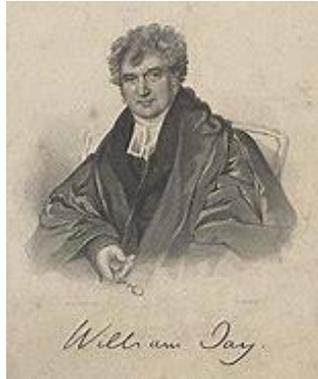


William Jay (1769-1853)

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How long has your pastor been at your church? 5, 10, 20, 30 years? I can pretty well guarantee that there is no pastor within EFCC who has been in his church for 60 years. Amazingly, William Jay of Bath, was the pastor of the same church for almost 62 years! Even more astonishingly, he maintained a fresh and effective ministry all the way through, witnessed a steady stream of conversions and additions to the church, and knew a remarkable sense of unity and oneness in the congregation.

Jay was born on May 6th, 1769, in Wiltshire, the fourth of five children. He lived at Tisbury during his boyhood. His parents were ordinary humble folk, and young William had a basic education, struggling to learn to read. He loved solitude, often wandering in the fields and lanes, and his shyness stayed with him all his life.

Called to preach

He was greatly influenced by the Methodists early on, and was converted as a boy. Although apprenticed as a stonemason at 14, William soon felt God's call upon him to preach and prepare for the Christian ministry. He began preaching in local chapels when just 16 and in 1785, began attending Rev. Cornelius Winter's Academy at Marlborough, studying there for three years. Following these studies, at the age of 21, he began his first and only pastorate at Argyle Chapel, Bath, in 1791.

The young pastor soon began drawing many people to the chapel. Preaching was always his priority. His preparation was thorough, systematic and deeply prayerful. He always read widely around his text, spending hours walking in the woods meditating on it.

His sermons were plain, simple, straightforward and practical – he aimed “low,” never pandering to those “high and mighty” who attended the chapel. Unusually for his time, his sermons were never longer than 45 minutes, and often shorter. He always preached without notes. By 1804, the chapel had to be enlarged, and again in 1821.

Catholic spirit

The church enjoyed years of great unity. “The dipped and sprinkled have dwelt in peace”, he once remarked. He had a large and generous catholic spirit towards all his fellow evangelicals. “Our regiments retain their own colours and officers, but fight against a common foe and for the same King of glory.” Although a convinced Calvinist, he believed

Calvinism “should leaven the whole character of the pastor and preacher, but not be urged dogmatically.” Wise stuff!

The shy William married Anne Davies in 1791 and they had six children. It was a happy home, with its inevitable share of sadness too. Anne died in 1845, after 54 years of marriage.

Sought after

Outside of his preaching and pastoral work Jay was a popular and much sought after speaker, and he travelled widely to minister. He helped form the London Missionary Society in 1794 and produced several editions of sermons, writings and daily readings that were well received in England and the USA. He knew scores of fellow evangelical ministers in the country, corresponded widely and welcomed a stream of influential visitors to the manse. He was a close friend of William Wilberforce, who greatly admired his preaching. At the Jubilee celebrations of his ministry in 1841 the hymns for the occasion were specially composed by James Montgomery.

The aged servant of the Lord preached his last sermon at the chapel on July 25th 1852 (Psalm 53:1-2), for after that he was taken ill. Resigning from the pastorate in October 1852, he died at the end of 1853 at the age of 84 years.

The memorial tablet erected in his honour admirably sums up his remarkable life: “The wise and good and holy William Jay, the great and useful preacher of the Gospel of our salvation.” The text underneath it says it all: “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24).

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