

# THE PENTECOST

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Hello, June is here and this last issue of The Pentecost, before the summer break, will deal with the life and ministry of the revivalist, and co-founder of the Salvation Army, Catherine Booth. God bless you!

Shawn Stevens

Here is a true story of a woman who, because of her willing sacrifice and total faith in Jesus Christ, was used to preach to thousands. As well, she and her husband founded the Salvation Army, which is still reaching out to needy people today in our communities. I pray that you are inspired and blessed as you read.

Ramona Stevens

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## THE MINISTRY OF CATHERINE BOOTH

*William, never you consider me. I can trust in God and go out with Him, and I can live on bread and water, go out and do your duty.*<sup>1</sup>

These were the words of Catherine Booth to her husband, William. These words, like many others that she said, expressed the sacrificial commitment that she had towards God and His work. It was William's duty to minister to England's suffering poor, and the burden of this great cause spread to her heart as well. Trusting in God, and fulfilling her duty to Him, became the hallmarks of the life and ministry of Catherine Booth.

Catherine Mumford was born on January 17, 1829, in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, England. She was blessed to be born into the home of strong, committed Christian parents. She had a loving father who worked as a coach builder. Her mother was especially saintly and Catherine says:

*The longer I live, the more I appreciate my mother's character. She was one of the Puritan type. A woman of sternest principles and yet the embodiment of tenderness, to her right was right, no matter what it might entail. She had an intense realization of spiritual things. Heaven seemed quite near, instead of being a far-off unreality.*<sup>2</sup>

Catherine's happy experience of being raised in a Christian family was mingled with painful experiences. When she was only two years old, her infant sister died. Even though Catherine was very young, she remembered this event and the awful feeling that it left with her. In nineteenth-century England the infant mortality rate was very high and the Mumford family also lost three sons in this way.

Losing siblings was not the only transition that Catherine faced. When she was five, the Mumford

family moved to Boston, Lincolnshire. This seemed to be a positive move and Catherine's father, John, deepened spiritually during this time. He became involved in the temperance movement, working zealously to advance its cause.

While her father was known for his temperance activism, Catherine became known for her sharp mind. Her favorite subject in school was history and she excelled in writing. She had read the entire Bible before the age of twelve.<sup>3</sup>

Between the ages of fourteen to sixteen, her mind was absorbed with Christian doctrine and philosophy. In her fifteenth year, some of her studies brought her to a deep spiritual crisis. Contradictory theories and philosophies that she had read created some confusion in her mind as she wrestled in her search for truth. Her mother was an especially helpful influence in her life during this time.

Having come through the spiritual crisis of Catherine's fifteenth year, her seventeenth year would also see great struggle and great breakthrough. She was thoroughly convinced of the truth of God's Word and the rightness of following it. However, the voice of her conscience was probing her with the question of whether or not she knew God personally. She knew that there was a difference between knowing about God and being in a saving relationship with God. Inwardly, she cried; "I must know, I must find." She also said; "... my heart is as bad as other people's, and if I have not sinned outwardly I have inwardly. I will never rest 'til I am thoroughly and truly changed ... faith is not logic, but logic may be faith ... it seemed unreasonable to suppose that I could be saved and not know it."<sup>4</sup> She could not remember a specific time or place in her life when she had met the Lord with saving faith. This now became her soul's desire and she set about praying earnestly for it. During this season of seeking she spent many nights pacing her room until early morning, in search of God.

One evening, after another exhausting spiritual struggle, Catherine put the Bible and a hymn book underneath her pillow and tried to sleep. Sleep would not come and she prayed to God; “Father, may it be that I awake tomorrow to an assurance of [Y]our forgiveness of my sin.”<sup>5</sup> It was after this that the breakthrough came. She says; “I cried for nothing on earth or in heaven, but that I might find Him whom my soul panteth after. And I did find [H]im ... I knew Him, I can't tell how, but I knew Him. I knew He was well pleased with me.”<sup>6</sup> When she woke up, she looked inside her hymn book and her eyes fell on the words of a song; My God, I am Thine, What a comfort divine, What a comfort divine, What a blessing to know that Jesus is mine! These words spoke deeply to her and she said:

*The words came to my inmost soul with a force and illumination that they had never before possessed. It was as impossible for me to doubt, as it had been before for me to exercise faith. The assurance of my salvation seemed to fill my soul. I jumped out of bed and without waiting to dress ran into my mother's room and told her what had happened. Til then I had been very backward in speaking, even to her, upon spiritual matters. I could not open my heart to her. I was so happy I felt as if walking on air.*<sup>7</sup>

Now that she was saved, Catherine became a member of the Brickston Methodist Church. With every passing day, her spirituality was deepening and her countenance radiated with the presence of Christ.

The wonderful mountain-peak experience of Catherine's conversion, and early Christian walk, was followed by a deeply painful experience. Her father, who had for all of her early years led a pious and zealous life, and had even served as a lay minister, began drifting away from his spiritual convictions. Even after being a strong advocate of the temperance movement, he began drinking. This created enormous grief for Catherine and

her mother. However, Catherine continued strongly in her faith.

The painful experience of her father's backsliding was followed by another deeply difficult crisis in Catherine's life. Within Methodism, during this time, many were expressing convictions that the Church was slipping away from its revival beginnings and was now in need of reform. A reform movement was rising up and many within the denomination viewed it as a threat to their established order. Catherine had become a woman of deep spiritual convictions. She immediately sympathized with those who were trying to bring reform. She longed to see the Church operating on its highest spiritual plane. She was broken-hearted and strained over its present condition. She could not help but speak what she was feeling so deeply. As a result, Catherine, as well as others, was expelled from the Methodist Church.

Catherine was not the only one to be expelled for her reform sentiments. A young man from Nottingham was creating quite a stir within the Methodist denomination. He had been converted at fifteen years of age and became a street preacher almost immediately. Because of his deep earnestness and exceptional giftings as a preacher, he was given many opportunities to preach in Methodist churches. Many, however, were offended and frightened by his intensity and it was not long before he was excommunicated from the Methodist Church. This man was William Booth.

William Booth may have lost the support of the Methodist Church but he gained the support of a wealthy individual, Mr. Rabbits, and continued on in a preaching ministry. Catherine had met William Booth at Mr. Rabbit's home. At a later date, Catherine heard William preach at Walworth Chapel. Very impressed with his message, she said that it was “One of the best I have heard in this chapel.”<sup>8</sup> On April 10, 1852, Catherine went to a service on Kowper Street. She was not feeling

well. After the service, arrangements were made for William to escort her home in his carriage. They became close immediately and this was the start of their relationship.

William was very busy in his evangelistic work and, consequently, much of their early communication was by correspondence. Even though William was excelling in his ministry work, Catherine was concerned that he was not studying enough. She felt that it would be beneficial for him to spend more time studying the Bible and other good literature. On one occasion, she asked him; “Could you not rise, say by six o'clock every morning and convert your bedroom into a study 'til breakfast time? After breakfast and family devotions, could you not again retire to your room and determinately apply yourself to it 'til dinner?”<sup>9</sup>

Desiring to see William spend more time studying, Catherine was pleased to learn that William was considering serving in ministry in the Congregational Church. This would mean that William would be required to go to college. As a couple, they balanced out their different strengths and weaknesses. William was a reluctant scholar, while Catherine was an avid student, devouring the works of John Wesley, John Newton and, especially, Charles Finney. William loved being busy in outreach work and disliked anything that would, in any way, complicate the simple gospel. Catherine was a cautious planner, while William was a bold pioneer. Catherine loved a broad range of doctrinal debates, while William cared primarily for the basic doctrines of salvation and holiness.<sup>10</sup> Because William rejected a Calvinist understanding of salvation, he decided against joining the Congregationalists.

Having chosen not to join with the Congregational Church, a new option opened for William. The Methodist reform movement appeared to be in the process of uniting with another movement

called the Methodist New Connection. Both William and Catherine were excited about the opportunity of serving with this group. However, this would impose a difficult restriction upon them. The Church would place a four-year probation period upon William before he would be allowed to marry.

William and Catherine wanted to marry, but they also wanted to serve in the revival stream of the New Connection. Catherine said; “I believe in revivalism with all my soul. I believe that it is God's idea of the success of the gospel. Of course, you know what I mean by revivalism: The genuine work of the Spirit, and I believe these are such.”<sup>11</sup> William and Catherine accepted the terms of the New Connection and William began preaching in New Connection circles. A certain Dr. Cooky heard William preach, was deeply impressed with his ministry, and influenced the New Connection Conference to allow William and Catherine to marry after a reduced, twelve-month period. On June 16, 1855, William and Catherine married.

In the early days of their marriage and their ministry, Catherine mainly stayed home while William travelled around the country as an evangelist. Catherine was now raising children and was also passionately studying theology and church history. However, she soon felt prompted to become personally involved in outreach work. She began noticing financially disadvantaged women who, either wandered the streets or, kept to their homes and peered out of their windows. Catherine began spending time with them and ministering to their needs.

While her personal outreach work was a stretching experience, a still greater stretching experience was ahead for Catherine. A conviction seemed to settle upon her that God wanted her to preach. While at a Sunday service she battled inwardly with this conviction and, after a time, rose to her feet, approached

William, and said to him that she wanted to say a word in the service. William agreed and, with much emotion, Catherine began speaking the convictions of her heart to the congregation. Many of her listeners, deeply touched, were heard sobbing. William soon stood to his feet and made the startling announcement that his wife would preach in the evening service.

This was the start of the thirty-one-year-old Catherine's preaching ministry.

For years, Catherine had been living in the shadow of her husband, one of England's greatest preachers. Now, doors were opening for her to use her preaching gift as well. Her preaching rang with earnesty and seriousness and was richly full of theology and church history. Invitations came flooding in for Catherine to speak.

Not only was Catherine now busy in the preaching ministry but she continued with her personal visitation outreach work, as well as being a wife to William and a mother to their children. During this time, the Booth home suffered many illnesses and Catherine was there to step in and meet the needs of her family.

William's calling was clearly that of an evangelist, but not everyone appreciated him serving in this capacity. In June of 1857, the New Connection Conference unexpectedly terminated William's work as a travelling evangelist. Instead of serving in this capacity, William was appointed to a more stationery form of ministry in the town of Brighouse, Yorkshire. William and Catherine humbly accepted the appointment. Later, in 1861, William asked if the New Connection Conference would again grant him a position as a travelling evangelist. The Conference turned down William's request. After prayerful consideration, William and Catherine made the decision to leave the denomination and launch out into itinerant evangelistic ministry.

While working as an evangelist, William was especially drawn to the poor and destitute population of London's East End. The need of England's impoverished masses was overwhelming. Four years of civil war in the United States had, in many ways, crippled England's economy and unemployment and poverty soared. East

London slums were continually expanding. Working-class families felt the pinch of hard times and, in many cases, were pushed over the edge into unemployment. Children, some as young as five years of age, and youths, worked in factories, sometimes putting in fourteen-hour days. Starvation caused the deaths of many and others were struck down by diseases created by unsanitary environments. Open sewers and poor water supplies contributed to the deterioration of the slums and epidemics, such as cholera, swept East London. In the summer of 1866, more than 8,000 East Londoners died of disease.<sup>12</sup> Both William and Catherine began to realize that their calling would be primarily to the suffering classes.

The Booth's were continuously being stretched in greater and greater ways. Both William and Catherine were busily involved in preaching ministry. Soon Catherine's health took a blow as she contracted dysentery. Medication did nothing for her and her weight and general condition deteriorated. Doctors said that she should leave London for the country where she would have fresh air. After a period of rest Catherine launched back into ministry, although her health was not fully restored.

Catherine's preaching continued to strike the hearts of those who came to hear her. People flocked from all over Britain to hear Catherine Booth. A certain individual even offered to build her a church, larger than that of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. She humbly and graciously declined the offer.

Again, trials came to the Booth home. In 1870, William contracted typhoid fever. He rested for three months and, during this crisis, Catherine filled the gap. She traveled from mission point to mission point, preaching, as always, with great zeal. After the three months, William attempted to step back into the work. It was too soon a return and doctors prescribed for him to take a year's rest away from preaching. One doctor even said that William would never preach again. William was out of ministry work until 1872. Catherine continued on and, with great emotion, she told one Sunday congregation that even if William died from his illness, their mission must go on. For this time, Catherine was the leader of their ministry, while the mother of eight children and while nursing William through his serious illness. Also during this time a certain mother, who was deathly ill, had need to give up

the care of her baby. The Booth family took on the responsibility for this child, as well. Catherine speaks of the struggle they experienced and the conviction that they shared during this difficult time:

*I have found my position trying and arduous in the extreme since my dear husband was compelled to leave us; but the Lord has wonderfully strengthened me. ... it would be too much to say that the work has not suffered; but ... all our workers have been kept in unity and love and the usual services have been sustained without diminution. It is our one absorbing desire the work should grow, whatever instrument should be laid aside. We want more of the Holy Ghost. Our difficulties in this East London you cannot possibly estimate unless you were in the fight.*<sup>13</sup>

William was not the only one in failing health. In 1876, Catherine was diagnosed with angina pectoris, William had a relapse of stomach fever, and their thirteen-year-old daughter, Lucy, contracted smallpox.

Despite personal hardships, the Booths persevered. By the mid-1870s, the Booths had established a number of mission stations. Although they had not planned it, an organization was starting to take shape around them and they called it The Salvation Army. Catherine said:

*We are an army. We grew into one, and then we found it out, and called ourselves one. Every soldier of this Army is pledged to carry the standard of the Cross into every part of the world, as far as he has opportunity. Our motto is 'The World for Jesus.'*<sup>14</sup>

Their ministries continued to expand. In the last six months of 1878, the number of their mission stations grew from fifty to eighty-one. On May 7, 1879, Catherine found herself preaching to an audience of almost 4,000 people. Because the Salvation Army was growing so rapidly, Catherine and William were now rarely able to minister together.

Along with their leadership of the mission stations and their evangelism work, the Booths took on other forms of outreach. They became concerned for homeless women, whose financial situation and vulnerability often led them into prostitution. The

Booths pressed for government intervention and Catherine was given the opportunity to address Prime Minister Gladstone and, also, his successor, Lord Salisbury. The Salvation Army demanded that, firstly, there be protection for children up to, and including, their seventeenth year; secondly, that it be made a criminal act to procure young people for immoral purposes; thirdly, that magistrates would be awarded the power to order the entry of houses where it was suspected that young women were being held against their will; and, fourthly, they called for legal equality between men and women and that it would be an offense for men to solicit women. Protest meetings were held and, through the efforts of the Salvation Army, a petition of 393,000 signatures was signed. As a result of the Booths pressing the issue, on August 14, 1885, the Parliament of England passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of consent to sixteen.

Catherine had seen many victories but, now, yet another hard turn would come in her journey. Her health began to deteriorate and she was noticeably more frail than before. Because of Catherine's tendency to push herself beyond her limit, it was arranged that an accompanying Salvation Army officer would tug on her jacket whenever her preaching exceeded one hour. This was a loving gesture in order for her to conserve her strength and, because her physical strength was often depleted, many times she was carried away from meetings.<sup>15</sup> She continued to preach with great effect and one author said of her:

*Above them all, to my mind, stands Catherine Booth. I cannot exactly describe the secret of the extraordinary, captivating power of her words, but her address remains unforgettable. Right from the beginning to the end she brought me into the personal presence of Jesus Christ.*<sup>16</sup>

On February 21, 1888, William received the painful news. The doctor's diagnosis came in. Catherine was diagnosed with cancer. After breaking the news to William, Catherine said to him, through her tears; "Do you know what was my first thought? That I should not be there to nurse you at your last hour."<sup>17</sup> William was scheduled to leave for Holland that very day for a ministry tour. He did not want to go, but Catherine insisted that he do so. After two days of ministry, he returned to her. A second, and third, medical opinion

confirmed the initial report and doctors wanted her to undergo surgery. The risks were high because of her heart condition and she decided on not having the operation. Her condition worsened, and it was clear that the cancer was spreading in her body. She still was actively involved in leadership during this time. When she could preach from a pulpit no longer, she continued to converse with others from her bedside. Although she could not attend the Salvation Army's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration, she sent these stirring words:

*My dear children and friends, My place is empty, but my heart is with you. You are my joy and my crown. Your battles, sufferings, and victories have been the chief interest of my life these past twenty-five years. They are so still. Go forward. Live holy lives. Be true to the Army. God is your strength. Love and seek the lost; bring them to the Blood. ... Love one another; help your comrades in dark hours. I am dying under the Army flag; it is yours to live and fight under. God is my Salvation and refuge in the storm. I send you my love and blessing.*<sup>18</sup>

On October 3, 1890, with William, family, and friends at her bedside, Catherine died. Her passing marked the end of a long road of trials, all of which she overcame and weathered. With Jesus Christ in her heart, and William at her side, she threw herself into the intense fight. It was a battle that many thought was unwinnable and not worth fighting, but Catherine proved it otherwise. Thousands felt her love and saw her faith and, consequently, many put their faith in the God Who had made her the person whom she was. She was a reformer who dared to speak the truth that burned within her. She believed in revivalism with all of her soul. She loved England's poor with her heart and she reached out to them with her hands.

Shawn Stevens

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Catherine Booth, quoted in Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army* (Don Mills: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1996), 164.
- 2 Catherine Booth, quoted in, Lewis Drummond and Betty Drummond, *Women of Awakenings*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997), 180.
- 3 John D. Walden, "Did You Know?" *Christian History*, Issue 26, 1990.
- 4 Catherine Booth, quoted in Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army* (Don Mills: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1996), 183-184.
- 5 Catherine Booth, quoted in Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 40.
- 6 Catherine Booth, quoted in *Women of Awakenings*, 184.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 188.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 189.
10. Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 76-77.
11. Catherine Booth, quoted in *Women of Awakenings*, 191.
12. Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 131-132.
13. Catherine Booth, quoted in Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 143.
14. *Ibid.*, 153.
15. Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 213.
16. Author unknown, quoted in Catherine Booth, quoted in *Women of Awakenings*, 212.
- 17 Catherine Booth, quoted in Trevor Yaxley and Carolyn Vanderwal, *William & Catherine : The Life and Legacy of The Booths : Founders of The Salvation Army* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 217.
18. *Ibid.*, 224-225.