

# John Berridge Biography

## JOHN BERRIDGE: THE COUNTRYSIDE PEDLAR OF THE GOSPEL (February, 1716 – January 22, 1793)

This page represents my tribute to John Berridge, a man who *"fought the good fight... finished the course... kept the faith"* (2Ti 4:7-note) ([See his "Tombstone Testimony"](#)). Berridge is a saint of yesteryear who is probably unfamiliar to most modern believers, but who is quite *"familiar"* to God. Some historians claim that if John Berridge had lived in London, he would have been one of the most famous preachers who ever lived. As it happened, he became known simply as **"the countryside pedlar of the Gospel"**, a **pedlar** in the Pauline mold and *"not like many, peddling (adulterating and corrupting for profit) the Word of God, but as from sincerity (clarity, purity), but as from God, (speaking) in Christ in the sight of God"* (2Cor 2:17). Indeed, John Berridge was a **"pedlar"**, albeit in the right sense of being an prolific proclaimer of Christ and Him crucified. His words in the following verse typify his Gospel centered, Spirit controlled life...

By thy Word we fain [gladly] would steer,  
Fain [gladly] Thy Spirit's dictates hear;  
Save us from the rocks and shelves,  
Save us chiefly from ourselves!

(Shelf = sand bank rendering sea shallow & dangerous to ships)

J C Ryle closes his biography of Berridge remarking that...

John Berridge is a minister who has never been rightly valued on account of his one besetting infirmity. The one "dead fly in his ointment" has made the Church ignore his many gifts and graces. **Yet he was a man of whom the world was not worthy.** Good judges of men, such as John Thornton, Lady Huntingdon, Wesley, Venn, Fletcher, John Newton, Rowland Hill, Charles Simeon, Jones of Creaton, were all agreed about him, and all held him in honor.

**Comment:** I have a book entitled "Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals" (IVP, 2003) and was absolutely flabbergasted that of the literally 100's of names of evangelicals since the early 1700's, including names of Berridge's contemporaries such as the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield and Charles Simeon, there as **no entry** for John Berridge! Even more ironic is the fact that while not having an entry of his own, Berridge was mentioned in the entry of Rowland Hill, as one of the most influential men in Hill's preaching ministry! **Talk about disrespect!** Perhaps a general ignorance among evangelicals (even the authors of this book) of how God used this man is a fairer criticism of this compendium of great evangelicals. If you take time to read even a sampling of the notes on the current page, I think you will readily agree that John Berridge was an evangelical "superstar", albeit one little known by most evangelicals. One lesson is that it is far better to seek the eternal pleasure and presence of God, then to seek the passing praises of men. Indeed, it was Berridge who said *"If you have less of this world—may you have more of His comfortable presence! Oh, blessed exchange!"*

I submit that John Berridge is an example of a man of God we would all do well to imitate! The writer of Hebrews says...

We desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be **sluggish**, but **imitators** (["mime"](#)) of those who through **faith** and **patience inherit** the promises. (Hebrews 6:11-12-note) (**As an aside** - How does one inherit the promises of God?)

### JOHN BERRIDGE'S PASSION TO PREACH

John Berridge is one of those men modern saints, both parishioners and pastors alike, would do well to imitate. I first became acquainted of Berridge in a sermon illustration of with his uncompromising stand in the proclamation of the Gospel. **Pastor Steven Cole** in his sermon on Second Timothy describes this somewhat humorous anecdotal moment in Berridge's ministry...

**"Be ready"** (aorist imperative - issued like an abrupt military command calling for urgent, assiduous obedience) **in season** ("convenient", "popular") **and out of season** ("inconvenient", "unpopular")." (2Ti 4:2-note)

(Pastor Cole explains) The idea here is that a preacher is not just to **play** at preaching. Rather, preaching must be his life consuming **passion**. He is never off duty. All his life and his walk with God go into the preaching of the Word, because biblical preaching is God's truth imparted through a man who walks with God. "**Be ready**" imparts a further sense of urgency. Picture a paramedic unit on call, ready to save someone's life. Souls are perishing without Christ. Christians are straying from the fold. Proclaim God's (Gospel) Word **whenever** and **wherever** you can!

The 18th century evangelical preacher John Berridge (1716-1793) was called in by the Anglican bishop and reproved for **preaching at all hours of the day and on every day of the week**

"**My lord**," he replied, "**I preach only at two times.**"

The bishop pressed him, "**And which are they, Mr. Berridge?**"

He quickly responded, "**In season and out of season, my lord!**"

[\(The Inextinguishable Blaze Spiritual Renewal & Advance in the Eighteenth Century - A. Skevington Wood - with some stories that would make good preaching illustrations\).](#) ([Preaching and Hearing God's Word - 2Timothy 4:1-5](#)) ([Listen to Pastor Cole's Mp3](#)) (Bolding added) (**Would it be that modern preachers of the Gospel would have such "harsh accusations" cast at them!**)

Someone else recounts this great preaching story this way...

There was once a Church of England clergyman who was gloriously saved. When Jesus Christ transformed his life ([See his Personal Testimony](#)), he started preaching the Gospel to his whole parish, and they were all gloriously saved (cp Ro 1:15-note, Ro 1:16-note, Mt 11:4-5, Mk 1:14, Lk 4:18, Acts 8:25, 14:5-7, 15, 21, 16:10, Ro 16:25-27-note, 1Co 1:17-18, 9:16-18, 15:1-note, Gal 1:8-9, 11, Rev 14:6-note). Then Berridge began to preach the Gospel of salvation in neighboring parishes, and the clergymen of those parishes became offended! Remember that when Berridge was first appointed Vicar of Everton, he as not yet saved and doubtless might also have been offended by the Good News which first describes the (offensive) bad news (Ro 2:12-note, Ro 3:9-note, Ro 3:10-note, Ro 3:19-note, Ro 3:23-note) These offended clergy asked the bishop who had authority over the parishes to order Berridge to cease preaching the Gospel in their parishes. When the bishop confronted Berridge, the Bishop declared "I hear you are always preaching, you don't seem to be doing anything else." Berridge, who had been transformed by he Gospel he was now preaching boldly replied, "Well bishop, I only preach during two *seasons* of the year." The bishop said, "I'm glad to know that; what *seasons* are they?" He replied, "*In season and out of season*" **Hallelujah! Amen!**

[\(If you've never heard of him, you must take a moment and be convicted and challenged by C H Spurgeon's assessment of Berridge\)](#)

## JOHN BERRIDGE'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

**John Berridge** of Clare Hall, Cambridge, friend of Wesley and Whitefield, records his personal testimony. For frame of reference keep in mind that Berridge was born in 1716 and relieved on a false believe of faith plus works for most of his young adult life. In the following letter Berridge relates what happened to his eternal soul in 1756 at about age 41 (and already in the ministry!)...

My desire and intention in this letter is to inform you what the Lord has lately done for my soul. In order to do this, it may be needful to give a little previous information of my manner of life, from my youth up to the present time.

When I was about the age of 14, God was pleased to show me that I was a sinner, and that I must be "born again" before I could enter into His kingdom. Accordingly I betook myself to reading, praying, and watching, and was enabled thereby to make some progress, as I flattered myself, in **religion**. In this manner I went on, though not always with the same diligence, till about a year ago (1755). I thought myself on the right way to Heaven, though as yet I was wholly out of the way (**Ed**: cp Jesus' sobering declaration to "**many**" [not just a few!] in that ominous day - Mt 7:21-note, Mt 7:22, 23-note), and imagined I was traveling toward Zion, though I had never set my face thitherward. Indeed, God would have shown me that I was wrong, by not owning my ministry; but I paid no regard to this for a long time, imputing my want of success to the **naughty** hearts of my

hearers, and **not** to my own **naughty** and unscriptural doctrine.

"You may ask, perhaps, 'What was my doctrine?' Why, it was the doctrine that every man naturally holds whilst he continues in an unregenerate state, that we are to be justified partly by our faith and partly by our works (Ro 3:20-note, Ro 3:28-note, Ro 9:31, 32-note, Ro 10:3NLT-note, Eph 2:8, 9-note, then come works but now "His" works, not "our" works! = Eph 2:10-note). This doctrine I preached for six years at a curacy (**Ed**: office, position) which I served from college, and though I took some extraordinary pains, and pressed sanctification (**Ed**: growth in holiness) very earnestly, yet the people continued unsanctified as before, and **not one soul was brought to Christ**. There was, indeed, a little more of the form of religion in the parish, but not anything of its power (2Ti 3:5-note, cp Titus 1:16-note).

Now some secret misgivings arose in my mind that I was not right myself. (This happened about Christmas, 1755.) These misgivings grew stronger, and at last very painful (**Ed**: cp Jn 16:7-8, 9-11). After about ten days, as I was sitting in my house one morning and musing on a text of Scripture, the following words were darted into my mind, and seemed indeed like a voice from Heaven: "*Cease from thine own works*." Before I heard these words my mind was in a very unusual calm; but as soon as I heard them my soul was in a tempest directly, and tears flowed from my eyes like a torrent. The scales fell from my eyes immediately (Acts 9:18, 3-4, 5-6, cp Acts 16:14, Lk 24:45, Ps 119:130-note, Acts 26:18, Rev 3:18-note), and now I clearly saw the rock I had been splitting on for nearly thirty years (**Ed**: Contrast God's Rock of our salvation Dt 32:15, 2Sa 22:47, Ps 62:6, 89:26, 95:1 with Berridge's "rock" of works - 1Peter 2:8-note, Ps 118:22-note, Isaiah 8:14, 15-note, Mt 21:42-44, cp Da 2:34-note).

Do you ask what this rock was? It was some secret reliance on my own works for salvation. *Doing, doing, doing*: I had hoped to be saved partly in my own name, and partly in Christ's Name, partly through my own works, and partly through Christ's mercies; though we are told we are saved through faith, not of works (Eph. 2:8-9-note) (**Ed**: Cp Eph 2:10-note which does teach that saving faith brings forth works, not our works but His works). I hoped to make myself acceptable to God partly through my own good works (Titus 3:5,6-note); though we are told we are **accepted in the Beloved** (Eph. 1:6-note). I hoped to make my peace with God partly through my own obedience to the law; though I am told that peace is only to be had by faith (Ro 5:1-note). I hoped to make myself a child of God by sanctification; though we are told we are made the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26, cp Jn 1:12, 13).

**Thus I stumbled and fell.** In short, to use a homely similitude, I put the justice of God into one scale, and as many "good" works (See study of **Good Deeds**) of my own as I could into the other; and when I found, as I always did, my own good works not being a balance to the Divine justice, I then threw in Christ as a makeweight. And this every one really does, who hopes for salvation partly by doing what he can for himself, and relying on Christ for the rest. At last when, in obedience to the Heavenly vision, I 'ceased from my own works' entirely, cast them all aside as 'filthy rags,' (Isaiah 64:6) and rested alone in 'the finished work' (John 19:30-see discussion of "**Paid in Full**") of the Redeemer (See our Kinsman Redeemer), did I learn the true meaning of '*having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Ro 5:1-note)." ([Excerpt from Hy Pickering's interesting book "Twice Born Men"](#)) (Bolding added for emphasis)

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**RECOMMENDATION:** If you enjoy reading stories of the redeeming work of God's grace than bookmark this short (71 page) book by [Hy Pickering entitled "TWICE BORN MEN."](#) Therein you find the testimonies of some men you have heard of and some you have not, but your soul will be blessed as you are reminded of our great God Who is always "Mighty to Save." (Isaiah 63:1-note).

Spurgeon on  
John Berridge  
([Link to full bio](#))

"The revival which resulted from his efforts was remarkable for depth and continuance, and for the personal persecution which it brought upon the good man. The clergy and gentry made common cause with the lowest mob against him. "The old devil" was the only name by which he was distinguished for between twenty and thirty years; but none of these things moved him. Crowds waited upon him wherever he journeyed, and his own church was crammed, we had almost said up to the ceiling, for we have heard of men clambering up and

sitting upon the cross-beams of the roof, while the windows were filled within and without, and even the outside of the pulpit, to the very top, so that Mr. Berridge seemed almost stifled. There is no wonder that the people thronged him, for his style was so intensely earnest, homely, and simple, that every ploughman was glad to hear the gospel preached in a tongue which he could understand, and with an earnestness which he could not resist." ([John Berridge](#))

## Grace Music Biography of John Berridge

[Excerpts from a third short biography on John Berridge](#) - The course of events which led John Berridge to become known as "the pedlar of the Gospel" was in itself a testimony to God's faithfulness in granting enabling power to those He called to preach His Word....

From that time on onwards Berridge's ministry was anointed with great power and with a new authority and within a few months there were frequent conversions in the large congregations which gathered to hear him preach. By 1758 Berridge was travelling throughout the whole of Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties, preaching up to twelve sermons a week in villages and farms and the open-air. As with Whitefield and Wesley he went wherever people could be found whether in large numbers or small family groups. Behind all his works for the Gospel lay the unwavering confidence that,

"God has promised a reformation when His word is truly preached," (cf Ps 119:25)

and consequently his methods were plain and direct as can be gauged from the guidance he gave to younger men preparing for the ministry. To Rowland Hill he wrote,

Look simply to Jesus for preaching food: what is wanted will be given and what is given blessed. Your mouth will be a flowing stream or a fountain sealed according as your heart is. Preach nothing down but the devil and nothing up but Jesus Christ.

While he advised **Charles Simeon**,

When you open your commission.....speak of the evil of sin in its nature, its rebellion against God.....declare man's utter helplessness to change his nature or to make his peace. Pardon and holiness must come from the Saviour.

The number of conversions amongst the people of [Everton](#) increased so steadily that it could be justly claimed that a revival of considerable proportions was taking place. Even those who went to the services with the intention of disrupting them often found themselves convicted by the preaching of the word and remained behind afterwards to ask Berridge about the way of salvation. Not all his hearers were so graciously dealt with, since Berridge often had to endure rowdy interruptions and insults, but he was never discouraged because he knew that the preaching of the Cross would always cause offence because the doctrines of grace "batter all human pride, undermine all human merit, lay the human worm in the dust and give the glory of salvation wholly unto God."

Although Berridge did not become as well known as leaders such as Whitefield and Wesley, he was a chosen instrument who was vitally involved in the real revival of the eighteenth century, as his contemporaries all recognized. Henry Venn who accompanied Berridge on preaching tours, stated in 1776 that he had "the largest congregations that were ever known .... and greatly was his word owned of the Lord." John Wesley had earlier noted that people "came now twelve or fourteen miles to hear him, and very few came in vain," while George Whitfield described Berridge as "a burning and shining light" and gladly invited him to preach at his chapel in London. Berridge however took as little notice of praise as he did of criticism, as can be seen from a letter he wrote shortly before he died, stating,

"If you ask my real name, it is Pride, and such an odd mysterious evil is it, I can even be proud of loathing my pride."

**TOMBSTONE TESTIMONY  
OF GOD'S "ERRAND-BOY"**

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Even when he died John Berridge sought to leave behind a testimony to be a witness to those who came after him by composing the epitaph on his tombstone. What a great example to imitate [cp Hebrews 6:11-12-note] considering all the soles of those who are treading through the cemetery at a time when their own souls are being pricked by the pathos of the passing of the soul of their loved one! Berridge testified...

Here lie the remains of John Berridge late vicar of Everton and an itinerant servant of Jesus Christ. Who loved his Master and his work and after running on His 'Errands' many years was called up to wait on Him above.

Picture of Berridge's Tombstone

Reader art thou born again?  
No salvation without new birth.  
I was born in sin February 1716.  
Remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730.  
Lived proudly on faith and works for salvation till 1754.  
Admitted to Everton Vicarage 1755.  
Fled to Jesus alone for refuge 1756.  
Fell asleep in Christ 22 January 1793.

When John Berridge died at age 77, thousands paid their respects by attending his funeral. And true to form, Berridge died as he had lived, a bit on the "*eccentric edge*", for one of his final requests was that his burial be on the Northeast side of the [Everton](#) churchyard (to use his words) as "*a means of consecrating it*". Prior to his burial, that portion of the cemetery had been reserved primarily for those who had come to a dishonorable demise! Not so for Reverend John Berridge, who surely received his justly deserved welcome of "***well done, good and faithful servant.***" (Mt 25:21). **May God grant that the tribe of His humble servant John Berridge increase to the glory of the Lamb. Amen.**

Here is my favorite John Berridge hymn that has been put to music...

### **JESUS CAST A LOOK ON ME**

by John Berridge

[Demo Mp3 by Michael Perryman Jones](#)

[Play Red Mountain Music's full version on youtube](#)

1. Jesus cast a look on me,  
Give me sweet simplicity  
Make me poor and keep me low,  
Seeking only Thee to know
2. All that feeds my busy pride,  
Cast it evermore aside  
Bid my will to Thine submit,  
Lay me humbly at Thy feet
3. Make me like a little child,  
Of my strength and wisdom spoiled  
Seeing only in Thy light,  
Walking only in Thy might
4. Leaning on Thy loving breast,  
Where a weary soul can rest  
Feeling well the peace of God,  
Flowing from His precious blood
5. In this posture let me live,  
And hosannas daily give  
In this temper let me die,

And hosannas ever cry!

**JOHN BERRIDGE...**  
**"THE WHITEFIELD OF**  
**THE COUNTRYSIDE"**

Here are some more of the poignant lyrics penned by this Spirit filled man John Berridge. Don't read these lyrics too quickly...

No help in self I find,  
And Yet have sought it well;  
The native treasure of my mind  
Is sin, and death, and hell.

To Christ for help I fly,  
The Friend of sinners lost,  
A refuge sweet, and sure and nigh,  
And there is all my trust.

All other refuge fails,  
And leaves my heart distress;  
But this eternally prevails,  
To give a sinner rest.

Lord, grant me free access  
Unto Thy pierced side;  
For there I seek my dwelling-place,  
And there my guilt would hide.

[Click here to read more of Berridge's hymns.](#)

**Robert Morgan** writes...

Had John Berridge lived in London or Edinburgh, he would have been famous for his powerful preaching, but the Lord placed him in out-of-the-way villages where he became the "Whitefield of the countryside." John was quaint and eccentric, but his strange ways merely added to the appeal and power of his ministry. He preached to great crowds in rural England, in one year alone leading over **four thousand people to Christ**—and he evangelized nonstop for thirty years (**Ed**: He never married, except, as it were, to Christ, for Whom he gave his all!)

He insisted he could most effectively minister by remaining unmarried, and he worried that the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield didn't do likewise. George Whitefield had married a woman with whom he had spent less than a week; she died in 1768. And poor John Wesley had marital woes. Writing to Lady Huntingdon, patron of the English evangelists, Berridge observed:

No trap [is] so mischievous to the field-preacher as wedlock; and it is laid for him at every hedge corner. Matrimony has quite maimed poor Charles [Wesley], and might have spoiled John [Wesley] and George [Whitefield], if a wise Master had not graciously sent them a brace [pair] of ferrets. Dear George has his liberty again, and he will escape well if he is not caught by another tenterhook. Eight or nine years ago, having been grievously tormented with housekeeping, I thought of looking out for a [wife] myself. But it seemed highly needful to ask advice of the Lord. So, kneeling down before the table, with a Bible between my hands, I besought the Lord to give me direction.

The Lord gave John Berridge Jeremiah 16:2—

"You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons and daughters in this place ..."

Thus he relinquished all thoughts of marriage, and gave himself to pleasing the Lord "without distraction."  
(**Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes**)

**JOHN BERRIDGE:**

## A MAN WHO REDEEMED THE TIME!

**Spurgeon** tells a great story about Berridge...

YOU can see great faults in others; but, my dear brother, be sure to look in the looking-glass every morning, and you will see quite as many faults, or else your eyes are weak. If that looking-glass were to show you your own heart you would never dare look again, I fear you would even break the glass. Old John Berridge, as odd as he was good, had a number of pictures of different ministers round his room, and he had a looking-glass in a frame to match. He would often take his friend into the room and say, "That is Calvin, that is John Bunyan," and when he took him up to the looking-glass he would add, "and that is the devil." "Why," the friend would say, "it is myself!" "Ah," said he, "there is a devil in us all." Being so imperfect, we ought not to condemn. - Flashes of thought

**Spurgeon** wrote

John Berridge, and what a lump of quaintness was he! You cannot read his letters without laughing; he could not have lived but for being funny. - Lectures to my Students, Vol. 4:

**Frank Boreham** writes...

In the eighteenth century, John Berridge, the Vicar of Everton, was considered one of the most eccentric and remarkable preachers in England. One of his most famous sermons was a sermon on the word *If*. 'My brethren,' he used to say, 'we will dub *If* an officer, and call him "Sergeant *If*," and regard him as the watchman or guard attending on the doctrine of perseverance. Sergeant *If*, you will notice, is low in stature, but he is lofty in significance—a very valiant guard, though a monosyllable.' - Boreham, Frank W. - All the Blessings of Life: The Best Stories of F. W. Boreham

**Spurgeon** writes that **Berridge** placed the following verse on his clock...

Here my master bids me stand,  
And mark the time with faithful hand;  
What is his will is my delight,  
To tell the hours by day, by night.  
Master, be wise, and learn of me  
To serve thy God as I serve thee.

Men and women who have been used greatly of God have always had a clear sense of their finite mortality and sought to redeem this brief vapor of a life (Jas 4:14, for eternity and the glory of God! Father, grant us a heart like Moses who prayed...

**So teach us to number our days,  
That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.**

(Psalm 90:12)

**To encourage you to redeem the time for the days are evil (Eph 5:16), observe how the Bible refers to our life, specifically the shortness of our lives:** Job 7:6, 7 Job 9:25-26 Job 14:1-2 Ps 37:2, Ps 39:5, Ps 39:6 Ps 90:4-6, 9, 10 Ps 102:3, Ps 102:11, Ps 103:15,16 Ps 144:4 Isaiah 38:12-13, Isaiah 40:6-7 James 1:10-11 James 4:14 1Peter 1:24 2Kings 19:26

Recall that Berridge had previously thought he was "saved" during his teenage years and had even been in the ministry for five years before he came to his senses and by grace through faith fled to Jesus alone for genuine salvation. As one who also was graciously saved at an older age (age 39 [now 65.5] - **My Personal Testimony of God's Grace**), I can appreciate that sense of "urgency" and zeal to "buy up" every remaining second after to coming to Christ later in life.

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John Berridge expected to follow his father into livestock, but he could never learn the ropes. His frustrated dad finally said, "John, I find you cannot form any idea of the price of cattle, and I shall have to send you to college to be a light to the Gentiles." Thus John went to Cambridge, then entered church work, but without personally experiencing the Gospel. His preaching was striking, his life upright, his energy boundless, his ministry worthless. His message, devoid of the death and resurrection of Christ, was like a solar system without the sun. For years he thrashed around brilliantly, but fruitlessly. In 1755 he became vicar in out-of-the-way Everton, and there at age 42 he finally agonized about his own soul.

“Lord,” he began crying, “if I am right, keep me so; if I am not right, make me so, and lead me to the knowledge of the truth in Jesus.”

One morning sitting before an open Bible these words flashed to mind: “Cease from thine own works; only believe.” He immediately started preaching salvation by grace through faith alone.

Soon one of his parishioners visited him. “Why, Sarah,” he said, “What is the matter?” “I don’t know,” said the woman. “Those new sermons! I find we are all lost now. I can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. I don’t know what will become of me.” Others echoed the same cry. Berridge’s church soon swelled with villagers giving their lives to Christ. People flocked from all parts, and the buildings proved too small. On May 14, 1759 Berridge began preaching outdoors.

“On Monday,” he wrote, “we called at a farmhouse. After dinner I went into the yard, and seeing nearly 150 people, I called for a table and preached for the first time in the open air. We then went to Meldred, where I preached in a field to about 4,000 people.”

His remaining 30 years found him preaching the Gospel in season and out, indoors and out. He never married, always resided alone, and remained in rural parishes until his death at age 77 in 1793. He was the Whitefield of the English countryside. - Robert Morgan - On this day : 365 amazing and inspiring stories about saints, martyrs & heroes

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**Edwin Charles Dargan** writes that

Only outlines of some of (Berridge’s) sermons and a farewell sermon remain. These hardly reveal the man, only his good and earnest thinking, for in actual delivery he was striking, peculiar, often odd and undignified, but deeply in earnest, popular in style, and abundantly fruitful in winning souls. Doubtless there was much in his manner and methods that was offensive to good taste, but his aim was high, his character sincere, his piety unquestioned. - A History of Preaching, Volume 2

## QUOTATIONS FROM JOHN BERRIDGE

**Hypocritical Concessions** - You have heard, no doubt, of beggars who tie a leg up when they go a-begging, and then make a hideous lamentation of their lameness. Why, this is just your case, sir, when you go to church a-praying, which is begging, you tie your righteous heart up, and then make woeful outcry for mercy on us miserable sinners. O sir, these tricks may pass a while unnoticed, but Jesus Christ will apprehend such cheats at last, and give them their desert.

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**Christ - Our Best** - My heart can have no rest, unless it leans on Jesus Christ wholly, and then it feels His peace. But I am apt to leave my resting-place, and when I ramble from it, my heart will quickly brew up mischief. Some evil temper now begins to boil, or some care would fain perplex me, or some idol wants to please me, or some deadness or some lightness creeps upon my spirit, and **communion with my Saviour is withdrawn**. When these thorns stick in my flesh, I do not try, as heretofore, to pick them out with my own needle, but carry all complaints to Jesus, **casting every care upon Him**. His office is to save, and mine to look for help.

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Christ will either be a whole Saviour or none at all.

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Sanctified afflictions are a thousand times rather to be chosen—than unsanctified prosperity.

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In the Gospels, Jesus often rebukes weak faith, but never rejects it.

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No heart thrives without much secret converse with God and nothing will make amends for want of it.

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If you do not preach the gospel, you may sleep soundly enough; but if you do preach it faithfully, you will hardly have a sound place in your skin, for you will soon have enemies enough assailing you.

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If you have less of this world—may you have more of His comfortable presence! Oh, blessed exchange!

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Oh heart, heart, what are you? A mass of fooleries and absurdities!

The vainest, foolishhest, craftiest, wickedest thing in nature!

And yet the Lord Jesus asks me for this heart, woos me for it, died to win it.

O incredible love! Adorable condescension!

O take it, Lord, and let it be forever closed to all but You!"

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Preach nothing down but the devil, and nothing up but Christ.

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Every man has a piece of land to till, which is the ground of the heart.

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**Comment:** Berridge took his cue from Jesus' parable of the sower, emphasizing that one's heart must be broken up so that the Word might enter as does plough into the ground preparing for the sowing of seed.

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On May 14, 1759, John Berridge began preaching outdoors writing...

After dinner I went into the yard, and seeing nearly a 150 people, I called for a table and preached for the first time in the open air. We then went to Meldred, where I preached in a field to about 4000 people. (Note: Berridge's remaining thirty years found him preaching the gospel in the open air. He was known as the "*Whitefield of the English countryside*.")

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All decays begin in the closet; no heart thrives without much secret converse with God, and nothing will make amends for the want of it.

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Living tongues are dumb at best,  
We must die to speak of Christ.

><>><>><>

As the heart is more washed, we grow more sensible of its remaining defilement; just as we are more displeased with a single spot on a new coat than with a hundred stains on an old one.

><>><>><>

Some fast by Calvin hold,  
Some for Arminius fight,  
And each is mighty bold,  
And seemeth surely right:  
Well, though with Calvin I agree,  
Yet Christ is all in all to me.  
-John Berridge

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A Christian never falls asleep in the fire or in the water, but grows in the sunshine.

Run, John, and work, the law commands,

Yet finds me neither feet nor hands;  
But sweeter news the gospel brings,  
It bids me fly, and lends me wings.

-John Berridge

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(In "The Salt Cellars" published in 1889 **C H Spurgeon** record **Berridge** as the author of this oft quoted poem.  
See additional note by Justin Taylor on [Run, John, Run!](#))

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**Spurgeon** in describing the universality of the Gospel said -

It was **John Berridge** who thanked God for "that blessed word '**whosoever**,' "in the Gospel invitations and promises. "If it had been written, 'John Berridge may come,' there might have been a doubt as to who was meant by it; for there may be a hundred John Berridges in the world. But with that word '**whosoever**' just there, there is no room for questioning. "Whosoever will, may come. Whosoever comes, shall receive. If you or yours are without remission of sins, whose fault is it?

**Edwin Long** records...

An amusing story is told of Berridge while on a visit in the North of England. Stopping at a village where he must needs stay over the Sabbath, he requested the proprietor of the inn to let the "parson of the parish" know that there was a clergyman stopping with him who would gladly assist at the service on the morrow.

In reply to this statement, the cautious shepherd remarked to the landlord, "We must be careful, for you know there are many of those wandering Methodist preachers about. What sort of man is he?" "Oh, it is all right, sir," was the answer, "just see his nose, sir, that will tell you he is no Methodist." "Well ask him to call on me in the morning," said the rector, "and I shall judge for myself." At the morning call it is said, "the waggish and somewhat rubecund nose" disarmed prejudices and opened the way to the pulpit, where he delivered a memorable discourse. - Long, Edwin McKean. Illustrated History of Hymns and Their Authors. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: P. W. Ziegler and Company, 1876.

## LETTERS OF JOHN BERRIDGE

**The heaviest afflictions on this side hell** (A consolatory letter to a Christian friend under severe afflictions, by John Berridge)

Dear Madam,

I grant that your circumstances are very severe and difficult—but let me beg of you not to construe your afflictions as a token of God's displeasure, or a sign of your not belonging to Him. This is an old temptation of Satan's, with which he often assaults the afflicted Christian; but take the shield of faith—that you may quench the fiery darts of Satan.

Alas! Crosses and afflictions are the common lot of the people of God in this present world. Our Lord has told us, that in this world—we shall have troubles! Every saint has his own particular difficulties, temptations and conflicts to grapple with.

We are too apt to settle on our lees, too apt to be absorbed with the vanities of this passing world. We are now chastened—that hereafter we may not be condemned with the world.

Ah! happy afflictions—which wean us from this wretched, dying world! They are a means to mortify our corruptions; to teach us to live more constantly by faith in Jesus Christ; and to fix all our hopes and expectations on the eternal world of glory!

Sanctified afflictions are a thousand times rather to be chosen—than unsanctified prosperity. These afflictions may consist with, yes are often the effects of God's special love. "Those whom I love—I rebuke and discipline." Revelation 3:19. God sees that we need afflictions—and He knows that they will work for our good.

God is infinitely wise—and knows what is best for me. God is infinitely gracious—and will be tender of the weakest of His children. God is infinitely sovereign—and may do what He pleases with His own!

The heaviest afflictions on this side hell—are less, far less than my iniquities have deserved! Oh, boundless grace! The chastening rod of a reconciled Father, might have been the flaming sword of an avenging Judge! I might now have been weeping and wailing with devils and damned spirits in hell! I will bear the indignation of the Lord—because I have sinned against Him. It is of His mercy alone, that I am not consumed!

Oh, it is but a little while—and then there will be an eternal end of all your sorrows, fears, trials and disappointments! That heavenly Bridegroom, who has betrothed you to Himself, will, before long, bring you into His eternal kingdom, where you will forget all the storms and tempests, clouds and darkness—in your passage through this wilderness world—and all shall be eternally filled with joy and peace, love and praise!

No troubles or afflictions shall ever assault you in that glorious place—but you shall dwell eternally under the constant shinings of divine love, and shall sing with the strongest believers, yes with the highest and most glorious archangels in heaven—the wondrous mysteries of redeeming grace! The comforts and blessedness of that state of rest, will be more brightened and endeared—by all your tears and sighings here below. The remembrance of the gall and wormwood of afflictions, will tend to sweeten the taste of heavenly enjoyments.

I pray that God may be with you—to support and comfort you with the divine consolations of His Holy Spirit, and establish you in His own due time. He is a faithful God—and therefore will not lay upon you more than He will enable you to bear. 1Cor 10:13. If you have less of this world—may you have more of His comfortable presence! Oh, blessed exchange! May you be supported with His everlasting arms—and have Him to sustain and uphold you in every time of need!

Remember your once dying, but now exalted Redeemer. Is the servant greater than his Lord? Shall we not joyfully tread in His steps—that we may at last be where He is? Can, or ought we to repine—if God deals with us—as He did with His own well-beloved Son?

May the Lord help you willingly to submit to Him. Doubt not, but that at the appointed time, when He sees it will be for your good and His own glory—that your heavenly Father will bring you out of your afflictions. You should rejoice to think that He is carrying on the great work of your eternal salvation, amidst all your troubles and disappointments, and under all your difficult afflictions. Oh, say then, with Job: "Though He slays me—yet will I trust in Him!" Job 13:15. Though I am surrounded with terrors—I will bless Him that I am out of hell!

Oh that you may be embraced in the arms of everlasting love, and enjoy the comforts of your pardoned state! Let me beg of you, once more, dear sister—not to allow the disappointments and crosses of this world, however sore and trying in themselves—to drive from your mind, the frequent and joyful forethoughts of what free, rich, and sovereign grace has designed for you in the eternal world—and is fitting and preparing you for, every day you live.

Let not the hardships of your journey—make you forget, but rather cause you to long for your eternal home. Oh, think on that heaven—which neither sin, nor death, nor hell—shall ever be able to deprive you of; in which you through sovereign grace, shall spend the endless ages of a blessed eternity!

"Do then, Lord, what You please with me—so that I may but die to this world, overcome my corruptions, live more upon Christ, bring more glory to Your name, and have more comfortable tastes and pledges of Your love. May Your will be done!"

Yours,

John Berridge

### **The death of your godly daughter**

I received your letter, about the death of your godly daughter—and hope that you will soon learn to bless your Redeemer for snatching her away so speedily. Methinks I see great mercy in the suddenness of her removal; and when your affections have done yearning for her—you will see it too.

O! what is she snatched from? Why, truly, from the plague of an evil heart, a wicked world, and a crafty devil—snatched from all future bitter grief, and from everything which might wound her ear, afflict her eye, or pain her heart!

And what is she snatched to? To a land of everlasting peace, where every inhabitant can say, 'I am no more sick!' No more affliction in the body, no more plague in the heart—but all full of love and full of praise; ever seeing with enraptured eyes, ever blessing with adoring hearts—that dear Lamb who has washed them in His blood, and has now made them kings and priests unto God, forever and ever!

Oh, madam! What would you rather have? Is it not better singing in heaven, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!'—than crying out on earth, 'O wretched woman that I am!'

Is it not better to have your daughter taken to heaven—than to have your heart divided between Christ and her? If she was a silver idol before—might she not prove to be a golden idol afterwards?

She has gone to the most blessed place, and will see you again by and by—never more to part. Had she crossed the sea and gone to Ireland—you would have born it; but now that she is gone to heaven—should this be difficult for you? Strange love is this!

Such behavior in others would not surprise me—but I could almost chasten you for it. And I am sure your daughter would chasten you too, if she was called back but one moment from the glories of heaven—to gratify your fond desires! I cannot soothe you—and I must not flatter you. I am glad the dear creature has gone to heaven before you. Lament, if you please; but 'Glory, glory, glory be to God!'

## **JOHN BERRIDGE'S TIPS ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL**

(Berridge's) numerous itinerants went out from him with such apostolic instructions as these,—

Never preach in working hours, that would raise a clamor. Where you preach at night, preach also in the morning; but be not longer than an hour in the whole morning service, and conclude before six. Morning preaching will show whether the evening took effect, by raising them up early to hear.

Expect plain fare and plain lodging where you preach, yet perhaps better than your Master had. Suffer no treats to be made for you, but live as your host usually lives, else he may grow weary of entertaining you; and go not from house to house. If you dare to be zealous for the Lord of Hosts, expect persecution and threats; but heed them not. Bind the Lord's word to your heart. The promise is doubled for your encouragement. The chief blocks in your way will be the prudent Peters, who will beg, entreat, and beseech you to avoid irregularity. Give them the same answer that Christ gave Peter, 'they savor of the things which be of men.'—Heed them not.

When you preach at night, go to bed as soon as possible, that the family be not kept up, and that you may rise early. When breakfast and morning family prayers are over, go away directly, that the house may be at liberty. If you would do work for the Lord, as you seem designed, you must venture for the Lord. The Christian's motto is—Trust and go forward, though the sea is before you. Do then as Paul did, give up thyself to the Lord; work, and confer not with flesh and blood, and the Lord be with thee."

These instructions, which are copied from a letter to one of his subordinates, were to regulate their manners; and with regard to the matter of their preachings, we find such as the following:-

When you state your commission, begin with laying open the innumerable corruptions of the hearts of your audience; Moses will lend you a knife which may be often whetted at his grindstone. Lay open the universal sinfulness of nature—the darkness of the mind,—the frowardness of the Will,—the fretfulness of the temper, and the earthliness and sensuality of the affections. Speak of the evil of sin in its nature—its rebellion against God as our sovereign—ingratitude to God as our benefactor—and contempt both of his authority and love. Declare the evil of sin in its effects—bringing on all our sickness, pains, and sorrows—all the evils we feel, and all the evils we fear—all inundations, and fires, and famines, and pestilences—all brawls, and quarrels, and fightings, and wars, with death to close these present sorrows, and hell afterwards to receive all that die in sin.

Lay open the spirituality of the law, and its extent, reaching to every thought, word, and action, and declaring every transgression (whether of omission or commission) deserving of death. Declare man's utter helplessness to change his nature, or to make his peace. Pardon and holiness must come from the Saviour. Acquaint them with the searching eye of God, watching us continually, spying out every thought, word, and action, noting them down in the book of his remembrance, and bringing every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil.

"When your hearers are deeply affected with these things (which is seen by the hanging down of their heads), preach Christ. Lay open the Saviour's almighty power to soften the hard heart, and give it repentance-- to bring pardon to the broken heart, a spirit of prayer to the prayerless heart, holiness to the filthy heart, and faith to the unbelieving heart. Let them know that all the treasures of grace are lodged in Jesus Christ, for the use of the poor needy sinner, and that he is full of love as well as power—turns no beggar from his gate, but

receives all comers kindly—loves to bless them, and bestows all his blessings tithe-free. Farmers and country people chop at that. Here you must wave the Gospel flag, and magnify the Saviour supremely. Speak it, ore rotundo, that his blood can wash away the foulest sins, and his grace subdue the stoutest corruptions. Exhort the people to 'seek his grace, to seek it directly, seek it diligently, seek it confidently; and acquaint them, that all who thus seek shall assuredly find the salvation of God." Of his own preaching, it has been said, that "When he explained the nature, end, and use of the law, he was very awful and affecting." "And now" (to adopt his own words) "I dealt with my hearers in a very different manner from what I used to do. I told them very plainly, that they were the children of wrath, and under the curse of God, though they knew it not, and that none but Jesus Christ could deliver them from that curse. I told them, if they had ever broken the law of God once in thought, word, or deed, no future good behavior could make any atonement for past miscarriages. For, if I keep all God's laws to-day, this is no amends for breaking them yesterday; if I behave peaceably to my neighbor this day, it is no satisfaction for having broken his head yesterday. So that, if once a sinner, nothing but the blood of Jesus can cleanse me from sin."

**JOHN BERRIDGE**  
**A BRIEF SKETCH**  
by J. C. Philpot

The middle and latter end of the last century was a remarkable period. A chain of ministers, commencing with Whitefield, and embracing in its links Toplady, Berridge, Newton, Romaine, Huntington, and Hawker, extends itself down to our degenerate days. However differing in gifts, all these men were evidently taught by the same Spirit, and preached the same Gospel....**Berridge** preaching from a horse-block at Potton, mingling smiles and tears, and the quaintest humor with the deepest pathos, were as different in natural disposition and constitution as can well be imagined. But each sighed and groaned under a body of sin and death, each dearly loved, and each highly exalted the dying Friend of sinners, each was honored and blessed in his work, and each is now in the bosom of his Lord and God.

**Of Berridge we now propose a slight sketch.**

John Berridge was the eldest son of a wealthy farmer and [grazier](#), and was born at Kingston, Nottinghamshire, March 1st, 1716. His father's intention was to bring him up to his own business, but partly through some early religious impressions and partly through an innate love to study, the youthful farmer could never learn how to hold a plough or handle a bullock. He was sent therefore to the University of Cambridge, his father probably thinking that his first-born might have sufficient talent to read prayers and preach a sermon, if not to learn the mysteries of a four-shift course or sell a broken-mouthed ewe. To Cambridge, therefore, John went; and when his father was asked what had become of the youthful student, he is said to have jocularly replied that "he was gone to be a light to the Gentiles." At the University he studied hard, but lost much of his early religious impressions, so much so as to give up almost entirely secret prayer for ten years, and to have drunk deeply into Arian and Socinian views, which at that time were widely prevalent. These last sentiments, however, he abandoned, from seeing that they lowered God the Father, as well as God the Son, and were destructive of all vital religion.

The experience of Berridge is best seen in his hymns. In them his whole heart is open. They were written in the furnace of a long and trying illness, and the fruits of the furnace are seen in them.

1. What honesty and sincerity are stamped upon them! Berridge knew himself. The Holy Spirit had taken him into the chambers of imagery, and shown him "The creeping things portrayed upon the walls round about." The veil of self-righteousness and self-complacency had been taken from off his heart, and he had seen light in God's light. This made him honest. No disguise, he knew, could shroud him from the eyes of Omniscience. "You God see me" was engraved on his heart. And to this we owe the transparency of his character, his freedom from deceit and hypocrisy.

2. Though a man of learning, his language was simplicity itself. Simplicity is always beautiful. God's works in nature, how beautifully simple! From a blade of grass to an oak; from a fly to an elephant; from the sand under our feet to the stars in the sky! Wherever the fingers of God are there is simplicity. And his word how simple! The parables of Jesus, the sermon on the mount, the farewell chapters with his disciples in the Gospel of John, what beauty! what simplicity shine throughout! True religion, real experience, vital godliness, wants no rouge upon its cheek. It shines forth with the luster of God, as the face of Moses when he came down from the mount of communion. It is falsehood and hypocrisy that want disguise. Truth needs no adventitious ornaments

to set off its intrinsic beauty. To adorn it is to spoil it—to array the virgin in the garb of a harlot. This beautiful simplicity was a marked feature in the character of Berridge, and is stamped on all his writings. He could afford to be sincere, as he alone can in whom the fear and grace of God dwell.

3. We admire, too, in Berridge the emptiness and self-destitution which form such prominent features in his character. He knew what Pharisaism was from a long experience of it in his own heart; and he abhorred the resident.

4. With this feature of destitution, poverty, and soul-emptiness which characterize Berridge, we see combined its inseparable companion, self-abhorrence. How feelingly he says,

"Self-condemned and abhorred,  
How shall I approach the Lord."

And again,

"I drop my vile heart in the dust."

5. But Berridge knew also the Gospel of the grace of God. Here he preeminently shines. The gospel flowed purely into his soul, and thence pure out of his mouth, not turbid and tainted like a ditch with the rotting leaves that Adam would gladly have covered himself with, but bright and sparkling as the river of life. Christ was indeed his all in all.

6. One point more we would call attention to lest we dwell too long upon this part of our subject. We mean the sweet and indescribable savor that rests upon Berridge's Hymns. They are "seasoned with salt," and are thus preserved from corruption. How many thousands of sermons, hymns, and tracts have been written and published within this last century! And who reads them now? They lacked that which God commanded never to be lacking from the meat offering, (Lev. 2:13) "salt." Their sacrifice was not seasoned with salt, (Mark 9:46; Col. 4:6,) and therefore lacked both savor and preservation. Not so with Berridge. His hymns are seasoned with salt; have therefore savor and flavor; have been preserved to our time, and will go down to all generations.

## JOHN BERRIDGE

by J. C. Ryle

Here is a more in depth discussion of Berridge by **Bishop J C Ryle** from VIII of his book ["The Christian Leaders of the Last Century or England A Hundred Years Ago"](#) (Interesting book - see Table of Contents - Whitefield, John Wesley, William Grimshaw, William Romaine, Daniel Rowlands, Henry Venn, Walker of Truro, James Berben, Toplady, Fletcher)

### Chapter I

- Born at Kingston, Notts, 1716
- Educated at Nottingham
- Fails to learn the Business of a Grazier
- Goes to Clare Hall, Cambridge, 1734
- Elected Fellow of Clare, 1742
- Curate of Stapleford, 1749
- Vicar of Everton, 1755
- Begins to Preach the Full Gospel, 1757
- Open-air Preaching
- Itinerant and Extra-parochial Ministrations
- Singular Physical Effect on some Hearers
- Opposition and Persecution
- Dies, 1793
- His Epitaph.

A HUNDRED years ago there were spiritual giants in the Eastern Counties of England, as well as in Lancashire and Wales. The sixth leader of the great revival of last century whom I wish to introduce to my readers, was a man as remarkable in his way as either Grimshaw or Rowlands. Like them, he lived in an obscure and out-of-the-way village. But, like them, he shook the earth around him,

and was one of those who “turn the world upside down.” The man I mean is John Berridge, Vicar of Everton, in the county of Bedfordshire.

Of all the English evangelists of the eighteenth century, this good man was undeniably the most quaint and eccentric. Without controversy he was a very odd person, a comet rather than a planet, a man who must be put in a class by himself, a minister who said and did things which nobody else could say or do. But the eccentricities of the Vicar of Everton are probably better known than his graces. With all his peculiarities, he was a man of rare gifts, and deeply taught by the Holy Ghost. Above all, he was a mighty instrument for good in the orbit in which he moved. Few preachers, perhaps, a hundred years ago, were more honoured by God and more useful to souls than the eccentric John Berridge.

My account of this good man is compiled from very scanty materials. A single volume, of no great size, containing his literary remains, and a short biography by his curate, Mr. Whittingham, is the only source of information about him that I can find. In this, however, there is nothing that should surprise us. He was never married, and lived entirely alone. He resided in an isolated rural parish, far away from London, in days when there were no railways, and even turnpike roads were not good. He was settled at a distance from his own family, in a county where, apparently, he had no relatives or connections. He wrote very little, and was chiefly known by his preaching. Add to these facts the mighty one, that Berridge belonged to “a sect everywhere spoken against,” and we need not wonder that the records remaining of him are very few. But there is a memorial of him that will never perish. The last day will show that his Master kept “a book of remembrance,” and that “his record was on high.”

### **BERRIDGE'S BIRTH**

John Berridge was born at Kingston, in the county of Nottinghamshire, on March 1, 1716, within a very few years of Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Romaine, and Rowlands. The village in which he was born may be seen any day from Kegworth Station by those who travel to the north along the Midland Railway. His father was a wealthy farmer and grazier at Kingston, who married a Miss Sarah Hathwaite, in the year 1714. John Berridge was his eldest son. He had three other sons, about whom I can find out nothing, except that his brother Thomas lived and died at Chatteris, in the Isle of Ely, and survived the subject of this memoir.\*

### **BERRIDGE'S YOUTH**

The first fourteen years of Berridge's life were chiefly spent with an aunt at Nottingham, with whom he was a particular favourite. Here also he received the groundwork of his education, but at what school, and under what teacher, I have been unable to ascertain. It is evident that even when a boy he was remarkable for seriousness and steadiness; so much so, as to excite the attention of all who knew him. There is not, however, the slightest proof that he knew anything at this time of scriptural religion; nor was it likely, I fear, in those days, that he would hear anything about it in Nottingham. No doubt, in after-life he had abundant reason to be thankful for his early morality. Steadiness and correctness of life, of course, are not conversion, and save no man's soul. But still they are not to be despised. The scars left by youthful sins, even after forgiveness and complete reconciliation with God, are never wholly effaced, and the recollection of them often causes bitter sorrow.

Berridge himself ascribes his first serious impressions to a singular circumstance:—

“One day, as he was returning from school, a boy, who lived near his aunt, invited him into his house, and asked if he might read to him out of the Bible. He consented. This, however, being repeated several times, he began to feel a secret aversion, and would gladly have declined if he had dared. But having obtained the reputation of being pious, he was afraid to risk it by refusal. One day, however, as he was returning from a fair, where he had been spending a holiday, he hesitated to pass the door of his neighbor, lest he should be invited as before. The boy, however, was waiting for him, and not only invited him to come in and read the Bible, but also asked if they should pray together. It was then that Berridge began to perceive he was not right before God, or else he would not have felt the aversion that he did to the boy's invitations. And such, he says, was the effect of that day's interview, that not long afterwards he himself began a similar practice with his companions.”

Facts such as these are always interesting to those who study God's ways of dealing with souls. It is clear that he often “moves on the face” of hearts by his Spirit long before he introduces light, order, and life. We must never despise the “day of small things.” The impressions and convictions of children, especially, ought never to be rudely treated or overlooked. They have often a green spot in their characters which ought to be carefully cultivated by good advice, kind encouragement, and prayer. Berridge, unfortunately, seems to have had no one near him at this critical period to guide and direct him. Who can tell but the counsel of some Aquila or Priscilla, if they had found him at Nottingham, might have saved him from many years of darkness, and from many agonizing exercises of mind?

## JOHN BERRIDGE: NOT A GRAZIER!

At the age of fourteen Berridge left school, and returned to his home at Kingston, with the intention of taking up his father's business. This plan, however, soon fell to the ground. For some time his father used to take him about to markets and fairs, in order that he might become familiar with the price of cattle, sheep, and pigs, and learn his business by observation and experience. The next step, of course, was to ask him to give his judgment of the value of animals which his father wished to purchase—a matter in which necessarily lies the whole secret of a grazier's success. Here, however, poor John was so invariably wrong in his estimates, that old Mr. Berridge began to despair of ever making him fit to be a grazier; and used often to say,

“John, I find you cannot form any idea of the price of cattle, and I shall have to send you to college to be a light to the Gentiles.”

How long this state of suspense about Berridge's future life continued, we have no means of ascertaining. In all probability it went on for two or three years, and was a cause of much family trouble. An old Nottinghamshire grazier was not likely to let his eldest son forsake oxen and sheep, and go to college, without a hard struggle to prevent him. But the son's distaste for his father's calling was deep and insuperable. His religious impressions, moreover, were kept up and deepened by conversation with a tailor in Kingston, with whom he became so intimate that his friends threatened to bind him to articles of apprenticeship under him. At last old Mr. Berridge, seeing that his son had no apparent inclination for anything but reading and religion, had the good sense to give up his cherished plans, and to consent to his going to Cambridge. And thus John Berridge was finally entered at Clare Hall on October 28, 1734, in the nineteenth year of his age.

## JOHN BERRIDGE AT CLARE HALL

God's ways are certainly not like man's ways. Curious as it may appear, for fourteen or fifteen years after entering Clare Hall, **John Berridge seems to have gone backward rather than forward in spiritual things.** He took his degree as B.A. in 1738, and as M.A. in 1742; and about the same time was elected Fellow of his College, and resided there, **doing comparatively nothing**, till 1749. He was a hard-reading man, and made such progress in every branch of literature that he obtained a high reputation in the University as a thorough scholar. A clergyman who knew him well for fifty years, said that he was as familiar with Greek and Latin as he was with his mother tongue. He says himself that he sometimes, at this period of his life, read fifteen hours a-day. But his very cleverness became a snare to him. His natural love of humor and social disposition entailed on him many temptations. His acquaintance was courted by people of high rank and position; and men like the elder Pitt, afterwards Lord Chatham, were among his intimate associates and friends. All this, no doubt, was very pleasant to flesh and blood, but very bad for his soul. In short, he had to learn, by bitter experience, that wit and brilliant powers of conversation, like beauty, musical skill, and a fine voice, are very perilous possessions. They seem to help people forward in this world, but they are in reality most dangerous to their possessors.

Whittingham, his biographer, says of him at this time:—

“‘Hudibras’ was so familiar to him, that he was at no loss in using any part of it on any occasion. While he was at college, if it was known he would be present at any public dinner, the table was sure to be crowded with company, who were delighted with the singularity of his conversation and his witty sayings. But as ‘evil communications corrupt good manners,’ so Berridge speedily caught the spirit of his company, and drank in the **Socinian** scheme of religion to such a degree that he lost all his serious impressions, and discontinued private prayer for the space of ten years, a few intervals excepted! In these intervals he would weep bitterly, reflecting on his sad state of mind compared with what it was when he first came to the University; and he would often say to a fellow-student, afterwards an eminent clergyman, ‘Oh that it were with me as in years past!’ ”

## JOHN BERRIDGE TAKES HOLY ORDERS

This part of Berridge's history is indeed a melancholy picture. It is the more so when we remember that it was during this period of his life that he must have taken holy orders as a Fellow of Clare Hall, and professed that he was “inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost” to take upon him the office of a minister! He was probably ordained by the Bishop of Ely. How utterly unfit he was for the ministerial office, we may see at a glance from the account given of him by Whittingham. Yet it is a sorrowful fact, I fear, that the case of Berridge has only been that of thousands. No earthly condition appears to be so deadening to a man's soul as the position of a resident Fellow of a college, and the society of a Common room at Oxford or Cambridge. If Berridge fell for a season before the influences brought to bear upon his soul at Clare Hall, we must in justice remember that he was exposed to extraordinary temptations. How hardly shall resident Fellows of colleges enter the kingdom of God! It was a miracle of grace that he was not cast away for ever, and did not sink beneath the waters, never to rise again.

1749  
Curate of Stapleford

In the year 1749 it pleased God to awaken his conscience once more, and to revive within him his old religious impressions. In that year, after eleven years of apparent idleness, he began to feel a desire to do something as a clergyman, and accepted the curacy of Stapleford, near Cambridge. At this period, it will be remembered, he was thirty-three years old, and thus had lost no less than ten valuable years of time.

Berridge entered on his duties as curate of Stapleford with great zeal, and a sincere desire to do good, and served his church regularly from college for no less than six years. He took great pains with his parishioners, and pressed upon them very earnestly the importance of sanctification, but without producing the slightest effect on their lives. His preaching, even at this time, was striking, plain, and attractive. His life was moral, upright, and correct. His diligence as a pastor was undeniable. Yet his ministry, throughout these six years, was entirely without fruit, to his own great annoyance and mortification. The fact was, that up to this time he was utterly ignorant of the gospel. He did not really know what message he had to deliver to his hearers. He knew nothing aright of Christ crucified, of justification by faith in his blood, of salvation by grace, of the complete present forgiveness of all who believe, and of the absolute necessity of coming to Christ as our Saviour, as the very first step towards heaven. At present these blessed truths were hidden from the Fellow of Clare College, and he could tell his people nothing about them. No wonder that he did no good! If he wounded, he could not heal. If he pulled down, he could not build up. If he showed his flock that they were wrong, he had no idea what could set them right. In short, his Christianity was like a solar system without the sun, and of course did no good to his congregation. There can be no doubt that he learned lessons as curate of Stapleford which he remembered to the last day of his life. He learned the thorough uselessness of a ministry, however zealous, in which Christ has not his rightful office, and faith has not its rightful place. But we may well believe that the clever and accomplished Fellow of Clare learned his lesson with much humiliation and with many bitter tears.

1755  
VICAR OF EVERTON

In the year 1755 Berridge was presented by his college to the vicarage of Everton, in Bedfordshire. He took up his residence at once on his living, and never moved again till he was called away to a better world, after holding his cure for no less than thirty-eight years. It was at this place that his eyes were opened to the whole truth as it is in Jesus, and the whole tone of his ministry was changed. It was here that he first found out the enormous mistakes of which he had been guilty as a teacher of others, and began to preach in a scriptural manner the real gospel of Christ. The circumstances under which this change took place are so well described by his biographer Whittingham, that I think it best to give the account in his own words.

1757  
BORN AGAIN  
IN THE MINISTRY!

“At Everton,” he says, “Mr. Berridge at first pressed sanctification and regeneration on his hearers as strenuously as he had at Stapleford, but with as little success. Nor was it to be wondered at, as his preaching rather tended to make them trust in themselves as righteous, than to depend on Christ for the remission of sins. Having continued for two years in this unsuccessful mode of preaching, and his desire to do good continually increasing, he began to be discouraged. A doubt arose in his mind whether he was right himself, and preached as he ought to do. This suggestion he rejected for some time with disdain, supposing the advantages of education, which he had improved to a high degree, could not have left him ignorant of the best mode of instructing his people. **This happened about Christmas 1757.** But not being able to repel these secret misgivings, his mind was brought into a state of embarrassment and distress to which hitherto he had been a stranger. However, this had the happy effect of making him cry mightily to God for direction. The constant language of his heart was this—

‘Lord, if I am right, keep me so; if I am not right, make me so, and lead me to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus.’

—After the incessant repetition of this child-like prayer, it is no wonder that God should lend a gracious ear, and return him an answer, which he did almost two days after. As he sat one morning musing on a text of Scripture, the following words seemed to dart into his mind like a voice from heaven—

‘Cease from thine own works;  
only believe.’

At once the scales seemed to fall from his eyes, and he perceived the application. He saw the rock on which

he had been splitting for many years, by endeavouring to blend the Law and the Gospel, and to unite Christ's righteousness with his own. Immediately he began to think on the words 'faith' and 'believe,' and looking into his Concordance, found them very frequently used. This surprised him so much, that he instantly resolved to preach Jesus Christ and salvation by faith. He therefore composed several sermons of this description, and addressed his hearers in a manner very unusual, and far more pointed than before.

"God very soon began to bless this new style of ministry. After he had preached in this strain two or three Sabbaths, and was wondering whether he was yet right, as he had perceived no better effect from them than from his former discourses, one of his parishioners came to inquire for him. Being introduced, he said,

'Well, Sarah, what is the matter?'—'Matter!' she replied; 'why, I don't know what is the matter. Those new sermons! I find we are all to be lost now. I can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. I don't know what is to become of me.'

The same week came two or three more on a like errand. It is easy to conceive what relief these visits must have afforded his mind in a state of anxiety and suspense. So confirmed was he thereby in the persuasion that his late impressions were from God, that he determined in future to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. He was deeply humbled that he should have spent so many years of his life to no better purpose than to confirm his hearers in their ignorance. He therefore immediately burned all his old sermons, and shed tears of joy over their destruction. This circumstance aroused the neighborhood. His church soon became crowded with hearers, and God gave testimony to the word of His grace in the frequent conviction and conversion of sinners."

In describing this period of his life, Berridge says himself, in a letter to a friend:

"I preached up sanctification by the works of the law very earnestly for six years in Stapleford, and never brought one soul to Christ. I did the same at Everton for two years, without any success at all. But as soon as I preached Jesus Christ, and faith in his blood, then believers were added to the Church continually; then people flocked from all parts to hear the glorious sound of the gospel; some coming six miles, others eight, and others ten. And what is the reason why my ministry was not blessed, when I preached up salvation partly by faith and partly by works? It is because this doctrine is not of God, and because he will prosper no ministers but such as preach salvation in his own appointed way; namely, by faith in Jesus Christ."

I pity the man who can read such an account as this without interest. **If ever there was a case in which we can see clearly the hand of the Holy Spirit, it was this case of John Berridge.** Here is a clergyman in the prime of bodily and mental vigor, suddenly changed from being a preacher of morality into a preacher of Christ's Gospel. He is not a mere boy, but a man of forty-two years of age, well read, of acknowledged literary attainments, and the very reverse of a fool. He is not persuaded and influenced by any living person, and seems to have no earthly friend or adviser. Yet all of a sudden he begins to preach the very same doctrine as Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Romaine, and Rowlands, and with the same effects. One account alone can be given of the whole affair. It was the finger of God. Flesh and blood did not reveal the truth to Berridge, but our Father who is in heaven. **Well would it be for the churches if there were more cases like his!**

Once enlightened by the Holy Ghost and brought into the liberty of God's children, John Berridge made rapid advances both in preaching and practice. He was not a man to do anything by halves, whether converted or unconverted; and as soon as he was converted he threw himself with constitutional energy into his Master's service, with all his might, and soul, and strength. The learned Fellow of Clare soon ceased to preach written sermons, having discovered, by a providential accident, that he possessed the happy gift of preaching without book.

### 1758 PREACHING IN OTHER PARISHES

His next step was to commence preaching outside his own parish, all over the district in which he lived, like a missionary. This he began on **June 22, 1758**. One of the first-fruits of this itinerant aggression was a clergyman named Hicks, rector of Wrestlingworth, near Everton, who afterwards became a very useful man, and a faithful laborer in Christ's vineyard. His third and crowning step was to commence preaching out of doors. This he began doing on **May 14, 1759**, and describes it himself in a letter quoted by Whittingham:—

"On Monday week, Mr. Hicks accompanied me to Meldred. On the way we called at a farm-house. After dinner, I went into the yard, and seeing nearly a hundred and fifty people, I called for a table, and preached for the first time in the open air. We then went to Meldred, where I preached in a field to about four thousand people. In

the morning, at five, Mr. Hicks preached in the same field to about a thousand. Here the presence of the Lord was wonderfully among us; and I trust, beside many that were slightly wounded, nearly thirty received heart-felt conviction."

Berridge had now climbed to the top of the tree as an evangelist. He preached the pure Gospel; he preached extempore; he preached anywhere and everywhere where he could get hearers; he preached, like his Master, in the open air, if need required. We cannot therefore wonder that he was soon publicly known as a fellow-laborer with Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, and Romaine, and, as a popular preacher, little inferior to any of these great men.

His life from this time forth, with little intermission, for more than thirty years, was spent in preaching the gospel. To this work he gave himself wholly. **In season and out of season, out of doors or in doors, in churches or in barns, in streets or in fields, in his parish or out of his parish, the old Fellow of Clare College was constantly telling the story of the Cross, and exhorting sinners to repent, believe, and be saved.** He became acquainted with Lady Huntingdon, John Thornton, John Wesley, Fletcher, John Newton, and other eminent Christians of his day, and kept up friendly intercourse with them. He went to London sometimes in the winter, and preached occasionally in the well-known Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road. But, as a general rule, he seldom went far from his own district, and rarely went into society. He found enough, and more than enough, to do in meeting the spiritual wants of congregations within that district, and seldom went to regions beyond.

### **BERRIDGE'S PRODIGIOUS LABORS**

The extent of his labors was prodigious. He used to preach in every part of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire, and in many parts of Hertfordshire, Essex, and Suffolk.\* He would often preach twelve times, and ride a hundred miles in a week. Nor was he content with preaching. He watched carefully over those who were aroused by his sermons, and provided lay evangelists to look after them when he left them. Some of these evangelists appear to have been nothing but humble laboring men, for whose maintenance he had to provide out of his own pocket. But expenses like these he cheerfully defrayed out of his own purse as long as he had a shilling to spare, counting it an honor to spend his income in furthering Christ's Gospel. When he had nothing of his own to give, he would ask help of the well-known John Thornton, the London merchant; and to the honor of that good man he never seems to have asked in vain.

### **EFFECTS OF HIS PREACHING**

The spiritual effects that were produced by his preaching were immense. In fact, a singular blessing appears to have attended his ministry from the very moment that he began to preach the Gospel. When we find that he was the means of awakening no less than four thousand persons in one single year, we may have some little idea of the good that he did in his district by his thirty years' preaching. In calculations like these, allowance must always be made for a vast amount of exaggeration, and for an equally vast amount of excitement and false profession. Still, after every reasonable deduction has been made, there is no just ground for doubting that Berridge was the means of doing good to thousands of souls. Wherever he went he produced some impression. Some were reclaimed from sin, some were awakened and convinced, and some were thoroughly converted to God. If this is not doing good, there is no such thing as doing good in the world. Spiritual work done in rural parishes is, perhaps, less "seen of men" than any work within the province of the Christian ministry. The work that Berridge did among farmers and laborers had few to proclaim and chronicle it. But I strongly suspect the last day will prove that he was a man who seldom preached in vain. How few there are of whom this can be said!

### **CURIOUS PHYSICAL EFFECTS**

It is undeniable that at certain periods of Berridge's ministry very curious physical effects were produced on those who were aroused by his preaching. Some of his hearers cried out aloud hysterically, some were thrown into strong convulsions, and some fell into a kind of trance or catalepsy, which lasted a long time. These physical effects were carefully noticed by John Wesley and others who witnessed them, and certainly tended to bring discredit on the Gospel, and to prejudice worldly people. But it is only fair to Berridge to say, that he never encouraged these demonstrations, and certainly did not regard them as a necessary mark of conversion. That such phenomena will sometimes appear in cases of strong religious excitement—that they are peculiarly catching and infectious, especially among young women—that even the most scientific medical men are greatly puzzled to explain them,—all these are facts which have been thoroughly established within the last twenty years during the Irish revival. To attempt to depreciate Berridge's usefulness because of these things, is simply ridiculous. Whatever the faults of the vicar of Everton were, he certainly does not seem to have favored fanaticism. That he was perplexed by the physical demonstrations I have described, and at first attached more value to them than they deserved, is the utmost that can be said against him on the subject. But, after all, the same may be said of many calm and sober-minded witnesses who saw the Ulster revival in 1858. In short, the whole subject, like demoniacal possession,

is a very deep and mysterious one, and there we must be content to leave it. But a minister ought certainly not to be put down as a fanatic because people go into convulsions under his preaching

## FIERCE PERSECUTION

It is needless to tell any Christian that Berridge was fiercely persecuted by the world throughout the whole period of his ministry. No name was too bad to be given to him. No means were left untried by his enemies to stop him in his useful career. Foremost, of course, among his persecutors were the **unconverted clergy** of Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Cambridgeshire, who, like the dog in the manger, would neither do good themselves nor let any one else do it for them. But, singularly enough, no weapon forged against the vicar of Everton seemed to prosper. Like Grimshaw at Haworth, there was an invisible wall of protection around him, which his bitterest foes could not pull down. Irregular as his proceedings undoubtedly were, offensive as they necessarily must have been to the idle, worldly clergymen who lived near him, they appeared unable to lay hold upon him and shut his mouth, from one end of his ministry to the other. **From some extraordinary cause which we cannot now explain, the itinerant evangelist of Everton was never stopped by his persecutors for a single day!** So true is the Word of God: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

One special interposition of God in order to protect Berridge from his enemies was so remarkable that it deserves particular notice. It derives a peculiar interest from the fact that the record of it has been handed down in the good man's own words. He says:—

"Soon after I began to preach the Gospel of Christ at Everton, the church was filled from the villages around us, and the neighboring clergy felt themselves hurt at their churches being deserted. A person of my own parish, too, was much offended. He did not like to see so many strangers, and be so incommoded. Between them both, it was resolved, if possible, to turn me out of my living. For this purpose, they complained of me to the bishop of the diocese, that I had preached out of my parish. I was soon after sent for by the bishop; I did not much like my errand, but I went. When I arrived, the bishop accosted me in a very abrupt manner: 'Well, Berridge, they tell me you go about preaching out of your own parish. Did I institute you to the livings of A——y, or E——n, or P——n?'—'No, my lord,' said I; 'neither do I claim any of these livings. The clergymen enjoy them undisturbed by me.'—'Well, but you go and preach there, which you have no right to do!'—'It is true, my lord, I was one day at E——n, and there were a few poor people assembled together, and I admonished them to repent of their sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls; and I remember seeing five or six clergymen that day, my lord, all out of their own parishes upon E——n bowling-green.'—'Poh!' said his lordship; 'I tell you, you have no right to preach out of your own parish; and if you do not desist from it, you will very likely be sent to Huntingdon gaol (jail).'—

'As to that, my lord,' said I, 'I have no greater liking to Huntingdon gaol than other people; but I had rather go thither with a good conscience, than live at my liberty without one.'

—Here his lordship looked very hard at me, and very gravely assured me 'that I was beside myself, and that in a few months' time I should either be better or worse.'—'Then,' said I, 'my lord, you may make yourself quite happy in this business; for if I should be better, you suppose I should desist from this practice of my own accord; and if worse, you need not send me to Huntingdon gaol, as I shall be provided with an accommodation in Bedlam.'—His lordship now changed his mode of attack. Instead of threatening, he began to entreat. 'Berridge,' said he, 'you know I have long been your friend, and I wish to be so still. I am continually teased with the complaints of the clergymen around you. Only assure me that you will keep to your own parish; you may do as you please there. I have but little time to live; do not bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.'—At this instant two gentlemen were announced, who desired to speak with his lordship. 'Berridge,' said he, 'go to your inn, and come again at such an hour, and dine with me.'—I went, and, on entering a private room, fell immediately upon my knees. I could bear threatening, but knew not how to withstand entreaty, especially the entreaty of a respectable old man.

At the appointed time I returned. At dinner I was treated with great respect. The two gentlemen also dined with us. I found they had been informed who I was, as they sometimes cast their eyes towards me, in some such manner as one would glance at a monster. After dinner his lordship took me into the garden. 'Well, Berridge,' said he, 'have you considered of my request?'—'I have, my lord,' said I, 'and have been upon my knees concerning it.'—'Well, and will you promise me that you will preach no more out of your own parish?'—'It would afford me great pleasure,' said I, 'to comply with your lordship's request, if I could do it with a good conscience. I am satisfied the Lord has blessed my labors of this kind, and I dare not desist.'—'A good conscience!' said his lordship; 'do you not know that it is contrary to the canons of the Church?'—'There is one canon, my lord,' I replied, 'which says, "Go preach the Gospel to every creature." '—'But why should you wish to interfere with

the charge of other men? One man cannot preach the Gospel to all the world.'—'If they would preach the Gospel themselves,' said I, 'there would be no need for my preaching it to their people; but, as they do not, I cannot desist.'—His lordship then parted with me in some displeasure. I returned home not knowing what would befall me, but thankful to God that I had preserved a conscience void of offence.

I took no measures for my own preservation; but Divine Providence worked for me in a way I never expected. When I was at Clare Hall I was particularly acquainted with a certain Fellow of that college, and we were both on terms of intimacy with Mr. Pitt, the late Lord Chatham, who was at that time also at the university. This Fellow of Clare Hall, when I began to preach the Gospel, became my enemy, and did me some injury. At length, however, when he heard that I was likely to come into trouble, and to be turned out of my living at Everton, his heart relented. He began to think within himself, 'We shall ruin this poor fellow among us.' This was just about the time that I was sent for by the bishop. Of his own accord he writes a letter to Mr. Pitt, saying nothing about my Methodism, but to this effect:—'Our old friend Berridge has got a living in Bedfordshire, and I am told there is one of his neighbors who gives him a great deal of trouble, has accused him to the bishop, and, it is said, will turn him out of his living. I wish you would contrive to stop his proceedings.' Mr. Pitt was then a young man, and, not desiring to apply himself to the bishop, spoke to a certain nobleman about it to whom the bishop was indebted for his promotion. This nobleman made it his business, within a few days, to see the bishop, who was then in London. 'My lord,' he said, 'I am informed you have a very honest fellow named Berridge in your diocese, and that he has been ill-treated by a litigious neighbor. I hear he has accused him to your lordship, and wishes to turn him out of his living. You would oblige me, my lord, if you would take no notice of this person, and not suffer the honest man to be interrupted.'—The bishop was astonished, and could not imagine in what manner things could thus have got round. It would not do, however, to object; he was obliged to bow compliance, and so I continued ever after uninterrupted in my sphere of action."

Great as Berridge's labors were, they do not appear to have materially affected his bodily health. He seems to have possessed one of those iron constitutions, which nothing but old age can quite break down. He lived to be seventy-seven; and though in his latter years a feeble old man, and very solitary, without wife, sister, or brother, to minister to him, he was mercifully kept in great peace to the last. Henry Owen's account of a visit to him in 1792, the year before he died, is very touching and interesting. He says,

"I lately visited my dear brother Berridge. His sight is very dim, his ears can scarcely hear, and his faculties are fast decaying, so that, if he continues any time, he may outlive the use of them. But in this ruin of his earthly tabernacle it is surprising to see the joy in his countenance, and the lively hope with which he looks for the day of his dissolution. In his prayer with me and my children, we were much affected by his commending himself to the Lord, as quite alone, not able to read or hear, or do anything. But he said, 'Lord, if I have thy presence and love, that sufficeth.' "

### FALLING ASLEEP IN JESUS 1793

Berridge died at Everton vicarage on January 22nd, 1793. For some little time the infirmities natural to his years had prevented him doing much public work. But he was most mercifully spared any long season of pain and disease, and died after only a few days' illness, the weary wheels of life not so much broken by sickness as worn out and standing still. (Ed: **This reminds me of the famous poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes, father of Chief Justice Holmes - [The Wonderful One-hoss Shay A Logical Story](#) - Clue to the poem "It all wore out at once!"**) His frame of mind during his last days was very comfortable. He spoke but little, but what he did say was in terms of gratitude for the rich support he experienced in the prospect of eternity. He felt the stability of the rock on which he had been long resting his hopes of heaven; and while speaking of the excellency and preciousness of the Saviour, he said in an emphatic manner, "What should I do now if I had no better foundation to rest upon than what Dr. Priestley the Socinian points out?"

He was buried in Everton churchyard on the following Sunday, amidst an immense concourse of people assembled from all parts of the country.

Six clergymen, "devout men, carried him to his grave, and made great lamentation over him." A funeral sermon was then preached by the well-known Charles Simeon, from 2Ti 4:7, 8, a text admirably well suited to the occasion. Old Henry Venn of Yelling, his son John Venn, and [Charles Simeon](#), were among the few neighbors with whom the good old Vicar of Everton felt entire sympathy; and his letters give frequent evidence of the value he set on them, and the pleasure he took in their society.

Berridge's tomb is placed on the north-east side of Everton churchyard, where formerly those only were buried who had come to some dishonourable end. But before he died he frequently said that his remains should be laid in that part of the churchyard, which,

he said with characteristic pleasantry, might be “a means of consecrating it.” His epitaph, composed by himself, is so remarkable in its way, that I think it needless to make any excuse for giving it entire. It is inscribed on the south side of his tomb, and at the time of his death required nothing but the date of that event being inserted to complete it. True to himself Berridge was quaint even to his grave.

HERE LIE  
THE EARTHLY REMAINS OF  
John Berridge,  
LATE VICAR OF EVERTON,  
AND AN ITINERANT SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST,  
WHO LOVED HIS MASTER AND HIS WORK,  
AND AFTER RUNNING ON HIS ERRANDS MANY YEARS  
WAS CALLED UP TO WAIT ON HIM ABOVE.  
READER,  
Art thou born again?  
No salvation without a new birth!  
I was born in sin, February 1716.  
Remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730.  
Lived proudly on faith and works for salvation till 1754.  
Was admitted to Everton vicarage, 1751.  
Fled to Jesus alone for refuge, 1756.  
Fell asleep in Christ, January 22, 1793.

I leave the Vicar of Everton here. I have yet other things to tell about him, but I have no room to give them now. A few anecdotes illustrating his character, and some account of his sermons, literary remains, and correspondence, will form the substance of another chapter.

## CHAPTER II

- His Quaintness and Eccentricity
- No Quaintness in his Outlines of Sermons
- His Style of Preaching Defended
- Specimen of his Quaint Thoughts
- His Humility, Love of Christ, Kindness, Self-Denial, Shrewdness, Courage
- His Sympathizing letters.

EVERY student of natural history knows well that some of God’s creatures are curiously odd-looking and grotesque. There are birds, like the American toucan, with bills of such enormous size that we cannot understand how they are used. There are beasts, like the Mandril baboon, marked with such brilliant blue and red colours that we are fairly at a loss to explain their object. Yet they are all the work of an all-wise Creator. Our Father made them all. Not one of them could have been made better. Each and all, we need not doubt, is perfectly adapted for the place in creation which it was intended to fill.

Thoughts such as these come across my mind when I survey the character of John Berridge, Vicar of Everton. Never, probably, did the grace of God dwell in a vessel of such singularly tempered clay. There was a strange vein of quaintness in his mental constitution, which seemed to crop out and bubble up on every occasion. He was continually saying odd things, and employing odd illustrations to convey his meaning. I do not for a moment think that he was an intentional “joker of jokes,” or really wished to set people laughing; but his mind was so peculiarly compounded that he could not help putting things in a ludicrous way. It was in vain that his friends warned him of his besetting sin, and entreated him to lay it aside. The poor old evangelist acknowledged his infirmity, and pleaded that he was born with a fool’s cap on, and that a fool’s cap was not so easily put off as a night-cap. Hard as he strove to keep down his enemy, it was never completely subdued. “Odd things,” he said, “break from me as abruptly as croaking from a raven.” The habit of quaintness was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. It stuck to him as closely as his skin, and never left him until he was laid in the grave. Quaintly he thought and quaintly he spoke, quaintly he preached and quaintly he wrote, quaint he lived and quaint he died. In this respect I fully concede he was a beacon to be avoided, and not an example to be followed.

While, however, I admit that Berridge was painfully quaint and odd, I do not at all admit the justice of Southey’s remark, that he was “buffoon as well as fanatic.” This judgment is unwarrantably severe. The twenty-six Outlines of Sermons, which his biographer has published, contain abundant proof that the Vicar of Everton never deliberately prepared buffoonery for the pulpit. On the contrary, with one or two trifling exceptions, there is a “conspicuous absence” of anything that could create a smile. The reader of these Outlines will find them very simple, very full of Scripture, very spiritual, and very evangelical. He will find in them, no doubt, nothing

very deep or profound, nothing very striking or original; though he will always find man painted in his true colours and put in his right place, and Christ magnified, glorified, and exalted in every page. But if he expects to find anything ludicrous, jocose, or absurd, any quaint anecdotes, or ridiculous illustrations, he will be utterly and entirely disappointed. I should like those who decry poor Berridge as a mere pulpit jester, to read over, with attention, the hundred pages in which Whittingham has recorded the remains of the good man's preaching. If they do not alter their opinion very materially, I shall be much surprised. They will probably agree with me that if the composer of such Outlines of Sermons was a "buffoon and a fanatic," it would do no harm to the Church of England if she had a few more such "buffoons and fanatics" among her clergy.

In justice to Berridge, I give it as my own deliberate opinion, that whatever quaintness there was in his sermons, was strictly confined to the extemporaneous part of them, or to the illustrations which struck him on the spur of the moment. At any rate, there is little or no trace of it in his written Outlines. A man like the old Fellow of Clare Hall, of great natural genius, and a keen sense of the ludicrous, with his mind full of Aristophanes and Hudibras, might surely be lightly judged if he sometimes said odd things in his sermons. The excitement of seeing a great multitude hanging on his lips was doubtless great. The anxiety to say what would arrest and arouse was, doubtless, overwhelming. What wonder if he sometimes broke away from the outlines of his sermons, and said things in the heat of his zeal which in calmer moments he might condemn? One thing, at any rate, is very clear from the remains of his preaching, and that is, that he was a methodical preacher. If he did occasionally break over the fence, and let fall odd sayings, he managed to get back into the road, and was sooner or later marching along in good order.

After all, I venture to think that men are often far too, squeamish in their judgment of preachers. Great allowance ought always to be made for those who, like Berridge, are constantly preaching in rural districts to uneducated congregations. None but those who have preached for many years in such districts can have the least idea of the preacher's difficulties. There is a gulf between his mind and the minds of his hearers of which few have the smallest conception. How to get at their understandings, how to make them comprehend what we are saying, is the grand problem that has to be solved. Their standard of taste is not that of Oxford or Cambridge. Things that sound coarse and vulgar and unrefined to a trained mind and a well educated ear, do not sound so to them. Their first and foremost want is to understand what the preacher is talking about; and he that can make poor farmers and labourers understand what he says is a preacher deserving of the highest praise. They care nothing for fine abstract ideas and rhetorical figures. They only care to hear what they can carry away. Now this, I suspect, was precisely the thing that Berridge never forgot. His grand aim was to make his hearers understand, and to attain that aim he sacrificed everything. If he made them smile, he also made them weep. If he excited them, he did not let them go to sleep. If he broke the rules of taste, and made men laugh, he also succeeded in breaking hard hearts, and making them repent. All honour be to him for his boldness! Better a thousand times for men to smile and be converted, than to look stiff, and grave, and sleepy in their pews, and remain dead in trespasses and sins. I do not defend Berridge's escapades and transgressions of good taste. I do not recommend him as a model to young preachers. I only say that those who run him down and depreciate him because of his quaintness, would do well to remember that he did what many do not—he awakened and converted souls. Thousands of correct, and smooth, and prim, and proper clergymen are creeping through this world, who never broke a canon of taste. in the pulpit, never told an anecdote, never used a vulgar illustration, and never raised a smile. They have their reward! Their educated friends and relations admire them, and the world praises them. But they never prick a conscience, never frighten a sinner, never build up a saint, never pull down a single stone of the devil's kingdom—never save a soul. Give me the man who, like Berridge, may commit many mistakes, and offend many scrupulous ears, but yet reaches hearts, and helps to fill heaven.

Those who wish to form a correct idea of the singularly quaint workings of Berridge's mind, must turn from the Outlines of his Sermons to his other literary remains. These remains consist of a collection of hymns called "Zion's Songs," a prose work entitled "The Christian World Unmasked," and a selection of private letters to friends. The hymns I shall leave alone. The Vicar of Everton was no more a poet than Cicero or Julius Cæsar; and although the doctrine of his hymns is very sound, the poetry of them is very poor, while the ideas they occasionally present are painfully ludicrous. The "Christian World Unmasked" is a dialogue between two imaginary characters about the way of salvation, and contains much that is pointed and clear; but it is written throughout in such a very unrefined style, that it is not likely to be extensively useful. The letters to private friends are excellent, and are worth all the rest of Whittingham's volume put together. From these and the "Christian World" I will now select a few specimens of Berridge's quaintness. I have spoken a good deal about it, and it is only just and fair to let the reader see what it was like.

### LETTERS OF JOHN BERRIDGE

Let us hear how Berridge speaks of human nature:

"Nature lost her legs in Paradise, and has not found them since; nor has she any will to come to Jesus. The way is steep and narrow, full of self-denials, crowded up with stumbling-blocks: she cannot like it; and when she does come, it is with huge complaining. Moses is obliged to flog her tightly, and make her heart ache, before she casts a weeping look on Jesus. Once she doated on this Jewish lawgiver, was fairly wedded to him, and sought to please him by her works—and he seemed a kindly

husband; but now, he grows so grim a tyrant, there is no bearing of him. When she takes a wrong step, his mouth is always full of cursing, and his resentment so implacable, no weeping will appease him, nor promise of amendment.”\*

Let us hear Berridge about the “Whole Duty of Man:”

“The ‘Whole Duty of Man’ was sent abroad with a good intent, but has failed of its purpose, as all such teaching ever will. Morality has not thriven since its publication; and never can thrive, unless founded wholly upon grace. The heathen, for want of this foundation, could do nothing. They spoke some noble truths, but spoke to men with withered hearts and loathing appetites. They were like way-posts, which show a road, but cannot help a cripple forward; and yet many of them preached higher morals than are often taught by their modern friends. In their way they were skilful fishermen, but fished without the gospel-bait, and could catch no fry. And after they had toiled long in vain, we take up their angle-rods, and dream of more success, though not possessed of half their skill. God has shown how little human wit and strength can do to compass reformation. Reason has explored the moral path, planted it with roses, and fenced it round with motives; but all in vain.\*

Let us hear him again:

“Men are rightly treated in the reading-desk, and called by their proper name of miserable sinners. But in the pulpit they are complimented on the dignity of their earthly, sensual, devilish natures, are flattered with a princely will and power to save themselves, and ornamented with a lusty seam of merit. Justification by faith, the jewel of the Gospel covenant, the groundwork of the Reformation, the glory of the British Church, is now derided as a poor old beggarly element, which may suit a negro or a convict, but will not save a lofty scribe nor a lewd gentleman. And the covenant of grace, though executed legally by Jesus, purchased by his life and death, written and sealed with his blood, is deemed of no value, till ratified by Moses. Paul declares no other foundation can we lay beside that which is laid, Christ Jesus. But men are growing wise above that which is written, and will have two foundations for their hopes. These are, fancied merit, added to the meritorious life and death of Christ. If an angel should visit our earth, and proclaim such a kind of gospel as is often hawked from the press and pulpit, though he preached morality with most seraphic power, and till his wings dropped off, he would never turn one soul to God, nor produce a single grain of true morality, arising from the love of God, and aiming only at his glory.”

Let us hear him again:

“Once I went to Jesus as a coxcomb, and gave myself fine airs, fancying, if He were something, so was I; if He had merit, so had I. I used him as a healthy man will use a walking-staff—lean an ounce upon it, and vapour with it in the air. But now He is my whole crutch; no foot can stir a step without him. He is my all, as he ought to be if he will become my Saviour, and bids me cast all my care on him. My heart can have no rest unless it leans upon him wholly; and then it feels his peace. But I am apt to leave my resting-place; and when I ramble from it, my breast will quickly brew up mischief. Some evil temper now begins to boil, or some care would fain perplex me, or some idle wants to please me, or some deadness or lightness creeps upon my spirit, and communion with my Saviour is withdrawn. When these thorns stick in my flesh, I do not try, as heretofore, to pick them out with my own needle; but I carry all my complaints to Jesus, casting every care on him. His office is to save, and mine to look to him for help. If evil tempers arise, I go to him as some demoniac. If deadness creeps upon me, I go as a paralytic. If dissipation comes, I go as a lunatic. If darkness clouds my face, I go as a Bartimeus. And when I pray, I always go as a leper, crying, as Isaiah did, Unclean, unclean.”\*

### PRIDE LIKE A HEDGEHOG

Let us hear what he says in a letter to **John Newton**, dated October 18, 1771:

“The foulest stain and highest absurdity in our nature is **pride**. And yet this base hedgehog so rolls himself up in his bristly coat, we can seldom get a sight of his claws. It is the root of unbelief. Men cannot submit to the righteousness of Christ, and pride cleaves to them like a pitched shirt to the skin, or like leprosy to the wall. No sharp culture of ploughing and harrowing will clear the ground of it. The foul weed will be sure to spring up again with the next kindly rain. This diabolical sin has brought more scourges on my back than anything else; and it is of so insinuating a nature, that I know not how to part with it. I hate it, and love it; I quarrel with it, and embrace it; I dread it, and yet suffer it to lie in my bosom. It pleads a right, through the fall, to be a tenant for life; and has such a wonderful appetite, that it can feed kindly both on grace and garbage—will be as warm and snug in a cloister as a palace, and be as much delighted with a fine prayer as a foul oath.”

Let us hear what he says in a letter to Samuel Wilkes, dated August 16, 1774:

“Sitting closely on the beach is very sweet after a stormy voyage; but I fancy you will find it more difficult to walk closely with Jesus in a calm than a storm, in easy circumstances than in straits. A Christian never falls asleep in the fire or in the water, but grows drowsy in the sunshine. We love to nestle, but cannot make a nest in a hard bed. God has given you good abilities. This, of

course, will make you respected by men of business, and tempt you at times to admire yourself, and thus bring a smart rod upon your back. Sharp genius, like a sharp knife, often makes a wrong gash, and cuts a finger instead of food. We scarcely know how to turn our backs on admiration, though it comes from the vain world; yet a kick from the world does believers less harm than a kiss. I apprehend a main part of your trial will lie here. When you are tempted to think gaudily of yourself, and spread your feathers like a peacock, remember that fine parts in themselves are like the fine wings of a butterfly, which garnish out the moth and grub beneath. Remember, too, that a fiend has sharper parts than the sharpest of us, and that one grain of godly grace is of more worth than a hundred thousand heads-ful of Attic wit, or of philosophic, theologic, or commercial science."

Let us hear what he writes to Lady Huntingdon about the marriage of ministers, on March 23, 1770:

"Before I parted with honest G., I cautioned him much against petticoat snares. He has burnt his wings already. Sure he will not imitate a foolish gnat, and hover again about the candle? If he should fall into a sleeping-lap, like Samson, he will soon need a flannel night-cap, and a rusty chain to fix him down, like a chained Bible to the reading-desk. No trap so mischievous to the field-preacher as wedlock; and it is laid for him at every hedge corner. Matrimony has quite maimed poor Charles [Wesley], and might have spoiled John [Wesley] and George [Whitefield], if a wise Master had not graciously sent them a brace of ferrets. Dear George has now got his liberty again; and he will escape well if he is not caught by another tenter-hook. Eight or nine years ago, having been grievously tormented with house-keeping, I truly had thought of looking out for a Jezebel myself. But it seemed highly needful to ask advice of the Lord. So, kneeling down on my knees before a table, with a Bible between my hands, I besought the Lord to give me a direction." I may add that Jeremiah 16:2 settled the question, to Berridge's satisfaction, in the negative.

In another letter he says:

"A man may be constitutionally meek as the lamb, constitutionally kind as the spaniel, constitutionally cheerful as the lark, and constitutionally modest as the owl; but these things are not sanctification. No sweet, humble, heavenly tempers, no sanctifying graces, are found but from the cross."

In another letter he says:

"A Smithfield fire would unite the sheep of Christ, and frighten the goats away; but when the world ceases to persecute the flocks, they begin to fight each other. Indeed, the worst part of the sheep is in his head, which is not half so good as a calf's head; and with this they are ever butting at each other."

In another letter he says:

"I told my brother Mr. Henry Venn he need not fear being hanged for sheep-stealing, while he only whistles the sheep into a better pasture, and meddles neither with the flock nor fleece. And I am sure he cannot sink much lower in credit; for he has lost his character right honestly by preaching law and gospel without mincing. The scoffing world makes no other distinction between him and me, than between Satan and Beelzebub. We have both got tufted horns and cloven feet; only I am thought the more impudent devil of the two."

I leave the subject of John Berridge's quaintness here. It would be easy to multiply quotations like those I have given; but I have probably said enough to give my readers some idea of the strange workings of the good Vicar of Everton's mind. I do not pretend to defend his odd sayings. I fully admit that they were calculated to interfere with his usefulness. But, once for all, I must request my readers not to judge them too severely, and, above all, to beware of setting down the eccentric author of them as a ranting fool. Berridge, we may depend on it, was nothing of the kind. Quaint as his sayings were, a Christian reader will seldom fail to discern in them a deep vein of common sense, shrewdness, and sagacity. Odd and unrefined as his illustrations often were, they were just the kind of thing that arrests and keeps up the attention of rural hearers. Let us grant that he erred in an excess of quaintness, but let us not forget that hundreds of preachers err in an excess of correct dulness, and never do good to a single soul.

I should be sorry to leave on my reader's mind the impression that quaintness was the leading characteristic of the good Vicar of Everton. There were other prominent features in his character which were quite as remarkable as his quaintness, but which his detractors have found it convenient to forget. There were many grand and fine points about this old evangelist, which deserve to be had in remembrance, and which all who love pure and undefiled religion will know how to appreciate. I will briefly mention a few of them, and then draw my account of him to a conclusion.

**Berridge was a man of deep humility.** That queen of all the graces, which adorned Whitefield and Grimshaw so remarkably, was a prominent feature in his character. No man could be more sensible of his infirmities than he was, and no one could speak of himself more disparagingly than he did. He says, in 1773: "Ten years ago, I hoped to be something long before this time, and seemed in a promising way; but a nearer view of the spiritual wickedness in my heart, and of the spiritual demands of God's laws, has forced me daily to cry, 'O wretched man that I am! God be merciful to me a sinner!' I am now sinking from a poor something into a vile nothing; and wish to be nothing, that Christ may be all. I am creeping down the ladder from self-complacence to self-abhorrence; and the

more I abhor myself, the more I must hate sin, which is the cause of that abhorrence.”—“As the heart is more washed, we grow more sensible of its remaining defilement; just as we are more displeased with a single spot on a new coat, than with a hundred stains on an old one. The more wicked men grow, the less ashamed they are of themselves; and the more holy men grow, the more they learn to abhor themselves.”

**For another thing, Berridge was a man who gloried in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in all his preaching, speaking, and writing, delighted to make much of Him.** He says, in one of his letters: “Once I was sensible of my lameness, but did not know that Christ was to be my whole strength as well as righteousness. I saw His blood could purge away the guilt of sin; but I thought I had some natural might against the power of sin. Accordingly, I laboured to cut away my own corruptions, and pray away my own will, but laboured in the fire. At length, God has shown me that John Berridge cannot drive the devil out of himself; but Jesus Christ, blessed be his name, must say to the Legion, ‘Come out.’ I see that faith alone can purify the heart as well as purify the conscience, and that Christ is worthy to be my all in everything, in wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”

**For another thing, Berridge was a man of singular kindness and self-denial.** No man perhaps ever carried on Christ’s work with more thoroughly disinterested views. Whether at home or abroad he was always giving, and never receiving, and went through all his immense labours gratuitously. Houses and barns were rented for preaching, lay-preachers maintained in all directions, and his own travelling expenses defrayed by himself. Whenever he preached in a cottage, he invariably left half-a-crown for the use of it; and, during his itinerancy, he actually spent £500 in this way alone. Cases of distress and suffering always met with munificent help from him. His whole income, both private and professional, was annually spent in doing good, and even his family plate was sold to buy clothes for his itinerant preachers. As to his own habits at home, they were simple in the extreme. To one who came to supply his pulpit (the Hon. and Rev. W. Shirley), when absent from home, he wrote the following quaint intimation: “You must eat what is set before you, and be thankful. I get hot victuals but once a week for myself, namely, on Saturday; but, because you are an Honourable man, I have ordered two hot joints to be got each week for you. Use what I have just as your own. I make no feasts, but save all I can, to give all I can. I have never yet been worth a groat at the year’s end, nor desire it.” As to his fare abroad, when itinerating in the eastern counties, he says in another letter: “I fear my weekly circuit would not suit a London or Bath divine. Long rides, and miry roads, in sharp weather! Cold houses to sit in, with very moderate fuel, and three or four children roaring or rocking about you! Coarse food, and meagre liquor! Lumpy beds to lie on and too short for the feet, with stiff blankets like boards for a covering! Rise at five in the morning to preach; at seven, breakfast on poor tea; at eight, mount a horse with boots is never cleaned, and then ride home praising God for all mercies!”

**For another thing, Berridge was a man of uncommon shrewdness, good sense, and sagacity.** Never was there a more complete mistake than to suppose that he, any more than Romaine, was a mere ranting, weak-headed fanatic. A careful perusal of his remains will show them to be replete with deep, thoughtful, and far-sighted remarks. His criticism of Cowper’s Poems, his letters about Lady Huntingdon’s College at Trevecca, his well-balanced statements of some of the most disputed points in the Calvinistic controversy, and his sensible treatment of enthusiasts under his ministry, are excellent evidences of this feature in his character. I know few wiser and more comprehensive letters of advice to a young minister about a sermon than one (not dated) which Whittingham has inserted at the end of his collection. Among other things, he says: “When you open your commission, begin with laying open the innumerable corruptions of the hearts of your audience. Moses will lend you a knife, which may be often whetted at his grindstone. Lay open the universal sinfulness of men’s natures, the darkness of the mind, the frowardness of the will, the fretfulness of the temper, and the earthliness and sensuality of the affections. Speak of the evil of sin in its nature, its rebellion against God as our Sovereign, ingratitude to God as our Lawgiver, and contempt both of his authority and love. Declare the evil of sin in its effects, bringing all our sicknesses, pains, and snares—all the evils we feel, and all the evils we fear.”—“Lay open the spirituality of the law and its extent, reaching to every thought, word, and action, and declaring every transgression, whether by omission or commission, deserving of death. Declare man’s utter helplessness to change his nature, or make his peace.”—“When your hearers are deeply affected with these things, which is often seen by the hanging down of their heads, then preach Christ. Lay open the Saviour’s almighty power to soften the hard heart and give it repentance, to bring pardon to the broken heart, a spirit of prayer to the prayerless heart, holiness to the filthy heart, and faith to the unbelieving heart. Let them know that all the treasures of grace are lodged in Jesus Christ for the use of the poor needy sinner, and that he is full of love as well as of power; turns no beggar from his gate, but receives all comers kindly; loves to bless them, and bestows all his blessings free. Here you must wave the gospel flag, and magnify the Saviour supremely. Speak it with a full mouth, that his blood can wash away the foulest sins, and his grace subdue the stoutest corruptions. Entreat the people to seek his grace, to seek it directly, to seek it diligently, to seek it constantly; and acquaint them that all who thus seek shall assuredly find the salvation of God.”

**For another thing, Berridge was a man of extraordinary courage and boldness.** He was one of those who could say with David: “I will speak of thy testimonies before kings, and not be ashamed.” In doing his Master’s business, and delivering his Master’s message, he was never stopped for a moment by fear of personal danger or regard for the opinion of the world. Neither bishops, squires, nor parsons had any terrors for him. At an early period of his evangelical ministry he took his line, and from that line he never swerved. The occasion of his first resolving never to be afraid is strikingly described in the following anecdote, which I take

from the "Churchman's Monthly Penny Magazine" for 1852:—

"In one of the villages in which he was known as a preacher of the new doctrines, which were then beginning to excite a great sensation in different spots in England, he was exposed, when passing through it, to the hootings and revilings of the mob to an extent which frequently chafed his excitable spirit. This village was composed nearly exclusively of a long, straggling street, and, as is to be seen in many similar hamlets in England and elsewhere, was surrounded on one side by a narrow lane, which, jutting off at one end, joined it again, by a much wider circuit than that made by the street, at the other. On one day in which Berridge was about to pass through this village, his spirit quailed within him, in anticipation of the rough reception he would certainly meet with from the bigoted inhabitants. He felt as if he could not encounter it, and accordingly turned into the narrow lane of which we have spoken just at the moment when a pig-driver of his acquaintance entered the street with his noisy charge. It was their hap, each pursuing his own course, to meet again at the farther end of the village, when the pig-driver, who not only knew Berridge, but knew his principles, and knew the truth, looked up in his face with a most peculiar expression, and said: 'So you are ashamed on't.'

The saying went to his heart. 'Yes,' he said, 'I have been ashamed on't; I resolve, in the strength of God, to be ashamed of it no more, but henceforth to press after it, firm unto the end.' A resolution which, undertaken by a resolute mind in the fear of God, was, perhaps, never more faithfully carried out in the future progress of a long and devoted life."

Last, but not least, Berridge was a man of deep acquaintance with Christian experience, and tender sympathy with the people of God. Those who fancy that he was a rough, vulgar, ranting out-door preacher, always full of jests and jokes and high spirits, and always dwelling on elementary truths, know very little of the good man's character. Let them read the following letters carefully, and mark how the itinerant evangelist of Everton could write to his friends. The first of the three was written to a friend on the occasion of his wife's death, and will be found in Whittingham's volume. The other two have come to me from private hands, and have never been printed before:—

**EVERTON, March 26, 1771.**

"DEAR BROTHER,—Mr. W—— informs me of the loss of your dear wife. You once knew she was mortal; but she has now put off mortality, and is become immortal. Can this grieve you? Oh, that I was where she now is!—

'Safe landed on that peaceful shore,

Where pilgrims meet to part no more.'

She was once a mourning sinner in the wilderness, but she is now a glorified saint in Zion; the Lord is become her everlasting light—the days of her mourning are ended. Does this trouble you?—She was once afflicted with bodily pains and weakness, encompassed with cares, and harassed with a crowd of anxious, needless fears; but she has now arrived at her Father's house, and Jesus has wiped away all tears from her eyes, and freed her in a moment from all pains, cares, fears, and wants. And shall this affect you?—You have not lost your wife; she has only left you for a few moments—left an earthly husband to visit a heavenly Father—and expects your arrival there soon, to join the hallelujah for redeeming love. Are you still weeping?—Fie upon you, brother!—weeping because your wife can weep no more! weeping because she is happy, because she is joined to that assembly where all are kings and priests! weeping because she is daily feasted with heavenly manna, and hourly drinking new wine in her Father's kingdom! weeping because she is now where you would be, and long to be eternally! weeping because she is singing, and singing sweet anthems to her God and your God!—O shameful weeping! Jesus has fetched your bride triumphantly home to his kingdom, to draw your soul more ardently thither, he has broken up a cistern to bring you nearer, and keep you closer to the fountain; has caused a moment's separation, to divorce your affections from the creature; and has torn a wedding-string from your heart, to set it a-bleeding more freely, and panting more vehemently for Jesus. Hereafter you will see how gracious the Lord has been, in calling a beloved wife home, in order to betroth the husband more effectually to himself. Remember member that the house of mourning becomes and befriends a sinner; that sorrow is a safe companion for a pilgrim, who walks much astray until his heart is well broken. May all your tears flow in a heavenly channel, and every sigh waft your soul to Jesus! May the God of all consolation comfort you through life, and in death afford you a triumphant entrance into his kingdom! So prays your friend and brother in the gospel of Christ,

J. BERRIDGE."

**"EVERTON, Sept. 14, 1773.**

DEAR SIR,—I received your kind letter, and thank you for it. You want nothing but an opened eye to see the glory of Christ's redemption; and he must give it, and will bestow it, when it is most for his glory and your advantage. Had you Daniel's holiness, Paul's zeal, John's love, Magdalen's repentance (and I wish you had them all), yet altogether they would give you no title to a pardon. You must at last receive it as a ruined sinner, even as the Cross-thief received it.

No graces or services of your own can give you a right to pardon; you must come to Jesus for it, weary and heavy-laden; and if you are afflicted for sin, and desirous of being delivered from its guilt and power, no past iniquities in your life, nor present corruptions of your heart, will be a bar to pardoning mercy. If we are truly seeking salvation by Jesus, we shall be disposed, as we are really bound, to seek after holiness.

But remember, though holiness is the walk to heaven, Christ is the way to God; and when you seek for pardon, you must go wholly out of your walk, be it good or bad, and look only to Him who is the way. You must look to him as a miserable sinner, justly condemned by his law, a proper brand for hell, and look to be plucked from the fire by rich and sovereign grace. You have just as much worthiness for a pardon as the Cross-thief had, which is none at all; and in your best estate you will never have any more. A pardon was freely given to him upon asking for it freely, and given instantly because no room was left for delays; and a pardon is as ready for you as for him, when you can ask for it as he did, with self-loathing and condemnation; but the proper seasons of bestowing the pardon are kept in Jesus' own hand. He makes his mercy manifest to the heart when it will most glorify his grace and benefit the sinner. Only continue asking for mercy; and seek it only through the blood of the cross, without any eye to your own worthiness, and that blood in due time will be sprinkled on your conscience, and you shall cry, Abba, Father.

Present my kindest love to my dear brother Mr. Romaine. The Lord continue his life and usefulness. Kind respects and Christian salutation to Mrs. Olney. Grace and peace be with both, and with your affectionate and obliged servant.

J. BERRIDGE."

**"EVERTON, Nov. 7, 1786.**

DEAR SIR,—I received your kind letter, along with your present. I thank you for the present, as being a token of your respect, and attended, I find, with your daily prayers for me, which I value more than human presents. The Lord bless you, and lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you a sweet enjoyment of his peace.

I have hitherto found that Christian people who live in the dark, fearing and doubting, yet waiting on God, have usually a very happy death. They are kept humble, hungering and praying, and the Lord clears up their evidences at length in a last sickness, if not before, and they go off with hallelujahs.

From what I know of you, and from the account you give of yourself, I have no doubt of the safety of your state: yet rest not here, but seek further. Two things should be carefully attended to by all upright people—one is the evidence of the Word, the other is the evidence or witness of the Spirit. The Word says: 'All that believe are justified from all things' (Acts 13:39). I ask, then, do you not place your whole dependence on Jesus Christ for salvation? Do you not heartily accept of Jesus Christ in all his offices, and are you not daily seeking to him to teach you and rule you, as well as to pardon you? Then you are certainly a believer, and as such are justified in God's sight from all your sins, according to the plain declaration of God's Word. Let this encourage you to seek with confidence for the evidence of the Spirit, to proclaim that justification to your heart. The evidence of the Word is given to hold up the heart in a season of doubts and fears, and the evidence of the Spirit comes to scatter those fears. Remember also that salvation does not depend on the strength of faith, but the reality of it. In the gospels, Jesus often rebukes weak faith, but never rejects it. Weak faith brings but little comfort, yet is as much entitled to salvation as strong.

I have had much of my nervous fever this summer; never once stirred out of my parish, and never further in it than to my church! Through mercy I am somewhat better; and when alone, with a Bible before me, am composed and comfortable, yet scarce able to bear visits, so weak are my spirits.... Give my love to Mr. G——, and tell him from first to last he has been the friend of my heart. I send my kind respects to your partner. Grace and peace be with you both, and with your affectionate servant,

JOHN BERRIDGE."

I close my account of the good old Vicar of Everton with one remark. The man who could write such letters as these is not one who ought to be lightly esteemed. John Berridge is a minister who has never been rightly valued on account of his one besetting infirmity. The one "dead fly in his ointment" has made the Church ignore his many gifts and graces. Yet he was a man of whom the world was not worthy. Good judges of men, such as John Thornton, Lady Huntingdon, Wesley, Venn, Fletcher, John Newton, Rowland Hill, Charles Simeon, Jones of Creaton, were all agreed about him, and all held him in honour. Let us reform our judgment of the good man, and cast our prejudices aside. Whatever some may please to say, we may rest assured that there were few greater, better, holier, and more useful ministers a hundred years ago than old John Berridge.

## RESOURCES ON JOHN BERRIDGE

- [Torchbearers of the Truth: John Berridge \(1716-1793\) Believer's Magazine](#)
- Collection of Hymns by John Berridge
- [Since Jesus Freely Did Appear - Cyberhymnal](#)
- [John Berridge, 1716-1793 - from Spurgeon's Eccentric Preachers](#)