

THOMAS BROOKS

(1608-1680)

by John Lodge

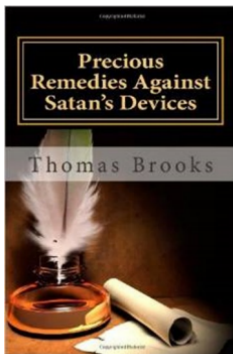


Thomas Brooks was born in 1608, and so we commemorate (belatedly) the 400th anniversary of the birth of one of the great Puritan Pastors. The majority of the evangelical ministers of that era were Presbyterian, but it is a fact that some of the finest preachers and theologians, e.g. John Owen, Thomas Goodwin and our subject, Thomas Brooks, were Independents (Congregationalists). Brooks was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, which was strongly Puritan, and he was ordained in 1640.

Today, "Puritans" are often despised and grossly misrepresented by the media, but their leaders were godly men with a heart for the Gospel and a pastoral concern for their people. They are sometimes associated with detailed, systematic exposition of books of the Bible, but actually much of their ministry dealt with important themes, and we can still benefit from their writings. C. H. Spurgeon considered Brooks to be one of the most readable, perhaps along with John Bunyan and Thomas Watson.

BOOKS

Two of his most influential books, which are still relevant to our needs and available today through the Banner of Truth, are *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* and *Heaven on Earth*. The first reminds us that we are in a spiritual conflict with the enemy of our souls, the Devil, who tempts in both subtle and intense ways. But the Bible does not leave us in ignorance of his methods



and provides the means to deal with his onslaughts. The second treatise is about assurance. Brooks says, "to be in a state of grace is to be miserable no more, it is to be happy for ever . . . but the seeing, the knowing of oneself in such a state is that which renders life sweet and comfortable." Such assurance is not essential to salvation and there may be times when we lack it, but God has given all the promises and means whereby we might attain it.

EJECTED

In 1662, Thomas Brooks, along with 2,000 other ministers, was ejected from his church for refusing to conform to the unreasonable requirements of the Act of Uniformity. Thus, the majority of evangelical pastors were removed from the Church of England. He used the occasion to great effect in his farewell sermon to his sorrowing congregation, reminding his flock that opposition to the Gospel will surely come and encouraging them with a summary of their privileges and responsibilities as believers.

Brooks continued to have opportunities to preach in London, and when many leaders of the established church fled the capital during the Great Plague of 1665, he remained with many other Puritan ministers to care for his congregation. The next year he was still to be found comforting his people when the Great Fire destroyed much of the city. Thus we see a true shepherd willing to follow his Master, the 'Good Shepherd,' in a willingness to lay down his life, if necessary, for the sheep.

UNCOMPROMISING

In church matters, he was quite uncompromising and refused to administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper indiscriminately. He believed that true religion should be inward and experiential. His last

pastorate was at Lime Street Congregational Church in 1672. There his first wife, Martha, whom he greatly treasured, sadly died. He described how she would pour out her soul before God for the Church and the nation. Brooks later remarried and was looked after by another spiritual wife, Patience, in his closing years till his death in 1680. We should take time to learn from his writings and seek to follow his godly example.

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