

## The “Road” to Aldersgate

Contributed by Eric Brown

On the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1738 – John Wesley returned from Georgia; a man striving as hard as he could to obtain faith.

A week later he was introduced to the 26 year old Peter Bohler – passing through London on his way to South Carolina where he was to be a missionary. The two men quickly became friends – the disturbed 35 year old and the 26 year old with a “happy faith”.

In conversation Bohler contended that:

“A true faith in Christ always brought two fruits – dominion over sin and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness”.

Wesley was “quite amazed” and looked upon it as a new gospel. If it was true, which he disputed, then it was clear he had no faith. He turned earnestly to the New Testament - seeking a justification for his beliefs – only to find more and more evidence that supported what Peter Bohler was telling him.

On Easter Sunday (April 2<sup>nd</sup>) 1738, Wesley preached in Lincoln College (Oxford) Chapel – where he was a Fellow - on the text:

*“The hour cometh and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live”.*

Sadly he had to record: “I see the promise; but it is far off”.

In late April the two Wesley brothers were together with Bohler in London. Charles was shocked and John astounded when Bohler told them that this faith they were seeking could come instantaneously to the worst sinner, the most ungodly man. He could be saved in an instant if he turned from his sins and trusted Christ alone.

John, turning again to the New Testament, particularly the Acts of the Apostles found confirmation! – but as an excuse claimed “God no longer worked in that way!!”

The month of May was a month of growing desire yet heaviness of heart for both Wesley brothers. Towards the end of the month Charles appeared to be dying – pleurisy returning for a second time. On Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> John and a few friends spent all night in prayer for Charles. The 21<sup>st</sup> being Whit Sunday – John went to church and as the curate had fallen ill during the service assisted in the administration of Holy Communion. As they came out of church the news came – brought by a group of excited friends – that Charles had believed!

He was at peace with God; rejoicing and already recovering his strength.

John quickly joined him and the brothers prayed together – the day ending with Charles disappointed that the Holy Spirit had not “fallen” on Jack, and John himself lapsing into misery once again; seeking and praying on the Monday and Tuesday for reliance on the blood of Christ.

We all know the story of May 24<sup>th</sup>:

The random opening, by John, of his Greek Testament:

*“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.”* (2 Peter 1:4)

and again on the words:

*“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”*

The anthem in St Paul’s that afternoon:

*“Out of the depths have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared.  
O Israel, trust in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.  
And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins.”* (Psalm 130)

We know of the unwilling visit to Aldersgate Street and the Assurance that accompanied the “strangely warmed heart”.

The next morning, Wesley records, the moment he awoke “Jesus, Master”, was in his heart and his mouth; and “I found my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him, and my soul waiting on Him continually”.

The anthem at St. Paul's that afternoon also reflected the change:

*"My song shall always be of the loving kindness of the Lord .....*"

But back to the previous night. The now rejoicing friends who had accompanied John to Aldersgate Street hurried him to Charles who was up and writing a hymn to celebrate **his** conversion.

Charles records:

"Towards ten my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared "I believe". We sang the hymn with great joy".

The hymn they sang? *"Where shall my wondering soul begin"* (Wesley's Hymns 1831 – 7 verses)  
(5 verses - MHB 361; H&P 706; STF 454 – slightly "modernised")

Here were men at the moment of, and celebrating, their Conversion, but by the fourth and subsequent verses of the original hymn they are longing to share their discovery with others.

This of course became the dominant theme for the rest of their lives

Many Methodists, throughout the world, give thanks to God for the road that led John Wesley to Aldersgate Street.

Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
A brand plucked from eternal fire,  
How shall I equal triumphs raise,  
Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?

O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which Thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God?  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
Blest with this antepast of heaven!

And shall I slight my Father's love?  
Or basely fear His gifts to own?  
Unmindful of His favours prove?  
Shall I, the hallowed Cross to shun,  
Refuse His righteousness to impart,  
By hiding it within my heart?

*No! though the ancient dragon rage,  
And call forth all his host to war,  
Though earth's self-righteous sons engage;  
Them, and their god, alike I dare;  
Jesus, the sinner's friend, proclaim:  
Jesus, to sinners still the same.*

Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!  
He spreads His arms to embrace you all;  
Sinners alone His grace receives:  
No need of Him the righteous have;  
He came the lost to seek and save.

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
Groaning beneath your load of sin!  
His bleeding heart shall make you room,  
His open side shall take you in;  
He calls you now, invites you home:  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!

*For you the purple current flowed  
In pardons from His wounded side;  
Languished for you the eternal God,  
For you the Prince of Glory died:  
Believe, and all your sin's forgiven;  
Only believe, and yours is heaven!*