

William Wilberforce:
Driven by Divine Mercy



Resources

- John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (1977).
 - William Wilberforce, *Real Christianity* (February 1797).
 - John Piper, *Peculiar Doctrines, Public Morals, and the Political Welfare* (February 5, 2002.)
 - Peter Hammond, *Setting the Captives Free (William Wilberforce)*, Frontline Fellowship.
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Wilberforce

Who is this man?

- Abolitionist
 - Politician who worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery
- Christian
 - He exemplified Christ's words in Matt 5:14-15
 - "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."

Wilberforce

Childhood

- Born August 24, 1759 in Hull, England.
 - Lived with uncle/aunt after death of father at age 9, and was influenced by John Newton.
 - Mother, alarmed that him is becoming religious, sent him away to another boarding school to become more worldly.
 - Idled his life away in college.
 - Ran for seat in House of Commons at 21 (1780): the start of 50 years in politics.
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Wilberforce

Conversion

- Vacation with childhood friend Isaac Milner in Winter 1784 (age 25) exposed him again to Christianity.
 - Gave “intellectual assent to the Biblical view of man, God, and Christ.”
 - Next summer, traveled with Milner again, and “intellectual assent” became convictions.
 - In the following months (Oct 1785), God would lay His finger on Wilberforce's heart.
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Wilberforce

Chosen to Serve

- Bemoaned “shapeless idleness of past” and loathed his wealth
 - Reasoned: if he was going to live for Christ, he must withdraw from the world.
 - Turned to boyhood hero, John Newton for advice.
 - “It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and for the good of the nation.” - John Newton in a letter to Wilberforce.
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Wilberforce

Christ's Servant

- New regiment for the use of Parliament Recess
 - Studying 9-10 hours per day for 1-2 months everyday until his marriage (11 years later.)
 - Trained mind to be alert to learned facts about conditions.
 - The Bible became his best loved book, and he learned stretches by heart.
 - He surrendered *everything* to Christ.
 - Self-examination of motives, conducts, words, even his eating habits.
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Wilberforce

Defender of the Oppressed

- God's calling became clear
 - "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of [morals]."
- Estimated annual export (1787) of slaves from western coast of Africa exceeded 100,000
 - Started abolition movement by the trade of slaves, so that existing slaves would be treated better.

Wilberforce

Defender of the Oppressed

- Christmas 1787, Wilberforce gave notice to Parliament that he would move the abolition of slave trade. This is the start of a **20 year** fight to make slave trade illegal.
 - His speech to Parliament in 1789...

“I confess to you, so enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for Abolition. . . . Let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition.”
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Wilberforce

Defender of the Opressed

- Oppositions to abolition of slavery led to constant defeats
 - Plantations
 - Port prosperities
 - Geo/Political ramifications
 - Foreign competition
 - Intimation / Criticism & Slander
 - Judged to be hypocritical, and was said to concentrate lesser ills than other needier causes. (“wage slaves”)
 - Wilberforce feared for his and his family's safety
 - Former friends left him and supporters “ran out of gas”
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Wilberforce

His Perseverance

- His adversaries complained
 - "Wilberforce jumped up whenever they knocked him down."
 - Wilberforce's address to the House in 1796:
 - "The grand object of my parliamentary existence [is the abolition of the slave trade]. . . Before this great cause all others dwindle in my eyes... If it please God to honor me so far, may I be the instrument of stopping such a course of wickedness and cruelty as never before disgraced a Christian country."
 - Speaking against idea of gradual abolition
 - "...why was the enmity of the Slave Traders directed solely against us?"
 - Health
 - Ulcerative colitis and very poor eye sight.
 - Curvature of spine that he can no longer keep his chin from his chest.
 - John Wesley wrote to Wilberforce:
 - "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of man and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you..."
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Wilberforce

Victory!

- Feb 23, 1807 – Last time the Bill for Abolition of Slave Trade was tabled and voted on...
 - Pollock - “The House rose almost to a man and turned toward Wilberforce in a burst of Parliamentary cheers. Suddenly, above the roar of 'Hear, hear,' and quite out of order, three hurrahs echoed and echoed while he sat, head bowed, tears streaming down his face." The vote result was Yeas - 283, Noes – 16.
 - Wilberforce fought for another **26 years** for the total abolition of slavery in the British Empire.
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Wilberforce

Tireless Labourer

- Formed the “Clapham Sect”
 - Fostered evangelical Christianity
 - Encouraged the Church Missionary Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society
 - Encouraged the good administration of India
 - Encouraged education and backed the Sunday School movement (Robert Raikes)
 - Founded Sierra Leone, and Zachary Macaulay put it on its feet
 - Attacked blood sports, dueling and gambling
 - Set higher standards of morality in public life
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Wilberforce

“Salt”

- Authored “Practical Christianity” in 1797
 - Concentrated on warning the imitation of Christianity, and sets out the essential doctrines of Christianity

"The grand radical defect in the practical system of these nominal Christians, is their forgetfulness of all the peculiar doctrines of the Religion which they profess – the corruption of human nature – the atonement of the Savior – the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit."

Wilberforce

“Salt”

“Christianity is scheme "for justifying the ungodly" [Romans 4:5], by Christ's dying for them "when yet sinners" [Romans 5:6-8], a scheme "for reconciling us to God – when enemies [Romans 5:10]; and for making the fruits of holiness the effects, not the cause, of our being justified and reconciled.”



Wilberforce

“Salt”

- Warned that ethics had lost its power of ethical life and public welfare:
 - “The fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight, and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment.”
 - Those who exhibit ethics and benevolence without the Holy Spirit have “received their reward in full”.
 - Urged MPs to limit activities on Sunday
 - Encouraged regular family prayers
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Wilberforce

Heart for the Lost

- Kept list of people to whom he talked about religion and personal faith, with ideas on how to approach them.
 - Often spent an hour after dinner to develop “launchers”, or openings in conversation with friends so as to "launch" into a talk of religion.
 - Propose resolutions to Parliament to authorize chaplains, missionaries and school teachers to serve in India.
 - “That remedy is Christianity... she take under her protection those poor degraded beings ... looked down with disdain. Christianity was declared by the great Author as 'Glad tiding to the poor'. Christianity still delights to instruct the ignorant, to succour the needy, to comfort the sorrowful, to visit the forsaken.”
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Wilberforce

“What can we learn from him?”

- Treasure the Saviour Christ
 - Worship

“Do we cheerfully devote our Sundays to the holy activities for which they were designed? Do we come into the courts of God with gladness? Are we busying studying God's Word, meditating on God's perfections, tracing the signs of His mercy of redeeming love, admiring His works, singing His praises and speaking good of His name? **We should consider it a privilege to spend it in the immediate presence of our heavenly Father, engaged in humble worship...** Our best emotions will be engaged by this activity. All our sorrows will be erased in this way, our worries put on hold, our fears comforted... **Our hearts will be quieted, purified, enlarged, and ennobled as we partake a portion of heavenly happiness, dwelling for awhile in a place of love, joy, confidence, and harmony.**

Wilberforce

“What can we learn from him?”

- Treasure the Saviour Christ
 - Exhortations to “look unto Jesus”
 - The best way we can learn to grow in the love of God. The certainty of His compassion and love has been so undeniably demonstrated to us that the sight of Him chases away any sense of tormenting fear. If our hearts are not totally dead and numb, we will find that emotions of admiration and hope, trust and joy, will spring up in us. ... A deep desire to please our Gift-giver will be brought to life in our hearts. With humble confidence, we understand that even our smallest attempts to please Him will never be rejected.

Wilberforce

“What can we learn from him?”

- Perseverance to follow through
 - Adrenaline Christians vs. Coronary Christians

“[May God] enable me to have a single eye and a simple heart, desiring to please God, to do good to my fellow creatures”

“I daily become more sensible that my work must be affected by constant and regular exertions rather than by sudden and violent ones.”

“Factories did not spring up more rapidly in Leeds and Manchester than schemes of benevolence beneath his roof.”
wrote James Stephen (Fellow Clapham Sectarian)