



### **Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)**

I have read many Christian biographies yet none has touched my heart and moved me to seek a closer walk with God than that of the life of Robert Murray McCheyne. Soon after my conversion to Christ in 1958 at age seventeen, my aunt gave me a book 'The Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne' by Andrew Bonar. And what a precious gift this was.

McCheyne was a godly young Scottish minister in a parish of Dundee, who in such a brief ministry, was the means under God of turning many to the Lord Jesus. It was the death of his brother David that aroused in him a vital concern for his soul.

Robert was now determined to prepare for the ministry of the Gospel so that he might be a herald of salvation to others. His desire was to go to the heathen in far off lands; but he soon found a wide field of missionary endeavour among the heathen in his own native land.

It was in the winter of 1831 that he commenced studying for the gospel ministry. These were formative years of marked spiritual growth. Amongst his intimate associates and fellow-students at the University were Horatius Bonar, Andrew A. Bonar (his biographer) and Alexander Somerville, each to become noteworthy ministers of Christ. They often met together for the study of the Scriptures, and in that close fellowship they grew in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In March 1835, Robert finished his theological course. After 18 months of ministry with John Bonar in the parish of Larbert, he was called to St Peter's, Dundee. After two years of constant labour at Dundee his health

gave way. Nothing short of complete rest could afford any hope of restoration. Under his father's roof in Edinburgh, he found a quiet retreat, and there he received new lessons in patience and acceptance of God's will from his heavenly Father's hand.

While slowly recovering his strength at Edinburgh, McCheyne was invited by Dr Candlish to travel in a deputation to Israel to enquire into Christian mission work among the Jews. In his absence from Dundee, a youthful William Chalmers Burns was invited to McCheyne's pulpit. McCheyne, wrote to Burns prior to leaving for the Holy Land: 'You are given in answer to prayer, and these gifts are, I believe, always, without exception blessed. I hope you may be a thousand times more than ever I was. Perhaps there are many souls that would never have been saved under my ministry who may be touched under yours. God has taken this method of bringing you into my place. His name is Wonderful.'

The Holy Spirit was to accompany Burns' ministry with great blessing. This gospel revival continued when McCheyne returned. It had far reaching effects. The whole city of Dundee was stirred. Although he was increasingly unwell, McCheyne extended his labours beyond his own parish, preaching at many places both in Scotland and England. In the course of three weeks in his last evangelistic tour, he proclaimed the gospel in his plain and winsome manner at twenty-four different places.

On the 12th March 1843 he preached twice at St. Peter's. These were his last sermons, and were not without blessing. The next two days brought his pastoral labours to a close. He felt 'the first chill grasp of fever', quietly arranged some necessary matters, and then lay down upon what proved to be his dying bed. A fortnight of severe suffering and frequent delirium followed, and on Saturday, March 25, 1843, before his thirtieth year, he obtained his wish - 'Absent from the body, present with the Lord.'

Some of McCheyne's hymns, 'Songs of Zion', are sung today. The better known are 'Jehovah Tsidkenu [I Once Was a Stranger to Grace and to God]' and 'When This Passing World Is Done'. His Bible Reading Calendar (Through the Word of God in a Year) is still used by countless numbers of Christians.

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