

#2 of 12 - 5 & 10 on the 15th

(a monthly series on Christian missionaries who poured out (5) their lives in Christ's strength and power (10) sent out around the 15th of each month)

Robert Murray McCheyne (pronounced Mick-Shane)

"Beaten oil, beaten oil for the lamps of the sanctuary"

McCheyne, referring to Exodus 27:20

Intro Refrain - This is the second in a monthly series this year entitled *Victorious Christians You Should Know* from Warren Wiersbe's book by this title, introducing you to one amazing Christian from the past each month.

Church history is so important! It's both encouraging and inspiring to hear how Christians have sought the Lord, lived for Him, been sustained by Him to accomplish great things in the Kingdom of God, and then die and pass into eternal life. We are the church in our time! We must both take up the cause of Christ in our day and also live for Jesus with dedication and passion – laying down our lives so that the life of Christ might be lived in us and through us. I hope these short sketches inspire you to read more about each of these Christians and to go out to live a more earnest and uncompromising Christian life.

Robert Murray McCheyne (pronounced Mick-Shane)

Introduction: Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843) was a Scottish Presbyterian minister whose life, though tragically brief, has impacted many Christians, particularly in the areas of 1) evangelism to reach the lost, 2) personal devotion to God, God's Word in the Bible and prayer, and 3) pastoral ministry. His sermons and writings, which were transcribed and published after his death, and the "McCheyne Bible Reading Plan" (<https://bibleplan.org/plans/mcheyne/>) are still used today for Bible reading, study, and encouragement.

Early Life and Education:

McCheyne was born on May 21, 1813, in Edinburgh, Scotland, to a well-established and Christian family. His father, a successful merchant, was a man of faith who deeply influenced Robert's early spiritual development. As a child, McCheyne was described as being particularly sensitive to spiritual matters, showing a precocious understanding of God's Word. His education began at the local grammar school, and he went on to study at the University of Edinburgh in November 1827 (at the age of 14) where McCheyne became serious about his Christian faith in a way that charted the trajectory of the remainder of his life.

Initially intending to pursue a career in law, McCheyne's sense of calling to the ministry became overwhelming (in part stirred by the death of his brother David), leading him to abandon his legal studies in favor of preparing for the Presbyterian ministry, entering the divinity school at Edinburgh in 1831. He was deeply influenced by the works of theologians like John Owen and Thomas Chalmers. His early spiritual struggles and his passion for holiness led him to a deep commitment to prayer, Bible study, and personal revival. He wrote, "If thou meanest to enlarge thy religion, do it rather by enlarging thine ordinary devotions than thy extraordinary."

Ministry and Pastoral Work:

After four years at the divinity school at Edinburgh, McCheyne was licensed to preach July 1, 1835 when he shortly thereafter accepted a call as an assistant. In his journal he wrote, "I see a man cannot be a faithful minister, until he preaches Christ for Christ's sake, until he gives up striving to attract people to himself, and seeks only to attract them to Christ."

In November 1836, McCheyne came to the charge of St. Peter's Church in Dundee at the age of 23. His arrival at St. Peter's marked the beginning of a remarkable ministry. He wrote, "A city given to idolatry and hardness of heart. Perhaps the Lord will make this wilderness of chimney-tops to be green and

beautiful as the garden of the Lord, a field which the Lord hath blessed!”

Although the congregation was initially small, McCheyne’s faithfulness to the gospel, powerful preaching, and heartfelt compassion for his people quickly endeared him to his flock.

McCheyne’s ministry in Dundee emphasized holiness, personal devotion, and sharing the Gospel with the lost. He was known for passionate preaching, always fresh and prepared, no borrowed sermons. *“Beaten oil, beaten oil for the lamps of the sanctuary,”* said McCheyne, referring to Exodus 27:20. His sermons were considered long, but full of nutrition, filled with an urgent appeal for all to join in reaching the souls of lost men and women. He wrote in a letter, “I feel there are two things it is impossible to desire with sufficient ardour—personal holiness and the honour of Christ in the salvation souls.”

His sermons focused on the themes of repentance, grace, and the holiness of God. A stranger once wrote to McCheyne, saying, “I heard you preach, and it pleased God to bless that sermon to my soul. It was not so much what you said, as your manner of speaking that struck me. I saw in you a beauty in holiness that I never saw before.”

During his time in Dundee, McCheyne was known for his commitment to prayer. He spent long hours in private devotion, seeking the Lord and asking the Lord to stir the hearts of those around him. His spiritual vitality spread to others, instilling the same fervor for holiness and evangelism within and flowing from his congregation. Upon hearing that a sinner had turned to Christ through hearing him preach, McCheyne wrote, “The precious tidings that a soul has been melted down by the grace of the Saviour...Lord, I thank Thee that Thou hast shown me this marvellous working, though I was but an adoring spectator rather than an instrument.”

He tirelessly worked to reach the lost with the Gospel, particularly through outreach to the poor and those on the fringes of society. His love for souls and his desire to see the gospel spread beyond the confines of his church led him to accept invitations to preach in many places and to undertake several missionary journeys, including a significant trip to Israel in 1839. During this

trip, McCheyne fostered evangelical work in the Holy Land and the investigation of the spiritual condition of the Jewish people.

Personal Holiness and Devotional Life:

McCheyne believed that the key to effective ministry in everyone's daily life and family and work was a personal devotion to God, involving regular hours of Bible reading, prayer, and reflection, out of which came McCheyne's daily Bible reading plan, designed to help Christians read through the entire Bible in one year, encouraging belief in the power of God's Word in Scripture to both transform lives and also move individuals to personal Christian care for all people.

Health Struggles and Early Death:

Despite his spiritual vitality, McCheyne's physical health deteriorated in 1840 at the age of 26. Even in his early ministry, he once fainted in the pulpit and often had to lie still for hours to help his palpitating heart to quiet down. He suffered from chronic illness and physical weakness. The demands of his pastoral ministry ("I preached twenty-seven times when I was away in twenty-four different places."), combined with his rigorous devotional practices and commitment to evangelism, took a toll on his health. In 1842, he took a brief leave of absence to recover, but his health declined.

Sadly, Robert Murray McCheyne died March 25, 1843, at the age of 29. His death shocked the Christian community, as he had become a beloved figure among his congregation, community, and fellow ministers. His seemingly premature passing underscored the intensity and passion with which he lived life. McCheyne's funeral was attended by thousands, gathering to mourn the loss of a man who had passionately dedicated his whole life to the service of Christ.