuller's Memoirs, part of a letter written to Ryland just a little more than a week before Fuller died. The letter is dated April 28, 1815:

We have some who have been giving out, of late, that "If Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful." If those who talked thus preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is. It is very singular that the mission to the East should have originated with men of these principles; and, without pretending to be a prophet, I may say, If ever it falls into the hands of men who talk in this strain, it will soon come to nothing.⁷⁰

Fuller explicitly notes here some twenty years after the arrival of the work by Edwards, that it was in fact his "principles" that caused the origination of the "mission to the East!" More will be said about this later – the connections must first be more clearly established.

Momentum would continue to form in the Midlands later in 1784, when Fuller preached at the Annual Meeting of the Northhamptonshire Baptist Association. It would in fact prove in time to be the Northhamptonshire Association "that contributed most to the cause of revival among the

Particular Baptists.”⁷¹ It was here at the Annual Meeting that one clearly notes the impact of Edwards’ work on Fuller as he powerfully challenged the association in his sermon with these words:

Let us take encouragement, in the present day of small things, by looking forward, and hoping for better days. Let this be attended with earnest and united prayer to him by whom Jacob must arise. A life of faith will ever be a life of prayer. O brethren, let us pray much for an outpouring of God's Spirit upon our ministers and churches, and not upon those only of our own connection and denomination, but upon “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours!”⁷²

Fuller and those around him were not just looking for “better days” to come in eternity. They were looking for them now! Theirs was an eschatology of hope, in thinking that God’s plan for the church in this age was much more glorious than had yet been experienced to date. Edwards had written in his call to prayer:

The Scripture does not only abundantly manifest it to be the duty of God's people to be much in prayer for this great mercy, but it also abounds with manifold considerations to encourage them in it, and animate them with hopes of success. There is perhaps no one thing that the Bible so much promises, in order to encourage the faith, hope, and prayers of the saints, as this; which affords to God's people the clearest evidences that it is their duty to be much in prayer for this mercy. *For, undoubtedly, that which God abundantly makes the subject of his promises, God's people should abundantly make the subject of their prayers* [emphasis added]. It also affords them the strongest assurances that their prayers shall be successful. With what confidence may we go before God, and pray for that of which we have so many exceeding precious and glorious promises to plead!⁷³

These men, and others like them, were being spurred on by a belief in the

promises of Christ to the church; and Edwards had been used by God to stir them to pray for those promises to be fulfilled!

At this same associational meeting, Haykin writes, “hard on the heels of Fuller’s sermon,”⁷⁴ John Sutcliff issued what would come to be known as “The Call to Prayer” to the churches of the association. A motion was made, and the following resolution was passed unanimously by the churches:

RESOLVED, to recommend to all our churches and congregations, the spending of one hour in this important exercise, on the first Monday in every calendar month. We hereby solemnly exhort all the churches in our connection, to engage heartily and perseveringly in the prosecution of this plan. And as it may be well to endeavor to keep the same hour, as a token of our unity herein, it is supposed the following scheme may suit many congregations, viz. to meet on the first Monday evening in May, June, and July, from 8 to 9. In Aug. from 7 to 8. Sept. and Oct. from 6 to 7. Nov. Dec. Jan. and Feb. from 5 to 6. March, from 6 to 7; and April, from 7 to 8. Nevertheless if this hour, or even the particular evening, should not suit in particular places, we wish our brethren to fix on one more convenient to themselves.

We hope also, that as many of our brethren who live at a distance from our places of worship may not be able to attend there, that as many as are conveniently situated in a village or neighborhood, will unite in small societies at the same time. And if any single individual should be so situated as not to be able to attend to this duty in society with others, let him retire at the appointed hour, to unite the breath of prayer in private with those who are thus engaged in a more public manner.

The grand object of prayer is to be that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified. At the same time, remember, we trust you will not confine your requests to your own societies [i.e. churches]; or to your own immediate connection [i.e. denomination]; let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe be the object of your most fervent requests. We shall rejoice if any other Christian societies of our

own or other denominations will unite with us, and do now invite them most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt.

Who can tell what the consequences of such an united effort in prayer may be! Let us plead with God the many gracious promises of His Word, which relate to the future success of His gospel. He has said, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them, I will increase them with men like a flock." Ezek. xxxvi.37. Surely we have love enough for Zion to set apart one hour at a time, twelve times in a year, to seek her welfare.⁷⁵

This statement of resolution is a long quotation without question. But, its length notwithstanding, this resolution passed unanimously by the churches of the Northhamptonshire Association June of 1784, must be both heard and noted. For it, in very clear terms, plainly is expressive of the momentum spreading in the area of the Midlands for the advance of the cause of Christ, and of the desire of the Midland churches to see Christ's Kingdom encompassing all the nations. Out of this prayerful zeal would eventually arise the Baptist Missionary Society, formed by many of these very men, which "commenced in a spirit of prayer."⁷⁶

The Spread of a Deep Affection for Prayer

This commitment to prayer does not stay within the confines of the Northhamptonshire Association long. The desire of these men to spread a strong affection for a united force of prayer was on the move. By the next year Fuller could write that "we have heard with pleasure that several churches not in the association...have united with us in prayer."⁷⁷ Furthermore in 1786 Sutcliff gave an update on the progress of the prayer call

being embraced by others and reported that the practice of prayer meetings was being “kept up with some degree of spirit.”⁷⁸

One direction this call to prayer was moving was to the west. Moving west from the Northhamptonshire Association of churches, it spread into the Midland Association. Meeting in the year 1786, the Midland Association of churches formally “entered into the same resolution.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, the Midland Association of churches reaffirmed their commitment to the cause of prayer in a resolution at their May 1795 meeting, a meeting at which Samuel Pearce was elected to be the treasurer! The resolution states: “Resolved also, that the monthly prayer meeting, for the revival of religion abroad and at home, be continued, and seriously observed by all the churches.”⁸⁰ Of historical interest, and of pertinence to this research, is that the Midland Association, as early as 1767, “several years before Sutcliff’s ‘Prayer Call,’...made the request that its churches devote every Friday evening to prayer ‘for the revival of God’s work’.”⁸¹ These churches were primed and ready for the call to prayer set forth by Sutcliff and friends! What makes this of note to the study here is that the church in Birmingham, the Cannon Street Baptist Church, to which Samuel Pearce was to be called as pastor in just a few years, was one of the Midland Association churches that had embraced the call to pray. Thus when Pearce would later arrive on the scene, he would find the spirit of prayer for missions, already filling the air of the church.

The spread of the growing and deepening affection for prayer was to continue in more concrete form May 4, 1789, with the republication in Olney, England of Edwards’ work. The edition was prepared by none other than John Sutcliff, who had issued the Prayer Call just five years prior. Being such an important publication, the preface is reproduced here in full:

IF any inquire why the ensuing work is re-published, I would beg leave to lay before them the following intelligence.

At an association of the ministers and messengers of the Baptist Churches in the counties of Northampton, Leicester etc. held at Nottingham, in the year 1784, a resolution was formed to establish through the association, a meeting of prayer for the general revival and spread of religion. This was to be observed the first Monday evening in every calendar month, by all the churches. It still continues. In 1786, another Baptist association commonly called the Midland, held that year at Aulcester, in the county of Warwick, entered into the same resolution. Many other churches, particularly in Yorkshire, have adopted, and now follow, the above practice. We have the pleasure also to find, that several Paedobaptist churches stately meet on those evenings for the same purpose.

The re-publication of the following work is with the avowed design of promoting the above agreement and practice. Those concerned in its first institution, never intended it should be confined to any peculiar connexion, or particular denomination. Rather they ardently wished it might become general among the real friends of truth and holiness. The advocates of error are indefatigable in their endeavours to overthrow the distinguishing and interesting doctrines of Christianity; those doctrines which are the grounds of our hope, and sources of our joy. Surely it becomes the followers of Christ, to use every effort, in order to strengthen the things which remain. By re-publishing the following work, I do not consider myself as becoming answerable for every sentiment it contains. An author and an editor are very distinct characters. Should any entertain different views respecting some of the prophecies in the inspired page, from those that are here advanced, yet such may, and I hope will, approve of the general design.

In the present imperfect state, we may reasonably expect a diversity of sentiments upon religious matters. Each ought to think for himself; and everyone has a right, on proper occasions, to show his opinion. Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and of Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in some respects entertain different sentiments, and practice distinguishing modes of worship, surely they

may unite in the above business.

O for thousands upon thousands divided into small bands in their respective cities, towns, villages, and neighborhood, all met at the same time, and in pursuit of one end, offering up their united prayers, like so many ascending clouds of incense before the Most High! May he shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion! Grace, great grace, be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Amen!⁸²

There are several points of interest in Sutcliff's preface to Edwards' work. First, Sutcliff states upfront the relationship between the reissuing of the call to prayer by Edwards and the call to prayer that went out to the churches of the Midlands area in 1784. They are to be seen as flowing one into the other. Secondly, he notes that this resolution to pray has now been embraced within others areas of the land – west to the Midlands Association and north to several churches in Yorkshire. Furthermore, there were several paedobaptist churches that followed the same pattern. Interesting, on a historical note, there is within the time of this movement rising among the Baptist churches in England, a movement of prayer that is being led by an evangelically minded Church of England pastor, William Romaine, who sent out a call to prayer of his own among the Anglican churches for the prosperity of the gospel and the “salvation of those souls for whom he shed his blood!”⁸³ Romaine initially sent out his *Earnest Invitation* in 1757, but it was reissued in 1779 and in 1795. Tim Shenton writes that “Romanine was always encouraging ministers and the people of God to devote a portion of their time to prayer for the extension of God's kingdom and for that revival that is so necessary if the work of God's people is to be truly effective.”⁸⁴ Only Providence will be able to draw the lines between the prayer calls of Edwards and Romaine, but it is encouraging to know that the spirit of prayer was rising

up all over the land among the people of God! Third and finally, it should be noted about Sutcliff's preface that he (and his other Baptist brothers would have agreed) sees this uniting in prayer as something which all "real friends of truth and holiness" could join in together. There was among these men a true ecumenical spirit of prayer for the advance of Christ's kingdom on the earth. Of this preface, Michael Haykin writes that....

Sutcliff positioned the Prayer Call of 1784 on the broad canvas of history, in which God and Satan are waging war for the souls of men and women. Prayer, because it was the weapon common to all who are 'friends of truth and holiness', was one sphere in which Christians can present a fully united front against Satan. Sutcliff was well aware that evangelicals in his day held differing theological positions and worshipped in different ways. He himself was a convinced Baptist - convinced in particular that the Scriptures fully supported congregational polity and believer's baptism - yet, he emphasized in the 'Preface' quoted above that such convictions should not prevent believers, committed to the foundational truths of Christianity, from uniting together to pray for revival.

Pearce Enters the Mission/Prayer Saturated Scene

There was, as has already been indicated previously, when Samuel Pearce arrives at Cannon Street in 1789 and a year later when he officially assumes the pastorate in 1790, a spirit of readiness for mission already in the air. It is true, the church was not without its problems, as has been mentioned previously. Nonetheless, the church had been primed for years and had been providentially postured and made ready for a pastor with a heart for the nations. This readiness could be appropriately observed, in its stated monthly gathering for prayer. Samuel Pearce Carey wrote that when Pearce

arrived at Cannon Street, he “had found this Meeting current...and specially well-attended.”⁸⁵ This pleased Samuel well, and as Pearce Carey again observed Pearce was “careful to foster it.”⁸⁶ In a letter written to the Baptist Missionary Society in October 1794, more than five years after his arrival at Cannon Street in June of 1789, Pearce wrote the following account of the prosperity and encouragement of the prayer meeting:

I had observed that our monthly meetings for prayer had been better attended than the other, prayer-meetings, from the time that I first knew the people in Cannon street; but I thought a more general attention to them was desirable. I therefore preached on the Sabbath day evening preceding the next monthly prayer meeting, from Matt. 6:10: “Thy kingdom come,” and urged with ardor and affection a universal union of the serious part of the congregation in this exercise. It rejoiced me to see three times as many the next night as usual; and, for some time after that, I had nearly equal cause for joy.

As to my own part, I continued to preach, much upon the promises of God respecting the conversion of the heathen nations; and by so doing, and always communicating to my people every piece of information I could obtain respecting the present state of missions, they soon imbibed the same spirit; and from that time to this they have discovered so much concern for the more extensive spread of the gospel, that at our monthly prayer-meetings, both stated and occasional, I should be as much surprised at the case of the heathen being omitted in any prayer as at an omission of the name and merits of Jesus.⁸⁷

What pastor would not want to walk into such a scene! The church at Cannon Street was among that group of watchmen of whom the prophet Isaiah writes declaring:

On your walls, O Jerusalem,
I have set watchmen;

all the day and all the night
they shall never be silent.
You who put the LORD in
remembrance,
take no rest,
and give him no rest
until he establishes Jerusalem
and makes it a praise in the earth.⁸⁸

Indeed, they were tireless in their efforts to bring the state of the church and the nations before their Lord in prayer, and as such were a great blessing to their pastor. Surely he must have had his congregation and their faithful labor in prayer in mind when he wrote to a Mr. Rogers of Philadelphia, just a few weeks after writing the above correspondence to the Baptist Missionary Society, that “Zion already travails in birth, and soon she shall bring forth her children. Already heaven is besieged with earnest supplications: ‘they who make mention of the Lord keep no longer silence, and will give him no rest until he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth’.”⁸⁹ God had truly made a beautiful union between this precious flock and their under shepherd.

It was only a few months after arriving at Cannon Street that Pearce came across a wonderful providence in hearing the preaching of one Thomas Coke. Coke, the “Foreign Minister of Methodism”⁹⁰ was in Birmingham preaching in one of the chapels established by John Wesley. Coke was mightily used by the Lord in the cause of the spread of the gospel among the nations. Samuel Pearce Carey gives no small amount of attention to Coke in his biography of Pearce. Carey writes of Coke that:

From being a strict High Churchman this short-statured Welsh clergyman had changed into a great-souled Evangelist. Eighteen times he crossed the Atlantic at his own expense, in those days of small ships and of rare and long voyages, for the furtherance of the gospel and of the

Methodist movement. “The world was his parish” even more truly than it was Wesley’s. With his imperial imagination and his tireless energy he was the founder of Methodist Missions. Even when he was seventy he pleaded with Conference to send him to India to establish a Mission, and out of his own purse gave £6,000 for this purpose, and died on his brave voyage to its shores.⁹¹

The event itself is one that never left Pearce. His record of it is to be read in his memoirs, and though it has been noted previously, it needs to be heard again due to its import:

The Lord...brought me to Birmingham; and here, amongst remember any wish for Foreign Service, till after a residence of some months I heard Dr. Coke preach at one of Mr. Wesley’s Chapels from Psalm 68:31, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” Then it was that in Mr. Horne’s phrase, “I felt a passion for missions.” Then I felt an interest in the state of the heathen world far more deep and permanent than before, and seriously thought how I could best promote their obtaining the knowledge of the crucified Jesus.⁹²

Here the Lord, in his sweet mercy, makes use of an Arminian Methodist missionary, in an Arminian Methodist chapel, to lay hold of the heart of a Calvinistic Baptist preacher for the cause of reaching the nations for Christ.

Pearce also makes mention here in passing, but not without importance, of a gentleman by the name of Mr. Horne. The phrase he centers on by Horne was “I felt a passion for missions.” Melvill Horne was a chaplain with the Sierra Leone Company of Africa, who preached, wrote, and lived much of missions. Horne wrote a collection of “Letters on Missions” that was a favorite of Pearce through the years. The combined effect of Horne’s “Letters” and Coke’s example and preaching, “kindled the smouldering embers of Pearce’s concern for unevangelised peoples, raising it to a flame.”⁹³

That this flame continued to impact his heart at least two years after the

message of Coke, is seen in a letter he wrote to his friend of London, William Summers on October 8, 1792. The Baptist Missionary Society (of which more will be said later) had just been formed October 2nd in Kettering, and the event regarding the Society's formation, coupled with the Word heard in preaching years prior, came together inspiring the following burst of hope from Pearce's pen:

May He whose glory I trust we have in view direct all future deliberations, and make the embryo effort ripen and succeed, till future ages prove that the plan begun at Kettering...comprehended in its consequences the salvation of the Ethiopian world. "Soon," my brother, "Soon (it is said) Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God." May we, like our divine master, not fail nor be discouraged, until the gospel be established in the earth, and the waiting isles have received the law "of Him who is the approaching desire of all nations!"⁹⁴

The Forging of New Friendships

Good friendships are indeed hard to come by, but those which are found are blessings indeed. May 24, 1791, a friendship was formed between two men that would literally last a lifetime. On the 24th of May, 1791, young William Carey was being ordained as pastor of the Harvey Lane church in Leicester, just about 40 miles northeast of Birmingham. Samuel Pearce was invited along with about "twenty ministers of different denominations" to "witness...the transactions of the day."⁹⁵ Pearce was invited in particular to preach in the evening service and his text was Galatians 6:14 where Paul declares: "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."⁹⁶

After the ordination service, which was the "first acquaintance" of Pearce and Carey, Pearce had an opportunity to spend some extra time with

the new pastor of Harvey Lane along with some other ministers from the meeting.⁹⁷ Carey at this point had been pleading the cause of missions to the heathen for some time. In fact, as recently as “one month earlier, on April 27, during the Easter meeting of the Northhamptonshire Association at Clipstone, Carey had pled for the formation of a society to propagate the gospel in unevangelised lands.”⁹⁸ Carey had been working diligently for some time clarifying his affections through writing. He had been working on a pamphlet that would later become known as “one of the most influential Baptist books of all time.”⁹⁹ This work is now known the world over as: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens: In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertaking and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered*. That night in May, after the associational gathering, Carey was “requested” by Pearce, to read to several of the ministers “from *The Enquiry*.”¹⁰⁰ Upon hearing from Carey’s work, Pearce related that hearing it “added fresh fuel to my zeal.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, it had been Mr. Thomas Potts, a deacon in the church, at of all places, the missions-minded congregation at Cannon Street, who had a few years earlier “prompted Carey to the writing of his famous *Enquiry*, and furnished the £10 for its cost!”¹⁰² This meeting between Carey and Pearce, though the first, would not be the last, and in the Lord’s sweet providence laid the groundwork for hearts that would forever be bound in gospel causes.

Prayer Transformed to Action

At the Easter meeting of the Northhamptonshire Association referred to above on April 27, 1791, Andrew Fuller had been the scheduled preacher. His message was entitled: *The Instances, the Evil Nature, and the Dangerous*

*Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion.*¹⁰³ His text read, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.”¹⁰⁴ The following is but a brief, albeit somewhat lengthy, section from his transforming message the fruit of which would soon be seen. Seeking to move the church to action he writes:

He who through a dread of opposition and reproach desists from known duty is in danger of being found among the “fearful, the unbelieving, and the abominable.”

Had Luther and his contemporaries acted upon this principle, they had never gone about the glorious work of the Reformation. When he saw the abominations of popery, he might have said, “These things ought not to be, but what can I do if the chief priests and rulers in different nations would but unite, something might be effected; but what can I do, an individual, and a poor man! I may render myself an object of persecution, or, which is worse, of universal contempt; and what good end will be answered by it!” Had Luther reasoned thus - had he fancied that, because princes and prelates were not the first to engage in the good work, therefore the time was not come to build the house of the Lord - the house of the Lord, for anything he had done, might have lain waste to this day.

Instead of waiting for the removal of difficulties, we ought, in many cases, to consider them as purposely laid in our way, in order to try the sincerity of our religion. He who had all power in heaven and earth could not only have sent forth his apostles into all the world, but have so ordered it that all the world should treat them with kindness, and aid them in their mission; but, instead of that, he told them to lay their accounts with persecution and the loss of all things. This was no doubt to try their sincerity; and the difficulties laid in our way are equally designed to try ours.

Let it be considered whether it is not owing to this principle that so few and so feeble efforts have been made for the propagation of the gospel in the world. When the Lord Jesus commissioned his apostles, he commanded them to go and teach “all nations,” to preach the gospel to

“every creature;” and that notwithstanding the difficulties and oppositions that would lie in the way. The apostles executed their commission with assiduity and fidelity; but, since their days, we seem to sit down half contented that the greater part of the world should still remain in ignorance and idolatry. Some noble efforts have indeed been made; but they are small in number, when compared with the magnitude of the object. And why is it so? Are the souls of men of less value than heretofore? No. Is Christianity less true or less important than in former ages? This will not be pretended. Are there no opportunities for societies, or individuals, in Christian nations, to convey the gospel to the heathen? This cannot be pleaded so long as opportunities are found to trade with them, yea, and (what is a disgrace to the name of Christians) to buy them, and sell them, and treat them with worse than savage barbarity. We have opportunities in abundance the improvement of navigation, and the maritime and commercial turn of this country, furnish us with these; and it deserves to be considered whether this is not a circumstance that renders it a duty peculiarly binding on us.

The truth is, if I am not mistaken, we wait for we know not what; we seem to think “the time is not come, the time for the Spirit to be poured down from on high.” We pray for the conversion and salvation of the world, and yet neglect the ordinary means by which those ends have been used to be accomplished. It pleased God, heretofore, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed; and there is reason to think it will still please God to work by that distinguished means. Ought we not then at least to try by some means to convey more of the good news of salvation to the world around us than has hitherto been conveyed! The encouragement to the heathen is still in force, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved: but how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?”¹⁰⁵

Timothy George writes that “Carey’s influence resonated through every word of Fuller’s message,” and this certainly is to be observed in the citation above.¹⁰⁶ It would yet be at little over another year before the plan would be in place, but Carey would not have been able to forget the words spoken by

Fuller. If Pearce had been present, his heart would have warmed to Fuller's words as well. For, when it came to the matter of reaching the heathen with the gospel, Pearce found in Carey "a soul nearly akin to his own!"¹⁰⁷ Sadly, Fuller recounts that

After worship Mr. Carey, who was present and much interested in the discourses, moved that something should be that day agreed upon relative to the formation of a society for the 'propagation of the gospel among the heathen.' The other ministers had, it is true, been in a manner compelled to think upon the subject by his repeatedly advancing it, and became desirous of it, if it could be accomplished ; but feeling the difficulty of setting out in an unbeaten path, their minds revolted at the idea of attempting it. It seemed to them something too great and too much like grasping at an object utterly beyond their reach.¹⁰⁸

Unbelievable! How disappointing this must have been to Fuller and Carey as well.

But fear not, the Scripture has abundant encouragements in the face of difficulty. Fuller had faithfully preached the word of Christ, of which the Lord declares he is watching over to perform.¹⁰⁹ Though it seemed as if the sermon fell upon deaf ears, God assures the church that His word will not return to Him void or empty until it first accomplishes His purpose.¹¹⁰ Though it seemed in truth, the men hearing this word remained unchanged and unmoved, Jesus himself assures His disciples that it is indeed one of the hallmarks of truth of Scripture, by which men are sanctified, changed into His very likeness.¹¹¹ And though it seems as if nothing is being done, the church is ever encouraged by the prophet Zechariah to not despise the day of small things!¹¹² The Spirit of God was truly at work as would be evidenced by the events that would follow.

The ministers did, before they dismissed the meeting, ask Carey if he

would in the months to come, finish work on his *Enquiry* and have it published. They did believe his message should be heard. Carey did so. Over the course of the next year Carey labored tirelessly on his paper. Recall, it was only a month after the above gathering, that Carey was found reading his work to the ministers, at the request of Pearce! George recounts for us that Carey “continued to revise his ‘piece’ until it was ready to see the light of day...in early 1792.”¹¹³ Now it would, being published, be advantageously placed “before the churches.”¹¹⁴

The turning point from prayer to action was to come at the next annual gathering of the Northhamptonshire churches May 30, 1792. Carey, who had now published his *Enquiry*, was selected to preach the annual sermon. Providentially this sermon was never published. But the God of the heavens does not need publishers to get out His word! Carey’s text was “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.”¹¹⁵ Timothy George writes that, “The burden of the sermon came to a crescendo in a summarizing couplet, eight syllables, six words...‘Expect great things. Attempt great things.’”¹¹⁶

What followed Carey’s sermon is related in the following account given by John Clark Marshman, son of Joshua Marshman of the Serampore Trio, consisting of “William Carey the translator, William Ward the Printer, and Joshua Marshman the preacher.”¹¹⁷

The discourse was animated and eloquent. The concentrated energy of the feelings which had been fermenting in his mind for so many years, was poured into his exhortations, and it seemed as if the fruition of his long-cherished hopes depended on the impression he could then produce

on the audience. With such vigor did he denounce the criminality of that indifference with which the cause of Missions was treated, that Dr. Ryland, who was present, said he should not have wondered if the audience had “lifted up their voices, and wept.” But when the assembled ministers came to deliberate on the subject, the old feelings of doubt and hesitation predominated, and they were about to separate without any decisive result, when Mr. Carey seized Mr. Fuller by the hand in an agony of distress, and inquired whether “they were again going away without doing anything?”¹¹⁸

One can only imagine the angst in the heart of Carey as he thought all once again was, by all human estimation, going to come to nothing. But again, God was clearly at work. Carey's plea to Fuller moved Fuller into action. It seems that Fuller appealed to brother Ryland, who was serving as the moderator for the meeting that something needed to be done. The records tell the rest of the story. The official minutes contain the following as the last official motion/resolution of the meeting before the closing prayer:

Resolved, that a plan be prepared against the next ministers' meeting at Kettering, for forming a Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen. Brother Carey generously engaged to devote all the profits that may [arise] from his late publication on this interesting subject, to the [use] of such society.¹¹⁹

Though part of the minute document is very difficult to read in the copy this writer possessed, the meaning is clear enough. Carey's long time desire was coming to fruition. A commitment is indeed made to assemble again at the next ministers' meeting for the stated purpose of forming a plan to reach the nations with the gospel of Christ!

The long anticipated meeting of the ministers took place October 2, 1792. Carey's moment had arrived! It is here, October 1792, that we find

the formation of “The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen” as they resolved to call themselves.¹²⁰ This body, most know today, as the Baptist Missionary Society. On that day “nothing less than a grand, God-glorifying, mission-oriented ‘theology of hope’ was entrusted to the church.”¹²¹

5

Laying Himself Out for the Cause



This meeting of the Northampton Baptist Association men was attended, by of all people, Samuel Pearce! It is important to recall at this point that he is not a member of their association. He is twenty six and the youngest minister present. The only one younger than Pearce was a student in the Bristol Academy that Pearce brought with him from the Cannon Street church. Pearce's presence was nothing short of providential. His presence was the result of a deep desire that had been welling up within him for years. He explains his presence at the gathering of Northampton men in these words:

When I heard of the proposed meeting at Kettering, October 2, 1792, for the express purpose of considering our duty in regard to the heathen, I could not resist my inclination for going; although at that time I was not much acquainted with the ministers of the Northhamptonshire Association. There I got my judgment informed, and my heart increasingly interested. I returned home resolved to lay myself out in the cause.¹²²

One might say this meeting was simply fuel for the fire. He was one of twelve men present who put their hand to the following resolutions:

1. Desirous of making an effort for the propagation of the gospel among the heathen, agreeably to what is recommended in brother Carey's late publication on that subject, we, whose names appear in the subsequent subscription, do solemnly agree to act in society together for that purpose.
2. As in the present divided state of Christendom, it seems that each denomination, by exerting itself separately, is most likely to accomplish the great ends of a mission, it is agreed that this society be called, The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen.
3. As such an undertaking must needs be attended with expense, we agree immediately to open a subscription for the above purpose, and to recommend it to others.
4. Every person, who shall subscribe ten pounds at once, or ten shillings and sixpence annually shall be considered a member of the society.
5. That the Rev. John Ryland, Reynold Hogg, William Carey, John Sutcliff, and Andrew Fuller, be appointed a committee, three of whom shall be empowered to act in carrying into effect the purposes of the society.
6. That the Rev. Reynold Hogg be appointed treasurer, and Rev. Andrew Fuller secretary.

7. That the subscriptions be paid in at the Northampton ministers' meeting, October 31, 1792, at which time the subject shall be considered more particularly by the committee and other subscribers who may be present.

Signed, John Ryland, Reynold Hogg, John Sutcliff, Andrew Fuller, Abraham Greenwood, Edward Sharman, Joshua Burton, Samuel Pearce, Thomas Blundel, William Heighton, John Eayres, Joseph Timms ; whose subscriptions in all amounted to 13£. 2s. 6d.¹²³

To these seven resolutions Samuel Pearce joyfully applied his name and for their keeping, he engaged all his heart. Andrew Fuller noted of Pearce in his memoirs, that, “When the brethren in the counties of Northampton and Leicester formed themselves into a Missionary Society at Kettering, in October, 1792, he was there, and entered into the business with all his heart.”¹²⁴ As immediate evidence of the depth of the affection that was fueled in Pearce one must hear of the events that speedily followed the gathering of the ministers. As told above, upon Pearce’s arrival back in Birmingham, he laid himself out for the cause of the new Society. Joseph Ivimey, the Baptist historian, recounts for us the report of Pearce:

on his return to Birmingham from the former meeting he informed his friends concerning the society, and preached upon the subject; he had collected £70; and also that his congregation in Cannon Street had formed a district Society in aid of the mission, ‘for the purpose of receiving both occasional contributions, and annual, quarterly, or weekly subscriptions, and to co-operate, by every other means in their power, with the primary society, in pursuing the grand object we have conjointly in view.’¹²⁵

The £70 was given to the fund at the next meeting, which had been scheduled at the previous meeting, to be held October 31, 1792. On that date other resolutions were passed, five to be exact. Incredibly, the fourth of the

five resolutions states: “That Brother Pearce of Birmingham, who was a member of the primary Society, and is the delegate from the corresponding Society at Birmingham, be considered as a member of the committee.”¹²⁶ This is astounding! Just a few weeks prior, as mentioned above, Pearce felt as if he was not well acquainted with the Northhamptonshire men. And now, they are bringing him into the inner circle of the leading committee of the Society. It is here that he will find his heart bound to men the likes of Fuller, Carey, Sutcliff and Ryland! Christopher Anderson writes that they made up a “little band of brothers”¹²⁷ who

were men of self-denying habits, dead to the world, to fame, and to popular applause, of deep and extensive views of divine truth, and they had such an extended idea of what the Kingdom of Christ ought to have been in the nineteenth century, that they, as it were, vowed and prayed, and gave themselves no rest.¹²⁸

At the next meeting of the Society, his value being observed by all, Pearce's involvement, influence and position grew amongst the newly formed body. He was given, in the new set of resolutions then passed by the Society, the recognition of secretary of the “assistant society” which had been recently formed by the brethren in Birmingham.¹²⁹ He was further recognized as one through whom official information should be conveyed to the Society itself, by those outside the Society having communications that needed to be passed on to the group. Lastly, alongside Fuller and Hogg, the respective treasurer and secretary for the Society itself, Pearce was given the authority to convene impromptu meetings of the Society outside their appointed gatherings.¹³⁰

This confidence of the Society in Pearce was in no way misplaced. Nor had they misjudged his character, for Pearce proved his worth in the months

and years to come. His commitment to the cause was unflagging. Truly “he labored with increasing ardor in various parts of the kingdom” to see the desire of the Society and the churches brought to pass.¹³¹ For the next almost year and a half, prior to Carey and party’s departure for India, it is noted that “Pearce continues indefatigable in desires and exertions for promoting the good work.”¹³² This boundless energy and effort for the cause of the Society would characterize the remainder of Pearce’s days. He would literally go to his grave with the nations on his heart. But more on this undying affection of Pearce for missions later.

Going Among the Heathen Himself

When Pearce returned from the initial meeting for the formation of the Society, he remarked that “my mind became now inclined to go among the heathen myself.”¹³³ Before Carey set sail for India, he had spoken to Pearce six unforgettable words: “Well, you will come after us.”¹³⁴ In response to these words, Pearce relates that, “My heart said amen! And my eagerness for the work increased; though I never talked freely about it, except to my wife.”¹³⁵ Sarah, his wife, was truly his indispensable helpmeet in all of life and ministry. He had baptized and married her shortly after his arrival at Cannon Street, and she ever remained “a vital support to Pearce throughout his pastorate at Cannon Street (and) was his closest friend.”¹³⁶

In Pearce’s memoirs by Fuller, it is noted that Pearce was “inclined to go among the heathen” himself.¹³⁷ Pearce truly believed at this point that this must be a desire the Lord had indeed placed upon his heart. He prayed fervently that the Lord would either “take away the desire or open a door for its fulfillment.”¹³⁸ The passing of the desire never came. In order to

perhaps humble the desire, Pearce sought a more spiritual frame of mind toward the issue. But he recounted that “the more spiritual I have been in the frame of my mind, the more love I have felt for God; and the more communion I have enjoyed with him, so much the more disposed have I been to engage as a missionary among the heathen.”¹³⁹ Though his desires to serve God in heathen lands were strong, Pearce also knew there was much to be done at home in Birmingham. Thus, at one point, he says that he thought he would most likely remain in his “present situation.”¹⁴⁰ This thought seemed to prevail, until he got a letter from Carey. Then he writes:

Since our brethren's letters have informed us that there are such prospects of usefulness in Hindostan, and that preachers are a thousand times more wanted, than people to preach to, my heart has been more deeply affected than ever with their condition; and my desires for a participation of the toils and pleasures, crosses and comforts of which they are the subjects, are advanced to an anxiety which nothing can remove, and time seems to increase.¹⁴¹

The bringing of these desires to fruition; however, required more than may have immediately met the eye. There were several obstacles that had to be overcome: (1) his wife, Sarah, was reluctant to go, (2) there were obligations he had pastorally toward his congregation and their desires that must be considered, and (3) Pearce would need to gain the approval of his “band of brothers” on the committee, for he would not have been one to “send” himself. Addressing each of these was no small task to say the least.

As it turned out – none of these wanted him to go! They all saw him as too valuable at home. In fact Fuller writes that several, upon hearing of his desire to go to India and join Carey, “were much concerned, and endeavoured to persuade him that he was already in a sphere of usefulness too important to

be relinquished.”¹⁴² Yet Pearce was determined. In fact, it was his conviction that all those who cautioned him “were too interested in the affair to be competent judges.”¹⁴³ He was not intending rudeness here in any way. They simply did not know his heart – they did not understand how long this affection had been building up within.

In regard to the obstacles mentioned above, Sarah, his beloved wife, was the first to concede. It should be added, she was the first and only to concede! Pearce wrote to Carey that Sarah had told him

on mature deliberation she approved of the plan I have adopted. And was much more comfortable in her mind than ever before since she knew my wishes, and was willing to leave it to the sound judgment of the ministers as I proposed, hoping she would see it in the hands of God. O help me to praise! It is a relief inexpressible. If I come, I am not without hopes of a companion in the good work.¹⁴⁴

Sarah reveals her deep piety in this response – being willing to humble herself before her husband and place faith and trust in the decision of the ministers of the Society regarding her husband's desire. More will be said of the ministers later. All of this humility in Sarah Pearce, it must be noted, is humility before her God. As noted in the above letter from Pearce to Carey, she sees all things now as in the “hands of God.” With this, Pearce is fully satisfied.

Another of Pearce's concerns lay in the direction of his precious flock – the saints at Cannon Street. His long standing desire expressed in his acceptance letter to the church upon their calling him as their pastor, was that his ministry among them would be “for your prosperity as a Church.”¹⁴⁵ This desire was still ever fixed in his affections. He would not want his leaving to keep the church from prospering. Toward the goal of reconciling this disconnect between pastor and congregation a special meeting was called by

the congregation to address the issue at hand. Samuel Pearce Carey in his biography of Samuel Pearce gives the following record:

One evening during the week – the date is not known – a large special Church-meeting was held at “Cannon St.,” which Pearce was asked to attend. He told his people all his heart’s desire, and begged their approval. Though he would be glad of their judgment, he could not bind himself by any decision they reached, “because affection would incline them to be partial.” They he withdrew. The meeting resolved to entreat him not to leave his pastorate, and, upon learning that the decision was to lie with a Committee of his brother-ministers, chose deacons Potts and King to represent to these their feeling.¹⁴⁶

From the above report it seems clear that Pearce was unable to convince the church that his leaving was in fact the clear will of the Lord. They were however, much like his wife mentioned previously, encouraged to hear of a Committee of ministers to whom Pearce was willing to be in submission. Not wanting though to be unheard, the church appointed two men, two deacons, to go to the meeting with their beloved pastor, to plead the church’s case.

It was a few weeks after the meeting which Pearce had with his congregation, that the ministers’ meeting had been scheduled to occur. Knowing that it would not be proper, or Biblical, for him to just leave out on his own, and deeply desirous of the support and encouragement of the men he had come to love and hold in high regard, Pearce let his feelings about serving as a missionary be known, and asked if the men of the Society would hear him on the matter. He believed these men to be “impartial men in this matter” and he was therefore content to “leave” the final decision of his going to India or remaining in England to them.¹⁴⁷ Having set aside time in the preceding month of “one day in every week to secret prayer and fasting, and to keep a

diary of the exercises of his mind during the whole of that period,"¹⁴⁸ he was therefore resigned to be "entirely governed by the opinion of the society."¹⁴⁹ Though, as Pearce, one might be able to agree that they were "impartial," being of a mind to seek the Lord in this matter, it should in no way be thought that these men were without their own thoughts! A sampling of these thoughts can be noted in Brother Fuller, when he initially sent out word, calling for a meeting of the men, with the addition of a personal word. Fuller wrote:

That dear man of God, Samuel Pearce, is resolved to go to India, if his brethren in the ministry will give their consent. He requests that a day may be set apart for fasting and prayer by the Committee, when he promises to open his heart, and to be directed by our advice. We have fixed on November 12 (1794) at Northampton.

Though I am persuaded that the Lord will take it "well that it was in his heart," yet at present I do not by any means think it desirable. His post is of great importance. I could not conduct the Mission without his assistance. He is very useful in Birmingham. His learning, piety, character and popular abilities promise to render him one of the first ministers in the Denomination. I admire the disinterestedness, ardour and magnanimity of his soul, though he should never go.¹⁵⁰

Fuller certainly was not shy in voicing his opposition, even if it was in the most gracious and praise-filled terms. John Ryland, another of this inner circle of friends, joined Fuller in his opposition to Pearce's departure.¹⁵¹

Others were opposed to his leaving as well. Samuel Pearce Carey recounts the opposition of a minister who was older than Pearce and well-loved by him who wrote: "I really think you must not leave England. The heathen will get more by you here than they will abroad; and surely your post must not be given up. I bless God for your zeal, but it will hurt the

cause, if you go. You know Bro. Fuller's infirmity."¹⁵² Apparently Fuller had suffered a "minor paralytic stroke in 1793" which had somewhat affected his labors, leaving him "with a tendency to severe headaches for the rest of his life."¹⁵³ In short, many were they who wanted him to stay, and few were those who wanted him to go. All, it could well be said, were of one mind with Pearce in seeking to do all things for the glory of their great Redeemer! With this affection, there was no division of heart! They were, in the words that Pearce used in reference to Carey of "one heart and one soul."¹⁵⁴

The long anticipated meeting arrived on the stated date of November 12, 1794, at Northampton. There, Pearce, along with deacons Potts and King arrived in the morning to spend time with the other ministers in fasting and prayer. Pearce had prepared a narrative recounting to the men his desire, and the Cannon Street deacons were given an opportunity to lay out the thoughts of the church. At around two in the afternoon, the three men were dismissed and the Committee spent several hours alone deliberating the issue. In the end, their decision was a negative one. Here is the record of their decision which was written out and handed to Pearce:

The brethren at this meeting are fully satisfied of the fitness of brother P[earce]'s qualifications, and greatly approve of the disinterestedness of his motives and the ardour of his mind. But another Missionary not having been requested, and not being in our view immediately necessary, and brother P[earce] occupying already a post very important to the prosperity of the Mission itself, we are unanimously of opinion that at present, however, he should continue in the situation which he now occupies.¹⁵⁵

This word one can only imagine must have been difficult to bear. Some might even say devastating. But Pearce took it as the "voice of God" on the matter.¹⁵⁶ He wrote, "To this I was enabled cheerfully to reply, 'the will of

the Lord be done.' ”¹⁵⁷

In the wake of this decision, two people were on his mind and heart: his sweet wife and his separated brother, William Carey. The first of these he wrote promptly. The next day Pearce humbly communicated the following to his wife:

I am disappointed, but not dismayed. I ever wish to make my Saviour's will my own. I am more satisfied than ever I expected I should be with a negative upon my earnest desires, because the business has been so conducted, that, I think the mind of Christ has been obtained. My dear brethren here have treated the affair with as much seriousness and affection as I could possibly desire, and I think more than so insignificant a worm could expect. After we had spent the former part of this day in fasting and prayer, with conversation on the subject, till nearly two o'clock, brother Potts, King and I retired. We prayed, while the committee consulted. The case seemed difficult, and I suppose they were nearly two hours in deciding it. At last, time forced them to a point, and their answer I enclose for your satisfaction. Pray take care of it; it will serve for me to refer to when my mind may labor beneath a burden of guilt another day. I am my dear Sarah's own - S. P.¹⁵⁸

It is not clear why, but Pearce would wait approximately four months before writing Carey on the same issue. When he did write, it was a rather lengthy letter of which a small portion is included here:

My very dear brother, Instead of a letter, you perhaps expected to have seen the writer; and had the will of God been so, he would by this time have been on his way to Mudnabatty [where Carey was living]: but it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. Full of hope and expectation

as I was, when I wrote you last, that I should be honoured with a mission to the poor heathen, and be an instrument of establishing the empire of my dear Lord in India, I must submit now to stand still, and see the salvation of God.¹⁵⁹

Of these letters Samuel Pearce Carey writes:

His letters after this decision are so uncomplaining and their submissiveness so humble, that a casual reader might suppose he little cared. But those who halt and listen can catch the sobbing of his saddened heart. Bravely he anointed his head, and washed his face, that he might not be seen of men to be fasting, but the forfeiture of his dear hope was a fasting indeed, as God was his witness; and an infinite bereavement. He learned, however, to say with the Psalmist:

Jehovah, not haughty is my heart,
And not lofty are mine eyes;
I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with its mother,
Like the weaned child is my soul with me.¹⁶⁰

Having heard as he stated, what he perceived to be the very “voice of God” in the decision of the Committee, Fuller writes, “though it rendered him much more reconciled to abide in his native country than he could have been without it, yet did not in the least abate his zeal for the object.”¹⁶¹ Pearce’s heart was still toward the nations, and so it would ever remain. This was no stop to Pearce, only a call to put his energies to work for the cause from home. This same driving affection for the good of the nations abroad, was now to be seen as the remaining days of his life are given for the cause of Christ’s kingdom at home.

6

Being Spent for the Gospel



Though Samuel Pearce never met Jim Elliot, missionary to Ecuador, in this life, Pearce would have heartily concurred with the sentiment in the oft quoted statement of Elliot from his diary entry, October 28, 1949: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”¹⁶² Though their deaths were not brought about in the same providential manner, they both were spent for the gospel. In fulfillment of the truths expressed in the anonymous hymn “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” they both in no way outlived their love for

Christ.¹⁶³ Their lives in this world both ended in difficulty – Elliot through martyrdom and Pearce through sickness - but their affectionate hearts were full of Christ to the very end. Pearce's willingness to give up all for the sake of his Savior and his eminent usefulness in the service of his King is to be seen at several points along his journey through the remaining years of his all too brief life.

Continuing Affection for Missions

Pearce never wavered in his commitment to the cause of the Society, its support of Carey, and its general interest in missions around the world. As mentioned previously, though Pearce did in fact receive a negative response from the Committee regarding his own going abroad, his zeal for the cause of the mission “did not in the least abate...for the object.”¹⁶⁴ In his own words, his diary entry from November 5, 1794, from the month that he was in prayerful preparation to meet with the Committee on the 12th of the same month, he writes: “One thing, however, I am resolved upon, that, the Lord keeping me, if I cannot go abroad, I will do all I can to serve the mission at home.”¹⁶⁵ And though he is “not without occasional pantings of spirit after publishing of the gospel to the pagans,” he does faithfully maintain his resolution to the very end.¹⁶⁶ His faithfulness to the cause of missions is to be observed in the following four instances.

Mission Fundraising and Promotion: Pearce remained an avid raiser of funds for the cause of the Society in the support of Carey and company in India. He indefatigably labored alongside Fuller as a “tireless advocate for

missions.”¹⁶⁷ Haykin notes that “in the three remaining years of Pearce’s earthly life, he expended much of his energy in raising support for the cause of foreign missions.”¹⁶⁸ In fact, he informed Carey in a letter from the fall of 1797, that he and Fuller had “the whole of the collecting business on our hands.”¹⁶⁹ The extent of his commitment to the cause of the raising of funds can be illustrated well by listening in on a conversation Pearce has with William Carey by way of a letter dated August 12, 1796:

With pleasure, approaching to rapture, I read the last accounts you sent us. I never expected immediate success: the prospect is truly greater than my most sanguine hopes. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a little leaven hid in three measures of meal, till the whole is leavened." Blessed be God! The leaven is in the meal, and its influence is already discoverable. A great God is doing great things by you. Go on, my dearest brother, Go, on; God will do greater things than these. Jesus is worthy of a world of praise: and shall Hindostan not praise him? Surely he shall see the travail of his soul there, and the sower and the reaper shall rejoice together. Already the empire of darkness totters, and soon it shall doubtless fall. Blessed be the laborers in this important work; and blessed be He who giveth them hearts and strength to labor, and promises that they shall not labor in vain!

"Do not fear the want of money. God is for us, and the silver and the gold are his; and so are the hearts of those who possess the most of it. I will travel from the Land's End to the Orkney's but we will get money enough for all the demands of the mission. I have never had a fear on that head: a little exertion will do wonders; and past experience justifies every confidence. Men, we only want; and God shall find them for us in due time."¹⁷⁰

How Carey’s soul must have soared to read such words from his “Barnabas” on the home front! Without an understanding of English geography the extent of Pearce’s commitment to this cause might escape the reader. Pearce tells Carey that he is willing to “travel from Land’s End to the

Orkneys.” In other words he is willing to traverse the whole of the island - from Land's End at the southwestern tip of the land, to the Orkneys - farthest islands of the Kingdom north of Scotland! Pearce was the quintessential antithesis of the hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees denounced by Christ in that when Pearce crossed land, and if God would will it, sea too, he would make one by the grace of Almighty God a child of heaven itself! His words he shared with Fuller from February 23, 1793 remained true of him till the very end, he was ever “willing to go anywhere, and do anything in (his) power.”¹⁷¹

Learning the Language of the Bengali People: In addition to his unflagging zeal for the promotion of the mission, Pearce pressed forward with his former practice of teaching himself the Bengali language. At times he would labor into the early hours of the morning (which many believe contributed to his poor health toward the end of his life) to steal some time away to learn the language of the people he so wanted to reach. Prior to his denial by the Committee, he records the following two entries in his diary from 1794, regarding his study of the language:

Oct. 20...In the evening I found some little difficulty with the language; but considering how merchants and captains overcome this difficulty for the sake of wealth, I sat confounded before the Lord that I should ever have indulged such a thought; and looking up to him, I set about it with cheerfulness, and found that I was making a sensible advance, although I can never apply till 11 o'clock at night, on account of my other duties.¹⁷²

Oct. 23. Have found a little time to apply to the Bengalee language. How pleasant it is to work for God! Love transforms thorns to roses, and makes pain itself a pleasure. I never sat down to any study with some peculiar and continued satisfaction. The thought of exalting the Redeemer in this language, is a spur to my application paramount to

every discouragement for want of a living tutor. I have passed this day with an abiding satisfaction respecting my present views.¹⁷³

Andrew Fuller notes of his friend in the ministry that his “night studies, (that) often continued till two or three o'clock in the morning, it is to be feared, were the first occasion of impairing Mr. Pearce's health, and brought on that train of nervous sensations with which he was afterwards afflicted.”¹⁷⁴ Though one might be hard pressed to disagree with Fuller's assessment of his friend, one would however find it difficult to fault Pearce's zeal. What devotion he had to those he wanted to reach, those whom he had never, and indeed, would never meet in this world. For what end, at present, did Pearce see the benefit of studying this language that he did not know if he would ever use? He answers this question in a letter to Carey dated March 27, 1795. This was the very letter in which Pearce told Carey of the decision of the Committee not to send him. He writes:

I think I said in my last, that I had taken some pains, or rather pleasure, with the Bengalee language; but having no vocabulary, or dictionary, or book to read in the language, I was obliged to lay it aside. Could you furnish me with any helps, I should be very thankful; for I have not yet relinquished my hopes of telling the Hindoos how Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; or, if not, our brethren wish me to learn the language, as they say it is possible that, when you have translated the Bible, it may be found most convenient to print it in England; to do which, it is necessary to have the press under the inspection of some pious person, who knows the language.¹⁷⁵

As usual, Pearce does what he does in order to help in the cause of the mission either abroad or at home. The mission was always on his mind. This should not be construed as some idolatrous obsession. For the mission represented to Pearce, a small, albeit important, portion of the great plan of God to reach

the nations. It is nothing less than this, the nations, that Pearce has on his mind and heart.

Sharpening the Focus on the Worldwide Task of Missions: Pearce's heart was not simply focused on one part of the world. Surely Pearce's vision was greater than India alone. He had for some years been amassing material on the state of the movement of Christianity and missions all over the world. The earliest reference this writer can find in his memoirs to this intention, is in a letter to William Carey dated March 27, 1795, in which he relates that he is "compiling a piece which I desire may deserve to be called, *The History and Present State of Protestant Christian Missions.*"¹⁷⁶ He later relates in March of 1799 to Carey, stating that he has been of late doing some research into the state of missions in Germany on a weekly basis for the past twelve months. However, he states that that he has been having trouble with the work. The difficulty relates to the fact that Pearce did not read German and had to get a young man from town to come in once a week and translate for him! He says that

the tediousness of the writers, and the irregularity of my translator, has long detained me on this part of my Mission History, a work to which, I think I told you before, I have for some years devoted my leisure hours; though my nervous complaint the last two years, my late affliction, and my constant run of pastoral duties and extensive correspondence, leave a mind, naturally indolent, too plausible an excuse for reposing when it ought to be at work, and hence I proceed by slow degrees.¹⁷⁷

By the last year of his life, though Pearce continued to labor when able to work on this lengthy project, he had become too ill to make much headway. Those around him knew this and also knew how much this work meant to him

and how profitable it would be to the church as a whole. The following is an account, included in the memoirs of Pearce by Fuller, telling of Fuller's desire to see the work, Lord willing, published in Pearce's name posthumously.

Towards the latter end of May, when Mr. Ward, and his companions, were just ready to set sail, a consultation concerning Mr. Pearce was held on board the *Criterion*, in which all the missionaries, and some of the members of the Baptist Missionary Society were present. It was well known that he had for several years been engaged in preparing materials for two volumes octavo: and as the sending of the gospel among the heathens had so deeply occupied his heart, considerable expectations had been formed by religious people, of his producing an interesting work on the subject. The question now was, could not this performance be finished by other hands, and the profits of it be appropriated to the benefit of Mr. Pearce's family? . . . The result was, that one of the members of the Society addressed a letter to Mr. Pearce's relations, at Plymouth, requesting them to consult him as he should be able to bear it, respecting the state of his manuscripts; and to inquire whether they were in a condition to admit of being finished by another hand; desiring them also to assure him, for his present relief concerning his dear family, that whatever the hand of friendship could effect on their behalf, should be accomplished.¹⁷⁸

An astounding offer! Pearce sent his reply, from Tamerton Foliot, where he had retreated to recover his health in June of 1799. He spends the first half of his letter, most likely to Fuller, expressing his thanks to him in desiring to see the work brought to completion, and for the expressions of care for his family when he is gone. As wonderful as this plan at first seemed, Pearce is less than positive it will succeed, for he fears that his "materials consist so much in references, which none but (he) would understand, that a second person could not take it up, and prosecute it."¹⁷⁹ Another letter was later sent to Pearce by Fuller

informing him more particularly that the above proposal did not originate with an individual, but with several of the brethren who dearly loved him, and had consulted on the business; and that it was no more than an act of justice to one who had spent his life in serving the public; also requesting him to give directions by which his manuscripts might be found and examined, lest he should be taken away before his arrival at Birmingham.¹⁸⁰

To which Pearce gave one final reply

I need not repeat the growing sense I have of your kindness, and yet I know not how to forbear. I cannot direct Mr. K(ing) to all my papers, as many of them are in books from which I was making extracts; and if I could, I am persuaded that they are in a state too confused, incorrect, and unfinished, to suffer you or any other friend to realize your kind intentions. I have possessed a tenacious memory. I have begun one part of the history; read the necessary books; reflected; arranged; written, perhaps, the introduction; and then, trusting to my recollection, with the revisal of the books as I should want them, have employed myself in getting materials for another part, &c. Thus, till my illness, the volumes existed in my head, my books were at hand, and I was on the eve of writing them out, when it pleased God to make me pause: and, as close thinking has been strongly forbidden me, I dare say, that were I again restored to health, I should find it necessary to go over much of my former reading to refresh memory. . . .Accept the sincere affection, and the ten thousand thanks, of your brother in the Lord, S. P.¹⁸¹

The sad footnote and close of this long yearned for project is given by Fuller in the following words:

As the manuscripts were found to be in such a state, that no person, except the author himself, could finish them, the design was necessarily dropped - the public mind however was deeply impressed with Mr. Pearce's worth, and that, which the friendship of a few could not effect, has since been amply accomplished by the liberal exertions of many.

As the Lord would have it, Pearce was not the man for this task. It indeed fell to others after him to accomplish. It had long been his desire, writes Samuel Pearce Carey that though “he could not yet go himself, he would learn and tell of all who had had that great honour.”¹⁸² What a labor of love Pearce had intended for the scattered church of Jesus Christ. And his worth had been a strong and enduring testimony to all who knew him.

Supporting the Formation of the London Missionary Society: One final instance in the life of Samuel Pearce will serve to tell of the faithfulness to the cause of the mission of Christ among the nations. Pearce was, in the words of Robert Oliver, “never a narrow denominationalist.”¹⁸³ As such, Pearce found himself giving support, by his presence and communications, to the rise of an interdenominational effort, the formation of the London Missionary Society in 1795. Pearce happened to be in London the week of the founding of the Society. Monday September 21st – Friday the 25th of September, the meetings convened and the Society was formed. Having attended the meetings he related to Carey a year later that the event was in his mind “a Pentecost!”¹⁸⁴ The stated purpose of the Missionary Society was “to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations.”¹⁸⁵ The impetus was none other than the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society, three years previous in Northampton. They wrote that “we lighted our torch at yours, and it was God who first touched your heart with fire from his holy altar.”¹⁸⁶

The Missions Picture Closer to Home

Fuller writes that the “governing principle” in the life of Samuel Pearce

was what he called “holy love.”¹⁸⁷ He writes that

To mention this is sufficient to prove it to all who knew him. His friends have often compared him to that disciple whom Jesus loved. His religion was that of the heart. Almost everything he saw, or heard, or read, or studied, was converted to the feeding of this divine flame. Every subject that passed through his hands seemed to have been cast into this mould. Things, that to a merely speculative mind would have furnished matter only for curiosity, to him afforded materials for devotion. His sermons were generally the effusions of his heart, and invariably aimed at the hearts of his hearers.¹⁸⁸

This made him ever effective in leading lost souls to Christ and ever hungry to see them come to the Savior. In fact, it has been written that, “Among the faithful departed, few were more successful in converting sinners unto God, than the excellent Mr. Pearce of Birmingham; and considering the shortness of his ministerial career, his usefulness in this respect was rather extraordinary.”¹⁸⁹ Though, as has been recounted in various ways in the preceding pages regarding his love for the nations of the world, Samuel Pearce had a love for souls closer to home as well. In the remaining years of his life Pearce had impact in the realms of Scotland to the north, Ireland to the west and had plans to send missionaries, himself among them, to France in the south!

Spreading the Gospel in Scotland: Through the visit of two ministers from Scotland in 1794, William Innes and Greville Ewing, Pearce providentially impacted the rise and promotion of the foreign missions movement in the land to the north of England. William Innes, “second minister”¹⁹⁰ of the Presbyterian Church in Stirling, Scotland, was a close friend of one Robert Haldane, a faithful minister of the gospel in the Church of Scotland, who later converted to “Baptist sentiments.”¹⁹¹ Following the

visit by Innes and Ewing, Pearce sent a copy of the *Periodical Account* on the mission to India to Innes, who in turn gave it to Haldane and his brother, James. The impression made upon the heart of Haldane as a result of reading the account of the Society in India, was nothing short of astounding. Alexander Haldane, Robert's nephew writes of his uncle that

He was exceedingly struck with this memorial of the first of those modern Missions to the heathen, which shed a ray of light over the moral darkness of a century then closing upon Europe amidst political and social convulsion. He was deeply impressed with the grandeur of the enterprise, and with the purity of the motives which had induced Dr. Carey to quit his native land to make known the Gospel in foreign parts. His mind (was) enlightened by a spark of heavenly fire...The Serampore Mission made a deep and indelible impression on Mr. Haldane's mind.¹⁹²

Haldane then began to make plans to go to India himself, but sadly as Robert Oliver writes “This proved impossible but their advocacy of foreign missions among the people of Scotland was of great importance.”¹⁹³ Here, in the words of William Innes, is “a striking example of the secret bond by which, in the administration of Providence and grace, one event is frequently connected with another.”¹⁹⁴

An Invitation from the West: Furthermore, Pearce visited Ireland at the invitation of the General Evangelical Society in Dublin, for a six week preaching tour, during which time he was greatly used by the Lord for the conversion of many souls. Though the state of religion was rather poor by Pearce's estimation, it was not entirely without promise. John Rippon in *The Baptist Annual Register* provides a copy of the letter sent him by Pearce upon his return from Ireland in which he tells of his experiences. It is a rich accounting. The impact of Pearce's visit is felt in the words of the elder

deacon, Mr. Howard from Dublin, who wrote two letters himself to Rippon stating:

We have had the pleasure of Mr. Pearce's labors for some time past. I trust it has been a blessed visit to many. Numbers of God's people have been greatly refreshed, and I believe several persons have been awakened, and brought to a serious concern about their everlasting interests under his preaching. He is now returned to his family and flock, but he will be long remembered with affection in this city.

We have had a jubilee for some weeks. That blessed man of God, Mr. Pearce, has preached among us with great sweetness, and with much power. I trust some will have reason to rejoice to eternity, that he was sent to this city.¹⁹⁵

This brief visit to Ireland ignited affection in his heart for this land of his kinsmen to the west. He would be invited back to preach in March of 1799, but would be too ill to give a positive reply.¹⁹⁶ His heart and concern for them was captured well in a letter he wrote to his wife during his visit stating, “Irish Zion demands our prayers!”¹⁹⁷ One can be sure; Samuel’s prayers had been secured.

A Deep Love for the French: Finally, a brief word regarding Samuel Pearce’s longing to see the gospel flourish again in France, a country where opposition long had been felt by those who stood faithfully for Christ. Pearce, a man of England, truly had a heart for the French people to know the Savior, in spite of the political tensions that existed between two estranged countries. He was contemplating, in the last year of his life, a mission to France of which he wrote to Carey in March of 1799. Astoundingly he wrote when badly ill and hardly able to speak:

I contemplate a Mission to France, when the way to visit it shall be opened, with pleasurable hopes. I have been endeavoring for some years to get five of our ministers to agree that they will apply themselves to the French language with this express object in view; then we might spend two months annually in that country, and at least satisfy ourselves that Christianity was not lost in France for want of a fair experiment in its favor: and who can tell what God might do?¹⁹⁸

Here Pearce envisions himself, along with four other Baptist brothers, learning the French language and spending two months a year ministering among the French people! This is such a profound picture of Pearce's devotion, for at the time when Pearce writes of this desire, William Ward, both he and Carey's dear friend, had been helping Pearce in the labors in Birmingham for some three months because Pearce was too ill to perform his duties! What a picture one sees here of the unstoppable heart of Pearce for the cause of the Kingdom of Christ. In the providence of the Lord this too would turn out like his plan to write a history of missions – it would be left for another to accomplish. Interestingly, it was Robert Haldane, the Scotch Baptist so greatly influenced by the labors of Pearce a few years prior, who would eventually be the one to carry the gospel to the French once again! It is recounted by his nephew that

The results of that Mission (the mission of Haldane to the French) stretch into eternity, and will forever connect the name of Robert Haldane with the revival of the Gospel in France and Switzerland. The distinguished historian of the Reformation, himself a trophy of this work of grace, has said that a narrative of its origin and progress would form “one of the most beautiful episodes in the history of the Church.”¹⁹⁹

The Work of the Gospel in the Association

If the lands of India and the nations were Pearce's “uttermost parts of the

earth,” and the lands of Scotland, Ireland and France were his “Samaria,” then the Judea of Pearce would have been the Midlands, near his home, and Birmingham, his Jerusalem. It is true Samuel Pearce had a heart that expanded beyond the borders of his homeland, but this should never be understood as if to say he was “unhappy” at home. Pearce loved England and longed to see the gospel flourish in those lands closest to his reach.

The highly regarded London pastor John Rippon has done the church of Christ, and particularly the Baptists within her ranks, a great service, with his multiple publications of the *Baptist Annual Register*. The records from the last decade of the 18th century demonstrate without question the commitment, respect, engagement and profit of Samuel Pearce to the churches of the Midland Association. Between the years of 1790 and his death in 1799 Samuel Pearce served twice as moderator at the annual meetings of the association, preached four different years at her gatherings, served at least once as the appointed treasurer and had the privilege of writing two of the association's annual circular letters.

His circular letters were weighty and profitable to all. They exhorted believers on the importance of making their lives “public blessings,”²⁰⁰ particularly by praying, giving and supporting the cause of the gospel to the nations, as well as a powerfully instructive and doctrinally rich letter on “salvation solely by God's free grace.”²⁰¹ It is exciting to read the former of the two letters and consider the environment into which it was cast. Pearce wrote the letter and presented it in June of 1794, just months before he would petition the Committee to send him to India! His heart was powerfully expressed here by the pen!

It is helpful, in seeking to evaluate Pearce's involvement in the life of the association, to consider that the above mentioned activities were all

accomplished in the years of 1790 - 1795. Truly these were busy years. From the information this writer had available to him, no record was to be found of Pearce participating in the life of the association during the remaining four years of his life, other than his serving as “Moderator at the Dudley Meetings” in May of 1796.²⁰² This in no way should be taken as disinterest on his part, or that a parting of ways had developed in any way between Pearce and his associational brethren. The years of 1796 - 1798 were very busy years for Pearce. He took his trip abroad to Ireland for almost two months in 1796, and he traveled extensively on behalf of the mission during those years as well. Toward the end of 1798, Pearce took ill, and in 1799, he was for all practical purposes taken out of public ministry due to profound and increasing illness.

The Good of Precious Souls to the Very End

Robert Oliver observes that “Pearce was never robust.”²⁰³ Though this seems to be an accurate summation looking at the halls of history, Pearce himself once thought of himself being “weather and labor proof for at least thirty years.”²⁰⁴ This hope filled view of his health, perhaps what some might call wishful thinking, is perhaps what led Pearce to take so little care of his frame in earlier days. But hope filled or wishful thinking aside, all seemed to catch up to him the last few years of his life in this world. He realized, perhaps too late, as he writes to Ryland in December of 1798, that he had become “increasingly convinced. . .(that he) was rapidly destroying the vital principle.”²⁰⁵

In the aforementioned letter to Ryland he relates how as early as Christmas of 1797, he had not been well. Since making a journey “to

Sheepshead, Nottingham and Leicester, on the mission business,” he related that his health had been “greatly debilitated” as a result of having caught a cold during his duties.²⁰⁶ From this bout with sickness Pearce never truly recovered. But it was the sickness brought on by other mission work about a year later that seemed to take the final toll on his weakened frame. In Kettering on the 16th of October, 1798, the Society gathered for its stated purpose of installing William Ward, Pearce’s dear friend, as a new missionary to India to assist William Carey. Pearce preached at the installation service and on return from the meeting Pearce was caught in the rain and took cold. His own account follows:

The severe cold I caught in my return from the last Kettering ministers' meeting, has affected me so much, that I have sometimes concluded I must give up preaching entirely; for though my head and spirits are better than for two years past, yet my stomach is so very weak, that I cannot pray in my family without frequent pauses for breath; and in the pulpit it is labor and agony, which must be felt to be conceived of. I have, however, made shift to preach sometimes thrice, but mostly only twice on a Lord's Day, till the last, when the morning sermon only, though I delivered it with great pleasure of mind, and with as much caution as to my voice as possible, yet cost me so much labor as threw me into a fever till the next day, and prevented my sleeping all night.²⁰⁷

He related to Carey in a letter the following March that the cold he contracted returning from that Kettering meeting, had been “violent,” and rather than rest he actually increased his ministry the following month thinking that “pulpit sweats would effect a cure.”²⁰⁸ Needless to say, this was a poor decision. What he needed was rest, but this his body was denied, until it would literally go no more. On December 2, 1798, Pearce preached what time would soon reveal to be his last sermon for the saints at Cannon

Street and by mid-December he could barely speak. This moved him to petition his longtime friend Ward to come and render him assistance in the work. During their months laboring together, William Ward grew deep in his affection for and admiration of Samuel Pearce. He wrote in a letter to a friend dated January 5, 1799, while assisting Pearce at Cannon Street the following,

I am happy in the company of dear brother Pearce. I have seen more of God in him, than in any other person I ever knew. Oh how happy should I be to live and die with him! When well, he preaches three times on a Lord's Day, and two or three times in the week besides. He instructs the young people in the principles of religion, natural philosophy, astronomy, &c. They have a benevolent society, from the funds of which they distribute forty or fifty pounds a year to the poor of the congregation. They have a sick society for visiting the afflicted in general; a book society at chapel; a Lord's Day School, at which betwixt two and three hundred children are instructed. Add to this, missionary business, visiting the people, an extensive correspondence, two volumes of mission history preparing for the press, &c, and then you will see something of the soul of Pearce.²⁰⁹

What a testimony of Pearce's untiring willingness to be spent for the gospel!

It is clear that "by the spring of 1799, Pearce was desperately ill with pulmonary tuberculosis" or as it is at times called consumption.²¹⁰ Yet his hopes remain undaunted. In a letter to Mr. King, one of the beloved deacons of the church in Birmingham, dated April 23, 1799 from Plymouth, he writes still having the nations on his heart.

I am indeed informed by my medical attendant here, that I shall never be equal to the labors of my past years, and that my return to moderate efforts must be made by slow degrees. As the path of duty, I desire to submit; but after so long a suspension from serving the Redeemer in his church, my soul pants for usefulness more extensive than ever, and I long to become an apostle to the world. I do not think I ever prized the

ministerial work so much as I now do.²¹¹

Many of his final days, without the ability to freely speak, were spent with pen in hand. Letters were frequent in those final months of gospel usefulness. Letters to his beloved wife, his father in the faith Isaiah Birt, his beloved missions minded deacon Mr. King, his co-laborer in the cause of the Society Andrew Fuller and of course, that one he longed to see again face to face, William Carey. One of the most touching letters he wrote in those final months was to his church, his “dearest, dearest friends and brethren.”²¹² He writes to those entrusted to his pastoral care, “Oh, my dear brethren and sisters! let me, as one alive almost from the dead, let me exhort you to stand fast in that blessed gospel, which for ten years I have now preached among you - the gospel of the grace of God; the gospel of God; the gospel of free, full, everlasting salvation, founded on the sufferings and death of God, manifest in the flesh.”²¹³

The last letter recorded by Fuller, having been written by Pearce, was dated August 19, 1799. It was written appropriately to Fuller himself. It was a very brief letter and very painful for Pearce to write. In it he conveys his resignation to the will of his God. He writes: “If it be the Lord’s will that I linger long, and suffer much, O let him give me the patience of hope, and still, his will be done! I can write no more. This is a whole day’s work; for it is only after tea that, for a few minutes, I can sit up, and attend to anything. S. P.”²¹⁴ With these words of exemplary humility to his dear friend, he laid down his pen, and it seems did not take it up again. Fuller adds in the memoirs that “from the latter end of August, and all through the month of September, to the 10th of October, the day on which he died, he seems to have been unable to write.”²¹⁵

Epilogue



Andrew Fuller once wrote that “the great ends of Christian biography are instruction and example. By faithfully describing the lives of men eminent for godliness, we not only embalm their memory, but furnish ourselves with fresh materials and motives for a holy life.”²¹⁶ Though this paper has not intended in the strictest sense to be merely biographical, it does hope to communicate the above biographical blessing. Samuel Pearce was indeed a man who lived a life profitable for instruction; reproof, as well as exhorting, in its example.

There is much here of “fresh material” and motivation for a “holy life.” Having seen Pearce planted and grown in the gospel soil of Southern England, trained to breath the evangelical gospel rich air of Bristol, called to serve in the prayer saturated Midlands and grow to have a heart that was as large as the world, one comes to find the truth – here indeed is one of the unsung heroes of the rise of modern missions. The church forgets men like Pearce to her detriment. She neglects them only to her shame. So may she take up afresh the admonition of Scripture and remember one who has spoken to her the word of God, consider the outcome of his way of life and go forward in imitation of his faith.

Early in Samuel Pearce's ministry he was given the sobering and joyful privilege of contributing to the obituary of his school companion at Bristol, Josiah Evans, who died at the young age of thirty two, one year younger than Pearce. In writing the following memorial words of Evans, in the purview of God's plan for Samuel, it is as if he was writing his own memorial:

As a Christian, his views of evangelical truth were...clear and consistent: his faith in them was without wavering, and the influence they had upon his heart and conduct was universal and permanent. He lived near to God, he watched over the state of his mind daily. I never found him unprepared for spiritual conversation: the things of God lay near his heart....The removal of one who promised so much usefulness to the churches of God, is among those mysteries of Divine Providence, which call for the most unsuspecting confidence in the unerring wisdom, and unchanging faithfulness of him, who, though “he giveth not account of any of his matters unto man,” yet “doeth all things well.”²¹⁷

On that fall day in 1799, when Pearce passed from this world to the next, if Bunyan was right, Pearce met that day “a company of the heavenly host” and

was addressed by shining ones as one who had “loved our Lord when (he was) in the world,” and had “left all for his holy name” and now he indeed has forever the unending privilege of looking his “Redeemer in the face with joy.”²¹⁸

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