

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 20 October 2019. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Adoniram Judson: Fruit-Bearer in Burma

This morning, we have come to the end of our missions emphasis month. For the last four Sundays, we have learned about several people, or groups of people, who “bore much fruit” for the Lord. This morning, we will learn about one more famous fruit-bearer—a man named **Adoniram Judson**.

Now, bearing fruit for God had not *always* been the life ambition of Adoniram Judson. Like every other sinner who has even been saved, Judson had to come to a point where *his* will was broken. Like everyone else, Judson had to believe on Jesus and repent of his sin to be saved. Now, you’d *think* that Judson would have made this decision when he was a child, because he grew in a Christian home. Yet, such was not the case. It wasn’t until Judson was 20 years old that he surrendered his life to Christ. Here is how it happened.

Judson was born in **Massachusetts**, in the United States, in **1788**. His father was a pastor of a Congregationalist church; and he had high hopes that one day his son would become a pastor himself. However, there was one big problem: Adoniram wasn’t saved. He believed in God; believed that Jesus is the Saviour; believed all the facts of the Christian faith; and knew the Bible extremely well. However, it was all in his *head*. In his *heart*, he had not repented and surrendered to Christ. In fact, when he was 12 years old, he actually *realised* that he wasn’t saved. He was an extremely bright and intelligent young man; and he desired to use his abilities to be a famous and wealthy pastor. Yet, he knew the Bible well enough to know that people who have truly been saved desire to praise *God* with their lives, and not themselves. So, at the age of 12, he realised that he was not really a Christian, because he had no intention of using His life to praise *God*. He *pretended* to be saved, in order to please dad and mum; but he knew he wasn’t saved.

At the age of 16, he went off to Brown University; and his future looked bright. He was at the top of his class. Now, while he was there, he became friends with a man named **Jacob Eames**; and Eames was a Deist. This means that he believed that there is a God; but he didn’t believe that the Bible is God’s Word, or that Jesus is God. Because Judson wanted to be ruler of his own life, he got on well with Eames; and it didn’t take him long to cast off *all* belief in the Bible. He graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1808; and he started a grammar school for children, and began to write and publish school textbooks. Yet, he was not happy or satisfied. He finally broke it to his parents that he no longer believed in the God of the Bible; and he angrily left his parents’ home, and went off to New York to find his own way in life. However, he soon became disillusioned with New York; and, unsure of what to do next, he started back to his parents’ home.

Now, on his way back to Massachusetts, something happened that changed Adoniram’s life forever. To begin with, he happened to lodge one night with a God-fearing Christian man; and during that evening, he could not help but see Christ in the man’s life. He saw that this humble man, though not as talented as he, had real peace in his soul. Then, the next night, Judson lodged at an inn; and all night long, he had to listen to the groans of a man in the next room who was extremely sick, and dying. All night long, this man’s horrible groans forced him to think about death; and he began to wonder if what the Bible says about hell was really true. He tried to shake it from his mind; but the next morning, he found out that the man next door

had died. This news was disconcerting enough; but Judson was shocked when he found out that the dead man was none other than **Jacob Eames**—his friend from university, who had led him to reject the Bible!

Judson was shaken to the core of his being. He knew that this was no coincidence. He knew now that God *is* real, that hell *is* real, and that God had allowed his unbelieving friend to die in agony in the very next room in order to wake him up and tell him, “Adoniram, you’d better repent!” After a few months of struggle, he finally repented and believed on Christ. *That* was when his service to Christ began. We will learn about this man’s service to Christ in this sermon, which I’ve entitled ***Adoniram Judson: Fruit-Bearer in Burma.***

I. **Adoniram Judson was faithful to the Word of God.**

After Judson’s salvation, the Book that he had scorned during his university years became the Authority for his life. Whatever God’s Word commanded him, he was now resolved to do. After four years of training for the ministry at Andover Theological Seminary, Judson felt compelled to obey Christ’s command to ***“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”***

Acts 1:1-9

The Great Commission gripped Judson’s heart during his last year at seminary. He felt a burden for the millions of lost souls in the Far East; and he believed that God was calling him to be a missionary in Southeast Asia. So, he set at work to do it. He and four other prayer partners appeared before the Great Association of the Congregational Church, and persuaded them of their need to form a missionary society. The Association was impressed with the appeal of Judson and his friends; and so, they formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

In 1811, Judson sailed to London to visit the London Missionary Society, in order to get “pointers” as to how to operate their new society. Now, Satan tried to stop Judson, by causing his ship to be hi-jacked by a French war ship. (The War of 1812 between France and England, and between England and America, had just started.) Judson was imprisoned in Bayonne, France, for a few months; but God intervened, and put it in his captors’ heart to release him. Judson sailed to London, visited the London Missionary Society, and then returned to America. Soon afterward, he married a godly young lady named **Ann Hasseltine**. He was ordained by his father’s church, the Tabernacle Church of Salem; and on 19 February (2 weeks after his marriage), he and his wife set sail for India. It was the last time that either of them saw their parents on this earth.

Now, why am I giving you all this detail about Judson’s background? Because I want you to have an idea of the *emotional* ties that Judson must have had to the Congregational Church. It was the denomination in which he was raised. The Tabernacle Church, in particular, was his *father’s* own congregation, where he had been brought up. His dearest family and friends were there. Also, Judson had *personally* invested much time and energy in forming the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; and the Congregationalist churches were excitedly waiting to hear about what God would do through his missionary work in India. There were high hopes and expectations from many people, including his own parents and family members.

Imagine all those expectations from family and friends. Then, imagine what it would be like if you discovered that the church in which you had been brought up—your *family’s* church—was

grievously wrong in a major point of doctrine? You see, during the voyage, Judson did an in-depth study on baptism; and he came to realize that the infant baptism that he had received as a baby was not Scriptural. You see, the Congregationalist Church had split off from the Church of England years before, and had cast off many of its unbiblical traditions; but they had not cast off infant baptism. They did not teach that infant baptism *saves*; yet, they still believed that it was some kind of “covenant” sign by which parents resolve to raise their children for the Lord. Judson now saw clearly in Scripture that baptism is not by sprinkling, but by *immersion underwater*. The Greek word *baptizo* (from which we get our word “baptise”), means “to dip or immerse.” He saw that baptism is not for infants, but only for those who have repented and believed on Christ. He saw that baptism symbolizes not washing from sin, but Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. He also saw that only *believer’s* baptism makes you a member of a local church. You do *not* become a “halfway member” by being sprinkled as an infant. Knowing all this, he now felt compelled to receive “*believer’s* baptism,” according to God’s Word.

Acts 8:26-38

As soon as they arrived in Calcutta, India, Judson wasted no time. He found **William Carey**, who had been serving God in India for two decades already; and soon afterward, a friend of Carey’s baptised Judson and his wife into their Baptist assembly in Calcutta. Despite all the objections that he knew were going to come pouring in from his family and friends back in America, he knew he had to *obey God’s Word* by being biblically baptised.

Now, make no mistake about it: Emotional and family ties are strong! Many lost people never get saved, and die and go to hell, because they fear what their family will think if they decide to follow Jesus. Even for genuine Christians, emotional and family ties can keep them from obeying God. Christian, if you won’t obey Christ in one area of your life, then it is very likely that you won’t obey Him in other areas of your life, either. A servant of Jesus Christ *must* obey God’s Word, no matter how high the cost! If you will not obey Him, you *cannot* bear fruit for Him.

John 15:14-16

II. Adoniram Judson was courageous in the face of persecution and death.

Adoniram Judson had to go through some very hard, life-threatening times during his 40 years as a missionary. In a moment, you will hear about some of his experiences; but first, let’s look at some Scriptures that talk about persecution.

Revelation 1:1 / 2:8-11

I’d like you to notice, first of all, how Christ addresses Christians in that first verse of **Revelation**. The Lord calls Christians his “*servants*.” Throughout the book of **Revelation**, the Lord continually refers to His people as His “*servants*.” Now, look at what the Lord had to say to His servants in the church of Smyrna, in particular. He warned them of something that was shortly going to “*come to pass*.” He said that they would have tribulation for “*ten days*.” We don’t know exactly what this tribulation was, except that there was some kind of fierce persecution, which lasted for 10 days. During this short, but fierce, 10 days, some of the people in this

congregation were cast into prison, and others were put to death; but God graciously warned them of what was coming, so that they could prepare themselves spiritually for the persecution.

Now, what would *you* do if you knew for certain that fierce persecution was coming to you very soon? Would you stop doing Christian activities for a while, so as not to attract attention, until the danger passed—and then act like a Christian again? If so, I have news for you: You do not have that option! God expects His servants to be faithful to Him **“unto death.”** Whether you like it or not, Christian, you *will* face persecution, to some degree or another. At the very least, there is always scorn, scoffing, and shunning in store for any Christian who is trying to serve God. However, there is always the danger of worse things than scorning—things such as loss of employment, fines, confiscation of goods, physical harm, or even death. This is a promise straight from the Lord Jesus Christ. Persecution is the norm for followers of Jesus Christ.

John 15:18-21 / 16:1-4

As I mentioned before, Judson faced great hardships and dangers as a missionary. Before he even set sail to the Far East to begin his missionary work, he was taken as a prisoner by the French, while trying to get to England to visit the London Missionary Society. He *was*, after all, attempting to go to England during a war between his own country and England, and between England and France! He was a prime target! Yet, he did not turn aside from God’s will.

Now, I hate to say it: but for many modern Christians, the danger and inconvenience that Judson went through on this voyage would have been more than sufficient reason to stop obeying God’s will. They’d say, “There’s just too much danger. I’ve got to think of my family, after all. If there’s this much danger now, I’d better stay home and find something else to do. There’s always plenty to do for the Lord close to home.” Now, before you say, “I would never refuse to do God’s will if I knew for sure He wanted me to go to a mission field,” ask yourself this question: How much does it take to keep you from obeying the *smallest* command of Christ? Jesus said, **“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).** In other words, if the Lord can’t trust you to do the smallest job that He asks you to do, He certainly can’t trust you with a big job. Many Christians today are “fair-weather Christians.” They’ll serve God if the weather is fair (not just figuratively, but even literally). If it be raining, they say, “Nope. Can’t go to church. It’s raining.” If it be cold, or hot, they say, “Nope, can’t go to church, or to Bible study, or to prayer meeting, or to soul-winning. Weather isn’t good.” If they’re tired, they say, “Nope. Can’t go to church. Can’t take time to read my Bible today. Can’t take time to witness to anyone. I’m too tired.” If someone should snicker at them, or look strangely at them when they attempt to witness for the Lord, they decide that witnessing isn’t for them; and they stop trying to witness to people. Folks, “fair weather” Christianity is not the Christianity of fruit-bearers. “I’ll try, as long as it isn’t too hard” Christianity is *not* the kind of Christian service turned the world upside down!

Many Christians make barely any impact upon the lost, because they will not even try to keep serving Christ if there be any kind of hardship. Judson was not such a man. Judson was the kind of Christian who turned the world upside down. (By the way, so was his wife, Ann. She was a woman of tremendous faith and courage.) When Judson arrived in India, the East India Company wouldn’t allow him into India (especially since he was American, and the war was on). So, he

had to go as a missionary elsewhere. After much prayer, he felt the Lord leading him to the Buddhist country of Burma instead. In Burma, he faced the constant threat of death because of the severe tropical diseases. Every one of Adoniram and Ann's children died because of the climate, and diseases. Then, during the war between England and Burma in 1824-1826, the Burmese government mistook Judson and his missionary co-workers as spies, because they were white, and spoke English. He and his co-worker, Price, were violently arrested, thrown to the ground, put in torture thongs, and thrown into a rat-infested dungeon. For 20 months they were imprisoned—during which time they were often tortured in unimaginable ways—such as being suspended in irons by their mangled feet, with their head and shoulders touching the ground. For six months, they were forced to march, barefoot and sick, through jungles, to a primitive village. In this village, nearly all the prisoners, except themselves and a few others, died. While Judson was in prison, his baby girl, who was born while he was in prison, became very sick; and shortly after his release, both the child and his beloved wife Nancy died from disease and stress. Later, he re-married to a missionary lady named **Sarah Boardman**, whose husband, George, had died while trying to reach a tribal people named the Karen. Adoniram and Sarah had children together; but after a few years, Sarah died, too. Only his third wife, **Emily Chubbuck**, outlived him.

Through all this, Judson fearlessly served the Lord. Now, if you are thinking that “I could never do that”...you're right! In your own strength and wisdom, you *couldn't* do it. But in God's strength, you can. In **Daniel 11:32**, we are told that even in the face of tremendous persecution, **“the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.”** That word “exploits” means “acts of amazing brilliance, boldness, and daring, in the face of incredible odds.” In **Zechariah 4:6** the Lord told Zechariah, **“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”** Being a fruit-bearer takes courage; but this courage *must* come from the Lord. Christian, are you drawing your strength from the Vine of Christ, so that you may bear fruit?

III. Adoniram Judson was selfless in his service to God and others.

Early in his life, Adoniram was anything but selfless. He was *selfish*. He was talented; but he was ambitious for himself, not for God. This was only natural, because he didn't know God. However, after Judson bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, he began to be transformed into a selfless man, whose ambition in life was to serve God. His wife, **Nancy**, had that same selfless character. They were both willing to leave everyone they loved in order to snatch people from the flames. Before Ann consented to marry Judson, she asked herself, in her diary, if she were able to commit herself “entirely to God, to be disposed of, according to his pleasure.” She answered her own question this way: “Yes, I feel willing to be placed in this situation, in which I can do most good, though it were to carry the Gospel to the distant, benighted heathen.”¹ Here is how Judson put it when he wrote a letter to his future father-in-law, to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage:

“I have now to ask, whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure, and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you

¹ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1956), p. 83.

consent to all this, for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home, and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion, and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with the crown of righteousness brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall redound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?”²

How would *you* respond to that question, if you were Ann’s father? Apparently, Ann’s father loved his daughter very much; but he loved his God more! Love for God compelled him to let her go. That is *exactly* what Jesus requires—that we love the Lord our God more than anyone else!

Matthew 10:37-38

Luke 9:57-62 (“*Suffer me to bury my father*” means, “I have family matters to attend to now.”)

The world can’t comprehend loving God more than family. However, to Christians, this should be not only understandable: it should be our lifestyle! God should have first place in your life! And here is the amazing thing about it. When Christ truly has *first* place in your life, He enables you to love others (including family) in a way that you couldn’t have loved them otherwise.

Philippians 2:1-4

In **Acts 20:35**, the Apostle Paul quoted the Lord Jesus when he said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*” This thinking is completely contrary to our old nature. In our fleshly minds, we think that it is better to *receive* than to give. At the very least, our fleshly mind says that giving and receiving should be 50-50. Giving to people who won’t (or can’t) give back to you, or even appreciate what you do for them, is unnatural to the fleshly mind; but to Christians, it should be reality. The same Jesus who died for us, even when we were rebellious, ungrateful sinners, can *enable* us rebellious, unthankful sinners to become loving and giving servants, as He is.

Jesus said that the First and Great Commandment is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and the second great command is: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” Because Adoniram followed these two Great Commandments, he was able to snatch many souls from hell. Over 24 years, Adoniram translated the Bible into the Burmese language; and his translation is still used today. The Lord also used Judson to be instrumental in 18,000 Burmese people coming to Christ during his lifetime, and in 100 churches being established!

Yet, you *must* understand that this did not happen overnight. It took Judson 6 long years to see his first Burmese man saved and baptised. The Buddhist people of Burma were very slow to react to the Gospel. It took Judson another 6 years to see 18 people saved (12 years, 18 converts)! But did Judson give up? No! He was driven by love for the Burmese people! It was only after his imprisonment, and the death of Ann, that larger numbers of people began to get saved. The Burmese people had to see that Judson’s faith in his God was *real* before they really began to listen. His faith was also a tremendous shot in the arm to the new Christians. If this foreigner, who had brought them the Gospel, could suffer all these things for Jesus, then they could, too.

² *Ibid.*

Lest you think that Adoniram was able to do all this because he was much smarter and more talented than the average Christian, think again. God can use *anyone* who is willing to be used of Him. Take, for example, one of Judson's converts, named **Ko Tha Byu**. Ko Tha Byu who was once a slave; but Adoniram freed him with his own money, and led him to Christ. This man was a known murderer, who had killed more than 30 people; and he was illiterate. He was a member of a jungle tribe called the Karen. Shortly after Ko Tha Byu had received Christ, he went back to his own people, accompanied by Judson's missionary friend, **George Boardman**; and he won *multitudes* of Karens to Christ. Now, how did an illiterate man do all this? Well, for one thing, God had been preparing the hearts of the Karen people to receive the Gospel for a long time. Even though they were idol worshippers, they still had some nuggets of truth which had been passed down through the centuries. They believed that there is an unchangeable, eternal, all-powerful God, Creator of heaven and earth, who formed the first man from the dust of the earth, and created the first woman from his rib. They believed that the first man was tempted by a devil to eat from a tree of death, and fell into sin. They believed that the Creator promised this first man that a saviour would come some day. They believed that this God, whom they called Y'wah (yes, this *does* sound like Jehovah!), had promised mankind that He would send them a Messiah some day to rescue them from their sin. They believed that the Karen people had once had a sacred scroll (a holy book) which contained the knowledge that they needed to know about God and the coming Messiah; but they believed that the father of their Karen tribe had carelessly lost that scroll centuries ago. And so, they were literally waiting for foreigners to come to them with "the sacred book," and tell them about this Messiah who could save them! In fact, they even had a tradition that the foreigners who would bring the sacred book to them would be white men!

Well, the Karen ate up the message of the Gospel! Many of them were saved! The truths that God gave to Adam 6,000 years ago were not entirely lost to these people. They had enough memory of the true God to realise that they *didn't* know Him, and that they needed to find out who He is, and be reconciled to Him. God sent the right man, at the right time, to give them the Gospel. Yet, this man wasn't educated. He wasn't talented. He was an illiterate Karen who believed that Jesus died and rose for him; and he took the Great Commission seriously.

Romans 10:13-15 says, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.*" The Karen people of Burma had been lying in spiritual darkness, waiting for someone to come and bring them the good news! God answered their plea. How did He do it? What material did He use? Well, He took a brilliant, talented, yet deeply selfish young man in America; saved Him by His grace; transformed him into a humble, loving servant; and sent him 13,000 miles to the other side of the world to win an illiterate murderer to Christ. He then sent that illiterate man into the jungles to introduce his own people to their long-awaited Saviour. *That* is the kind of God we serve, my friends! He will use *whoever* will surrender his ambitions, his will, and his heart, to Him.

Conclusion: Are *you* serving Christ with all your might, Christian? Are you steadfast in the face of opposition? Are you willing to die for Him, if need be? Are you truly selfless in your service to Jesus? Are

you bearing fruit for Christ? Before I close, I would also ask: Are you saved? If you have never repented of your sin and trusted Christ to save you, I urge you to do so this morning!