



Jonathan Edwards: Man of God

I nervously adjusted my hat in my hands while waiting to see Jonathan Edwards, the president of Princeton University. My father had been a member of his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, and I had never forgotten how affected he was by Mr. Edwards' fervor for God and unwavering obedience to His will. You can only imagine my joy when the announcement had come that the Reverend Jonathan Edwards had accepted the position of president at Princeton University where I was studying theology. I had begged for an interview with him at the soonest possible opportunity. Now here I was, waiting to speak with my father's, and therefore my own, hero.

I was so engrossed in thought that I did not hear the office door open. "Mr. Cooper?" In a moment, I was on my feet. A brisk, but friendly-looking man was shaking my hand vigorously.

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Edwards," I managed to say. "I have wanted to speak with you for a long time."

"My pleasure, Mr. Cooper," Mr. Edwards replied. "I am always glad to help young men grow in their walk with God. What did you wish to speak with me about? But I am forgetting my manners. Please – sit down."

I entered his office and sat in the plush chair he indicated. Mr. Edwards sank into a matching chair behind his desk. He put his elbows on the desk, leaned forward attentively, and waited. After collecting my thoughts for a moment, I began.

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“Mr. Edwards, as I told you before, I have wanted to speak with you for a long time. Your teaching and writings have been a great inspiration to both my father and myself. The particular subject I wanted to speak with you about today was the practical aspect of obedience to God.


“Your five resolutions amaze me, Mr. Edwards. ‘Resolved: To live with all my might while I do live. Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to use it in the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved: Never to do anything which I should despise or think meanly of in another. Resolved: Never to do anything out of revenge. Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.’ No one but you could have put the duty of every man on earth into so few words. I read them so often that I have them memorized, and I certainly have attempted to adopt them as my own. But so often, I do not remember them until after I have broken each and every resolution on the list!

“And here, in one of your sermons, you said...”

I reached into the pocket of my jacket and produced a well-worn copy of a pamphlet containing several sermons by Mr. Edwards. In a moment, I found the page that I had marked. As I placed the open book on the desk between us, Mr. Edwards joined me in studying its contents.

“Here. ‘We should travel on in a way of obedience to all God’s commands, the difficult as well as the easy commands. We should travel on in a way of self-denial, denying all our sinful inclinations and interests.’ And so on and so forth.

“Mr. Edwards, with all due respect, I don’t see how even a holy man of God like you can keep your counsel. For, as the Good Book says, in Jeremiah, ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?’ May I ask how you do it?”



Mr. Edwards smiled at me. I could see the love in his eyes, both for God and for myself.

“Really, my boy, it is quite simple...”

Three weeks later, I stood in the pouring rain beside a freshly dug grave – the grave of our dear president Jonathan Edwards, swept away by the smallpox epidemic raging through Princeton. A botched vaccination had claimed the life of this man of God. How grateful I was that I had taken the time to speak to Mr. Edwards before his fatal inoculation. I treasure his words now more than ever.