



PROFILE IN FAITH

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

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Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) is called by some the greatest preacher of the last century. He had an impact on many leaders of this generation. J.I. Packer at the age of 22 heard Lloyd-Jones preach in London. Packer said that he had “never heard such preaching.” It had for him the force of an electric shock, Lloyd-Jones bringing him “more of a sense of God than any other man” he had known. George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization, said that Lloyd-Jones’ *Sermon on the Mount* was the greatest thing he had ever read. John Piper said that when reading the same work, he was deeply moved by the “greatness and weight of spiritual issues.”

Lloyd-Jones was born in Cardiff, Wales, on December 20, 1899. He moved to London with his family at age 14. He went to medical school at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, where in 1921 he got his M.D. and became chief clinical assistant to Sir Thomas Horder. Horder described Lloyd-Jones as “the most acute thinker I ever knew.” From 1921 to 1923, the Lord worked deeply in Martyn, and he felt an increasing call to leave medicine in order to go into the ministry—to preach.

In 1926 he took a church in Wales at Landfield, Aberavon. In 1927 he married Bethan Phillips, also a doctor (with whom he had two children, Elizabeth and Ann). His preaching started to get noticed in Britain and America. In June 1937 he preached in Philadelphia when G. Campbell Morgan was in attendance. Campbell Morgan was moved to ask him to be his assistant at Westminster Chapel in London.

Lloyd-Jones was being considered at that time for the position of president of the Calvinistic Methodist College in Bala, in North Wales. He was inclined to accept this offer if it came, but the college turned him down. Lloyd-Jones’ main advocate on the board of the college

missed his train and was not present to argue his call to be president. So Lloyd-Jones accepted the call to Westminster Chapel and remained there until he retired in 1968. John Piper commented on this situation:

I can’t help but pause and give thanks for the disappointments and reversals and setbacks in our lives that God uses to put us just where he wants us. How different modern Evangelicalism in Britain would have been had Martyn Lloyd-Jones not preached in London for 30 years... Praise God for missed trains and other so-called accidents.

From 1939-1943, Lloyd-Jones ministered alongside Campbell-Morgan. When the latter retired, he became the head pastor. His ministry grew quickly. By 1947 there were about 1,500 people attending service on Sunday morning and about 2,000 on Sunday evening. Later, he also drew many to his Friday evening Bible studies. This meant three separate sermon preparations each weekend, each pursuing a different exposition of a biblical book. His sermons were usually about 40 minutes long, and he went through the Bible verse by verse. For instance, his sermons on Romans have been published in 14 volumes. His series on Ephesians extends to eight volumes on the book’s six chapters. Similar detailed expositions are now available on II Peter, Philippians, and I John.

Preaching

Preaching was at the center of Lloyd-Jones’ ministry. His preaching was very serious and straightforward—no jokes, personal stories, and only occasional allusions to the latest current events—just exposition of God’s Word with power. Lloyd-Jones did not want attention

given to the personalities of preachers. He wanted to emphasize and practice God-centered preaching.

One young man went to hear Lloyd-Jones for the first time. Lloyd-Jones started quietly, but for the next 40 minutes the young man was riveted by the message, leaving him unaware of anything else around him. He was impressed by the message, not by the preacher. Later, this man, Tony Allen, became a well-known Scottish preacher.

Though Lloyd-Jones' preaching was plain and straightforward, it was riveting and often caused people to forget the external world. One person hearing him preach about the storm on the Sea of Galilee and the predicament of the disciples found himself stretching forward in the pew to grab an oar. Another time Lloyd-Jones was demonstrating the sensitivity of the eye and how the eyelid shuts involuntarily. His description was so graphic that when he suddenly thrust his finger towards his eye, people jumped in their seats.

One of the marks of Lloyd-Jones' preaching was a consciousness of being in the presence of God. He would often pray for an hour before he preached, so one had the sense that Lloyd-Jones had come to convey the presence of God to the listener. Earlier in his ministry, at Sandfields, a spiritualist woman came to hear him speak. She was conscious of being surrounded by a "clean" power that contrasted with her own practice.

Reading the Bible

In Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers*, he stressed the importance of reading the Bible systematically. Although his remarks were directed to preachers, his advice applies equally to any committed believer. He said:

Read your Bible systematically. The danger is to read at random, and that means that one tends to be reading only one's favorite passages. I would say that all preachers should read through the Bible in its entirety at least once every year.

Lloyd-Jones said that the most important discovery he made as a preacher was that, while reading the Bible, when a verse jumps out at you, "do not go on reading. Stop immediately and listen to it. It is speaking to you, so listen to it and speak to it. Stop reading at once, and work on this statement that has struck you this way. Go on doing it to the point of making a skeleton of a sermon." He says that he never read the Bible without a pad to be used for making notes.

Prayer

Prayer is vital to our own growth and ministry. But prayer is not a simple thing. Lloyd-Jones confessed that he found it difficult to pray in the morning:

You cannot pray to order. You can get on your knees to order; but how to pray? I have found nothing more important than to learn how to get oneself into that frame and condition in which one can pray. You have to learn how to start yourself off, and it is just here that this knowledge of yourself is so important. What I have generally found is that to read something which can be characterized in general as devotional is of great value.

Lloyd-Jones said that if you start with just the Scriptures, you have the same problem. Read something that will warm your spirit. Get rid of any spiritual coldness. Learn how to kindle a flame in your spirit. This devotional tool is not merely to be something sentimental, but something that leads to the worship of God.

He also emphasized that prayer is not to be confined merely to one time during the day. It should be going on throughout the day. Prayers can be brief sometimes, like an arrow shot to the heavens. Paul calls us in I Thess. 5:17 to *pray without ceasing*. Lloyd-Jones said,

That does not mean that you should be perpetually on your knees, but that you are always in a prayerful condition. As you are walking along a road, or while you are working in your study, you turn frequently to God in prayer... Above all—and this regard as most important of all—always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading, when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is a work of the Holy Spirit... So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it, and you will find not only that you have not been wasting time with respect to the matter with which you are dealing, but that actually it has helped you greatly in that respect.

Doctrine and Practice

Lloyd-Jones was convinced of the necessary relationship between doctrine and practice. He didn't believe in giving people what they wanted. He thought it essential to give people what they need; for instance, to speak regularly on the nature of sin and God's view of sin. Someone might object that this is too negative, puritanical, ugly, and black. Wouldn't it be better to

stick to the beauty of Jesus or the love of God? Lloyd-Jones had the following response:

What are we to say to such objections? First, I would point out that such an attitude denotes an entirely false view of preaching. What is really implicit in that criticism is that preaching should always give men what they desire rather than what they need. There is a feeling that men have a right to demand certain things of messengers of God. That is a popular view of preaching, and I have no doubt that it accounts very largely for the state of the world today.

Lloyd-Jones' objective was to get people to understand the teaching of Scripture because "it is a failure to understand doctrine that causes a failure in practice." Sometimes he so stressed the importance of revival and the experience of the Holy Spirit that he was thought to be a Pentecostal. Others heard his preaching on doctrine and thought he was just an intellectual. But he maintained that doctrine and experience were intertwined:

We seem to be opposing everything and thus we receive criticisms from all sides.... For myself, as long as I am charged with being "nothing but a Pentecostalist" and on the other hand with being an intellectual, a man who is always preaching doctrine, as long as the two criticisms come, I am very happy; but if one should ever cease, then is the time to be careful and to begin to examine the very foundations. The position of the Scripture as I am showing you is one which is facing two extremes. The Spirit is essential, experience is vital, truth and definition and doctrine and dogma are equally vital and essential, and our whole position is one which proclaims this; that experience which is not based solidly on truth and doctrine is dangerous.

Lloyd-Jones was involved in a number of theological controversies during his time. One was with what is called the Keswick doctrine, that sanctification is simple: Become a "broken vessel," "yield," "let go and let God." Some would say that the Christian life is "Christ in you without any help from you." He felt that this doctrine contributed to a loss of interest in theology. Lloyd-Jones certainly wanted to see holiness and righteousness encouraged:

But Keswick had isolated one doctrine, holiness, and altered it by the false simplicity contained in the slogan, "Give up, let go and let God." If you want to be holy and righteous, we are told the intellect is dangerous and it is thought generally unlikely that a good theologian is likely to be a holy person... The apostles, who wrote "stir up your minds," "fight the good fight of faith," and many such things, would be surprised.

This teaching led to the neglect of all the biblical teachings and commands, making them unnecessary. All doctrine was reduced to one thing, expressed as "let go," "yield," or "let God." It was one-step sanctification. Later, J.I. Packer wrote in a journal that Keswick, thought to be a citadel of orthodoxy, "offers a salvation which, far from being 'so great,' is in reality, attenuated and impoverished; that its teaching rested on a theological axiom which is false to Scripture and dishonoring to God." The article caused great controversy because of its strong language. It is interesting to note that this teaching is still around in authors such as Watchman Nee, Oswald Chambers, and others.

Overall, Lloyd-Jones was convinced that almost all our problems come down to an ignorance of God. He also maintained that one of our greatest problems is that we listen to ourselves rather than talk to ourselves. Rather than spiraling down into a depression by focusing on our problems, we are to remind ourselves of who God is: we should bombard our problems with the truths of God's Word.

Altar Calls and Testimony

Lloyd-Jones held a couple of other views that go contrary to much evangelical practice. He questioned the appropriateness of altar calls and frequent use of testimonies. Altar calls were, he said, an innovation traced to Charles Finney in the 1820s. The altar call introduced a psychological element directed at the will. Lloyd-Jones maintained that "there is a grave danger of people coming forward before they are ready to come forward. We do believe in the work of the Spirit, that He convicts and converts, and He will do His work. There is a danger in bringing people to a 'birth,' as it were, before they are ready." In other words, they might be like the "foolish virgins" (Matt.25), or those who say "Lord, Lord" and yet don't know Christ (Matt.7). He felt it was wrong to directly pressure the will. The true biblical order is to have truth presented to the mind, which moves the heart, and which, in turn, moves the will. Certainly, many people have come to Christ through altar calls, but some have come forward who are not truly believers and might think that they are saved.

Lloyd-Jones also cautioned about the frequent use of testimonies. Even though it is valid to hear others' stories, there are a number of dangers in the way things are normally done. Often, testimonies follow a similar pattern where people are led to expect a standard experience which may be contrary to their own. Focus is often given to the dramatic features of the story,

and eyes are directed to the person telling the story and not to God. Lloyd-Jones was also aware that the cults (such as Christian Science) often have dramatic testimonies about their own experiences. He said that "our case" was not to be based on experience but on objective facts grounded in history. He was always wary about sharing his own story of how he gave up medicine for the ministry because he didn't want to focus on what he had done and because he didn't feel that he had sacrificed anything: "I gave up nothing... I received everything." Again, there may be a place for testimonies, but we often indulge in them without discernment about their dangers.

Pastoral Guidance

Lloyd-Jones was a wise counselor and made himself available after services to as many people as wanted to talk to him. He would sit or stand in his church parlor and greet each person as they were sent in to see him. There was often a long line of people waiting. He talked to them all. There are many stories about the helpfulness of his advice. Here is a glimpse of his thoughts on guidance from a letter written to his daughter Elizabeth when she was a student at Oxford University:

Looking back, I thank Him quite as much for the things He has prevented me doing as for the positive leadings. See Acts 16:6-7 in this connection. More and more do I see that our supreme duty is to submit ourselves unreservedly unto Him. He will make His way plain and clear, and to attempt to anticipate or be over-concerned about it all, or even to think too much about it, is a lack of faith. How glad we should be that we are in God's hands and that He determines our ways. What foolish mistakes and blunders we would often make. How kind and good He is to restrain us and to order our circumstances as He knows best. Nothing is better or gives greater joy and happiness than to be able to say: "He knows the way He taketh and I will walk with Him." If we only understood God's love to us and His concern for us.

In the space of this article we can only touch on various aspects of Lloyd-Jones' life. It would be great to discuss his role in founding London Bible College, his extensive work among college students, his constant preaching all around the United Kingdom, his role in recovering the insights of the Puritans, the Puritan Conference, his founding of a classic library in London, his perspective on the ecumenical movement, his disagreements with Billy Graham, John Stott, and J.I. Packer, his occasional interaction with C.S. Lewis,

his marriage and family life, and his later years after retirement. Perhaps it is best to focus on his preaching.

Emil Brunner, a neo-orthodox theologian, maintained that Lloyd-Jones was the greatest preacher in Christendom of his day. One pastor said that the essence of Lloyd-Jones' message was that the only hope for our world or in the world to come is to abandon our illusions and come as a helpless child to God. Another magazine article summed up his ministry:

No one can pronounce the word Scripture with such force as this great expositor. You cannot hear him preach for three minutes without realizing that he believes God is speaking in His Word, that the Word is infallible, and that what we do with the Word of God will determine our eternal destiny.

If you want to explore further, I recommend Lloyd-Jones' *Sermon on the Mount*, *Spiritual Depression*, or his commentaries on Philippians, Ephesians, and Romans. I have also benefited greatly from the extensive biography (authorized) written by Iain Murray (2 volumes) entitled, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years (1899-1939)* and *The Fight of Faith (1939-1981)*.

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